

# Sociolinguistic Analysis of Societal Class Differentiation in “My Fair Lady”

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**Abstract:** The linguistic variables found in the British society of “My Fair Lady” are interesting to analyze in terms of the social class distinctions between the upper class and lower class. Various phonological variables are chosen for analysis in the study of the speech of upper and lower-class society in “My Fair Lady” with several consonantal and vocalic variables as being the most prominent features of class differentiation of standard and non-standard phonological variables. The most preferred varieties are those which are most standard, and the least preferred varieties are those which are the most non-standard. The phonological and grammatical variables can be considered as markers, as they have social significance and are potent carriers of social information that the upper and lower-class characters of “My Fair Lady” are aware of in differentiating high and low-class society. After identifying the linguistic variables for analysis, data was collected concerning its variants, so that certain conclusions could be drawn about the social distributions of those variants. The occurrences of these variables were tabulated based on social class membership. An analysis of the linguistic variables depicts differences in linguistic behavior among the upper- and lower-class characters of the film.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In societies all over the world, it is rare to find a group of people with a uniform speech pattern. Most societies have linguistic differences, especially today as people are much more mobile. One’s speech or dialect is a way to mark oneself off from others with a different dialect. Various social differences are marked by one’s speech, such as social class, age, gender, ethnic group, religion, among others. One’s dialect or accent is shared with a larger group of people who have a similar dialect or accent. This can be used as an identity label to make various suppositions, conclusions, and stereotypes about particular social classes. In the film “My Fair Lady”, such social differences are also prevalent to distinguish the Standard English of the upper class and the Cockney English of the lower class. Differences in power, class, and gender relations, then, are directly related to one’s sociolect as portrayed in “My Fair Lady”. The roles of heredity and environment are intertwined with those of education and language.

In assigning people to particular social classes, various criteria can be used. An educational scale,

income level, profession, as well as residential housing and location are the most obvious criteria that separate the upper and lower classes in “My Fair Lady”. As these features are not described in detail in the film, the most noticeable features for analysis of the upper and lower classes are through phonological and grammatical varieties and their manifestations between the two social groups. Social class behavior can also be seen as being a reflection of educational level and social surroundings.

## 2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of conducting this research is to examine the differences between upper and lower class society of early 20<sup>th</sup> century England with special emphasis given to speakers of the RP dialect and Cockney dialect, as representations of upper and lower class members. The research questions analyzed are 1) How are sociolinguistic class behavior and gender differences depicted through the various social settings? 2) How do

prominent linguistic social class variables differentiate high and low class society?

## 2.1 Language and Society

According to Trudgill (Trudgill P, 2000), there are two aspects of language behavior which are important from a social point of view: the function of language in establishing social relationships and the role played by language in conveying information about the speaker. This shows that language and society are closely connected to each other. For instance, when two English strangers are in the company of others, it is commonplace to talk about the weather or one's health. This is done to break the ice and make the atmosphere more relaxed. This also serves a purpose to establish and keep relations with others. By engaging another person to talk, it also facilitates knowing what kind of a job a person has and what social status or class the individual has. By listening to how a person speaks, it can give clues about where a person is from and what kind of a person he/she is. This kind of small talk is also seen in the movie "My Fair Lady" as Eliza learns the art of conversing with upper class society in a social setting.

Wardhaugh (Wardhaugh R, 1993) claims that if a person has command over a particular dialect or language, it can show a bond and a feeling of solidarity with others. In contrast, when a person does not have mastery over a dialect or language, then the individual will be considered as an outsider to a speech community. Although there may be overlap in speech communities, the film does not show this too much as the boundaries are depicted as being more rigid. When Eliza has adopted the RP dialect, she finds it difficult emotionally to return to the Cockney dialect. However, Alfred still has the same Cockney dialect when he is bestowed with a good monthly income, but he still changes various behavioral aspects to be in line with upper class society like he hears a top hat and formal clothes, gets married, goes to church regularly, has elevated social status and prestige due to his new found wealth, and attracts many new friends and "lost" relatives who want to take advantage of his good fortune. As Alfred has a limited verbal repertoire, he will not be able to penetrate upper class society without some sort of training or education related to using the RP dialect and having proper social graces.

By viewing one's particular social networks, it is possible to see how individuals relate to other individuals. The more intensive particular social relationships are, the more individuals will identify

with certain networks. In "My Fair Lady", the upper class and lower class only interact out of necessity not by choice. For example, in a marketplace environment, the upper class will go there to watch an opera or theatrical performance in an antiquated building or to buy something from the market sellers such as flowers or vegetables. The lower class will not interact with the upper class in formal social settings except to provide a particular service such as a delivery person, waiter, maid, etc., and then have to maintain a proper social decorum.

Wardhaugh defines a speech repertoire as "the repertoire of linguistic varieties utilized by a speech community which its speakers, as members of the community, may appropriately use." (Wardhaugh R, 1993) He considers one's verbal repertoire as being "the linguistic varieties which are at a particular speaker's disposal." (Wardhaugh R, 1993) Therefore, various aspects of the upper and lower class characters' verbal repertoire can be seen to bond themselves with others in subtle ways. By using certain sounds, words, or expressions different from those of another social group, it can identify which groups particular speakers belong to and what differentiates them from speakers of another group. This reveals the degree of inclusion and exclusion for members of a society.

In comparing a regional dialect with a social dialect, Wardhaugh (Wardhaugh R, 1993) states a regional dialect "marks off the residents of one region from those of other regions". Different from that, he states a social dialect is "a variety associated with a specific social class or group, marking that class or group off from other classes or groups." (Wardhaugh R, 1993)

In a metropolitan area, it is often difficult to make dialect atlases based on concrete boundaries where one dialect begins and another one ends. Although Higgins is able to make an isogloss (line) showing distinct geographical boundaries between various dialects, in real life it is not as neat or clear-cut as this, because people are very mobile and do not necessarily spend their entire lives in the same location. In "My Fair Lady", there are no specific geographical boundaries, but Higgins groups people together based on their verbal repertoire and boasts he can pinpoint their residential areas within a few blocks or miles. Higgins considers many of the areas as being relic areas that are unaffected by changes from neighboring areas through a kind of imaginary isogloss. He assumes that when people move to another area, they will adopt portions of that regional dialect but that the overall regional dialect

that they are moving into will not be affected by an outside dialect. Higgins prefers to think of individuals adding to their verbal repertoire when they move from place to place, but that the speech repertoire of the various speech communities will not change.

Various speech communities are seen in the film "My Fair Lady", but the two speech communities most emphasized are those of the RP dialect (upper class) and the Cockney dialect (lower class). In the opening scene, as Higgins is able to make accurate guesses about where the people he encounters in the market area reside or originate, it reveals that in a society people are able to make educated guesses about where other people are from by the way they speak. People have general impressions about the characteristics of particular speech communities. Higgins is able to substantiate this, as he can tell the origins of the various people he encounters from places like Lisson Grove, Selsey, Hawkestone, Cheltenham, Harrow, Cambridge, etc., just by their accent and lexis. He can determine their geographical location as well as social class. Wardaugh (Wardaugh R, 1993) defines a community as "any set of individuals united for a common end, that end being quite distinct from ends pursued by other groups. Consequently, a person may belong at any one time to many different groups or communities depending on the particular ends in view."

## 2.2 Language Behavior and Social Situations

The working class people are portrayed as being drunk, lazy, unruly, uncouth, and sometimes dangerous people. The upper class people are depicted as being economically and culturally elite. It can be seen in the style and fashion of their attire as well as their lavish and extravagant social gatherings and parties. The upper class people adhere to particular social principles that members of their class must abide by. Respectability is an essential trait that must be portrayed to society in all instances. That is why Mrs. Higgins occasionally criticizes her son, Professor Henry Higgins, for not acting in a respectable manner. These class members are expected to be respectable in their attire, manners, speech, and behavior. The male characters are generally seen as being the breadwinners and social leaders. However, the women are also important as protectors of the upper class society. For instance, at the ball, the Queen of Transylvania is curious about Eliza and instructs Karpathy to

investigate her to confirm her place in their elite society. Karpathy considers himself as an expert in detecting frauds, but he will keep societal frauds' secrets if they pay him enough.

Throughout the movie, the characters are differentiated by their manners, their wealth, and their speaking style. The characters do not necessarily have to possess all of these traits in order to be considered part of the upper class society, but the more of these traits they have, the more society will view them as part of higher class society. For example, when Alfred wears fine clothes after inheriting money, he is judged as being an upper middle class person because of his appearance. Next, when Alfred goes to Higgins' house, he does not recognize his daughter, Eliza, because she is dressed in fine clothes and has bathed. The same is also true for the market sellers when they see Eliza dressed in fine attire, clean, and speaking an RP dialect, they do not realize who she is. These are all important determinants of social class distinction.

Professor Henry Higgins can easily tell where the characters in the film have lived and originated from by observing their accents and regional dialects. He carefully listens to the words the characters say in their conversations and in what instances they use these particular words. In characterizing the speech patterns of the upper class and lower class society members, Henry Higgins is representative of the upper class with his use of the RP Standard English. He enunciates his words clearly, as one is supposed to do in using Standard English. In showing his controlled anger or displeasure with Eliza, he is also able to combine his higher level of education with his Standard English to insult her by saying such things as, "You disgrace to the noble architecture of these columns", "You incarnate insult to the English language", and "You squashed cabbage leaf". These insults are above Eliza's head, because she does not have the same level of education understand the insults being thrown her way.

As a member of the lower class society, Eliza speaks the Cockney dialect, which is used by the poor working class. Eliza has various unladylike habits that portray her to be a person of lower class society as well like her howling, uncouth behavior, refusal to bathe, using her sleeve to wipe her face instead of the handkerchief given to her by Higgins, among others. Eliza also shows her lack of social graces by saying "ahhh" while sticking her tongue out at her father as a form of disapproval or rebellion. Cockney English has distinctive pronunciations and lexical choices in conversation.

For example, Eliza frequently likes to use the "Aooow" sound to show her displeasure or anger about situations. The instances of Eliza using this "aooow" expression can be seen in **Table 1**. In the sentence, "Aooow! I ain't dirty. I washed me face n' 'ands afore I come, I did," she says "ain't" instead of "am not", "me" instead of "my", "afore" instead of "before", and "come" instead of "came". She also adds "I did" at the end of her statement to provide assurance about her action. These characteristics of her speech pattern are not found in Standard English. The instances of Eliza adding assurances at the end of her statements (**Table 2**) are representative of the Cockney speaking style.

Table 1. Eliza's Use of "Aooow" to Show Displeasure or Anger.

1	She shows anger to Freddy for bumping into her at the market.
2	She displays displeasure to Higgins about him guessing her origins.
3	She shouts at Higgins after he admonishes her for "crooning like a bilious pigeon".
4	She screams at Higgins for saying she should be "taken out and hung for the cold-blooded murder of the English tongue".
5	She yells at Higgins for calling her a liar in the market.
6	She shouts at Higgins for calling her baggage.
7	She shows displeasure to Mrs. Pearce for saying "Do as you're told".
8	She is angered by Higgins calling her a "draggel-tailed guttersnipe".
9	She is outraged at Higgins who threatens to put her in the dustbin.
10	She yells at Higgins for thinking she can be bought by gold and diamonds.
11	She expresses anger at Mrs. Pearce for forcing her to take her clothes off to bathe.
12	She is cross after Higgins says "Oh, so the creature's nervous after all".

Table 2. Eliza's Addition of Assurances after Conducting an Action.

"I'm a good girl, I am." (at the market)
"I'm a good girl, I am." (at Higgins' house)
"You're no gentleman, you're not." (at Higgins' house)
"I know what the likes of you are, I do." (at Higgins' house)
"I've always been a good girl, I 'ave." (at Higgins' house)
"I'll call the police, I will." (at Higgins' house)
"I washed me face an' 'ands afore I come, I did." (at Higgins' house)
"I'm a good girl, I am." (at the market)

Language use will also change according to social situations. As Trudgill notes (Trudgill P, 2000), people "do not just respond automatically to situations. They can also use switching for their own purposes: to manipulate or influence or define the situation as they wish and to convey nuances of meaning and personal intention". Eliza becomes talented in utilizing the upper class speech pattern for her own needs. For instance, at Mrs. Higgins' house, Eliza says, "Good afternoon, Professor Higgins. Are you quite well? Of course you are. You are never ill. Would you care for some tea?" Higgins replies, "Don't you dare try that game on me. I taught it to you." Eliza, then, is able to manipulate her relationship with Higgins to achieve her goal of making Higgins think of her as an equal and not a sub-class of humanity.

Before Eliza goes to Ascot, she has to learn the proper way to engage in upper class conversations. "Conversations are structured, rule-governed, non-random sequences of utterances." (Trudgill P, 2000) Eliza not only has to learn the proper RP pronunciation, but she also has to master the rules for the interpretation of discourse, in order to be able to properly interact with upper class society. For example, Eliza does not understand the meaning behind stress emphasis, as shown when Freddy Eynsford-Hill asks her, "How **do** you do?" with emphasis on the first "do" to show he is smitten with her.

Eliza's introduction of lower class slang into the upper class verbal repertoire can be considered as a linguistic innovation that spreads from the non-RP dialect to the RP dialect. She is able to do this at Ascot because she is considered as a part of upper



class society. If she were found out to be a member of the lower class, she would not have been able to introduce various terminologies from her regional dialect, as it is considered inferior to the RP dialect.

### 2.3 Portrayal of Gender Differences in Social Settings

In “My Fair Lady”, gender-role stereotyping is obvious. There is specific acceptable behavior and language associated with men and women. Terms used to refer to men and women also differ and do not necessarily have the same equivalence. Pairs of words for males and females are generally gentleman-lady, man-woman, and boy-girl. Even though Eliza is in her early 20s, because of her lower class status, she is often treated as a “girl”. Her lack of proper upbringing makes the upper class people she encounters consider her as immature and not worthy of being called a “lady”. For example, Mrs. Eynsford-Hill admonishes Eliza as a lower class woman by saying “my girl”. Next, Henry Higgins talks down to Eliza in the market by calling her a “silly girl”. Then Pickering refers to her as a “girl” in the market. Even Mrs. Pearce admonishes Eliza at Higgins’ house by saying “nonsense girl”. Many other instances of are found throughout the film of Eliza being called a “girl” until she has mastered the manners and social graces of upper class society and earned the right to be called a “lady”.

Based on Trudgill (Trudgill P, 2000), the first thing one notices about someone when meeting the individual for the first time is what sex the person is. Social differentiation and linguistic differentiation are also found between the sexes, especially among the upper class. This can be seen in how men and women talk to and amongst each other. Gender differences and social class expectations are also apparent in “My Fair Lady”. From the behavior of Higgins and Pickering, it is clear that all a woman needs to do is have a proper dialect, education, and social graces. Equipped with those skills, she is marriageable material. Upper class society considers marriage as a woman’s ultimate goal to happiness and fulfillment. In contrast, Eliza is interested in being self-sufficient and not just selling herself or being someone’s token wife. She desires to support herself by opening a flower shop.

The values of a society can also have an effect on its language and behavior. Trudgill (Trudgill P, 2000) says the most interesting way this happens is through the phenomenon known as taboo. He defines taboo as “being concerned with behavior which is believed to be super-naturally forbidden, or

regarded as immoral or improper. In language, taboo is associated with things which are not said, and in particular with words and expressions which are not used.” Taboo words are also different between social classes. Many more taboo words are found amongst women than men, as women being the fairer sex are supposed to maintain a higher degree of respectability and polite behavior. In modern British society, it is traditionally more acceptable for men to swear and use taboo words than women. Women are also expected to have better behavior than men. That is why an upper class woman faints upon hearing Eliza shout, “Move your bloomin’ arse!” at Ascot, because it is unheard of language for a lady. Taboo words and slang phrases among the lower class include “bloomin’”, “blimey”, “garn”, “bloody”, “saucy”, “he’s off his chump”, “blighters”, “ruddy”, “arse”, “done her in”, “pinched it”, “ladling”, “bit off the spoon”, “sniggering”, etc.

### 2.4 Language Use and Linguistic Repertoire

On the basis of how people talk, generalizations can be made about what social classes they fall into. The experiment carried out by Higgins and Pickering to test Eliza’s acceptance into upper class society at the race track and ball, is similar to an experiment carried out in Detroit to test recognition of black and white speech of speakers through tape recordings (Trudgill P, 2000). Both of these experiments reveal that by listening to one’s accent, various value judgments can be made about one’s ethnicity and social class. The differences between these two experiments are the film shows language as a defining characteristic of social-group membership, whereas the Detroit study deals more with ethnic-group membership.

At the beginning of “My Fair Lady”, it is clear that Higgins and the upper class society set barriers to prevent the infiltration of lower class society dialect to the upper class society dialect. The upper class people judge the lower class dialect as a threat to their culture and way of life. By excluding the lower class dialect from penetrating their “proper” dialect, they desire to preserve their political, social, and economic power. Therefore, language is clearly tied to power in various social fronts.

Higgins uses various other insults directed at Eliza such as “bilious” (of or containing bile, characterized by or experiencing gastric distress), “guttersnipe” (a very uncouth and insulting word for a person of the lowest class), “ignoramus” (an ignorant person), and “sniveling” (to complain or

whine tearfully). "Tomfoolery" (foolish behavior) "tosh" (foolish nonsense), "impertinence", "dashed", and "good heavens" are also expressions used by the upper class.

By using this type of language, Higgins is able to insult Eliza without her knowing what he is talking about, because he has greater mastery of the English language, which gives him more power in conversation. In practicing her enunciation of /ai/ instead of /e/, Higgins instructs Eliza to say "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain" repeatedly. Frustrated by her inability to perfect this, Higgins states, "The majesty and grandeur of the English language is the greatest possession we have." He considers the RP dialect to be superior to all others and looks down on anyone who speaks differently.

In comparison, the lower class uses many more slang and harsh terms such as "Blimey", which is a Cockney expletive which is a corruption of "Gorblimey", which is a corruption of "God blind me". "Off his chump" is said by Eliza, which is British slang for insane or mad or drunk.

Another aspect which is different between two linguistic communities is their verbal repertoire. Trudgill (Trudgill P, 2000) defines this as the totality of different linguistic varieties used in different situations and for different purposes. Registers, which are linguistic varieties linked to particular occupations or topics (Trudgill P, 2000), will be different among different social classes as well. This can pose to be especially challenging for lower class society when they are forced to engage in an upper class society activity for which they lack the proper registers, as is the case with Eliza. Registers related to a ball or horse race will be quite different from those in the marketplace. "Registers are an example of a particular kind of language being produced by a particular kind of social context." (Trudgill P, 2000) Formality is one such aspect which is more closely related with upper class society than lower class society. People with an extensive verbal repertoire will be able to recognize formal and informal language and the proper contexts. At the opposite end of the language style spectrum is slang which is very informal language.

Eliza shows that it is a very difficult task to learn a different dialect of her own language. She faces many obstacles in learning the RP dialect, as she can still communicate with the upper class in her own dialect and she still has strong ties to her lower class group identity. In many ways, it is easier to learn a completely different language than just a different dialect. By adopting the RP dialect, Eliza is able to

overcome class discrimination among the upper class society members who are unaware of her true social class background. Eventually, Eliza is able to utilize code-switching to switch from one language variety to another as the situation dictates.

By mastering the RP dialect, Eliza has equipped herself with more power in social situations. Wardaugh (Wardaugh R, 1993) claims that power is a useful concept that can explain much linguistic behavior. "Power, as both something to achieve and something to resist, exerts considerable influence on the language choices that many people make." Therefore, through power, it is possible to examine the relationships between social classes and language use.

### 3 FINDINGS OF LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In speaking, if a certain pronunciation comes to be regarded as a prestige feature in a particular community, then it will tend to be exaggerated (Trudgill P, 2000). This can be seen in the case of Eliza at the race track. At Ascot, Mrs. Doolittle asks, "Will it rain, do you think?" Eliza replies by saying, "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain. But in Hartford, Hereford, and Hampshire, hurricanes hardly ever happen." She is very proud of her newfound ability to enunciate "a" and "h" properly based on Received Pronunciation that she exaggerates her pronunciation of "a" and "h" while reciting the practice lines she learned from Higgins. This draws much amusement and fascination from Freddy Eynsford-Hill, as he considers her to be unique from the other upper-class people he usually encounters.

Related with this, in proper pronunciation, Eliza has to enunciate all of her words clearly instead of running them all together by practicing to say, "How kind of you to let me come" over and over again. She also has to say "cup of tea" instead of "cuppatea". In addition, she must enunciate "With blackest moss, the flower pots were thickly crusted, one and all" clearly with marbles in her mouth to learn not to combine the words together. She also exaggerates her enunciation in saying the words much more clearly than an upper class person may do in most social situations.

By examining these social-class accent features, differences between the social classes are more obvious. Various examples of elision are obvious among the lower class. For example, the lower class

will say “n” as opposed to “ng: in words like goin’, payin’, takin’, sayin’, nothin’, speakin’, makin’, living’, writin’, leavin’, lodgin’, lookin’, sittin’, restin’, givin’, mornin’, farthin’, shillin’, talkin’, bein’, blinkin’, philanderin’, ‘avin’, undeservin’, deservin’, playin’, swimmin’, etc. From these examples, it is clear that the lower class has a preference for using “n” endings as opposed to “ng” endings for “-ing” words.

Another example of elision is seen in the “h” variable at the beginning of words for Cockney dialect speakers. The lower class society members often leave out “h” at the beginning of “h” words that are normally pronounced by RP English speakers. Some examples are ‘e, ‘e’s, ‘im, ‘alf, ‘ere, ‘ow, ‘arm, ‘imself, ‘eat, ‘ands, ‘ead, ‘ome, ‘er, ‘ole, ‘ard, ‘usband, ‘ad, ‘eard, ‘adn’t, ‘andkerchief, ‘ad, ‘ave, ‘ospitality, ‘iggins, ‘uman, ‘avin’, ‘elp, ‘enry, ‘eadache, etc.

Therefore, by considering the “ng” and “h” phonological variables above, it shows how use of the variants is related to social class. In analyzing the variables (ng) and (h), it reveals that the (ng) and (h) variants at the end and beginning of words are used more frequently among upper class people. Social class membership reveals that the lower the social class, the greater the incidence of non-standard variants.

An additional feature that separates the upper and lower classes is in the pronunciation of vowels. In pronouncing her vowels, Eliza says “ahyee”, “e”, “iyee”, “ow”, and “you” instead of A, E, I, O, U that are commonly pronounced by RP English speakers.

Another important grammatical characteristic of upper-class speakers is the absence of non-standard multiple negation (ex. I don’t want none) in the same manner that lower class speakers do.

The use of multiple negations is another grammatical variable that is marked, because it is in disfavor among the RP using upper class. This variant of negation is frequently found among Cockney dialect speakers.

Another aspect that separates the two classes is the use of “ain’t” is often used by the lower-class society. For example, they say such phrases such as “I ain’t done nothin’ wrong”, “he ain’t a tec, he ain’t”, “you ain’t been near ‘er for months”, “if that ain’t worth ‘alf a crown”, “you ain’t ‘eard what I come for yet”, “I ain’t come here t’ ask for any compliment”, “but I ain’t got sixty pounds”, “I ain’t dirty”, “I ain’t got no parents”, “I ain’t a duchess yet”, etc. The word would never be used by speakers of Standard English.

The rolling “r” is also used for emphasis on several occasions by the lower-class society. A woman in Eliza’s dwelling emphasizes that Eliza “ain’t been home for **three** days”. Eliza emphasizes while singing a song, “Thanks a lot king, in a manner well-**bred**”. Alfred says while singing a song, “kick up a **rumpus**” for emphasis about getting married.

Incorrectly used lexical items are frequently found as well. Pronouns are also incorrectly used by lower class people such as “me doctor”, “meself”, “me vowels”, etc. Also, words such as “loverly” and “absobloominlutely” are frequently said by the Cockney dialect speakers, even though they are not found in RP speakers’ linguistic repertoire.

In an investigation of linguistic variation for the (s) variable, the speech patterns of upper and lower class characters are also analyzed. The (s) is the extension of third-person singular verb marking to all other persons (ex. I knows, you knows, we has, and they calls). The lower class society uses an incorrect speech pattern in terms of the (s) variable.

Therefore, a clear correlation can be seen between variation and social class. Social attitudes are closely related with the importance of identity. One’s languages does not only signal one’s social status but also one’s gender identity. So, it is pertinent to consider various lexical, phonological, and grammatical variables to see how they interrelate to form one’s identity.

The factors determining language boundaries between groups do not just rely on linguistic items but also attitudes and social meanings. “Any enduring social relationship or group may come to define itself by selection and/or creation of linguistic features, and a difference of accent may be as important as one boundary as a difference of grammar at another. Part of the creativity of users of language lies in the freedom to determine what and how much linguistic difference matters.” (Hymes D H, 1974 ) Interrelations can be seen between linguistic items and social evaluations through pronunciation of various words in “My Fair Lady” like upper class “them”, “of”, “to”, “do”, “and”, “old”, “what did”, “you”, “about”, “don’t you”, “flowers”, and “flower” pronounced as lower class “em”, “o”, “t”, “d”,

“an”, “ol”, “what’d”, “ya”, “ab’ut”, “don’tcha”, “flow’rs”, “flow’r”. These linguistic differences are all significant in determining which social groups the speakers belong.

Furthermore, the rolling ‘r’ can be seen as being an example of free variation for the lower class society in “My Fair Lady” as it is used several times

instead of the standard 'r' in speech with no significant reason for the variance. For instance, a Cockney woman in Eliza's living quarters emphasizes that Eliza "ain't been home for **three** days". Next, Eliza says "'Thanks a lot King', in a manner well-**bred**", in a song. Then Alfred says while singing a song "kick up a **rumpus**" about getting married.

By investigating this range of variables, it indicates that certain stereotypes and presuppositions can be made about social class groups or regional variety groups in considering certain linguistic evidence. According to Wardaugh (Wardaugh R, 1993), "a linguistic variable is an item in the structure of a language, an item that has alternate realizations, as one speaker realizes it one way and another in a different way or the same speaker realizes it differently on different occasions." For example, the word "eating" can be realized as "eating" or "eatin'", depending on the speaker and circumstance.

The linguistic variation found between the two classes reveal the intricacies involved in the social variation of British society. The language used by the characters in "My Fair Lady" aptly reflect their speech community (the same regional dialect that is spoken as a standard language variation by a group of people) as well as social and regional variation according to social class.

In comparing the language of the upper class and lower class, the upper class uses proper diction, syntax, pronunciation, speech volume, stress, and intonation when conversing with others. Meanwhile, the lower class does not have much concern for proper diction, syntax, pronunciation, speech volume, stress, and intonation. For instance, in referring to Eliza, Higgins says, "Chickens cackling in a barn just like this one". He uses lower intonation. For stress, Higgins states, "How kind of you to let me come" with emphasis on the first and last words of the sentence. In contrast, Eliza says the same sentence with stress given to all the words. For syntax, Higgins and the other upper class members use correct sentence structure, while the lower class members often use incorrect sentence structure.

In "Why can't the English teach their children how to speak?", Higgins is very critical of all the regional accents of English used around the world outside of his own Received Pronunciation. Higgins is also critical of Eliza and her Cockney accent, because she cannot aspirate the "h" sound properly in words and instead drops the "h" sound. Rather, she pronounces an "h" sound on the word "ever", which should be absent of an "h". In criticism of

Eliza's speaking style in particular, and the Cockney accent in general, Higgins states, "By right she should be taken out and hung for the cold-blooded murder of the English tongue!"

In summary, this movie depicts a clear example of Cockney English that is considered to be a lower or harsh form of English by educated English speakers. The characteristics of the Cockney style of speaking are easily recognizable by observing the particular characters who signify this dialect. The main characteristics of Cockney English are: -"g" dropping at the end of -"ing" words. There is also -"h" glottal dropping at the beginning of words to make them homophonic (a kind of elision marked by the omission of the /h/ sound). Next, there is the diphthongization of long vowels like /i:/ "bead" /bi:d/ becomes /əi/ in /bəid/ and (u:) "boot" (bu:t) becomes /əu/ /bəut/; a diphthong shift, so /ei/ is realized as /ai/ ex. "lady" ('leɪdɪ) = /ləidi/, /ai/ is realized /oi/, so "price" (praɪs) becomes /prois/, /əu/ "load" (ləʊd) is realized as /l\_ʊd/, and /au/ "loud" (laʊd) is realized as /a:/ /ləid/. Related with this, when Eliza says (ei) sounds, she pronounces them as (æ i), as in, "The rine in Spine sties minely in the pline" instead of saying "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain". She also says, "Will you pie me off then" instead of "Will you pay me off then". Besides this, there are also changes in reflexive pronouns to become "meself". In addition, some of Eliza's /θ/ consonants are said as /f/ like in the example "But I ain'tdone nothin". Furthermore, there is the use of slang and non-standard forms. Therefore, the characters who speak with these linguistic 'deficiencies' are stigmatized as being lower class citizens.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

By studying linguistic evidence, then, it is possible to assign a social status to a speaker. It allows for correlations to be made between a social class and standard or local linguistic forms. Examining linguistic evidence can also reveal much about the social structure of a certain community. The social barriers between classes will be clearly reflected in their language. Linguistic evidence can also reveal the percentage or tendency of certain words being used or pronounced in a particular way. Even though the characters in "My Fair Lady" generally adhere to pronouncing and saying specific lexical items most of the time, in real society there will probably be speaker variation in these frequencies. Although the linguistic variables analyzed in "My Fair Lady" are fairly clear-cut and representative of the upper and



lower classes, in a real modern society such distinctions or class labels are much more difficult to define as more variable are involved. When considering various linguistic features as a whole, it can reveal a great deal about a particular social class. In modern society, egalitarianism amongst ethnic groups, people of different gender, and various social upbringings reveal that modern society is much more fluid and social class membership is not as rigid as depicted in the film. Modern cities change rapidly which in turn, have a significant effect on social change. Finally, in looking at social classes and changes brought about in them, linguistic evidence can provide much information about the processes involved in linguistic change. For example, in “My Fair Lady”, there is linguistic evidence about certain expressions regarded as “the new small talk” by Higgins, which shows that Eliza can potentially introduce lower-class idioms and lexical items into the upper class society by unwittingly fooling them into believing it is actually part of upper class language with terms such as “done her in”, etc. Therefore, by investigating various sociolinguistic variables, conclusions can be made as to speakers’ social standing and changes to their sociolect over time.

In short, the speech community that the particular characters are a part of is reflective of their social class position. A higher class person will use more Standard English, while a lower class person will use more non-standard English with a local or regional variety. The film can be seen as being representative of the depiction of social class variation and stereotypes associated with it in the real world. As various dialect groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds can be found in societies everywhere, the film also brings to light the significance of having non-standard dialects from numerous cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These regional and social class dialects can contribute to learning about the historic developments of languages and give insight into cultural differences between them. Therefore, just because individuals speak with a particular regional or class dialect, assumptions or stereotypes should not be applied to the group as a whole.

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