

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE'S VARIANTS IN CONTEMPORARY GREAT BRITAIN

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**Abstract.** *Learning society is a condition of human survival. To know foreign language, its history, borrowings, variants, dialects, accents mean an extension of human identity, new possibilities to communicate with people from different nations.*

*The English language has become the global language, the language essential in promoting cultural relations, in the areas of air traffic control, transportation, tourism, study and work abroad, international business, scientific conferences and research, entertainment, politics, literature, history and religion.*

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That is why so important to know the essence and fortune of social and regional dialects and accents of contemporary Great Britain. What are the peculiarities of the dialects of Cornwall, Yorkshire, Lancashire? How can you understand a phrase in Cockney?

How do people implement the rhyming slang of East London, which is considered to be unique? How many groups of regional dialects are there in Great Britain? What can we do in order to save and hand down these unique variants of English to the next generations?

The proposed research will give us possible answers, considering the essence of the dialect together with the history of the region where it is used.

The **Problem** of the research is the fate of social and regional dialects of contemporary Great Britain.

The **Aim** of the research is to investigate the dialects and accents of contemporary Great Britain which are in danger of disappearance from the face of the Earth.

The **Method** of the research is the theoretical analysis of the linguistic, pedagogical and psychological literature on the topic.

### **I. Regional Variants of the English Language in Great Britain**

Since the days of Shakespeare the English language of South East England was considered as the **standard**. According to Arnold (1996), **Standard English** is the official language of Great Britain, taught at schools and universities, used by press, radio, TV, spoken by the educated people. This English language is current and literary. Its vocabulary is contrasted to various local dialects.

The author should clarify two terms – “a dialect”, and “an accent”.

One uses the term “a dialect” to refer to varieties distinguished from each other by the differences of grammar and vocabulary, whereas “an accent” will refer to the varieties of pronunciation (Hughes, 1994):

“Dialect” – a manner of speaking; phraseology; idiom; a form of a language prevailing in a particular district, and marked by peculiarities of vocabulary or pronunciation; a special variety or branch of language, or one of a number of languages regarded as a family; a form of a language characteristic of a particular profession or trade, whereas “accent” – a special effort of utterance

making one syllable more prominent than others, as by a change of pitch or by stress of voice; manner of utterance (Finnegan, 1989).

Scottish, Welsh and Irish are generally the most popular regional accents, then Northern, Yorkshire and West Country accents come, and at the bottom of the list there are London's, Liverpool's, Glasgow's and West Midlands', the least popular accents in Great Britain.

Regional varieties possessing a literary form are called "variants" (Arnold, 1996).

There are two variants in contemporary Great Britain:

- Scottish English, and
- Irish English (Hughes, 1994)

Opinions on the number of main groups of dialects vary.

The linguist Arnold (1996) believes that there are five main groups of dialects in Great Britain, whereas Ginsburg (1997) specifies the following six groups of regional dialects:

- Lowland (the north of the Tweed);
- Northern (between the Tweed and the Humber);
- Western;
- Midland;
- Eastern (between the Humber and the Thames);

Each group contains several (up to ten) dialects. One of the best-known Southern dialects is Cockney, the regional dialect of London. But according to the opinion of Hughes and Trudgill (1994:37), regional dialects in Great Britain may be subdivided as following:

- North-East (Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham);
- Central-North (Bradford, Lancaster, York, Leeds);
- Central Lancashire (Blackburn, Burnley, Accrington);
- Merseyside (Liverpool, Birkenhead);
- Humberside (Scunthorpe, Hull, Grimsby);
- N.W. Midlands (Manchester, Derby, Stoke, Chester);
- E. Midlands (Nottingham, Leicester, Grantham);
- W. Midlands (Walsall, Birmingham, Wolverhampton);
- S. Midlands (Bedford, Northampton);
- E. South-West (Bristol, Gloucester);
- W. South-West (Plymouth, Exeter);
- South-East (London, Brighton, Dover);
- East-Anglia (Norwich, Ipswich).

They are distinguished from each other by the absence of Long Mid Diphthong in the western south-west part of Great Britain. East Anglia has preserved initial [h], both East Anglia and the south part of Midlands have completed [j]-dropping.

Within the southern area, two south-west areas are distinguished by having [r] in "bar" and "bark". Non-prevocalic [r] is preserved in central Lancashire. Such words like "money" have final [i] in the North-East, Humberside, Merseyside, and West Midlands areas. Long Mid Diphthonging in the words "gate" and "coat" occurs in Merseyside, in the North-West, East, Western parts of Midlands. The author notes that the word "dialect" is used in two meanings nowadays, to denote:

- old dialects which are becoming extinct now,
- regional variants, i.e. a literary standard with some features from local dialects.

The most marked difference among dialects and regional variants lies in the fact that dialects possess phonemic distinctions, whereas regional variants are characterized by phonetic distinctions (Arnold, 1994).

Even among the educated the speech of Northern England differs considerably from that of the South. The southern vowel [ʌ] occurs in the North as [u] in such words as “butter”, “cut”, “guy”, and some southern vowels, the southern retracted vowel [a:] occurs as the short vowel [a] in the northern dialects, for example, in the words “chaff”, “grass”, “path”. Seventeen different vowels occur in the word “house”, including the vowel [u:] of the Old English word “hus”, at least in the six northern counties. Let us analyze some dialects, variants and accents more in detail.

## **II. Cornwall and Cornish**

Now let's go to mystic Cornwall in order to get to know Cornish...

“Cornwall”- means “Cornubian Welsh”; the name Wealhas

(Wales, Welsh) was a common noun, meaning “strangers”; it was given by the newcomers to the unfamiliar Celtic tribes...

But how can one get here, in Cornwall, Somerset? The gentle landscape of Somerset is a home to the Somerset cider, or “Scrumpy”, - an alcoholic apple drink- and cheese.

Cider is made from apples only and is sold all over the United Kingdom, but “Scrumpy” is much stronger, and it usually has small pieces of fruit floating in it. “Cheddar” cheese, the most popular and firm cheese, was stored and matured in caves at Cheddar Gorge.

Cornwall is famous for its distinct culture as it was settled by Celts from Brittany and Ireland. Cornwall is mystic, Celtic and historical. The Lizard, the southern part of England, took its name from the Cornish “lit”, palace and yard, appropriate words for this majestically beautiful coast.

According to The Oxford Companion to the English Language (1992);

Cornwall – [ before 10 c; from Old English Cornweallas

- the “Cornwelsh Celtic equivalents Kerno’u or Pou Kerno’u

(Latin pagus Cornubii, medieval Latin Cornubia).

Compare the district of Cornwaille in Britany, known in Breton as Kernēo’ and Kerne’.

Some words derived the name from Celtic “corn (u) horn“, for the shape of the peninsula. Official title is - Cornwall and Isles of Scilly. A county of England occupying the extreme south-western peninsula]. Cornwall is considered the most remote English dialect of the counties of England, romantically associated with tin mining, megaliths, smugglers and wreckers. Although the region was a part of England since 815, many local people regard England as situated beyond the River Tamar. The people of Cornwall were always proud of their language. The efforts are being made to revive it now. The old language survives chiefly in the form of place-names, folk dances and folk music festivals, for example, celebrations of the May Day derived from old fertility rites, the unique form of wrestling.

The May Day is celebrated as a spring festival, this tradition came from the ancient times. The English and other people conquered by the Romans developed their May Day from the Roman festival called “Floralia”. The May Day became the most favourite holiday of many English villagers from the medieval times. Although the Cornish language ebbed away over the centuries it is still recalled in the Celtic place-names, as it was mentioned above.

According to the Oxford Companion to the English language (1992: 265);

Cornish – [16c: from Corn(wall) and – ish : Celtic equivalents Kerniak, Kernewek, the ancient Celtic language of Cornwall].

“In Cornwall is two speches; the one is naughty Englyshe, and the other is Cornyshe speche’ (Boorde, 1547).

The information about the early Cornish “scant” we can find in few texts, the major survivor was “The Ordinalia”, (written, probably, in the late 14century), a trilogy of verse dramas of 8734 lines in all.

The Cornish language began to decline from the time of Reformation. Relics of the Cornish language are found in places and family names beginning with

- “pen” head, hill (Pendennis, Penhale, Penzance),
- “pol” pool, hole (Polkerris, Polmassick, Polperro),
- “porth” port (Porthallow, Pothcothan, Portcurno),
- “tre” farm (Tremain, Tresillian, Trevelyan).

Cornwall has St. Michael’s Mount, while Britany has Mont-Saint-Miche. Both have many Celtic saints’ names, and the characteristic features of Cornwall is the existence of names of many saints: St. Austell, St. Buryan, St. Columb, St. Ewe, St. Ives, St. Just, St. Levan, St. Mawgan, St. Newlyn.

The change of speech could formerly be heard at the country boundary, but Devon speech encroached upon the north-west about the River Bude. The guttural usage of Devon is weakened in Cornwall, but not so much as formerly. The dialect used in Cornwall is a part of the West Country group, but because Cornish survived so long, the local variant of English was developed as a language learned from foreigners, leading to many differences from the speech of Devon. In the dialect there are words wholly or partly derived from Cornish, such as:

“clicky-handed”- left-handed (from glikin), “clunk” to swallow, and “whidden” runt or weakling (in a litter of piglets; from “gwyn” white).

Revived Cornish exists now as well. It is partly artificial language administered by Kesva Tavas Kernevek – The Cornish Language Board, set up in 1967 to promote the study and revival of the Cornish language. This medium is sometimes referred to scholars as “Pseudo-Cornish “, and, according to Price (1984) is called “Cornic”.

The revival began with the appearance of the book

“A Handbook of the Cornish Language” (1904) by the Cornish nationalist Henry Jenner, followed by Robert Morton Nance’s “Cornish for All”; “A Guide to Unified Cornish” (St. Ives, 1929), Nance’s dictionaries published by the Federation of Old Cornwall Societies, and A.S.D. Smith’s Grammar “Cornish Simplified” (1939). The revivalists claim that the traditional English accent in Cornwall provides a key to Cornish pronunciation.

### **III. The Scousers and Their Accent**

Have you ever heard about “Scouse”? Let’s come to the native land of the legendary “Beatles” - to Liverpool. Liverpool is best known among the popular music lovers of all over world, especially in the 1960s when the “Beatles” started there...

According to Oxford Companion to the English Language (1992:910);

Scouse [From 18c. lobscouse, a sailor’s dish of stewed meat, vegetables, and ship’s biscuit, not unlike Irish stew. “Lobscouser” was a slang name for a sailor.

The terms “Scouse” and “Scouser” for someone from Liverpool seem to be recent, and probably arose because the city was a port and stew was a feature of the diet, the OED cites the

“Southern Daily Echo” (1945), in which “a scouse” is explained as “a native of Liverpool where they eat “scouse”].

1. Also Scouser. A person born in the city of Liverpool, on the River Mersey, especially if from working class.

2. The often-stigmatized working class speech of Merseyside.

The accent combines the features of Lancashire with varieties of English from Ireland and to a lesser extent from Wales, brought in by 19-20 century immigration.

Accents range from broad Scouse through modifications towards RP and RP itself in the middle and upper classes. Among the distinctive expressions in Scouse are “the Pool”, a nickname for Liverpool, and Liverpoolian (the correct name for someone born in Liverpool, substituting “puddle” for “pool”). Non-Scousers, especially from the north of the city, are sometimes called “woolybacks” (sheep), a nickname suggesting rusticity and lack of wits.

### **Pronunciation**

The following features are widely regarded as “shibboleths”, especially when several ones occur together: a merger of the vowels in such pairs as “fair/fur” and “spare/spur” is recognized as an [e:] as in other parts of the north-west of England, syllable-final “-ng” is pronounced as in long-g for “long”, “sing-ging-g” for “singing”; the vowel in such words as “pin” and “sing” is pronounced [ɪ:], so they sound close to “peen” and “seengg”; the sound [r] may be either an alveolar continuant or an alveolar tap that is particularly distinct initially (“rabbit”, “run”), after stops and fricatives (“breathe”, “grass”, “three”) and between vowels (“carry”, “ferry”); a [t] between vowels is often replaced by [r], sometimes shown in print as [rr], as in “marra” for “matter”: “What is the marra with you then?”.

In a publicity drive for Liverpool clean streets campaign, litter was described as “norra lorra fun”; some speakers, especially the working - class Catholics of Irish background replace [t, d] with [ð], as in “dese tree” for “these tree”. “Month” may be pronounced [munth]; in syllable-initial and syllable-final position, a fricative can follow a stop, as in “k/x/ing” for “king”) where [x] represents the fricative in Scottish “loch”, “me”, “d/z/ad” for “my dad”, “back[x]” for “back”, and “bad[z] for “bad”;

Scouse is often described as having a flat intonation, in effect a rise with a level tail where RP has a fall: in the statement “I don’t like it”, it goes up on “like” then runs level, whereas RP starts going down on “like” and keeps going down. There is also a kind of fall in “yes-no” questions where RP would have a rise, so that in the question “Are you from Birkenhead?”, Scouse falls on “Birk” where it rises in RP. Until recently it was possible to distinguish the speech of Irish Catholics from Protestant English through pronunciation of some words; a double advertisement on local buses in the 1960s read on one side of the bus “Treat us furly, travel early”, on the other “Treat us fairly, travel airly” (the latter denoting Irish derived usage); unlike in other northern urban accents, the final vowel of words like “city”, “seedy” is [ɪ:]; [p, t, k] are heavily aspirated or even affricated.

Thus: can’t [k/x/ a: nt], straight [streits], “back/x/” for “back”. In final position, [p, t, k] there may be realized as fricatives [s, k]; [h] is usually absent, but sometimes is present - “him, her”, the suffix – “ing” is [ɪn]. The voice quality of speakers of Scouse was often described as “adenoidal”, and phoneticians speculated about the origins of such a feature.

According to Knowles (1986), the centre of gravity of the tongue is brought backwards and upwards, the pillars of the fauces are narrowed, the pharynx is tightened, and the larynx is

displaced upwards in Scouse. The main auditory effect of this setting is the “adenoidal” quality of Scouse, which is produced even if the speaker’s nasal passages are unobstructed. The effect is primarily achieved by the sustained closure of the velum or soft palate.

The usage of the accent of Liverpool is limited to the city itself, to urban areas adjoining it, and to towns facing it across the River Mersey. While the accent is northern rather than southern in character, it differs in a number of ways from other northern urban varieties, including those of the rest of Lancashire, the county where Liverpool is located. Many famous songs by “Beatles” have their special charm typical for Scouse.

#### **IV. Cockney**

The East End of London grew with the spread of industries to the east of the City. It is also one of those areas of London where foreigners came to find a job, the East End is especially famous as the centre of clothing industry (or “rag-trad”) in London. The East End has many old properties, built already in Dickens’ time, many houses which the Londoners christened “slums”. The markets of the East End are famous throughout the world. The Petticoat Lane Market takes place every Sunday morning, it became one of the sights of London. Street-salesmen promise that the goods are of the highest quality and much cheaper than those you can buy in the West End! “Come on darlin’...amazin’ bargain...you ain’t seen nuffink like it!”

The majority of those lived in the East End are the hereditary inhabitants of the area. Their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers were born there. They love the East End and are proud that they have the right to call themselves “Cockneys”.

The word “Cockney” is a fairly wide term, meaning “the true Londoner” or “an old resident of the East End”.

One of the strongest and most unusual accents is to be found in the East of London, at the home of “Cockneys”.

According to M.Mackenzie(1994) , “Cockney“ is a colloquial name applied to a Londoner born under the sound of Bow bells - the bells of the Church of St. Mary-Le-Bow, which stands nearly in the centre of the City of London.

The origin of this word was the subject of many guesses, but the historical examination of the various uses of “Cockney” by Sir James Murray (1991) shows that the earliest form of this word is “cokenay” or “cokeney”; i.e., “ey” or “egg”, and “coken”, the genitive plural of “cock”, “cocks’ eggs” being the name given to the small and malformed eggs sometimes laid by young hens.

Thus, Robert Whittington speaks of Cockneys in such a phrase - “it is used in great cities as London, York, Perusy (Perugia). It was not till the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century that “Cockney” appears to be confined to the inhabitant of London.

The so-called “Cockney accent “was chiefly characterized by the substitution of a “v” for “w”, or vice versa in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The chief consonantal variation existed now is perhaps the change of “th” to “f” or “v”, as in “fing” for “thing”, or “farver” for “father”. The vowel sound changed from “ou” to “ah “, as in “abaht” “for about”, were illustrated in the “Coster Songs” by Albert Chevalier (1987: 93).

The most marked change of the vowel sound is that of “ei” for “ai”, so that “daily” becomes “dyly”. The omission of “h” is not peculiar to Cockney. The Cockney accent is not a particularly pleasant or melodious one, and the Cockney’s distortion of the English language is such that the

foreigner often finds it impossible to understand the speaker until his ear acclimatizes to the peculiar tones.

According to Meredith (1991), this accent, known as the “Cockney slang”, was first developed by the representatives of the Underworld in the 1860s when thieves and crooks were able to pass information among themselves and confuse the police and other law-abiding citizens at the same time.

“Cockney” is, of course, the southern accent. The Cockney language is really more than an accent, since it includes many words and expressions that cannot be heard in any other part of the country. The principal characteristics of the Cockney accent consist in a general slurring of consonants (the aspirate aitch is often ignored) and a distortion of vowel sounds. Cockney is very different from the idea of a typical speech of an Englishman.

According to E. Partridge (1992), “Cockney” exists on two levels:

- as spoken by the educated lower middle classes, it is a social dialect marked by some deviations in pronunciation but few in vocabulary and syntax;
- as spoken by uneducated, “Cockney” differs from Standard English not only in pronunciation but also in vocabulary, morphology and syntax.

“The Encyclopaedia Britannica” treats “Cockney” as an accent, not acknowledging it the status of the dialect. A linguist Rastorguyeva (1983:159) believes that “Cockney” is the dialect of London. The history of this dialect reveals the sources of the literary language in the late Middle English. The Early Middle English records made in London in 1258 show that the dialect of London was fundamentally East Saxon; in terms of the ME division, belonged to the South-Western dialect group.

The most likely explanation of the change of the dialect type and of the mixed character of London English lies in the history of London population. The inhabitants of London came from the south-western areas of England in the 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. London had over 35000 inhabitants by the 1377. Most of the new arrivals came from the East Midlands: Norfolk, Suffolk, and other populous and wealthy counties of Medieval England. As a result, the speech of Londoners was much closer to the East Midland dialect.

As recorded by Ch. Dickens over a century ago, “Cockney” was phonetically characterized by the interchange of the labial and labio - dental consonants [w] and [v]:

“wery” for “very”, and “vell” for “well”. The voiceless and voiced dental spirants are still replaced - though not very consistently – by [f] and [v] respectively: “fing” for the word

“thing”, and “farver” for the word “father”. Then there is the interchange of the aspirated and non - aspirated initial vowels: “hart” for “art”, and “eart for “heart” in Cockney. The most marked feature in the vowel sound is the substitution of the diphthong [ai] for standard [ei] in such words as: “day”, “face”, “rain”, “way” pronounced: [dai], [fais], [rain], [wai].

Cockneys don't pronounce their [h], e.g. “house” is pronounced [ouse], “here” is pronounced [ere] and, “plate” - [late], “plite” – [lite] ...

There are some specifically Cockney words and set expressions such as [up the pole]- “drunk”, [you' ll get yourself] “disliked” ( a remonstrance to a person behaving very badly ).

Cockney is lively and witty, its vocabulary is imaginative and colourful. Its specific feature not occurring anywhere else is so-called “rhyming slang “. The rhyming slang was used a lot by the performers in the old music halls in the early 1900s.

According to Brewer (1986), “rhyming slang” – slang, much used by the Cockneys, in which the word intended is replaced by one that rhymes with it, as:

[apples and pears] for “stairs”,  
[butcher’s hook] for “look”,  
[plates of meat] for “feet”,  
[Rory O’ More] for “door”,  
[dicky dirt] for “shirt”,  
[dicky bird] for “word”,  
[left and right] for “fight”,  
[mince pies] for “eyes”,  
[Micky Mouse] for “house”,  
[this and that] for “flat”,  
[loaf of bread] for “head”,  
[Uncle Ned] for “bed”,  
[bees and honey] for “money”,  
[custard and jelly] for “telly” (television)...

When the rhyme is a compound word the rhyming part is often dropped, leaving the uninitiated somewhat puzzled.

Thus, [Chivy (Chevy) Chase] rhymes with “face”, by dropping [chase], [Chivy] remains. For example,

[“Use your loaf!”] means “Use your head...don’t be silly!”

And [“Let me have a butcher’s”] means “Let me have a look.”

Similarly, [daisies] are “boots”, from [daisy roots], the [roots] were being dropped. Raspberry is a [heart (or vulgarly, [fart]), contracted from a [raspberry tart]. Numerous colloquial expressions derive from it, as: [that’s a fiddle], from [Yiddisher fiddle] (the musical instrument) which rhymed with [diddle].

This type of slang in the Cockney dialect arose due to the necessity to communicate without any witnesses (especially, police) in overcrowded districts of poor people. “Boots”, for instance, are called [daisy roots], a “hat” is [tit for tat], a “head” is sarcastically called [loaf of bread], and a “wife” - [trouble and strife] ...

It sets expression of its own. Here is an example of a rather crude phrase for somebody being dead: ["She may have pulled me through me operation,"] said Mrs Fisher, ["but 'streuth I'm not sure I wouldn't be better off pushing up the daisies, after all."] (C.Dickens). The vocabulary of the dialect is remarkable for its conservatism - many words that became obsolete in Standard English are still kept in its dialects, e.g. and “envy” < OE andian;

[barge pig] < OE berg;

[bysen blind] < OE bisene and others, where OE is Old English. If one keeps one’s ears open on buses, in railway stations, in street markets and similar places, it will soon become evident that the spirit of Cockney humour is still alive, although the old Cockney pronunciation is less common than hitherto.

### **Conclusion**

Dialects, accents and variants of English are the essential components of the history of the language, culture and history of Great Britain. Helping people to achieve intercultural sensitivity, establishing a willingness to understand, creating an open-minded attitude towards their own and



the target cultures through implementing the language and its variants, in all these ways foreign language teaching can contribute to the students' personal growth, development and life-long intercultural learning and communication.

We should study and save all variants of the English language of contemporary Great Britain and successfully implement them nowadays.

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