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**ESTUARY ENGLISH**

**A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE?**

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napisana pod kierunkiem  
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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Estuary English – the origins, features and controversies

#### 1. The origins of the term ‘Estuary English’

‘Estuary English’ (EE) has been evident in the writings of both professional linguists and journalists ever since David Rosewarne, a lecturer in linguistics at the University of Surrey, coined the term in October 1984 and published his views concerning the ‘intermediate’ language variety existing between Received Pronunciation and regional south-eastern accents in the *Times Educational Supplement*.

Rosewarne describes Estuary English as a variety that includes the features of standard English phonology, Received Pronunciation, and regional south-eastern speech patterns. He places Estuary English speakers on a continuum of accents between RP and Cockney (London speech) somewhere in the middle, where they can converge on from above and from below until they find themselves in the position where their speech reflects similar pronunciation traits.

What Rosewarne also suggests is that this variety reflects a set of changes leading the British society towards a more democratic system with blurred class barriers. Therefore, Estuary English can be used by those who hold power, as well as working-class members. Its attractiveness lies in the premise that it “obscures sociolinguistic origins”, thus preventing a person from sounding too posh and too common.

The area around the Thames and its estuary is supposed to be the cradle of this type of speech, but the influence of EE is felt in the whole of the south-east. Rosewarne does not exclude the possibility of EE exerting a strong influence on RP and becoming the pronunciation of the future.

Rosewarne stresses the fact that the processes involved in the emergence of EE are not new: ‘This started in the later Middle Ages when the speech of the capital started to influence the Court and from there changed the Received Pronunciation of the day’.

Although other equivalents of the label 'Estuary English' have been proposed, e.g.: Tom McArthur's 'New London Voice' or John Wells's 'London English', 'General London' or 'Tebbitt-Livingstone-speak', it caught on and began receiving great attention from the academic world, especially abroad, but most of all, from journalists, who used the fact that this 'new' unexplored variety left a lot of space for easy manipulation of reader's emotions evoked by the inevitable discussions concerning British accents.

## 2. Commonly cited salient features of Estuary English

The descriptions of Estuary English draw on the expertise of Standard English and Cockney and appear at the phonological, grammatical and lexical level.

The phonetic characteristics of Estuary English have been most explicitly expressed by Wells (1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1997, 1998), who states that it exhibits tendencies towards certain phonetic features similar to those of Cockney, namely:

- l-vocalization, pronouncing the l-sound in certain positions almost like [w] ...  
The l-sounds that are affected are those that are 'dark' [ɫ] in classical RP
- glottalling, using a glottal stop [ʔ] ... instead of a t-sound in certain positions ...  
The positions in which this happens are most typically syllable-final -- at the end of a word or before another consonant sound. ...
- happy-tensing, using a sound more similar to the [i:] of beat than to the [ɪ] of bit at the end of words like *happy, coffee, valley*. ...
- yod coalescence, using [tʃ] (a ch-sound) rather than [tj] (a t-sound plus a y-sound) in words like *Tuesday, tune, attitude*. ... The same happens with the corresponding voiced sounds: the RP [dʒ] of words such as *duke, reduce* becomes Estuary [dʒ], making the second part of *reduce* identical to *juice*, [dʒu:s]. (Wells 1997)
- striking allophony in GOAT (→ [ɒ]) before dark /l/ or its reflex), leading perhaps to a phonemic split (*wholly holy*) (Wells 1994)
- diphthong shift, particularly of the FACE, PRICE and GOAT vowels (*wotshor nime?*) (Wells 1997)

The features that Wells excludes from EE's phonetic make-up that are typical of Cockney are:

- h-dropping, omitting [h], so that Cockney *hand on heart* becomes [ˌænd ɒn ɑːʔ] ('and on 'eart).
- th-fronting, using labiodental fricatives ([f, v]) instead of dental fricatives ([θ, ð]). This turns *I think* into [ɑɪ ˈfɪŋk] and *mother* into [ˈmʌvə]. (Wells 1997)

However, Coggle (1993) claims that TH fronting in word-medial and word-final positions is becoming widespread at the Cockney end of the EE spectrum.

Rosewarne (1984) pinpoints one additional phonological feature:

- the realisation of /r/ different from that in RP and Cockney, but similar to General American: “the tip of the tongue is lowered and the central part raised to a position close to, but not touching, the soft palate” (argued with by Maidment 1994, who defines this realisation as a speech defect )

and claims that:

- prominence is given to auxiliary verbs and prepositions, as in the example *Let us get TO the point* (for the discussion see Maidment 1994 and Battarbee 1996)
- the EE pitch range is narrower than that of RP intonation (for the discussion see Maidment 1994), causing the overall impression of “deliberateness and even an apparent lack of enthusiasm” (proved false by Haenni’s research 1999)

At the level of grammar, Crystal distinguishes:

- The 'confrontational' question tag (p.299), as in *I said I was going, didn't I*. Other Cockney tags (such as *innit*) are also sometimes found in jocular estuary speech (or writing, p.410), which may indicate a move towards their eventual standardization.
- Certain negative forms, such as never referring to a single occasion (*I never did, No I never*). Less likely is the use of the double negative, which is still widely perceived as uneducated (p.194).
- The omission of the **-ly** adverbial ending, as in *You're turning it too slow, They talked very quiet for a while*,
- Certain prepositional uses, such as *I got off of the bench, I looked out the window*.
- Generalization of the third person singular form (*I gets out of the car*), especially in narrative style; also the generalized past tense use of *was*, as in *We was walking down the road*. (Crystal 1995: 327)

While the distinctive lexical features mentioned by Rosewarne (1994) and Coggle (1993) are:

- frequent use of the word *cheers* for *Thank you* and *Goodbye*,
- use of the word *mate* (at the Cockney end of the RP – EE – Cockney continuum),
- extension of the actual meaning of the word *basically* to use it as a gap filler

Still, Coggle (1993) and Wells (1998-1999) oppose to the claim that such expressions are markers of EE. Wells regards this usage of *cheers* as a stylistic variation of Standard English and Coggle admits that it is now widespread especially among the young, not necessarily EE speakers.

Both Rosewarne and Coggle maintain that EE speakers are open to influences from American English, and give a list of expressions that have been adopted in EE. They are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Americanisms adopted by EE speakers

Americanisms absorbed by Estuary English	British equivalents
<i>There you go</i>	<i>Here you are</i>
<i>Excuse me</i>	<i>Sorry</i>
<i>No way</i>	<i>By no means</i>
<i>Hopefully</i>	<i>I hope that</i>
<i>Hi</i>	<i>Hello</i>
<i>Right</i>	<i>Correct</i>
<i>Sure</i>	<i>Certainly</i>

Again, the use of these Americanisms has been explained as being part of youth sub-culture, not restricted to the EE territory.



### **3. The areas of controversy**

Ever since the term 'Estuary English' came into existence, there has been a considerable amount of discussion over the concept it represents, and linguists warn it is a highly controversial issue.

The controversies that Estuary English arouses concern the term itself, as well as the nature of the concept. Thus linguists wonder about the presumable territory of EE, its duration, causes of the rise and spread and its status as a homogeneous language variety. They argue whether it is a regiolect, dialect, accent or style. Moreover, there are those who fiercely oppose the idea of the existence of Estuary English. Difficulties are even greater when it comes to determining boundary-marking features of this quasi-variety. Discrepancies exist between research findings on the influence of EE on other accents or dialects and the reports that the media feed to ordinary people. The prospects of EE are puzzling and Rosewarne's anticipation that EE may replace Received Pronunciation has been questioned.

Another aspect in the debate over Estuary English is the social portrait of this variety and its speakers. Who and what shapes people's mental picture and awareness of 'Mockney'? How much do laymen know about EE? Is a stereotypical image of an EE speaker and a real EE speaker a convergent or divergent picture?

Last but not least is the question of what the practical applications of Estuary English could be. Is it a suitable model to be taught to foreign students, as Rosewarne suggested? Could it serve as a means of international business communication, with its increasing popularity among English businessmen?

Herein an attempt to discuss these issues will be made.

## Chapter 2

### Linguists' voices in the debate over Estuary English

Rosewarne's coinage has met with a considerable amount of criticism on account of its imprecision. Linguists have been discussing various aspects of the term itself, as well as the concept it represents. This section is meant to familiarise the reader with the main points under dispute.

#### 1. The geographical dimension: Is 'Estuary' English estuary?

Rosewarne (1984) states that "the heartland of this variety lies by the banks of the Thames and its estuary". However, in the name itself the Thames is not mentioned. This seems to have irritated some of the academics, who willingly displayed their reluctance to the term.

In his posting to the Linguist List, for instance, Battarbee (1996) talks of "... regional arrogance of the SouthEast within the UK: it takes for granted that 'Estuary' means the Thames Estuary. There are many estuaries in Great Britain, and several of the emerging regional mega-accent are estuarially based".

Other linguists have criticised the term because it suggests that the variety is restricted to the area of the Thames estuary. Trudgill (2001) severely criticises both the concept of EE and its name, among others because "it suggests that it is a variety of English confined to the banks of the Thames Estuary, which it is not". Also Maidment (1994) expresses his negative attitude to the term: "... Estuary English, if it exists at all, is not only spoken on or near the Thames estuary. There is no real evidence that it even originated there. ... the accent of younger speakers in Milton Keynes which is a new city quite a long way from the Thames Estuary has many of the features claimed for EE". Further, Crystal (1995) calls 'Estuary English' "something of a misnomer, for the influence of London speech has for sometime been evident well beyond the Thames estuary, notably in the Oxford-Cambridge-London triangle (p.50) and in the area to the south and east of London as far as the coast."

Moore (p.c.), UK coordinator of the European Network of Innovative

Schools, best describes the drawbacks of the term 'EE':

*The name is neither helpful nor accurate. Because of a superficial resemblance of some features to the speech sounds of the south-east of England, it has been named for the Thames estuary. But there is no evidence that it really originates there - and is probably far more geographically diverse in its origins. The description is also stupid, since it omits the name of the river - as if the Thames were the only river with an estuary. It is yet more stupid because the distribution of the accent has no real connection at all with the river estuary (whereas this might have been the case in past ages for the speech of communities whose lives, trade and occupations were determined by a river).*

To conclude, linguists argue that (1) London influence on English is not only apparent on the Thames estuary (Rosewarne himself wrote: "it seems to be the most influential accent in the south-east of England", not only in the Thames estuary), and (2) 'Estuary English' is not a felicitous or adequate name. Nonetheless, it is now so solidly entrenched in the English language, particularly in the academic circles, that it would be unwise to struggle against it.

## **2. Estuary English as a 'new' language variety**

People who have had a chance to read newspaper articles concerning Estuary English, might have had the impression that it is a relatively new Cockney-influenced language variety making its way into various regions of the country at a rapid pace.

In this respect, the opinions held by the coiner of the term and other linguists are congruent but different from the journalists' ones. Rosewarne (1984) explains that the variety that he chose to call 'Estuary English' is not new: "It appears to be a continuation of the long process by which London pronunciation has made itself felt. This started in the later Middle Ages when the speech of the capital started to influence the Court and from there changed the Received Pronunciation of the day." Although with a pinch of criticism, Trudgill (2001) supports this claim: "This is an inaccurate term which, however, has become widely accepted. It is inaccurate because it suggests that we are talking about a new variety, which we are not."

It is also affirmed by Wells, who admits that influences from London are now easier to observe:

*Estuary English is a new name. But it is not a new phenomenon. It is the continuation of a trend that has been going on for five hundred years or more - the tendency for features of popular London speech to spread out geographically (to other parts of the country) and socially (to higher social classes). The erosion of the English class system and the greater social mobility in Britain today means that this trend is more clearly noticeable than was once the case. (Wells 1997)*

To sum up, Estuary English is a result of certain long-lasting processes leading to language changes in the region where it appears, in which the influences from London play a significant role. It is not a variety that has spontaneously emerged recently. Therefore, what can be read about ‘the sudden emergence of a new type of English’ results from irresponsible disregard for the facts.

### **3. Causes of the rise and spread of EE - various hypotheses**

#### **3.1. Cockney speakers’ accommodation in the new territories?**

##### **Fox 1999/2000: Basildon Project**

One of the presumable causes of the rise of Estuary English is forced migration around the London area after World War II (overspill building programmes for Londoners). Cockney speakers would modify their speech to accommodate to the rest of the population traditionally settled in the places where they were transplanted, creating in the course of years an intermediate variety or intermediate varieties reflecting pronunciation compromises between the newly migrated and the rest of the new towns dwellers. The opposite (the locals changing their speech towards Londonish speech) would also be the case (Crystal 1995).

This hypothesis has been challenged by Susan Fox (2000 & 2003 p.c.) in her Basildon Project, which was conducted in 1999/2000.

Basildon is a predominantly white, working class town developed in the 1950’s in response to the need of East End Londoners forced to leave the city and find new houses in the post-war period. The location of the town, approximately 25 miles east of London, would imply that the dialect spoken there is Estuary English as Rosewarne (1984) believed that the variety was based by the banks of the Thames, but also used in the south-east of England.

Research methodology:

Fox recorded thirty adolescents, aged 12 – 19, from working class backgrounds. Equal numbers of females and males were chosen to avoid gender bias. All participants were born or settled in Basildon before the age of three. To obtain the material with different speech styles, the recording consisted of two stages: ‘Quick and Anonymous’ Survey (elicitation tasks – a passage of prose and a word reading list) and sociolinguistic interviews of 2 to 3 informants with the fieldworker. Finally, six speakers’ data were analysed auditorily in two phases.

The following variables were tested:

- /h/ dropping at the beginning of the word (word-initially) - supposedly not a feature of Estuary English but Cockney. Thus one should not find /h/ dropping in Basildon if it was the town where EE was the dominant variety
- voiceless TH fronting word-initially, word-medially and word-finally (/θ/ becomes [f]) and voiced TH fronting word-medially and word-finally (/ð/ becomes [v]) – also reported to be a Cockney not an Estuary feature
- T glottaling word-medially and word-finally, in end of syllable position when the next syllable begins with a consonant (found in both EE and Cockney) and word medially between vowels and vowel sounds (found in Cockney only)
- the MOUTH vowel /aʊ/, its monophthongal ([æ:] [a:]) and diphthongal realisations [æə].

The summary of the Basildon research findings is presented in Table 2.

The outcomes suggest that the variety used in Basildon displays the characteristics of Cockney, rather than Estuary English: “there appears to be a case for claiming that the vernacular is simply ‘Cockney moved East’” (Fox 2000). Therefore, it is tempting to disagree that ex-Londoners accommodated in terms of language to speakers of traditional dialects by adopting what some people now call ‘Estuary English’, but this situation may have been one of the many contributory factors in the gradual process of the establishment of Estuary English.

Table 2 The summary of the Basildon research findings (1999/2000). The data comes from three male and three female speakers analysed auditorily.

	<b>Interview style (IS)</b>	<b>Reading prose (RP)</b>	<b>Word-list style (WL)</b>
<b>/h/ dropping</b>	5 speakers – <b>85%</b> and above; 2 speakers – over <b>90%</b> ; the lowest rate <b>55%</b>	<b>16,5%</b>	<b>3,5%</b>
	Speakers showing awareness that /h/ dropping is a stigmatised feature: Speaker 1: <b>91%</b> IS – <b>25%</b> RP – <b>0%</b> WL Speaker 2: <b>85%</b> IS – <b>80%</b> RP – <b>0%</b> WL		
<b>TH fronting</b>	6 speakers – <b>100%</b> word-medially (voiceless), word- finally (voiceless) & word-finally (voiced)	<b>82, 5%</b> word- initially (voiceless) <b>90%</b> word- medially (voiceless)	<b>69,5%</b> word- initially (voiceless) <b>77%</b> word- medially (voiceless)
	word-initially (voiceless): 4 speakers – <b>100%</b> 1 speaker – <b>97%</b> 1 speaker – <b>77%</b>	<b>90%</b> word-finally (voiceless)	<b>83%</b> word- medially (voiced)
	[ʔ] used as a variant of a dental fricative in the word ‘something’ [sʌʔɪŋk]		
<b>T glottaling</b> between vowels, between a nasal and a vowel, between an /r/ and a vowel	5 speakers – between <b>96-100%</b>	<b>47,5%</b>	<b>25,5%</b>
	The speakers whose rate of T glottaling drops in the more formal style: Speaker 2: <b>100%</b> IS – <b>40%</b> RP – <b>25%</b> WL Speaker 3: <b>100%</b> IS – <b>20%</b> RP – <b>25%</b> WL The speakers who always do the glottaling at equally high levels: Speaker 4: <b>100%</b> IS – <b>100%</b> RP – <b>100%</b> WL Speaker 1: <b>100%</b> IS – <b>100%</b> RP – <b>100%</b> WL		
the <b>MOUTH</b> vowel	Monophthongal realisations of /aʊ/ found in Basildon speech: [ɑ:] or [æə]		

### 3.2. Ambitions and needs: social mobility and peer pressure

What has been observed in Britain for the last several years is what sociologists refer to as social mobility, which is “movement of individuals, families, or groups through a system of social hierarchy or stratification ... If a change in role does involve a change in social-class position, it is called ‘vertical mobility’ and involves either ‘upward mobility’ or ‘downward mobility’” (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition [1998] vol.10 pp. 921 - 922). Both types of vertical mobility may have led to what Rosewarne (1984 onwards) called “the middle ground”, where formerly upper middle or middle and lower classes meet, also linguistically.

Crystal (1995: 327) observes: “Estuary English may ... be the result of a confluence of two social trends: an up-market movement of originally Cockney

speakers, and a down-market trend towards 'ordinary' (as opposed to 'posh') speech by the middle class.” This claim is supported by Kerswill (1994): “people who speak this are often highly mobile, socially and geographically; they can converge on it from 'above' (RP) or 'below' (local dialect)”. He adds: “Because it obscures sociolinguistic origins, ‘Estuary English’ is attractive to many. The motivation, often unconscious, of those who are rising and falling socio-economically is to fit into their new environments by compromising but not losing their original linguistic identity.”

It is Kerswill, as well, who points out to the importance of social networks in the spread of Estuary English:

*The mechanism for standardisation lies in the kinds of social networks people have. People with more broadly based (more varied) networks will meet people with a higher social status, most typically at work. They will **accommodate** to them (Giles & Powesland 1975, Giles & Smith 1979) – a phenomenon known as **upward convergence**. The opposite, **downward convergence**, where a higher status person accommodates to a lower status person, is much rarer. Kerswill (2001)*

However, such relationships play a great role among adults, who are aware that their status may be dependent on the connections they have. In the case of children and adolescents, social networks are not crucial. It is peer pressure that exerts strong influence on their conduct, including their linguistic behaviour: “This accommodation [upward convergence and downward convergence] is thought to happen mainly among adults, not children or adolescents, because in Western societies children and adolescents have much more self-centred, narrower peer groups. This means that standardisation is something that adults do (while children and adolescents do other kinds of levelling).” (Kerswill 2001)

Coggle (1998 – 1999) explains why the young prefer using Estuary English to speaking the accents of their parents in a similar way: “Actually, young people have always tended to fall in line with their peers (rather than with their parents) and it is now considered unacceptable by younger people (and sometimes even by middle-aged people) to sound too "posh" and privileged, whereas in the past people had fewer qualms about their wealth and privilege.”

In her studies of Estuary English, Schmid (1999: 80) observed: “EE is an

important factor in group membership and an important way of signalling group solidarity.”

If a person does not intend to change their accent permanently, a need to demonstrate loyalty towards one’s interlocutors may lead to short-term accommodation and result in code-switching, that is “the ability to move between two or more accents, which enables the speaker to show his sense of community variously with the educated speaker of RP or with groups which express their regional or class identity by a non-standard accent” (Schmid 1999: 78). Schmid finds the linguistic situation of the south-east, with RP on the one hand and regional varieties on the other, conducive to the development of “mesolectal varieties united in the term Estuary English” (Schmid 1999: 78). She is convinced that in such divergent communities “every individual may choose between the standard and the non-standard variant of a variable”, and “Estuary English implies integrated variant-switching.” During her own research Schmid noticed that her young respondents were masters in accent-switching, depending on the situational context. She would describe one of her informants in the following way: "According to the given context he would slide up and down the accent scale, being an expert in accent-switching.”

It can be assumed that social mobility in the case of adults and peer group solidarity in the case of children and adolescents may have contributed to the spread of Estuary English along the social scale of the British society.

### **3.3 Geographical mobility, dialect levelling and koineisation**

The socio-economic situation in England in the last several decades forced many inhabitants of the southeast to commute to work, others moved out of London or to London. All of them have been exposed to an intense contact with people speaking different dialects. The speech of the capital has become felt, not only because of its widespread appearance in the media: “London-influenced speech can now be heard around three other estuaries -- the Humber in the north-east, the Dee in the north-west, and the Severn in the west -- at least partly because of the relatively easy rail and motorway commuting networks” (Crystal 1995).

Constant dialect contact leads to long-term accommodation, which takes



place “between accents that differ regionally rather than socially” (Trudgill 1986: 3). By virtue of this and other complex processes, such as radical changes in economy and people’s social networks, the non-standard urban dialects are being levelled in the whole SE region (Kerswill 1994). Trudgill (1996: 98) states that levelling implies “the reduction or attrition of *marked* variants ... forms that are unusual”. Kerswill (2001) suggests that dialect levelling is accompanied by standardisation. However, this phenomenon is not ubiquitous: “EE retains some regional low-level phonetic features” and it is “a particular example of the resistance that dialects show against becoming fully standardised and homogenised” (Kerswill 2001).

Kerswill’s hypothesis that ‘Estuary English’ can be accounted for by dialect levelling, is shared by Williams:

*The principal trend in the past thirty years would appear to be dialect levelling, i.e. the reduction of phonological, syntactic and morphological differences between regional dialects, and the adoption of common linguistic features over a wide geographical area. In the south of England, this process has resulted in a generalised south-eastern variety of English, popularly referred to as Estuary English. (Williams 1999)*

A closely related factor in the formation of Estuary English may be a process of koineisation. Trudgill claims that dialect contact and dialect mixture situations initially create a high rate of linguistic variability, which undergoes gradual focusing through reduction. This reduction is done through the process of koineisation which entails “*levelling* out of minority and otherwise marked speech forms, and of *simplification*, which involves, crucially a reduction of irregularities”, the result being that “a historically mixed but synchronically stable dialect which contains elements from the different dialects that went into mixture, as well as interdialect forms that were present in none” is created (1996: 107).

Britain (2003 p.c.) speculates about the possibility of koineisation in the south-east: “I think that there is regional dialect convergence/koineisation going on in South East England, but am also sceptical about the existence of EE - a regional koine may well be in the process of focussing in the south-east, but there will still be considerable internal regional and social variation...”

Estuary English, as will be demonstrated in section 4, is by no means a

uniform accent or dialect. It shares the features of both: a national standard and regional southeastern varieties of speech. There is a degree of likelihood that it may be a southeastern koine.

### **3.4. London Regional RP**

Heretofore, the explanations of how Estuary English might have emerged involved the interplay between the standard and regional accents/dialects of the south-east. There are, however, linguists who are convinced that Received Pronunciation itself has developed factions that incorporate some regional features (not marked enough to make them simply regional accents).

Cruttenden is a case in point. He states that Regional RP will “vary according to which region is involved in ‘regional’” (1994: 80), and what others call Estuary English he defines as the London-influenced form of RP (1994: 86). Similarly, Windsor Lewis (1985, cited in Fabricius (2000: 32)) identifies ‘metropolitan sub-variety of RP,’ situated in London.

These opinions are shared by Gupta (2003 p.c.): “I myself (and I'm not alone in this one...) think that the supposedly 'non-localised' accent of England, RP, has actually developed regional accents. The kinds of accents used by BBC presenters are often regional varieties of RP... If you see 'Estuary' in this wider sense it seems to make more sense.”

Upton (2003 p.c.) only partly agrees with the above statements: “RP does indeed have sundry 'near' RP variants, some of which are localisable to the southeast, the north, etc. It would be quite wrong to claim that RP is moving in the direction of something called 'EE'. It is certainly changing, as any living accent changes, and some of the pressures on it might well be south-eastern, but those pressures are complex in geographical and social origin and are changing all the time.”

In this light, Rosewarne's predictions that “Estuary English may be the strongest native influence upon RP” (1984) should not be totally rejected.

### 3.5. Influence of the media

It has been suggested that the spread of Estuary English has been prompted by the media.

*The type of estuary English that most broadcasters (certainly most broadcasters under 40) speak has become the vernacular of the age. It isn't a case of a widespread adoption of mockney, or symptomatic necessarily of what are taken to be the inverted snobbery and anxiously democratising principles of the age, but a reflection of the obvious powers of mass communication. (Observer Sunday December 24, 2000)*

Their role, if there were such, would be twofold. The first thing to be considered is whether people who watch television or listen to radio broadcasts can be influenced by the accents present there to such an extent as to change their own pronunciation in the long run. Then, it is worth mentioning that the media engage in some kind of propaganda aimed at shaping a specific image of a particular language variety, which strengthens the already existing stereotypes or builds new ones. What is it like in the case of Estuary English?

Some linguists attribute the spread of Estuary English to many factors, among other things its wider acceptance in the public media, and consequently an increased amount of exposure to its sounds. What also hides behind it is the role of media personalities speaking this variety, and whom ordinary people would like to imitate (Crystal 1995: 327 & Schmid 1999: 65), perhaps for psychological reasons.

But the function of the media should not be overestimated. Trudgill, for instance, assumes that essential to the diffusion of linguistic innovations is accommodation, which occurs only during face-to-face interaction:

*...the electronic media are not very instrumental in the diffusion of linguistic innovations, in spite of widespread popular notions to the contrary. The point about the TV set is that people, however much they watch and listen to it, do not talk to it (and even if they do, it cannot hear them!), with the result that no accommodation takes place. If there should be any doubt about the vital role of face-to-face contact in this process, one has only to observe the geographical patterns associated with linguistic diffusion. Were nationwide radio and television the major source of this diffusion, then the whole of Britain would be influenced by a particular innovation simultaneously. This of course is not what happens... (Trudgill 1986: 40)*

As Upton (cited in Morrish 1999) captured it: "...television and radio can't permanently change people's accents. To learn an accent, you have to speak it".

On the other hand, the media are said to shape public opinion, and in this respect their potential is greater. The notion of Estuary English has been extremely popular with the media, mainly because of its geographical location:

*Much of the popularity of the notion is due to the fact that our media are very London-based. Not only do south-eastern matters receive great prominence, but there is an undoubted wish by journalists to suggest that the whole of Britain is heavily influenced by the capital. If the estuary involved had been the Severn, the Humber, or the Clyde, I doubt if we would have heard very much about 'Estuary English' at all. (Upton 2003 p.c.)*

It could be deduced that the degree of public recognition of the term should be very high, the reason being the extensive and aggressive media coverage of Estuary English. Much to the surprise of everyone, the facts are contrary (for details see Chapter 3 Section 1.2.). There is no evidence that the media could have directly contributed to the spread of Estuary English. Nor, despite all the bold attempts, have they significantly increased people's knowledge of this construct.

All things considered, none of the presumable causes in separation could have lead to the emergence of Estuary English. What may have prompted its rise and progress is the spontaneous but long-lasting interplay of them all. But again it is impossible to state that categorically.

#### **4. The status of EE as a homogeneous language variety**

In the debate over Estuary English one of the focal points is establishing whether it is a language variety in its own right and how homogeneous and compact the alleged entity is. The following section will first illustrate the various opinions held by linguists, and next the reader will acquaint with the researches designed to determine the status of EE.

##### **4.1. Is Estuary English a regiolect, dialect, accent or style?**

While reading literature on Estuary English, it is possible to come across a multitude of expressions referring to it. The most common are regiolect, dialect, accent and style. It is thus difficult to describe Estuary English not to run the risk of committing a blunder and being ridiculed at. It would be helpful to consider what category this variety falls in by looking at what terminology professional linguists apply to it. The task will not be easy, though. Roach (accessed 2003) warns against categorising EE: “there is no such accent, and the term should be used with care”. It must be true since linguists’ opinions are conflicting.

Crystal (1995: 327) argues, “the variety is distinctive as a dialect not just as an accent” because apart from pronunciation, what distinguishes EE speakers from others are grammatical and lexical features (an essential condition for a variety to be called a dialect). While describing EE, apart from the phonetic aspects, Wells talks about “standard grammar and usage” (1994), suggesting the same.

David Britain (2003b) calls Estuary English “a relatively new regional dialect of the south-east of England” on account of its geographical distribution.

On the other hand, Tatham (1999/2002) believes that it is an accent: “In no sense is the newer Estuary English an ‘elevated’ or ‘more sophisticated’ or ‘more educated’, etc., version of Cockney. By the same token it is not a debased form of Standard English or RP [Received Pronunciation] - it is simply an accent of English.” This conviction stands in opposition to what Maidment suggested in a conference paper. He considered “the possibility that EE is no more than slightly pushed up Cockney or RP which has gone “down market” in appropriate situations and that rather than there being a newly developed accent which we should call EE,

all that has happened over recent years is that there has been a redefinition of the appropriateness of differing styles of pronunciation to differing speech situations”.

Others however, recognise the fuzziness of the concept: “Estuary English presents a similar problem as RP: it is rather vague. Within what would be called as EE, there are so many varieties that it seems difficult to consider it as a unitary accent; in this it is much like RP.” (Parsons 1998: 61) and “EE is something much more vague; it might be a modification of several south-east English regional accents in the direction of what is perceived to be the standard, or diluted Cockney spreading outwards from London... It is much more likely that the situation is a dynamic one, with local forms and immigrated forms influencing each other.” (Parsons 1998: 60-61). Setter (2003 p.c.) backs up this observation: “I agree... that Estuary English is a kind of umbrella term for a number of accents spoken in the area of England around London and beyond which have some similarities, like glottal stopping and /l/ vocalisation, for example. It certainly is not an identifiable single accent.”

The author is not in authority to decide whether Estuary English is a regiolect, a dialect, an accent or a style. It is probably none of them, and as Wells (1998) put it: “... there is no such real entity as EE - - it is a construct, a term, and we can define it to mean whatever we think appropriate”.

#### **4.2. Difficulties in defining phonological boundaries between Received Pronunciation, Estuary English and Cockney**

Rosewarne (1984 onwards) places Estuary English speakers on an accent continuum between RP and Cockney, and according to him they can display various shades of EE either towards the Cockney or the RP end of this continuum.

Maidment (1994) represents this definition by means of Diagram 1 and points to the fact that such a depiction of Estuary English would indicate that there are rigid boundaries between Cockney and EE, and EE and RP.

Diagram 1

**[Cockney][EE][RP]**

Maidment sees it as an oversimplification and is more prone to accept a model represented in Diagram 2, which takes into account the stylistic and register variation present in every speaker of a given accent.

Diagram 2

**[I <---Cockney---> F] [I <---RP---> F]**

**[I <---EE---> F]**

The difficulties in deciding whether a certain passage of speech can be recognised as Estuary English lies in the “fuzziness of the boundaries between EE and Cockney, and EE and RP” (Maidment 1994), which is the consequence of an overlap between the formal style of Cockney and informal style of EE, and the formal style of EE and the informal style of RP.

Several studies have been designed to determine whether such boundary markers exist and whether they can function separately or collectively only. One of such attempts was made by Haenni (1999: 14 – 38), who examined selected accent features of EE to see if they can fix a rigid boundary between Cockney, EE and RP. His survey reveals that clear-cut markers of Estuary English do not exist (1999: 38).

Haenni systematised his findings in a form of a table. Here it has been adapted to suit the technical requirements of the paper by permission of Haenni (see Table 3).

Fieldwork data presented in the next sub-section will verify at least some of these findings.

Table 3 Summary of (selected) phonetic features of EE adapted from Haenni 1999

Feature	Boundary EE-RP	Boundary EE-Cockney	Marker of EE
T-glottalling	RP accepts glottaling only in word or morpheme final positions before consonant	Cockney-style intervocalic use of glottal stop excluded from EE	Unsuitable because of its increasing wide geographical distribution
L-vocalisation	Increasingly accepted in RP, in particular after labial consonants; avoided after alveolar plosives	Possible number of vowel neutralisations before [o] allegedly much higher in Cockney	Proposed boundaries appear too arbitrary (change in progress)
Yod-coalescence	RP tends to confine yod coalescence to unstressed environments	Fuzzy boundary, because traditional Cockney yod dropping after alveolar plosives is gradually replaced by yod coalescence	Boundary Cockney-EE impossible to establish (competitive change in progress)
Yod dropping	Process of shedding yod increasingly accepted in RP as well (in particular after /l/ and /s/)	Presumably, yod dropping in EE accepted only after /l/, /s/, /z/, /θ/ (in contrast to extensive, East-Anglian-style use)	Difficult to establish a coherent picture; boundary EE-RP extremely fuzzy
EE /r/	Allegedly found neither in RP...	... nor in 'London' pronunciation	If referring to labio-dental [v]: probably rather an example of a supra-regional 'youth norm' than a distinct marker of EE
Happy-tensing	General trend towards the use of /i/ instead of /ɪ/ currently operating both in Britain and the United States	Impossible to be established; diphthongised variant, for example, can occur both in Cockney and in EE	Not distinctive because part of a larger process
Decline of weak /ɪ/	Use of a more centralised vowel [ə] accepted in both RP and EE	Cockney appears to cling to [ɪ] in certain endings	General trend not only affecting the south
Developments affecting /ʊ/	In RP (and presumably, in EE as well), /u/ is gradually replacing /ʊ/ in weak syllables		Part of a general trend (while Rosewarne's mentioning of word-final lengthening seems dubious)
Diphthong shifts	RP: Quality of diphthongs /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /əʊ/ maintained	Cockney-style diphthong shifts >/aɪ/, >/aɪ/, >/ʌʊ/ at work in EE as well; /aʊ/, however, not monophthongised in EE	Boundary Cockney-EE too fuzzy to be distinctive
GOAT split	Not part of RP	Allegedly well established "in all kinds of London-flavoured accents, from broad Cockney to near-RP" (Wells)	Boundary Cockney-EE too fuzzy to be distinctive; feature referred to by Wells only
Other selected features		Generally restricted to Cockney: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H-dropping</li> <li>• TH-fronting</li> </ul> (though apparently steadily advancing)	

### 4.3. Evidence from empirical research:

To give credence to the opinions expressed earlier it is necessary to confront them with hard empirical research. Not many of them have been conducted so far, though, and the pioneers in studies over Estuary English were Altendorf (1999a & 1999b),



Przedlacka (2001 & 2002), Schmid (1999) and Fox (2000 & 2003 p.c.; for details see Chapter 2 Section 3.1.). The researches will be presented chronologically.

#### **4.3.1. Altendorf 1997: London Project (1)**

Altendorf's study was conducted in London. The adolescent informants, born and brought up in Greater London, were aged 9 and 14, and at the time of the study were attending a moderately expensive, private day school located in a middle-class area, close to a working class area. The students came from lower-middle to middle-middle class backgrounds. The experiment involved: 1 junior schoolboy, 6 senior schoolgirls, and 6 senior schoolboys (but 4 teenagers were discussed in the available paper). Adults between 45 and 55 years of age were also recorded.

Altendorf elicited the discussion style, the interview style, the reading style and the word list style.

The linguistic variables tested in the study

- /t/-glottaling (=after a stressed syllable) and when /t/ preceded by a vowel, nasal or lateral);
  - quantitative differences in the use of the glottal variant in Cockney, EE and RP
  - differences in the distribution of the glottal variant in different phonetic contexts (esp. the stigmatised use of [ʔ] in intervocalic and pre-lateral positions)
- /l/-vocalisation
  - quantitative differences in the use of the vocalised variant in Cockney, EE and RP
  - differences in the distribution of the vocalised variant in different phonetic contexts

The findings:

/t/-glottaling decreases with the rise in formality and social class, esp. in the case of adults, with one adult speaker demonstrating immensely low degree of /t/-glottaling.

Moreover, adolescent speakers do more glottaling than adult speakers, but students from junior school tend to do less glottaling than adults – influenced more by parents than peers. Altendorf observes a gap in the frequency of /L/-vocalisation between generations and tendency to converge within them. In addition, the frequency of /l/-vocalisation is much higher than that of /t/-glottaling. Different frequencies according to class are no longer observed in the older generation and differences according to style are disappearing.

Conclusions:

Altendorf (1999a) concludes that /t/-glottaling and /l/-vocalisation are characteristic of EE, but they ‘are not exclusive enough to define Estuary English as a distinct variety’.

#### **4.3.2. Przedlacka 1997/1998: the Home Counties Project**

The sociophonetic study of teenage speech in the Home Counties conducted by Przedlacka, contained the diachronic and the synchronic dimensions. The data from (1) ‘Estuary English’ speakers and the informants included in *The Survey of English Dialects* (the SED) recorded in the 1950s (Orton 1967 & 1970, in Przedlacka 2001 & 2002a), and (2) speakers of ‘Estuary English’, Cockney and Received Pronunciation were compared. Gender and class differences were taken into account. The fieldwork was done in four localities: Aylesbury, Bucks, Little Baddow, Essex, Farningham, Kent, and Walton-on-the-Hill, Surrey (the supposed territory of Estuary English) each locality represented by four speakers, eight males and eight females altogether. The speakers were recruited in two different types of schools: eight students from selective (grammar) schools and eight students from non-selective (comprehensive) schools.

The 14 phonetic variables tested by Przedlacka were:

- the vowels of:

FLEECE, TRAP, STRUT, THOUGHT, GOOSE, FACE, PRICE, GOAT, MOUTH

- /l/-vocalisation
- /t/-glottaling
- STR-cluster
- yod-dropping
- Th-fronting

[Words containing some of these variables pronounced by the alleged Estuary English speakers recorded during this study can be heard on a CD-ROM accompanying this paper (by permission of Joanna Przedlacka).]

The findings for EE speakers:

Realisations of Estuary English vowels (B for Buckinghamshire, E for Essex, K for Kent and S for Surrey):

FLEECE: [iɪ] - [i] (B, E, K and S)

TRAP: [a] - [æ] - [ɛ] (B), [æ] - [ɛ] (E), [a] - [æ] (K and S)

STRUT: [ʊ] - [v] (B), [ʌ] (E, K and S)

THOUGHT: [ɔ<sup>ɹ</sup>] (B), [ɔ] (E), [ɔ<sup>ɹ</sup>] (K), [ɔ] (S)

GOOSE: [u] - [ʏ] (B), [u] - [u] (E), [u] - [ʏ] (K), [u] (S)

FACE: [ɛɪ] (B), [ɛɪ] - [ɛɪ] (E), [ɛɪ] (K and S)

PRICE: [aɪ] - [pɪ] (B), [aɪ] - [qɪ] (E, K and S)

MOUTH: [æʊ] - [æʏ] [aʊ] - [aʏ] (B, E, K and S)

GOAT: [əʏ] (B), [əʏ] - [əʊ] (E), [əʏ] (K), [əʏ] - [əʊ] (S)

Consonants:

Currently l-vocalisation is firmly established in all the four localities and vocalised variants are more numerous in comparison with the SED data.

In three counties, Buckinghamshire, Essex and Surrey, t-glottaling stays at the same level as it was fifty years ago. In Kent women use the glottal variants more often.

Przedlacka takes it as “evidence that we are not witnessing an emergence of a new accent variety” and that the reports of significantly increased glottaling are mere exaggeration.

Interestingly, Essex and RP speakers demonstrate an identical amount of glottaling, whereas the occurrence of l-vocalisation in the Kent and Essex informants approximates the Cockney frequency.

The data also indicate that there is a difference between RP, EE and Cockney in the distribution of glottal variants, depending on phonetic context.

There is lack of apparent differences between the counties, genders and social classes in the realisation of the STR-cluster.

TH is predominantly realised as standard /θ/ and /ð/, however TH fronting ([f] and [v]) and dental fricatives with a labial gesture [ð<sup>v</sup>] also occur. TH fronting amounts to 42% for males and 15% for females.

There exist minor differences between the counties, genders and social classes in the amount of yod-dropping: WC speakers drop their yods more often than MC speakers and males are more advanced than females.

Conclusions:

Przedlacka (2001) concludes that in the territory where EE is said to be the dominant way of speaking there is “a number of distinct accents” with some influences from London speech, not a single and definable variety. She observes tendencies rather than absolutes as far as differences in the distribution of phonetic variables in male and female speech are concerned.

#### **4.3.3. Schmid 1998: Canterbury Project**

The study in Canterbury involved 48 informants: 13 men, 13 women and 22 teenagers: aged 14-15 and 17-18. The data were collected directly; recordings of spontaneous speech were made and transcribed phonetically. Eventually Schmid analysed 22 informants displaying many EE features as she set out to prove that Estuary English influenced the speech of her informants.

5 phonetic variables were investigated:

- Glottal reinforcement
- L-vocalisation
- Yod coalescence
- Diphthong shifts
- Vowel changes

The findings:

Some informants used variants inconsistently.

The males displayed over 50% frequency in the use of a glottal stop in all possible contexts and vocalised variants equally miscellaneously. Their vowels were closer to the Cockney end of the continuum.

The female informants were using fewer glottal variants, which in four women's speech never trespassed the limit of 50%. The number of glottal stops in intervocalic positions was much lower than in the male samples. L-vocalisation was common in various contexts and vowels tended to have the quality of those in RP.

Schmid observed an interesting phenomenon among adolescents - they were capable of accent-switching, depending on the situation they were in. "I found that teenagers are experts in camouflaging their original accent, adopting a more 'trendy' accent in informal situations, and more conservative accents in formal and serious contexts" (Schmid 1999: 142). She did not notice much difference in terms of the use of specific variants between the genders; more important were education, context and social background. The latter did not matter so much outside school.

Conclusions:

Schmid concludes that: (1) "... speakers from different social backgrounds share to a greater or lesser extent *Estuary English* as their common accent", (2) "EE unites all the young people, regardless of which social background they come from" and (3) males are more willing to adopt stigmatised features of EE than women (Schmid

1999: 144).

#### **4.3.4. Altendorf 1998/99: London Project (2)**

Altendorf's second research in South London suburbs was only an introduction to a greater project devoted to Estuary English (Altendorf 2003). There were six informants altogether: 2 Estuary English speakers, 2 Cockney speakers from East End and 2 RP speakers from a school in Central London, all of them women born and brought up in Central or Greater London. Social classes were represented by different schools: Comprehensive School, Public School I, Public School II – working class, middle class and upper middle class.

Three linguistic variables were examined:

- /l/-vocalisation to find out if there is a difference of frequency in the use of the vocalised variant in Cockney, EE and RP
- /t/-glottaling to see if there is a difference of frequency in the use of the glottal variant in Cockney, EE and RP and what the difference with regard to the distribution of the glottal variant in different phonetic contexts is (in intervocalic and prelateral positions)
- TH fronting to determine if TH fronting can serve as a 'boundary marker' between EE and Cockney

The examined styles were the interview style, the reading style and the word list style.

Altendorf puts forward the following questions:

*(a) What are the linguistic and social patterns of diffusion of /t/-glottaling, /l/-vocalisation and TH fronting on the continuum between Cockney and RP?*

*(b) Can any of them serve as 'boundary markers' between EE and its neighbouring varieties as proposed by Wells (cf. Table 3)*

*(c) Are they creeping into the 'realm of RP', which according to Rosewarne is already under attack from EE?*

The findings:

/L/-vocalisation turns to be well advanced in all three classes and styles. However, the frequency of vocalised forms varies: the higher the class, the lower the occurrence. There exists a wide gap between the middle and upper (middle) class. Therefore, Altendorf concludes that “the relative frequency of /l/-vocalisation can at best function as a ‘boundary marker’ between EE and RP”.

/T/-glottaling is widely used by all three social classes, but there is social and stylistic differentiation. The most noticeable difference exists between the working class and the middle class speakers in formal styles, while between the middle and upper middle class the difference is less obvious. “The relative frequency of /t/-glottaling can at best serve as a ‘boundary marker’ between Cockney and EE in formal styles”, writes Altendorf. Working class speakers are found to do /t/-glottaling frequently in intervocalic and prelateral positions. In this context the feature is almost absent in the interview style and ruled out in the word list style in the middle and upper (middle) class speech.

TH fronting only occasionally appears in the middle and upper (middle) class speech. A marked social difference is observed between working and middle class speakers. “TH fronting can therefore serve as a ‘boundary marker’ between Cockney and EE.”

Conclusions:

/L/-vocalisation and /t/-glottaling are widespread in the speech of all social classes on the continuum between Cockney and RP. Nevertheless, the use of a glottal stop by EE and RP speakers is restricted to less formal styles and is blocked in intervocalic and prelateral positions. TH fronting is a feature of Cockney, extremely rarely present in EE and RP.

The glottal stop between vowels (and to a certain extent in prelateral position) along with TH fronting can (to a certain extent) play the role of ‘boundary markers’ between EE and Cockney.

/L/-vocalisation and /t/-glottaling are possible in RP. TH fronting and /t/-glottaling in prelateral position are slowly entering into EE.

All the above studies debunk the myth of the emergence of a single and

definable accent. The speech samples analysed prove that there are some tendencies towards specific language changes in the south-east of England, but the pace of these changes is different in the particular localities. In addition, the speech patterns of men and women differ, with males tending to use stigmatised features more readily than females and women being more innovative. Differences between the two social classes analysed are also noticeable.

## **5. The influence of Estuary English on other accents.**

In the late 1990s and at the beginning of this century the media have been feeding the English audience with frequent reports of a gigantic flow of Estuary English in many corners of Great Britain, for instance Hull, Newcastle or Liverpool. Moreover, Estuary English was blamed for the change in the Glaswegian speech patterns. The press shocked the readers with such headlines as “Scouse is threatened by the rising tide of Estuary English”, “Estuary English Sweeps the North”, “Glasgow puts an accent on Estuary”, “Cockneys are killing off the Scots accent”, “Soaps erode the Scots accent” or “Bad language crosses the Border”, all referring to Estuary English as a potential threat to the identity of the place expressed among others through a local accent. All of these accounts, however, appear to be gross journalistic exaggerations, finding no confirmation in any empirical research. The aim of the following section is to prove that Estuary English is far from ‘sweeping’ Britain despite the spread of some south-eastern linguistic innovations.

### **5.1. Estuary English in the Fens? - Britain 2003.**

The degree of absorption of certain south-eastern linguistic innovations into the Fenland Englishes was studied by David Britain, lecturer in dialectology at the University of Essex. The material used for the study was part of a corpus of recordings of the language used in the Fens, a rural area to the north-west of East Anglia, about 150 km north of London. The region is rural, with main industries of



agriculture and food processing. From the point of view of linguistics it is an interesting territory as regards its dialect formation processes, involving dialect contact between the eastern (Norfolk) and western (Lincolnshire and Huntingdonshire) varieties. Dialect in the Fens shows ‘structural characteristics of an interdialect, a structural compromise of dialects from the west and east’ (Britain 2003a). The speech of 18 adolescents from three different localities, the western Spalding, the central Wisbech and the eastern Terringtons (=St Clement and St John) was analysed in terms of allophonic realisations of 4 consonant [voiced and voiceless (TH), (L) and (R)] and 5 vocalic variables [(U:), (U), (OU), (Λ) and (AI)].

The findings:

- voiced and voiceless (TH): the fronting of /θ/ and non-initial /ð/ to [f] and [v] respectively: ‘think’ [fɪŋk]; father [fɑ:və];

TH fronting is present in the speech of Fenland adolescents, but not older speakers. The overall instances are not frequent, with more occurrences of the non-standard variants in the eastern than the central and western parts of the Fens. Moreover, voiced TH is fronted more often than voiceless TH.

According to Wells (1997) TH fronting is not a characteristic of Estuary English. Nevertheless, this feature has been reported in many urban centres in England. Britain (2003a: 82) questions the legitimacy of Wells’s claim: “It is sometimes considered as a ‘London’ and not an ‘Estuary’ feature though it is difficult to ascertain, in the absence of socio-economically stratified and sociolinguistically sophisticated analyses, how such judgements are made”.

- (L): the vocalisation of /l/: ‘bottle’ [bɒʔɹ], ‘bell’ [bɛɹ], ‘belt’ [bɛɹt]

The levels of L-vocalisation are the highest in the western and the lowest in the eastern Fens. Tentatively, Britain attributes this state to the lack of clear-dark /l/ distinction in the latter part of the Fens.

- (R): the use of labiodental [ʋ] of /r/: ‘red’ [ʋɛd], ‘brown’ [bʋaʊn]

The Fens are acquiring this innovation at a very slow pace: the use of labiodental [ʋ] is rare, with the lowest occurrences in the western Spalding.

- (U): The fronting of /u:/: ‘goose’ [gʏ:s]

p. v.: [ɣ:], [ʏ:] and [ʉ:]

The fronting of /u:/ seems advanced in all the three analysed localities.

- (U): The fronting, unrounding and lowering of /ʊ/: ‘good’ [gɪd], ‘books’ [bɪks]

p. v.: [ɪ], [ʉ] and [ʊ];

The fronting and unrounding of /ʊ/ is much more frequent in the East than in the West of the Fens, the cause being the lack of clear /ʊ/ - /ʌ/ split in the latter.

- (OU): The fronting of /ʌu/: ‘know’ [nɛɪ], ‘show’ [ʃɛɪ]

p. v.: [æʉ - æɪ], [ɛʉ - ɛɪ], [ɛʉ - ɛɪ], [ʌʉ], [ʌɪ], [ɒʉ], [ɣʉ] and [ɒʉ]

Two different patterns of change must be distinguished on account of the MOAN-MOWN distinction retained in the eastern Terrington. In the eastern Fenland adolescents do more fronting in the MOWN lexical sets than the MOAN lexical sets. Two thirds of the central Fenland informants use [ɛʉ] or fronter variants, while in the west the use of such variants amounts to 30% only.

- (ʌ): The fronting of /ʌ/: ‘cup’ [kɛp]

p. v.: [ʊ], [ʏ], [ɣ], [ʌ], [ʌ], [ɛ] and [a];

Fronting of /ʌ/ was not observed in the speech samples, and London-type

variants very occasionally occurred in the far south only.

- (AD): The backing and monophthongisation of /ai/: ‘price’ [pɹaɪs - pɹɑ:s]

p. v.: [ɔɪ], [ʌɪ], [əɪ], [ʌɪ], [ɑɪ] and [ɑ:- ɒ:].

In Wisbech and the Terringtons adolescents use similar variants of /ai/, whereas in Spalding more monophthongal forms in pre-voiced environments are found.

(p. v. = the possible variants found in the Fenland speech)

To conclude, the study proves that the dialects of the Fenland do change, but only to some extent influenced by the language of the South-East. Furthermore, the alterations in the speech of the young inhabitants of East Anglia are taking place at different paces in the particular parts of the region. It would be much premature then to claim that Estuary English is leading its way into the homes of the Fenlanders. As Britain (2003a) captured it: “Despite the fact that some features of the south-eastern koine have diffused to the Fens, enough local differentiation still survives for us to claim that this variety has not (yet) been fully swept up into the empire of ‘Estuary English’.”

## **5.2. Jockney in Glasgow? – Stuart-Smith, Timmins and Tweedie 1997**

After the media conveyed their own version of Stuart-Smith and her assistants’ research findings in June 2000 (and earlier), the readers were left with an impression that no place could be safe against the invasion of Estuary English. The newspaper headlines were popularising the term ‘Estuary English’ in a most negative sense and the comments that journalists made were based on what had been published in 1999 in Foulkes--Docherty’s *Urban Voices* under the title “Glasgow: accent and voice quality”. However, the truth was distorted and Stuart-Smith fell yet another victim of the reporters in their need to feed the people hungry for sensation. “The quickfire patter of Glaswegians ... is being polluted by southern slang – Estuary English” or “The quickfire Glaswegian patter ... is being infiltrated by Estuary English” - such comments hit the headlines of very well-known newspapers.

What was the truth like then? Did Stuart-Smith find traces of Mockney (=Estuary English) in Scotland? Or do children in Glasgow speak Jockney [“jockney = blend of *jock* 'working-class Scot' plus *Cockney* 'working-class Londoner’” (Wells 1999)]? The information included below comes from *Urban Voices*.

Research methodology:

The research took place in Glasgow in 1997. Two different areas were designated for the purpose of collecting data – recording the speech of Glaswegians: Maryhill, a WC inner-city area and Bearsden, a MC suburb to the north-west (an area of upward social mobility). The 32 informants were selected in the way that would reflect different social and regional backgrounds, both sexes (equal numbers) and different ages [adults (40-60) and children (13-14)]. High quality digital recordings of read word-lists and spontaneous conversations were made, with word-lists digitalised into a Pentium PC running Xwaves/ESPS speech-processing software. An analysis followed.

The researchers analysed the vowels of:

KIT, HEAD, DRESS, NEVER, TRAP, STAND, LOT, STRUT, FOOT, BATH, AFTER, CLOTH, OFF, NURSE, FLEECE, FACE, PALM, STAY, THOUGHT, GOAT, MORE, GOOSE, DO, PRICE, PRIZE, CHOICE, MOUTH, NEAR, SQUARE, START, BIRTH, BERTH, NORTH, FORCE, CURE, happY, lettER, commA, horsES.

and the following consonants:

STOPS, TH, S, Z, WH, X, H, J, R, L.

The findings:

The details of the findings have been illustrated in Tables 4 and 5. Additionally, Table 5 contains the characteristics of EE consonants (Wells 1997) to provide the frame of reference in the comparison of what is thought to be EE with what was discovered by Stuart-Smith. To make sure that the possible similarities between current Glasgow speech and South East London English (referred to in the press) could be traced, the data from Tollfree’s (in Foulkes – Docherty 1999) 1996 research have also been included in both tables.

Table 4 Comparison of allophonic realisations of South East London and Glaswegian vowels.  
 (SELRS – South East London Regional Standard, SELE – South East London English, GSE – Glasgow Standard English, GV – Glasgow Vernacular)

ELICITED LEXICAL ITEMS	SOUTH EAST LONDON Tollfree (1996)		GLASGOW Stuart-Smith (1997)	
	SELRS	SELE	GSE	GV
KIT	ɪ ~ i	ɪ ~ i	ɪ	i ~ i
HEAD	lack of data	lack of data	ɛ	i
DRESS	ɛ ~ ɛ̃	ɛ ~ ɛ̃	ɛ	ɛ
NEVER	lack of data	lack of data	ɛ ~ ɛ̃	i
TRAP	æ	æ	ɑ	ɑ
STAND	lack of data	lack of data	ɑ	ɔ
LOT	ɒ ~ ɔ̃	ɒ ~ ɔ̃	ɔ	o
STRUT	ɐ ~ ʌ	ɐ ~ a	ʌ	ʌ
FOOT	ʊ ~ ʊ̃	ʊ	ʊ	i ~ i
BATH	ɑ: ~ ɑ̃: ~ ɑ̃:	ɑ: ~ ɑ̃: ~ ɑ̃:	ɑ	ɑ
AFTER	lack of data	lack of data	ɑ	ɛ
CLOTH	ɒ ~ ɔ̃	ɒ ~ ɔ̃	ɔ	o
OFF	lack of data	lack of data	ɔ	ɑ
NURSE	ɜ: ~ ə:	ɜ: ~ ə:	ʌ	ʌ ~ ɪ
FLEECE	i: ~ ĩ (:)	i: ~ ĩ (:)	i ~ j	i ~ j
FACE	eɪ ~ ɛɪ ~ ɛ̃ɪ	aɪ ~ ɑɪ ~ ɑ̃ɪ	e	e
PALM	ɑ: ~ ɑ̃: ~ ɑ̃:	ɑ: ~ ɑ̃: ~ ɑ̃:	ɑ	ɑ
STAY	lack of data	lack of data	e	e ~ ʌɪ
THOUGHT	ɔ: ~ ɔ̃:	ɔ: ~ ɔ̃: ~ ɔ̃ʊ ~ ɔ̃:	ɔ	o
GOAT	ʌʊ <sup>(w)</sup> ~ ɣʊ ~ ɣə ~ ɔ̃ʊ	ʌʊ ~ ʌɣ ~ ɐɣ ~ a:	o	o
GOAL	ɒʊ <sup>(w)</sup> ~ ɒɣ ~ ɑʊ	ɒʊ <sup>(w)</sup> ~ ɒɣ ~ ɑʊ	lack of data	lack of data
MORE	lack of data	lack of data	o	e
GOOSE	ʊ <sup>(w)</sup> : ~ ʊ̃: ~ ʊ̃:	ʊ <sup>(w)</sup> : ~ ʊ̃: ~ ʊ̃:	ʊ	ʊ
GHOUL	ʊ:	ʊ:	lack of data	lack of data
DO	lack of data	lack of data	ʊ	e
PRICE	aɪ ~ ɑɪ ~ ɑ̃ɪ	ɑɪ ~ ɑ: ~ ɑ̃:	ʌɪ	ʌɪ
PRIZE	lack of data	lack of data	ae	ae
FIRE	aɪ(j)ə	aɪ(j)ə ~ aɪ(j)ə ~ ɑ̃: ~ ɑ̃:	lack of data	lack of data
CHOICE	ɔɪ ~ oɪ	ɔɪ ~ oɪ	ɔe	ɔe
MOUTH	aʊ ~ aɣ	æ: <sup>(ʊ)</sup> ~ ɛ:	ʌʊ	ʊ
POWER	aʊə ~ aɣə	æʊwə ~ æ: ~ ɛ̃:	lack of data	lack of data
NEAR	ɪ: ~ ɪ <sup>ɔ̃</sup>	ɪ: ~ ɪ <sup>ɔ̃</sup> ~ ɪ:a	i	i
SQUARE	ɛ: <sup>(ɔ̃)</sup> ~ ɛ̃: <sup>(ɔ̃)</sup>	e: ~ e: <sup>(ɔ̃)</sup>	e	ɛ ~ e
START	ɑ: ~ ɑ̃: ~ ɑ̃:	ɑ: ~ ɑ̃: ~ ɑ̃:	ɑ	e
BIRTH	lack of data	lack of data	ɪ	i ~ ʌ
BERTH	lack of data	lack of data	ɛ	ɛ ~ ɪ
NORTH	ɔ: ~ ɔ̃:	ɔ: ~ ɔ̃: ~ ɔ̃ʊ ~ ɔ̃:	ɔ	o
FORCE	ɔ: ~ ɔ̃:	ɔ: ~ ɔ̃: ~ ɔ̃ʊ ~ ɔ̃:	o	o
CURE	jʊə ~ jʊ̃ə ~ jɔ̃:	jʊ̃ə ~ jʊ̃ə ~ jʊ̃: ~ jɔ̃:	jʊ	jʊ
happy	i(:)	i(:)	e	e ~ i
letter	ə ~ ɛ̃	ə ~ ɛ̃ ~ ɐ	i ~ ʌ	ʌ
comma	ə ~ ɛ̃	ə ~ ɛ̃ ~ ɐ	ʌ	ʌ
horses	ɪ ~ i	ɪ ~ i	ɪ	i ~ ʌ

Table 5 Possible allophonic realisations of selected consonants

	<b>EE consonants (Wells, 1997)</b>	<b>Tollfree's findings SOUTH EAST LONDON (1996)</b>	<b>Stuart-Smith's findings GLASGOW (1997)</b>
P, K		variable glottal reinforcement/replacement pre-consonantly, pre-pausally, intervocalically and before a nasal	less aspirated in MC and WC speakers than in English English
T	plosive [t] (the prestige form)  a glottal stop [ʔ] in syllable-final positions, word-finally or pre-consonantly	plosive [t] (the prestige form)  a glottal stop [ʔ] <b>SELRS:</b> pre-consonantly, in word-internal and cross-word boundary contexts; (older speakers) before syllabic /n/, but not syllabic /m/, or before a syllabic lateral (stigmatised); (older speakers) pre-vocalic cross-word boundary and pre-pausal position; (younger speakers) T glottalisation is blocked <b>SELE:</b> in word-final pre-vocalic (widespread) and word-internal intervocalic (where the prominence of the preceding syllable is greater than that of the subsequent syllable; no evidence it's on the increase) positions; between the stems of compound items, in phrasal verbs and specific lexical items T glottalisation is blocked when /t/ is preceded by a non-resonant consonant in final positions, and in foot-initial onset position, in word-internal foot-initial onset position  fricated [tʰ] <b>SELRS:</b> (esp. older speakers in confident or affective speech style) occasionally: pre-vocalically and word-finally; in broader varieties most frequently in pre-pausal or word-internal intervocalic contexts  tapped [ɾ] <b>SELRS:</b> in intervocalic position (across a word boundary and word-internally in certain items); <b>SELE:</b> intervocalically, esp. in cross-word boundary cases and word-internally	plosive [t] (the prestige form)  a glottal stop [ʔ] non-initial t-glottalling stigmatised, but very common and on the increase; social differences in the distribution of [ʔ]  tapped [ɾ] when /t/ is final in a short-vowelled syllable
L	l-vocalization: pre-consonantly & pre-pausally otherwise clear [l]	<b>SELRS</b> and <b>SELE:</b> a continuum of clear [l] – dark [ɫ] alternation; all speakers : variable, context-dependent <b>L-vocalisation</b> , more frequent in younger speakers, (/l/ realised as a back vocoid, articulated in the velar or pharyngeal region), in word-final pre-consonantal, word-internal pre-consonantal and word-final pre-pausal positions; <b>L-vocalisation</b> blocked in word-initial and word-internal intervocalic contexts, but instances of vocalised forms in word-final pre-vocalic position in the younger <b>SELE</b> speakers	clear [l] (MC speakers); secondary articulation - dark [ɫ], most usual secondary articulations of /l/: velarised, and velarised and pharyngealised; <b>L-vocalisation</b> to a high back rounded vowel [ɯ] or [o] clearly evidenced in the speech of WC children
R		most commonly [ɹ]; present linking and intrusive R after /ɔ:/, /a:/ and /ə:/; some instances of variable use of a labiodental approximant [ʋ]; consistent use of [ʋ] in the speech of 4 young speakers	commonly post post-alveolar [ɹ], retroflex [ɻ] (MC speakers), apical taps [ɾ] (WC speakers); rarely a trill; R-loss found in the speech of WC children
GLIDES		in broad forms: J-dropping after /h, n, m, s, d, t, l, b/, but not after /p, f, v, k, g/	J-dropping after /l/ and commonly after /s/
[tj]	yod coalescence [tʃ]	lack of data	in clusters with /j/ e.g. /tj/ - yod coalescence to [tʃ] in <b>GV</b> , but not in older <b>GSE</b> speech
[dj]	yod coalescence [dʒ]	lack of data	lack of data
TH	<b>no th-fronting</b>	both age groups: variable use of [f] and [v] for /θ/ and /ð/; [d] or zero in initial positions -frequent realisations of /ð/ ; instances of TH-fronting in initial voiced TH: /ð/ becomes[v]; in broader speech: [h] and [ʔ] as variants of /θ/ (a few instances)	a possible variant of /θ/ in <b>GV</b> is [h], with a retroflex or alveolo-palatal fricative or [ɟ] in the initial cluster /θr/; variable but frequent instances of [f] for /θ/ are found in WC children in careful and conversational styles; /ð/ is realised as [v] (in some lexical items) and [ɾ], esp. intervocalically (very common local variants in <b>GV</b> ), or there is complete elision word-initially
H	<b>no h-dropping</b>	<b>SELRS:</b> (older speakers) variable h-dropping in closed-set items, occasional in unstressed items, not belonging to closed sets, (younger speakers) variable h-loss in the pronoun and auxiliary sets, occasionally in metrically stressed and unstressed position in non- closed set items, rarely in foot-initial onset position; <b>SELE:</b> h-loss widespread: auxiliaries and pronouns post-consonantly across word boundaries, sometimes pronouns; h-dropping not blocked in pre-vocalic environments	h-dropping generally not present in Scottish English; rarely present in Stuart-Smith's data

One does not need to be phonetically trained to notice the vast differences between the realisations of the variables in question. Thus, it seems plausible to claim that the Scottish speech of Glasgow is changing like every living language variety and probably these changes to some extent are parallel to those going on in many English cities, which has not got much to do with Estuary English itself.

As far as Stuart-Smith is concerned, Wells made her comments on the issue available to everyone on his website, where she clearly denied that Estuary English is the accent of young Glaswegians: ‘[...] I’d be hesitant to say, from this, that the children are speaking Estuary English [...] What I’m trying to say is that these children don’t sound as if they’re speaking Estuary English.’ ([www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/glasgow.htm](http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/glasgow.htm)).

On 28 April 2000 Stuart-Smith, Timmins and Tweedie gave a lecture at the conference ‘Language Variation & Change’: English. It was called ‘Could Glesga’ drown in the English estuary? Accent levelling or shift in Glaswegian’, but I doubt the journalists listened to what they had to say.

Again it would be premature to claim that Estuary English is spreading. Some London-like features are observed in the speech of people located far from London, but these have not been proven to have originated there. The near-panic that the media have induced is quite irrational.

## **6. The future prospects of Estuary English: Will it replace RP?**

“What I have chosen to term Estuary English may now and for the foreseeable future, be the strongest native influence upon RP.” (Rosewarne 1984)

The very optimistic claim by Rosewarne that Estuary English will exert strong influence on Received Pronunciation has been stuck to by the media and gossip about the death of Queen’s English in the foreseeable future has been spreading to the detriment of EE speakers: “Reports of its death are silly journalistic exaggerations.” (Wells 1998-1999). This, in turn, triggered off reactions from linguists, who started speculating about whether Estuary English can replace RP as a

national standard. Below the two extreme positions as well as the middle-ground opinions will be presented, along with their justifications.

Tatham allows for the possibility of EE becoming the accent of the majority of English people from various socio-economic groups, while the linguistic minorities from the lowest groups may “use certain features of ‘Estuary English’ in combination with elements of whatever their regional speech might be” (1999/2002). He assumes that Estuary English may take over some of the functions RP has served for years, for example disguising one’s origins. He actually thinks that EE may have already become a model for general imitation “for large and influential sections of the young”.

Trudgill (2001) approaches the question with an apparent reserve and justifies his point of view in practical terms; the present sociolinguistic conditions are not favourable for EE to spread in the whole of the UK. First of all, London is not the only large urban centre; therefore it has not exclusive rights to influence the speech in all the regions of the country. Next, such centres as Belfast, Dublin, Cardiff, Glasgow, Newcastle, Nottingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol have been reported to focus the accents around them. And last but not least, “There is no parallel here to the nationwide network of residential Public Schools which gave rise to RP.”

The last argument has been challenged by Parsons (1998: 63-64): “there seems to be no need for this, if EE grows on the substrate of RP. If at one time in the future EE should invade the last strongholds of RP, the old boarding public schools (possibly because there will be no more teachers who speak anything else, or because pupils will refuse to be ‘branded on the tongue’ by speaking anything else), then EE will be the New RP.”

Parsons (1998: 61) also takes a position on the influence of the current levelling of accents in the south-east on the possible substitution of RP by EE:

*If... levelling of accents is taking place in the whole of south-east England, the home territory of RP, or if such a levelling is perceived, because people cannot tell the difference (bearing in mind that ‘accent is in the listener’), then EE will indeed be in a very strong position to oust RP, which is what has been predicted by ROSEWARNE*



(1996 and earlier).

This is contrary to what Przedlacka (2001) states: “If EE is a levelled out variety, then it is an unlikely candidate for a standard accent. Watt and Milroy (1999: 43) remark that ‘standards by definition are institutionally imposed ... and the essence of the levelled out variety is that it develops by quite regular sociolinguistic process’.

Coggle (2000) does not support the claim that EE will oust RP either; however, he supposes that “... EE would probably influence the speech of power-holders in the Greater London area, and indeed that some EE speakers would become power-holders.”

According to Agha, Estuary English and Received Pronunciation may approximate each other:

*This is certainly possible, though in more than sense. At present, ‘Mainstream’ RP and Estuary English are centered in very different institutional loci. The demographic profiles of their speakers are also different, despite some overlap. But RP itself is a register that has changed internally in numerous ways... These changes are... of different kinds... These include changes in phonetic patterns, exemplary speakers, register names, characterological discourses, as well as changes in the demographic profile of those who recognise the register as a standard to be emulated, versus those able to speak some form of it (whether exemplary or not). RP and estuary English may well come to approximate one another in one or more of these respects as well; but whether or not they do, their mode of co-existence at any given point in their history is linked to their modes of dissemination and the logic of socially anchored role alignment between speakers and hearers of utterances, linked to each other through them. (Agha 2003)*

All in all, theoretically, it is difficult to agree with those who claim that Estuary English will replace RP, following Trudgill (2001) “It is unlikely that it will ever become anything more than a regional accent, albeit the accent of a rather large region covering, together with its lower-class counterparts, the home Counties plus, probably, Sussex Hampshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and parts of Northamptonshire.” But whether EE makes its way into the homes of the majority of Englishmen yet remains to be seen in another five hundred years, because the current evidence is too limited to draw definite final conclusions.

## Chapter 3

### Estuary English in the eyes of ordinary people

#### 1. Who shapes the social portrait and awareness of Estuary English and its speakers?

The concept of 'Estuary English' is not very-well known overseas, especially to people who are not involved in any linguistic activity. However, the situation is slightly different in the country where it is spoken, since to a certain extent the term has been popularised by mass media, especially the press. In addition, it is possible to come across a few dictionary and encyclopaedic entries aimed at defining this rather vague variety of speech.

##### 1.1. Estuary English in dictionaries and encyclopaedic definitions for laypeople

When a linguistically naïve person is first confronted with the term 'Estuary English', if they ever bother to find out more about what it is, they turn to semi-professional, easily available sources, such as encyclopaedias or English monolingual dictionaries.

Unfortunately, not many of them can satisfy their curiosity. One of the few traditional dictionaries, which contain this entry, is *The Oxford Guide to British and American Culture*. Here is what it offers:

*Estuary English* n [U] a type of spoken English, especially common among younger people in Britain, that mixes Received Pronunciation and Cockney. It began in the area around the estuary of the River Thames(=the wide part of the river where it joins the sea), but has now spread to other parts of the country, some people have criticized it as a lax and ugly way of speaking the language (Crowther (ed.) 1999).

The definition is neither well-informed nor objective. First of all, not every layperson is aware of what Received Pronunciation and Cockney are (Haenni 1999), so it would probably be better to describe the main characteristics of EE in a more straightforward way. Secondly, it implies that Estuary English has been spreading beyond the territory where it originated, which has not been proved. And lastly, it shapes the reader's negative attitude to this 'variety' by suggesting that EE is

perceived as a negative trend ('a lax and ugly way of speaking the language') in certain circles (the reader is not informed who those 'some people' are).

But the hungry-for-knowledge searcher pursues further. Another idea that comes to one's mind when traditional sources fail is browsing the Net. The Web abounds in dictionaries and encyclopaedias, but is EE subject to a better description there? Will they find out what the features of EE are? Will their views be shaped objectively? And finally, will the myth of the spread of EE be sustained?

The Collins English Dictionary©2000 HarperCollins Publishers gives a non-judgmental, but equally incomprehensive definition:

*Estuary English* adjective, noun *a variety of standard British English in which the pronunciation reflects various features characteristic of London and the Southeast of England [ETYMOLOGY: 20th Century: from the area around the Thames estuary where it originated]*

A different attempt to depict EE has been made by the author of American·British-British·American Dictionary © 1988, 2003 Jeremy Smith:

*Estuary English* n: *the name given to the late 20th C accent which is the inevitable assimilation by Standard English of the Cockney accent, in the London and surrounding (Kent & Thames Estuary) areas. (Features include dropping h's (hat /at/), glottal stopping t's (bitter /bi?ε/), and pronouncing l like w at the end of a syllable (milk /miuk/).)* (Smith 2003)

It is suggested here that EE came into existence as late as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which has been argued by linguists, and that one of the phonetic markers of EE is h-dropping, which in fact phoneticians do not consider an element of EE, but the poor unprofessional does not know this. They might, however, consult yet another source, Longman Web Dictionary:

*Estuary English* noun [uncountable] *an English accent (=way of speaking) which is common in London and the southeast of England, and which is becoming more common in central and western England because of the influence of television and radio. Estuary English is similar in some ways to a cockney accent, but it is less strong.*

Again, what we are faced with is the authoritative claim that Estuary English is a

spreading phenomenon and the cause of this spread are the media (for the discussion see Chapter 2 Section 3.5.).

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language Fourth Edition\_2000.htm presents the searcher with a ‘sociolinguistic’ explanation of what EE is:

*Es-tu-ar-y English* An accent used by many speakers of various social classes in southeastern England, characterized by a mixture of features drawn from middle-class and working-class speech. (Pickett 2000)

The reader still does not know what these features are, but at least becomes more aware of who uses the ‘variety’. Moreover, they are not exposed to the delusion of EE’s omnipresence.

When browsing the web further, one can come across the entry of Estuary English in an on-line encyclopaedia called Wikipedia, which explains the case of EE in the following way:

*Estuary English is the form of the English language common in the South-East of England, especially along the river Thames and its estuary. It is a hybrid of Received Pronunciation and a number of South Eastern accents, particularly from the London and Essex area. Some people think it will eventually replace Received Pronunciation as the Standard English pronunciation.*

*Some of the features of Estuary English are:*

- *the letter h not pronounced (except for things like ch, sh, th)*
- *the letter t pronounced as a glottal stop except at the beginning of a word, or sometimes the end of a word, or part of a multi-consonant cluster. "Stop ba'ing I fink my bruvvers go'u bat"*
- *the letter l pronounced like a wɫ when at the end of a syllable.*
- *th pronounced as in thin pronounced as f*
- *th pronounced as in this pronounced as v*

Once more this diverges from what has been said about the phonetic make-up of EE by phoneticians (Wells 1997, for details see Chapter 1 Section 2) and the improbability of EE to become a future standard (for details see Chapter 2 Section 6).

Many more such instances of misleading descriptions could be cited, which proves that: (1) the term EE does not cover a uniform entity, easy to define in a coherent way and (2) there are a number of stereotypes concerning EE perpetuated even when objectivity should be the goal.

## **1.2. Estuary English in journalistic writings**

Another source of popular knowledge of Estuary English is the media. There is a saying that mass media can shape public opinion, and to say that in the case of EE they do, would not be a distortion of facts. That holds true also for the press. Rosewarne's idea was a good pretext to start a storm of inevitable dispute over a relatively interesting and simultaneously delicate matter of one's accent. For the last decade journalists have been beating their competitors at writing articles referring to 'Mockney', "a fake form of Cockney". But what was the image that the press ascribed to this way of speaking?

Unfortunately, Estuary English has not been an editors' or journalists' pet, and hardly ever can one find positive attitudes to it in the press. Comments on EE prevail in two genres: newspaper articles and letters to the editor.

Journalists have reported on the alleged spread of Estuary English, scaring those who believe in language purity with such titles as "Estuary English Engulfs a Nation" (Arthur 1998) or "Yer wot? 'Estuary English' sweeps Britain" (Hymas 1993) and many others. The society was to beware of the corruption and fall in speech standards associated with EE. No wonder Maidment's 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells Syndrome' (1994) reflecting this type of prescriptive attitude has been thriving. The escalation of hostility evoked by comments of this type has almost lead to panic, of course among those who are susceptible to what the press offers them. A good illustration may be what one could read in a letter to the editor of the *Sunday Times* on 21 March 1993: "The spread of Estuary English can only be described as horrifying. We are plagued with idiots on radio and television who speak English like the dregs of humanity, to the detriment of our children." (in: Maidment 1994).

It is difficult not to get an impression that it is the media that have portrayed Estuary English as a monster. But Maidment seems to blame Rosewarne and Coggle

for the creation of this unjust image:

*What [David Rosewarne and Paul Coggle] have done ... by giving this purported phenomenon a name and by publicising it in rather simplistic terms is ... built the image of an ogre which threatens the imagined static, pure condition of the English language. Nothing is likely to enrage DTW more than the suggestion that the standard language which he/she holds so dear, the grail of which he/she sees him/herself the guardian, is being usurped by the usage of people who are NOT OUR CLASS. DTW is not going down without a fight, you may be sure. (Maidment 1994)*

In the presence of such an intense anti-EE press campaign and lack of explicit and objective information for non-linguists, it might be concluded that (1) a vast number of people in England are familiar with the label, (2) they have a rather vague picture of what constitutes EE and (3) their attitudes to this way of speaking are not neutral - probably even negative.

The aim of the following section is to confront these hypotheses with the reality.

## **2. How much do Englishmen know about Estuary English and what are their attitudes to it?**

R.W.: *"It's the unlocalised accents I love least – exaggerated RP, estuary English and mid-Atlantic."*

D.W.: *"Estuary English? I'm unfamiliar with this one."*

R.W.: *"Lucky you! It's a fake form of Cockney (aka "Mockney") and includes the use of a glottal stop instead of "t", "v" instead of "th", a vague |w| sound instead of "l" (e.g. "Biv" instead of "Bill"), various **tortured vowels** and some Cockneyesque syntax and vocabulary. Originally found in Sarf Essex and Norf Kent and other places near the Thames... it has spread to be a universally encountered mode among young persons (and older people who should have more sense). ... I like genuine Cockney, and worked with real east Londoners for many years, but **this noise is as inauthentic as The Monkees**. In sociological terms, one can see it as an attempt to create a classless accent. ... they [professional linguists] overlook the fact that is **damned ugly and sounds awful**... As you will have worked out by now, I don't like it. 8-)" (EDline Vol. 7, no. 151; Internet forum: 21-27 June 2002; emphasis mine; J.R.).*

This authentic excerpt from an Internet forum seems to confirm the hypotheses formulated in the previous section, but is it representative of the whole English society? There is a danger that drawing conclusions from such a limited sample will lead to hasty generalisations. Therefore, a systematic study is needed to verify the earlier assumptions.

Apart from Rosewarne's matched-guise technique studies in 1994 and 1997 (for details see Chapter 4 Section 1.2.2.), complex research was carried out by Haenni (1999: 72 - 118) to establish the degree of public recognition of the 'EE' and 'RP' labels and the attitudes that English people adopted to Estuary English and other varieties of English. Moreover, the design of the research allowed Haenni to compare what the informants thought they knew about EE with what they actually did know. Much less elaborate research was conducted by Twardowska (1995), who interviewed Englishmen dealing with linguistics in order to find out what their attitudes to EE were.

Haenni's study consisted of a set of steps including dialect map drawing, speech samples rating and recognition of the accents they represented, rating of several public figures in terms of 'standardness', completing a questionnaire and explicit presentation of the concept of EE to the respondents. Haenni's eighty-four informants came from different parts of England, and represented both sexes, six age groups and various professions.

The findings were surprising. The experiment revealed rather low rates (18%) of recognition of the term 'EE' despite wide media coverage of this concept and relatively high level of education and awareness of the respondents.

Most of those who knew the label admitted that they owed their first contact with it to mass media. Six respondents remembered that EE was presented as a corruption of speech. Therefore, EE carried negative prejudices from the very start. Most of the 'EE group' described EE in relation to RP. Two respondents mentioned geographical origins. TH-fronting and h-dropping were frequently seen as EE features along with t-glottaling, and 'lengthening' and 'distortion' of vowels. Poor grammar and lexical features were mentioned by one respondent only. Most of the respondents referred to EE as "a speech pattern of the urban south-east England" that was spreading as a consequence of mass media.

Half of those who had not known the label earlier, after Haenni's presentation of the concept, admitted they believed such a category existed. Fifteen of them referred to the key associations with EE: middle class, youth, social flexibility, higher mobility and migration, south-east and urban/metropolitan area (thus it may

be concluded that they had a notion of EE, though not the knowledge of the term itself). Most of the 'non-EE group' members could not name the characteristic features of EE, except for a few respondents who mentioned glottal stops, TH-fronting and southern vowel lengthening. Most of the respondents thought of that intermediate variety as if it were a blend of various dialects. 50% believed that London features were spreading. There was a discrepancy in twelve respondents' data: they believed that an intermediate category between RP and localisable dialects existed, but at the same time denied that London features, essential to the notion of EE, were spreading. Six respondents regretted that speech was deteriorating because of people's increasing laziness.

On the whole, Haenni's research proved that the concept of 'Estuary English' is artificial and carries negative associations because of its resemblance to Cockney, and thus evokes the stereotypes of the urban south-east, which also carries negative connotations. Much of its popularity the label owes to the media, which simultaneously build its rather negative image. Furthermore, Estuary English does not hold promise to function as a standard since its social perception does not correspond with 'non-localisability', which is an essential characteristics of a standard.

While Haenni's project entailed a wide range of tasks for a variety of people, Twardowska's research consisted in interviewing (prospective) linguists at the University of Reading, with the purpose of collecting opinions concerning recent changes in modern English. The questions concerning EE focused mainly on two points. The first was whether EE would become a new standard and the other was more related to how her interlocutors perceived EE. Twardowska's paper (1995) does not contain any sociolinguistic background to the study or detailed findings, but some interesting though overgeneralised patterns can be extracted. The following are Twardowska's observations:

- EE is considered a regional (and minor) accent which despite gaining popularity and influencing RP is unlikely to replace it;
- most of the respondents would rather their children did not speak EE;
- some of the interviewees consider EE superior to RP in its conservative version



- some of them consider it to be a possible handicap when it comes to career prospects
- very few of them explicitly expressed their disapproval of EE

Twardowska summarises her findings in a humorous way: “On the whole, they have no objections to EE but since they cannot stop it, well, they don’t want to stop it, let it progress and they will watch it evolve.” (1995).

Another interesting question is what Estuary English speakers’ attitude to their own accent is. No data on an investigation to explore this question is currently available. But in his book *Do you speak Estuary?*, Coggle (1993: 92) mentions that some Estuary English speakers hold their own accent in low esteem: “Examples of self-denigration abound...There is rarely any feeling of pride in being an Estuary English speaker.”

To sum up, naturally linguists are more aware of what is going on in terms of language in the south-east and as linguists they cannot pass negative judgments on any language variety. Ordinary people know astonishingly little about Estuary English in comparison with what could be expected of them after so much effort had been put up by the media to publicise the topic.

### **3. A stereotypical and a real Estuary English speaker – a convergent or a divergent picture?**

In certain circles Estuary English is perceived as lowering of speech standards. It would therefore be plausible to associate its speakers with the nouveau riche trend in the society. Such a stereotype existed and was very vivid:

*Estuary English evokes a similarly stereotypical image of shell suits, beer bellies, Ford Escorts, chunky gold chains, flats in Marbella...and - again in the case of women - white high-heeled shoes preferably worn with no tights... The stereotypes are perpetuated and intensified by the media – in advertisements, soaps and even in serious drama ...the stereotype assumes that Estuary English marks its speakers as members of the lower strata of British society. (Coggle 1993: 73)*

Kerswill (2001) confirms an association between Estuary English and the not-so-praiseworthy move in Britain: “In 1980s Britain, we saw the media creations of the

‘yuppies’ and ‘Essex man’, referring to well-to-do, self-made young people who were seen by the establishment as lacking in ‘culture’ and ‘taste’. These people, typically, spoke Estuary English...”

The media often linked EE with the language of disc jockeys, sportsmen, soap opera actors and pop singers.

However strong the stereotype might be, the real social distribution of Estuary English has changed. As soon as in 1984, Rosewarne claimed that it could be heard spoken by “some members of the Lords, whether life or hereditary peers” and “in the City, business circles, the Civil Service, local government, the media, advertising as well as the medical and teaching professions in the south-east”.

Coggle refuted the stereotype as well, but he did not delimit the social territory of EE to powerful positions only:

*In fact Estuary English is now spoken across a very wide social spectrum, and contrary to popular belief, there are among Estuary English speakers growing numbers of professional people, many of them academically educated and highly qualified... It is difficult, if not impossible, to find any profession in which Estuary English speakers are not represented... When faced with the evidence, the stereotype of the Estuary English speaker as working class, common and uneducated begins to look distinctly questionable. (1993: 73 & 75)*

All told, the picture of a real Estuary English speaker does not correspond to the stereotype: “Doctors, scientists, lawyers, teachers, lecturers, industrialists and politicians who appear in the media can be heard using mild Estuary English or another mild regional accent.” (Kerswill 2001). Let these examples speak for themselves.

## Chapter 4

### Estuary English and foreigners

*I love Estuary English! I wish I had a teacher who would help me with that accent. It's the real McCoy! Let class and social taboos not hinder your using that accent.*

The above quotation is a fragment of a posting to the author's Internet forum: "Estuary English" as a pronunciation model for TEFL <Joanna> (Teachers' Forum 1). But does it reflect the enthusiasm for Estuary English of the majority of foreigners?

#### 1. Estuary English as a pronunciation teaching model

Reports of increased popularity of Estuary English among the British, especially the younger generation, multiply. Estuary is said to promote an 'upfront image' and 'lend street credibility'. For this reason, it might be a good idea to employ it in foreign language classrooms, but is it? This section will present the issue from the point of view of professionals engaged in educational affairs, and then their opinions will be confronted with available research findings that reveal students' attitudes to EE. Some of the views demonstrated below have been published, but the others have been obtained through personal communication. The author has been permitted to quote the latter in this paper.

##### 1.1. Lecturers' and teachers' opinions

In her search, the author failed to find positive answers to the question whether to teach Estuary English to foreigners, and the negative opinions were justified in a number of ways.

Trudgill (2001), for instance, thinks that the teaching of Estuary would be "the worst kind of metropolitan bias". A similar view has been expressed by Richard Bolt, *Teacher's Forum* editor:

*For most people in the UK your home region is very significant and as most British people do not come from or speak such an English (including myself) - so I am personally not in favour!!! How long will Estuary English last? To many British people*

*it would seem like the latest in a long line of attempts by London to tell the rest of us how to behave, and to impose that on the rest of the world is a kind of nightmare.* (Bolt 2003 p.c.)

Jane Setter, Director of English Pronunciation Research Unit School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies The University of Reading, provides for certain technical difficulties: “I personally do not think EE is a particularly good model for ELT; many students and teachers find glottal stopping particularly difficult, for a start! And in any case, one cannot choose to use a certain accent as a model when it doesn't really exist.” (2003 p.c.).

Wells (1998-1999), despite his approval for Dutch students speaking EE, recommends the teaching of modernised RP. Similarly Coggle (1994 & 1998-1999), happy when overseas students sound like natives even when using EE pronunciation, opts for teaching Estuary abroad only for recognition purposes “until EE has become more firmly established as the new RP”.

Bex (2003 p.c.) himself confessing a democratic approach to teaching various accents warns that EE might not be respected by examination boards and may not fulfil students’ needs: “... it is very important to offer the pupils a variety that will best serve their needs. At the moment, I think it doubtful that EE fulfils that function. At the very least, it is not likely to be recognised by examiners as having much value”.

Native teachers of English themselves will probably not adjust their own accents to teach Estuary English: “I don't have any strong feelings on Estuary English. If that's what the teacher speaks, or what the students want, then why not? You tend to teach with the voice and accent you have, so I don't teach Estuary English per se.” (tdol teacher, in Teachers’ Forum 2).

Andrew Moore (2003 p.c.), the author of the ‘universalteacher’ website sees more advantages of teaching RP, but does not totally reject the idea of teaching other accents, even regional ones:

*My own views on this one are quite simple, but I am certainly no expert. Using Estuary as a model for TEFL purposes assumes that there is a more or less coherent and standard set of speech sounds for so-called "Estuary English". I think this is not the*

*case. And it's certainly not the case that many native English speakers would know what this variety is... In the case of TEFL teaching, the question for the non-native speaker is perhaps whether he or she wishes to learn a more prestigious form of spoken English, a regional accent (which need not be from the UK), or a more neutral form. The merits of Received Pronunciation and Standard English are: that they are likely to be more widely understood, and that (like wearing a suit and tie), they conform to the expectations of some listeners who see them as an indication of learning or even of good character.*

Being a non-native secondary school teacher of English herself, the author would find it rather difficult to teach Estuary English to her students on account of shortage of suitable teaching aids, her own accent which diverges from EE, and most of all because of students' attitudes to pronunciation classes. It seems that native-like pronunciation, although nice to listen to for the teacher as a reflection of their success, does not appeal to the students at this level of education so much as the teacher would aspire to.

## **1.2. Students' ratings of Estuary English**

The above opinions are personal beliefs resulting from years of observations, and many of them find confirmation in experimental measurements of the suitability of Estuary English as a pronunciation model. Below are discussed the studies conducted to see the acceptability of EE to foreign students of English.

### **1.2.1. Chia Boh Peng and Adam Brown 2002: 'Singaporeans' reactions to Estuary English'**

Chia Boh Peng and Adam Brown tested how seventeen Singaporean undergraduate students on a phonetics course at the National Institute of Education Singapore rated Estuary English on such categories as *competence*, *personal integrity* and *social attractiveness* (after listening to recordings of two RP, two EE and two Singapore English male speakers).

The study was triggered by the fact that Estuary English and Singapore English (SgE) share the following features: /l/-vocalization, /t/-glottaling, /t/ affrication, yod dropping and coalescence, TH-fronting, possible neutralisation of the high vowels [i:, ɪ] and [u:, ʊ] before a vocalic [l], happY-tensing, /ri:/ for initial re-

in words like ‘resist’, centring diphthongs and certain suprasegmental features.

The students ranked both EE and Singapore English highly in terms of sounding sincere, interesting and friendly. EE was valued low in terms of being intelligible and appropriate for teaching in Singapore schools.

As a result, it is obvious that despite its pronunciation similarities to Singapore English, Estuary English could not be adopted as a pronunciation model in Singapore as its public image in that country is not sufficiently positive. Received Pronunciation still enjoys great prestige among Singaporeans and that variety will stay to be taught there.

### **1.2.2. Calvert-Scott, Green and Rosewarne 1997: American-based studies**

Calvert-Scott, Green and Rosewarne (ref. Rosewarne 1997) studied 212 native and non-native students’ attitudes to six different varieties of English in the context of teaching English at American universities. Reactions to Estuary English were also tested. Fourteen semantic differential scales were used to indicate how the respondents perceived the studied English-language accents.

Estuary English ranked as the fifth (57.00) after General American, Standard British, Australian and Indian English, but before Japanese in a language attitude test. To compare, the 1990 British-based matched guise technique study by Rosewarne resulted in placing EE on the fourth position (57.45) (Rosewarne 1994).

Estuary English was rated lowest of all six varieties on: interest, politeness, attractiveness, pleasantness (of voice) and friendliness.

In spite of the fact that Estuary English does not enjoy high prestige or attractiveness internationally, Rosewarne suggests that it could be very appealing especially for teenagers coming to the south-east of England if only the TEFL organisations took an effort to invest more into its promotion.

To sum up, Rosewarne’s optimism concerning the application of Estuary English in teaching English as a foreign language appears to be premature. First, most of the British English teaching is RP-oriented, the materials would need to be

revised (at least in terms of phonetic transcriptions and recording new listening tapes), or alternative materials would have to be produced from the scratch. Secondly, teachers would need to be retrained, which might be difficult to achieve on account of the ‘bad’ language stereotype associated with EE. Next, examination standards would need to take into account the possibility of choosing the accents students want to master. And the most crucial of all, students would need to want it, which so far is hardly ever the case.

## **2. Estuary English as a means of international business communication**

Estuary English is reported to have taken over Received Pronunciation in such areas of life as politics, banking, trade and advertising: “It is to be heard on the front and back benches of the House of Commons and is used by some members of the Lords, whether life or hereditary peers. It is well established in the City, business circles, the Civil Service, local government, the media, advertising as well as the medical and teaching professions in the south-east.” (Rosewarne 1984).

It turns out, however, that such popularity (the expression used here may be an exaggeration) of ‘Estuary’ is confined only to the native speakers of English. As an international means of business communication Estuary English fails, for the simple reason that overseas business partners have problems understanding it, many of them GA- or RP-fed at schools or language courses.

Calvert-Scott, Green and Rosewarne’s study (1997; see Section 1.2.2. above) sheds light on how foreign students perceive the suitability of Estuary English for teaching purposes. It also shows how unfavourable Estuary English is when it comes to international business. American and US-based business students rated EE 24% lower than Received Pronunciation.

All in all, the above facts evidently prove that foreigners are not particularly enthusiastic about Estuary English. Neither do most of them want to learn it nor do they want to use it, while Received Pronunciation, which is so frowned upon by many Englishmen, is going to continue to be taught to those who choose to learn some form of British English for many years to come.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

‘Estuary English’ is an artificial term that covers a number of levelled out varieties of English spoken in the south-east of England. It constitutes a continuum of accents between Received Pronunciation and Cockney, accompanied by standard grammar and possibly several characteristic lexical features.

Since Rosewarne invented this label linguists have been discussing various aspects of the concept, though there have not been many of those who published their views.

Those who did, were primarily interested in discovering whether it was a uniform accent in its own right and defining the boundaries between EE and the neighbouring accents – RP and Cockney. They failed to do so because as it turned out those boundaries were too fuzzy – the supposedly typical EE features appeared in the other two accents as well. Nevertheless, they established the contexts in which the features could appear without being overtly stigmatised and agreed that there were certain tendencies in the patterns of their distribution according to social class, gender and locality. They simply debunked the myth that a new accent emerged.

Other areas of interest to linguists were the possible causes of the rise and alleged spread of the variety, its possible influence on other accents, as well as its future prospects. Again, it has not been proved that Estuary English is spreading geographically, although single features of London speech may be. The process of EE creation is not new and the motivations for its emergence may only be speculated about although the most plausible ones seem to be dialect levelling and koineisation in the south-east region. These phenomena are a consequence of long-term accommodation of speakers from various backgrounds. The role of the media in its spread is overestimated, but one thing is certain about them. They have created an image of a monster that endangers the ‘pure’ English language.

Among laypeople the label is not very popular and the associations it carries with it are rather negative. That is not a surprise considering the whole package the



media presented it in. Also semi-professional sources fail to clarify the concept to ordinary people. Moreover, the stereotypes involving the image of Estuary English speakers as tasteless nouveau riche do not overlap with the reality. Estuary speakers occur in every walk of life and enjoy considerable prestige on account of their good education and professionalism.

Abroad Estuary English is not valued high as a potential model for imitation. It is rated low among students; and teachers think it is not able to serve students' needs as well as the 'old' RP. Besides, it is not comprehensible enough to become a means of international business communication.

Twenty years after Rosewarne's capture of the phenomenon, 'Estuary English' still arouses as many mixed feelings as when it came into daylight, and despite numerous attempts the controversies have not been settled yet. David Rosewarne's ideas have been both appreciated and criticised by the academic world. However, his work has been very useful for those who are interested in the changes going on in the English language, as it drew attention to the complex processes taking place in the south-east of England and simultaneously in the other urban centres across Britain. We should not overlook the fact that journalists owe him some of their earnings, for the writing material the topic supplied was sensational.

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