

“Cockney and the Queen”

*The importance and development of the
accent known as Estuary English*

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Abstract

For this MA thesis I have chosen to investigate the accent known as Estuary English (EE). Even though it is having a massive impact on the development of the English language (especially in Britain) there are few extensive sources regarding this accent, and even though studies have been conducted they are few and hard to come across. Even linguists agree that there are few sources regarding EE, which makes it an interesting research topic. Due to the structure and (lack of) status of EE it is being discussed by linguists and commoners alike, and the media has acted as a linguistic “battlefield” of sorts where linguists and members of the general public have presented their arguments, suggested definitions, and frustrations regarding the new accent. The fact that the general opinions differ greatly and that definitions are changing continually makes it a very interesting base for research. It is a dynamic topic, a linguistic phenomenon which is happening in our time.

As my thesis is being written over the course of only one semester I have chosen not to do field work or conduct a survey, although I will attempt to refer to studies conducted by other researchers where this is feasible. Because of the time limit I have chosen to focus mainly on theoretical aspects, such as the problems regarding a proper definition of EE and the discussion around which phonemic traits are part of the accent. In addition to this I chose to look at the spread of EE (which is a vital part of the issues regarding a uniform definition) and how the accent is perceived in means of development and importance. I have chosen to include information on general dialect stigmatization as well, focusing on the way the speakers of scouse (Liverpool accent) and RP (Received Pronunciation) are perceived. The relationship between the “parental accents” of EE, RP and Standard London/Cockney, is also crucial in order to understand how EE has gained such a strong foothold in Britain.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 What IS Estuary English?

Estuary English is, as the name indicates, an accent of English that originates from the area surrounding the Thames Estuary. An estuary is, according to the Cambridge Dictionaries Online, the area where a river widens out before joining the sea. This means that the accent name refers to its place of origin: the areas close to the Thames Estuary, where the river Thames flows into the North Sea. The original speakers of EE were the lower middle class of the Home Counties, the counties bordering on London: Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Berkshire, Middlesex, Kent, Surrey, and eastern and western Sussex. Estuary speakers were also found in London itself, although most of the indigenous Londoners adapting EE are located on the Cockney side of the spectrum.

The exact name of the accent I have chosen to refer to as *Estuary English* (henceforth referred to as EE) has been a matter of much debate among linguists ever since David Rosewarne coined the term in 1984. In his paper J.D Maidment quotes Rosewarne's definition of EE, who, in his 1984 article named "David Rosewarne describes a newly observed variety of English pronunciation" called it

A variety of modified regional speech. It is a mixture of non-regional and local south-eastern pronunciation and intonation. If one imagines a continuum with Received Pronunciation and London speech at either end, EE speakers are to be found grouped in the middle ground (Rosewarne, 1984).

Seeing how EE has been spreading rapidly since then it can be argued whether or not the term *Estuary English* can still be considered to be correct. Peter Trudgill states that continuing to call this accent Estuary English "suggests that it is a variety of English confined to the banks of the Thames Estuary, which it is not" (Trudgill 1990, 80). Due to the massive spread of Estuary English between the 1980s and today the original name of the accent is, by many, deemed to be incorrect. In the introduction to her study, Joanna Przedlacka says that "the

accent itself has been hailed, largely by journalists, as 'the new standard English' as well as a democratic and modern pronunciation" (Przedlacka 2002, 1). However, this definition is not necessarily appropriate: it depends on the attributes we expect a "standard English" to have, which is another much debated topic among linguists.

The title of this thesis, "Cockney and the Queen", is based on a quote made by David Rosewarne when referring to speakers of EE in his 1994 article: "they are 'between Cockney and the Queen'". One of the many problems related to the definition of EE is, in fact, exactly *what* it is. John Wells actually says that "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" (Wells, 1998). This is problematic as it, in theory, means that every linguist can form his or her own definition of what EE is. If such a thing were to happen it would probably be impossible to achieve a universal definition of what EE is, which would complicate research on the topic, as the researcher would have to take numerous definitions into consideration, and probably still risk leaving many out unless he/she is able to find all available sources on EE.

The possibilities regarding what EE is are many: accent, dialect, variety, standard...and the opinions differ, both in linguistic circles and in the media. The terms have been used interchangeably, especially by the media (but also by linguists), even though they are in fact four very different linguistic groupings. The fact that such a crucial part of the definition has been subject to such debate makes it even more difficult to agree on an overall definition of EE, as such a definition should determine whether EE is a standard, variety, dialect or accent. Problems arise due to the fact that all the aforementioned types of speech variety are just that: they all include ways of speech and how they diverge from the RP standard.

It seems like there is a general consensus among scholars that EE is not a dialect (although some, like Swantje Tönnies in her seminar paper, have at some point referred to EE as a dialect). A dialect is defined as "a form of a language that people speak in a particular part of a country, containing some different words and grammar, etc." (Cambridge Dictionaries Online). A more concise definition is given by Arthur Hughes, Peter Trudgill and Dominic Watt: "we use dialect to refer to varieties distinguished from each other by differences of

grammar and vocabulary” (Hughes, Trudgill & Watt 2005, 2) and they also say that the term dialect “refers to varieties distinguished from each other by differences of grammar (**morphology** and **syntax**) and vocabulary (**lexis**)” (Hughes, Trudgill and Watt 2005, 12), while their definition of ‘accent’ is that the term refers to variations only in pronunciation. They go on to say that it is crucial to distinguish between accent and dialect in English, because that is in fact important in regards to the relationship between them. Still, as there is little to no general grammatical difference to be found between EE and RP, it seems safe to say that EE cannot be called a dialect. There are bound to be people who *do* use a grammar in a way which is closely related to the way they speak, but this can occur in a minority of speakers of any accent. The vocabulary has slight differences, but the grammar is mostly the same. There are words that are typical for EE, such as *cheers* in place of *thank you* or *mate/pal* rather than *friend*, but these words are not found exclusively in EE. In his written “Questions & Answers about Estuary English” session, John Wells says that “Rosewarne suggests that ‘cheers’ is the EE equivalent of standard ‘thank you’. I am not a speaker of EE, but like everyone else in England I can use both of these expressions. ‘Cheers’ is just as much StdEng as ‘thank you’, but is stylistically marked as colloquial” (Wells, 1998). This shows that the percentage of lexical, morphological and syntactic difference between EE and standard English is not high enough for EE to be regarded as a dialect in its own right.

As mentioned earlier, EE is often referred to as a “standard” of English which, according to Przedlacka, “implies that with respect to language ‘standard’ is occasionally equated with correctness” (Przedlacka 2002, 4). When looking up the definition of the word “standard” in the Cambridge Dictionaries online there are two hits: one saying that a standard is “a level of quality”, the other that a standard is “a moral rule which should be obeyed”. The first definition is the one which is most applicable to EE, but the second definition is also of some interest: one can say that a standard accent is the accent which should be used by the majority of speakers. However, there are several reasons why EE has been labelled a standard. The main reason is that it is spreading throughout typical RP territory, and it keeps being adopted by new groups of speakers in different areas of Britain. Still, it cannot be said to be the accent of choice for the majority of speakers of English at this point in time. When referring to RP as the standard variety of English it is important to remember that people who were considered to be highly revered members of society (Ascherson refers to the “great men of Westminster”, for instance) actually spoke with their original local accents up until approximately two

centuries ago. This means that RP has not been the typical standard accent of the majority of the English upper class for as long as we might think.

The following table, Ulrike Altendorf’s list of the characteristics desired in a standard, should be taken into account when discussing whether or not EE can be referred to as a standard variety in the same way as RP, as it includes different substantial sociolinguistic aspects that are important when determining the status of an accent.

Table 1

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Characteristics of standard varieties</i>
Linguistic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. minimal variation in form: Standard varieties aim at providing one form for one meaning (Haugen, 1966, 931). Alternative forms are considered as “incorrect” (notion of ‘correctness’) (Stein 1994, 3) 2. maximal variation in function: Standard varieties must accommodate the linguistic needs of various functions (Haugen 1966, 931)
Functional	Appropriate for use in “high functions”: The standard variety is used in situations of official or formal character, such as the language of education, science, administration and the national media (Görlach 1988, 133)
Geographical	Supra-local or supra-regional: A standard must have at least a supra-local currency (Milroy 1994, 19)
Social	Prestigious: The standard is accepted and used by members of high-status social groups and is a prerequisite for social recognition, power and wealth (Haugen 1966, 932)
Attitudinal	Scores high on the status dimension: The standard variety is qualified as <i>correct</i> , <i>pure</i> and <i>pleasant</i> . The speaker of this variety is characterized as <i>educated</i> and <i>intelligent</i> (Bartsch 1987, 243)
Historical	The standard variety has gone through a process of standardization consisting of the following stages: <i>selection</i> , <i>codification of form</i> , <i>elaboration of function</i> and <i>acceptance</i> (Haugen 1966, 933)

Dimensions and characteristics of standard varieties. Altendorf 2003, 27-28 (table 1)

Altendorf’s list includes several important aspects that must be taken into consideration. The accent in question (in this case EE) should fulfil most, or preferably all, of the criteria listed above in order to qualify as a standard variety of English. According to this list, RP clearly qualifies as a standard variety. However, EE does fulfil several of the criteria as well. When it comes to functionality, EE is becoming recognized as an acceptable form of speech in formal and official situations. However, this can be discussed: the close-to-RP variety of EE is more acceptable than close-to-Cockney, and the latter would probably not be deemed appropriate in official or formal situations or in education. EE does have a supra-local, maybe even supra-regional currency (as will be discussed in chapter 3). As it is spreading far beyond the Thames

Estuary and the Home Counties, it is clear that EE is becoming less bound to location. It has been indicated that EE would spread far beyond its original boundaries ever since it was first named; in his first major article on the subject David Rosewarne said that “it seems to be the most influential accent in the south-east of England” (Rosewarne, 1984). This means that EE was already spreading by the time the term was established.

The social dimension is closely related to the functional dimension, and it is clear that EE is being used by certain high-profile members of society such as profiled footballer David Beckham: in an interview with Jimmy Kimmel on American television channel ABC it is easy to hear how Mr. Beckham has clear /l/ vocalization and T glottalization. Another prime example of a celebrity speaking EE is comedian Ricky Gervais, exhibiting the same phonemic traits as David Beckham. Speaking EE as a celebrity is nothing new, but even former Prime Minister Tony Blair has some traces of EE in his speech: in the interview with Burns Hargis one can hear Mr. Blair pronounce the word *hall* as /hɔ:ʊ/ rather than /hɔ:l/ approximately 1 min 10 sec into the clip. There is also some T glottalization, but only in word-final position. This could indicate that Mr. Blair is on the close-to-RP side of the EE spectrum, but an EE speaker nonetheless. Seeing how such important people use EE, to varying extent, it is clear that it is gaining social acceptance. Still, it cannot be said to be on the same level as RP. The attitude towards the typical EE speaker does not allow it to qualify for the attitudinal dimension, as EE is rarely perceived as particularly correct, educated or intelligent. The history of EE as an accent in its own right is not long enough for it to have fulfilled all the requirements of the historical dimension either, although it has (some) established codes and functions as well as an increasing acceptance.

Received Pronunciation has been known to be the main standard of spoken English, both in Britain itself and as the accent of choice in the teaching of English as a second language. It has been the most prestigious accent of English for centuries, the language of the educated and successful. RP has also been seen as a “neutral” accent, however, this view is becoming less common as RP is redefining itself as the accent of a minority of the highest ranking members of the English upper class. But, as the number of RP speakers dwindles, it is possible that the decline in the use of RP leaves room for a different standard to emerge. The present language situation in Britain indicates that EE is a strong contestant due to its rapid

spread and social acceptability. Still, due to stigma attached to EE, it is unlikely that EE will rise above RP in the accent hierarchy any time soon. If the criteria Altendorf presents in her table are used as a basis it becomes clear that even though EE can be accredited with some of the traits of a standard, it is still too stigmatized as a working-to-middle-class accent to be considered a standard variety, and there is no guarantee that it will ever be perceived as a proper standard of English. This indicates that EE ought to be referred to as an accent or a variety, at least for the time being, as it cannot be called either *dialect* or *standard variety*.

When looking at different accents of English it becomes clear that there are no set boundaries between them geographically speaking: it is impossible to establish firm lines, or isoglosses, on a map in order to define the boundaries of an accent or a dialectal phenomenon. Mountains and rivers usually provide the firmest boundaries, but even those do not establish a concrete divide between two accents. The determination of where the isoglosses are is further problematized by people moving from one dialect area to another, bringing their original accent with them. RP itself, originating in the upper class of south-eastern England, has gradually lost its original localizability as people moved to and from the area.

The division or change between English accents can best be seen as a spectrum, where pronunciation and phonemic realization undergo a gradual change. This is a nationwide spectrum. But there are “microspectrums” as well: within every accent there will be so-called broad speakers, as well as speakers with an accent which is closer to RP, and everything in between. This can also be said of EE, where the spectrum ranges between speakers whose speech is very close to proper standard RP as the one extreme, and broad London speech (Cockney) as the other. I will also refer to EE as a continuum, which can be defined as “something that changes in character gradually or in very slight stages without any clear dividing points” (Cambridge Dictionaries Online), or “a gradual changing of pronunciation” (Hughes, Trudgill and Watt 2005, 9). It is appropriate to regard EE as a continuum accent, as it is clear that EE is undergoing constant change and development. The comparison of the speech of Ricky Gervais, David Beckham and Tony Blair illustrates the diversity of EE, and as they all qualify as speakers of EE (Blair on the close-to-RP side of the continuum, Gervais somewhere in the middle, and Beckham on the close-to-Cockney side), the similarities and differences in the way they speak show the gradual changes in EE.

1.2 Source issues and work methods

For this thesis I have chosen to focus on the theoretical aspects of EE rather than on statistics and case or field work. One of the major reasons for this is the problem regarding sources. Although much has been said and written about EE over the last 15 years, there are relatively few longer texts and articles on the subject. When searching for appropriate sources I got many hits on EE, but most of these were a couple of paragraphs in one book and a couple of pages in others. Some of the books I found were too informal to use as main sources, the most extreme case being Steve Crancher. In his *Guide to Estuary English* he focuses mostly on the way of speaking, and in addition, his “dictionaries” and speech examples tend to be on the Cockney side of the spectrum rather than showing the diversity found in EE. Another problem with this source in particular is that Crancher does not transcribe his examples; he has chosen to write them out the way a speaker would have said them. This makes it a fun book for learning some EE, but it is not quite as good when compared to more academic sources. The more reliable source books I found, as mentioned, often limited their discussion of EE to either pages or paragraphs.

However, the sources available still provided a solid base for discussion, as they often presented very different and varying opinions. There were a large number of articles online, written by both accomplished linguists and newspaper journalists. This proved to be interesting, as I found that the media and the linguistic society often have colliding views (as will be seen further on in this thesis). The media allows us to look into the opinions of the general public, which is crucial in order to properly understand the causes of the spread, development and increasing importance of EE. In addition to that, it sometimes happens that the media is able to pick up on trends and changes in (local) speech before the linguists discover them, which is another reason why the media can be such a valuable source when researching different aspects of EE.

Chapter 2: Phonemic traits

Speakers of EE are generally said to be speaking a kind of Received Pronunciation (RP) merged with traits that are typical for the standard working class London accent, commonly referred to as Cockney. Using this kind of speech would be unthinkable for a stereotypical RP speaker, which might actually be one of the reasons for EE speakers to adopt these traits in particular. Barbara Fennell says that “it [EE] is characterized as being more appealing to the masses than RP, which some consider 'snobbish' and indicative of the old school and the establishment” (Fennell 2000, 189). Many younger people today do not want to be associated with the stereotypical RP speaker which would come from the extreme upper class, the Queen and the Royal family, politicians, people from the educational system, and so forth. John Wells says that “the main new trends of the last 30 years are increased t-glottalling and l-vocalization. There is also a new acceptance of speech patterns associated with the working class, and a disinclination to accept RP as the self-evident norm of pronunciation” (Wells, 1998). This indicates that people who were born 30 years ago or later are less likely than their elders to be judgmental of people who speak with these phonemic traits, and by doing so allow the aforementioned phenomena to (possibly) gain increased acceptance amongst the younger generations of speakers of English.

As the influence of Cockney on EE is massive, I have chosen to address some of the most prominent London accent traits adopted by EE speakers. These traits are always up for discussion, and linguists argue as to whether they are actually used by EE speakers or reserved for speakers of Cockney. Most experts claim that some of them are used only by those with a broad London accent, and that this places them outside the EE spectrum. Others, such as Paul Coggle, point out that there are differences between EE speakers too: some adopt different phonemic traits originally found in Cockney; “‘fink’ and ‘fahver’, being low in the acceptability hierarchy, are generally not adopted by Estuary speakers with social aspirations” (Coggle 1993, 49). However, Coggle also says that “the number of speakers who live well beyond Cockney territory but nevertheless use these pronunciations is surprisingly high” (Coggle 1993, 50). This indicates that even though the most stereotypical Cockney traits are stigmatised by both speakers of RP and EE (especially close-to-RP speakers) they are appearing more frequently in the speech of people who would not traditionally be associated with the Cockney accent. Still, due to the stigma associated with these phonemic traits, it is

impossible to say whether they will become standard EE traits over time, and there is also no way of telling whether they will end up spanning the entire EE continuum or remaining solely on the close-to-Cockney side of the spectrum.

I have chosen to focus mainly on consonants in this chapter. Although there are many stereotypical vowels in EE as well (both monophthongs and diphthongs) the consonant traits are more prominent. There are several vowel sounds that differ from those of the RP standard, but as vowels tend to be more fluid due to their not being caused by an obstruction somewhere in the oral cavity, the changes in vowels and diphthongs are more difficult to distinguish without paying them extensive focus. The differences between RP and EE when it comes to vowels are many, but they are more subtle than the differences between consonants. Still, these differences are indeed worth looking into, but they will not be given much focus in this thesis.

2.1 L vocalization

L vocalization is typical of the London accent. Peter Trudgill describes the phenomenon: “When /l/ occurs finally after a vowel [...]; before a consonant in the same syllable [...]; or as a syllable in itself [...], it is realized as a vowel” (Trudgill 1990, 75) and Maidment says that “/l/ is realised as a back, closeish rounded vowel in positions before a consonant with or without an intervening word boundary or in absolute utterance final position before a pause”. This means that the /l/ in words such as *milk* and *Paul* is most often realized as /ɔ/. Other variations are possible, such as /l/ being replaced by either [ɣ] or [o]. Trudgill also makes the point that in cases where the preceding vowel is [ɔ:] there might be a complete loss of /l/, such as in *Paul's* [po:z]. Fennell has a good illustration of this: when /l/ is vocalized in the sentence “faully books have been supplied in error” the pronunciation of *faully* can be confused with that of *forty*, making the meaning of the sentence something completely different. This can pose a problem for foreign speakers of English, or even native speakers with a different accent. L vocalization is a typical Cockney trait, but it has gained a foothold in so-called Regional RP as well; the main reason for this massive spread might be that, unlike H dropping, L vocalization is not a particularly stigmatized phonemic trait. Because it is not regarded a negative way of speech, it is easily adopted by speakers because it simplifies the

pronunciation of a lot of words containing /l/.

Replacing the allophone [ɫ] with [ʊ] is a phonemic trait that has been spreading fast since the 1990s. The pronunciation of the [ʊ] allophone is similar to that of the open approximant [w] (Tönnies 2005, 7), which is one of few consonants pronounced as a vowel due to the speaker's lack of obstruction of the air flow. It also means that [ɫ] can be realized both as a proper vowel ([ʊ]) and as an open approximant ([w]). Several linguists represent the vocalized /l/ with [w] (in his article Maidment refers to both Coggle and Rosewarne). However, only the velar (dark) allophone of /l/ is vocalized. On the other hand, the lateral approximant /l/, most commonly found in initial or medial position, is never vocalized. But, even though L vocalization can be regarded as a rather stigmatized phonemic trait, it is also present in RP: "some RP speakers use a vowel in place of dark [ɫ] in certain environments, as in /'teɪbʊ/ *table* or /'bjʊ:tɪfʊ/ *beautiful*" (Hughes, Trudgill and Watts 2005, 45). Tony Blair is one example of this, as mentioned in the introduction.

A change in the pronunciation of [l] is happening in Norway as well, where the regular [l] is being replaced by [ʌ]. Even though this is not directly related to the development in EE it indicates that "lazy speech"/ease of articulation does not occur only in English. Young speakers in different countries make shortcuts in pronunciation, which could be another indication that the general trend is that this particular group wants to distance itself from the "old-fashioned" and typical upper class speech. However, even people who can be defined as upper class have been known to speak with L vocalization, although it is not necessarily very prominent. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair is known for this, and when comparing him to other prominent contemporary politicians such as current Prime Minister David Cameron or Nick Clegg it is not difficult to hear the difference in their accents even though all three can be considered to be upper class. Even though Tony Blair's L vocalization might be slight, it is there nonetheless.

2.2 TH Fronting

One of the most well-known traits of broad London Cockney is TH fronting, which means

that the speaker substitutes [θ] and [ð] with [f] and [v]. This replacement can happen both initially, medially and finally. Examples:

Initially: /θri:/ (three) will be pronounced /fri:/

Medially: /'mʌð.ər/ (mother) will be pronounced /'mʌv.ər/

Finally: /bəʊθ/ (both) will be pronounced /bəʊf/

In the case of [ð] it is often replaced by [d] or Ø in initial position. A good example of this is *they*, which would be realized as /deɪ/, or simply as /eɪ/. The latter realization would be more common in a close-to-Cockney speaker.

TH fronting has become a widespread phenomenon in the greater London area due to its strong position in Cockney, and it also occurs in other accents across Britain. One major reason for this spread might be its ease of articulation; that pronouncing the labiodental fricatives [f] and [v] demands less effort than the pronunciation of the dental fricatives [θ] and [ð]. Pronouncing labio-dental fricatives does not require movement of the tongue, while the tongue is pressed against the teeth when pronouncing dental fricatives. TH fronting is another phonemic phenomenon that, together with /l/ vocalization, can be regarded as a result of “lazy speech”. However, TH fronting is more stigmatized than /l/ vocalization; Coggle states that “*fink* and *fahver*, being low in the acceptability hierarchy, are generally not adopted by Estuary speakers with social aspirations” (Coggle, 1993, 49). This is a clear indicator that extensive TH fronting is mainly used by the working class speakers of EE, and it is likely that the phenomenon occurs more often in speakers living in or in close proximity to London.

But the spread of TH fronting throughout the UK is not necessarily a result of its use among EE speakers. In 1876 C. Clough Robinson published a grammar and glossary for mid-Yorkshire, where he states that

There is a strong disposition to sound this consonant in the place of initial *th*, initially, in certain words, as in *thrat*ch (to quarrel sharply), *through*, *thrust* [fruost·], *thimble* [fɪm·u 1], *throstle*, *throng*, and in *thought*, as habitually pronounced by individuals as [faowt·] (Upton/Mugglestone 2002, 307).

It is believed that TH fronting moved north from London in the late 19th century; this would account for its appearance in Clough Robinson's glossary and grammar. Still, as Clive Upton says, TH fronting seems to have been such an established trait of the mid-Yorkshire speech that it attracted the attention of linguists as early as in the late 1870s. This is a clear indicator that EE is not the only "culprit" when it comes to the increasing use of TH fronting, especially amongst younger speakers.

However, there is uncertainty among linguists as to when and how TH fronting became a typical EE trait. Peter Trudgill, in *The Dialects of English* (1990, second edition 1999), writes that "it does not have features typical only of working-class accents, such as the glottal stop in *better* and *water*, or the use of 'f' and 'v' in words such as *mother* and *thing*" (Trudgill 1990, 81). This is interesting as Trudgill here discards two of today's most prominent features of EE. In his 2002 publication Steve Crancker specifically states that "th is commonly replaced by f at the beginning of a syllable, and v if it occurs elsewhere" (Crancker 2002, 5). This might indicate that the use of TH fronting in EE has increased rapidly over a short time span. Trudgill does emphasize that TH fronting, as well as T glottalization is spreading; when *Dialects of England* was written both phenomena were heard as far away from the Thames Estuary as in Cardiff (Trudgill 1990, 82).

2.3 T Glottalization and glottal stops

As mentioned in the segment about TH fronting, one of the major reasons for change in pronunciation can be ease of articulation (in the group of speakers in question). This is perhaps particularly the case when it comes to T glottalization (the phoneme /t/ being realized as a glottal stop, [ʔ]) and glottaling (when any consonant is realized as a glottal stop). In EE the phoneme [t] is frequently either partially or completely replaced with a glottal stop, both in middle and final position. Glottal stops replacing [t] do occur in RP as well (such as in the word *department*, pronounced /dəpɑ:ʔmɪnt/), but in Cockney it is a given. Words like *get*, *what*, *bitter* and *pity* would be pronounced /geʔ/, /wɔʔ/, /bɪʔə/ and /pɪʔi/ respectively. The [ʔ] does produce a sound which speakers would recognize as a [t] replacement in examples such as the above, but as a glottal stop is simply a stop in the air flow in the throat it is definitely

easier and quicker for the speaker to replace [t] with [ʔ] in order to make speech flow more easily. Hughes, Trudgill and Watt call T glottalization “a particularly salient, widely discussed and often heavily stigmatized ‘Estuary’ form” (Hughes, Trudgill & Watt 2005, 5).

Replacing medial [t] with [ʔ] has been typical of very stereotypical working class accents, such as broad London or Cockney, and according to Hughes, Trudgill and Watts (2005, 40) the glottal stop actually lacks the status of a proper phoneme in RP (even though it does occur in RP as well as in other accents). Wells says that “I would say that it is ALREADY the norm in certain environments, eg for word-final /t/ before a consonant, in all except the most formal styles” (Wells, 1988), meaning that it is also establishing itself in RP. However, it is not completely certain that T glottalization started in London: another possibility is that it originates in the eastern counties rather than in central London itself (Trudgill 1990, 77). It is likely that, as EE is partially a downgrading of RP, the speakers have adopted [ʔ] for [t] in order to further separate and distance their accent from RP. Still, there are settings where it is more likely that a complete glottal stop for [t] will occur. Hughes, Trudgill and Watt have constructed a list where the most likely scenario comes first and the least likely scenario comes last (Hughes, Trudgill & Watt 2005, 66):

Word-finally before a consonant – *that man*

Before a syllabic nasal – *button*

Word-finally before a vowel – *that apple*

Before syllabic [l] – *bottle*

Word-internally before a vowel – *better*

One thing one must keep in mind when referring to this list is that it is primarily based on RP. Seeing how the Cockney accent has exercised increased influence over EE, one must assume that the less frequent scenarios in RP will occur more often among EE speakers, especially younger speakers who might strive to remove themselves as far from standard RP as possible without adapting a full-blown Cockney accent: “it is most common in the speech of younger urban working-class speakers” (Hughes, Trudgill and Watt 2005, 66). It is also possible that the rarer cases of [ʔ] for [t] from the list above are being used more frequently by speakers from more remote areas. The general consensus seems to be that [t] replacing [ʔ] in an intervocalic position is much less common in EE than in Cockney, and that [t] between

vowels is usually pronounced, while it is more commonly replaced with [ʔ] in final position. In her thesis Natasha Harkness claims that “there is a general agreement among most commentators that [ʔ] for [t] in preconsonantal environment should be regarded as part of EE” (Harkness 2003, 65), which is an indication that T glottalization is spreading throughout the EE continuum. There is also evidence that T glottalization (and glottaling as a whole) is becoming more frequent amongst younger speakers of RP as well; “upper- as well as middle-class, may be heard variably using a glottal stop in word-final position, either before a pause or before a vowel” (Hughes, Trudgill and Watt 2005, 43). This is likely to be because of the increasing influence that greater London speech (Cockney and broader cases of EE) is having on young speakers all across Britain.

However, phenomena similar to glottalization and glottaling are not restricted to [t]; in some cases it has been seen accompanying the other two plosives [p] (bilabial) and [k] (velar) as well. A good example of this is the word *paper*, which speakers of EE tend to pronounce /'peɪʔpə/ rather than /'peɪ.pə/ and the word “flicker”, which is realized as /'flɪkʔə/ rather than /'flɪk|.ə/. This is known as *glottal reinforcement* or *glottalization*, and is most commonly found in northern parts of England (Upton in Mugglestone 2006, 317). Some accents, such as Liverpool’s “scouse”, tend to have heavily aspirated /p, t, k/ as they have a tendency to suppress glottaling and glottalization. Even though it is primarily found north of the typical EE areas, glottal reinforcement is also found in EE, although it is mainly used by speakers who are closer to Cockney in the EE continuum. Again, a main reason for the increased use of glottal reinforcement/glottalization of other plosives would seem to be the ease of articulation it brings with it. As EE continues to spread, it is likely that more speakers will adopt this trait as they merge EE with their own original accent.

Like H dropping and TH fronting, T glottalization is one of the most stigmatized phonemic traits of EE. All three are stereotypical working class phenomena, and are thus found to a larger extent in EE speakers who qualify as close-to-Cockney. The stigma associated with T glottalization, especially in intervocalic position (such as in the word *letter*), also makes it one of the heavily debated EE traits. However, it is perhaps the only typical Cockney and EE trait which is actually being used by RP speakers as well, which is clear in such words as *Gatwick*. This is a clear indicator that, even though there is still a lot of stigma associated with T

glottalization, replacing [t] with [ʔ] in certain positions is becoming more acceptable. The appearances of T glottalization in RP might be few and relatively far between, but, like L vocalization, it is there. Hughes, Trudgill and Watt present the following observation:

It appears that many younger RP speakers are also adopting [ʔ] [...] despite (or perhaps because of) the stigma of ugliness, inarticulacy and ‘sloppiness’ that is often attached to the form. The fact that prominent public figures, such as the prime minister, Tony Blair, and certain younger members of the British royal family, can be heard to use glottal stops in pre-consonantal, pre-nasal and even word-final pre-vocalic positions suggests that this stigma may be receding, however (Hughes, Trudgill and Watt 2005, 67).

This adds weight to previous observations made in this thesis: certain stigmatized phonemic traits are being adopted by prominent members of society, making them more acceptable to the general public (and perhaps especially to younger people). Because of the increasing acceptance of phonemic phenomena that have been heavily stigmatized these traits are being adopted by an increasing number of speakers across the EE continuum (even those whose speech is considered to be closer to RP). When stereotypical RP speakers adopt these traits they begin to lose the stigma that has been connected with them, making them more attractive to speakers who want to distance themselves from the standard old-fashioned RP without moving too far away from the standard variety.

2.4 H Dropping

When the phoneme /h/ is found in initial position it is rarely pronounced in EE, unless it precedes a vowel of a certain quality and is stressed. Hughes, Trudgill and Watt (2005, 44), referring to Ladefoged and Maddieson, say that “we could, therefore, think of /h/ as being a kind of voiceless vowel as well as a fricative”. The H dropping phenomenon is widespread in almost all accents of English, especially in function words (such as auxiliaries and pronouns, *had* and *have*), but in EE it occurs in most words with initial /h/. *House* would be realized as /aʊs/, *here* as /ɪə/ and so on. H dropping also occurs alongside other specific phonemic traits, such as T glottalization and glottaling. A good example of this is the word *hat*, which could (in a very broad speaker, probably one speaking more of a Cockney accent than EE) be realized simply as /æʔ/.

However, initial /h/ has not vanished completely in EE. When a syllable containing [h] is stressed, it is occasionally pronounced. Most native speakers of (British) English would have no problem understanding words where [h] is dropped, as the context would usually make it clear whether the word in question is for instance *hat* or *at*, *heart* or *art* etc. H dropping is common in nearly all of England, but [h] in initial position is normally pronounced in parts of East Anglia as well as in the Newcastle area. Trudgill says that “unlike RP, most urban regional accents of England and Wales do not have /h/, or are at least variable in its usage” (Trudgill 1990, 66). This is probably another reason why H dropping is being adopted by speakers of EE: whether they live in or near London or further away from the capital they will face H dropping in most accents. Steve Crancher simply says that “H is also dropped at the beginning of a word” (Crancher 2002, 5). By making such a bold statement about H dropping Crancher separates himself from many of the more renowned linguists, who tend to claim that H dropping is rarely adopted by speakers of EE unless they are on the far end on the spectrum and speak in a way that borders on Cockney. Tönnies, Maidment and Trudgill are among those who claim that H dropping is not a trait found in EE (or that it is only found on rare occasions) while Paul Coggle argues that even though H dropping is more prominent in speakers who are close to Cockney on the EE spectrum it, is also found in speakers who have not had the same exposure to H dropping in their indigenous local accent(s). The conflicting views on this particular phonemic trait makes H dropping worth mentioning when working with EE, not because it is considered to be a major part of EE, but because it is a matter of much debate among linguists. It is also relevant when discussing the stigma associated with EE because of it originally being a phonemic trait typical of the speech of lower classes. This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Based on my sources it is apparent that Coggle (and Crancher to some extent) is the only linguist who makes the claim that H dropping is indeed part of the EE spectrum, but Coggle does admit that it is a trait found only in those speakers whose EE is on the border between the EE continuum and Cockney. By saying this, he partly agrees with the majority of linguists, who say that H dropping is not a major part of EE. Still, he does say that H dropping *is* found in EE, and based on his role in the linguistic society, his claim cannot be flat out denied. H dropping is actually a good indicator when it comes to placing a speaker on the EE spectrum: if he/she has extensive H dropping, the person would most likely be deemed as close-to-Cockney. There are some speakers who are closer to RP that also have H dropping,

but on this side of the spectrum, H dropping is most prominent in function words (also known as elision, which will be explained in part 2.5).

One major reason for the debate regarding H dropping is that it is very heavily stigmatized. It has always been a typical trait of very stereotypical London working class people speaking broad Cockney, and for this reason it has been one of the phonemic traits that have definitely revealed the speaker's place at the bottom of the social hierarchy. It was perhaps even more widespread in groups that were actually below the working class, which is one of the reasons why it is such a stigmatized phonemic trait: it has been a typical trait amongst the lowest of the low, making it a very undesirable way of speaking. However, despite the massive debate between linguists, I believe that H dropping is indeed a crucial feature in the EE spectrum. It may be more prominent in speakers who are close-to-Cockney, but there is no denying that it is being used by EE speakers. An example is David Beckham, who is consistently not pronouncing [h] in word-initial position. As Mr. Beckham grew up in London it is to be expected that his speech would be somewhere close-to-Cockney on the EE spectrum, but he does not speak with all the typical Cockney traits (although his speech can be defined as significantly closer to Cockney than can that of many other prominent EE speakers).

2.5 Reduction processes and stylistic variation

Stylistic variation can be found in all accents of English, and EE is no exception. What is interesting is that the reduction processes connected with stylistic variation might partially account for some of the phonemic variation within the EE continuum. Stylistic variation has to do with how people speak in different situations, and how they alter their way of speech in order for it to be appropriate for the current situation. It is something that is familiar to speakers of all languages: on more formal occasions we are all more likely to strive to pronounce things correctly and completely, including all syllables and letters, correct stress, and all of this while using an accent with an acceptable standard. In England (and other nations where British English has traditionally been taught), this accent has been Received Pronunciation. However, different kinds of stylistic variation can also help explain why the EE spectrum is as comprehensive as it is.

The most common type of stylistic variation is *elision*, which means that certain sounds will be elided (omitted). This is found in all languages, and is very common in every variety of spoken English (both in Britain and in other countries). Dropping /t/ at the end of a word can be seen as one form of elision, as described in the paragraph about Mike Skinner's pronunciation. Still, it is difficult to say whether T dropping is indeed elision, or if it is a phenomenon of its own (perhaps connected with T glottalization). The most common type of elision is the absence of initial /h/ in function words, which is found in most accents of English in Britain. This also provides a link to H dropping, but H dropping and elision of /h/ is not the same thing. However, it might account for the varying presence of H dropping across the EE continuum: /h/ elision seems to be more common than actual H dropping in speakers who are close-to-RP, while H dropping occurs gradually when moving towards the close-to-Cockney side of the spectrum. This phenomenon also affects vowels, and in normal informal speech, unstressed vowels tend to be reduced to /ə/ (schwa), thus replacing the original sound with one that is easier to articulate, which will keep speech more fluid.

Even though people are still likely to adjust the way they speak according to the situation, the clear divide between formal and informal speech is becoming less prominent. This might be, in part, because of the increasing acceptance of the use of accents even in more formal settings. As mentioned in part 2.3 it is clear that assorted phonemic traits that have typically been considered undesirable and inarticulate are undergoing a massive change in terms of people's attitude towards them, and their being used by such prominent members of society is, in a way, legitimizing them as phonemic traits, as they gradually lose the stigma that has traditionally been connected with them. As these traits continue to gain acceptance, they are bound to appear more frequently in the close-to-RP part of the EE continuum as well as in the close-to-Cockney area, possibly decreasing the difference between the two EE extremes. It also increases the possibility that these features will appear in more formal speech, completely changing their status when it comes to stylistic variation.

Assimilation is also an important aspect of stylistic variation. Assimilation means "to become similar", and Hughes, Trudgill and Watt use the phrase *that plate* as an example (2005, 7): the final /t/ in *plate* is likely to be realized as /p/ due to assimilation (the last consonant of the first word is replaced by the first consonant of the second word, substituting /t/ with /p/), making it /ðæp pleit/ rather than /ðæt pleit/. This is important, as assimilation and T dropping/glottaling,

especially in cases such as these, are very similar phenomena. Assimilation is also a key feature in *accent/dialect levelling*, which means that typical accent traits are disappearing and being replaced by the standard variety. Accent levelling is commonplace in most languages, but it is very noticeable in English because of EE: if it continues to spread at the same rate as it has been, EE is likely to replace (to some extent) various local accents. EE is already a good example of accent levelling in practice, seeing how it is smudging the boundaries of RP and Cockney, joining the two in a shared continuum. EE appears to be the “scapegoat” when it comes to dialect levelling: its rapid spread throughout Britain is destroying the peculiarities and individual features of other accents. When searching for “dialect levelling” on the internet one of the first hits you will get is Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia, which is a massive collection of articles submitted and edited by the public. The final part of the first paragraph in the article on dialect levelling in Britain goes as follows: “Television has broadcast Estuary English through programmes such as 'Eastenders' over a long period of time. With more people viewing and listening to Estuary English, it becomes more widely used throughout the country” (quote from ‘Dialect levelling in Britain’ on Wikipedia). This illustrates several points:

- a) Estuary English is considered (perhaps at least by the public, given how the article is on Wikipedia) to be a major influence on the current status of English in Britain due to how viewers are exposed to it via the media
- b) Dialect levelling across Britain seems to be strongly connected to the spread of EE, at least in the eyes of the public

I deliberately chose to refer to the Wikipedia article rather than to its sources, because Wikipedia can be an interesting way to investigate how the general public views different phenomena. The writer(s) of the article do refer to numerous sources, but EE is given focus already in the first paragraph. As there are no sources in this paragraph, it seems likely that the paragraph in question reflects the author’s opinion on the subject, which gives support to several of the claims made in this thesis. Still, it is important to remember that while articles on Wikipedia can give interesting information regarding regular people’s opinions on different matters, they cannot replace more traditional, traceable and reliable sources.

Chapter 3: The spread of Estuary English

3.1 What has caused the spread of Estuary English?

It is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint one single reason for the increasing spread of EE. Still, the expanding use of accents used in and around London is not a new phenomenon. Over the centuries people from all over Britain have travelled to London in order to do business, establish themselves, or simply because they wanted to see the capital. The classical example might be the upper middle class country girl who travels to London to visit relatives and establish a social circle, which seems to have been a commonplace thing to do in the 18th and 19th centuries. As the London upper class was “a relatively small and, more importantly, socially isolated group” (Przedlacka 2002, 13), it is not likely that their way of speech would make a large impact on the speech of the common people. However, people with social aspirations became aware of their own accent; they began to notice less desirable aspects of how they were speaking, which gradually gave the stereotypical London accent a reputation for being “vulgar” as well as for being a disadvantage if you wanted to climb the social ladder.

Another point worth mentioning is that people from most social groups are able to attend higher education, a privilege formerly reserved for the upper class. This is important for two reasons:

- a) People from different areas and social groups intermingle, and thus are able to influence the speech of one another;
- b) When the students have finished their studies and move, either back home or to another place, they will take their accent with them.

Some students, perhaps especially those with working class or international backgrounds, are likely to try and elevate their accent to a level they feel appropriate in regard to their future profession. It is also likely that EE can develop in young speakers: in a school where there is a noticeable percentage of RP-speaking children, but where the majority speak with a local accent, the two groups are likely to influence each other’s speech, which can lead to the

creation of a way of speech which is similar to EE. As RP is still perceived as the most prestigious standard by most speakers of English, it tends to be the accent people try to adopt. This phenomenon occurs when people move from more rural areas into the city, or from one city to another. Such accent levelling is common in other countries as well: young people adapt their accent when moving to the city, but most of them retain traces of their original accent even if they try to adopt the desired standard variety. The change in question is not limited to EE, but as EE is perceived as a good middle ground between RP and the typical London working class accent it is probably one of the more attractive accents one can adopt: speaking EE indicates either that you are rising from the working class, or that you are “downgrading” upper class speech in order to seem more approachable and common. Either way adapting EE can rid speakers of the stigma associated with their original accent, and if people uproot themselves and relocate they will take their “new” accent with them.

3.2 Geographical boundaries

When linguists attempt to establish the spread of an accent, being able to draw an *isogloss* can be very helpful. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines an isogloss as “a boundary line between places or regions that differ in a particular linguistic feature” or “a line on a map representing an isogloss”. However, there is no way to set a firm isogloss, or geographical boundary, for accents. It is impossible to draw a straight line in order to separate two linguistic features. The clearest boundaries used to be concrete blockages in the accent’s path, such as a river or mountain range. Still, these natural divides proved insufficient when establishing isoglosses: people could have the same dialect on both sides. Rather than looking at dialects as a whole, the language researchers had to look at specific dialectal traits. Two neighbouring villages could have an almost identical accent, but while village A had H dropping, village B had /l/ vocalization. This makes it difficult to isolate different phonemic traits in terms of set isoglosses.

In modern times, and especially since the industrial revolution, the importance of topographical obstructions has diminished rapidly. Due to the existence of trains, planes and cars, people travel more easily and are able to cover large distances in a short amount of time. Commuting and business trips take people across large areas, and for many these are

commonplace events. As people travel over larger distances on a regular basis, families relocate and major businesses attract people from all over the nation it is no wonder that an accent such as EE has undergone a rapid spread (and is still spreading). At this point in time it would appear that EE is the fastest spreading accent in Britain. This might be caused by the fact that EE is beginning to be perceived as a new standard rather than an accent, as EE is becoming more difficult to pinpoint geographically. This trend was seen in RP as well, and now it is virtually impossible to determine where a RP speaker is from without asking him/her.

Even though the term “Estuary English” is geographically limited, the accent cannot be said to be limited to the areas around the Thames Estuary. It is more common in the areas surrounding London, but several linguists have acknowledged that the number of EE speakers in other areas of the country is on the rise.

There is some evidence to suggest that young people further north are adopting some of the features of Estuary English. It is simply that, at present, Estuary English speakers are not the norm in cities such as Birmingham, Derby and Leicester, though it is relatively common to find them in less competitive urban environments such as Norwich and Southampton (Coggle 1993, 27).

Ulrike Altendorf brings forth four hypotheses regarding the spread of EE (Altendorf 2003, 16):

- The Thames-Estuary hypothesis
- The Home-Counties hypothesis
- The South-of-England hypothesis
- The Plus-Liverpool-Plus-Glasgow hypothesis

The first three are agreed upon, at least to some extent, in newer sources focusing on the spread of EE (Swantje Tönnies also mentions these hypotheses on pages 6-7 of her seminar paper from 2005). This makes hypothesis number four the most interesting; according to Altendorf it “claims that some characteristics of EE have spread on even further north, in particular to Liverpool and Glasgow” (Altendorf 2003, 16). This adds another dimension to Coggle’s claim about how speakers in places far north of the original EE areas are starting to include EE features in their daily speech. However, this hypothesis has had little data to support it, and neither Rosewarne, Coggle nor Wells believes that there is enough information

to confirm or discard this hypothesis. Altendorf represents their views in this table, alongside that of the media:

Table 2

<i>Stage of development</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Rosewarne 1984, 1994</i>	<i>Coggle 1993</i>	<i>Wells 1998</i>	<i>Media</i>
1 st stage	<i>Thames-Estuary hypothesis</i>	+	+	+	+
2 nd stage	<i>Home-Counties hypothesis</i>	+	+	+	+
3 rd stage	<i>South-of-England hypothesis</i>	Rosewarne 1994	Individual features	0	0
4 th stage	<i>Plus-Liverpool-Plus-Glasgow hypothesis</i>	0	0	0	+

Regional extension of EE according to Rosewarne, Coggle, Wells and the media. Altendorf 2003,17 (table 9)

In the table above, + indicates *mostly present*, while 0 means that there is *not enough data to verify presence/absence* (Explanation of symbols used by Altendorf 2003, XII). As the table shows, the media believe that they have enough data to support their claim that the *Plus-Liverpool-Plus-Glasgow* hypothesis is valid. An example of this is Kathy Marks' article in *The Independent* where she quotes professor Andrew Hamer, who does regional accent research at Liverpool University: "Mr Hamer blames social mobility and EastEnders for the relentless march of Estuary English [...] He says that the trend is most noticeable in people under 30 and contrasts the sounds uttered by young scousers to those of earlier generations" (Marks). This can be seen as an indication that EE is indeed migrating further north than Wells and Rosewarne have originally stated, which supports the claims of both Coggle and Hamer. Naturally this further complicates the issue regarding definitions (Chapter 1): if EE is indeed found as far north as Liverpool and Norwich the term "Estuary English" is far too limiting. Even Rosewarne has made a point of this, as early as in 1994: "In the decade since I started research into it, Estuary English has spread northwards to Norwich, and westwards to Cornwall, with the result that it is now spoken south of a line from the Wash to the Avon" (Rosewarne, 1994). This is an extensive spread considering how the article was written only a decade after Estuary English was first defined. Due to the rapid spread of EE it can be discussed whether or not the *Plus-Liverpool-Plus-Glasgow* hypothesis is still a hypothesis, or if it has become an established fact.

3.3 Social acceptance

For many, EE is perceived as the exact opposite of RP: it is an undesirable accent that indicates that the speaker is of little prestige and has little social aspiration. It is an accent you would not want to be connected with. However, this might be changing. The change in how EE is perceived by linguists and speakers alike has had great influence on the spread of EE. As different accents become more prominent in the media they also become more acceptable to most British people. Many typically stigmatised accents are being viewed differently, and a variety of local accents are replacing RP as the main accent in their area of origin. In his article from 2000 David Ward points out how the formerly heavily stigmatised Scouse accent has begun being perceived as “straight, understanding and friendly. It is not seen as a barrier to business”. This is a large contrast to the results presented in section 4.1, where Scouse is deemed the accent of people more likely to commit crimes, et cetera. The acceptance of other accents has also paved the way for the acceptance of EE. In some ways EE has been more stigmatised than other accents as it has been perceived as “lazy speech”, due to some of the phonemic traits listed earlier in this thesis.

Even though EE is becoming known as a new standard form of speech it has been heavily criticized by linguists, the media, and even by political institutions; “it has even received official condemnation from the Secretary of State for Education as a form of English which should be disallowed to be taught at schools” (Przedlacka 2002, 4). This indicates two things

- a) Estuary English is indeed establishing itself as a new standard, both in opposition to and coexisting with other accents, RP in particular. It is doing so to the extent that it is being adopted by people in professions where RP has always been the standard.
- b) From the quote above it would seem that The Secretary of State for Education is labelling EE as an undesirable development in the English language, and that the accent (or new standard) is a downgrading of the prestigious standard which RP has represented throughout history.

Where a) is concerned it has become obvious that EE is no longer deemed a socially inferior accent. Coggle points out that an increasing number of highly educated people turn to EE

rather than use the standard they are expected to adopt with regard to their educational background and choice of profession. RP seems to become increasingly outdated even in circles where it would have had a firm foothold only decades ago, which reflects the language situation in all of Britain: a very small number of people actually use RP (as few as 2-3% of the population) as their standard of speech. Given their rank in the social hierarchy as well as their social and educational background, the people who historically would have been speaking RP will be closer to RP than Cockney on the EE spectrum, but they do fall into the EE spectrum nonetheless. Historically speaking, RP has been the speech of the well-educated and prosperous upper class and aristocracy, and there were few to none working class students in higher education. This was bound to make RP the standard accent of prestigious occupations as the only people qualified for them were highly likely to have been RP speakers in the first place. Over time more and more people from the middle and working classes have been able to go through with higher education, which effectively decreased the number of upper class RP speakers.

Estuary English has rapidly climbed the ladder of the linguistic hierarchy. Przedlacka refers to an issue of *The Sunday Times*, published on 21st March 1993, which contains several letters from their readers:

complaints about the current state of the language, calling the new pronunciation ‘increasingly slovenly use of speech’, describing the spread of EE as ‘horrifying’, and referring to speakers of the new variety as ‘idiots on radio and television who speak English like the dregs of humanity’ (Przedlacka 2002, 14-15).

In his article, Maidment, like Przedlacka, lists several quotes he has found in various newspapers, all agreeing that EE is undesirable and ought to be eliminated as an accent (and especially as a potentially rising standard). Some of these quotes are rather harsh: “It is slob speak, limp and flaccid: the mouths uttering it deserve to be stuffed with broken glass”, as well as

God forbid that it becomes standard English. Are standards not meant to be upheld? We must not slip into slovenliness because of a lack of respect for the language. Ours is a lovely language, a rich language, which has a huge vocabulary. We have to safeguard it. (Maidment 1994)

However, as mentioned in the introduction, EE traits are heard in the speech of an increasing number of prominent people, despite opinions such as those quoted above. The fact that individuals who excel in their field use EE is interesting, as it indicates that being part of the EE spectrum is much less stigmatized than it was when *The Independent* published the letters quoted by Przedlacka. It is not uncommon that entertainers such as Ricky Gervais or athletes such as David Beckham speak with an accent, as they have no particular need to change their accent in order to advance in their field. Ricky Gervais, originally from Reading in Berkshire (which is part of the Home Counties), seems to be somewhere in the middle of the EE spectrum: his speech has both /l/ vocalization and T glottaling, probably even traces of glottal reinforcement. David Beckham's speech includes those elements also, but in Beckham's interview with Michael Parkinson he has apparent cases of TH fronting as well: approximately 0:44 into the clip he can be heard pronouncing *another* as /ə'nʌv.ər/. This can probably be accredited to the fact that he grew up in London, but it is still interesting as he speaks with one of the most stigmatized EE traits. His accent can be placed on the close-to-Cockney side of the EE spectrum, but he does not speak with a full-blown broad London accent. Both men originate from the areas where EE first developed, but the differences in their speech reveals the variation found within the EE spectrum. The most prominent difference between the two is that Beckham has TH fronting while Gervais does not. Another reason accounting for the difference in their speech is that Beckham, as a footballer, does not have the same pressure on him as Gervais, a comedian, does when it comes to speech. The interview Burns Hargis did with former Prime Minister Tony Blair is perhaps even more interesting: Tony Blair's speech did have cases of /l/ vocalization, which is not found in standard RP. The /l/ vocalization was not as prominent as it is in the speech of Beckham and Gervais, but the traces of a typical EE trait do indicate that Tony Blair might belong in the close-to-RP group of EE speakers. It does not place him in the more stigmatized end of the spectrum, but it does show that even people with a background similar to that of Tony Blair are adopting some of the less prominent features of EE to some extent. That EE is being spoken in higher circles was verified as early as in 1993-94: "Tony Banks, M.P, interviewed on the B.B.C Radio programme 'Word Of Mouth' on 29 June 1993 reported that Estuary English is now spoken by Conservative members of Parliament as well as Labour" (Rosewarne 1994).

3.4 Music, movies and television

While it is clear that the use of accents is becoming acceptable in the media (perhaps especially in news broadcasts and related types of media), accents have been a major part of entertainment for a very long time. Although some accents traditionally have been used to bring forth certain stereotypes (such as the orphan ringleaders in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, who were typical Cockney speakers), to some artists and actors their accents have also been a way to underline their message and show people that they pride themselves in where they come from...and it can show the complete opposite. An example is Mike Skinner from *The Streets*, a successful band/rap group. He grew up in Birmingham, but when listening to his records I found several traits more typical of EE than of brummie. When listening to his hit single *Dry Your Eyes* from the album *A Grand Don't Come For Free* (2004) I found these examples:

- /θru:/ (*through*) pronounced /fru:/ (0:47), /θɪŋ/ (*thing*) realized as /fɪŋ/ (1 min 36 sec). Not exaggerated TH fronting, but he is clearly not pronouncing TH properly. Also examples of TH fronting in intervocalic position: /'ev.ri.θɪŋ/ (*everything*) pronounced /'ev.ri.fɪŋ/ (2 min 26 sec), as well as /'nʌθ.ɪŋ/ (*nothing*) pronounced /'nʌf.ɪŋ/ (2 min 30 sec)
- /wɪð/ (*with*) pronounced /wɪv/ (1 min 46 sec)
- /ɔ:l/ (*all*) pronounced /ɔ:ʊ/ (2 min 47 sec), /fɔ:l/ (*fall*) realized as /fɔ:ʊ/ (2 min 53 sec)
- /aʊt/ (*out*) pronounced /aʊʔ/ (2 min 57 sec), /ɪ'tɜ:.nɪ.ti/ (*eternity*) realized as /ɪ'tɜ:.nɪ.ʔi/ (50 sec)
- /ə'dʒʌst/ (*adjust*) realized as /ə'dʒʌs/ (35 sec), completely dropping the final /t/. This happens on several occasions

There are few very distinguished examples of H dropping, but there are occasions where /h/ is pronounced less prominently, such as in the word *hurts* at 2:11. Of course, some of this can probably be attributed to Skinner's Birmingham background, but it can also be a strong indicator that Skinner's accent has been affected by EE spreading to the Birmingham area.

Television in particular has been "blamed" for the spread of EE. The popular BBC TV series *EastEnders*, which went on air in 1985 (and is still being aired on BBCOne as of 2012), has

been a popular scapegoat for those who do not approve of the spread of EE. Being based in the eastern parts of London several of the characters speak EE on one side of the spectrum or the other. This makes sense, as the series is based in eastern London: the issue raised is that such a popular TV show might have a linguistic influence on its viewers. Some younger people see EastEnders English as the same as EE even though the language used in EastEnders is mostly close-to-Cockney. In his article from 2001 Stuart Jeffries points out that learners of English in France are using EastEnders to learn “proper English”. Jeffries states that BBC World managing director Patrick Cross “emphasised that the aim of the initiative was not for French children to speak like cockneys, but for the channels to provide exposure to English as it is spoken today” (Jeffries, 2001). The fact that the close-to-Cockney EE mainly used in EastEnders is considered to be ‘English as it is spoken today’ shows how the status of EE has changed due to its use in popular media. Since this article was published in 2001 it is likely that EE in some form is even spreading abroad, but the extent of this spread is unclear and unknown. Still, it does raise the question about how EE should be defined: if it is indeed becoming an accent taught in schools for ESL pupils, is it on its way to become a standard, either alongside or replacing RP?

A new television phenomenon where EE is the main accent is *The Only Way is Essex* (henceforth TOWIE), which aired for the first time in 2010. In the trailer for this spring’s series the cast members tell the viewer about what to expect from the fourth season (airing on ITV spring 2012), and it is clear that the speakers are all in the EE spectrum. Some are closer to Cockney, which is rather surprising as the show is set in Essex. What is interesting is that, as TOWIE is a semi-reality show (scripted but with room for personal interpretation), it is likely that the accent the different cast members use is actually their own, not one they have rehearsed.

It is also possible that EE is used intentionally in order to get a certain message across. When trying to promote fields or activities traditionally connected to the upper class it can be beneficial to use a different accent than RP in order to reach out to as high a number of people as possible. If the speaker or presenter is perceived as too distant from the target audience because of his or her accent, it is likely that the promotion will be less successful than it could have been if the target audience had been more able to relate to the presenter. Rosewarne has an example of this: “Nigel Kennedy, the violinist, who comes from an R.P.-speaking

background and has ‘popularised’ his accent in order to popularise classical music” (Rosewarne 1994). This is the same effect we would find in television commercials, where it is important to use actors with the right accent(s) in order to reach the target audience.

Chapter 4: Development and importance

4.1 The status of Estuary English

EE was, as mentioned in the introduction, originally referred to as the accent of the lower middle class of the Home Counties. When looking at EE today, it is clear that it has not only outgrown its original geographical boundaries, but it has also become a “classless” accent. By this I mean that speakers of EE can no longer be associated with a certain social class, just like their origin cannot be pinpointed based on the fact that they are EE speakers. This alone is an indication of the status change which EE is undergoing. As it keeps expanding beyond its original definition it continues to prove its importance in modern day English, establishing its status as a major and extensive accent of English in Britain (but also spreading abroad at an increasing rate). Originally your way of speaking would be, in ways, a “caste mark”, clearly marking that you belonged to a certain part of society. With the spread of EE, this way of labelling people is becoming increasingly difficult. An accent would serve as a marker on several levels (educationally, socially, historically (in the case of RP) and related to your area of origin), but with EE this is clearly no longer the case. EE speakers can be found in Parliament, the BBC, and in major business corporations, and have been found in such environments ever since the early 1990s. As the stigma attached to EE has continued to decrease, increasing numbers of prominent people have been heard speaking with an EE accent.

In some ways the development in the greater London area can be compared to the language situation in Oslo, where teenagers and young adults adopt words from the stereotypical “east end” and “west end” accents and incorporate them into their daily speech. In the case of EE, it is more widespread among young adults, and it is also becoming more noticeable among people in the media and in politics. Accents in general are more accepted than ever before, and both politicians (such as Tony Blair) and people in the BBC are reverting to using variations of their own accent rather than striving to use RP. However, many say that by merging RP and the London accent, the speakers of EE have elevated the typical London working class accent and downgraded RP, thus making a new accent suitable for the new young middle class. This is still a matter of discussion, both among linguists and in the general public as a whole. As the social hierarchy is becoming less prominent, is it not a good

thing that an accent has been developed which crosses the old social boundaries, binding people of different classes together? Opinions on this are varied. Some feel that EE is a positive development of the English language, bringing together different accents as it spreads. Others feel that this “degradation” of RP will ruin a linguistic tradition that goes back for centuries, and that the advancement of a typical working class accent should be discouraged. Still, there is no denying that EE does have an increasingly high linguistic status, which is logical, as it keeps spreading both geographically and socially.

One reason for the increasing popularity and spread of EE is that RP is, by many, perceived as a prudeish, arrogant and snobbish accent. In his article in Mugglestone’s 2006 book, Clive Upton refers to a study where people were asked to rate different accents on a scale from 1 to 7. On the question of the level of education of the speakers, RP received the highest score (5.7), while Liverpool landed on a 3. However, when the participants in the study were asked to rate the accents based on friendliness, RP only got a score of 3.6 (while southern Irish got the highest score with a 5.3). When asked about honesty, the Irish got top score yet again (4.9), while Liverpoolians came in last with 2.2. This is interesting because of what Kathy Marks points out in her article: “scouse” is under severe pressure from EE. According to Andrew Hamer, an increasing number of Liverpoolians are adopting the “watered-down form of Cockney that has already colonized much of southern Britain” (Marks, 1999). And while many are upset about the fading of the Liverpool accent, others rejoice. Author Beryl Brainbridge, “reserving a special dose of vitriol for the Liverpool twang she professes to “hate”, [...] recommended that children be forced to take elocution lessons, to “wipe out” their accents” (Doig, 1999). As illustrated by the study referred to above, Doig states that research has shown that speaking “scouse” (Liverpool) or “brummie” (Birmingham) will cause difficulties when looking for jobs. The low honesty score for “scouse”, a measly 2.2, means that many see Liverpoolians as less honest; a psychological study from 1997 showed that people from Birmingham were twice as likely to be perceived as criminals, purely because of their “brummie” accent. This would help make EE seem like a good compromise: you would not be forced to speak “the Queen’s English”, and you would not completely forsake accent traits, but you would have an accent which would be less stigmatizing.

Almost 20 years ago, David Rosewarne observed that teenagers from typical RP areas would discard the accent of their parents and adopt EE in order to increase the status they had

amongst their peers (also known as “street cred”). This means that EE was a way of making a stand as early as in the early 1990s: using EE would give you a certain image, and for youths with typical RP backgrounds, EE would provide them with a way of speech which would distance them from the stigma connected with RP, but at the same time allow them to tread the middle ground between working and upper class speech. This had a “pebble in a pond” effect; more and more teenagers who were in some way connected to these youths would start to speak with an EE accent in order to fit in. Due to EE’s way of disguising the sociolinguistic origin of the speaker, it has, in particular, become attractive to those who want to elevate their social status:

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. Again, often unconsciously, those RP speakers who wish to hold on to what they have got are often aware that General RP is no longer perceived as a neutral accent in many circles (Rosewarne, 1984).

4.2 Downgrading RP, upgrading Cockney?

As EE exists in the continuum between RP and Cockney it would seem logical that people who speak EE strive to place themselves in a specific part of the continuum between RP and Cockney. The difficult part is to come to an agreement as to whether EE is a result of RP speakers “downgrading” their speech or caused by Londoners trying to rid themselves of their stigmatised Cockney accent. The most likely conclusion is that EE is the result of both. Due to its origin in the British upper class and the typical speaker often being perceived as an arrogant and cold person, RP is losing terrain, and it is rapidly becoming an accent or way of speech for a select few people. In his article, Ascherson says that “The upper class young already talk “estuary English”, the faintly Cockneyfied accent of the South east. When the children of privilege in a multi-national state turn to speaking with the accent of one province, the ruling culture is breaking up”. This is another strong indication that RP is less favoured by young adults today. However, some are more harsh in their definition of EE: Przedlacka has included a quote from Gillian Shephard, the Minister of Education, as quoted in Wells 1997, where she says that one definition of EE is that it is a “middle class and working class speech, a bastardised version of Cockney” (Przedlacka 2002, 16). Still, this quote raises an interesting question: has RP or Cockney had the greater influence on EE? Both Ascherson and Shephard say that EE is Cockney based, but does this indicate that EE is partly an elevation of the

Cockney accent, or that it is a downgrading of RP?

The logical conclusion to the question posed above, when looking at the former status of the two accents in question and the history behind them, would be that EE originated as the accent of working class Londoners striving to rid themselves of the stigma connected with their native London accent. However, the two statements above change the credibility of this conclusion. One must also take into consideration the fact that Cockney traits appear to be the most influential, spanning the entire EE continuum in varying degrees. Some of these traits are indeed more frequent and prominent in speakers who are closer to the Cockney side of the spectrum, such as H dropping and TH fronting, but T glottalization and glottaling are expanding to include also the speakers whose speech borders on RP. There are also examples of T glottalization in proper RP, but these are infrequent and seem to be reserved for certain words. “Gatwick” is a good example; in this word, even RP speakers allow themselves to replace the [t] with a glottal stop.

Due to some of the phonemic traits mentioned earlier in this thesis a significant number of the population consider EE to be so-called “lazy speech” rather than a proper accent. And, as mentioned before, there are several reasons why EE has seemingly deserved this label. When /t/ is replaced by a glottal stop the speaker simply uses his/her larynx in order to stop the air flow, thus creating the “hiccup-like” sound represented by /ʔ/. By doing this the speaker does not have to move the tongue or mouth in order to form /t/, which would be more of an effort. Replacing /t/ with /ʔ/ does, however, makes the speech seem less fluid as the sound representing /ʔ/ makes for more of an abrupt stop in pronunciation than it would if the speaker had pronounced a proper /t/. The opposite can be said of L vocalization; when the dark /l/ is replaced with /ʊ/ the speaker puts less effort into shaping the sound, which can make the speech seem to flow more freely than if he or she were to pronounce the proper /l/ sound, as /ʊ/ ends up being realized as [w]. The controversial trait H dropping can also be used to support the label “lazy speech”, but different influences must be taken into account. Seeing how /h/ is largely unused in English it is not a vital part of a word’s realization, nor does it have any impact on our understanding of the word (exceptions may be words where initial /h/ is stressed, such as *haven* and *harvest*). In function words /h/ is hardly ever pronounced, except initially in word groups, no matter what the accent of the speaker is.

These points make it clear that /h/ dropping cannot be stigmatized as “lazy speech” due to its prominence in the English language as a whole.

There is still stigmatization of EE speakers. When looking at such TV series as *The Only Way is Essex* this becomes clear: the cast, who mostly speak a type of EE (spread across the EE spectrum), represent different stereotypes. Some of these stereotypes are rather unflattering, an attribute given to EE speakers by many of those who oppose the spread of EE. Still, the popularity of the series indicates that viewers are not put off by the cast member’s way of speech; this might be because many of the viewers are teens or young adults who might already speak EE, and thus can relate to these stereotypes in a different way than adults (although they might not identify themselves with them). The language used is well-known by the target audience, while the older adults might scoff at the stereotypes presented in such series. Many see EE as a degradation of the English language, but series such as these show the widespread use of EE and how it is used by the younger generation.

Deciding on whether EE is a downgrade of RP, an upgrade of Cockney or the “bastard child” of the two varieties is not an easy task. But then again, one can question whether such a definition is actually necessary. It is clear that people with typical upper class backgrounds, who should theoretically be proper RP speakers, are in fact speakers of EE (In his article from 1994 Rosewarne names prominent people such as the Archbishop of Canterbury). There are also people who should traditionally be speaking with a Cockney (or similar London working class) accent who are found in the EE spectrum (David Beckham being a good example). There is no denying that EE bridges the span between RP and Cockney, but that definition in itself should be enough; it describes the role EE plays in present day English without complicating matters to the extreme. It is also important to remember that most linguistic trends in England during the last five centuries or so have originated in London, then spreading to parts or all of Britain. This allows for a two-way influence between RP and Cockney, which have both been present in London for a long time, resulting in EE.

4.3 Estuary English and the media

Like in several other countries, including the Scandinavian peninsula and Denmark, Britain

had a standard of speech used by those who worked in radio and television. This accent was dubbed 'BBC English' (in addition to 'Oxford English' and 'the Queen's English', which would both be linked to the speaker's place in the social hierarchy), even though it was basically a branch of RP. Up until recently, using one's original accent when working in the BBC was considered to be inappropriate, and employees had to adopt the standard accent if they wanted their listeners and viewers to see them as competent and trustworthy. This was perhaps especially important when it came to news presenters, but the general trend was that BBC English was used unless there were parodies or fictional characters which would have had an accent had they been actual people. An example could be the musical *My Fair Lady*, which premiered in 1964. The play is based on George Bernard Shaw's novel *Pygmalion* (1913), where the main character Eliza Doolittle is instructed in how to lose her Cockney accent by phonetics professor Henry Higgins. The entire point of this is that she has no chance of being perceived as a proper lady if she keeps her Cockney accent, and Higgins is teaching her RP in order for her to have the possibility to climb the social ladder. The play's early release date indicates that the Cockney accent was stigmatized at the time, and if one takes a look at the works of Dickens, it is obvious that this stigmatization has survived for a very long time. The characters using Cockney, as well as more rural accents, were often of low birth, and many were portrayed in very negative roles (criminals, whores and brawlers, as well as people of the working class). This is one probable reason for the stereotypical rigid use of RP by radio and television presenters.

In recent times, the BBC appears to have grown tired of being associated so closely with RP, due to the decreasing prominence of the former status accent. As studies have shown, it is clear that the general public associates RP with the typical upper class, making it too formal and too "rigid" for everyday use in the media. The BBC, being the largest broadcasting company in Britain, cannot afford to lose their foothold among younger viewers and listeners just because their younger target group does not have the same relationship with RP as their elders do. If news readers were to cling to the old ways it is likely that they would lose their popularity, especially with younger people; they might as well check out the news on the Internet rather than watch a news reader who they perhaps see as a pompous and dull presenter. In the "Your Voice" section of the BBC website they say that "if you ask people to think of a person who might speak with a traditional RP accent, they'll often think of an old-fashioned BBC announcer addressing the nation on the Home Service" (BBC Your Voice,

Received Pronunciation and BBC English). However, this would have been an actual goal in the early years of radio and television broadcast: as RP was the accent of the upper class, who were likely to have a better income than the working-class, it would be more likely that an RP-speaking person would own a radio or a television set. By using announcers and presenters who spoke RP themselves there would be no obvious social difference between the listener and the speaker. Today pretty much everyone in Britain has access to this type of media, and where the use of RP presenters would bridge a gap between the speaker and the listener fifty years ago, the use of a stereotypical RP speaker today would only make the gap larger. It is also believed that people who are regularly featured in the media are most likely to influence people with the way they speak, especially when it comes to EE: “radio and TV presenters were more influential than politicians in the spread of Estuary English” (Rosewarne 1994).

On their website (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/yourvoice>) the BBC has an entire section dedicated to RP and BBC English, as well as a couple of pages where they make a short summary of some of the important aspects of English language history, especially with regards to RP and BBC English. Dr. Catherine Sangster begins her section by saying that

Although the BBC does not, and never did, impose pronunciations of its own on English words, the myth of BBC English dies hard. It owed its birth no doubt to the era before the Second World War, when all announcers ... spoke ... Received Pronunciation (Miss M.G. Miller, BBC Pronunciation Unit preface to the BBC Pronouncing Dictionary of British Names, 1971. As quoted by Dr. Catherine Sangster).

This indicates that the BBC has been trying to diminish the belief that they have had real rules as to how their presenters ought to talk. Still, the fact that the term is substantially rooted in Britain shows that it has generally been believed that the BBC did in fact have a rigid standard for their announcers and presenters; there are few other logical reasons why the term ‘BBC English’ was coined in the first place. Sangster goes on to claim that “‘BBC English’ is a popular term for a particular *acrolect* – that is a prestigious form of speech”, and continues her article by quoting Haran Rasalingam (a poster in the Your Voice message board) saying “public school dialects, educated dialects and BBC dialects are dialects of status and power which is why people feel they should try to speak more like that than their own native dialect”

(BBC Your Voice, *What is BBC English?*).

Mr. Rasalingam's reply shows what the general public feel about the so-called "status accents". EE is, in many ways, the ideal accent for those who share his view: they are allowed to keep some of their local speech identity while they climb the "accent hierarchy" by moving closer to classical RP. Although some phonemic traits which are found in the EE continuum are still regarded as too lower-class for many speakers, they are still likely to change their accents in order to receive the "perks" of a speaker of EE. For the BBC, the introduction of EE was bound to make the younger generation relate more to the presenters and announcers, as they immediately appeared to be more on the same level. Teens and young adults surrounded by EE speakers are unlikely to relate to TV personalities who use stereotypical RP, as few of them have grown up in a social circle where RP was used as the standard speech. It also seems plausible that commercials where the presenter and participants speak EE (or other accents which are not RP) could have a wider reach as they would give the commercial a more informal feeling, making it more appealing to younger people.

The media as a whole have also made EE a hot topic of discussion. As seen in Mr. Rasalingam's comment on the BBC website, it is clear that much of the general populace of Britain have formed an opinion on EE, but as the majority of these are not linguists or language researchers, it is safe to presume that a lot of the information they have on the topic has been presented to them via different types of media. Przedlacka points out that "there exist a (presumably) large body of newspaper articles where the term 'Estuary English' gets a mention" (Przedlacka 2002, 10).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to establish how and why the accent known as Estuary English is on the rise, and whether or not it is an accent of importance. I have looked at different definitions of what EE is according to linguists who have done some work on the subject, spanning the years between 1984 and up to recent years. Even though finding substantial sources has proved to be difficult, I have attempted to put the sources I did find up against each other, in order to see where they agree and where they differ. A crucial part of understanding EE lies in understanding its form and structure, and thus I have chosen a few of the most prominent phonemic traits and discussed how and why they are to be considered part of the EE spectrum, as well as how their presence or absence influences how EE speakers are perceived. There are numerous other phonemic traits that are a crucial part of EE, but I chose to focus on some of those that are most noticeable and most controversial. Another vital point when working with Estuary English is to clarify what role EE plays in the span between RP and Cockney: is it a “bastardization” of the traditional Cockney working class accent, or a downgrade of the prestigious upper class standard variety? In order to define exactly *what* EE is it is also crucial to look at how and where it originated as well as its present day status, and as accents have always been connected with some sort of stigma, it is important to shed light on whether or not the attitudes towards EE have changed over the last 25 years or so, i.e from the coining of the term in 1984 to the accent we have today. There is a significant amount of information to be found in the media on this subject, even more so than in “proper” linguistic sources, and I have found that using assorted forms of media as a source should definitely not be underestimated when working with a topic as debated and unclear as Estuary English.

Ever since the phenomenon was named in 1984, Estuary English has been subject to debate, discussion and stigmatization. David Rosewarne went as far as to speculate about whether or not EE “in the long run might influence the speech of all but the linguistically most isolated amongst the highest and lowest socio-economic groups in England” (Rosewarne, 1994), also saying that it is likely that these two extremes might become the minority when it comes to speech: that EE will end up as the dominant accent of the majority of speakers of English in Britain. As it continues to spread throughout Britain, EE is something most people in the British population will face in some way or another, and most are likely to take a stand and

form an opinion about EE based on how they perceive this accent which seems to be replacing Received Pronunciation as the main “all-round accent”, especially in England and Wales. It is seeping into fields and groups normally associated with RP; people who are prominent in higher education use it, it has challenged the so-called ‘BBC English’, and it might even be seeping into the royal family via its younger members. As mentioned earlier, traits of EE are even found in the speech of people such as Tony Blair. My research shows that EE is slowly but surely becoming accepted in most circles, even though the opinions on the accent differ greatly. Prominent members of society, such as celebrities and politicians, speak EE to some extent; if one is to follow Altendorf’s list of criteria for a standard variety, there can be little doubt that EE is climbing the social ladder. But the fact that EE is on the rise makes sense: its speakers are also advancing in society, climbing the hierarchical ladder regardless of whether or not they have a working class background. David Beckham is a good example of this.

While EE is starting to become recognized as an all-round accent due to its spread throughout Britain, it is unlikely that EE will replace RP as the most prestigious standard of English. Over time the speakers of RP have lost their role as definers of the linguistic trends, which allowed the spread of EE. RP has been the standard for centuries, and even though the number of RP speakers continues to dwindle, the role RP has had in Britain continues to secure its place on top of the accent hierarchy. Speaking with an accent is less stigmatized than it has been, and surveys indicate that even though stigmatization does occur, more of the typical lower-class accents are becoming more acceptable. This trend is not unique for Britain, although the accent hierarchy seems to have been slightly more firmly rooted there than in other countries undergoing the same change. RP is the preferred standard taught in schools (both in Britain and abroad), and it is the accent most foreigners will strive to achieve. A reason for this is that RP still attracts people, perhaps especially outside Britain: foreigners know the terms ‘BBC English’, ‘Oxford English’ and ‘The Queen’s English’ (which are all popularized names of RP), and when asked to speak with an English accent, they are likely to try and mimic these. RP is the accent most foreign speakers are exposed to through news and films, and in ESL teaching (English as a Second Language) the textbooks tend to be accompanied by a CD where the texts and tasks from the book are recorded using RP speakers.

Because of the way EE is developing, spreading and changing, it will continue to prove difficult to establish a universal definition of what EE actually is. These definitions are bound to change for as long as EE remains such a dynamic accent, outgrowing the boundaries of its original definitions. This has been happening ever since David Rosewarne first defined EE in 1984: his original definition has been added on to several times in order to accommodate the changes EE has undergone, but many would still say that this definition is outdated and no longer correct. I believe that the main issue might be the name itself: the term Estuary English has become very firmly rooted in both linguistic circles and amongst the public, even though the name itself is no longer neither sufficient nor correct due to the way EE is continuing to spread. When calling the accent “Estuary English” one implies that it is limited to areas in and around the Thames Estuary, and while this was more or less correct in 1984, the situation is very different today. This means that when trying to define Estuary English we are, in some ways, trying to define something that is not properly definable, as it no longer exists in its original form. Estuary English is no longer confined to the areas around the Thames Estuary, and because of this a renaming of the accent might be in order. Still, because of the way the name “Estuary English” has been adopted by the people (linguists, journalists and commoners alike), this might not be possible. In a future definition it will be important to include the fact that EE is *not* Estuary English as it was in 1984, but simply that the name is derived from its place of origin. This is something on which most linguists can agree.

EE also owes some, or perhaps even most, of its status (or lack of status) to the media. Accents in general are starting to become accepted in such media as the BBC, and this also affects EE. Numerous entertainers speak with an accent that can be placed somewhere in the EE continuum, and even news anchors are heard speaking with some sort of accent. However, the influence media has on accents, and perhaps EE in particular, is not always positive. An example is the ITV show *The Only Way Is Essex*, where the cast (who are mostly speakers of some type of EE) are associated with different stereotypes that often have negative connotations. Still, these stereotypes can be seen as both positive and negative in regards of the influence and status of EE. Among the older generation the stereotypes portrayed in the show are likely to be perceived as undesirable and vulgar, while younger people, who can relate to the aforementioned stereotypes in a very different way, are more likely to accept the way they speak, as it is similar to their own.

In a way we can say that speaking EE is becoming a safe middle ground: it hides your origin (both geographically and socially), and it provides its speakers with a blank slate. They can leave the negative aspects of their old accent behind, but they will still have to deal with the stigma connected with EE. However, when looking at sources dating from 1984 and up to the present day it becomes clear that the attitudes towards EE are changing. They appear to be less negative and more accepting, even though many still see EE as a massive setback and a degradation of the English language, due to the phonemic traits that are favoured among its speakers because of their ease of articulation, earning it the more derogatory term “lazy speech”.

On a closing note, it is also important to point out that due to the continuous change in EE, it will be difficult to rename the accent or to redefine it at this point in time. As the accent continues to spread and develop, it is almost certain to outgrow any new definitions made, and it would probably have to be redefined several times before the development slows down. This means that the current definition, although not technically correct, should probably be kept at least for the time being. It is clear that EE is very much a dynamic accent, and it is likely that it will continue to be so for quite some time. Even though all accents undergo change, EE is like a young solar system: constantly expanding, growing and changing, until it eventually slows down. EE is definitely a topic that will continue to fascinate both linguists and the media due to its massive relevance both for the people as a whole and for the linguistic trends in Britain.

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