

スタンダードイングリッシュに対する 英国人の態度

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Standard English and Language Attitudes

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Abstract

This paper investigates the attitudes and opinions surrounding Standard English (SE) within the United Kingdom. The definition of SE, for the purposes of this study, is standard grammar and standard pronunciation of southern English, commonly referred to as 'BBC English'. The subject of SE and attitudes towards different accents and dialects of British English is emotive and attracts strong opinions. The main issues discussed here are the place of language in society, the social implications of different dialects, and government policy towards SE. Some account is also taken of the persistence of non-standard dialects of English.

Language in Society

Language belongs to everyone and because of this each person has an opinion regarding what constitutes acceptable, or unacceptable, language. The views held by individuals are subjective, often idiosyncratic and also unreliable, as the linguistic forms claimed to be used are sometimes found to be in conflict with those recorded. Despite these facts, the public has strong feelings about language and the subject is an emotive one. Part of the reason for this is that language doesn't exist in isolation, it is a fundamental part of society and language values constitute the vital framework of the social structure. Violation of the linguistic norms of a community can be construed as an attack on the society itself.

Language and identity, both local and national, are also closely linked. An individual accepted as part of a community is expected to act both socially and linguistically in accordance with the prescribed norms. Notions of linguistic correctness delimit the boundaries of acceptance within a community and serve as a reminder of individual and collective identity.

Since Saussure put forward the notion of the arbitrary nature of the sign it has, in theory, been possible to take an objective view of language varieties and state that no code is better or worse than another. Thus language description is to be pursued in preference to prescription. In terms of linguistic theory this stance is completely acceptable but from a sociolinguistic viewpoint it is an impossibility. From the time that one variety is promoted as the standard and is linguistically described, it becomes, in effect, the prescribed norm. In other words as Davies states "description generally implies prescription" (Tickoo:1991).

Because those people who have high social/economic positions speak SE and those who aspire to the same adopt SE, the prestige status of this variety is maintained. SE is the point of reference for first language teachers as well as foreign language instructors. Standardization thus gives rise to prescription which in turn attaches social values to different language varieties.

Social Implications

The importance of a language is largely determined by the importance of the people who speak it.

(Baugh & Cable:1978)

The above statement can also be applied to the standard dialect of a language. Whereas it is clearly desirable to have a standard variety, because of the prestige value it attracts, all other dialects become second class and are judged differentially to be inferior.

There are two distinctions to be made regarding Non-Standard English (NSE) speakers. The first is the dialect speaker who uses non-standard grammar and lexical items. The second is the speaker of SE who has a regional accent. Both types of speaker are stigmatized to some degree, though the former is viewed as 'worse' than the latter.

It is a fact that those who aspire to climb the social ladder tend to modify their speech to closer approximation with the standard. Fear of ridicule and the wish to identify with those in positions of power places an emphasis on the NSE speaker to acquire SE. According to Haugen: "A dialect is a language that is excluded from polite society" (Pride & Holmes:1972) and therefore acts as a barrier between an individual and the position he or she seeks. To a certain extent the language a person uses says more about that person than what he or she says. SE is a class dialect and as such is a leveller among those who speak it. For this reason it is considered valuable by some and is disliked by others. Judgements concerning different varieties tend to be based on "knowledge of the social connotations which they possess", according to Edwards (Ryan &

Giles:1982). For example a rural West Country accent is thought to indicate a dull, slow-witted person. Television, in particular, tends to perpetuate these stereotypes.

Some experiments, reviewed by Edwards, to determine attitudes towards speakers of different varieties have been carried out using a 'match-guise' technique. This technique involves tape recordings of a person reading the same passage in two or more different varieties. The people asked to judge the personalities of the 'speakers' aren't told, and typically don't guess, that there is only one speaker who is reading in different accents. What is being judged then is the stereotypical response to different speech varieties.

A number of studies of this kind were carried out and the overall results indicate that speakers of the prestige variety tended to be more highly regarded, both by fellow SE speakers and by NSE speakers. Regional accents were perceived to have more integrity (helpfulness and trustworthiness) and attractiveness (friendliness and sense of humour) but this was probably a reflection of in-group solidarity according to Edwards (ibid).

The Persistence of NSE

Given that SE is viewed by most speakers to be the prestige variety, it is worth considering why NSE varieties have persisted for so long.

There are several factors which contribute to the positive attitude some speakers adopt towards regional or ethnic varieties. One of these is the concept of solidarity and the strength of social networks (Milroy & Milroy:1991). Covert prestige and the desire to be marked off from other, outside members of a social group also play a part in maintaining these NSE dialects. When a NSE speaker modifies his or her speech there is a concomitant loss of regional identity. In such cases it is not unusual for these speakers to switch codes, depending on who they are speaking to.

In recent years attention has been focused on 'Estuary English' (EE) and some commentators have heralded this variety as a preferred alternative to Received Pronunciation (RP). The term EE was first coined in 1984 by David Rosewarne and is defined as a modified variety of the regional speech heard in areas bordering the Thames Estuary (Essex and Kent). The rise and subsequent prominence of EE is attributed to changes in the socio-political climate of Britain. RP, associated with the 'elitist' upper and upper-middle classes, has, since the 1980s, been stigmatized by certain sections of the community. Some linguists have claimed that the spread of EE is owing to the fact that upwardly socially mobile people have adopted this form in preference to RP. While at the same time, native RP speakers have modified their speech to a closer approximation of EE, in order to appear non-elitist. EE is more accurately defined as an example of an urban dialect

which has its roots in the Home Counties (those areas which border London) rather than a regional variety limited to the Thames Estuary. The apparent rise of EE can be accounted for by considering two factors. Firstly, there has been a recent trend, particularly in the media, for employing speakers with regional accents, where formally RP speakers would have been heard. Secondly, as Trudgill points out (Trudgill:2001) the metropolitan bias in the media (radio and television) gives rise to the prominence of speakers with lower middle-class regional accents, which translates as mostly those people from the environs of London who naturally speak a form of EE. Thus it may appear that the number of NSE speakers is rising and that EE is becoming accepted as a form of SE.

Standard English and Education

SE is taught in schools both as the spoken and written norm. It is promoted as the form of English that all English speakers within the U.K. understand and as the language variety used in most of the media and in the workplace. Government educational policy encourages pupils to learn about different accents and dialects within the UK and to equip them with the ability to express themselves in formal and informal register (National Curriculum). Thus, while there is, in theory, tolerance towards regional varieties, pupils are actively encouraged to acquire SE in order to be better able to function within society and to improve their employment prospects. In the classroom non-standard forms of English are corrected, but as the survey conducted by Cheshire and Edwards discovered, such corrections often cause confusion and can even be counter-productive. Their findings point to the usefulness of discussions about the relationship between SE and NSE (Cheshire & Edwards:1998).

The wider implications of language attitudes and employment have been highlighted by Kalin who reviewed a number of experiments involving a 'status-matching process'. That is one in which members of the public are asked to match a number of speakers of various accents to suitable jobs. Again, recordings of different speakers, or match-guise speakers, were used. The results indicated the following:

Speakers with a standard or high-status accent were judged to be particularly suited for high-status and unsuited for low-status jobs. The reverse was the case for speakers with non-standard (ethnic or regional) accents.

(Ryan & Giles:1982)

What these experiments revealed was a "double discrimination" (ibid), namely that the high-status variety speakers were not only judged to be more suitable for high status jobs, but were also felt to be "unsuited for low-status jobs". A person's language variety can therefore work both positively for and negatively against him or her, no matter where in the hierarchy of accents and dialects it falls.

Conclusion

Britain has undergone economic and socio-political changes within the past twenty years which, on the surface, appear to have broken down linguistic barriers in the class system. Broadcasters are no longer required to be RP speakers and in education there is a policy of tolerance towards NSE. In practice, however, SE - though not necessarily RP - is still respected and in many cases aspired to as a way to achieve upward social mobility. Where NSE does persist, one of the main factors is its use as an outward show of regional solidarity and this underlines the fact that language is an expression of personal identity.

Sources

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