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A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF EDUCATING RITA

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Englanninkielisissä maissa, kuten muuallakin maailmassa, yhteiskuntaluokkaerot tulevat esiin puheessa. Englantilaiset ovat erityisen herkkiä tällaisille eroille. Tässä tutkielmassa selvitetään, kuinka luokkaerot ovat havaittavissa Willy Russellin *Educating Rita* – näytelmän dialogin sanastossa, ja hypoteesina on, että myös näytelmän tekstissä luokkaerot ovat selvästi havaittavissa pelkästään sanaston ja rekisterin perusteella. Sosiolingvistiikan alalla on vahvistettu, että yksittäisenkin sanan tai sen ääntämyksellä voi päätellä mihin luokkaan puhuja kuuluu. On myös löydetty sanoja, jotka ovat ainoastaan tietyn luokan käytössä. On myös havaittavissa, että viime vuosikymmenten aikana luokkajaon perusteet Englannissa ovat muuttuneet, eikä ammatilla ole enää yhtä suurta merkitystä kuin sillä perinteisesti on ollut. Puhe vaikuttaa siis entistä enemmän puhujan yhteiskuntaluokan määrittämisessä.

Tätä tutkielmaa varten keräsin näytelmästä sanapareja, joiden toinen sana on yleiskielinen ja toinen puhekielinen. Poimin myös joitain esimerkkejä hahmojen käyttämästä kielestä yleensä, ja tilanteita, joissa ilmenee kommunikaatiovaikeuksia johtuen murteiden erilaisuudesta. Tuloksena oli, että vaikka tarinan edetessä lainauksia hahmolta toiselle tapahtuukin, keskiluokkainen henkilö käytti kuitenkin selvästi enemmän yleiskielisiä muotoja. Aineiston verrattainen suppeus oli toisaalta ongelma, koska tietyt sanat esiintyivät näytelmässä niin harvoin, että niistä oli vaikea tehdä johtopäätöksiä, tai sattuman takia tulokset olivat epäloogisia. Toisaalta suppealla aineistolla oli hyvä aloittaa, ja selvittää metodin toimivuus mahdollisia myöhempiä tutkimuksia varten.

Asiasanat: sociolinguistics, social class, Willy Russell, plays

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Open University in Britain offers a magnificent setting for clashing communication styles between classes because tuition is also available as evening classes and participants do not have to pay the same tuition fees as full-time students. *Educating Rita* by Willy Russell is a play which tells the story of a working class woman who enrolls on a course at the Open University in Liverpool. The present study is a sociolinguistic analysis of the two characters in the play.

The aim of the present study is to shed light on how exactly class differences affect communication. Different social or regional dialects may hinder the mutual understanding between participants, and linguistic items may be borrowed. The changes and borrowings may concern almost any aspect of language: grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary as well as register and body language. The main focus of the present study, however, is on vocabulary. The initial differences between the subjects and possible changes as the story proceeds will be investigated.

The study is divided into four sections. Chapters 2 and 3 form the background: Chapter 2 is an overview of related literature in the fields of sociolinguistics and conversation analysis; while Chapter 3 is a description of the methodology used for the present study. The final two sections before concluding are the data in Chapter 4—example words and their usage, and extracts of conversation—and a detailed analysis of the data in Chapter 5.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study of language as represented in a work of art is not a common approach for sociolinguistic analysis. In the following sections the phenomenon under investigation, and how the issue has been approached in the past, will be explained. The first section (2.1) includes ways in which social class is evident in individuals' sociolects, and what phenomena are attached to the communication between people from different classes. Some special qualities of social class division in England will be mentioned, and reasoning provided for the choice of division that shall be used in the present study. The second section (2.2) is to demonstrate a gap in the field as there is very limited, if any, similar research available. This may be because

professional researchers have been investigating real speech as opposed to that of fictional characters. Finally, in 2.3 some explanation will be given for the use of conversation analysis on text.

2.1 Social Class

The relationship between social class and language is a basic area of interest in sociolinguistics. Speech cannot, however, be fully analysed based solely on the social class or classes of those involved. Factors such as the age, sex, region and context will invariably have an effect on the linguistic form of conversation.

2.1.1 Effects on Language

The relationship between class and speech has been extensively studied. A notable scholar in the field is Labov, who conducted his early work in the 1960s. Labov has a widespread reputation as one of the founders of sociolinguistics. Prior to his studies it was believed that variation between speakers within a certain area was either random or a result of dialect contact (Mesthrie et al. 1999: 77). Labov's early studies concentrated on phonetics rather than vocabulary, but their principles are similar to those in research concentrating on other linguistic features. For instance, Labov (1966, as quoted by Mesthrie et al. 1999: 84) published an investigation regarding social stratification in New York City. Mesthrie et al. (1999) explain that one of the main discoveries was that pronouncing certain words carefully (e.g. pronounce *fourth* with an audible *r*) depended on two things: the social class of the speaker and the formality of the situation in which the words were uttered. There will be variation within each social group but generally speaking the frequencies in which vernacular pronunciations are used do not overlap. Another important study in the field is one by Trudgill (1974, cited in Mesthrie et al. 1999: 98). He studied social stratification in the city of Norwich in England. The methods were similar to Labov's, but the results were different in some aspects: especially males claimed to use prestigious variants less than they actually did, whereas normally people will report to use them more than they actually do (Trudgill 1974 as cited in Mesthrie et al 1999: 99). Trudgill (ibid.) suggests that the difference is due to the different kind of class consciousness in the United States and the United Kingdom: In the UK the

regional variant has more prestige than it would in the United States because of the sense of belonging and community it brings to the users.

The exception to the clear-cut stratification between classes is hypercorrection, whereby a member of one of the middle classes has social aspirations and attempts to sound more prestigious, or “smarter”, as though he or she was one step higher on the social class ladder (Mesthrie et al.1999). The result is speech that is even “smarter” than the speech of those who actually belong to the desired class and thus a clear indication that the speaker is lower class (Fox 2004). The cause of hypercorrection has been labelled linguistic insecurity and it only takes place when the speakers feel they are being observed (Mesthrie et al. 1999: 90). As far as the present investigation is concerned, this could well be the case in a semi-institutional setting, where the speaker who is of a lower class may try to speak more prestigiously in order to impress the person who is dominating the situation. Since most available studies regarding hypercorrection in English look at pronunciation only, and the present study is related to hypercorrection in vocabulary, some of the general principles regarding the effect of class on speech may not apply. These principles include at least Eckert’s (2000, as quoted by Laitinen 2007, p.c.) observation that the hypercorrection rule only seems to apply to linguistic variables that are undergoing change. There are various lexical items that reveal whether the speaker (or the recipient judged by their reaction) has social aspirations. These items include, as illustrated by Fox (2004: 77-78), words such as *toilet*, *serviette*, and *settee*. These words sound “posh” to the ears of lower middle and middle middle class speakers—who often wish they were of a higher class—but would never be used by upper middle or upper class. The actual “smart” correspondents of the words are *loo*, *napkin* and *sofa*, respectively. These are simpler, more frequently used words, which at face value can understandably seem less prestigious. The present study will take advantage of this kind of lexical items as they will undoubtedly be present in the speech of the characters in *Educating Rita*.

Pronunciation is a key element in language attitudes, which in turn can affect how an individual chooses to speak. Therefore the subject is important although it is not the focus of the present study. The issue of pronunciation is brought up in the play as one of the characters purposefully starts speaking in what she believes is a

prestigious way. The higher classes and highly educated people in England generally speak in Received Pronunciation (RP) accent instead of the accent of the area where they live. RP is thus the accent of educated people throughout Britain, although it originated in the South-East of England (Trudgill and Hannah, 1994: 9). One of the characters in *Educating Rita* is likely to speak RP, and the other one attempts to adopt it as her accent to demonstrate her becoming educated. However, since the accent is merely an imitation of a real RP-speaker, her attempt fails and even when she tries to speak differently, she is obviously of a lower class. It seems to the RP speaker that she is not speaking properly.

Social class and language attitudes are closely related and the subject has been studied extensively. These are useful for the present study because they help identify and evaluate instances where there are explicit comments made about the different dialects the subjects use. Hiraga (2005) studied Britons' attitudes towards different variants of British and American English and concluded that British people favoured American English more than regional (i.e. lower prestige) variants of British English. In addition, Elyan et al. (1978: 129) have found out that English people associate women who speak RP with certain masculine attributes, such as independence and egotism. Furthermore, RP-speaking women are seen as more successful in working life but less successful in social life than women who speak in regional accents. At the same time, some definitely feminine characteristics were attributed to female RP-speakers, so the notion of a woman speaking in a non-regional way seems to have been somewhat controversial in the late 1970s (Elyan et al. 1978: 129). A reason for this could be that women have traditionally looked after the home, so masculine, powerful speech was not expected of them in the same way. This study is particularly relevant because the contrasting accent to RP is a Northern English accent, and the play analysed in the present paper is set in northern England. In the play the female speaks in a regional accent and the male in RP. Even if the two used the same register and vocabulary, their accents would reveal the social status with all the associated attitudes to each other.

2.1.2 Social Class in England

The position of social class in England is especially interesting because nowadays social class is largely a matter of speech and lifestyle rather than wealth, education or occupation (Fox 2004). The English are also highly class-conscious, which is clearly visible even to a foreigner. Naturally those visiting England will not be as aware of the fine nuances that exist between people and how to talk about them. As an example, two English upper-middle class girls around the age of eight had a conversation about how they are not *posh*, they are *fine*. Fox (2004: 79) explains that *posh* is a word that is used by lower-class people referring to higher classes.

Traditionally class has been determined by the person's occupation. An example of the traditional class division is to divide people (more specifically males over a certain age) into classes 1-5 with some variation (Vision of Britain 2007). Table 1 below gives an example of the official class division from 1931. The information is very clearly occupation based, and explicit terms (e.g. "social class 1") are used. Table 2 illustrates a modern division into occupational groups, which in practice form a basis for social class divisions. The division is far more detailed than in the 1931 census one, and no direct reference is made to social class. This is evidence for talk of social class becoming politically less correct. One of the latest formal references to social class is from 1998 when Tony Blair, then a new Prime Minister of the UK, commented that "slowly but surely, the old establishment is being replaced by a new, larger, more meritocratic middle class" (as quoted by Marwick 2003: 459).

Table 1: Different social classes in 1931 according to the 1931 population census.

Social Class 1	Professional, etc Occupations
Social Class 2	Intermediate Occupations
Social Class 3	Skilled Occupations
Social Class 4	Partly Skilled Occupations
Social Class 5	Unskilled Occupations
Un-class	Students, retired, working outside UK, etc

Table 2: A modern rank of occupations as outlined from National Statistics (2008).

1	Employers (Large Companies)
2	High managerial positions
3	High professional positions (e.g. scientists)
4-6	Lower managerial & supervisory; and high technical positions
7	Intermediate, no supervisory responsibilities (e.g. clerical & sales)
8-9	Self-employed / employers (Small companies)
10-12	Lower technical and supervisory positions / Semi Routine (e.g. technical labour, childcare)
13	Routine (simple labour and service)

In any study related to social class the question of how to divide the population into groups is essential. Various different systems have been invented for different purposes. In the present study I shall use class divisions as they are presented by Fox (2004). She explains that the English are highly sensitive to class and its complexity and therefore dismisses “traditional” simple class divisions (such as in the tables above) based on occupation and such factors that can be taken at face value. In her opinion such divisions do not correspond to how ordinary English people perceive and categorise people and their social classes (2004: 15). Given that the present study aims to examine the relationship between class and language in England as opposed to as viewed from a different culture, Fox’s class division is a reasonable one to adopt. She divided the society into (1) working class, (2) upper working class, (3) lower middle class, (4) middle middle class, (5) upper middle class and (6) upper class. The system does, of course, have its weak points such as the poor inclusion of the unemployed or analysis on how to include immigrants into the class system. Fox’s (2004) investigation shows, however, that upper working class, lower middle class and middle middle class have similar behaviour patterns, rising from wanting to be distinguished from the class below and identify with the class above them, so grouping them together could be a sensible idea. At that point the division would move closer to the classic upper class /non-upper class (“u/non-u”) -division (coined by Roos in 1959, as quoted by Mesthrie et al. 1999: 104): the clear division of people into two groups that are upper class and everybody else. If the similar behaviour and speech patterns of working, upper middle and upper classes (Fox 2004) are taken into account, a possible division of people to those with and without

social aspirations or, alternatively, those below and those above social aspirations arises.

2.2 Previous analysis on literature

There do not seem to be many studies regarding class in literature, and the few studies available have concentrated on one hand on novels and on other hand on the content of the story being told rather than the actual text and the ways in which social class is evident in characters' "speech". There is therefore a gap in the field regarding modern plays, and regarding investigation of speech as represented in text form by an author. The present study introduces a rare if not unique form of analysing speech and social class. Similar methodology has been used in historical linguistics regarding for example Shakespeare (Laitinen 2007, p.c.). The lack of similar research is mostly due to the restricted resources available for the present study. Professional academics who investigate similar issues normally have the opportunity to use real people as their subjects.

The only available academic analyses about *Educating Rita* specifically concern education (and especially the position of women in it) and translation studies. As an example, Mansikkala (1983) has investigated in her MA thesis how *Rita* is portrayed in the Finnish translation of the play. These topics are only indirectly, if at all, related to social class or sociolinguistics. Overall, research on which to build the present study does not seem to exist.

2.3 Conversation analysis

In the present study investigation of plays is viewed as a substitute for real-life conversation, and it is therefore reasonable to draw on conversation analysis. It is rare in normal, non-institutional, conversation to correct or repair what somebody else said because of its social significance: people prefer to wait for the other person to correct him or herself and it is considered impolite to boldly correct another person's speech (Schegloff et al.1977). In this context a correction is defined as correcting a clear mistake, whereas reparation is giving more information or otherwise altering the previous utterance although there was never an actual mistake

(ibid.). While it is naturally impossible to find out whether a pause in conversation is significantly long unless the play specifically states this, conversation analysis can be helpful for example in finding out whether a certain utterance is problematic to one of the characters. This, in turn, can help determine a difference in attitudes towards a certain subject and in some cases it can reveal how familiar the characters are with a topic.

3 METHDOLOGY

I am investigating how social class is evident in the speech of characters in the play *Educating Rita* by Willy Russell. It is clear from the setting that they are from different social classes: it is explicitly said that one is working class, and the other is a university lecturer, so obviously from a more prestigious background. There was also no doubt about whether social class would be present in the language the characters use because the play is written in “spoken language”. Therefore the purpose of the analysis is not to find out whether there are differences in speech (or, to be more exact, the written representation of it) but what those differences are like. In other words, the present study is descriptive. For the purpose of the present paper the investigation is limited to the vocabulary and register used by the characters: what kinds of words the characters use and whether they are suitable for the context. The hypothesis is that there are noticeable linguistic differences between the characters even though the focus is on vocabulary and register only.

3.1 Variables and Data

The variables to be measured have been divided into two parts. Firstly, there are lists of different words or word pairs that carry a social meaning. Such words and pairs include for instance *what* vs. *pardon* vs. *sorry*, as used to prompt someone to repeat what they have just said, and the use of the word *please*. These variables must be chosen according to what kind of words are included in the data. Naturally, there are an overwhelming number of words that could be investigated, so I have restricted myself to the ones that stand out most clearly as non-standard forms, but also have a standard equivalent present in the text. These word pairs include *dead* vs. *very*, where *very* is the standard form and *dead* its non-standard synonym. Secondly, extracts from the play will be used in order to highlight the characters’ attitude

towards their own language and that of the other person. Another interesting phenomenon to look for is instances where the two characters fail to communicate effectively because of their language differences. Regarding extracts from the play, the interpretation will draw on conversation analysis to find out the problem points in the situations. As for single words and word pairs, the frequency of interchangeable forms will be shown where relevant. Generally attempts have been made to collect similar information regarding both characters and find similarities and differences in their use of the variables. The examples are, however, concentrated on Rita's speech as it is more informal and unfamiliar to the reader than the Standard English used by her tutor. He uses a very elaborate vocabulary, and a few examples are enough to illustrate it.

3.2 Rationale for the choice of play

The data used for the investigation is a play in written form, and naturally the subjects of this study are two characters in the play. A play is a reasonable choice for a study of the present scale for two main reasons. Firstly, there is no observer's paradox whereby the results would be affected by the presence of a researcher, and secondly, there is a lot of data available. Educating Rita was chosen because of the type of language in which the play is written, and because of the clear-cut difference in how the two characters speak. I shall only exclude areas where the two are speaking on the phone, reading out loud, or deliberately speaking differently than normally, so in other words not engaged in conversation with each other or posing for someone else. Many studies show that when people read out loud, they alter their speech because the situation is more formal; the audience has an effect on the speakers' language as well (e.g. Bell 1984, as quoted by Mesthrie et al. 1999: 181). In the play Rita is a working class woman who decides to start studying English literature in the Open University in Liverpool. Frank is Rita's personal tutor. The story is about the changes in their relationship as Rita becomes competent in literary criticism and does not need Frank's help any more. The play first appeared on stage in 1980 and was a success.

The author of the play has a similar background to Rita's, so it is reasonable to think his description of the language is fairly accurate as well. Since it is implicitly

revealed that the play is set in Liverpool, it is also possible to try to find regional characteristics in the text. There is no exact information about what time the story is set in, but it was written in the early eighties, and given the realism I would not place it in “the future” by any means. The time of writing places the play around the time or Margaret Thatcher’s early years as Prime Minister (which was 1979-1990). However, in the early 80s she did not have such a strong grip on English politics yet (Marwick 2003: xiv) so the play cannot be said to be set in “Thatcherist England”. Marwick (2003: 151-152) describes the time before Thatcher as a decline period in English society, characterised by for example economic troubles, unemployment, and the presence of terrorism by the IRA. This would have been the time of Rita’s youth, whereas Frank is perhaps 20 or 30 years older than her and would have grown up immediately after the war, experiencing the ups and downs of the post-war era.

4 FINDINGS

While examining the data, it must be taken into account that Rita’s speech changes towards a more academic style as the story proceeds. Therefore the data is divided into two groups: tokens from Act 1 and tokens from Act 2. In addition, both characters are influenced by their audience: the other person. Because of these two issues the language cannot be considered pure, intact working or higher class language at face value. Despite both characters accommodating the other’s accent, there is a noticeable contrast in their speech. Both characters are from the same region, so if there are any regional characteristics to be found, it is reasonable to assume they will be of the same region. However, I was unable to find any regional characteristics in Frank’s speech as he kept very strictly to Standard English. Rita, however, does demonstrate Northern features in her speech. The very absence of such characteristics in Frank’s speech is a clear indicator that he is of a higher social class. The actual data collected from the book is in the form of lists, tables and extracts of a few lines where conversation analysis is helpful. I have collected tokens of marked words, such as *please* and *pardon*, as well as tokens of a regional variant: *me* for *my*. I then looked for any changes in their use, and compared the two characters’ speech based on the findings. There are also lists of words and expressions that demonstrate the overall style of the two characters quite clearly and

it is easy to see that the lists are very different. Finally, I have chosen a few extracts where one person corrects the other or explains what an expression means.

Table 3: Tokens in Act 1

Tokens in Act 1	Rita	Frank
yes		X
yeh	X	
pardon		1
sorry (for pardon)		
what (for pardon)	X	1
me, meself	13	
my, myself	2	X
dead (very)	11	
very	1	X
off my/one's cake (mad)		
off me cake	X	

X= character uses the word but not its listed synonyms

Number: if the character uses both alternatives, the ratio of their use. E.g. Rita uses *me* or *meself* 13 times per every two instances of *my* or *myself*.

(My explanations in parenthesis)

Table 4: Tokens in Act 2

Tokens in Act 2	Rita	Frank
yes		X
yeh	X	
pardon		
sorry (for pardon)		
what (for pardon)	X	X
me, meself	5	
my, myself	2	
dead (very)	X	1
very		1
off my/one's cake (mad)		X
off me cake		

X= character uses the word but not its listed synonyms

Number: if the character uses both alternatives, the ratio of their use. E.g. Rita uses *me* or *meself* 5 times per every two instances of *my* or *myself*.

(My explanations in parenthesis)

Example 1: The use of the word please

- a) F: All right, but please stop burbling on about Mr Tyson.
- b) F: would you like to sit down - R: no!
- c) F: Do you think I could have a cigarette?
- d) F: but you'll have one? R: all right
- e) F: water? R: all right
- f) Rita often shakes her head to say 'no thank you'
- g) R: No, ta, I've packed it in.

Example 2: Frank's vocabulary

- a) enormous benefit to literature
- b) the dubious quality your criticism displays
- c) That would only amount to a slight misdemeanour.

Example 3: Rita's vocabulary

- a) stupid bleedin' handle on the door
- b) Look at those tits
- c) sth gets on my tits (annoys me)
- d) Because you're a crazy mad piss artist ... an' I like you. Don't you recognise a compliment?
- e) dead (very)
- f) soft, mental
- g) off me cake (crazy)
- h) narked (mad/upset)
- i) posh
- j) dinner (lunch)
- k) Flora man
- l) ..an' what came out of our discussion was that apart from the simple surface value of Blake's poetry there's always a like erm... erm...
(my explanations in parenthesis)

Example 4: Extracts from the play

- a) RITA ...I told me mother once. She said I was off me cake.
FRANK What in the name of God is being off one's cake? (Exaggerated look on his face)

RITA Soft. Y' know, mental.
FRANK Aha. I must remember that. The next student to ask me if --- shall be told that one is obviously very off one's cake!
RITA Don't be soft. You can't say that.
FRANK Why ever not?
RITA You can't. If you do it, it's slummin' it. Comin' from you it'd sound dead affected, wouldn't it?
FRANK Dead affected?
- b) RITA D' y' get a lot like me?
FRANK Pardon?
RITA Do you get a lot of students like me?
- c) RITA Well, it's immoral
FRANK Amoral

5 ANALYSIS

The present chapter will detail the analysis of the data presented in chapter 4 and is organised similarly. The data has been examined as indicators of the linguistic social level of the characters, and the changes that occur over the course of the play are also taken into consideration.

5.1 Analysis for Tables 3 and 4

Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the occasionally very clear-cut differences in the language of the two characters. One of the first things to notice in the tables is that the results for each character rarely overlap. Most often Frank is more consistent and stays within the limits of Standard English, whereas Rita often uses forms that are of a lower level of formality. For example, the division between *yes* and *yeh* is very distinct as each person only uses one variant consistently.

With another word set, *pardon* vs. *sorry* vs. *what*, the differences between the two characters are not as systematic: Rita, unsurprisingly, never says *pardon*, but at the same time Frank uses both *pardon* and *what* as often in Act 1. He only uses *pardon* when he first meets Rita, and starts using the less formal *what* thereafter. *Pardon* does not feature at all in Act 2. It is worth noticing that *Sorry* is not used in the same meaning as *pardon* at all. This is one of the reasons Frank cannot be said to belong to the highest social classes. In fact, Fox (2004: 76) names using the word *pardon* as one of the clearest linguistic proof that the speaker is middle-middle class at best.

Using *me* for *my* is a feature of the Liverpool area dialect. It is, therefore, understandable that Rita favours the use of *me*, but worth noticing that Frank does not use such a common regional feature at all. In addition, there are situations where both *me* and *my* are grammatically correct according to Standard English norms (e.g. *Y' don't mind me swearin', do y'?*), so the study of these forms is not straightforward. Ambiguous situations have been left out of the total of tokens for each variant. Rita uses a smaller proportion of the non-standard *me* in the second act, although she does still use *me* over twice as much as *my*. The change is possibly a sign of the two characters converging in speech styles as they get to know each other better and Rita's level of education rises.

The usage of the words *dead*, *very* and the expression to be *off one's cake* are instances where the expected result was that over the course of the story the two characters would accommodate to each others' speech and start using forms adopted from the other person. This theory was based on the observation that Frank sometimes uses these slang words as borrowed from Rita. However, the actual

evidence regarding *dead* and *very*, as present in the play, is inconclusive. At face value, it seems that, contrary to what is logical given the increased standard of education Rita has, she stops using the more prestigious *very* altogether, while Frank ends up using *dead* as frequently as *very*. There were very few tokens of Frank's use of these words in either Act, so it is likely that the two forms seem equally frequent because of pure chance. In addition, Frank also uses forms that were not included in the comparisons: namely *absolutely*. To be *off one's cake*, then, is an expression Frank has never heard of when Rita first uses it and he even makes fun of the phrase (see also Example 4a). This expression is, however, one of the few that Frank adopts from Rita as the story proceeds. Apart from repeating the phrase after Rita when he first heard it, Frank does not use it at all in Act 1, but in Act 2 he does use a Standard English form *off my cake*. Rita, on the contrary, only uses the phrase in Act 1 and never the Standard English version.

5.2 Analysis for Example 1: The use of the word please

The use of the word *please* is essential in English politeness. The word is not used by Rita at any time, and Frank uses it only once, although one would expect a highly educated professor to use it more frequently. In 1a *please* is used quite literally as an indication of pleading (because Frank is jealous of Rita's new male friend) as opposed to a politeness marker in a request. Instead of saying please, Frank uses different means to indicate politeness. He says for example *would you like to* (1b) and *do you think I could* (1c) when he is offering or asking for something. Even though he is not as polite as he could be, there is a noticeable difference in politeness between him and Rita. She often says *all right* (1d-e) when she "should" say *yes please*, and shakes her head (1f) to say *no thank you*. She occasionally uses the word *ta* for *thank you* (1g). *No, ta* is therefore as polite as *No, thank you*, only in a non-standard form. However, there is even an instance when her reply to an offer is a rather blunt "*No!*" (1b). Overall the situations could be seen as fairly formal as there (should be) teaching in progress, but in terms of politeness the conversations seem quite informal and relaxed, and the topics vary a great deal.

5.3 Analysis for Examples 2-3: Frank and Rita's Vocabulary

The words and expressions in examples 2 and 3 illustrate the kind of vocabulary the two characters use. The lists are heavily concentrated on Rita, but a few examples of Frank's vocabulary in example 2 are in place. It is possible that the author purposefully gave Frank correct-to-standard and obviously well-read style, because it highlights the social differences between Frank and Rita.

Example 3 shows that Rita has many non-standard features in her speech: even the kind that will complicate understanding between her and a speaker of a different regional or social dialect. In the play there are indeed a few occasions when Frank must ask Rita to clarify as he does not understand a phrase or a word Rita has used. Rita uses a very informal register, especially considering that she is talking to a university lecturer, as illustrated in 3a-d. One of the reasons for this seems to be that she is uneducated. For instance, she admires a religious nude that is hung up in Frank's office and comments it rather flatly: *Look at those tits* (3b). That is certainly not the kind of remark one would expect to hear at a university lecturer's office or about a religious nude. Rita also refers to Frank as *crazy mad piss artist* (3d), and it is in fact a compliment on Frank's edgy character. Frank does go along with the use of this kind of language but to him it seems to be a joke. For example, Rita complains that something *gets on her tits* (3c), meaning that it annoys her. Frank's response is "Good. You must show me the evidence." Other marked words Rita uses include very usual words that have an alternate meaning: *dead* (3e) means *very*, and *soft* (3f) means *crazy*. Other slang expressions include *mental* (3f), *off me cake* (3g), and *narked* (3h), meaning *crazy* (3f-g) and *upset* (3h). Examples 3i-j are words that bear a strong class connotation in England. As explained in 2.1.2, the English are class conscious, so even lexical features that appear fairly neutral to foreigners can be loaded. Rita uses the word *posh*, which has been referred to in 2.1.2, and also the word *dinner*, while presumably talking about lunch. Using *dinner* for lunch is one of the basic features that indicate social aspiration (Fox 2004: 77; see chapter 2.1.2.), and it features towards the end of the play where Rita has started to speak less commonly. As a member of working class with few aspirations to start with Rita speaks openly about class differences, for instance calling Frank a *Flora man* (3k), after the healthy margarine. The final example (3l) of Rita's vocabulary shows the

expansion it goes through over the course of the play. Her speech has not transformed completely, but the contrast to her earlier speech is noticeable.

5.4 Analysis for Example 4: Extracts from the Play

The extracts in Example 4 are all very interesting in their own way. In the first one (4a) Rita explicitly brings up that there are differences in the speech of the two characters and that they should not mix. The extract highlights that even the characters themselves are aware of their class differences and the linguistic dimensions thereof. Example 4b illustrates how Rita corrects her speech when she is asked to repeat—an example of hypercorrection that emerged in Labov’s pilot study (1962, as quoted by Mesthrie et al. 1999: 85) as well. The first two examples also demonstrate how there are problems of understanding between the two characters due to the language used.

In addition to Frank not understanding Rita’s accent, there are some occasions when Frank must explain a term to Rita. It is understandable for Rita not to know the terminology of her Open University course, so if she is being corrected on specialist vocabulary, it is the form of the correction that is of interest. In 4c Frank is explicitly correcting Rita’s speech. While the word Rita used was not the correct one by the norms of Standard English, it did not cause any difficulty in mutual understanding. Frank is, of course, Rita’s teacher, so the relationship between the two is unequal at times. According to Schegloff et al. (1977) there is a noticeable pause in the conversation immediately before a repair or a correction. However, there is no written information available on whether Frank tried to get Rita to correct herself before pointing out that the word she meant in 4c is *amoral*. Assuming that Frank acted “normally” and preferred Rita to correct herself, Frank was the only person to whom the non-standard word was problematic. With probability Rita did not correct herself as she did not think there was a problem with what she said. This phenomenon demonstrates the clash of two different standards of conversation, and highlights the distance between the two social classes.

6 CONCLUSIONS

My hypothesis, that the linguistic differences between the speakers are clear even though pronunciation is excluded and the attention is directed towards vocabulary and register only, is correct. Rita's vocabulary is simpler and significantly less formal because of her social class, a feature of which is adapting regional dialect. She does notice that there are differences between how she and Frank speak, but she shows no evidence of being aware of her lacking sense of register. It was surprising to notice that Frank (or Rita) never says please, which is regarded as a "basic" necessity in British English—especially in institutional contexts. A possible direction with which to continue, based on the present study is to compare multiple texts to find out whether social stratification is generally described in the same way by authors who write "spoken language". For this purpose the scale of the present study was reasonable, and it could be seen as grounds for further investigation as there is not much research into written representations of social stratification in spoken language.

The disadvantages with a study of this scale stem from the length of the text to process and thus had a low number of tokens for most words in the table that was used (e.g. only few instances of *pardon* and *what*). It would be more reliable to look at several texts or indeed real life situations. With this few tokens of certain words the results are easily affected by chance and it is difficult to draw many conclusions from the data. The usage of corpus tools would guarantee more accurate results as the risk of missing tokens is diminished. There is certainly a need for further investigation into the effect of social class into speech and especially what kind of problems it creates in communication across classes. This type of study could be useful when applied to for example Patois or African-American English as attempts are made to include black minorities more in higher education. Learning about the differences between different dialects and the causes behind them should be helpful in preventing speech from being an obstacle in upwards social movement or access to higher education.

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