

Joanna Przedlacka, 2002. *Estuary English?* Frankfurt: Peter Lang

**Preface (p. ix)**

The purpose of the present work is to establish the nature of an allegedly new accent variety, called Estuary English. The phenomenon was first observed in mid-1980s, but the literature on the subject has had a largely impressionistic character. The data for Estuary English were recorded in four of the SED fieldwork sites in the Home Counties. For diachronic comparison, the speech samples of the present teenage informants were confronted with the 1950s transcriptions of speech from the same localities.

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If, then, we apply this popular label to part of widespread changes in progress leading to the formation of a widely localisable variety, or indeed to regional influences on RP, then we are obliged to say that EE exists. However, claims concerning the emergence of a uniform new accent which is about to oust RP belong with fiction rather than fact.

**General conclusions (p. 97-98)**

The examination of the phonetic make-up of the teenage speech in the Home Counties was carried out in order to answer the following questions:

- (a) Is there a coherent and uniform variety, frequently referred to as Estuary English?
- (b) Can we legitimately call it a newly emerging accent?

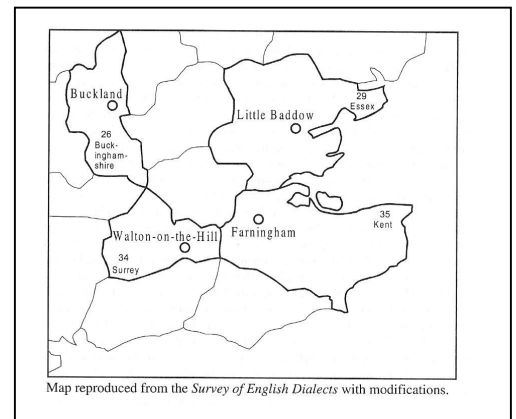
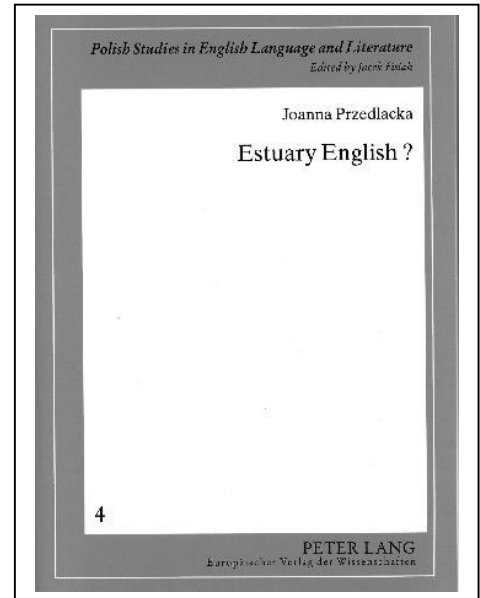
The main findings of the research reported in the present study can be summarized as follows:

The extent of geographical variation alone allows us to conclude that we are dealing with a number of distinct accents, not a single and definable variety. There exist quite sharp phonetic differences between the speech of the four localities situated within a 50-mile radius. At the same time, what is known as "Estuary English" appears to be a part of more general changes. Thus, the tendencies observed in the present study (the fronting of GOOSE and GOAT vowels, *l*-vocalisation as well as *th*-fronting) are not confined to the Home Counties, their appearance having been reported in other areas of Britain. Furthermore, some of these innovations (e.g. the universal GOOSE fronting), increase in glottaling (New Zealand) or *l*-vocalisation (Australia, the USA) are not exclusive to the British Isles.

Perhaps the most interesting finding of the study is the geographical pattern of two variables, i.e. *l*-vocalisation and *t*-glottaling, allegedly the most prominent features of this putative variety. As regards the former, vocalised realisations predominate at present in all the four localities and show a substantial increase as compared to the SED records.

Strikingly, the same is not true of the latter variable. The evident split in the Kent locality reveals that females are beginning to lead the change towards glottal variants. However, the data clearly indicate that the old geographical pattern of *t*-glottaling is still discernible. For the other three localities, the current teenagers' scores closely resemble those of the SED informants, thus providing evidence that we are not witnessing an emergence of a new accent variety. Moreover, such a result shows that impressionistic assertions about "Estuary English" being characterised by a substantial increase in glottaling were exaggerated at best.

It is unlikely that the variety discussed has an impact on the speech of other areas in England. In light of gravity models, it seems more plausible that the speech of the Home Counties itself is subject to London influence. In fact, certain phonetic features of Cockney (e.g. *th*-fronting and *l*-vocalisation) are present in what is referred to as "Estuary English" speech. The appearance of those variants in the Home Counties may well exemplify geographical diffusion of the features of London speech. However, currently those variants are no longer uniquely Cockney or "Estuary English".



**Percentage of glottaling by teenagers (p. 87)**

RP	Eton	8
EE	counties	32
Cockney	Bethnal Gn	85

Aylesbury, Bucks	43
Lit. Baddow, Essex	8
Farningham, Kent	38
Walton/Hill, Surrey	21