Week 4. Estuary English

1. The claim: “‘Estuary English’ is a variety of modified regional speech. It is a mixture of non-regional and local south-eastern English pronunciation and intonation. If one imagines a continuum with RP and London speech at either end, ‘Estuary English’ speakers are to be found grouped in the middle ground. [...] The heartland of this variety lies by the banks of the Thames and its estuary, but it seems to be the most influential accent in the south-east of England.” (Rosewarne 1984).

2. The hype: “Estuary English can nowadays be heard throughout London and the Home Counties and well beyond. [...] as far as the north Norfolk coast, ... the Dorset coast, ...the south Kent coast... beyond the northern boundaries of Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire.” (Coggle 1993: 23, 26-27). Some claim EE is due to replace RP as the educated accent of England (Rosewarne 1994a).

3. My proposed definition of Estuary English:
   Standard English spoken with a non-RP, London-influenced accent.

4. EE arguably differs from Cockney (i) in using standard grammar and (ii) in lacking stigmatized characteristics such as h-dropping, steady-state MOUTH and intervocalic T glottalling within a word.

5. The confusion.
   - Stylistic variability: StdE and RP can be informal. Usages such as cheers, y’know, or intonation oddities such as accented prepositions are compatible with StdE.
   - Good or bad? Street cred, modern, up-front, trend-setting (Coggle 1993), tomorrow’s RP? — or ‘a bastardized version of Cockney dialect’, the antonym of good English?

6. The truth: Everyone agrees that there is a spectrum of intermediate possibilities between RP and Cockney: ‘popular London English’. If EE is a mere name for this, fine. But Przedlacka has shown that EE is not a single coherent accent ‘sweeping the southeast’.

References (see website www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary)