



WE 026: Accents, dialects and Peaky Blinders

By order of the Peaky Blinders. Yes, I said it, yes I did it, so the secret has been revealed, you know immediately what this episode is going to be about. It is going to be about Peaky Blinders, in a way. So, I'm sure that there are these two groups of listeners who are listening to me right now, so there is one group of the listeners that instantly know what I'm talking about; I mean what *Peaky Blinders* is or who Peaky Blinders are, but I'm sure there are also those of you who have never heard a name before. And so I'll put you in the picture I got, I'll guide you through and I'll tell you what *Peaky Blinders* is. But of course, as we meet here, we meet here for the purpose of the language, so of course, there is going to be the story that is connected with the English language and I'll tell you in a second how this story is going to be connected with English.

But first things first, so I'll tell you what *Peaky Blinders* is. This is a series, a series that is broadcast regularly on Netflix, it's a British series, set in Birmingham. Peaky Blinders is a gang, a gang that is composed of the Shelby family and there is this leader of the gang, Thomas Shelby. I'm not going to spoil a party in here, I'm not going to tell you what the whole plot is about of course, because I would like to invite you, encourage you to watch the series, 'cause it is absolutely amazing. It is absolutely amazing on very many levels, in here, as we are meeting we can cover lots of levels, right. So we can cover the subject of the acting and the plot; it is truly amazing.

You know what happens on Netflix very often, so when there are these series, you cannot stop watching them. So, the thing is that when you start watching one episode, you cannot stop and immediately you have to find out what is going to happen in the next episode; and this is, there you go, this is called binge watching. So, binge watching means that you watch one episode of a given series and then, because it is so engrossing, it is so interesting, you cannot stop and you have to watch another one. Very often it happens that just people burn the midnight oil, which means that they go to bed very, very late at night or even early in the morning, because they cannot stop. And just to remind you about this



expression *binge watching*, I'll tell you what it comes from because definitely you know that it is so much easier to associate different expressions if you know where they come from. So I'll tell you that the expression *binge watching* comes from this expression *go on a binge*. And you can go on different binges, so to say. So that can be shopping binge, that can be drinking binge, which means that you just cannot stop yourself from doing something, so you just keep on going.

So this is what happens with the series and I'm sure if you start watching *Peaky Blinders*, this is what will happen to you. So as I said, there is this plot that we can cover, we can cover plot and acting because it is absolutely amazing, we can cover clothes. Again, just this lovely subject because there is this attribute of the Peaky Blinders gang and it is called the flat cap, very popular in Britain at that time, in post-war Britain because the whole action takes place in Britain after the First World War. And the flat caps are these very typical elements of the garment, of the clothing; that was worn at that time. There can be the music, another very interesting subject; I'll talk to you a little about this music 'cause there are great bands that contributed to the soundtrack of the series. But what we are going to concentrate on here is a very interesting matter, I do believe it is an interesting matter for all the learners of English, because we are going to concentrate on the accent. And, yes, *Peaky Blinders*, the series, it has aroused a lot of controversy when it comes to studying the language and speaking English because there is this great issue of the accent.

So, I'd like to put you in the picture when it comes to the subject of accents a little bit. So you know this, right, you know that there are a lot of accents in England, they vary across the country. And you also have to be aware of the fact that most of you, the ones that are studying English, what you learn, what you hear very often it is RP, which means that it is Received Pronunciation, it is, in other words, Standard English or Queen's English. So you're studying this very educated, this very elegant standard of the language. But, mind you, there are at least of course; it is very difficult to count all of the dialects, all of the accents that are there, because, as I've said, they vary across the country, in different counties, in



different shires you can meet people speaking, well I can say just simply this different language to you. But, more or less, I can say that there are about like thirty-seven dialects in England and you can hear them, a lot of them, in London, right. Because London attracts a lot of people, people from different countries, like from abroad and also from different parts of England. And so, we can call London this melting pot. Another very useful expression in here I like you to remember, so London would be this melting pot for Europe and New York would be this melting pot for America, yes. So *melting pot* means that there are a lot of nations in one place, in one city, that they speak different languages, different dialects and they...this city, the city, the place's composed of just different cultures, different habits, customs and different people.

So, let us continue our journey through accents. And as I introduced the very first accent in English, it is this Received Pronunciation and this is the kind of accent that you can hear when you listen to the Queen, you can hear it on BBC. But you have to know that actually not many people speak this language and you may be, this accent, you may be very surprised that when you go to England, not many people will use that variety of the language because it is this kind of language that is educated. And what you can hear, funny thing, is that when you go there, people living there would say that you speak English better than they do because your variety, your standard of the language is so much better than theirs because it is educated.

Another variety of the accent that is there and it is also associated with London, it is Cockney. This is the London accent, this is this accent of the working class, rather poor class, associated with this poor class. And there is this one thing, I mean not only one thing, but there is this one thing that is leading, that is very characteristic, there is this difference between Cockney and Received Pronunciation, namely the glottal stop. What is the glottal stop? So the glottal stop is this that you actually do not pronounce all of the sounds, the full sounds but you in a way, kind of swallow them. And I'll try and I will just pronounce this sentence, I'll try to use my glottal stop and show you what that is, what that means, so



please listen very carefully to this sentence *I wanted to buy a bottle of whisky, you know that.*

Yep, so that could be glottal stop and I wonder if there are any people who are listening to me right now who know exactly what kind of sentence I have pronounced. I hope and I'm sure that there are quite a few who actually understood, because what I said is *I wanted to buy a bottle of whisky, you know that.* You have to be aware that when you go to England, that kind of language, that kind of English that is so smooth and so well pronounced, it is a rarity. It is a thing that you will not hear very often, so my advice is to just get used to these different varieties. So just remember that when you, when you get the sentence just like that *I wanted to buy a bottle of whisky, you know that,* that this is something very typical.

There is yet another accent in London and it is called Estuary English. Estuary means this mouth of the river and of course it is connected with the River Thames. People who live in that area are supposed to speak that kind of language and when it comes to these differences or similarities between Received Pronunciation it would be that it is kind of closer to Received Pronunciation, it is considered to be more educated than Cockney. So, if you just listen to somebody speaking Estuary English, you would, I believe, find it easier for, you would find it easier simply to understand.

There is yet another accent, and I'll just tell you that the list that I have prepared to hear for you, there are just a few names, but the names that are most popular I would say I believe they are. These dialects, these types of accents are most popular, so I guess that when you travel, this is what you will hear most often.

So, another type, another dialect would be Yorkshire and this is like Yorkshire is a huge area, that's a, that covers a huge area in England and so people living, living in that place they are supposed to, they are considered to be speaking that variety of the language. And, of course, that there are these differences between RP and this is the accent that I introduced as the first one because it is this benchmark, so to say. So, the Queen, the BBC, journalists working there, Prime



Minister, the most educated people in Britain would be speaking exactly this Received Pronunciation variety. So, when it comes to this difference between Yorkshire and RP, what I would say here is that there are words that are ending in the *i* sound, right. They are pronounced more like *yh*, something like that. So, you would need to be aware of this, right. So, you wouldn't hear like *nasty* but you would hear it like *nastyh*, something more or less like that.

And we are travelling north. So, there is the Northern Irish accent and there is Scottish accent. I'll start with Scottish one and I'm sure that some of you who are listening to me right now, they've got these smiles on their faces, because anybody who has been to England, they would ask the question *Do these people even speak English?* Because at times it is so much difficult to understand what is going on there and the typical thing, the characteristic thing of the Scottish accent is it's being very hard. Well, hard in the way you just pronounce and it is also very hard to understand and the fun fact in here is that it is hard for the Scottish people living in Scotland themselves. So you can imagine how difficult that is for anybody, any foreigner just visiting this place.

I mentioned, as I mentioned, the Scottish accent, I also mentioned the Northern Irish accent and it is a strong accent. Again, so as you travel north, you would, what you would get, what you would hear what comes to the accent is this the accents that are becoming stronger, much stronger than the accents from the south. So, as I said, it's a strong accent and there seems to be many letters missing. So as people pronounce different words, they are not pronounced as they are in, the full words, full expressions, but they would, again, kind of swallow some of the letters and that's why you have to have this good ear, you have to keep this open ear in order to understand what is going on there. But, of course, when it comes to different accents in England, this is just a matter of getting used to them. So I know people who studied English, the Standard English, so to say, the Queen's English, here in Poland, they went abroad, they went to different counties, when I say abroad, what I mean in here is England in this respect. So,



they went to different counties, different parts of England and they simply got used to their accent.

I have prepared yet a few of these accents and I'll finish with the one that is used in the *Peaky Blinders* series. This will, this accent will come as the very last one, so I've got this accent here for you which is called Scouse, as well. And this is the accent that people in Liverpool use and Scouse seems to be quite popular because this is the accent that was popularized by the Beatles. So, if you know the Beatles, if you have ever, well, heard their songs that's one thing, but if you have ever heard them speaking, you would know what kind of dialect that is.

There is yet another very interesting accent called Geordie and here we've got this element of popular culture in here because this Geordie accent is characteristic for the people living in New Castle. And all the people who are, who know, who watch television on a regular basis, who are interested in popular culture, they would know that there was this programme, this reality show called *Geordie Shore* that was broadcast on MTV. And the brief idea of this show was to just portray young people from Britain, living together, parting together, having all the ups and downs, and building friendships and liking each other, hating each other. And the people, as the very name suggested, they came from New Castle and they used this variety of the accent. The greatest difference in here, between this RP, because this is our benchmark in here, it is that the *r*'s at the end of the expressions or words is not produced. If you want to listen to this variety of the accent, all you have to do is just watch one of the episodes of the *Geordie Shore*. I'm not judging here, I'm not talking about the idea of the programme, and I'm not talking about the plot, so to say, and all the performances of the people who took part in the programme, but I'm talking about this accent. So, you can watch this episode of the *Geordie Shore* just to listen to the people speaking this accent.

And here comes, as I told you, the very last accent that I like to cover today and this is the Brummie. Brummie is this accent that is used, that is spoken on the *Peaky Blinders* show. And as I was saying that it is the kind of accent that is spoken there, I was hesitating, I hesitated for a second because the question is *Is it spoken*



or not? And this is the greatest controversy. So this Brummie accent, this is the variety of the accent that is typical of older people living in Birmingham. And this is what happens in the *Peaky Blinders* show, so the series portrays this gang, as I told you, the Shelby family, living in post-war Britain, after the First World War, and they are based in Birmingham and because they are based in Birmingham, they speak or they are supposed to speak Brummie.

One of the greatest representatives of this Brummie accent, so to say, is Ozzie Osbourne, guys. And we know that right now Ozzy Osbourne doesn't live in England, where he lived in America, but the thing is that this Brummie accent is so strong that you can live in another parts of the world, in other parts of England, in other parts of Europe, in America, but definitely the way you speak, it will always show that you come from Birmingham.

And as I've started today's episode with the presentation of the subject, of the subject of accents in England, I can ask you, this is the question, I can ask you what kind of accent is your favourite one. So, many people would find it difficult to answer, some people would choose the Scouse because it is associated with the Beatles, right, other people would, of course, say that this is RP because it is very posh, it is educated, it is typical of all the people who lead, you know, who belong to this upper class. Because you also have to remember that these accents that are there, in England, they also show which social class you belong to. But if you ask anybody what kind of accent they hate most, most of the people would say that this is Brummie. All the people who are rather gentle and want to be delicate, would say that this Brummie accent sounds rather dirty and rather thick. And the brutal ones, so people who just want to speak their minds and are rather straightforward, they would say that it sounds stupid and unintelligent. There you go. And this is what this characters of the *Peaky Blinders* series, this is the variety of the language that they are using or they are trying to use because the greatest controversy about this series is that actually they do not speak this dialect, they do not use this accent. Well, why? Well, it is actually the thing that to imitate Brummie it is something very, very difficult. So, only the people who were born



there, only the people who are of this Birmingham origin, they would know how to do it and the actors who are there, performing the roles absolutely, in an absolutely fantastic way, they are great, they become these characters; the lead character, Thomas Shelby, who is portrayed by Cillian Murphy, right. So when Cillian Murphy becomes simply Thomas Shelby, he is, it is beyond words what he is doing there, he is so fantastic. But these residents of Birmingham say that no one, fortunately, nobody that is there is using the proper Brummie accent and what they do, what the actors do and what they try to do is that they would rather speak with this accent characteristic of Liverpool rather than Brummie.

And what is characteristic in the Brummie accent is that there are this round vowels. There is a very specific word, very specific word used in *Peaky Blinders* series but it is a swear word, the F-word, which I'm not going to use here, but you can imagine what kind of word I'm talking about and this swear word is pronounced in an absolutely different way. So instead of this simple, short sound, there is this rounded vowel. So if you ever watched one of the episodes and if you haven't, please do it, and if there is this word pronounced, you will know instantly, right. You will hear it that this is pronounced in a different way; we are used to a different variety of pronunciation when it comes here. And the -ing sounds that are at the end of the words, so the gerund sounds are also pronounced in a different way. The fun fact about Brummie that is used or that is supposed to be used in the series, in *Peaky Blinders* series, is that if you want to be a true speaker of the Brummie accent, you shouldn't move your face very much, so there shouldn't be very much of this facial movement. And that's why Thomas Shelby, so the main character, that's why he's faced with a poker face, possibly.

But thanks to this series, what the series has managed to do, the series has managed to introduce Birmingham into this scene, into this world, world scene because all the, most of the accents or most of the variety of the language, of English, something that we are used to or exposed to as the viewers, that is either American English. So that's why so many people say that there is easier to understand American English because they are used to it, they watch a lot of



American films. And even if they manage to watch some stuff that was produced in Britain, it would be rather something produced in London. So the accents that you can get there, that would be rather RP or this Estuary English, sometimes Cockney just to portray people, people from the working class. But what the *Peaky Blinders* series managed to do and all the filmmakers, all the producers who are behind this series, what they managed to do is, they managed to show that there is such a city, forgotten really, like Birmingham. And Birmingham place at that time, after the war it was dirty, it was dark, there was a lot of gravel, it was like pitch-dark almost. But the series brought Birmingham into the scene, so to say, so even though these actors do not manage to speak the proper accent, the people living there, the residents, the local residents, they are actually very, very grateful for all this because now, we like in here, we are speaking about the subject. So we are talking about Birmingham, we are talking about Brummie, we are talking about them, and we are exchanging our conclusions, we are exchanging our opinions about what is going on there. The filmmakers, the film producers say that what is most important when it comes to *Peaky Blinders*, it is rather them acting and it is fantastic thing and this is more important than the accent itself. But as let me say it once again, because of this, because of the series, because there is this subject covered of people living in Birmingham, the city became popular and the accent became popular as well.

The fun fact is also that there's another fun fact when it comes to the accent from the film, is that the viewers from America that watch *Peaky Blinders*, they have to watch it with subtitles, because they are not able to understand it. So you can imagine how difficult it is to differentiate between different accents and I want you, as the students of English, I want you to be fully aware of this because sometimes you may be surprised that there is this word that you know, but it is pronounced in such a way that is difficult for you to understand.

At the very beginning of this meeting, I told you that I'd like to draw your attention also a little bit to music. Let me just introduce a couple of bands, a couple of great musicians that contributed to the soundtrack of this series. And



there is the main theme entitled *Red Right Hand*, which is performed by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. The soundtrack is, I would say another character, like a key feature absolutely, of the film, because it builds the theme, it builds the atmosphere, the climate of this dirty, working class Birmingham back then. And the soundtrack from the series is just unique, so this is another great asset that is there, apart from this acting, apart from the language, apart from the people, from the actors, the plot and there is this music. Another great bands that contributed to this soundtrack they are the White Stripes, the Radiohead and, mind you, there is the remastered version of Black Sabbath's *War Pigs* and as you know, I told you this, Ozzy Osbourne comes from Birmingham. And so this is, this is a nice tribute to him thanks to his songs, thanks to Black Sabbath's *War Pigs*.

Guys, I hope you have managed to stay tuned, you have managed to go through these different varieties of the accent. I hope I got you interested in the subject because it is truly interesting. And I always repeat this that when you study the language, you have to be fully aware of everything that is around it: of the history of the country, of the culture, of the customs and habits, of the associations because the locals, the local residents, they think in a different way. This is some, the subject that I introduced a couple of episodes ago, like about this structure, different structure, different way of thinking. So, it all helps and it all improves a learning process and in here, this another element that is very important, you have to know that the variety of the language that you speak, that you learn, that you listen to, it may vary, so don't give up, because sometimes, that's my experience, sometimes I hear from people they say *Oh my gosh, I can't understand English*. That's not true, right. You just have to know that this is a different dialect and you just have to train your ear, so to say, and you have to just keep this open ear and get used to it. Please watch *Peaky Blinders*, please listen to this variety of the language and enjoy it because English is a truly enjoyable thing. Thank you so much.