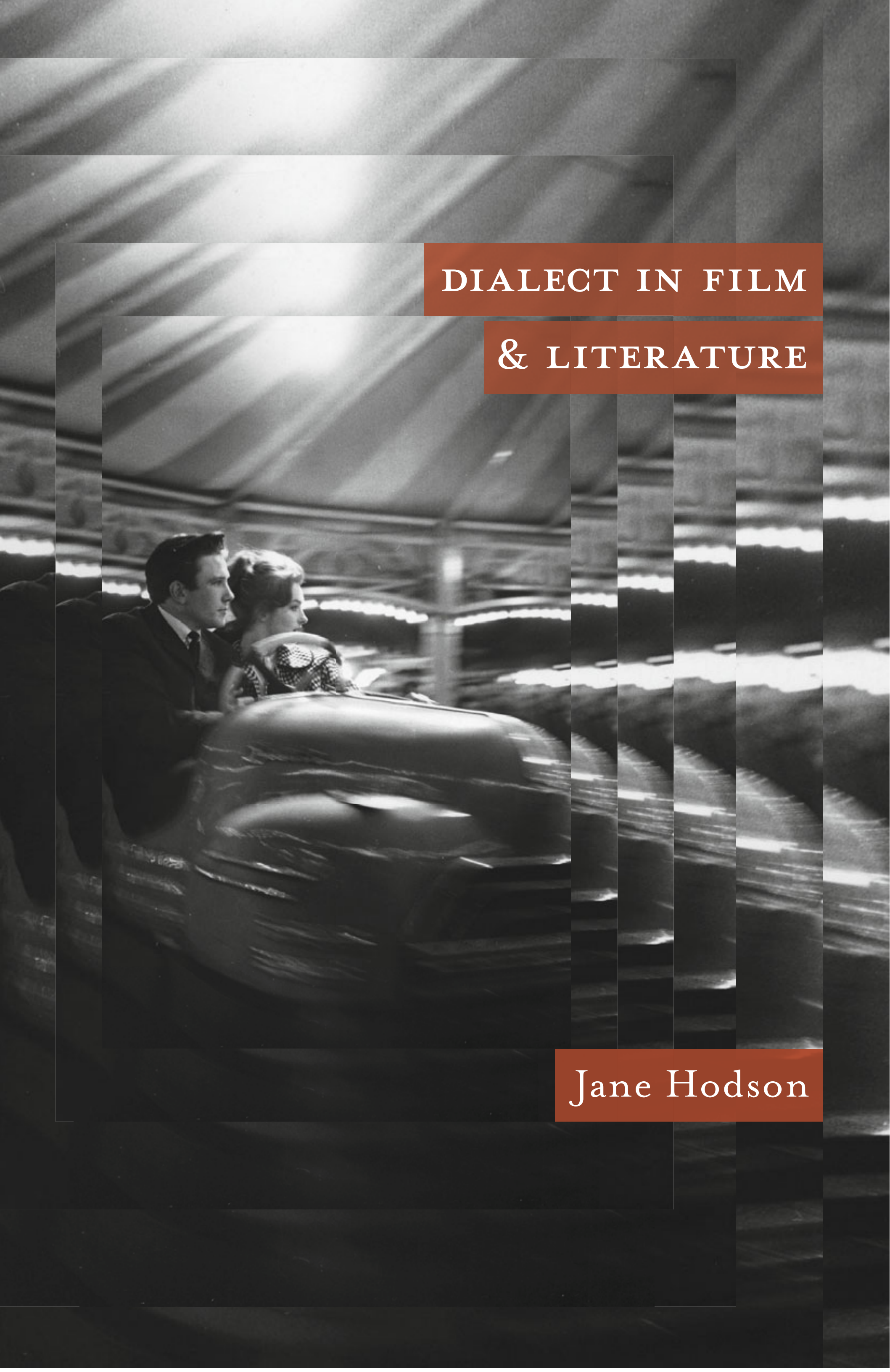

DIALECT IN FILM & LITERATURE

Jane Hodson

Dialect in Film and Literature

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Jane Hodson

macmillan international
HIGHER EDUCATION

RED GLOBE PRESS

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For Del

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Preface

I have been extraordinarily fortunate over the years to work with many colleagues and postgraduate students who have shared my interest in the representation of dialect. From research seminars, to supervisions, to conversations in the corridor, they have all made the University of Sheffield an excellent place to work on this project and my book would have been much poorer without their input. I would particularly like to thank Sylvia Adamson, Joan Beal, Alex Broadhead, Paul Cooper, Hugh Escott, Susan Fitzmaurice, April McMahon, Julie Millward, Emma Moore, Chris Montgomery and Jonathan Rayner. Above all, however, I would like to thank Richard Steadman-Jones for listening, critiquing and encouraging at all the right moments.

I have also been privileged to be part of a broader intellectual community thinking about these issues. I have benefited from these academics at conferences, reading their work and communicating by e-mail. Specific mention goes to Taryn Hakala, Jackie Labbe, Phil Leigh, Carol Percy, Lauren Stewart, Ingrid Tieken Boon von-Ostade and Katie Wales, but I am grateful to everyone who participated in the very productive sessions at the International Conference on Dialect and Literature in Sheffield in 2011. I would also like to thank Mary Bucholtz for allowing me to see an early draft of her work on Hollywood white African American English.

Many thanks to all my students on 'Language and Power' and 'Dialect in Literature and Film'. I have learned much from working with them and hearing what they thought of the material we have discussed together.

Very special thanks to Peter Stockwell, who generously read this in draft form not once but twice, and whose thoughtful and perceptive comments have gone some way to correcting earlier weaknesses in its structure and argument. All remaining failings are of course my own. Thank you also to Aléta Bezuidenhout, who is finally shepherding this manuscript through to production with efficiency and good humour.

Many thanks to my parents who have always provided warmth, stability and encouragement in everything I do. They can also take credit for kickstarting my interest in language variety, by moving the family when I was 8 from Middlesbrough to Surrey, where none of the other children in the playground could understand a word I said.

Thank you to my two daughters, Anne and Esther. Reading books to them has given me lots of opportunities to think about how dialects are represented in children's books, and also forced me to acknowledge my complete inability to perform any kind of accent out loud. In addition, Anne has provided valuable insights into how a Yorkshire child perceives my Southern English accent: I have learnt that in my accent *cut* sounds like 'cat', and a good spelling of my *last* is 'larst'.

Most importantly, thank you to my husband, Del, who has listened to me talk about dialect and literature a lot over the last few years, and who has variously provided coffee, meals and space to work. I'm not sure that you want a book about dialect representation, but this is for you.

JANE HODSON

A note on transcription

This book contains several transcriptions of film scenes. I have not attempted to represent anything about the accent of the speakers in the transcription. This is because a full phonetic transcription would be difficult for those without linguistic training to read, while a transcription that uses some respelling to indicate pronunciation is problematic for reasons that are discussed in Chapter 5. In the transcriptions I have therefore used standard spelling for all words, regardless of the pronunciation the actor uses. I then pick out the specific phonetic features of the performance that I wish to highlight in the discussion afterwards. In these discussions I have used the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) although I have also tried to describe the features in question. Any reader who would like to get to grips with the IPA is recommended to read J.C. Catford's *A Practical Introduction to Phonetics* (2001).

I have chosen to present the transcripts in a straightforward 'film script' style rather than marking pauses, intonation, etc. as would be appropriate if this were a conversation analysis book. Again, this makes the transcripts easier to read on the page for those unfamiliar with the conventions. In any case, the actors are working to a pre-existing script in most of the films I discuss here, so this style of transcription works better than it would do for natural conversation.

For reasons of copyright I have in one case used a published film script (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*). In all other instances the transcriptions are my own.

1

Why study dialect in film and literature?

This book draws on ideas and approaches from the discipline of linguistics in order to investigate the ways in which different dialects of English are represented in a range of films and literary texts. As I will explore in later chapters, the representation of dialects in both film and literature primarily means the representation of different spoken, rather than written, varieties. Speech has been central to the novel since its emergence as a distinct genre in the eighteenth century, and it has been an integral aspect of film since the invention of the ‘talkies’ in the 1920s. Both art forms have employed a range of different dialects in their representations of speech throughout their history, in different ways and for different purposes. However, while the analysis of dialect in literature has received some significant critical attention during the last 100 years, the question of dialect in film has largely been ignored, and the two topics have never been considered together. In this chapter I begin by defining what I mean by the term ‘dialect’ and I present some of the reasons why I think that dialect in film and literature is a valuable field of analysis. I then explain why I have chosen to treat film and literature together in a single book. Finally, I map out the structure of the rest of the book.

Dialect in Film and Literature is designed to be accessible to scholars working at different levels and with a range of different academic backgrounds. With undergraduate students in mind, I have provided exercises and recommended reading at the end of each chapter. However, this book will also be of value to more advanced scholars at postgraduate and postdoctorate levels. Recent developments in linguistics with regards to subjects such as identity, authenticity and metalanguage make this an exciting time to investigate the role that dialect plays in film and literature. I hope that this book will offer some innovative approaches to the field of dialect representation, and assist readers in undertaking their own research.

What is a dialect?

A dialect is a variety of English which is associated with a particular region and/or social class. To state the obvious, speakers from different geographical regions speak English rather differently: hence we refer to ‘Geordie’ (Newcastle English), ‘New York English’ or ‘Cornish English’. In addition to geographical variation, the social background of a speaker will also influence the variety of English that person speaks: two children may grow up in the same Yorkshire village, but if one is born into a wealthy family and attends an expensive private school, while the other is born into a less well-off family and attends the local state school, the two are likely to end up speaking rather different varieties of English. It is this combination of regional and social variation that I refer to collectively as ‘dialect’ in this book.

In linguistic terms a dialect is a combination of regional pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar and can be described at those three levels. A specific regional pronunciation is an accent; hence we can refer to a Geordie accent, a New York accent, or a Cornish accent when we wish to describe the way in which someone pronounces English. In many cases vocabulary, grammar and accent co-occur: a person who speaks with a Geordie accent is also likely to use the vocabulary and grammatical features of Geordie English, in which case we say that they speak in a Geordie dialect. In some circumstances, however, this may not be the case: a speaker may have a Geordie accent without also using the vocabulary and grammar of Geordie English. In this case we say that they speak with a Geordie accent, but that they do not speak in a Geordie dialect. (See Kerswill 2006: 25–7 for a more detailed discussion of the definition of ‘accent’ and ‘dialect’.)

Standard English is the dialect of English used by ‘educated’ people. It is the dialect that is taught in schools, and is employed on radio and television for ‘serious’ programmes, such as current affairs. In the British Isles, the accent most frequently associated with Standard English is termed Received Pronunciation (RP). However, it is possible to find the grammar and vocabulary of Standard English pronounced with different regional accents. This is common, for example, among newscasters who often use regional accents to deliver the news in Standard English. Indeed, Paul Kerswill notes that '[i]ncreased social mobility in the second half of the twentieth century has apparently led to the downgrading of this "standard" pronunciation, RP, in favour of mildly regionally accented varieties such as "Estuary English"' (Kerswill 2006: 25).

Thus far I have suggested that speakers use different dialects of English depending on their social and regional background. However, it must be noted at the outset that matters are rather more complicated. In addition to all the background factors that may govern the variety of English that a person speaks, the context within which he or she speaks and the purpose of the speech will also influence the variety used. All speakers command a range of different varieties of English which they will employ as appropriate, depending upon factors such as: who they are interacting with, what the purpose of the interaction is, and where the interaction takes place. Linguists use the term style to categorize language varieties which can be defined according to the circumstances within which they are employed. I will be focusing on the topic of style and style-shifting in Chapter 9.

Dialect and character

Because different varieties of English are associated with speakers from different regions and social backgrounds it is possible to deduce information about speakers' backgrounds from the way in which they speak. In everyday life, the way in which someone speaks provides clues about where they come from, what social group they belong to, what kind of education they received, and so forth. This is something that authors and filmmakers make use of in various ways, not the least of which is to provide background information about characters and locations. As an example, try watching the first two minutes of *Nil by Mouth* (Oldman 1997) and thinking about what you can deduce about the character of Ray and the setting of the film. Here is a transcription of Ray's speech:

> Can I have a drink mate, mate?
> Can I get served here? Can I have a drink?
> Yeah, I want two, no three, three pints of lager, oh and erm three vodka tonics, and a drop of scotch. Half a lager and lime and all.

Three vodka tonics, yeah, slice of lemon in them. Oh, and erm put an olive in that.
You got a tray, mate? Yeah? A tray?
No, I want half a lager. Half a lager. Yeah, a lager and lime that's all.
How much?
Ta.
Ain't you got no ice?
You got no ice?

This is quite a low-key opening for a film, in that all that happens is that a man orders a round of drinks at a noisy bar. Indeed, the fact that it is the kind of mundane scene that rarely appears in film already hints at the fact that this will be a film committed to the realistic depiction of everyday life. The scene is intercut with the film's opening credits meaning that as we are being given written information about the production and cast of the film, so we are also getting a first view of one of the central characters in what is to follow. It is possible to analyse various aspects of filmmaking in the bar scene. The lighting, for example, is low-key with significant portions of the image in shadow. The scene is filmed in close-up and has a crowded composition; backs of other heads move across the screen occasionally, obscuring Ray from view. The camera is handheld, meaning that it sways throughout rather than being fixed on a tripod. All of these features tend to provide a naturalistic feel: they give the impression that someone has wandered in with a single camera and filmed a real-life event. The music works rather differently. It does not have an obvious source within the scene (it is not coming from an onscreen performer or sound system) and there is no evidence that the characters on screen are aware of it. Music without an onscreen source is called extra-diegetic music by film critics, and its purpose is often to establish the mood of the scene. In this case, a bluesy guitar piece is playing, providing a melancholic and downbeat mood which contrasts in interesting ways with the onscreen scenes of people having a sociable evening out.

Camerawork, lighting and music thus all do important work in terms of establishing the tone and feel of the film that is to follow. However, it is the dialect of the central character, played by Ray Winstone, that provides the clearest indications of who this man is and where he might be. His accent immediately signals that he comes from South East England: he deletes /h/ at the start of 'half' and 'how'; he employs TH-fronting so that he says [friː] ('free') for 'three'; he uses

L-vocalization so that he says [ɔʊ] ('aw') for 'all', and T-glottalizes at the end of 'mate' so that it is realized as [meɪʔ]. Several of the vocabulary items that he uses ('pints of lager', 'half a lager', 'lager and lime') are all strongly suggestive of a British setting, as is his repeated use of the address term 'mate'. At the same time some of his grammar, particularly the double negative of 'ain't you got no ice', are stigmatized in the UK, suggesting that he does not come from a socially privileged background and probably does not have a high level of education. Finally, the fact that he is clearly comfortable in the setting of the bar suggests that he is on home turf in London. Thus, even before we move beyond this initial close-up of one character ordering drinks, the speech of the actor has provided the audience with some strong clues as to the background of the character in question, and the social and geographical setting of the movie. Sarah Kozloff notes that one of the chief ways in which language variety is used in film is to provide background for a character without having to laboriously spell it out. She writes that 'Recognizable, clichéd dialects are used on-screen to sketch in a character's past and cultural heritage, to locate each person in terms of his or her financial standing, education level, geographical background, or ethnic group' (Kozloff 2000: 82). Rosina Lippi-Green makes a similar point, noting that 'film uses language variation and accent to draw character quickly, building on established preconceived notions associated with specific loyalties, ethnic, racial or economic alliances' (1997: 81). All of this occurs with the character of Ray in the opening minutes of *Nil By Mouth.*

This is not to say that dialect is the only aspect of a film that provides clues as to the background of the character. In the case of the bar scene of *Nil By Mouth,* for example, we might also deduce information about his social identity from his checked shirt and close-cropped haircut, the fact that he regularly sniffs rather than using a handkerchief, and the fact that he is ordering pints of lager rather than, say, a glass of cabernet sauvignon or a vodka martini. Furthermore, any assumptions drawn from the way a character speaks may sometimes prove to be false. In the case of the opening of *Nil by Mouth* it might, for example, be revealed that the character is putting on the accent because he is a spy; or he might be a Londoner on holiday in Spain; or he might be a university professor who has retained the accent of his childhood. It might even be the case that the film is set thousands of years in the future on a distant planet. Sometimes a deliberate mismatch between the visual and verbal identity of a character might be played for laughs. Most of the time, however, the way in which a character speaks will correlate directly with their social and geographical background, and as audiences or readers we are accustomed to using these clues to help us understand the film or novel.

Quite how much we depend upon dialect to fill in information can be seen when we watch a film where we are not attuned to the dialects in question. I had an experience of this sort recently while watching the French film *A Prophet* (Audiard 2009). In this film a young Muslim man, Tariq, is committed to prison for an unspecified crime. While there he is persuaded by an older man, César, to murder another prisoner, and thereafter he comes under César's protection and begins to rise through the hierarchy of the prison. The film is in French, but is subtitled into English so that even someone who (like me) speaks limited French will find it easy to understand the content of the dialogue. However, I had been watching the film for quite a while before it was explicitly stated that César was from Corsica, and even after that it took a while for me to understand that he was a high-up member of a gang of organized Corsican criminals, and that the Corsican mafia are to be feared every bit as much as the more internationally recognized Sicilian mafia. The film began to make a lot more sense at this point: I had not really understood why César wanted the other prisoner killed, or how he exerted such influence throughout the prison. It is likely that a French viewer would have recognized that César speaks with a Corsican accent immediately, and considered the possibility (particularly in the context of a prison) that he belonged to the mafia. This points to the fact that when analysing dialogue in film it is important to consider not only *what* is said but also *how* it is said. When someone speaks in a dialect with which we have some familiarity, we are able to bring a range of both linguistic and extra-linguistic information to bear in understanding the nuances and implications of their style of speech. If the film had been set in America and César spoke with an Italian-American accent, for example, it is likely that I would have suspected him to belong to the mafia much more quickly because I have seen many American films featuring mafiosi of Sicilian origin speaking with Italian-American accents.

Inter-character relationships and thematic concerns

Thus far, then, I have suggested that it is worth paying attention to the use of different varieties of English in films and literature because of the information that they supply to audiences about character and location. But if dialect were just a static label in this way, it would be of limited interest. As I will explore in this book, dialect can be much more dynamic. Shifts in dialect can, for example, also be used to suggest relationships between characters. Consider, for example, this short scene from Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island*:

> As my feet had set down on the soil of England an Englishwoman approached me. She was breathless. Panting and flushed. She swung me round with a force that sent one of my coat buttons speeding into the crowd with the velocity of a bullet. 'Are you Sugar?' she asked me. I was still trying to follow my poor button with the hope of retrieving it later as that coat had cost me a great deal of money. But this Englishwoman leaned close in to my face and demanded to know, 'Are you Sugar?'
>
> I straightened myself and told her, 'No, I am Hortense.'
>
> She tutted as if this information was in some way annoying to her. She took a long breath and said, 'Have you seen Sugar? She's one of you. She's coming to be my nanny and I am a little later than I thought. You must know her. Sugar. Sugar?'
>
> I thought I must try saying sugar with those vowels that make the word go on for ever. Very English. Sugaaaar. And told this woman very politely, 'No I am sorry I am not acquainted with . . . '
>
> But she shook her head and said, 'Ohh,' before I had a chance to open any of my vowels. This Englishwoman then dashed into a crowd where she turned another woman round so fast that this newly arrived Jamaican, finding herself an inch away from a white woman shouting, 'Sugaaar, Sugaaar,' into her face, suddenly let out a loud scream.
>
> (Levy 2004: 15)

In this passage it is 1948 and the narrator, Hortense, has just arrived in Britain from Jamaica in order to be with her husband, Gilbert. One aspect of the scene that might immediately be noted is that Levy does little to characterize the narrative voice of Hortense as identifiably Jamaican. In part this may be because Levy does not want to make Hortense's first-person narration too difficult for an audience unfamiliar with Jamaican Creole to understand, and this is an issue which will be discussed in much more detail in Chapter 6. However, it would also appear that Hortense's background and education mean that she speaks a prestigious variety of Jamaican English. During the period when Jamaica was a colony of the British Empire, a creole emerged, which is a vernacular that develops under specific circumstances of language contact. Creoles often arose in colonies out of the mixing of the languages used in the colony, including English and the African languages of the slaves who were brought to work the plantations. Given the continued social and economic prestige of the English language, what is now spoken in Jamaica is a post-creole continuum, ranging from the acrolect, which is the variety closest to Standard English, to the basilect, which is the variety furthest from Standard English and containing the highest density of creole forms (for a full account of creoles see Sebba 1997). In Hortense's case, her mother was a poor 'country girl' and her grandmother is shown to have spoken a basilectal form: 'When me mudda did pregnant dem seh smaddy obeah'er' (Levy 2004: 43). However, she is very proud of the fact that her absent father is 'a man of class' and she has been brought up in the family of one of his well-to-do cousins (Levy 2004: 37). She has received a good education at a private school run by a white American couple, and then at a teacher-training college in Kingston. In short, Hortense speaks an acrolectal form of Jamaican English, which marks her out as belonging to a privileged social class within Jamaica.

The English woman only speaks a few sentences, and there is little direct evidence in the scene to mark her language variety. Given that the scene is set in London, it might be assumed that the Englishwoman who accosts her is a Londoner and that she speaks with a London accent. However, it can also be noted that the woman is employing a nanny, which suggests that she belongs to the upper middle classes. Her vocabulary and grammar appear to be Standard English, and, the long second vowel that Hortense describes in 'Sugaaaar' fits with the Received Pronunciation that was characteristic of the upper middle classes during the early part of the twentieth century.

The two women are thus alike in speaking with accents that identify them as belonging to privileged social groups. However, they respond to each others' accents in very different ways. Hortense's immediate response is that she wants to sound like the woman: 'I thought I must try saying sugar with those vowels that make the word go on for ever'. The phenomenon of adapting your style of speech to suit a particular situation is termed convergence by linguists, and it is something that

I will explore in detail in Chapter 9. At this point, however, I will simply note that the style-shifting between the two speakers is distinctly unilateral: Hortense wishes to sound like the Englishwoman, but the Englishwoman makes no effort to be at all polite towards Hortense, let alone to sound more like her. This immediately suggests an imbalance of power between the immigrant Hortense, who is desperate to fit in, and the established Englishwoman who evinces no interest, linguistic or personal, in the newcomer.

Finally, the scene also dramatizes the simplistic ways in which different social groups perceive one another. Hortense thinks of the woman as 'The Englishwoman' and finds her vowels to be 'Very English' because she has not yet learnt to discern the differences in social classes that accents can connote in England. Conversely, the Englishwoman is unaware that there may be any social differences between Jamaican immigrants, and the fact that the she tells Hortense that Sugar is 'one of you' reveals that she lumps all Jamaican immigrants into a single, distinctly subordinate, category. Hortense may pride herself on her family background and education, but in her new home this counts for little among people who see skin colour first. Elsewhere in the novel it is suggested that such generalizations are by no means uncommon across the race divide. For example, Hortense recalls that even the American couple who ran her school were unable to distinguish between varieties of Jamaican English:

> Mrs Ryder, in her movie-star accent, remarked, 'Someone must help these poor negro children. Education is all they have.'
>
> Many people wondered if Mr and Mrs Ryder were aware that their school took only the wealthiest, fairest and highest-class children from the district. Or whether these polite, clean and well-spoken pupils nevertheless still looked poor to them.
>
> (Levy 2004: 44)

Again, the fact that Hortense hears any American voice as having a 'movie-star accent' suggests that she is unaware of the social distinctions that accent can index in America, which is unsurprising given that she has never been to America. Rather more surprising is the fact that the Ryders do not register the social standing of the 'polite, clean and well-spoken' children they work with. Both the Englishwoman at the docks and the Ryders in their school appear to make assumptions about the Jamaicans they encounter based upon race alone: they ignore all other social distinctions which language variety might alert them to.

Thus in the scene on the docks we do not just encounter two different varieties and learn about speakers' identities through the way in which they speak, but we also learn something about the speakers' attitudes and the broader social attitudes they typify. It offers an illuminating insight into Hortense's character by demonstrating how strongly predisposed she is to admire and emulate wealthy, well-educated English people, while at the same time demonstrating how completely uninterested the average wealthy, well-educated English person is in engaging with Hortense. The scene from *Small Island* is a small one, and it is the only time that the character of the Englishwoman appears. Within the context of the novel, however, it offers an example of the casual racism she will encounter repeatedly in Britain and it demonstrates the enormous gulf in expectations that exists between the existing inhabitants of the British Isles and the arriving immigrants: Hortense arrives expecting to make a new home, but the Englishwoman is only interested in finding a domestic servant. It thus highlights some of the wider thematic concerns of the novel.

Text-external reasons for studying dialect in fiction

I have offered two reasons for studying dialect in film and literature: that it can tell us about individual characters and locations, and that it can tell us about relationships between characters, and so highlight broader thematic concerns. Both of these motivations might be characterized as text-internal: pursuing them helps us to understand the texts better. Alongside these motivations, there are also text-external reasons. Text-external reasons for studying the representation of dialects of English in film and literature focus on the way in which such representations interact with the society within which they appear. Thus far I have suggested that readers and filmgoers bring their existing knowledge about language varieties to a film or text in order to interpret the dialects they encounter. In practice, however, it seems unlikely that the situation is this straightforward because as well as bringing existing knowledge *to* a new text or film, readers and audiences also take ideas about language varieties *from* that text or film. Indeed, in some instances their existing knowledge about a particular variety of language may have been acquired from other films and texts rather than from the real world (my own knowledge of Italian-American accents, for example, is entirely based upon media exposure as I have never met a person of Italian-American descent in real life). As Rosina Lippi-Green has argued in her study of language varieties in Disney films:

> For better or worse, the television and film industries have become a major avenue of contact to the world outside our homes and communities. For many, especially children, it is the only view they have of people of other races or national origins.
>
> (Lippi-Green 1994: 81)

In many instances, audiences end up with the impression that they know what a dialect sounds like and what characteristics a speaker of that dialect is likely to have, even though they have no real-life experience of interacting with speakers of that variety. These linguistic impressions form an integral part of their understanding of the social or ethnic group that uses that variety. This highlights a potential danger in the way that filmmakers use dialect as a shortcut to 'sketch in a character's past and cultural heritage': such shortcuts can result in films that reinforce negative stereotypes about particular groups of people, and this is an issue to which I will return in more detail in Chapter 4. Sarah Kozloff has written eloquently about the way in which film dialogue can contribute to the stereotyping of marginalized groups in American film:

> Much scholarship has been devoted to demonstrating the negative portrayals in American film of women, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans. Most of these analyses have concentrated on the level of plot and characterization. What is often overlooked is how much the speech patterns of the stereotyped character contribute to the viewer's conception of his or her worth; the ways in which dialect, mispronunciation, and inarticulateness have been used to ridicule and stigmatize characters has often been neglected. Who gets to speak about what? Who is silenced? Who is interrupted? Dialogue is often the first place we should go to understand how film reflects social prejudices.
>
> (Kozloff 2000: 26–7)

As Kozloff points out, the way in which dialogue and dialect is used in film and literature is a good indicator of our attitudes towards the characters thus portrayed.

To what extent, however, do such portrayals simply ‘reflect’ social prejudices, as Kozloff suggests, and to what extent do they serve to create and maintain such prejudices, as Lippi-Green suggests? This is perhaps an impossible question to answer because, alongside the films they see and the books they read, individuals are also influenced by, among other things, their family and friends, their education, and their experiences in the workplace, as well as by other media including newspapers, television and advertising. It is simply not possible to isolate out the influences that literature and film have. What is possible, however, is that by examining the way in which varieties of language are represented in film and literature we can become more conscious of the ways in which literature and film depict different social groups, and better able to resist the simplifications that they offer. These are topics I will focus on particularly in Chapters 4 and 6.

Dialect in film and literature versus dialect in real life

In the previous sections I have suggested that our ability to interpret this information rests in large part upon our real-world abilities to make deductions based upon the way in which people speak. However, a central premise of this book is that there are important differences between the way in which language varieties function in a film or literary text and the way in which they function in real-life situations.

In literary texts many of these differences are obvious on the page because audible speech has to be rendered into the visual medium of print. In the first instance, both the Englishwoman’s pronunciation of ‘sugar’ (‘Are you Sugar?’) and Hortense’s (‘I must try saying sugar’) are presented through exactly the same combination of letters, even though logically we know that there must be differences in the way the two women pronounce this word. Hortense then specifically reflects upon her perception that the Englishwoman pronounces the word with ‘those vowels that make the word go on for ever’ and the word is respelled as ‘Sugaaaar’ to indicate this. The repeated ‘aaaa’ is evidently intended to indicate a lengthened vowel sound, but it is rather a blunt instrument. What kind of /a/ does it represent? In my own accent should I understand the ‘a’ as in ‘ant’ [ænt], ‘awful’ [ɔːfəl] or ‘artful’ [ɑːtfəl]? And what about the fact that the book is liable to be read by people with different accents, who will interpret ‘aaaa’ in different ways? Also, given that the Englishwoman is from the South East of England, it is extremely unlikely that she would actually pronounce the ‘r’ at the end of ‘Sugaaaar’, but it is retained in the spelling by Levy. Does this mean that the Englishwoman pronounces the ‘r’? Or is it just there to help the audience see that the word is still ‘sugar’ (a spelling ‘Sugaaaa’ might be confusing)? This topic of how we make sense of the orthographic manipulations that writers undertake to indicate accent is something that I will explore further in Chapters 5 and 6. For the time being, it is enough to note the fact that writing an accent down on paper requires the visual representation of an audible sound, and that this is a very inexact process.

In film matters are more straightforward. Because speech is recorded directly as sound, the differences between real speech and the filmic representation of it are less obvious. Nevertheless, as Sarah Kozloff has pointed out, speech in films is still very different from real-world speech:

> In narrative films, dialogue may strive mightily to imitate natural conversation, but is always an imitation. It has been scripted, written and rewritten, censored, polished, rehearsed, and performed. Even when lines are improvised on set, they have been spoken by impersonators, judged, approved, and allowed to remain. Then all dialogue is recorded, edited, mixed, underscored, and played through stereophonic speakers with Dolby sound.
>
> (Kozloff 2000: 18)

In the case of film, as Kozloff has bluntly put it, ‘linguists who use film dialogue as accurate case studies of everyday conversation are operating on mistaken assumptions’ (Kozloff 2000: 19). This is true even in the case of a film which seems very ‘realistic’ such as *Nil by Mouth*. In the opening scene, for example, it is noticeable that that although Ray’s voice is clearly audible, the voice of the bartender cannot be heard even when Ray is evidently responding directly to something that has been said to him (‘No I want half a lager. Half a lager.’) In part, this might be because the scene is edited so that we can see Ray’s face when he is speaking, and the credits come up when he is silent. However, it is not simply the case that the soundtrack is muted when the credits are on screen because both the extra-diegetic music and the background chatter from the bar can be heard throughout. A deliberate decision has been taken to omit the bartender's voice, either by editing it out of the soundtrack or not recording it in the first place. This was perhaps because the director wanted to ensure that the entire focus is on Ray at this point in the film; if we could hear the bartender it would become an interaction between two characters. This directorial decision highlights the fact that, far from being a raw 'slice of life' that has been captured on film, the speech in the opening scene of *Nil by Mouth* is a highly mediated work of art.

Susan L. Ferguson, in an article in which she analyses the representation of dialect in three Victorian novels, has coined the term 'ficto-linguistics' to describe the way in which varieties of English function within literary texts. She writes:

> I will explore the *narrative consequences* of dialect use in fiction by looking at what might be called the ficto-linguistics as opposed to the socio-linguistics of dialect in the novel. By ficto-linguistics I mean the systems of language that appear in novels and *both* deviate from accepted or expected socio-linguistic patterns *and* indicate identifiable alternative patterns congruent to other aspects of the fictional world.
>
> (Ferguson 1998: 3)

As Ferguson emphasizes, the systems of language that we find in fiction may differ significantly from those we find in real life. The term 'ficto-linguistics' is valuable because it provides a way of talking about the patterns of language variety we find within fictional texts, and using terms and concepts borrowed from linguistics in order to do so, while making it clear that language varieties do not function in the same way as language varieties in the real world. The term thus moves us beyond analysing language varieties in literary texts in order to rate them in terms of their real-world accuracy or consistency, which is what sometimes happens when linguists analyse literary texts, and instead enables us to see that they form an integral part of the fictional world within which they appear. Although Ferguson's article focuses solely upon Victorian novels, the term ficto-linguistics can be extended to include the study of language varieties in all works of fiction, including narrative poetry, film and television.

Why study film and literature together?

One question that I have frequently been asked in the writing of this book is why I am attempting to deal with film and literature together in a single volume. Are they not, as I have already indicated, rather different subjects, and would I not be better off dealing with them separately? There are three main answers that I give to this question.

First, I think there are sufficient similarities for them to be treated as different aspects of the same basic question, which is: how is dialect used in fictional narratives? Furthermore, as I shall be demonstrating in the chapters that follow, some recent developments in the linguistic study of dialects, particularly in fields such as metalanguage, style-shifting and perceptual dialectology, are applicable to the fictionalized presentation of dialects in both media.

Second, I have personally found that considering them together has greatly enhanced my own understanding of dialect representation in both art forms because it has made me aware of what is and is not possible within each. At first sight, as I have suggested, it seems to be much easier for filmmakers to represent dialects then writers, because for filmmakers it is simply a case of setting up a microphone and recording the actors. This is perhaps why dialect in film has been the subject of so little analysis – it is simply too easy and too obvious. And yet, by bringing to bear some insights from the much better established tradition of studying the representation of dialect in literature, such as Ferguson's concept of 'ficto-linguistics', it becomes possible to talk about the fact that films use dialect in highly artificial and purposeful ways. At the same time, comparing film to literature has made me aware of what literature can do that film cannot. As I shall be discussing in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8, literary texts often have narrators who comment explicitly upon the dialects that can be heard, and report how other characters respond to them. One example of this can be seen in the *Small Island* extract where Hortense reports her own response to the Englishwoman's accent. Commentary of this sort allows writers to draw the reader's attention to dialect variation in ways that are much more difficult for film to achieve. This is something I had not thought about until I began working on film and literature together.

A third reason for dealing with film and literature together is that I hope that this book will be useful to teachers and lecturers teaching classes on dialect, as well as to individual readers who wish to