

Teaching How to Speak 'Correct' English in No Time: An Assessment of the 'Success' of Professor Higgins' Motivation in George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion

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Abstract : This paper examines the 'success' of George Bernard Shaw's main character Professor Higgins' motivation in teaching Eliza Doolittle, a young Cockney flower girl, how to speak 'correct' English in no time in Pygmalion. Notice should be given that Shaw in whose writings, language issues feature prominently, does not believe there is such a thing as perfectly correct English, but believes in the varieties of spoken English as a source of its richness. Indeed, along with his fellow phonetician Colonel Pickering, Henry Higgins succeeds in teaching Eliza that he first judges unfairly, the dialect of the upper classes and Received Pronunciation, to facilitate her social advancement. So, after six months of rigorous learning, Eliza's speech and manners are transformed, and she is able to pass herself off as a lady. Such is the success of Professor Higgins' motivation in linguistically transforming his learner in record time. On the other side, his motivation is unsuccessful since, by the end of the play, he cannot have Eliza he believes he has shaped to his so-called good image, for wife. So, this paper aims to show, in support of the psychological approach, that in motivation, feelings, pride and prejudice cannot be combined, and that one has not to pre-judge someone's attitude based purely on how well they speak English.

Keywords : teaching, speak, in no time, success

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