Overview

• Charles Dickens
• Context & Content of *Bleak House*
• Historical places and their significance
• Non-standard English of the character Phil Squod
• Examples & explanations for Phil’s use of substandard English (Cockney)
• Sources
Charles Dickens
07.02.1812-09.06.1870

• One of the most famous writers of the Victorian era (1837-1901)
• Lived in London for most of his life
• Influenced by rapidly social changes
  Industrialisation, growing cities
  changes in moral, religious, scientific and economic values
The Context and Content of *Bleak House*

- Novel written in 20 monthly installments between 1852-1853

- Story is built around the court case of Jarndyce & Jarndyce

  bitter and ironic critique of Chancery

  many subplots dealing with:
  - social class
  - human moral
  - women in society
Historical places and their significance

• Saffron Hill:
  – Street in London Borough of Camden
  – Home of paupers and thieves
  – Descriptions in Dicken’s *Oliver Twist*
    • Dirty, narrow and muddy
    • Filthy odours

• Hatton Garden:
  – Street & area in London
  – Centre of jewellery trade
Historical places and their significance

• **Clerkenwell:**
  – Area of central London
  – Working-class district
  – Clerkenwell Green (housing, offices, pubs, courthouse)

• **Smithfield:**
  – Area of the City of London
  – Cattle and hay market
Historical places + their significance
Non-standard English of Phil Squod

• Special function of literature
  – Position and status of characters
  – Social classification

• People using non-standard English
  → plain and simple people

• Not able to master "correct " English
  → no high level of education
Non-standard English of Phil Squod

- Not well-educated
- Working class
- Submissive + grateful to the “commander”
- Allusion to a non-open-minded person
- Feeling of security only in familiar environment
Non-standard English of Phil Squod

Cockney:

– Geographical and linguistic associations
– Brodest form of London local accent
– Used by many working-class Londoners
– Special vocabulary and usage ("rhyming slang")
“I was sent on a errand, and I see him a sittin under a old buildin with a fire all to himself *wery* comfortable,…”

Line 41-42

Confusion between [w] and [v] (a stereotype)
Phonology

- In final position voiced [g] often realised as unvoiced [k] after the velar nasal /ŋ/.

"Why, you see, commander," says Phil, "I ain't acquainted with anythink else, and I doubt if I ain't a getting too old to take to novelties."

Line 31-32
Phonology

Distinction between *a* in front of a consonant and *an* before *an* vowel is not regularly observed

"I'm something with *a* eight in it," says Phil.  Line 35
“I was sent on *a* errand, and I see him *a* sittin under
*a* old buildin‘…“  Line 41
Phonology

• Tendency for some vowels to be raised to [i]
• But here we can also trace this back to OE swilc

“…and marking myself by sich means;…” Line 66
Phonology

Lack of palatalization, e.g. /t/ for /tʃ/

“...and what with being nat’rally unfort’nate in the way of running against hot metal,...” Line 65
Syntax

Reflex of the preposition *on* (reduced to *a-* and no longer used today) to introduce the progressive

“I was sent on a errand, and I see him **a sittin** under a old buildin‘…“ Line 41

"I ain't acquainted with anythink else, and I doubt if I ain't **a getting** too old to take to novelties." Line 31-32
Syntax

Non-standard concord between subject and verb, especially with the verb to be

"I don't know where they are," says Phil; "but I see 'em, guv'ner. They was flat. And misty." Line 7

"Was you indeed, commander?" Line 12

“I warn’t like him.” Line 56
Syntax

• After verbs of saying or thinking as is used with the meaning of *that*

"N-no, I don't know **as** I do, *particular,*" says Phil. Line 29

• Adjectives are used adverbially (see above)
Syntax

• Preposition *of* is often replaced by *on*

“…I am ugly enough to be make a show *on.*”… Line 67
Morphology

• Often the third person singular {–s} is extended to other persons (esp. in narratives use)

“…poor neighbourhood, where they uses up the kettles till they’re past mending.” Line 55

“Yes” and him and me and the fire goes home to Clerkenwell together.” Line 43

“When you stops, you know,” cries Phil,… Line 70

“Would you like to come along a me, my man?” I says… Line 42
Morphology

- Some strong verbs get weak endings and for some the past tense (preterite) and past participle are the same

“…being **blowed** out of winder, case filling at the firework business;…” Line 66

“I didn’t say much to you, commander, then for I was **took** by surprise, that a person so strong and…” Line 71
Morphology

Survivals from OE come – come – come
give – give – give
The final –n of past participles often disappears
It sounds as if has or have has been forgotten

“I was able to count up to ten; and when April Fool Day come round again,…” Line 44

"I see the marshes once," says Phil, contentedly eating his breakfast. Line 3

“Drink put him in the hospital, guv’ner, and the hospital put him- in a glass-case, I have heerd,” Phil replies mysteriously. Line 50-51
Morphology

Special negation of *to be*; not only for 1st person singular

“I ain’t acquainted with anythink else, and I doubt if I ain’t a getting too old to take to novelties.” Line 31
Conclusion

• Dickens captures the social differences at that time by:

• Choosing characters from the countryside and the city of London

• Giving his characters ‘linguistic tics’ to make them real characters
Sources


• Internet sources:
  • [http://books.google.de/](http://books.google.de/)