

## The Dialect of Queen I

**Interviewer:** Sam Walter (Interviewer, Ideas Lab)

**Guest:** Dr Mel Evans

**Recorded:** 17/09/2013

**Broadcast:** 20/09/2013

**Intro VO :** Welcome to the Ideas Lab Predictor Podcast from the University of Birmingham. In each edition we hear from an expert in a different field, who gives us insider information on key trends, upcoming events, and what they think the near future holds.

**Sam:** So we're here today with Dr Mel Evans who's a Lecturer in the Department of English, here at the University of Birmingham. Hello Mel.

Mel: Hi.

**Sam:** So can you tell us a bit more about what you do here at the university?

Mel: I'm a Lecturer in English Language and my research is on language variation and change in English and how that relates to people's identities, but unlike a lot of people who work in that field who work on modern English, I tend to focus on historical periods of English, particularly the 16th Century, so the period of Shakespeare and Elizabeth I.

**Sam:** And you're here today to talk about Elizabeth I's changing language aren't you?

Mel: Indeed, yes. Some of the research I've done recently has shown that Elizabeth, when she was participating in the changes that occurred during the 16th Century, so starting to use new forms of language that we would recognise as 'standard' today, she seemed to, or she uses these new forms of language earlier than many of her contemporaries, even people working with her at the court for example during her reign. She seems to have been a leader if you like in language change.

**Sam:** So what was Elizabeth's role in shaping the English language? How was she a leader as such?

Mel: Well she was very innovative, so she seemed to have been very sensitive to new forms of the language that were emerging in different social areas. So for example as a child she started to use new forms of pronouns. So we used to have the pronouns 'ye' and 'you' which generalised so we now just use the form 'you' and she started doing this very early, from her childhood, which may reflect the fact that maybe the women around her, it was a form associated with female speakers, were using this form and she picked up on it and it became the standard form in her language and her idiolects from that point in her life onwards.

**Sam:** So how did her language change as time went on? What made her change and why did she change?

Joan: Well I mean language change over the course of a lifespan is something that happens to all of us; it's not unique to Elizabeth I, but what's interesting about Elizabeth is that her receptivity to different types of language change. So because of course she was a Queen, so she was a woman in a man's world if you like, she was exposed to different linguistic influences from both female and male domains. So in addition to say her female care givers in her childhood, you also see her using forms associated with administrative documents and language, which was obviously a male domain. So for example she starts to use single negation, so 'I did not do anything' whereas prior to that and at the time people were using multiple negation forms, 'so I did not do nothing'. So the fact that she's participating in these male domains mean that she's actually exposed to the forms so she can start to use them, which is obviously something that many female speakers were not able to do. So by inhabiting the kind of two social spheres, her language was able to – she had the opportunity for her language to evolve and change over the course of her lifetime. One thing I was interested in was whether her language would change because she became Queen, so at the point of her accession does her language become different in any way, but it's not quite as simple as that, you know, her preferences in language show similar tendencies over the course of her life but the forms themselves are sensitive to what she was doing at particular points.

**Sam:** And how is this different from what the coaches were doing before? What was their change of approach after doing the programme?

Mel: I mean I think we at least have come quite some way in terms of having coaches do some type of training. It's not always the case that coaches have had courses or what have you but it's getting better. But if you look at most of the coach education out there it primarily focuses on the xs and os. How do you teach children strategy and technique and how can you organise drills and things like that? And even when these courses referred to kids and working with children, it's quite superficial, it's like 'OK, remember they're children and you want to have children feel well and you want to have sport be fun'. Well, we can go a lot deeper than that. We've done work with parents. They're a key component of contributing to their children's motivation. We know they love their kids and they care and they want their kids to do well but how they can give these motivational messages in a more adaptive way. So yeah, it's like chipping at the base of the mountain. There's many different aspects that come to play when you talk about children's sense of self and their sense of physicality and likelihood of adopting an active lifestyle but youth sport and the environment that coaches curate are one important piece.

**Sam:** So was there any sort of anticipation of 'I will be Queen, I have to change my language', can you notice that?

Mel: She was trained to be a female elite and the emphasis during the 16th Century on the power of language and how you spoke was a direct relation to who you were inside and your mental abilities, cognitive abilities. So she knew that language was important throughout her childhood and because she became Queen, which wasn't expected when she was receiving this education, that she kind of had if you like the basis to kind of exploit the power of language specifically to do what she could do while she was Queen.

**Sam:** So we actually have a clip of – a re-enactment I must add – of a speech that Queen Elizabeth I had done, which is recorded by Hannah Perrin, with the guidance of Jose A. Perez Diez, a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Birmingham's Shakespeare Institute. Can you tell us a little bit about what this piece shows?

Mel: This was a parliamentary speech that Elizabeth delivered to her parliament in the 1580s. It's interesting because it's one of the few speeches that we have that is in her handwriting, or at least with annotations of her handwriting and in this speech she was basically trying to delay parliament and put them off in making a decision on the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, obviously quite a topic close to Elizabeth's heart given that Mary was also a Queen, like Elizabeth, and it was essentially regicide. And what's interesting about this speech is that Elizabeth uses pronouns in particular to construct a kind of identity, a powerful informed identity. So one thing that does occur when Elizabeth becomes Queen is the use of Royal 'we', which is very famous from Queen Victoria's, 'we are not amused' and she uses this in her letters and presumably in spoken conversation, not that we have that. But what she does in this speech is rather than use royal 'we', she creates a little kind of elite group of 'we princes', so she's kind of saying to her parliament 'look, I'm a prince and Mary's a prince and there's this kind of heritage and long line of princes and we're different to you and so you have to give me the time to make our choice'.

**Sam:** Brill, well let's have a listen.

**Queen Elizabeth I (read by Hannah Perrin):** "And all little enough: for we princes, I tell you, are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed. The eyes of many behold our actions; a spot is soon spied on our garments, a blemish quickly noted in our doings. It behooveth us therefore to be careful that our proceedings be just and honourable. But I must tell you one thing more: that in this late Act of Parliament you have laid an hard hand on me, that I must give direction for her death, which cannot be but most grievous and an irksome burden to me. And lest you might mistake mine absence from this Parliament (which I had almost forgotten), although there be no cause why I should willingly come amongst multitudes, for that amongst many some may be evil, yet hath it not been the doubt of any such danger or occasion that kept me from thence but only the great grief to hear this cause spoken of, especially that such a one of state and kind should need so open a declaration, and that this

ation should be so spotted with blots of disloyalty, wherein the less is my grief for that I hope the better part is mine, and those of the worse not much to be accounted of, for that in seeking my destruction they might have spoiled their own souls."

**Sam: So that's pretty stirring stuff.**

Mel: Yes, it's very nice to hear after seeing it written down and you deal with written manuscripts and then all of a sudden you get to actually hear it and you get a real sense of what it might have been like to actually be stood there whilst Elizabeth's talking at you and telling you what to do!

**Sam: So what's left to find out about Elizabeth I? What have they left to find?**

Mel: Oh there's plenty left to find. One question is about – obviously I've been dealing with letters that she wrote in her own hand, what you call autograph writings, but obviously the amount of correspondence that was issued in her name is vast and what we don't yet have a clear picture of is the relationship between Elizabeth and the workings of her secretaries and scribes. So a sense of, you know, was she stood over their shoulder saying 'write this down' or was she kind of leaving them to it. And what I hope is that some of the data and the traits that I've identified in her language will actually help us to have a better sense of her role in the authorship of these kind of letters. So that's one thing to get a better sense of the administrative system relating to Elizabeth. And another thing that I want to look at is obviously Elizabeth seems to be very unique in the period in terms of her participating in language change, particularly when she's a child, perhaps due to her education, and so what I want to look at now is to see is this actually representative of this kind of social elite group, at the Tudor heirs if you like, by looking at the language of her younger brother, Edward VI, who very conveniently has left us a diary from the late 1540s and early 1550s. So what I want to know is, you know, is Elizabeth's language unique or is it in fact kind of more of a Tudor sociolect, you know, the way of speaking because these were the future Kings and Queens of England.

**Sam: A lot to be discovered then! Well Dr Mel Evans, thank you very much for joining us today.**

Mel: Thanks for having me.

**Outro VO :** This podcast and others in the series are available on the Ideas Lab website: [www.ideaslabuk.com](http://www.ideaslabuk.com) (<http://www.ideaslabuk.com>). There's also information on the free support Ideas Lab has to offer to TV and radio producers, new media producers and journalists. The interviewer and producer for the Ideas Lab Predictor Podcast was Sam Walter.

---

[Privacy](#) | [Legal](#) | [Cookies and cookie policy](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Site map](#) | [Website feedback](#) | [Charitable information](#)

© University of Birmingham 2015

