

**Theme:** Language and social class in *My Fair Lady* / *Pygmalion*

**Source:** Extract from G.B. Shaw's screenplay (*Pygmalion*)

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*Dissolve to:*

*The study the following day.*

*Liza, in her new clothes, and feeling her inside out of step by a lunch, dinner, and breakfast of a kind to which it is unaccustomed, is seated with Higgins and the Colonel, feeling like a*  
5 *hospital out-patient at a first encounter with the doctors.*

[...]

HIGGINS. Say your alphabet.

LIZA. I know my alphabet. Do you think I know nothing? I dont need to be taught like a child.

10 HIGGINS [*thundering*] Say your alphabet.

PICKERING. Say it, Miss Doolittle. You will understand presently. Do what he tells you; and let him teach you in his own way.

LIZA. Oh well, if you put it like that -- Ah-ye-e, bey-ee, cey-ee, dey-ee --

15 HIGGINS [*with the roar of a wounded lion*] Stop. Listen to this, Pickering. This is what we pay for as elementary education. This unfortunate animal has been locked up for nine years in school at our expense to teach her to speak and read the language of Shakespear[e] and Milton. And the result is Ah-ye-e, bey-ee, cey-ee, dey-ee. [*To Eliza*] Say A, B, C, D.

LIZA [*almost in tears*] But I'm saying it. Ah-ye-e, bey-ee, cey-ee --

HIGGINS. Stop. Say a cup of tea.

20 LIZA. A cappete-ee.

HIGGINS. Put your tongue forward until it squeezes against the top of your lower teeth. Now say cup.

LIZA. C-c-c -- I cant. C-Cup.

PICKERING. Good. Splendid, Miss Doolittle.

25 HIGGINS. By Jupiter, she's done it at the first shot. Pickering: we shall make a duchess of her. [*To Liza*] Now do you think you could possibly say tea? Not te-ye-e, mind: if you ever say bey-ee, cey-ee, dey-ee again you shall be dragged around the room three times by the hair of your head. [*Fortissimo*] T, T, T, T.

30 LIZA [*weeping*] I cant hear no difference cep that it sounds more genteel-like when you say it.

### Annotations

**1** dissolve to – film editing technique where one scene "melts" or fades into another scene

**21** squeeze – press hard **25** duchess - woman with the highest social rank outside the royal family

**29** cep – except; genteel - old-fashioned - relating to a good social class

### Assignments:

1) Describe the situation and the different roles the characters play in this scene.

2) Work closely on the text to show how language helps to mark differences between the three characters.

3) In what way is Eliza comparable (or rather not) to the American actress Beth whom we got to know in a listening comprehension exercise?