

Theme 3

THE STUDY OF PHONETICS

In a preface to *Pygmalion*, Bernard Shaw wrote: “The English have no respect for their language and will not teach their children to speak it...The reformer we need most today is an energetic phonetic enthusiast: that is why I have made such a one the hero of a popular play.” This hero, **Professor Higgins**, devotes his life to the study and training of human dialects and speech patterns. The story of *Pygmalion* is based on a bet made by **Professor Higgins** to pass off a lower-class woman as a duchess after a few months of speech training.



DISCUSSION

- * What value do we place in today's society on proper grammar and pronunciation?
- * **Professor Higgins** claimed that **Eliza** would never be able to “leave the gutter” unless she learned to speak properly. Does improper speech have the same effect in modern times?
- * How have email and internet chat rooms changed the way we “speak” to each other?
- * In addition to speech, what further alterations would be necessary to convince people that a common street vendor was a duchess?
- * Actors spend considerable time on speech training, and several books have been written on the subject. Find either books or chapters from books on actor training, and practise some vocal warm-ups and exercises.