1 Standard English and standards of English

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1.1 Introduction

This book is about the plurality of standard English across the anglophone
world, hence the deliberate use of the plural in the title and of a lowercase
's' in the word 'standard'. It may be thought that there is a contradiction
here. Part of the popular conception of standard English is that it is a single
form of language. But this view refers only to the written language and even
there it is not wholly true. Across the English-speaking world there is vari-
ation in spelling, grammar and vocabulary in those forms of language which
would be regarded by their users as standard. When it comes to the spoken
word the variation among publicly used varieties of English is considerable,
from country to country or often from region to region. A pluralistic con-
ception of standard English is thus likely to be closer to linguistic reality
in the societies across the world which use English. Furthermore, the par-
ticular standard of English, whether written or spoken or both and which
applies in a given country, may be an indigenous development, albeit on
the basis of input from outside, or it may stem from an external source, in
the main from either Britain or the United States, though other sources are
identifiable in particular instances. This situation is historically the result of
colonialism by which forms of English were carried to various parts of the
world (Hickey, 2004b: 1–25). Certainly for the northern hemisphere, where
anglophone settlement began in the seventeenth century, the question of
standard English did not initially play a role. However, in the eighteenth
century conceptions of standard English began to develop in Britain which
were to dominate thinking about the public use of language in England and
all its colonies at that time. This thinking led in the course of the eighteenth
century to the codification of English in England and with that began the
standardisation of the language (Garvin 1993: 41–4).

1.2 How English was codified

Codification is a process which has historical roots. In Britain it can be
traced back at least to the eighteenth century (Hickey 2010a: 2–5) when the

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grammar of English was largely codified (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006a, 2006b, this volume) and when prescriptive norms were set down for pronunciation by authors such as Thomas Sheridan (1780; see Harder 1977) and John Walker (1791). Before that period the notion of standard was confined to the establishment of educated speech in London and the Home Counties as received usage in English society, see Holmberg (1964), Joseph (1987), Fisher (1996), Stein and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (1994), Wright (2000) and Nevalainen (2003); on pre-eighteenth-century pronunciation, see Davies (1970 [1934]).

In the United States, overt codification of English was initiated and undertaken on a lexical and orthographical level by Noah Webster (1789, 1828). In Britain the foundation for modern lexicographical work was laid by Samuel Johnson (1747, 1755). The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries then saw the planning and compilation of the monumental *Oxford English Dictionary*. In recent years there has been an increase in research into the lexical codification of English, see Brewer (2007) and the contributions in Mugglestone (2000).

The grammar of American English, in deliberate contrast to that of British English, has also been the object of research, most recently by Algeo (2006; for morphology, see pp. 9–214, and for syntax, see pp. 215–304). The historical development of American English, specifically its gradual divergence from British English in its genesis as an overseas variety of English, is treated in Schneider (2003a, 2007: 251–308).

1.2.1   *The question of 'standard' in previous centuries*

When looking at the recent history of English it is important to distinguish between the notion of 'standard' and the actual term 'standard'. The earliest reference to 'southern or standard English' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates from 1836. However, the notion of 'standard' existed before that and is essentially an eighteenth-century development. It is true that there was a fifteenth-century Chancery Standard (Fisher 1996: 36–64), but this was a register-specific variety of written English used for court and legal documents and should not be interpreted in the modern sense of standard, which is a variety propagated by education, codified in books and favoured by non-regional speakers in a society.

Standard English, in the codified sense, arose in the eighteenth century (Hickey 2010a). There are many reasons why it should have arisen then. First it should be noted that there were precursors to the eighteenth-century notion of standard. John Hart (d. 1574) in *An Orthographie of English* (1569) offered a reformed spelling of English so that 'the rude countrie Englishman' can speak the language 'as the best sort use to speak it'. George Puttenham (d. 1590) in *The Arte of English Poesie* commented that 'After a speech is fully fashioned to the common

vnderstanding, & accepted by consent of a whole countrey & nation, it is called a language.' He then stated that in his view the prime form of this language was 'the vsuall speach of the Court and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles and not much aboue'. Such comments show that, already by the end of the sixteenth century, the conception was prevalent that English was the language of the entire country of England and that its lead variety derived from the language of the established classes in the capital. About a century later, Christopher Cooper in his *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1685) stated that he regarded London speech as 'the best dialect', the 'most pure and correct'. These comments are significant as they firmly acknowledge the prestigious status of English in the capital. However, Cooper does not show the later judgemental dismissal of varieties outside of London and appears to have been tolerant of variation, consider his remark that 'Everyone pronounceth them [words] as himself pleases.'

Because of the lack of a codified standard before the eighteenth century it would appear more pertinent to talk of careful, formal usage in documents which would be later classified as written in standard English, e.g. scientific or religious texts (Claridge and Kytö 2010). However, many of the features of these formal written texts had disappeared by the eighteenth century at the latest. For instance, Claridge and Kytö (2010: 30–2) show that the oblique third-person plural pronoun *them* was found as a demonstrative in relatively formal usage of the early modern period but later does not occur in textual records of this kind.

Is it then true to maintain that demonstrative *them* was once standard English but is now no longer so? Perhaps it might be more appropriate to say that certain features of earlier formal usage were not adopted into the codified standard of British English which emerged during the eighteenth century (see below) and which was shaped by the strictures of normative grammars which were published at that time. It may of course be the case that prescriptive usage of the general educated public – and not primarily of the grammarians – led to the demise of structures such as demonstrative *them*.

1.2.2 *Deciding what belongs to the standard*

Rational arguments for what elements of early modern usage should have been adopted into the standard are not generally available, in fact the opposite is the case. The arbitrariness of what was to become standard usage can be easily recognised, consider verbs in modern English. The majority of these are regular and show the suffix *-ed* in the past, e.g. *laugh*, *laughed*. But irregular verbs in English (Anderwald 2009: 49–65; 144–6) can display up to three distinct forms for the present, preterite and past participle respectively, though many have just two and others only one.

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(1)   a.   *Verb forms in modern standard English*

	3 forms	2 forms	1 form
present	*blow*	*bring*	*cast*
preterite	*blew*	*brought*	*cast*
past participle	*blown*	*brought*	*cast*

           b.   *Verb forms in vernacular varieties of English*

	3 forms	2 forms	3 forms	2 forms
present	*see*	*see*	*do*	*do*
preterite	*saw*	*seen*	*did*	*done*
past participle	*seen*	*seen*	*done*	*done*

Today, the non-standardness of the two-form versions of the above verbs results from the syncretism of preterite and past-participle. But as the examples in (1a) show, this is accepted usage for a variety of other verbs. What may well have happened is that *seen* and *done* as preterites became associated with vernacular speech and were quite salient, given their high frequency in English. Hence they came to be excluded from formal usage and did not enter the later standard.

The widespread occurrence of two-form versions of *see* and *do* is attested by their presence in virtually all vernacular varieties of English, both in Britain and overseas. This would imply that these features have been present in colloquial forms of English for centuries but were excluded from formal usage in the eighteenth century. However, their existence on a vernacular level would explain why they have continued in non-standard varieties of English throughout the anglophone world.

1.2.3   Disputed grammatical features

When it comes to grammar one cannot find quite the same tenor of condemnation which characterises works on English pronunciation. It is true that of all eighteenth-century grammarians, Robert Lowth (1710–87) has the greatest reputation for prescriptivism in the popular and all-too-often in the academic imagination as well. His *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), rightfully or wrongfully (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2010a, 2011: 1–23), became an icon of prescriptivism from the time of its publication. But as Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade has shown, this view of Lowth is two-dimensional and a more nuanced view is called for (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2010a, 2011: 289–94).

Irrespective of the disputed accuracy of later views of Lowth, prescriptivism clearly has had a grip on English grammar since the eighteenth century. There are many prohibitions which can be traced to this time such as the following.

(i)   Double negation
           They don't want no support.

(ii)   Preposition stranding
            Something I am delighted about.
(iii)   Split infinitives
            He advised them to seriously consider the matter.

The second and third of the above features have had a precarious exist-
ence down to the present-day. Preposition stranding (Yáñez-Bouza 2008a,
2008b) is more or less the rule today, though it can still be avoided in formal
styles as can split infinitives. Double negation disappeared entirely from
standard English in the nineteenth century and is now seen as a purely dia-
lectal feature. The relegation to non-standard English is a fate which many
grammatical features experienced. For instance, double comparatives are
no longer found in standard English (Gonzalez-Diaz 2008) though they are
amply attested dialectally.

Change among grammatical constructions continued throughout the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular, structures involving
non-finite verb forms (Molencki 2003) and sentential complements (Fanego
2010) underwent subtle shifts in the past two centuries, but were not the
object of prescriptive comment in the eighteenth century.

1.2.4   The sociolinguistics of the standard

The crystallisation of 'standard English' as a concept in the eighteenth cen-
tury had at least an intellectual and a social dimension. On an intellectual
level one finds authors during the Augustan Age – the early eighteenth cen-
tury comprising the reigns of Queen Anne (1702–14) and King George I
(1714–27) – who showed a distinct concern with 'fixing' the English lan-
guage. Linguistically conservative writers, most notably Jonathan Swift
(1667–1745), were keen to stem change in English and appealed to language
use in the past. The notion of 'fixing' English is a key aspect of the emer-
ging standard, though one which does not correspond to reality, namely
immutability. Later in the eighteenth century reconciling recommendations
for the supposedly unchanging standard with the recognition that this in
itself displayed variation was a difficulty for writers like Thomas Sheridan
(1719–88) and John Walker (1732–1807). Apart from literary authors,
there were others for whom the 'fixing' of English was a practical concern.
The eighteenth century is a period in which a large number of grammars
appeared, mostly for practical purposes, i.e. for use in education, often pri-
vate education. It was also the period in which women wrote many such
works (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2010b; Percy 2010) and these grammars do
not concern themselves with variation but with imparting knowledge about
a unified form of language.

The social dimension to eighteenth-century notions of standard English
concerns attitudes to language use and the increasing concern of an incipi-
ent middle class (then termed the 'middling orders', Rogers 2002) with the

linguistic expression of their social status. This dimension is most clearly visible in the works on pronunciation from this time. As phonology is the aspect of people's speech which is most readily accessible for social assessment it was a particular concern with writers of the time. The practice of elocution acquired a new meaning, not just the art of successful public speaking and oratory, but the technique of speaking with a non-regional, quasi-standard accent (Smart 1842). A significant market for works on this topic arose in the mid eighteenth century and authors like Thomas Sheridan were responsible for both stimulating this market, by generating linguistic insecurity, and then supplying the market with works with which to alleviate this very insecurity (Hickey 2010a).

These eighteenth-century developments are central to the judgemental attitudes towards non-standard speech which arose then and which fed directly into the nineteenth-century Victorian condemnation of regional and local accents. In the words of Norman Fairclough:

> Standard English was regarded as *correct* English, and other social dialects were stigmatised not only in terms of correctness but also in terms which indirectly reflected on the lifestyles, morality and so forth of their speakers, the emergent working class of capitalised society: they were *vulgar*, *slovenly*, *low*, *barbarous*, and so forth. (Fairclough 2001: 48, emphasis in original)

A change had also taken place in both fictional and non-fictional literature. While pre-eighteenth-century references to and examples of regional and local accents in literature served an illustrative purpose, as of the eighteenth century there was a clear message that these were socially unacceptable to the established classes of English society. The opprobrium attached to non-standard accents was initially felt by those outside England, first and foremost the Irish, but also the Scots, and to a much lesser extent the Americans (Cooley 1992). However, it was quickly extended to the regions of England outside the Home Counties, the north, the south-west, etc.

Indeed, the standard became more and more characterised by its non-regional character. The divorcing of preferred public usage from regionality and local identity meant that the emerging standard was an essentially non-regional form of English. Hence favouring this incipient standard in public, educated usage meant that the regional accents were condemned accordingly: 'a strong provincial accent … destroys all idea of elegance' (Roscoe in Mugglestone 2003: 43). This notion was prevalent throughout the nineteenth century and was stated in no uncertain terms; consider the following quotation: 'It is the business of educated people to speak so that no-one may be able to tell in what county their childhood was passed' (Burrell 1891: 24).

In fact the more the standard became an instrument of social inclusion or exclusion the more it lost its geographical basis in the south-east. By the early nineteenth century the standard was being defined as a form

of speech which is characterised by the lack of just this regional basis. Consider the remarks of Benjamin Smart in *Walker Remodelled* (1836): 'The common standard dialect is that in which all marks of a particular place and residence are lost, and nothing appears to indicate any other habit of intercourse than with the well-bred and well-informed, wherever they be found.' Even clearer is the programmatic nature of works such as Smart's *A Practical Grammar of English Pronunciation* (1810), which has a long sub-title beginning 'on plain and recognized principles, calculated to assist in removing every objectionable peculiarity of utterance arising from either foreign, provincial, or vulgar habits, or from a defective use of the organs of speech'. The goal here is not far from what contemporary sociolinguists regard a 'standard' to be: 'an idea in the mind rather than a reality – a set of abstract norms to which actual usage will conform to a greater or lesser extent' (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 23).

With this notion of standard also came the idea of its inherent value. The standard was 'good' and all forms of non-standard speech were 'bad'. From then onwards remarks on standard and non-standard use of language became evaluative as many sociolinguists have remarked, e.g. 'The belief in the exist-ence of some "inherently good" variety of their language is one of the most deeply held tenets of public ideology in most Western countries. Yet a cursory inspection of the facts will reveal that these standard varieties are nothing more than the social dialect of the dominant class' (Guy 2011: 162).

1.2.5   *What was previously 'non-standard'*

Given that the term 'standard' with reference to English is a label which does not appear until the nineteenth century, is it permissible to speak of 'non-standard' before this time? This would appear justified because authors writing on matters of language and concerned with condemning usage which they saw as socially unacceptable use labels such as 'vulgar, ignorant, inaccurate, barbarous, uneducated, shameful, disgraceful' (see dis-cussion in Hickey 2010a). The forms of English which prescriptivists such as Thomas Sheridan and John Walker criticised are what would be termed 'non-standard' today. The concept of 'non-standard' usage already existed in the eighteenth century, even though this precise label was not employed.

Usage which was censured in previous centuries was usually connected with choices which speakers could make. Where variants were available more than one possibility existed for a pronunciation, word or syntactic structure. Of the existing variants one was generally regarded as preferred in public, educated usage and the other or others were stigmatised as what would now be called 'non-standard'. The only real exception to this were cases of archaic language where prescriptive authors, such as John Walker, simply recommended that more modern words be used (Hickey 2010a).

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1.2.6   *The yardstick for preferred usage*

The decisions on what variants of a variable were to be preferred were not always conscious and rarely rational, though authors such as John Walker did attempt, when making recommendations, to apply the notion of 'analogy', i.e. regularity and symmetry among similar forms and in paradigms. Well into the eighteenth century, a common yardstick of good usage was the language of 'our best authors'. The works of writers from the Augustan period (see above) were regarded as embodying the English language in an elevated form, e.g. Jonathan Swift's writings which were much admired by Robert Lowth.

The implicit notion of standard in the early eighteenth century involved the idea of a 'national' variety of English. This idea of 'national' appears already in the early eighteenth century: Richard Johnson talked of his *Grammatical Commentaries* (1706) as 'being an Apparatus to a new National Grammar'. What is being referred to here is a work which would unify usage throughout the regions of Britain and Ireland. This notion was taken up repeatedly by authors in the eighteenth century, especially those concerned with educational matters; see Thomas Sheridan's *British Education* (1756). This view of a standard as a national variety led later to the empowerment of standard English as the language of government and state and hence superior in status to all other varieties with which it might be contrasted (McColl Millar 2005, chapter on 'Language and nation-building'). There is a curious paradox here: the 'national' variety was promoted as a form of English for the whole nation, but in essence it corresponded to the speech of a small and privileged section of the population.

However, within England certain types of record did not participate in the increasingly depersonalised and factual nature of public texts. Private correspondence remained rooted in familiar usage so that letters from regional speakers show an abundance of non-standard features (Claridge and Kytö 2010). Testimonies such as those found in the depositions of *The Old Bailey Corpus* (Huber 2009) illustrate regional speech. Furthermore, in the constructed speech of literary drama there are many attestations of regional features (Culpeper and Kytö 2010).

1.2.7   *Public use of language*

The idea of a single nation and a single form of language emanating from its centre is a predominant theme in eighteenth-century writings. These are public matters and the use of language in public was an integral part of the national language complex. Hence, training for speaking in public was a concern which was addressed in print, consider, for example, the title of John Mason's *An Essay on Elocution, Or, Pronunciation intended chiefly for the Assistance of those who instruct others in the Art of Reading. And of those who are often called to speak in Publick* (1748).

The major language commentators of the time were concerned with elocution and some of them published dedicated books on the subject. Notable among these is Thomas Sheridan's *Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762) and John Walker's *Elements of Elocution* (1781). The tradition continued across the threshold to the nineteenth century with Samuel Whyte *An Introductory Essay on the Art of Reading, and Speaking in Public* (1800) and William Graham *Principles of Elocution* (1837). Indeed, one can note that in 1842 Benjamin Smart's *The Practice of Elocution* was already in its fourth edition.

It is only a small step from the effectiveness of public speech to the acceptance of its pronunciation, and with this step one reaches that concern of eighteenth-century authors which has had the most enduring effect in English society, namely a concentration more on the form of speech than on its content. First and foremost, the form of speech involved pronunciation with grammar a good second.

The shift in emphasis can be recognised by considering what authors highlight in their discussions. For instance, it is significant that Mason (1748: 6–39) in his list of points about what constitutes a bad and what a good pronunciation does not mention any social factors, such as acceptance of one's accent in public. This changes with Sheridan who a little more than a decade later, in 1762, is concerned with specifying a standard for English, a lasting concern of this author. Consider his *General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780), published towards the end of his life, of which Sheridan says that 'one main object of [the dictionary] is to establish a plain and permanent standard of pronunciation', though, as pointed out below, many of his pronouncements are about what is not part of the standard rather than what is.

1.2.8   *The divergence of sound and spelling*

It was not only the results of the Great Vowel Shift (Pyles and Algeo 1993 [1964]: 170–3) that led to a divergence between the pronunciation and spelling of English. There are a number of other developments of the early modern period which contributed to this divergence. The lowering and unrounding of short [ʊ] to [ʌ] in the STRUT lexical set and the lengthening of the vowel in the BATH lexical set can also be mentioned in this context. Many changes of this period gave rise to homophony and hence to distinctions in spelling which did not correspond to differences in pronunciation, for instance the TERM and NURSE lexical sets which merged to a rhotacised schwa which was then reduced to schwa (in south-eastern English English).

The increasingly divergent nature of writing and pronunciation was a concern which was dealt with openly. Lists of words which were spelled one way and pronounced another were published, e.g. Richard Brown, *The*

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English School Reformed (1700), which in the long subtitle specifies that the book contains *A Collection of Words that are writ one way and sounded another.* This concern is a common motif in many works on phonetics throughout the century, e.g. that by Abraham Tucker (1773), which contains a section 'English not spelt as spoken' (Tucker 1773: 3–7).

The phonological changes in English at the time led many authors to publicly campaign for a fixed form of the language in which these changes would no longer disrupt the relationship of spelling and sound. For example, Rice (1763) closes his treatise on education with an appendix in which he offers 'the sketch of a plan for establishing a Criterion, by which the Pronunciation of Languages may be ascertained; and, in particular that of the English Tongue, *reduced to a Certain fixt Standard*' (1763: 307; emphasis added, RH). This notion of fixing the language is different in motivation from that put forward by Jonathan Swift in his *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Language* (1712). While Swift wished to have the language fixed so that works of literature would be accessible to later generations, non-literary authors, such as Rice just quoted, were concerned with the practical implications of not having a fixed standard.

1.2.9   *Variation in the emerging standard*

English phonology in the eighteenth century shows a number of instances of change where co-variation existed for some time and where it was not certain which variants would be preferred in a 'fixed standard' of the language. Syllable-final /-r/ was being lost in the south-east of England (Jones 2006: 110–12, 336–44) and those writers who favoured a more conservative pronunciation or one where there was the greatest degree of correspondence between spelling and sound were uncertain about what to recommend. For instance, John Walker, who favoured a one-to-one relationship between spelling and sound, supported the use of syllable-final /-r/ while recognising that it was being lost across a broad front of English society in his day.

1.3   Effects of standardisation

1.3.1   *Linguistic insecurity*

While the novelist and travel writer Daniel Defoe could remark non-judgementally in the 1720s (Defoe 1724–7) on the attitude of the Northumbrians to features of their pronunciation, after the mid eighteenth century comments became far more critical. A vocabulary was adopted by authors on language which is condemnatory of all features which are not part of received southern English usage.

It is remarkable that 'vulgarisms' and 'provincialisms' are lampooned by commentators like Sheridan and Walker, but there is little attempt to specify