The Development of Standards of English

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English Linguistics
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John Walker (1732-1807)  Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788)  Robert Lowth (1710-1787)  Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)
English in 18th century Britain

The rise of prescriptivism and the development of the standard of English in 18th-century Britain: Dictionaries, grammars and works on elocution (the art of public speaking, later of accepted pronunciation) appeared in the second half of the 18th century. They were intended to fix the public usage of English. Some of these works are shown in the following table and more information on four of the major authors is given below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dictionary</th>
<th>Rhetorical grammar</th>
<th>Work on elocution</th>
<th>Provenance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>1755</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>1781</td>
<td>1762</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenrick</td>
<td>1773</td>
<td>1784</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker</td>
<td>1791</td>
<td>1781</td>
<td>1781</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

English writer and lexicographer. Johnson was a major critic and scholar who was known both for his brilliant conversation and the quality of his writing. As a man of letters his influence on literature in his day and later periods was considerable. His significance for linguistics lies in the fact that he compiled the first major monolingual dictionary of English, his *Dictionary of the English language* (1755), which was a model for all future lexicographers.
A DICTIONARY
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE:
in which
the words are deduced from their originals,
and
illustrated in their different significations
by
examples from the best writers,
to which are prefixed,
A HISTORY of the LANGUAGE,
and
AN ENGLISH GRAMMAR.

By SAMUEL JOHNSON, A.M.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

LONDON,
Pinted by W. Savyman,
For J. and P. Knapton; T. and T. Longman; C. Hivich and L. Hawes;
A. Millan; and R. and J. Doolity.

Ldgcly.
OATMEAL. n. s. [oat and meal.] Flower made by grinding oats.

Oatmeal and butter, outwardly applied, dry the scab on the head.

Our neighbours tell me oft, in joking talk,
Of ashes, leather, oatmeal, bran, and chalk.


OATS. n. s. [aeten, Saxon.] A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.

It is of the grass leaved tribe; the flowers have no petals, and are disposed in a loose panicle: the grain is eatable.

The meal makes tolerable good bread.

The oats have eaten the horses. Shakespeare.

It is bare mechanism, no otherwise produced than the turning of a wild oatbeard, by the insinuation of the particles of moisture.

For your lean cattle, fodder them with barley straw first, and the oat straw last. Mortimer's Husbandry.

His horse's allowance of oats and beans, was greater than the journey required.

Oat'thistle. n. s. [oat and thistle.] An herb. Swift.
1. A volume in which we read or write.
   
   See a book of prayer in his hand;
   
   True ornaments to know a holy man.
   
   Shakespeare, Richard III.
   
   Receive the sentence of the law for sins,
   
   Such as by God's book are adjudged to death.
   
   Shakespeare, Henry IV.
   
   But in the coffin that had the book, they were found as fresh
   
   as if they had been but newly written; being written on parchment
   
   and covered over with wax candles of wax.
   
   Bacon.
   
   Books are a fort of dumb teachers; they cannot answer
   
   sudden questions, or explain present doubts: this is properly the
   
   work of a living instructor.
   
   Wits.
   
   2. A particular part of a work.
   
   The first book we divide into sections; whereas the first is
   
   these chapters puff.
   
   Burnett's Theory of the Earth.
   
   The registrar in which a trader keeps an account of his debts.
   
   Gay.
   
   Is nobler than attending for a check;
   
   Prouder, than ruffling in unpaid for silk:
   
   Such gain the cap of him that makes them fine,
   
   Yet keeps his book uncorrect'd.
   
   Shakespeare, Cymbeline.
   
   4. In books.
   
   In kind remembrance.
   
   I was so much in his books, that, at his decease, he left me
   
   the lamp by which he used to light his lucubrations.
   
   Addison.
   
   
   By memory; by repetition; without reading.
   
   Sermons read they abhor in the church; but sermons without
   
   book, sermons which spend their life in their birth, and may
   
   have public audience but once.
   
   Hooker, b. v. § 21.
   
   To book. v. a. [from the noun.] To register in a book.
   
   I beseech your grace, let it be booked with the rest of this
   
   day's deeds; or I will have it in a particular ballad elix, with
   
   mine own picture on the top of it.
   
   Shakespeare, Henry IV. p. ii.
   
   He made willful murder high treason; he caused the murderers
   
   to book their men, for whom they should make answer.
   
   Davies on Ireland.

Book-keeping, n. s. [from book and keep.]

The art of keeping accounts, or recording the transactions of a man's affairs, in such a manner, that at any time he may thereby know the true state of the whole, or any part of his affairs, with clearness and expedition.

Harris.

Bookbinder, n. s. [from book and bind.]

A man whose profession it is to bind books.

Bookful. adj. [from book and full.]

Full of notions gleaned from books; crowsed with undigested knowledge.
The legacy of Samuel Johnson

Johnson’s dictionary became the standard work of English lexicography because of its range, objectivity and use of quotations from major authors to back up definitions given. It was not until over a century later that it was superseded by the dictionary which was to become the Oxford English Dictionary.
A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles

A proposal was made by Richard Trench in 1857 to the Philological Society to design a new dictionary which would serve as a definitive work on the vocabulary of English with complete historical coverage. The Scotsman James Murray (1837-1915) became the main editor (see inset on right). The first letter was published as a volume in 1888 and all the 12 vols were completed in 1928. A thirteenth supplement volume came out in 1933 (after which it was called the Oxford English Dictionary published by Oxford University Press. The twenty-volume second edition appeared in 1989 (this is also available electronically). Work on a much expanded third edition is underway at present.
Henry Watson Fowler (1858-1933) was an English lexicographer whose principal work is *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926; later revised by Sir Ernest Gowers in 1965). This is a loosely structured commentary on English usage and style. Together with his brother he also wrote *The King’s English* (1906).
Robert Lowth (1710-1787)

Author of a normative grammar *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) which achieved great popularity for the manner in which it made recommendations for grammatical usage, something which was interpreted as very prescriptive, even though this may not have been intended as such. Lowth was professor of poetry in Oxford and later bishop of Oxford and of London (as of 1777).
A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH GRAMMAR: WITH CRITICAL NOTES.


Nam ipsam Latinam loqui est ille quidem in magna laude ponendum: sed non tam sua sponte, quam quod est a plerisque neglectum. Non enim tam praelarum est scire Latinam, quam turpe nefasire; neque tam id mihi oratoris boni, quam civis Romani proprium videtur. Cicero.

LONDON,
Printed for A. MILLAR, in the Strand; and R. and J. Dodsley, in Pall-mall,
MDCLXIII.
The legacy of Robert Lowth

Lowth is perceived as the original prescriptivist in English grammar and indeed he made statements which match this perception such as the following:

‘The principle design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language; and to enable us to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not’.

He certainly promoted the concern with correctness in grammar and hence was in large degree responsible for the types of evaluative statements about people’s language which came to be common from the late 18th century onwards in the English-speaking world.
The codifiers and the English language: tracing the norms of Standard English

1. Introduction
The starting point of this project is Robert Lowth (1710–1787), Hebrew scholar, grammarian and, from 1777 onwards, Bishop of London. Lowth is credited with having written one of the most authoritative English grammars of the eighteenth century (1762) and at the same time blamed for taking a normative approach to grammar. Many prescriptive rules in English grammar are attributed to him, making him the focus of criticism from structural linguists, such as the much maligned stricture against the preposition at the end of a sentence (preposition stranding):

1. It was just the thing he had hoped for.

Lowth is even blamed for rules which he never formulated, such the one against the use of the split infinitive (see "Bishop Lowth was a fool"), as in

2. He was inclined to frequently write letters of abuse.

The rule, however, dates from the nineteenth, not the eighteenth century (Mittins et al. 1970:69–73). Both instances illustrate the extent to which Lowth is considered an icon of prescriptivism: his name has become "synonymous with prescriptive grammar" (Oxford Companion to the English Language). He is usually mentioned in one breath with Priestley (1761) and Murray (1795) (e.g. Finegan 1992:123–126). Priestley because he took a different position on the question of usage as a guiding principle for grammatical correctness, and Murray because his grammar was reprinted in several million copies sold all over the world.
Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788)

Irish writer, born in Dublin and educated in London and Dublin. He became a travelling expert on elocution. Sheridan produced *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762), *A Rhetorical Grammar of the English language* (1788) and *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780) in which he gives guidelines for the ‘correct use’ of English.
BRITISH EDUCATION:
Or, The Source of the
Disorders of GREAT BRITAIN.
BEING
An Essay towards proving, that the Immorality, Ignorance, and false Taste, which so generally prevail, are the natural and necessary Consequences of the present defective System of Education.

WITH
An Attempt to shew, that a Revival of the Art of Speaking, and the Study of our own Language, might contribute, in a great Measure, to the Cure of those Evils.

IN THREE PARTS.

I. Of the Use of these Studies to Religion, and Morality; and, to the Support of the British Constitution.
II. Their absolute Necessity in Order to refine, adorn, and fix the English Language.
III. Their Use in the Cultivation of the Imitative Arts: Shewing, that were the Study of Oratory made a necessary Branch of the Education of Youth (Poetry, Music, Painting, and Sculpture, might arrive as high a Pitch of Perfection in England, as ever they did in Athens or Rome.

By THOMAS SHERIDAN, A.M.

Hoc opus, hoc studium, parvi propteremus, et amplius,
Si volumus patriae, si nobis vivere cari. H.O.R.

LONDON:
Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-mall.

M.DCC.LVI.
A COURSE of LECTURES ON
ELOCUTION:
TOGETHER WITH
Two DISSERTATIONS on LANGUAGE;
AND
Some other TRACTS relative to those SUBJECTS.

By THOMAS SHERIDAN, A.M.

LONDON:
Printed by W. STRAHAN,
For A. MILLAR, R. and J. DODSLEY, T. DAVIES, C. HENDERSON,
J. WILKIE, and E. DILLY. M DCC LXII.
A GENERAL
DICTIONARY
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

One main Object of which is, to establish a plain and permanent
STANDARD OF PRONUNCIATION.
TO WHICH IS PREFIXED
A RHETORICAL GRAMMAR.

By THOMAS SHERIDAN, A.M.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. DODSBY, PALL-MALL; C. BILLY, IN THE POULTRY,
AND J. WILLIS, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.
MDCCCLXX.
A RHETORICAL GRAMMAR
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE.
Calculated solely for the Purposes of Teaching
PROPRIETY OF PRONUNCIATION,
AND
JUSTNESS OF DELIVERY,
IN THAT TONGUE,
BY THE
ORGANS OF SPEECH.

BY THOMAS SHERIDAN, A. M.

DUBLIN:
PRINTED FOR MESSRS. FRY, W. AND H. WHITSTEDS;
SALTER, SHIPPARD, BURKE, CROCK,
ELIN, STEWART, MILLS, WILKINSON,
BEDSHAW, FERRIN, BYRNE.
MDCCLXXXI.
3809. f. 11.
John Walker (1732-1807)

A Londoner and prescriptive author of the late 18th century, best known for his *Critical pronouncing dictionary* (1791) which enjoyed great popularity in its day and throughout the entire nineteenth century.
A RHETORICAL GRAMMAR,
OR COURSE OF LESSONS
IN
ELOCUTION.

Mira est natura vocis, cujus quidem est tribus omnino sonis
inflexo, acuto, gravi, tanta fit, et tam suavis varietas per-
fecta in cantibus. Est autem in dicendo etiam quidam
cantus.

CICERO, ORATOR.

By J. WALKER,
AUTHOR OF ELEMENTS OF ELOCUTION, &c.

LONDON,
Printed for the AUTHOR,
And Sold by G. ROBINSON, Pater-noster-Row; and
T. CADELL, in the Strand.

MDCCLXXXV.
A CRITICAL
PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY,
AND EXPOSITOR OF
THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE:
IN WHICH, NOT ONLY THE MEANING OF EVERY WORD IS CLEARLY EXPLAINED,
AND THE SOUND OF EVERY SYLLABLE DISTINGUISHINGLY SHOWN,
BUT, WHERE WOODES ARE SUBJECT TO DIFFERENT PRONUNCIATIONS,
THE AUTHORITY OF OUR BEST PRONOUNCING DICTIONARIES ARE FULLY EXHIBITED,
THE REASONS FOR EACH ARE AT LARGE DISPLAYED, AND THE
PREFERABLE PRONUNCIATION IS PRINTED OUT.

To which are prefixed,
PRINCIPLES OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION:
IN WHICH THE SOUNDS OF LETTERS, SYLLABLES, AND WORDS, ARE CRITICALLY
INVESTIGATED, AND SYSTEMATICALLY ARRANGED;
THE INFLUENCE OF THE GREEK AND LATIN ACCENT AND QUANTITY, ON THE ACCENT AND QUANTITY
OF THE ENGLISH, IS THOROUGHLY EXAMINED, AND CLEARLY DEFINED;
AND THE ANALOGIES OF THE LANGUAGE ARE SO FULLY SHOWN AS TO LAY THE FOUNDATION
OF A CONSISTENT AND RATIONAL PRONUNCIATION.

LIXINGE,
Rules to be observed by the Natives of Scotland, Ireland, and London,
for avoiding their respective peculiarities; and
DIRECTIONS TO FOREIGNERS, FOR ACHIEVING A KNOWLEDGE OF THE USE OF THIS DICTIONARY.

The whole interspersed with
OBSERVATIONS, ETYMLOGICAL, CRITICAL, AND GRAMMATICAL.

BY JOHN WALKER,
AUTHOR OF ELEMENTS OF ELOCUTION, EDIUSING DICTIONARY, &c. &c.

THE FIFTEENTH EDITION.

LONDON:
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY A. WILSON, CARDIN TOWN;
FOR T. CAMEL, AND W. DAVIES, G. WILKIE, LONGMAN, HURST, EDEMS, AND BROWN;
H. AND R. CROSBY, G. AND S. ROBINSON, CHADDE AND JOY; HIBBSWOOD;
NEELY, AND JONES; AND WALKER, EDWARDS, AND REYNOLD.

1815.
A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary,  
and Expositor of the English Language  
in which not only the meaning of every word is clearly explained, and the sound of every word distinctly shown, but, where words are subject to different pronunciations, the authorities of our best pronouncing dictionaries are fully exhibited, the reasons for each are at large displayed and the prefereable pronunciation is pointed out.  
To which are prefixed,  
PRINCIPLES OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION:  
in which the sounds of letters, syllables, and words, are critically investigated, and systematically arranged; The influence of the Greek and Latin accent and quantity, on the accent and quantity of English, is thoroughly examined, and clearly defined, and the analogies of the language are so fully shown as to lay the foundation of a consistent and rational pronunciation  
likewise,  
Rules to be observed by the Natives of Scotland, Ireland, and London, for avoiding their respective peculiarities; and  
DIRECTIONS TO FOREIGNERS, FOR ACQUIRING A KNOWLEDGE OF THE USE OF THIS DICTIONARY.
The aftermath of Sheridan and Walker:

Both were held in great esteem and their influence can be recognised in the revamping of the originals which occurred in the 50 years or so after their deaths, consider the following examples (one for each author):


The legacy of Sheridan and Walker

Did the strictures of Walker or Sheridan influence the later pronunciation of non-local British English? The answer to this question must be ‘no’. In some cases Walker, as opposed to Sheridan, favoured a form which was later to become default in English, e.g. merchant for marchant. But this did not happen because of Walker’s opinion on the matter.

In many respects, Walker was swimming against the tide of language change. His insistence on maintaining regular patterns of pronunciation across the language (his ‘analogy’) and, above all, his view that the spoken word should be close to the written word, meant that he favoured archaic pronunciations. His view that syllable-final /r/ should be pronounced was already conservative in his day. In many of his statements he does, however, accept change although he might not have agreed with it.

The legacy of both Sheridan and Walker should be seen in more general terms. Even if their individual recommendations were not accepted by standard speakers of British English, both were responsible for furthering general notions of prescriptivism. And certainly both contributed in no small way to the perennial concern with pronunciation which characterises British society to this day.
The English concern with pronunciation

Pronunciation in English is a yardstick of one’s language. More than European countries, the English judge the standardness of someone’s speech by its phonetics.

The ideal which arose during the 18th century and established itself in the 19th century was that one’s speech was not to betray where one came from, i.e. regional accents were frowned upon.
Views of the development of the English language today

(note the use of the article and the singular versus the plural in the following books)
Robert McCrum
Robert MacNeil
William Cran

The International Bestseller, with a New Introduction

THE STORY OF ENGLISH

Half A Million Copies Sold Worldwide

'A marvellous book ... for anyone who loves the English language(s) it will be a treasure-house'
Philip Pullman

David Crystal

The Stories of English
The development of modern English
A standard work (published 2004) on the late modern period (1700-present)
A more flexible view of how standard English is evolving (published 1999)
Outside the mainstream: the history of varieties of English apart from southern British English
There are many persistent misconceptions about language. This book examines a range of these and discusses them objectively.
Every language which is spoken is changing. This study looks at the ways in which standard varieties of English have been evolving in the past hundred years or so.
Beyond national borders: the idea of World Englishes

English is increasingly seen in a global context, one in which the language is divorced from its origins in England. As a result of this, notions of standard English, deriving from Britain and America, are seen as increasingly inappropriate for the non-western world.
World Englishes
The Study of New Linguistic Varieties

RAJEND MESTHRIE AND RAKESH M. BHATT

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Other introductions to World Englishes
Authority in printed form: major dictionaries of English (British and American)
thou, pers. pron., 2nd sing.

1. The pronoun by which a person (or thing) is addressed, in the nominative singular; the pronoun denoting the person (or thing) spoken to.

Thou and its cases thou, thine, thy, were in OE. used in ordinary speech; in ME. they were gradually superseded by the plural ye, you, yours, yous, in addressing a superior and (later) an equal, but were long retained in addressing an inferior. Long retained by Quakers in addressing a single person, though now less general; still in various dialects used by parents to children, and familiarly between equals, esp. intimates; in other cases considered as rude. In general English used in addressing God or Christ, also in homiletic language, and in poetry, apostrophe, and elevated prose. For details of dialect use, see Wright, *Eng. Dial. Dict., Thou II*, Eng. Dial. Gram. §404.

In ME. freq. combined with its verb when this precedes, the thy being then absorbed in the preceding t, as art thou = art thou, hasten = hast thou. The initial p also became t after s, t, or d, as hasten = hast thou, pat thou, and to: see § 8.

Beowulf 507 Eart þu se Beowulf? c825 Vesp. Psalter ix. 15 Du uphest mec of gæatum dædes. c1205 Lay. 690 Nijong þu æt al deade. Bot þu nim lace do. *ibid.* 2978 þeou [c1275 þou] æt leoercere yene mi lié. c1225 Anct. R. 240 þænce ec hwat þu owust Gode, uor his god dened. c1240 Ælfric in Cott. Hom. 199 So þu dest and so þu schalt. c1250 Gen. & Ex. 361 For þu min bod-word haues broken, þu salt bea ut in sorze luken, In swinc þu salt tilia ei mete. 1297 R. Glouc. (Rols) 0371 þou ne ssalt of pin lifode neuere carie nögt. c1300 Cursor M. 19585 (Edin.) Hauis þu [v.r. þu, þou] na parte...here. *Ibid.* 1253 (Gött.) In þat way sal þu [Cott. þou] find forsoth þi moþer. *ibid.* 8306 (Fairf.) Werrour artow [Cott. art pow] gode in fiȝt. c1391 Chaucer Astol. 1. §13 Thanne hastow a brod Rewle. c1440 Pallad. on Husb. 1. 42 The better may thouw with that water holde. 1535 Coverdale Ps. Iviv. [i.v.] 1 Thou, O God, art praised in Sion. 1592 Shakes. Rom. & Jul. 1. v. 9 Good thou, saue mee a piece of Marchpane. 1597 — 2 Hen. IV, ii. ii. 17 How many paire of Silk stockings yu haste. 1671 H. M. tr. Erasm. Colloq. 326 Why shouldest thou do so, seeing how thou was not far from thine own shore? 1715—20 Pope *Bibl.* xxii. 69 Oh thou! bold leader of the Trojan bands, And you, confederate chiefs from foreign lands! 1741 Richardson *Pamela* II. 273, I dare say thou'lt set the good Work forward. c1835 Mrs. Heman...
RANDOM HOUSE WEBSTER'S unabridged dictionary

with CD-ROM

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SPECIAL NEW-WORDS SECTION PLUS AN ESSAY ON THE GROWTH OF ENGLISH
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22,000 new words and meanings.
27,000 examples showing appropriate word usage.

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the most widely approved dictionaries for home, office and school.
Dictionaries with a different approach: ‘real English’, ‘the living language’
References (selection)


