The Development of Standards of English

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John Walker (1732-1807)  Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788)  Robert Lowth (1710-1787)  Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)
The question of a standard for English
16th and 17th century authors concerned with standard pronunciation

John Hart (d. 1574) in An orthographie of English (1569) offers 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 comments that ‘After a speach is fully fashioned to the common vnderstanding, & accepted by consent of a whole countrey & nation, it is called a language’. He then proceeds to mention that he regards the prime form of this language as ‘the vsuall speach of the Court and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles and not much aboue’.

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’, but he was quite liberal towards variation: ‘Everyone pronounceth them (words) as himself pleases’.
*The Augustan age*

The early to mid 18th century was a period during which satire flourished in England (and Ireland). The main authors are Joseph Addison (1672-1719), John Dryden (1631-1700), Alexander Pope (1688-1744), Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729) and the Irish writer Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), the latter being particularly concerned with questions of language and entertaining generally conservative views on language change. The term *Augustan* is derived from the comparison of this age to that of the Roman Emperor Augustus under whose reign Horace, Ovid and Virgil flourished, authors who the latter-day English writers also admired.
A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue

Jonathan Swift

A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue, in a Letter to the Most Honourable Robert Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, Lord High Treasurer of Great Britain, Printed from Benjamin Tooke, at the Middle Temple Gate, Fleetstreet, 1712

To the Most Honourable Robert Earl of Oxford, &c.

My Lord,

What I had the Honour of mentioning to Your Lordship some time ago in Conversation, was not a new Thought, just then started by Accident or Occasion, but the Result of long Reflection; and I have been confirmed in my Sentiments by the Opinion of some very judicious Persons, with whom I consulted. They all agreed, That noting would be of greater Use towards the Improvement of Knowledge and Politeness, than some effectual Method for Correcting, Enlarging, and Ascertaining our Language; and they think it a Work very possible to be compassed, under the Protection of a Prince, the Countenance and Encouragement of a Ministry, and the Care of Proper Persons chosen for such an Undertaking. I was glad to find Your Lordship's Answer in so different a Style, from what hath been commonly made use of on the like Occasions, for some Years past, that all such Thoughts must be deferred to a Time of Peace: A Topick which some have carried so far, that they would not have us, by any means, think of preserving our Civil or Religious Constitution, because we were engaged in a War abroad. It will be among the distinguishing Marks of your Ministry, My Lord, that you had the Genius above all such Regards, and that no reasonable Proposal for the Honour, the Advantage, or the Ornament of Your Country, however foreign to Your immediate Office was ever neglected by You. I confess, the Merit of this Candor and Condescension is very much lessened, because Your Lordship hardly leaves us room to offer our good Wishes, removing all our Difficulties, and supplying all our Wants, faster than the most visionary Projector can adjust his Schemes.
The rise of lexicography in the 18th century

The middle of the 18th century sees the rise of the novel (initially in epistolary form) and the publication of the first major lexicographical work, the monolingual dictionary *Dictionary of the English language* (1755) by Samuel Johnson which was a model for all future lexicographers. (Johnson drew on the dictionaries of Nathaniel Bailey - such as the *Universal etymological English dictionary* (1721), with some 40,000 entries, and the *Dictionarium Britanicum* (1730) - for the word list he used in his own).
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

LONDON,

MDCCCLXV.
The Rise of Prescriptivism
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.
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 ipsum Latin loqui est illud quidem in magna laude ponendum: sed non tam sua sponte, quam quod est a plerisque neglectum: Non enim tam praeclarum est scire Latin, quam turpe nescire: 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.
MDCCLXIII.
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.
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, in aid, 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 at 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 prosperius, et amplius,
Si volumus patriae, si nobis vivere charis. 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.

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. WILLIE, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.
MDCCCLXX.
A RHETORICAL GRAMMAR
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Calculated solely for the Purposes of Teaching

PROPRIOETY OF PRONUNCIATION,
AND
JUSTNESS OF DELIVERY,
IN THAT TONGUE,
BY THE
ORGANS OF SPEECH.

BY THOMAS SHERIDAN, A. M.

DUBLIN:
PRINTED FOR MESSRS. FEICE, W. AND H. WHITESTONE;
SHEPHERD, HUNTER, R. CROSS,
ELIN, STEWART, MILLS, WILKINSON,
EHSHAW, FEARIN, BYRNE.
MDCCLXXII.

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 varletas 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.
MDCCCLXXV.

John Walker 1785
A Rhetorical Grammar
or Course of Lessons in
Elocution
London
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 DISTINCTLY SHOWN,
BUT, WHERE WORDS ARE SUBJECT TO DIFFERENT PRONUNCIATIONS,
THE AUTHORITIES OF OUR BEST PRONOUNCING DICTIONARIES ARE FULLY EXHIBITED,
THE REASONS FOR WHICH 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 GENRE AND LATIN ACCENT AND QUANTITY, ON THE ACCENT AND QUANTITY
OF THE ENGLISH, IS THOROUGHLY EXAMINED, AND CLEARLY DEFINED;
AND THE ANALOGIES OF THE LANGUAGES ARE SO FULLY SHOWN AS TO LAY THE FOUNDATION
OF A CONSISTENT AND RATIONAL PRONUNCIATION.

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

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

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

THE FIFTEENTH EDITION.

LONDON:
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY A. WILSON, CAMBOY TOWN;
FOR T. CABER, AND W. DAVIES; G. WILKIE, LONGMAN, BISHH, ERSK, O'MEY, AND BROWN;
H. AND R. CROSBY; W. AND A. ROBINSON, CRADOCK AND JOY, HIBBWS, NEWELL, AND JONES; AND WALKER, EDWARDS, AND REYNOLDS.

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  
syllable 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 preferable 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 ideological aspects of standardisation and the connection between prescriptivism and the rise of the middle class and universal education are discussed in this publication.
The Oxford English Dictionary

The Oxford English Dictionary

SECOND EDITION

Clarendon Press - Oxford

Volumes I - XX

A. Bazold
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.
James Murray (1837-1915), main editor of the Oxford English Dictionary
Continued Prescriptivism in England
Self-appointed authorities on English

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).
The codification of Received Pronunciation
Daniel Jones (1881-1967)
major English phonetician of the 20th century
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.
Grammatical issues in Standard English today
Inside and outside the standard: What slipped through the prescriptivists’ net

_I see what you mean; I seen him yesterday; I’ve seen those students._

_I do my work every week; I done the work yesterday; I’ve done that task._

This type of distribution leads to spurious objections to non-standard forms: two-form verbs involve fewer distinctions and are hence sloppy, lazy, inaccurate, etc. But are they? Just look as this:

_I hit the main road at eight every morning._

_I hit the curb going around the curve._

_I’ve hit that curb before._

The same is true of other verbs like _bet, cast_, etc.
Persistent non-standard features

1) *Them* as a demonstrative pronoun

   *Them teachers are annoying.*

2) Second person plural personal pronouns

   *You* (plural) = ye, youse, yuns, y’all. Nowadays = you guys

3) Negative concord

   *We’re not going to no party. I’m not giving no money to nobody.*

4) Unmarked adverbs

   He did the work real well.

5) Double comparisons

   *That’s more worse than the first one.*
General characteristics of standard languages

Standard forms of language maintain seemingly irrational features. These make the standard more difficult to acquire, less intuitive. James and Lesley Milroy are of this opinion.

The maintenance of the third personal singular inflection in the present-tense of verbs is just such a case. Dialects of English have either dropped this inflection (East Anglia for instance) or they have re-analysed the ending and use it for a specific purpose, e.g. for an habitual – *I goes there every morning* - or have established correspondences between the inflections and the nature of the verb’s subject (Northern Subject Rule).

Despite its own ideology of immutability, even the standard continues to develop. The gradual shift of verb forms from strong to weak is a case in point. *dive : dove : dived* has been more or less replaced by *dive : dived : dived* in present-day English. Another example would be the use of a continuous form with so-called ‘psych’-verbs, e.g. *I’m wanting to go there* for *I want to go there*. 
Standards in the anglophone world
The question of codification

The two major varieties of English, British and American English are explicitly codified and there are grammars and dictionaries for both of them. In the case of the USA this is due to the following person.

Webster, Noah (1758-1843) An American lexicographer and author on language matters. His reputation as a major scholar was established with the appearance of his Grammatical Institute of the English Language (1783-85). The first part of this work, The Elementary Spelling Book, gave the impulse to an American spelling of English contrasting with British practice. His lexicographical work includes the Compendious Dictionary (1806) which was followed by his major work, The American Dictionary of the English Language (1812) which contained some 70,000 words, 12,000 of which had not been listed before. Webster revised his dictionary several times even at late as 1840.
Webster’s name is synonymous with American lexicography in the present-day United States and many dictionaries bear his name.
Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary

A Merriam-Webster

More than 150,000 entries. Over 191,000 precise definitions. 22,000 new words and meanings. 27,000 examples showing appropriate word usage.

The latest... eighth in the famous Collegiate series, the most widely approved dictionaries for home, office and school.
The question of codification (cont.)

For many varieties of English, there is an extra-national written standard of English, e.g. for Ireland vis à vis England, much as there is in Austria vis à vis Germany. But in the smaller anglophone countries there is also a covert standard, at least for pronunciation, which is based on non-vernacular, supraregional use of the country in question. Although such local standards are not usually explicitly codified, speakers are aware of what features belong to this supraregional variety and what features do not.

An important question in this context is how supraregionalisation takes place, i.e. how do some features become acceptable in a local standard and some become stigmatised and indicative of vernacular varieties. On this complex, see:

References for standards and standardisation in the anglophone world


References (selection – cont.)


Questions about Standard German in Luxemburg from an external perspective

Did codification of German take place in Luxemburg?

Was this codification overt or covert?

Was the keeping of a certain distance from standard German a recognisable goal, even though this may have been implicit?

Are the differences between Luxemburg Standard German and German Standard German to be found on all levels? Is there a split between pronunciation and grammar in this regard?
Questions about Standard German in Luxemburg from an external perspective

What kind of stigma, if any, is associated with more local features in Luxemburg Standard German (not Luxemburgish).

Is there a cline of vernacularity along which speakers can move, for colloquialisation purposes?

What kind of metalinguistic comments are available for Luxemburg Standard German in the 19th century?

Are the domains, registers and genres in which it can be used clearly recognisable?