Revisiting standardisation and variation

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1   "Standardisation" and "variation" are very familiar terms from the sociolinguistics literature (Labov 1972; Haugen 1972; Trudgill 1974; Milroy 1987 among many). But the relationship between them may be much more complex than is often assumed. The papers in this volume together challenge the notion of a simple opposition between the two concepts, by exploring aspects of English standardisation and variation in their interaction with social contexts.

1. The process of standardisation: creating a uniform language

2   According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first recorded use of the verb "standardise" occurred in the nineteenth century with the meaning of to "bring to a standard or uniform size, strength, form of proportion of ingredients or the like". When applied to language, the verb invariably refers to "the process of one variety of a language becoming widely accepted throughout the speech community as a supradialect norm – the 'best' form of the language – rated above regional and social dialects, although these may be felt to be appropriate in some domains" (Ferguson 189). The resulting norm or Standard is "a variety propagated by education, codified in books and favoured by non-regional speakers in a society" (Hickey 2), suggesting that standardisation leads inevitably to uniformity and suppression of variation.

3   The actual process of standardisation has been presented by Haugen (252) as comprising four stages:

> The four aspects of language development that we have now isolated as crucial features in taking the step from 'dialect' to language, from vernacular to standard, are as follows: (1) selection of norm, (2) codification of form, (3) elaboration of function, and (4) acceptance by the community.

4   Applied to the English language, the first stage is traditionally identified as the selection of the East Midlands dialect, due largely to economic and political factors (Nevalainen and Tieken-Boon Van Ostade 275). This East Midlands variety is said to have been spread by clerks in Chancery (Wright 5) or by the merchant class based in London (Leith 32), with scholars frequently underlining the role played by Caxton in selecting this variety for printing.[1] However, it cannot be said to have been officially selected or legally sanctioned in any way (Cheshire 14). It was then codified and regularised, through a series of grammar, spelling and pronunciation reforms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Johnson's dictionary (1755), Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), and Walker's pronouncing dictionary (1791) are among the most notable. Haugen's "elaboration stage" is exemplified by the adoption of the newly standardised language in government, education, law and the media, resulting in its acceptance by the wider community as socially prestigious and desirable. The English language is already perceived at the end of the eighteenth century as evolving towards a standard, as the preface to Walker's *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language* makes perfectly clear:

> At first composed of a horrid mixture of uncultivated conquerors, Danes, Saxons, and Normans, had introduced, mixed up with the adulterated idioms of the native British, which they had adopted – it was a speech harsh, dissonant and uncouth. Succeeding ages smoothed down and polished it; the change has become total and complete.

5   Of course, Haugen did not present his model as a linear chain of events, one stage after another, but summary histories of English have tended to conflate it with the common view of standardisation as a chronological process. The danger of portraying standardisation as a process with fixed stages is that these stages may appear to be mutually exclusive, when in fact they can co-exist and/or overlap. It also runs the risk of replicating the erroneous idea that a standard involves a transformation from a "barbaric" state of affairs to a cultured state of perfection (cf. the quotation above from Walker). In fact, standardisation is a continuous, ongoing process, for the uniformity it seeks can never be fully attained. As Milroy and Milroy (*Authority in Language* 19) point out, "the only fully standardised language is a dead language".

6   Recent scholars (such as Wright 1996) have therefore pointed out how the linear view, in ignoring the great complexity of the real picture, can be extremely misleading. We should beware of labelling an early variety as prestigious or as a standard (Hickey 2) when in reality the notion of a prestige variety is modern and the sense of "standard" has evolved. The importance of the role of Caxton's printing press in actually "fixing" the standard has also been questioned, with scholars pointing to the variation to be found in early printed works. In fact, the widespread view that print culture played an essential role in standardising the written language only took hold in the nineteenth century (Robertson 42), following "broader contemporary ambitions established in the previous century amongst modernising intellectuals and entrepreneurs of the Enlightenment for creating ordered systems to regulate habit and action" (McKitterick 166). And recent studies of codifiers such as Lowth or Johnson have shown them to be more complex characters and far more nuanced in their approach to language than their traditional portrayal as opinionated prescriptivists allowed for (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011; Mugglestone 2018).

7   Milroy and Milroy (*Authority in Language* 22) elaborate on Haugen's four-stage model with a proposal that standardisation comprises seven elements: selection, acceptance,

diffusion, maintenance, elaboration of function, codification and prescription. The selection of a variety is accompanied by its acceptance by influential people; it is then diffused both geographically and socially through channels such as official documents, the education system etc. In their model, maintenance occurs at an early stage in the process and continues through the means of elaboration, codification and prescription. Elaboration means that the variety becomes used in an ever-growing range of contexts, which in turn makes the variety more prestigious and desirable for the socially-mobile. Milroy (*Ideology of the Standard* 134) points out that such elaboration leads to a desire for uniformity:

> As the language becomes used in a greater and greater variety of functions, it becomes more and more important that a near-uniform variety should be available to fulfil all these functions. Just as the proliferation of varying coinages or weights and measures is dysfunctional, so a proliferation of different forms of the language would be highly undesirable in a society that requires widespread communications.

8 Codification (through grammars and dictionaries) and prescription (the belief that one variety is the "correct" variety) also serve to maintain the Standard. Milroy and Milroy argue that their seven elements are not "aspects" of the Standard but stages in the implementation of the Standard. They also make the important point that the stages are not necessarily sequential, and written and spoken modes do not necessarily go through the same stages at the same time. Ayres-Bennett, studying the French language in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, also rejects the idea of sequential stages. She concludes that it seems "more realistic to view (elaboration and codification) as constructs in a model which is useful to the understanding of the standardization process" (68) than temporally based stages.

9 Prescription is an important addition to Haugen's model. It reflects the need for the standard to be continually maintained or monitored by "norm authorities, norm enforcers, norm codifiers, and norm subjects, any of whom, in the case of linguistic norms, can in principle also fulfil the other roles" (Bartsch 72). Dictionaries and grammars are two means of gatekeeping, but equally important is the role of style and usage guides in enforcing the norm and maintaining the Standard (Peters 2006; Pillière 2018; Tieken 2017 and 2018). These guides provide clear advice on usage, labelling variants as either right or wrong, and they feed on the community's basic linguistic insecurity. If the ordinary language user is uncertain whether to use *it is me* or *it is I* or whether to write *alright* or *all right*, a usage guide will provide a reassuringly clear-cut answer. This may well explain their continuing popularity and the high number of new editions of works such as Fowler's *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* – first published in 1926, but now in its revised fourth edition. Little does it matter, or so it seems, that these usage guides are not written by language experts and frequently provide judgments based on personal preference.

10 The role of "norm subjects" or ordinary speakers in monitoring the language should not be underestimated. One result of codification and prescriptivist practices is to make the layperson believe that there is one correct variant and that all other linguistic forms are "illegitimate" (Milroy and Milroy *Authority in Language* 30), as we shall see in the following section.

2. Maintaining the Standard: the effects on variation

11 One result of maintaining a Standard variety is to marginalize all other varieties. Milroy and Milroy (*Authority in Language* 30) have been quick to point out that "the effect of codification and prescription has been to legitimize the norms of formal registers of standard English" and to stigmatize other varieties, labelled non-standard. The Standard thus becomes the norm against which variants and other varieties are measured. This has led to some distorted analysis of usages that conform to a variety other than the Standard variety (see Larroque this volume).

12 As the Standard variety is the choice for education, its use has become naturally associated with being educated and/or intelligent while use of other varieties is seen as indexical of a lack of education – so much so that it is commonly believed that using non-standard forms will have an adverse effect on one's professional career (Ebner 2017).

13 Recent research (Chapman 2012; Gill 2012; Tieken 2018) indicates that a certain section of the general public keeps a close eye on any variation they perceive as threatening the Standard and will stigmatize such forms quite easily. Change and variation are therefore shunned and letters to the editor abound with examples of readers giving vent to their displeasure at what they perceive to be deviations from the norm. Such reactions to variation are expressed often in "an obsessive, moralistic and alarmist manner, as if it betokened some imminent catastrophe" (Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene* 82). Cameron goes further (*When words collide* 9) to claim that judgements on language "carry the kind of *emotional* charge associated with social identities and distinctions like those of class, race and nation". Ebner (2017) draws attention to laypeople's perceptions of stigmatized variants, and underlines how quickly criticism of linguistic forms degenerates into moral criticism. Variation therefore becomes associated with deviance and, when a judgemental moral note enters the debate, users of non-standard varieties are accused of carelessness, vulgarity and slovenliness (Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene* 39; Fairclough 48). Norman Tebbit's comments made in 1985 and quoted in Cameron (94), illustrate this point well:

> If you allow standards to slip to the stage where good English is no better than bad English, where people turn up filthy at school… all these things tend to cause people to have no standards at all, and once you lose standards then there's no imperative to stay out of crime.

14 The reaction to variation or change in the established order is neither new nor confined to English. As Labov (6) remarks:

> Communities differ in the extent to which they stigmatise the newer forms of language, but I have never yet met anyone who greeted them with applause. Some older citizens welcome new music and dance, the new electronic devices and computers. But no one has ever been heard to say "it is much better than the way we talked when I was a kid".

15 Milroy and Milroy (*Authority in Language*) posit that the ideology of standardization has been maintained through the complaint tradition, in which language users grumble about the state of the language. Such complaints may hark back to a past "Golden Age" that never existed; or blame language professionals for letting standards slip; or, as in Tebbitt's remarks, identify language change as indicating a general decline in standards.

16 Arguments used against variation are not always moral. Some appeal to a need for clarity, maintaining that communication is deficient if more than one form exists. McArthur

(104), commenting on his work as editor for the journal *English Today,* quotes from a letter sent by a subscriber, George Racz:

> I am concerned with the lack of uniformity in English: Different spellings, pronunciations, constructions are heard and/or seen and there is no one [sic] who has the authority to say which is right, *inquire* or *enquire*, *dispatch* or *dispatch*, *different from* or *different to* ... Until someone is authorized to rule on these matters the language will continue to lack uniformity and one day will become unteacheable [sic].

17   The recognition of one variety as being the most prestigious in a society therefore has an adverse effect on other varieties, which in turn become labelled as non-standard. This means that the Standard variety derives its legitimacy not from "linguistic properties but from social institutions that valorize one variety as the standard and install it as a hegemonic and supposedly fixed norm" (Gal 223).

18   Recent research has moved away from simply considering the linguistic elements of the Standard variety and the process of standardisation to considering the underlying ideology. However, one should be careful not to oversimplify what is a complex issue. It is perhaps too easy to jump on the political bandwaggon. Guy (2011 162), for example, remarks that

> The belief in the existence 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.

19   Leaving aside the remark about Western countries, which is in itself arguable, we need to be wary of the kind of reasoning that equates the Standard variety with the "social dialect of the dominant class". Interestingly, Guy makes no distinction between spoken and written varieties. Most linguists argue that the Standard can only be applied to written language. Moreover, although social class and the Standard variety are linked, they are not isomorphic. This is perhaps best illustrated by the "standard" variety in pronunciation (RP) which has not only broken up into at least three variants, but is probably spoken by no more than 2% of the population and is arguably less prestigious today than it was at the turn of the twentieth century. Milroy and Milroy's statement (*Authority in* Language 19) that the Standard variety should be considered "as an idea in the mind rather than a reality" is more accurate, as a Standard variety is always an artificial, constructed variety.

20   Yet if individual speakers are only concerned with respecting the standard, how can we account for variation? Milroy (*Towards a speaker-based account* 23) reminds us that change and variation in language are brought about "by speakers, who introduce innovations which may under certain circumstances enter the linguistic system and become linguistic changes". This suggests that variation and standardisation may not be so opposed as first appears.

3. Variation: challenging the uniformity of standardisation

21   Prescriptivists who maintain that one linguistic form is more "correct" than another imply that the forms are communicatively equivalent, thus ignoring differences in register or meaning or style. Recording variation, understanding it and trying to account

for it are at the heart of sociolinguistic research, and it has long been recognised that social groupings play an important role in explaining how linguistic features vary from one speaker to another. Labov's seminal work on variation and change in different social groups shows change coming from those in intermediate groups: the upper-working class and lower-middle class. Trudgill's work on linguistic variation in Norwich reveals the same phenomenon. These findings in the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for further research in language variation that examined data from different social communities and sought to "correlate a linguistic variable with a sociolinguistic one such as gender, social class, age or education" (Hazen 10). As our understanding of the complexity of these categories grew, so too did the complexity of sociolinguistic research, which began looking at how the indexicality of language contributes to constructing identities in social networks, in communities of practice and even in the individual.

22   Notions of convergence and divergence – of how speakers vary their language to be part of the "in-group" or to distance themselves from a particular group – are key elements in communication accommodation theory (CAT) (Giles 1984; Giles, Coupland and Coupland 1991). Social groupings and variation patterns have also been analysed, notably in Milroy and Milroy (1985) in their research on social networks in Belfast, Northern Ireland. They demonstrate how speakers in a dense social network will be less likely to use variants than those in a weaker network (Milroy and Milroy 1985). Variation has also been explored in "jointly negotiated enterprises", or communities of practice. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's research, for example, aims to "encourage a view of the interaction of gender and language that roots each in the everyday social practices of particular local communities and sees them as jointly constructed in those practices" (433). Coupland takes this one step further and suggests that we should consider the individual level where style is no longer a question of group membership or dialectal variation but encompasses other elements such as terms of politeness and of self-presentation (2001 90).

4. Standardisation and variation: more than binary opposites

23   Research on variation within networks is not necessarily at odds with the process of standardization. Meyerhoff (207) argues that "systematic linguistic patterns can emerge whether speakers are grouped in larger clusters like socioeconomic classes or in smaller clusters defined in terms of contact and shared goals within a social network". Meyerhoff's remark requires further precision. Norms do indeed emerge in every community of practice or social network, although there is evidence that these speech communities are necessarily limited in size. However, once groups become larger, an artificial standard has to be established, taught/learnt and maintained if "wide" mutual intelligibility is to prevail. Norms of practice and standardisation exist within variation at every level, although they may be maintained differently. Milroy and Milroy (*Social Constraints* 76) remark that "standard language maintenance is assisted by overt institutional pressures (sometimes including explicit planning of language" whereas "nonstandard maintenance relies wholly on informal, noninstitutional and largely uncodified norm-enforcement".

24   Since standardisation is not a state but a process and uniformity is never fully achieved, the standard variety will contain its own variations, both synchronically and diachronically.

25   From a diachronic perspective, considering standardisation as a process means that the Standard variety will change over time. This is quite clear if we consider Received Pronunciation (RP) which is the Standard pronunciation of spoken English. Research on the Queen's vowels in her annual Christmas broadcast has demonstrated that there has been a marked change from the 1950s to the twenty-first century (Harrington 2007). In more recent times, the glottal stop is becoming more widely used by RP speakers – although even RP is not a uniform variety. It is a truism to state that the grammar of Shakespeare is not identical to our grammar today, but even in the twenty-first century, there are variations within the Standard as the work carried out by Leech et al. illustrates. Such variations are not only the replacement of one form by another. Leech et al. (8) point out that "syntactic change has more often been statistical in nature, with a given construction occurring throughout the period and either becoming more or less common generally or in particular registers". They note, for example, the falls in frequency of *shall* and *ought* and an increase in the use of the present progressive. Beal (*Modern Times* 2004: 78-82) reaches a similar conclusion regarding the use of progressive constructions and cites the McDonald's slogan *I'm loving it* as perhaps influential in the increase in use of structures such as *I'm liking this* or *What are you wanting* (Beal *Regional Englishes* 34). Over time, variants within the Standard variety can become legitimized (see Lukač this volume). Such changes are clearest if we look at the lexis. Fowler's *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* provides some interesting examples of such changes. Fowler (179) explains his preference for the word "fiddle" and states that "exotics like violin with accents on their last syllable should not be allowed to upset the natural run of English sentences".

26   From a synchronic perspective, there is not one Standard English in the world today and "a pluralistic conception of standard English is thus likely to be closer to linguistic societies across the world which use English" (Hickey 1). Similarly, for Bauer (3), the term "Standard Englishes" is more useful because "there is regional variation between varieties of English, each of which is recognized as a standard in its own sphere of influence". Within Standard British English, there are syntactic, lexical and phonetic variations, and even codifiers such as style and usage guides can give different advice (Pillière 2018). People's judgements on language are complex and there can be differences, for example, between how one social group evaluates a particular word form, whatever the level of social grouping. Coupland (45) rejects the idea that "social meanings for speech are principally ordered along a culturally fixed single continuum of perceived social prestige" and suggests instead that "we judge linguistic varieties on many dimensions simultaneously, and they often work against each other in complex profiles".

27   Both standardisation and variation need to be considered then not just as linguistic phenomena, but how they relate to the wider social context. For Coupland (xii) the answer is to have "a sociolinguistics of variation for people and society, as well as (not instead of) a sociolinguistics of variation for language".

28   The contributors to this issue of *E-rea* all offer fresh insights into the concepts of standardization and variation, both written and spoken. The first paper, by Elaina Frulla, takes a diachronic perspective, focusing on the work of Noah Webster (1758-1843). Recent research has revisited many of the codifiers of the eighteenth century, traditionally

labelled as "prescriptivists", and reassessed their attitude to language through that a close reading of their texts. Tieken-Boon van Ostade's study of Lowth (2006) reveals that his grammar is far from being as prescriptivist as is usually thought and that he was not responsible for the disappearance of double negation with which he is traditionally associated; Mugglestone's work on Johnson (2015; 2018) illustrates the complex interplay that exists between prescription and description in his dictionary. In her article on Webster, Frulla explores how Webster sought to achieve uniformity not only of the American spelling system but also the sounds that were connected to each letter of the alphabet. Starting with a presentation of the early dialect history of American English, Frulla discusses the koineization that resulted from dialect contact through levelling (Trudgill 1986; Kerswill 2002). North American eighteenth-century writers presumed – erroneously – that they spoke and wrote a dialect-free version of Elizabethan England that had persisted, uncorrupted, in the United States after the arrival of the colonists, while back in England these varieties had declined. However, as Frulla points out, the linguistic situation was more complex than this. The colonists had hailed from various parts of the British Isles and spoken various dialectal forms of English. The resulting *koine* was the product of the levelling that had taken place as the different dialects came into contact with each other. Second generation immigrants levelled the variety further. For the eighteenth-century writers, the *koine* was superior to the many dialects spoken back in England. It is against this background that Webster's attitude towards foreign languages or regional differences needs to be considered. The *koine* became associated with America's unity and Webster's desire for uniformity made him wary of foreign languages or regional differences that threatened to "corrupt" the language and unsettle the nation. For Webster, standardising the language was a means of unifying the nation and his attempts to do so need to be considered in the wider political context.

29   The following articles look at modern-day English and the relationship between variation and standardisation. Varieties can be social in nature but also professional and newspaper English or journalese is a well-documented variety. Florent Moncomble's article focuses on one aspect of newspaper English: headlinese. He examines the syntactic features of newspaper headlines and compares them with Standard English. After a detailed analysis of some of the linguistic features of headlines, such as the omission of obligatory constituents or the concatenation of noun phrases, all of which seem to mark a departure from Standard English, Moncomble argues that this variation from the norm actually builds on the potentialities of the Standard variety. Headlines' use of the zero article demonstrates that within the Standard variety, variation can and does exist, often designed to fit the pragmatic purposes of the speaker/writer. Headlinese illustrates how individual varieties establish their own norms, even if they are not monitored. Although idealized presentations of syntax in grammars present it as stable and uniform, headlinese demonstrates just how creative syntax can be. This creativity is of course to be found also in works of literature and E.E Cummings' violation of traditional syntax is often used to illustrate the point (Lecercle; Miller).

30   Christelle Lacassain-Lagoin's analysis of *to*-infinitive clauses used in the complementation of perception verbs in the active voice, also challenges the norms or usages to be found both in prescriptive and descriptive grammars. Both types of grammar frequently exclude structures such as "Harry hears Suzy to be saying that her flaw are genial ones" or "Did you ever observe them to argue or fight",[2] but Lacassain-Lagoin's corpus-based study demonstrates that such syntactic structures do exist and are used in the Standard

variety. Moreover, the verbs to be found in the main clause, such as *hear* or *observe*, do not necessarily undergo a semantic shift as is sometimes claimed, and still convey a meaning of sensory perception. The study thus demonstrates that grammars of Standard English do not cover all the syntactic variations to be found in the Standard variety, and also that within the Standard variety competing syntactic structures can co-exist. Whether or when such forms will be accepted by grammars, only time will tell.

31 Isabelle Gaudy-Campbell's study of *ain't* and *innit* focuses on two forms that are currently marginalized in Standard English, and considered to be non-grammmatical or non-standard, both in spoken and in written English. In 1961, *Webster's Third International Dictionary* caused a public furore when it included the following entry for *ain't* : "though disapproved by many and more common in less educated speech, used orally in most parts of the U.S. by many cultivated speakers, esp. in the phrase *ain't I*".

32 One of the adverse effects of standardisation on linguistic research is that it tends to encourage linguists to focus on the Standard variety, or, in the case of marginal forms, those which feature heavily in style and usage manuals, such as double negation. The two linguistic forms examined by Gaudy-Campbell (especially *innit*) have often been neglected by linguists (with one or two notable exceptions). Gaudy-Campbell illustrates the extreme versatility of these two forms, which are often used in texts to signal orality. She suggests that *ain't* can be used by the speaker to express modal distance, operating at a meta-discursive level, while *innit* works as a thetical, a discursive comment on what is being said.

33 Neologisms are evidence that languages change and evolve. While some neologisms may find their way into a dictionary if they are adopted by the linguistic community, others remain on the margins and may only be used the once (hence the term "nonce words"). Lexicographers from Johnson onwards have cited poets and authors as their primary source of evidence for a new word, and Brewer (2018) demonstrates that canonical literary works featured heavily in the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. There are various reasons for this bias towards literary works but, as Jean Missud demonstrates in his study on phrasal compounds, literary writers will often challenge standard morphology by creating new words and expressions. Phrasal compounds are one example of a linguistic form that rarely finds its way into a dictionary and, for some morphologists, they do not belong to the category of standard compounds. However, such forms raise interesting theoretical questions and can be used for various stylistic effects.

34 Jim Walker's article analyses mirative *only,* as in "He's only gone and done it again!". Although this use of *only* is not uncommon, especially in spoken English, it is again a linguistic form which rarely features in grammars on Standard English. Starting with the prototypical use of *only* as a restrictive adverb, Walker traces the evolution of *only* and its use as a discourse marker to express counter-expectation or undesirability. He suggests that it has undergone pragmaticalization and that it is more common in British English than in other varieties.

35 The pressure to use the prestige variety can lead language-users to hypercorrect a word form and thus inadvertently "make a mistake". One example of this is the use of *between you and I*. Another example concerns adverbs. Not all adverbs end in *–ly*; English has a number of flat adverbs, such as *fast*, whose form is identical to that of an adjective. But insecure speakers tend to add *ly* to all adverbs, even when a flat form is required such as *seldom*, *much* or *thus*. Morana Lukač's article looks at the use of *thusly* which has frequently been marginalized by usage guides such as Garner. Her survey of English

speakers and their attitude towards this form offers interesting insights into how speakers situate themselves in relation to the Standard variety. She reports on an online survey carried out in 2015 in which participants were asked to rate the word *thusly* on a six-fold acceptability scale. The results of the survey reveal that *thusly* is becoming more acceptable, especially among young Americans. This suggests that it may well become a legitimate form, and illustrates how "non-standard" forms can become Standard over time. Her article underlines that linguistic forms are not Standard *per se*; it is how they are perceived by the linguistic community that makes them "standard". People's judgements on language are complex and Lukač's study shows that there can be differences, for example, between how two age groups evaluate a particular word form. This is also true of other features of Standard English such as accent. Coupland (45) rejects the idea that "social meanings for speech are principally ordered along a culturally fixed single continuum of perceived social prestige" and suggests instead that "we judge linguistic varieties on many dimensions simultaneously, and they often work against each other in complex profiles".

36   In his article, Patrice Larroque underlines the difference between Standard English and the linguistic forms which are actually used by people. Analysing forms which appear to be "linguistic irregularities", such as double negation, he shows that these forms are in fact common and his article shows once again that the notion of a grammatical norm or standard depends on social parameters and values.

37   Works of fiction frequently feature non-standard forms. They can be used to give an authentic feel to dialogue or to create character (Hodson 2014). As such, non-standard forms are literary devices and not "true" representations of dialects or oral varieties. Michael Percillier's article presents the findings from a corpus created at the University of Strasbourg as part of a project entitled "The representations of oral varieties of language in the literature of the English-speaking world". The project sought to compare literary representations of dialects with actual varieties, but also to contrast and compare the representation of non-standard forms in literary texts from various parts of the world. Percillier presents a quantative analysis of texts from Southeast Asia, West Africa and Scotland, and shows that, although the non-standard forms used in these very different regions have some points in common, they also follow clearly distinct patterns. Scottish texts, such as works by Kelman, rely heavily on phonology to introduce non-standard forms, while Southeast Asian texts use code-switching features and West African texts introduce non-standard forms through grammatical differences. Although such findings would need to be confirmed by a larger corpus they do indicate some interesting tendencies which may vary over time if the socio-political context changes. Percillier suggests that the *Speak Good English Movement* in Singapore could well influence the representation of non-standard forms in Singaporean literary works.

38   The final article in this issue, by Joan Beal, revisits the dichotomy between descriptivism and prescriptivism. Prescriptivism is traditionally associated with enforcing the Standard variety, with legitimizing the "norms of formal registers of standard English" (Milroy and Milroy, *Authority in Language* 30) and "becomes more intense after the language undergoes *codification...* because speakers then have access to dictionaries and grammar-books, which they regard as authorities (Milroy and Milroy, *Authority in Language* 22). The two terms, prescriptivism and descriptivism, have long been considered as a binary opposition, although more recently scholars have underlined that this is yet another oversimplification (Curzan 2014; Pillière et al. 2018; Halpern 1997; Pinker 2012). Starting

with the definitions of the two terms in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* Beal goes on to look at the definition of *grammar* and to compare and contrast descriptive and prescriptive grammars, underlining the deep gulf that exists between "language pundits" on the one hand, and linguistics experts on the other. At first, it appeared that the influence of descriptive grammar on teaching was becoming more influential in the 1980s, but this trend was short-lived and the introduction of compulsory spelling, punctuation and grammar tests for all eleven-year-old school children in state schools in England and Wales "turned the grammatical clock back fifty years" (Crystal quoted in Beal). Beal argues that prescriptivism is very much alive in the twenty-first century and suggests that linguists need to engage with issues of language and education.

Conclusion

39   All the cases discussed in this special issue arise from social perceptions of variation and standard as two sides of the same coin. Together they provide a range of fascinating studies of disparate "transgressions" of norms. From venerable, familiar shibboleths like *ain't* to innovative extensions such as *to*-clauses after perception verbs; from change brought about by hypercorrection, as is shown for *thusly,* to natural evolutions such as mirative *only.* The studies are put into sociopolitical context by the opening and closing papers, which make clear the consequences, past and present, of institutional pressures for language attitudes, and indeed for the way both sociolinguists and laypeople, in their different ways, conceive of variation and standardisation.

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NOTES

1. See for example Fennell 125 and Baugh and Cable 182. Fennell claims that "Caxton probably did more to standardize English in his time than any other individual".
2. Examples borrowed from Lacassain-Lagoin (see this issue).

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