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Spoken English and Standard English

TEACHERS' STANDARDS

A teacher must:

3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge

- have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject, and address misunderstandings
- demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship
- demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject

4. Plan and teach well structured lessons

- impart knowledge and develop understanding through effective use of lesson time
- promote a love of learning and children's intellectual curiosity
- contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject area(s).

8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities

- take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development

Curriculum context

National Curriculum programmes of study

This knowledge is designed to underpin the teaching of the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 programmes of study for English, which state, for example, that children should:

- be introduced to some of the main features of spoken Standard English and be taught to use them;
- understand how word order affects meaning.

Children should learn to speak competently and creatively for different purposes and audiences, reflecting on impact and response. They should learn to explain and comment on speakers' use of language, including vocabulary, grammar and non-verbal features.

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Learning Goals specify that, by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children should:

- Enjoy listening to and using spoken and written language, and readily turn to it in their play and learning.
- Extend their vocabulary, exploring the meanings and sounds of new words.
- Speak clearly and audibly with confidence and control and show awareness of the listener.

Introduction

English is one of the most widely spoken and written languages in the world. It is estimated that there are 300 million native speakers and 300 million who use English as a second language, while a further 100 million use it as a foreign language. It is the language of science, aviation, computing, diplomacy and tourism. It is listed as the official or co-official language of 45 countries. Chinese may be spoken by more people, but English is probably the language used for the widest variety of purposes.

It is not surprising, then, that English is a large and flexible language. There are probably between a million and two million words, not including the half a million abbreviations in English. An educated English speaker may have a vocabulary of 50,000 or so active words and half as many again that are understood without being regularly produced. Becoming a successful speaker of English is not simply about knowing the words and how to pronounce them. It also involves knowing the wide range of rules governing the way words and phrases are ordered into spoken discourse as well as the conventions that govern the ways varieties of English differ to include linguistic differences of region, class, gender, formality and relationship.

This chapter considers what Standard English is and the main types of language variation you will deal with as a teacher.

Standard English

There is no 'Standard' for English like the 'standard' metre or gram – something against which all English can be measured and corrected. Standard English is a particular variety of English which, although most educated adults recognise and use it, is difficult to define. Standard English is largely a matter of using certain grammar, vocabulary and, when written, spelling. It can be spoken in most English accents and does not have a correct pronunciation.

REFLECTIVE TASK

Which sentences are Standard English? How do you know?

They were just over here.

I did not do it.

I've never been here.

They was there a minute ago.

I ain't never been here.

I never done it.

As a fluent Standard English user you may find the answers to this activity easy, but also find that explaining your answers demands reflection on language, and vocabulary about language that you do not use every day.

Standard English is a form of English that carries prestige within a language group (people in Britain, in this case) and so it is the form of English usually learnt by foreigners and used by most people in formal, business and political situations. This form of English is a 'standard' in that the prestige of Standard English is recognised by the adults in the language community and so it has become an educational target. In Britain we aim for all children to be able to use Standard English in their writing and in appropriate speaking situations. Not to be able to do so would certainly be a disadvantage in modern life and people unable to do so would be liable to be considered poorly educated by their peers.

Despite the near universal recognition of Standard English as a powerful variant of English that all children should learn and the fact that Standard English is very widely understood, very few people actually speak only Standard English. For most of us a mixture of Standard English and a regional variety of English is used for much of the time. Spoken Standard English is likely to be used in situations where clarity and near universal understanding are required – reading the television news is an obvious example. Teachers need to be able to use, and model the use of, Standard English to their children. The most common occurrence of Standard English is in writing and so it is not surprising that, for many of us, newsreaders sound as though they are ‘speaking in writing’.

Finally, it is important to point out that there are a number of ‘Standard’ varieties of English. English has become an international language in that it has an unprecedented worldwide presence. Yet it has also been adopted as the language of a number of countries. Because it has been used in different countries, each country has reached agreement over language issues so that the language reflects the identity of that country. As a result there is not one ‘correct’ Standard world English, but different Standard English varieties in different English-speaking countries. You have only to look at the language section of your word processor to be offered Standard British English, Indian English, Australian, New Zealand, American and Canadian English spelling and grammar checkers. All these Standard English variants have slightly different vocabularies, rules governing grammar and conventions of punctuation. In this book, and in teaching in UK schools, we are dealing with Standard British English, although many people say that there is also a Standard Scots English.

Although we aim to offer all children access to Standard English, there are important types of language variation that teachers and children need to learn about. These affect the ways we speak and write, as well as the nature of the language.

Historical variation

One way that English varies is over time. English has a long and complicated history (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5), which partly accounts for the complexity of the language. As a living language it is constantly changing to accommodate new situations. This means that Standard British English gradually invents, borrows or changes words, phrases and expressions, grammatical rules and conventions of punctuation.

In terms of grammar, there are broadly agreed grammatical rules and conventions that make Standard English understandable and relatively stable. For example:

- It is usual for the subject and verb in a sentence to agree.

They were, NOT they was
He is, NOT he are

- There are complicated spelling and grammatical conventions about the formation of past tense verb forms.

I fell, NOT I falled
She stopped, NOT she stoped
I did, NOT I done
I have done, NOT I have did

However, there are always some ‘grey areas’ where standard usage is changing.

REFLECTIVE TASK

Which of these sentences seem like appropriate usage to you? Which do not, and why?

It was something I couldn't put up with.

I wanted to quickly leave.

I did not understand the relevance of it.

An example of change in grammatical usage is the use of the split infinitive. Less than 50 years ago many people felt that the infinitive form of a verb ('to go', 'to be' etc.) should not be split. Today, however, most people have accepted the use of phrases such as 'to quickly leave', while 'to boldly go' must be the most famous split infinitive in the world. This sort of change is evident in every aspect of English. The words of English change. New words are invented or borrowed and meanings change. Some words and expressions have changed in our lifetime. (This topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.)

PEDAGOGICAL LINK

Children need to be able to use morphology and etymology to spell new and unfamiliar words. Dictionaries contain more than just definitions – they include information on word class, formation and origin. All primary teachers need to become familiar with a really good dictionary such as *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, which gives some information about word origins. The *Oxford English Dictionary* contains all the information about a word you could need and is now available online.

PRACTICAL TASK

Think of some modern equivalents of these words, phrases and expressions:

wireless

LP

parlour

charabanc

spooning

vexed

How have these words and expressions changed meaning?

He is a sad little man.

presently

regular

gay

Here are some words from a 1990 *Dictionary of New Words*. Which ones remain part of Standard usage and which ones don't? Why? How long do you think they will remain?

mad cow disease

skorts

bumbag

bimboy

diffuser

fatwah

cardboard city

In order that children can use knowledge of word structure and origins to develop their understanding of word meanings, they need to study and collect new words.

It is not only spoken Standard English that changes. In recent years new conventions have entered written English. Fifteen years ago few people used bullet points to punctuate lists of sentences, phrases or words but bullet points are now a Standard written convention. The dash to signal parenthesis or an afterthought in writing has become a very common usage

and is accepted in Standard English. These changes raise the question of who decides what is correct usage in Standard English? The answer is not simple. At root, usage that is generally accepted as appropriate by the language group is correct – in this case, the British public. It can be difficult to decide whether something is accepted appropriate usage, especially when the English language is changing so quickly. It is important for teachers to maintain awareness of language usage in society, on television and radio, in newspapers, books and online and to keep in mind the goal of clarity of expression. However, this underlines that there can never be an absolute statement of correct Standard English – the aim is appropriate use of English.

Regional variation

Standard English has the features of a dialect in that it uses particular words and grammatical forms. However, unlike most dialects it does not tell us where the speaker comes from. Many regional varieties of English tell us about the speaker's origins in terms of geography or class. There are two main elements of regional variation: accent and dialect.

A **dialect** is a variety of English that includes particular words and grammatical rules that indicate the origins of the speaker. In UK schools one of the most obvious examples of word variation is the word for shoes worn for PE. Do you call them daps (south west and Wales), plimsolls (south east), pumps (midlands), sandshoes (north east) or even rubbashoes (Gibraltar)? There are many other dialect words you might use and linguists have researched and recorded the distribution and change of dialect words. As a teacher, it is important to know local dialect terms that children might use appropriately in speech, if not in all types of writing.

Each dialect may also have a consistent, but often non-Standard, grammar. For instance, although Standard English uses the third person plural of the verb to be ('were') and demands that it agree with the third person pronoun ('we were'), in some dialects 'we was' is consistently used. The sentence 'I ain't never been there' is identifiably not Standard English because of the formation of 'have not' and the double negative. In Standard English the sentence would be 'I have never been there'. However, in parts of north London, this is a popular dialect usage.

The dialect (or language) primarily used at home by young children is very important for a number of reasons. It is the language variety through which they have learnt about the world and their place in it. It is also the language variety that marks them out as part of the social group of their home community. For these reasons it is important to recognise that non-Standard dialects have an important role in children's lives and are not simply 'wrong' use of words and grammar. At the same time it is also vital to teach children both how to use Standard English and when it is appropriate to use it. Very young children will begin to use Standard English in school discussions and structured play. As schooling progresses children will be taught to consider critically what they speak and write and to correct Standard English in writing and, when appropriate, in speech.

Study of direct speech in children's literature is one way in which children can study the differences between dialect and Standard English.

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Children need to be able to identify how talk varies with age, familiarity, gender and purpose and how it varies between formal and informal occasions. This involves both listening to speakers and study of children's books and plays that include direct speech.

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Here is an extract from *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. It is the story of Mary, an orphan who is brought up in her Grandfather's house in Yorkshire.

For two or three minutes he stood looking around him, while Mary watched him, and then he began to walk about softly, even more lightly than Mary had walked the first time she had found herself inside the four walls. His eyes seemed to be taking in everything – the grey trees with the grey creepers climbing over them and hanging from their branches, the tangle on the wall and among the grass, the evergreen alcoves with the stone seats and tall flower urns standing in them.

'I never thought I'd see this place,' he said at last in a whisper.

'Did you know about it?' asked Mary.

She had spoken aloud and he made a sign to her.

'We must talk low,' he said, 'or someone'll hear us an' wonder what's to do in here.'

'Oh! I forgot!' said Mary, feeling frightened and putting her hand quickly against her mouth. 'Did you know about the garden?' she asked again when she had recovered herself.

Dickon nodded.

'Martha told me there was one as no one ever went inside,' he answered. 'Us used to wonder what it was like.'

He stopped and looked around at the lovely grey tangle about him and his round eyes looked queerly happy.

'Eh! The nests as'll be here come springtime,' he said. 'It'd be th' safest nestin' place in England. No one ever comin' near an' tangles o' trees an' roses to build in. I wonder all th' birds on th' moor don't build here.'

Note down the grammatical and lexical features which indicate Dickon is speaking in a regional dialect, using Standard English as a reference point. What is the effect of using this dialect in the passage?

Another feature of geographical and social variation in spoken English is **accent**. This is represented in the passage above through spelling and punctuation. Standard English can be spoken in the whole range of regional accents and there is no Standard accent. A particular type of accent, which has been called 'BBC' or 'The Queen's English', is widely recognised by foreign learners of English. This accent is known by linguists as RP, or 'received pronunciation'. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this accent developed as the accent spoken by those who 'were received in society'. However, in recent years the incidence of RP has declined and now few people speak in an RP accent, with even most RP speakers including a number of regionally identifiable sounds. It is important to recognise that, although most regional dialects are spoken in a regional accent, Standard English can be spoken perfectly clearly in a regional accent.

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This is a transcript of a conversation with two twelve-year-old African-Caribbean girls and illustrates the West Yorkshire dialect. The girls were born and live in Yorkshire but follow certain aspects of Rastafarian culture, like beaded hair, which come into conflict with school rules.

Marilyn *They (teachers) used to say we couldn't wear (beads in our hair) before.*

Charleen *Yeah, 'cos last – when my sister were in this school, right, 'er friend wore beads in 'er hair, and one of t'teachers told 'er to tek 'em out, and she said no, she 'adn't to tek 'em out, so she (teacher) just got 'er hair and just took 'em out, and she (girl) just put 'em back in.*

VG *But now they let you wear them do they?*

Marilyn *They don't say owt to me.*

(from *Adolescent Girls and Their Friends*, Vivienne Griffiths, 1995, p45)

This passage contains some dialect words (e.g. 'owt' – anything) as well as some characteristic grammatical structures (e.g. 'my sister were') and abbreviations. Now try to find some other examples.

The very prejudice with which people treat accents in Britain suggests it is an important issue. In market research surveys, accents are frequently rated in terms of popularity, with Scots accents and Newcastle accents often rated as 'warm and trustworthy' and RP rated as 'intelligent and cold'. This is pure prejudice – accents may indicate a person's social or geographical origins but do not indicate anything about their intellectual ability or personality. Accent, like dialect, can be an important part of a person's social identity. It is important for teachers to teach children to speak clearly and use Standard English. It is not appropriate or necessary to change a child's home accent.

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'We've fallen on our feet and no mistake,' said Peter. 'This is going to be perfectly splendid. That old chap will let us do anything we like.'

'I think he's an old dear,' said Susan.

'Oh come off it!' said Edmund, who was tired and pretending not to be tired, which always made him bad-tempered, 'Don't go on talking like that.'

'Like what?' said Susan; 'and anyway, it's time you were in bed.'

'Trying to talk like Mother,' said Edmund. 'And who are you to say when I should go to bed? Go to bed yourself.'

(from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis, 1950, p10)

Although the passage is written in Standard English, there are indications of the period when it was written and the class background of the children. What are these? Find some other examples in the text that help to date this extract.

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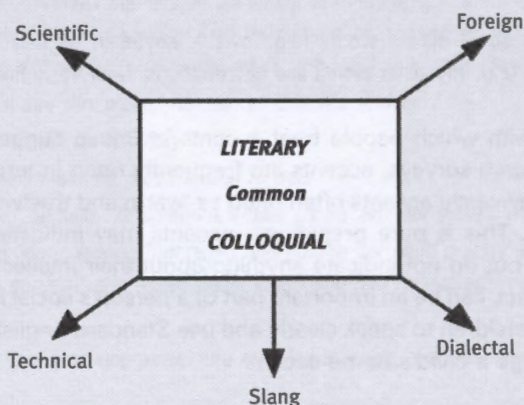
Children should be able to listen for language variation and identify **how** it varies, including accents. This involves study of children's books and plays that include direct speech. Accents may also be a feature of drama work in speaking and listening and children may find audio clips useful.

Individual variation

The way we speak English depends not only on which accents and dialects we have access to, but also on the social situation in which we are speaking. The term **language register** has been used to describe the way speakers (or writers) use different words and grammatical formations depending on the situation.

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This diagram was originally used by James Murray to introduce the first volume of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1888). It describes the way word choice varies in a number of situations. Some linguists dispute the differences between common and colloquial vocabulary, since many colloquial words become common.



When we speak (or write) in any situation the language we use reflects a number of things: the degree of familiarity between the speaker and listener, the social situation of school, work, home, etc. and the formality of the situation.

We use certain words and expressions for formal situations and completely different ones for informal situations. The classroom is a relatively formal situation. A teacher might say 'Please, be quiet!' to a child, but that child might simply say to a friend 'Shuddup, you!' without any intention of rudeness or malice. The difference between the utterances is the relationship between the speaker and listener. Children learn the unwritten rules of vocabulary selection for the classroom easily, but may need to consider and discuss their choice of words in less familiar contexts.

PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK

There are many ways to say that someone has died, or is dead. How many can you list?
Choose words or phrases to suit these situations:

1. A lawyer discussing a client who has died, leaving a will to be administered.
2. An undertaker talking to bereaved relatives.
3. A newsreader reporting a major flood disaster in a distant country.
4. A man telling a friend about the death of a local person some 20 years ago.
5. A comedian making a joke.

It is not only word choice that varies according to the situation. We also use grammatical structures differently.

This is a discussion between two seven-year-old boys finishing their work in school:

You done it?

No. Hang on.

You what? She'll do you.

Nearly done it. Not long.

Get on with it! Come on!

OK, OK keep your hair on, bro.

I got to go. Can't wait, sorry.

What evidence can you identify that tells you:

- that this is informal conversation?
- that the discussion was spoken, not written?
- that the children knew each other well?

In speech we tend only to use complete sentences when we speak in quite formal settings or where a person is not well known to us. This is partly to do with the level of clear, explicit information we need to put into speech. In informal conversation about a very familiar topic, speakers can actually leave out a great deal of detail and some expression that is conveyed through gesture or is already known to both speakers. When we speak (or write) to someone we do not know well or when a speaker needs to be very precise in a formal situation, full sentences with explicit detail become useful. Informal conversation tends to consist of linked clauses or phrases, often with sentence elements implied or left out. This is why it can be difficult to transcribe speech.

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Below is an extract from *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe*, by Penelope Lively (1975). Two boys are talking about a notice they have seen, purporting to be from 'Thos. Kempe Esq. Sorcerer':

'There!' said James, with a mixture of triumph and despair. 'There! Now do you believe me?'

Simon took his glasses off, scrubbed round them with his fingers and read the notice for a second time.

'Well,' he said cautiously.

'Well what?'

'Somebody could have put it there.'

'Such as who?'

'I don't know.'

'Such as me, perhaps?' said James in a freezing voice.

'No. Not you. You've been with me all morning ...'

'He just wants things done like they were in his time,' said James. 'With him doing them. And me helping.'

'Oh,' said Simon. 'I see.' He sounded polite. Too polite.

James said, 'You don't believe he's a ghost, do you?'

'I didn't say I didn't.'

'But you don't.'

'I kind of half do and half don't,' said Simon with great honesty. 'I do when I'm with you but I think if I was by myself I wouldn't.'

What has the author used to replace the facial expression and actions between the two characters?

What does the passage tell you about the relationship between the two characters?

PEDAGOGICAL LINK PEDAGOGICAL LINK PEDAGOGICAL LINK PEDAGOGICAL LINK

Children need opportunities to talk in a range of situations, including in groups, to the whole class and in drama. Some group discussion activities (such as circle time or debates) are used to teach children about the conventions of turn-taking. Others such as a child instructing a partner how to build a model that cannot be seen are designed to teach children to be precise and explicit in speech. In these ways and by discussing how to talk effectively, children can learn to use talk flexibly.

It is not only the words and grammar of speech that change depending on the situation. The very volume and pace we use for speech and the degree to which we prepare what we say depends on the purpose and audience for that speech. However, this is not to suggest there are no rules. When speaking in a formal situation a speaker would try to use clear, well-thought-out language at a volume everyone could hear. In discussion with a few friends a speaker might produce a tentative idea, rephrase it several times and use pauses and 'ums'.

In conversation there is a clear turn-taking structure that speakers must follow if their contributions are to be acceptable and there are appropriate levels of acceptable interruption. In class we teach children that if they are chosen to speak to the whole class their contribution will generally be listened to in full, but in a tentative discussion about a group task children are likely to interrupt one another repeatedly, finish one another's utterances and talk at the same time.

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With a partner, choose one formal and one informal conversation to role play, as though you are on the telephone:

Informal

- asking a friend to a party (pub or club)
- talking to someone in your family

Formal

- making a doctor's appointment
- making a complaint about a faulty washing machine (car, television)

Compare the way you speak in the two situations in terms of:

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| ● vocabulary | ● grammatical structures |
| ● length of utterance | ● acceptable interruptions |

How would these utterances change if you were not on the telephone, and why?

PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK

Here are some language autobiographies. You may find it useful to read them and think about language variation in these cases.

Maggie took A-levels and then went on to a B.Ed. course, specialising in maths.

I was born in Jersey and spent the first few years of my life there. My grandma spoke Jersey French (a French patois) which my Mum and Dad understood but didn't really speak. Once my Nan wrote some down for me and I took it proudly to school. The teacher took one look and said, 'That's not proper French.'

I took quite a long time to learn to speak, which, looking back, may have been something to do with being hearing impaired. But this wasn't diagnosed until I was at college. My Mum and Dad knew something wasn't right, but they didn't want to acknowledge it. Now they say things like, 'When you were little, if you went on ahead and we called you, you didn't turn round.' But at the time they didn't do anything about it.

When I was seven we moved to Cornwall. I had a bit of a Jersey accent which I wasn't really aware of at the time. I always remember the first day I was in the playground, a girl came up to me and said, 'Don't worry. We'll soon teach you how to talk properly.' I used to call my Granddad 'Papa' which was the Jersey way – and obviously came from the French – but the other children thought that was odd so I soon learnt to say 'Granddad' instead when I was at school. Also I remember one of my favourite things to eat as a child was Jersey pudding – made from flour, milk and suet basically – you eat it with gravy. People used to say, 'There's no such thing as Jersey pudding! Don't you mean Yorkshire pudding?'

Later when I went to grammar school we moved from rural Cornwall to Essex and I went to Nellswood School for Girls [*said in a 'posh' voice*]. This was quite a big change too and I felt very aware of being different. Maybe it was because of this – and my hearing impairment – but I found it difficult to put words together and I never had the confidence to speak in groups, something which I still find hard today.

1. What impact do you think the teacher's reaction to the Jersey French had on Maggie?
2. How did Maggie's hearing impairment affect her language development and her confidence as a speaker? Discuss the possible effects of the late diagnosis.
3. Look at the points when Maggie moved, first to Cornwall and then to Essex. How did these moves affect her language identity and self-esteem?

Jon took a degree in biology, then a PGCE, specialising in science.

I grew up in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. Eastwood's a peculiar place. It's on the Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire border so it has a dialect that's neither one nor the other but a meld of the two. It's where D.H. Lawrence grew up, and the English side of my family is connected: my grandfather ran a pub that's in one of Lawrence's books. My mother's family is firmly rooted in the area. My father, who's Polish, was stationed in Hucknall nearby during the war. He was originally going to Canada, but he met my mother at a dance, married and stayed, so the family's firmly embedded.

Some elements of my family were racist. I remember arguments over family tea about my father, how he couldn't speak English properly. We were subject to racist attacks – windows broken – and I was assaulted several times on the way home from school. Nottingham had a large Polish community, which tended to cluster round certain places, so my father had some Polish friends.

There was a Polish school on Saturday mornings. I wanted to go to it, but my grandmother, who was the matriarch of the family, said it would be more useful for me to go to music school than Polish school. So I grew up with very little knowledge of Polish, no conversational Polish except a few words: 'Jen dobre' (hello), 'badso' (my friend), 'dai bugie' (give us a kiss), and 'Jadek' (grandfather) and 'Babja' (grandma) which my children call my parents to distinguish them from their other grandparents.

I had a very strong sense of belonging to a time-warped community. There was a joke about Eastwood: everywhere else had mods and rockers in the '60s, but they didn't take hold in Eastwood till 1975. It was a small, insulated mining community, with just the pit (mine). I grew up in an odd atmosphere, but adopted the Eastwood dialect. It's a very broad dialect, with lots of important words. I spoke it all the time. For example, you'd say, 'Eh oop sorry, 'owta gooin' on?' The response is, 'Middlin', middlin'.' 'Sorry' means 'my dear', or we'd sometimes say, 'me duck' (pronounced 'dook'). I had very little exposure to 'outside', mainly through visits to a Polish family. They'd either speak Polish, which was a closed book, or converse in more Standardised English than I was used to. When I left college and came to Sussex, after two to three years people would say to me, 'You come from Birmingham.' After three or four years away I had a London accent. I couldn't maintain the Eastwood dialect as people wouldn't understand me. But given two weeks' immersion I'd be in it again.

Lawrence's dialect is his Standardised version, but watered down to a degree so it's accessible. The only time I've seen it written down as I remember it is a poem which was in the *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*. It encapsulated my roots in terms of language.

1. How does Jon convey the sense that Eastwood was a closed community?
2. How do you think this affected his language development?
3. What attitudes did his mother's family and the community have to Jon's father being Polish and how were these expressed?
4. Look at the dialect in one of D.H. Lawrence's novels (e.g. Mr Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, or Mellors the gamekeeper in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*) and try to identify some of its main characteristics, bearing in mind what Jon says about it being 'watered down'.

A SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- > **Standard English is a powerful, flexible and useful variety of English, which all speakers and writers should be able to use. This does not mean that other language varieties will cease to be used or should be penalised.**
- > **Spoken English is affected by historical, regional and personal variation. This is why it is so flexible.**
- > **Accent is the way words are pronounced. Dialect is the grammar and vocabulary of the language.**
- > **It is important to teach children not only how to speak and write Standard English but also when Standard English usage is appropriate.**
- > **Speaking and listening about texts as part of English teaching, discussion in group and class activities and drama all have a part to play in learning to use Standard English and other dialects. However, such learning also involves explicit discussion of the rules covering Standard English, as well as of dialects and accents.**

- > In practice, issues such as dialect and formality can only really be discussed when children have knowledge of Standard English as a reference point and are able to discuss and reflect on their own language.

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You might like to think about your own language biography. Do you speak Standard English or are there any regional variations in the way you speak? (You would be very unusual if your natural way of speaking was entirely Standard!)

If there are non-Standard features in your speech, what do you think you should do about this? There are some possibilities you might think about, which can be illustrated by some examples.

1. One teacher found that her class did not at first understand the word 'pumps' that she used to refer to the shoes the children wore for PE. Rather than change her word, she taught the children that this was an interesting feature of her speech. They quickly got to understand the word and saw their teacher as a more interesting person because of this slight language difference.
2. Another teacher found that her class naturally used the construction 'we was going'. In her dialect (which she had deliberately suppressed in favour of the Standard English variant), she would have said 'we were going' but also 'I were going'. By contrasting these usages she was able to raise her children's awareness of Standard and local English.

FURTHER READING FURTHER READING FURTHER READING FURTHER READING

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