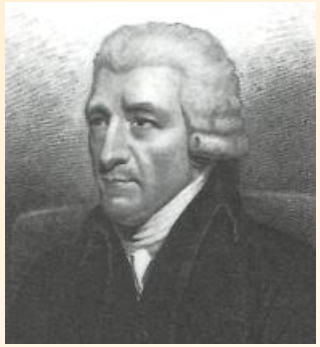
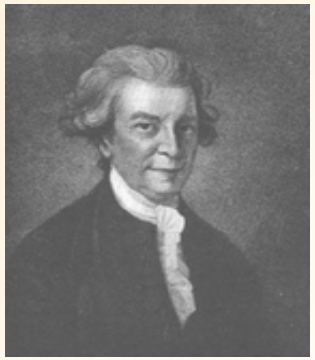
The Rise of Standard English

Raymond Hickey, University of Duisburg and Essen



John Walker (1732-1807)



Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788)

Robert Lowth (1710-1787)

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

Structure of talk

- Background to the language concerns of the 18th century.
- The main authors in 18th century language studies.
- The extent to which these authors effected notions of standards afterwards, i.e. their legacy.
- The “Standard English” debate today.

Early references to the speech of London as the emerging standard

The language of the court in London came to be perceived in the late 16th and 17th centuries as a guideline for speakers from the provinces. Initially, this is a very benign type of prescript-ivism without the censure of provincial forms which was to develop in the 18th century.

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'.

Concerns about changing English

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.

1667-1745

Dictionaries of English

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

English writer and lexicographer. Johnson was a major critic and scholar who was known both for his brilliant conversation and the quality of his writing. As a man of letters his influence on literature in his day and later periods was considerable. His significance for linguistics lies in the fact that he compiled the first major monolingual dictionary of English, his *Dictionary of the English language* (1755), which was a model for all future lexicographers.

A

DICTIONARY

OF THE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE:

IN WHICH

The WORDS are deduced from their ORIGINALS,

AND

ILLUSTRATED in their DIFFERENT SIGNIFICATIONS

BY

EXAMPLES from the beſt WRITERS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED,

A HISTORY of the LANGUAGE,

AND

AN ENGLISH GRAMMAR.

BY SAMUEL JOHNSON, A.M.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

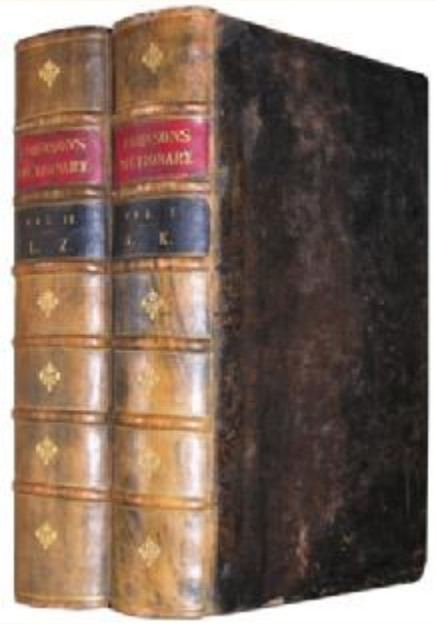
Hor.

LONDON,

Printed by W. STRAHAN,

For J. and P. KNAPTON; T. and T. LONGMAN; C. HITCH and L. HAWES;
A. MILLAR, and R. and J. DODSLEY.

MDCCLV.



OA'TMEAL. *n. ſ.* [*oat* and *meal.*] Flower made by grinding oats.

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

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

OA'TMEAL. *n. ſ.* An herb. *Ainſworth.*

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

It is of the graſs leaved tribe; the flowers have no petals, and are diſpoſed in a looſe panicle: the grain is eatable. The meal makes tolerable good bread. *Miller.*

The *oats* have eaten the horſes. *Shakeſpeare.*

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

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

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

OA'TTHISTLE. *n. ſ.* [*oat* and *thiſtle.*] An herb. *Ainſ.*

An ill-bred boatman, rough as waves and wind. *Prior.*

Young maſter next muſt riſe to fill him wine,
And ſtarve himſelf to ſee the *booby* dine. *King.*

BOOK. *n. ſ.* [boc, Sax. ſuppoſed from *boc*, a beech; becauſe they wrote on beechen boards, as *liber* in Latin, from the rind of a tree.]

1. A volume in which we read or write.

See a *book* of prayer in his hand;
True ornaments to know a holy man. *Shakeſp. Richard* III.

Receive the ſentence of the law for ſins,
Such as by God's *book* are adjudg'd to death.
Shakeſp. Henry IV.

But in the coffin that had the *books*, they were found as freſh as if they had been but newly written; being written on parchment, and covered over with watch candles of wax. *Bacon.*

Books are a ſort of dumb teachers; they cannot anſwer ſudden queſtions, or explain preſent doubts: this is properly the work of a living inſtructor. *Watts.*

2. A particular part of a work.

The firſt *book* we divide into ſections; whereof the firſt is theſe chapters paſt. *Burnet's Theory of the Earth.*

3. The regiſter in which a trader keeps an account of his debts.

This life
Is nobler than attending for a check;
Prouder, than ruſtling in unpaid for ſilk:
Such gain the cap of him that makes them fine,
Yet keeps his *book* uncroſs'd. *Shakeſp. Cymbeline.*

4. *In books.* In kind remembrance.

I was ſo much *in his books*, that, at his deceaſe, he left me the lamp by which he uſed to write his lucubrations. *Addiſon.*

5. *Without book.* By memory; by repetition; without reading.

Sermons read they abhor in the church; but ſermons *without book*, ſermons which ſpend their life in their birth, and may have publick audience but once. *Hooker, b.* v. § 21.

To BOOK. *v. a.* [from the noun.] To regiſter in a book.

I beſeech your grace, let it be *booked* with the reſt of this day's deeds; or I will have it in a particular ballad elſe, with mine own picture on the top of it. *Shakeſp. Henry* IV. *p.* ii.

He made wilful murder high treaſon; he cauſed the marchers to *book* their men, for whom they ſhould make anſwer. *Davies on Ireland.*

BOOK-KEEPING. *n. ſ.* [from *book* and *keep.*] The art of keeping accounts, or recording the tranſactions of a man's affairs, in ſuch a manner, that at any time he may thereby know the true ſtate of the whole, or any part, of his affairs, with clearneſs and expedition. *Harris.*

BO'OKBINDER. *n. ſ.* [from *book* and *bind.*] A man whoſe profeſſion it is to bind books.

BO'OKFUL. *adj.* [from *book* and *full.*] Full of notions gleaned from books; crouded with undigeſted knowledge.

The

PREFACE.

IT is the fate of those who toil at the lowest employments of life, to be rather driven by the fear of evil, than attracted by the prospect of good; to be exposed to censure, without hope of praise; to be disgraced by miscarriage, or punished for neglect, where success would have been without applause, and diligence without reward.

Among these unhappy mortals is the writer of dictionaries; whom mankind have considered, not as the pupil, but the slave of science, the pioneer of literature, destined only to remove rubbish and clear obstructions from the paths of Learning and Genius, who press forward to conquest and glory, without bestowing a smile on the humble drudge that facilitates their progress. Every other author may aspire to praise; the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach, and even this negative recompence has been yet granted to very few.

I have, notwithstanding this discouragement, attempted a dictionary of the *English* language, which, while it was employed in the cultivation of every species of literature, has itself been hitherto neglected, suffered to spread, under the direction of chance, into wild exuberance, resigned to the tyranny of time and fashion, and exposed to the corruptions of ignorance, and caprices of innovation.

I have ... attempted a dictionary of the English language, which, while it was employed in the cultivation of every species of literature, has itself been hitherto neglected, suffered to spread, under the direction of chance, into wild exuberance, resigned to the tyranny of time and fashion, and exposed to the corruptions of ignorance, and caprices of innovation.

When I took the first survey of my undertaking, I found our speech copious without order, and energetick without rules: wherever I turned my view, there was perplexity to be disentangled, and confusion to be regulated; choice was to be made out of boundless variety, without any established principle of selection; adulterations were to be detected, without a settled test of purity; and modes of expression to be rejected or received, without the suffrages of any writers of classical reputation or acknowledged authority.

Having therefore no assistance but from general grammar, I applied myself to the perusal of our writers; and noting whatever might be of use to ascertain or illustrate any word or phrase, accumulated in time the materials of a dictionary, which, by degrees, I reduced to method, establishing to myself, in the progress of the work, such rules as experience and analogy suggested to me; experience, which practice and observation were continually increasing, and analogy, which, though in some words obscure, was evident in others.

15

THE PLAN OF A DICCIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE:

Addressed to the Right Honourable

PHILIP DORMER, Earl of CHESTERFIELD,

One of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State.

MY LORD,

WHEN first I undertook to write an English Dictionary, I had no expectation of any higher patronage than that of the proprietors of the copy, nor prospect of any other advantage than the price of my labour. I knew, that the work in which I engaged is generally considered as drudgery for the blind, as the proper toil of artless industry, a task that requires neither the light of learning, nor the activity of genius, but may be successfully performed without any higher quality than that of bearing heedless with dull patience, and beating the track of the alphabet with sluggish resolution.

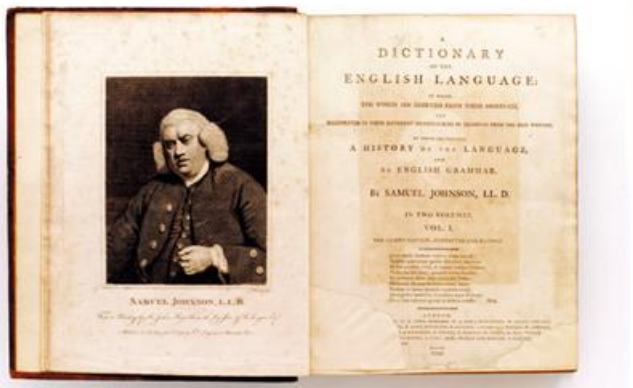
WHETHER this opinion, so long transmitted and so widely propagated, had its beginning from truth and nature, or from accident and prejudice, whether it be decreed by the authority of reason, or the tyranny of ignorance, that of all the candidates for literary praise, the unhappy lexicographer holds the lowest place, neither vanity nor interest incited me to enquire. It appeared that the province allotted me was of all the regions of learning generally confessed to be the least delightful, that it was believed to produce neither fruits nor flowers, and that after a long and laborious cultivation, not even the barren laurel had been found upon it.

YET on this province, my Lord, I entered with the pleasing hope, that as it was low, it likewise would be safe. I was drawn forward with the prospect of employment, which, tho' not splendid, would be useful, and which tho' it could not make my life envied, would keep it innocent, which would awaken no passion, engage me in no contention, nor throw in my way any temptation to disturb the quiet of others by censure, or my own by flattery.

I HAD read indeed of times, in which princes and statesmen thought it part of their honour to promote the improvement of their native tongues, and in which dictionaries were written under the protection of greatness. To the patrons of such undertakings, I willingly paid the homage of believing that they, who were thus solicitous for the perpetuity of their language, had reason to expect that their actions would be celebrated by posterity, and that the eloquence which they promoted would be employed in their praise. But I considered such acts of beneficence as prodigies, recorded rather to raise wonder than expectation, and content with the terms that I had stipulated, had not suffered my imagination to flatter me with any other encouragement, when I found that my design had been thought by your Lordship of importance sufficient to attract your favour.

Of all the candidates for literary praise, the unhappy lexicographer holds the lowest place.... It appeared that the province allotted me was of all the regions of learning generally confessed to be the least delightful, that it was believed to produce neither fruits nor flowers, and that after a long and laborious cultivation, not even the barren laurel had been found upon it.

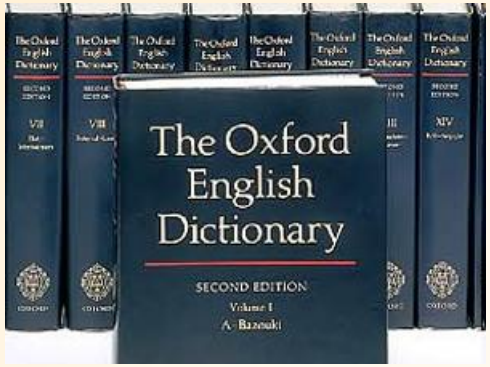
365



The legacy of Samuel Johnson

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

A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles



A proposal was made by Richard Trench in 1857 to the Philological Society to design a new dictionary which would serve as a definitive work on the vocabulary of English with complete historical coverage. The Scotsman James Murray (1837-1915) became the main editor (see inset on right). The first letter was published as a volume in 1888 and all the 12 vols were completed in 1928. A thirteenth supplement volume came out in 1933 (after which it was called the *Oxford English Dictionary* published by Oxford University Press. The twenty-volume second edition appeared in 1989 (this is also available electronically). Work on a much expanded third edition is underway at present.

Grammars of English

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.

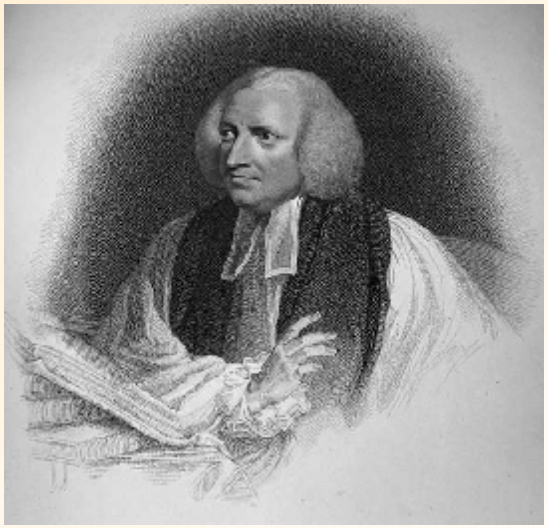
THE SECOND EDITION, CORRECTED.

Nam ipſum *Latine* loqui eſt illud quidem in magna laude ponendum: ſed non tam ſua ſponte, quam quod eſt a pleriſque neglectum. Non enim tam præclarum eſt ſcire *Latine*, 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.

Some of Lowth's strictures

1) Use *whom* as the oblique form of *who* is proscribed:

Whom do men say, that I am?

2) Do not use double negation:

She cannot love, Nor take no shape nor project of affection.
*(*Shakespeare, *Much ado about nothing).*

3) Double comparatives and superlatives are not allowed:

*His more braver daughter (*Shakespeare, *Tempest).*

4) These verbs have three forms, not two:
do: did: done; see : saw : seen

Some of Lowth's strictures (cont.)

5) Prepositions should be put before a relative in written style:

Horace is an author, with whom I am much delighted.

Note: These strictures are arbitrary, based on Lowth's personal preferences and with linguistic justification. However, he was aware that certain forms, like *thou*, or structures, like *for to be seen*, were obsolete at his time.

In addition, Lowth contrasts what he calls the 'solemn or elevated Style' with 'common conversation', for instance, when discussing the common occurrence of prepositions in sentence-final position.

Universiteit Leiden

LUCL
Linguistics in Leiden

- Home
- People
- Information
- Events
- M.Phil and PhD
- PhD Defences
- Working Papers
- **Projects**
- Intranet

The codifiers and the English language: tracing the norms of Standard English

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

English in 18th century Britain

To recap: the rise of prescriptivism and the development of a standard of English in Britain is an 18th-century development: dictionaries and grammars were appeared and used by the public.

There were also works on elocution (the art of public speaking, later of accepted pronunciation) which were published in the second half of the 18th century. They were intended to fix the public usage of English, especially pronunciation. These works were even more prescriptive and led to the general condemnation of dialects as vulgar and unacceptable in English polite society.

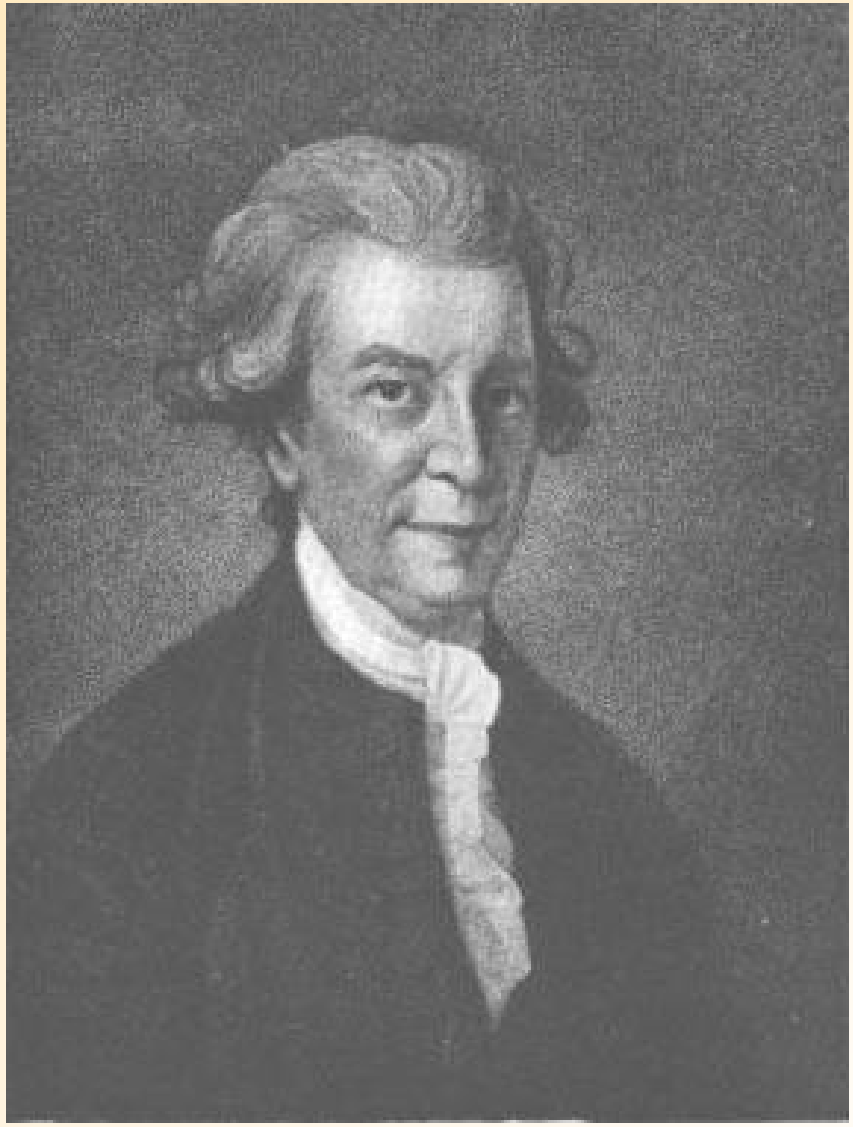
	Dictionary	Rhetorical grammar	Work on elocution	Provenance
Johnson	1755	– – –	– – –	London
Sheridan	1780	1781	1762	Ireland
Kenrick	1773	1784	– – –	Scotland
Walker	1791	1781	1781	London

Johnson, Samuel 1747. *The plan of a dictionary of the English language*. London.
1755. *A dictionary of the English language*. London.

Sheridan, Thomas 1762. *A Course of Lectures on Elocution*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.
1780. *A General Dictionary of the English Language. 2 vols*. Menston: The Scolar Press.
1781. *A Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language*. Dublin: Price.

Kenrick, William 1773. *A new dictionary of the English language*. London: John and Francis Rivington.
1784. *A Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language*. London: Cadell and Longman.

Walker, John 1781. *Elements of Elocution*. London.
1785. *A Rhetorical Grammar or Course of Lessons in Elocution*. London.
1791. *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language*. Menston: The Scolar Press.



Sheridan, Thomas (1719-1788) Irish writer, born in Dublin and educated in London and Dublin. He was first an actor and is the author of a farce *The Brave Irishman*; *or Captain O'Blunder* (1743; published 1754).

Later 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.

THOMAS SHERIDAN OF SMOCK-ALLEY

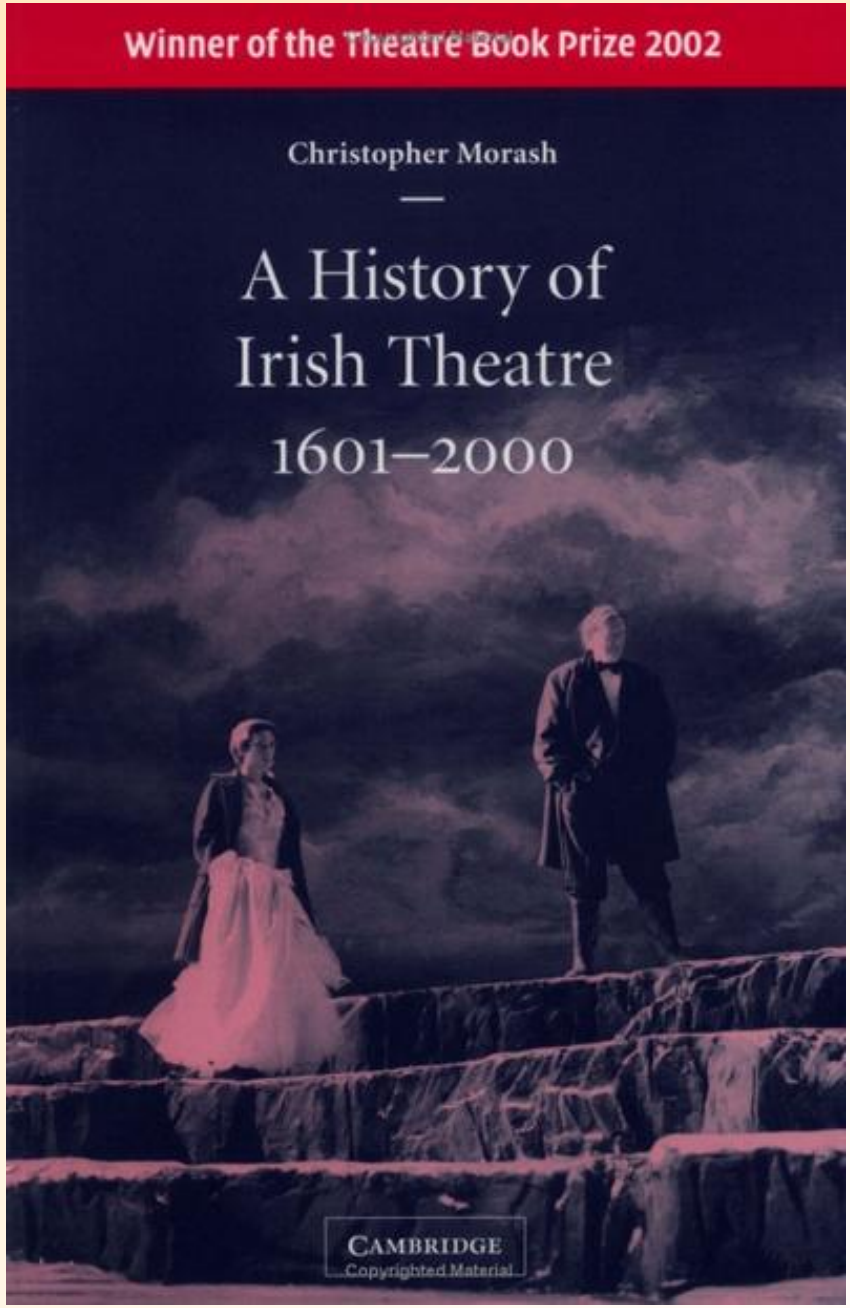
recording his life as actor and theater manager in both Dublin and London; and including

A SMOCK-ALLEY CALENDAR

for the years of his management.

BY ESTHER K. SHELDON

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY
1967



Richard Brinsley Sheridan

(1751-1816)

Playright and son of

Thomas Sheridan

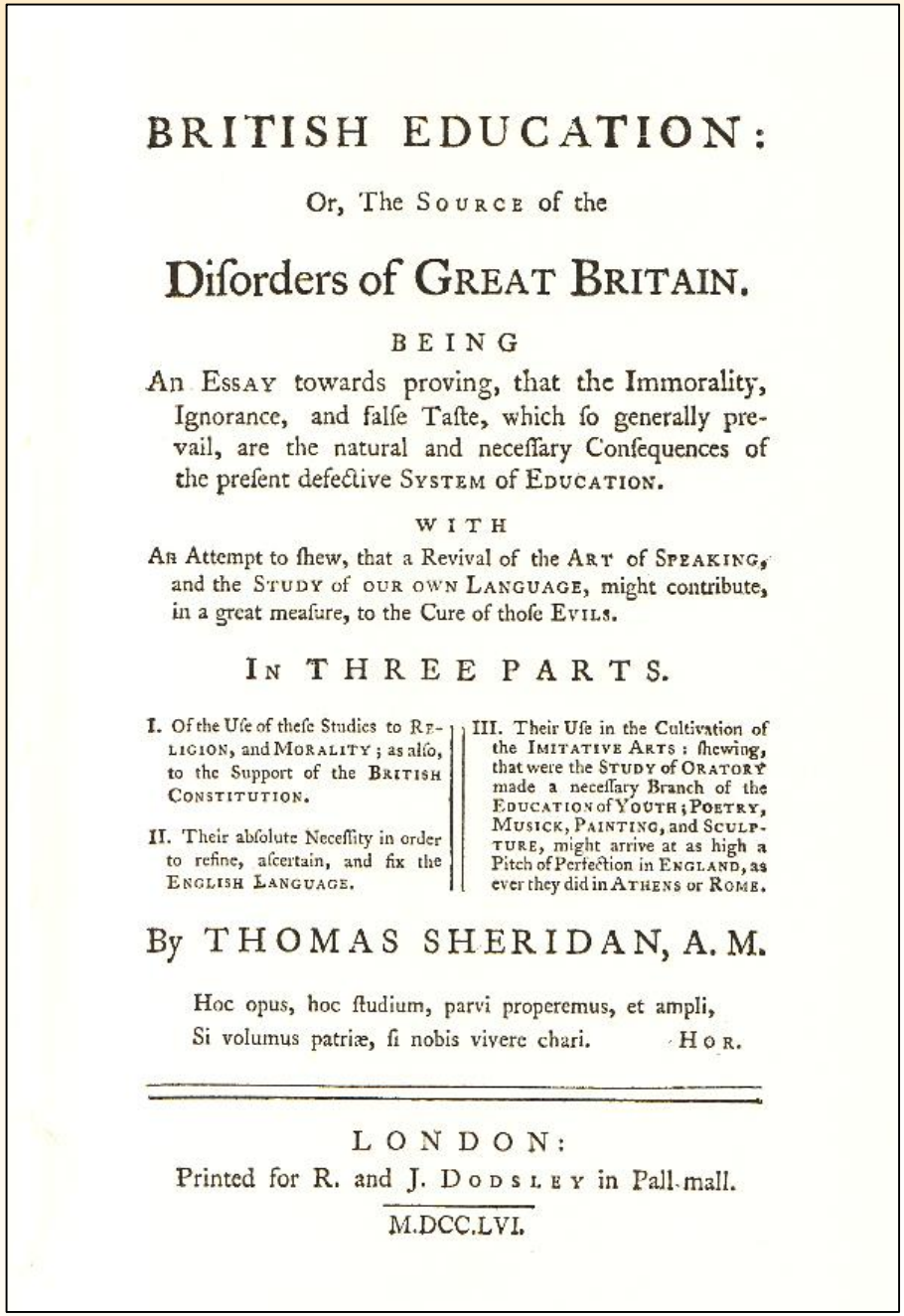
(1719-1788)

Complaining about the state of affairs, here of education and public speaking

Sheridan was firmly rooted in the ‘complaint tradition’ of English writing and lamented the state of British education in his day.

But he was also a manipulator who generated linguistic insecurity among his readers then offered relief in his many prescriptive regulations.

This type of strategy can be found among prescriptivists to this very day.



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; as alſo, to the Support of the BRITISH CONSTITUTION.

II. Their abſolute Neceſſity in order to refine, aſcertain, and fix the ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

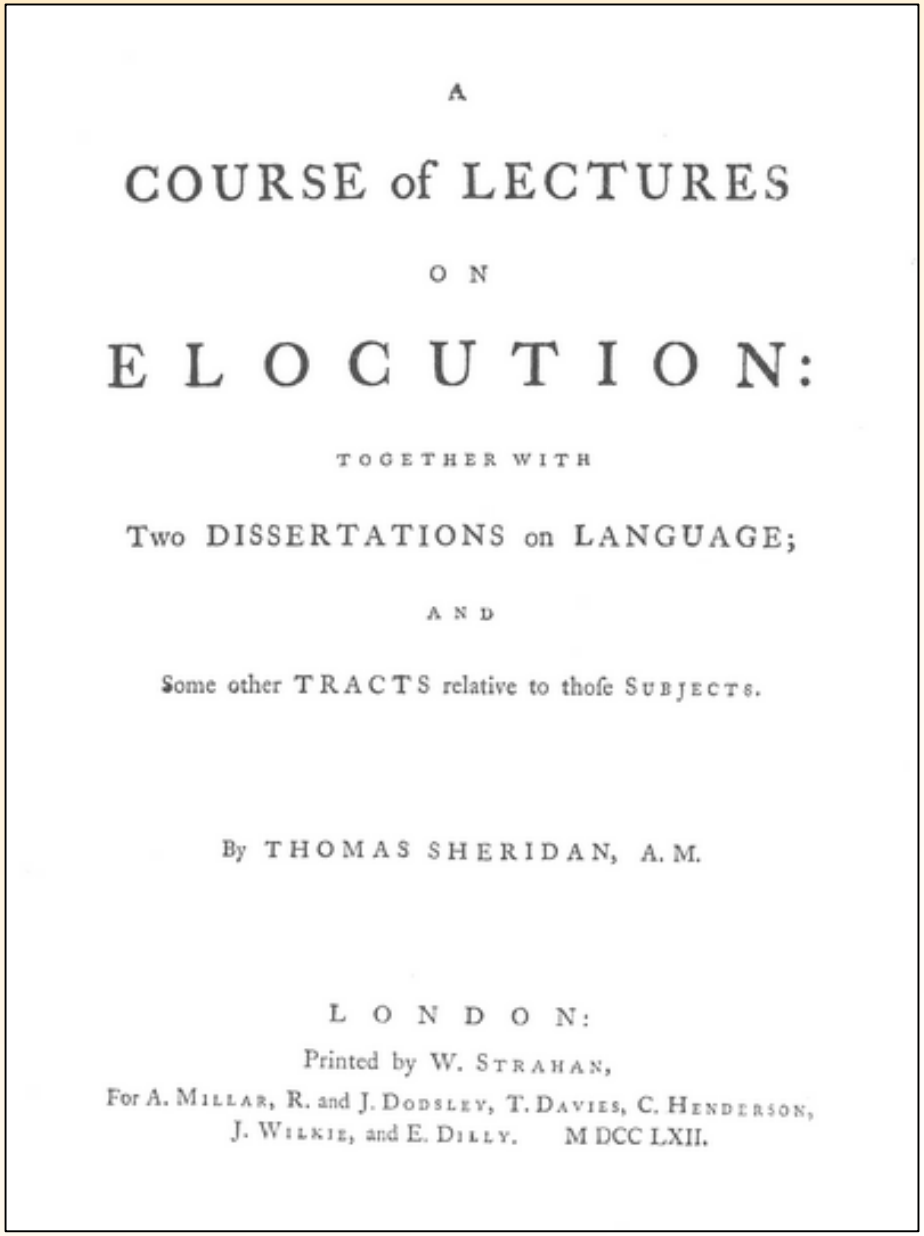
III. Their Uſe in the Cultivation of the IMITATIVE ARTS: ſhewing, that were the STUDY of ORATORY made a neceſſary Branch of the EDUCATION of YOUTH; POETRY, MUSICK, PAINTING, and SCULPTURE, might arrive at as high a Pitch of Perfection in ENGLAND, as ever they did in ATHENS or ROME.

By THOMAS SHERIDAN, A. M.

Hoc opus, hoc ſtudium, parvi properemus, et ampli,
Si volumus patriæ, ſi nobis vivere chari. HOR.

LONDON:
Printed for R. and J. DODSLEY in Pall-mall.
M.DCC.LVI.

Sheridan *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762)



A

COURSE of LECTURES

ON

ELOCUTION:

TOGETHER WITH

Two DISSERTATIONS on LANGUAGE;

AND

Some other TRACTS relative to thoſe SUBJECTS.

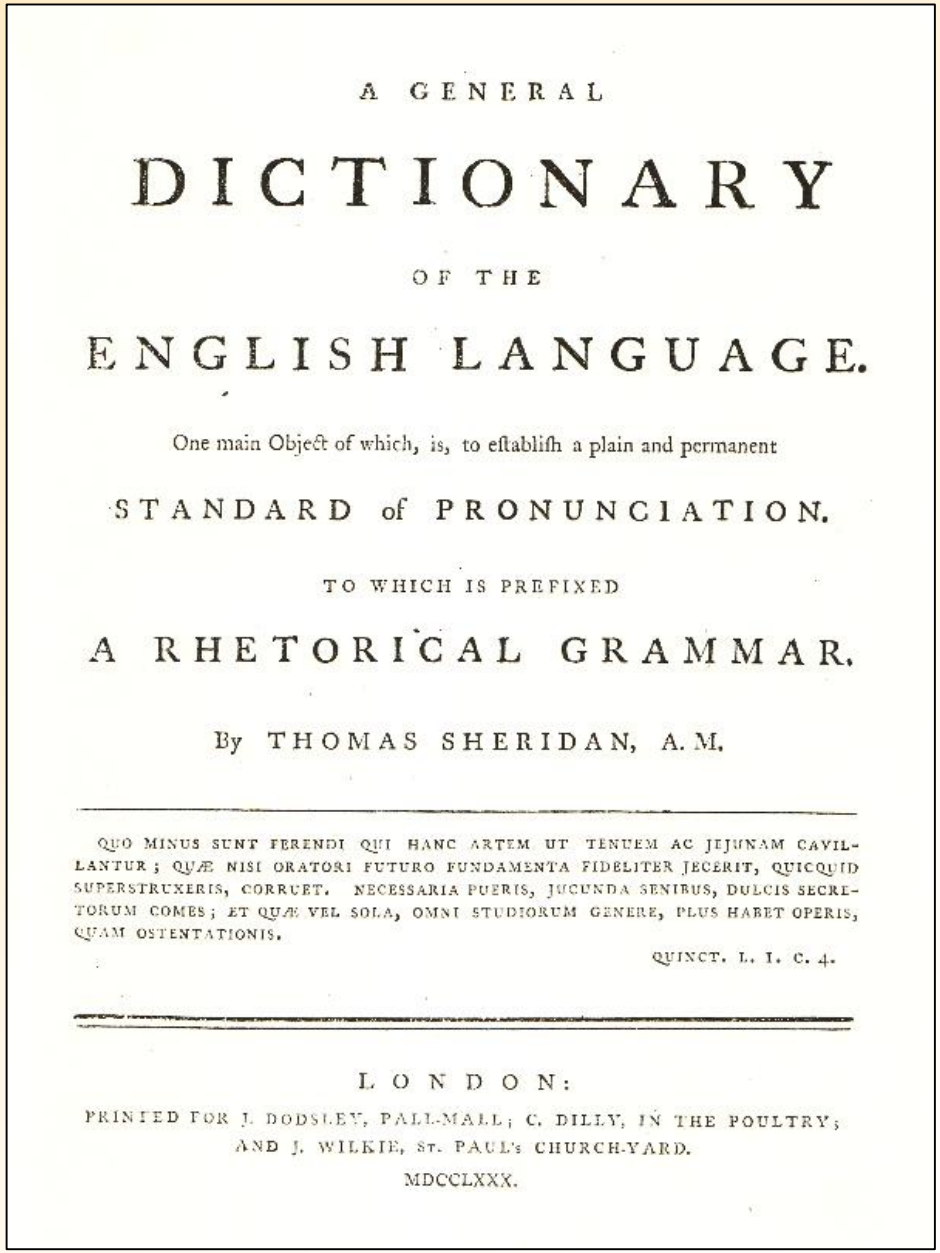
By THOMAS SHERIDAN, A. M.

LONDON:

Printed by W. STRAHAN,

For A. MILLAR, R. and J. DODSLEY, T. DAVIES, C. HENDERSON, J. WILKIE, and E. DILLY. M DCC LXII.

Sheridan *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780)



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.

QUO MINUS SUNT FERENDI QUI HANC ARTEM UT TENUEM AC JEJUNAM CAVILLANTUR; QUÆ NISI ORATORI FUTURO FUNDAMENTA FIDELITER JECERIT, QUICQUID SUPERSTRUXERIS, CORRUET. NECESSARIA PUERIS, JUCUNDA SENIBUS, DULCIS SECRETORUM COMES; ET QUÆ VEL SOLA, OMNI STUDIORUM GENERE, PLUS HABET OPERIS, QUAM OSTENTATIONIS.

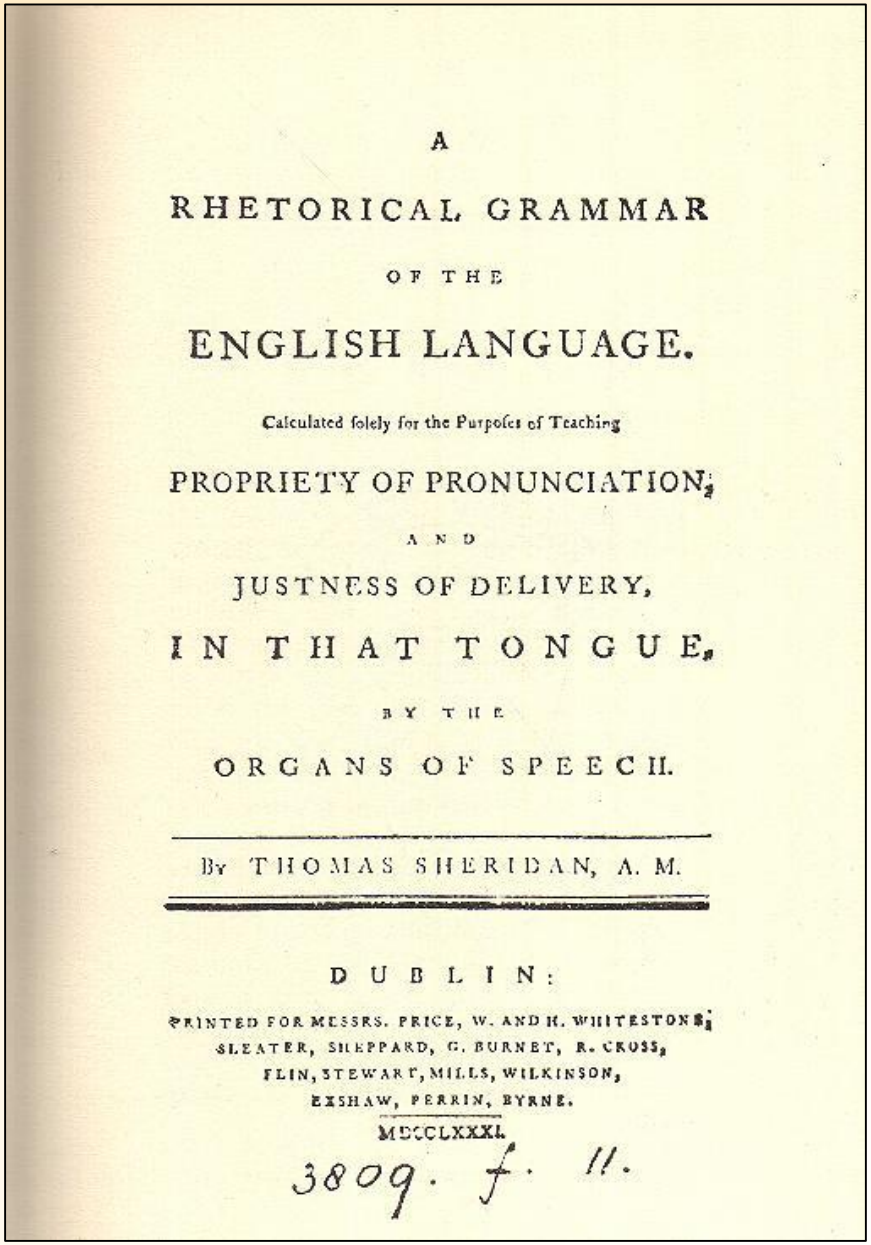
QUINCT. L. I. C. 4.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. DODSLEY, PALL-MALL; C. DILLY, IN THE POULTRY; AND J. WILKIE, ST. PAUL's CHURCH-YARD.

MDCCLXXX.

Sheridan *A Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language* (1781)



A

RHETORICAL GRAMMAR

OF THE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Calculated solely for the Purpoſes of Teaching

PROPRIETY OF PRONUNCIATION,

AND

JUSTNESS OF DELIVERY,

IN THAT TONGUE,

BY THE

ORGANS OF SPEECH.

By THOMAS SHERIDAN, A. M.

DUBLIN:

PRINTED FOR MESSRS. PRICE, W. AND H. WHITESTONE,
SLEATER, SHEPPARD, G. BURNET, R. CROSS,
FLIN, STEWART, MILLS, WILKINSON,
EXSHAW, PERRIN, BYRNE.

MDCCLXXXI.

3809. f. 11.

Sheridan’s system of phonetic transcription

Scheme of the Vowels.

	First	Second	Third
a	*hat*[1]	*hate*[2]	*hall*[3]
e	*bet*[1]	*bear*[2]	*beer*[3]
i	*fit*[1]	*fight*[2]	*field*[3]
o	*not*[1]	*note*[2]	*noose*[3]
u	*but*[1]	*bush*[2]	*blue*[3]
y	*love-ly*[1]	*lye*[2]	

Scheme of the Vowels.

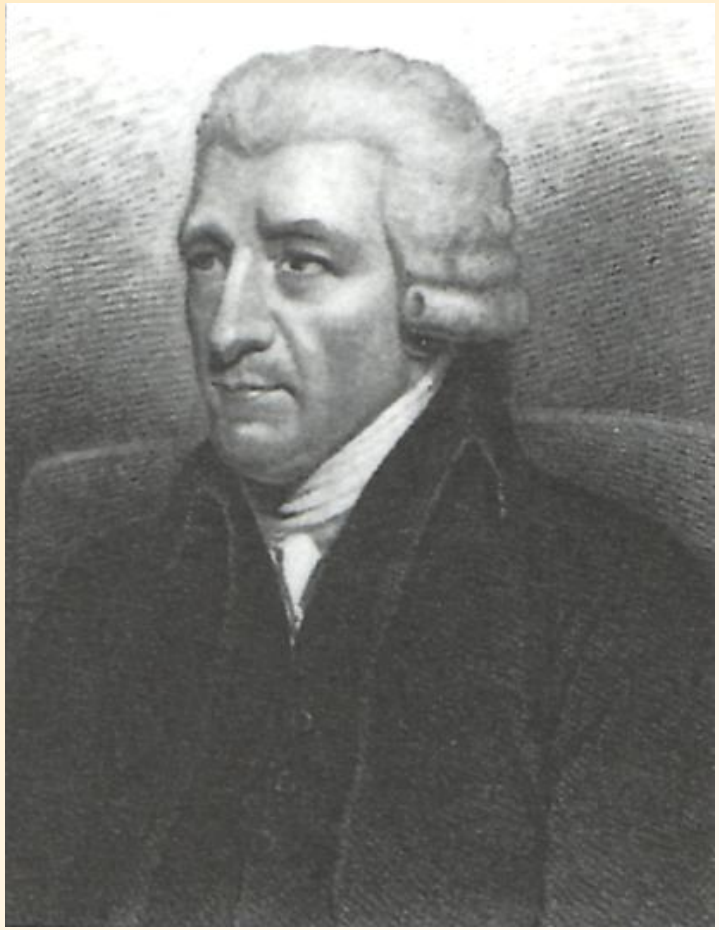
	First	Second	Third
a	*hat*[1] [æ]	*hate*[2] [eː]	*hall*[3] [ɔː]
e	*bet*[1] [ɛ]	*bear*[2] [eː]	*beer*[3] [iː]
i	*fit*[1] [ɪ]	*fight*[2] [aɪ]	*field*[3] [iː]
o	*not*[1] [ɒ]	*note*[2] [oː]	*noose*[3] [uː]
u	*but*[1] [ʌ]	*bush*[2] [ʊ]	*blue*[3] [uː]
y	*love-ly*[1] [i]	*lye*[2] [aɪ]	

Sheridan uses the additional term ‘palatine’ to refer to /g, k, l, r/

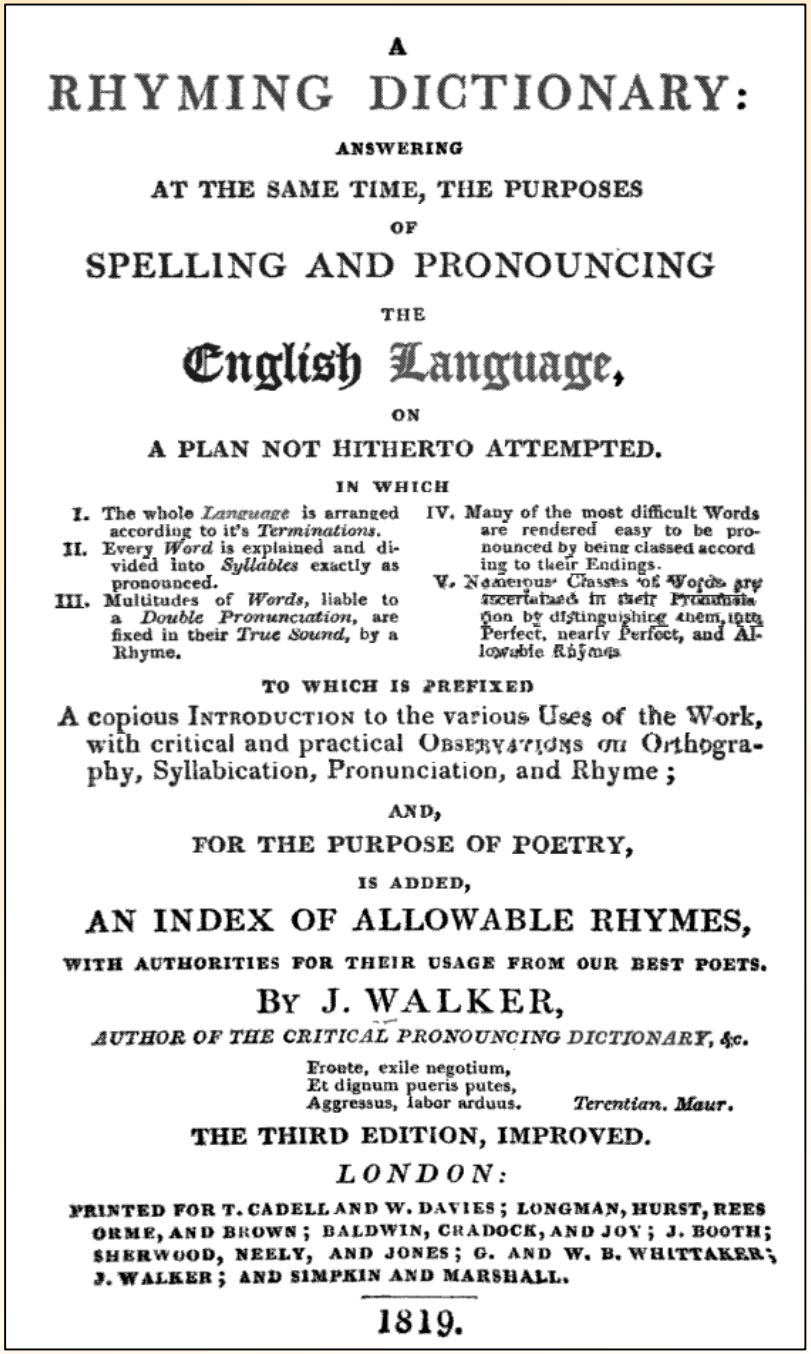
The labial are four,	eb	ep	ef	ev.
Dental eight,	ed	et	eth	eth.
	ez	es	esh	ezh.
Palatine four,	eg	ek	el	er.
Nasal three,	em	en	ing.	

(Sheridan 1781: 10)

John Walker



Walker, John (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.



A

RHYMING DICTIONARY:

ANSWERING

AT THE SAME TIME, THE PURPOSES

OF

SPELLING AND PRONOUNCING

THE

English Language,

ON

A PLAN NOT HITHERTO ATTEMPTED.

IN WHICH

I. The whole *Language* is arranged according to it's *Terminations*.
II. Every *Word* is explained and divided into *Syllables* exactly as pronounced.
III. Multitudes of *Words*, liable to a *Double Pronunciation*, are fixed in their *True Sound*, by a Rhyme.
IV. Many of the most difficult Words are rendered easy to be pronounced by being classed according to their Endings.
V. Numerous Classes of Words are ascertained in their Pronunciation by distinguishing them into Perfect, nearly Perfect, and Allowable Rhymes.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A copious INTRODUCTION to the various Uses of the Work, with critical and practical OBSERVATIONS on Orthography, Syllabication, Pronunciation, and Rhyme;

AND,

FOR THE PURPOSE OF POETRY,

IS ADDED,

AN INDEX OF ALLOWABLE RHYMES,

WITH AUTHORITIES FOR THEIR USAGE FROM OUR BEST POETS.

BY J. WALKER,

AUTHOR OF THE CRITICAL PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY, &c.

Fronte, exile negotium,
Et dignum pueris putes,
Aggressus, labor arduus. *Terentian. Maur.*

THE THIRD EDITION, IMPROVED.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES; LONGMAN, HURST, REES ORME, AND BROWN; BALDWIN, CRADOCK, AND JOY; J. BOOTH; SHERWOOD, NEELY, AND JONES; G. AND W. B. WHITTAKER; J. WALKER; AND SIMPKIN AND MARSHALL.

1819.

John Walker 1775

Rhyming Dictionary of the English Language

London

A

RHYMING, SPELLING,

AND

PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY.

A.

A The first letter of the alphabet, s.
Baa The cry of sheep, s.
Al'ba A Syriac word, signifying father, s.
As-sa-ra-bac'ca A plant, s.
Fe-luc'ca A small open boat, s.
An-gel'i-ca A plant, s.
Ba-sil'i-ca The middle vein of the arm, s.
Vom'i-ca An encysted tumour in the lungs, s.
Pi'ca The green sickness; a printing letter, s.
Sci-at'i-ca The hip-gout, s.
An-a-sar'ca A sort of dropsy, or pitting of the flesh, s.
Ar-ma'da A large fleet of ships of war, s.
Cas'sa-da An American plant, s.
Co-lo-quin'ti-da The bitter apple, s.
As-a-foet'i-da A stinking gum, s.
Cre-den'da Articles of faith, s. plur.
Pan-a-ce'a A universal medicine; an herb, s.
I-de'a Mental imagination, s.
Bo-hea' A species of tea, s.
Lea Grass land enclosed, s.
Flea A troublesome insect, s.
To flea To clean from fleas, v. a.
Plea Allegation; form of pleading; excuse, s.
Guin'ea A gold coin, value 21s. rhymes whinny, s.
Di-ar-rhoe'a A flux of the belly, s.
Gon-or-rhoe'a A venereal running, s.
Ap-or-rhoe'a Effluvium; emanation, s.
Dysp-noe'a A difficulty of breathing, s.
Or-thop-noe'a A disorder of the lungs, s.
Pea A well-known kind of pulse, s.
A're-a An open surface, as the floor of a room, s.
Sea The ocean; large lake, s.
Tea A Chinese plant, s.
Yea Yes, ad.
So'fa A very wide movable seat, s.
A'ga A Turkish military officer, s.
O-me'ga The last letter of the Greek alphabet, s.

Just as Samuel Johnson had saught patronage for his dictionary from Lord Chesterfield (Philip Dormer Stanhope, 1694-1773), Walker appealed to the famous actor David Garrick (1717-1779) for similar support for his dictionary. Both authors did this by dedicating the plan for their respective dictionaries to their would-be patrons.

TO

DAVID GARRICK, Esq.

SIR,

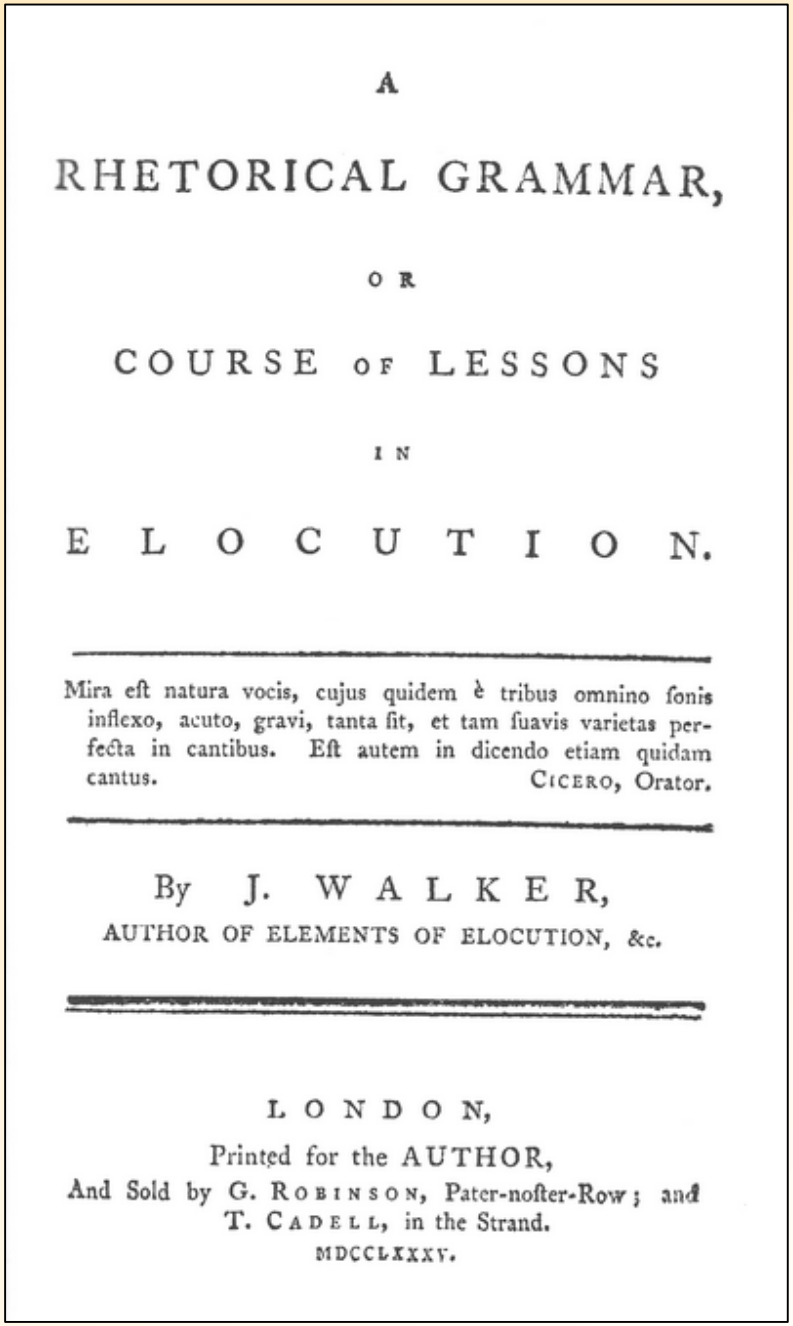
THE same motives which induced me to solicit your patronage for the General Idea of a Pronouncing Dictionary, have determined me to prefix your name to the present work. If either have a sufficient degree of merit to recommend them to the attention of the public, it is in a great measure owing to the early opportunities I have had of observing your pronunciation on the stage, and the frequent advice you have favoured me with in the prosecution of my enquiries. Without any apology, therefore, I present you with a production, which, if useful to the public, will be allowed to be properly addressed to you; and, if worthless, will at least be a proof of your readiness to encourage even the faintest endeavours in the service of the muses; a disposition which will raise you a nobler monument with posterity than that delicate distinction of character, that intensely animated expression, in which you excel as an actor, or that strenuous perseverance in the arduous duties of a manager, which has so largely contributed to the credit and improvement of the English stage.

I am, SIR,

With the utmost respect,

Your most obedient Servant,

J. WALKER.



A

RHETORICAL GRAMMAR,

OR

COURSE OF LESSONS

IN

ELOCUTION.

Mira eſt natura vocis, cujus quidem è tribus omnino ſonis inflexo, acuto, gravi, tanta ſit, et tam ſuavis varietas perfecta in cantibus. Eſt autem in dicendo etiam quidam cantus.

CICERO, Orator.

By J. WALKER,

AUTHOR OF ELEMENTS OF ELOCUTION, &c.

LONDON,

Printed for the AUTHOR,

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

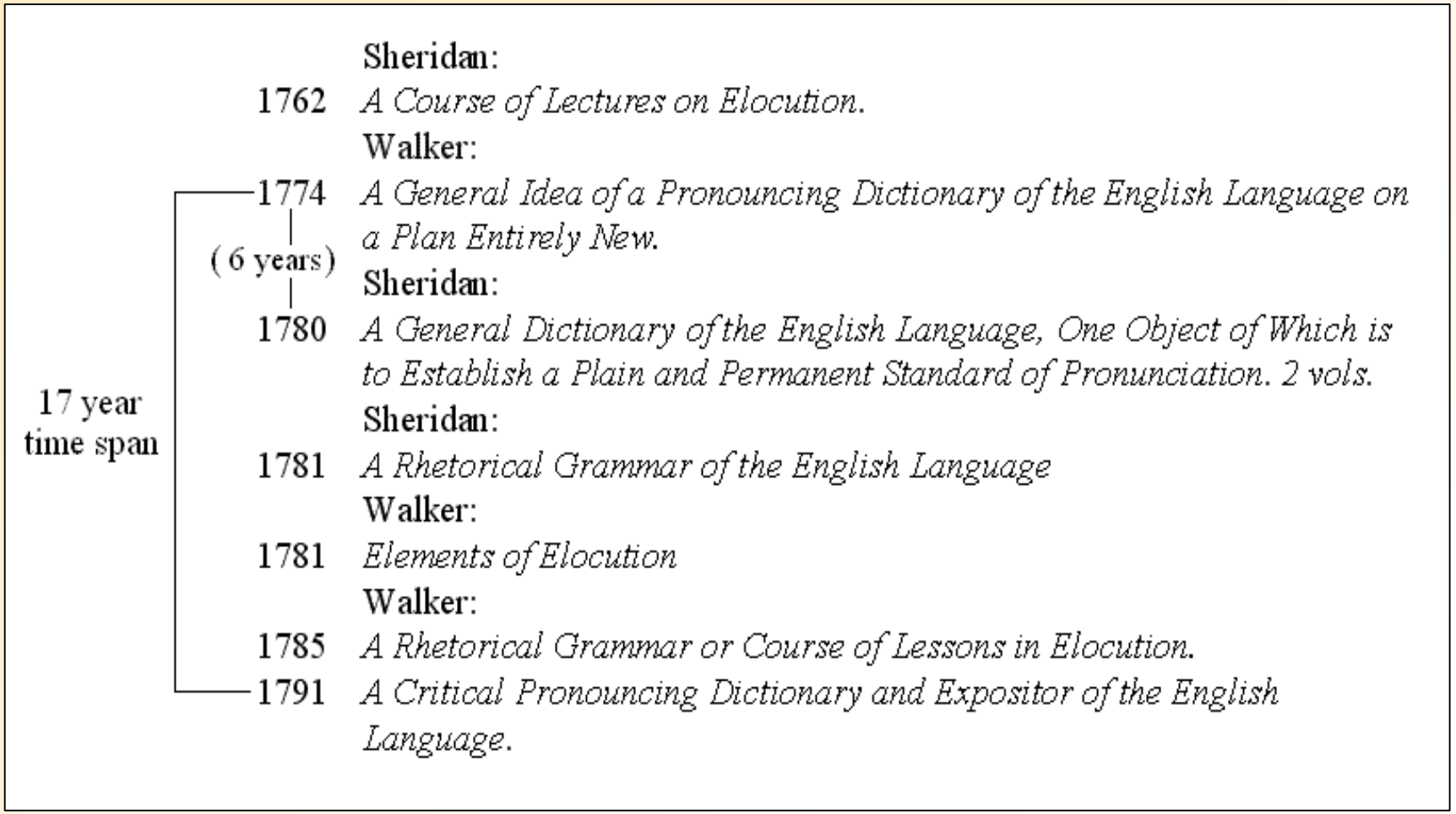
MDCCLXXXV.

John Walker 1785

A Rhetorical Grammar or Course of Lessons in Elocution

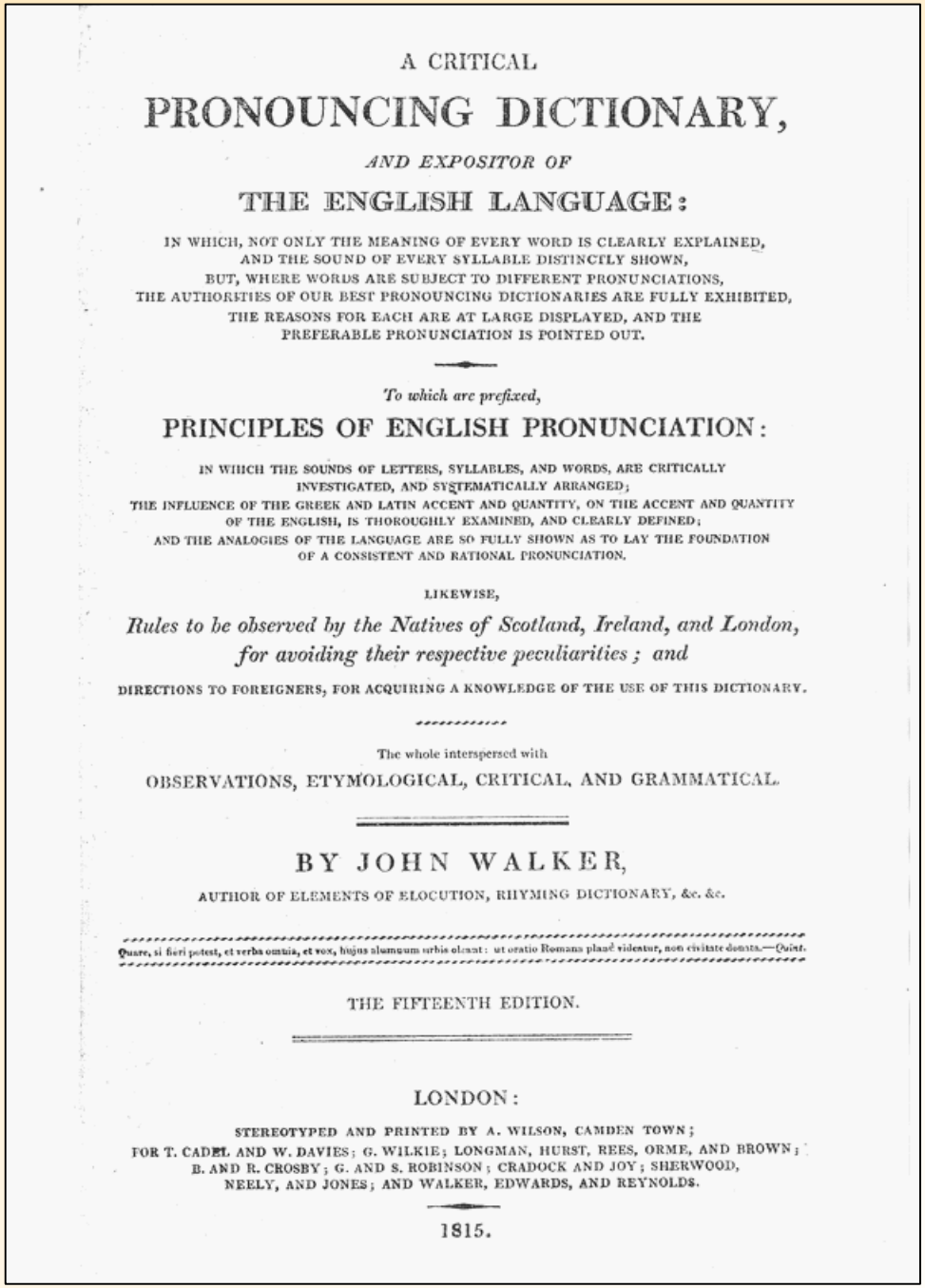
London

Comparison of publication dates for Sheridan and Walker



Walker (1791: iii) on Sheridan:

'It must, indeed, be confessed, that Mr. Sheridan's Dictionary is greatly superior to every other that preceded it; and his method of conveying the sound of words, by spelling them as they are pronounced, is highly rational and useful. – But here sincerity obliges me to stop. The numerous instances I have given of impropriety, inconsistency, and want of acquaintance with the analogies of the Language, sufficiently show how imperfect I think his Dictionary is.'



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 THE ENGLISH, IS THOROUGHLY EXAMINED, AND CLEARLY DEFINED;
AND THE ANALOGIES OF THE LANGUAGE ARE SO FULLY SHOWN AS TO LAY THE FOUNDATION
OF A CONSISTENT AND RATIONAL PRONUNCIATION.

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 whole interspersed with

OBSERVATIONS, ETYMOLOGICAL, CRITICAL, AND GRAMMATICAL.

BY JOHN WALKER,

AUTHOR OF ELEMENTS OF ELOCUTION, RHYMING DICTIONARY, &c. &c.

Quare, si fieri potest, et verba omnia, et vox, hujus alumnum urbis olent: ut oratio Romana planè videatur, non civitate donata.—Quint.

THE FIFTEENTH EDITION.

LONDON:

STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY A. WILSON, CAMDEN TOWN;
FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES; G. WILKIE; LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN;
B. AND R. CROSBY; G. AND S. ROBINSON; CRADOCK AND JOY; SHERWOOD,
NEELY, AND JONES; AND WALKER, EDWARDS, AND REYNOLDS.

1815.

John Walker 1791

A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language

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 each are at large displayed and the prefereable pronunciation is pointed out.

To which are prefixed,

PRINCIPLES OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION:

in which the sounds of letters, syllables, and words, are critically investigated, and systematically arranged; The influence of the Greek and Latin accent and quantity, on the accent and quantity of English, is thoroughly examined, and clearly defined, and the analogies of the language are so fully shown as to lay the foundation of a consistent and rational pronunciation

likewise,

Rules to be observed by the Natives of Scotland, Ireland, and London, for avoiding their respective peculiarities; and

DIRECTIONS TO FOREIGNERS, FOR ACQUIRING A KNOWLEDGE OF THE USE OF THIS DICTIONARY.

Walker’s system of phonetic transcription

An Analogical Table of the Consonants.

Mute labials	sharp *p*, *pump* flat *b*, *bomb*				labio-nasal liquid *m*
Hissing labials	sharp *f*, *if* flat *v*, *of*				
Mute dentals	sharp *t*, *tut* flat *d*, *dad*	aspirated	*etch*, *edge*, or *j*		dental-nasal liquid *n*.
Hissing dentals	sharp *s*, *say* flat *z*, *as*	aspirated	*esh*, *passion* *ezhe*, *vision*		dental-nasal liquid *l*.
Lisping dentals	sharp *eth*, *death* flat *the*, *sythe*				
Gutterals	sharp *k*, *kick* flat *g*, (hard) *gag*				gutteral liquid *r*.

Dento-gutteral or nasal *ng*, *hang*.

Terms in Walker's *Dictionary* (left column) and their present-day equivalents (right column)

sink	delete
sharp	voiceless
flat	voiced
mute	stop
hissing	fricative
lisping	interdental fricative
gutteral	velar
slender	raised (of vowels)

DUKE, dūke. ſ. (376).

One of the higheſt order of nobility in England.

☞ There is a ſlight deviation often heard in the pronunciation of this word, as if written *Dook*; but this borders on vulgarity; the true ſound of the *u* muſt be carefully preſerved, as if written *Dewk*. There is another impropriety in pronouncing this word, as if written *Jook*; this is not ſo vulgar as the former, and ariſes from an ignorance of the influence of accent.—See Principles, No. 462.

/dju:k/ versus /du:k/ versus /ʤu:k/

IMBECILE, ĭm-bĕs′sĭl, or ĭm-bē-sēl′. a.

Weak, feeble, wanting ſtrength of either mind or body.

☞ Dr. Johnſon, Dr. Aſh, Dr. Kenrick, and Entick, accent this word on the ſecond ſyllable, as in the Latin *imbecilis*; but Mr. Scott and Mr. Sheridan on the laſt, as in the French *imbecille*. The latter is, in my opinion, the more faſhionable, but the former more analogical. We have too many of theſe French ſounding words; and if the number cannot be diminiſhed, they ſhould, at leaſt, not be ſuffered to increaſe. (112).

This word, ſays Dr. Johnſon, 'is corruptly written *embezzle*. This corruption, however, is too well eſtabliſhed to be altered: and, as it is appropriated to a particular ſpecies of deficiency, the corruption is leſs to be regretted.

/ɪmˈbeːsɪl/

versus

/ɪmbəˈsiːl/

HORIZON, hŏ-rī′zŏn. ſ.

The line that terminates the view.

☞ This word was, till of late years, univerſally pronounced, in proſe, with the accent on the firſt ſyllable; and that this is moſt agreeable to Engliſh analogy cannot be doubted. But Poets have as conſtantly placed the accent on the ſecond ſyllable, becauſe this ſyllable has the accent in the Greek and Latin word; and this accentuation is now become ſo general as to render the former pronunciation vulgar.

/ˈhɒrɪzən/ versus /həˈraɪzən/

To Impugn, ĭm-pūne′. v. a.

To attack, to aſſault.

☞ Notwithſtanding the clear analogy there is for pronouncing this word in the manner it is marked, there is a repugnance at leaving out the *g*, which nothing but frequent uſe will take away. If *ſign* were in as little uſe as *impugn* we ſhould feel the ſame repugnance at pronouncing it in the manner we do. But as language is aſſociation, no wonder aſſociation ſhould have ſuch power over it. For the analogies that lead us to this pronunciation, ſee Principles, No. 385.

Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Nares, and Mr. Scott, pronounce the word as I have marked it; that is, with the *g* ſilent, and the *u* long; but Dr. Kenrick, Mr. Perry, and Buchanan, though they ſuppreſs the *g*, pronounce the *u* ſhort. That this ſhort ſound is contrary to analogy cannot be doubted, when we take a view of the words of this termination; and the only plea for it is, the ſhort ſound of the vowels before *gm* in *phlegm*, *diaphragm*, *parapegm*, *apophthegm*, and *paradigm*, (389): but as the accent is not on any of theſe ſyllables, except *phlegm*, which is irregular, (389), it is no wonder the vowel ſhould ſhorten, as it ſo frequently does in the numerous terminations in *ile*, *ine*, *ite*, &c. (147).

/ɪmˈpjuːn/

versus

/ɪmˈpʌn/

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):

Jones, Stephen 1798. *Sheridan Improved. A General Pronouncing and Explanatory Dictionary of the English Language*. 3rd edition. London: Vernor and Hood.

Smart, Benjamin H. 1836. *Walker Remodelled. A New Critical Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language.* London: T. Cadell.

The legacy of Sheridan and Walker

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

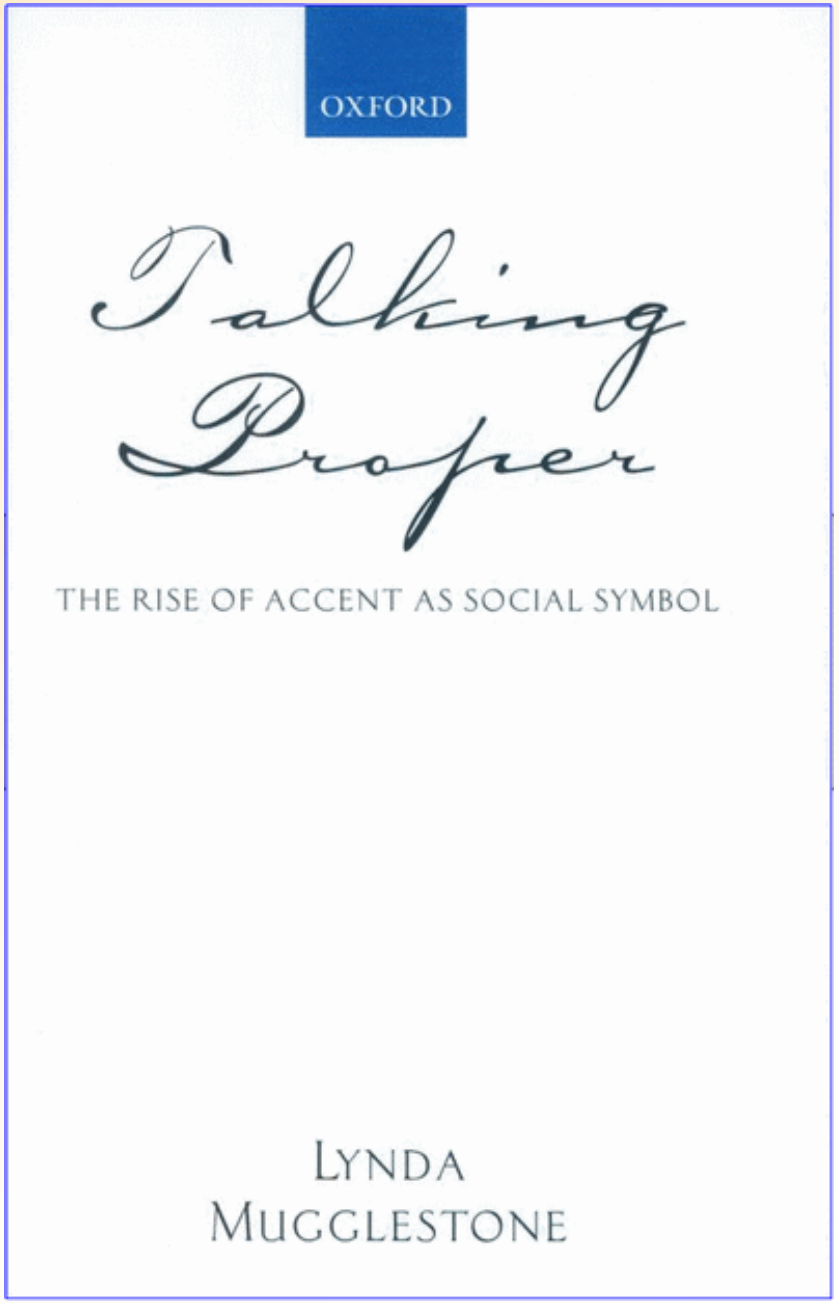
In many respects, Walker was swimming against the tide of language change. His insistence on maintaining regular patterns of pronunciation across the language (his 'analogy') and, above all, his view that the spoken word should be close to the written word, meant that he favoured archaic pronunciations.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

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

The English concern with pronunciation

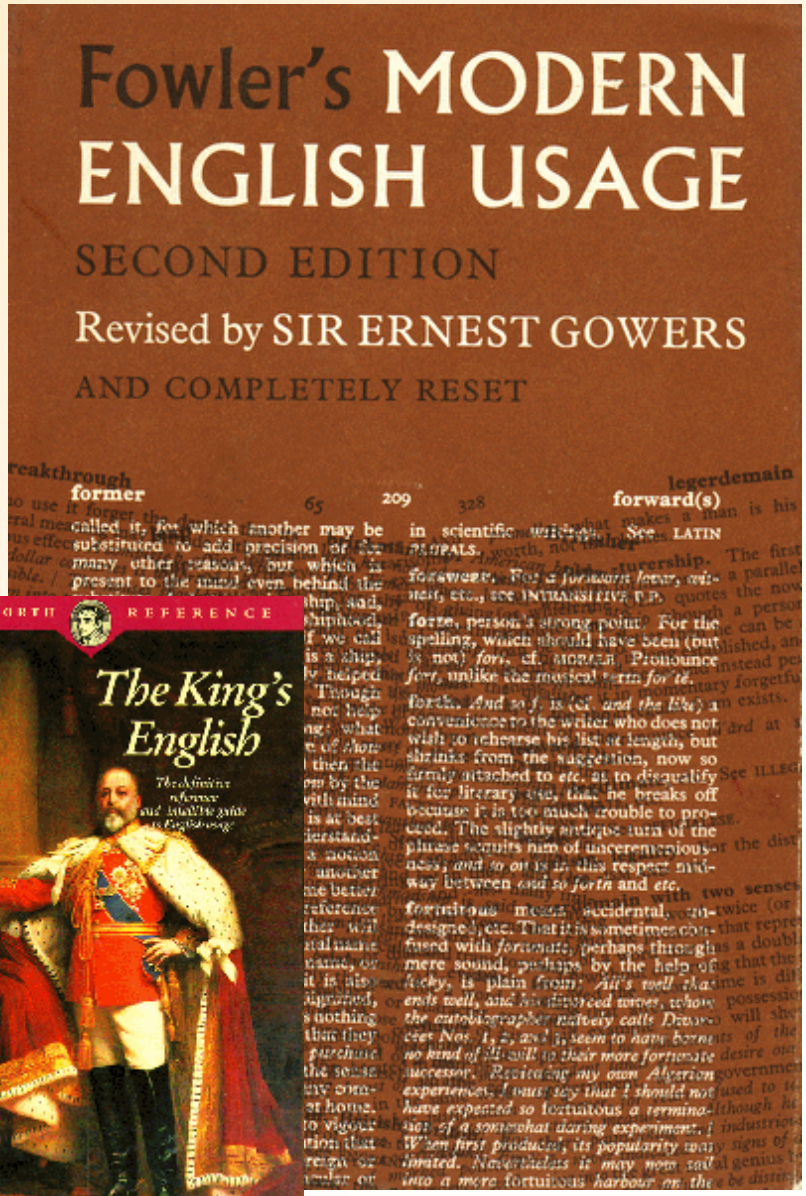
Pronunciation in English is a yardstick of one‘s language. More than European countries, the English judge the standardness of someone’s speech by its phonetics.

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



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).



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

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 is the continuous form with stative verbs, e.g. *I'm wanting to go there* for *I want to go there.*

Conclusion

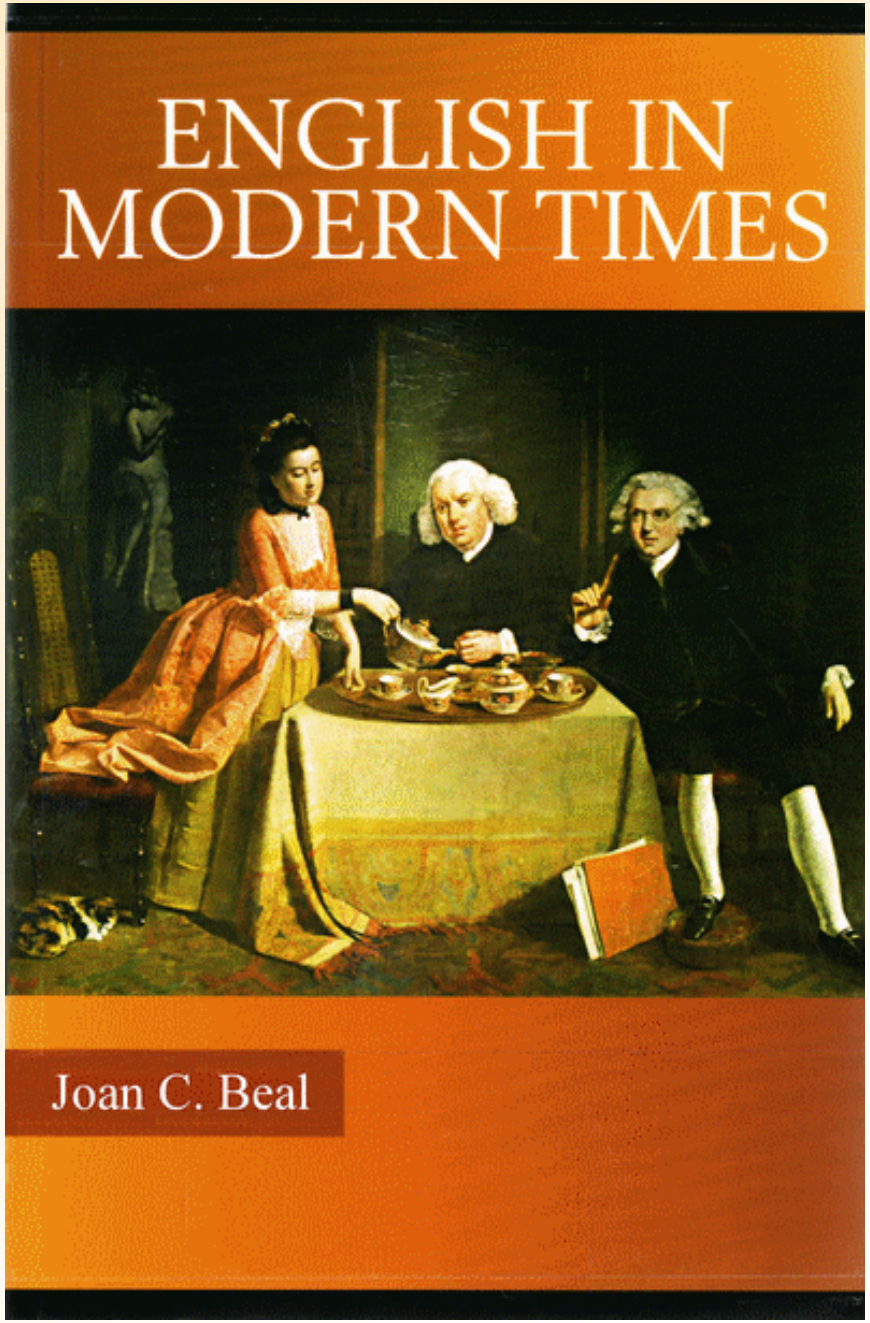
Standard English is an entity which developed over the past few centuries out of public usage in London and its surroundings. Increasingly, it became independent of place and typical of the educated middle classes.

The features which became part of the standard are not linguistically justified but the result of various factors, e.g. the personal preferences of well-known authors (in grammar) or general long-term developments of the sound system (in pronunciation).

Unfortunately, users of standard English came to see it as the preferred variety and became judgmental of those who spoke a non-standard variety. Here linguists would object and stress that all varieties of a language are of equal value and serve their communities as their own means of communication, irrespective of their relation to an existing standard.

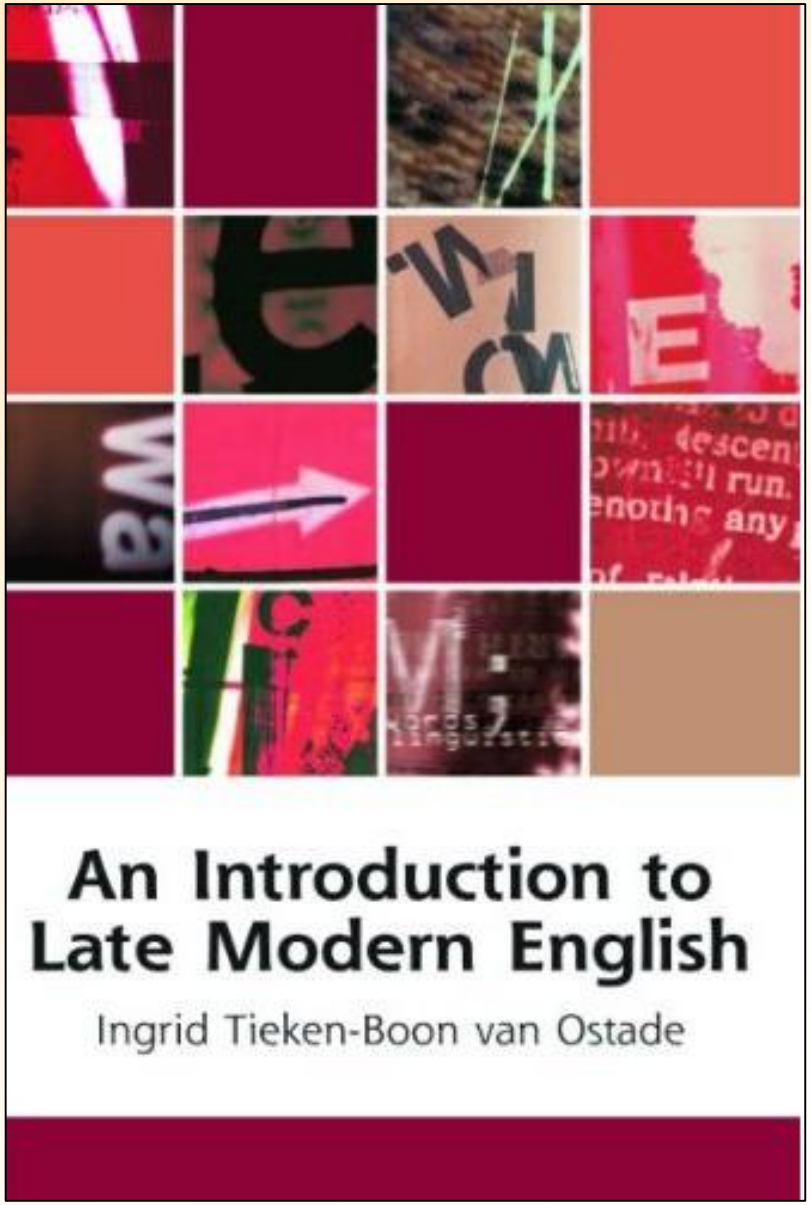
Literature on the development of modern English

A standard work (published in 2004) on the late modern period (1700-present)

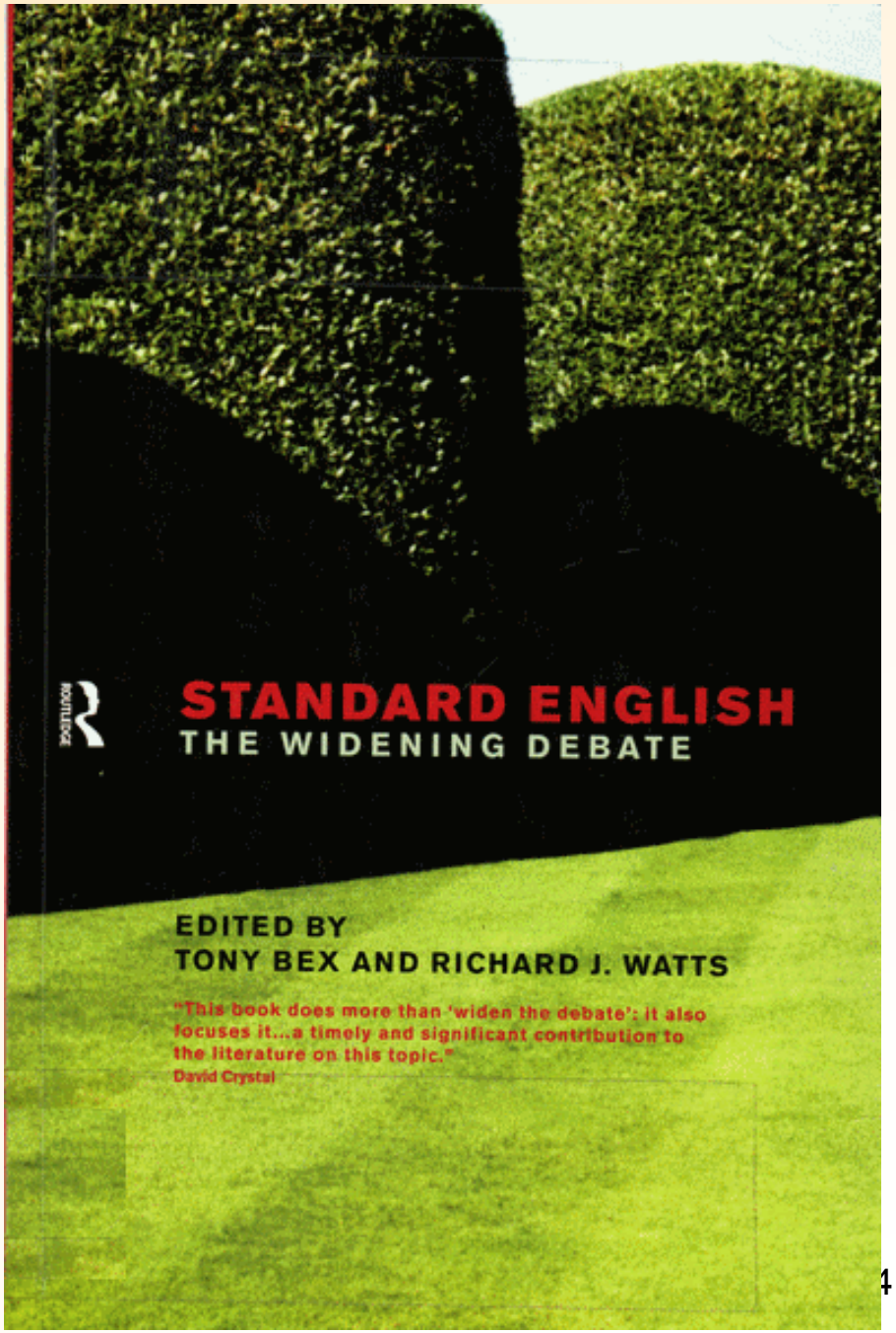


A recent overview (published in May 2009) by a leading expert on 18th century English.

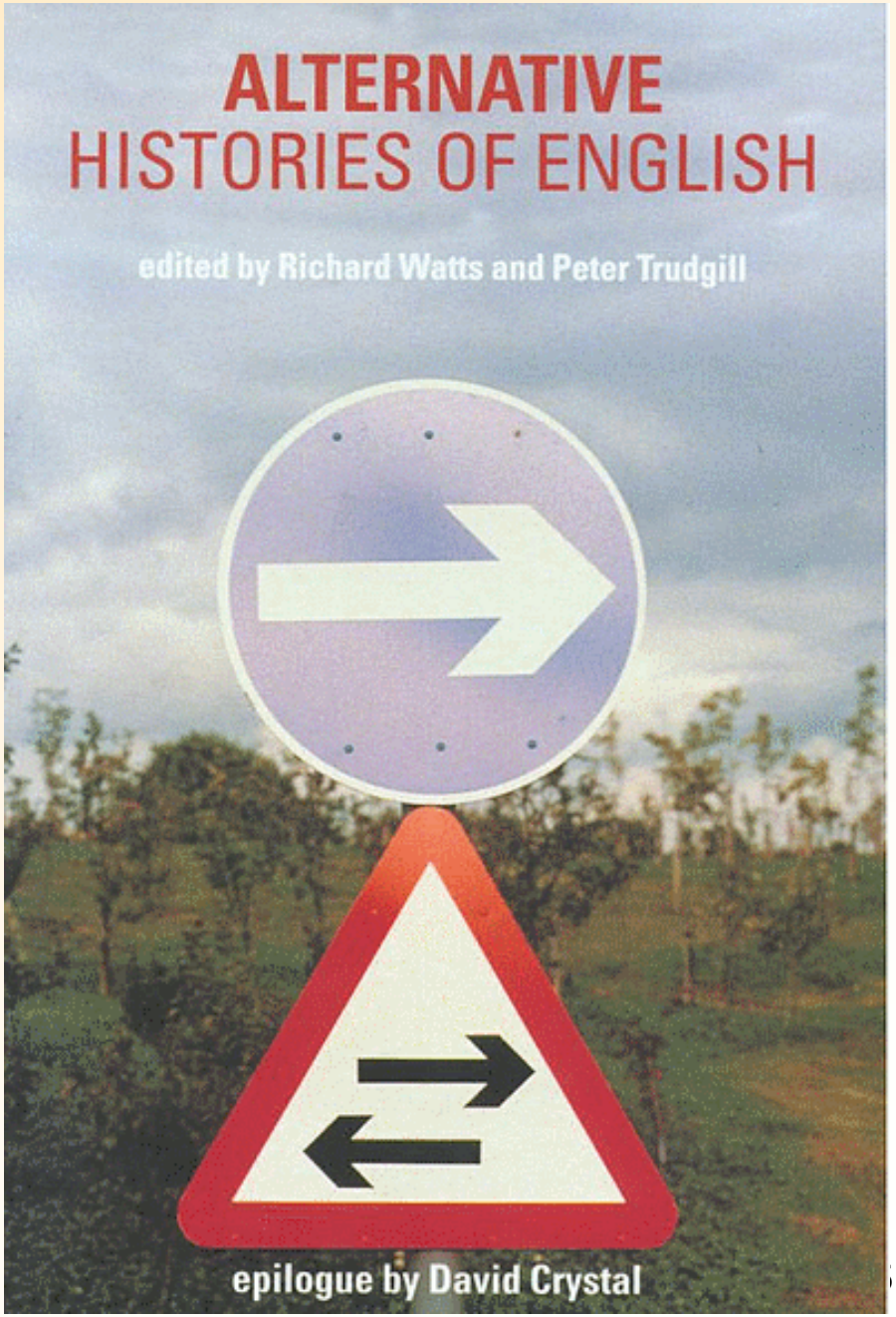
Published by Edinburgh University Press.



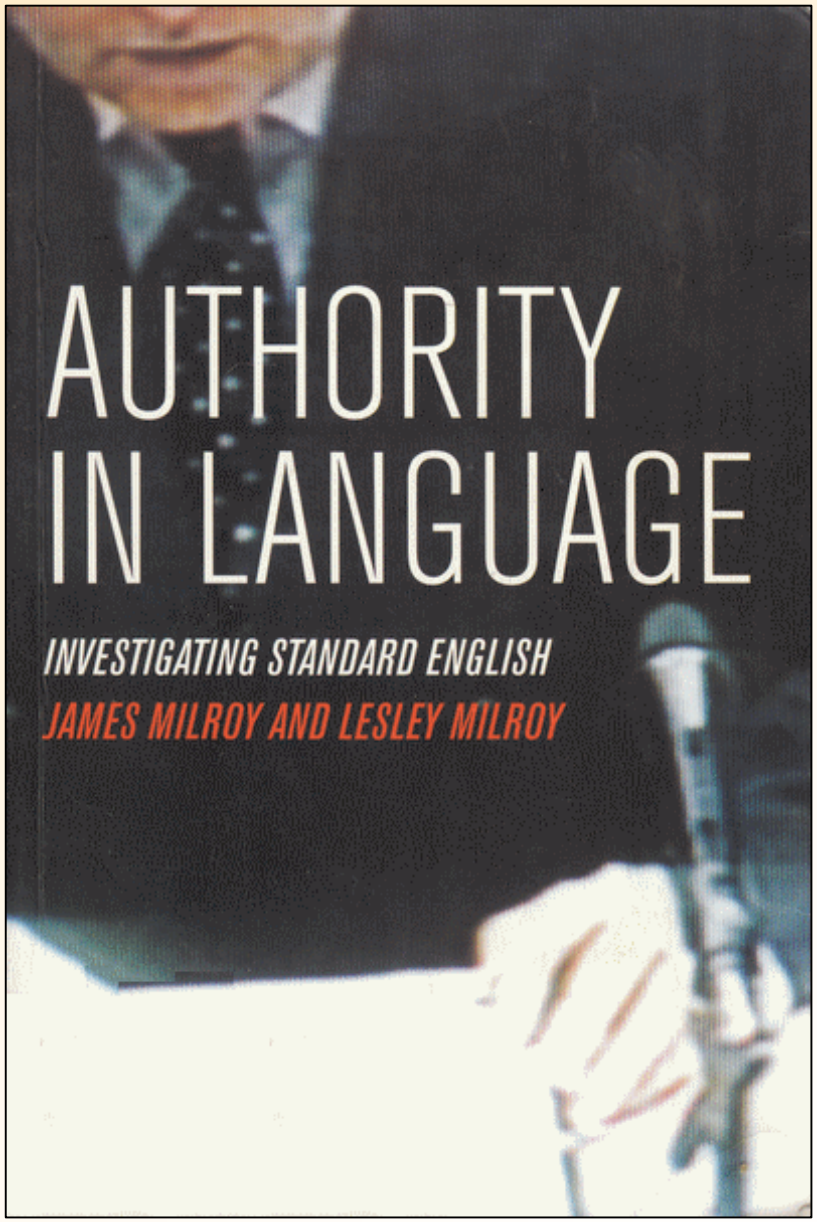
A more flexible view of how standard English is evolving (published in 1999)



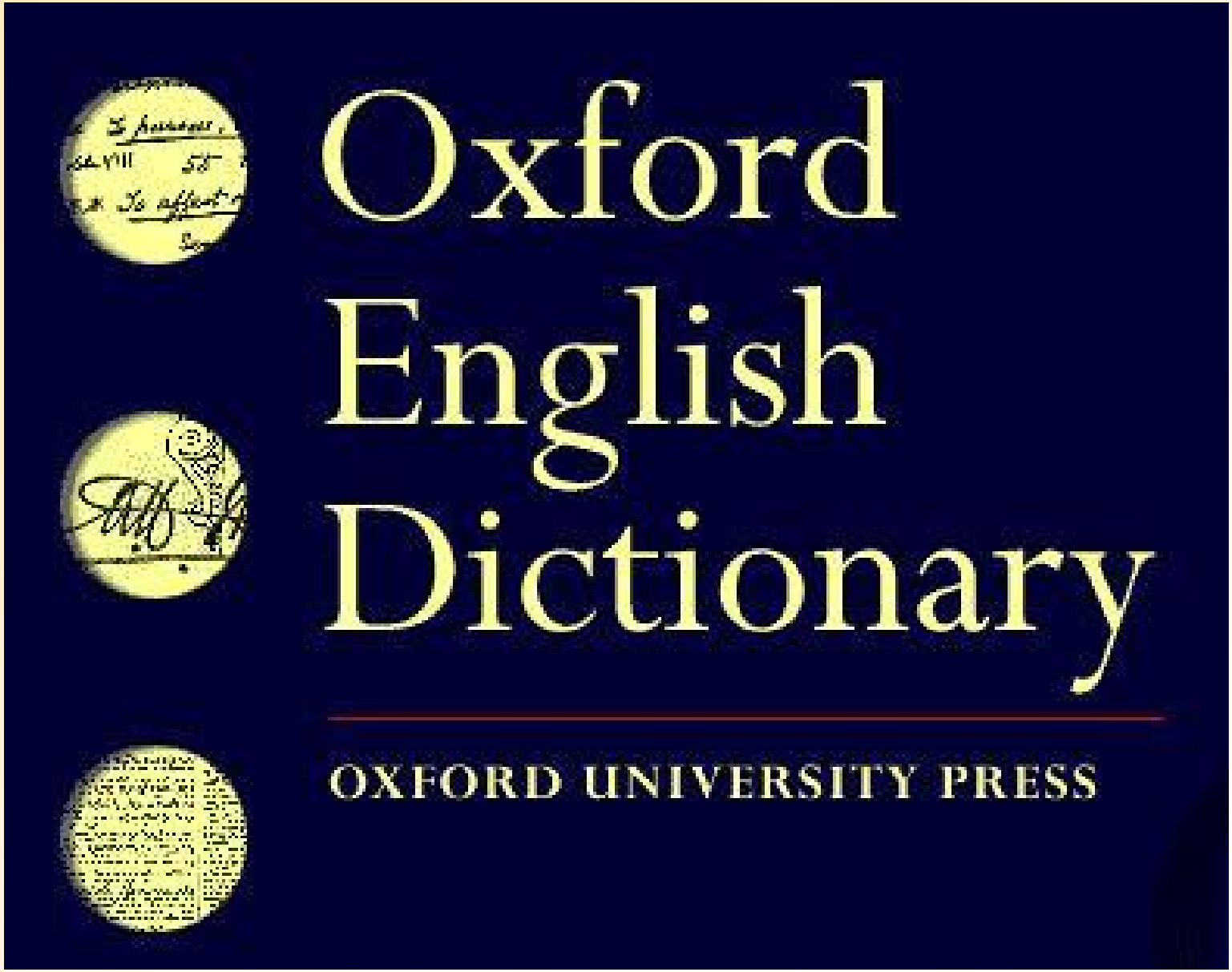
Outside the mainstream: the history of varieties of English apart from southern British English

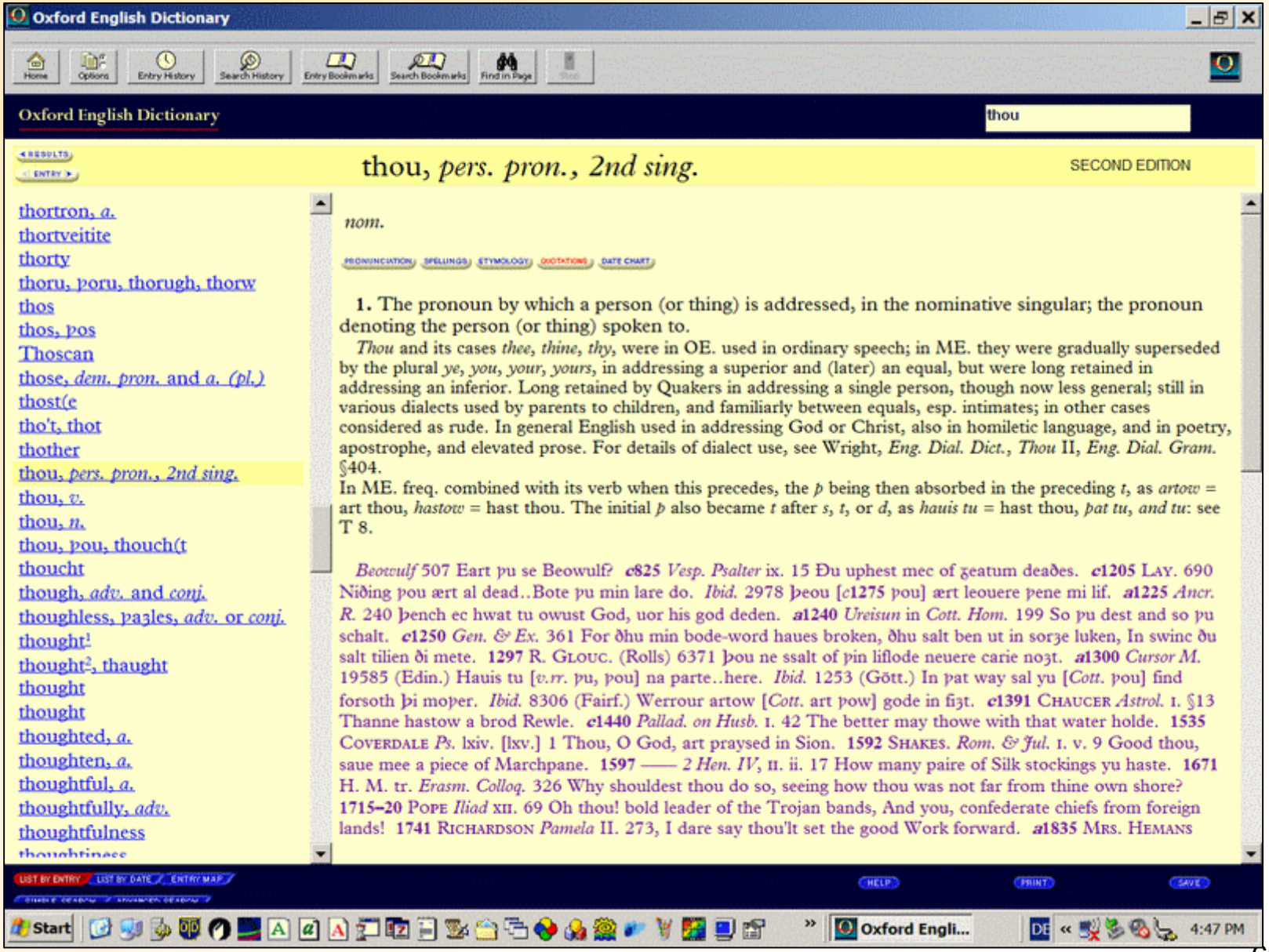


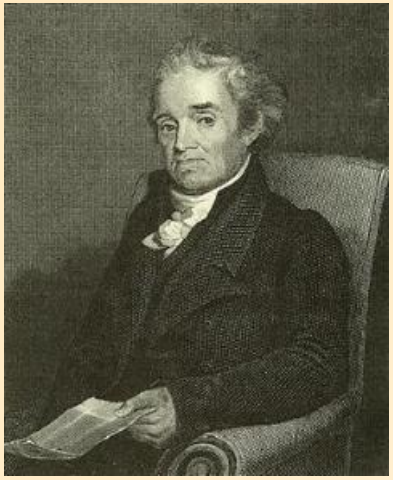
A critical look at the way in which notions of standard language are used manipulatively and to exclude others.

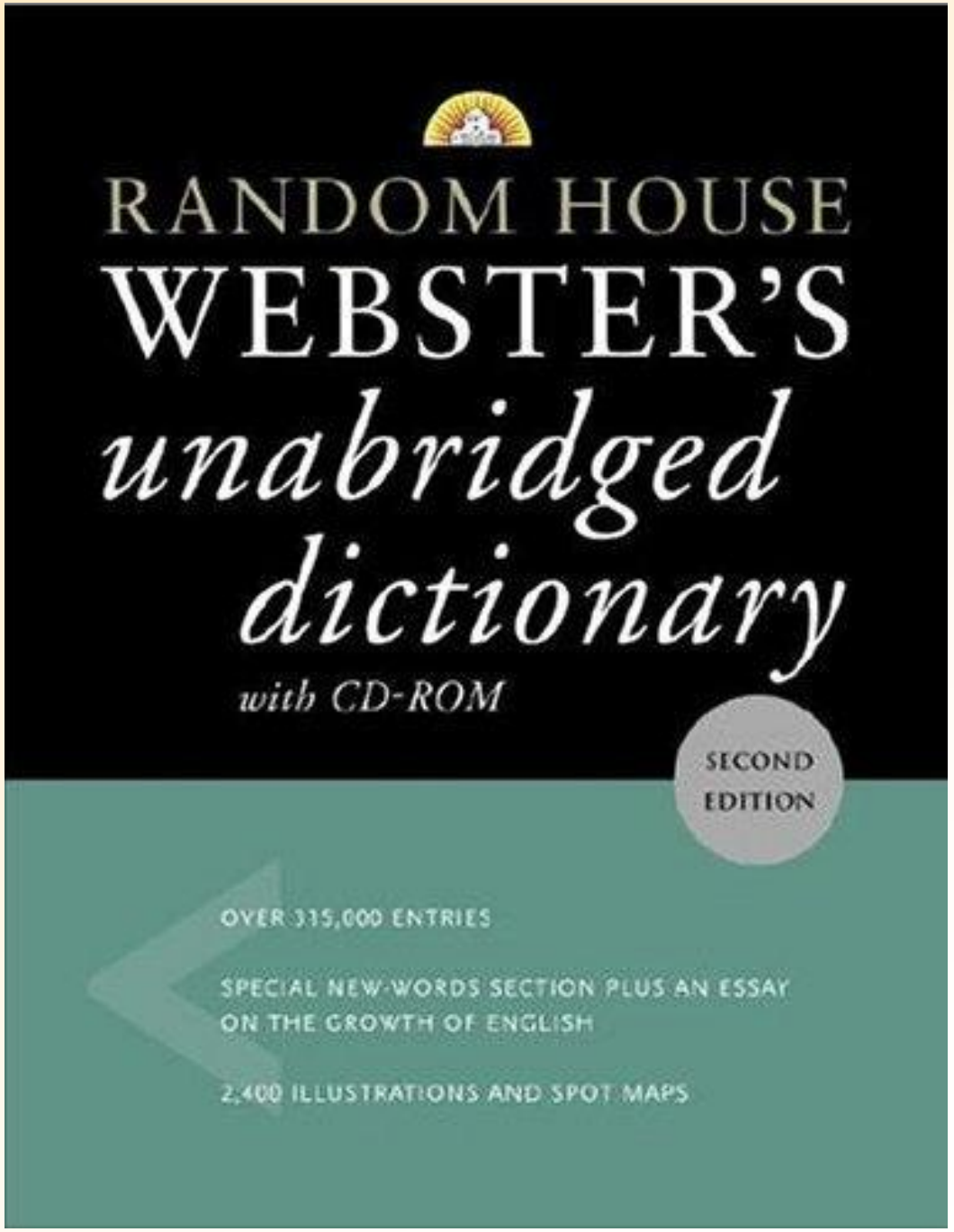


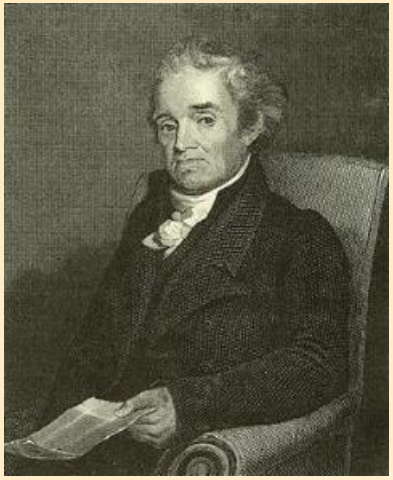
Authority in printed form: major dictionaries of English (British and American)

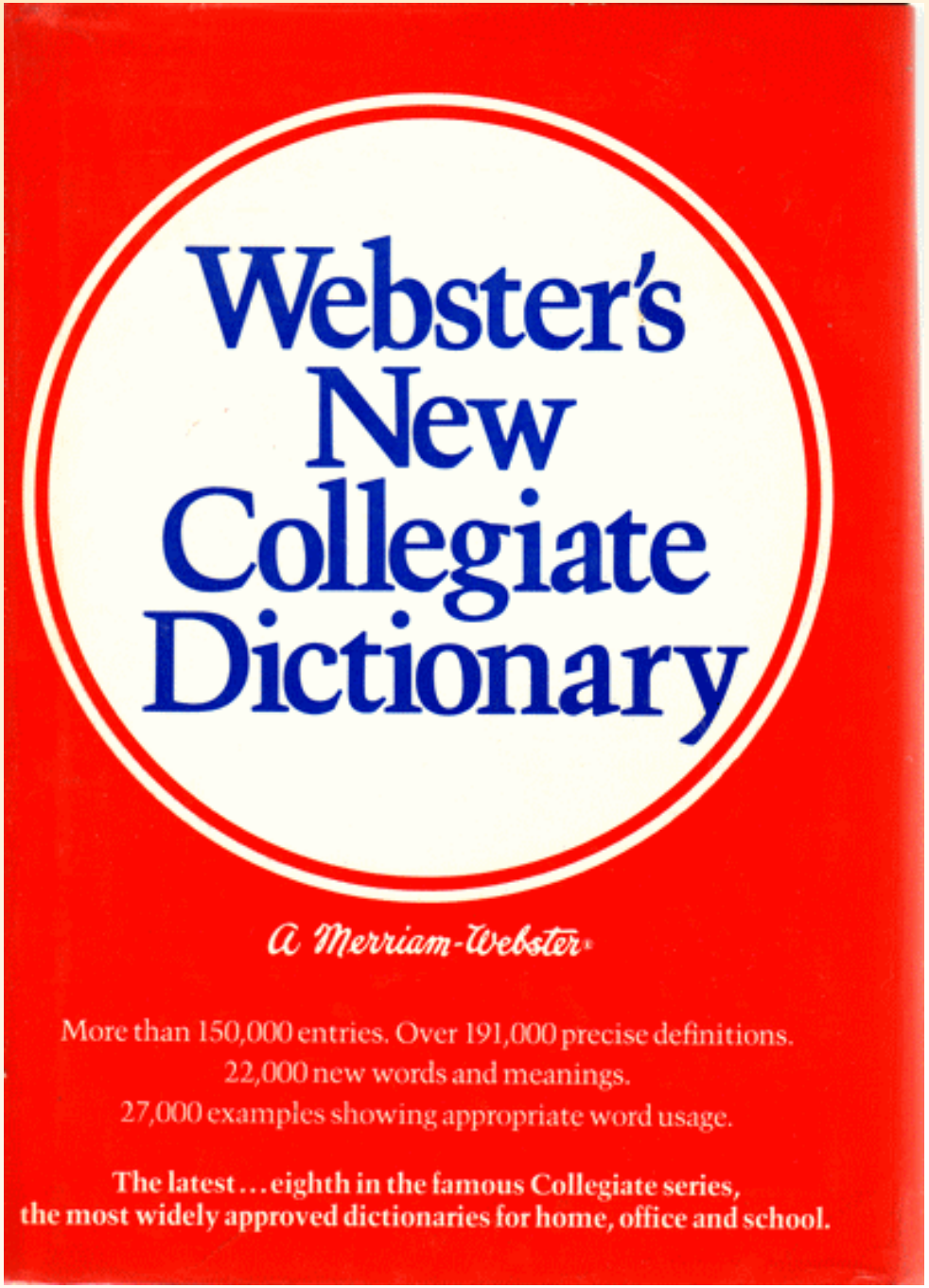

Oxford
English
Dictionary
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS


Oxford English Dictionary
Home
Options
Entry History
Search History
Entry Bookmarks
Search Bookmarks
Find in Page
Stop
Oxford English Dictionary
thou
RESULTS
ENTRY
thou, pers. pron., 2nd sing.
SECOND EDITION
thortron, a.
thortveitite
thorty
thoru, poru, thorugh, thorw
thos
thos, pos
Thoscan
those, dem. pron. and a. (pl.)
thost(e
tho't, thot
thother
thou, pers. pron., 2nd sing.
thou, v.
thou, n.
thou, pou, thouch(t
thoucht
though, adv. and conj.
thoughless, paȝles, adv. or conj.
thought¹
thought², thaught
thought
thought
thoughted, a.
thoughten, a.
thoughtful, a.
thoughtfully, adv.
thoughtfulness
thoughtiness
nom.
PRONUNCIATION
SPELLINGS
ETYMOLOGY
QUOTATIONS
DATE CHART
1. The pronoun by which a person (or thing) is addressed, in the nominative singular; the pronoun denoting the person (or thing) spoken to.
Thou and its cases thee, thine, thy, were in OE. used in ordinary speech; in ME. they were gradually superseded by the plural ye, you, your, yours, in addressing a superior and (later) an equal, but were long retained in addressing an inferior. Long retained by Quakers in addressing a single person, though now less general; still in various dialects used by parents to children, and familiarly between equals, esp. intimates; in other cases considered as rude. In general English used in addressing God or Christ, also in homiletic language, and in poetry, apostrophe, and elevated prose. For details of dialect use, see Wright, Eng. Dial. Dict., Thou II, Eng. Dial. Gram. §404.
In ME. freq. combined with its verb when this precedes, the þ being then absorbed in the preceding t, as artow = art thou, hastow = hast thou. The initial þ also became t after s, t, or d, as hauis tu = hast thou, þat tu, and tu: see T 8.
Beowulf 507 Eart þu se Beowulf? c825 Vesp. Psalter ix. 15 Ðu uphest mec of ȝeatum deaðes. c1205 Lay. 690 Niðing þou ært al dead..Bote þu min lare do. Ibid. 2978 Þeou [c1275 þou] ært leouere þene mi lif. a1225 Ancr. R. 240 Þench ec hwat tu owust God, uor his god deden. a1240 Ureisun in Cott. Hom. 199 So þu dest and so þu schalt. c1250 Gen. & Ex. 361 For ðhu min bode-word haues broken, ðhu salt ben ut in sorȝe luken, In swinc ðu salt tilien ði mete. 1297 R. Glouc. (Rolls) 6371 Þou ne ssalt of þin liflode neuere carie noȝt. a1300 Cursor M. 19585 (Edin.) Hauis tu [v.rr. þu, þou] na parte..here. Ibid. 1253 (Gött.) In þat way sal yu [Cott. þou] find forsoth þi moþer. Ibid. 8306 (Fairf.) Werrour artow [Cott. art þow] gode in fiȝt. c1391 Chaucer Astrol. I. §13 Thanne hastow a brod Rewle. c1440 Pallad. on Husb. I. 42 The better may thowe with that water holde. 1535 Coverdale Ps. lxiv. [lxv.] 1 Thou, O God, art praysed in Sion. 1592 Shakes. Rom. & Jul. I. v. 9 Good thou, saue mee a piece of Marchpane. 1597 —— 2 Hen. IV, II. ii. 17 How many paire of Silk stockings yu haste. 1671 H. M. tr. Erasm. Colloq. 326 Why shouldest thou do so, seeing how thou was not far from thine own shore? 1715–20 Pope Iliad XII. 69 Oh thou! bold leader of the Trojan bands, And you, confederate chiefs from foreign lands! 1741 Richardson Pamela II. 273, I dare say thou'lt set the good Work forward. a1835 Mrs. Hemans
LIST BY ENTRY
LIST BY DATE
ENTRY MAP
HELP
PRINT
SAVE
Start
Oxford Engli...
DE
4:47 PM

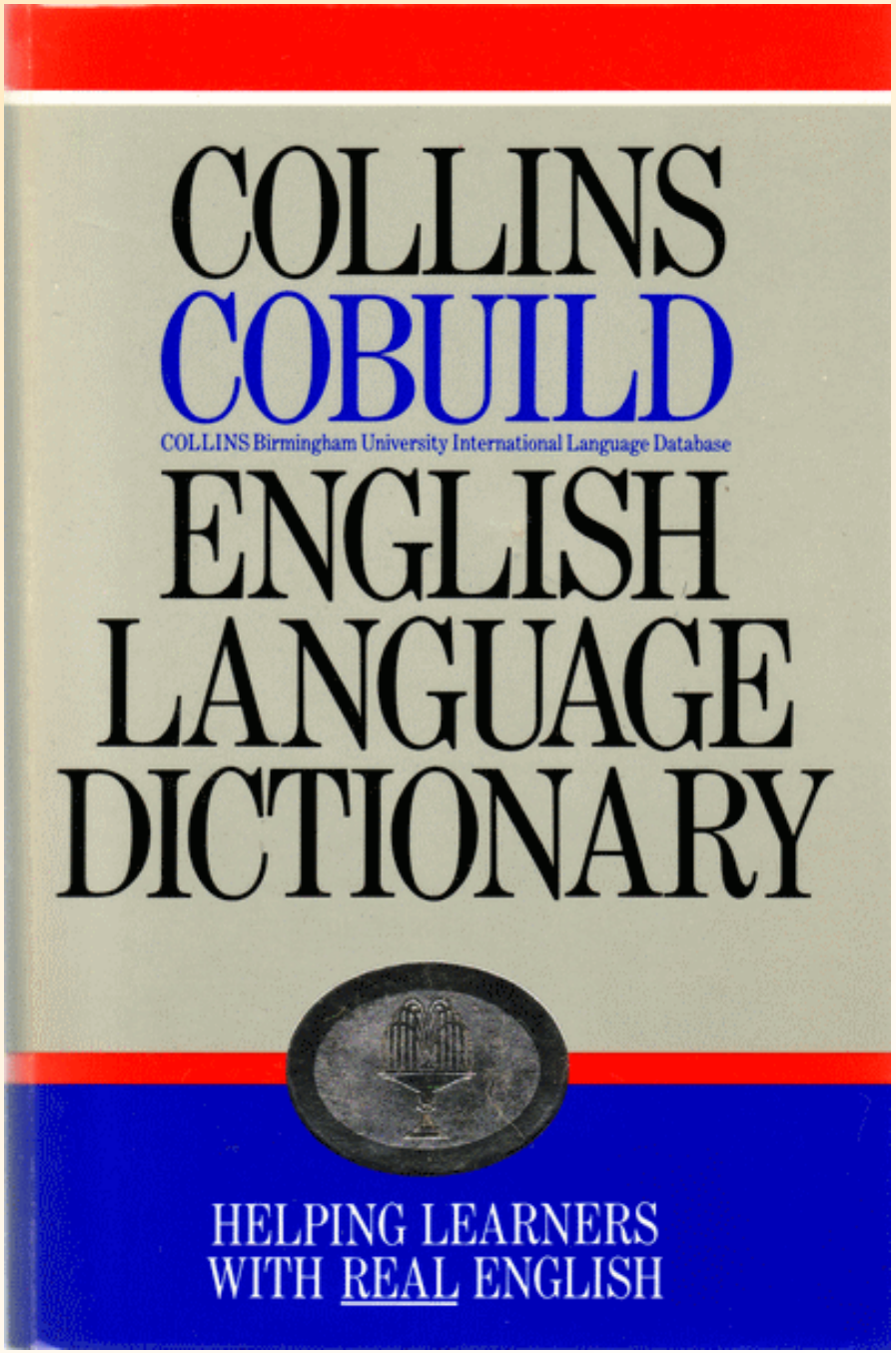


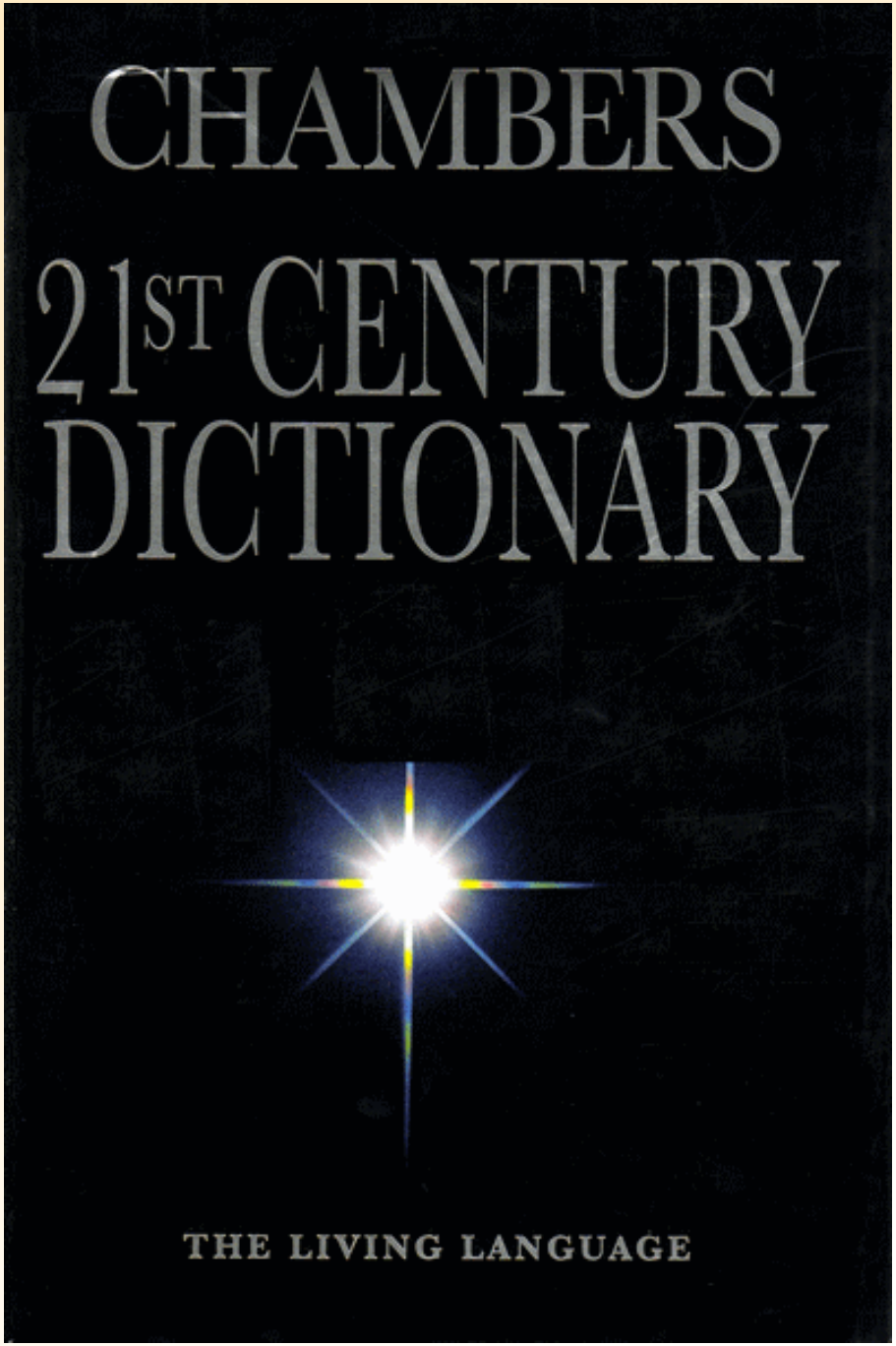

RANDOM HOUSE
WEBSTER'S
unabridged
dictionary
with CD-ROM
SECOND EDITION
OVER 315,000 ENTRIES
SPECIAL NEW-WORDS SECTION PLUS AN ESSAY ON THE GROWTH OF ENGLISH
2,400 ILLUSTRATIONS AND SPOT MAPS




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.

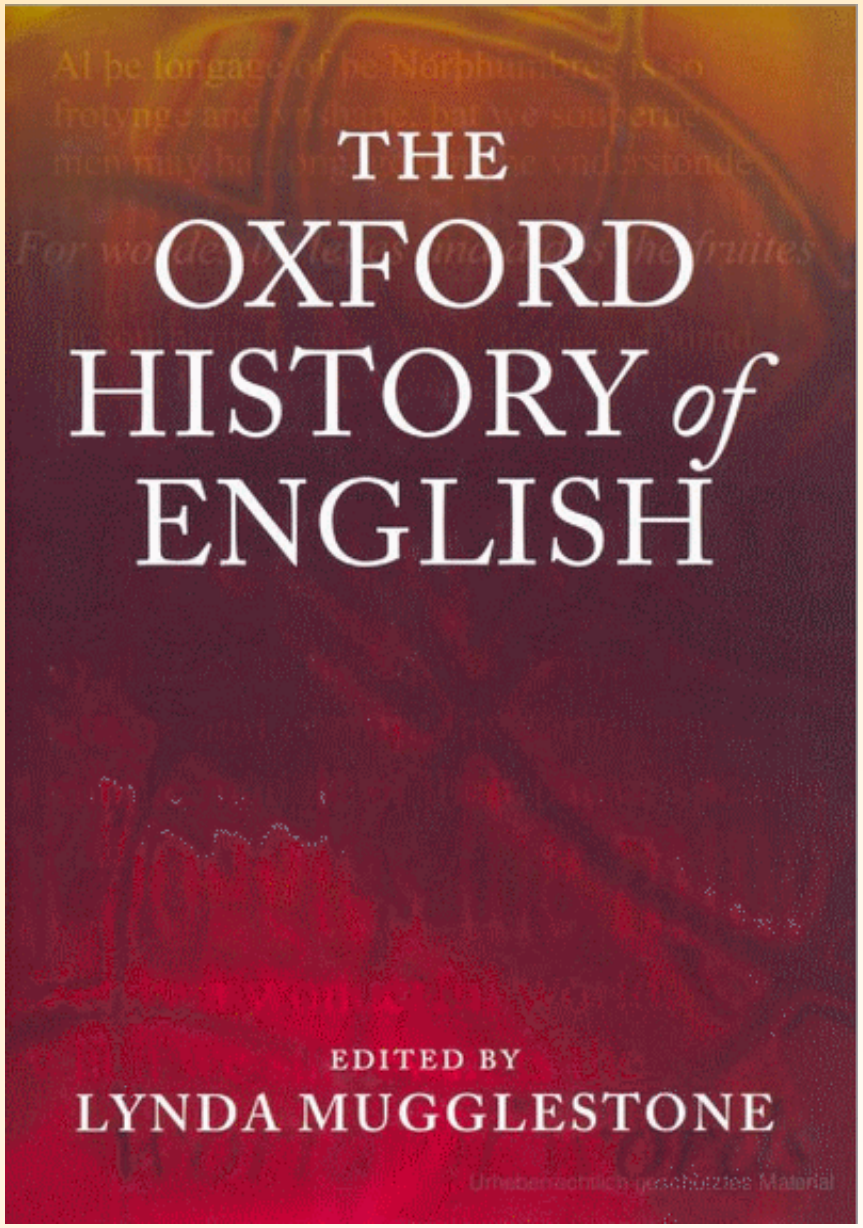
Dictionaries with a different approach: ‘real English’, ‘the living language’

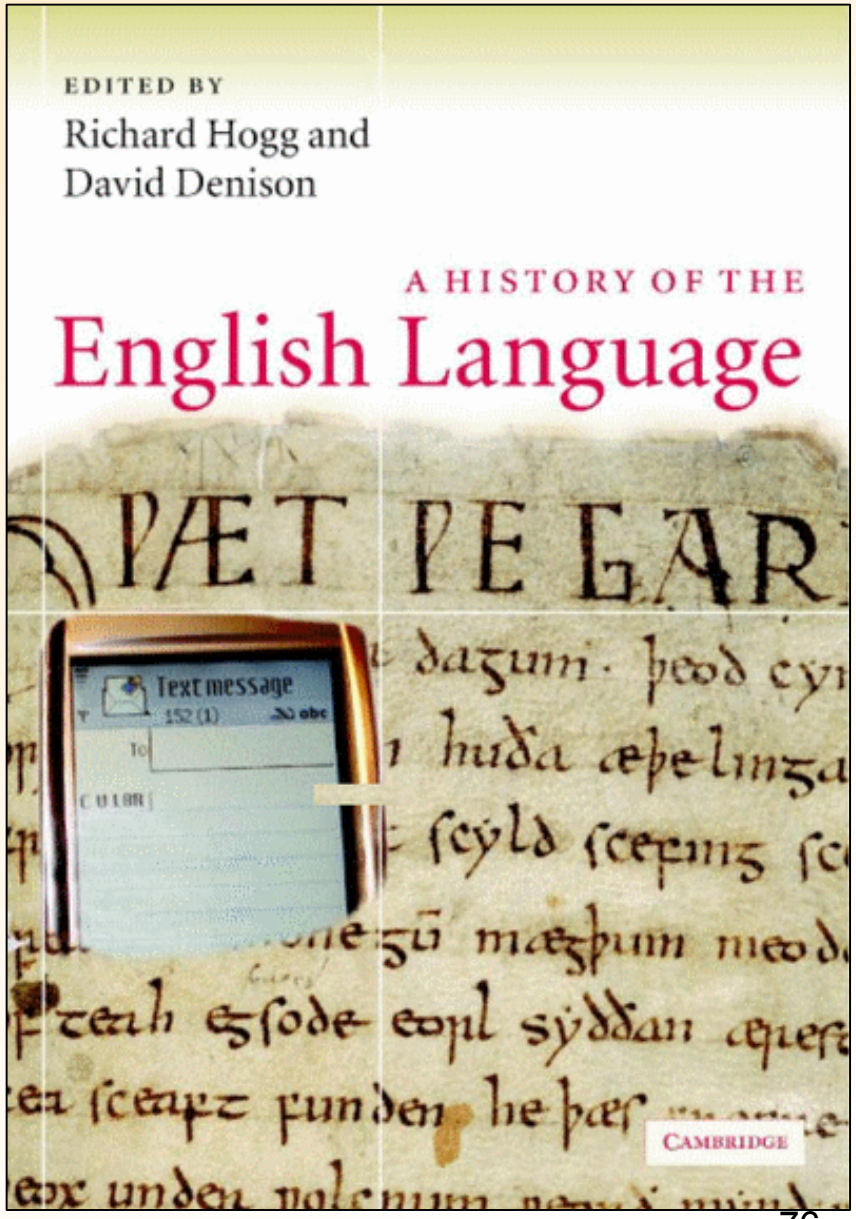

COLLINS
COBUILD
COLLINS Birmingham University International Language Database
ENGLISH
LANGUAGE
DICTIONARY
HELPING LEARNERS
WITH REAL ENGLISH

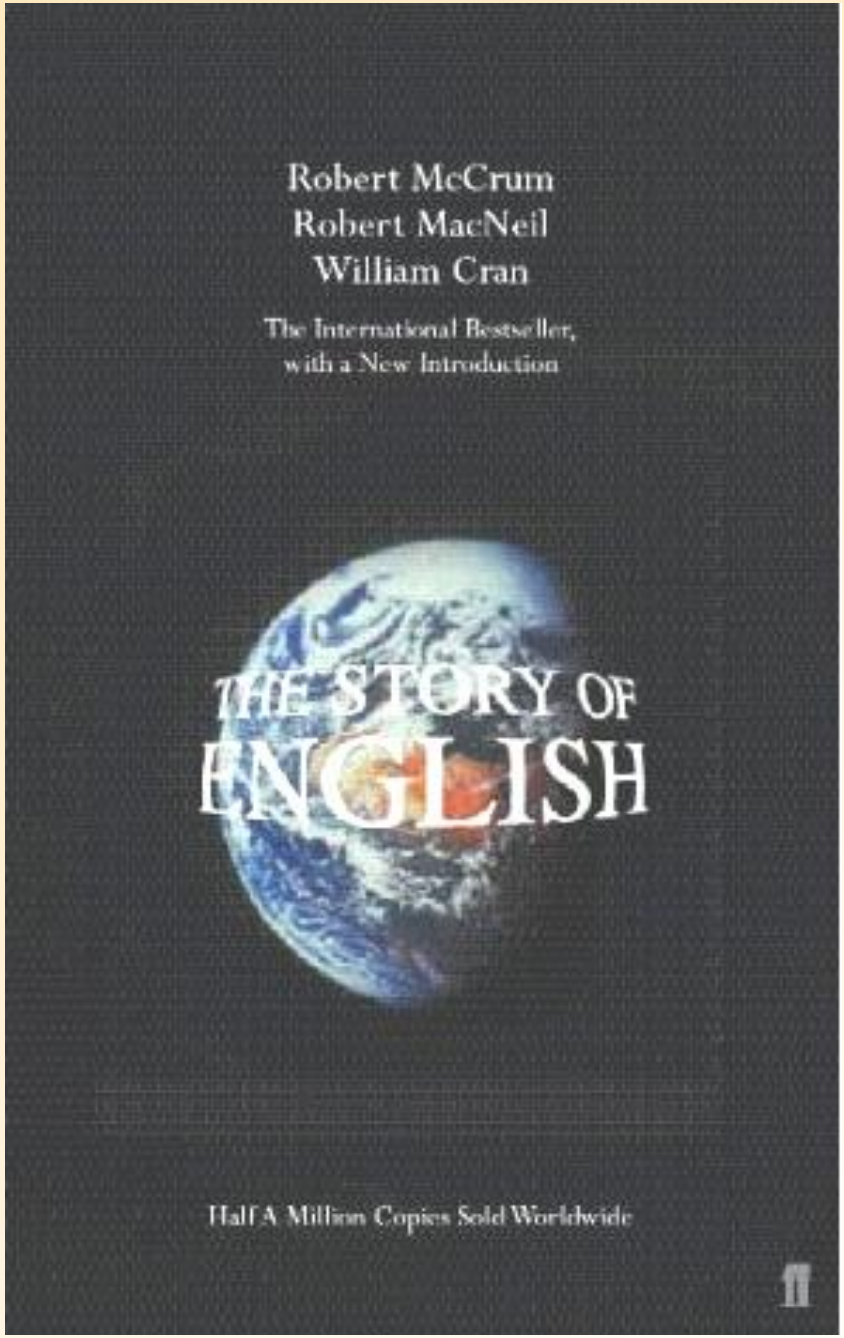

CHAMBERS
21ST CENTURY
DICTIONARY
THE LIVING LANGUAGE

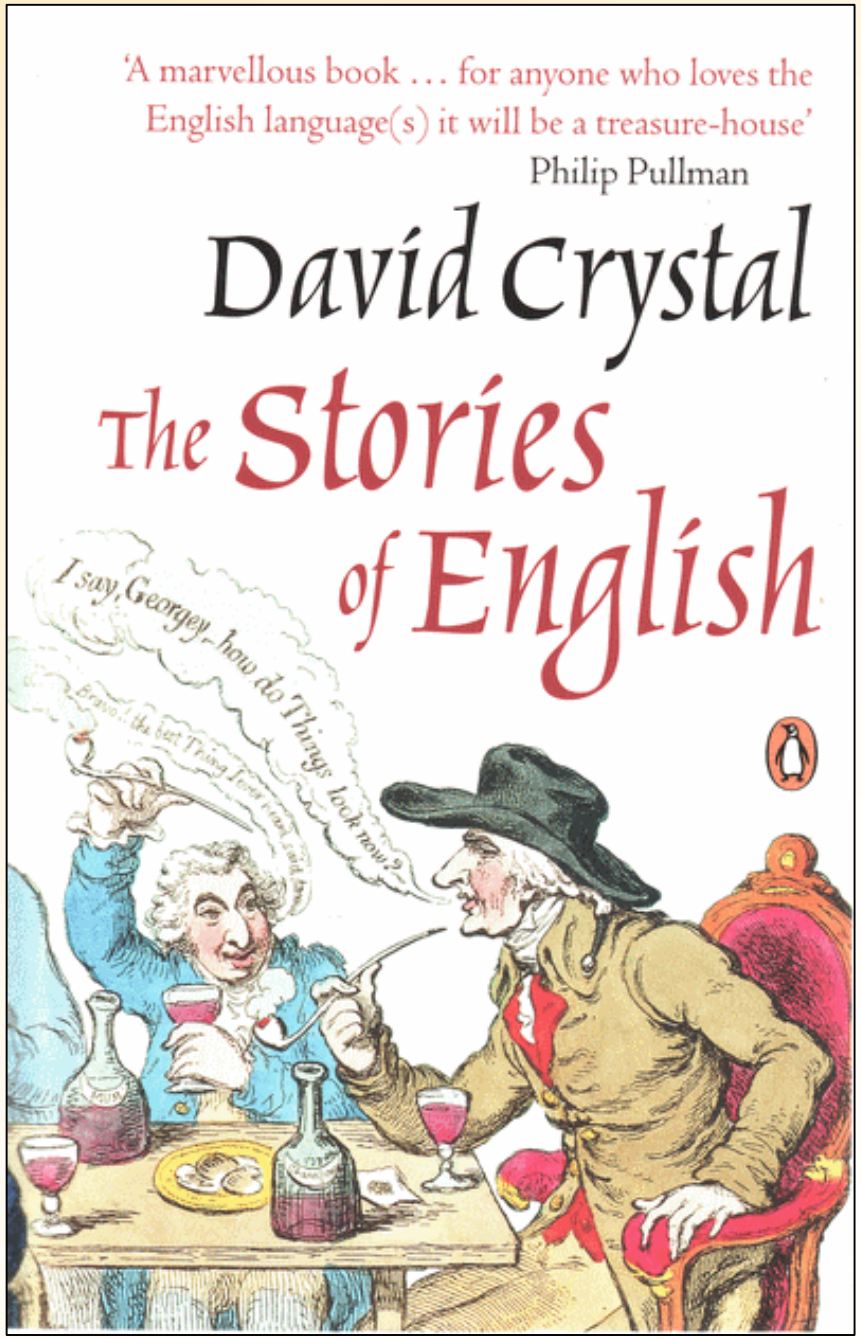
Views of the development of the English language today

(note the use of the article and the singular versus the plural in the following books)


THE
OXFORD
HISTORY of
ENGLISH
EDITED BY
LYNDA MUGGLESTONE


EDITED BY
Richard Hogg and
David Denison
A HISTORY OF THE
English Language
Text message
CAMBRIDGE


Robert McCrum
Robert MacNeil
William Cran
The International Bestseller,
with a New Introduction
THE STORY OF
ENGLISH
Half A Million Copies Sold Worldwide


'A marvellous book . . . for anyone who loves the English language(s) it will be a treasure-house'
Philip Pullman
David Crystal
The Stories of English
I say, Georgey, how do Things look now?

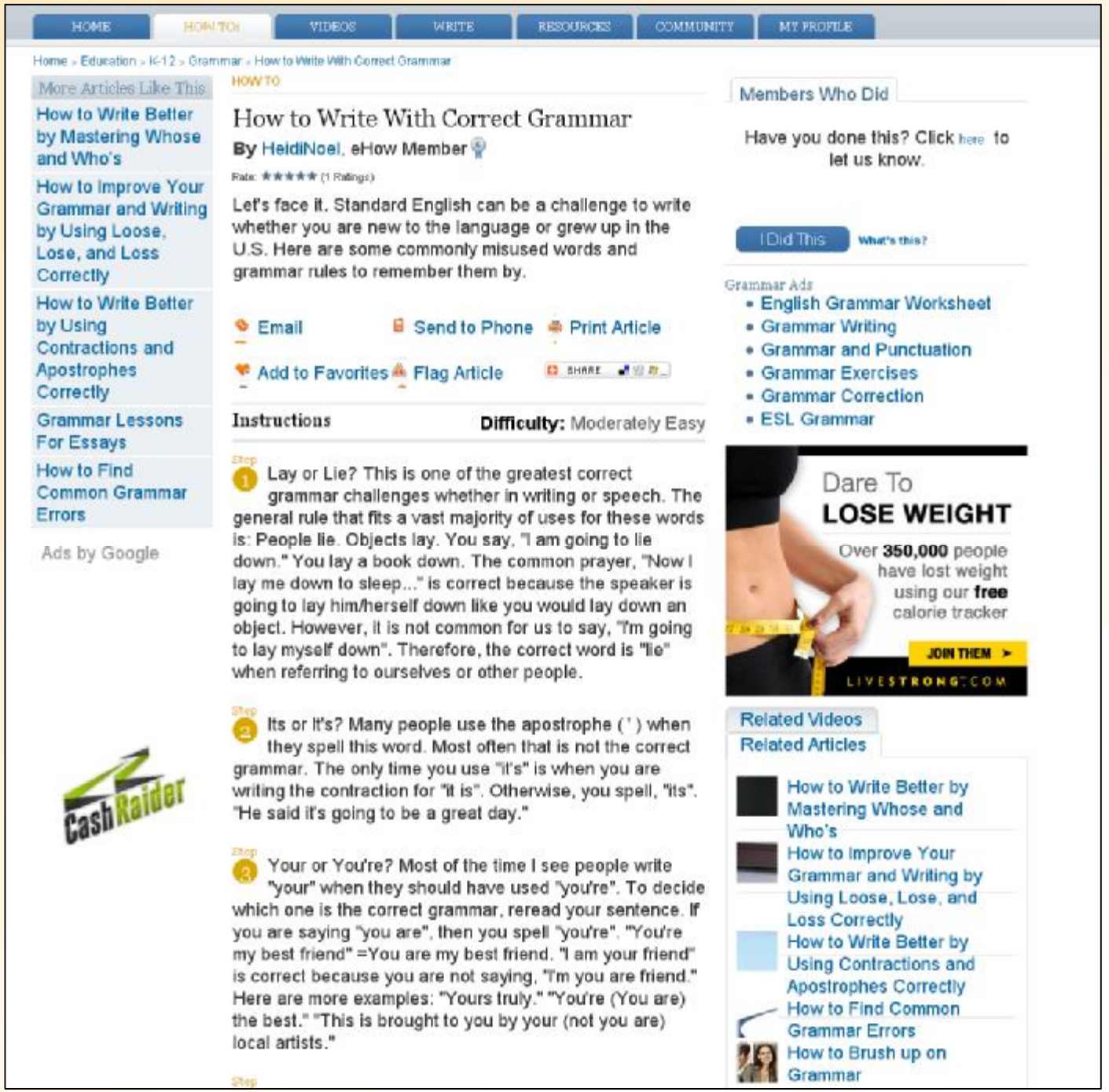
The Language Industry in Today's Society

my english are fabuluos

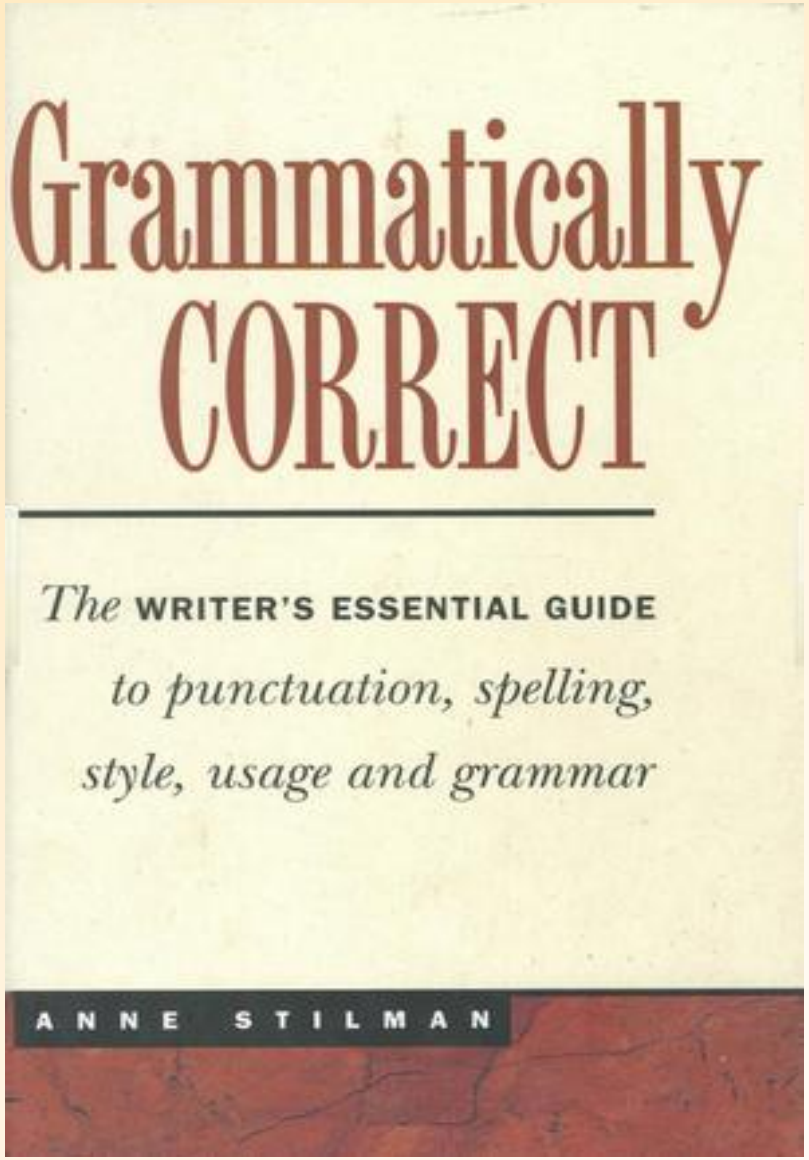
Your Grammar is broken.

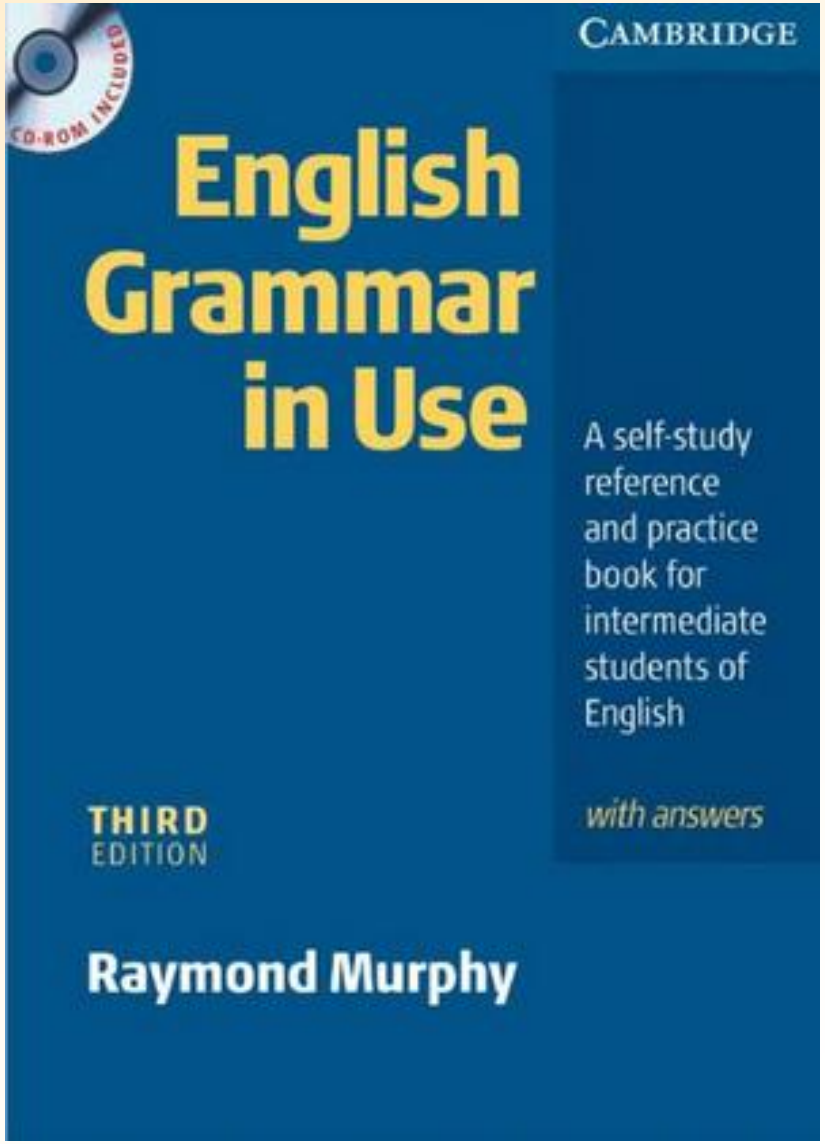
WE CAN FIX IT!

There is plenty of well-meant advice available for those uncertain about what is ‘correct grammar’

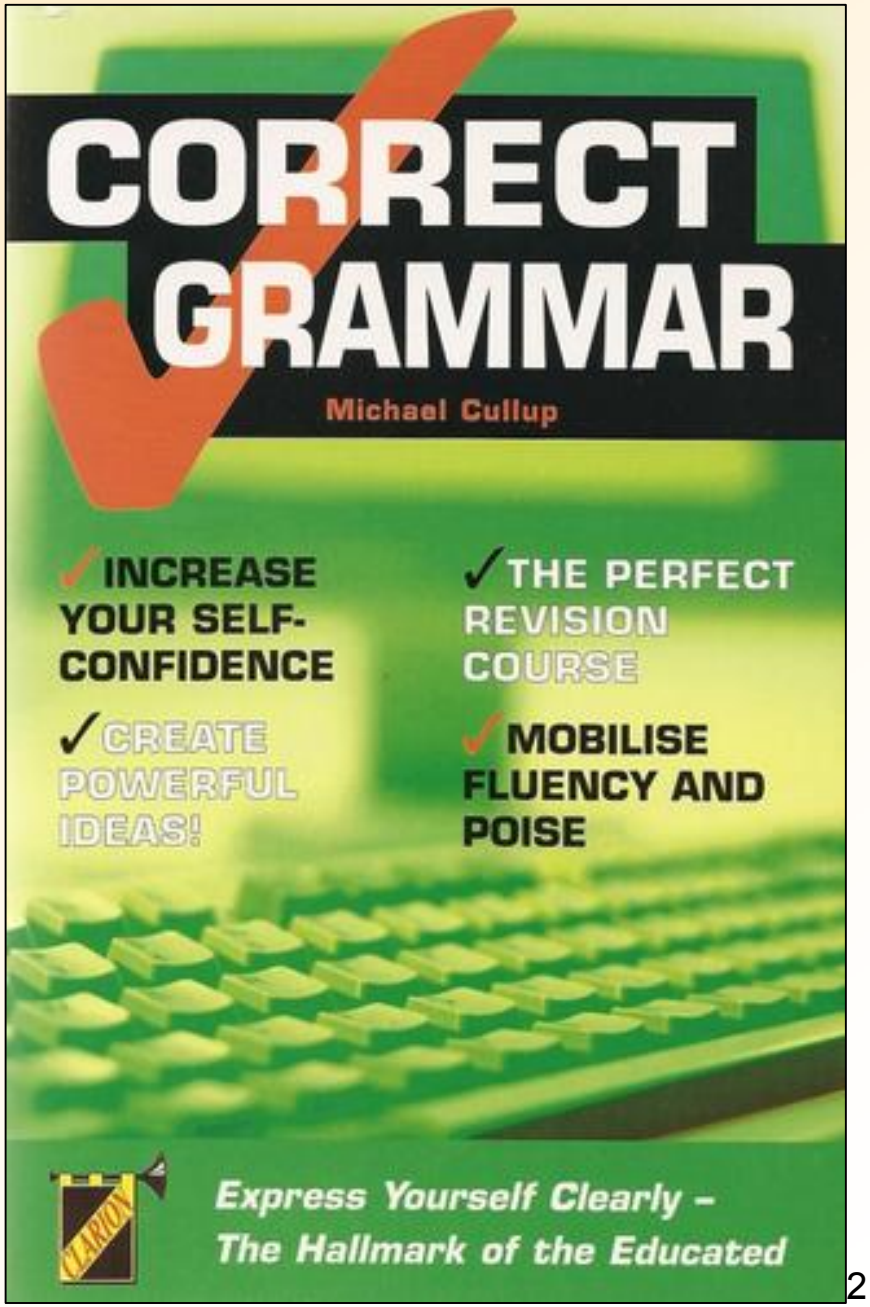


Books on mastering / using grammar

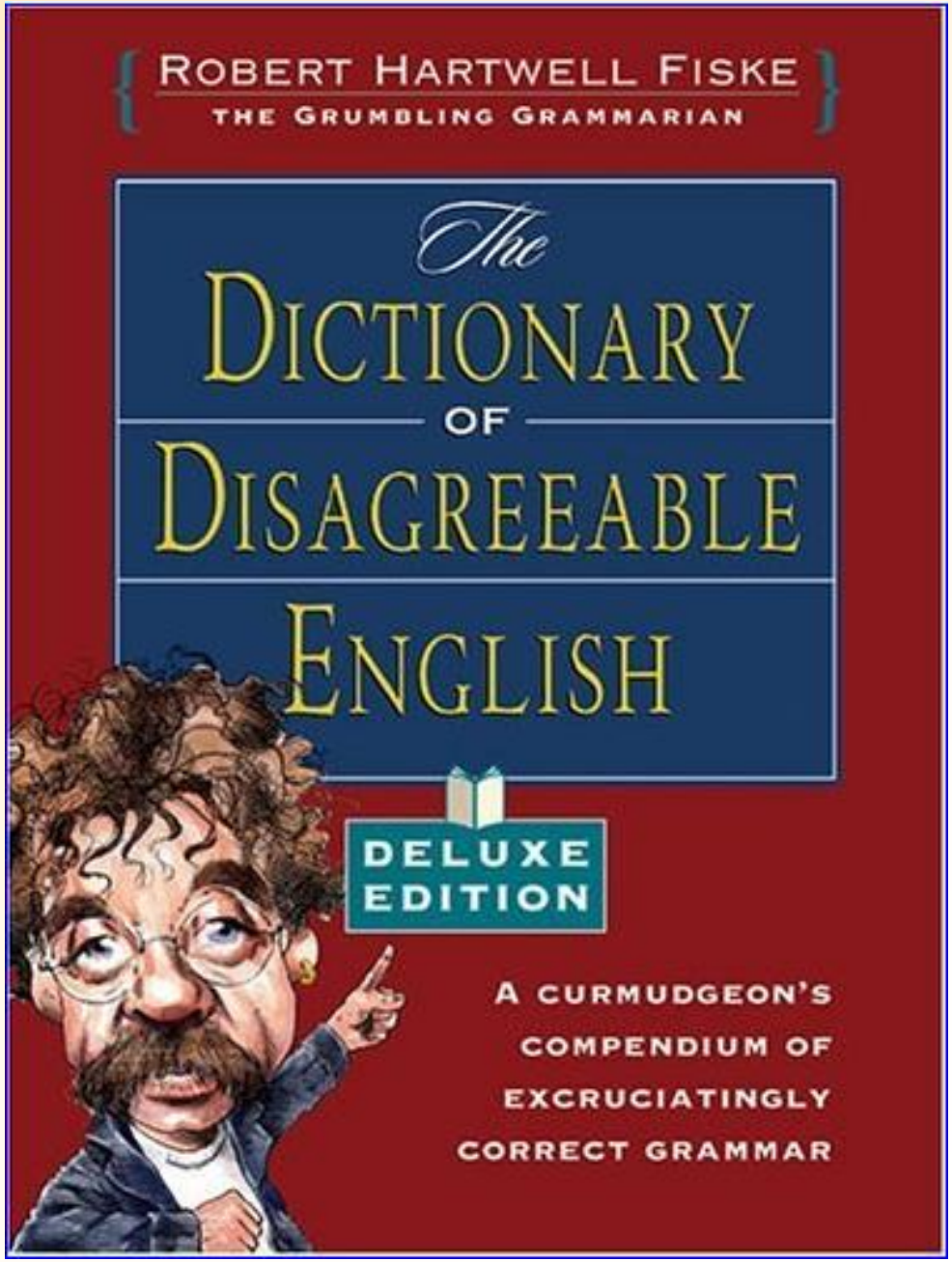


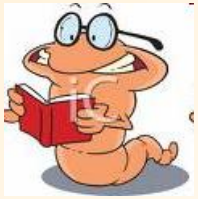


Correct grammar and appearing ‘educated’



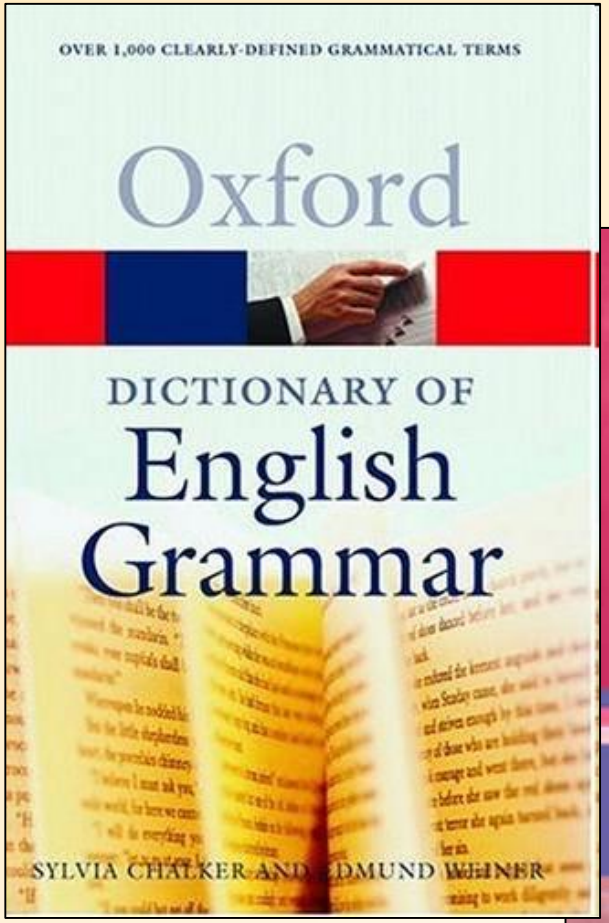
Making fun of others' mistakes

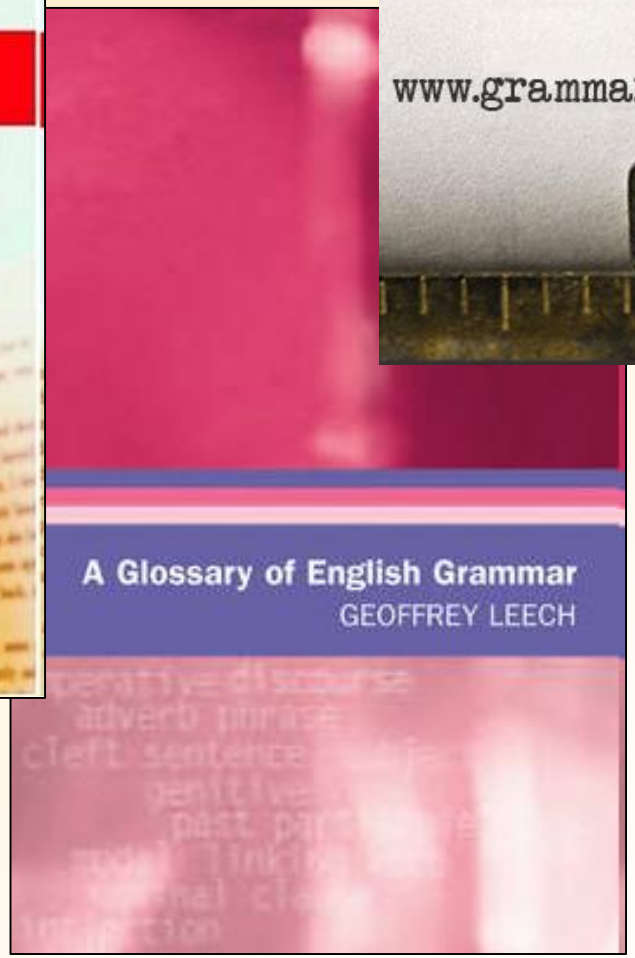




Linguistic insecurity: What is the ‘correct’ form?

Yes, grammar matters, but . . .



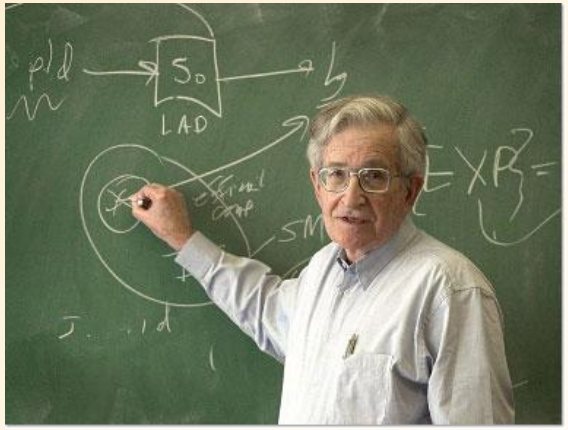


What should the teachers do?

It depends on the context. If you are teaching English, especially in a foreign language context, then you must make sure that your students learn standard forms, hence the need for correction.

If there is tension between the vernacular of a student (his/her native dialect) and the standard then you should stress that the standard is just one form of language without any inherent claim to superiority over colloquial forms. But it is the form used publicly and hence when in a public context it is advisable to use at least a modified form of the standard to avoid censure by others.

And what is the linguist's standpoint?



The standard is one form of language which by historical accident became that which is preferred in writing and in public usage. There is nothing better about the standard or worse about colloquial speech or dialects.

Be tolerant and put aside any prejudice you might feel about certain pronunciations, words or turns of phrase!

References (selection)

Bauer, Laurie and Peter Trudgill (eds) 1998. *Language Myths*. New York: Penguin.

Bex, Tony and Richard J. Watts (eds) 1999. *Standard English. The widening debate*. London: Routledge.

Crowley, Tony 2003. *Standard English and the Politics of Language.* Second edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Curzan, Anne 2014. Fixing English. *Prescriptivism and Language History*. Cambridge: University Press.

Deumert, Ana and Wim Vandenbussche (eds) 2003. *Germanic Standardizations. Past to Present*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Hickey, Raymond 2010. *Eighteenth-Century English. Ideology and Change*. Cambridge: University Press.

Milroy, James and Lesley Milroy 1991. *Authority in language. Investigating language prescription and standardisation*. 2nd edition. *Language, Education and Society* London: Blackwell.

Tieken-Boon von Ostade, Ingrid 2019. *Describing Prescriptivism.* London: Routledge.

Trudgill, Peter and Richard Watts (eds) 2001. *Alternative histories of English*. London: Routledge.

Wardhaugh, Ronald 1999. *Proper English. Myths and Misunderstandings about Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Thank you for your attention.

Any questions?

- Raymond Hickey
- English Linguistics
- University of Duisburg and Essen

raymond.hickey@uni-due.de