EL2111 Historical Variation in English
Tutorial No. 7

1. Respond to these statements: indicate the extent of your (dis)agreement and give reasons for your view.
(*a*) All languages have standard varieties.
(*b*) Varieties that are not standard are sub-standard and erroneous.
(*c*) The standard variety carries with it great prestige.
(*d*) The standard variety is the one supported by the government, the school and examination system, and used in important writings like religious texts and dictionaries
(*e*) Standard English can be spoken with many different accents.
(*f*) The purest variety is usually the one chosen as the standard.

2. Attempt a *definition* of a standard language. What do you understand by it having 'minimal variation in form and maximal variation in function'?
        Which English dialect eventually got selected to become the standard variety? What are the reasons that this dialect was selected?

3. An important figure in the codification of Standard English is Dr Samuel Johnson, who attempted to write a definitive dictionary in 1755. Read the following extracts from his *Dictionary* and answer the questions below. (Watch out for the 'long s' which looks a bit like our <f>.For the whole preface, see
http://www.cie.uce.ac.uk/englishweb/Texts/Samuel%20Johnson/JohnsonPreface/JohnPrefaceHome.htm)

Extract 1

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.

Extract 2

So far have I been from any care to grace my pages with modern decorations, that I have ſtudiouſly endeavoured to collect examples and authorities from the writers before the reſtoration, whoſe works I regard as *the wells of Engliſh undefiled*, as the pure ſources of genuine diction. Our language, for almoſt a century, has, by the concurrence of many cauſes, been gradually departing from its original *Teutonick* character, and deviating towards a *Gallick* ſtructure and phraſeology, from which it ought to be our endeavour to recal it, by making our ancient volumes the ground-work of ſtile, admitting among the additions of later times, only ſuch as may ſupply real deficiencies, ſuch as are readily adopted by the genius of our tongue, and incorporate eaſily with our native idioms.

But as every language has a time of rudeneſs antecedent to perfection, as well as of falſe refinement and declenſion, I have been cautious leſt my zeal for antiquity might drive me into times too remote, and croud my book with words now no longer underſtood. I have fixed *Sidney*'s work for the boundary, beyond which I make few excurſions. From the authours which roſe in the time of *Elizabeth*, a ſpeech might be formed adequate to all the purpoſes of uſe and elegance. If the language of theology were extracted from *Hooker* and the tranſlation of the Bible ; the terms of natural knowledge from *Bacon* ; the phraſes of policy, war, and navigation from *Raleigh* ; the dialect of poetry and fiction from *Spenſer* and *Sidney* ; and the diction of common life from *Shakeſpeare*, few ideas would be loſt to mankind, for want of *Engliſh* words, in which they might be expreſſed.

(*a*) What are his motivations for putting together the *Dictionary*? (Remember that this was done in a painstaking manner!)

(*b*) What seems to have been his guiding principle? Was any help available to him?

(*c*) Selection entails inclusion and exclusion (whether explicit or implicit). What seems to have been included or excluded?

4. Examine the following Cockney version of part of the story of Noah and the flood. What would be the problems with non-standardisms. In the foreword by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cockney version is said to '[take] it out of the formal church setting and [put] it back into the marketplace, into the streets, where [the Bible] originally took place'. Do you agree? (You can try translating this to CSE or Singlish and consider the effect: 'God then say to Noah, 'Eh Noah-ah, you-ah and also your family-ah must go into the big boat, you know …')

God then said to Noah, 'OK, me ol' china. I want you to get into the nanny with all your family. You are the only geezer in the whole bloomin' world who does the right thing, that's why I'm saving you and your family. I want you to take with you seven pairs of each kind of ritually clean animal …, and one pair of each kind of animal that is not clean in a religious sort of way. You're also to take seven pairs of each kind of Richard. I'm asking you to do this, Noah, so that every kind of animal and Richard will be kept alive, and then later, they can make lots of other animals and Richards to fill the earth again. Seven days from now, you're gonna see more Andy Cain than you've ever seen in your fork; it will keep on raining for forty days and nights and every living thing is gonna be done in!' As ever, Noah did everything that God had asked 'im to do.

    Now would you Adam-and-Eve it, Noah was 600 years old when the big flood came. He an' 'is trouble, an' 'is currants and their troubles, went into the great big nanny to be saved from the flood. Males and females of every kind of animal and Richard also went into the nanny with Noah, just like God wanted.

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1 **china** china plate = mate (*rhyming slang*)

1, 15, 16 **nanny** nanny goat = boat

2 **geezer** chap, fellow (*slang*)

6-8, 16 **Richard** Richard the third = bird

9 **Andy Cain** = rain

10 **fork** fork and knife = life

13 **Adam-and-Eve** = believe

14 **trouble** trouble and strife = wife

14 **currants** currant buns = sons

[Mike Coles, *The Bible in Cockney: Well bits of it anyway …* (London: BRF, 2001), pp. 17–18.]

5. Robert Lowth (1710–87) was well known for his *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), and went through many editions in subsequent years and had great influence in what happened in schools, particularly in the USA. His aim was this: *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.*

    What are your reactions to some of these 'rules'?

- *Two negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an affirmative.*
- *The preposition is often separated from the Relative which it governs, and joined to the Verb at the end of the Sentence, or of some member of it: as, 'Horace is an author, <u>whom</u> I am much delighted <u>with</u>' … This is an idiom, which our language is strongly inclined to: it prevails in common conversation, and suits very well with the familiar style in writing: but the placing of the Preposition before the Relative is more graceful, as well as more perspicuous; and agrees much better with the solemn and elevated style*

    Following prescriptive grammar, what would be the problems with these sentences? Are these prescriptive rules logical?

(*a*) Neither the pupils nor their teacher are coming.

(*b*) None of them have the ability to discern between good and evil.

(*c*) Everyone must make up their own minds about who to support in the elections.

(*d*) Space: the Final Frontier. These are the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds; to seek out new life, and new civilisations; to boldly go where no man has gone before.

(*e*) I didn't know that it was him who played that dirty trick.