

Information about Standard English.

Origins of Standard English

Standard English has its origins in an East Midlands dialect that was spoken in the middle ages. The dialect was spoken over a large area of Southern England, including London, Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

When William Caxton set up the first printing press in 1476 he decided to follow the spelling conventions of his dialect. He used the same conventions when he published English language translations of foreign texts.

The development of Standard English continued and many dictionaries and books on grammar were published. The most important dictionary was compiled by Samuel Johnson in 1775. Johnson's dictionary promoted the standardisation of word meanings and spellings. Grammarians such as Robert Lowth established the grammatical rules that we still use today.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries universal education and the spread of literacy encouraged the acceptance of a variety of English that was nationally recognised and understood by all.

Complaints about sloppy or incorrect use of the language usually refer to deviation from Standard English. Linguists do not use the term good or bad to describe these deviations. Linguists note the differences and the appropriateness of the differences to a particular situation.

Discussion topic.

'Nothing more effectively condemns an individual to his class or ethnic ghetto than an inability to communicate clearly and logically in English.'

John Honey