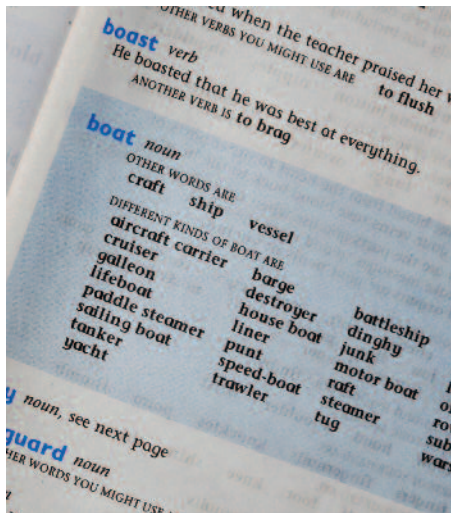




Standard English

Standard English is just one dialect of English..

- Standard English is more usually applied to written forms of language.
- It should not be confused with a person's dialect or accent.
- All speakers use more formal/informal language according to context.
- In the classroom, teaching about Standard English is likely to be part of teaching about written composition.

Standard English is the form of English widely accepted as the 'correct' (high status) form and is most usually applied to written forms of language and formal speaking. UKLA supports the view that Standard English should not be confused with variation in dialect or accent according to where someone is born or brought up. Speakers from all over the English speaking world will be able to speak in Standard English but with variations of accent and vocabulary. All speakers vary the register of their language according to where they are and who they are speaking to, for example, when people talk to friends they are likely to use a less formal register; when they talk to someone they do not know, they are likely to be more formal.

When Standard English is approached in schools/educational contexts, it is more likely to be taught in its written form. In spoken language, Standard English should be seen as part of the repertoire of all pupils but should not be seen as 'correcting' a child's first dialect but as a 'dialect' to be used when appropriate.

Sources

Crystal, D. (2000) *Rediscover Grammar*. London: Longman.

Eyres, I. (2000) *Primary English*. Subject Knowledge Series. London: Paul Chapman/Open University Press.

Classroom example

Dialect, non-standard and standard forms of language

Bella was working with her class of 10 and 11 year olds in Southern England on Classic English novels and she had chosen *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. This novel is a rich source for critical reading about class and disability – as well as being an absorbing story of redemption. One of the features of the novel is its use of dialect and Bella decided to spend a short while exploring standard and non-standard forms of language and their contexts and uses. As a teacher from Birmingham, Bella is proud of her local dialect and, as she knows the language well, she chose to read some of Liz Berry's poetry with the class. She began with 'Birmingham Roller', a poem about a racing pigeon and enjoyed reading it with an authentic accent. Bella read the poem first then showed it on the classroom screen, asking the children to ask any questions they had about the poem. Gradually they began to build the meaning so she read it again asking them to identify their favourite bits. They loved 'whose onds grew soft as feathers', 'jimmucking the breeze' and 'caught by the open donny of the clouds' and the class talked about the effect of using these dialect expressions to create a sense of the beauty of the birds and their flight.

Bella returned to the poem and asked the class what they noticed about the words 'yowm' and 'we'm' meaning 'you are' and 'we are'. She gave them a few more examples from her own experience, when her Auntie Mary used to tell her if she cried, 'yowm worse nor a babby' and the familiar cry 'her's at it again' if she was naughty. They 'translated' the expressions and noticed that they were just parallels of 'you are', 'we are' and 'she is' and that everyone who speaks the dialect understands it perfectly. The class searched for examples of dialect in *The Secret Garden* and found that it was only in the speech that the author used dialect. This allowed Bella the chance to establish that written English is usually in standard form and that dialect and non-standard English are usually spoken. The class went on to think about the contexts of using these different forms of language, considering when they might speak their local dialect and when they might speak in a more standard form.

Bella asked the class if anyone ever corrected their spoken language and some said that their parents told them not to say 'I done' rather than 'I did'. This led to some lively debate about other things their parents told them not to say and discussion about knowing when it is acceptable to use non-standard forms of language and when it was suitable to use Standard English. Bella was keen to emphasise that each is a perfectly legitimate form of spoken expression and that, except in poetry or dialogue, it is usual to write in Standard English but that non-standard forms were chosen for specific reasons to suit the writer's intentions.

The class wrote their own poems and working in pairs 'translated' them into Standard English. Corinne wrote:

'Who did this?' the teacher bellowed.
 'He done it, Miss.'
 '*Who* did it?'
 '*He* done it'.
 'We was in the playground...'
 'We were in the playground,'
 'Was you there, Miss?'
 'No, you were.'
 'We was, Miss, you're right.
 And then he done it.'

She and Nathan translated it to:

'Who did this?' the teacher bellowed.
 'He did it, Miss.'
 '*Who* did it?'
 '*He* did it'.
 'We were in the playground...'
 'We *were* in the playground,'
 'Were you there, Miss?'
 'No, you were.'
 'We were, Miss, you're right.
 And then he did it.'

and explained that the standard version completely missed the point of the humour!

'The Birmingham Roller' by Liz Berry can be found on:
<https://poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/birmingham-roller/>

Eve Bearne and David Reedy on behalf of UKLA

See also

UKLA bookshop www.ukla.org/shop

Teaching Grammar Effectively at Key Stage 1
by Eve Bearne, Rebecca Kennedy and David Reedy

Teaching Grammar Effectively in Primary Schools
by David Reedy and Eve Bearne

Making an Impact 5: Teaching Grammar in Context
by Rebecca Kennedy and Eve Bearne: professional development materials to
accompany *Teaching Grammar Effectively in Primary Schools*

English Language and Literacy 3-19:
Grammar and Knowledge About Language
by John Richmond

UKLA website www.ukla.org/resources

Website resource *Grammar in its place*: <https://ukla.org/resources>