**‘Standard English’ and the ideology of prescriptivism**

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This paper deals with a cluster of interlinked topics: normativity, prescriptivism, rules, grammar, style, conservativeness, and relations between standard and nonstandard dialects. The educated English-speaking general public (journalists, essayists, educators, politicians) wallows in unproductive and confused controversies over such topics. Non-compliance with prescriptive pseudo-rules is equated with moral turpitude, and critical attention to reformulation of rules is mistaken for total abandonment of rules. It often seems to linguists that these confusions result from wilful refusal to accept elementary facts: languages change; most changes are trivial and do not threaten communication; dialect variation is natural; bidialectalism is not harmful; nonstandard dialect use does not signal inferiority or stupidity. But even among linguists who accept these points, characterization of Standard English is sometimes confused with denigration of nonstandard dialects; sociolinguistic nonstandard status is confused with political subjugation to the ideology of a ruling linguistic elite; and normativity of their subject matter (the existence of a distinction between grammatical well-formedness and grammatical deviance) is confused with prescriptivist attitudes toward linguistic behaviour. I cannot attempt to clear up all of these confusions, but I hope to be able to clarify some of the issues.