

Children's Use of Spoken Standard English.
A short report prepared for
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Preface

This paper is the first in a series to be published by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) under the general title SCAA Discussion Papers.

As the series title suggests, these papers arise from discussions around key issues in the implementation of the National Curriculum. The papers aim to be informative and accessible, stimulating debate on matters of interest to the profession and to the wider public.

The study reported here provides some evidence about pupils' use of spoken standard English. The evidence does not claim to be exhaustive; it is taken from a small sample of audio recordings made in schools in 1988. The date of the recording is significant, in that it comes before the implementation of the National Curriculum. It gives us a snapshot of the spoken language of 11 and 15-year-olds before there was any specific requirement for the teaching of standard English.

The linguistic analyses carried out on the data contribute to our knowledge about the standard and non-standard forms found in children's speech, and offer a glimpse of the way such forms were used. We hope this information will be useful in clarifying some of the debates about this important area of the English curriculum.

Acknowledgments

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Summary

This report summarises the findings of a small-scale investigation of the spoken English used by 11 and 15-year-olds. The study used a set of audio tapes made during 1988 in different regions of England. The children were recorded in situations likely to encourage their use of standard rather than nonstandard English and the focus of the study was the extent to which they did use standard forms in these situations. Additionally, the study investigated which features were involved in the distinctions between standard and non-standard English. The total number of children in the study was 350.

The main findings were as follows:

- 32 per cent of the speakers did not use any nonstandard forms;
- girls used fewer non-standard forms than boys at both ages;
- 11-year-olds used fewer non-standard forms than 15-year-olds, but this may be simply because they spoke less;
- almost every non-standard form was used by some speakers alongside its standard equivalent, ie by 'choice' rather than out of ignorance;
- there were 13 clusters of non-standard forms which occurred in all four regions, and between one and nine others which were specific to one region. These clusters are listed, with examples, in Appendix A;
- these clusters vary a great deal in frequency, both in terms of how often the occasion to use them arose and also in terms of how likely they were to be used when the occasion did arise;
- the average number of distinct non-standard forms used per speaker is hard to calculate, but among those who used any non-standard forms at all, the number probably lies somewhere between two and five. (The evidence is reviewed in Appendix B.)

These findings are objective, factual and reproducible, in the sense that any similar study of the same tapes would have found the same forms and distributions (with differences in detail only). It is, however, less clear how to generalise from our sample to the total national population, or to other age groups.

The findings are relevant to educational policy and practice, as they:

- provide a database of forms that teachers may find helpful;
- are relevant to decisions about which forms should be given priority in teaching;
- give some indications about what might be involved in enabling every school-leaver to be fluent in spoken standard English;
- provide a baseline against which future achievements may be measured.

It should be stressed, of course, that these findings have no direct bearing on the question of how spoken standard English should be taught.

1 Methodology

The data used were audio tape-recordings made in 1988 by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) as part of a national survey of children's use of language (Gorman et al, 1988). To begin with, all the tapes from the four regions agreed with SCAA (Merseyside, Tyneside, South-west and London) were selected from the NFER archive, then for each of the four regions a further selection was made. The research assistant listened to all the tapes from that region in order to pick out the speakers who used only spoken standard English (SSE), and to build a list of the nonstandard English (NSE) forms used in that region. The project director listened to a selection of tapes to check the initial analysis and to review decisions over problematic cases. All the tapes which contained NSE uses were listened to a second time, recording for each speaker which of the locally available NSE forms they used, and also recording the use of SSE alternatives to these forms.

These findings were consolidated into a number of raw data tables, then summarised for statistical analysis to provide the basis for the report.

Data

A total of some 2,000 tapes were made by the NFER and are still available for research. This material is particularly suitable for the current project as the recordings:

- were made in school situations likely to have inclined pupils more towards the use of standard than to non-standard forms. The pupils were for the most part speaking in the presence of an unfamiliar adult whom they knew to be a teacher, and they were carrying out specific spoken language tasks. The contexts in which pupils' use of SSE will be assessed under the revised National Curriculum are likely to include similar features, so these tapes should give a reasonable basis for documenting pupils' ability to use SSE;
- were made in 1988, just before the introduction of the National Curriculum, so they provide a rough baseline for measuring the effects of teaching specifically geared to encouraging the use of SSE.
- were made under broadly similar circumstances in all schools, so it is meaningful to compare performances across schools and regions;
- are accessible, and are catalogued and classified by school, sex of speaker and age of speaker (age 11 or 15)
- were collected as part of a carefully planned national survey, so they should be reasonably representative;
- were of sessions lasting around half an hour each, so each pupil had a chance to speak for a significant amount of time. On average the speakers included in the study spoke for between 5 and 10 minutes each.

There are, however, some limitations to the data:

- some tapes were unusable because of the recording quality, and others were very hard to use;

- it was not possible to obtain information on the speakers' social backgrounds, whether their home was rural or urban, or how long they had lived in the area concerned;
- all the activities involved at least two speakers, and some involved four, so it was often very hard to track speakers through the tape;
- neither schools nor speakers were selected as part of a random stratified sample, so the speakers studied may not be typical;
- ages, sexes and regions are not equally balanced in the sample, so trends are hard to isolate. This limitation is greatest for the sample for London and for 11-year-olds from Merseyside.

These qualifications are important and should be born in mind in reading the report. The limitations are acceptable so long as it is remembered that this is only a **preliminary** and **exploratory** investigation carried out within six weeks.

2 The sample of speakers

The initial instruction was to study 16 speakers (matched for sex and age) from each of the four regions, but in the event the research assistant managed to deal with more speakers than this. He was able to study all the tapes available from four geographical areas defined by LEA:

- Merseyside (Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, Wirral)
- Tyneside (Gateshead, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North Tyneside, Sunderland)
- South-west (Devon and Cornwall)
- London (ILEA)

This gave a total of 350 speakers (excluding those whose contributions were unusable, either because they were inaudible or because they spoke very little). Their distribution by region, age and sex is given in Table 1, which also anticipates the later discussion by showing the percentage who used only SSE.

As this table shows, the speakers are very unevenly distributed among the various categories, leaving some badly underrepresented. In particular, the whole of London is represented by only 16 11-year-olds and 20 15-year-olds, and there were only 26 11-year-olds from Merseyside. The figures for these groups should therefore be treated especially carefully.

Table 1. Speakers by region, sex and use of spoken standard English.

Region	Age	Total speakers			% SSE only		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Merseyside	11	14	12	26	(14)	(67)	(38)
	15	37	11	48	14	27	17
Tyneside	11	40	30	70	45	43	44
	15	26	20	46	31	25	28
South-west	11	46	30	76	37	47	41
	15	36	12	48	22	42	27
London	11	12	4	16	(8)	(25)	(13)
	15	16	4	20	(25)	(0)	(20)
All	11	112	76	188	34	47	39
	15	115	47	162	22	28	23
Total	all	227	123	350	28	40	32

The contract with SCAA defined a list of general aims and more specific questions. The aims were to:

- **A1** indicate the extent to which children at different stages of schooling already use some or all of the SSE features (ie of the SSE forms whose NSE equivalents are different);

- **A2** suggest whether or not there is a developmental progression in the mastery of SSE, by comparing children at the end of KS2 with those in KS4;
- **A3** provide evidence about which features of SSE are more frequently mastered than others, and hence which features might be in need of targeted teaching;
- **A4** provide some baseline information against which to monitor the impact of the new curriculum for English over the next five years;
- **A5** feed into decisions that might be taken by SCAA to provide additional materials, or exemplification, to support the implementation of the English Order;
- **A6** have the potential to refine current definitions of SSE and the associated requirements of the Speaking and Listening programmes of study;
- **A7** help to clarify issues in the debates about teaching and learning SSE.

The following sections of this report will address most of these aims. Full answers to some of them require further expertise, though the findings are certainly relevant. This seems true of aims A4, A5 and A7, which all go beyond purely linguistic questions.

The SCAA contract also defined the following questions:

- **Q1** How many children use non-standard forms at all?
- **Q2** How frequently do any non-standard forms occur in the speech of the least standard speakers? (eg 10 times per minute or 10 times per hour?)
- **Q3** Which non-standard forms are used most frequently by these speakers, according to region?
- **Q4** Which features are used by the greatest number of speakers? This may not show the same pattern across regions?
- **Q5** Which speakers use which forms variably, with the corresponding standard form as an alternative?
- **Q6** Is there any relation between the grades assigned by those who assessed the performance (for effective communication) and use of SSE?
- **Q7** Is there any evidence of a relation between the use of standard or non-standard forms and social class?

Unfortunately it was impossible to tackle questions Q6 and Q7 at all because the necessary data were unavailable.

Nor can we give a satisfactory answer to Q2 because of the difficulty of measuring the amount of speech produced by each speaker (since all sessions involved more than one person). Given more time for the project this question could have been answered, but we felt it was more important to cover a wide range of speakers.

On the basis of figures from just one area (Merseyside), it seems that speakers can use as many as 28 non-standard forms in one of these sessions, so if we assume about seven minutes per speaker that would make an average of four non-standard forms per minute. However, this figure is little better than a guess, and in any case the number may be misleadingly inflated by 22 examples of 'indefinite this' as in 'This guy showed us... ', which some people may prefer to classify as standard. Removing this figure brings the

total down to six, giving an average of just one non-standard form per minute for a speaker who would be one of the least standard speakers from Merseyside.

The remaining aims and questions will be referred to in the following at the points where they become relevant.

3 Standard and non-standard English (A6)

This study forced us to make numerous decisions about the boundary between SSE and NSE. Most of these decisions were quite easy and (we believe) uncontentious; for example, it is certain that *them books* is NSE, in contrast with its SSE equivalent *those books*. However, it is important to state three general principles:

- Accent is irrelevant to this distinction. Some pupils who used pure SSE had quite broad local accents, and most pupils had recognisably local accents. We ignored accent because it was outside our terms of reference and also because it is explicitly set aside by the National Curriculum.
- SSE need not be formal. Since many speakers use SSE 'natively', ie at home and with their friends, it necessarily has the full range of styles including the most casual. For example, if a speaker said *Don't think so* (without *I*), we counted this as SSE on the grounds that it could be used by native speakers of SSE. Nor did we count the 'narrative present' as an example of NSE, because this seems to us to be a matter of style rather than of use of SSE.
- SSE, like all other varieties of language, is constantly changing and being redefined. Some of these changes involve forms that used to belong only to NSE but which seem to be widely used by young people who in all other respects use only SSE; but others are completely new, as with the use of the verb *go* with the meaning 'say':

[1] ...and he goes to the woman, 'Have you been drinking or something?', and she goes, 'No'.

This example is relatively straightforward because the innovation comes from outside Britain - it seems to have started in the USA, and has never been particularly associated with NSE.

Without at least the first two principles, our definition of SSE would have been so narrow as to exclude every single speaker on our tapes (including the teacher-assessors). This consequence would have been absurd. The third principle may be somewhat more controversial, but it only affects a very small number of forms. Our decisions can be judged by the forms that we list as NSE in later sections.

Appendix A lists all the forms that we counted as nonstandard. Readers seeking further information will find Milroy and Milroy (1993) an accessible source of reference.

4 How many children use non-standard forms? (A1, Q1)

Table 1 shows the percentage of speakers who used nothing but SSE in our material – an overall average of 32 per cent if we combine all regions and both ages and sexes. The remaining speakers, 68 per cent of the total, used at least one non-standard form. This figure must be seen as a minimum estimate for those who natively speak NSE, for the following reasons:

- The situation in which these pupils were performing encouraged them to use SSE rather than NSE, so we may assume that any pupil who nevertheless used NSE in these recordings would certainly use it outside the school, at home or with peers. We also assume that some of the speakers who avoided nonstandard forms in our recordings would use them outside the school.
- Our material contains only a few minutes of speech per pupil, and any increase in this length would provide more opportunities for the use of NSE. All of our speakers have gaps for some forms, where we have neither the NSE form nor its SSE equivalent; and most speakers have gaps for most forms. If we could fill these gaps by analysing more material, the number who use some NSE forms is likely to rise.

The pupils can be further subdivided by age, sex and region. We shall discuss the effect of age in the next section, so we shall ask here whether sex or region appears to have any influence on the use of standard English. When the figures for all males are compared with those for all females there is a significant difference ($p < 0.05$): more girls than boys use SSE. Why? One possibility, which unfortunately cannot be ruled out, is that the sample is biased; but another is that this is (yet another) example of the widespread tendency for females to use more standard speech than males, which sociolinguists have reported in numerous studies (for a convenient survey see Graddol and Swann 1989, chapter 3). At any rate we can report that 40 per cent of our sample of girls used nothing but SSE, compared with only 28 per cent of boys.

As for region, this is probably not relevant. If we compare regions for each of the four groups defined by sex and age, only one group shows a significant effect of region (male 11-year-olds $p < 0.05$, due to a lack of standard speakers in London). However, we feel that this result probably tells us more about the sample than about the populations of the regions concerned.

5 Is there a developmental progression from age 11 to age 15? (A2)

The effect of age is rather interesting, and somewhat unexpected from an educational point of view. The relevant figures are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The effect of age on use of standard English

	All	Users of NSE	Users of pure SSE
11-year olds	188	114	74 = 39%
15-year olds	162	124	38 = 23%

The difference between 11 and 15-year-olds in their use or non-use of NSE is highly significant ($p < 0.001$), even more so than the differences between girls and boys noted above. What is really unexpected is the direction of the difference, with the 15-year-olds producing **fewer** speakers of SSE than the 11-year-olds. Once again, we do not know whether the differences reflect bias in the sample or a genuine trend in the total population, but in this case there is also a third possibility which has to be considered: that the difference reflects the sheer quantity and complexity of speech produced by the two age-groups. As we mentioned above, a real user of NSE forms can easily be misclassified as a non-user if they say so little that the occasion for using a non-standard form never arises. This means that those who say little are more likely to be misclassified as users of pure SSE than those who say more; so if the 11-year-olds in our sample said less than the 15-year-olds, this in itself could explain the difference in their use of NSE.

This is almost certainly true, though we cannot confirm it in terms of the number of words or minutes of speech produced. What we do know is which speakers had the opportunity to use each of the non-standard forms (because we recorded the standard equivalents as well as the non-standard forms). It is easy to count the number of distinct non-standard forms which each speaker had an opportunity to use in our tapes, and to calculate the average for different groups. Table 3 shows the averages for the different ages and regions.

Table 3. Average number of potential non-standard forms which each speaker had an opportunity to use by age and region.

<i>Region</i>	<i>11-year olds</i>	<i>15-year olds</i>
Merseyside	4.5	5.0
Tyneside	3.7	4.8
South-west	3.9	5.0
London	4.9	5.9
All	4.0	5.0

The figures in Table 3 raise important educational issues. They show a clear tendency for 15-year-olds to produce more opportunities for using non-standard forms than 11-year-

olds. It is reasonable to assume that this is the reason why we found more non-standard forms in the 15-year-olds' speech than in the 11-year-olds'. What we did not find, however, is that 15-year-olds in fact used fewer non-standard forms than 11-year-olds, as might be expected if they learn to use more standard forms in school simply by hearing them used by the teacher.

Our evidence may indicate that mere exposure is not sufficient, and that some kind of direct teaching or encouragement is needed. This is an issue which deserves attention.

Another way to approach this question is to ask how many different non-standard forms 11-year-olds and 15-year-olds used, though once again we must interpret the findings in the light of the tendency for 15-year-olds to produce more opportunities. The average number of distinct non-standard forms used by 11-year-olds is 1.3 (247 recorded non-standard forms per speaker, divided by the total of 188 11-year-old speakers), but the figure for 15-year-olds is 2.0 (326 divided by 162). These figures confirm the tendency for 15-year-olds to use more non-standard forms than 11-year-olds, with the same reservations about how to interpret this finding.

6 Which non-standard forms are used most frequently and most widely? (A3, Q3, Q4)

This question is an attempt to assess the relative 'importance', from an educational point of view, of the various non-standard forms. The most obvious way to measure importance would be in terms of how often the various forms were used, but we did not set out to count all occurrences so we cannot provide this figure. What we do have is the number of speakers who used each non-standard form. This is shown in the Appendix after each category, and column a of Table 4 shows how many pupils used each of the six most common categories (as listed in the Appendix).

Table 4: The six most widely used non-standard categories.

<i>NSE form</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>
	Speakers who used the NSE form	Speakers who had the opportunity to use it	% of speakers who used the NSE form (a/b)
there is	88	101	87
this guy	76	164	46
she come	45	108	42
out the window	40	65	62
Have fell	30	86	35
Them books	28	67	42

The figure in column b of this table is most important for any interpretation of the other figures, because it defines the population out of which the first figures are taken – the 'relevant population'. The highest figure is 87 per cent for *there is*, but as we explain in the Appendix, our figures for *there is* probably include some uses which are normal in SSE. The next highest figure in column c is 62 per cent for *out the window*. If only 65 speakers happened to say anything which gave them an opportunity to use this non-standard form, we clearly cannot assume that those who did not use it would not. However, if these opportunities depend on what is being said, rather than on the speaker's social or linguistic background, we may assume a random distribution through the total population. On that assumption, the percentage of speakers who used *out the window* when they had the chance to do so in our tapes ought to be similar to the percentage in the total population of 350 speakers. If this selection of speakers is representative of the population of England as a whole, we may have the basis here for claiming that 62 per cent of the general population might use at least this one non-standard form in a relatively formal 'public' situation such as these tape-recordings. Any of these assumptions could, of course, be wrong, in which case the conclusion would also be unfounded. However this figure agrees well with the figure of 32 per cent for pure SSE users in Table 1. If about 68 per cent of all our speakers used some NSE forms, then it would not be surprising if the figure for the most frequent NSE forms was just below this.

Which NSE forms, then, are the most commonly used, and does the answer vary much from region to region? Table 5 lists the 8 NSE forms in each region which have the highest percentage ratings for use (out of a population of at least 12 people who had the chance to use them). It should be noticed that the first figure gives the percentage of these speakers who used the nonstandard form concerned, rather than the absolute number, because the percentage makes comparison across regions easier. The second number gives the size of the relevant population (ie the number of people who used either the form concerned or its SSE equivalent). The forms that are used only in the one region are marked with a star. Once again we must warn that the figures for *there is* may include some SSE uses.

It can be seen that there is a good deal of similarity in the rankings from region to region, though there are differences as well.

Alternatively, one could take a national rather than a regional view of the relative importance of the various forms. Table 6 presents a single consolidated list of the forms that have the highest percentage of uptake when the regional figures are combined.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that this discussion does not cover all the possible criteria that one might apply in assessing the importance of a non-standard form. One such criterion is how speakers (and listeners) evaluate the forms concerned, and would distinguish forms such as 'double negatives' and the forms of the past tense of the verb *be* from other forms, which most of us are hardly aware of (eg *he don't* in London). There may be other criteria that could be applied, and that may be just as important as the questions of distribution among speakers that we have been discussing.

Table 5. The most widely used non-standard forms in four regions

<i>Merseyside</i>		<i>South-west</i>		<i>London</i>		<i>Tyneside</i>	
there is	81/27	there is	100/35	ain't	75/16	out the window	80/25
this guy	60/47	this guy	40/54	she come	60/25	there is	76/34
she come	59/17	out the window	39/18	isn't it	47/15	hissself*	64/14
dead	59/17	she come	34/47	have fell	46/13	them books	53/30
good*		they was	29/31	not ...no	44/18	come quick	50/16
they was	56/16	not ... no	26/42	out the window	43/14	she come	50/18
have fell	52/19	come quick	24/21	this guy	33/18	geatt*	43/23
them books	43/14	have fell	19/36	things	14/21	this guy	42/53
never had	27/15			what			

Table 6. The 12 NSE forms used by the most pupils with the chance to do so

<i>NSE form</i>	<i>Speakers who had the opportunity to use it</i>	<i>% of these speakers who used it</i>
there is	101	87
ain't (london only)	16	75
give us	11	73
hissself (tyneside only)	14	64
out the window	65	62
dead good (merseyside only)	17	59
come quick	48	47
isn't it (london only)	15	47
this guy	76	46
geatt (tyneside only)	23	43
she come	108	42
them books	67	42

7 Which non-standard forms are used alongside their standard equivalents? (Q5)

Almost all of our NSE forms are used by at least one speaker alongside their SSE equivalents. Here are some representative extracts.

[2] The man *come* out of his house and he said to him, 'You've got my parrot,' and he says 'What parrot?' and he says 'You've got my parrot – you pinched it,' and the man *ran* off so the young boy waited for him to come back and he sneaked back in through ... the back [inaudible] and he *came* out the front. ..and the boy *ran*...

[3] The man *run* off so the small boy threw [him ?] his orange but he tripped on it and fell backwards and one of his trainers *come* off...

Both of these extracts were said by the same speaker (a 15-year-old boy from Tyneside) and show how a single speaker may alternate between NSE and SSE – between *come* and *came*, and between *run* and *ran*, as the past tenses of the respective verbs.

Similarly, the following passages illustrate alternation between SSE *out of* and NSE *out* (the speakers are different, but are both 15-year-old boys from the same school in the South-west).

[4] He shoots them, throws them *out* the window, takes the fish *out of* the tank, throws the tank *out of* the window.

[5] He takes him *out of* the room, and he takes the fish *out of* the tank, he throws the tank *out* the window as well and he runs *out of* the door – runs *out* the room ...

According to our records, at least one speaker alternated in this way for each of our non-standard forms except *me and him went*, *was sat*, *that fast*, *dead good* and *people who's*. These are all quite rare patterns so the gaps are most likely due to lack of data, and it is probably safe to assume that alternation would be found for every non-standard form if we had enough data.

This alternation is important from an educational point of view because it shows that at least some pupils use NSE forms not out of ignorance but by choice, in the sense that they have a choice between it and the SSE form. It is hard to quantify the extent to which pupils are capable of alternation on the basis of our very limited data. We classified each speaker, for each non-standard form, according to whether the speaker uses:

- just the NSE form;
- just the SSE form;
- both forms (ie alternates); or
- neither form, for lack of opportunity.

If we call the first three classes 'positive', we can report that 16 per cent of our positive classifications (228/1456) were alternating. No doubt any increase in the size of the database would tend to move speakers into the alternating category (and would never move them out of it), but of course we cannot go so far as to say that every speaker is capable of using either form. This is presumably a question of fact, but not one that we can answer here.

8 Conclusions

Our speakers may be typical of 11-year-old 15-year-old pupils who have not received any specific teaching about the use of SSE such as is envisaged in the National Curriculum, so the following general conclusions may be justified.

- 68 per cent of the sample use some NSE forms in our rather formal texts, though we may assume that the figure is higher for use at home and in the peer group.
- Girls use fewer NSE forms than boys, as expected from other surveys, but there is no evidence of a decrease in NSE usage with age; in fact, our figures show the contrary trend but we do need to bear in mind the possibility that the 15-year-olds say more than the 11-year-olds.
- There are about a dozen clusters of NSE forms that occur in every region, and a somewhat smaller number that are confined to specific regions.
- These clusters are quite specific, limited and (presumably) amenable to study, though some involve generalisations across a range of words (eg the rules for forming adverbs by adding *ly* to adjectives).
- Different NSE forms are used by very different percentages of the sample, ranging from the mid sixties for *out the window* to just a few per cent for rarities such as the Tyneside *gan* and *mak* (whose combined use amounts only to 7 per cent of the 103 speakers who had the opportunity to use them).
- NSE forms also differ in prominence according to how often the occasion for using them arises; for example, *she come* (covering any non-standard past-tense form) could have been used by 108 of our speakers, though only 42 per cent of these speakers actually used it.
- At least 16 per cent of the NSE forms that occur are used by speakers who on other occasions use the SSE equivalent. The true number for the population as a whole may be very much larger than this.

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Appendix A. The non-standard English forms referred to in the study

Non-standard but non-regional forms (Q4)

The following is a list of the NSE features which were used in all four regions. For concreteness we have named them after typical examples. The figures in brackets show the total number of speakers who used any non-standard forms, divided by the total number who had an opportunity to do so; for example, 30/86 after *have fell* shows that 30 speakers used at least one non-standard past participle such as *fell*, out of a total of 86 who could have done.

- *Have fell* (30/86). Some verbs have non-standard past participles (used after *have* and in other places), which are typically the forms used in SSE as the past tense (eg *he fell*). The verbs affected in this way vary somewhat from region to region, but for simplicity we can bring all the examples from our material together in Table 7 (where forms are counted as occurring in 'all' regions if they occur in at least three of them). Needless to say, this table is not complete.

[1] They have fell out of the picture.

[2] I think they've threw it in the house.

[3] It's been an emergency and he's ran in.

[4] It could have came in the window.

Table 7. Verbs whose past tenses and/or past participles are different in SSE and NSE.

Verb	SSE		NSE		Regions
	Past tense	Past participle	Past tense	Past participle	
beat	beat	beaten	beat	beat	M
break	broke	broken	?	broke	L
bring	brought	brought	brung	?	L
choose	chose	chosen	?	chose	TL
come	came	come	come	came	all
do	did	done	done	?	all
fall	fell	fallen	?	fell	all
forget	forgot	forgotten	?	forgot	T
give	gave	given	give	?	LS
go	went	gone	?	went	TL
overcome	overcame	overcome	overcome	?	S
ring	rang	rung	rung	rang	MS
rise	rose	risen	rised/riz	?	L
run	ran	run	run	ran	all
see	saw	seen	seen	?	all
sink	sank	sunk	sunk	?	MT

spring	sprang	sprung	sprung	?	L
steal	stole	stolen	?	stole	S
swim	swam	swum	?	swam	S
swing	swang	swung	swang	?	L
take	took	taken	?	took	all
throw	threw	thrown	thrown	threw	all
write	wrote	written	writ	wrote	S

- *She come* (45/108). This is the reverse pattern, in which the NSE form of the past tense is the same as the SSE past participle. These are also summarised in Table 7.

[5] She probably come out the TV.

[6] The men run off...

There is two (88/101). This is the use of *is* with *there* and a following plural.

[7] Is there any poles hanging down?

[8] ..because there's jobs isn't there and jobs aren't exactly easy to come by.

Example [8] shows how specific the non-standard rule is, as the non-standard form ' *s/isn't* occurs only after *there*, contrasting with the neutral *aren't* in the next clause. Examples like this are clearly non-standard, but SSE also allows examples like the following (which are taken from Quirk et al 1985:756,1407, the classic description of SSE):

[9] There's hundreds of people on the waiting list.

[10] There's some people that I'd like you to meet.

It seems that the abbreviated form 's is allowed in SSE as well as NSE with a plural 'real' subject, though it is only in NSE that it is also allowed in the 'tag question' (*isn't there?* in example [8]). Consequently examples like the last two could be taken as either standard or non-standard. This is a very difficult distinction to make reliably and the figures quoted should therefore be treated with caution.

- *This guy* (76/164). In this use *this* or *these* is used (with a noun) to refer to a person or thing not mentioned before. As mentioned earlier, it is debatable whether this belongs to SSE; one problem is deciding whether it really has any SSE equivalent.

[11] This guy showed us...

- *Them books* (28/67). The use of *them* (or in the South-west, *they*) instead of SSE *those*.

[12] See them paperclips?

- *Come quick* (22/48). The use of an adjective as an adverb, without the SSE *-ly*. Most common with *quick*, *easy* and *good*. This also covers comparatives, whose SSE form is more complicated (eg the comparative of *quickly* is *more quickly*).

[13] I can always do lids up quick.

[14] You can turn this easier.

- *Out the window* (40/65). This seems to be especially common before *window*, *door*, *room* or *house*. See examples (4) and (5) above.
- *Things what* (20/136). The use of *what* instead of SSE *that* as a relative pronoun.

[15] ...in case there's a bit of glass what you step on.

- *Not.. .no* (22/95). So-called 'double negatives', in which NSE uses *no* where SSE uses *any* (and similarly for *never/ever* and so on).

[16] It's not getting no water inside it.

The next four NSE forms were found in Merseyside, London and the South-west, but we found no evidence for them in Tyneside.

- *They was* (22/70). Use of *was* with a plural subject.

[17] ...as they was running out.

[18] There was trainers going missing.

[19] They climbed to the top and was amazed at the sight.

- *Me and him went* (6/6). Use of *me*, *him*, (and presumably of *her*, *us* and *them*) in compound subjects. This may in fact be part of casual SSE among the younger generation.

[20] Me and Ryan thought...

- *Give us* (8/11). Use of *us* for SSE *me* after the imperative of *give* (and a few other verbs: *let, tell, show, pass*).

[21] Give us it!

- *Never had* (7/32). Use of *never* to refer to one particular occasion, as an alternative to SSE (and NSE) *didn't* (etc.).

[22] If it never had the blutack on it, it wouldn't fall.

Non-standard forms that are regional

Merseyside

- *Was sat* (5/8). Use of *sat, stood* (and presumably *lain*) instead of SSE *sitting, standing* and *lying*.

[23] I wasn't just sat at a desk, doing nothing.

- *More easier* (5/24). Use of *more* as well as *-er* to form adjective comparatives.

[24] This one is more easier to use.

- *That fast* (1/2). *That* for SSE *so*.

[25] They ran that fast, they fell over.

- *Dead good* (10/17). *Dead*, meaning 'very', used generally with any adjective, rather than only with a few (eg *easy, slow*) as in SSE.

[26] It's dead good.

Tyneside

- *People who's* (3/4). The use of *'s* instead of SSE *'ve* after a relative pronoun *who* with a plural antecedent.

[27] There's people who's got arthritis.

- *Gan, mak* (7/103). In Tyneside *gan* is an ordinary verb meaning 'go', and the verb *make* is pronounced /mak/. These cases are on the border between dialect and accent, so may not be relevant.

[28] See if you can mak it gan in the middle.

- *Lend* (3/6). The use of *lend* to mean the same as SSE *borrow*. Probably widespread, but only found in our Tyneside material.

[29] We'll lend someone else's.

- *Hisself* (9/14). The use of *hisself* for SSE *himself*, and similarly for *wirself* (or *wirselves*) and *thasself* (or *thasselves*).

[30] We need them, to dry wirself.

- *Geatt* (10/23). This versatile word corresponds to several SSE words: *really*, *great*, *big*, *good* (with numbers).

[31] Do it up...geatt tight.

[32] ...a geatt conversation.

[33] ..build a geatt motorway...

[34] It's a geatt twenty miles...

- *Cut...off* (4/11). In SSE we cut ourselves *on* something, but in Tyneside NSE the preposition is *off*.

[35] You can cut your finger off there.

- *Canna* (14/36). This corresponds to SSE *can't*.

[36] You canna cook it on a fire.

- *Three mile* (no figures available). Some 'measure nouns' have no plural marker when combined with a number or other indication of quantity.

[37] ...twenty mile away...

[38] ...a few month...

[39] ..seven year...

- *Them are* (no figures available). A strangely restricted use where *them* seems to be used instead of the normal SSE and NSE *they* to mean 'It's them that.. ' .

[40] ...the children, them are more...it's the children we're more interested in in a way 'cos they're the ones who are going to have to learn. And them will have to find jobs and all that so...

London

- *He were* (2/14). This is the reverse of the usage we called *they was* above (see examples (22) to (24)), which is also found in London. We don't know whether this reflects the coexistence of two systems (*I/he/we/you/they was* versus *I/he/we/you/they were*) or a system which simply reverses that of SSE (*I were, he were, we was, you was, they was*).

[41] It weren't going to be built.

- *He don't* (3/7). The use of *don't* where SSE has *doesn't* (ie as an auxiliary verb).

[42] It don't work.

- *Isn't it* (7/15). The use of undifferentiated *isn't it* (also pronounced *innit*) like French *n'est-ce pas*, regardless of the subject, verb and tense of the main sentence.

[43] We started first, isn't it?

- *Ain't* (12/16). Use of *ain't* for *hasn't, haven't, aren't* or *isn't*. We also found this in our material from the South-west (where the numbers were 8/41).

[44] We ain't got enough.

Appendix B. The number of non-standard forms used per speaker

At the end of the project it was agreed with SCAA that it would be both possible and desirable to aim at a preliminary answer to the question: 'How many different non-standard forms does each speaker typically use?' Our data are not ideally suited for addressing this question because some speakers spoke for as little as half a minute; we can at least give a partial answer which may be useful as the basis for further research. Our answer is summarised in the last paragraph of this Appendix. All the data relevant to this discussion are shown in Table 8, which combines the figures from all four regions and both age-groups.

Table 8. The number of speakers who used a given number of non-standard forms out of a given number of opportunities for using such forms.

Oppor- tunities	Speakers d+...+	Number of different non-standard forms used										All NSE d+e*2 +...l*9	Mean NSE m/b	% uptake 100.n/a
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o
1	7	18	7									7	1	100
2	14	23	12	2								16	1.1	57
3	25	12	15	9	1							36	1.4	48
4	35	10	13	14	6	2						67	1.9	48
5	33	6	12	10	6	5						70	2.1	42
6	44	1	15	12	8	5	3	1				104	2.4	39
7	33		7	5	6	8	5	2				104	3.1	45
8	17	1	3	5	2	4	2	1				51	3.0	37
9	11	1	1		2	5	2	1		2	2	43	3.9	43
10	9	1		1		2	1	1	1			55	6.1	61
11	4				2	1						17	4.2	38
12					1	1						3	3.0	25
13	1					1						4	4.0	31
Total	234		85	58	36	33	13	6	1	2	2	583	1.7	

- The most immediately understandable figures are along the bottom line in the main body of the table (ie in columns d-l), which shows that 85 of our speakers used just one NSE form (irrespective of how many times they may have used this form), 58 used two NSE forms, and so on.
- The number of speakers who did not use any nonstandard forms at all is 114, but unfortunately our records for this category do not allow us to include them all in the main part of the table, because 41 spoke on tapes which were completely disregarded after the first pass since they contained no examples of NSE. Consequently the figures in column c add up to only 73. Because of this discrepancy all these figures have been ignored in the calculations in all but the next paragraph.

- The figure 1.7 on the bottom line of column n is the average number of non-standard forms used by all our 350 speakers. This figure is highly relevant if we want to know how many NSE forms to expect in this kind of activity, where children are speaking in a relatively formal situation at school for a few minutes each. If this is how their use of SSE is to be evaluated in future, then our figure could provide a useful baseline for measuring the effects of the National Curriculum.
- On the other hand, all these figures are based on very different amounts of speech from different speakers which (as pointed out above) gave some of them far more opportunities to use non-standard forms than others. At least some of those who used no NSE forms, or only a few, might have used far more if they had spoken for longer. This is relevant if the National Curriculum's aim is for school-leavers to be able to speak SSE confidently for extended periods, without using any NSE forms at all. On the basis of our data we can approach this question only indirectly, by comparing the number of distinct NSE forms actually used with the number of opportunities speakers had for using any of the available ones. This information is shown in the main body of the table (columns c-1). The vertical dimension shows the number of opportunities (column a), which increases towards the bottom of the table: as we move from the top of the table towards the bottom, so the amount said by each speaker increases and the figures become more representative of the speaker's total possible output. Unfortunately, the number of speakers in each category also tends to drop sharply as can be seen from column b (which excludes speakers who used no non-standard forms, for the reasons given above).
- As can be seen from column n, the mean number of non-standard forms used does indeed increase steadily with the number of opportunities, as we should expect. Another way of approaching this question is to calculate the proportion of available opportunities that lead to NSE forms. This figure is given in the last column, o. The figure starts high because of our artificial exclusion of all speakers who use no NSE forms. Apart from an uncharacteristic high of 61 per cent at 10 opportunities, most of the figures are around 40 per cent, and if anything the figure drops as the number of opportunities increases.
- It is not known whether this figure would apply to much larger quantities of speech than we have in our tapes. It will be seen that those who produced the most speech seemed to use fewer NSE forms giving an uptake figure of only 25 per cent and 31 per cent for the bottom two lines; but it is quite possible that these speakers are above average not only in their volubility but also in their relative use of spoken standard English. If we can extrapolate from our tapes, it would seem that those who use some nonstandard forms typically use about 40 per cent of the available range – ie about 5 or 6 different forms each.
- In conclusion, how many different non-standard forms does a typical (ie average) English pupil use when talking in relatively formal context at school? We can only approach this question indirectly, but it presumably lies somewhere between the two figures we have quoted: less than 2 and up to 5 or 6. The former is too low because it is based on the number of non-standard forms used in our rather short extracts; and the latter is too high because it excludes speakers who used only standard forms on the tapes.