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Standard and Nonstandard English: The Role, Advantages and Disadvantages of Grammatical Description and a Sociological Approach in the Characterization of Varieties

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RESUMEN

Las diferencias entre el inglés estándar y sus variedades no estándar aparecen en todos los niveles de la lengua (gramatical, léxico y fonético). Las razones de estas diferencias tienen mucha variedad dependiendo del contexto del análisis. Muchas veces las diferencias aparecen debido a la distancia geográfica y otras dependiendo de la clase o el grupo social al que el hablante pertenece. Este estudio se centra en las diferencias gramaticales entre lo que se considera inglés estándar y sus variedades a nivel geográfico y social. Estas variedades se consideran inglés non-estándar ya que no siguen las mismas reglas que el inglés estándar.

Dado el abundante estudio sobre los dialectos del inglés y sus diferencias con el estándar, esta disertación tiene como objetivo demostrar que las diferencias realmente no son tan claras y no es tan fácil separar lo que se considera estándar y no-estándar. Además de poner en duda qué es lo que hace caracterizar una construcción gramatical como estándar y por qué. Los ejemplos utilizados para demostrar estas diferencias proviene de diferentes fuentes: enseñanzas sobre la materia, series de televisión y libros.

El análisis de este trabajo se ha desarrollado a través de la comparación de los ejemplos sacados de las anteriores fuentes mencionadas con el inglés estándar. Se ha demostrado que muchas veces algo es considerado como no-estándar simplemente porque es lo que se utiliza en una clase social baja o con poco prestigio.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

My dissertation is intended to determine the features or criteria that best differentiate Standard English from nonstandard varieties of the language; in other words, whether those features are lexical, grammatical, phonetic, or a combination. In addition to this, it aims to look into the role of social and regional factors in explaining the differences between Standard and Nonstandard English. My interest in this topic arose from watching the American comedy-drama series *Orange is the New Black* (Jenju Kohan, 2013) as a student of EFL in an English Studies BA degree. Without quite understanding why, I began to make a list of what I readily labelled as 'examples of nonstandard English'. When I later tried to justify my choices (the characters and their background) I realised that perhaps there was not a clear-cut distinction between standard and nonstandard English; in the search for information, my TFG supervisor drew my attention to the existence of 'disputed usages' in English, English language "controversies" according to the Wikipedia, which seem to point only to grammar. All of this made me think about the whole concept of Nonstandard English and what you can include under its scope.

Given the aim mentioned above, the first thing to do is to provide a definition of the notion of Standard English. Nowadays, everybody studies English at school and English is even the second official language within a country. It is true that what people learn is usually Standard English but there is some lack of knowledge about what Standard English actually means or what its role is. Therefore, most linguists have tried to give a proper explanation or even a characterization of what Standard English is. So, according to Peter Trudgill (2002) what we actually need is more of a characterization than of a definition and it should be based on what Standard English is not. He suggests that it is not a language. It is supposed to be one variety among many and considered as

the most important of them because it is used in writing, printing, the education system in all the English-speaking countries of the world and spoken by "those who are often referred to as 'educated' people" (Trudgill, 2002). Moreover, Trudgill also argues that it is not an accent. Most linguists agree that Standard English has nothing to do with pronunciation. Nevertheless, in Britain there is a high status accent which is called Received Pronunciation (RP) but this variety is mostly related to the notion of social class. Sociolinguists associate it with the upper-middle-classes or an upper-class background. In fact, it has to be said that many native speakers speak Standard English but do not use an RP accent. For instance, people from the north of the UK speak Standard English but without an RP accent.

According to Trudgill (2002), Standard English is not a style of writing, either, although it may sometimes be confused with a formal variety of the English language. This confusion may arise from the fact that styles are also considered to be varieties of the language because they are normally classified from formal to informal, which also depends on the social situation. And as shown below, social factors play an essential role in the characterization of Standard English, which in turn makes Sociolinguistics a keystone in the study of Standard English. In this case, the speakers' social experiences and education are highly important because they enable speakers to know how to switch from one style to another. These stylistic differences are more obvious in lexis:

"Father was exceedingly fatigued subsequent to his extensive peregrination"

"Dad was very tired after his lengthy journey"

"The old man was bloody knackered after his long trip"

Through these examples, it can be seen that formality is generally confined to lexis. Sometimes, a formal style is related to Standard English but there is no necessary

connection between them. The mere occurrence of lexical items such as ‘bloody’ (adverb) and ‘knackered’, which are classified as ‘chiefly British slang’ by dictionaries, does not seem to be enough to claim that the construction in which they occur is an instance of Nonstandard English.

Finally, Trudgill suggested that Standard English is not a register. The concept of ‘register’ usually makes reference to the “variety of language determined by topic, subject matter or activity, such as the register of mathematics, of medicine, or of pigeon fancying” (Trudgill, 2002). In order to acquire these kinds of register, the education system has to transmit it to users or learners in an explicit manner. Even though these types of register are learnt at school, which is where Standard English is supposed to be mostly used, this does not mean that people who speak Nonstandard English are not ever going to use technical words.

If Standard English is not a language, an accent, a style or a register, what is it then? British sociolinguists as represented by Peter Trudgill (2002) agree that Standard English is a dialect and “simply one variety of English among many” (Trudgill, 2002). Trudgill gives a further explanation of it saying that “it is, for example, by far the most important dialect in the English speaking world from a social, intellectual and cultural point of view; and it does not have an associated accent. It is also of interest that dialects of English, as of other languages, are generally simultaneously both geographical and social dialects which combine to form both geographical and social dialect continua.” That is to say Standard English is considered as purely a social dialect. Even if its origins belong to the south east of England, it is no longer a geographical dialect and, as explained below, this is due to its unusual history and its extreme sociological importance. Standard English is normally employed in writing and spoken by educated speakers of the language. As it was already pointed out 25 years

ago, “this is the variety of English that students of English as Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL) are taught when receiving formal instruction” (Trudgill & Hannah, 1991).

As mentioned earlier, Standard English is the variety employed by ‘educated speakers’ of the language, but this does not mean to say that it is the only standard that can be found. In the UK it is called United Kingdom Standard English (UKSE), but linguists argue that there is not just one type of Standard English. In fact, it has different forms depending on the country it belongs to. According to Trudgill and Hannah (1991) Standard English slightly differs from Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, The Republic of Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Accordingly, while Standard English is not a geographical entity, its “forms” certainly are.

The fact that there are different types of Standard English is due to many reasons, the main one being colonisation and the spread of English around the world. During colonization, English was imposed on the colonised countries as the official language. The contact between it and the other languages has resulted in a huge variety of new types of Standard English. Some of them, after the process of decolonisation, have developed standard and vernacular varieties on their own.

Moreover, these types of variation (social, cultural, geographical, etc.) can simultaneously manifest themselves at different levels of language such as pronunciation, grammar and lexis. For example, in terms of pronunciation, the word *tie* in RP is pronounced as /taɪ/ while in the Cockney dialect is pronounced /tɔɪ/. Pronunciation can thus be a social marker related to the working class. On the other hand, pronunciation can show differences, too, depending on the region. For instance, in General American the phoneme /ɑː/ is replaced by /æ/. It is seen in the word *bath* which

is pronounced /'bæθ/ in General American English and /'bɑ:θ/ in RP English. In addition to this, variation manifests itself at the grammatical level. For instance, in American English, collective names are usually followed by a verb in the singular, our *team is losing*. But in Standard British English speakers can use both, singular and plural: *our team is/are losing*. In terms of social class, Scouse Dialect speakers use *me* instead of *my*, so they would say *this is me car* instead of *this is my car* as speakers do in Standard British English. These variations are more noticeable at the level of lexis. For example, in American English, speakers use the word *fall* while speakers of Standard British English use the word *autumn*. However, this is also seen in relation to the social class. Indeed, in Cockney English they use *booze* in order to refer to a drink. To sum up, variation at any level of the language is chiefly related to the region and social class of the speaker.

Consequently, it seems that it is the sociological element of variation that is of paramount importance in the characterization of Standard English, since it has been said that language is "one of the most powerful emblems of social behaviour" (Wolfram, 2012). Through their use of language, speakers transmit information about who they are, where they come from and who they are associated with. Moreover, speakers are characterised by their use of language, dialect and even the choice of a single word. Accordingly, the science that studies all these choices and usages of language is called Sociolinguistics. In fact, it is the science which studies the effects of all aspects of society on the way language is used. In addition, it is focused on how the language differs depending on the social variables (level of education, status, religion, age, etc.) and how each individual is characterised according to the variables in social classes. It has to be taken into account that language changes from one place to another and this also happens among social classes. These "sociolects" (differences) are what

sociolinguistics studies. That is to say, it focuses on the sociological parameters which classify an individual's social status and his linguistic behaviour compared to his social position. Back in 1974 Peter Trudgill already made it clear that "social stratification takes the form of the division of society into different social classes and status groups, rather than into, say, different castes". Moreover, a social class is composed by members who have a similar economic position, prestige, power and value orientations. The difference between classes is also reflected in education, manners, consumptions and speech. Even though there is a clear cut between classes, the boundaries are flexible and fluid which means that mobility from one class to another is possible. As mentioned earlier, language may be considered as a form of social behaviour and social factors "are as important as geographical factors in determining linguistic variation" (Trudgill, 1974).

For these reasons, Nonstandard English would be any dialect of English which is different to the standard variety in the sense that it does not conform in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary to the characterised and acceptable usage of educated people. Nonstandard English is mainly characterised as lacking in social prestige or as regionally and socially limited. Not unlike Standard English, Nonstandard English is again marked by geography, social class and gender. Besides, Nonstandard English is generally considered as bad English because it is supposed not to follow the rules of the Standard. In this context, it must be said that a dialect cannot be considered wrong just because it has another grammatical system different from that of Standard English. In fact, it is worth saying that English is a language in evolution and at some point in this constant change, the majority of speakers would use what is considered Nonstandard or "incorrect" English.

As mentioned earlier, Nonstandard English can also be described or characterised in terms of geography, social class or gender. That is to say, it can be a dialect, a variety or what is considered as slang, jargon or even as something which is in between, for example the so-called "disputed usages" (see below). Accordingly, the notion of Nonstandard English is neither negative nor positive, since its types show a wide range of value-judgment connotations. All of these types of varieties are somehow characterised by the region where they are spoken, the social class that the speakers belong to or their gender. To start with, slang is "very informal usage in vocabulary and idiom that is characteristically more metaphorical, playful, elliptical, vivid and ephemeral than ordinary language" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). It has to be said that it is more characteristic in spoken language than in written language and the terms generally have a different meaning from the literal one. Apart from that it is supposed to be used by people who have the same social status and background and at the same time they know each other very well. In fact, it can offend people who are outside the group. Sometimes, it might be characterised as vulgar language or socially taboo. Another interesting fact about slang is that it changes quickly and even disappears and that is the reason why it is not taught to EFL/ESL learners. As is the case with Standard English, there can be different types of slang and they are marked by geography, race, gender, and sexuality. For example, linguists have started to categorise it into four groups: urban slang, country slang, common slang and gay slang. Each of them is used in different backgrounds. In the case of urban slang, it is the one used in the city or by Afro-Americans. On the other hand, country slang makes reference to the language which is spoken in the countryside. This has to do with the regional distribution, but gay slang is related to sexuality and it is considered as the language of homosexual or bisexual people. Finally, common slang is used by almost each speaker

of English. However, the most relevant aspect of slang as regards the characterization of Nonstandard English is the fact that what makes slang peculiar is its vocabulary and expressions, not its grammar. There are not many changes in grammar but there are in vocabulary. For example, in slang language speakers would say *big time* instead of *very much* as in Standard English. Slang speakers also create words by combining two or more words. For instance, *frenemy* is a combination of "friend" and "enemy" and they use it in order to describe a person who seems to be a friend but at the same time he or she could be the opposite (the two sides of the same coin).

In addition to slang, jargon is another term that may be used to describe a specific type of language which does not belong to Standard English. Not unlike slang, jargon is the characteristic language of a particular group, trade or profession. Therefore, linguists consider jargon as meaningless and unintelligible speech or writing for those who are outside the group that uses it. Its vocabulary and meaning are very complex. In addition, it is used by lawyers, writers, politicians, doctors, analysts and engineers in order to interchange complex information. In the case of literature it is used in order to give emphasise to a situation or to show the author's knowledge of other fields of knowledge with a given communicative purpose, which can be illustrated even by means of Shakespeare's writings:

"*Why, may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he suffer this mad knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery? Hum! This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances* […]" (LiteraryDevices, 2014)

The highlighted words are legal terms which Shakespeare used in his text in order to create a humorous effect. For example *battery* is the legal term for violence and assault and *recognizance* is the obligation to appear in court. The trouble with slang and jargon is that they only allow to discuss variation at the level of lexis. At the grammatical level, differences do not seem to be clear.

Lastly, while slang and jargon are normally considered Nonstandard English, and normally apply only to vocabulary, there are certain grammatical constructions which are a halfway house between Standard English and Nonstandard English. They are called "disputed usages". In fact, they are under dispute because there are linguists who consider these constructions as incorrect while others identify them as correct. Again, most circumstances which could provoke disputes are of a sociological nature. For example, at school learners are taught not to start a sentence with an "and" or "because" and not to finish it with prepositions, but the origins of these rules are quite ambiguous and have no rational basis. As a consequence, authorities describe them as "superstitions and myths". Another important fact is the lack of an authoritative governing academy. Furthermore, education has an important role and educated speakers are supposed to speak Standard English whereas less educated speakers are considered speakers of Nonstandard English. This has been discussed by linguists since decades ago because some of them do not agree with this classification and they do not consider them as nonstandard speakers. In addition, less educated speakers often try to avoid mistakes and they take the rules beyond their scope and this is called hypercorrection. The way in which they try to avoid these mistakes probably is incorrect sometimes. Another factor is imitation. Speakers who lack a proper education would tend to imitate respected authors. For example, Ernest Hemingway used to start sentences with "and" and some speakers do the same. Another point is that English

grammar used to be based on the grammar of the Latin language and as a consequence, linguists would focus on classical languages in order to determine whether a certain grammatical construction was acceptable or not. The last circumstance which should be taken into account is analogy. Just as English grammar was sometimes compared with the grammar of classical languages, new grammatical constructions may be compared with another grammatical construction which already exists, and depending on the similarity they have, it will be considered correct or incorrect. The more similar they are, the more correct they will be considered and vice versa.

Another clear example of disputed usages is the split infinitive, also known as cleft infinitive. It is a grammatical construction consisting of a verb in the infinitive which is separated from *to* by a word or a phrase. That is to say, a word or a phrase (usually it is an adverb) is found between the *to* and the bare infinitive, for example, *to happily sing*. The split infinitive has a controverted history because it is generally believed that it had already been forbidden during the Renaissance times but linguists have demonstrated that it did not appear until the 19th century. Split infinitives started to be a controversy in 1834 when an anonymous writer considered it to be of frequent use among uneducated speakers. He suggested that the particle *to* and the bare infinitive should not be separated by an adverb and the adverb should precede the particle or follow the verb. In addition to that, there were more linguists who agreed with the anonymous linguist that regarded the split infinitive as a common fault. For instance, Henry Alford was the one who reinforced the proposed rule in 1864. He also suggested not to separate the particle from the bare infinitive. On the other hand, there were other linguists who agreed about the separation of the two elements. For example, Brown (1851) was aware of the use of the split infinitive but he maintained that its position within the infinitive would make clearer the meaning of the adverb. As a result, at the

beginning of the 20th century, the use of the split infinitive was forbidden and the writers who would use it, would be considered as bad writers. Consequently, the debate between splitter and anti-splitters arose. Each of them had their own reasons in order to use it or not. Since the 1960s authorities have shown a strong tendency to use the split infinitive and accept it as correct. This was due to several reasons. For example, it was considered to give emphasis to the adverb and to the verb or to improve the sentence because the position of a modifier is before the word it modifies. Therefore, the position of an adverb should be prior to the verb. As a result of this dispute some authorities are in between both opinions about the split infinitive. They suggest that there are cases in which a split infinitive cannot be used because it could create confusion but there are other cases in which splitting is appropriate in order to give emphasis. It has to be said that the meaning of the sentence would change depending on where the adverb is placed. For example: *You really have to watch him* means that it is important to watch him and on the other hand, *You have to really watch him* means that you have to watch him closely. The advice that they give is not to use them in formal writings unless it does not alter the meaning of the sentence.

To sum up, the existence of disputed usages, or language controversies, seems to indicate that there is no definite frontier between Standard and Nonstandard English. Furthermore, those definite varieties of Nonstandard English that do seem to exist (e.g. slang) refer chiefly to lexical differences, which takes away from the effect or significance of grammar as a touchstone. Therefore, I decided to carry out a qualitative analysis of my own experience as a 'detector' of standard and nonstandard forms in order to identify concrete criteria or factors beyond what the experts and the literature on the topic claim, which, as shown above, may prove to be a bit arbitrary due to the strong sociological component of the typical approach to the question.

2. METHODS

My study or applied analysis is based on a comparative method in which several varieties of English have been sampled or characterized in relation to Standard English. This type of comparison is centred on the impact or importance of taking regional and particularly social factors into account for an analysis of English with the purpose of clearly distinguishing between Standard and Nonstandard constructions.

For this reason, the constructions or samples of authentic English I decided to choose in order to identify the differences between varieties were taken from specialized works and particularly from TV series or songs. As regards books, *A Guide to Varieties of Standard English* written by Peter Trudgill and Jean Hannah in 1985 provides examples from almost all well-known dialects and varieties of English in a regional context. After reading this type of study in search of appropriate examples, every time I watched a popular soap opera on TV or listened to a pop song in English and I came across apparently ungrammatical constructions in scripts or lyrics, I wrote them down in order to analyze them from the standpoint of Standard English. In fact, the TV series in which I found the most noteworthy constructions is *Orange Is the New Black* (Jenji Kohan, 2013) because several characters speak Afro-American Vernacular English, among other varieties, and the differences between this dialect and Standard English are quite obvious.

Because of this approach, I also had to make use of certain scholarly, theoretical sources for the definition of the issues and notions involved in this type of dissertation. For instance, in order to find a pertinent definition of Standard English I turned to *Sociolinguistic Variation and Change* by Peter Trudgill (2002), which studies variation in English and does so from a clearly sociolinguistic standpoint. Similarly, and in spite

of its 'age', I found Trudgill's *Social Differentiation of English in Norwich* (1974) very useful because it gives a practical definition of sociolinguistics by giving concrete examples in order to help to understand it.

3. RESULTS

According to its present-day geographical distribution, English is spoken on all five continents. As mentioned earlier, this fact is due to the colonial policy imposed by the British Empire. Those varieties of English outside Britain and North America are called overseas or extraterritorial varieties. Consequently, they are different from Standard English mainly because of the distance from the original homeland, which adds to the fact that a language is always in process of evolution and change.

Within the British Isles there are also several regional varieties, which I found to be very relevant for my study because, together with the usual lexical differences[1], all these varieties are characterised by a strong grammatical component. For instance:

Irish English: one of its most salient features in comparison to Standard English can be seen in the distinction between second person singular and second person plural pronouns. Consequently, Irish English speakers would use *ye*, *youse* or *yez* instead of *you* for the second person plural pronoun. Another distinctive feature is the durative aspect of so-called 'at- prefixing'. For instance, *she was at singing* while in Standard English it is *she was singing*.

Welsh English: one of the main characteristics of this variety is the use of multiple negation. For example, Welsh speakers would say *we did not do nothing* instead of *we*

[1] By way of illustration, in the *Wikipedia* article for 'British English', the author's first choice of examples about variation is lexical, not grammatical: "Slight regional variations exist in formal, written English in the United Kingdom. For example, the adjective *wee* is almost exclusively used in parts of Scotland and Northern Ireland, whereas *little* is predominant elsewhere".

did not do anything. The use of ‘them’ as a demonstrative adjective is also characteristic of Welsh English. For instance, speakers would use it in this way: *them cars in the front of the house* while in Standard English, speakers would say *those cars in the front of the house*.

Scottish English still contains some features from Old English as it is seen in some grammatical constructions which differ from those in Standard English. In Scottish English there is a negative contraction of the verb ‘to be’ in the first person singular, *amn’t*.

Other more local, 'English' varieties also show significant grammatical characteristics that distance them from Standard English:

Geordie: Northern speakers tend to use third person singular *is* when referring to a plural, *Five cats is*, instead of the standard use ‘are’. This construction is also maintained in the past tense, *Five cats was*. Another salient feature of Geordie grammar is the change of the number and category of the first person singular pronoun, *I*, for the first person plural object pronoun *us*. So instead of using ‘I go’, they would use *Us go*.

Lancashire dialect (Lanky) is characterised by having a different system for the past tense of verbs like ‘open’, ‘speak’ and ‘break’ which become *oppen*, *spokken*, *brokken* among young generations of that area.

East Midlands English grammar contains a personal pronoun system different from that of Standard English. For instance, *yorn* would be used instead of ‘yours’. Apart from that, the ‘-self’ suffix of the reflexive pronouns is replaced by –sen. For example, *mesen* instead of ‘myself’.

As mentioned earlier, variation can also be related to the social level of language due to factors such as social class, educational levels, religion, age, race and ethnicity. As regards *Orange is the New Black* (*OITNB*), this type of variation is far more relevant than geographical variation because most of my potentially Nonstandard-English examples were taken from that TV series and their most plausible description or even justification seemed to be sociological as it entailed the analysis of a social institution (a prison), a societal segment, as a self-contained entity in relation to society as a whole[2]. The varieties of English that came to mind were hardly those exemplified by Irish English or by Geordie, since I found that most of the constructions that I noted down could be traced to African-American Vernacular English (AAVE).

AAVE is typically spoken by part of the lower-class population in the USA and is treated as nonstandard because of its marked differences from Standard American English and the distinctive race and ethnicity features that most of its speakers show. The main 'nonstandard' constructions I identified in *OITNB* are the following:

— the absence of plural marker '-s' when the plural is used, e.g. 'one of my best friend';

— the absence of the verb 'to be' when referring to current actions, 'you thinking you can open a road' (You are thinking you can open a road);

— the absence of the third person singular marker '-s' in verbs; e.g. 'that don't keep me from eating Mexican food / Mary give a lecture'.

In the TV series, these examples of grammatical differences between AAVE and Standard English are accompanied by others typical of general accounts of the question:

[2] I am referring here to the fact that *OITNB* is based on Piper Kerman's memoir, *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* (2010), about her experiences at FCI Danbury, a minimum-security federal prison.

— Double negative: 'Mike is not going nowhere' (Mike is not going anywhere/ Mike is going nowhere)

— Use of ‘be’ when expressing habitual actions: 'The beer be warm at that place' (The beer is warm in that place)

— Use of ‘ain’t’ for negative constructions: 'I ain’t do that' (I do not do that)

When talking about regional varieties as Nonstandard English, sociological aspects such as the language that can be expected to be used by the members of certain societal segments (here in a prison) should also be taken into account because they also influence the characterization of those varieties of the language. Here are some grammatical examples of British dialects usually associated with the working classes:

— Cockney English: it is used to refer to the dialect spoken by the working classes from London. Saying *me car* instead of ‘my car’ *or ain’t play* instead of ‘don’t play’ is judged to be nonstandard in the sense that is working-class English.

— Other typical 'social-variety' constructions: they are considered as nonstandard in the sense that they are used by speakers with a lower social status or lower education.

- 'Ain’t': it is characteristic from the English working-class. The majority of the speakers use it as the auxiliary *have*.
- 'Yez/youse/yous' as the second person plural pronoun. Their use is sociolinguistically significant because they tend to be associated with lower classes and uneducated speakers.
- Absence of plural marker –s: 'You need two pound of rice' (You need two pounds of rice).

- The use of ‘to’ in questions related to direction or orientation: 'Where’s the park to?' (Where is the park?)
- Th-forms *thou / thee* are still used among miners: 'Thou watch TV every night' (You watch TV every night)
- Omission of the ‘to’ particle with the verb *to give*: 'She gave it him' (She gave it to him)

Apart from the examples provided above, more examples can be found at the end of the dissertation, in the Appendix.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The comparison between the different dialects and varieties illustrated above and Standard English yields a number of outstanding results which enable me to argue that there are significant differences between Standard English and Nonstandard English at the grammatical level despite the fact that sometimes these grammatical differences are not as clear or 'visible' as phonetic and lexical ones. Grammatical differences require, therefore, plenty of research or at least a careful analysis in order to be classified as standard or nonstandard. In addition to this, my study shows that grammar as a tool or source of examples for the characterization of Standard and Nonstandard English is strongly influenced by regional and social factors which can only be used as discriminative tools if a sociological approach is applied to them.

Another relevant result concerns the fact that there is actually a “continuum” between Standard English and Nonstandard English as it is shown by the “disputed usages”. They act as a bridge between both types of language and therefore defy these otherwise watertight categories. Consequently, these “disputed” usages also constitute social and educational issues. That is to say, there are several constructions which do

not fit in well with conventional Standard or Nonstandard English, but can once again be regarded as a consequence of the social and educational background. Furthermore, in the literature, disputed usages are hardly ever associated with the levels of phonetics and phonology, which would again prove that the clearest examples of variation do not always come from the field of grammar.

Apart from this, the analysis of the grammatical differences between several nonstandard varieties and Standard English reveals that certain constructions are more widespread than others in the nonstandard types, thus giving some unity or cohesion to Nonstandard English. For instance, the double negative constructions and the omission of the –s in the third person singular verbs are said to occur in almost all nonstandard varieties as one of their most representative features. Moreover, this claim is not only applied to geographical variation, but also to social variation, as Trudgill already made clear back in 1974 when he published the following results:

	% -s	
Speakers	**Informal**	**Formal**
Lower working class	3	13
Middle working class	19	36
Upper working class	25	62
Lower middle class	71	95
Upper middle class	100	100

The fact that there is a relationship between geographical and social variation is also reinforced by the examples taken from *Orange is the New Black*. This TV series is about imprisoned women. A very interesting feature from the series is the fact that its

characters are very different from one another in terms of nationality, ethnicity, race, age, social class and even educational levels. In this context, the linguistic results of the use of English as a tool for communication differ between characters and from Standard English, and they very often do so at the level of grammar. For example, Afro-American women (characters) can be heard to say *I won't support the sexuation of baby girls*; a white middle-class woman says *bitches gots to learn*; lastly, the most religious woman of the series (or at least that is what she thinks) usually uses –ing forms without the verb 'to be': *She is a lesbian. They lesbianing together*. Accordingly, when talking about variation in English, all these aspects should be taken into account in order to identify what actually determines the variation or the gap between Standard and Nonstandard English.

As has been shown above, nonstandard varieties of English do exist, which can be seen at both the lexical and the grammatical level, with a prevalence of the former unless specific social and regional varieties of English are brought into the picture. As regards the differences between Standard English and nonstandard varieties, several issues arise. For instance, certain constructions (e.g. the use of the –ing form for marking the progressive aspect) can be identified in both types of English. While they concern the same communicative purposes, there is something in the way in which they are used that makes them standard or nonstandard (here e.g. the lack of auxiliary BE in the verb phrase, which is judged to indicate nonstandardness). Moreover, as it was explained above, everyone can speak with a regional accent and a standard grammar but not vice-versa. Speakers of RP are unlikely to use nonstandard grammar. In this context, I must admit that it was that type of observation together with my experience as a fan of *OITNB* that made me start pondering over what was actually leading me to classify some features as nonstandard and what linguists normally classify as nonstandard. For

example, the case of Scottish English and the second person plural pronoun *youse* is often considered to be nonstandard but there is no clear reason why unless you adopt a sociological approach (who makes that type of claim and where). Therefore, one of the reasons could be the fact that *youse* does not appear in books such as *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et. Al. 1985) in which the grammar of Standard English is explained. Accordingly, linguists probably classify *youse* as nonstandard when their aim is to standardize the language, and may thus have to make a few practical, but significant decisions that probably cause them to suggest avoiding certain lexical and grammatical constructions on the basis, perhaps, of quantitative or statistical reasons (how many varieties have *youse*?) in order to assure maximal, mutual, global comprehensibility.

But the definition or characterization of Nonstandard English from a sociological and ideological perspective does not stop at the sphere of standardization or of the characterization of regional and social varieties. For instance, so-called "disputed" usages reinforce the idea that there is a continuum between Standard English and Nonstandard English rather than a definite, watertight boundary. The main connotation of the notion of "dispute" is that there exist two opposite sides, consensus being probably difficult, and that the circumstances that have triggered the dispute are of a sociological nature, since, apart from linguists, the constructions in question often come under the focus of the media and other popular sources (e.g. the Web) —and, ultimately, it all depends on the individual decisions that speakers take. This again demonstrates that when talking about nonstandard varieties of English, ideological and sociological factors and theories should always be taken into account.

Finally, the distinction between Standard and Nonstandard English can even be further complicated by the fact that sometimes the limits between the notions of

‘regional’ and ‘social’ varieties are not easy to establish. For example, Cockney English is considered to be nonstandard because it is characteristic of working class speakers (hence a 'social' variety), but the region where it is spoken is London (a 'regional' variety). And it so happens than when defining British English and relating it to standardization it is very frequent to find references to 'geographical' causes (here again to London) such as the fact that for historical reasons dating back to the rise of London in the 9th century, "the form of language spoken in London and the East Midlands became standard English within the Court, and ultimately became the basis for generally accepted use in the law, government, literature and education in Britain" (from the *Wikipedia* entry for 'British English'). As a result, even if Cockney is spoken in a specific area of the region in which the standard language originated, it is still a social dialect because it is attributed to a specific social class. Again, by way of conclusion, the existence of a continuum from Standard to Nonstandard English seems to be paralleled by the notion that there may also be a continuum between regional and social varieties —when talking about a regional variety, the sociological situation should also be taken into account. If I had to choose, I would say that the scope of the concept of Nonstandard English, at least as regards the British Isles context, is more definite than that of Standard English since there are more similarities in form and function between what are considered to be nonstandard varieties than between standard ones in a global sense.

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6. APPENDIX

Irish English	Standard English
He is after drinking the beer	He has just drunk the beer
She was at singing	She was singing
Ye, youse, yez	You (plural)
My Mother asked me would I tidy my room	My mother asked me to tidy my room
Sarah is not allowed enter to Facebook	Sarah is not allowed to enter to Facebook

Welsh English	Standard English
We did not do nothing	We did not do anything
The children as played in the park	The children who played in the park
Them cars in the front of the house	Those cars in the front of the house
Coming home tomorrow he is	He is coming home tomorrow
You cannot do that too	You cannot do it either
I plays the guitar / We goes to a party	I play the guitar / We go to a party
Yon	-

Scottish English	Standard English
Herself is coming now	She is coming now
Amn't I right?	Am I not right?
I'll not come next week	I won't come next week
He turned out the light	He turned the light out

Sarah is no coming / She have nae got it	She is not coming / She has not got it

Northern English: Geordie	**Standard English**
Five cats is / was	Five cats are / were
I done it	I did it
Us go	I go
Them cars	Those cars
Something new, what has not been discovered yet	Something new, that has not been discovered yet
Mother has three sisters are in Germany	Mother has three sisters who are in Germany
He does it automatic	He does it automatically
I often tells him	I often tell him

Broad Yorkshire	Standard English
His car is better nor your car	His car is better than your car
Ten pound	Ten pounds
Do thou want to eat?	Do you want to eat?
Mary was right angry	Mary was very angry
John does not know nothing	John does not know anything /John knows nothing

West country	Standard English
Mike a-played the guitar	Mike played the guitar
They books are Sarah's	Those books are Sarah's
I be eating at the moment	I am eating at the moment
I baint	I am not

Norfolk dialect	Standard English
She go to university / He were at school yesterday	She goes to university / He was at school yesterday
Do he do as he do do, do you let me know	If he does as he usually does, then be sure to let me know
There were no sweeties, yet a surprise party	There were no sweeties, nor a surprise party
She is the one what lives near the park	She is the one who lives near the park
The children were a-reading a book	The children were reading a book

African American Vernacular English	Standard English
One of my best friend	One of my best friends
Mike is not going nowhere	Mike is not going anywhere / Mike is going nowhere
You thinking you can open a road	You are thinking you can open a road
That don't keep me from eating Mexican food / Mary give a lecture	That does not keep me from eating Mexican food / Mary gives a lecture
The beer be warm at that place	The beer is warm in that place

I ain’t do that	I do not do that

Cockney English	Standard English
This is me car	This is my car
I ain’t play football	I do not play football
I have not nothing	I have nothing / I do not have anything
He seen her yesterday	He saw her yesterday
‘Cos you’re a girl, in’t you?	Because you are a girl, aren’t you?
John’s going down the pub	John is going down to the pub

Estuary English	Standard English
You have to do it quiet	You have to do it quietly
I told you that already didn’t I	I told you that already, didn’t I?

Scouse English	Standard English
Wot yous up to?	What are you doing?
Me mother izza nurse	My mother is a nurse
Giz	Give us

East Midlands English	Standard English
Mine	Mine
Yorn	Yours

Hisn	His
Hern	Hers
Ourn	Ours
Theirn	Theirs

East Midlands English	Standard English
Mesen	Myself
Y'usen	Yourself
Hisen/Hersen	Himself/Herself
Ussens	Ourselves
Thisens	Yourselves
Thisens	Themselves