



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

Investigating Non-Standard English in GCSE level students in England.

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to measure the levels of awareness of non-standard English amongst GCSE level students.

Non-standard English (NSE) is a systemic feature of language which is shared with other speakers of the language but which diverges from the standard form. There is not a single NSE (in the way that there might be considered a single Standard English [SE]), but rather a number of forms, which include double negatives ("I can't find no money") and non-standard past simple or past participles (e.g. "She brung me a drink").

The National Curriculum requires that pupils should be taught about differences between standard and non-standard English, and in particular, "to be aware that different people make different choices about when standard English is appropriate" (DfEE, 2001). However, recent research into NSE has found an increase in NSE in GCSE scripts between 1994 and 2004 (Massey et al, 2005) and "an overall decline in the children's awareness of standard English features" between 1999 and 2005, though this pattern was not uniform for all non-standard forms (Lockwood, 2006).

This paper seeks to add to the empirical research on non-standard written English in young people. Twenty four forms of NSE were sampled on an assessment instrument consisting of two sections. The first section comprised twelve sentences containing some NSE forms. Respondents were asked to identify words which did not sound right and rewrite the sentences accordingly – thus requiring both recognition and production. In the second section, respondents were asked to match sentences with predetermined situations (e.g. "speaking to a friend"; "letter to a teacher") in order to gain a notion of respondents' sense of appropriateness of NSE usage.

This paper will present overall levels of NSE recognition, which forms of NSE were most and least recognised and deemed appropriate in a number of situations, as well as a qualitative analysis of the sentences produced by respondents. This research also reveals some quite surprising outcomes in terms of the proportion of respondents who identified the language in the stimulus sentences as "common" or "chavvy" despite National Curriculum aspirations not to identify SE as the prestige version.

Introduction

There is a reasonable consensus on the conception of Standard English (SE) – a dialect or variety of English, (though with no local base). It is the most prestigious form of the language, its identifiable features residing in its grammar, vocabulary and orthography¹, but not in accent or pronunciation (Crystal, 1997, Trudgill, 1999). It is the variety of English used as the norm of communication in official communications, publications and broadcasting (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002). Paradoxically perhaps, as a spoken form, SE is probably a minority variety. Although it is widely understood, it is not widely used in spontaneous speech.

¹ The accepted system of writing a language, including spelling and punctuation.

Non-standard English (NSE), is not just language which is merely different from SE, an accidental or one-off 'slip'; NSE implies a systemic feature of language which is shared with other speakers of the language but which diverges from the standard form. Nevertheless, an NSE utterance may have no marked semantic differential from the SE form. As Deborah Cameron (1995) points out, non-standard forms do not interfere with intelligibility – listeners are not bamboozled when decoding the intended meaning of Mick Jagger's "I can't get no satisfaction".

There is not a single NSE (in the way that there might be considered a single SE), but rather a number of forms, which include double negatives ("I can't find no money") and non-standard past simple or past participles (e.g. "She brung me a drink"). A literature review reveals at least 41 different forms (see Appendix A). Many of these forms have their origins in particular regional English dialects. For example, irregular past participles 'getten' and 'putten' (for get and put) are associated with Tyneside (McDonald reported in Crystal), additional use of prepositions such as "I got off of the bench" is associated with Estuary English (Crystal, 1997) and in Farnworth, there is the use of a negative verb with adverbs such as hardly (Shorrocks, 1985).

The National Curriculum requires that pupils should be taught about differences between standard and non-standard English, and in particular, "to be aware that different people make different choices about when standard English is appropriate" (DfEE, 2001). Certainly, the ethos of SE in the National Curriculum is intended to be descriptive, rather than prescriptive (Hudson, 2000), that English pupils should have a respect for their own and others' dialects and a sense of linguistic appropriacy – being able to shift their language usage in terms of register and form according to the communication situation. However, the expectation is that pupils will be able to write "sustained standard English with the formality suited to reader and purpose" (Assessment Focus for Key Stage 3). There has, of course, been considerable and heated debate over the last two decades concerning the place of SE in the National Curriculum and how non-standard varieties or dialects should be treated (e.g. Cameron, 1995; Honey, 1997). This debate continues (e.g. QCA, 2005).

English is constantly evolving. Certainly, we are all familiar with changes in lexical usage as new words fill lexical gaps, find their way into usage and published dictionaries; slang terms become acceptable for formal usage. Change also takes place at the level of syntax². Crystal illustrates this point by describing how the SE of today is not the SE of Jane Austen (Crystal, 1995). Differences include tense usage ("So, you are come at last"), irregular verbs ("so much was ate"), articles ("to be taken into the account"), prepositions ("she was small of her age"). It is an interesting point for prescriptivists to note, as such structures might now be considered as much non-standard as archaic.

Many commentators believe that English is undergoing unprecedented change, both in the form of 'dialect levelling' (the replacement of local linguistic features by others with a wider geographical currency) within the UK and change as a result of its worldwide presence. Erard's (2008) figures indicate that in addition to 328 million first language English speakers around the world, there are also in the region of 495 million second language English speakers. Each community has particular features in terms of syntax and morphology. But because of English as the world lingua franca and increased international mobility, some dialect levelling is undoubtedly at play on the world stage as well as in the UK.

There has been, however, less research into actual levels of usage of non-standard English. Hudson and Holmes (1995) investigating spoken English found that about 30% of a selection of school children could speak for several minutes without using any NSE forms. Since this was produced in a rather formal school context it probably sets the upper limit (Hudson, 2000). QCA (1999) found surprisingly little non-standard English in whole GCSE scripts, with 67% not displaying any non-standard forms.

² the rules and principles that govern the sentence structure of a particular language.

Massey et al (2005), using a cross-longitudinal design, identified a notable increase in non-standard usage in a sample of GCSE English scripts stratified (by grade) between 1980 and 2004, and in particular, between 1994 and 2004. The report also suggested that boys were more likely to use non-standard English forms than girls. Furthermore, as found in the QCA study, there was an indication that non-standard English usage was more prevalent amongst lower grades. The scope of this research, however, does not record the usage of the various NSE forms.

Lockwood (2006), in a cross-longitudinal study of 10-11 year-olds, found "an overall decline in the children's awareness of standard English features" between 1999 and 2005, though this pattern was not uniform for all non-standard forms. Similar to Massey et al, he too found a gender difference, with males less likely than females to display awareness of NSE forms.

This paper seeks to add to the empirical research on non-standard written English in young people. Twenty-four forms of NSE (out of over 40 as identified in the literature, and including some 'international' forms) were sampled on an assessment instrument consisting of two sections. The first section comprised twelve sentences, each containing some NSE forms. Respondents were asked to circle the words which did not sound right and rewrite the sentences accordingly – thus requiring both recognition and production, and facilitating both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Respondents were also asked to describe the type of English used in these sentences. The second section was intended to gain a notion of respondents' sense of appropriateness. Respondents were asked to match eight sentences with five predetermined situations (e.g. "speaking to a friend"; "letter to a teacher"; "msn to a friend") in which they thought it would be appropriate to use such English.

There were over 2000 student responses from 25 geographically diverse English schools and colleges. All student respondents were enrolled on GCSE English courses. In addition, 50 teachers also completed the assessment instrument described above, as well as a questionnaire on teaching practices of, and attitudes towards, SE/NSE.

This project attempts to add to the research in the following areas:

- which NSE forms are most and/or least recognised
- whether respondents could produce SE versions of the NSE forms
- whether respondents could spontaneously use the term non-standard English when asked to identify the type of English used in the assessment instrument
- perceptions of NSE
- gender differences in relation to recognition and production of NSE

Method

Devising the NSE Assessment Instrument

The assessment instrument used in this study was broadly based upon that of Michael Lockwood's (2006) task and comprised two main sections. The first section contained twelve sentences/lines, each of which contained one or more NSE forms (see Appendix B). The sentences deliberately contained standard or even quite basic vocabulary in order to reduce the likelihood of adding an irrelevant source of difficulty.

Respondents were instructed "neatly circle the word/s that don't sound right to you, then, underneath in the grey space, rewrite the sentence to make it a better one". Thus, this provided both a test of recognition and production.

Respondents were also asked to describe *the type* of English in these sentences. It was hoped that this would reveal something about the perceptions of NSE and whether or not respondents would be able to spontaneously produce the term 'non-standard English'.

The second section contained eight sentences and a set of five different communication situations with varying socially accepted demands of formality (e.g. letter to a teacher/boss, email/msn to a friend, speaking to a friend etc). The sentences and the communication situations were arranged in a matrix. Respondents were asked to indicate which situations it would be appropriate to use such English for each sentence, and were told that they may select more than one option. [The results for this part of the study will be reported elsewhere.]

The instrument also had space to collect some personal data (name, age, centre number, sex). Data on ethnicity was not collected.

The assessment instrument had been piloted in two centres prior to the study in order to anticipate and remedy any difficulties that might occur with administration, instructions, duration of the task and so on. Some small alterations had taken place after this.

The NSE forms contained within the instrument are listed below in Appendix A. Not all the 41 NSE forms identified in the literature review were included, for reasons of brevity or the difficulty posed in creating a stand-alone sentence with an unequivocally NSE form. Finally, some NSE forms were deemed to be associated exclusively with particular dialects and these too were excluded. Three NSE forms with origins in other “Englishes” were included: ‘gotten’ – which is an American variant of the past participle of ‘get’; noun phrase plus pronoun as subject (“that boy he went...”); and ‘luggages’, (treating an uncountable noun as countable), a common feature of second language English speakers in India, Singapore and Nigeria (Crystal, 1995).

Sample

The sample consisted of 2098 students enrolled on English GCSE courses, of which 56.5% were male, 39.0% female (4.5% unrecorded). The students were from 26 schools, representing 23 different counties in England³. Although the original invited sample had been carefully constructed in order to represent the overall population in terms of geographic spread and centre type variation, the final sample that took part was more heavily weighted towards the independent sector (56% of respondents) as shown in figure 1 below.

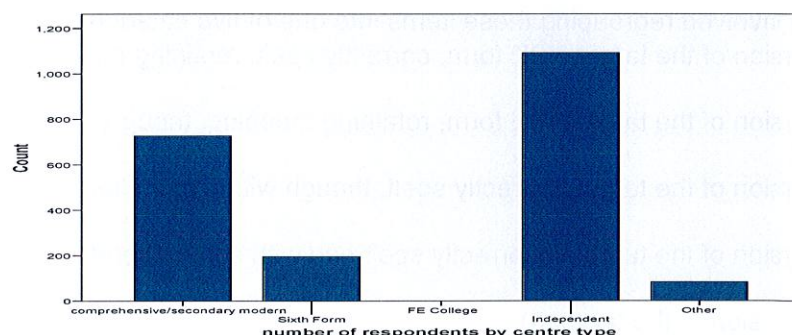


Figure 1: Frequency chart of participants according to centre type.

Materials

Each centre which had agreed to participate was sent multiple copies of the questionnaire so that in theory, there was one for each student enrolled (in either Year 10 or Year 11 in most cases) on a GCSE English course (see Appendix B). In addition, the contact teacher (in most cases, the Head of Department) was also sent instructions to help them administer the questionnaire as well as standardised instructions to read out to the class and other information in the form of “Frequently Asked Questions”. Teachers were also given the option to set the questionnaire as homework if there was too much pressure on teaching time. In brief, respondents were informed that the purpose of the research was to develop a national picture of English usage in England. They were instructed on how to complete both sections and that in

³ These were: North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, County Durham, Greater London, Bedfordshire, Essex, Suffolk, West Midlands, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Merseyside, Tyne and Wear, Somerset, Devon, West Sussex, East Sussex, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Kent and Gloucestershire.

both, there was not necessarily a single correct answer – they were asked to indicate what they thought was best or most appropriate. It is worth noting that, for the purposes of clean data collection for the question: “how would you describe the type of English used in many of the original sentences above?” the instructions deliberately avoided the term “non-standard English” at all times. For further information of administration, please see Appendix B.

The assessment instruments were completed in Spring Term 2007, or soon after the Easter holidays. Upon return to Cambridge Assessment, the responses were scanned into a database using TeleForm™ data capture.

Analysis

The emphasis of this research was on particular forms of NSE and whether some forms were more readily recognised than others.

There were multiple strands to the analysis.

- Rates of correct recognition for each NSE form.
- Rates of correct versus incorrect production for each NSE form.
- Content analysis of student response for each NSE item as described below.
- Overall performance of the cohort on the assessment instrument including gender and school type differences.
- Content analysis of responses to the question “How would you describe **the type of English** used in the original sentences above”.

The content analysis for each question in Section A involved coding each response at three levels or tiers.

- In the first tier of coding, (the lowest level), each response was coded in terms of what was written. Therefore in item 2 (target NSE form “the most beautiful”), the responses “the most beautiful”, “the prettiest”, “beautiful” etc. would each receive a different coding.
- The second tier of coding involved regrouping these items into one of five categories:
 - An appropriate SE version of the target NSE form, correctly spelt, retaining meaning (C)
 - An appropriate SE version of the target NSE form, retaining meaning, though incorrectly spelt (C_{SP})
 - An appropriate SE version of the target, correctly spelt, though with some alteration of meaning. (A)
 - An appropriate SE version of the target, incorrectly spelt *and* with some alteration of the meaning. (A_{SP})
 - An inappropriate SE version of the target (I)
- The third tier of coding was a simple binary coding to represent
 - Any acceptable SE version of the target NSE form (1)
 - No SE version of target NSE form supplied. (0)

In order to reliably code the second and third tiers, three judges independently coded each response type produced from the first tier of coding. A discussion took place on all items where there was not 100% agreement. In the majority of cases, this achieved a resolution. In about four cases where there was some disagreement, a fourth judge acted as the arbiter.

Results

Recognition and Production rates

Here the analysis looked at which forms were most and least recognised, as well as the production rates – whether respondents could produce acceptable SE versions of the target

NSE form (regardless of any other changes that might have been made which may have introduced a spelling error or even a non-target NSE form elsewhere in the sentence).

Table 1: NSE forms according to most and least recognised and production rates of appropriate SE version of the target NSE form

Item	NSE form	Example in NSE instrument	Recognition of target NSE form		Production of SE version of target NSE form	
			Rank	% recognised	Rank	% corrected
1	Noun phrase + pronoun	That girl she is tall	4	88.0	4	93.7
2	-est form with adjective > 2 syllables	Most beautiful	7	84.2	9	88.2
3	Double negative	I didn't break no vase	1	91.2	11	84.9
4	Use of additional preposition	Off of	23	56.6	21	67.8
5	There is + plural	There isn't any seats left	14	74.0	20	70.6
6	Could of/should of etc	We should of	19	69.2	17	79.1
7	Use of adjective as adverb	Come quick	25	41.9	25	44.3
8	Loss of preposition	out the window	20	65.3	14	82.2
9	Me and him as compound subjects.	Me and my friend...	24	53.8	24	56.5
10	Third person singular + were	It were quite good	3	88.8	1	97.5
11	More with +er	More easier	17	71.3	16	80.9
12	Third person singular + don't	That one don't work	8	83.9	5	92.8
13	Past Participle instead of past simple	It wasn't me who done it	13	75.9	13	84.1
14	Them + plural noun	Them books	10	79.6	10	87.1
15	Plural subject + was	[Them]...books was already ripped	11	78.7	6	92.7
16	Non standard past tense	Tom had gotten cold	12	77.5	15	82.2
17	Non-standard past tense	His mum brung him	5	86.6	8	89.6
18	Subject verb agreement	She walk...	2	89.1	2	96.9
19	Measure nouns without plural marker	...three mile	9	79.9	3	95.9
20	Past simple instead of past participle	Must have took	16	72.4	19	77.1
21	Use of 'what' as relative pronoun	...the trainers what I need	6	84.7	7	92.4
22	Was sat/was stood	She was stood	22	57.3	23	58.5
23	Negative plus negative adverb	..and couldn't hardly move	18	71.0	18	78.6
24	This + noun to indicate newly introduced thing	This man showed us	21	58.8	22	65.6
25	Plural uncountable noun	Luggages	15	73.7	12	84.3

Looking at table 1 above, we can see there is overall a high correlation between NSE recognition and NSE 'correction', which provides some evidence of cross-validation of the two measures. However, perhaps counter to intuition, the rates of recognition (in all but two instances), are lower than that of correction. Possible reasons for this might include:

- i. Respondents could not be bothered or did not realise they had to circle the relevant words even though they had recognised the presence of a non-standard form. There is some evidence for this as over 50% of respondents who did not correctly recognise a single NSE form had scores of over 20 in terms of correctly producing SE versions of the NSE forms.

- ii. Respondents had either overlooked or had not consciously realised some of the NSE forms (because they did not interfere with comprehension), though naturally altered them at the point of production. This certainly seems likely in items 18 and 19 where a quick read may not always register the missing –s; but where it is not a form the respondent would naturally produce.

The two NSE forms which bucked the trend and had higher recognition rates than production rates were 'there is' + plural noun ('There isn't any seats - Item 5) and the double negative (I didn't break no vase... - Item 3). In these cases, some respondents who had circled the target NSE form struggled to produce SE versions (see figure 11, later).

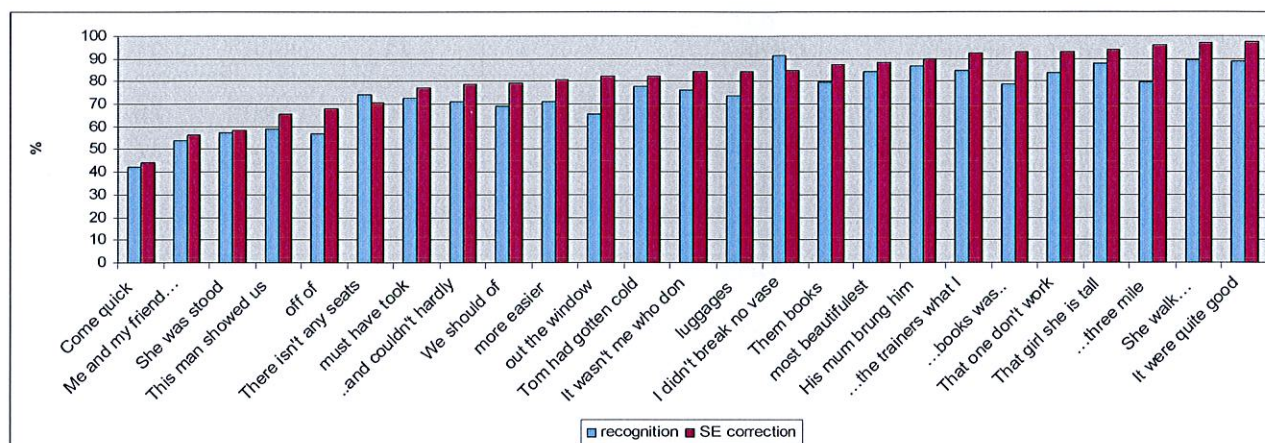


Figure 2: Recognition and production rates for each NSE form on the assessment instrument, arranged in ascending order according to SE production rates for NSE form.

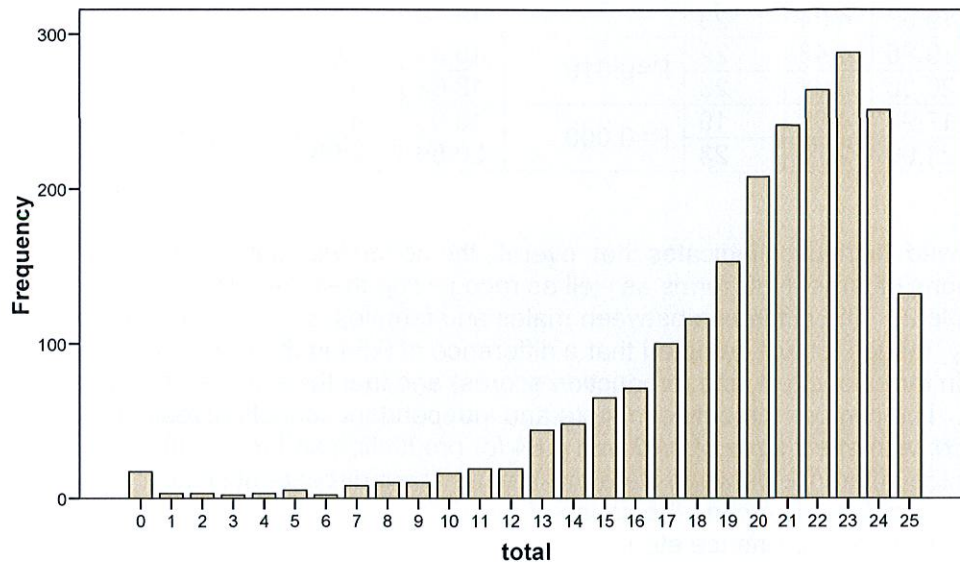
Overall, the most commonly recognised NSE forms were the double negative ("I didn't break no vase" – Item 3) the loss of inflection from 3rd person singular verb ("she walk" – Item 18) and subject-verb agreement ("It were quite good..." - Item 10). The most commonly successfully corrected forms also included "she walk..." and "It were quite good..." as well as "three mile" (item 19). Certainly, recognition of double negatives and subject-verb agreement are flagged up in the National Curriculum as examples of non-standard English and this may explain the higher awareness in the respondents.

Non-standard forms which were least recognised and corrected were the use of adjective as adverb (omission of adverbial form –ly) as in "Come quick" (Item 7) and the use of compound subjects "Me and my friend" (Item 9). Interestingly, while some authors note that "me and my friend" is "unquestioningly non-standard" (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002) it is fairly standard in teenagers' conversation. "She was stood", "This man.." and "off of" all have less than 70% recognition and correction rates.

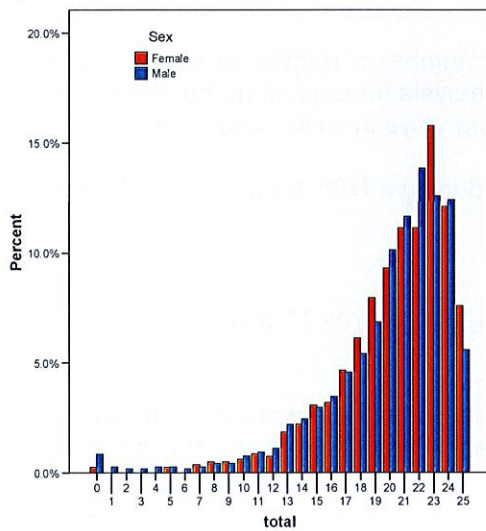
It is possible that these less well recognised NSE forms will find their ways into SE, especially given the view that teenagers are linguistic innovators who bring about change in standard dialect (Kerswill and Cheshire, in prep).

Cohort profile

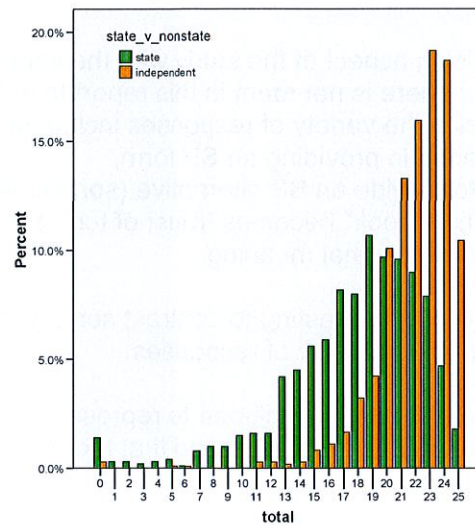
It is of some interest to see, the distribution of respondents' scores on the questionnaire. Apart from anything else, it gives us some insight into how capable the cohort was overall at 'correcting' NSE forms. For the frequency graphs below (see figure 3) the 'production' figures were used, rather than the recognition figures as these represent possibly more sensitive outcomes.



3a) Overall candidate distribution for 'production' scores on the assessment instrument.



3b) Male-female differences in the distribution



3c) School type differences in the distribution⁴

Figure 3: Whole cohort score distribution profile of total score on the assessment instrument, with breakdowns for both gender and school type.

⁴ For this bar chart, the state school category includes comprehensive and sixth form respondents.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for distribution of 'production' scores on the assessment instrument.

	Production scores				Recognition scores			
	Mean	s.d.	mode	Significance (two-tailed)	Mean	s.d.	mode	Significance (two-tailed)
Overall	19.98	4.34	23		18.55	5.71	22	
Male mean	19.85	4.48	22	P=0.019	18.62	5.65	22	ns
Female mean	20.30	3.94	23		18.62	5.73	22	
State funded	17.90	4.80	19	P=0.000	16.05	6.17	19	P=0.000
Independent	21.90	2.70	23		20.86	4.06	22	

The negatively skewed distribution indicates that, overall, the cohort was quite capable at producing SE versions of target NSE forms as well as recognising them (see mean and modal scores above in table 2). The difference between males and females is significant, with females scoring more highly, though it must be noted that a difference of 0.54 in the means is only equivalent to 0.12 in terms of effect size (production scores) and that there is no difference for recognition scores. The comparison between state and independent schools reveals a highly significant difference, with effect sizes of 0.92 and 0.84 for production and recognition scores respectively. While the difference between state maintained and independent sectors is significant, it is not possible to determine the cause of this difference within this study (e.g. academic ability, educational experience etc.).

Content Analysis

One surprising aspect of the study was the variation in the number of responses generated by each item. There is not room in this report to include an analysis for each item, but the figures below display the variety of responses including the differing ways in which respondents:

- succeeded in providing an SE form,
- failed to provide an SE alternative (sometimes by introducing a NSE form such as the target "must have took" becomes "must of took"), or
- altered the original meaning.

Additionally, it is interesting to contrast some of the figures (e.g. figures 11 and 12) in terms of the scale of the diversity of responses.

A selection of figures is included to represent some of the most frequently and least frequently recognised NSE forms. It is hoped that these speak for themselves and require little in the way of comment.

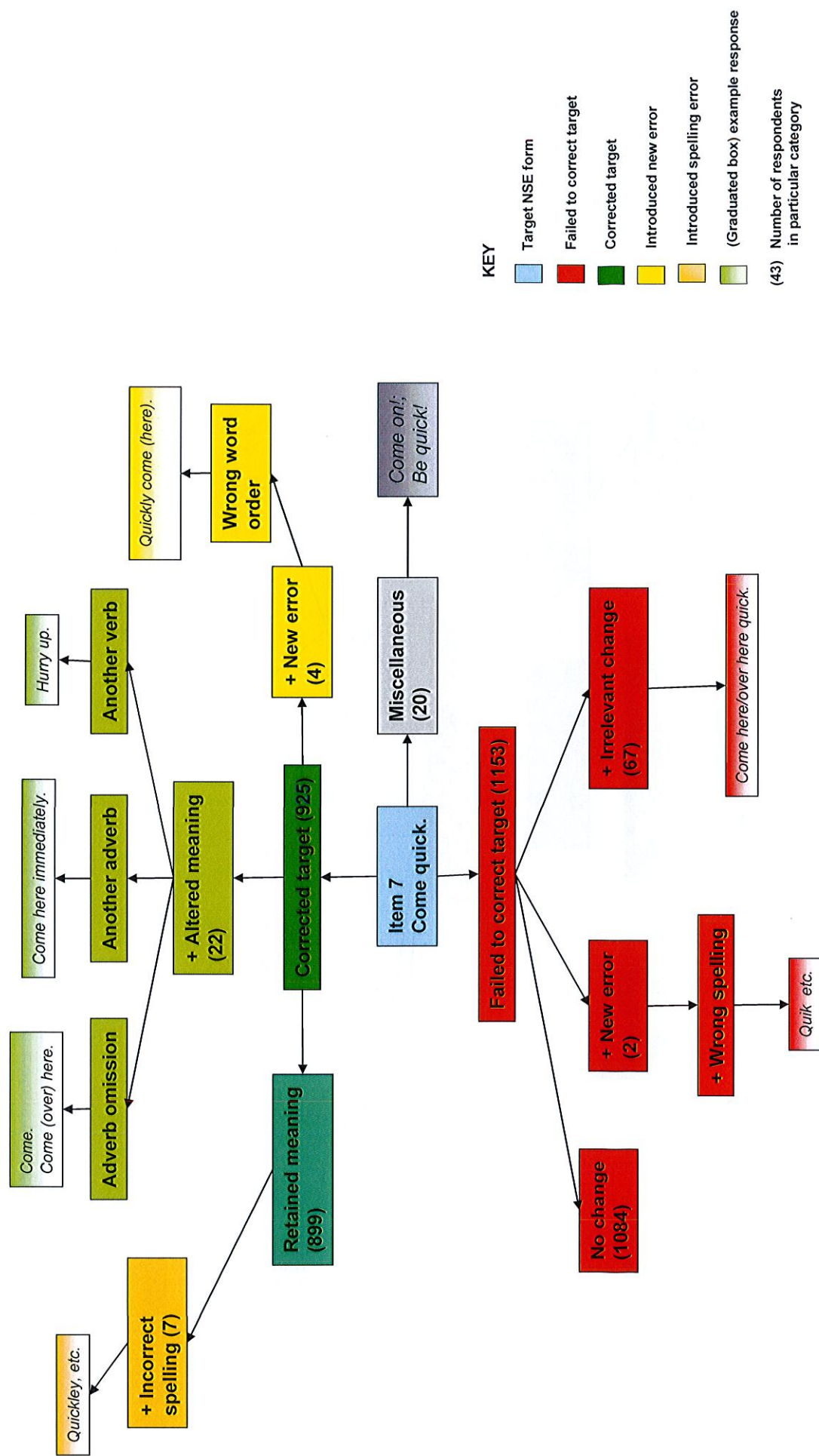


Figure 4: Use of adjective as adverb - Come quick – the least recognised and least “corrected” NSE form. The majority of participants left the form unchanged.

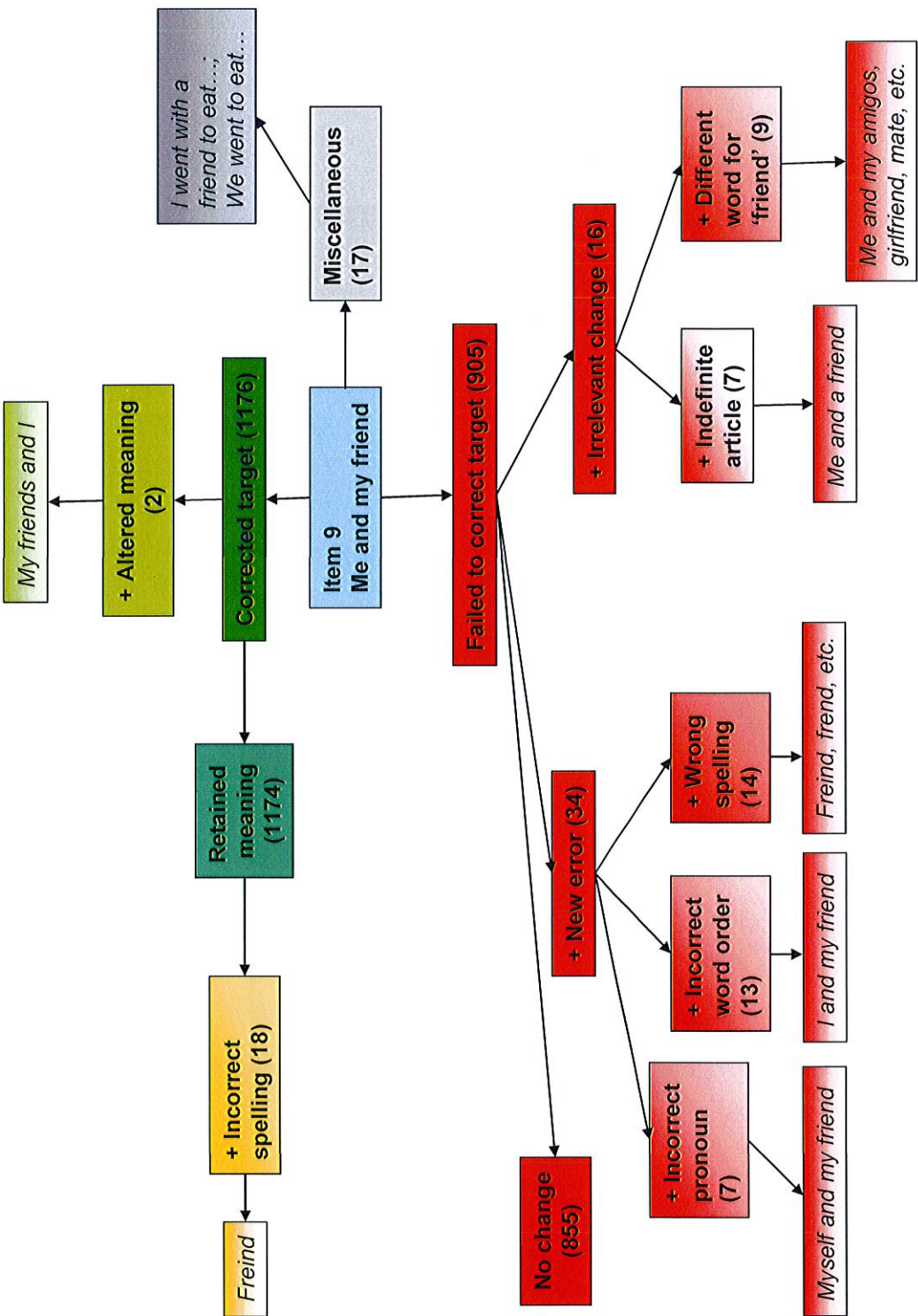


Figure 5: "Me and xx" as compound subject. Again, this was a relatively poorly recognised and 'corrected' NSE form.

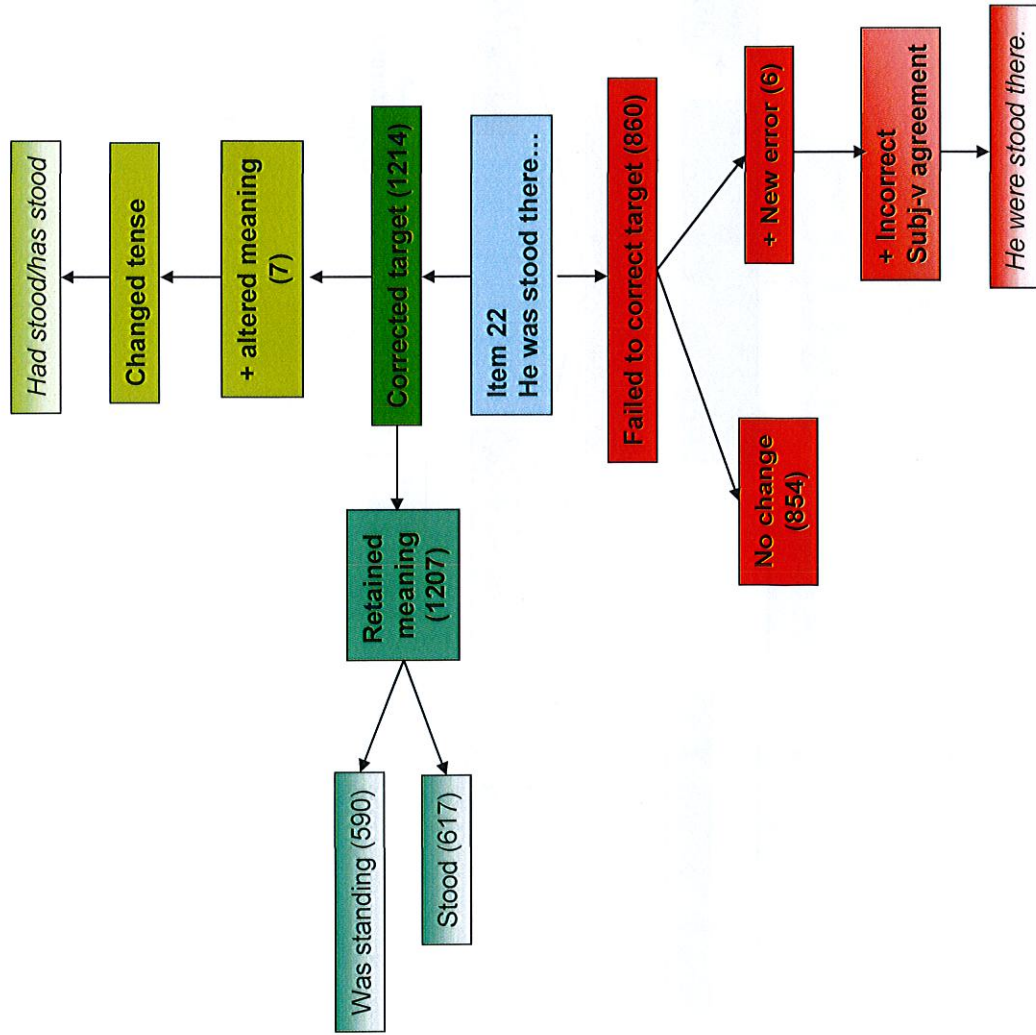


Figure 6: "Was stood" – This was the third least recognised and 'corrected' NSE form, with 41% leaving the target unchanged. Also note the introduction of NSE third person singular + were form - "he were stood" by some respondents.

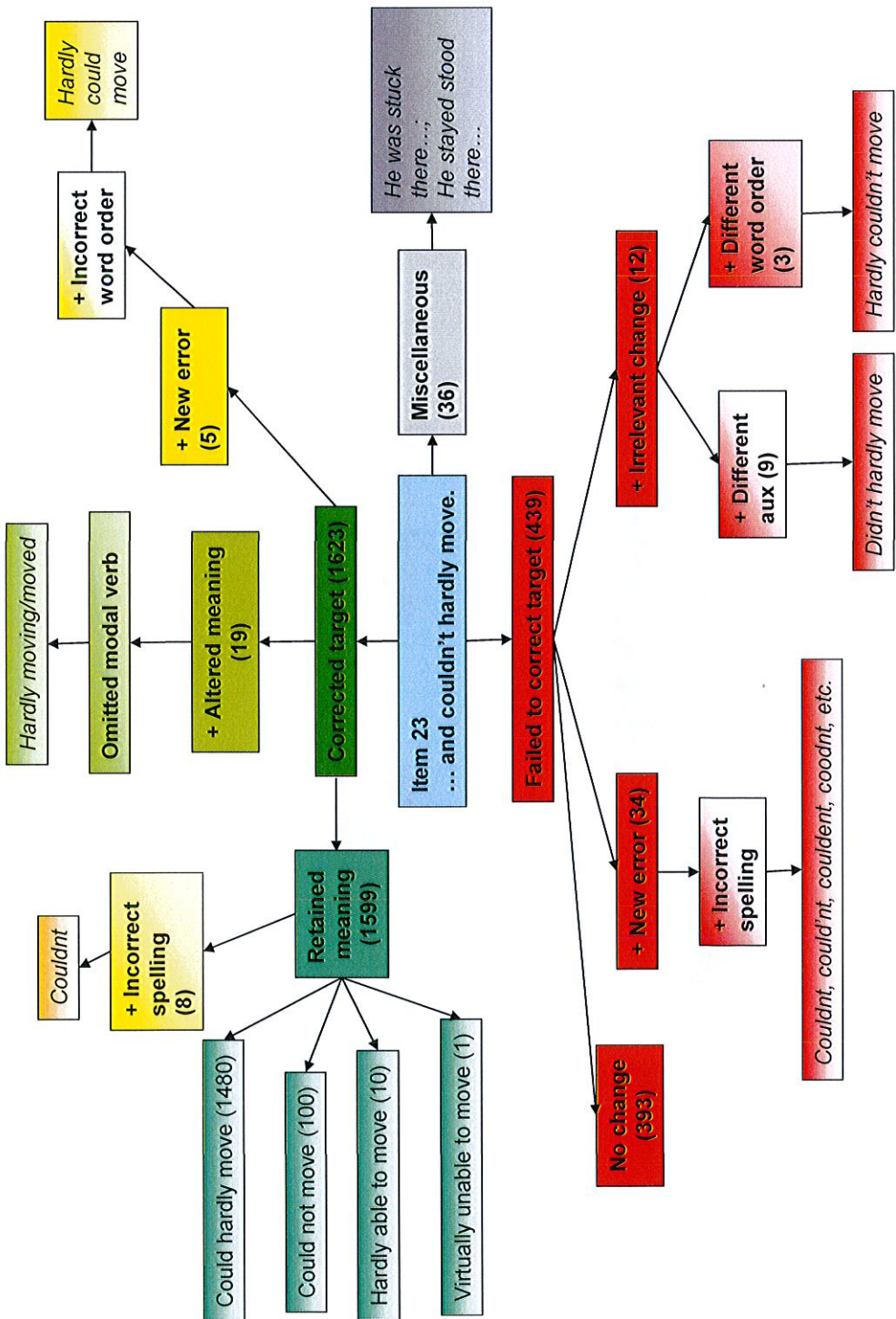


Figure 7: Negative + negative adverb, “couldn’t hardly”:

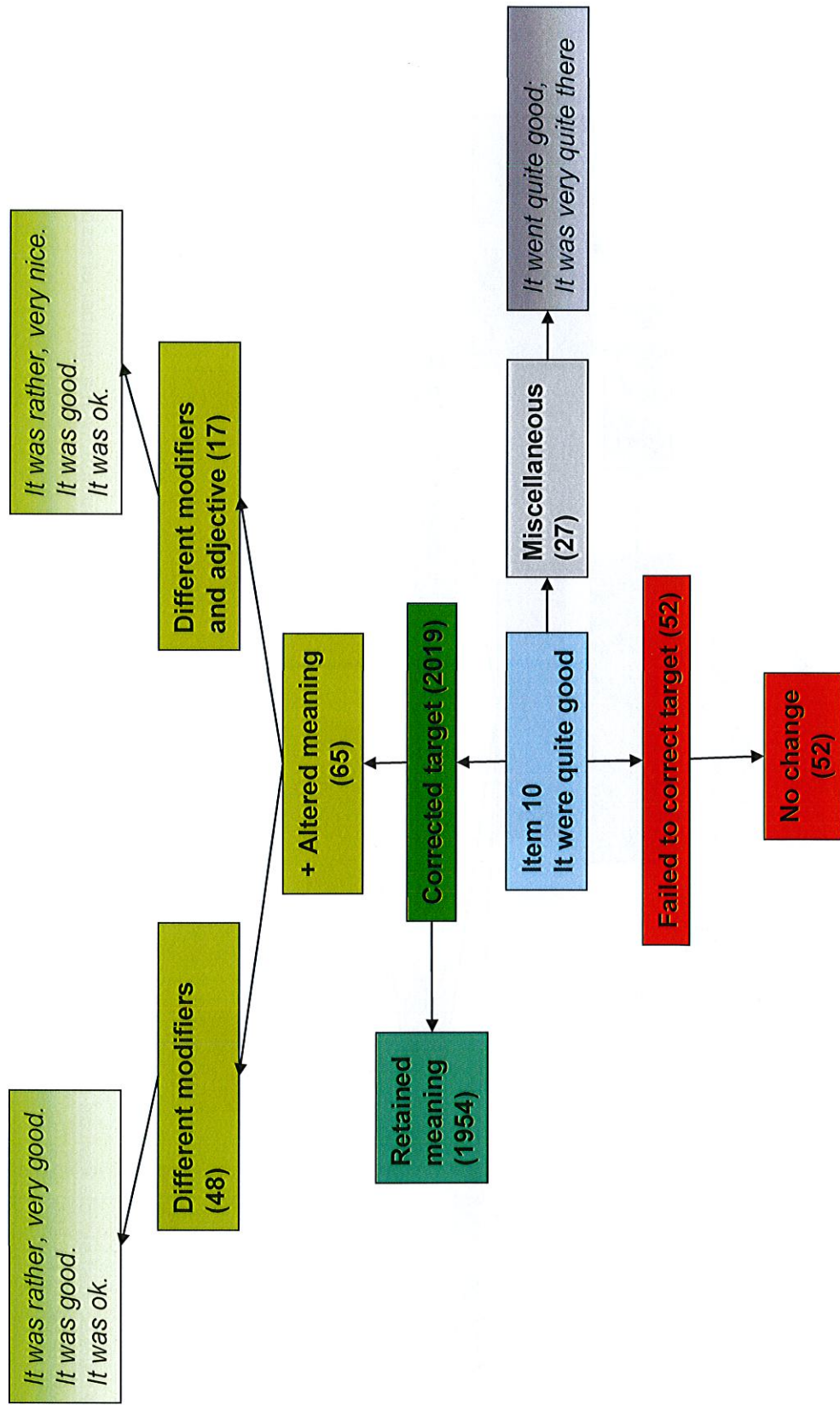


Figure 8: Third person singular + were. This was the NSE form with the highest 'correction' rate.

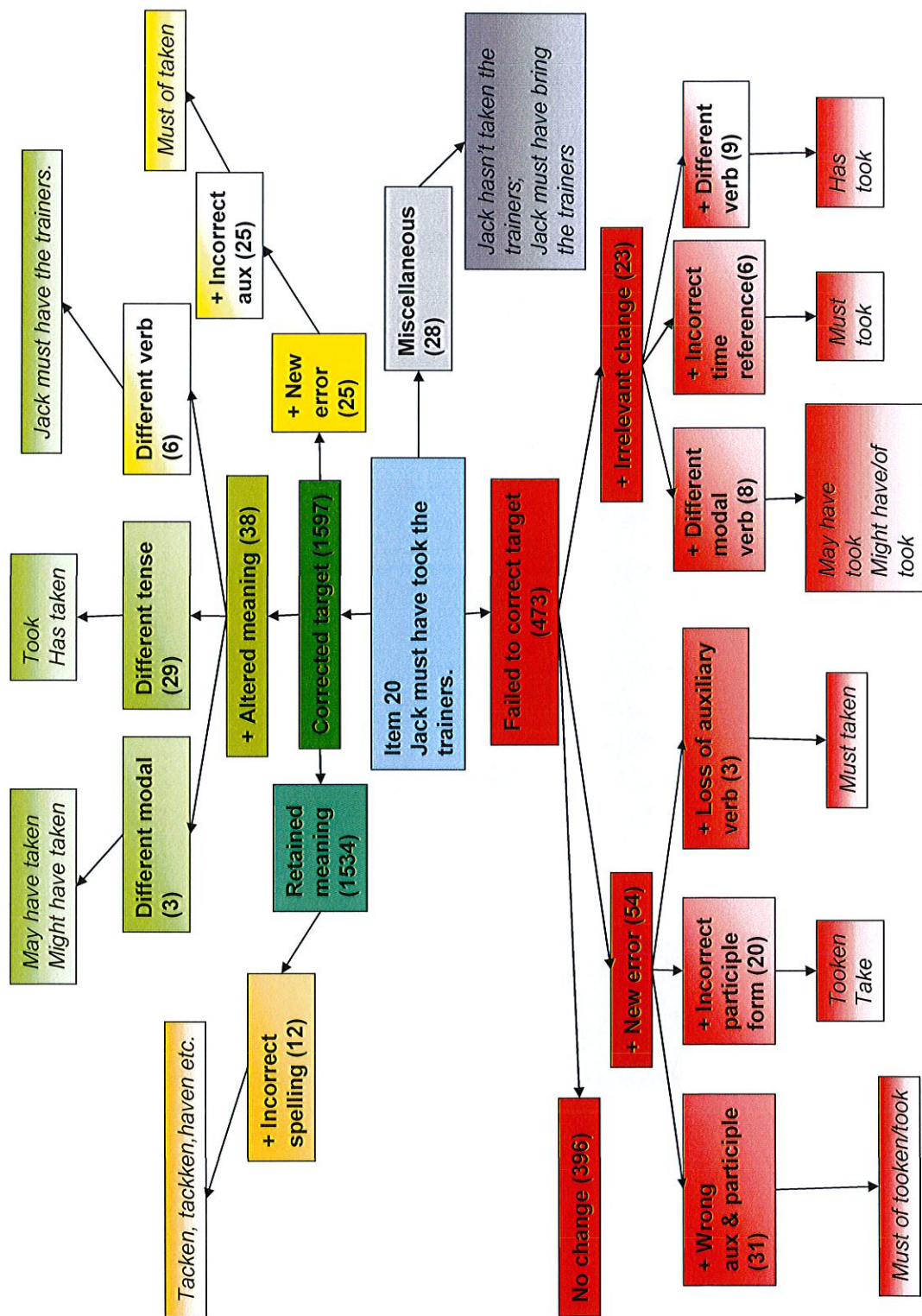


Figure 9: Past simple instead of past participle. This seems to be an area of some confusion, with a number of respondents struggling to produce the correct past participle form of take (taken) and/or introducing the form "must of..."

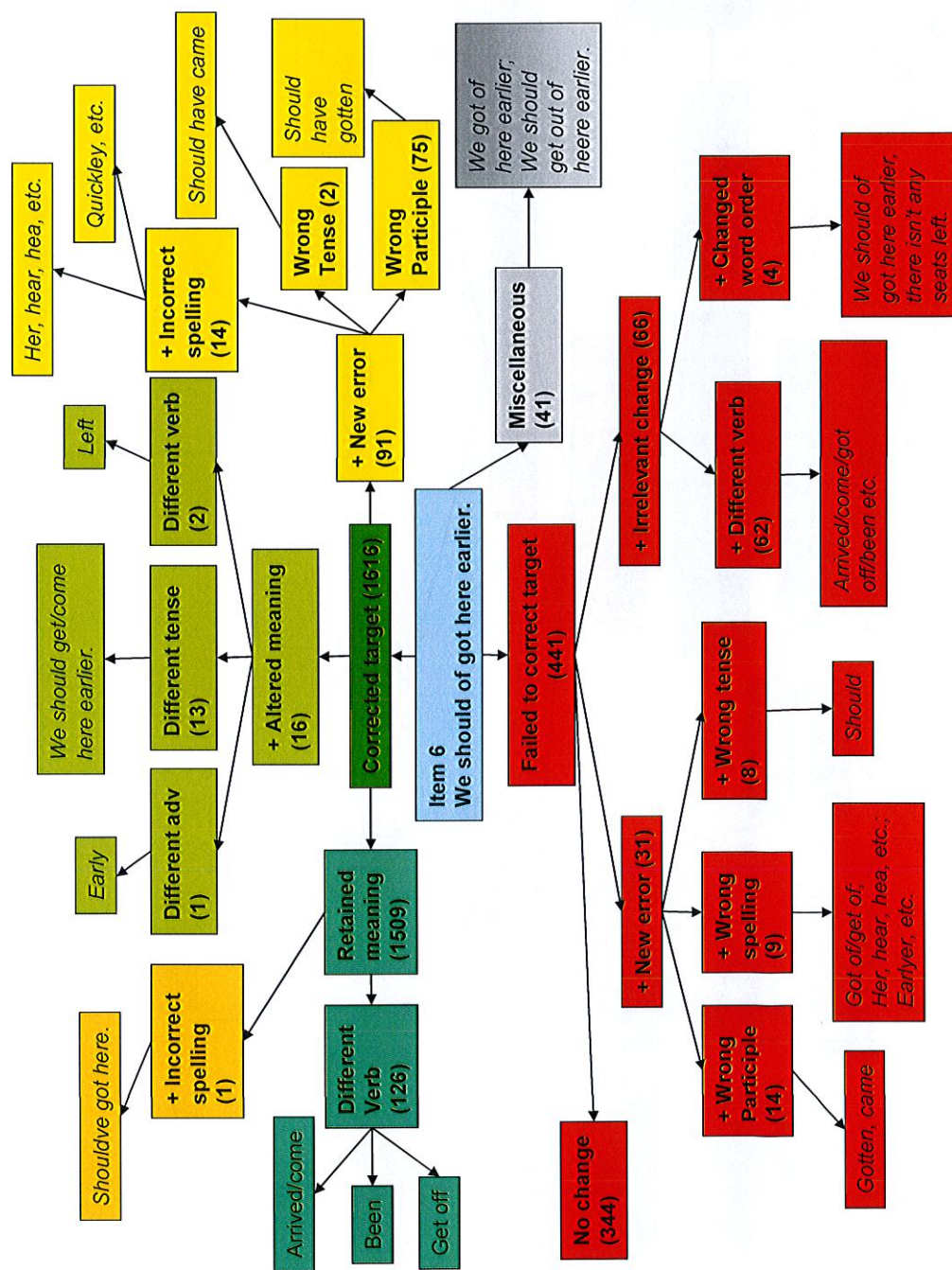


Figure 10: Should of + past participle. 21% of respondents retained the form should + of. Analysis of responses, similarly to figure 9 above, shows there is some confusion concerning the past participle form, with a number of respondents introducing the American variant form 'gotten' (c.f. item 16 of assessment instrument).

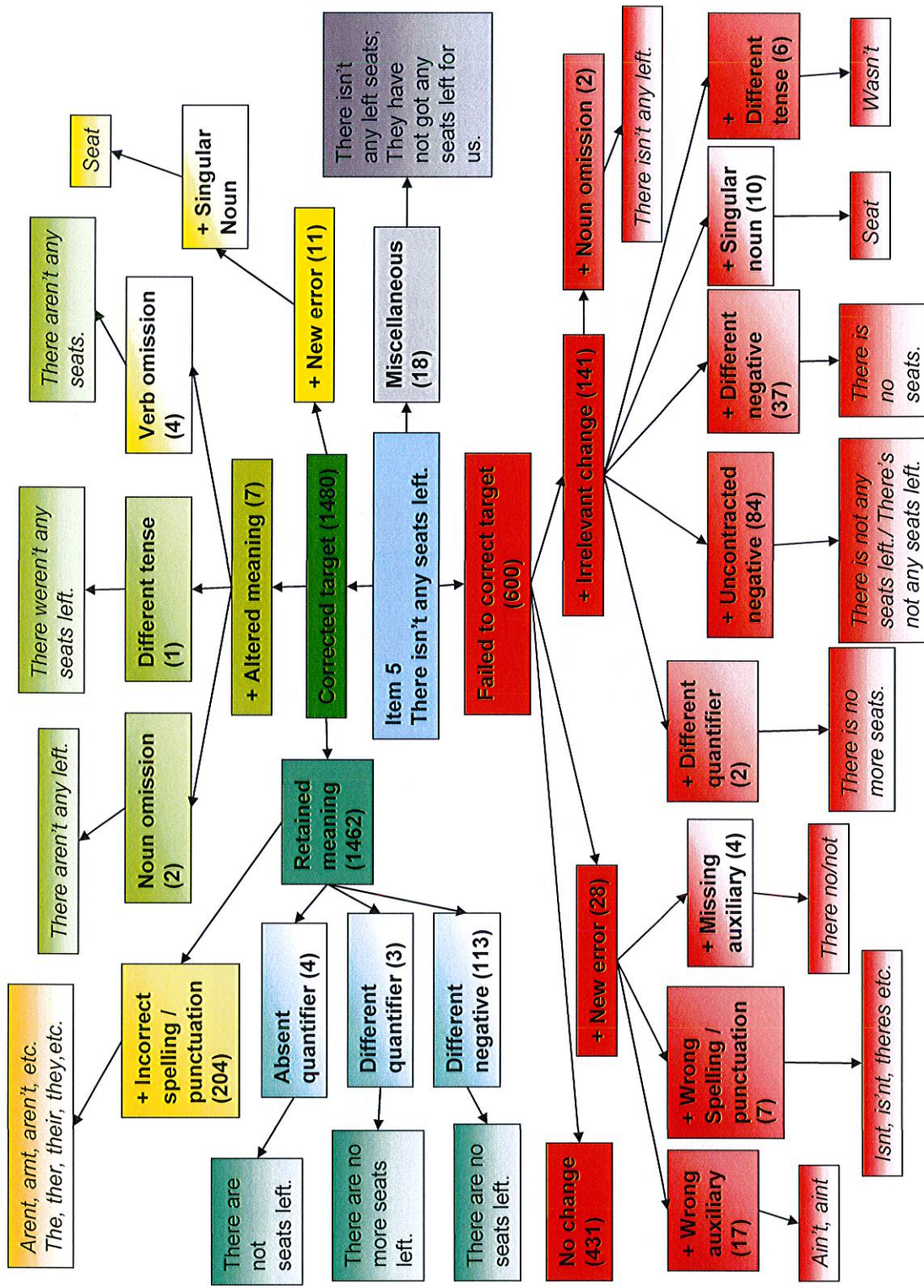


Figure 11: There is + plural. The complexity of the figure is indicative of respondents' difficulty in finding a neat SE version.

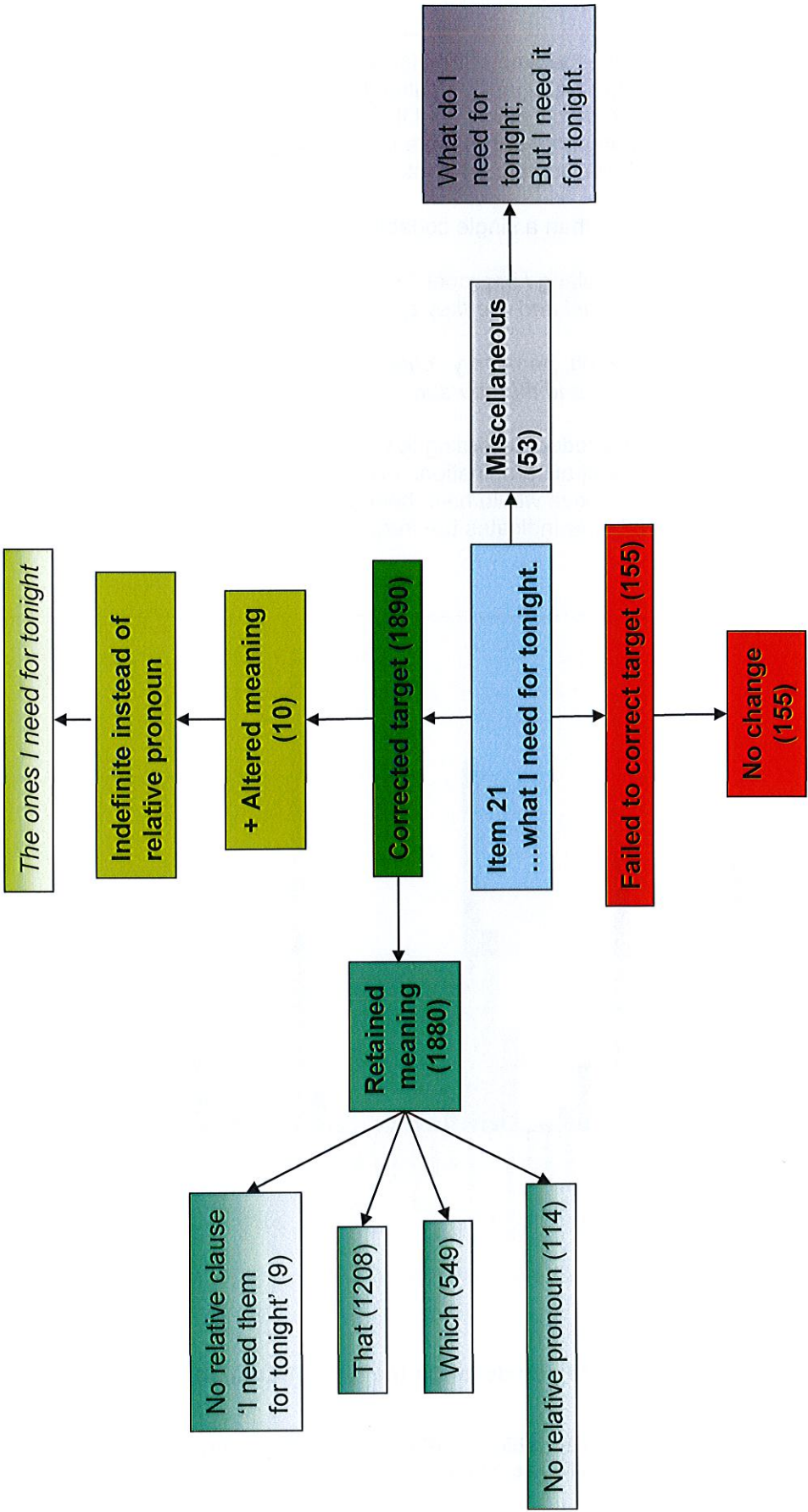


Figure 12: The use of what as a relative pronoun. This is an example of an NSE which, in comparison to figure 11 above, respondents could provide an SE version quite easily.

Perceptions of NSE

Respondents were asked to name the type of English in the sentences in Section A of the instrument. One of the aims of the National Curriculum for literacy is for students to be able to identify standard versus non-standard English, and that they should also see NSE as a dialect with equivalent status to SE, though not appropriate for formal spoken or written English. It was hoped that this question would give some insight into perceptions of NSE.

Many respondents included more than a single codable response such as:

Respondent #962: "wrong / slang / improper English"

Respondent #1656: "*Coloquel and like they speak in Eastenders! Informal, conversational.*"

Respondent #1390 "*Common, peasantry, 'chav', Incorect, Heinous grammatical errors*"

Respondent #1380 "*Formal and third person*"

Responses to this question were coded according to the first codable unit in any response as any coding method to take account of combinations of descriptions involved in excess of 100 categories. Thus, the examples above would have been coded, in turn, as "wrong", "colloquial", "common", "formal". Figure 13 below indicates the frequencies of the first codable unit in any response.

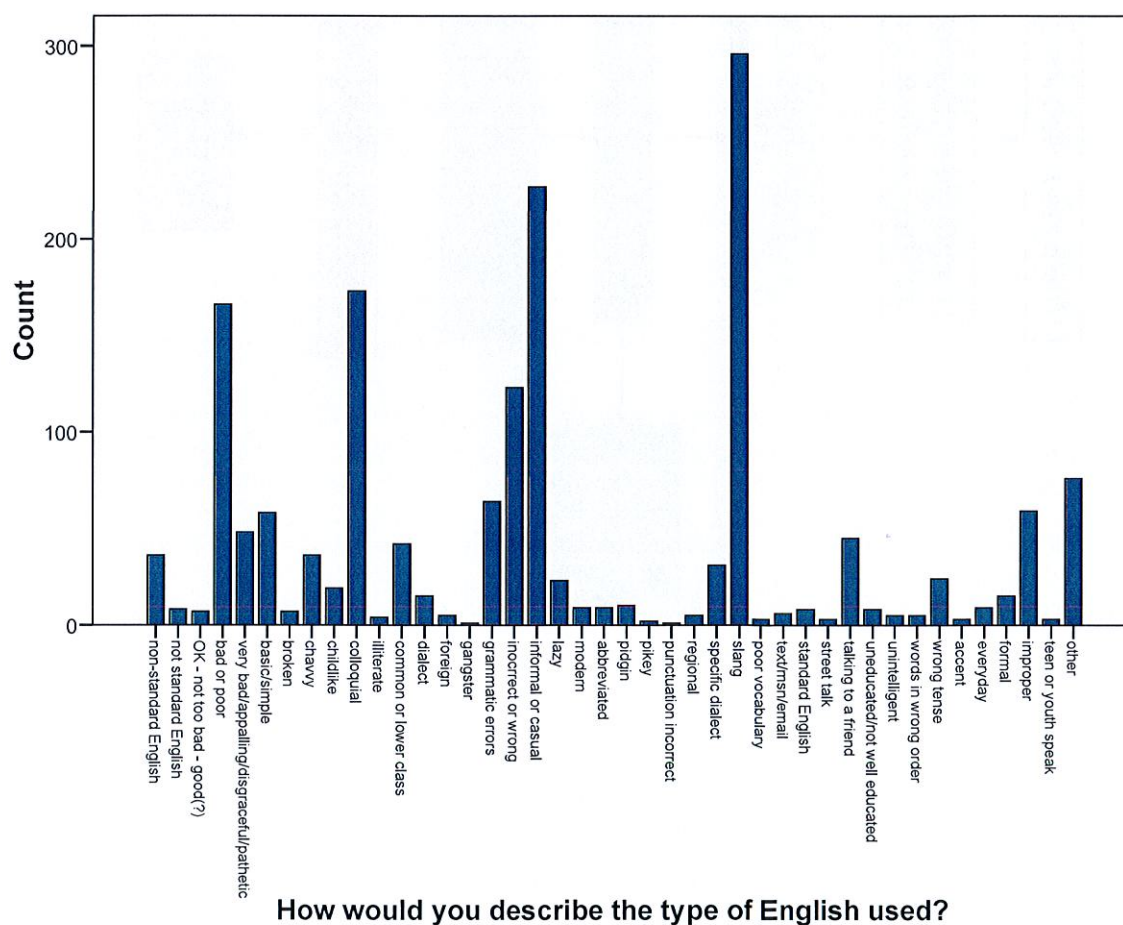


Figure 13: Frequency counts of first codable unit of responses to the question "how would you describe the type of English used in the sentences above?"

Figure 13 shows that the four most common first responses (according to codable response) were “slang”, “informal / casual”, “colloquial” and “bad / poor”. A number of respondents identified the language as “childlike” (or ‘like a 5 year old’) – and it is possible that for these respondents the salient features of the language were *not* the non-standard forms per se, but the simple sentence structure and vocabulary.

Overall the term non-standard English (or “not standard English”) was present (at any point) in just 2.8% of responses (n=59) (compared with 3.4% (n=72) for ‘chavvy’). Thus, it seems that most of the respondents could not spontaneously deploy the term non-standard English.

One interesting pattern in the response was amongst those who identified the type of English as a specific dialect.

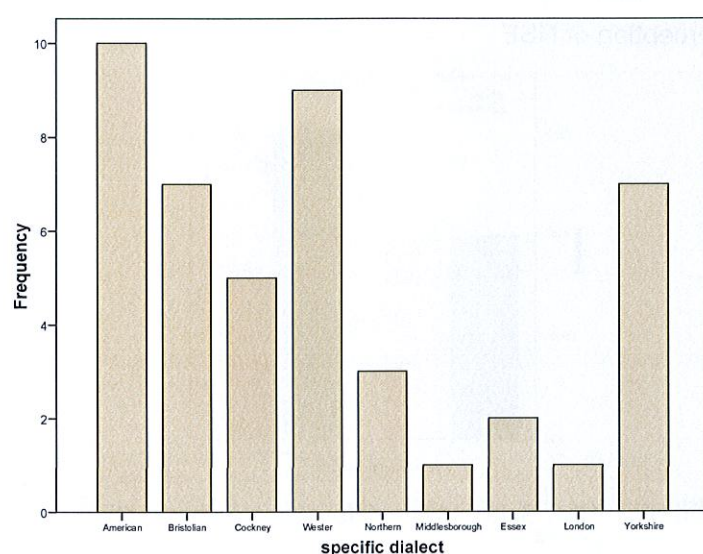
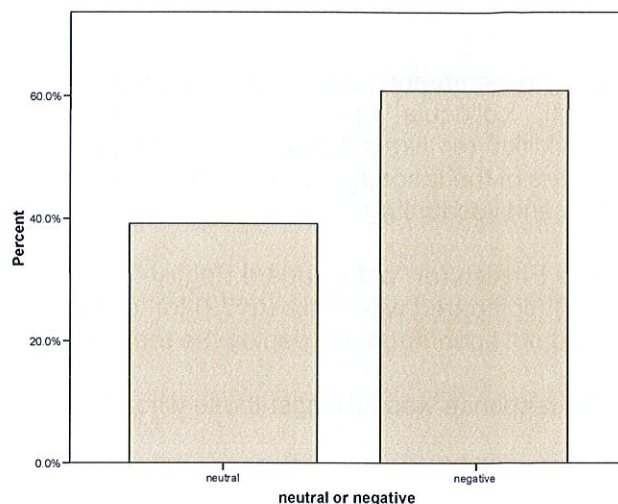


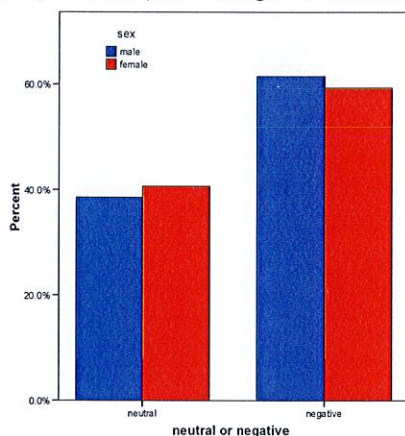
Figure 14: Respondents who identified the type of English as representing a specific dialect.

Interestingly, these identified dialects range (in addition to American) from north-east to south-west England, and in the majority of cases represent a geographic locality close to the respondent. In these cases, it is not always possible to know whether the respondent themselves identified with specific dialect (their own in-group), or regarded it as belonging to an out-group.

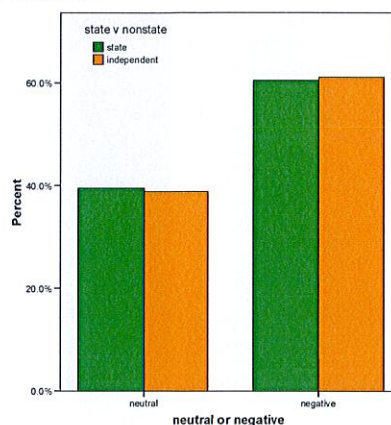
Further analysis was required to discover whether respondents viewed NSE (regardless of whether they had used this term or not) as of equal status to SE as is the intention of the National Curriculum, or as a lower status form. This involved recoding the first codable units (as seen in figure 13) into either ‘neutral’ or ‘negative’. Thus, responses originally coded as “colloquial”, “informal”, “casual”, “abbreviated”, “teen speak”, “everyday” were coded as neutral; while “bad”, “poor”, “disgraceful”, “pikey”, “Pidgin” (NB, in every case, spelt like the bird), “unintelligent” and so on, were coded as negative. The percentages are presented below in figure 15.



15a) overall percentage distribution of perception of NSE



15b) Male-female differences in perception of NSE



15c) School type differences in perception of NSE⁵

Figure 15: Perception of NSE of respondents, as coded on the basis of the first codable unit of response to the question

Overall, (see figure 15a) respondents were more likely to present the NSE forms as negative/inferior than give a response indicating a more neutral stance⁶. There was little evidence of any gender difference in these perceptions, or, as one might have imagined, a state versus independent school difference.

Other responses, which provide some insight into attitudes and understanding of language, include:

Respondent #2017: *Confused tenses (a.k.a. Russell Brand speak.) and plural adjectives and verbs incorrect. In a word 'childish.'*

Respondent #78: *I can describe this type of English like a type of simple language what we can use when we speak with friends.*

Respondent #1263: *COMMON/AGRICULTURAL*

Respondent #929: *It is understandable however there are many mistakes.*

Respondent #1456: *"Not correct, yet understandable"*

Respondent #1400: *"Bristolian / chav"*

⁵ For this bar chart, "state school" includes both comprehensive and sixth form respondents.

⁶ It is likely that if the coding were based upon the whole response, that the proportion of negative responses would increase.

Respondent #291: *incorrect, slang, use of double negatives.*

Respondent #126: *dissscorrectly ordered.*

Respondent #1222: *Some of the original sentences had small mistakes and there were bit unproper.*

Respondent #301: *Standard english / poor grammer*

Respondent #447: *The original sentences have different dialects which make them incorrect*

Respondent #102: *Very informal, as you would talk to a friend or over an instant messaging programme (msn).*

Respondent #1898: *written in a Regional accent. Non standard english*

Discussion

There are some interesting similarities and differences between this research and that of Michael Lockwood, though it must be remembered that Lockwood's study looked at a younger age group. Similarities include:

- Some gender difference, though not large, in awareness of NSE. Lockwood's own longitudinal survey points to a closing gender gap as a result of declining female awareness rather than increasing male awareness.
- High awareness of the various NSE forms which involve subject-verb agreement.
- Similar rates of identifying 'gotten' as NSE (77.5% in this study versus 70% in Lockwood's).

Some of the differences are worth pondering. One might speculate whether the differences are due to research design issues such as the choice of sentences, sample size, or age of the respondents. It is possible that children 'grow out of' some forms of NSE between the age bands of 10-11 and 14-16.

- Adverbial use of adjective ("Come quick") was the least commonly recognised form in this survey, though one of the most commonly recognised in Lockwood's ("We done our work proper").
- In Lockwood's study, 'could of' was accepted by 92% of respondents as standard, averaged over the three sampling years. However, this study reports that only 20% of respondents failed to correct this form. This may suggest that this is one feature of English at which children improve.
- In Lockwood's study, "Me and my dad" was accepted as SE by 86%, compared to 43.5% in this study, again, possibly indicative of awareness increasing with age.

Limitations

While this research had a very large sample, there were some limitations which included:

- The assessment instrument contained contrived sentences in order to try to produce clearly non-standard examples. Their contrived nature may not have been sufficiently convincing or life-like and may have confounded responses.
- Whilst this research shows that, for example, 'Come quick' (use of adjective as adverb) was the least commonly recognised and 'I didn't knock no vase' (double negative) as the most recognised, these results might not necessarily generalise to other examples of the same form such as "I did it easy", "speak proper" or "I'm not never going back there again". Different syntax and construction may alter the perception of a sentence or form within a sentence as non-standard.
- This research involved only written English, and did not tell us about the usage of these forms in spoken English.
- From this research alone, and without replication of this work in several years' time, it is not possible to know whether the usage and awareness of NSE is stable, increasing or decreasing.

Further work

The data offers other possibilities for analysis including:

- Whether there is a correlation between NSE awareness and academic performance at GCSE level
- For the varying forms of NSE, whether there are differential rates of recognition and correction according to gender, school type and region.
- Analysis of teachers' responses on the questionnaire and assessment instrument.

Conclusions

In summary, this research indicates:

- Despite National Curriculum aspirations not to treat SE as the prestige version, the majority of respondents identified the language in the stimulus sentences as of an inferior type.
- There are significant differences in school types (independent versus state) in terms of correct production of SE versions of NSE forms.
- There is a small though significant difference between males and females in correct production of SE versions of NSE forms
- There are differences in the rates of recognition and 'correction' for NSE forms.

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Appendix A - Non-Standard English forms as identified in literature review and their appearance in the assessment instrument.

Description of NSE form		Examples (Example in bold indicates item in the assessment instrument, with SE form indicated in italics)	Section A sentence	Section A item	Section B item
1	Past simple instead of past participle	Jack must have took (<i>taken</i>)... They have fell (<i>fallen</i>) out of the picture. It could have came in the window	10	Item 20	
2	Past participle instead of past simple	It wasn't me who done (<i>did</i>) it She come (<i>came</i>) out of the TV. The men run (<i>ran</i>). He swung (<i>swang</i>) on the rope and then jumped down.	7	Item 13	
3	Non standard past tenses/past participles	His mum brung (<i>brought</i>) him a hot drink Tom had gotten (<i>got</i>) cold (<i>Americanism</i>) He writ a long letter. She has gotten wet She had putten the food away.	8 8	Item 17 Item 16	
3	There is + plural	There isn't (<i>aren't</i>) any seats left. Is (<i>are</i>) there any poles hanging down? There isn't (<i>aren't</i>) any jobs in that town	3	Item 5	
4	This + noun to indicate thing/person previously unmentioned	When we got to the hotel, this (a) man showed us to our room... I was walking down the street when I saw this man...	12	Item 24	
5	Them + plural noun (instead of those) ("use of them as a determiner")	Them (those) books.. See them paperclips over there?	7	Item 14	
6	Use of adjective as adverb/omission of adverbial form -ly – most common with quick, easy and good, as well as comparatives instead of comparative adverbs	Come quick (quickly). You can turn this easier (<i>more easily</i>) Don't eat fast, eat slow.	4	Item 7	3
7	Loss of preposition 'of – especially common with window, door, room or house	out (of) the window.	4	Item 8	5
8	Use of what instead of SSE as a relative pronoun	He must have the trainers what (that) I need for tonight ...in case there's a bit of glass what you tread on.	10	Item 21	
9	Double negative (or "multiply marked negative")	I didn't knock no vase It's not getting no water inside it	2	Item 3	
10	They was – use of was with plural	Those books was (were) already ripped.	7	Item 15	

subject	As they was running out There was trainers going missing They climbed to the top and was amazed at the sight.		
11 Me and him (as compound subjects) <i>Though SSE in younger generation</i>	Me and my friend... (<i>My friend and I</i>) Me and ryan thought..	5	Item 9
12 "Give us" meaning "give me", usually with imperative verbs let, tell, show, pass	Show us your homework		
13 Use of <i>never</i> to refer to a single occasion, used instead of <i>didn't</i> etc	"It if never had the blutack on it, it wouldn't fall."		
14 Was sat/ was stood instead of SSE was sitting, was standing etc.	He was stood there... I wasn't just sat at a desk doing nothing. I was stood there, just watching the fight.	11	Item 22 6
15 "More easier". Use of more + -er to form adjective comparatives	This one is more (ornit) easier to use.	6	Item 11
16 That instead of so	They ran that fast they fell over		
17 "Dead good" dead meaning very & used with any adjective	"That dinner was dead good"		
18 "People who's" – use of 's instead of 've after a relative pronoun <i>who</i> with a plural antecedent.	"There's people who's got arthritis"		
19 Lend instead of borrow	We'll lend someone else's "Sir, I haven't got my book. Can I lend one off you?"		
20 Hissel/wirself/wirselves/thaself/tha selves	"We need them to dry wirself" "He banged hisself on the head"		
21 Geatt – great, really, big good etc			
22 "Cut (yourself) off" rather than "Cut (yourself) on"	You can cut your finger off there		
23 Canna instead of can't	You canna cook it on a fire.		
24 Three mile (measure nouns without plural marker when combined with a number or other indication of quantity)	She walks three mile (miles) everyday... A few month Seven year	9	Item 19
25 "Them are" them seems to be used instead of the normal SSE and NSE <i>they</i> referring to "it's them that..."	It's the children we're more interested in in a way cos they're the ones who are going to have to lear. And them will have to find jobs and all that so..."		

26	Third person singular + were	It were (was) quite good. It weren't going to be built. We went to a gig. It were all right.	5	Item 10
27	Third person singular + don't	This one don't (doesn't) work	6	Item 12
28	Isn't it – tag usage regardless of the subject, verb and tense of main question.	We started first, isn't it?	4	
29	"Ain't" – used for hasn't, haven't aren't or isn't.	We ain't got enough.	9	
30	An –s ending occurs with all subjects, except 3 rd person singular (aux verb do)	That's what I does, anyway, I just ignores them.		
31	A form (do) lacking a suffix occurs with third person singular subjects	She cadges, she do.		
32	Negative + adverb	He couldn't (could) hardly move I couldn't hardly eat	11	Item 23
33	Prepositional uses (additional) (contrast with number 7)	... off of (omit) the shelf. I got off of the bench	2	Item 4
35	Generalisation of 3 rd person singular form	I gets out of the car. We was walking down the road.		
36	Could of/should of / would of ⁷	We should of (have) got here earlier I should of seen it coming.	3	Item 6
37	-est form with adjective >2 syllables	She is the beautifulest (most beautiful) girl... Lucy is the beautifulest of the two sisters	1	Item 2
38	Countable/uncountable confusions	Luggages (luggage) Advices, furnitures, hairs	12	Item 25
39	Noun phrase plus pronoun	That girl she (omit) is tall.	1	Item 1
40	Progressive tense for simple (esp on stative verbs)	I am having two brothers. I am living here for 5 years.		
41	Generic subject verb agreement.	She walk (walks) three miles They was... He were...		Item 18

⁷ This is one form which may not be regarded unanimously as NSE. 'Should of / could of' (included in Lockwood's study) might be viewed as a spelling error of 'should've', 'could've' etc. more than an alteration of grammatical rules.

Appendix B Copy of NSE Assessment Instrument

Student questionnaire

1	7	1	0
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Name

Date of birth - -

Centre number

Sex ☐ Male ☐ Female

Instructions (please read carefully)

Below are 12 sentences. For each one:
 If the sentence doesn't sound right,
 -neatly circle the word/s that don't sound right to you, then:
 -underneath in the grey space, rewrite the sentence to make it a better one.

The first one has been done for you.

E.g. When Martin seen Jane he run up to her.



When Martin saw Jane he ran up to her.

1. That girl she is tall. She is the beautifulest girl in the class.

2. I didn't knock no vase off of the shelf.

3. There isn't any seats left. We should of got here earlier.

4. Come quick. Look at that man jumping out the window.

5. Me and my friend went to eat in the new restaurant. It were quite good.

6. That one is more easier to use. This one don't work.

7. It wasn't me who done it. Them books was already ripped.

Please turn over

23116



8. Tom had gotten cold from playing in the snow. So his mum brung him a hot drink.

9. She walk three mile everyday with her dog.

10. Jack must have took the trainers what I need for tonight.

11. He was stood there and couldn't hardly move.

12. When we got to the hotel, this man showed us to our room and carried our luggages.

How would you describe the **type of English** used in many of the original sentences above?

Instructions for Part B:

Look at the following sentences below and the situations listed on the right. For each sentence, decide which situation/s it would be appropriate to use such English. You may select more than one option. The first two have been done for you.

	Speaking to a friend	Email/men to friend	Letter to friend	Speaking to teacher/boss	Letter to teacher/boss
1. She can't find no money.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The shop will close at 7pm.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. He can do this easy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. This computer don't work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. He went out the house early.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. She was sat at her desk all day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. John came to visit last week.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. He could of finished it this morning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. There ain't any jobs in this town.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. It must have happened during the night.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Appendix C Instructions for teachers to administer the questionnaire

Instructions for administering the student questionnaire

(IMPORTANT: please read to yourself before giving out the questionnaire to students)

- These questionnaires should be given to students who are taking GCSE English (or units of) this year.
- **Please do not** use the term 'Non-Standard English' when you give students the questionnaire - this will bias the response to one of the questions!
- This is a national English survey, with centres from all around England participating.
- Students should ideally work alone. Please discourage students from working together or collaborating.
- This questionnaire can be given either as a class activity or set as a homework activity, whatever is easiest for you. (NB class activity is preferable from the researchers' point of view, however we recognise the pressure on your valuable teaching time, see FAQs overleaf).
- If you wish to discuss the questionnaire with your students, please can you collect their questionnaires in first so that they are not tempted to make any alterations to their original responses!

Instructions to be read out to students

As a school/college we are taking part in a national English survey. This is being run by Cambridge Assessment (a non-teaching department of the university of Cambridge and the parent organisation of OCR). The purpose of the research is to develop a national picture of English usage in England.

For this, you need to fill in this questionnaire, working alone. Please work through the questionnaire in order. There are two sections.

In Section 1, there are 12 questions or sentences.

Go through each one in turn.

If the sentence doesn't sound right, you need to :

- *first, neatly circle the word or words that don't sound right, then,*
- *second, rewrite the sentence to make it a better one in the grey space.*

Have a look at the first one which has been done for you.

Section 1 continues over the page.

There is not necessarily a single correct answer, just write what you think is best.

In Section 2, there are 10 sentences.

For each sentence, decide in which situation or situations it would be appropriate to use such English.

You may select more than one option.

Have a look at the first two which have been done for you.

Again, there are not necessarily right or wrong answers – what is required is your own personal opinion.

Once again, you should work on this alone.

The whole questionnaire will take you around 20 minutes.

Many thanks for completing this questionnaire.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)... [or anticipated FAQs]

Are my students being assessed?

No. The questionnaires are not 'assessed' or 'graded' individually. We are trying to develop an accurate national picture of written English usage. Therefore, we are not assessing students on an individual basis.

What happens to the questionnaires and the data?

When the questionnaires are returned, they will be scanned into a computer database. The researchers are looking for overall patterns. The results will be reported anonymously. The research will identify neither schools nor individuals. All data will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Feedback on the outcomes of the research will be made available to all the schools and colleges which kindly took part.

Do I have to time my students? Do I have to stop them after 20 minutes?

This is not a timed test! In the pilot of the questionnaire, the majority of students (mixed ability) completed the questionnaire within 20 minutes and therefore this seems a sensible time period to allocate for completion. However, some may need more time. Ideally, we would like your students to complete as much of the questionnaire as possible.

I think some of my students might struggle to fill in much of the questionnaire. Should I not give it to them at all?

Please give the questionnaires to all ability levels and encourage your students to complete as much as they can.

My English AS/A level students would be very interested in this questionnaire. Can they fill it in too?

The questionnaire is aimed at GCSE English students only, who are taking GCSE English (or units of) this year. Therefore, we do not wish to collect data from students following a more advanced level course in English. However, we are happy to send you some further copies of the questionnaire if they will be of some use or interest to you and your students.

I do not have enough questionnaires / I need more questionnaires for GCSE English students.

Please contact Beth Black on 01223 556153 or send an email to Black.B@cambridgeassessment.org.uk to request further copies. We aim to despatch them within one or two working days. (It is best not to use photocopied questionnaires as it is likely that the quality of the photocopy will not allow them to be scanned into the computer database.)

Is it better for students to complete this in class or for homework?

Class is probably better in terms of the fidelity of the responses (students are less likely to seek help and probably more likely to return a completed questionnaire and not lose it). However, we appreciate that class time is precious. For you as a teacher, if it is a choice of setting this questionnaire as homework or not at all, we would prefer you to set it as homework! But our first choice would be for it to be completed in the classroom.

As a teacher, do I have to complete both the teacher and student questionnaire?

As a teacher, please complete the teacher questionnaire. There is also a copy of the student questionnaire attached (on yellow paper) as many teachers in the pilots expressed an interest in completing these. Therefore, this bit is entirely optional!

I do not have enough room on my teacher questionnaire to fully respond to some of the questions. What should I do?

If you wish to make further or additional comments, please attach another piece of paper. We are very interested in your views.

Many thanks for all your help and co-operation.

