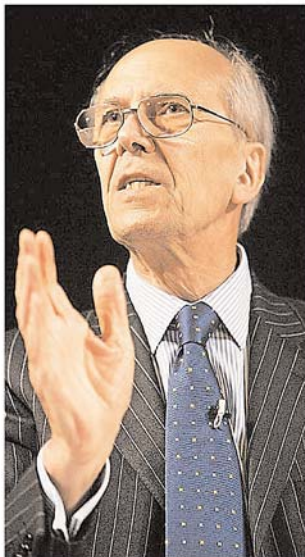


The only crime here is the attack on native dialects

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■ Lord Tebbit, the former Tory government minister.

Norman (Lord) Tebbit, the former Tory government minister, once said: "If you allow standards to slip to the stage where good English is no better than bad English, where people turn up filthy at school – those things cause people to have no standards at all, and once you lose standards, then there's no imperative to stay out of crime."

So there you are, then. 'Bad English' causes crime.

And we know what Norman means by "bad English", don't we?

He means saying "that go" instead of "it goes".

He means saying "Hair that be!" instead of "Here it is!".

He means saying "I done it yistry" instead of "I did it yesterday".

So that's good news: all we have to do is persuade everybody in Norfolk to abandon our native dialect grammar and use the Standard English dialect instead – and the crime rate in our county will plummet.

In the meantime, though, it would be fun to know which particular crimes are caused by which particular aspects of 'bad

English'.

It's hard to imagine that the absence from the Norfolk dialect of the third-person singular has been directly responsible for any terribly serious criminal activity.

In fact, it's almost certain that the nation was swindled out of millions through the mis-selling of PPIs by people who were saying 'this product works really well', not 'this product work rarely good'.

The whole thing is, of course, complete nonsense.

But notice the effortless self-confidence with which Norman used the word "standards".

That's what people in positions of wealth and power do. They define the way they themselves speak as being of a 'high standard', and their English as 'good' – cultured, elegant, and 'correct'.

Any other way of speaking, as used by ordinary people with less power and wealth, is self-evidently inferior – and not just inferior but 'bad'.

That would all be OK – we could just leave them alone to get on with their delusions – if it wasn't for the fact that they try very hard to persuade the rest of us that their language really is the only 'good' English there is.

And since they've always had the power to control our media and education, they've been rather successful.

But we mustn't let ourselves be fooled. All dialects are equally good, correct, systematic, and of a high standard, including ours.

Next time a policeman stops you for cycling without lights, tell him that in't nothing to do with your grammar; just your battery.