In all the exercises for this book, we are as interested in how you think about things, as in whether you can recall a particular correct answer, so if you can think of an argument that is not used in our suggested answers, then you might still want to check it with your lecturer and tutor.

Answers to exercises: Chapter 1

1. Public opinions about English

These statements illustrate widely held misconceptions about language and the English language, in particular. Here we’ve provided a brief discussion of each of them, together with some handy references that you might like to follow up.

1. English is the language of England.

At the start of Chapter 11 we quote the words of Homer Simpson: *English? Who needs that? I'm never going to England!* As we describe here, Homer is completely mistaken and not simply for the reason that English is the standard language of the USA. The world’s population is around six billion and a staggering proportion of this six billion are already regular users of English – approximately one out of every five of the world’s population speaks English to some level of competence. This global takeover by English probably began more than 450 years ago with the initial spread towards Wales and Scotland. Since that time English has been slowly but surely bulldozing its way to becoming the language of the world – and now even the language of space and cyberspace. The need for international intelligibility, coupled with a series of geographical, cultural, economic and political episodes, has secured the position of English as a global *lingua franca* or common language (well, at least for the moment – speakers of English should not be complacent!). Worldwide opportunities involving trade, international travel, satellite broadcasting, the information superhighway, world press, world stock markets and multinational corporations are changing the concept of the English speech community beyond recognition. No longer are we simply looking at a group of people bound together because they live close by and speak the same language. English has now established itself in almost every corner of the globe, and as Crystal (2006: 412) put it, ‘No one nation can any longer be said to “own” English and no one nation’s anxieties over local norms of usage will make much impact in a world where diverse regional standards are the norm, and where the Internet provides these varieties with new levels of public display.’

*Recommended reading*


2. English is the hardest language to learn.
In fact it is impossible to say which language is the hardest to learn. There are basically two reasons for this. One, it depends where you start from. If English is your mother tongue, then it’s going to be far harder to learn a language that isn’t closely related – or indeed linguistically related at all. An English speaker would find Irish or Welsh difficult, more difficult than Dutch and German. These languages are all relatives, to be sure, but Dutch and German are near relatives, being in the same Germanic family as English. Even harder to learn would be languages from a completely different language family, say one of the Australian Aboriginal languages, a Dravidian language like Tamil, or perhaps an Amerindian language like Nootka or Navaho. The sounds and grammar would be very different and the vocabulary unfamiliar, not just in form but also in content. But what also makes it hard to determine the relative difficulty of a language is that we are dealing with complexity at different levels. One example might involve, say, morphology. As you will see in this book, when it comes to grammatical morphology English is rather impoverished. An English noun like duck can have two forms only (duck/ducks) and verbs come in fours (quack/s/ed/ing). Modern Italian and Spanish verbs have about 50 different forms, Classical Greek verbs 350. There are some languages, such as many of the American Indian languages, that show far greater morphological complexity than even the Greek. Polysynthetic languages, as they are known, show mind-bogglingly long and complicated word forms, at least from the perspective of an English speaker. But then you have to take in other aspects of the language — for example, sounds and sentence construction. There are also languages that might be described as difficult from the point of view of rules of politeness and indirect speech styles. So here’s the rub – it is impossible to say what language is the hardest to learn because there is no straightforward measure of simplicity. Typically what you find is complexity in one area of the language and simplicity in another.

Recommended reading

3. Writing is a more perfect form of language than speech.

Once upon a time we wrote as we spoke. Speech was primary and writing was there to represent it visually. Nowadays it’s the reverse. When reading and writing ceased to be educational luxuries but rather became necessities, writing took centre stage and speech started to be viewed more as its oral representation. Writing also took a hold of our minds in ways it hadn’t done before (cf. Bolinger 1980: 51). So focused are we now on the written word that many of us don’t even think words exist until we see how they are spelled — somehow they don’t become real until we can actually see them. Literate people also attribute sounds to the letters of these words — we are expected to say our h’s, we are expected not to drop our g’s. This is nonsensical, of course, because letters don’t have sounds; they symbolise sounds. But ours is very much a society where the linguistic tail wags the dog — even what we now think of as the rules of English grammar are based largely on written texts. As Jim Miller once told us, when the Watergate Tapes were first transcribed and reproduced in the papers, the public was horrified — how could they have elected people who are unable to produce a decent grammatical sentence? But this was spontaneous speech where, as you will see in this book, the concept of ‘sentence’ is simply not appropriate.
Until quite recently, even the activities of linguists and grammarians overwhelmingly concentrated on the structures of planned and highly standardized speech (and therefore usually written). Relatively little was known about the unplanned and more spontaneous discourse varieties. Recording is a modern phenomenon and we simply did not have proper access to live unsolicited speech. Unfortunately, the legacy of this is that people have come to equate ‘normal’ language with the written form. This, together with the increasing importance of writing over speech in society, has meant that common spoken features remain highly stigmatized. The following is one such example:

Melanie: Oh, there’s someone came through yesterday.

If this were a piece of written language, we would expect the clause Melanie utters to have a wh-word (who). But this is speech and what we must never do is judge it through the spectacles of writing. Speech is a very different beast — it is not ‘spoken writing’ any more than writing is ‘speech written down’. The two mediums have their own distinctive capabilities of expression, their own very different sets of ‘rules’.

**Recommended reading**

**4. The English language is going to the dogs.**

English has been changing throughout its lifetime and it’s still changing today. For most speakers, these changes are fine as long as they’re well and truly in the past. Paradoxically, people can be curious about word origins and the stories that lie behind the structures we find in our language, but they experience a queasy distaste for any change that might be happening under their noses. There are even language critics who are convinced that English is dying, or if not dying, at least being progressively crippled through long years of mistreatment.

There is a special human kind of doublethink involved here. The fact that Shakespeare might have misinterpreted the word *grovelling* and backformed a new verb *to grovel* is interesting; the fact that younger speakers have done the same with *versus* and created a new verb *to verse* ‘compete against’ (as in *Team A is versing Team B*) is calamitous. If dictionary makers and handbook writers do acknowledge current usage and include entries like *to unfriend* and *nomophobia*, there are howls about declining educational standards; yet dictionaries that fail to update cease to be used.

We want to emphasize, with fanfare and with trumpet blast, that flux and variance are natural and inevitable features of any language. The only languages that don’t change are dead ones! With over 350 million first language speakers and many more second language speakers, English is well and truly alive — the future has probably never looked so good.

**Recommended reading**
5. It would be simpler, and more sociable, if we all spoke the same.

The primary, and orthodox, function of language is to serve as a vehicle of communication. We all use language to get across ideas, facts and opinions. And if that was all language was about, then perhaps it would be more straightforward if we spoke the same way. But language is also about relating socially. As well as communicating ideas, language is all about facilitating social cohesion – without it, you would have no social life. So linguistic exchanges also express important information to do with an individual’s background, their social characteristics, their relationships and values. Such information is signalled through linguistic variation. This includes regional variation (the geographical background of speakers). At any given point in time, English will differ both between countries and within the same country. There is also social variation. Any socially significant group of people will differ in their linguistic behaviour. For example, social parameters to do with age, sex, sexual preference, socio-economic class, education and occupational status of speakers will typically correlate with the way sounds, vocabulary and grammar vary – people wear different linguistic features like badges of identity. We also alter our language to suit the occasions in which we find ourselves. Our language varies constantly in response to different situational factors, including things like the relationship between speakers and their audience (and even others who might be within earshot), the setting, the subject matter, whether a spoken or written medium is used.

In short, language is a culturally transmitted system. Even if one of the scientifically engineered languages like Esperanto were ever accepted and used worldwide, it would change in precisely the same way that a natural language changes. There would soon be different regional and different social varieties springing up all over the place. Speakers do not suddenly stop wanting to signal their aspirations, their adherence to certain life styles and their allegiance to different groups.

Recommended reading


6. People who say *nobody saw nothing* can’t think logically.

When people are asked to say what they regard as really bad grammar, many will give the example of double negation, as in *Nobody saw nothing* or *I don’t understand nothing*. Like many features of English we object to, this particular construction has been in the language for many centuries. It wasn’t condemned until the first grammars of the late 1700s. The justification was that two negatives make a positive. Now, two negatives might make a positive in mathematics, but it is not necessarily the case in language. In English, double (or even triple) negatives were once commonplace and accepted – they did not negate each other, but served as reinforcement. In an etiquette...
manual from the 1400s, for example, you will find the advice ‘Pick not your teeth with no knife’ – double negatives, and in a book on etiquette! In French, double negation became a feature of the standard language. Here the negative markers ne and pas wrap themselves around the verb (je ne sais pas ‘I don’t know’) – even the French Academy doesn’t worry about this one! Because of its expressive nature, negation is an aspect of language that is prone to rather rapid change. The history of English negation offers a spectacular illustration and we’ll finish here with a potted history just for interest.

A thousand years ago we were forming negative sentences with the little word ne. More usually, though, this ne was complemented with additional expressions. Two or even more negators in one sentence became the norm. Here’s some medical advice from the 14th century (literally, ‘There not-is nothing that so quickly smites with grievance the head as wine’) — þere nys noþinge þat so sone smyteþ with grevaunce the hed as wyne. One of these extra negative expressions was ne -a-wiht (literally ‘not-ever-anything’). This eventually reduced to noght, the predecessor of Modern English not. Although it began life as a reinforcing element, in the course of Middle English it became so common that it lost its emphatic quality and in combination with ne emerged as the normal expression of negation. We then got something called ‘embracing negation’ – the two negators ne and not snugly wrapped themselves around the verb. For example, Hit ne swelleth not (‘It not swells not’). Eventually ne dropped out altogether and not triumphed as the exclusive negator.

At this stage things start looking more familiar, but there were more changes to come. Here’s a piece of 16th century advice on how best to sleep — Sleep not grouellynge upon the stomacke. This is not bad Modern English, but it sounds better with the addition of the verb do. We are more likely to say Do not sleep grovelling upon the stomach. This use of do spread slowly. For quite some time people continued to say things like I know not and Fear not — we have to wait until well into the 18th century before the system we now know stabilised.

So what’s the current state of play? Well, in normal speech not is reduced to -n’t and attaches itself to the verb, as in won’t from will not. In fact, it often disappears entirely. In normal rapid speech, all that’s left is a bit of nasality on the vowel — much like the ‘Cheshire Cat’s grin’, the nasality lingers on. Sound change has now left not a fragment of the original expression ne-a-wiht from which it derives. Small wonder linguist Ron Langacker describes language as ‘a gigantic expression compacting machine’! With not now so reduced, Standard English negation is ripe for renewal.

Change is typically marked by rivalry between variant forms and there are several competitors here. One candidate is the expression a bit. This derived originally from bite and was used to strengthen negative sentences involving eating (along the lines of I didn’t eat a crumb and I didn’t drink a drop). Nowadays, we no longer connect bit with bite and it appears in all sorts of places — It didn’t hurt a bit. (If you think the development of bit into a negator is far fetched, bear in mind French pas derives from Latin passus ‘step’ – pas would have originally strengthened verbs of walking.) Other likely contenders for the job include no way as in No way I did it and never as in I never did it (here the meaning is ‘I didn’t do it’, not ‘I didn’t ever do it’).
7. Bringing up a child bilingually is damaging.

For many years, there has been a feeling about that bilingualism is a bad thing – that by adding a considerable cognitive load to children in those vital early years, this was somehow damaging to these children. In fact, research has not shown this at all – quite the contrary.

Events currently happening outside the education arena certainly suggest that that there are positive benefits to a bilingual upbringing. The phenomenon of globalization, particularly issues to do with trade, tourism and business, makes language a very marketable commodity. Security needs are currently highlighting the shortfall in competence in LOTE (Languages Other Than English). We should also point out that, from a worldwide perspective, ‘monolingual’ communities, where there is only one language used, are rather rare. Most children in the world grow up learning at least two languages.

Another piece of evidence is in language learning and literacy. As research continues in this area, so more empirical support emerges for literacy interdependence between two (or more) languages – students can transfer cognitive and academic skills acquired in the first language to their second language. The problem still is how to get the message across that second language learning is not a barrier to literacy, but rather a boon! As Tony Liddicoat describes it:

Learning a new language teaches the learner something about the nature of language and languages, and this is knowledge which needs to be developed by a literate person. […] Most importantly, it helps one to come to see language as an object that can be talked about, which is a fundamental step in becoming literate. Second language learning is therefore a resource for enhancing literacy, not a problem for acquiring literacy. It forms part of a whole package for learning about language as a part of schooling and provides additional insights into the nature of language that are not available to the monolingual learner. (Liddicoat 2000–01: 12)

Below, we summarise what current research has revealed about the benefits of bilingualism:

- **Flexible thinking:** Bilingual children understand better how language works and are better able to differentiate form from content/meaning – something that is crucial to our everyday thinking – and this is a good basis for future cognitive development, especially when it comes to flexible thinking.

- **Bilingualism and reading readiness:** (Note, this not restricted to children growing up bilingually – it also applies to, say, very young children who are participating in a primary school language program, such as Italian.) When you’re exposed to a new language, it teaches you about the nature of language and languages, and as literacy experts show, this is precisely the sort of knowledge that literate people need to develop.

- **Linguistic awareness:** Bilingual children are better able to judge grammaticality of sentences – they can understand grammatical rules and detect word boundaries more successfully than monolingual children.
We conclude by emphasizing that children will not suffer or be disadvantaged in any way by a bi- or multilingual education – in fact, quite the opposite. There are all sorts of advantages and all sorts of skills that are enhanced by a bilingual experience. The research is quite clear on this.

Recommended reading


2. Language prescription

A prescriptive account of whom

Linguistic prescription, or purism, seeks to constrain the conduct of individuals by identifying certain elements in a language as ‘bad’. Typically, these are words and word usage that are believed to threaten the identity of the culture in question. Authenticity here has two faces: one is the struggle to arrest linguistic change and to retain the language in its perceived traditional form; the other is to rid the language of unwanted elements and to protect it from foreign influences. Some people justify their concerns by appealing to rational explanations, such as the need for intelligibility.

Here’s what Harry Blamires has to say on the use of who versus whom (p. 36):

Writers sometimes slip up over the use of the relative pronoun ‘who’. I may refer to the man ‘who kicked me’ (where ‘who’ is the subject of the verb ‘kicked’) or to the man ‘whom I kicked’ (where ‘whom’ is the object of the verb ‘kicked’). Clearly commonsense demands that there should be no confusion over who kicks and who is kicked. Nevertheless misuse of ‘who’ in place of ‘whom’ is widespread.

Here Blamires sees a clear commonsensical distinction between what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’ in the language. For others, there appears to be more at stake. Deborah Cameron (1995) in her book called Verbal hygiene makes the point that in many people’s minds, there is a link between linguistic decline and moral decline. Protecting the language against perceived abuse guards against moral harm, perhaps even physical harm, because of the link made between bad language and bad behaviour. If you have no regard for the nice points of grammar, then you will probably have no regard for the law! Rules of grammar, like other rules in a society, are necessary for the health of that society.

A descriptive account of whom

All over the English-speaking world, the use of whom is disappearing in favour of who. It has become stylistically marked and considered rather formal usage. In interrogatives such as Whom did you see at the party it is now rarely encountered. You may still find it in relative clauses, especially in positions following prepositions,
such as *There’s the person to whom I gave my book* (and we have more to say on these clauses later in the book), but it is on the decline, more a feature of the written language (we use an example below – see if you can spot it).

Pronouns such as *whom* and also *whose* (also *he* versus *him*, *they* versus *them*, etc.) are remnants of an earlier grammatical system involving inflections; in other words, grammatical endings that signal the relationships between words in a sentence. Modern English now indicates this kind of grammatical information in different ways. For example, in *The queen loved the king* versus *The king loved the queen* it’s now the order which tells us who is loving who (or rather whom?). The endings that would have once told us this have now gone. A striking theme running through the story of English is the erosion of such grammatical endings. The form *whom* belong to the tiny group of survivors. It’s conceivable that the rest will disappear with time. More than likely, phrases like *more tasty* and *more big* will eventually evict *tastier* and *bigger* just as *more beautiful* evicted *beautifuler*. Possessive *-s*, past *-ed* and plural *-s* are hanging in there, but also endangered. However, it’s a hazardous business trying to predict linguistic change. It’s true, we might go the whole way and totally lose these endings, but they might also endure. In fact, we might even reverse the trend and create some new endings, too. If you look at the languages of the world you can find examples of both outcomes. Chinese used to have plenty of endings, but these have now gone. Hindi, on the other hand, lost a good many of its endings but then invented a whole heap of new ones.

**A note on prescription versus description**

The garden is perhaps a useful image to distinguish these two very different positions. There is a sense in which gardens and standard languages have something in common. Both are human constructions and they share two fundamental characteristics. They are restricted by boundaries and they are cultivated. Garden weeds also provide an instructive metaphor. Described as ‘plants growing where we do not want them’, ‘plants whose virtues are yet to be discovered’, ‘plants growing out of place’, ‘plants that you do not want’, ‘plants that you hate’, garden weeds are the perfect symbol for speakers’ linguistic bugbears. A more precise horticultural definition for the term *weed*, even in technical works on weed management, is impossible – in fact, not practicable. The difficulty is that weeds are context specific. It depends entirely on location and on time whether something is classified as a weed or not. And so it is with the weeds in language. One speaker’s noxious weed can be another’s garden ornamental. A linguistic weed today can be a prized garden contributor tomorrow. Whether they are in gardens or in languages, weeds are totally centred around human value judgements.

For prescriptivists like Harry Blamires, and indeed many people in the wider community, there is usually a very clear distinction between the unwanted plants in the garden and those that should be encouraged to survive. Accordingly, they might see linguists as the seasoned gardeners whose task is precisely to advise on what should be trimmed, removed or promoted in the garden – linguists control the pests, build the hotho uses and perform the topiary. Not surprisingly, many people reject the neutral position of the linguistics profession. As Bolinger (1980) and Cameron (1995) have also shown, the feeling is one of mutual distrust; linguistic experts fail to address lay concerns and lay activists show no interest in heeding linguists.
The great gardening debates of the 18th and 19th centuries can shed light here. Gardeners during this time fell into two camps over the question of what constituted a ‘proper garden’. For some it was a work of nature, while for others a work of art. In the same way, linguists see language as a natural (even if social) phenomenon, something that evolves and adapts and can be studied objectively. This stance is resoundingly rejected by others in the broader community for whom language is an art form, something to be cherished, revered and preserved. Just as William Morris once said of the ideal garden: ‘It should be well fenced from the outside world. It should by no means imitate either the wilfulness or the wildness of Nature’ (Morris 1882). Linguists find such popular perceptions of language ill-informed and narrow-minded. The general population feels let down.

References and some recommended reading
Burridge, K. to appear 2010. ‘Linguistic cleanliness is next to godliness’. English Today. The entire volume is devoted to the question of linguistic purism.

3. Acceptability

The interesting thing to note here is that (if this is done as a class activity) you will find speakers’ acceptability judgements vary wildly – some sentences will trigger the full gamut of responses from totally unacceptable to totally acceptable and natural. Often it is the case that people react to something other than the grammatical feature we intended. For example, they might condemn a sentence because it contains their least favourite lexical expression. Below we briefly discuss the aspects of the structure that we were interested in here.

(a) See yous later!

The plural second person pronoun youse (compare also you-all, you-uns and you together) – now common usage around the English-speaking world, but a long way off being considered standard.

(b) (Who ate the chocolate?) It was me.

Some prescriptive grammars still insist on the subject case for the pronoun here, i.e. It was I. Yet, most of us would find this quite unacceptable, except perhaps in formal contexts such as you find in the next example. See also the discussion of whom in question 2 above.

(c) It is I who am responsible.

See above.
(d) The mission of the USS Enterprise is to boldly go where no man has ever gone before.

This is the so-called ‘split infinitive’, where something intervenes between the infinitive marker and the verb – to boldly go. This is a construction still condemned by many (usually older) speakers.

(e) There’s fairies at the bottom of my garden.

The thorny issue here is which is the subject of this sentence (and therefore what triggers a singular or plural verb); we refer you here to the discussion in the book of ‘dummy’ there.

(f) I aren’t bothered.

See below.

(g) I ain’t bothered.

See below.

(h) I’m right, aren’t I?

It makes sense to consider (f)–(h) together. Aint/ain’t was once a perfectly respectable contraction and examples like it aint certain were found in the speech of even the most highly educated of speakers. It became an all-purpose contraction – a form of am not (for which there is no standard contraction such as amn’t), are not, is not (here you have to imagine a series of changes something like is not > isn’t > innit > int > aint) and even haven’t and hasn’t (so-called H-dropping was also rife at this time). As an omnibus contraction, it probably attracted too much attention to itself; aint fell into disgrace and this is when the confusion of am not and are not came about. Those who didn’t dare use the contracted form aint started saying are not where you would expect am not. And that’s in fact what we all say today. Even those who wouldn’t be caught dead saying I are not or I aren’t say Aren’t I in the interrogative tag in (h). It is a curious little inconsistency in the Standard language that speakers produce something like I’m not coming, am I but I’m coming aren’t I.

(i) He’s fatter than me.

Some prescriptive grammars still insist on the subject form of the pronoun here; so He’s fatter than I, arguing that this is a shortened version of He’s fatter than I am.

(j) Everyone can come if they want to.

See also discussion above on whom (question 2).

Singular they is still widely condemned. Yet, it is a natural solution to the problem that English has no epicene (or gender-neutral) pronoun set aside for both sexes. In fact, both William Shakespeare and Jane Austen used this form – and we wouldn’t
want to accuse either Shakespeare or Austen of bad grammar! See discussion in the book (Section 3.4 under pronouns).

(k) Between you and I, he’s a bit of an idiot.

It is the pronoun *I* here that is contentious. The so-called standard rule, the one recommended by the guidebooks to English language etiquette, says this: whether you say *I* or *me* is determined by the form that appears correct if there were only a pronoun in the sentence. So *between* is a preposition which would demand the object form of the pronoun *me* here; hence, *between you and me*. However, the non-standardness of a construction like *Fred and me left later* means many people have grown rather uneasy about the pronoun *me*. Hence, the other system we find — the pronoun *I* everywhere. This usage would have begun as something called hypercorrection. In going out of their way to avoid the pronoun *me* in sentences like *Fred and me left later*, some speakers overdid it and produced *between you and I* and *He gave it to Fred and I*. However, constructions like *between you and I* is now so widespread among speakers of Standard English, and has been for several centuries, we should probably now consider it a proper part of the standard language. Some of you might gag at this idea, but as linguistic history shows, today’s non-standard is often tomorrow’s standard — or today’s weeds are tomorrow’s cherished garden ornamentals!

(l) There’s a man on the phone wants to talk to you.

As discussed above, Standard English cannot delete relative pronouns that fill the subject position in the relative clause (see discussion in Chapter 8).

(m) He objected to my arriving late.

See discussion for (n).

(n) He objected to me arriving late.

Preference for the object form of the pronoun (here *me*) extends to pronouns that precede the *ing* participle (*arriving*). This is now commonplace for standard speakers but still condemned in some prescriptive grammars. You’ll learn more about this construction in Chapter 8 of the book.

(o) It was meant to be made a joke of, money was! (AUS#69:9)

This example shows an expressive word order that would normally never appear in writing. It resembles the kind of topic-oriented structure known as right-dislocation and you will find more examples of this in Chapters 9 and 10.

(p) Then I got eaten by flies. (AUS#69:9)

Not all passive clauses have the *be* auxiliary; some contain *get* instead, as in this example. Such passives are more colloquial and tend to be avoided in formal language (they hover somewhere between standard and non-standard). As described in Chapter 6, they also give the interpretation that the subject is somehow more
involved in the event; in other words, they provide a more agent-like reading of the subject (hence get is the expected auxiliary in something like *He deliberately got caught*).

(q) Maybe he’s dead? Killed his self getting out of the bath. (AUS#36:16)

This example reveals an inconsistency in the standard language – the form of the pronoun in what are called reflexive pronouns can be the object form (*himself, themselves*) or the possessive form (*myself, ourselves*). Non-standard varieties iron out this inconsistency in different ways. Some generalise *ze* possessive rather than object pronoun forms, as in *hisself* and *theirself/theirselfs*. Others generalise the object forms, as in *meself*.

4. Non-Standard versus Standard English

Below we’ve bolded some of the non-standard forms and later provided the standard equivalents, together with some explanation. Note that we have ignored pronunciation features (such as H-dropping in forms like *'e 'ad*) and lexical features (such as *Cripes!*).

Harv:

Old Kit ... ’e ’ad the only chopping axe John Behan had,
Nobody ’d two **them** days **y’know**, in the bad old days,
And John ’ad a pretty good axe ...
... they got Kit entered in this Chop **y’know** ...
’e was off say three or five or **whatever**.
When they said ‘Five!’ ’e’s no sooner [unclear] than ’e hit
’er [= the block], y’know,
and ’e chopped two or three six-inch nails clean off ...
’e dug himself in too low, **y’see**, 
and ’e **fetches** ’er [= the axe]
and ’e **looks** at ’er, **y’see**, 
... and ’e **holds** ’er round to John,
And ’e’s got a great big gap clean through the face of ’er,
and ’e said ‘Cripes!’ Hahaha!
when ’e turned – when ’e showed it [the axe or the face?] to John.

Here we see **them** in place of demonstrative **those**, as in **them days**. This is typical of vernacular varieties in the Antipodes and elsewhere.

A lot of the non-standard features here are typical of spoken language. Hedging expressions such as *y’know* and *or whatever* would certainly never be written but, like other discourse markers, regularly occur in the speech of speakers of Standard English. Yet, because of the clout of the written word, they remain on the border between standard and non-standard. The word order here also shows a lot of the focus structures typical of speech.

In this piece, we see the sudden changes from past to present tense. As described in Chapter 6 (section 6.2), suddenly switching to the present tense in a narrative can make the action seem more lively and dramatic.
This dialect shows something like the start of a gender system in pronoun assignment (where ‘gender’ refers to morphosyntactic classes of nouns). In this piece, the appearance of the pronominal forms *he* versus *she* is triggered, not just by animate nouns (like *girl* and *boy*), but also by inanimate nouns (furniture, tools, body parts, plants and so on). For example, tools (here the axe) are feminine.