THE POLITICS OF DISCOURSE:
THE STANDARD LANGUAGE QUESTION
IN
BRITISH CULTURAL DEBATES

***THE POLITICS OF
DISCOURSE:
THE STANDARD LANGUAGE
QUESTION IN
BRITISH CULTURAL DEBATES***

Tony Crowley

M
MACMILLAN

© Tony Crowley 1989

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1956 (as amended), or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 33–4 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7DP.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published 1989

Published by
MACMILLAN EDUCATION LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Typeset by Wessex Typesetters
(Division of The Eastern Press Ltd)
Frome, Somerset

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Crowley, Tony

The politics of discourse: the
standard language question
in British cultural debates

1. English language. Historical linguistics

I. Title

420

ISBN 978-0-333-45471-8

ISBN 978-1-349-19958-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-19958-7

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	x
<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 <i>A History of 'The History of the Language'</i>	13
Introduction	13
The appearance of historicity	14
History and language in Britain	20
Appeals for 'the history of the language'	27
The birth of 'the history of the language'	31
The study of language and British history	39
Conclusion	49
2 <i>Archbishop Trench's Theory of Language: the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus</i>	51
Introduction	51
Language as material history	54
The historical theology of language	59
Language: the political unconscious	66
Language and social unity	74
Trench and the appeal for English studies	83
Conclusion	89
3 <i>The Standard Language: the Literary Language</i>	91
Introduction	91
Maintaining standards	93
Finding a language: where to look and what to look for	95
The standard language: the uniform language?	99
The standard language: the central form	104
The <i>OED</i> : the theoretical source of the standard literary language	107
Conclusion	124

4	<i>The Standard Language: the Language of the Literate</i>	125
	Another standard	125
	‘The higher instrument’: a standard for speech	129
	The lower instruments of speech: the spoken dialects	138
	The standard spoken language: whose language?	145
	Sub-standard English: the fatal letters	151
	Conclusion	162
5	<i>Theorising the Standard: Jones and Wyld</i>	164
	Introduction	164
	Theorising the spoken standard: Daniel Jones	165
	Henry Wyld	174
	Further theoretical developments	188
	The best English: the superiority of Received Standard English	194
	Conclusion	204
6	<i>Language Against Modernity</i>	207
	Language and class	207
	The articulate and the barbarians	214
	Language, nation and citizenship	222
	Language and education	234
	Conclusion: language against modernity	250
7	<i>Conclusion: Past and Present</i>	258
	Introduction	258
	Mellifluous rhetoric: the language trap	259
	Returning to Victorian values	269
	The politics of discourse	272
	<i>Notes</i>	275
	<i>Bibliography of Works Consulted</i>	279
	<i>Index</i>	299

For My Father
Cornelius Crowley
Sí teanga na muintire a shlánós an mhuintir

Preface

If I were to thank all those who have helped me to write this book it is possible that this preface would be longer than the main body of the text. So I shall have to apologise in advance to anyone I leave out. My first thanks are to Professor Roy Harris of the University of Oxford who supervised my doctorate on a related topic; and to Alan Ward and Raymond Williams who examined it. Thanks of this order are also due to Dennis Horgan who helped me start this project, and to Kate Belsey, Terry Eagleton, Cathy Fuller and Andrew Thacker who read and gave me help with later work. My colleagues and students at the universities of Oxford and Southampton have my gratitude for putting up with me and for giving me the intellectual space and time in which to work. Special thanks in this respect to my special option group of 1986–7. And my very, very special thanks to the secretaries at the Department of English in Southampton: Sheila James, Jill Bennett, and in particular Norma Martin who provided such cheerful and indispensable help.

My thanks are also due to all those whose friendship and good advice made it worth undertaking this project: Sue Forber, who gave me great friendship, support and encouragement in times of doubt; Isobel Armstrong, Debbie Cameron and Edmund Papst who often, in different ways, made me think things through again when I wrongly thought that I had proved my point; Courtney Greenaway and Kadiatu Kanneh who have made me think in new and better ways; Tom Mulhearn who has long given me the benefit of his friendship and logical skills. Also Angela Poingdestre, Steve Sheedy, and all the Prangleys: Clare, Paul (the boss), Ged, Ant, John, and most of all Kate, who have long supported me.

Perhaps my deepest debt can be acknowledged last. To my brother and sisters, Nicky, Collette, Terry and Jacky, and my father, Cornelius Crowley, I offer my thanks and love.

T.C.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Oxford University Press for their permission to include the diagram from the 'General Explanations' in volume 1 of *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. J.A.H. Murray.

T.C.