**3. WHAT IS STANDARD ENGLISH?**

Having instinctively used their knowledge of Standard English in producing re-writes, this unit aims to encourage students to think more consciously about the nature of SE and its role in linguistic comparative study.

**Activities 1-3** are designed to get students thinking about the methods they have used to analyse language in the previous sections. The aim is to lead them towards a recognition of the role Standard English plays in analysis.

**Activity 4** makes the process more practical: students now need to both recognise **and** describe language features. Each of the six sentences communicates the same meaning, but uses different types of English (very formal SE, formal SE, informal SE, regional non-standard English and social/multicultural non-standard English). Although essentially saying the same thing, the language and grammar tell us a lot about the speaker/writer. The task offers an opportunity to discuss the concept of style and the effect that each sentence would have on an audience. The logical next step is to discuss ‘appropriateness’, considering the contexts in which each version may or may not be acceptable. Writing their own parallel sentences (**Activity 5**) will enable students to use their own regional, social or multi-cultural dialects alongside SE variations.

**Activity 6** draws together the ideas raised in discussion by focusing on some key issues about SE. The list of statements includes some concepts that should engage students in an interesting debate e.g. whether swearing is SE or not, about prescriptive and descriptive attitudes to language, about the links between language and identity, and about value judgements.

The idea that SE never changes can link back to the ideas of changing language raised in the introductory section ‘What happens when a language changes?’ – living languages inevitably change or die. Discussion can include attitudes to:

* prepositions at the end of sentences
* split infinitives
* the subjunctive
* metathesis in words like ‘aks’ and ‘prehaps’
* the use of fillers (‘like’)

**Activity 7** then encourages students to frame their own working definition of SE. Encouraging wider reading/research will be useful at this point. Resources could include some interesting websites on SE.

[**http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/standard.htm**](http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/standard.htm)which provides links to essays by Peter Trudgill (‘Standard English: what it isn’t’), Richard Hogg ([The standardiz/sation of English](http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/SEhogg.htm)), Ann Williams (‘[Discourses about English: Class, codes and identities in Britain](http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/ec/papers/williams2008.rtf)’**;** [Standard English and education](http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/ec/papers/williams2007.doc)) and Richard Hudson (‘The language teacher and descriptive versus prescriptive norms: The educational context’).

[www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/staff/kerswill/pkpubs/kerswill2006rpstandardenglish.pdf](http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/staff/kerswill/pkpubs/kerswill2006rpstandardenglish.pdf)