

There's nothing wrong with writing like what we talk

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Until recently, no one in Norfolk would have thought about writing in their local dialect. What I mean is, they wouldn't have thought about it because they would have just gone ahead and done it.

That wasn't so very long ago that Lord Nelson was writing in his log that "Captain Lambert have been very fortunate". That was what everybody done in them days.

Speech come before writing. All the languages in the world was spoken long before they was written; and most on 'em still in't written down. Children learn to speak before they learn to write. And many people in the world never learn to read and write at all. For nearly all of human history, there weren't no such thing as writing. Human language developed about 200,000 years ago, and writing weren't invented until 195,000 years later.

When writing did first develop, what people naturally done was to write like what they spoke. What else was they a-going to do? Writing is just the representation of speech in a more permanent medium, and so they write down what they would've said if they had been a-talking.

But now a different practice have evolved: people are encouraged not to



■ Horatio Nelson would have wrote like what he spoke.

write like what they speak – unless they come from the upper social classes. The upper classes speak Standard English as their native dialect; and the rest on us are encouraged to write in their dialect, not in our own. The idea seem to be that uniformity is a good thing. But this is a very new idea, and that in't totally obvious that that's a good one. That make for problems for children who have to learn to read and write in a kind of language that in't their own.

Of course, there are still writers what use their native dialect. But we have a long

way to go before we get to the level of dialect use reached in Norway, where that's not unusual for serious novels and poetry to be in dialect. The problem is that local dialects are often looked down on as inferior – even though from a linguistic point of view they definitely in't. And writing in a local dialect is often considered to be eccentric – even though from a historical point of view that most certainly in't.

But whatever can be written in Standard English can be written in dialect too, like what I've done here.