

Speaking the Queen's English

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University of Birmingham research reveals Elizabeth I was language pioneer

Queen Elizabeth I was a pioneer of the English language, adopting new forms of speech and making progressive steps towards our modern, standardised system of English national spelling, according to a fascinating new book from a University of Birmingham academic.

In **[The Language of Queen Elizabeth I](http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Language-Queen-Elizabeth-Sociolinguistic/dp/1118672879/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1379501373&sr=8-2&keywords=language+of+queen+elizabeth)** (http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Language-Queen-Elizabeth-Sociolinguistic/dp/1118672879/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1379501373&sr=8-2&keywords=language+of+queen+elizabeth), Dr Melanie Evans, a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics at Birmingham, turns the traditional idea of the monarchy being conservative in use of language on its head; exploring how the so-called Virgin Queen was a leader of change in language during her reign, writing her own parliamentary speeches and letters, and undertaking literary translations, as part of her duties as queen in Renaissance England.

One of the reasons for this, the book reveals, was the fact that the Queen picked up new language from the numerous visitors she received in London from all over the world, and spread what she learned among her courtiers.

Renowned for being persuasive and strong willed, the Queen used her innovative language skills to get her own way in Parliament. In one speech recounted by Dr Evans in the book, in 1586 Elizabeth adopted an imagined group of 'we princes' to emphasise her regal status when seeking to delay Parliament's decision on the execution of Mary Queen of Scots.

She adopted new and innovatory forms of the English language that would later become the norm, forms that are still in use today such as 'runs' rather than 'runneth'. Her English spelling was also more consistent, if no less idiosyncratic, than many of her subjects, contributing to the development from a regional system of spelling to something more standardised.

Dr Evans comments: 'Elizabeth I appears to have recognised the power of language to craft, and maintain, her social identity, which contributes to her notable role in the development of Tudor English'

Dr Evans is going on to explore the language of King Edward VI to see what common threads there were, including how much of Elizabeth I's speech was idiosyncratic and how much simply 'speaking like a Tudor'.

Notes to editors

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