11
The English Language in America

238. *The Settlement of America.*

The English language was brought to America by colonists from England who settled along the Atlantic seaboard in the seventeenth century.[1] It was therefore the language spoken in England at that time, the language spoken by Shakespeare and Milton and Bunyan. In the peopling of this country three great periods of European immigration are to be distinguished. The first extends from the settlement of Jamestown in 1607 to the end of colonial times. This may be put conveniently at 1787, when Congress finally approved the Federal Constitution, or better, 1790, when the last of the colonies ratified it and the first census was taken. At this date the population numbered approximately four million people, 95 percent of whom were living east of the Appalachian Mountains, and 90 percent were from various parts of the British Isles. The second period covers the expansion of the original thirteen colonies west of the Appalachians, at first into the South and into the Old Northwest Territory, ending finally at the Pacific. This era may be said to close with the Civil War, about 1860, and was marked by the arrival of fresh immigrants from two great sources, Ireland and Germany. The failure of the potato crop in Ireland in 1845 precipitated a wholesale exodus to America, a million and a half emigrants coming in the decade or so that followed. At about the same time the failure of the revolution in Germany (1848) resulted in the migration of an equal number of Germans. Many of the

[1] There is no easy solution to the ambiguity of "American" and "Americans." The present chapter is about English in the United States, and although many of the observations apply to Canadian English as well, the distinctive characteristics of Canadian English are discussed in Chapter 10.

latter settled in certain central cities such as Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and St. Louis or became farmers in the Middle West. The third period, the period since the Civil War, is marked by an important change in the source from which our immigrants have been derived. In the two preceding periods, and indeed up to about 1890, the British Isles and the countries of northern Europe furnished from 75 to 90 percent of all who came to this country. Even in the last quarter of the nineteenth century more than a million Scandinavians, about one-fifth of the total population of Norway and Sweden, settled here, mainly in the upper Mississippi valley. But since about 1890 great numbers from Southern Europe and the Slavic countries have poured in. Just before World War I, Italians alone were admitted to the number of more than 300,000 a year, and of our annual immigration of more than a million, representatives of the east and south European countries constituted close to 75 percent.

Outside the patterns of European immigration was the forced immigration of Africans through the slave trade that began in the seventeenth century and continued until the mid-nineteenth. There are presently some 25 million African Americans in the United States, mostly settled in the South and in the larger cities of the North. Finally, one should note the influx during the mid-twentieth century of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other Hispanic immigrants. Extreme economic imbalances among the countries of the Western Hemisphere have caused a sharp increase in migration, both legal and illegal, to the United States during the past two decades.

For the student of the English language the most interesting period of immigration to America is the first. It was the early colonists who brought us our speech and established its form. Those who came later were largely assimilated in a generation or two, and though their influence may have been felt, it is difficult to define.[2] It is to these early settlers that we must devote our chief attention if we would understand the history of the English language in America.

239. *The Thirteen Colonies.*

The colonial settlement, the settlement of the thirteen colonies along the Atlantic seaboard, covered a long narrow strip of land extending from Maine to Georgia. This area is familiarly divided into three sections—New England, the Middle Atlantic states, and the South Atlantic states. The earliest New England settlements were made around Massachusetts Bay. Between 1620 and 1640 some 200 vessels came from England to New England bringing upward of 15,000 immigrants. By the latter year

[2] On this question see two papers by E.C.Hills, "The English of America and the French of France," *American Speech,* 4 (1928–1929), 43−47; "Linguistic Substrata of American English," *ibid.,* 431–33.

this number had grown to about 25,000 inhabitants. The majority of the settlers came first to Massachusetts, but in a very few years groups in search of cheaper land or greater freedom began to push up and down the coast and establish new communities. In this way Connecticut got its start as early as 1634, and the coasts of Maine and Rhode Island were early occupied. New Hampshire was settled more slowly because of the greater resistance by the Native Americans. New England was not then misnamed: practically all of the early colonists came from England. East Anglia was the stronghold of English Puritanism, and, as we shall see, there is fair evidence that about two-thirds of the early settlers around Massachusetts Bay came from the eastern counties.

The settlement of the Middle Atlantic states was somewhat different. Dutch occupation of New York began in 1614, but the small size of the Netherlands did not permit of a large migration, and the number of Dutch in New York was never great. At the time of the seizure of the colony by the English in 1664 the population numbered only about 10,000, and a part of it was English. After the Revolution a considerable movement into the colony took place from New England, chiefly from Connecticut. New York City even then, though small and relatively unimportant, had a rather cosmopolitan population of merchants and traders. New Jersey was almost wholly English. The eastern part was an offshoot of New England, but on the Delaware River there was a colony of Quakers direct from England. At Burlington opposite sides of the town were occupied by a group from Yorkshire and a group from London. Pennsylvania had a mixed population of English Quakers, some Welsh, and many Scots-Irish and Germans. William Penn’s activities date from 1681. Philadelphia was founded the following year, prospered, and grew so rapidly that its founder lived to see it the largest city in the colonies. From about 1720 a great wave of migration set in from Ulster to Pennsylvania, the number of emigrants being estimated at nearly 50,000. Many of these, finding the desirable lands already occupied by the English, moved on down the mountain valleys to the southwest. Their enterprise and pioneering spirit made them an important element among the vigorous frontier settlers who opened up this part of the South and later other territories farther west into which they pushed. But there were still many of them in Pennsylvania, and Franklin was probably close to the truth in his estimate that in about 1750 one-third of the state was English, one-third Scots, and one-third German. Germantown, the first outpost of the Germans in Pennsylvania, was founded in 1683 by an agreement with Penn. In the beginning of the eighteenth century Protestants in the districts along the Rhine known as the Palatinate were subject to such persecution that they began coming in large numbers to America. Most of them settled in Pennsylvania, where, likewise finding the desirable lands around Philadelphia already occupied by the English, they went up the Lehigh and Susquehanna valleys and formed communities sufficiently homogeneous to long retain their own language. Even today “Pennsylvania Dutch” is spoken by scattered groups among their descendants. Lancaster was the largest inland town in any of the colonies. Maryland, the southernmost of the middle colonies, and in some ways actually a southern colony, was originally settled by English Catholics under a charter to Lord Baltimore, but they were later outnumbered by new settlers. The Maryland back country was colonized largely by people from Pennsylvania, among whom were many Scots-Irish and Germans.

The nucleus of the South Atlantic settlements was the tidewater district of Virginia. Beginning with the founding of Jamestown in 1607, the colony attracted a miscellaneous group of adventurers from all parts of England. It is said, however, that the eastern counties were largely represented. There were political refugees, royalists, Commonwealth soldiers, deported prisoners, indentured servants, and many Puritans. The population was pretty mixed both as to social class and geographical source. From Virginia colonists moved south into North Carolina. In South Carolina the English settlers were joined by a large number of French Huguenots. Georgia, which was settled late, was originally colonized by English debtors who, it was hoped, might succeed if given a fresh start in a new country. It was the most sparsely populated of any of the thirteen colonies. The western part of all these South Atlantic colonies was of very different origin from the districts along the coast. Like western Maryland, the interior was largely settled by Scots-Irish and Germans who moved from western Pennsylvania down the Shenandoah valley and thus into the back country of Virginia, the Carolinas, and even Georgia.

240. *The Middle West.*

The country from the Alleghenies to the Mississippi is divided into a northern and a southern half by the Ohio River. South of the Ohio this territory belonged originally to the colonies along the Atlantic, whose boundary in theory extended west to the Mississippi. North of the Ohio was the Old Northwest Territory. The settlement of this whole region illustrates strikingly the spread and intermingling of elements in the population of the original thirteen colonies. Kentucky was an offspring of Virginia with many additions from Pennsylvania and North Carolina. Tennessee was an extension of western North Carolina with the same strongly Scots-Irish coloring that we have seen in this part of the parent colony. Alabama and Mississippi were settled from the districts around them, from Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Tennessee. Nearly half the population, however, was African American. Louisiana, through being so long a French colony, had a population largely French, but even before the Louisiana Purchase there were numerous Scottish and English settlers from the mountainous parts of the southern colonies, and after 1803 this migration greatly increased. Missouri likewise had many French, especially in St. Louis, but as a territory in which slavery was permitted it had numerous settlers from its neighbors to the east, Kentucky and Tennessee, and even Virginia and North Carolina. These soon outnumbered the French in this region.

The Old Northwest Territory began to be opened up shortly after the Revolution by settlers coming from three different directions. One path began in New England and upper New York, earlier colonized from western New England. The movement from this region was greatly stimulated by the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. A second route brought colonists from Pennsylvania and from other states who came through Pennsylvania. The third crossed the Ohio from Kentucky and West Virginia and accounts for the large number of southerners who migrated into the territory.[3] In 1850 the southerners in Indiana outnumbered those from New England and the Middle States two to one. Michigan and Wisconsin were the only states in this territory with a population predominantly of New England origin. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the Old

Northwest Territory and the upper Mississippi valley received large numbers of German and Scandinavian immigrants whose coming has been mentioned above.

241. *The Far West.*

The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 opened up the first of the vast territories beyond the Mississippi. From here fur traders, missionaries, and settlers followed the Oregon trail into the Pacific Northwest, and the Santa Fe trail into the sparsely populated Spanish territory in the Southwest. After the Mexican War and the treaty with Great Britain (1846) establishing the forty-ninth parallel as the northern boundary of the United States to the Pacific, when the territory of this country extended to the ocean, it was only a question of time before the Far West would be more fully occupied. Oregon in 1860 had a population of 30,000 pioneers. About half of them had come up from Missouri and farther south, from Kentucky and Tennessee; the other half were largely of New England stock. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 resulted in such a rush to the gold fields that in 1849 the 2,000 Americans that constituted the population in February had become 53,000 by

[3] "A good illustration of this migration is Daniel Boone, himself of English stock, who was born on the Delaware only a few miles above Philadelphia. The Boone family soon moved to Reading. Thence drifting southwestward with his compatriots, Daniel Boone settled in the North Carolina uplands, along the valley of the Yadkin, then passed beyond into Kentucky, and, after that location began to be civilized, went on as a pioneer to Missouri. His son appears a little later as one of the early settlers of Kansas, his grandson as a pioneer in Colorado." (Madison Grant, *The Conquest of a Continent* [New York, 1933], pp. 122–23.)

December. When the territory was admitted to the Union as a state in September 1851, its population was at least 150,000, and in not much more than another twelve months it had become a quarter of a million. Every part of America was represented in it.

242. *Uniformity of American English.*

In this necessarily rapid survey some emphasis has been laid on the geographical and ethnic groups represented in the settlement of different parts of the country. The reason for this emphasis will appear later (§ 250). But it been equally the intention to show that except for a few districts, such as the region around Massachusetts Bay and the tidewater section of Virginia, the most prominent characteristic of the occupation of the United States is the constant mingling of settlers from one part with settlers from other parts. Not only were practically all sections of the British Isles represented in the original colonists, with some admixture of the French and the Germans, but as each new section was opened up it attracted colonists from various districts which had become overcrowded or uncongenial to them. Thus colonists from Massachusetts went north into Maine and New Hampshire and south into Rhode Island and Connecticut. Others moved from New England into New York, New Jersey, and colonies as far south as Georgia, as when a body from Dorchester in Massachusetts, known as the Dorchester Society, moved to Georgia in 1752. The Ulster Scots seem to have been of a more roving disposition or a more pioneering spirit than the English, and their movement from Pennsylvania to the South, from there into the Old Northwest Territory, and eventually into the Pacific Northwest seems to indicate that they were generally to be found on each advancing frontier. Except for a few of the larger cities with numerous recent and as yet unassimilated immigrants, and except for certain localities such as Wisconsin and Minnesota where the settlement of large groups of Scandinavians and Germans took place in the nineteenth century, there is probably nowhere a European population of such size and extent with so homogeneous a character.[4]

Linguistically the circumstances under which the American population spread over the country have had one important consequence. It has repeatedly been observed, in the past as well as at the present day, especially by travelers from abroad, that the English spoken in America shows a high de-

[4] The history of African Americans is strikingly different. The institution of slavery during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, the decades of segregation in the South following the Civil War, and the isolation of African Americans in northern cities during the present century have produced a major anomaly in the structure and mobility of American society. This anomaly has had its corresponding linguistic effects, which require separate treatment below (§ 250.8). The uniformity of the language of the majority of Americans, as described in the following paragraphs, makes the contrast with the English of many African Americans more evident than it would appear in a linguistically diverse society.

gree of uniformity. Those who are familiar with the pronounced dialectal differences that mark the popular speech of different parts of England will know that there is nothing comparable to these differences in the United States. This was the object of remark as early as 1781, when John Witherspoon, the Scottish president of Princeton University, observed of the common people in America that "being much more unsettled, and moving frequently from place to place, they are not so liable to local peculiarities either in accent or phraseology."[5] Isaac Candler, an Englishman who traveled in America in 1822–1823, wrote: "The United States having been peopled from different parts of England and Ireland, the peculiarities of the various districts have in a great measure ceased. As far as pronunciation is concerned, the mass of people speak better English, than the mass of people in England. This I know will startle some, but its correctness will become manifest when I state, that in no part, except in those occupied by the descendants of the Dutch and German settlers, is any unintelligible jargon in vogue. We hear nothing so bad in America as the Suffolk whine, the Yorkshire clipping, or the Newcastle guttural. We never hear the letter H aspirated improperly, nor omitted to be aspirated where propriety requires it. The common pronunciation approximates to that of the well educated class of London and its vicinity."[6] We must not be misled by his statement about the goodness of American English. He does not mean that equally good English was not spoken in England. What he says is that in America there was little local variation and in the matter of pronunciation there was a more general conformance to what he conceived to be an educated standard. At about the same time James Fenimore Cooper spoke to much the same effect. "If the people of this country," he said, "were like the people of any other country on earth, we should be speaking at this moment a great variety of nearly unintelligible patois; but, in point of fact, the people of the United States, with the exception of a few of German and French descent, speak, as a body, an incomparably better English than the people of the mother country. There is not, probably, a man (of English descent) born in this country, who would not be perfectly intelligible to all whom he should meet in the streets of London, though a vast number of those he met in the streets of London would be nearly unintelligible to him. In fine, we speak our language, as a nation, better than any other people speak their language. When one reflects on the immense surface of country that we occupy, the general accuracy, in pronunciation and in the use of words, is quite astonishing. This resemblance in speech can only be ascribed to the great diffusion of

[5] In a paper contributed to the *Pennsylvania Journal,* conveniently reprinted in M.M.Mathews, *The Beginnings of American English* (Chicago, 1931), p. 16.
[6] *A Summary View of America…by an Englishman* (London, 1824), p. 327.

intelligence, and to the inexhaustible activity of the population, which, in a manner, destroys space."[7] We may excuse the patriotism that inspired some of these remarks, remembering that Cooper was writing at a time when Americans often felt the need for dwelling on the advantages of their country, but the fact remains that the uniformity of American English seems to have been something generally recognized at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Indeed, in another passage Cooper expresses the opinion that such local differences as did exist and that could be detected "by a practised ear" were diminishing. "It is another peculiarity of our institutions, that the language of the country, instead of becoming more divided into provincial dialects, is becoming, not only more assimilated to itself as a whole, but more assimilated to a standard which sound general principles, and the best authorities among our old writers, would justify. The distinctions in speech between New England and New York, or Pennsylvania, or any other state, were far greater twenty years ago than they are now."[8]

The merging of regional differences through the mixture of the population that has been described has been promoted since by a certain mobility that characterizes the American people. It has been said that it is unusual to find adult Americans living in the place in which they were born, and while this is an obvious exaggeration, it is nevertheless true that change of abode is distinctly common. The very extensiveness of the country, moreover, tends to create an attitude of mind that may almost be said to diminish space. Americans are so accustomed to distance that they disregard it. Witness the willingness of the westerner to make trips of five hundred or a thousand miles upon slight occasions, or to drive across the continent for a vacation. In the past Americans have had to reckon with the influence of Webster's spelling book (see § 248) and Lindley Murray's grammar, and at all times public education in America has been a standardizing influence. We respect in language the authority of those who are supposed to know;[9] it is part of our faith in specialists, whether in surgeons or "publicity experts." And we must not forget the American instinct of conformity and the fact that they readily accept standardization in linguistic matters as in houses, automobiles, and other things.

This is not to deny that currents contrary to standardization have always run through American speech communities. Traditional dialectology, sociolinguistics, and studies in the sociology of language have illuminated contin-

[7] *Notions of the Americans* (2 vols., London, 1828), II, 164–65.
[8] *Ibid.,* II, 165–66.
[9] "If pressed to say definitely what good American English is, I should say, it is the English of those who are believed by the greater number of Americans to know what good English is." R.O. Williams, *Our Dictionaries* (New York, 1890), p. iii.

uing variation and change in American English. Joshua Fishman's description of immigrant languages in the United States reminds us of an often neglected point: "The two processes—de-ethnization and Americanization, on the one hand, and cultural-linguistic self-maintenance, on the other—are equally ubiquitous throughout all of American history. They are neither necessarily opposite sides of the same coin nor conflicting processes. Frequently the same individuals and groups have been simultaneously devoted to both in different domains of behavior. However, as a nation we have paid infinitely more attention to the Americanization process than to the self-maintenance process."[10] As we shall see later, at least nine varieties of American English have enough coherence within themselves and distinction from other varieties, to warrant their description as separate dialects. But just because distinguishing features can be perceived, it is easy to exaggerate them while losing sight of the great majority of features that the speech of all parts of the country has in common. Even African American Vernacular English, the most conspicuous example of a non-standard dialect, diverges from the uniformity of American English in superficial ways (see § 250.8). The relatively few features that characterize African American Vernacular English, some of which are features of standard Southern English, are more important as a social reality than as a linguistic reality.[11] The features are perceived as more pervasive than they actually are, and a few occurrences of patterns such as *He tired* or *She don't be busy* evoke in the listener's mind a full stereotype with its associations, negative or positive, depending on the listener's nonlinguistic sympathies. But regarding the linguistic insignificance of the features themselves, sociolinguists and traditional dialectologists have made the same point. William Labov draws upon the deep structures of generative grammar to show that differences between the English of black speakers and that of white speakers "are largely confined to superficial, rather low level processes."[12] And Raven I.McDavid, Jr., who spent years recording American dialects for the Linguistic Atlas, confirmed the conclusions of the less systematic observers quoted above: "To those familiar with the situation in European countries, such as France or Italy or even England, dialect differences in American English are relatively small."[13]

[10] *Language Loyalty in the United States* (The Hague, 1966), p. 15.
[11] This useful distinction is drawn by William Labov, "Some Features of the English of Black Americans," in *Varieties of Present-Day English,* ed. Richard W.Bailey and Jay L.Robinson (New York, 1973), pp. 242–43.
[12] William Labov, *The Study of Nontandard English* (Champaign, IL, 1970), p. 40. Labov's analysis shows that the patterns of Black English provide systematic aspectual distinctions and thus are not "mistakes" in the usual sense.
[13] "The Dialects of American English," McDavid's chapter in W.Nelson Francis, *The Structure of American English* (New York, 1958), p. 482.

243. *Archaic Features in American English.*

A second quality often attributed to American English is archaism, the preservation of old features of the language that have gone out of use in the standard speech of England. American pronunciation as compared with that of London is somewhat old-fashioned. It has qualities that were characteristic of English speech in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The preservation of the *r* in General American and a flat *a* in *fast, path,* etc. (§ 250.7) are two such that were abandoned in southern England at the end of the eighteenth century. In many little ways standard American English is reminiscent of an older period of the language. Most Americans pronounce *either* and *neither* with the vowel of *teeth* or *beneath,* while in Britain an alternate pronunciation has developed since the American colonies were established and the more usual pronunciation is now with an initial diphthong [aI]. The American use of *gotten* in place of *got* as the past participle of *get* always impresses the British of today as an old-fashioned feature not to be expected in the speech of a people that prides itself on being up-to-date. It was the usual form in Britain two centuries ago. American English has kept a number of old words or old uses of words no longer used in Britain. Americans still use *mad* in the sense of angry, as Shakespeare and his contemporaries did, and they have kept the general significance of *sick* without restricting it to nausea. They still speak of *rare* meat, whereas the British now say *underdone*. *Platter* is a common word in the United States but is seldom used anymore in Britain except in poetry. Americans have kept the picturesque old word *fall* as the natural word for the season. They learn *autumn,* the word used in Britain, in the schoolroom, and from books. The American *I guess,* so often ridiculed in England, is as old as Chaucer and was still current in English speech in the seventeenth century. If we were to take the rural speech of New England or that of the Kentucky mountaineer, we should find hundreds of words, meanings, and pronunciations now obsolete in the standard speech of both England and this country. There can be no question about the fact that many an older feature of the language of England can be illustrated from survivals in the United States.

The phenomenon is not unknown in other parts of the world. The English spoken in Ireland illustrates many pronunciations indicated by the rhymes in Pope, and modern Icelandic is notably archaic as compared with the languages of the Scandinavian countries of the mainland. Accordingly it has often been maintained that transplanting a language results in a sort of arrested development. The process has been compared to the transplanting of a tree. A certain time is required for the tree to take root, and growth is temporarily retarded. In language this slower development is often regarded as a form of conservatism, and it is assumed as a general principle that the lan-guage of a new country is more conservative than the same language when it remains in the old habitat. In this theory there is doubtless an element of truth. It would be difficult to find a student of the Scandinavian languages who did not feel that the preservation of so many of the old inflections in Icelandic, which have been lost in modern Swedish and Danish, speaks strongly in support of it. And it is a well-recognized fact in cultural history that isolated communities tend to preserve old customs and beliefs. To the extent, then, that new

countries into which a language is carried are cut off from contact with the old we may find them more tenacious of old habits of speech.

Yet it is open to doubt whether the English language in America can really be considered more conservative than the English of England.[14] It is but a figure of speech when we speak of transplanting a language. Language is only an activity of people, and it is the people who are transplanted to a new country. Language is but the expression of the people who use it, and should reflect the nature and the experiences of the speakers. Now we generally do not think of the pioneer who pulls up roots and tries the experiment of life in a new world as more conservative than the person who stays at home. Moreover, the novel conditions of the new environment and the many new experiences that the language is called upon to express are inducements to change rather than factors tending to conserve the language unaltered. We may well ask ourselves, therefore, whether the archaic features we have noted in the language of America are evidence of a conservative tendency or are survivals that can be otherwise accounted for—whether, in short, American English is more conservative than the English of England. And here we must ask ourselves what form of American English we are considering and with what we are going to compare it in England—with the received standard that grew up in the southern parts of the island or with the form of the language spoken in the north. If we compare the English spoken in America outside of New England and the South with the received standard of England, it will undoubtedly appear conservative, but it is not noticeably so as compared with the speech of the northern half of England. On the other hand, the language of New England and in some features that of the South have undergone many of the changes in pronunciation that characterize the received standard of England. We must be equally careful in speaking of archaic survivals in the American vocabulary. Illustrations of these are often drawn from the rural speech of

[14] This doubt has been well expressed by Frank E.Bryant, "On the Conservatism of Language in a New Country," *PMLA,* 22 (1907), 277–90, and supported with additional arguments by George P.Krapp, "Is American English Archaic?" *Southwest Review,* 12 (1927), 292–303, and by Manfred Görlach, "Colonial Lag? The Alleged Conservative Character of American English and Other 'Colonial' Varieties," *English World-Wide,* 8 (1987), 41–60.

New England. But they are no more characteristic of American speech in general than of the received standard of England, and many of them can be matched in the rural dialects of England. In this respect the rural speech of England is just as conservative as that of America. Even the archaisms that are really a part of educated American English can generally be found surviving locally in the mother country. The difference is one of dissemination and social level. It is a question whether an equal number of survivals could not be found, such as *fortnight, porridge, heath, moor, iron-monger,* in educated English that are lost or uncommon on this side of the Atlantic. In general, it seems nearest the truth to say that American English has preserved certain older features of the language that have disappeared from Standard English in England. But it has also introduced innovations equally important, to which we must turn.

244. ***Early Changes in the Vocabulary.***

When colonists settle in a new country they find the resources of their language constantly taxed. They have no words for the many new objects on every hand or the constant succession of new experiences that they undergo. Accordingly in a colonial language changes of vocabulary take place almost from the moment the first settlers arrive. When the colonists from England became acquainted with the physical features of this continent they seem to have been impressed particularly by its mountains and forests, so much larger and more impressive than any in England, and the result was a whole series of new words like *bluff, foothill, notch, gap, divide, watershed, clearing,* and *underbrush*. Then there were the many living and growing things that were peculiar to the New World. The names for some of these the colonists learned from Native Americans, words like *moose, raccoon, skunk, opossum, chipmunk, porgy, terrapin;* others they formed by a descriptive process long familiar in the language: *mud hen, garter snake, bullfrog, potato bug, groundhog, reed bird*. Tree names such as the *hickory* and *live oak,* and the *locust* are new to colonial English, as are *sweet potato, eggplant, squash, persimmon, pecan*. Contact with Native Americans brought into English a number of words having particular reference to their way of life: *wigwam, tomahawk, canoe, toboggan, mackinaw, moccasin, wampum, squaw, papoose*. These are Native American words, but we have also English words formed at the same time and out of the same experience: *war path, paleface, medicine man, pipe of peace, big chief, war paint,* and the verb *to scalp*. Native American words for Native American foods were taken over in the case of *hominy, tapioca, succotash,* and *pone*. The latter is still heard in the South for corn bread, the kind of bread the Native Americans made. The individual character of our political and administrative system required the introduction of words such as *congressional, presidential, gubernatorial, congressman, caucus, mass meeting, selectman, statehouse, land office*. Many other words illustrate things associated with the new mode of life—*back country, backwoodsman, squatter, prairie, log cabin, clapboard, corncrib, popcorn, hoe cake, cold snap, snow plow, bobsled, sleigh*.

As indicated above, the colonists got a number of the words they needed ready-made from the languages of the Native Americans. They got some, too, from other languages. From the French colonists they learned *portage, chowder, cache, caribou, bureau, bayou,*

levee, and others; from the Dutch *cruller, coleslaw, cookie, stoop, boss, scow;* from German *noodle, pretzel, smearcase, sauerkraut*. More interesting, however, are the cases in which colonists applied an old word to a slightly different thing, as when they gave the name of the English *robin* to a red-breasted thrush, applied the word *turkey* to a distinctive American bird, and transferred the word *corn* to an entirely new cereal. *Indian corn* was known in England only from the accounts of travelers, and naming its various features seems to have taxed the ingenuity of the first Americans. *Maize,* the West Indian name that came into England through the Spanish, was seldom used by the American settler. Henry Hudson called it *Turkish wheat,* a designation found in French and Italian and among the Pennsylvania Germans. But the colonists used the common English word *corn,* which in England is used of any kind of grain, but especially of wheat. At first they prefixed the distinguishing epithet "Indian," but this was soon dropped, and consequently *corn* means something quite different in England and in America today. There were other difftculties. *Tassel* and *silk* were natural descriptions of the flower, but the *ear* was more troublesome. The *cob* was known in Virginia as the *husk* or *huss,* and John Smith calls it the *core*. The outer covering, which we generally call the *husk* today, was variously known as the *hose,* the *leaves,* and the *shuck*. The latter word survives in the sociable activity of *corn-shucking,* the equivalent of the New England *husking bee*. In an instance like this we catch a glimpse of the colonists in the very act of shifting and adapting their language to new conditions, and we find them doing the same thing with *rabbit, lumber, freshet,* and other words that have a somewhat different meaning in American and English use. American speakers were perhaps at their best when inventing simple, homely words like *apple butter, sidewalk, lightning rod, spelling bee, crazy quilt, low-down,* and *know-nothing,* or when striking off a terse metaphor like *log rolling, wire pulling, to have an ax to grind, to be on the fence*. Americans early manifested the gift, which they continue to show, of the imaginative, slightly humorous phrase. To it we owe *to bark up the wrong tree, to face the music, fly off the handle, go on the war path, bury the hatchet, come out at the little end of the horn, saw wood,* and many more, with the breath of the country and sometimes of the frontier about them. In this way America began her contributions to the English language, and in this period also we see the beginning of such differentiation as has taken place between the American and the British vocabulary. Both of these matters will be dealt with in their later aspects below.

245. *National Consciousness.*

There is evidence that at the time of the American Revolution and especially in the years immediately following it, Americans were beginning to be conscious of their language and to believe that it might be destined to have a future as glorious as that which they confidently expected for the country itself. It was apparent that in the 150 years since the founding of Jamestown and Plymouth the English language on this continent had developed certain differences that were often the subject of remark. Thomas Jefferson thought that Americans were more tolerant of innovations in speech than the people of England and that these innovations might eventually justify calling the language of America by a name other than English. The consciousness of an American variety of English with characteristics of its own led to the consideration of a standard that should

be recognized on this side of the Atlantic. John Witherspoon, whose papers on the English language in the *Pennsylvania Journal* for 1781 have already been mentioned, believed it probable that American English would not follow the course of Scots and become a provincial dialect. "Being entirely separated from Britain," he says, "we shall find some centre or standard of our own, and not be subject to the inhabitants of that island, either in receiving new ways of speaking or rejecting the old." That others were thinking along the same lines and were unwilling that this standard should be left to chance is evident from a communication published in January 1774 in the *Royal American Magazine*. The writer signs himself "An American" and gives evidence of his patriotic fervor by venturing the opinion that although English has been greatly improved in Britain within the last century, "its highest perfection, with every other branch of human knowledge, is perhaps reserved for this Land of light and freedom." He proposes the formation of something like an academy in this country:

> I beg leave to propose a plan for perfecting the English language in America, thro' every future period of its existence; viz. That a society, for this purpose should be formed, consisting of members in each university and seminary, who shall be stiled, *Fellows ofthe American Society of Language:* That the society, when established, from time to time elect new members, & thereby be made perpetual. And that the society annually publish some observations upon the language and from year to year, correct, enrich and refine it, until perfection stops their progress and ends their labour.
>
> I conceive that such a society might easily be established, and that great advantages would thereby accrue to science, and consequently America would make swifter advances to the summit of learning. It is perhaps impossible for us to form an idea of the perfection, the beauty, the grandeur, & sublimity, to which our language may arrive in the progress of time, passing through the improving tongues of our rising posterity; whose aspiring minds, fired by our example, and ardour for glory, may far surpass all the sons of science who have shone in past ages, & may light up the world with new ideas bright as the sun.[15]

Whether the author of this proposal was John Adams, a future president of the United States, is not certain. His name has sometimes been mentioned in connection with it because a few years later he made a somewhat similar suggestion in a letter to the president of Congress, written from Amsterdam, September 5, 1780. After directing attention to the importance of "eloquence and language" in a republic and citing the example of France, Spain, and Italy in forming academies for the improvement of their languages, he continues:

[15] First republished by Albert Matthews in *Trans. of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts,* XIV, 263–64. It is reprinted in M.M.Mathews, *The Beginnings of American English* (Chicago, 1931), pp. 40–41.

> The honor of forming the first public institution for refining, correcting, improving, and ascertaining the English language, I hope is reserved for congress; they have every motive that can possibly influence a public assembly to undertake it. It will have a happy effect upon the union of the States to have a public standard for all persons in every part of the continent to appeal to, both for the signification and pronunciation of the language. The constitutions of all the States in the Union are so democratical that eloquence will become the instrument for recommending men to their fellow-citizens, and the principal means of advancement through the various ranks and offices of society….
>
> …English is destined to be in the next and succeeding centuries more generally the language of the world than Latin was in the last or French is in the present age. The reason of this is obvious, because the increasing population in America, and their universal connection and correspondence with all nations will, aided by the influence of England in the world, whether great or small, force their language into general use, in spite of all the obstacles that may be thrown in their way, if any such there should be.It is not necessary to enlarge further, to show the motives which the people of America have to turn their thoughts early to this subject; they will naturally occur to congress in a much greater detail than I have time to hint at. I would therefore submit to the consideration of congress the expediency and policy of erecting by their authority a society under the name of "the American Academy for refining, improving, and ascertaining the English Language…."[16]

There is nothing very original in this suggestion. It follows the proposals that had been made by Swift and others in England (see §§ 192ff.). But it is significant as indicating a growing sense of the importance that Americans were beginning to attach to the form that English was taking and should take in the future in America. That feeling was to find expression in the more extreme views of one of Adams' contemporaries, Noah Webster.

246. ***Noah Webster and an American Language.***

The Declaration of Independence and the years during which the colonies were fighting to establish their freedom from England produced an important change in American psychology. Accustomed for generations to dependence upon the mother country, the people who settled in America imported most of their books and many of their ideas from

[16] Mathews, *The Beginnings of American English,* pp. 42–43.

Europe. It was a natural and entirely just recognition of the superior civilization of the Old World and the greatness of English literature and learning. But with political independence achieved, many of the colonists began to manifest a distaste for anything that seemed to perpetuate the former dependence. An ardent, sometimes belligerent patriotism sprang up, and among many people it became the order of the day to demand an American civilization as distinctive from that of Europe as were the political and social ideals that were being established in the new world.

No one expressed this attitude more vigorously than Noah Webster (1758–1843). Born on the outskirts of Hartford, Connecticut, he received at Yale such an education as universities in the country then offered and later undertook the practice of law. But business in the legal profession was slow, and he was forced for a livelihood to turn to teaching. The change determined his entire subsequent career. The available English schoolbooks were unsatisfactory, and the war diminished the supply of such as there were. Webster accordingly set about compiling three elementary books on English, a spelling book, a grammar, and a reader. These he published in 1783, 1784, and 1785 under the high-sounding title *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*. They were the first books of their kind to be published in this country. The success of the first part was unexpectedly great. It was soon reissued under the title *The American SpellingBook* and in this form went through edition after edition. It is estimated that in a hundred years, more than 80 million copies of the book were sold. From a profit of less than a cent a copy Webster derived most of his income throughout his life. The influence of the little book was enormous and will be discussed below. Here it is sufficient to note that it had the effect of turning its author's attention to questions of language and enabled him to devote himself to a number of projects of a linguistic kind. In 1789 he published a volume of *Dissertations on the English Language, with Notes Historical and Critical*. In 1806 he brought out a small *Dictionary,* the prelude to his greatest work. This was *An American Dictionary ofthe English Language,* published in 1828 in two quarto volumes. In all of these works and in numerous smaller writings he was animated by a persistent purpose: to show that the English language in this country was a distinctly American thing, developing along its own lines, and deserving to be considered from an independent, American point of view. His selfassurance had its faults as well as its virtues. It led him to ignore discoveries from Europe that were establishing the principles of comparative linguistics, and to spend years writing etymologies that were inadequate even for his time.[17] The etymologies could be replaced eventually by a German scholar, C.A.F. Mahn, but the sustaining zeal that carried him to the completion of his work drew on resources of personality more complex and rarer than current knowledge of the discipline.

In the preface to the first part of the *Grammatical Institute* Webster says: "The author wishes to promote the honour and prosperity of the confederated republics of America; and cheerfully throws his mite into the common treasure of patriotic exertions. This

[17] See Allen W.Read, "The Spread of German Linguistic Learning in New England during the Lifetime of Noah Webster," *American Speech,* 41 (1966), 163–81, and Joseph H.Friend, *The Development of American Lexicography, 1798–1864* (The Hague, 1967), pp. 75–79.

country must in some future time, be as distinguished by the superiority of her literary improvements, as she is already by the liberality of her civil and ecclesiastical constitutions. Europe is grown old in folly, corruption and tyranny…. For America in her infancy to adopt the present maxims of the old world, would be to stamp the wrinkles of decrepid age upon the bloom of youth and to plant the seeds of decay in a vigorous constitution." Six years later, in his *Dissertations on the English Language,* he went much further. "As an independent nation," he says, "our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government. Great Britain, whose children we are, should no longer be *our* standard; for the taste of her writers is already corrupted, and her language on the decline. But if it were not so, she is at too great a distance to be our model, and to instruct us in the principles of our own tongue." But independence of England was not the only factor that colored people's thinking in the new nation. A capital problem in 1789 was that of welding the thirteen colonies into a unified nation, and this is also reflected in Webster's ideas. In urging certain reforms of spelling in the United States he argues that one of the advantages would be that it would make a difference between the English orthography and the American, and "that such an event is an object of vast political consequence." A "national language," he says, "is a band of national union. Every engine should be employed to render the people of this country *national;* to call their attachments home to their own country; and to inspire them with the pride of national character." Culturally they are still too dependent upon England. "However they may boast of Independence, and the freedom of their government, yet their *opinions* are not sufficiently independent; an astonishing respect for the arts and literature of their parent country, and a blind imitation of its manners, are still prevalent among the Americans." It is an idea that he often returns to. In his *Letter to Pickering* (1817) he says, "There is nothing which, in my opinion, so debases the genius and character of my countrymen, as the implicit confidence they place in English authors, and their unhesitating submission to their *opinions,* their *derision,* and their *frowns*. But I trust the time will come, when the English will be convinced that the intellectual faculties of their descendants have not degenerated in America; and that we can contend with them in *letters,* with as much success, as upon the *ocean*." This was written after the War of 1812. So far as the language is concerned, he has no doubt of its ultimate differentiation. He is sure that "numerous local causes, such as a new country, new associations of people, new combinations of ideas in arts and science, and some intercourse with tribes wholly unknown in Europe, will introduce new words into the American tongue. These causes will produce, in a course of time, a language in North America, as different from the future language of England, as the Modern Dutch, Danish and Swedish are from the German, or from one another."

The culmination of his efforts to promote the idea of an American language was the publication of his *American Dictionary* in 1828. Residence for a year in England had somewhat tempered his opinion, but it was still fundamentally the same. In the preface to that work he gave final expression to his conviction: "It is not only important, but, in a degree necessary, that the people of this country, should have an *American Dictionary* of the English Language; for, although the body of the language is the same as in England, and it is desirable to perpetuate that sameness, yet some differences must exist. Language is the expression of ideas; and if the people of our country cannot preserve an identity of ideas, they cannot retain an identity of language. Now an identity of ideas depends

materially upon a sameness of things or objects with which the people of the two countries are conversant. But in no two portions of the earth, remote from each other, can such identity be found. Even physical objects must be different. But the principal differences between the people of this country and of all others, arise from different forms of government, different laws, institutions and customs… the institutions in this country which are new and peculiar, give rise to new terms, unknown to the people of England…No person in this country will be satisfied with the English definitions of the words *congress, senate* and *assembly, court,* &c. for although these are words used in England, yet they are applied in this country to express ideas which they do not express in that country." It is not possible to dismiss this statement as an advertisement calculated to promote the sale of his book in competition with the English dictionaries of Johnson and others. He had held such a view long before the idea of a dictionary had taken shape in his mind. Webster was a patriot who carried his sentiment from questions of political and social organization over into matters of language. By stressing American usage and American pronunciation, by adopting a number of distinctive spellings, and especially by introducing quotations from American authors alongside those from English literature, he contrived in large measure to justify the title of his work. If, after a century and a half, some are inclined to doubt the existence of anything so distinctive as an American language, his efforts, nevertheless, have left a permanent mark on the language of this country.

247. ***Webster's Influence on American Spelling.***

It is a matter of common observation that American spelling often differs in small ways from that customary in England.[18] We write *honor, color,* and a score of words without the *u* of English *honour, colour,* etc. We sometimes employ one consonant where the English write two: *traveler—traveller, wagon—waggon,* etc. We write *er* instead of *re* in a number of words like *fiber, center, theater*. We prefer an *s* in words like *defense, offense,* and write *ax, plow, tire, story,* and *czar,* for *axe, plough, tyre, storey,* and *tsar*. The differences often pass unnoticed, partly because a number of English spellings are still current in America, partly because some of the American innovations are now common in England, and in general because certain alternatives are permissible in both countries. Although some of the differences have grown up since Webster's day, the majority of the distinctively American spellings are due to his advocacy of them and the incorporation of them in his dictionary.

Spelling reform was one of the innumerable things that Franklin took an interest in. In 1768 he devised *A Scheme for a New Alphabet and a Reformed*

[18] For an excellent discussion of English and American spellings see H.L.Mencken, *The American Language* (4th ed., New York, 1936), chap. 8.

Mode of Spelling and went so far as to have a special font of type cut for the purpose of putting it into effect. Years later he tried to interest Webster in his plan, but without success. According to the latter, "Dr. Franklin never pretended to be a man of erudition—he was self-educated; and he wished to reform the orthography of our language, by introducing new characters. He invited me to Philadelphia to aid in the work; but I differed from him in opinion. I think the introduction of new characters neither practicable, necessary nor expedient."[19] Indeed, Webster was not in the beginning sympathetic to spelling reform. At the time that he brought out the first part of his *Grammatical Institute* (1783) he wrote: "There seems to be an inclination in some writers to alter the spelling of words, by expunging the superfluous letters. This appears to arise from the same pedantic fondness for singularity that prompts new fashions of pronunciation. Thus they write the words *favour, honour,* &c. without *u*…. Thus *e* is omitted in *judgment;* which is the most necessary letter in the word…. Into these and many other absurdities are people led by a rage for singularity…We may better labour to speak our language with propriety and elegance, as we have it, than to attempt a reformation without advantage or probability of success." But by 1789 Franklin's influence had begun to have its effect. In the *Dissertations on the English Language,* published in that year, Webster admitted: "I once believed that a reformation of our orthography would be unnecessary and impracticable. This opinion was hasty; being the result of a slight examination of the subject. I now believe with Dr. Franklin that such a reformation is practicable and highly necessary." As an appendix to that volume he published *An Essay on the Necessity, Advantages and Practicability of Reforming the Mode of Spelling, and of Rendering the Orthography of Words Correspondent to the Pronunciation*. In this he urged the omission of all superfluous or silent letters, such as the *a* in *bread* and the *e* in *give,* the substitution of *ee* for the vowels in *mean, speak, grieve, key,* etc., the use of *k* for *ch* in such words as had a *k*-sound *(chamcter, chorus),* and a few other "inconsiderable alterations." The next year he exemplified his reform in *A Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings,* but the changes here proposed met with so much opposition that he abandoned most of them in favor of a more moderate proposal.

By 1806 when he published his first small dictionary[20] he had come to hold that "it would be useless to attempt any change, even if practicable, in those

[19] *Letter to Pickering* (1817), p. 32. Franklin's letter to Webster on the subject was written June 18, 1786, and indicates that Webster had already devised an alphabet of his own *(Writings of Benjamin Franklin, ed.* A.H.Smyth, IX, 518, 527; for Franklin's *Scheme,* V, 169–78).

[20] *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language. In which Five Thousand Words are added to the number found in the best English compends. The Orthography is, in some instances, corrected,* etc. By Noah Webster (Hartford, CT, 1806). The work is available in a facsimile edition with an Introduction by Philip B.Gove (New York, 1970).

anomalies which form whole classes of words, and in which, change would rather perplex than ease the learner." The most important modifications he introduces are that he prints *music, physic, logic,* etc., without a final *k; scepter, theater, meter,* and the like with *er* instead of *re; honor, favor,* etc., without the *u; check, mask, risk,* etc., for *cheque, masque, risque; defense, pretense, recompense,* and similar words with an *s;* and *determin, examin, doctrin, medicin,* etc., without a final *e*. In all except the last of these innovations he has been followed generally in American usage. He was not always consistent. He spelled *traffick, almanack, frolick,* and *havock* with a final *k* where his own rule and modern practice call for its omission. But on the whole the principles here adopted were carried over, with some modifications and additions,[21] into his *American Dictionary* of 1828, and from this they have come into our present use.[22]

It has been thought well to trace in some detail the evolution of Webster's ideas on the subject of spelling, because the most characteristic differences between British and American practice today are owed to him. Some of his innovations have been adopted in Britain, and it may be said in general that his later views were on the whole moderate and sensible.

248. *Webster's Influence on American Pronunciation.*

Though the influence is more difftcult to prove, there can be no doubt that to Webster are to be attributed some of the characteristics of American pronunciation, especially its uniformity and the disposition to give fuller value to the unaccented syllables of words. Certainly he was interested in the improvement of American pronunciation and intended that his books should serve that purpose. In the first part of his *Grammatical Institute,* which became the *American Spelling Book,* he says that the system "is designed to introduce uniformity and accuracy of pronunciation into common schools." That it was not without effect can, in one case at least, be shown. In the preface to that work he says, *"Angel, ancient,* the English pronounce *anegel, anecient,* contrary to every good principle." Now James Fenimore Cooper, in his *Notions of the Americans,* tells how as a boy he was sent off to a school in Connecticut, and when

[21] For example, he restored the *e* in *determine, examine,* stated the rule for not doubling the consonant in words like *traveler, traveling,* etc.

[22] "Webster inculcated his views on orthography and pronunciation upon all occasions. He wrote, he lectured, he pressed home his doctrines upon persons and assemblies…. The present printer [1881] of 'Webster's Dictionary' remembers that when he was a boy of thirteen, working at the case in Burlington, Vermont, a little pale-faced man came into the office and handed him a printed slip, saying, 'My lad, when you use these words, please oblige me by spelling them as here: *theater, center,* etc.' It was Noah Webster traveling about among the printing-offices, and persuading people to spell as he did: a better illustration could not be found of the reformer's sagacity, and his patient method of effecting his purpose." (Horace E.Scudder, *Noah Webster* [Boston, 1882], pp. 213–14.)

he came home for a vacation he was pronouncing the first syllable of *angel* like the article *an,* and *beard* as *berd* or *baird* (another Websterian pronunciation). He was only laughed out of the absurdity by the rest of his family. But he adds: "I think…a great deal of the peculiarity of New England pronunciation is to be ascribed to the intelligence of its inhabitants. This may appear a paradox; but it can easily be explained. They all read and write; but the New England-man, at home, is a man of exceedingly domestic habits. He has a theoretical knowledge of the language, without its practice…. It is vain to tell a man who has his book before him, that *cham* spells *chame,* as in *chamber,* or *an, ane* as in *angel;* or *dan, dane,* as in *danger*. He replies by asking what sound is produced by *an, dan,* and *cham*. I believe it would be found, on pursuing the inquiry, that a great number of their peculiar sounds are introduced through their spelling books, and yet there are some, certainly, that cannot be thus explained."[23]

In this case the effect was fortunately temporary. But because of the use to which the Webster *Spelling Book* was put in thousands of schools, it is very likely that some of its other effects were more lasting. In the reminiscences of his early life, Joseph T.Buckingham, a newspaper publisher of some prominence in New England, gives an interesting account of the village school at the close of the eighteenth century:

> It was the custom for all such pupils [those who were sufficiently advanced to pronounce distinctly words of more than one syllable] to stand together as one class, and with *one voice* to read a column or two of the tables for spelling. The master gave the signal to begin, and all united to read, letter by letter, pronouncing each syllable by itself, and adding to it the preceding one till the word was complete. Thus a-d *ad,* m-i *mi, admi,* r-a *ra, admira,* t-i-o-n *shun, admiration*. This mode of reading was exceedingly exciting, and, in my humble judgment, exceedingly useful; as it required and taught deliberate and distinct articulation When the lesson had been thus read, the books were closed, and the words given out for spelling. If one was misspelt, it passed on to the next, and the next pupil in order, and so on till it was spelt correctly. Then the pupil who had spelt correctly went up in the class *above* the one who had misspelt…. Another of our customs was to choose sides to spell once or twice a week…. [The losing side] had to sweep the room and build the fires the next morning. These customs, prevalent sixty and seventy years ago, excited emulation, and emulation produced improvement.[24]

[23] Cooper, *Notions of the Americans* (London, 1828), II, 172–74.

[24] Letter to Henry Barnard, December 10, 1860, printed in Barnard's *American Journal of Education,* 13 (1863), 129–32.

Webster quotes Sheridan with approval to the effect that "A good articulation consists in giving every letter in a syllable its due proportion of sound, according to the most approved custom of pronouncing it; and in making such a distinction, between syllables, of which words are composed, that the ear shall without difficulty acknowledge their number." And he adds the specific injunction, "Let words be divided as they ought to be pronounced *clus-ter, hab-it, nos-tril, bish-op,* and the smallest child cannot mistake a just pronunciation." In the light of such precept and evidence of its practice, and considering the popularity of spelling bees among those of a former generation, it seems certain that not a little influence on American pronunciation is to be traced to the old blue-backed spelling book.

249. *Pronunciation.*

The earliest changes in the English language in America, distinguishing it from the language of the mother country, were in the vocabulary. These have already been mentioned. From the time when the early colonists came, however, divergence in pronunciation began gradually to develop. This has been due in part to changes that have occurred here but has resulted still more from the fact that the pronunciation of England has undergone further change and that a variety of southern English has come to be recognized as the English received standard. At the present time American pronunciation shows certain well-marked differences from English use.[25]

Perhaps the most noticeable of these differences is in the vowel sound in such words as *fast, path, grass, dance, can't, half.* At the end of the eighteenth century southern England began to change from what is called a flat *a* to a broad *a* in these words, that is from a sound like the *a* in *man* to one like the *a* in *father*. The change affected words in which the vowel occurred before *f, sk, sp, st, ss, th,* and *n* followed by certain consonants. In parts of New England the same change took place, but in most other parts of the country the old sound was preserved, and *fast, path,* etc., are pronounced with the vowel of *pan*. In some speakers there is a tendency to employ an intermediate vowel, halfway between the *a* of *pan* and *father,* but the "flat *a*" must be regarded as the typical American pronunciation.

Next to the retention of the flat *a,* the most noticeable difference between English and American pronunciation is in the treatment of the *r*. In the received pronunciation of England this sound has disappeared except before vowels. It is not heard when it occurs before another consonant or at the end of a word unless the next word begins with a vowel. In America, eastern New England and some of the South follow the English practice, but in the Middle

[25] See Eilert Ekwall, *American and British Pronunciation* (Uppsala, Sweden, 1946), and J.C. Wells, *Accents of English* (3 vols., Cambridge, UK, 1982).

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(see § 248)

States and the West the *r* is pronounced in all positions. Thus in the received standard of England *lord* has the same sound as *laud* and *there* is pronounced [ðɛə] with the indeterminate vowel [ə] as a glide at the end. The American *r* is either a retention of older English pronunciation or the result of north-of-England influence in our speech. It has caused more comment than any other distinction in American pronunciation.

A distinction less apparent to the layman is the pronunciation of the *o* in such words as *not, lot, hot, top*. In England this is still an open *o* pronounced with the lips rounded, but in America except in parts of New England it has commonly lost its rounding and in most words has become a sound identical in quality with the *a* in *father,* only short.

There are other differences of less moment between English and American pronunciation, because they concern individual words or small groups of words. Thus in England *been* has the same sound as *bean* but in America is like *bin*. *Leisure* often has in America what is popularly called a long vowel but in England usually rhymes with *pleasure*. There, too, the last syllable of words like *fertile* and *sterile* rhymes with *aisle*. American English has kept the common eighteenth-century pronunciation with a short vowel or a mere vocalic *l*. The British pronunciation of *either* and *neither* is sometimes heard in America, as is *process* with a close *o*. But Americans do not suppress the final *t* in *trait* or pronounce an *f* in *lieutenant*. The pronunciation of *figure* with [jər] would be considered pedantic in Britain, according to Fowler, who also confirms the pronunciation of *ate* as *et,* while noting that the American pronunciation has been growing there. In the United States *figger* and *et* would betray a lack of cultivation.

A more important difference is the greater clearness with which Americans pronounce unaccented syllables. They do not say *secret'ry* or *necess'ry*. Bernard Shaw said he once recognized an American because he accented the third syllable of *necessary,* and the disposition to keep a secondary stress on one of the unaccented syllables of a long word is one of the consequences of our effort to pronounce all the syllables. Conversely, the suppression of syllables in Britain has been accompanied by a difference at times in the position of the chief stress. The British commonly say *centen'ary* and *labor'atory,* and *adver'tisement* is never *advertise'ment*. There is, of course, more in speech than the quality of the sounds. There is also the matter of pitch and tempo. Americans speak more slowly and with less variety of tone. There can be no gain-saying the fact that American speech is a bit more monotonous, is uttered with less variety in the intonation, than that of Britain.

The differences between British and American pronunciation are not such as should cause any alarm for the future, any fear that the British and Americans may become unintelligible to each other. As already said, the difference in the pronunciation of the *o* in *lot, top,* and so on is one that often escapes the notice of the lay person. The pronunciation of the *r* may continue to stir mutual curiosity, but the difference between the broad *a* and the flat *a* affects fewer than 150 words in common use.[26] Other differences are sporadic and on the whole negligible.

250. ***The American Dialects.***

Certain features of pronunciation characteristic of a part of New England and others associated with many parts of the South are so easily recognized and so well known that

for a long time it was customary to distinguish three main dialects in American English—the New England dialect, the Southern dialect, and General American, meaning the dialect of all the rest of the country. Such a division, in a broad way, is not unjustified because each of the dialect types is marked by features that distinguish it clearly from the others. But it is not sufficiently exact. Not all of New England shares in the features—such as the so-called "broad a" and the loss of [r] finally and before consonants—that are thought of as most characteristic. Parts of the South were settled from Pennsylvania and are not typically southern in speech. And finally, General American itself shows regional differences which, although not so obvious to the lay person, can be recognized by the linguist and charted.

Our ability to distinguish more accurately the various speech areas that exist in this country is due to the fact that we now have a large mass of accurate data gathered by field workers for the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* (see page 399) and a growing number of detailed studies of regional pronunciation and other features. These have contributed greatly to a clearer understanding of some of the speech areas of the country.[27]

In 1949 Professor Hans Kurath published a study of the first importance, *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States*. On the basis of lexical evidence, mainly in the Atlantic Coast states as far south as South Carolina, he distinguished eighteen speech areas, which he grouped into three main groups: Northern, Midland, and Southern. Positing a Midland dialect had the effect of taking parts of what had been considered General American and

[26] See J.S.Kenyon, "Flat *a* and Broad *a,*" *American Speech,* 5 (1930), 323–26.

[27] The following studies may be mentioned by way of illustration: Hans Kurath and Raven I. McDavid, Jr., *The Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States* (Ann Arbor, 1961); E.Bagby Atwood, *Survey of Verb Forms in the Eastern United States* (Ann Arbor, 1953), and the same author's *Regional Vocabulary of Texas* (Austin, 1962); and Craig M.Carver, *American Regional Dialects: A Word Geography* (Ann Arbor, 1987). An account of the more important dialect areas will be found in the chapter contributed by McDavid to W.Nelson Francis, *The Structure of American English* (New York, 1958). An excellent overview that includes social dialects is by Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes, *American English: Dialects and Variation* (Oxford, 1998). The newest description of American dialect areas is by William Labov in the Atlas of North American English: www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas. For the publication of regional atlases and dictionaries, see § 255.

THE DIALECTS OF AMERICAN ENGLISH

Southern and carving out a third major dialect, straddling the traditional boundary and extending from the Middle Atlantic area to the Mississippi and beyond. This area was divided into North Midland, which comprised most of Pennsylvania and the central areas of the Great Lakes states; and South Midland, which continued to be referred to as the Upper South or the Southern Uplands, and which included the southern Appalachians, the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas, and parts of Oklahoma and Texas. Subsequent studies have supported or modified particular isoglosses and dialect boundaries, the results varying from study to study with the phonological and lexical criteria used. The main point of controversy has been whether the selection and weighting of isoglosses supports a distinct Midland dialect. Although Kurath's tripartite division was widely accepted for forty years, recent investigations have led some dialectologists to reemphasize a primary North-South linguistic boundary. Craig M.Carver, for example, proposes *Upper South* for *South Midland* and *Lower North* for *North Midland*.[28] Ellen Johnson, while supportive of Kurath's *Midland,* prefers the term *Appalachian* for that dialect, and for Kurath's *South* the term *Deep South*.[29] These and other differences among dialectologists are partly matters of nomenclature, though not merely that, because it is nomenclature linked to culture and history; the differences also result from the indeterminacy of the concept *dialect* itself. Unlike state and county boundaries, which can be found demarcated on the land, dialect boundaries are abstractions of linguists, artifices that are built on empirical

[28] *American Regional Dialects*, p. 181.
[29] "Yet Again: The Midland Dialect," *American Speech,* 69 (1994), 419–30.

observations but that depend on the diagnostic features chosen. We shall use the terms "Upper North," "Lower North," "Upper South," and "Lower South," and we shall recognize Eastern New England as a distinctive enough subregion within Upper North to merit separate description.

The boundary marking the main North-South division begins in central Delaware, runs westward near the old Mason-Dixon Line and continues approximately along the Ohio River, eventually extending south into Oklahoma and Texas.[30] The line separating the Upper North (Kurath's Northern) from the Lower North (North Midland) runs northwest across New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania and then in a fairly regular westward progression across the northern parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. As the boundary approaches the Mississippi in northwestern Illinois it turns north and, to the extent that it can be traced as a boundary at all, continues that general course across the upper Midwest. The division between the Upper South (South Midland) and the Lower South (Southern) begins at the Atlantic Ocean at a midpoint on the Delmarva peninsula, describes a northward arc through Maryland, and turns southwest, skirting the eastern edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia and North Carolina and turning west just north of Atlanta. To the east lie the Piedmont and the coastal plain. To the west the Midland-Southern boundary continues through northern Georgia and Alabama, then turns north into western Tennessee. West of the Mississippi the boundary becomes predictably more diffuse, but it can still be traced through Arkansas and east Texas.

At least six regional dialects in the eastern half of the country are prominent enough to warrant individual characterization, and three additional dialects of considerable importance extend over several regions:

1. *Eastern New England.*

This includes the whole or parts of states that lie to the east of the Connecticut River in Massachusetts and Connecticut and east of the Green Mountains in Vermont. Although not all features of the dialect are uniform in their distribution, we may recognize as characteristic the retention of a rounded vowel in words like *hot* and *top,* which the rest of the country has unrounded to a shortened form of the *a* in *father;* the use of the broad *a* in *fast, path, grass,* etc.; and, as we have seen, the loss of the *r* in *car, hard,* and the like except before vowels *(carry, Tory)*. Boston is its focal area.[31]

[30] The boundaries (especially the broken lines) on the accompanying map are approximations that are crossed by individual features, lexical and phonological. The Norfolk, Virginia, region, for example, is included in the Virginia area but has largely escaped the Piedmont influence and is more closely related to the adjacent part of North Carolina.

[31] A focal area is one that because of its political, commercial, cultural, or other importance (e.g., social) has influenced the speech of surrounding areas. *Tonic* (soft drink), for instance, has spread apparently only to communities served by distributors whose headquarters are in Boston.

2. *New York City.*

Although often considered a part of the Eastern New England dialect, the speech of New York City and adjacent counties is on the whole quite different. The occurrence of *r* has increased significantly since World War II, and its frequency among various groups of speakers has become a reliable indicator of social class.[32] *Cot* and *caught* are phonemically contrasted kɑt, [kɔt] because the *o* in words like *cot* and *top,* before voiceless stops, is almost always unrounded. The pronunciation of *curl* like *coil, third* as *thoid* is the characteristic most distinctive of New York City in the popular mind, although it should be added that among cultivated New Yorkers *curl* and *coil* are phonemically distinct [kʌɪl, kɔɪl].

3. *Upper North.*

Western New England, upstate New York, and the basin of the Great Lakes share features of pronunciation that derive from the original settlement and the spread of the population westward through the water route of the lakes. Like the speech of eastern New England, the Upper North dialect distinguishes [o] in words like *mourning* and *hoarse* from [ɔ] in *morning* and *horse*. Also like the dialect of eastern New England and in contrast with the prevailing forms of the Pennsylvania settlement area, the Upper North has [ð] regularly in *with,* [s] in *grease* (verb) and greasy, and [U] in *roots*. *The Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest* (see § 255) shows that traces of the boundary can be extended beyond the Mississippi into Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakotas, although it is less distinct than the boundary in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, just as the boundary in those states is less distinct than that of the original settlements in Pennsylvania. Because the speech of the Upper North differs strikingly from that of eastern New England in its retention of postvocalic [r] and in the occurrence of the vowel [æ] in words like *ask,* it is necessary to separate these two Northern varieties, with a prominent boundary running in a northerly direction from the mouth of the Connecticut River to the Green Mountains of Vermont.

4. *Lower North.*

Like the dialect of the Upper North, that of the Lower North preserves the *r* in all positions and has [æ] in *fast, ask, grass,* etc. Within the Lower North region one of the two major subareas is the Middle Atlantic, which includes the eastern third of Pennsylvania below the Northern-Midland line, the southern half of New Jersey, the northern half of Delaware, and the adjacent parts of Maryland. The speech of this subarea has the unrounded vowel in *forest* as well as in *hot,* the [ɛ] of egg in *care, Mary, merry,* and a merging of [o] and [ɔ] before [r] and *four* and *forty*. The other major subarea

[32] See William Labov, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (Washington, DC, 1966), pp. 63–89, 207–43, *et passim.*

includes the speech of western Pennsylvania and its derivatives in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Although closely related to the Middle Atlantic dialect, it has some differences of pronunciation such as the merging of the vowels in *cot* and *caught*. The two words are generally homonyms [kɒt], the same vowel occurring with a considerable range of allophones in *lot, John, palm, barn, law,frost, dog, fog,* and *foggy*.

5. *Upper South.*

This area includes all of West Virginia except the counties bordering on Pennsylvania and Maryland,[33] the mountain regions of Virginia and North Carolina, most of Kentucky and Tennessee, with a small portion of the states to the north and the south. At the present stage of investigation it appears that the dialect of the Upper South extends west of the Mississippi through southern Missouri and northern Arkansas into north Texas, where it blends with that of the Plantation South. Settled first from Pennsylvania and later from the South, the region shows in its speech the mixed character that is to be expected under the circumstances. Although none of the dialect features of the Upper South are unique in themselves, and all of them occur in either the Lower North or the Plantation South, the configuration of features is peculiar to the Upper South. Thus the *r* is sounded as in the Lower North, but [aI] is generally pronounced [a$^{\varepsilon}$],or in the southern part of the area [a^{ə}, a] as in many parts of the South. Despite this mix, the speech of the Upper South has so much in common with that of the Plantation South that a variety of Southern English comprising the two large regions is a linguistic and cultural reality.

6. *Lower South.*

The dialect of the Lower South covers a large area, the old plantation country, and it would be unreasonable to expect uniformity in it. Important focal areas are the Virginia Piedmont and the low country near the coast of South Carolina. In many districts it agrees with eastern New England in the loss of *r* finally and before consonants, as in *car* and *hard,* but tends to go even further and omit the *r* before a word beginning with a vowel, as in *far away* [f*a*:ə'we]. But it does not have the rounded vowel in words like *top* and *hot,* or the broad *a* in *grass* and *dance*. In the latter words it shows a preference for [æə, æ^{I}] ae^{I}]. A distinctive feature of the Southern dialect is the treatment of the diphthong in *out*. Instead of the usual [aU] the Southern speaker begins this diphthong with [æ] before voiced consonants and finally, while in Virginia and South Carolina this diphthong takes the form [əU, ΛU] before voiceless consonants. Equally characteristic is the so-called Southern drawl. This is not only a matter of slower enunciation but involves a diphthongization or double diphthongization of stressed vowels. In its most pronounced form this *results* in *yes* becoming [jɛIs] or [jɛjəs], *class* becoming [klæIs] or [klæjəs], etc. Final consonant groups are likely to suffer from a weakened articulation: *las', kep', fin',* for *last, kept, find,* especially in nonstandard use. Around New Orleans and Charleston

[33] In the southern and eastern part of West Virginia the influence of Virginia speech is strong.

curl and *third* are pronounced [kΛIl] and [θΛId], as in New York City, a pattern that may be phonologically related to certain other diphthongizations in the Southern drawl.[34] Many speakers pronounce *Tuesday* and *duty* with a glide [tjus-, dju-], and in much of the South homonomy of mid and high front vowels before nasals is general, no distinction occurring between *pin* and *pen* [pIn]. There are considerable differences in the speech of the South, enabling a southerner at times to tell from a short conversation the particular state that another southerner comes from. But a northerner can seldom do this.

7. *General American.*

This variety and the next one, African American Vernacular English, are controversial and unlike the dialects discussed above in not directly reflecting geographical patterns of migration and settlement. Both varieties can be superimposed on large areas of the map of dialects at the beginning of this section, although many dialectologists would deny the validity of such a description. At the time of the first edition of this history, General American was widely accepted as one of the three main dialects of American English, along with New England and Southern. It was usually said to be characterized by the flat *a* (in *fast, path,* etc.), the unrounded vowel in *hot, top,* etc., the retention of a strong *r* in all positions, and less tendency than British English to introduce a glide after the vowels [e] and [o], *late, note*. The western half of the country and the regions enumerated in the preceding discussions except eastern New England, metropolitan New York, and Southern were often spoken of as constituting General American. Since the 1930s, investigations for the *Linguistic Atlas* (see § 255) have identified dialect areas within the old General American area and have prompted a repudiation of this "prescientific concept."[35] However, if the term is completely abandoned, something very much like it will have to be invented in the future. It is difficult to know whether the western areas of the old General American should be subdivided at all. Even as the records of the *Linguistic Atlas* become available in published form, they reflect the language of speakers who were of the older generation during the middle decades of this century. The questions asked and the informants interviewed put an emphasis on items of rural vocabulary that are now seldom used by younger speakers. If the trend toward homogeneity within the vast area of General American continues, there will be less utility in the terms "Northern" and "Midland" for identifying speakers from, say, Minnesota (Northern) and southern lowa (Midland) than in the supplanted term "General

[34] See James Sledd, "Breaking, Umlaut, and the Southern Drawl," *Language,* 42 (1966), 18–41.

[35] Roger Abrahams and Rudolph C.Troike, eds., *Language and Cultural Diversity in American Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972), p. 130. See also W.R.Van Riper, "General American: An Ambiguity," in *Lexicography and Dialect Geography: Festgabe for Hans Kurath* (Wiesbaden, 1973), pp 232−42, and J.B.McMillan, "Of Matters Lexicographical," *American Speech* (1970; pub. 1974), 289–92. Frederic G.Cassidy abandoned the term in his 1954 revision of Stuart Robertson, *The Development of Modern English* (New York, 1934), as did C.K. Thomas in his 1958 revision of *An Introduction to the Phonetics of American English* (New York, 1947), proposing instead four regional dialects in the General American area beyond the Atlantic states.

American," which would group these speakers together along with the majority of speakers from the West Coast and the states in between.[36]

8. *African American Vernacular English.*

One of the most intensively studied varieties of English during the past three decades has been the speech of many African Americans in the South and in northern cities. The very name of this variety, *African American Vernacular English* or *Vernacular*

Black English, indicates both that the variety is not a geographical dialect and also that it is not the dialect of all African Americans. The term *vernacular* refers to nonstandard features of the variety, just as nonstandard features of English spoken mainly by whites have brought about the use of *White Vernacular*. Although *African American* might be more misleading than useful because of the many middle-class African Americans who do not speak the black English vernacular, the term does serve to identify a coherent linguistic situation on the west coast of Africa and in the Caribbean during the days of the slave trade. Pidgin English, characterized by syntactic structures and words from West African languages, was the means of communication between English-speaking Europeans and Africans, and among Africans whose languages were mutually unintelligible. In the New World this pidgin English continued to be spoken by transported slaves and eventually as a creole dialect by their descendants.[37] The best-known example of an English-based creole in the continental United States is the Gullah dialect spoken by blacks along the coast and on the coastal islands of South Carolina and Georgia.[38] In studies of African American Vernacular English during the 1960s, controversy between traditional dialectologists and creole scholars centered on the extent to which linguistic features could be traced either to British English or to creole origins.[39] Both views recognized that the migrations of African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North during the past century brought a dialect with distinctly Southern features to New York, Chicago, Detroit, and other cities, where it has continued to be learned by successive generations. The balanced perspective of recent studies generally accepts the "creole hypothesis" as an important part of the explanation of current "street speech" without denying the interaction of features traditionally identified from the different dialects of urban and rural England.[40] Controversy has shifted to the question of

[36] See, for example, J.C.Wells's use of "General American" in *Accents of English* (3 vols., Cambridge, UK, 1982), III, 470–90.
[37] On pidgin and creole languages, see § 230, pp. 325–28. See also David DeCamp, "Introduction: The Study of Pidgin and Creole Languages," in *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages,* ed. Dell Hymes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 13–39. For problems in defining pidgins and creoles, see Suzanne Romaine, *Pidgin and Creole Languages* (London, 1988), pp. 23–70.
[38] The standard work on Gullah is Lorenzo D.Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949; reprinted with a new foreword by David DeCamp, Ann Arbor, MI, 1974). On its present state see Salikoko Mufwene, "The Ecology of Gullah's Survival," *American Speech,* 72 (1997), 69–83.
[39] See, for example, the articles by B.L.Bailey, W.A.Stewart, and D.Dalby reprinted in *Black-White Speech Relationships,* ed. Walt Wolfram and Nona H.Clarke (Washington, D.C., 1971).
[40] See John Baugh, *Black Street Speech: Its History, Structure, and Survival* (Austin, TX, 1983), pp. 11–12.

whether the black and white vernaculars are diverging or converging.[41] From the creole hypothesis one might expect a steady convergence over the years through the process of "decreolization." Recent studies, however, have found features of the vernaculars of both African Americans and whites in cities such as New York and Philadelphia to be diverging from those of standard English. The issue has received attention in the press, partly because of educational policies that may be implied.

Some features of African American Vernacular English (often abbreviated AAVE) occur also in the Southern white nonstandard English of comparable socioeconomic levels. However, there are also phonological and morphological features that occur almost exclusively in AAVE or occur at a significantly higher rate than in other varieties. The reduction of final consonant clusters (for example, *lis'* for *list*), as we have seen, is a common feature of the Lower South, as is the loss of postvocalic *r* (*ca'* for *car, fo'* for *four*), and both of these deletions occur in AAVE. The most usual context for deletion of such consonants is before a word beginning with a consonant. AAVE differs from other varieties in having a higher rate of deletion before a vowel (for example, *lif' up* for *lift up*). AAVE is also characterized by deletion of a word-final single consonant after a vowel as in *ma'* for *man,* with a nasalized [æ], or *boo'* for *boot*. Both voiced and voiceless *th* vary from Standard English in AAVE—for example,[ð] in *that* realized as [d], *dat;* [θ] in *thin* realized as [t], *tin;* and [θ] in *nothing* and *mouth* realized as [f], *nuf'n, mouf*. As in many varieties of English, both standard and nonstandard, the *-ing* suffix occurs as [In], *singin'*.

Among the grammatical features of AAVE, the verbal system is especially interesting in its systematic differences from Standard English. The verb *to be* is regularly deleted both as the linking verb and as the helping verb: for example *He tall* for Standard English *He is tall,* and *They runnin'* for *They are running*. There is a category of *verbal aspect* that represents habitual action that may occur over a period of time repeatedly, though not necessarily continuously; for example, *They be runnin'* for Standard English *They are usually running,* or *They usually run*[42] In AAVE this structure contrasts with *They runnin',* cited above, which means *They are running right now*. Other systematic features of the verbal system in AAVE include the use of *done* to emphasize the completed nature of an action—for example, *He done did it* for Standard English *He's already done it*—and the absence of third person singular present tense *-s,* as in *He talk* for Standard English *He talks*.

9. *Hispanic American English.*

Like African American Vernacular English, Hispanic American English is a social and ethnic variety, but like the Anglo

[41] See the essays by Ralph W.Fasold, William Labov, Fay B.Vaughn-Cooke, Guy Bailey, Walt Wolfram, A.K.Spears, and John Rickford in *American Speech,* 62 (1987).

[42] In informal discussion of grammar a distinction is often not made between verbal tense and aspect, though clearly it is necessary to be more precise in describing these categories in AAVE. *Tense* refers to the time during which the action of a verb takes place. *Aspect* refers to the beginning, duration, completion, or repetition of the action of a verb.

dialects of the Southwest it is also a geographical variety for which isoglosses can be traced across the map. Indeed, some of the roots of its geography reach back further than those of any other variety of American English, to the late sixteenth century and for more than two centuries afterwards, when Texas was a part of Mexico. Hispanic American English is unique among the major varieties of English in being the result of languages in continuing contact within a bilingual culture, and yet the complexity of the linguistic situation is such that some scholars have questioned whether it is a dialect at all. The alternative would be to consider the features associated with Hispanic American English the result of language contact with Spanish and thus the manifestations of English learned as a second language, rather than the features of a stable dialect. It has been only within the past three decades that enough research has been done to establish that it is a variety of American English in its own right. Many of the features of Hispanic American English do not appear in Spanish, and many of its speakers have low proficiency in Spanish or are monolingual in English. These facts make clear that the variety is learned and spoken like any other variety of English. Yet the situation is complex, because the community of speakers includes those who are fluently bilingual, those who are much more proficient in Spanish than in English, those who are much more proficient in English than in Spanish, and others located at various points along the spectrum. While features of pronunciation and intonation may remain stable, the selection of those features depends on numerous variables, including the context of speech and the attitude of the speaker. In a study of Mexican-American English, a variety often referred to as *Chicano English,* the authors conclude: "Within the Chicano community, there is a large span of social differences which are correlated to differences in language acquisition patterns, language usage—code-choice—and linguistic variables pertaining to Chicano English and other dialects. When considering Chicano English and patterns of language usage, it is perhaps a misnomer to refer to '*the* Chicano community' when there is such wide variation within the community."[43] Such variation contributes to the difficulty of estimating the number of speakers of Chicano English; within the United States a reasonable number would be 25 to 30 million people. Whereas speakers of other varieties of English might modulate the degree of regionalism or ethnicity by changing the proportions of certain variable structures of English, speakers of Chicano English who also know Spanish might shift out of English altogether within a single sentence. This *code-switching* between English and Spanish is a familiar feature of Chicano English, as illustrated in the works of Rolando Hinojosa:

[43] Joyce Penfield and Jacob L.Ornstein-Galicia, *Chicano English: An Ethnic Contact Dialect* (Amsterdam, 1985), p. 18.

> Mi querido Rafa: Election Day plus two and God's in his heaven and Noddy's in *his;* regarding each other with suspicion, one would imagine.
>
> Pues sí, it's in all the papers y no te traigo noticias que tú no sepas. Ahora solamente es asunto de pick up the pieces and the litter.
>
> Our newest commissioner is more restrained, less exuberant, as it were—eso de 'as it were' es frasecita de Ira; le gusta y la usa venga o no al caso. Sorry, no free samples, Si no se cuida, la gente le va a poner *Asitwere,* at the very least.

> Dear Rafe: Election Day plus two and God's in His heaven, and Noddy's in his, regarding each other with suspicion, one would imagine.
>
> Well, sir, it's in all the papers, and Fm not telling you something you don't already know. And now, it's simply a matter of picking up the pieces and the litter.
>
> Our newest commissioner is more restrained, less exuberant, *as it were*. This last is now a pet phrase. As such, he uses it at the drop of a jaw. If he's not careful, the instructed electorate will start calling him *Asitwere*. At the very least.[44]

To the extent that dialects are defined by word choices, the lexicon of Hispanic American English presents a more contemporary picture than the oldfashioned rural vocabulary of traditional dialect studies. While fewer and fewer speakers know that a *whiffletree* involves a harness or that a *spider* can be a skillet, words used to trace isoglosses in Hans Kurath's *Word Geography,* a growing population in the United States and in other English-speaking countries knows the meaning of *tapas, seviche,* and *luminaria*. The categories of borrowed words include politics, from which we get *Sandinista, Contra, Fidelist;* food and drink, represented by *nachos, burrito, sangria, margarita;* and ethnicity, with *Chicano* and *Chicana, Latino* and *Latina* as prominent designations.[45] In the past, Spanish borrowings have typically marked the regional dialects of Western and border states—California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado—and then some have gained general currency in American English. A few of these words have become part of world English. Contact between Spanish and English will be a continuing source for the introduction of new or revived Spanish words into regional varieties of English

[44] Rolando Hinojosa, *Mi querido Rafa* (Houston, 1981), p. 44; *Dear Rafe* (Houston, 1985), p. 51. Used by permission of Arte Público Press.

[45] For more on Spanish loanwords, see Garland Cannon, "Recent borrowings from Spanish into English," in *Spanish Loanwords in the English Language: A Tendency towards Hegemony Reversal,* ed. F.R.González (Berlin, 1996), 41–60.

and into larger domains. As Ronald Butters, the president of the American Dialect Society, observes, “Whatever social and political directions our linguistic future may take, Spanish is sure to play an increasing role, one that is different from anything we have ever experienced.”[46]

Although certain patterns in African American Vernacular English have clearly been influenced by African languages and those in Hispanic American English by Spanish, many other dialectal differences in the United States have been explained by tracing them to the districts in England from which the earliest settlers came.[47] If this explanation is valid, we must believe that the English spoken by the first colonists—mainly those who came during the seventeenth century—determined the speech of the communities in which they settled, and that later accretions to the population of districts already occupied were made sufficiently gradually to be assimilated to the speech that had become established there. There is nothing in the facts to contradict this assumption. The nucleus of the New England colonies was in the district around Massachusetts Bay, and the earliest settlements in the South were in the tidewater district of Virginia. Fortunately, it is for just these sections that we have the fullest information concerning the English homes of the earliest settlers. In the *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States*[48] the evidence has been collected. Of the settlers in New England before 1700, 1,281 have been traced to their source in England, and for Virginia during the same period the English homes have been found for 637. These numbers, to be sure, are not large, but it is believed that the group of colonists identified in each case is representative of the two settlements. The result shows that the predominant element in New England was from the southeastern and southern counties of England.[49] Sixty-one percent of those traced are accounted for by

[46] “The Internationalization of American English: Two Challenges,” *American Speech*, 75 (2000), 283–84.

[47] For an excellent statement of this view see Hans Kurath, “The Origin of the Dialectal Differences in Spoken American English,” *Modern Philology,* 25 (1928), 385–95. A convenient summary of supporting evidence collected in the years since is Kurath’s *Studies in Area Linguistics* (Bloomington, IN, 1972), especially chap. 5, “The Historical Relation of American English to British English.”

[48] Prepared by Charles O.Paullin and John K.Wright (Washington and New York, 1932), pp. 46–41. To this may be added Marcus L.Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration, 1607–1860* (Cambridge, MA, 1940) and the same author’s account of the settlement of New England contributed to the *Handbook of the Linguistic Geography of New England* mentioned on p. 399.

[49] “The number of settlers from London for New England was 193, or 15 percent; for Virginia 179, or 28 percent. The counties (with numbers) sending the most settlers to New England are as follows: Norfolk 125, Suffolk 116, Kent 106, Essex 100, Devon 76, Wiltshire 69; to Virginia, Gloucester 44, Kent 42, Yorkshire 30, and Lancaster 22. Of the emigrants from Gloucester both to New England and Virginia more than half came from Bristol. Of the Norfolk emigrants to New England half came from Hingham and Norwich.” (Paullin and Wright, *op. cit.,* p. 46.)

the larger counties mentioned in the footnote, and because the figures for the smaller counties are not given, we may conservatively say that two-thirds of the New England colonists before 1700 came from the south of England, especially the southeast. For Virginia the percentage is not quite so large but is still decisive. Forty-two percent were derived from London, Gloucester, and Kent, all in the south. Again figures for the smaller counties are omitted. From the map that these statistics accompany, however, it appears that the south Midlands and the west were more fully represented among the settlers of Virginia than in the New England colonies. In any case, it is certain that more than 50 percent of the Virginia settlers traced came from the southern half of England. The inference is that the English brought to New England and Virginia was that spoken in the southern parts of England, and that the similarity of the New England and Southern dialects in this country to present-day standard English is due to the preponderance of settlers from the south of England in these colonies. The importance of Virginia in the later settlements of the South has already been pointed out and doubtless accounts for the spread of the early Virginia form of speech in the southern states.

We unfortunately do not have the same sort of information about the early settlers in the middle colonies. But we are not without a basis for inference. We know that the Quakers played the principal part in the settlements along the Delaware, and that this sect had its largest following in the north of England and the north Midlands. We should expect a good many of the settlers in eastern Pennsylvania and the adjacent parts of New Jersey and Delaware to have come from the northern half of England. We know also that large numbers of Scots-Irish settled in Pennsylvania and were later prominent in the settlement of parts of the South and the West. They were mostly Scots who had been settled for a few generations in northeastern Ireland. They, of course, spoke Northern English. The Germans, who formed a large element in the population of the middle colonies, acquired their English from the English-speaking colonists among whom they settled. It would seem likely that the population of the Middle States was much more northern than that of New England and Virginia, and that the preservation of the *r* and other characteristics of Northern English found in the dialect of these states is to be accounted for in this way. It may not be too much to assert that the prominence of the Scots-Irish in the constant advance of the western frontier was an influential factor in carrying the form of English spoken in the middle colonies into the newer territories of the West and in making this speech the basis of General American.

In describing the principal dialect areas that can be distinguished in the language of this country we have spoken only of distinctive features of the pro-nunciation. This does not mean that there are no other local differences. There are also peculiarities of vocabulary or idiom that may represent a survival of some older form of expression or some special development whose origin cannot be traced. They are especially characteristic of the popular speech. When a person calls a certain kind of cheese *smearcase,* we suspect contact at some time with the Pennsylvania Dutch settlements. In the neighborhood of Boston one may call for a *tonic* when one wants only a *soft drink*. In different parts of the country one may get sugar in a *bag,* a *sack,* or a *poke,* and may either *carry* it or, in the South, *tote* it. The Philadelphian uses the word *square* not only for a small city park but also for what Baedeker describes as “a rectangular mass of buildings bounded by four streets,” and what is elsewhere known as a *block*. Within a

small area a number of interesting variants for the same thing can often be found in the half-hidden recesses of popular speech. Thus in different New England communities the *earthworm* exists under the name *angleworm, angledog, easworm* (with variants *eastworm* and *easterworm*), *fishworm, mudworm,* and *minworm*.[50] There are also odd deviations of idiom from the standard speech. Such are the Middle Western *phone up* and *I want in,* or the expression reported from South Dakota, "I got up at six o'clock this morning although I don't *belong to* get up until seven." It would be easy to multiply local peculiarities of word or phrase in all parts of America, as in other countries. In this country they are not always genuine examples of dialect, because they are not peculiar to a particular dialectal region but may occur in numerous parts of the country, often at a considerable distance from one another.[51] In any case they should not by themselves be made the basis for distinguishing major dialect areas.

In connection with this discussion of American dialects it is necessary to recall what was said above about the general uniformity of the English language in this country. The differences between the English of one section and that of another are not great. The universal spread of education in modern times and the absence of any sharp differentiation of social classes in this country are not favorable to the development or maintenance of dialect. Although southerners or people from "down East" can usually be recognized by their speech, there are large sections of the country in which it would be impossible to tell within a thousand miles the district from which an individual comes. That such differences as exist are more noticeable in the East and are

[50] Cf. Rachel S.Harris, "New England Words for the Earthworm," *American Speech,* 8, no. 4 (1933), 12–17, and maps 139 and 140 in Kurath, *Word Geography,* mentioned on page 370.
[51] Miles L.Hanley, at one time editor of *Dialect Notes*, gave an interesting example of this in the Connecticut term "the minister's face" for the head of a pig after the animal has been butchered and the ears, jowls, eyes, etc., have been removed. The phrase is occasionally found in New Hampshire in parts settled from Connecticut but also occurs in Virginia.

greater from north to south than from east to west is but a natural consequence of the geographical configuration of colonial America.[52]

251. *The Controversy over Americanisms.*

From the time that differences in the vocabulary and idiom of Americans began to be noticed, they became the subject of comment and soon of controversy. In the beginning English comment was uniformly adverse, at least as far back as the utterances of Dr. Johnson. Often Americans were accused of corrupting the English language by introducing new and unfamiliar words, whereas they were in fact only continuing to employ terms familiar in the seventeenth century that had become obsolete in England. When the injustice of this attitude was perceived, Americans began to defend their use of English and, with a growing sense of their position among nations, to demand parity for their speech with the English of England. Over this difference in point of view a controversy was carried on through most of the nineteenth century.

The first person to use the term *Americanism* was John Witherspoon, one of the early presidents of Princeton University. In 1781 he defined it as "an use of phrases or terms, or a construction of sentences, even among persons of rank and education, different from the use of the same terms or phrases, or the construction of similar sentences in Great-Britain." In justification of the word he added, "The word Americanism, which I have coined for the purpose, is exactly similar in its formation and signification to the word Scotticism." Himself a Scot, he naturally did not look upon differences from the English of England as necessarily bad. He said, "It does not follow, from a man's using these, that he is ignorant, or his discourse upon the whole inelegant; nay, it does not follow in every case, that the terms or phrases used are worse in themselves, but merely that they are of American and not of English growth."[53] So independent an attitude is not surprising in one who, if he did not paint his name in characters so bold as John Hancock, was nevertheless one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson, who did not scruple to coin the word *belittle,* was independent without being belligerent. He objected to "raising a hue and cry against every word he [Johnson] has not licensed…. Here where all is new, no innovation is feared which offers good…. And should the language of England continue stationary, we shall probably enlarge our employment of it, until its new character may separate it

[52] For discussions of the English language in Hawaii, which touch on some of the same problems found in discussions of AAVE, see John E.Reinecke, *Language and Dialect in Hawaii: Sociolinguistic History to 1935,* ed. Stanley M.Tsuzaki (Honolulu, 1969); Elizabeth Carr, *Da Kine Talk: From Pidgin to Standard English in Hawaii* (Honolulu, 1972); and the articles by Elizabeth Carr and Stanley Tsuzaki in *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages,* ed. Dell Hymes.
[53] In the *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser,* reprinted in M.M.Mathews, *The Beginnings of American English* (Chicago, 1931), p. 17.

in name, as well as in power, from the mother tongue." With most, however, the spirit of conformity prevailed. Even so original a thinker as Franklin was ready to accept English usage as his own guide. Acknowledging a criticism of Hume's, he wrote: "I thank you for your friendly admonition relating to some unusual words in the pamphlet. It will be of service to me. The *pejorate* and the *colonize,* since they are not in common use here [in England], I give up as bad; for certainly in writings intended for persuasion and for general information, one cannot be too clear; and every expression in the least obscure is a fault. The *unshakable,* too, tho clear, I give up as rather low. The introducing new words, where we are already possessed of old ones sufficiently expressive, I confess must be generally wrong, as it tends to change the language…. I hope with you, that we shall always in America make the best English of this Island our standard, and I believe it will be so."[54]

The first dictionary of Americanisms was published in 1816 by John Pickering under the title *A Vocabulary, or Collection of Words and Phrases which have been supposed to be Peculiar to the United States of America.* Although the work of an American, it is thoroughly English in its point of view. Both in the introductory essay that accompanies it and in the comment throughout the body of the glossary Pickering shows clearly that he has been inspired by a desire to purify the language of his countrymen by pointing out all departures from English usage and persuading them that only by strict accord with that usage can they hope to write pure English. This attitude aroused the wrath of Noah Webster, who felt that his own position had been attacked. With manifest effort at self-control he replied in a published *Letter to the Honorable John Pickering on the Subject of His Vocabulary* (1817). "With regard to the general principle," he wrote, "that we must use only such words as the English use let me repeat, that the restriction is, in the nature of the thing, impracticable, and the demand that we should observe it, is as improper as it is arrogant. Equally impertinent is it to ridicule us for retaining the use of genuine English words, because they happen to be obsolete in London, or in the higher circles of life." "Let it be further observed," he said, "that the charge against the people of this country, of introducing new words, is, to a great degree, unfounded. Your own researches have proved this fact. I question whether ten words can be found among men of reputable character in the United States, which are not authorized by English usage, either general or local. But whether the number is ten or fifty, is not material. New words will be formed and used, if found necessary or convenient, without a license from Englishmen." The battle was on.

[54] *Writings,* ed. A.H.Smyth, IV, 83–84. In the same place Franklin says: "Yet, at the same time, I cannot but wish the usage of our tongue permitted making new words, when we want them, by composition of old ones whose meanings are already well understood…."

A much more ambitious *Dictionary of Americanisms* was published in 1848 by John R.Bartlett and greatly enlarged in a second edition of 1859. The author was for three years commissioner on the Mexican boundary and had an opportunity to gather many words from prairie and frontier life. Considering the date at which it was compiled, it is a very commendable piece of work. In it the older attitude of Pickering has given place almost entirely to an interest in dialect for its own sake. Bartlett refrains from controversy, and though he has no hope that "the pure old idiomatic English style can ever be restored in this country," he ventures the thought that we may some day have a"style and a literature which will also have their beauties and merits, although fashioned after a somewhat different model."

Up to the time of the Civil War the prevailing attitude in the United States seems to have been one of deference to English usage. In 1866, however, James Russell Lowell published in book form the Second Series of *The Biglow Papers* and supplied it with a lengthy introduction. Ostensibly an exposition of the dialect in which the *Papers* were written, this essay is in reality one of the most important contributions to the controversy over Americanisms. Although it had often been recognized that many of the distinctive features of American English were survivals of the older English of England, no one had been at pains to bring together the enormous mass of evidence on the subject. Lowell filled more than fifty pages with closely packed but eminently readable parallels to American expressions, drawn from his wide reading of the older literature of England. His reputation both in this country and abroad ensured a wide public for his views. Since the appearance of this essay, the legitimacy of one large class of Americanisms has not been questioned. Those who have written most on the subject, such as Lounsbury[55] and Brander Matthews, have generally taken Lowell's defense as a point of departure, explicitly or implicitly, and have employed their strength in combatting the idea that because an expression is of American origin it has no right to a hearing. They have preached the doctrine of American English for the American as a natural mark of intellectual sincerity. "For our novelists to try to write Americanly, from any motive," said William Dean Howells, "would be a dismal error, but being born Americans, we would have them use 'Americanisms' whenever these serve their turn; and when their characters speak, we should like to hear them speak true American, with all the varying Tennesseean,

[55] Lounsbury further stressed the fact that many so-called Americanisms were not Americanisms at all by pointing to parallels in the English dialects. He found such "typically American" expressions as *to ride like blazes, in a jiffy, a tip-top fellow, before you could say Jack Robinson, that's a whopper, gawky* (awkward), *glum* (gloomy), *gumption* (sense), *sappy* (silly) in a glossary for Suffolk, England, published in 1823. Cf. the *International Rev.,* 8 (1880), 479.

Philadelphian, Bostonian, and New York accents."[56] What Brander Matthews, in his *Americanisms and Briticisms,* wrote of English criticism of American spelling has a wider significance as indicative of the contemporary attitude in America toward English authority in matters of linguistic usage: "Any American who chances to note the force and the fervor and the frequency of the objurgations against American spelling in the columns of the *Saturday Review,* for example, and of the *Athenaeum,* may find himself wondering as to the date of the papal bull which declared the infallibility of contemporary British orthography, and as to the place at which it was made an article of faith." By the end of the twentieth century passionate criticisms and defenses of Americanisms had given way to other concerns about language, and the general attitude on both sides of the Atlantic now seems to be close to what the British author William Archer wrote a century earlier: "New words are begotten by new conditions…. America has enormously enriched the language."

252. *The Purist Attitude.*

The controversy over Americanisms has at times been more or less connected in the United States with the purist attitude,[57] always an element in linguistic discussions in any age. There is nothing, of course, to compel purists in America to be hostile to an American standard of "purity," but as a matter of fact they were in the beginning almost always identical with those who accepted English usage as a norm and believed that Americans should conform as completely as possible to it. While theoretically the purist ideal and advocacy of the English standard are two quite distinct things, they are so often united in our guardians of linguistic decorum that it would be difficult to separate them for purposes of discussion. Conversely, in England at any time during the nineteenth century any impurity in the language, meaning anything that the individual purist objected to, was more likely than not to be described as an Americanism. Coleridge objected to "that vile and barbarous word, *talented,*" adding, "Most of these pieces of slang come from America." *Talented* did not come from America, though the point is of no consequence. Mencken tells us that *scientist* was denounced as "an ignoble Americanism" in 1890.[58] It is well known that the word has been disliked by many in England, although it was coined in 1840 by an Englishman.

[56] *Harper's Magazine*, 32 (1886), 325.
[57] *Purist* and *purism* "are for the most part missile words, which we all of us fling at anyone who insults us by finding not good enough for him some manner of speech that is good enough for us…; by *purism* is to be understood a needless and irritating insistence on purity or correctness of speech." (Fowler, *Modern English Usage* [Oxford, 1926], pp. 474–75.)
[58] *TheAmerican Language* (1st ed.), p. 38.

That the various modifications of the English language in the United States were all "gross corruptions" was a belief vigorously expressed by an anonymous writer of 1800 in *The Monthly Magazine and American Review*. The article "On the Scheme of an American Language" contains an ironical reference to those who "think grammars and dictionaries should be compiled by natives of the country, not of the British or English, but of the American tongue." After thus paying respects to Webster, the author states the conviction that for their standard of language Americans must look to "the best educated class, whose dialect is purified by intimate intercourse with English books."

Pickering, whose *Vocabulary* of Americanisms has been mentioned above, begins his introductory essay with the statement: "The preservation of the English language in its purity throughout the United States is an object deserving the attention of every American, who is a friend to the literature and science of his country." This seems general enough, but after quoting several pages of extracts from English journals in condemnation of Americanisms, he adds that the language of the United States "has in so many instances departed from the English standard, that our scholars should lose no time in endeavouring to restore it to its purity, and to prevent future corruption." In 1835 an unknown writer in the *Southern Literary Messenger* looked forward (none too hopefully) to the time when "we shall no longer see such a term as *firstly* in a work on metaphysics, nor hear such a double adverb as *illy* on the floor of Congress—no longer hear of an event's *transpiring,* before it has become public, nor of an argument being *predicated* on such and such facts." He stated that the only safeguard against such licenses was the adoption of some common and acknowledged standard. "Such a standard exists in the authorized classics of Great Britain." The famous "Index Expurgatorius" of William Cullen Bryant has often been cited as an example of the purist ideal in journalism. It is a list of words that he excluded from the New York *Evening Post* and that seems to have grown up gradually during the years (1829–1878) when he was the editor of this well-known newspaper. Many of the expressions he disliked "bear the stamp of vulgarity, pretension, haste, and slang," but the only objection to some of them, such as *dutiable, presidential, lengthy* (defended by Webster fifty years before), seems to have been the fact that they were Americanisms. A purist of a rather extreme type was Richard Grant White. In his books called *Words and Their Uses* (1870) and *Every-Day English* (1880) conformity to the purist ideal and acceptance of the English standard of usage become practically synonymous. In the preface to the former book he specifically disavows any right of Americans "to set up an independent standard." His opinion carried much weight with a certain class of people, a class possessed of a fine, if somewhat old-fashioned, culture. Such people are likely to have the point of view of the purist and to be more or less constantly influenced by English literary tradition.

With the establishment during the previous century and the flourishing during the present of a modern tradition in American literature, the authority of English opinion and usage has diminished. Sentiments favoring prescriptivism persist, however, and the purist ideal continues to find expression in the popular press and in lexicographical enterprises. When the Merriam Company published *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* in 1961, an outpouring of reviews ignored the considerable merits of the dictionary to criticize its restraint in legislating on matters of usage. The inclusion of *finalize* and *normalcy* without statements of their acceptability and of *irregardless* (though it was

labeled "nonstandard") stirred editorial responses of extraordinary emotion and hostility. When the *New York Times* announced that it would continue to use the *Second International* edition of 1934, Bergen Evans pointed out that the very issue of the *Times* which made the announcement used 153 separate words, phrases, and constructions listed in the *Third International* but not in the *Second* and nineteen others that are condemned in the *Second*. Evans concluded: "Anyone who solemnly announces in the year 1962 that he will be guided in matters of English usage by a dictionary published in 1934 is talking ignorant and pretentious nonsense."[59] It is no more reasonable to look to a past, or a supposed past, in American lexicography for guidance in the current use of the language than to look across the ocean. The purist ideal is a manifestation of the same temperament in America as elsewhere in the world. In the United States it has been guided in past years by a considerable respect for English opinion and usage, and in recent times by what seems to be self-confident introspection.[60] In all periods, the purist ideal has made the answers to difficult questions rather easier than they actually are. The judgments that can be asserted for lists of words taken without regard to context, audience, or expository intent imply falsely that linguistic forms have a certain value once and for all, and that the keys to effective writing and speaking can be found in the mastery of a few, clear, permanent proscriptions.

253. *Present Differentiation of Vocabulary.*

Except in pronunciation the distance that the English language in America has traveled in its separation from that of England is chiefly measured in its vocabulary. It is easy to exaggerate the

[59] "But What's a Dictionary For?" *Atlantic* (May 1962), p. 62; reprinted in an instructive collection of reviews and essays on the subject, *Dictionaries and* That *Dictionary,* ed. James Sledd and Wilma R.Ebbitt (Chicago, 1962), p. 248.
[60] As, for example, in Dwight Macdonald, "The String Untuned," *The New Yorker* (March 10, 1962), pp. 130–34, 137–40, 143–50, 153–60; reprinted in Sledd and Ebbitt, pp. 166–88.

importance of the differences that can be readily pointed out. The American on going to England or the British traveler on arriving in America is likely to be impressed by them, because each finds the other's expressions amusing when they do not actually cause puzzlement. As examples of such differences the words connected with the railroad and the automobile are often cited. The British word for *railroad* is *railway,* the *engineer* is a *driver,* the *conductor* a *guard*. The *baggage car* is a *van,* and the *baggage* carried is always *luggage*. American *freight train* and *freight yard* become in Britain *goods train* and *goods yard*. Some of the more technical terms are likewise different. A *sleeper* in the United States is a sleeping car; in Britain it is what Americans call a *tie*. American *switch* is a *point,* a *grade crossing* a *level crossing,* and so on. In connection with the automobile, the British speak of a *lorry* (truck), *windscreen* (windshield), *bonnet* (hood), *sparking plugs, gear lever* (gearshift), *gearbox* (transmission), *silencer* (muffler), *boot* (trunk), *petrol* (gasoline or gas). British *motorway* is American *expressway* and *dual carriageway* is *divided highway*. Such differences can be found in almost any part of the vocabulary: *lift* (elevator), *post* (mail), *hoarding* (billboard), *nappy* (diaper), *spanner* (wrench), *underground* (subway), *cotton wool* (absorbent cotton), *barrister* (lawyer), *dustman* (garbage collector). Americans readily recognize the American character of *ice cream soda, apple pie, popcorn,free lunch, saloon* from their associations, and can understand why some of them would not be understood elsewhere. A writer in the London *Daily Mail* complained that an English person would find "positively incomprehensible" the American words *commuter, rare* (as applied to underdone meat), *intern, tuxedo, truck farming, realtor, mean* (nasty), *dumb* (stupid), *enlisted man, seafood, living room, dirt road,* and *mortician,* although some of these have since become normal in British English. It is always unsafe to say what American words a British person will not understand, and there are some pairs in this list that would be pretty generally "comprehended" on both sides of the Atlantic. Some words have a deceptive familiarity. *Lumber* with Americans is timber but in Britain is discarded furniture and the like. *Laundry* in America is not only the place where clothing and linen are washed but the articles themselves. A *lobbyist* in England is a parliamentary reporter, not one who attempts to influence the legislative process, and a *pressman* for Americans is not a reporter but one who works in the pressroom where a newspaper is printed.[61]

It is of course on the level of more colloquial or popular speech that the greatest differences are noticed. The American seems to have a genius for

[61] For words, phrases, and syntactic structures from British English that have recently been adopted into American English, see John Algeo, "The Briticisms Are Coming! How British English is Creeping into the American Language," *Journal of English Linguistics,* 23 (1990–95), 123–40.

ephemeral coinages that are naturally quite meaningless to one who is not constantly hearing them. *Bawl out, bonehead, boob, bootlegger, dumbbell, flivver, go-getter, grafter, hootch, peach of a, pep, punk,* and to *razz* are part of a long list of terms in an American novel that had to be explained by a glossary in the British edition. There is nothing surprising about the geographical limitations of slang. Colloquial language has always shown more local variation than the more formal levels of speech. There were doubtless many colloquialisms current in Shakespeare's London that would not have been understood in contemporary Stratford. These do not constitute the English language either in Britain or America. It is well to remember that in the written language the difference between the British and the American use of words is often so slight that it is difficult to tell, in the case of a serious book, on which side of the Atlantic it was written.

254. *American Words in General English.*

The difference between the British and the American lexicon today is lessened by the fact that many American words have made their way into British use, and their number appears to be increasing rather than diminishing. Often they have had to make their way against long and bitter opposition. The verbs to *advocate, placate,* and *antagonize* were buried under a literature of protest during most of the nineteenth century. This is not true of most of the early words adopted by the colonists from the Native Americans for Native American things. Other words associated with American things have at times been accepted fairly readily: *telephone, phonograph, typewriter, ticker, prairie* are familiar examples. Some American political terms, especially those associated with less admirable practices, have also been taken in: *caucus, logrolling, graft, to stump,* among others. It is easy to recognize the American origin of such words as *to lynch, blizzard, jazz, joyride, bucket shop,* but in many other cases the American origin of a word has been forgotten or the word has been so completely accepted in Britain that the dictionaries do not think it important any longer to state the fact. Generally speaking, it may be said that when an American word expresses an idea in a way that appeals to the British as fitting or effective, the word is ultimately adopted in Britain. Ernest Weekley, in his *Adjectives—and Other Words,* says: "It is difftcult now to imagine how we got on so long without the word *stunt,* how we expressed the characteristics so conveniently summed up in *dope-fiend* or *high-brow,* or any other possible way of describing that mixture of the cheap pathetic and the ludicrous which is now universally labelled *sob-stuff*' It is difficult to determine how large the debt of English is to the American vocabulary, but in the last two hundred years it has probably exceeded the debt of English to any other source.

255. *Scientific Interest in American English.*

Apart from the interest in Americanisms, which, as we have seen, goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, considerable study of American English as a branch of English philology developed during the twentieth century. It began with the investigation by individual scholars of particular dialects or regional characteristics.

Pioneers in the field were George Hempl, Charles H.Grandgent, and O.F.Emerson.[62] Interest in American dialects led to the formation in 1889 of the American Dialect Society, which published a journal called *Dialect Notes*. The society, reorganized, now issues *PADS (Publications of the American Dialect Society).* In 1919 H.L.Mencken published a book of nearly 500 pages which he called *The American Language*. This contained a large amount of entertaining and valuable material presented in a popular way and had the effect of stimulating a wider interest in the subject. It has gone through four editions, and subsequently two supplements were published (1945 and 1948), both larger than the original book.[63] A few years later a magazine called *American Speech* was launched, in which popular and technical discussions appear as evidence of the twofold appeal that American English has for the people of this country. In 1925 George P.Krapp published the first comprehensive and scholarly treatment of American English in his two-volume work *The English Language in America*. This is the work of a philologist but is not without its attraction for the lay person. Subsequently there have been prepared and published at the University of Chicago *A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles,* edited by Sir William Craigie and James R. Hulbert (4 vols., Chicago, 1938–1944), and A *Dictionary of Americanisms, on Historical Principles,* the work of Mitford M.Mathews (2 vols., Chicago, 1951). An American dictionary comparable with Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* has been a goal of the American Dialect Society since its founding. The *Dictionary of American Regional English* (1985–) under the editorship of Frederic G.Cassidy achieves that goal and provides an invaluable account of American dialects as they were recorded between 1965 and 1970. The five-year period of fieldwork in more than one thousand communities in all fifty states provides an almost instantaneous picture in comparison with the time required for most dialect surveys.

Much longer in the making and in many ways the most important of the undertakings designed to record the characteristics of American speech is the

[62] Grandgent was interested in the speech of New England. His most important essays on the New England dialect are reprinted in a volume called *Old and New* (Cambridge, MA, 1920). Emerson's monograph on the dialect of Ithaca, New York, was the first extensive study of an American dialect.

[63] A convenient abridged edition in one volume, with annotations and new material is by Raven McDavid, Jr. (New York, 1963).

Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, publication of which began in 1939. Although conceived as a single enterprise, the various regional projects have evolved into a series of independent but closely associated investigations. In this undertaking America has followed the lead of Europe. In the latter part of the nineteenth century there began to grow up an interest in linguistic geography, the study of the geographic distribution of linguistic phenomena. Apart from the value of such study in ensuring the preservation of accurate records of dialects and even languages that were in process of dying out, it was seen that it might play an important role in linguistic science. The best way to study the phenomena of linguistic evolution and change is in the living speech of communities whose origin, cultural development, and relation to other communities can still be traced. Accordingly there have been published, or are in course of preparation, linguistic atlases for more than a dozen European speech areas, notably French, German, and Italian.[64] The proposal for an American atlas was made in 1928 at a meeting of the Modern Language Association and, independently, at a session of the Linguistic Society. With the support of the American Council of Learned Societies, work was begun in 1931 under the direction of Professor Hans Kurath of the University of Michigan. The portion of the *Atlas* covering the New England states was published during the first twelve years of the project, the data being presented graphically in a series of 730 maps.[65] Records of the speech of some 200 communities were made. "In each community at least two informants (subjects) are selected: (1) An elderly representative of the long established families whose speech is felt to be old fashioned. (2) A representative of the middle-aged group who has not had too much schooling and has preserved, in the main, the local type of speech." The history of the settlement is traced and generally a fairly full history of the individual informant is obtained before he or she is approached. The material collected covers pronunciation, grammatical forms, syntactical usages, and vocabulary and is obtained

[64] For an account of the various surveys then being made see J.Schrijnen, *Essai de bibliographie de géographie linguistique générale* (Nimègue, 1933). Later information may be found in the issues of *Orbis: Bulletin internationale de documentation linguistique* (Louvain, 1952–). For a survey of earlier work and a general treatment of the province of linguistic geography, see Albert Dauzat, *La Géographie linguistique* (Paris, 1922), and the exhaustive work of Sever Pop, *La Dialectologie: Aperçu historique et méthodes d'enquêtes linguistiques* (2 vols., Louvain, 1950). William A.Kretzschmar, Jr., traces the relation of the older European work to current studies in "Dialectology and Sociolinguistics: Same Coin, Different Currency, *Language Sciences,* 17 (1995), 271–82.

[65] *Linguistic Atlas of New England*, ed. Hans Kurath et al. (3 vols., in 6 parts, Providence, 1939–1943), with a *Handbook of the Linguistic Geography of New England,* by Kurath et al. (Providence, 1939), discussing the dialect areas distinguished, the selection of communities and informants, the settlement of New England, the work sheets, and various procedural matters.

by means of a carefully prepared questionnaire designed to bring out the most characteristic dialectal features, known or suspected.[66] The answers are recorded in phonetic notation and supplemented by phonograph records and tapes. A half century after the publication of the *Linguistic Atlas of New England,* the volumes for the Upper Midwest (Minnesota, lowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota) and for the Gulf states (Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and East Texas) have appeared,[67] and materials for most of the other regions have been collected or are well advanced. Even in their unedited and unpublished form, they have been the source for a number of regional studies (see footnote 27, page 376).

Any large project that requires several decades to record features of a language will encounter the problem of changes in the language as well as changes in the methods of studying human institutions. In the half century since the inception of the *Linguistic Atlas,* both kinds of change have occurred at a rapid rate in the United States. While the Atlas fieldworkers were recording rural linguistic items from older, settled speakers, American society was becoming increasingly mobile and urban. In recent years linguists have turned more of their attention to the complex patterns of speech in the cities of the United States. William Labov's work has been especially influential in its application of techniques from sociology to the description of urban speech. In studying the social varieties of English, Labov and others have attempted to observe the language in its social setting, outside the artificial context of an interview.[68] The methodological conclusions that these linguists have drawn from their trials, failures, and successes in recording urban English are as important as their descriptions of particular pronunciations or syntactic structures. Labov argues that the lack of verbal ability and logic that some linguists find in nonstandard English is the result of asking the wrong questions in the wrong situations and then analyzing the answers within the

[66] See Alva L.Davis, Raven I.McDavid, Jr., and Virginia G.McDavid, eds., *A Compilation of the Work Sheets of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada and Associated Projects* (2nd ed., Chicago, 1969).

[67] Harold B.Allen, *The Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest* (3 vols., Minneapolis, 1973–1976); and Lee Pederson, ed., *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States* (7 vols., Athens, GA, 1986–1992). The materials for the rest of the Atlantic seaboard, collected during the 1930s and early 1940s by Guy S.Lowman, were passed to Hans Kurath, then to Raven I.McDavid, Jr., and now to William A.Kretzschmar, Jr., whose team has edited the *Handbook of the Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States* (Chicago, 1993). See also William A.Kretzschmar, Jr., and Edgar W.Schneider, *Introduction to Quantitative Analysis of Linguistic Survey Data: an Atlas by the Numbers* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1996) and William A.Kretzschmar, Jr., "Quantitative and Areal Analysis of Dialect Features," *Language Variation and Change,* 8 (1996), 13–39. Many of the Linguistic Atlas materials are now available on the Internet at http://us.uga.edu/.

[68] See William Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia, 1972), chap. 8, and *Language in the Inner City* (Philadelphia, 1972), chaps. 5–7.

investigator's linguistic system rather than the subject's. If the practical implications that have been drawn from recent sociolinguistic studies are often contradictory, the contradictions are hardly surprising at our present stage of understanding.[69] It is unrealistic to expect the discipline of sociolinguistics, which has only recently acquired its name, to provide immediate solutions to problems that are rooted not only in the stratification of the language but finally in the society that the language reflects.

At the same time that linguistic geography and sociolinguistics were contributing so much to our knowledge of the language of the United States in its regional and social aspects, the study of American English was making great advances in one other direction, that of its basic structure. In the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth the interests of linguistic scholars were mainly historical and comparative. Such studies, of course, still constitute a large and important field of scholarship. But with the increasing interest in the United States in the recording and interpretation of the languages of Native Americans, new procedures were found to be necessary to deal with structures totally different from those of the languages most familiar to us, the languages of Europe and western Asia. In the new approach Franz Boas and his pupil Edward Sapir were the pioneers, and their work was supplemented and continued by Leonard Bloomfield. The publication in 1933 of Bloomfield's book *Language,* the most important work on general linguistics in the first half of the twentieth century, marked a turning point in American linguistic scholarship. The methods that had proved their worth in the study of Native American languages began to be applied to the study of American English (and other modern languages). Starting with the premise that any language is a structured system of arbitrary signals (here conceived of as vocal sounds), structural linguistics sought to determine which elements (including stress, intonation, pauses, etc.) are significant and to describe the pattern in which they are organized. It began with phonemic analysis[70] and proceeded

[69] Cf. the contrasting conclusions drawn by Labov, "The Logic of Nonstandard English," in *Language in the Inner City,* chap. 5, and those by the influential British sociologist Basil Bernstein, "Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences," in *The Ethnography of Communication,* ed. J.J.Gumperz and D.Hymes, special pub. of *American Anthropologist,* 66, no. 6, part 2 (1964), 55–69.

[70] The *phoneme* is a minimum unit of speech sound in any given language or dialect by which a distinction is conveyed. Thus the initial sounds of *pit* and *bit* in English are different phonemes. On the other hand, the initial sounds of *keep* and *coop* (or *Kodak*), though physiologically and acoustically different, are in English (but not, for example, in Arabic) only varieties of the phoneme /k/ because they always occur in different phonetic environments, and in phonemic transcription need not be represented by different symbols. Such varieties of the same phoneme are called *allophones* and are said to be in complementary distribution. It is customary to enclose phonetic symbols within brackets [k], phonemes between diagonal strokes /k/.

from there to morphology and syntax. It generally ignored semantics, or the study of meaning.[71]

In 1957 Noam Chomsky presented a radically different model of language in a thin, technical book entitled *Syntactic Structures*. Instead of beginning the description with phonology, as the structuralists who followed Bloomfield had done, Chomsky began with syntax and argued that the part of the grammar which describes syntactic structures should have priority as the creative component. By this view, the other two major parts of grammar—semantics and phonology—are "interpretive components," the purpose of which is to act upon and assign meaning and sound to the structures generated by the syntax. In characterizing the syntactic component of grammar as "creative," Chomsky brought attention to certain obvious but easily overlooked facts about English (and every other natural language), and he pointed out inadequacies in existing systems of descriptive grammar. The fact that speakers of English can recognize and produce sentences which they have never before encountered suggests that the grammar which describes English must provide for infinite syntactic novelty. But the grammar itself must be a finite thing if one assumes that a goal of linguistic description is to account for the knowledge—or, in a technical sense of the word, the "competence"—of a native speaker of a language. Chomsky sketched a model of a grammar that was unlike existing grammars in its ability to generate an infinite number of sentences from a finite set of rules. In addition, he formalized the kind of rule necessary to show certain relationships of meaning, as for example between an active sentence and its corresponding passive form. These rules which show relationships are known as *transformational rules,* and the system of description is known as *generative grammar*. In its revised forms in Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (New York, 1965) and *Lectures on Government and Binding: The Pisa Lectures* (Dordrecht, Holland, 1981), it has become the most influential system of linguistic description in the second half of the twentieth century, and it has had a significant effect on the related disciplines of psychology and sociology, as well as on the teaching of grammar in the schools.[72] During the past quarter century a number of linguists have challenged, and others have

[71] H.A.Gleason, An *Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics* (rev. ed., New York, 1961) is a good general treatment of linguistics from a structural point of view. See also G.L.Trager and H.L.Smith, Jr., *An Outline of English Structure* (Norman, OK, 1951; *Studies in Linguistics, Occasional Papers,* no. 3); C.C.Fries, *The Structure of English* (New York, 1952); and A.A.Hill, *Introduction to Linguistic Structures* (New York, 1958), as well as the numerous publications of B.Bloch, W.N.Francis, R.A.Hall, Z.S.Harris, C.F.Hockett, H.M.Hoenigswald, E.A.Nida, K.L.Pike, M.Swadesh, W.F.Twaddell, and R.S.Wells, to mention only a few.

[72] For the highly abstract phonology of generative grammar, the major work is by Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle, *The Sound Pattern of English* (New York, 1968).

defended and modified, various parts of the extended standard theory of generative grammar.[73] In the 1960s participants in the debate often viewed their discipline as parallel to the natural sciences in its pattern of advancement, and Chomsky's model was seen as a "paradigm change" in the sense described by Thomas S.Kuhn.[74] The lively attacks on Chomsky's model and the counterattacks on competing theories were inspired in part by the belief that further changes in the paradigm were imminent. After a period of extreme fragmentation in the 1970s, the major linguistic theories have developed in a general direction of convergence, at least to the extent that some form of generative grammar is the overwhelmingly preferred orientation for any discussion of theoretical syntax and phonology. The most obvious challenges to Chomsky's Government-Binding approach to syntax, including Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar and Lexical-Functional Grammar, are themselves generative grammars.[75] A criticism sometimes made of all generative grammars is that they deal with marginal sentences invented by the linguist rather than with empirical surveys of actual language use. Such a criticism misses the point that the marginal sentences lead to a distinction between a "core" language (the idealized structures that are determined arbitrarily by universal grammar) and a "periphery" (the parts of a particular language or dialect that are unsystematic: the results of borrowings, historical residues, inventions, and so on). With this distinction, better descriptions of English in all its varieties are possible, as for example, in the studies of pidgins and creoles by Derek Bickerton and others (see § 230). In identifying both what does not occur in a dialect, the gaps, and also the historical accretions, one can provide a more adequate description of the dialects of American English or of any other variety.

256. ***American English and World English.***

In bringing the history of the English language to a conclusion with a chapter on American English, it is clear that the United States and the United Kingdom are countries whose national varieties of the language (each with varieties within it) serve as major points of reference and contrast. As regards the formal written language, the differences between British English and American English are so minor that often a para-

[73] Among the hundreds of books, articles, and papers on syntactic theory during the past three decades, the advanced student will find important developments in John R.Ross, "Constraints on Variables in Syntax" (Dissertation, MIT, 1967), published as *Infinite Syntax* (Norwood, NJ, 1985); Noam Chomsky's *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use* (New York, 1986) and *The Minimalist Program* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); James D.McCawley, *The Syntactic Phenonmena of English* (2 vols., Chicago, 1988); and Irene Heim and Angelika Kratzer, *Semantics in Generative Grammar* (Malden, MA, 1998).
[74] *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed., Chicago, 1970).
[75] See Carl Pollard and Ivan A.Sag, *Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar* (Chicago, 1994); and Joan Bresnan, *Lexical-Functional Syntax* (Malden, MA, 2001).

graph of a whole essay will not reveal the nationality of the author. A century ago American commentators often felt called upon to defend their national variety, though it is hard to find anyone much concerned about the matter now. There is nothing at present like the sustained controversy over Americanisms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see § 251), and a judgment such as Basil De Selincourt's would be taken as facetious exaggeration on either side of the Atlantic: "Only when we hear English on the lips of Americans do we fear for its integrity." To be sure, during most of the twentieth century Europeans preferred British English, and European instruction in English as a foreign language followed the norms of British English in pronunciation (specifically RP), lexical choice, and spelling. This was a result of proximity, the effective methods of language teaching developed by British institutions such as the British Council, and the perceived "prestige" of the British variety. As American English grew more influential in the world, it became an option alongside British English in mainland Europe and elsewhere. For a while, especially during the second half of the twentieth century, a prominent attitude was that either variety was acceptable for a learner of English as long as each variety was kept distinct. The idea was that one could speak British English or American English but not a random mix of the two.

The global context of English described in Chapter 10 has made the traditional categories more problematic and the choices more complex than they were previously perceived to be. It is worth distinguishing again between English as a second language (especially in multilingual countries where English has an official status) and English as a foreign language. Where English is widely used as a second language, as in India, Africa, and Singapore, national varieties have developed that are neither British nor American, whatever the historical, political, and cultural interactions had been. Where English is mainly a foreign language, as in France, Japan, or China, the language often has a mix of British features and American features, Americanization being especially prominent in business and technology. As we have seen, there is linguistic variation among groups of native speakers within both Britain and American. Some of these varieties are more comprehensible than others, and some can be understood in international settings only with great difftculty. Indeed, many Scandinavian speakers of English can communicate more effectively in these settings than many British or American speakers with a strong regional dialect and accent. It has been argued that English as an international language is being shaped as much by non-native speakers as by native speakers, and the variety that is emerging will not be rooted in the culture, geography, and national sense of any country. The term "Mid-Atlantic English" has been used to describe this cosmopolitan variety.[76]

David Crystal, one of the leading scholars in reconceptualizing the categories of an expanding global English points to his own three dialects: his original Welsh/Liverpool mix functioning as a marker of local identity; his educated (Standard) British English functioning both as a means of national communication within Britian and as a marker of national identity outside; and what he foresees as an international standard of spoken English, to be used as a means of international communication.[77] A form of this last variety can be seen in "Euro-English," in which politicians, diplomats, and civil servants from Britain working in Brussels accommodate their use of English to speakers of other languages. This result is not "foreigner talk" or anything resembling pidgin, but

something more subtle: the accommodation of an increasingly syllable-timed rhythm (as in French), the avoidance of idioms and colloquial vocabulary, a slower rate of speech, and the avoidance of some of the assimilations and elisions that would be natural in a first-language setting (p. 15).

American English may be the most prominent source of emerging global English, and yet it will be American English deracinated and adapted in a utilitarian way to the needs of speakers whose geography and culture are quite different. To the extent that Americans think about the global use of English at all, it is often as a possession that is lent on sufferance to foreigners, who often fail to get it right. Such a parochial attitude will change as more Americans become involved in the global economy and as they become more familiar with the high quality of literature being produced in post-colonial settings. Many earlier attacks on American English were prompted by the slang, colloquialisms, and linguistic novelties of popular fiction and journalism, just as recent criticism has been directed at jargon in the speech and writings of American government officials, journalists, and social scientists. Along with the good use of English there is always much that is indifferent or frankly bad, but the language of a whole country should not be judged by its least graceful examples. Generalizations about the use of English throughout a region or a culture are more likely to mislead than to inform, and questions that lead to such generalizations are among the least helpful to ask. In the United States, as in Britain, India, Ghana, and the Philippines, in Australia and

[76] See Marko Modiano, "Rethinking ELT," *English Today*, 62 (April 2000), 31. See also two related articles by Modiano, "International English in the Global Village," *English Today,* 58 (April 1999), 22–28, and responses, pp. 28–34; and "Standard English(es) and Educational Practices for the World's Lingua Franca," *English Today,* 60 (October 1999), 3–13.

[77] David Crystal, "The Future of Englishes," *English Today*, 58 (April 1999), 16.

Jamaica, one can find plentiful samples of English that deserve a low estimate, but one will find a language that has adapted to the local conditions, usually without looking over its shoulder to the standards of a far away country, and in so adapting has become the rich medium for writers and speakers of great talent and some of genius.

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