Università di Firenze Dipartimento di Formazione, Lingue, Intercultura, Letterature e Psicologia a.a. 2019-20 Corso di Laurea magistrale 37 in Lingue e Letterature moderne europee e americane

Laboratorio di Lingua e Traduzione inglese

“Characteristics and Varieties of North American English” John Gilbert

**Handout 1: Standard language, dialect, variety. Origins of English. World English today**

**standard language**

* the official language variety of a language community, especially in formal, institutional communication & in the codified written form
* holds social prestige, but is not “superior” or “better’ than the other language varieties
  + a standard is not a “neutral” variety of a language
  + not a pre-destined, superior form of a language
* “selected” for historical, socio-economic & political reasons

- *“A language is a dialect with an army and navy"* ([Yiddish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/yiddish_language) linguist [Max Weinreich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/max_weinreich), early 19th c)

- 4 distinct but overlapping stages in **standardization**:

1. **selection** of a particular variety/dialect in preference to all others

- stygmatization of other varieties

- for BE/RP: variety spoken by new mercantile class in London-Oxford-Cambridge triangle 15th/16th c

2. **acceptance** by the rest of language community

3. **functional elaboration** in official & public discourse; an omnifunctional variety

- e.g. English replacing Latin, French, regional forms in scholarship & education, diplomacy, the Court, government, law/tribunals, religion, etc.

4. **codification** (began systemically for English in 18th c)

- fixed in grammars, dictionaries, text books

- prestigious usage; exclusion, stigmatization/exclusion of other varieties & usages

- importance of **written form** for process of standardization

- needs to be taught explicitly, unlike spoken form of other language varieties

- notion of “standard English”

- but often much non-regional lexis

- English one of most (the most?) lexically mixed languages in world

- grammar of written language

- written norm has remained very homogeneous around the world

- no international norm for pronunciation

-spelling most fixed area; pronunciation the least

**dialect** (regional, ethnic, social class, etc.)

- a language variety socially subordinate to a national standard language, often historically cognate (related in origin; e.g. Italian & Spanish cognate languages) to the standard, but **not a mere variety** of it or in any other sense derived from it

- a **dialect** is a specific branch or form of a language spoken in a given geographical area, differing sufficiently from the official standard form of the language in one or all of the levels of the language (pronunciation, grammar/morphology/syntax, lexis, idiomatic use of words) to be viewed as a distinct linguistic entity, yet not sufficiently different from the other dialects of the language to be regarded as a separate language

-if a distinction can be made only in terms of pronunciation, the term [**accent**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/accent_(linguistics)) is more appropriate, not dialect (although in common usage, "dialect" and "accent" are often synonymous).

**variety**:

* a formally definable, conventionalized group use of language

**Origins of English language**

**Old English** (5th c to 1150)

- end of Roman rule in Britain in 410 AD

* also called “Anglo-Saxon” period: dialects referred to as “Anglo-Saxon”
* a West Germanic language which originated from Anglo-Frisian dialects brought to England from the mid-5th to 7th c A.D.

- began w/ settlement of Germanic-speaking tribes (Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Frisians) in Britain in mid-5th century

- an inflected language that slowly evolved a written literary form

* vocabulary expanded thru spread of Christian culture, with some lexis adopted or translated from Latin
* in 8th, 9th & 10th c Scandinavian Vikings raided & settled, bringing Old Norse, another Germanic language, & new lexis

**Middle English** (1150-1500)

- after Norman Conquest (Battle of Hastings 1066), Anglo-Norman was language of ruling classes,

but from 14th century Germanic “Englishes” again became the standard

- by 15th c most of its inflected endings had disappeared

- in Middle English period about half of iexis was replaced by Norman French & Latin Words

- Normans introduced ca. 10,000 words: many words related to semantic fields of administration, government, parliament, the legal system and the monarchy. Also beef, veal, pork, mutton, poultry, herb & juice. Also words beginning with ‘con’, ‘de’, ‘dis’ and ‘en’, as in: conceal, continue, demand, encounter, disengage & engage. Also words ending in ‘age’ & ‘ence’ such as : advantage, courage, language & commence.

**Modern English** (1500 onwards)

* development of English up to about 1500 as history of its dialects

- in 1500 spoken by perhaps 5 million people in England & southern Scotland

- no strong **centralizing influence** on “English” until after arrival of printing process from China (where originated in ca. 8th c) in **mid-15th century** & Gutenberg’s invention of the movable-type press in ca. 1450.

- printing introduced in England in 1470s

* **selection** of South-east Midland dialect of new London-based merchant class in 16th c

- London-Oxford-Cambridge triangle

- reached stage of **acceptance** during 16th c

- at least by elite of wider language community

- disappearance of 2nd person informal singular form *thou, thee, thy, thine, thyself*

- decline of *thou* in 17th c according to linguists: increasing identification of *you* w/ "polite society” w/ rise of mercantile capitalism & new merchant social class & uncertainty of using *thou* (for equals/

inferiors) versus *you* (for superiors): w/ unclear status of social relations, safer to use *you*

- 1611 King James authorized version of Bible

- by **middle of 17th c** level of shaky standardization of English

- the same “language” wherever it was spoken: possible for “educated” people to understand each

other in spoken & written English wherever they went

- 2-tier language became the norm & still is (standard form & dialect/variety)

- by late 17th c written records comprehensible to any educated reader today (unlike Chaucer or even

Shakespeare)

- by **18th century**, **Br English** had reached very much its present **standard** form

- but immediately challenged by **NAm variety** of newly independent USA

- standardization of **spelling** took place in the second half of the **18th century**

- publication of Dr. Johnson’s dictionary in **1755**

- but pronunciation kept changing esp. realisation of vowel phonemes & rhotic/non- rhotic /r/

- explains why spelling often does not correspond to pronunciation

- an advantage because spelling accommodates variances in pronunciation

- **18th century** society established the **prescriptive attitudes/normative approach** towards English so influential over the last three centuries.

- no major changes in English **grammar** since 18th century.

- in Later Modern English there has been some reduction in the amount by which **pronunciation** varies in BrE

- inside England the old rural dialects have been dying out, although there are still class & re gional accents in England.

- the biggest change in the consonant system in Later Modern English was the disappear-ance during the 18TH century of /r/ before a consonant or a pause in BE/RP English (non-rhotic accent)

- however the majority of the English-speaking community retain a rhotic accent with pre-consonantal and final /r/ (NAmE also IrishE, ScottishE, parts of SW England)

- English began to spread internationally in 16th c & then exploded in 19th & esp. 20th c

* after **Declaration of Independence** in **1776** & victory of “**American Revolution**” w/ end of war in 1783, the English spoken in the new Republic of the U.S.A. emerged as **another standard form** of **English** alongside British English

- U.S. linguistic nationalism; “Americanisms”

- **1828 Noah Webster**’s ***An American Dictionary of the English Language***

- in ca. 1850 the U.S. population overtook that of England

- in 1860 U.S. pop. (36 states) 31m; British (England, Wales, Scotland) pop. 30m

- but until about end of 19th century the major English speech-area still Britain

* until around end of WWII, center of gravity of English still in the Oxford-Cambridge-London triangle of South-east England

**World English today**

since World War II a range of **national standard forms** of English recognized in world: **British, North American, Irish (“Hibernian”), Scottish, Australian & New Zealand, South African**

- greatest differences among standard international varieties in **pronunciation**

- mostly regard the **vowel system** (BE 20 v. NAE 16 vowel phonemes) & **rhoticity**

- for this reason, paradoxically, one of greatest advantages of English may be lack of one-to-one relation between sound & spelling

- the consonant system of English, however, w/ exception of rhotic /r/, virtually same in all present-day varieties : 24 consonant phonemes

- also differences in lexis, small differences in grammar, minor spelling differences

* English also important as L2 in many parts of the world

- world’s most widely-used L2 (over 1 billion regular users)

- by 2050 est. 1/2 world pop. will be more or less proficient

- the international language of **globalization**

- English official or semi-official language in over 70 countries

- esp. in ex-British colonies such as Indian subcontinent (+ 80 million ESL & ca. 50m English 3rd language users in India) & Nigeria (pop. +200m).

- **ENL**, **ESL**, **ESD** (English as a 2nd dialect: speakers of a creole or other non-standard variety: e.g. Aboriginals in Australia, 1st Nations in Canada), **EFL**

- classification not sufficient but best model available

- “functional” v. “genetic” nativeness (Braj Kachru, 1997)

- 1st language English speakers not necessarily ENL

- ESL v. EFL distinction somewhat arbitrary

- really a **continuum** of usage

- ESL substitutes other languages for internal functions (as lingua franca) &

international functions

- situation of bi- or pluri-lingualism

- English as “language killer”

- **EFL** used for international functions, not internally: e.g. China, Egypt

- since about 1980 majority of English speakers in world **non-ENL** speakers

- **ESL** & **EFL** speakers now more than 3 times more than **ENL** speakers

- “near standards? - W. Indian/Jamaican, Indian subcontinent, Nigerian?

- “New Englishes”? e.g. India, Nigeria

- connected to new sense of national identity?

- the English language belongs to all those who use it

- phenomena of **denationalization, deculturization**, “**indigenization"**

- ENL speakers progressively “expropriated” of their language:

“the Empire strikes back”

- e.g. “Euro-English” of EU

- English has become a multi-centered language, w/ very strong NAE influence

- ongoing process of “Americanization" of lexis of various Englishes around world

- merging into a flexible & accommodating standard “World” or “Global” English

- already live & since 17-18th c have lived in a world w/ both an English language & a range of English languages

* models of linguistic reference (Braj Kachru, 1985): who establishes norms?

- ENL (inner circle) -> establishers of norms?

- ESL (outer circle) -> developers of norms?

- EFL (expanding circle) -> followers of norms?

- or now for English also establishers/developers of norms?