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 4: Regional Varieties of North American English**

* tendency towards linguistic homogeneity

- leveling effects: increase in mobility, mass media supraregional communication

- “covert prestige” of stigmatized regional/ethnic varieties

- strongest w/ marginalized groups

- identity markers, loaded w/ symbolic meaning

- 80% whites, 70% Afro-Ams., 75% Latinos attend segregated schools

(Frankenberg, Lee, Orfield *A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools: Are We losing the Dream?* 2003, also Davis *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City,* 2001, p. 135)

- NAE very uniform: most syntactical, lexical & phonological patterns shared by all varieties - many non-standard features used across regional, ethnic, social, sexual & age lines

- but frequency index varies

**social distinctions**:

- supra-regional uses of certain socially-stigmatized grammatical features:

- *ain’t*

- double modal (e.g. *I might could help you.)*

- multiple negation

- *them* as a demonstrative adjective (e.g. Hand me them cups.)

- *don’t* in 3rd person singular

- *was* w/ a plural subject

- *come, done, seen, knowed, drownded* for simple past

- *took, went, tore, fell, wrote,* etc. as past participle

- all very common forms; sometimes majority forms

- used most frequently by less well educated of rural & urban working class

**Regional varieties**: 3 major geographic varieties

1) **Northern** (including Canadian Eng. except Maritime Provinces)

2) **Midland**

3) **Southern**

- but also importance of social, ethnic, cultural differences

- within any region more than one form of English

- differences according to gender, race, ethnicity, education, social class

- e.g. greater norm-orientation of women

- but also great importance of **rural/traditional vs. urban varieties**

- grammatical differences relatively unimportant

- most differences concern pronunciation & lexis

- lexis, unlike pronunciation, more subject to conscious control

- regional lexical varieties easily replaced by more universal terms

- increasingly general NAE terms replacing regional distinctions

- lexical variation:

- e.g. *sub/submarine sandwich* (Pittsburgh), *hero* (NYC), *hoagie* (Philadelphia), *grinder* (Boston), *po’ boy* (New Orleans)

- Northern vs Midland: pail/bucket; teeter-totter/see-saw; fire-fly/lightning bug

- more sub-regional differences along Eastern coast than in rest of country (e.g. coastal New England, NYC)

- major regional contrast is between **Northern/Midland & South**

- lexical & pronunciation differences, but also to some extent grammatical

**1) Northern**

**Canadian English** (pop. ca. 38m (2019): 56% ENL; 20.6% French L1

- subvariety of NAE

- shares most linguistic characteristics

- few differences are in pronunciation & vocabulary

- almost universal use of idiomatic interjection: *“eh?”*

- **Newfoundland English** dialect

- high degree of linguistic homogeneity across Canada esp. west from Ontario (not Maritime provinces)

**2) Midland**

- North Midland usu. considered “General American”

- accent of national broadcasting networks

**3) Southern**

* strongest, best-known regional variety: higher frequency of non-standard forms

- but also great variation among Southern regions & generations

- marker of regional identity & cultural pride (covert prestige?)

- speaking slowly or “drawling” (lengthening & fronting vowels; *strascicare le parole)*

- **lack of rhoticity** in Coastal & Gulf Southern, but inland/upland/midland Southern (majority form today?) rhotic

* realization of /aI/ as (a’) or (a)

- *night, idea, ride, right, I, eyes, by*

* long vowels may be followed by a glide so strong it is made into an extra syllable, especially if followed by [l] or [r] -- "pale","beer", or “fool"
* diphthongization of traditional short front vowels: /æjə/ *pat,* /ejə/ *pet,* /Ijə/ pit
* pin & pen are indistinguishable, w/ the vowel sound merging toward a slightly lengthened [I]
* Heel and hill may also be indistinguishable: /hi:l/
* /j/ in words such as *new, dew, due* may occur through out South

- not “yod dropping” as in standard NAE

* plural 2nd person: *y’all/you all*
* possessive: *Y’all’s book is on the table.*
* *afixin’ to* or *fixin’ to* - to indicate immediate future action: about to do something: *He’s fixin’ to eat. They’re fixin’ to go.*
* verb forms: *drug, brung, drunk, drownded, knowed, choosed* as past tense for *drag, bring, drink, drown, know, choose*

*I knowed you for a fool as soon as I seen you.*

* perfective use of *done* as an auxiliary verb between the subject and verb in sentences conveying the past tense w/ sense of *already*

*I done told you before.*

- use of *done* (instead of *did*), *seen* (instead of *saw*) as simple past

*I only done what you done told me. I seen her first.*

- future *gon: I’m gon* – not *goin’* – *tell you something.* You 'gon like it.

- extreme types of multiple negation: *He’s not comin’, I don’t believe.*

* use of *was* instead of *were*
* use of *been* instead of *have been* in perfect continuous constructions

*I been livin’ here darn near my whole life.*

* use of doubt modals: *might could, might should, might would, used to could* (called “modal stacking”) *I might could climb to the top. I used to could do that.*
* preservation of older English *me, him,* etc. in reflexive forms

*I’m fixin’ to paint me a picture. He’s gon catch him a big one.*

* *this here* instead of *this* or *this one,* and *that there* instead of *that* or *that one.*

*This here’s mine and that there’s yours.*

* use of *ever* instead of *every:* *Ever’where’s the same these days.*

- use of *over yonder* instead of *over there*

- **strongly influenced by AAVE** (Afro-American Vernacular English)

- historically on slave plantations children played together till age of 6

- whites usually outnumbered

- Black women did nursing (*mammies)*