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The study of language

Aronoff, M., and Rees-Miller, J. (eds.) 2005. *The handbook of linguistics*. London: Blackwell.

This collection of essays summarizes the nature of the field of linguistics, including reports from both theoretical and applied research.

Banich, M. T., and Mack, M. (eds.) 2003. *Mind, brain, and language: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Banich and Mack bring together essays that explore the relationship between brain, mind, and language. Essay topics include language development, language processing, and the neurological bases of language.

Language acquisition

Gleitman, L., and Landau, B. (eds.) 1994. *The acquisition of the lexicon*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

This anthology brings together specialists from a variety of academic disciplines to discuss their research exploring issues related to the processes by which children acquire their lexicon so quickly and are then able to use it so creatively.

Hulst, L. M., and Howard, M. R. 1993. *Born to talk: An introduction to speech and language development*. New York: Macmillan.

This study traces language development stage by stage, attempting to reveal how culture, place, and identity interact as formative influences.

Jackendoff, R. 1994. *Patterns in the mind: Language and human nature*. New York: Basic Books.

The author lucidly explains contemporary theories about the structure and acquisition of human language.

Pinker, S. 1994. *The language instinct: How the mind creates language*. New York: HarperPerennial.

Psycholinguist Steven Pinker provides a basic introduction to the production and uses of language.

http://mbsj.dj.vanderkari(2009): American English: history, structure, usage. CUP. 19-40.

2 Defining American English

Key terms

Language variety
 American English
 Prolonged language contact
 Standard American English or SAE
 Privileged language
 First language
 Second language
 Linguistic relativity

Overview

This chapter asks you to explore the concept of American English by considering the historical connections between a nation's language and its national identity. You'll learn that the United States is a collection of diverse language communities, each using a variety of American English. You'll also realize that language is tied to social status. The languages of communities with high status, or power, in a society are privileged over the languages of other, less powerful communities. Finally, the chapter offers a view of American English in the world and how it is changing to fit the needs of diverse language communities. The Hot Topic asks you to explore the use of politically correct language in American English.

Introduction

Did you know that there is a long history of regarding American English as a "lesser" language? In colonial times, speakers of British English considered American English to be merely a corrupt version of their own language. In 1735, for example, the British tourist Francis Moore complained about the "barbarous" American use of the word *bluff* to describe a river bank, a meaning not employed in Britain. In 1887, one of Oscar Wilde's fictional

characters in *The Canterbury Ghost* comments, "We have really everything in common with America nowadays except, of course, language." Even more recently, in 1995, *The Times* quoted His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales complaining about the corrupting quality of American English.

Is American English really just a bad version of British English? Despite its detractors, you know this can't be true since, as you learned in Chapter 1, languages are not intrinsically "good" or "bad." A national language simply reflects the identity of a nation's people. In this chapter we'll examine how American English defines and expresses the national identity of the United States. As we begin to explore this complex topic, we ask you to first consider the examples of usage in Box 2.1.

Box 2.1 American English?

Examine the following sentences and identify the one(s) in American English:

1. "Let's redd-up the room."
2. "Don't block the box."
3. "El restaurante esta mucho busy today."
4. "How's by you?"
5. "She ask him but he busy."
6. "You go up in through there."

Actually, all of these sentences are American English, even though the vocabulary or the sentence structure might not be immediately recognizable to many of you. The first three sentences use vocabulary that's probably unfamiliar to the majority of American English speakers. We can easily identify the communities in which these usages are common. "Let's redd-up the room" comes from Pennsylvania Dutch country, where "redd-up" means that the speaker wants to clean up, in this case to clean up the room. You probably recognize all the words in the second sentence, "Don't block the box," but might not recognize what they mean in this particular usage. It's a message for drivers in New York City, warning them not to drive into an intersection until the way out of that intersection is clear. And the third sentence, "El restaurante esta mucho busy today," might be labeled "Spanglish" because it follows English sentence structure but combines Spanish and English vocabulary.

Although the words in the last three sentences are more commonly recognized than the words in the first three, each uses a sentence structure that many Americans might not understand. The fourth sentence, "How's by you?" might seem to be missing a word or two, but this sentence simply asks "How are you?" for natives in Wisconsin. Americans familiar with the language in urban areas or with the African American English dialect would recognize that, in sentence five, "She ask him but he busy," a woman has asked a man a question, but he was too busy to fulfill her request. Texas is represented in the sixth sentence, "You go up in through there," with the speaker giving directions by listing

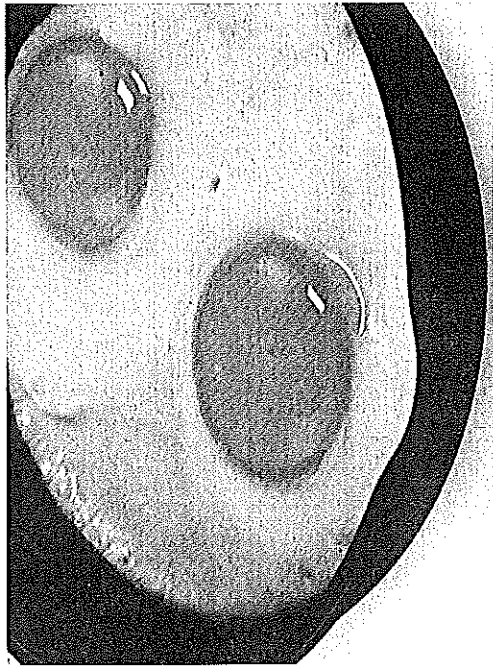


Figure 2.1 Do you prefer *dippy* eggs, *sunny-side-up* eggs, or *eggs over easy*? (©Stockphoto.com/Juammonino)

prepositions in a way that a non-Texan would undoubtedly find confusing. So as you see, each of these six sentences is tied to a specific American language community.

These sentences reveal that American English is extremely varied, differing in both vocabulary and sentence structure from one part of the country to another, and from one ethnic heritage to another (see Figure 2.1). (Chapter 8 discusses such language variation in more detail.) Because linguists recognize that all languages exist in varied usages rather than in a single unchanging form, they commonly discuss **language varieties**, a term that recognizes the diversity existing within a language, such as American English, without ranking these variations into some sort of imposed order. The fact that American English has specific varieties within it helps to define its uniqueness because other kinds of English, such as British English or Australian English, don't contain the same variations. Examining its varieties may help us to understand the composition of American English, yet this study doesn't define the language as a whole. What do we mean when we refer to "American English"? Let's try to answer this question below.

What is American English?

If we think about defining American English in terms of geography, we might claim that American English is the language that's spoken in the United States of America. This is obviously wrong, though, because many

languages are spoken in the United States in addition to American English. For example, think about all the Native Alaskan languages, or Spanish, or Russian, or any other of the languages spoken in America on a daily basis. Gordon (2005) lists the United States of America as having 162 living languages spoken within its borders. This number includes the languages spoken by immigrants and American English varieties of languages, such as Pennsylvania Dutch, as well as native languages such as the Aleut spoken in Alaska.

Claiming that American English is the English spoken in America is also wrong. Many other kinds of English are spoken regularly in the United States. Just think about all the British, Canadian, Scots, Irish, Australian, and other English speakers inside American borders who would be quite surprised if we were to claim they were speaking American English. Furthermore, American English speakers also exist in other countries around the world. Thus we have to conclude that using geography to identify American English doesn't provide a valid basis for a definition.

If we think about defining American English in terms of nationality, we might claim that it's the language spoken by Americans. Yet this definition, too, is flawed. Americans speak a wide variety of languages in addition to English; in fact, many Americans either don't speak English at all or are learning English as their second language. So identifying a speaker's nationality also fails to help when defining American English.

Having rejected the previous approaches, let's turn to a historical point of view, which might help us out. We can define **American English** as one of the many types of English, like Canadian English or Australian English or British English or Indian English and so on, that originated in England and traveled to America with British colonists. (See Figure 2.2) American English differs from the other types because it adapted over time to fit the needs of its speakers in the United States. This perspective is more helpful than the previous two approaches to defining American English because it gives us a way to describe the language. It also guides us toward thinking about its connection with the community that uses it and its important role in shaping a national American identity, as well as the identities of individual Americans.

The history of American English

The history of the American English language reflects the history of the nation itself, which teaches us that the United States has always been a land

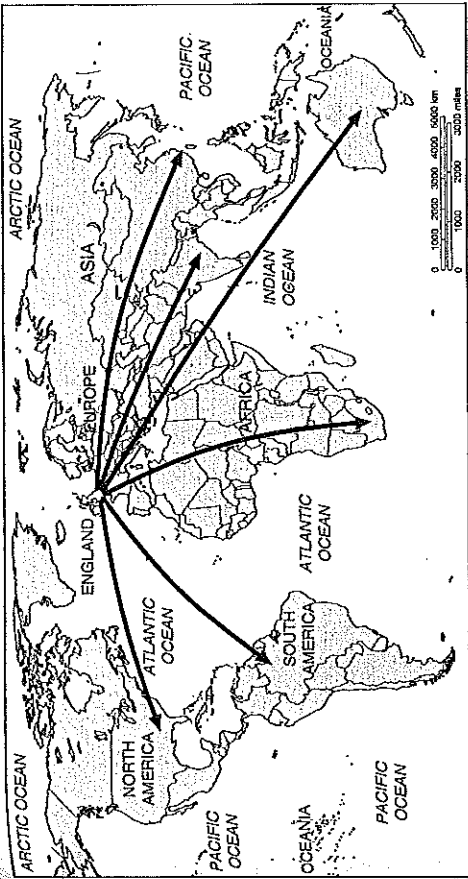


Figure 2.2 British colonization carried English around the world

of immigrants. And because immigration brings new peoples and languages into contact with each other, it has always been a dominant force of change on American English. The term **prolonged language contact** refers to the way that a language will change over time as a result of the users of one language interacting with the users of another language. Early colonists first brought English to America, and later waves of immigration brought new words and new influences, creating new prolonged language contacts for American English and so changing the language.

Exercise 2.1

Trace the history of your own personal language use by examining your family history and your geographical region. Where has prolonged language contact come into play in your own history? Be sure to consider the following questions:

1. Ancestry — What languages have shaped speakers in your family? What role has race and/or ethnicity played in these languages?
2. Geography — What regional variations have influenced the way you speak and the way earlier generations spoke?

Write up your findings in a two or three-page report, giving examples of the language you and your family use.

American English initially appeared when British colonists took up life along the eastern coastline of North America. From the moment the first colony was settled in Jamestown, the colonists found that their native language was no longer sufficient. The New World had animals, plants, peoples, and terrain

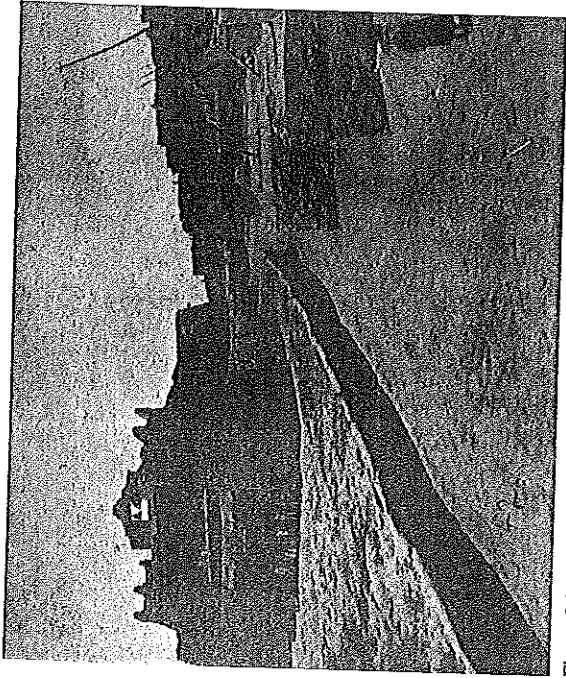


Figure 2.3 The Old Mission Church in Zuni, New Mexico, built in 1776
(Credit: T. H. O'Sullivan/The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-50460)

never before seen by the British, so new words had to be learned. Many times these words came from the Native Americans: *opossum*, *raccoon*, *skunk*, *hickory*, *pecan*, and *squash*, for example. And as new words were added, older words became obsolete. In addition, American English pronunciation began subtly altering as well, because the colonists would not have heard the same speech sounds that their family and friends in Britain heard on a daily basis. So even the first generation of colonists to the New World was already using a language different from that of their mother tongue.

By the time of the American Revolution, almost 3 million people of European and African descent lived in North America. Although the majority were native English speakers, almost one-fourth had European first languages such as German, French, and Dutch. And approximately one-fifth of the total population was African American, primarily slaves, with a variety of African native languages. Many common words today, such as *levee*, *boss*, *cookie*, and *noodle*, first entered American English as a result of prolonged contact with immigrants speaking other languages during the colonial period. When we also add interaction with the Native American languages to this mix, we see that English in America was able to expand in many different directions due to its constant exposure to other languages.

Later periods saw different waves of immigrants, each with its own separate influence. The Irish Potato Famine and the failed German revolution of the 1840s resulted in approximately 3 million new Irish and German immigrants.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw Scandinavians settle in the upper Midwest. The early twentieth Century brought large numbers of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, including Italians and Jews. More recently, Hispanic and Asian peoples have swelled immigration numbers. While each of these groups was learning American English, it was also bringing changes to its new language.

A similar type of prolonged language contact occurred during the years when the United States expanded westward to the Pacific and brought American settlers into a region where many Spanish speakers already lived. Figure 2.3 illustrates the presence of Spanish speakers in early America. Here, though, instead of new settlers bringing another language into contact with the established language of American English, the new language in the West was American English. Because of its prolonged contact with the Spanish already in use on the West Coast, American English gained vocabulary and usages reflecting this western cultural addition to the American identity.

Exercise 2.2

As you now know, the development of American English is integrally intertwined with the development of its population. Each group of words below entered American English from the first language of an immigrant wave. As you work with a partner, examine these lists to identify the cultural contexts in which American English speakers might have learned these particular words from an immigrant population. You might find that a little research into the period and culture is also helpful. For example, a number of words for food items might indicate that a specific wave of immigrants owned or worked in a lot of restaurants or in an earlier period got jobs as cooks, so that those outside their particular language community learned to enjoy their native dishes.

French (before 19th century)	Native American (before 19th century)	Spanish (by early 19th century)
portage	totem	fanat
prairie	moccasin	lasso
rapids	tepee	ranch
bayou	wigwam	mustang
crevasse	powwow	burro

In more recent times, political conflict and wars have created yet another type of prolonged language contact for American English. The actual contact between peoples of different cultures created when Americans leave the United States to live in another country, as well as the media coverage of this type of contact, have brought many new usages into the language. For example, the Gulf Wars in recent years have expanded the American English vocabulary with Arabic words and phrases, such as *jihad* and *burqa*.

Today British and American Englishes differ from each other because American English has been shaped by its history. But we have to remember that they also differ because British English has been changing as well, just in different ways from its American cousin. It has not remained the same as it was when the earliest colonists immigrated to the New World. In some cases, an aspect of British English has changed since colonial times while Americans have retained the older usage. This might make even contemporary American English seem a bit archaic from the British perspective. For instance, some Americans preserve pronunciations that British speakers have lost, like pronouncing the initial vowel sounds in *either* and *neither* like the first sound in *ear*. The British, instead, pronounce this sound as *i* as in the vowel sound found in *kite*. And of course some of the British vocabulary has shifted as well. In other cases, British English has remained the same while the American usage has changed.

This brief discussion of American English history gives you a broad overview of the language's development. Future chapters will examine specific aspects in more detail. Chapter 4 looks at other forces that shape language change. Chapter 8 explores regional, social, and other varieties in American English, giving you the chance to consider language variation in more detail. But now that you have a better understanding of American English itself, let's consider the relationship between the language and national identity.

American English and American Identity

At first, language use itself didn't receive much attention from the early colonists. After all, they were busy trying to survive. But as the political identity of America began to develop, American English was recognized as part of that identity. After ending the Revolutionary War with Britain, the early United States Congresses debated for another six years the appropriate system of government for the new nation. During this period early statesmen, as well as common citizens, also deliberated on the language of their recently created country. Some objected to the continued use of English in America since the nation had just fought, and won, a war against Britain. They wanted to mark their independence by severing all connections, including those linguistic, to England. Others were concerned about the identity of the new nation as a whole and worried that continued use of English would inhibit the growth of nationalism and a sense of unity in the population. Other languages suggested to take the place of English included Greek, French, and German. None of these alternatives, however, was ever seriously considered as a replacement for American English as the nation's primary language.

Commentators such as author and educator Noah Webster took note of the importance of language in nation-building. In his *Dissertations on the English*

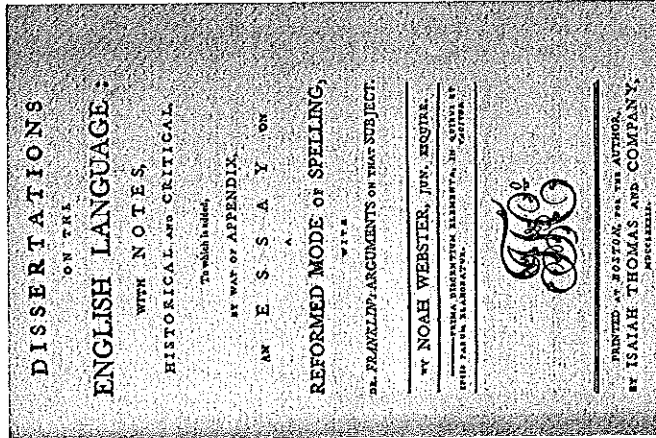


Figure 2.4 Noah Webster's *Dissertations on the English Language* shaped attitudes toward American English.

Language, Webster ([1789] 1951, pp. 20–21, see Figure 2.4) defended the use of English by suggesting that Americans deliberately employ American, and not British, English:

Our political harmony is therefore concerned in a uniformity of language. As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government. Great Britain, whose children we are, and whose language we speak, 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.

So although English continued to be the primary language of the newly created United States, it was recognized and valued as American English, different from British English.

In 1828, Noah Webster published his most influential work: *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. His earlier writing had revealed his strong interest in the English language, particularly in American usage, and this publication attempted to capture the lexicon of everyday Americans. It contained approximately 12,000 American words not previously used in British English. Chapter 6 discusses Webster's role in shaping American English spelling.

Exercise 2.3

You're probably aware of some of the stereotypes people around the world hold about Americans. Let's use these preconceptions to examine the way that language and identity reflect each other on a national basis. The following list describes several usages common to American English.

- shortening words (math, fridge)
- preferring the informal and the personal (oral instead of written)
- avoiding titles and courtesies common in other languages (use of first names)
- using euphemisms (*restroom*, *washroom*, or *powder room* instead of *toilet*)
- having a tendency to exaggerate (the *Super Bowl* of American football, the *World Series* of American baseball, the *America's Cup* of international yachting)

What sort of stereotypes might people of other nationalities make about Americans based on these characteristics of their language? Think about both positive and negative judgments. Now think about other nationalities from an American perspective. Can you think of any stereotypes that seem to be supported by particular language use common to a particular nation? How valid are conclusions about national character that are drawn from language usage? Be prepared to discuss your conclusions with the class.

Today Americans are interested in these earlier concerns about American English for what they might say about the role of language in creating national identity, still a matter of concern. But the worries about establishing an American English no longer exist. American English, like Americans themselves, now has its own identity. It's not confused in any way with British English, Indian English, or any other kind of English spoken in the world. Defining American English is still a complicated task, but unlike what America's founders experienced, the complications today have nothing to do with the British.

Standard American English

Some of the Americans concerned with clarifying the separation between British and American English in the late eighteenth century focused on deliberately changing American English themselves rather than waiting for the language to change over time. These individuals wanted their national language to be truly national, with only one variety used by all Americans. And they also wanted their language to be respected around the world rather than considered a corrupt version of British English. Future President John Adams even proposed establishing "The American Academy for Refining, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Language," with its authority to control the language coming directly from Congress (see Figure 2.5). Although these may have been good political ideals, your own linguistic understanding of how languages change reveals why such an organization of "language police" would ultimately have been powerless to affect the development of American English. After all, language doesn't change because of the imposition of rules but because language changes over time.



Figure 2.5 John Adams (Credit: The Library of Congress. LC-USZ62-133304)

Although an "American Academy" has never been established, one specific variety of American English, Standard American English or SAE, has become the expected norm for communications in a public forum, such as in the government, education, or media. Thus it is the socially privileged language variety in the United States.

From a linguistic perspective, as you know from Chapter 1, all languages are considered equal; one is not considered more valuable or "better" than another. So linguists haven't named SAE as the *standard* variety because it's the best; SAE is not a judgmental term. Instead, it recognizes that this particular variation is widely used in educational and political institutions, the institutions of power, within a certain language community. When we talk about Standard American English, we aren't identifying the "correct" version of the language. *Standard* in this usage means something that is widely used or accepted rather than a model by which to judge others. For example, when a builder talks about a *standard ceiling height*, he's referring to the most commonly used distance between the floor and the ceiling rather than the *correct* distance. Similarly, *Standard American English* refers to the language variety that is the most commonly recognized as the preferred model for use in public institutions.

Perhaps the best way to describe SAE is to contrast it with other American Englishes. Language varieties might be marked by geographical boundaries, such as Southern or Minnesotan, by cultural boundaries, such as Chicano or Navajo-English, and so on. Since all people, not just Americans, speak a language shaped by factors such as their geographical location, gender, race, socioeconomic class, etc., we can safely say that no one in America speaks SAE naturally; in fact, SAE is a learned variety of American English, different from the language we naturally

You can read Adams' thoughts on language for yourself in this collection of excerpts from his letters: www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/adams/feature/5_letters.html

acquire when we first gain language. And because of this, SAE also tends to refer to the written, rather than spoken, form of American English. As we continue to discuss Standard American English throughout the rest of this textbook, remember that we're speaking from an objective, linguistic perspective rather than a judgmental one.

Since SAE is the language of national institutions, it's associated with the politically and socially powerful people who use it. And the human desire for power of all kinds is also extremely important in shaping language. In most human relationships, one entity has power over others, whether through economic, political, physical, social, or some further means of control. The choices we make about language usage define who we are by indicating the specific status or role we possess. For instance, imagine that you own a

successful computer software company. You decide to expand your business by buying a rival company located in Brazil. Even though you new Brazilian employees use their native language of Portuguese to communicate with each other, they use American English when dealing with you. You might have required them to use American English because you're not fluent in Portuguese, but they might also have made this change voluntarily. Who would want to risk their job by using a language the new boss doesn't understand? In instances like this, accepting the language choices of others means that these employees have accepted a subordinate position; they have acknowledged your authority. This is just one instance of many ways in which language exerts power. The next section explores the relationship between language and power in more depth.

Unlike Standard American English, which stresses the written form of the language, Standard British English also stresses the spoken form, identified as *Received Pronunciation*. *Received* in this instance means *accepted*, so *Received Pronunciation* means the pronunciation that would be expected and used among the educated.

(see Figure 2.6): Most Americans would consider *Received Pronunciation* a "typical" British English variety because of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC's) influence in the United States, although this is changing as the BBC has increased the range of language varieties it broadcasts.

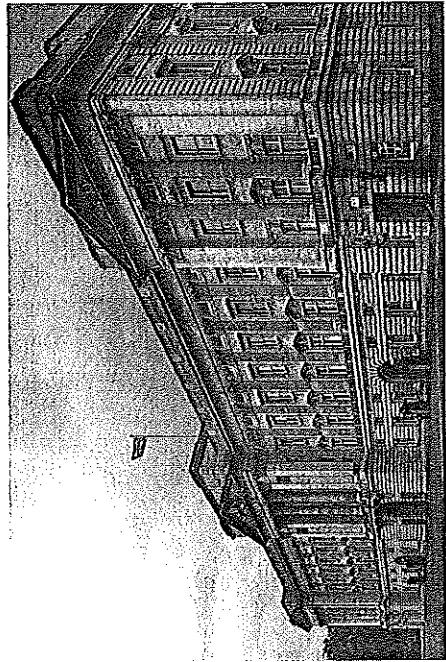


Figure 2.6 Buckingham Palace – site of the Queen's English (©iStockphoto.com/S. Greg Panosian)

Language and power

Most people are unaware of the more subtle ways in which our language becomes a tool in power negotiations in our society. Because language is closely allied with social attitudes, speakers with social power also become speakers with language power, that is, the power to control how others express themselves. This expression of power might be as simple as allowing an individual to talk, like when someone screens phone calls to decide whether to answer or not. It can also be as complex as determining how others can use language, such as when workplaces mandate certain written conventions regarding word choice or tone.

When one speaker's language dominates because that person holds control of the larger social situation, we identify the speaker's language as privileged. A *privilege* is a benefit or an advantage granted to a small number of people, so a **privileged language** is one that receives advantages not granted to other languages. In other words, one speaker has advantages over others because of the language she uses. We see these advantages being illustrated in a variety of ways. If certain members of a group are allowed to spend more time talking, or are permitted to interrupt other members of that same group, we can see that their language is privileged. On a larger level, one community's language may be privileged over another community's. For example, dealing with the Internal Revenue Service requires a taxpayer to become familiar with the bureau's language so that he can understand the questions and explanations related to his taxes. The IRS does not take the time to learn the language of a hairdresser or a history teacher because the organization has power over the individual (see Figure 2.7). Thus the responsibility falls on the individual, who must take the time to learn the IRS bureaucrat's language. Language both carries and conveys, then, the power markers of human relationships.



Figure 2.7 The teacher controls language within the classroom

And when we consider even larger language communities, we can see the role that privileging plays in *shaping an entire community's language*. At the national level, Standard American English holds the privileged role among all the varieties of American English because it is used by those who possess power in American society. For this reason, learning SAE in school is considered extremely important; without this knowledge, individuals might not be able to get jobs or interact appropriately with others who use SAE professionally. And we see the same dynamics of privileging at work when two different languages and cultures come into contact. Just think about the early nineteenth-century contact between American English and Spanish speakers in what would become the state of California. Although it absorbed some Spanish vocabulary due to the contact between the two cultures, American English became the dominant language as American English users came to hold political, economic, and social power, and Spanish and Spanish speakers held more subordinate positions.

Exercise 2.4

On your own, brainstorm about other situations, either in the past or in your daily interactions, where you see evidence of the relationship between language and power. To get started, consider some of the different roles you play throughout the course of your daily life: student, employee, child, parent, consumer, and so on. How are power relations displayed through language in your interactions with others? Be prepared to talk about these situations in class.

Given its place of privilege, why doesn't every American choose to use SAE all the time? Why do so many varieties of American English exist? To answer these questions, think once again about the relationship between language and identity. We learn our first language as very young children from our families and caregivers in our homes. Deliberately choosing another language may seem like a betrayal of the others in our first language community, like we're trying to be "better" than they are or are trying to assume a new identity. Many people are unwilling or unable to make such a choice. Instead, they might move back and forth between language varieties as they change language communities. So, for example, a speaker who uses a regional variation with a family member might then use SAE at school or with a boss. In this way speakers can negotiate among different language communities. The fact that American English users change their language depending on the community demonstrates that English is not one single language but consists of varieties. And the interaction between

The relationship between power and language in American school systems came to national attention in 1979, when African American parents successfully sued the Ann Arbor, MI School District Board, claiming that their children's language use had led to discrimination by the schools, which in turn resulted in the children receiving an inferior education. Research has since shown the truth behind this charge. The fact that cultures privilege one kind of language over another means that speakers of the less privileged language are frequently judged to be less intelligent than those who speak the privileged language. A child's use of a minority language variety can lower the quality of his or her education (Labov 1972).

varieties means that each is constantly influencing the other. No living language exists in a vacuum.

We've been focusing on American English as it has developed over time within the boundaries of the United States. But these same principles of prolonged language contact and language privileging shape usage on the global level as well. Because American English is now used in countries around the world, part of its identity in the twenty-first century is as a global language. Let's now consider language change and identity on the international level.

American English as a global language

Obviously the wide use of both British and American English around the world attests to the power that English users have held in the past and continue to hold in the present. A country's history as a colony of England or the United States might mean that government agencies, law courts, and even schools continue working in English. Today, roughly one-fourth of the world's population uses some variety of English, as shown in Figure 2.8. And American English holds as much or more influence as British English in many parts of the world because the United States has become so powerful in terms of political, economic, and cultural forces. Americans control most of the world's television programming, and American English is the language of Hollywood, the computer industry, business, air traffic control, and the scientific community. For these reasons, American English can truly be called a global language: it's used around the world. Just as we see variations in American English usage in the

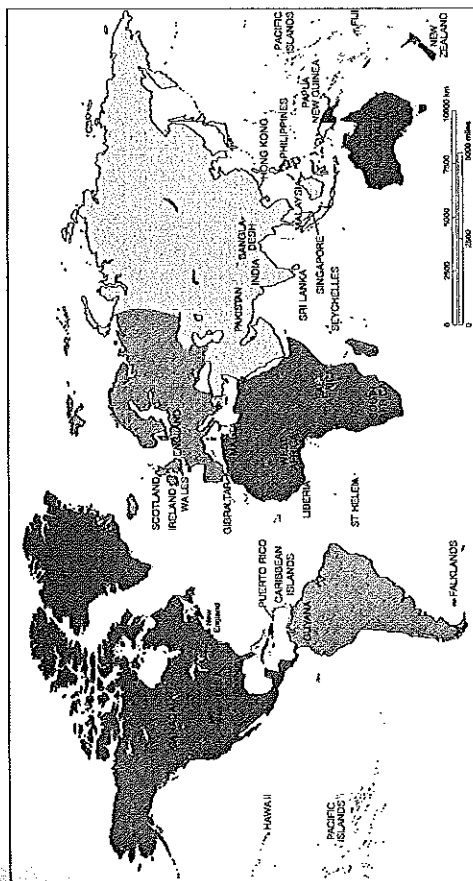


Figure 2.8 English has become a dominant language in countries around the world

United States, though, we note its many varieties elsewhere in the world. Let's now consider the forces at work in shaping American English as a global language.

One of the primary factors affecting a global language is the reason people have for using it. In many countries, such as Australia, English is learned as a first, or native, language. Roughly 400 million people around the world have English as their first language. In other countries it's learned as a second language, in addition to an individual's native language, because it is widely used in business, education, and/or political contexts. Some estimate that over 1 billion individuals around the world use English as a second language. These numbers mean that, currently, English is probably the most widely spoken language in the world, but only because of its use as a second language. In other words, global users rely on English for specific, immediate purposes, rather than learning and using any sort of standardized American or British English. In fact, a recent study by David Graddol (2004) suggests that the use of English as a first language is actually declining, down from 9 percent of the world's population in the mid twentieth century to about 5 percent by 2050 (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 *Projected changes in global language communities: 1995–2050* (after Graddol 2004)

Top ten global language communities of native speakers in 1995	Number of native speakers (in millions)	Top ten global language communities of native speakers aged 15–24 in 2050	Number of native speakers (in millions)
Chinese	1,113	Chinese	166
English	372	Hindi/Urdu	74
Hindi/Urdu	316	Arabic	72
Spanish	304	English	65
Arabic	201	Spanish	63
Portuguese	165	Portuguese	33
Russian	155	Bengali	32
Bengali	125	Russian	15
Japanese	123	Japanese	11
German	102	Malay	10

Obviously English is still being privileged on the international level because it's important enough to be learned as a second language, but it's no longer increasing as a first language. And because a second language has a different purpose from that of a first language, users might not need as thorough a vocabulary or range of sentence structures as native speakers do. In addition, second languages are used differently from first languages. Individuals using English as a second language typically alternate between their two languages, depending on their particular circumstances. Such close contact between two

languages enables the one to exert a strong influence on the other, with users importing lexical elements in the knowledge that others will easily understand them. This is creating new varieties of English fairly quickly. In Japlish, for example, English words are used along with Japanese words, syntax, and even pronunciation. Such mixtures can be difficult to understand for people who don't use both Japanese and English, yet its widespread use in Japan shows that it's a successful language of communication.

Exercise 2.5

Speakers who use American English as their first language tend to be scornful of international Englishes such as Japlish, regarding them as corrupt imitations rather than "real" languages, much the same attitude that British English speakers have had about American English. To give you an idea of how widespread they are, here are a few more examples of these international Englishes:

- Taglish – Philippines (Tagalog and English)
- Chinglish – China, Hong Kong, Taiwan (Chinese and English)
- Hindlish – India (Hindi and English)
- Konglish – Korea (Korean and English)
- Swenglish – Sweden (Swedish and English)
- Franglais – France (French and English)

Make a list of pros and cons, reasons why such international Englishes have a positive purpose, as well as reasons why they might be harmful.

The fact that English is so widespread leads some linguists to speculate on the future development of a new variety, World English. They recognize that satellite broadcasting, travel, world markets, multinational corporations, and other established international organizations will encourage a core of vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and pronunciation to develop, enabling successful communication in English anywhere in the world by any speaker of English. And many times business communications take place in English between non-native English speakers. For example, a Japanese importer might conduct negotiations with an Argentinian exporter in English, even though neither speaks English as a first language. Yet a uniform global English that would simplify such transactions doesn't currently exist. Even the Englishes spoken as first languages differ enough to cause communication breakdowns. As an illustration, imagine that your boss leaves you a message to meet with him at *half nine* to discuss your request for a promotion. If you're American, you probably don't whether

Globish is a 1,500-word, extremely simplified variety of English created specifically for the business world. Its creator, Jean-Paul Nerrière, was an IBM vice president in international Marketing. Nerrière, whose first language is French, used English in professional conferences and meetings. He noticed that meeting with non-native English speakers, such as Koreans and Japanese, was much more efficient than meeting with native English users. Even though their purpose was to conduct business, basic English users wouldn't use the instead using vocabulary and phrasing too complicated for their international peers to comprehend easily. So after retiring from IBM, he designed *Globish*, intended only for international communications, not to convey the culture of a national language. www.globish.com

this means 8:30 or 9:30, while if you're British, you know that your boss will be expecting you at 9:30. Using a World English would minimize the potential for such conflicts.

Culturally, though, the desire for national identity might oppose the development of an internationally uniform variety of World English. Each country has its own natural and cultural features, each with its own lexicon for describing these unique aspects. And each nation has its own desire for independence and autonomy. Accepting a World English might mean giving up unique aspects of a nation's English language usage.

Exercise 2.6

Write about the positives and negatives of a single, uniform World English. Why would it be useful to be able to communicate anywhere in the world in one language? What would naive language speakers have to give up or change in order for a world language to come into existence?

How will these international tensions be resolved? David Crystal (2003) suggests a few possibilities. If all the major international institutions adopted the same variety of English, that variety would automatically become the World English. Or a new variety could be intentionally created and put into use to serve this specific purpose of functioning as the World English. Crystal even suggests that English speakers of the future may find themselves moving between a regional English, such as southern American English, a national English, such as American English, and World English, comfortable in all three varieties. Other researchers disagree with Crystal's suggestion, finding quite optimistic the idea that English could transcend its history and belong to the entire world without privileging one culture over another. As we've discussed in this chapter, language almost always implies power, and therefore some forms of English are bound to be privileged over others.

Now that you're more knowledgeable about American English, its history and its future, you're ready to examine its elements. Chapter 3 begins this examination by considering the words of English.

Chapter summary

This chapter has defined **American English** as a language with its roots in Britain, which has adapted over time to fit the needs of its speakers in the United States. The linguistic forces created by immigration, bringing contact between diverse cultures and their languages, have been particularly significant in shaping American English. You have learned that there are many **varieties** of American English and that some of these, typically the language of the socially or politically empowered, are **privileged** over others. And you've thought about how English is used in countries around the world.

Critical Thinking exercises

1. Fighting over language? Because the history and culture of Quebec are more closely connected with the French than with the British, during the 1960s and early 1970s the political factions supporting the sovereignty of Quebec resented the legal privileging of English and English users in their province. Bombings, strikes, and even kidnappings and the declaration of martial law marked the height of this discord. In 1977, the Charter of the French Language was enacted, which not only declared French the official language of Quebec but also identified the legal rights of both French and English users to prevent future discrimination. Today, examining this cultural conflict helps us identify some of the same positions in other language conflicts around the world. Working with several classmates, explore the history of Quebec's language law. You'll find the CBC's archive of radio and TV news broadcasts, *Fighting Words*, particularly useful in understanding the attitudes of all sides in the debate. Once you understand the issues involved in this particular conflict from the past, think about the current growth of English as a global language. Do the non-English peoples who are beginning to use English as a second language for economic reasons risk dealing with the same problems that the citizens of Quebec faced, or are the situations completely different? Be prepared to take a position.
 2. Those of you who intend to pursue teaching careers after you complete college may very well encounter classrooms in which there is a range of socioeconomic, ethnic, foreign, and other language varieties. You have learned in this chapter that language and identity are closely interconnected, and so working with students who use diverse American English varieties will take care and sensitivity. To anticipate how you might handle a diverse classroom, consider now your own attitudes toward the range of existing varieties, including SAE. How might these attitudes come into play in the ways in which you present material, plan lessons, manage classroom behavior, and all the other work you would do as a teacher? Next, think about the populations you will serve: the students, parents, principal, and community at large. What might be their attitudes toward language and language teaching? Summarize your ideas in an exploratory essay of one or two pages that shows you have considered a range of opinions.
 3. Pay attention to world news reports, making special note of any news items that deal with English used internationally. Although these stories might not deal directly with language, any sort of

interaction will obviously require its use. You might find relevant news stories dealing with business, technology, science, politics, even the media itself. Quickly summarize the news items. Then analyze them carefully in terms of contacts between cultures and language and/or the privileging of one language over another. Be able to explain to the class how your news stories illustrate either or both of these two concepts.

Hot Topic: Politically correct language and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

As you are learning, language and culture are closely intertwined. If we define culture as a set of behaviors, accepted practices, and beliefs, then we can say that defining American English means, to a large extent, defining American culture. While most people understand the notion that language reflects our cultural beliefs, some scholars have argued that language not only reflects but also determines to some extent how we think about things, a hypothesis called **linguistic relativity**. This belief in the power of language to shape one's reality, sometimes called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, was introduced by linguist Edward Sapir in the 1930s, and then later enlarged upon by his student, Benjamin Whorf. Whorf compared some Native American languages and cultures with English-speaking cultures and hypothesized that cultural perspectives were in large part determined by their language. In one example, he noted that western, English-speaking cultures, like the United States, regard time in a linear fashion, a fact underscored by the English verb tense system of future, present, and past. In contrast, the Native American Hopi culture conceives of time as continual, regarding the past and future as ever a part of the present. In the Hopi language there are no past or future tenses. Whorf suggested that the languages of these two cultures produced the distinctions between their speakers' concepts of time.

Since Whorf's time, linguists have contested his hypothesis, questioning his translations of Native American languages, as well as his analysis of their grammars. And, more recently, cognitive linguists, who study the processes of language in the brain, argue that language and thought are not the same thing at all, but that we think in a "language" of thought that is different from any one language we speak. Despite these disagreements with Whorf's ideas and methodology, though, most contemporary linguists do accept a weaker form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which recognizes that we perceive the world in certain ways because of the way that our language orders ideas. If we live in a world, for example, in which electronic technology is at our fingertips, then we are bound to have many words and phrases in our vocabularies to refer to these items. And this same language may appear in contexts that are decidedly un-technological: have you ever used phrases such as *The team is all charged*

up. The interface between the high school and college students has improved, and so on? While language does not confine or limit our thoughts, then, it does influence how we think about things and how we express ourselves.

Politically correct language, the practice of replacing negative terminology with more emotionally neutral language, illustrates a current application of linguistic relativism in American culture. One purpose behind using politically correct language is to shape the general public's attitudes toward people who have been disregarded or treated negatively in the past. For example, a recent usage guide put out for reporters and news people by a media group suggests that reporters use descriptors such as *differently abled*, *physically challenged*, and *physically disabled*. It explains that even though individuals might refer to themselves as *gimpies* or *crips*, such terms carry negative judgments and so should not be used in objective reports.

For this assignment, look at the following list of some politically correct terms and consider their invention – why did these words enter into American English? What made them go out again? See if you can create a history of some of the words – what earlier forms were used to describe the same group or thing? Think of possible reasons for the changes that have come about in the ways in which groups have been identified. Then decide for each word whether ideas and/or attitudes about that group or thing might have been changed because of the language. Write up your research and conclusions in a paper to be handed in to your instructor.

1. Orientals
2. mentally challenged
3. colored people
4. people of color
5. the poor
6. physically challenged
7. ladies
8. queer

Learn more about it

American English

Algeo, J. 2001. "External history," in John Algeo (ed.), *The Cambridge history of the English language*, vol. VI: English in North America. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–58.

Algeo examines the development of American English by tracing the influence of historical and cultural events on the language.

Dillard, J. L. (ed.) 1980. *Perspectives on American English*. The Hague: Mouton De Gruyter.

This collection of essays examines the social and historical contexts for the development of American English and its many varieties.

MacNeil/Lehrer Productions 2005. *Do you speak American?* [Television documentary], New York: Thirteen/WNET.

This public television documentary examines the dynamic state of American English; its accompanying website provides helpful explanations and resources for further study: www.pbs.org/speak/

Language and power

Milroy, J. and Milroy, L. 1991. *Authority in language: Investigating language prescription and standardization*. 2nd edition, London: Routledge.

Milroy and Milroy examine judgments about language and the consequences of such judgments in society and in the daily lives of individuals.

Schmidt, R. 2000. *Language policy and identity politics in the United States*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Schmidt compares and contrasts two different approaches toward language policy in the United States: language assimilation and language pluralism.

Thomas, L., Wareing, S., Singh, I., Peccel, J., Thornborrow, J., and Jones, J. 2004. *Language, society, and power*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge.

This wide-ranging text discusses in a number of contexts the ways in which language functions and influences thought.

English as a global language

Crystal, D. 2003. *English as a global language*. 2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This brief text, written for the general public, provides an overview of how English came to be used around the globe, as well as speculation about its role in the future.

Graddol, D. 2004. "The future of language." *Science* 303:1,329-1,331.

In this article, Graddol examines the rapid changes affecting the world's languages, pointing out that English may not be the dominant language of the future.

3 American English morphology

Key terms

Lexical meaning
Grammatical function
Morpheme
Root
Stem
Affix
Prefix
Suffix
Inflectional morpheme
Derivational morpheme
Lexicon
Etymology
Loanword
Synonym
Coined words
Compound
Initialism
Acronym
Clipped word
Back formation
Eponymy
Blend

Overview

Chapter 3 examines the basic structure of American English words. You will learn about the conventions American English speakers follow to combine meaningful elements together into words. These building blocks of the American English language system allow speakers to communicate effectively, even when conveying complex information. The chapter also explores how words come into language. What are the many ways in which the wordbank of American English has expanded or contracted through time? Finally, the Hot