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American English and its distinctiveness

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Editors' introduction

This chapter explores a topic of enduring interest to many Americans (and their counterparts in England): the distinctiveness of American English vis-à-vis British English. After cautioning that we should be careful to consider features in comparable registers or situations (e.g., newspaper writing with newspaper writing and conversation with conversation), Edward Finegan launches into a discussion of vocabulary differences on either side of the Atlantic. Many of the examples he discusses involve automobiles, traffic, and travel (British *motorway* and *roundabout* vs. American *freeway* and *traffic circle*), but other domains – household items and package labels – are rich in contrasts too. A noteworthy source of distinctive American words (some very old) are those borrowed from the languages of Native American and Latino populations, including place names like *Maitihu* (from Chumash) and *El Paso* (from Spanish) and foods like *persimmon* and *torrilla*.

Going beyond the stereotypical "tomayto/tomahito" examples, the chapter surveys a number of recurrent pronunciation differences between American and British English, some involving consonants (pronouncing /t/ in words like *auto* as a sound like [d] or as an aspirated [tʰ]), some vowels ("mo-bal" vs. "mo-bile"), and some stress or accent (*garage* vs. *garage*). Among other things noted, regional pronunciation is less varied in the USA than in Britain: although Britain is geographically smaller, it has a longer and more complex settlement history.

Contrary to the popular perception that there are few grammatical differences between American English and British English, this chapter draws our attention to a wide range of examples. Many of them come from analyses of computerized corpora of American and British speech and involve quantitative rather than qualitative differences. The list includes agreement rules, mid-sentence ellipsis (*When [are] you coming back?*), relative pronouns (more *that* in American English, more *which* in British English), past participles (*gotten* vs. *got*), and other parts of speech. The chapter also covers spelling differences between the national varieties (e.g., *favoritavour* and *pejamas/pyjamas*) and closes with a discussion of prospects for the future. Whereas the influences of different immigrant and ethnic groups in each country could lead to increasing divergence, increasing use of the Internet could lead to greater convergence in spelling and other conventions, particularly in the written English of the most highly educated sectors of both populations, which already show the least variation.

National varieties of English

When the Harry Potter books are published in the USA and produced as films, not only are expletives like *Cor!* and *Blimey!* replaced by more familiar American ones, but other expressions that Americans would readily understand such as *whilst* and *straight away* are likewise "translated." In another context, even university textbooks are sometimes "translated" from one national variety of English into another: Canadian into US English, US into Australian English, and so on. In textbooks, some translation is cultural (interchanging baseball and cricket terms, for example). In linguistics textbooks, alternative pronunciation codes and illustrations might be needed so as not to perplex readers.

Like all national varieties of any language, American English (AmE) varies across regions and social groups and across the social situations in which it is used. To characterize AmE, this chapter identifies illustrative features that mark it as distinct, and for practical and historical reasons the English of Britain is the point of comparison. British English (BrE) encompasses more than the English of England, but this chapter makes no systematic reference to the English of Northern Ireland, Scotland, or Wales. Of course, AmE and BrE influence one another, and some expressions recognizably American to older Britons seem home-grown to younger ones (Trudgill and Hannah 2002: 55).

Dialect refers to any variety of a language that is characteristic of a particular social group. The term is traditionally associated with regional varieties such as those of New York City or the South, but the characteristic varieties of working-class speakers and middle-class speakers are also sometimes called social dialects or sociolects. African American English and Latino English are prominent ethnic group dialects of AmE. In the speech of any one person, characteristics of several social group memberships come together, including those of sex, age, socioeconomic status, regional origin, and education.

The term *register* refers to language varieties that are characteristic not of social groups but of social situations. Conversations, sermons, lectures, campaign speeches, and sports broadcasting are examples of spoken registers. Written registers include recipes, class notes, personal letters, newspaper headlines, and scientific reporting. Each register has characteristic linguistic features. Salutations in business letters (*Dear Ms. Portillo*, *Dear Sirs*) differ from those in personal letters (*Hey Ashley*, *Dear Devon*). Every text – every piece of natural language – represents characteristics of both its situation and its speaker or writer; every text is simultaneously register and dialect. Naturally, spoken texts and informal written ones signal more about a person's social group affiliations than do formal written texts, which tend to be "standardized."

Some linguistic features are found in AmE or in BrE but not in both. For example, in talk of motor vehicles, speakers of AmE refer to *truck*, *hood*, *gas*, *wrench*, and *truck*, speakers of BrE to *boot*, *bonnet*, *petrol*, *spanner*, and *lorry*. Other features occur in both varieties but much more frequently in one or the other. A word, a meaning, a pronunciation – any linguistic feature – may be so much

more common in one variety that it serves as a salient marker of identification. As an example, *vacation* and *maybe* are far more common in AmE, *holiday* and *perhaps* far more common in BrE.

Features and frequencies of features differ from register to register, so when making comparisons across dialects it is important to compare equivalent registers – conversation with conversation, news reporting with news reporting. This chapter cannot identify all the types of distinctive features or provide comprehensive lists of the features it does identify. It can only illustrate and, in the suggestions for further reading, point to fuller coverage.

Vocabulary

Probably most words brought to America on the tongues of English colonists still carry the same or closely related meanings on both sides of the Atlantic. But other words have arisen, and some older words have shifted meaning, not always in the same way on both sides of the Atlantic. A conversation between American and British friends today would highlight the effects of a centuries-long separation, as we can illustrate in a domain undeveloped when English settlers first arrived on American shores. Americans use the terms *highway* and *freeway* (not *motorway*), *traffic circle* (not *roundabout*), and we usually *pass* (rather than *overtake*) other motorists. We refer to *traffic jams*, not *jams*, and to *détours* instead of *diversions*, and to *construction* or *maintenance* instead of *roadworks*.

BrE terms like *contraflow* (traffic moving in the “wrong” direction), *tailback* (*backup*), and *verge* (*grass strip*, *boulevard*) are unfamiliar in the USA, and hearing about a new *dual carriageway* or Edinburgh’s infamous *Barrion roundabout* *tailback* would puzzle most Americans. Americans who have passed a *driver’s test* and received a *driver’s license* can rent a car, check the *tires* of the rental car, make sure the interior has been *vacuumed* and the *windshield* cleaned, and then, assuming the *line* isn’t overly long, drive out of the *parking lot* or *parking structure* to start a *vacation*. Britons, after passing a *driving test* and getting a *driving licence*, would *hire a car*, check the *tyres* of the *hire car*, ensure the *windscreen* was clean and the interior *hoovered*, and then, assuming a short *queue*, drive out of the *car park* to go on *holiday*.

Many differences in the customary vocabulary and idioms of AmE and BrE crop up in intimate domains like the home, where there is relatively little shared communion between Yanks and Brits: *can* for *tin*, *eggplant* for *aubergine* and *zucchini* for *courgettes*, *dessert* for *pudding*, *baked potato* for *jacket potato*, *stove* for *cooker*, even *supper* for *tea* and *dish towel* for *tea towel*. Still, there is not much that speakers of AmE and BrE wouldn’t understand in one another’s speech, especially in context. Consider labels on packaged goods. Some terms differ in customary expression, where the alternative could occur but doesn’t, as with *nutrition facts* (instead of BrE *nutrition information*) and *mixing bowl* (instead of *basin*). An American package might invite customers with *questions* (not *queries*)

to phone the company *at* (not *on*) its toll free number. Features more likely to be remarked are those that could *not* be said in the other variety. Instead of *calories*, British food packages list *energy* – but they do so in units of *kilojoules* and *kilocalories*, which are not generally familiar in the USA. In reference to a promotional guide for consumers, a Bostonian would be baffled by the instruction to send a *crossed cheque* in the amount of £3.99. Even a dollar equivalent and the spelling *check* would not clarify the notion.

Some common shorthand terms like *math*, *TV*, and *ad* differ from *maths*, *television*, and *adverts*; in addition, here is a short list of everyday AmE and BrE equivalents:

<i>face cloth/wash cloth</i> = <i>flannel</i>	<i>band aid</i> = <i>plaster</i>
<i>diaper</i> = <i>nappy</i>	<i>sweater</i> = <i>jumper</i>
<i>pants</i> = <i>trousers</i>	<i>sneakers/running shoes</i> = <i>trainers</i>
<i>underpants</i> = <i>pants</i>	<i>flashlight</i> = <i>torch</i>
<i>apartment</i> = <i>flat</i>	<i>realtor</i> = <i>estate agent</i>
<i>sidewalk</i> = <i>pavement</i>	<i>zee</i> = <i>zed</i> (‘the letter z’)
<i>trash can/garbage can</i> = <i>dustbin</i>	<i>fired</i> = <i>sacked</i>
<i>busy signal</i> = <i>engaged</i>	<i>laid off</i> = <i>made redundant</i>
<i>pay raise</i> = <i>pay rise</i>	<i>tailor made</i> = <i>bespoke</i>

Names for dishes in cuisines that are popular in the USA but not in Britain contribute to AmE distinctiveness. British visitors to a Mexican restaurant in El Paso, Los Angeles, or Chicago might need to inquire about such menu items as *albondigas*, *burrito*, *ceviche*, *chili relleno*, *chorizo*, *empanada*, *enchilada*, *frijoles*, *guacamole*, *huevos*, *rancheros*, *mariscos*, *salsa*, *pescado*, *taco*, *tamale*, *tortilla*, *chipotle*, *mole*, *fajita*, *tostada*, *arroz con pollo*, *salsa roja*, *salsa verde*, *salsa de chile rojo*, and *tostadas con carne* – foods enjoyed with a cold *cerveza* ‘beer’ and the sounds of a *marachi* band. Comparable lists could be made for Brazilian, Cuban, Japanese, Korean, and Thai cuisines.

Not only in culinary terms have neighboring and faraway cultures exercised a distinctive imprint on American vocabulary. Of these borrowings from Spanish, some are old, others recent: *arroyo*, *barrio*, *branco*, *corral*, *canyon*, *hacienda*, *hombre*, *hoosegow*, *jalapeno*, (beef) *jerky*, *lariat*, *mesa*, *mesquite*, *pancho*, *peyote*, *presidio*, *pronto*, *pueblo*, *rodeo*, *salsa*, *serape*, *tequila*, *tomatillo*, and *siesta*. (*Macho* and *mucho* are not included because they did not enter English through AmE.) In Arizona, California, Colorado (‘red, reddish’), Nevada (‘snow, snow covered’), and other southwestern states, and even in Alaska, Florida, Maine, Montana (‘mountain’), and elsewhere, thousands of place names bear witness to the influence of earlier Spanish and Mexican culture: *Amarillo* (‘yellow’), *Cape Canaveral* (‘place of canes’), *El Monte*, *El Paso* (‘the passage’), *Fresno* (‘ash tree’), *Las Cruces* (‘the crosses’), *Las Vegas* (‘the meadows’), *Los Angeles* (‘the angels’), *Los Gatos* (‘the cats’), *Los Osos* (‘the bears’), *Marina del Rey* (‘marina of the king’), *Palo* (‘tree’) *Alto* (‘high’), *Rancho Mirage*, *Sacramento*, *Santa Fe*

('holy faith'), *San Luis Obispo* ('Saint Luis Bishop'). In many cities, Spanish names grace streets, neighborhoods, rivers, canyons, and mountains, including *Rio* ('river') *Grande*, *Merced* ('mercy') *River*, *Sierra Nevada*, as well as social institutions, such as *Alcatraz* ('pelican') *Island*, *El Toro* ('bull') *Marine Base*, and *El Conquistador* ('conqueror') *Resort*. From San Diego to San Francisco along Route 101, travelers see reminders of California's Hispanic past in the roadside signs shaped like mission bells and proclaiming *El Camino Real* 'the royal road.'

Borrowings from Native Americans are particularly distinctive of AmE, and many cities, states, and rivers bear Indian names: *Arkansas*, *Kansas*, *Maibau*, *Milwaukee*, *Minnesota*, *Mississippi*, *Oklahoma*, *Penobscot*, *Texas*, *Waukesha*, *Winnepesaukee*, *Wisconsin*, and thousands of others. Some words originating in AmE reflect Native American culture: *moccasin*, *terrapin*, and *tomahawk* (from Algonquian languages), *papoose* and *sachem* (Narragansett), *sagamore* (Penobscot), *squaw* and *powwow* (Narragansett and Massachusetts), *tepee* (Dakota), and *wigwam* (Abenaki). Others identify animals or plants unfamiliar to the arriving colonists, who borrowed the names from Native Americans but adapted their pronunciations to English patterns: *chipmunk*, *raccoon*, *skunk*, *woodchuck*, *opossum*, *persimmon*, *sequoia*, and *squash*. In addition, compounds incorporating the word *Indian* were coined, among them *Indian file*, *Indian giver*, *Indian summer*, and *Indian wrestling*. Finally, from the often hostile interaction between settlers and Native Americans arose nouns like *warhoop*, *war dance*, *snake dance*, *warpaint*, and *warpath*, as well as verb phrases like *be on the warpath*, *bury the hatchet* ('make peace'), and *smoke a peace pipe*.

In the early history of the American colonies, contact between English-speaking colonists and the Dutch in New Amsterdam contributed the place names *Brooklyn*, *Bronx*, *Staten Island*, *Bowery*, *Harlem*, *Hellgate*, *Teaneck*, *Tarrytown*, and many ending in *-kill* 'stream' (*Cobleskill*, *Catskill*, *Fish Kill*), along with the everyday words *boss*, *cole slaw*, *cookie*, *cruller*, *snoop*, and *stoop*. Contact with French brought *prairie*, *beyou*, *bute*, *jambalaya*, *palisades* ('a line of cliffs along a waterfront'), *pecan*, *praline*, and such place names as *Louisiana*, *Maine*, and *Vermont*. Later, Yiddish-speaking immigrants contributed *klutz*, *schlep*, *schlemiel*, *schtick*, *schmo*, *schmooze*, *schmuck*, and *schnook*, which are better known in metropolitan areas than elsewhere. Other languages, including German and Swedish, have contributed as well.

AmE has shown inventiveness in creating colloquial and slang expressions, and of course many have spread to other varieties. The following, identified in *Webster's New World College Dictionary* as having American origins, are listed in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, although the highlighted ones are marked North American or chiefly North American: *jamboree*, *jalopy*, *widget*, *school-marm*, *scofflaw*, *sidekick*, *wisecrack*, *sideburns*, *pencil pusher*, *jack pot*, *jack hammer*, *pushover*, *press conference*, *hope chest*, *jigsaw* and *jigsaw puzzle*, *prat-fall*, *mess hall*, *honky-tonk*, *hooper*, *joyride*, *wolf whistle*, *whodunit*, and *tip off*.

as well as the shortened or combined forms *pen* ('penitentiary'), *wiz*, *prom*, *sicko*, *sickie*, *psychobabble*, *preemie*, *wino*, *hoopla*, *megabuck*, *jazz*, *jazzy*, and *honest-to-goodness*. Not listed in the *Concise Oxford* are *square shooter*, *poop sheet*, *press agent*, *press box*, and *jug head*, among others. A British reader of *Time* or *Newsweek* would note distinctly American expressions only a few times on any page, matching the few distinctly British expressions an American reader of *The Economist* would note. In shared domains like science and scholarship, or where economic, financial, and political alliances support frequent analysis in print, vocabulary differences tend to fade.

Pronunciation

Some pronunciation features of AmE are so well known as to be stereotyped. Examples include vowel correspondences, such as the stressed vowel in *tomato* (ay vs. ah) and *barána* (nan vs. nahn), the first vowel in *leisure* (rhyming with *seizure* but in BrE with *pleasure*), and the miscellany represented in *vitamin* (vite-a vs. vit-a), *schedúle* (sked vs. sted), *charade* (raid vs. rahd), and *privacy* (prive vs. privv). Stress patterns may also differ. AmE stresses the first syllable in the words *controversy* and *renaissance* and the compounds *weekend* and *ice cream*. BrE the second syllable. There are also differences of intonation patterns in utterances, especially questions, but we lack space to address intonation here. The most significant pronunciation differences affect sets of sounds and classes of words, as illustrated below.

Consonants

Intervocalic /t/ and /d/

Between vowels and vowel-like sounds, /t/ and /d/ are typically pronounced alike: *metal*, *bitter*, and *matter* sound like *medal*, *biddler*, and *madder*. To be more precise, /t/ and /d/ are pronounced alike between vowels when the preceding syllable is stressed, as in *móto* and *píty*. This /t/d sound is a flap or tap of the tip of the tongue and is represented by [ɾ] in the International Phonetic Alphabet (the "IPA"). When /t/ precedes a stressed vowel (*tin*, *ténder*, *autóronry*, *petúnia*), it is pronounced with aspiration, as [tʰ]. In the same circumstances in which /t/ and /d/ are pronounced alike within words, they are pronounced alike across words, as in *bet a bit* and *bed 'n' breakfast*. Irrespective of stress patterns, BrE generally aspirates /t/ even between vowels, as in *water* and *later*.

Postvocalic /r/

AmE generally pronounces /r/ when it occurs after a vowel in the same syllable (*car*, *sure*, *card*, *beard*, *motor*, *later*). That makes it a "rhotic" variety. By contrast, some British dialects have lost /r/ in such words and are "non-rhotic." In the

dialects of metropolitan New York City, eastern New England, and some southern Atlantic coastal areas, /r/ is *variably* dropped. That means some social groups drop it more frequently than others and more so in some registers than others. The catch phrase "Pahk the cah in Hahvad Yahd" lightly captures the *r*-lessness of eastern New England, which in this regard resembles BBC English and some other British dialects.

Initial /h/

Many words spelled with initial *h* are pronounced alike in AmE and BrE — some with /h/ (*history, hospital*), others without it (*honor, hour*). Possibly all dialects vary the pronunciation of pronouns like *he, him, his, her, and hers*, with /h/ dropped more frequently in relaxed speech. But in words like *house, home, here*, and *who*, AmE shows a strong tendency to preserve initial /h/ where dialects of BrE frequently omit it, especially with *have* words (*'ave a safe journey*). With *herb* and *herbal*, AmE usually omits and BrE usually preserves /h/. With *human* and *humor*, only some AmE dialects pronounce /h/.

WH-words — *when, which, where, why*

In southern dialects of AmE, the *when, which, where* words are pronounced as though spelled "hwen," "hwich," etc. This "hw" sound is represented by [w̥], thus [w̥ɛn], [w̥ɪtʃ], and [w̥ɛr]. In these dialects, *which* and *witch* are not homonyms. In northern dialects, however, WH-words are pronounced with [w], not [w̥], so *which* and *witch* are pronounced alike, as are *where/ware, whether/wet, whether/weather*, and *why* and the name of the letter *y*.

The Asian, Persian class

In AmE, the *st* in words such as *Asia* and *Asian, Persia* and *Persian*, represents "zh" ([ʒ]), or in some American books [ʒi] and not the "sh" sound [ʃ] often heard in BrE ([ʃ]). [ʃ] is represented in some American books by [ʒ]. In AmE, *glacial* is invariably pronounced with a medial "sh" as [gleʃəl], not as in BBC English sometimes as [glesjəl]. In AmE, *immediately* has five syllables (im-mee-dee-lee) and is not pronounced "im-meed-jit-lee."

Vowels

The *half, fast, path* class

The vowel of the *cat, fat, mar* class of words tends to be pronounced alike in AmE and BrE — as [æ], although the vowel shifts discussed below and in chapter 4 create considerable variation in AmE. In AmE, the vowel of *car* appears in the *half, fast, path* words, where the vowel is followed by a fricative such as /f/, /s/, or /θ/ (θ represents the *th* of *thick* and *thin*). For these words, some dialects of BrE (including BBC English) have the vowel sound of *father* [ɑ]. Some AmE dialects have the vowel of *father* in the word *aurt* (which is more commonly pronounced

like *art* [ɔrt]), but otherwise the so-called "broad a" is heard in the *half, fast, path* class only in eastern New England.

The *tune, duty* class

Pronounced as though spelled "toon," "doo," "enthoosiastic," "noo," and "lood" are the *tune, dew, enthuse, new*, and *lewd* words (with syllables beginning in /t/, /d/, /θ/, /n/, or /l/ and followed by /u/). Only seldom — and principally from older Americans — would you hear the pronunciations "tyune" and "tyuty" or "choon" and "jewty," as in some varieties of BrE.

The *mobile, missile* class

Adjectives like *mobile, facile, fertile, missile*, and *sterile* are pronounced as though ending in *-al*; thus "fert-al" corresponds to BrE "fer-tile." *Juvenile* is pronounced both ways (the noun usually with *-aisle*, the adjective with *-aisle* or *-al*). *Reptile*, a noun, is pronounced with *-aisle* on both sides of the Atlantic.

Diphthongs

In most AmE dialects, the vowels of words like *pie* and *tie* ([aɪ]), *soy* and *boy* ([ɔɪ]), and *cow* and *now* ([aʊ]) are complex sounds (called *diphthongs*) that move from an onset vowel ([a] or [ɔ]) to an end point vowel ([ɪ] or [ɪ]). (You can experience this movement by slowly saying *pie, soy, now*.) In pronouncing *It's*, AmE speakers generally monophthongize the diphthong, keeping only the onset vowel [a] and producing "ahm." In dialects of the South, diphthongs are more often monophthongized to pronunciations that can be perceived by outsiders as "tah" for *tie* and "taw" for *toy*. Coupled with the pronunciation of [w] in WH-words, this produces "wha" [wə] (or [wæ]) for *why* and "ha" [hæ] (or [hæ]) for *how* in southern dialects, while northerners say [waɪ] and [hau].

Vowel mergers

Two sets of vowel mergers are prominent, though they have different regional distributions. In much of the South, the vowel sounds of *pit* and *pet* are merged preceding nasals as in *pin* ~ *pen*, which sound to speakers of other dialects like *pin*, and *him* ~ *hem* (which sound like *him*). Elsewhere, especially in eastern New England, western Pennsylvania, and much of the West, the vowels of *cor* and *caught* are merged or merging, so that *hock* and *hawk, Don* and *Dawn, wok* and *walk*, and other such pairs are indistinguishable.

Vowel shifts

Underway at the present time are two significant shifts of vowel pronunciations, a relatively recent Northern Cities Shift and an older Southern Shift, both of which are described briefly in the following chapter.

Stress patterns and vowel reduction

Compare the AmE pronunciation of the three-syllable *li-bra-ry* and four-syllable *sec-re-ta-ry* with the BrE "lie-bree" and "sec-re-tree." BrE tends to maintain a name given stress pattern in words and has fewer vowels reduced to schwa (the vowel in the first vowel of *above* and the final vowel of *sofa* and represented by [ə]). For example, in words like *construction* and *condition*, AmE maintains a full vowel only in the stressed middle syllable and shows a reduced vowel (schwa) in the initial and final syllables: [kən dɪ ʃən] and [kən strʌk ʃən]; by contrast, speakers of BrE tend to say [kən dɪ ʃən] and [kən strʌk ʃən], with a reduced vowel only in the final syllable. *Laboratory* has four syllables on both sides of the Atlantic, but is pronounced in AmE as "lá-bra-tór-ee" and BrE as "la-bór-a-tree." Similar differences appear in kindred forms, including *commentary*, *lavatory*, and *dictionary*, invariably with four syllables in AmE but often three in BrE.

In some words borrowed relatively recently from French, the stress pattern of the original is preserved to a greater degree in AmE. *Garage* and *filler* have primary stress on the final syllable (ga-ráj, fil-láy), while BrE stresses the initial syllable (gá-ridge, fill-it); note how the stress patterns affect the vowel in the respective final syllables. *Ballot* is pronounced "bal-lay," but AmE stresses the second syllable, BrE the first. Among other borrowings from French, *parois*, *massage*, *debris*, and *berzer* are pronounced in AmE with stress on the final syllable, in BrE on the initial syllable.

Pronunciation variation

Across regional groups

Even combined, England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are no larger than Oregon, the tenth largest state in the USA, so one might expect more linguistic variation in the USA. Given Britain's longer and more complex pattern of settlement history, however, dialect differences there are greater than in the USA. The relative uniformity of AmE should not suggest, however, that a visitor to Atlanta, Boston, Charleston, Chicago, Dallas, Minneapolis, New York, Seattle, and San Francisco would fail to note characteristic regional pronunciations. (See chapters 3 and 6 of this volume.)

Across socioeconomic groups

At least in urban areas along the eastern seaboard of the USA, variation across socioeconomic status groups appears to follow similar patterns in AmE and BrE. For example, in New York City and in Norwich, England, *-ing* is pronounced with and without "the g." In both cities, middle-class residents pronounce the *g* ([ɪŋ]) more frequently than working-class residents. Said the other way around, *-ing* is pronounced without the *g* ([ɪn]) more frequently by working-class than by middle-class speakers. Some dialects of the American South have such frequent *-in'* pronunciations that *-in'* is said to be used "almost exclusively," and the same is true in the north of England and in some Scots dialects (Labov 2001: 90).

For the sound represented by *th* in *this* and *brother* ([ð]), many speech communities in the USA and Britain have more frequent [d] pronunciations among lower-ranked socioeconomic groups than among higher-ranked groups. Likewise for the pronunciation of *th* as [t] in words like *think* and *with*: lower-ranked groups say [t] more frequently than higher-ranked groups. New York City residents vary their pronunciation of words with *th*, and among some speakers the [d] and [t] pronunciations are so frequent that the Big Apple has been stereotyped as having a "dis, dat, dem, and dose" dialect and its speakers as uniformly saying "toity-toid and toid" (for 33rd Street and 3rd Avenue). (See chapters 4 and 26.)

Across ethnic groups

The dialects of African Americans and Latinos have been studied more than those of other ethnic groups. (African American English is treated in chapter 5, and observations about the English of Latino communities appear in chapters 10 and 11. For a book-length treatment of Chicano English, see Fought 2003.) The English of Asian Americans has been studied less thoroughly (see chapter 13), as has that spoken by Native Americans (see Leap 1993).

On English-language radio and television broadcasts, correspondents generally speak without marked social group accents, although attentive listeners may occasionally identify traces of regional origins. An interesting phenomenon can be observed in the speech of Latino radio and television announcers and reporters. Latino correspondents typically do not exhibit dialect markers in the body of their reports, but some use a marked ethnic pronunciation of their own names when they sign off. CNN's Maria Hinojosa identifies herself as "mah-REE-ah ee-noh-HOH-sah," avoiding typical English vowel reduction and pronouncing the characteristic trill *r* in REE. Likewise, news reports delivered by Latino correspondents often display characteristic pronunciations of Latino names: *de la Cruz* as "deh-lah-CROOS," *Fuentes* as "FWEHN-tehs," and *Hernandez* as "chr-NAHN-dehs." Such ethnically marked pronunciations highlight a reporter's pride in his or her ethnic identity.

Grammar and sentence structure

While it is commonly said that AmE has few distinctive grammatical features, some are noteworthy.

Agreement rules

Verb agreement with collective nouns

One difference concerns agreement rules between verb and subjects that are collective nouns (*family*, *staff*, *team*, *committee*) or the names of sports teams (*Cleveland*, *Manchester*), or companies, organizations, and institutions (*Lipton*, *Ford*, *CNN*, *the government*). In AmE, all these require a singular verb (*The federal government is considering*, *The team has won*), while BrE allows a singular or plural verb (*Manchester is/are ahead by one*, *Staff was/were invited*). The

following clauses (from the British National Corpus) would not normally occur in AmE: *Once ITV realize the BBC are going ahead; CNN never say we made a mistake . . . ; The dead man's family are in shock; the Government are not wholly to blame for this recession.* Neither would this company slogan from a box of tea: *Brooke Bond don't make tea bags for anyone else!* The AmE subject-verb agreement pattern is determined by the singular or plural form of the noun rather than by its sense. About the Anaheim Angels baseball team, AmE says *Anaheim has won* but *The Angels have won*. British publications increasingly use the AmE pattern.

Ellipsis in conversation

Ellipsis is the technical term for the kind of grammatical shortening that results from omission of certain structures. In sentences like the following, AmE shows twice as much mid-sentence ellipsis of the auxiliary verb as BrE (*Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, hereafter called LG; see Biber et al. 1999):

When you coming back? (compare *When are you coming back?*)
How you doing? (compare *How are you doing?*)

Generally, however, AmE shows less ellipsis than BrE. It less often omits the combined subject and auxiliary, as in *Want it?* (compare *Do you want it?*), *Like it?*, and *Wanna clear a crowded room?* and less often omits the combined subject and main verb, as in *Serious?* (compare *Are you serious?*) and *Too early for you?* (compare *Is it too early for you?*). It also shows half as much initial ellipsis and final ellipsis as BrE (LG 1108), as in these examples (all taken from a "Judge Judy" television broadcast):

Yes, no question about it. (compare *Yes, there's no question about it.*)
 (Don't slur your words.) *Sorry.* (compare *I'm sorry.*)
 (Did you press any charges?) *I tried to.* (compare *I tried to press charges.*)
 (Now, he didn't hit you first.) *Yes, he did.* (compare *Yes, he did hit me first.*)

Auxiliaries in questions and replies

In conversation and fiction, AmE shows an overwhelming preference for question forms with *do* (*Do you have any novels about horses?*). By contrast, in conversation BrE prefers *Have you got any novels about horses?* (which is uncommon in AmE) and in fiction *Have you any novels about horses?* (LG 216).

Relative clauses and the relative pronouns which and that

In certain structures, relative pronouns can be omitted, as you can see by comparing *Are those the books that you lost?* with *Are those the books you lost?* Sometimes when the relative pronoun is expressed, either *which* or *that* may be

grammatical: *the books that you lost* or *the books which you lost*. AmE shows a somewhat stronger preference for introducing such relative clauses (called restrictive or defining relative clauses) with *that* rather than *which*, while BrE shows a stronger preference for *which*. In news writing, *that* is 50 percent more frequent in AmE and in conversation twice as frequent as in BrE (LG 616).

But neither, but nor

AmE can begin a conjoined negative clause with *but neither* (or with *neither* or *nor*) + auxiliary verb. *Congress should not be running monetary policy, but neither should it . . . let Alan Greenspan decide the country's economic priorities* (AmE, *Newsday*). The BrE equivalent is *but nor* + auxiliary verb, an expression that is uncommon in AmE: *She makes no excuses for Runt or Pig, but nor does she judge them* (BrE, *Guardian*).

Parts of speech

Verbal forms

Past tense and past participle of get

In AmE, *got* can serve as a simple past tense meaning 'became' (*She got tired*) or 'arrived' (*when she got home*). Both *got* and *gotten* can serve as the past participle of *get*, but they are not used equivalently, and *gotten* is strongly preferred in AmE, as in: *The president's war efforts have gotten high marks* (AmE, *Newsweek*). BrE examples may strike American ears as ungrammatical: *No amount of NATO pressure would have got it even on to paper* (BrE, *Economist*).

In AmE, *Have you got any?* is a frequent equivalent to BrE *Do you have any?* (which is also familiar in AmE). In a shortened form, it appears in *I got a deadline early Monday*, and it underpins a currently popular *Got milk?* advertising campaign. *Gotten* often means 'received' or 'acquired,' as in *Have you gotten any?* Contrast these uses with those where *have got* means simply 'have': *We've got ID cards now, We've got locked gates* (*Los Angeles Times*).

Omitting the infinitive marker to

In some contexts, AmE shows a robust tendency to omit the infinitive marker *to* after *come*, *go*, *help*, and certain other verbs (Todd and Hancock 1986: 477), as in 1 and 2 below, or to make them compound verbs as in 3. Compare these three examples with 4, 5, and 6, which are BrE:

1. *You wanna go get some water?* (*Los Angeles Times*)
2. *Proceeds will help establish a wetlands protection fund.* (*Cleveland Plain Dealer*)
3. *I feel it's only right that I come and help out.* (*Boston Globe*)

4. . . . you'll already know where to go to buy your uniform. (*Daily Telegraph*)
5. . . . what this study will help to establish is what consumers really mean . . . (*Guardian*)
6. . . . a friendly wizard who can help you to find a red and gold scarf . . . (*Daily Telegraph*)

Negation

Among distinctive features of AmE is a preference for certain patterns of negation and a marked infrequency of others. According to LG (161), AmE conversation shows a strong preference for *do not have the* (*don't have the time, do not have the information*) and *have no* (*has no plans, have no doubt, has none of your character, has nothing to fear*) as compared with BrE. Curiously, the *have no* form so heavily preferred in AmE conversation is used with equal frequency in AmE and BrE fiction and news registers. AmE conversation shows little or no use of *have got no* (*have got no one to love, have got nothing to hide*), *have not got alary* (*has not got an easy task*), and *have not the* (*has not the strength*).

Modals

In conversation, the modals *must, will, better*, and *got to* are less frequent than in BrE. By contrast, *going to* (often pronounced "gonna") and *have to* ("hafta") are more common than in BrE (LG 488). Except in legal registers, the use of *shall* has practically vanished (and is diminishing in BrE as well).

Noun phrases

Compound nouns

AmE commonly uses singular forms of nouns in compounds like *rent policy, drug fund, drug enforcement unit, wage ordinance*, and *new fair market rent policy*, whereas BrE shows a preference for plural forms of the first element, as in *drugs policy, drugs fund, drugs enforcement unit, wages ordinance, prisons policy, taxes policy, market rents policy*, and *future rents policy*. In AmE, if the first element of the compound noun phrase is itself a compound already containing a plural form (e.g. *hate crimes* or *war crimes*), then the larger compound incorporates that plural: *hate crimes policy, war crimes punishment*.

Definite articles

In some expressions, AmE and BrE omit the article with relatively general senses of the noun: *in school, to class, in college, to church*. In other expressions, AmE custom calls for the definite article where BrE omits it; those would include: *in the hospital, at the university*, and of *the* term for BrE *in hospital, at university*, and of *term*.

Complex noun phrases in journalistic prose

AmE news writing shows an inclination to place noun phrases or strings of nouns before names of people or events, while BrE prefers the information after the proper noun, as an appositive.

American style	British style
D.C. police chief Charles Ramsey	Diana Krall, a Canadian
Freaks and Geeks producer Judd Apatow	John Lennon, the founder Beatle
Orlando Magic basketball star Patrick Ewing	Josh Bolten, the head of the president's domestic policy staff
Joel and Ethan Coen's tragicomic <i>cardiograph</i>	David Owen, a staff writer for the New Yorker

Pronouns

For 'you plural,' *you all* or *y'all* occurs in conversation three times as often in AmE as in BrE (LG 330). By contrast, *you two* occurs half as often. Besides the Southern *y'all* are other regional forms, including *yuns* (in Western Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley) and *yous* (notably in metropolitan New York City). *You guys* is increasingly common as a simple plural for addressing males or females.

AmE and BrE use the indefinite pronouns *anybody* and *anyone*, but at least in fiction AmE shows a stronger preference for the *-body* forms (*anybody, everybody, nobody, somebody*), while BrE prefers *anyone, everyone, no one, and someone* (LG 352).

Terms of address

Distinctive terms of address – especially more generic ones – include *buddy* (for BrE *mate*), *miss* (for BrE *madam*, though *madam* is also frequent in AmE and *ma'am* especially in the South). Other address terms include *folks* (always plural) and, especially among younger Americans, *guys* and *you guys* (usually plural), *dude* (typically singular), *bro* and *brotha* (especially among African Americans), British favorites like *lads, love*, and *you lot* are very rare in AmE.

After a full name introduces someone (*Alice Burner Gunnerson, Andrew Beckis*), *The New York Times* prefers title plus surname (*Ms. Gunnerson, Mr. Beckis*). Britain's *Economist* has a similar policy (*Mr Bush warned Mr Sharon that Mr Arafat must remain unharmed*). By contrast, after initial mentions, US publications like *Time* and the *Los Angeles Times* prefer bare surnames (*Bush said Cheney would be cleared by the SEC*).

Adverbs

Unmarked adverbs and the amplifier *real*

Characteristic of AmE is the use of the amplifier *real*, as in *real good, real tall, real soon*, and *real fast*, instead of *really good, really tall*. Posted along many roads, signs say *Go slow*, displaying an older historical adverb form.

The amplifiers *pretty*, *quite* and *rather*

AmE conversation prefers the amplifier *pretty* (*pretty easy*, *pretty funny*, *pretty good*) over the BrE equivalent *quite*, and this use of *pretty* occurs about four times as often as in BrE (LG 567). *Quite* as an amplifier (*quite big*, *quite easy*, *quite good*) is not common, occurring only one-seventh as often as in BrE. While AmE and BrE use *quite* and *pretty* with the adjectives *sure* and *good*, AmE tends to limit *quite sure* to negative contexts (*not quite sure*, *never quite sure*), whereas in BrE it occurs in negative and positive contexts (*She was probably quite sure*). As an amplifier, *rather* seems formal in AmE and is not common.

The adverbs *immediately* and *directly*

Immediately and *directly* are adverbs in AmE and BrE. Unlike BrE, though, AmE does not permit their use as subordinators as in these BrE examples from the British National Corpus, a 100-million word reservoir of written and spoken texts:

- *I could have hauled each fish out of the swim immediately it was hooked and kept disturbance down to a minimum.* (compare AmE *immediately after*)
- *Directly he was in, he jerked impatiently at the reins, called to the horse, and they were off!* (compare AmE *Directly after*)

Prepositions

In AmE in certain environments a preposition may be omitted (*write to me* or *write me*), where BrE tends strongly to keep it. By contrast, AmE sometimes requires a preposition where BrE can omit it; compare BrE *to save him learning to dislike such politicians* with AmE *to save him from learning to dislike such politicians*.

The preposition is often omitted from references to days of the week and certain other time references, as well as after certain verbs:

American English only	American and British English
<i>have a doctor's appointment</i>	<i>have a doctor's appointment on</i>
<i>Monday</i>	<i>Monday</i>
<i>departed JFK on time</i>	<i>departed from JFK on time</i>

In some phrases, different prepositions are preferred. An American store on *Main Street* is a British shop *in the High Street*. In telling time, AmE prefers *a quarter of eleven* or *quarter till eleven* and *a quarter after ten* or *twenty after nine*, but can also use the customary BrE forms *quarter to eleven* and *twenty past nine*. There are a few minor differences in the form of prepositions, as with *around the house* and *toward the light* rather than the more common BrE *round the house* and *towards the light*. Because *different* is a very common adjective, the AmE preference for *different than* rather than BrE *different from* or *different to* is striking. Given that

usage guides criticize *different than*, some published writing prefers *different from*, but it appears to be vanishing from AmE conversation. Some phrasal verbs also have different prepositions: Yanks come *across* as arrogant, Brits come *over* as stiff.

Idioms and slang

Many, although certainly not all, idioms originating in the USA are known in other varieties as well. The older verb *bite the dust* (which appears in the OED) and the more recent *be on the same page* (which does not), as well as such noun phrases as *bottom line* and *slam dunk* (both of which make appearances in the OED) are not confined to the USA.

Modern preferences such as AmE *take a look over* BrE *have a look* are numerous and usually not perplexing.

Especially among younger speakers of AmE today, stand-alone *Cool!* (with a distinctive intonation) is exceptionally frequent as an expression of approval or endorsement. It serves, for example, as an apt response to hearing what someone does for a living or for recreation.

A: *What kind of work do you do?*

B: *I'm a sewage treatment supervisor.*

A: *Cool!*

This usage derives from the more familiar use of adjectival *cool*, as in *In Bangkok we took in a temple and had a little riverboat tour, which was real cool*.

Even the briefest discussion of informal styles in AmE must note the use of way as an adverb meaning 'very, much/more, more by far', as in *way cool* and *way more*. Especially among younger speakers, this way is extremely popular: *way more sports*, *way more hits*, *way more mileage*, and *way more than kids*. The absence of an unambiguous instance in the British National Corpus suggests that this usage has not yet caught fire in BrE, although recent Internet examples can be found.

Semantics

Word senses

Some words carry different meanings. As an example, *mad* means 'angry', as it did for Shakespeare at the time English first arrived in North America, while in BrE it means 'insane' (a sense also familiar in AmE). *Presently* means 'at present, now, currently' and is not understood to mean 'in a short while, shortly', its usual sense in BrE and the sense represented in AmE *momentarily* 'in a moment'. Above, we saw that *paris*, *tin*, *torch*, *juniper*, and *diversions* carry different

meanings in AmE and BrE. There are many other instances besides these, and some can cause at least brief puzzlement in conversation.

Sports metaphors

American culture favors metaphors drawn from business, politics, food, and guns (all of which are illustrated in Totie 2002). Above all, though, sports metaphors dominate. On the popular television interview program "Hardball," only tough questions are *thrown at* guests, and a *softball* question would be regarded as partisan. Other metaphors from baseball, the national sport, include *stepping up to the plate*, *striking out* and having *two (or three) strikes against you*, getting to *first base*, being *out in left field*, throwing *a curve* or *a curve ball*, being *a utility infielder*, and *sitting in the bleachers*. By no means, however, do all popular sports metaphors reflect baseball, as illustrated in these examples from golf, basketball, boxing, gaming, and football:

- *Lord Robertson in NATO is hard at work with a resolution . . . that would tee up . . . prime Article 5 responsibilities.* (Secretary of State Colin Powell)
- *We are undertaking a full court press diplomatically, politically, militarily . . .* (Colin Powell)
- *It's not easy to get up off the mat after such a blow.* (New York City Fire Department Chief Daniel Nigro)
- *Anyone who bets against America is simply wrong.* (New York Stock Exchange chairman Dick Grasso)
- *The Monday-morning quarterbacking on Al Gore's defeat has begun.* (Newspaper columnist Chuck Raasch)

Discourse markers and miscellaneous

Discourse markers

As a discourse marker, *now* (*Now what I mean is . . .*) is less than half as frequent in AmE as in BrE, while *you see* occurs only an eighth as frequently (LG 1097). The discourse markers *well* (*Well, I'm not sure*) and *I mean* are somewhat more frequent in AmE than in BrE, while *you know* is more than twice as frequent (LG 1096). As a conversational backchannel, *right* is common in AmE, but as a discourse marker for a conversational transition AmE prefers *all right* and *alright then* (LG 1098), as in *All right, let's do it*.

Miscellaneous

Interjections

As a response form, *okay* – the most famous Americanism – is at least ten times more common in AmE than in BrE, while *yeah* is only somewhat more frequent

and *yes* only half as frequent. Much more commonly heard in AmE than in BrE are the interjection *wow* (eight times more frequent) and the attention seeker *hey* (six times more frequent), while the response elicitor *huh* is ten times as frequent in AmE. The interjection *oh* is used about equally in AmE and BrE conversation (LG 1096–97).

Greetings

As a greeting, *hi* is eight times as frequent in AmE as in BrE, *hello* only two-thirds as frequent. *Bye bye* is twice as frequent in AmE, but *bye* alone occurs with about the same frequency on both sides of the Atlantic (LG 1097).

Polite expressions

The expressions *sorry*, *pardon*, and *please* are less common than in BrE, but *thank you* and *thanks* are twice as common (LG 1098). BrE *ta* 'thanks' is all but unknown in the USA.

Hedges

AmE exhibits far more frequent occurrences of the hedges *maybe*, *kind of*, and *like*, while BrE prefers *sort of* (LG 869). Compare *There's like no place to put the stuff* with BrE *We sort of were joking about it*. Note also AmE *Well, but maybe it's good* and *Her bones are kind of cracking*.

Expletives

In conversation, expletives are abundant on both sides of the Atlantic – but not necessarily the same ones with the same frequency. In AmE, *my God* occurs twice as often as in BrE, but *God* only half as often. About twice as common are the euphemisms *my goodness*, *my gosh*, *gee*, and *gee*. The common British swear words *bloody*, *bloody hell*, and so on are rarely heard in the USA, and the same is true for the verb *sod* (*sod it!*) and the noun (*you sod*) (LG 1098). Also unfamiliar are *Cor* (a "vulgar corruption" of *God*, the OED calls it), *blimney* (a "vulgar corruption" of *blind me!* or *blame me!*), and *bugger*.

Spelling

AmE prefers *-ize* over *-ise* (*subsidize*, *generalize*, *liberalize*, *organize*, but *advertise*); *-or* over *-our* (*favor*, *rumor*, *labor*, *color*, *succor*, *savior*, *harbor*, *behavior*, *parlor*). Affecting fewer words are preferences for *-er* over *-re* (*meager*, *center*, *theater*) and *-se* over *-ce* (*license*, *defense*, *offense*).

Before adding the suffix *-ment* to verbs ending in *e*, AmE drops the *e*: *judgment*, *abridgment*, *acknowledgment* instead of BrE (and occasional AmE) *judgement*, *abridgement*, *acknowledgement*.

Conventions for consonant doubling distinguish *cancelled*, *dialled*, *kidnaping*, *modeled*, *signaled*, *traveled* and *traveler* from BrE *cancelled*, *dialled*, *kidnaping*, etc. By contrast, AmE doubles *l* in *installment*, *fulfillment*, *skillful*, and

some others, where BrE usually does not. Miscellaneous spelling differences crop up in words such as *fetal, maneuver*, and *encyclopedia*, instead of the sometimes preferred BrE versions *foetal, manoeuvre*, and *encyclopaedia*. In addition, the following AmE ~ BrE pairs are familiar, none signaling a pronunciation difference, except that BrE *isar* is sometimes pronounced with initial [ts] rather than [z] as in AmE. The AmE spellings are apparently spreading.

<i>catalog</i> ~ <i>catalogue</i>	<i>check</i> ~ <i>cheque</i>
<i>curb</i> ~ <i>kerb</i>	<i>program</i> ~ <i>programme</i>
<i>czar</i> ~ <i>tsar</i>	<i>story</i> ~ <i>storey</i>
<i>jail</i> ~ <i>gaol</i>	<i>tire</i> ~ <i>tyre</i>
<i>pajamas</i> ~ <i>pyjamas</i>	<i>ton</i> ~ <i>tonne</i>

Other spelling distinctions represent pronunciation differences: *aluminum* (not *aluminium*), *specialty* (not *speciality*), and *spelled, learned, burned* (not *spelt, learnt, burnt*), although AmE pronunciation varies between [d] and [t] for these last three. AmE *learned* [li:nd] has neither the alternative British spelling *learnt* nor the pronunciation "lent" [lent].

Prospects for the future

No one can confidently predict degrees of divergence or convergence between AmE and BrE in the future. One might expect that shared film and television would lead to greater similarity but, except in some domains of vocabulary, the exposure to language these media represent seems less powerful an agent of change than one might imagine. Further, to the extent that AmE and BrE are influenced by different immigrant groups, they may tend to diverge. The same may be said of the influence of long-standing ethnic groups, in particular African Americans, whose relationship to other varieties of AmE may be in flux. In any case, changes affecting AmE or BrE could spread to the other variety.

For the most part, the features discussed in this chapter reflect standard varieties. But there is less variation across educated speakers than other speakers, and variation from region to region is greater across lower ranked socioeconomic groups than across higher ranked ones. Thus, while there may be greater commonality and increasing understanding in US and UK books, magazines, and newspapers, the everyday conversation of ordinary citizens, enlivened as it is by the independent tides that govern intimate colloquial forms, may increase distinctness. Differences in spelling and other orthographic matters will likely shrink, partly from increased use of the Internet and the widespread use of university textbooks published by international publishing houses and distributed worldwide.

To return to the Harry Potter books and films mentioned at the top of this chapter, critics have claimed a serious loss of cultural exchange in such substitutions as *English muffin* for BrE *crumpet*, *field* for *pitch*, and *two weeks* for *fortnight* (Glick

2000). For the time being, though, at least younger speakers of AmE and BrE may benefit from the occasional "translation." How far into the future, and to what extent, translation will be needed remains an open question.

Acknowledgments

In identifying features to discuss, I have relied principally on Trudgill and Hannah (2002) and especially for quantitative data on Biber et al. (1999), referred to as LG within the chapter. Some illustrations I have taken from the British National Corpus, Lexis-Nexis, and assorted newspapers and magazines, and sometimes they have been slightly altered. My appreciation also goes to Julian Smalley, originally of Nottinghamshire, for his observations about English in the USA.

Suggestions for further reading and exploration

No one has written more energetically about AmE than H. L. Mencken and Mencken (1963) is a convenient abridgment of his three-volume work. Chapters 3 and 6 of the present volume discuss variation within AmE, while chapter 20 treats slang and chapter 21 hip hop. An excellent source of historical information about slang is Lighter's (1994-) multivolume dictionary, while Chapman's (1995) single-volume dictionary is handy and informative. Craigie and Hulbert (1960) and Mathews (1951) are classic historical dictionaries of AmE. Flexner and Soukhanov (1997) and Flexner (1982) are coffee-table books, rich with informative slices of AmE. Crystal (2003), another big book, treats English more broadly. Barnhart and Metcalf (1997) makes delightful reading about selected Americanisms, one each for most years from 1555 (*canoe*) and 1588 (*stank*) to 1996 (*soccer mom*), 1997 (*Ebonics*), and 1998 (*millennium bug*). Trudgill (1985) provides an amusing sociolinguistic perspective of a visit to the USA by a British tourist. Showing special sensitivity to nonnative speakers and teachers of English as a Foreign Language, Tottie (2002) is fresh, accessible, and interesting. The quarterly *American Speech* offers cutting-edge discussions of a wide range of topics.

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3

Regional dialects

WILLIAM A. KRETZSCHMAR, JR.

Editors' introduction

This chapter treats *regional dialects* – a topic of tremendous interest to the general public. The first part is introductory, covering, among other things, the fact that no two people speak exactly alike but that regional speech is still a reality, for people from the same region do speak more like each other than like people from other regions. The US regional dialects developed in part from the separateness and isolation of the earliest colonial settlements and in part from the different mixtures of people who populated each region (Native American, German, African, and so on). Although some of the distinctiveness of the speech habits of the earliest settlers has been ironed out, broad regional patterns still remain, although they are constantly in flux, and they are to some extent abstractions.

The chapter draws extensively on maps and tables, and William A. Kretzschmar uses them to outline the boundaries and salient features of the main (Eastern) American English dialects in the mid-twentieth century, based on the work of legendary American dialectologist Hans Kurath. Kretzschmar shows how Kurath established isoglosses that demarcated dialects on the basis of people's familiarity with lexical alternatives like *darning needle* (Northern), *mosquito hawk* (Southern), and *snake feeder* (Midland), all of which refer to the 'dragon fly.' Subsequent analyses of pronunciation patterns essentially confirmed the regional dialect patterns that had been established on the basis of word use.

The chapter closes with a discussion of twenty-first-century regional dialect patterns. More recent studies of the word usage and pronunciation patterns of US dialects confirm the broad regional speech difference identified half a century earlier, but vocabulary and pronunciation changes have occurred, and to quote Labov and Ash (1997) (who are cited at length in this chapter), "the local accents [of major US cities] are more different from each other than at any time in the past." This chapter suggests that something closer to a uniform national dialect is spoken by the well educated, but that regional differentiation and vibrancy are evident among working-class and lower middle-class Americans.

Background

While all Americans know there are regional dialects of American English (see chapter 26), it is actually quite difficult to prove them right. Detailed investigation of what Americans say – their pronunciation, their grammar, the words they use for everyday things and ideas – shows that each of us is an individual in our language use, not quite the same as any other person studied. All English speakers do of