

4

Dialects in the United States: Past, Present, and Future

In an important sense, dialects simultaneously reflect the past, the present, and the future. The present configuration of American dialects is still very much in touch with its past patterns, and their future development no doubt will build on present dialect contours. Dialects mark the regional and cultural cartography of America as well as any other cultural artifact or practice, and there is no reason to expect that they will surrender their emblematic role in American life in the near future—despite popular predictions and persistent rumors that American English is heading towards homogenization.

In this chapter, we consider the evolution of the dialects of American English from their inception to their current course of development. In the process, we will see that American dialects still reflect some of the influences of the dialects brought by the original English-speaking colonists, the so-called founder effect we described in chapter 2. At the same time, they reflect the history of contact with speakers of other languages. In addition, they have undergone and continue to experience many innovations that set various dialects of American English apart from one another—and from other varieties of English throughout the world.

[Video: History of English in ten minutes](#)

In the process of its development, American English has evolved through a number of different stages, from the simple transplantation of a wide range of British dialects to the Americas to the internal diversification of dialects within America. Edgar Schneider (2003) suggests that there are five stages that can be applied to the spread of English to different locations across the world, including its movement to and development within the United States. In the initial phase, the FOUNDATION STAGE, English is used on a regular basis in a region where it was not used previously. In this stage, often typified by colonization, speakers come from different regional backgrounds and do not behave linguistically in a homogeneous way. In the second phase, called EXONORMATIVE STABILIZATION, communities stabilize under foreign dominance—historically mostly British, in the case of the early United States. In the next phase, NATIVIZATION, there is a fundamental transition towards independence—politically, culturally, and linguistically, and unique linguistic usages and structures emerge. An important part of this phase is the differentiation of the language variety of the newly independent country from its linguistic origins or homeland. In the fourth phase, known as ENDONORMATIVE STABILIZATION, the new nation adopts its own language norms rather than adhering to external norms, while in the final phase, DIFFERENTIATION, internal diversification takes over and new dialects evolve on their own, usually quite differently from how language change is proceeding in the former homeland. Each phase in this cycle is characterized by a set of cultural and political conditions that coincide with linguistic changes, reflecting the

close association that often exists between language and nationhood, especially in Western industrialized societies. In such a progression, we see how language variation in the United States has developed from its initial roots in the English language of the early British colonists to its current state in which the dialects of American English are viewed as the regional and cultural manifestations of diversity within America.

4.1 The First English(es) in America

4.1.1 Jamestown

When the first successful English settlement was founded in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, British English was quite different from what it is today. American English, of course, was non-existent. As we mentioned in chapter 2, scholars refer to the language of this time period—the language of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan era—as Early Modern English, to distinguish it from today’s English (Modern English or Present-Day English) as well as from the English of Chaucer’s day (Middle English, spoken from about 1100 to 1500) and from even earlier varieties of the language (Old English, c.600–1100). Not only was Early Modern English in general quite different from today’s language, but there was also quite a bit of variation within the language at that time. Since the beginnings of English, there have been numerous distinct dialects within the British Isles, dialects that arose and were continually enhanced by longstanding lack of communication between speakers of different dialect areas. Furthermore, the notion of a unified “standard” language was not firmly established until around the mid-eighteenth century so that there was no social pressure to try to erase dialect differences. These differences in earlier varieties of British English had a profound effect on the development of the dialects of the United States, since people from different speech regions tended to establish residence in different regions of America. In fact, some of today’s most noticeable dialect differences can still be traced directly back to the British English dialects of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Contrary to popular perceptions, the speech of many early colonists more closely resembled today’s American English than today’s standard British speech, since British English has undergone a number of innovations which did not spread to once-remote America. For example, even though Shakespearean actors, speaking in “proper” British style, pronounce words such as *cart* and *work* as *caht* and *wuhk* (that is, without the *r* sounds), many of Shakespeare’s contemporaries would have pronounced their *r*’s, just as do most Americans today. Similarly, the early colonists would have pronounced the BATH vowel in words like *path*, *dance*, and *can’t* like the TRAP vowel of American English today, even though British standards now demand a sound similar to the PALM vowel of *father*.

Certain words and word meanings handed down to today’s Americans by the first colonists also are retained, despite the fact that British speakers have long since abandoned them. For example, Americans can use the word *mad* with its early meaning of “angry”, while British speakers can only use it to mean mentally unbalanced, or the word *fall* to refer to the season which follows summer, but British speakers only use the term *autumn*, even though both terms coexisted for centuries in Britain, and a few syntactic structures that have been preserved in American English that have been lost from British English. The American use of *gotten*, as in *Has he gotten the mail yet?*, is an older form, supplanted in Britain by *got* (*Has he got the mail?*); further, the British use of *done* in a question–answer pair such as *Did you leave your wallet in the car?/I might have done* arose after English had sunk its roots in American soil. Thus, Americans reply to questions such as the above with *I might have* or *I might have done so* but never with *I might have done*, a modern-day, distinct British-ism.

Many of the early colonists in the Jamestown area—that is, Tidewater Virginia—came from Southeastern England, the home of Britain’s cultural center, London. These speakers

would have spoken varieties of English that were quite close to the emerging London standard rather than the more “rustic” varieties spoken in outlying areas such as Northern and Southwestern England. One important feature of the new standard was the loss of *r* after vowels and before consonants (as in “wuhk” for *work*) that today serves as one of the chief features differentiating British English from American English. Even though, as we mentioned above, English was largely *r*-pronouncing, or *r*-ful, in the early seventeenth century, the loss of *r*, or *r*-lessness, was not uncommon in Southeastern England at this time. It gradually gained prestige in this region and finally became a marker of standard British speech. As *r*-lessness was gaining prestige in England, colonists in Tidewater Virginia were building a prosperous society based on plantation agriculture. The aristocrats of this region, descended from fairly *r*-less Southeastern English speakers, maintained strong ties with the London area and its standard speakers, and so *r*-lessness was established in lowland Virginia. This is in sharp contrast to the piedmont and mountain regions to the west of the Tidewater, and indeed to most varieties of American English today, which are *r*-ful. Most of the English speakers who established residence in the uplands of Virginia, more than a hundred years after the founding of Jamestown, were vernacular speakers from Britain’s *r*-pronouncing regions or were descended from these speakers. In particular, the *r*-pronouncing Scots-Irish from Ulster in Northern Ireland were to have an enormous impact on the speech of the Virginia colony and on American English in general.

Another reason for the *r*-ful character of upland Virginia speech is that this region was subject to more dialect mixing than the Tidewater area, which remained relatively homogeneous for a number of generations. When a number of different dialects come into contact with one another, differences among the varieties may be leveled. For some reason, most likely the preponderance of Scots-Irish settlers in the American colonies, the reduction of dialect differences in early America tended to produce *r*-ful rather than *r*-less speech, even if a number of settlers in “mixed” areas initially brought *r*-less speech with them. Finally, speakers in upland Virginia were *r*-ful because they did not maintain as much contact with Britain as their neighbors to the east. Settlers in the piedmont and mountain regions tended to establish small farms rather than large plantations and to lean toward democracy rather than aristocracy. In addition, they were less wealthy than plantation owners and were not able to afford luxuries such as schooling of their children in London.

4.1.2 Boston

As in Tidewater Virginia, speakers of “proper” Southeastern England speech were prevalent in Eastern New England, beginning with the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1620. Thus, Eastern New England became an *r*-less dialect area as standard or “proper” British English moved toward an *r*-less norm, in contrast with neighboring dialect areas such as Western New England (west of the Connecticut River Valley) and New York State, which became *r*-pronouncing regions for the same reasons that upland Virginia did: (1) settlement by *r*-pronouncing speakers; (2) the reduction of dialect differences in the face of dialect contact and language contact; and (3) relative lack of contact with London as compared with speakers in Eastern New England. To this day, Eastern New England survives as an *r*-less island in the midst of a sea of *r*-fulness, caricaturized through phrases such as “Pahk the cah in Hahvahd Yahd” for “Park the car in Harvard Yard.” One of the most stereotypically *r*-less regions in this country, New York City, as demonstrated in phrases such as “toity-toid street” for “thirty-third street,” began life as an *r*-ful speech area. In fact, it wasn’t until at least the mid-nineteenth century that *r*-lessness, which spread into the city from New England, was firmly established there. Today, *r*-lessness is receding sharply in Southern dialect areas like Tidewater Virginia. It is also declining in New York City and Eastern New England, though mostly in more formal speech styles.

A map showing the US regions that historically have been characterized by *r*-less speech is given in figure 4.1

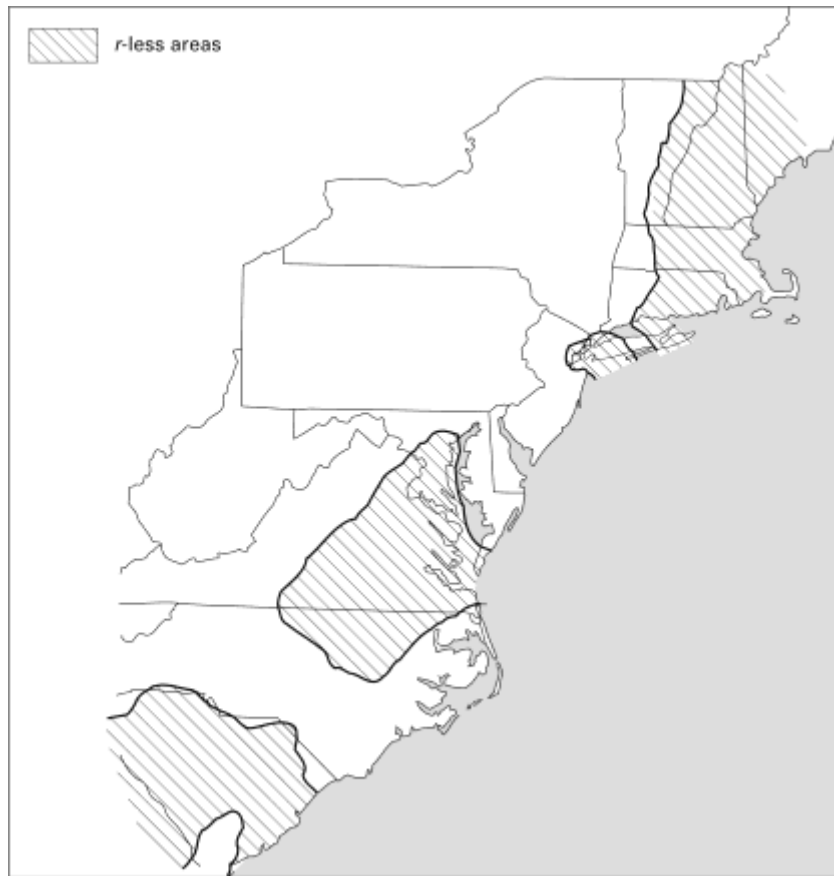


Figure 4.1 Traditional regions of *r*-lessness and *r*-fulness in American English (adapted from Kurath and McDavid 1961: map 32)

[Video: R-lessness in *Gone with the Wind*](#)

[Video: R-lessness in FDR speech](#)

Exercise 1

In the decades following World War II, *r*-lessness has been receding sharply in the United States. What do you think the reason for this decline might be? Consider caricatures of New York City and Boston speech (e.g. *toity-toid street* “thirty-third street”, *pahk the cah* “park the car”), as well as the fact that *r*-lessness is avoided in formal speech styles even by people who are still quite *r*-less in casual conversation. Compare the decline of *r*-lessness in the United States with its historical rise and continued maintenance in British speech. What do the changing patterns of *r*-fulness and *r*-lessness in America and Britain tell us about the inherent value (linguistic and/or social) of particular dialect features?

Following the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a number of other important settlements were founded in the mid- to late seventeenth century. These include several settlements in the Connecticut River Valley area beginning in 1635, as well as settlements in the Hudson River Valley, including what was later to become New York City,

beginning in the 1640s. In addition, Providence, Rhode Island, was established in 1638 by several families from the Massachusetts Bay Colony who were dissatisfied with the severity of religious and social practices in Salem and Boston. While Boston was to become the cultural and linguistic center of Eastern New England, influencing speech patterns throughout Massachusetts and up into lower Maine, Western New England would develop its own characteristic speech patterns, which radiated outward from the initial settlements in the lower Connecticut Valley. Further, Rhode Island would persist as a dialect sub-region for centuries, evidence for the strong and enduring character of dialect boundaries established in an era of minimal intercommunication between speakers of different areas, including even neighboring regions.

Some of the chief differences between traditional Eastern New England and Western New England speech derive from cultural differences that have distinguished the two areas since their initial settlement by English speakers. Many early residents of Eastern New England made their living from the sea, and so the traditional dialect is rich with nautical terminology, including such words as *nor'easter*, which refers to a storm from the north and east, and *lulling down* and *breezing up*, used, respectively, to refer to decreasing and increasing winds. A number of these nautical terms have their origins in the speech of the western counties of England rather than the southeast, since people from the seagoing west were frequent settlers along the coast of early America.

The influence of Southwest England along the coastal edges of the Eastern Seaboard of the US can also be felt in more southerly dialect areas. For example, even though the Tidewater Virginia area is characterized as a traditionally *r*-less, there are important pockets of *r*-fulness in the Chesapeake Bay area and to the immediate south. To this day, the highly distinctive speech of the Delmarva Peninsula, Tangier and Smith Islands (in the Chesapeake Bay), and the Outer Banks islands of North Carolina is far more reminiscent of the speech of Southwest England than of the Southeastern English from which Tidewater English proper is descended.

As we move inland, traditional regional dialects tend to be characterized by a preponderance of farming terms rather than nautical words. Thus, the traditional Western New England dialect is replete with terms pertaining to an agricultural lifestyle, in contrast with neighboring Eastern New England speech. Of special interest are terms that relate to localized farming practices. For example, a *stone drag* refers to a piece of equipment used for extricating stones from the rocky New England soil, while the term *rock maple* refers to the sugar maple, an important source of income for early farmers in Western New England.

The traditional speech of rural New York State is also rich with localized farming terms. However, its overall character is rather different from the speech of neighboring Western New England, due in part to the influence of Dutch and German. The Dutch had control of the Hudson Valley area until 1644, when the British took over; in addition, a huge influx of Germans began pouring into New York and Pennsylvania in the early eighteenth century. The Dutch and German influence on traditional New York speech is evidenced in terms such as *olicook* “doughnut” (from Dutch *oliekoek* “oil cake”) and *thick milk* “clabber” (from German *dickmilch* “thick milk”), which remained current in the region through the early years of the twentieth century. In recent years, most of these words have faded out of use or have spread far beyond the region (e.g. *cruller* “doughnut”, from Dutch *krulle* “curly cake”) and so no longer serve as markers of New York speech. In fact, the only Dutch and German terms that truly remain intact in the region are place names such as *Brooklyn* and *Harlem* (from Dutch *Breukelyn* and *Haarlem*, respectively). At the same time, many current place names reflect the names for the original Native American Indian groups in these areas: for example, Merrimac, Nabasset, and Cochituate in Massachusetts (as well as the name of the state of Massachusetts itself); and Chesapeake, Rappahannock, and Shenandoah in Virginia.

Exercise 2

Using an appropriate map or maps, examine the place names found in two states from different regions of the United States. To what extent do you see the influence of different language groups in these place names? Cite the influences of at least several groups of inhabitants, including Native American Indians. If you aren't sure about the etymology of the place name, you can consult the web site for the town or region; such web sites often give information on the origins of local place names.

4.1.3 Philadelphia

Another of the nation's earliest cultural and linguistic centers was Philadelphia, established in the 1680s by Quakers under the leadership of William Penn. The Quaker movement was originally based in Northern England, and so Philadelphia was, from the first, far less like Southern England in its speech habits than was New England. Also prevalent in Philadelphia from its earliest days were emigrants from Wales and Germany. Almost immediately, the Germans, many of whom were of the Moravian, Mennonite, and Amish sects, began moving westward into Pennsylvania and began developing their own distinctive culture and language, Pennsylvania Dutch. This language is not really Dutch but rather a unique variety of German which developed in the New World, partly in response to speakers' contact with English and partly as a result of longstanding isolation from European German varieties.

One of the most important groups to settle in early Philadelphia was the Scots-Irish. In 1724, thousands of Scots-Irish arrived in Delaware and then proceeded northward into Pennsylvania, New York, and New England. The initial wave of immigration was followed by numerous others throughout the course of the eighteenth century. Immigration reached its peak in the 1770s but persisted well into the twentieth century. The Scots-Irish were descendants of Scots who had emigrated to Ulster in the north of Ireland at the beginning of the seventeenth century in order to seek economic gain and to escape discrimination and persecution at the hands of the English. At the time of the initial migrations to Ulster, Scots English was even more distinct from London speech than today's highly distinctive Scots English is from standard British English, or RP (Received Pronunciation). The English spoken in Scotland in the early seventeenth century tended to become less distinctive as the centuries passed; however, the old, highly distinctive speech tended to be preserved in Ulster, since the Scots-Irish did not maintain much contact with Scotland, or with England. Thus, the variety of English that the Scots-Irish brought to America in the early eighteenth century was a rather archaic form of Scots English. It was little influenced by Irish English, since most Irish people in the Ulster area spoke the Irish language (also known as Irish Gaelic) rather than English. Among its other characteristics, Scots-Irish English was strongly *r*-ful, and as it established itself in America it successfully resisted the incursion of *r*-lessness via such cultural centers as Boston and Richmond. Around 250,000 Scots-Irish had migrated to America by 1776 and one in seven colonists was Scots-Irish at this time. The impact of the Scots-Irish would only strengthen over time. From their initial settlement areas, particularly Pennsylvania, the Scots-Irish and their descendants would spread throughout the Mid-Atlantic states and the highlands of the American South; and their influence can even be felt throughout the Northern and Western US, where *r*-ful speech predominates to this day, despite the fact that *r*-lessness now dominates in Great Britain. Eventually, some two million immigrants of Scots-Irish descent made their way to America during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

As early as the 1730s, the Scots-Irish began moving westward into the heart of Pennsylvania, where they encountered the Pennsylvania Dutch. From these colonists the

Scots-Irish picked up such German terms as *sauerkraut* and *hex*; in addition, they borrowed the musical instrument known as the *dulcimer*, which would later become a trademark of Scots-Irish culture in the Southern highlands, as well as the German-style log cabin, a hallmark of American pioneer culture throughout the frontier period. Because the Germans had already claimed much of the prime farming land in Pennsylvania, the Scots-Irish quickly turned toward the hill country. As early as the 1730s, they began traveling southward down the Shenandoah Valley in the western part of Virginia. From there they fanned out into the Carolinas, Kentucky, and Tennessee, bringing with them enduring features of speech. A number of features of the Southern highland dialect region, as well as the Midland dialect region situated between the South and the North, are traceable to the persistent influence of the Scots-Irish, including the use of *till* to express time (e.g. *quarter till four*), constructions such as *the car needs washed*, and the use of *want* plus a preposition, as in *the dog wants in*. In addition, the Midland feature known as “positive anymore” (e.g. *They watch a lot of Netflix anymore*) is of Scots-Irish origin as well. By 1776, there were already several thousand Scots-Irish living in Eastern Kentucky and the Tennessee Valley, and they continued to pour into the area throughout the Revolutionary War.

4.1.4 Charleston

As the Scots-Irish established a culture revolving around small, independent farms in the highland South, they remained relatively separated from the plantation culture that was flourishing in the lowland South. We have already mentioned one major center of plantation culture, the lower Virginia area, especially Richmond. The most important center, however, was Charleston, South Carolina, established in 1670. From the beginning, Charleston was a far more heterogeneous speech area than Richmond. Its original settlers were English, Irish, and Welsh; these were quickly followed by such widely varied groups as Huguenots from France, Dutch people from Holland and New Amsterdam, Baptists from Massachusetts, Quakers from Louisiana, and a number of Irish Catholics. Slaves imported from the west coast of Africa and Caribbean to work in South Carolina’s booming rice plantations also constituted an important group of settlers. Among the most important planters were a group of Barbadians who established plantations to the north of Charleston and initiated an active trade with the West Indies that was to play a vital role in the formation of the language and culture of Charleston. Very quickly, Charleston’s booming rice-based economy led to its establishment as the largest mainland importer of African slaves. As early as 1708, its population included as many blacks as whites, and by 1724, there were three times as many Blacks as Whites.

The early development of African American speech in the American South has been intently studied and hotly debated by linguists for decades. Some linguists maintain that the contact situation among speakers of various African languages and English resulted in the formation of a new contact-based language, or CREOLE language that eventually developed into vernacular African American speech. Other researchers, however, believe that African American English (AAE) derives directly from British English, as do other American English dialects. As we will see in chapter 8, the truth regarding the origins of AAE most likely lies somewhere in the middle of these competing hypotheses. AAE has long had much in common with European-based American English dialects; at the same time, the radical language contact situations in which it was forged left enduring marks on the language variety that have persisted to this day. There is a longstanding creole language in the Southeastern United States, called Gullah, or Geechee, which is still spoken by African Americans in the Sea Islands area of coastal South Carolina and Georgia. It is unclear, however, whether a full-fledged creole language or languages was ever widespread throughout the American South.

The influence of Charleston speech quickly spread throughout the lowlands of South Carolina and into Georgia, where settlement was halted for a number of decades at the Ogeechee River, the borderline between colonial and Native American Indian territory. Florida was not as heavily influenced by the Charleston hub in the colonial years as the rest of

the Lower South, since it was under Spanish rule until the early nineteenth century and was not subject to extensive settlement by English speakers until relatively late. For the most part, the English that radiated outward from Charleston was *r*-less, just like the plantation speech centered around the Tidewater Virginia settlement hearth. At the same time, Charlestonian speech, particularly in the pronunciation of its vowels, developed as a distinct dialect that today remains quite different from other Southern US dialects (Baranowski 2007). For example, residents of Charleston typically do not exhibit either the ungliding of the PRICE diphthong or the “breaking” of other vowels (i.e. pronunciation with prominent offglides) that are (stereo)typical of today’s Southern American English and lead to its popular characterization as the “Southern drawl.”

4.1.5 New Orleans

One final center of early settlement in America that played a role in shaping its dialect landscape was New Orleans. The construction of New Orleans by the French began in 1717, but it was some years before significant numbers of settlers could be persuaded to live in this swampy, humid area. The earliest European settlers were French, with an admixture of German. Slaves from Africa and the West Indies were also among the earliest inhabitants, although New Orleans plantations were never as prosperous as those of the Atlantic colonies. Blacks in the New Orleans area developed their own creole language, based on French rather than English, which is the ancestor of today’s Louisiana Creole. The year 1765 marks the arrival of another very important cultural group in Louisiana, the Acadians, or ‘Cajuns. The Acadians were a people of French descent who had been deported from the Canadian settlement of Acadia (now Nova Scotia and New Brunswick). They brought with them a variety of French that was quite different from and more archaic than the Parisian French of the mid-1700s. Today the speech variety of the Acadians in Louisiana survives in a variety of English known as Cajun English. Spain took over control of New Orleans in 1763, but the impact of the Spanish language on this speech region has always been very slight, with the French influence far outweighing that of any other linguistic group, as evidenced in such regional terms as *lagniappe* “a small gift”, as well as terms of French origin that originated in this region but later spread throughout the United States, such as *bisque* “a cream soup” and *brioche* “a rich, pastry-like bread.” The French influence can also be heard in certain pronunciation features of Cajun English, for example the production of word-initial *p*, *t*, and *k* without aspiration (a slight brief puff of air) and the heavy nasalization of vowels before orthographic nasals (in words like *man*; cf. French *bon* [bɔ̃] ‘good’). In 1803, New Orleans passed into American hands, and settlers of British descent finally began inhabiting the region in significant numbers. This strong English presence in New Orleans, however, came far too late to erase the heavy French influence that still characterizes Louisiana Creole and Cajun English. We discuss Cajun English in detail in Chapter 7.

4.2 Earlier American English: The Colonial Period

In the previous section, we showed the dialect influence of five primary cultural hearths established early in the history of colonial America: Jamestown, Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston, and New Orleans. All of these regions had emerged by the time of the Revolutionary War. Some of the most distinctive dialects in the United States were already developing at this early date, though they might not have been recognized as such until much later. To a large extent, the period leading up to the Revolutionary War was more focused on how “Americanisms” in English were differentiating it from British English, as is often the case during the nativization phase of English spread.

When the Thirteen Colonies became the United States, there were already clear indications that American English was becoming a separate linguistic entity from British English. We

have already hinted at the changes that took place in American English due to contact with various non-English languages. Earlier American English was influenced by French in the New Orleans area, Spanish in Florida, German in Pennsylvania and New York, and by West African languages such as Mande, Mandingo, and Wolof throughout the Lower South. And, of course, it was influenced by the numerous Native American Indian languages spoken by the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas. As we discussed in chapter 2, American English acquired such terms as *raccoon*, *hominy*, and *bayou* (from Choctaw *bayuk* “a small, slow-moving stream”, through New Orleans French) from various Native American languages, including languages of the Algonquian, Muskogean, Iroquoian, Siouan, and Penutian families. However, the influence of Native American languages in today’s America is best attested in the hundreds of current place names in the United States that come from the original inhabitants of these regions.

In addition, the development of English in America was affected by contact between speakers of language varieties that originated in different parts of the British Isles, including such varieties as Southeastern English, Southwestern English, Scots English, Scots-Irish, and even Irish and Scots Gaelic. For example, such words as *shenanigan* “trickery, mischief”, *smithereens*, and *shanty* most likely come from the Irish language, although their etymologies are not completely certain. In addition, general American usages such as *He’s in the hospital* (compare the British *He’s in hospital*) and Appalachian English *He’s got the earache* “He has an earache” may be the result of transfer from the Irish language to English, since early Irish English speakers in America tended to use definite articles in a number of constructions where speakers of other English varieties would omit them.

Language and dialect contact were not the only factors responsible for the creation of a uniquely American brand of English. When early emigrants arrived in America, they encountered many new objects, plants, animals, and natural phenomena for which they had no names. Some names they borrowed from other languages, particularly Native American Indian languages such as those of the Algonquian family, but other labels were innovated using the resources of the English language. For example, *seaboard*, *underbrush*, and *backwoods* are all compounds which were created in America; in addition, some existing words were given new meanings to better suit the American landscape. Thus, *creek*, which originally meant “small saltwater inlet” (still a current meaning in Great Britain and parts of the Southeastern US coast), came to be used in America to refer to any sort of small stream, in particular a freshwater stream. Proof that English in America very quickly became distinct from British English is found in the fact that, as early as 1735, British people were complaining about American words and word usages, such as the use of *bluff* to refer to a bank or cliff. In fact, the term “Americanism” was coined in the 1780s to refer to particular terms and phrases that were coming to characterize English in the early United States but not British English.

A number of innovations that distinguish American from British English were undertaken quite self-consciously by early Americans, who wanted to indicate their political separation from Britain through their language. For example, Thomas Jefferson was a frequent coiner of new words (*belittle*, for instance, is an invention of his), while Benjamin Franklin was a staunch advocate of spelling reform for American English. The greatest champion of this cause, however, was the early American lexicographer Noah Webster, who gave Americans such spellings as *color* for *colour*, *wagon* for *waggon*, *fiber* for *fibre*, and *tire* for *tyre*.

Despite resistance to British English in early America, British norms continued to exert considerable influence in America for quite some time. The transition from British-based, external norms to American-based, internal norms was not a rapid, seamless one. In fact, there is reason to wonder how complete the influence of British English has been even centuries after independence. For example, British English is still viewed as more prestigious and

“standard” than American English throughout the world—and also by many Americans themselves. Furthermore, the spread of *r*-lessness throughout the South and in New England was almost certainly due in part to emulation of British standards. In addition, other sweeping changes in British English which took place during the Early Modern English period occurred in America as well. For example, *thee* and *thou* were replaced by *you* in both Britain and America at this time (though they still persist in some English dialects), and third-person singular *-eth* (e.g. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures*) was replaced by *-s* on both sides of the Atlantic as well.

One of the questions that comes up with respect to earlier American English is the extent to which the leveling of the different dialects brought from the British Isles took place. Certainly, some of these differences were reduced as American English nativized, and some features became quite widespread rather than confined to only a few regions or settlement groups. For example, the use of third-person plural *-s* in sentences like *The dogs barks a lot* became fairly widespread among earlier varieties of American English even though it was a regional British trait associated primarily with Northern England to begin with. Although there are certainly many cases in which distinctive features of regional British dialects were leveled and some cases in which localized British dialect traits became part of generalized American English, there is also evidence that regional varieties of English arose relatively early in the history of the United States, in many cases as a direct result of regional dialect differences brought over from the British Isles, and that these differences have been maintained since their initial establishment. As noted above, a number of Scots-Irish traits were documented relatively early in the Midland, between the North and the South, and were restricted to that region from that time forward. And the regional use of *weren't* in sentences such as *It weren't me* was largely confined to Southeastern coastal areas relatively early and has remained regionally restricted to this day. Earlier dialect influence seems evident in the traditional dialect map given in figure 4.2, one of the first systematically compiled maps of dialect areas in the United States. The data for the map were gathered from older speakers in the 1930s and 1940s. Though the data thus represent the speech of people who learned their varieties of English in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their connection to the original settlement patterns seems apparent. For example, the map indicates the early influence of the Boston (Northern) and Philadelphia (Midland) linguistic and cultural hubs, as well as the outward spread of distinctive varieties from these central points.

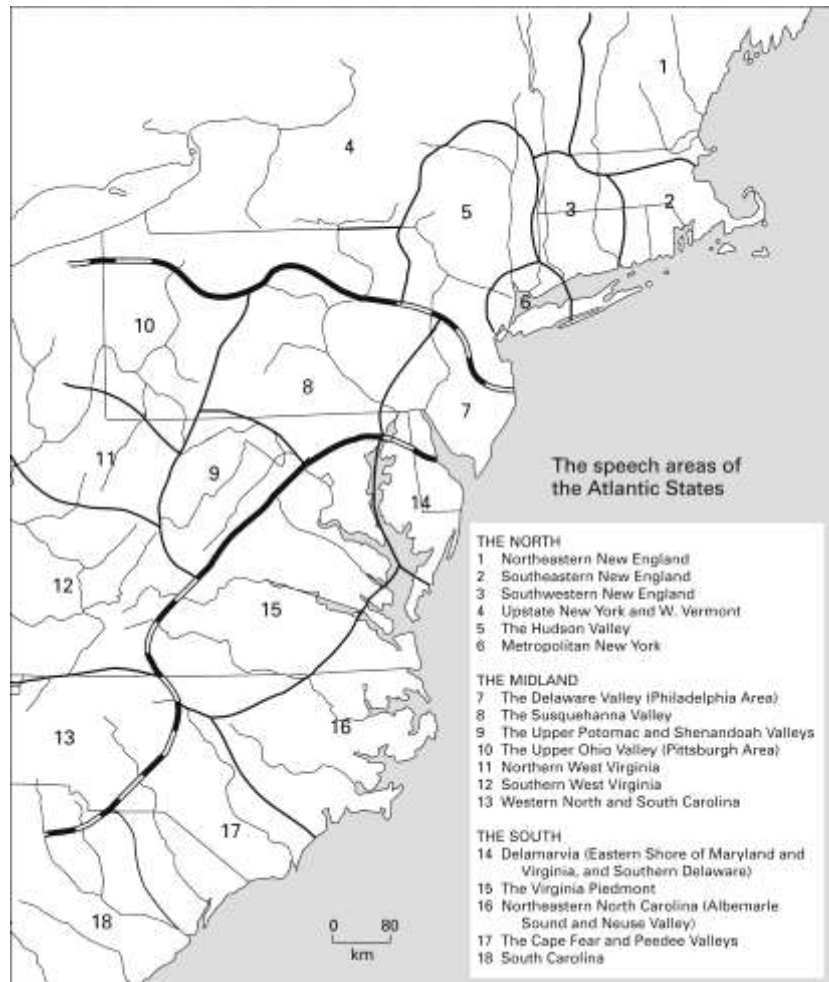


Figure 4.2 Dialect areas of the Eastern United States: a traditional view (from Kurath 1949: figure 3; reprinted by permission of the University of Michigan Press)

Although American English shared innovations with British English and instituted its own language changes, the traditional dialects of American English are rather conservative in character when compared with standard British English. This is particularly true of the two dialect areas that once kept pace with changes in British English more than the rest of the country: New England and the South. For example, these two dialect areas are still typified by lexical items from Elizabethan and even earlier English. Thus, in rural New England we may still hear terms such as the fourteenth-century word *rowan* (“a second crop grown in a hayfield which has been harvested”), while in the South we may hear such fifteenth-century terms as *foxfire* (a phosphorescent light caused by fungi on decaying wood), *kinfolk* (family, relatives), and *liketa* “almost” (*He liketa broke his neck*). The Midland dialect area traditionally tended to be more innovative than its neighbors to the north and south, chiefly because immigrants from the British Isles, Europe, and points beyond continued to pour into this area long after Northern and Southern dialect boundaries were established. The fact that New England and the South historically were partners in linguistic conservatism is evidenced in the fact that the two regions traditionally have shared a number of dialect features, despite their geographic distance from one another. For example, the two regions share such older lexical items as *piazza* “porch” (an early borrowing from Italian) and such pronunciation features as *r*-lessness.

It seems apparent that the seeds of regional speech were sown early in the history of English in the United States, and regional distinctions have remained surprisingly intact over several centuries, notwithstanding the effects of leveling. Even when traditional dialect features are lost, they may be supplanted by new features whose distribution follows the same lines as the old features, thus preserving the dialect boundary. Whereas many terms associated with old-fashioned methods of farming have understandably passed out of the New England lexicon, some newer terms pertaining to newer lifestyles, such as the use of *rotary* for “traffic circle”, *parkway* for a divided highway with extensive plantings, or *wicked* as a general intensifier (e.g. *He’s wicked crazy*) are largely confined to the traditional New England dialect region. Such regionally confined terms, according to Craig Carver, offer “proof that dialect expressions inevitably spread or die out, but that dialect boundaries remain relatively stable and alive” (1987: 32). We will discuss the fate of traditional dialect regions in the United States in more detail in the final section of this chapter and in the following chapter.

4.3 American English Extended

Just as initial British and Continental European settlement patterns along the Eastern Seaboard defined the dialects of the East Coast, so too did these initial dialect boundaries play a large role in shaping the dialect landscape of the interior of the United States. For the most part, European settlers and their descendants tended to move directly westward as America expanded, so that Northern states in the interior tended to be inhabited by speakers from New England and New York, the middle states to be inhabited by Midland speakers, and the Southern states by Southerners. An overview map of the dialect areas that resulted from this settlement pattern is given in figure 4.3, from Carver (1987). No single map can paint a full picture of regional dialect variation in American English; dialect areas contain sub-dialects; regional variation intersects with language variation based on factors like social status, ethnicity, gender, and speech style; and dialects comprise features on all levels of language variation, from phonology to grammar to discourse, and dialect boundaries can look different depending what features or types of features they are based on. The map in 4.3 is based on lexical differences characterizing traditional US dialects. Later, we present a map based on current phonological differences that shows considerable overlap with this map.

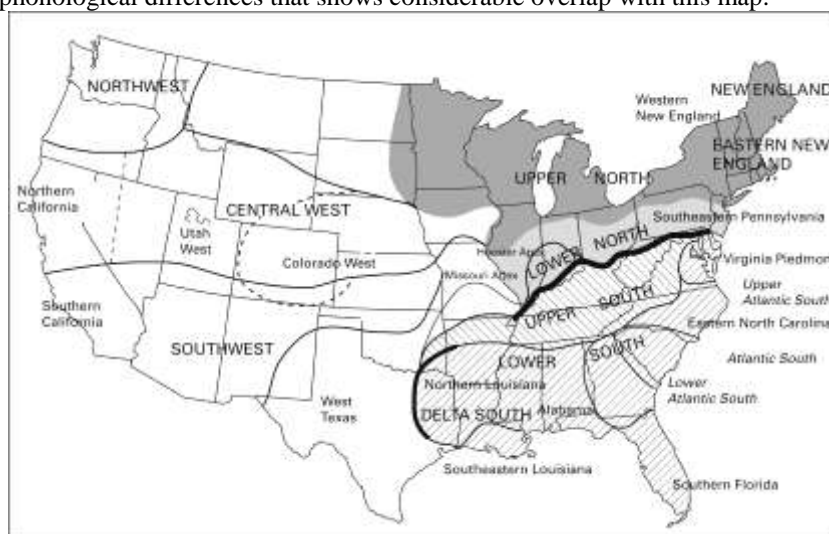


Figure 4.3 The major dialect areas of the United States: a revised perspective (from Carver 1987: 248; reprinted by permission of the University of Michigan Press)

Figure 4.3 clearly portrays the primarily westward flow of dialect expansion in the United States. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Europeans and their descendants in New

England and New York began pushing westward beyond New York into Ohio, driven by overcrowding, high land prices, steep taxes, and the extreme religious and social conservatism of the Northeast. The northeastern corner of Ohio, called the Western Reserve, became an important region of New England speech and was to remain for many years a sort of dialect island in a state largely dominated by Southern and Midland dialects. The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 deflected migrations from New York and New England from the Ohio River Valley to the Great Lakes, reinforcing the linguistic insularity of the Western Reserve and populating Michigan. After 1833, thousands of people came to Detroit by regular steamer service, fanning out from there into Michigan and Northern Illinois. By 1850, most of lower Michigan had been settled by New England farmers.

For the most part, Indiana was bypassed by New England settlers, who were swayed by reports of high land prices and undesirable living conditions. Some of the earliest settlers of European descent in neighboring Illinois were miners, who flocked to the northwestern portion of the state beginning in 1822. Chicago began to be transformed from a small settlement to one of the nation's greatest cities in the 1840s, when steamboats began bringing settlers on a regular basis. By 1850, European American settlement in Illinois was firmly established. Europeans and people of European descent also pushed into Wisconsin in the early years of the nineteenth century; most came to this state from New England, but there was also an important contingent of settlers from Northern and Western Europe, including Norway, Ireland, and especially Germany.

In general, then, the northern United States is largely a region of New England expansion. It forms a large dialect area which is extremely unified through the easternmost portion of the Dakotas and is referred to simply as the North by many dialectologists but as the Upper North by Carver (1987). Traditional dialect items characterizing the North were phonological features such as the different pronunciation of the vowels in NORTH and FORCE, as in *horse* [hɔrs] and *hoarse* [hors], the use of [z] rather than [s] in *greasy*, and the pronunciation of *root* with the FOOT vowel rather than the GOOSE vowel. Traditional lexical items which typify Northern speech include the use of *pail* (vs. *bucket*) and *eaves* or *eavestrough* for *gutter*. Grammatical features include items like *dove* as the past tense of *dive* and phrases such as *sick to/at the stomach* (vs. *sick in/on the stomach*). In the next chapter, we see how the Northern Cities Vowel Shift has become a prominent dialect trait now setting apart the heart of the Northern dialect region (the Inland North; see Figure 4.4 below) from other dialect regions.



Figure 4.4 Dialect areas of the United States, based on telephone survey data (from Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006; reprinted by permission of Mouton de Gruyter, a division of Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co.)

Although the map in figure 4.3 shows New England and Eastern New England as sub-regions of the North, other dialect geographers classify these two areas as separate from the Northern dialect area (again, Carver's Upper North). This region draws its dialectal distinctiveness, in part, from the numerous non-English-speaking Europeans who were among its earliest non-native inhabitants, particularly in the northernmost section of the region. In fact, the 1860 Census (the first to record origin of birth) shows that 30 percent of those living in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and northern Michigan were born outside the United States, a higher percentage than almost anywhere else in the United States at that time.

On dialect maps based on traditional dialect features, such as Carver's map in figure 4.3, a discontinuity in the primary boundary separating the North (Carver's Upper North) from the Midland (Carver's Lower North) occurs at the Mississippi River, along the Illinois-Iowa border. This is because the Mississippi facilitated south-to-north migration from Illinois into Iowa, creating a sort of "dialect fault line." Beyond the Mississippi, the cohesiveness of the North weakens, due to the ever-widening sphere of influence of Midland speech varieties as one proceeds westward.

The westward expansion of the American Midland was accomplished chiefly by three groups of speakers: those from the Upper South, the Mid-Atlantic states, and the New England/New York dialect area. For the most part, the three streams remained separate, at least up to the Mississippi River, giving rise to a three-tiered settlement and dialect pattern, most notable in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Settlers from the Upper South had pushed into the heart of Tennessee and Kentucky by the latter part of the eighteenth century and from there continued into Southern Missouri and Northern Arkansas. In some places, heavy concentrations of Southern settlement extend northward beyond the boundaries of the Upper South, forming anomalous dialect pockets called APEXES. The best known of these is the HOOSIER APEX, a pocket of Southern speech in lower Indiana and Illinois; in addition, the encroachment of Southern speech into Missouri constitutes another dialectal apex.

Also moving westward into the Midland along with Upper Southerners were settlers from the Mid-Atlantic, chiefly Pennsylvania and Maryland, who traveled along the Ohio River and the National Road (a road that extended from Cumberland, Maryland, to Southern Illinois, the precursor of today's US 70), settling in Ohio, Indiana, and Central Illinois. Subsequently, they moved into Southern Iowa, Missouri, and other points west of the Mississippi, where they fanned out broadly to encompass portions of states as far north as North Dakota and as far south as Oklahoma. Besides Upper Southern and Mid-Atlantic speakers, there were also a limited number of speakers from New York and New England who settled in the Midland. However, they tended to confine themselves to the northern portions of this dialect area, in effect pushing the bounds of the Northern dialect area southward rather than contributing substantially to the character of the Midland dialect.

At the same time that the Northern and Midland dialect boundaries were being extended westward, the Lower South was expanding as well. Several dialect lines were laid in Georgia, since settlement was halted at the Ogeechee River for a number of decades until 1805 and at the Chattahoochee for a number of years beginning in the 1830s. Alabama is also sometimes considered a separate sub-dialect area, since it was settled rather late in comparison with the majority of the South and since its settlers tended to be from both Lower and Upper Southern dialect regions. However, Mississippi is Lower Southern in character. Southern Oklahoma and Texas are Southern as well, and Central Texas has even developed its own sub-variety of Southern speech, probably due in large part to Texans' strong sense of cultural distinctiveness from the rest of the United States. As we noted above, most of Florida forms a separate sub-region, as does the delta area in Southern Louisiana.

As the English language was transported westward in America, dialect mixing intensified, and American English became more and more different from English in the British Isles, where mixing did not occur on as grand a scale. At the same time, the leveling out of dialect differences within the United States increased, as speakers from different dialect areas came into increasing contact with one another, particularly speakers in the ever-expanding Midland dialect region. Another factor that had an impact on the development of American English in the nineteenth century and beyond was the enormous influx of immigrants from other countries that took place during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Millions of Irish people poured into America, mostly via New York, in the 1830s and 1840s. The Germans came in even greater numbers in the 1840s and 1860s, along with more than five million Italians, who came to America between 1865 and 1920. In addition, there were several other groups who immigrated in significant numbers, including about three million Jews from Eastern and Central Europe who came to the United States between 1880 and 1910, and nearly two million Scandinavians, who arrived in the 1870s. German had considerable influence on American English, since Germans were one of the largest immigrant groups to come to America (with more than seven million having arrived since 1776). Thus, we find in today's American English not only German-derived vocabulary items (e.g. *delicatessen*; *check*, from German *Zech* "bill for drinks") but also sentence structures (e.g. *Are you going with?* in some regions) and word formations (e.g. the *-fest* ending of *gabfest*, *slugfest*, etc.).

A large majority of the non-English immigrants who came to the United States in the nineteenth century settled in the North and Midland portions of the country rather than in the South, which further intensified dialect differences between Southern and non-Southern speakers. However, Southern American English had already been heavily influenced by such languages as French in the New Orleans area, Spanish in Florida and Texas, and Native American and West African languages throughout the entire region. In addition, there were several important German settlements in the South, including in the western parts of Virginia, North Carolina, and West Virginia, as well as in the San Antonio–Austin–Houston area of Texas.

4.4 The Westward Expansion of English

While immigrants were pouring into the United States in the nineteenth century, all sorts of Americans were pushing westward toward the Pacific Coast, particularly after the California Gold Rush of 1848. Although the traditional Eastern US dialect boundaries fade out for the most part in the Western United States, there are several longstanding dialect areas in the West, and newer dialects have arisen as well. The most coherent of the enduring dialect areas are the Northwest and Southwest, as indicated again in figure 4.3. The Northwest encompasses the entire state of Washington as well as most of Oregon and Western Idaho. The Southwest spans more than a thousand miles, from West Texas to Southern California, and can be broken down into two sub-dialects, one centered in Texas and the other in California. Prior to the arrival of English-speaking settlers, the Southwest had long been dominated by Spanish speakers, first under Spanish and Mexican rule and then under the US government. The influence of Colonial Spanish on the English of the Southwest is pervasive to this day, chiefly in the lexicon, which is replete with such terms as *corral*, *canyon*, and *fiesta*, all three of which, of course, are now part of general American English. In addition, modern varieties of Spanish continue to have a very large and growing presence in the area.

Southern Texas remains largely Spanish-speaking to the present day. Central Texas (which we will call simply Central Texas) was heavily populated by English-speaking settlers after 1836, when Texas became a sovereign republic, independent from Mexico, and then became a US state 10 years later. The southern portion of Central Texas received a large influx of English speakers from the Gulf States (Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana), while northern

Central Texas was populated by many English speakers from the Upper South, especially Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, and Arkansas. Settlement by English-speaking peoples in West Texas took place somewhat later than in East Texas, essentially as an extension of settlement in the north central part of the state.

English-speaking settlers did not begin arriving in Southern California in significant numbers until the 1850s, but by the 1880s Los Angeles had become a thriving population center with a wide sphere of cultural and linguistic influence. Northern California received its first major influx of English speakers in 1848, with the advent of the Gold Rush, and migrations to the region became even heavier after 1869, when the Transcontinental Railroad was completed. San Francisco became a thriving urban center in a very short time period, and people from all over the United States and the world flocked to the area during the latter half of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth. In particular, immigrants from Asia, especially China, have long been a very prominent part of San Francisco's linguistic landscape, although the Chinese population remained for many decades quite isolated from English-speaking San Francisco (Hall-Lew 2009, 2010).

The Pacific Northwest has long been a relatively coherent dialect area centered on the Portland district. The earliest English speakers in the Northwest were the British, who had settled in the Puget Sound area of Washington by 1828. Following closely on their heels were trappers and traders from New England. These people were so prevalent on the Oregon coast, even as early as the latter years of the eighteenth century, that Native Americans in the area once referred to all White people as "Bostons." Following the establishment of a successful American settlement in Northwestern Oregon in 1843, English-speaking settlers began arriving in the Northwest in large numbers, at first from the Ohio Valley states and Tennessee, and later from Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa. In addition, there was a significant Scandinavian presence in the region from the end of the nineteenth century.

The New Englanders who populated the Pacific Northwest during its earliest decades of English-speaking settlement brought with them a number of Northern dialect features which persisted into the early twentieth century, including lexical items such as *gunny sack* for "burlap bag." In contrast, the Southwest has little Northernism, particularly in the immense area dominated by the Texas hub. The persistence of New England speech features as far west as Washington and Oregon is testament to the enduring character of the dialect boundaries established in the earliest decades of English in the New World.

At the same time, some newer dialect areas in the West are now becoming more distinctive from other varieties of American English. For example, a distinctive California English was noted by sociolinguists beginning in the 1980s (Hinton, et al. 1987; Moonwomon 1992; Eckert and Mendoza-Denton 2006). This dialect is characterized by a series of vowel pronunciation changes, for example the fronting of the GOOSE and GOAT vowels toward FLEECE and DRESS (see chapter 5), respectively, as in the stereotypical "Valley Girl" and "Surfer Dude" pronunciations of *dude* and *totally*. In addition, the use of so-called UPTALK—that is, rising or "question" intonation on declarative statements—has become a prominent trait of California English which has now spread far beyond its apparent West Coast origins and is prevalent in the speech of younger people in many parts of the United States and beyond. We thus see that some innovations in American English are now actually spreading from West to East rather than following the traditional East to West flow. Furthermore, in some regions, features with originally regional associations are coming to be used to convey social or cultural distinctions. For example, residents of urban areas in Arizona tend to use West Coast vowel pronunciations, while Arizona ranchers use more Southern vowel features. In addition, various non-white ethnic groups in California use or avoid features of California English to varying degrees in crafting their own distinctive ethnic identities. For example, Lauren Hall-Lew (2009, 2010) shows that young Chinese Americans in San Francisco share a number of

features of California English with younger whites in the area (e.g. merger of LOT and THOUGHT, fronting of GOOSE and BOAT), despite the common assertion in sociolinguistics that non-white ethnic groups do not participate in regionally based pronunciation changes led by whites. In contrast, Carmen Fought (2003) shows how a particular group of Chicana teenage girls in a California high school avoids the fronting of GOOSE that characterizes California English as part of the construction of a cool, tough, gang-affiliated Chicana identity.

A focus on the original development of English on the West Coast may reflect a westward expansion of the traditional dialects of the Eastern United States, but a contemporary perspective shows that some regions on the West Coast are forming their own dialect niches and that people who live in these regions may use or avoid the features of these newer varieties to convey an array of types of social meanings, including not only “California” but also “youth,” “urbanity,” and “coolness.”

4.5 The Present and Future State of American English

Finally, we examine the current dialect contours of the United States and their future path of development. As we have already mentioned, the traditional dialect boundaries of the United States, particularly those in the Eastern United States, were drawn based on information from linguistic surveys that were conducted in the 1930s and 1940s. Since most of the speakers surveyed were older, the patterns reflect dialect divisions in the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries, when these speakers’ speech patterns were established. Thus, one cannot simply assume that the dialect boundaries depicted in figure 4.2 were still firmly in place in the 1940s and beyond. The boundaries depicted in figure 4.3, based on data gathered between 1965 and 1970 in addition to the earlier data (Carver 1987), suggest that dialect divisions may not have changed greatly in the first half of the twentieth century.

As we consider the extent to which the traditional dialect landscape has been altered over the course of the twentieth century into the twenty-first, we must bear in mind that a number of important sociohistorical and sociocultural changes have taken place since the initial linguistic surveys were conducted in the United States. Among the important changes are the following: (1) changing patterns of immigration and language contact; (2) shifting patterns of population movement; (3) changing cultural centers; and (4) increasing interregional accessibility.

During the twentieth century, immigrants continued to pour into America. Many were members of the same cultural groups who came in large numbers in the nineteenth century (e.g. Germans, Italians, Irish), while others were new to the United States or arrived in significant numbers for the first time. The languages brought by these new immigrant groups affected Mainstream American English, as did the languages of previous generations of immigrants. These languages may also serve as bases for the creation of new sociocultural varieties of English. Spanish-influenced English is now so widespread in the United States that there are a number of recognized varieties of Latino English. Although Spanish influence on English is longstanding, this influence was not pervasive enough to lead to the formation of distinctive dialects of English until recent decades, when new influxes of Spanish-speaking peoples, mostly from Latin America, began arriving in large numbers. In fact, Hispanics now comprise the largest non-white ethnic group in the United States, at nearly 17 percent of the population, and many speak a variety of Latino English as their primary or sole language—not Spanish. In addition, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen large influxes of Asians, especially from China, the Philippines, India, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. And whereas the varieties of English spoken by the array of people of Asian ethnicity in the United States have been understudied compared to varieties like African American English and

Latino English, research indicates that some distinctive varieties of Asian English have arisen, or are in the process of formation, for example Vietnamese English in Houston, Texas, and Arlington, Virginia (Wolfram 1984, 1985), Hmong English in Minneapolis-St. Paul (Ito 2010), and Korean English in Northern New Jersey, adjacent to New York City (J. Lee 2014). And even in cases where the English varieties of Asian Americans are not noticeably different from surrounding white varieties or from MAE, they still use quite subtle patterns of language variation to indicate their regionalized ethnic affiliations, as we discuss in chapter 7.

In addition to the changing patterns of cultural and linguistic contact that result from new patterns of immigration, we also find changing cultural relations among members of different ethnic groups who have long resided in America. The desegregation of ethnic communities is an ongoing process in American society which continually brings speakers of different ethnicities into closer contact with one another. The expected result of this interethnic contact is the erosion of ethnic dialect boundaries, even though ethnolinguistic boundaries can be remarkably persistent. Furthermore, even when speakers do cross ethnic dialect lines by adopting features from other ethnic groups, they may subtly alter the adopted features in order to convert them into markers of their own ethnolinguistic identity.

In large part, the continuing linguistic distinctiveness of the myriad ethnic groups is due to the fact that ethnolinguistic dialects are often an important component of cultural and individual identity. At the same time, though, *de facto* ethnic segregation persists in many areas of the United States, including a number of its major cities, despite the illegalization of official segregation in the second half of the twentieth century so that the lack of interethnic contact can still be a factor in the persistence of ethnicity based dialects.

Not only are speakers coming into contact with different cultural and linguistic groups through immigration and desegregation, but we also find that cross-cultural and cross-dialectal mixing results when large populations of speakers migrate from one region of the country to another. Historically, the significant migrations of English-speaking people in the United States have run along east–west lines, but in the twentieth century there was major population movement along north–south lines as well. For example, beginning in the post-World War I years, large numbers of rural southern African Americans began migrating northward into such major cities as Chicago, Detroit, and New York. As we mentioned in chapter 2, there were two streams of northerly migration: African Americans from such states as North and South Carolina tended to migrate along a coastal route to Washington, DC, Philadelphia, and New York, while those from the Deep South tended to migrate via a Midwestern route into St Louis, Chicago, and Detroit. There are some subtle dialect lines that seem to mark these routes of migration. For example, speakers of vernacular African American speech in Midwestern cities are less likely to use [v] for voiced *th* [ð] in items such as *bruvver* “brother” and *smoov* “smooth” than their counterparts in Eastern Seaboard locales such as Philadelphia and New York. In more recent decades, there has been a movement of African Americans back to the South, indicating something of a reversal of the population movement of the early and mid-twentieth century, a trend that has extended into the twenty-first century.

For the most part, it seems that the descendants of the African Americans who migrated northward following World War I, particularly those of the working class, have remained relatively isolated from surrounding White speakers, and so there has been little cross-assimilation between African American and European American speech varieties in America’s large northern cities. Only in certain cultural areas has African American speech made a large impact on European American English. For example, because popular music has been heavily influenced by African Americans, so too has its lexicon, as evidenced in the widespread usage of such derived terms as *jazz*, *riff*, and *jam* for older generations and *rap* and *hip hop* for younger ones. In addition, youth culture in America and beyond relies heavily upon African American music, fashion, and ways of speaking. Linguists debate whether non-native speakers

of African American varieties can really “pick up” the variety, using all of its (unconscious) rules correctly; however, there is no denying that adolescents and young adults all over the nation (and across the world) use certain lexical items, set phrases, and specific pronunciations, whether or not they have managed to integrate these various features into a consistent language system. Further, we have to bear in mind that people use features of other dialects for a variety of social reasons (e.g. “fitting in,” performing, “being popular”), and linguistic “accuracy” may have very little bearing on achieving these goals.

In recent decades, the American South has witnessed a large influx of European American speakers from the US Midland and Northern dialect areas, who are settling there in increasing numbers due to factors that range from economic opportunity to desirable climate. It is unclear at this point exactly how great an impact the speech of these non-Southerners has had or will have on the traditional Southern dialect. At first glance, the effect seems enormous indeed, especially in areas such as Miami, Florida; Houston, Texas; and the Research Triangle Park area of North Carolina, where Southerners are overwhelmed by non-Southerners to such a degree that it is becoming increasingly rare in these areas to locate young people with “genuine Southern accents.” However, there are factors that work to counter the dialect inundation that may result from such linguistic SWAMPING. For example, Southerners have long viewed their dialect as a strong marker of regional identity and often even as a source of cultural pride, and such feelings about a speech variety may certainly help preserve it, even in the face of massive linguistic pressure from outside groups. So far, the overall Southern dialect boundary is holding steady despite leveling in metropolitan areas; in fact, as we discuss below and in chapter 5, North-South dialect divisions are actually intensifying, contrary to what we might expect.

A third type of sociocultural change that has affected America over the last couple of centuries is the shifting of cultural and economic centers. As Americans began leaving rural areas in large numbers for the economic opportunities offered by the nation’s larger cities in the early twentieth century, older and newer metropolitan areas took on increased significance. Today, these metropolitan areas are the focal points for many current linguistic innovations. In the process, dialect features that were formerly markers of regional speech have been transformed into markers of social class, ethnicity, or urban–rural distinctions. For example, some of the Southern regional features which form part of African American speech (e.g. *r*-lessness, the pronunciation of *time* as *tahm*) became markers of ethnic rather than regional identity in the large northern cities to which these varieties were transplanted. Similarly, it has been shown that as Europeans in the Midwestern cornbelt leave their farms for the economic opportunities of the city, they are bringing with them certain linguistic innovations that characterize rural speech. They then use these rural language features as a symbolic means of asserting their belief in rural values and a rural lifestyle even though they are surrounded by urban culture and dialect forms in the midst of the big-city atmosphere. Further, the English varieties developed by the European immigrant groups who poured into America in the nineteenth century came to serve as markers of intra-city ethnic identity rather than as indicators of European nationality *per se*; in addition, these speech varieties also often came to serve as indicators of lower social status, as did AAE and other varieties whose roots are in rural dialects, despite the many positive associations rural dialect may also carry (e.g. friendliness, being “down to earth”).

Another change in the linguistic landscape brought about by increasing urbanization is the loss of much of the traditional vocabulary, largely rural in nature, whose distributional patterns underlie the traditional dialect maps. However, as we discussed above, the loss of traditional dialect terms does not entail the erasure of dialect boundaries. For example, although many traditional rural terms have disappeared from the New England dialect area, a number of new terms have come into the dialect, and these follow the same dialect boundaries as the older words.

The final type of change we must bear in mind is the ever-widening network of transportation and intercommunication that has spread across the US landscape throughout the later twentieth century and is still spreading in the current one, providing ready access to even the remotest of speech communities. The development of major interstate highways in the mid-twentieth century, as well as the paving of roads and building of bridges broke down formidable geographic barriers, and once-remote regions have been transformed into havens for tourists and other outside visitors. Cable and satellite television, mobile telephones, and internet communications, including social media, are bringing Americans from across the country into closer communicative contact than ever before. A decade ago it was hard to imagine that we might contact a participant in a study in a remote mountain or island community by e-mail or a text message to ask follow-up question after a face-to-face interview, but such is the nature of present-day communication networks—and sociolinguistic fieldwork.

One of the most important linguistic consequences of this increasing contact has been the emergence of the phenomenon we now call DIALECT ENDANGERMENT. As some of the more remote areas of the nation are opened to intercommunication with the outside world, their distinctive language varieties, fostered in isolation and spoken by relatively small numbers of people, may be overwhelmed by encroaching dialects. Such a fate is currently befalling a number of island communities on the Eastern Seaboard that have become increasingly accessible to tourists and new residents during the latter half of the twentieth century. Studies of islands on the Outer Banks of North Carolina and in the Chesapeake Bay indicate that some of these dialects are in a MORIBUND, or dying, state. And there can be dramatically different responses to dialect endangerment, ranging from the rapid decline of a traditional dialect within a couple of generations of speakers to the intensification of dialectal distinctiveness. Thus, while some dialect areas of the Outer Banks in North Carolina are rapidly losing most of their traditional dialect features, residents of Smith Island, Maryland, in the Chesapeake Bay, are actually escalating their use of distinguishing dialect features. However, as the traditional maritime trade in Smith Island declines, more and more islanders are moving to the mainland. Thus, even though the dialect is intensifying rather than weakening, it is in danger of dying out through sheer population loss. Most likely, this intensification is due to an increasing sense of community solidarity as fewer and fewer islanders remain to follow the traditional Smith Island way of life.

The fact that different communities may have such different responses to moribund dialect status underscores the need to examine ecological, demographic, economic, and sociocultural factors in examining the course of language change, not only with respect to endangered dialects but with respect to language change in general. These situations also raise caution about predicting the fate of dialects in a given community, since there are so many different intersecting factors that come into play, ranging from the nature of linguistic structures to the sociopsychological disposition of the community and its individual members with respect to the community's traditional lifestyle, including its dialect.

As noted above, a comprehensive dialect survey conducted by William Labov, Sharon Ash, and Charles Boberg (2006), the *Atlas of North American English*, shows that American dialects are alive and well—and that some dimensions of these dialects may even be more prominent than they were in the past. Though the ultimate fate of American English dialects is often debated in public and by the media, it is hardly an issue to linguists. American dialects are alive and well—and in some dimensions of these dialects may even be more prominent than they were in the past. This survey, focused on younger rather than older speakers and based primarily on phonology, is given in figure 4.4.

Although the exact path followed by the dialect lines in this map differ slightly from those of earlier maps (figures 4.2 and 4.3), the basic separations in the East and Midwest are still

between a Southern and Northern dialect area, with a Midland region falling in between. As we discuss in the next chapter, Labov and his colleagues' analysis shows that the vowel systems characterizing the Northern and Southern dialect areas are actually becoming more different from one another. Also differentiating itself to a greater degree than in past decades, although not shown on the overview map, is the Pacific Northwest. The Portland, Oregon, area is developing its own vowel system that combines elements of the California Vowel Shift and a vowel shift pattern that characterizes Canadian English. For example, residents of Portland are likely to front the GOOSE vowel toward the FLEECE vowel, as in California English, and to pronounce the KIT vowel as DRESS and the DRESS vowel as TRAP, though the latter two features are so far used to a lesser extent in Portland than in California or Canada (e.g. Conn 2006). Furthermore, some of whose innovative features have been spreading eastward across the United States.

Clearly, new dialects must be included along with the old when we consider the contemporary state of dialects in the United States. Dialect difference in America is by no means a thing of the past, and there is every indication that the boundaries whose foundations were laid when the first English colonists arrived in Jamestown in 1607 will continue to exist in some form long into the future.

Exercise 3

Given the fact that television and other forms of mass media now expose speakers to all sorts of dialects, particularly MAE, why do the basic dialect divisions in the US appear to be holding steady and even strengthening? What role, if any, do TV and the internet play in the maintenance of traditional dialect lines? What role do they play in the development and spread of new dialects?

4.6 Further Reading

Carver, Craig M. (1987) *American Regional Dialects: A Word Geography*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Based on data from linguistic surveys conducted under the aegis of the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* in the 1930s and 1940s and the *Dictionary of American Regional English* in 1965–70, Carver carefully delineates the dialects of American English. His discussions of dialect areas and dialect features are interwoven with a detailed account of the dialect history of the US. A number of illustrative maps are provided.

Kurath, Hans (1949) *Word Geography of the Eastern United States*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. In this work, Kurath presents what has come to be regarded as the traditional dialect map of the United States. Subsequent dialectologists have made slight revisions to this map, but Kurath's original lines, for the most part, remain intact, and his work remains historically significant. Kurath's work is part of the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* series of dialect geographic projects begin in the early twentieth century. Reports on regional dialect variation based on these projects can be accessed at <http://us.english.uga.edu> (last accessed July, 2014). Included are numerous maps generated with state-of-the-art cartographic plotting software.

Labov, William, Sharon Ash, and Charles Boberg (2006) *The Atlas of North American English*. New York/Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. This work presents the results of the most comprehensive and current survey of American English dialects, as delimited by their phonological systems. Interactive CD-ROMs with extensive sound files help illustrate many of the features discussed in the book. There is also an accompanying web site allowing users to explore dialect variation in the US by feature, feature system (e.g. Northern Cities Shift, Southern Shift), dialect area, and project participant. Users may view a multitude of maps and listen to speakers from across the US and Canada. The web site is available at: <http://www.atlas.mouton-content.com/>.

Montgomery, Michael (2004) Solving Kurath's puzzle: Establishing the antecedents of the American Midland dialect region. In Raymond Hickey (ed.), *The Legacy of Colonial English*. Cambridge:

- Cambridge University Press, 410–25. This article provides an informed discussion of issues surrounding the formation of the Midland dialect of American English, with a discussion of specific retentions, modifications, and losses of structures from Ulster English. It also points out the complexities involved in making these assessments.
- Schneider, Edgar W. (2003) The dynamics of new Englishes: From identity construction to dialect birth. *Language* 79: 233–81. This article offers an excellent outline of the sociopolitical, sociopsychological, and sociolinguistic traits associated with the progressive stages of English language diffusion throughout the world. Case studies of the spread of English into many locations world-wide, including the United States, give insight into the social and linguistic dynamics of earlier American English.
- Wolfram, Walt, and Ben Ward (eds.) 2006. Malden/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. *American Voices: How Dialects Differ from Coast to Coast*. This edited volume is a collection of articles by experts on various US dialects written for general audiences with little or no background in linguistics. Included are engaging overviews of many of the language varieties mentioned in this chapter, including those of Charleston and New Orleans in the South; Boston, New York, and Philadelphia in the Northeast; California and Portland in the West; and Smith Island, Maryland, Ocracoke Island, North Carolina, and the Gullah-speaking Sea Islands area of South Carolina. There are also accessible treatments of ethnolinguistic varieties like African American English, Chicano English, Cajun English, Lumbee English, and Jewish English, as well as a summary chapter by the authors of this textbook on the future of dialect variation in the US.