

REGIONAL VARIETIES OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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ANNOTATION: *In Modern linguistics the distinction is made between Standard English, territorial (regional) variants and local dialects of the English language. Standard English may be defined as that form of English which is current and literary, substantially uniform and recognized as acceptable wherever English is spoken or understood either within an English-speaking country or throughout the entire English-speaking world. It is the official language of Great Britain taught at schools and universities, used by the press, the radio and the television and spoken by educated people. Its vocabulary is contrasted to dialect words or dialectisms.*

KEYWORDS: *Linguistics, territorial, classification, speakers, languages...*

English is a West Germanic language that was first spoken in early medieval England and is now the global lingua franca. Named after the Angles, one of the Germanic tribes that migrated to England, it ultimately derives its name from the Anglia (Angeln) peninsula in the Baltic Sea. It is most closely related to the Frisian languages, although its vocabulary has been significantly influenced by other Germanic languages in the early medieval period, and later by Romance languages, particularly French. English is either the official language or one of the official languages in almost 60 sovereign states. It is the most commonly spoken language in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand, and is widely spoken in some areas of the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia. It is the third most common native language in the world, after Mandarin and Spanish. It is the most widely learned second language and an official language of the United Nations, of the European Union, and of many other world and regional international organisations. It is the most widely spoken Germanic language, accounting for at least 70% of speakers of this Indo-European branch.

English was adopted in North America, India, parts of Africa, Australasia, and many other regions. In the post-colonial period, some of the newly created 60 nations that had multiple indigenous languages opted to continue using English as the official language to avoid the political difficulties inherent in promoting any one indigenous language above the others. In the 20th century the growing economic and cultural influence of the United States and its status as a superpower following the Second World War has, along with worldwide broadcasting in English by the BBC and other broadcasters, significantly accelerated the spread of the language across the planet. By the 21st century, English was

more widely spoken and written than any language has ever been. A major feature in the early development of Modern English was the codification of explicit norms for standard usage, and their dissemination through official media such as public education and state sponsored publications. In 1755 Samuel Johnson published his *A Dictionary of the English Language* which introduced a standard set of spelling conventions and usage norms. In 1828, Noah Webster published the *American Dictionary of the English Language* in an effort to establish a norm for speaking and writing American English that was independent from the British standard. In terms of grammatical evolution, Modern English has now reached a stage where the loss of case is almost complete (case is now only found in pronouns, such as he and him, she and her, who and whom), and where SVO word-order is mostly fixed. Some changes, such as the use of do-support have become universalised. (Earlier English did not use the word "do" as a general auxiliary as Modern English does; at first it was only used in question constructions where it was not obligatory. Now, do-support with the verb have is becoming increasingly standardised). The use of progressive forms in -ing, appears to be spreading to new constructions, and forms such as had been being built are becoming more common. Regularisation of irregular forms also slowly continues (e.g. dreamed instead of dreamt), and analytical alternatives to inflectional forms are becoming more common (e.g. more polite instead of politer). British English is also undergoing change under the influence of American English, fuelled by the strong presence of American English in the media and the prestige associated with the US as a world power. English is an Indo-European language, and belongs to the West Germanic group of the Germanic languages. English is classified as a Germanic language because it shares new language features (different from other Indo-European languages) with other Germanic languages such as Dutch, German, and Swedish. These shared innovations show that the languages have descended from a single common ancestor, which linguists call Proto-Germanic. Some shared features of Germanic languages are the use of modal verbs, the division of verbs into strong and weak classes, and the sound changes affecting. Modern English grammar is the result of a gradual change from a typical Indo-European dependent marking pattern with a rich inflectional morphology and relatively free word order, to mostly analytic pattern with little inflection, a fairly fixed SVO word order and a complex syntax. Some traits typical of Germanic languages persist in English, such as the distinction between irregularly inflected strong stems inflected through ablaut (i.e. changing the vowel of the stem, as in the pairs speak/spoke and foot/feet) and weak stems inflected through affixation (such as love/loved, hand/hands) .

Dialectologists distinguish between English dialects, regional varieties that differ from each other in terms of grammar and vocabulary, and regional accents, distinguished by different patterns of pronunciation. The major native dialects of English are often divided by linguists into the two general categories of the British dialects (BrE) and those of North America (AmE). There also exists a grouping of major native varieties of English in the southern hemisphere, the most prominent being Australian and New

Zealand English. As the place where English first evolved, the British Isles, and particularly England, are home to the most variegated pattern of dialects. Within the United Kingdom, the Received Pronunciation (RP), an educated dialect of South East England, is traditionally used as the broadcast standard, and is considered the most prestigious of the British dialects. The spread of RP (also known as BBC English) through the media has caused many traditional dialects of rural England to recede, as youths adopt the traits of the prestige variety instead of traits from local dialects. At the time of the Survey of English Dialects, grammar and vocabulary differed across the country, but a process of lexical attrition has led most of this variation to disappear. Nonetheless this attrition has mostly affected dialectal variation in grammar and vocabulary, and in fact only 3 percent of the English population actually speak RP, the remainder speaking regional accents and dialects with varying degrees of RP influence. There is also variability within RP, particularly along class lines between Upper and Middle class RP speakers and between native RP speakers and speakers who adopt RP later in life. Within Britain there is also considerable variation along lines of social class, and some traits though exceedingly common are considered "non-standard" and are associated with lower class speakers and identities. An example of this is H-dropping, which was historically a feature of lower class London English, particularly Cockney, but which today is the standard in all major English cities – yet it remains largely absent in broadcasting and among the upper crust of British society. English in England can be divided into four major dialect regions, Southwest English, South East English, Midlands English, and Northern English. Within each of these regions several local subdialects exist: Within the Northern region, there is a division between the Yorkshire dialects, and the Geordie dialect spoken in Northumbria around Newcastle, and the Lancashire dialects with local urban dialects in Liverpool (Scouse) and Manchester (Mancunian). Having been the centre of Danish occupation during the Viking Invasions, Northern English dialects, particularly the Yorkshire dialect, retain Norse features not found in other English varieties. Since the 15th century, Southeastern varieties centred around London, which has been the centre from which dialectal innovations have spread to other dialects. In London, the Cockney dialect was traditionally used by the lower classes, and it was long a socially stigmatised variety. Today a large area of Southeastern England has adopted traits from Cockney, resulting in the so called Estuary English which spread in areas south and East of London beginning in the 1980s. Scots is today considered a separate language from English, but it has its origins in early Northern Middle English and developed and changed during its history with influence from other sources, particularly Scots Gaelic and Old Norse. Scots itself has a number of regional dialects. And in addition to Scots, Scottish English are the varieties of Standard English spoken in Scotland, most varieties are Northern English accents, with some influence from Scots. In Ireland, various forms of English have been spoken since the Norman invasions of the 11th century. In County Wexford, in the area surrounding Dublin, two highly conservative dialects known as Forth and Bargy and Fingalian developed as offshoots

from Early Middle English, and were spoken until the 19th century. Modern Hiberno-English however has its roots in English colonisation in the 17th century. Today Irish English is divided into Ulster English, a dialect with strong influence from Scots, and southern Hiberno-English. Like Scots and Northern English, the Irish accents preserve the rhoticity which has been lost in most dialects influenced by RP. American English is generally considered fairly homogeneous compared to the British varieties. Today, American accent variation is in fact increasing, though most Americans still speak within a phonological continuum of similar accents, known collectively as General American (GA), with its differing accents hardly noticed even among Americans themselves (such as Midland and Western American English). Separate from GA are American accents with clearly distinct sound systems; this historically includes Southern American English, English of the coastal Northeast (famously including Eastern New England English and New York City English), and African American Vernacular English. Canadian English, except for the Maritime provinces, may be classified under GA as well, but it often shows unique vowel raising, as well as distinct norms for written and pronunciation standards. In GA and Canadian English, rhoticity (or r-fulness) is dominant, with non-rhoticity (r-dropping) becoming associated with lower prestige and social class especially after World War II; this contrasts with the situation in England, where non-rhoticity has become the standard. In Southern American English, the largest American "accent group" outside of GA, rhoticity now strongly prevails, replacing the region's historical non-rhotic prestige, though social variation may still apply. N.Southern accents are colloquially described as a "drawl" or "twang," being recognised most readily by the Southern Vowel Shift that begins with glide-deleting in the /a/ vowel (e.g. pronouncing spy almost like spa), the "Southern breaking" of several front pure vowels into a gliding vowel or even two syllables (e.g. pronouncing the word "press" almost like "pray-us"), the pin-pen merger, and other distinctive phonological, grammatical, and lexical features, many of which are actually recent developments of the 19th century or later. Since 1788 English has been spoken in Oceania, and the major native dialect of Australian English is spoken as a first language by the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Australian continent, with General Australian serving as the standard accent. The English of neighbouring New Zealand has to a lesser degree become an influential standard variety of the language. Australian and New Zealand English are most closely related to each other, followed by South African English and the English of south-eastern England, and both have similarly non-rhotic accents, aside from some accents in the South Island of New Zealand. They stand out for their innovative vowels: many short vowels are fronted or raised, whereas many long vowels have diphthongised. Australian English also has a contrast between long and short vowels, not found in most other varieties. Australian English grammar differs from British and American English only in few instances, one difference is the lack of verbal concord with collective plural subjects. New Zealand English differs little from Australian English, but a few characteristics sets its accent apart, such as the use for wh- and its front vowels being even closer than in Australian English. English is

spoken widely in South Africa and is an official or co-official language in several countries.

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