Changing English in a changing world

Unit 6
Inner Circle Varieties 3

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American Englishes

- American English dialects
- New York
- Detroit
- African-American Vernacular English (AAVE)
American English dialects

US dialect areas

• North,
• Midland (Lower North + Upper South),
• South,
• West.

(Carver, 1987)
**American English dialects**

**relative uniformity of American English**

**dialects more homogenous than in Britain:**
- areas more divergent in original primary settlement: East;
- areas less divergent due to dialect mixing in areas of secondary settlement: Midland + West.

**reasons for homogeneity:**
- geographical and social mobility during settlement – with the result of **dialect mixing**;
- general geographical and social mobility ever since.

(Fennell, 2001, pp. 216-217)
American English dialects

Rhoticity

Non-rhotic areas and sociolects:
(Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006, p. 107)

- Southern: Tidewater Virginia (Jamestown)
- Southern: South Carolina (Charleston), Georgia
- Eastern New England
- Lower class New York English
- Afro-American Vernacular English
American English dialects

Merger of /ɔ/ and /aː/: cot and caught sound like RP father

Midland:
• Eastern New England (Boston)
• Western Pennsylvania

West:
• American West excluding Californian metropolitan areas

(Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006, pp. 68-78)
American Englishes

Syntax

(1) Regularisation
Verb forms OF irregular verbs analogically levelled in the paradigm to look identical:
in all Northern and Southern vernaculars
1. past as participle: had went
2. participle as past: done
   He done it yesterday.
3. bare root as past
   She come home yesterday.
(Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006, pp. 79-86)
American Englishes

Syntax

(2) fixin to (fixta) ‘planning to’, ‘about to’
South: South Atlantic, Gulf states (South)

(3) Double modals: might could, might should, etc.
She might could do it. pro:
She might do it. She could do it.
lessens the force of obligation
Southern vernacular

(Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006, pp. 79-86)
New York English

/ai/ in *tide*

Nucleus backed to /ɔ/  
1. New York: /toidi toid/ street: 33rd Street  
2. Outer Banks of North Carolina:  
/hoi toiders/ high tiders

(Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006, pp. 68-78)
American English dialects: Northern Cities Chain Shift

**long low vowels:** forward and upward

**short vowels:** downward and backward

(Fennell, 2001, p. 227)
American English dialects: Northern Cities Chain Shift

Areas:
- Western New England
- N Pennsylvania
- N Ohio, N Indiana, N Illinois
- Michigan, Wisconsin

Cities: Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo, Albany, Cleveland

(Fennell, 2001, pp. 227-228)
Detroit

Significant difference in the use of three variables by burnouts and jocks: burnouts in the vanguard of the change

- /ai/
- /ei/
- /uh/

(Eckert, 2005)
Detroit

Belten High study -- Eckert (2005)

Student categories along various social practices

• Jocks
• Burnouts
• In-betweens
AAVE

Theories of origin (Fennell, 2001, pp. 232-233):

Anglicist
- most distinctive features can be traced back to dialects in Britain (loss of -s; habitual BE) brought to the South;
- any features that cannot be found in Britain come from African languages of the slaves (substrate effect).

Creolist
- result of a creole that developed from the contact between African languages and English in internment and on plantations;
- even though approximating to the standard, AAVE still retained a lot of creole substrate features.
Syntax:

- **remote past** *been* (used to refer to sg that happened far in the past):
  
  *I been seen him a long time ago.*
  
  *You been told her that.*

- **copula deletion**: *She nice;*

- **use of habitual or distributive *be***:
  
  *Sometimes my ears be itching.*

(Fasold, 1981; cited in Fennell, 2001, pp. 233-234)
Morphology:

- general absence of -s/-es in plurals: *four book*;
- absence of -s in 3rd person singular, present tense: *he sit*;
- absence of possessive –s: *man hat*.

(Fasold, 1981; cited in Fennell, 2001, pp. 233-234)
AAVE

**Pronunciation:**
(Fasold, 1981; cited in Fennell, 2001, pp. 233-234)

- reduction of final consonant clusters followed by a vowel: 
  
  *lif up pro lift up;*

- devoicing of voiced stops in stressed syllables:
  
  */lit/ pro lid;*
References


