

Variants of the English Language

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Lecture 15

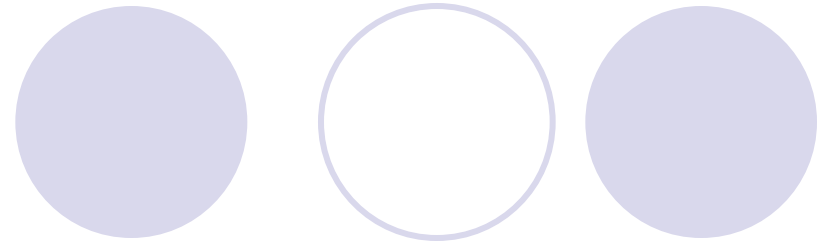
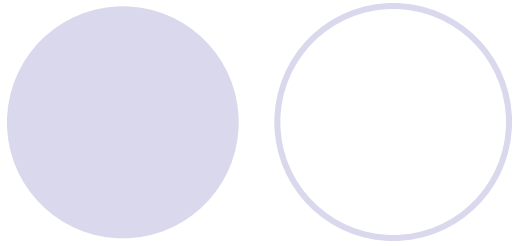
1. The Main Variants of the English Language



- Every language allows different kinds of variations: geographical or territorial, perhaps the most obvious, stylistic, the difference between the written and the spoken form of the standard national language and others.



- For historical and economic reasons the English language has spread over vast territories. It is the national language of England proper, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and some provinces of Canada. It is the official language in Wales, Scotland, in Gibraltar and on the island of Malta.



- In modern linguistics the distinction is made between Standard English, territorial 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. Standard English is the variety most widely accepted and understood either within an English-speaking country or throughout the entire English-speaking world.

Variants of English



- are regional variants possessing a literary norm. There are distinguished variants existing on the territory of the United Kingdom (British English, Scottish English and Irish English), and variants existing outside the British Isles (American English, Canadian English, New Zealand English, South African English and Indian English).



British English

- is often referred to the written Standard English and the pronunciation known as Received Pronunciation (RP).

2. Variants of English in the United Kingdom

- Besides British English, there are two other variants of the English language existing on the territory of the United Kingdom: Scottish English and Irish English, which have a special linguistic status

2.1. Scottish English



- has a long tradition as a separate written and spoken variety. Pronunciation, grammar and lexis differ from other varieties of English existing on the territory of the British Isles. It can be explained by its historical development.
- The identity of Scottish English reflects an institutionalized social structure, as it is most noticeable in the realm of law, local government, religion, and education.

Lexical peculiarities of Scottish English

1. Some semantic fields are structured differently in Scottish English and in British English, e.g. the term *minor* in British English is used to denote a person below the age of 18 years, while Scottish law distinguishes between *pupils* (to age 12 for girls and 14 for boys) and *minors* (older children up to 18);

2. Some words used in Scottish English have equivalents in British English, e.g. (ScE) *extortion* – (BrE) *blackmail*;
3. A great deal of the distinctiveness of Scottish English derived from the influence of other languages, especially Gaelic, Norwegian, and French. E.g., Gaelic borrowings include: *cairn* – ‘a pile of stones that marks the top of a mountain or some other special place’ – *sporrán* – ‘a small furry bag that hangs in front of a man’s kilt as part of traditional Scottish dress’

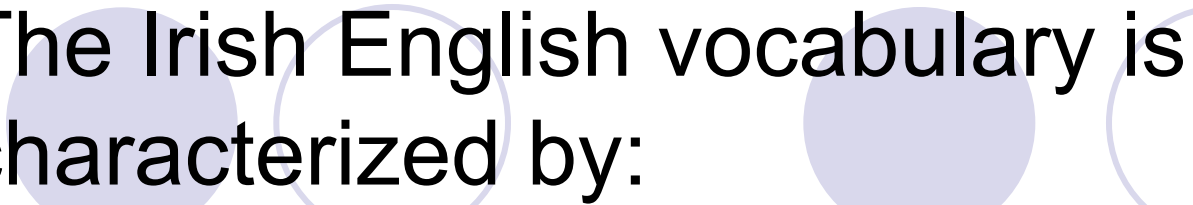


4. Many words which have the same form, but different meanings in Scottish English and British English, e.g. the word *gate* in Scottish English means ‘road’;
5. Some Scottish words and expressions are used and understood across virtually the whole country, e.g. *dinnae* (don’t), *wee* (‘small’), *kirk* (‘church’), *lassie* (‘girl’).

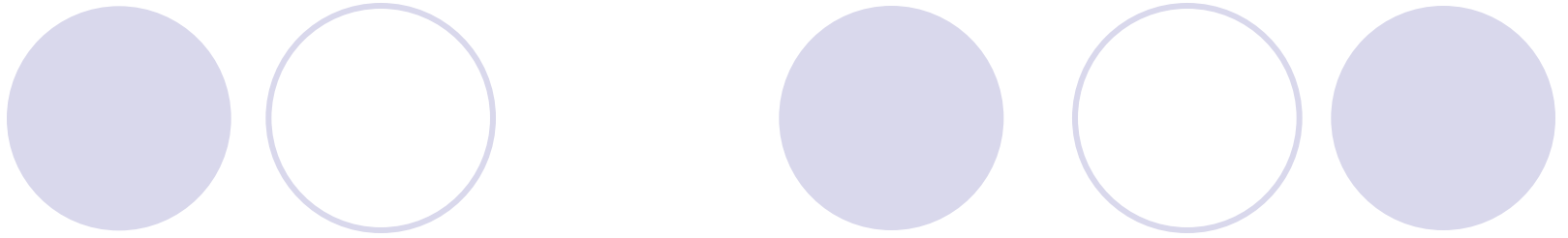
2.2. Irish English

- subsumes all the Englishes of the Ireland. The two main politico-linguistic divisions are *Southern* and *Northern*, within and across which further varieties are *Anglo-Irish*, *Hiberno-English*, *Ulster Scots*, and the usage of the two capitals, *Dublin* and *Belfast*.


The Irish English vocabulary is characterized by:




1. the presence of words with the same form as in British English but different meanings in Irish English, e.g. *backward* – ‘shy’; *to doubt* – ‘to believe strongly’; *bold* – ‘naughty’;



2. the use of most regionally marked words by older, often rural people, e.g. *biddable* ‘obedient’; *feasant* – ‘affable’;
3. the presence of nouns taken from Irish which often relate either to food or the supernatural, e.g. *banshee* – ‘fairy woman’ from *bean sidhe*;

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4. the Gaelic influence on meanings of some words, e.g. *to destroy* and *drenched*. These words have the semantic ranges of their Gaelic equivalents *mill* ‘to injure, spoil’ and *báite* ‘drenched, drowned, very wet’;
 5. the presence of words typical only of Irish English (the so-called Irishisms), e.g. *begorrah* – ‘by God’;

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6. the layer of words shared with Scottish English, e.g. *ava* – ‘at all’; *greet* – ‘cry, weep’; *brae* – ‘hill, steep slope’.

Besides distinctive features in lexis Irish English has grammatical, phonetical and spelling peculiarities of its own, e.g. the use of ‘does be/ do be’ construction in the following phrase: ‘They *do be talking* on their mobiles a lot’.

3. Variants of English outside the British Isles

1. **American English** is the variety of the English language spoken in the USA. The vocabulary used by American speakers has distinctive features, they are called Americanisms.

a) Historical Americanisms:



- *fall* – ‘autumn’;
- *to guess* – ‘to think’;
- *sick* – ‘ill, unwell’.

In American usage these words still retain their old meanings whereas in British English their meanings have changed or fell out of use.



b) Proper Americanisms

- were not discovered in British vocabulary:
redbud – ‘an American tree having small budlike pink flowers’;
- *blue-grass* – ‘a sort of grass peculiar to North America’.

c) Specifically American borrowings

- reflect the historical contacts of the Americans with other nations on the American continent: *ranch, sombrero* (Spanish borrowings), *toboggan, caribou* (Indian borrowings).



d) American shortenings:

- *dorm* – dormitory;
 - *mo* – moment;
 - *cert* – certainly.
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- the layer of words shared with Scottish English, e.g. *ava* – ‘at all’; *greet* – ‘cry, weep’; *brae* – ‘hill, steep slope’.

2. Canadian English


- is the variety of the English language used in Canada and close to American English. Specifically Canadian words are called Canadianisms, e.g.
- *parkade* – ‘parking garage’;
- *chesterfield* – ‘a sofa, couch’;
- *to fathom out* – ‘to explain’,
- *to table a document* – ‘to present it’, whereas in American English it means ‘to withdraw it from consideration’.

3. Australian English

- is similar to British English, but also borrows from American English, e.g. *truck* is used instead of *lorry*. It is most similar to New Zealand English.

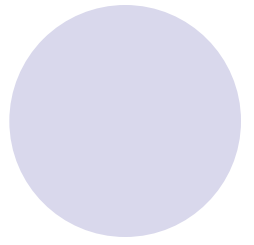
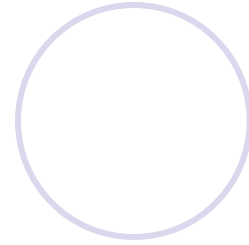
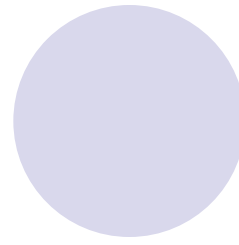
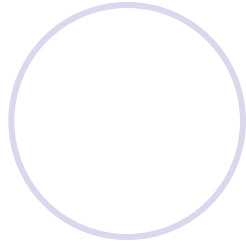
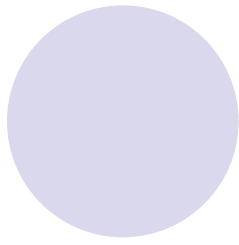
Uniquely Australian terms:

- *outback* – remote regional areas;
- *walkabout* – a long journey of certain length;
- *bush* – native forested areas.

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- Australian English has a unique set of diminutives formed by adding **-o** or **-ie** to the ends of words: *arvo* (afternoon), *servo* (service station), *barbie* (barbecue), *bikkie* (biscuit).
 - A very common feature of traditional Australian English is rhyming slang based on Cockney rhyming slang and imported by migrants from London in the 19th century.

4. New Zealand English

- is the variety of the English language spoken in New Zealand and close to Australian English, e.g. *bach* – ‘a small holiday home, often with only one or two rooms and of simple construction’; *footpath* – ‘pavement’; *togs* – ‘swimming costume’.



- Many local words in New Zealand English were borrowed from the Maori population to describe the local flora, fauna, and the natural environment, e.g.
- the names of birds (*kiwi, tui*);
- the names of fish (*shellfish, hoki*);
- the names of native trees (*kauri, rimu*) and many others.

5. South African English

- is the variety of the English language used in South Africa and surrounding countries (Namibia, Zimbabwe). It is a mother tongue only for 40 % of the white inhabitants and a tiny minority of black inhabitants of the region. South African English bears some resemblance in pronunciation to a mix of Australian and British English.

In South African English there are words that do not exist in British and American English, usually derived from Afrikaans or African languages, e.g.

- *bra, bru* – ‘male friend’,
- *dorp* – ‘a small rural town or village’,
- *sat* – ‘dead, passed away’.

In South African English

- *boy* – ‘a black man’ (derogative),
- *township* – ‘urban area for black, Coloured or Indian South Africans under apartheid’,
- *book of life* – ‘national identity document’.

6. Indian English



- is the variety of the English language spoken widely in India. The language that Indians are taught in schools is essentially British English and in particular, spellings follow British conventions. Many phrases that the British may consider antique are still popular in India. Indian English mixes in various words from Indian languages, e.g. *bandh* or *hartal* for strikes.



Words used only in Indian English are:

- *crore* – ‘ten millions’;
- *scheduled tribe* – ‘a socially/economically backward Indian tribe, given special privileges by the government’,
- *mohalla* – ‘an area of a town or village, a community’.

- There are some phonetic peculiarities of Indian English, for example, *rhotic* [r] is pronounced in all positions, the distinction between [v] and [w] is generally neutralized to [w], in such words as *old* and *low* the vowel is generally [ɔ], etc.
- There is a great variety in syntax: *one* used rather than the indefinite article, for example, *He gave me one book, yes* and *no* as question tags: *He is coming, yes?* Present Perfect rather than Past Simple:
 - *I have bought the book yesterday*, etc.

4. Some Peculiarities of British English and American English

- The American variant of the English language differs from British English in pronunciation, some minor features of grammar, spelling standards and vocabulary.
- 1) The American **spelling** is in some respects simpler than its British counterpart, in other respects just different. Some of the spelling differences are shown in the table.

| Words written with | British English | American English |
|------------------------|--|--|
| -our/-or | col <u>our</u> , hon <u>our</u> | color, honor |
| -ou-/-o- | fav <u>our</u> ite | favor <u>ite</u> |
| -re/-er | cent <u>re</u> , theat <u>re</u> | cent <u>er</u> , theat <u>er</u> |
| -gue/-g | catalog <u>ue</u> , dialog <u>ue</u> | catalog, dialog |
| -ise/-ize -yse/-yze | real <u>ise</u> , harmon <u>ise</u> , anal <u>ise</u> | real <u>ize</u> , harmon <u>ize</u> analy <u>ze</u> |
| -xion/-ction | connex <u>ion</u> , reflex <u>ion</u> | connec <u>tion</u> , reflec <u>tion</u> |
| -ll-/-l- | counsell <u>or</u> , modell <u>ing</u> | counsel <u>or</u> , model <u>ing</u> |
| -ae-/-e- | encyclopa <u>a</u> edia ana <u>a</u> emia | encyclop <u>e</u> dedia an <u>e</u> mia |

2) Lexical differences:

1. Cases where different words are used for the same denotatum *sweets* (Br) – *candy* (Am); *reception clerk* (br) – *desk clerk* (am);
2. Cases where some words are used in both variants but are much commoner in one of them: *shop* (br) – *store* (am);

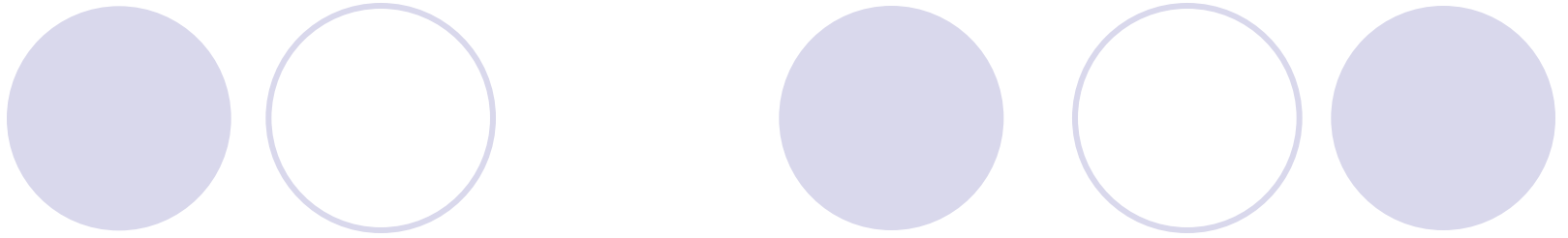
3. Cases where one (or more) lexico-semantic variant(s) is (are) specific to either British or American English. Both variants of English have the word *faculty*. But only in Am. E. it denotes 'all the teachers and other professional workers of a university or college'. In Br.E. it means *teaching staff*.
4. Cases where the same words have different semantic structure in Br. And Am. E.: *homely* in Br.E. means 'home-loving' in Am.E. "unattractive in appearance".

5. Cases where there are no equivalent words in one of the variants, e.g. *drive-in* is used only in Am.E. denoting 'a cinema or restaurant that one can visit without leaving one's car'.
6. Cases where the conlocational aspect of meaning comes to the fore. The word *politician* in Br.E. means 'a person who is professionally involved in politics', whereas in Am.E. the word is derogatory as it means 'a person who acts in a manipulative way, typically to gain advancement within an organization'.

3) Derivational and morphological peculiarities:

Such affixes as *-ee*, *-ster*, *-super* are more frequent in Am.E.:

- *draftee* – ‘a young man about to be enlisted’,
- *roadster* – ‘motor-car for long journeys by road’,
- *super-market* – ‘a very large shop that sells food and other products for the home’.



- Am.E. sometimes favours words that are morphologically more complex:
transportation – *transport* (br). In some cases the formation of words by means of affixes is more preferable in Am.E. while the in Br.E. the form is back-formation:
burglarize (Am) – *burgle* (from *burglar*) (Br).

- English is now the dominant or official language in over 60 countries, and is represented in every continent. In four continents, Asia, Africa, and the Americas, and in the vast ocean basin of the Pacific, it is an official language in thirty-four countries. The two leading normative models in fostering standard of educated usage are British and American English. Currently, English is the de facto international language of the Third World. In 21st century English has become the international language of communication, both conventional and digital.

