МІНІСТЕРСТВО ОСВІТИ ТА НАУКИ УКРАЇНИ

ЧЕРНІВЕЦЬКИЙ НАЦІОНАЛЬНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ

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ФАКУЛЬТЕТЕ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ

The main variants of the English language

Чернівці 2011

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**General Characteristics of the English Language in Different Parts of the English-Speaking World**

It is natural that the English language is not used with uniformity in the British Isles and in Australia, in the USA and -in New Zealand, in Canada and in India, etc. The English language also has some peculiarities in Wales, Scotland, in other parts of the British Isles and America. Is the nature of these varieties the same?

Modern linguistics distinguishes territorial variants of a national language and local dialects. Variants of a language are regional varieties of a standard literary language characterized by some minor peculiarities in the sound system, vocabulary and by their own literary norms. Dialects are varieties of a language used as a means of oral communication in small localities, they are set off (more or less sharply) from other varieties by some distinctive features of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.

Close inspection of the varieties mentioned above reveals that they are essentially different in character. It is not difficult to establish that the varieties spoken in small areas are local dialects. The status of the other varieties is more difficult to establish.

It is over half a century already that the nature of the two main variants of the English language, British and American (Br and AE) has been discussed. Some American linguists, H. L. Mencken for one, spoke of two separate languages with a steady flood of linguistic influence first (up to about 1914) from Britain to America, and since then from America to the British Isles. They even proclaim that the American influence on British English is so powerful that there will come a time when the American standard will be established in Britain. Other linguists regard the language of the USA as a dialect of English.

Still more questionable is the position of Australian English (AuE) and Canadian English (CnE).

The differences between the English language as spoken in Britain, the USA, Australia and Canada are immediately noticeable in the field of phonetics. However these distinctions are confined to the articulatory-acoustics characteristics of some phonemes, to some differences in the use of others and to the differences in the rhythm and intonation of speech. The few phonemes characteristic of American pronunciation and alien to British literary norms can as a rule be observed in British dialects.

The variations in vocabulary, to be considered below, are not very numerous. Most of them are divergences in the semantic structure of words and in their usage.

The dissimilarities in grammar like AE gotten, proven for BE got, proved are scarce. For the most part these dissimilarities consist in the preference of this or that grammatical category or form to some others. For example, the preference of Past Indefinite to Present Perfect, the formation of the Future Tense with will as the only auxiliary verb for all persons, and some others. Recent investigations have also shown that the Present Continuous form in the meaning of Future is used twice as frequently in BE as in the American, Canadian and Australian variants; infinitive constructions are used more rarely in AE than in BE and AuE and passive constructions are, on the contrary, more frequent in America than in Britain and in Australia.

Since BE, AE and AuE have essentially the same grammar system, phonetic system and vocabulary, they cannot be regarded as different languages. Nor can they be referred to local dialects; because they serve all spheres of verbal communication in society, within their territorial area they have dialectal differences of their own; besides they differ far less than local dialects (e.g. far less than the dialects of Dewsbury and Howden, two English" towns in Yorkshire some forty miles apart). Another consideration is that AE has its own literary norm and AuE is developing one. Thus we must speak of three variants of the English national language having different accepted literary standards, one spoken in the British Isles, another spoken in the USA, the third in Australia. As to CnE, its peculiarities began to attract linguistic attention only some 20 years ago. The fragmentary nature of the observation available makes it impossible to determine its status.

# Lexical Differences of Territorial Variants

Speaking about the lexical distinctions between the territorial variants, of the English language it is necessary to point out that from the point of view of their modern currency in different parts of the English-speaking world all lexical units may be divided into general English, those common to all the variants and 1ocally-marked, those specific to present-day usage in one of the variants and not found in the others (i.e. Briticisms, Americanisms, Australianisms, Canadianisms, -etc.).

When speaking about the territorial differences of the English language philologists and lexicographers usually note the fact that different variants of English use different words for the same objects. Thus in describing the lexical differences between the British and American variants they provide long lists of word pairs like

BE

flat

underground

lorry

pavement

post

tin-opener

government

leader

AE

apartment

subway

truck

sidewalk

mail

can-opener

administration

editorial

faculty

teaching staff

From such lists one may infer that the words in the left column are the equivalents of those given in the right column and used on the other side of the Atlantic. But the matter is not as simple as that.

These pairs present quite different cases.

It is only in some rare cases like tin-opener—can-opener or fishmonger—fish-dealer that the members of such pairs are semantically equivalent.

In pairs like government—administration, leader—editorial only one lexical semantic variant of one of the members is locally-marked. Thus in the first pair the lexical semantic variant of administration—'the executive officials of a government' is an Americanism, in the second pair the word leader in the meaning of 'leading article in a newspaper' is a Briticism.

In some cases a notion may have two synonymous designations used on both sides of the Atlantic ocean, but one of them is more frequent in Britain, the other—in the USA. Thus in the pairs post—mail, timetable—schedule, notice—bulletin the first word is more frequent in Britain, the second—in America. So the difference here lies only in word-frequency.

Most locally-marked lexical units belong to partial Briticisms, Americanisms, etc., that is they are typical of this or that variant only in one or some of their meanings. Within the semantic structure of such words one may often find meanings belonging to general English, Americanisms and Briticisms, e.g., in the word pavement, the meaning 'street or road covered with stone, asphalt, concrete, etc is an Americanism, the meaning 'paved path for pedestrians at the side of the road' is a Briticism (the corresponding American expression is sidewalk), the other two meanings 'the covering of the floor made of flat blocks of wood, stone, etc.' and 'soil' (geol.) are general English. Very often the meanings that belong to general English are common and neutral, central, direct, while the Americanisms are colloquial, marginal and figurative, e.g. shoulder—general English—'the joint connecting the arm or forelimb with the body', Americanism—'either edge of a road or highway'.

There are also some full Briticisms, Americanisms. For example, the words fortnight, pillar-box are full Briticisms, campus, mailboy are full Americanisms, outback, backblocks are full Australianisms.

These may be subdivided into lexical units denoting some realia that have no counterparts elsewhere (such as the Americanism junior high school) and those denoting phenomena observable in other English-speaking countries but expressed there in a different way (e.g. campus is defined in British dictionaries as 'grounds of a school or college'). The number of lexical units denoting some realia having no counterparts in the other English-speaking countries is considerable in each variant. To these we may refer, for example, lexical units pertaining to such spheres of life as flora and fauna (e.g. AuE kangaroo, kaola, dingo, gum-tree), names of schools of learning (e.g. junior high school and senior high school in AE or composite high school in CnE), names of things of everyday life, often connected with peculiar national conditions, traditions and customs (e.g. AuE boomerang, AE drug-store, CnE float-house). But it is not the lexical units of this kind that can be considered distinguishing features of this or that variant. As the lexical units are the only means of expressing the notions in question in the English language some of them have become common property of the entire English-speaking community (as, e.g., drug-store, lightning rod, super-market, baby-sitter that extended from AE, or the hockey terms that originated in Canada (body-check, red-line, puck-carrier, etc.); others have even become international (as the former Americanisms motel, lynch, abolitionist, radio, cybernetics, telephone, anesthesia, or the former Australianisms dingo, kangaroo and cockatoo).

The numerous locally-marked slangisms, professionalisms and dialectisms cannot be considered distinguishing features either, since they do not belong to the literary language.

Less obvious, yet not less important, are the regional differences of another kind, the so-called derivational variants of words, having the same root and identical in lexical meaning though differing in derivational affixes (e.g. BE acclimate—AE acclimatize, BE aluminium—AE aluminum).

Sometimes the derivational variation embraces several words of the same word-cluster. Compare, for example, the derivatives of race (division of mankind) in British and American English:

BE racial/racialist a, racialist n, racialism n

AE racist a, racist n, racialism/racism n

When speaking about the territorial lexical divergences it is not sufficient to bring into comparison separate words, it is necessary to compare lexico-semantic groups of words or synonymic sets, to study the relations within these groups and sets, because on the one hand a different number of members in a lexico-semantic group is connected with a different semantic structure of its members, on the other hand even insignificant modifications in the semantic structure of a word bring about tangible difference in the structure of the lexico-semantic group to which the word belongs.

For example, the British and Australian variants have different sets of words denoting inland areas: only inland is common to both, besides BE has interior, remote, etc., AuE has bush, outback, backblocks, back of beyond, back of Bourke and many others.

Accordingly, the semantic structure of the word bush and its position in the two variants are altogether different: in BE it has one central meaning ('shrub') and several derived ones, some of which are now obsolete, in AuE it has two semantic centres ('wood' and 'inland areas') that embrace five main and four derived meanings.

Lexical peculiarities in different parts of the English-speaking world are not only those in vocabulary, to be disposed of in an alphabetical list, they also concern the very fashion of using words. For instance, the grammatical valency of the verb to push is much narrower in AuE, than in BE and AE (e.g. in this variant it is not used in the patterns VVen, NVen, NVing, NprpVing. Some patterns of the verb are typical only of one variant (e.g. NVen and NprpVing—of BE, NV and NVing — AE). There are also some features of dissimilarity in the word's lexical valency, e.g. a specifically British peculiarity observed in newspaper style is the ability of the verb to be used in combination with nouns denoting price or quality (to push up prices, rents, etc.).

As to word-formation in different variants, the word-building means employed are the same and most of them are equally productive. The difference lies only in the varying degree of productivity of some of them in this or that variant. As compared with the British variant, for example, in the American variant the affixes -ette, -ее, super-, as in kitchenette, draftee, super-market, are used more extensively; the same is true of conversion and blending (as in walk-out—'workers' strike' from (to) walk out; (to) major—'specialize in a subject or field of study' from the adjective major; motel from motor + hotel, etc.). In the Australian variant the suffixes-ie/-y and-ее, as well as abbreviations are more productive than in BE.

Thus, the lexical distinctions between different variants of English are intricate and varied, but they do not make a system. For the most part they are partial divergences in the semantic structure and usage of some words.

**Some Points of History of the Territorial Variants and Lexical interchange between them**

The lexical divergences between different variants of English have been brought about several historical processes.

As we have known the English language was brought to the American continent at the beginning of the 17th century and to Australia at the end of the 18th century as a result of the expansion of British colonialism. It is inevitable that on each territory in the new conditions the subsequent development of the language should diverge somewhat from that of British English.

In the first place names for new animals, birds, fishes, plants, trees, etc. were formed of familiar English elements according to familiar English patterns. Such are mockingbird, bullfrog, catfish, peanut, sweet potato, popcorn that were coined in AE or dogger - 'professional hunter of dingoes', Bushman—'Australian soldier in Boer War—formed in AuE.

New words were also borrowed to express new concepts from the languages with which English came into contact on the new territories. Thus in the American variant there appeared Indian hickory, moose, racoon, Spanish canyon, mustang, ranch, sombrero, etc.

At the same time quite a number of words lost in BE have survived on the other continents and conversely, certain features of earlier BE that have been retained in England were lost in the new varieties of the language, changed their meaning or acquired a new additional one.

For example, Chaucer used to guess in the meaning of to think, so do the present day Americans; the English however abandoned it centuries ago and when they happen to hear it today they are conscious that it is an Americanism. The same is true of the words to loan for to lend, fall for autumn, homely for ugly, crude, etc.

The word barn designated in Britain a building for storing grain (the word was a compound in Old English consisting of bere—'barley' and aern—'house'); in AE it came also to mean a place for housing stock, particularly cattle. Similarly, corn was applied in America to an altogether different cereal (maize) and lost its former general meaning 'grain'. The word station acquired the meaning of 'a sheep or cattle ranch', the word bush—the meaning of 'wood’ and shrub (AuE scrub)— .'any vegetation but wood' in AuE. Modern times are characterized by considerable levelling of the lexical distinctions between the variants due to the growth of cultural and economic ties between nations and development of modern means of communication.

For example, a large number of Americanisms have gained currency in BE, some becoming so thoroughly naturalized that the dictionaries in England no longer mark them as aliens (e.g. reliable, lengthy, talented, belittle). Others have a limited sphere of application (e.g. fan— colloq. 'a person enthusiastic about a specific sport, pastime, or performer', to iron out—'smooth out, eliminate'). The influx of American films, comics and periodicals resulted in the infiltration of American slang, e.g. gimmick—'deceptive or secret device', to root—'support or encourage a contestant or team, as by applauding or cheering', etc.

Certain uses of familiar words, which some 50 years ago were peculiar to the US, are now either completely naturalized in Britain or evidently on the way to naturalization. Numerous examples will be found by noting the words and meanings indicated as American in dictionaries at the beginning of the century and in present days.

At the same time a number of Briticisms have passed into the language of the USA, e.g. smog which is a blend of smoke and fog, to brief— 'to give instructions'. This fact the advocates of the American language theory deliberately ignore. Sometimes the Briticisms adopted in America compete with the corresponding American expressions, the result being the differentiation in meaning or spheres of application, for example, unlike the American store, the word shop, taken over from across the ocean at the beginning of the 20th century is applied only to small specialized establishments (e.g. gift shop, hat shop, candy shop), or specialized departments of a department store. British luggage used alongside American baggage in America differs from its rival in collocability (luggage compartment, luggage rack, but baggage car, baggage check, baggage room). In the pair autumn—fall the difference in AE is of another nature: the former is bookish, while the latter colloquial.

**Local Variants in the British Isles and in the USA**

Local Dialects in the British lsles

In the British Isles there exist many speech varieties confined to particular areas. These local dialects traceable to Old English dialects may be classified into six distinct divisions: 1) Lowland (Scottish p£ Scotch, North of the river Tweed), 2) Northern (between tne rivers Tweed and Humber), 3) Western, 4) Midland and 5) Eastern (between the river Humber and the Thames), 6) Southern (South of tne Thames). Their sphere of application is confined to the oral speech of the rural population in a locality and only the Scottish dialect can be said to have a literature of its own with Robert Burns as its greatest representative.

Offspring’s of the English national literary language, the British local dialects are marked off from the former and from each other by some phonetic, grammatical and lexical peculiarities.

Careful consideration of the national and the dialect vocabularies discloses that the most marked difference between them lies in the limited character of the dialect vocabularies. The literary language contains many words not to be found in dialects, among them technical and scientific terms.

1. Local lexical peculiarities, as yet the least studied, are most noticeable in specifically dialectal words pertaining to local customs, social life and natural conditions: laird—'landed proprietor in Scotland', burgh—'Scottish chartered town', kirk—'church1, loch—'Scottish lake or landlocked arm of the sea', etc. There are many names of objects and processes connected with farming, such as the names of agricultural processes, tools, domestic animals and the like, e.g. galloway—'horse of small strong breed from Galloway, Scotland', kyloe—'one of small breed of long-horned Scotch cattle', shelty—'Shetland pony'. There is also a considerable number of emotionally coloured dialectal words, e.g. §cot. bonny—'beautiful, healthy-looking', braw—'fine, excellent', daffy—'crazy, silly', cuddy—'fool, ass', loon—'clumsy, stupid person'.

In addition, words may have different meanings in the national language and in the local dialects, e.g. in the Scottish dialect the word to call is used in the meaning of 'to drive', to set—'to suit', short—'rude', silly—'weak', etc.

Dialectal lexical differences also embrace word-building patterns. For instance, some Irish words contain the dimmutіve suffixes -an -een, -can, as in bohaun—'cabin' (from Irish both—'cabin'); bohereen— 'narrow road' (from Irish bothar—'road'); mearacaun—'thimble' (from Irish mear—'finger'); etc. Some of these suffixes may even be added to English bases, as in girleen, dogeen, squireen (squirrel), etc. Some specifically dialectal derivatives are formed from standard English stems with the help of standard English affixes, e.g. Scot, flesher—'butcher', Sudden ty—'suddenness’.

A great number of words specifically dialectal appeared as a result of intense borrowing from other languages, others are words that have disappeared from the national literary language or become archaic, poetical, such as gang—'go', OE sangan; bairn—.'child', OE beam, etc. Thus, the lexical differences between the English national language and its dialects are due to the difference in the spheres of application, different tempos of development, different contacts with other peoples, and deliberate elaboration of literary norms.

The Relationship Between the English National Language and British Local Dialects

The local dialects in Britain are sharply declining in importance at the present time; they are being obliterated by the literary language. This process is two-fold. On the one hand, lexical units of the literary language enter local dialects, ousting some of their words and expressions. On the other hand, dialectal words penetrate into the national literary language. Many frequent words of common use are dialectal in origin, such as girl, one, raid, glamour, etc. Some words from dialects are used as technical terms or professionalisms in the literary language, e.g. the Scotch cuddy—'ass' is used in the meaning of jack-screw and lug—'ear' in the meaning of handle.

Dialect peculiarities (phonetic, grammatical, but mainly lexical) modify in varying degrees the language spoken in different parts of Britain. These speech-forms are called regional variants of the national language and they are gradually replacing the old local dialects. It should be noted that the word dialect is used in two meanings nowadays: to denote the old dialects which are now dying away, and to denote the regional variants, i.e. a literary standard with some features from local dialects.

The most marked difference between dialects and regional variants in the field of phonetics lies in the fact that dialects possess phonemic distinctions, while regional variants are characterized by phonetic distinctions. In matters of vocabulary and grammar the difference is in the greater number and greater diversity of local peculiarities in the dialects as compared with the regional variants.

lexical dialect english language

# Local Dialects in the USA

The English language in the United States is characterized by relative uniformity throughout the country. One can travel three thousand miles without encountering any but the slightest dialect differences. Nevertheless, regional variations in speech undoubtedly exist and they have been observed and recorded by a number of investigators.

The following three major belts of dialects have so far been identified, each with its own characteristic features: Northenr Midland and Southern, Midland being in turn divided into North Midland and South Midland.

The differences in pronunciation between American dialects are most apparent, but they seldom interfere with understanding. Distinctions in grammar are scarce. The differences in vocabulary are rather numerous, but they are easy to pick up. Cf., e.g., Eastern New England sour-milk cheese. Inland Northern Dutch cheese, New York City pot cheese for Standard American cottage cheese (творог).

The American linguist "O. F. Emerson maintains that American English had not had time to break up into widely diverse dialects and he believes that in the course of time the American dialects might finally become nearly as distinct as the dialects in Britain. He is certainly greatly mistaken. In modern times dialect divergence cannot increase. On the contrary, in the United States, as elsewhere, the national language is tending to wipe out the dialect distinctions and to become still more uniform.

Comparison of the dialect differences in the' British Isles and in the USA reveals that not only are they less numerous and far less marked in the USA, but that the very nature of the local distinctions is different. What is usually known as American dialects is closer in nature to regional variants of the literary language. The problem of discriminating between literary and dialect speech patterns in the USA is much more complicated than in Britain. Many American linguists point out that American English differs from British English in having no one locality whose speech patterns have come to be recognized as the model for the rest of the country.

# Conclusions

1. English is the national language of England proper, the USA, Australia and some provinces of Canada. It was also at different times imposed on the inhabitants of the former and present British colonies and protectorates as well as other Britain- and US-dominated territories, where the population has always stuck to its own mother tongue.

2. British English, American English and Australian English are variants of the same language, because they serve all spheres of verbal communication. Their structural peculiarities, especially morphology, syntax and word-formation, as well as their word-stock and phonetic system are essentially the same. American and Australian standards are slight modifications of the norms accepted in the British Isles. The status of Canadian English has not yet been established.

3. The main lexical differences between the variants are caused by the lack of equivalent lexical units in one of them, divergences in the semantic structures of polysemantic words and peculiarities of usage of some words on different territories.

4. The so-called local dialects in the British Isles and in the USA .are used only by the rural population and only for the purposes of oral communication. In both variants local distinctions are more marked in pronunciation, less conspicuous in vocabulary and insignificant in grammar.

5. The British local dialects can be traced back to Old English dialects. Numerous and distinct, they are characterized by phonemic and structural peculiarities. The local dialects are being gradually replaced by regional variants of the literary language, i. e. by a literary standard with a proportion of local dialect features.

6. Local variations in the USA are relatively small. What is called by tradition American dialects is closer in nature to regional variants of the national literary language.

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**Dictionary**

**uniformity** [] одноманітність; однаковість

**set off** 1) відзначати 2) відкладати ) протиставляти

reveal I [] 1) відкривати, викривати

scarce [] 1. 1) убогий, недостатній 2) рідкісний; дефіцитний

fragmentary [] 1) уривчастий; фрагментарний

designation [] 1) вказівка 2) призначення, ціль

pedestrian [] 1. 1) пішохід 2) учасник змагань із спортивної ходьби

marginal []) граничний 4) мінімальний

tangible [] 1. 1) відчутний (на дотик) ; що сприймається дотиком; матеріальний

intricate [] заплутаний, складний; скрутний

barn [] 1) комора; сарай; клуня, стодола 2) стайня; корівник

grain [] 1. 1) зерно 2) хлібні злаки

shrub [] кущ, чагарник

influx [] 1) місце впадання (притоки в річку) 2) приплив

infiltration [] 1) просочування, інфільтрація 2) проникання

advocate 1. [] 1) прихильник, прибічник; оборонець

elaboration [] 1) розробка; уточнення 2) вироблення; переробка; опрацювання

obliterate [] 1) стирати, викреслювати; знищувати 2) згладжувати(ся)

oust [] 1) виганяти, займати (чиєсь) місце; витісняти

penetrate [] 1) проникати всередину, пронизувати, проходити крізь

diversity [] 1) відмінність, несхожість; різниця, різноманітність 2) строкатість

conspicuous [] показний; помітний; що впадає у вічі