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An Introduction to Language

SEVENTH EDITION

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**An Introduction to Language,
Seventh Edition**

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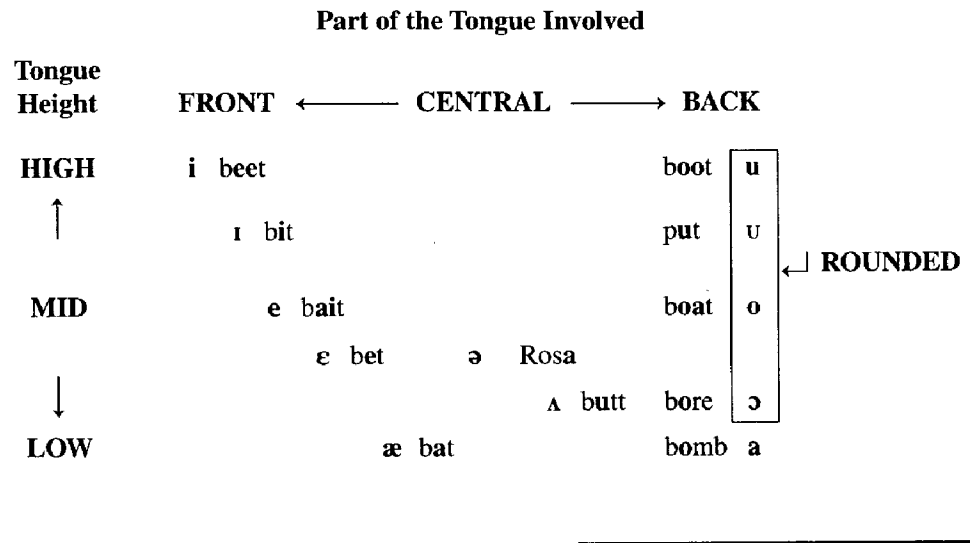
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Classification of American English Vowels



A Phonetic Alphabet for English Pronunciation

Consonants				Vowels					
p	pill	t	till	k	kill	i	beet	ɪ	bit
b	bill	d	dill	g	gill	e	bait	ɛ	bet
m	mill	n	nif	ŋ	ring	u	boot	U	foot
f	feel	s	seal	h	heal	o	boat	ɔ	bore
v	veal	z	zeal	l	leaf	æ	bat	a	pot/bar
θ	thigh	ç	chill	r	reef	ʌ	butt	ə	sofa
ð	thy	j	Jill	j	you	aj	bite	aw	bout
f/ʃ	shill	ʌ	which	w	witch	ɔj	boy		
ʒ/ʒ	azure								

10 CHAPTER

Language in Society

Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Letters and Social Aims*



Dialects

A language is a dialect with an army and a navy.

Max Weinreich

All speakers of English can talk to each other and pretty much understand each other. Yet, no two speak exactly alike. Some differences are due to age, sex, size, speech rates, emotional state, state of health, and whether English is a first language. Other differences come from word choices, the pronunciation of words, and grammatical rules. The unique characteristics of the language of an individual speaker are referred to as the speaker's **idiolect**. English may then be said to consist of more than 450,000,000 idiolects, or the number equal to the number of speakers of English (which seems to be growing every day).

Like individuals, different groups of people that speak the "same" language speak it differently. Bostonians, New Yorkers, Blacks in Chicago, Whites in Denver, and Hispanics in Albuquerque all exhibit systematic variation in the way they speak English. When there are systematic differences in the way different groups speak a language, we say that each group speaks a **dialect** of that language. Dialects are mutually intelligible forms of a language that differ in systematic ways. *Every* group, whether rich or poor, regardless of region or racial origin, speaks a dialect, just as each individual speaks an idiolect. A dialect is *not* an inferior or degraded form of a language, and logically could not be so since a language is a collection of dialects.

It is not always easy to decide whether the systematic differences between two speech communities reflect two dialects or two languages. A rule-of-thumb definition



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can be used: When dialects become mutually unintelligible — when the speakers of one dialect group can no longer understand the speakers of another dialect group — these “dialects” become different languages. However, to define “mutually intelligible” is itself a difficult task. Danes speaking Danish and Norwegians speaking Norwegian and Swedes speaking Swedish can converse with each other. Nevertheless, Danish and Norwegian and Swedish are considered separate languages because they are spoken in separate countries and because there are regular differences in their grammars. Similarly, Hindi and Urdu are mutually intelligible “languages” spoken in Pakistan and India, although the differences between them are not much greater than those between the English spoken in America and Australia. On the other hand, the various languages spoken in China, such as Mandarin and Cantonese, although mutually unintelligible, have been referred to as dialects of Chinese because they are spoken within a single country and have a common writing system.

Because neither mutual intelligibility nor the existence of political boundaries is decisive, it is not surprising that a clear-cut distinction between language and dialects has evaded linguistic scholars. We shall, however, use the rule-of-thumb definition and refer to dialects of one language as mutually intelligible versions of the same basic grammar, with systematic differences among them.

Regional Dialects

Phonetics . . . the science of speech. That's my profession. . . . (I) can spot an Irishman or a Yorkshireman by his brogue. I can place any man within six miles. I can place him within two miles in London. Sometimes within two streets.

George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*

Dialectal diversity develops when people are separated geographically and socially. The changes that occur in the language spoken in one area or group do not necessarily spread to another. Within a single group of speakers who are in regular contact with one another, the changes are spread among the group and “relearned” by their children. When some communication barrier separates groups of speakers — be it a physical barrier such as an ocean or a mountain range, or social barriers of a political, racial, class, or religious kind — linguistic changes do not spread easily and dialectal differences are reinforced.

Dialect differences tend to increase proportionately to the degree of communicative isolation of the groups. *Communicative isolation* refers to a situation such as existed between America, Australia, and England in the eighteenth century. There was some contact through commerce and emigration, but an Australian was much less likely to talk to an Englishman than to another Australian. Today the isolation is less pronounced because of the mass media and air travel, but even within one country, regionalisms persist.

Dialect leveling is movement toward greater uniformity and less variation among dialects. Though one might expect dialect leveling to occur due to the mass media, there is little evidence that such is the case. Dialect variation in the United Kingdom is maintained despite the fact that only a few major dialects are spoken on national radio and television. Indeed, there may actually be an increase in dialects in urban areas, where different groups attempt to maintain their distinctness. On the other hand, dialects die out, and do so for a number of reasons. This is discussed in chapter 11 in the section on extinct and endangered languages.

Changes in the grammar do not take place all at once in a speech community. They take place gradually, often originating in one region and spreading slowly to others, and often taking place throughout the lives of several generations of speakers.

A change that occurs in one region and fails to spread to other regions of the language community gives rise to dialect differences. When enough such differences accumulate in a particular region (e.g., the city of Boston or the southern area of the United States), the language spoken has its own “character,” and that version of the language is referred to as a **regional dialect**.

Accents

Regional phonological or phonetic distinctions are often referred to as different **accents**. A person is said to have a Boston accent, a southern accent, a Brooklyn accent, a midwestern drawl, and so on. Thus, *accent* refers to the characteristics of speech that convey information about the speaker’s dialect, which may reveal in what country or what part of the country the speaker grew up or to which sociolinguistic group the speaker belongs. People in the United States often refer to someone as having a British accent or an Australian accent; in Britain they refer to an American accent.

The term *accent* is also used to refer to the speech of someone who speaks a language nonnatively. For example, a French person speaking English is described as having a French accent. In this sense, *accent* refers to phonological differences or “interference” from a different language spoken elsewhere. Unlike the regional dialectal accents, such foreign accents do not reflect differences in the language of the community where the language was acquired.

ALLO? EEZ THEES DER
POOBLIC LAHBRRORY?
YAH?



I EM BEEG EEMPORTANT
REZEARCHER OOND I
REQUIRE EENGLISH VOOLGAR
ZYNONYMS FOR DISGUSTINK
BODY VUNKTIONS, YAH?



ALLO?
ALLO?



NO LUCK?
THOSE LIBRARIANS
ARE A SHARP
BUNCH.



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Dialects of English

The educated Southerner has no use for an r except at the beginning of a word.

Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*

In 1950 a radio comedian remarked that "the Mason-Dixon line is the dividing line between *you-all* and *youse-guys*," pointing to the varieties of English in the United States. Regional dialects tell us a great deal about how languages change, which is discussed in the next chapter. The origins of many regional dialects of American English can be traced to the people who settled in North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The early settlers came from different parts of England, speaking different dialects. Regional dialect differences existed in the first colonies.

By the time of the American Revolution, there were three major dialect areas in the British colonies: the Northern dialect spoken in New England and around the Hudson River; the Midland dialect spoken in Pennsylvania; and the Southern dialect. These dialects differed from each other, and from the English spoken in England, in systematic ways. Some of the changes that occurred in British English spread to the colonies; others did not.



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How regional dialects developed is illustrated by changes in the pronunciation of words with an *r*. The British in southern England were already dropping their *r* 's before consonants and at the ends of words as early as the eighteenth century. Words such as *farm*, *farther*, and *father* were pronounced as [fa:m], [fa:ðə], and [fa:ðə], respectively. By the end of the eighteenth century, this practice was a general rule among the early settlers in New England and the southern Atlantic seaboard. Close commercial ties were maintained between the New England colonies and London, and Southerners sent their children to England to be educated, which reinforced the “*r*-dropping” rule. The “*r*-less” dialect still spoken today in Boston, New York, and Savannah maintained this characteristic. Later settlers, however, came from northern England, where the *r* had been retained; as the frontier moved westward, so did the *r*.

Pioneers from all three dialect areas spread westward. The mingling of their dialects leveled many of their dialectal differences, which is why the English used in large sections of the Midwest and the West is similar.

Other waves of immigration brought speakers of other dialects and other languages to different regions. Each group left its imprint on the language of the communities in which they settled. For example, the settlers in various regions developed different dialects — the Germans in the southeastern section, the Welsh west of Philadelphia, the Germans and Scotch-Irish in the Midlands area of Pennsylvania.

The last half of the twentieth century brought hundreds of thousands of Spanish-speaking immigrants from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central America, and Mexico to both the east and west coasts of the United States. In addition, English is being enriched by the languages spoken by the large numbers of new residents coming from the Pacific Rim countries of Japan, China, Korea, Samoa, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Large new groups of Russian and Armenian speakers also contribute to the richness of the vocabulary and culture of American cities.

The language of the regions where the new immigrants settle may thus be differentially affected by the native languages of the settlers, further adding to the varieties of American English.

English is the most widely spoken language in the world if one counts all those who use it as a native language or as a second or third language. It is the national language of a number of countries, such as the United States, large parts of Canada, the British Isles, Australia, and New Zealand. For many years it was the official language in countries that were once colonies of Britain, including India, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and the other “anglophone” countries of Africa. Dialects of English are spoken in these countries for the reasons just discussed. It is likely that upwards of one billion human beings can speak English with useful fluency.

Phonological Differences

I have noticed in traveling about the country a good many differences in the pronunciation of common words. . . . Now what I want to know is whether there is any right or wrong about this matter. . . . If one way is right, why don't we all pronounce that way and compel the other fellow to do the same? If there isn't any right or wrong, why do some persons make so much fuss about it?

Letter quoted in “The Standard American,” in J. V. Williamson and V. M. Burke, eds., *A Various Language*

A comparison of the “*r*-less” and other dialects illustrates phonological differences among dialects. There are many such differences among the dialects of American English, and they created difficulties in writing chapter 6, where we wished to illustrate the different sounds of English by reference to words in which the sounds occur. As mentioned, some students pronounce *caught* /kɔt/ with the vowel /ɔ/ and *cot* /kat/ with /a/, whereas other students pronounce them both /kat/. Some readers pronounce *Mary*, *marry*, and *merry* the same; others pronounce the three words differently as /meri/, /mæri/, and /meri/; and still others pronounce two of them the same. In the southern area of the country, *creek* is pronounced with a tense /i/ as /krik/, and in the north Midlands, it is pronounced with a lax /ɪ/ as /kɹik/. Many speakers of American English pronounce *pin* and *pen* identically, whereas others pronounce the first /pɪn/ and the second /pen/. If variety is the spice of life, then American English dialects add zest to our existence.

The pronunciation of British English (or many dialects of it) differs in systematic ways from pronunciations in many dialects of American English. In a survey of hundreds of American and British speakers conducted via the Internet, 48 percent of the Americans pronounced the mid consonants in *luxury* as voiceless [lʌkʃəri], whereas 96 percent of the British pronounced them as voiced [lʌɡʒəri]. Sixty-four percent of the Americans pronounced the first vowel in *data* as [e] and 35 percent as [æ] as opposed to 92 percent of the British pronouncing it with an [e] and only 2 percent with [æ]. The most consistent difference occurred in the placement of primary stress, with most Americans putting stress on the first syllable and most British on the second or third in multisyllabic words like *cigarette*, *applicable*, *formidable*, *kilometer*, and *laboratory*.

Britain also has many regional dialects. The British vowels described in the phonetics chapter are used by speakers of the most prestigious British dialect.¹ In this dialect, /h/ is pronounced at the beginning of both *head* and *herb*, whereas in American English dialects it is not pronounced in the second word. In some English dialects, the /h/ is regularly dropped from most words in which it is pronounced in American, such as *house*, pronounced /aws/, and *hero*, pronounced /iro/.

There are many other phonological differences in the many dialects of English used around the world.

Lexical Differences

Regional dialects may differ in the words people use for the same object, as well as in phonology. Hans Kurath, an eminent dialectologist, in his paper “What Do You Call It?” asked:

Do you call it a *pail* or a *bucket*? Do you draw water from a *faucet* or from a *spigot*? Do you pull down the *blinds*, the *shades*, or the *curtains* when it gets dark? Do you *wheel* the baby, or do you *ride* it or *roll* it? In a *baby carriage*, a *buggy*, a *coach*, or a *cab*?²

¹ This dialect is often referred to as R.P., standing for “received pronunciation,” because it was once considered to be the dialect used in court and “received by” the British king and queen.

² H. Kurath. 1971. “What Do You Call It?” In J. V. Williamson and V. M. Burke, eds. *A Various Language: Perspective on American Dialects*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

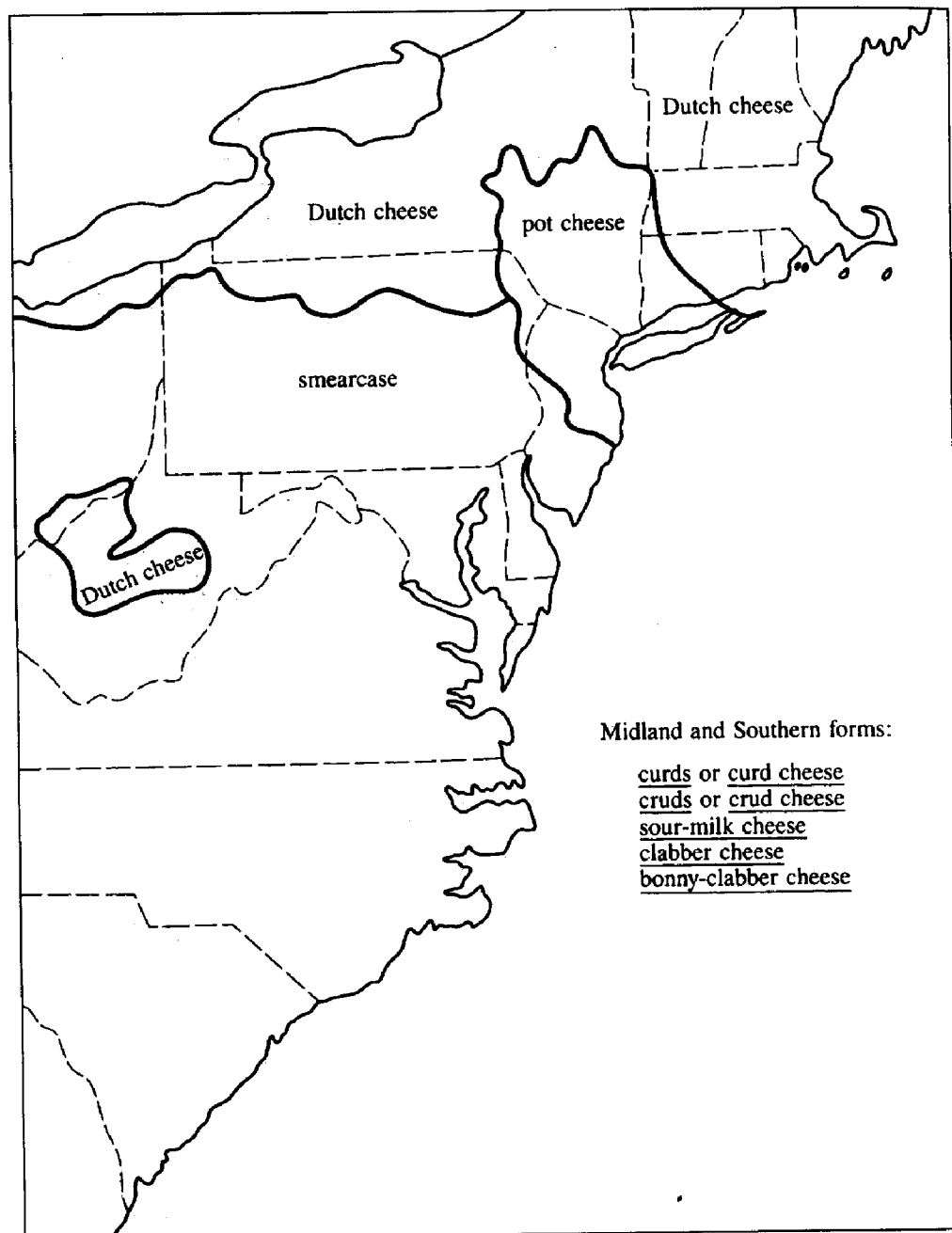


Figure 10.1 A dialect map showing the isoglosses separating the use of different words that refer to the same cheese. Kurath, Hans. *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, copyright © 1949. Reprinted with permission of University of Michigan Press.

American dialectologists and is a major resource for those interested in American English dialectal differences. Its first three volumes, covering *A* through *O* are published; volume 4, covering *P* through *S*, is due out in 2002. Its purpose is described on its World Wide Web page:

The *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)* is a reference tool unlike any other. Its aim is not to prescribe how Americans should speak, or even to describe the language we use generally, the “standard” language. Instead, it seeks to document the varieties of English that are **not** found everywhere in the United States — those words, pronunciations, and phrases that vary from one region to another, that we learn at home rather than at school, or that are part of our oral rather than our written culture. Although American English is remarkably homogeneous considering the tremendous size of the country, there are still many thousands of differences that characterize the various dialect regions of the United States. It is these differences that *DARE* records.

Syntactic Differences

Systematic syntactic differences also distinguish dialects. In most American dialects, sentences may be conjoined as follows:

John will eat and Mary will eat → John and Mary will eat.

In the Ozark dialect the following conjunction is also possible:

John will eat and Mary will eat → John will eat and Mary.

Both shortened conjoined sentences are the result of deletion transformations similar to the ones discussed in Exercise 19 of chapter 4. It was shown there that the ambiguous sentence *George wants the presidency more than Martha* may be derived from two possible deep structures:

1. George wants the presidency more than he wants Martha.
2. George wants the presidency more than Martha wants the presidency.

A deletion transformation either deletes *he wants* from the structure of (1), or *wants the presidency* from the structure of (2). A similar transformation derives *John and Mary will eat* by deleting the first occurrence of the VP *will eat*. Most dialects of English, however, do not have a rule that deletes the second VP in conjoined sentences, and in those dialects *John will eat and Mary* is ungrammatical. The Ozark dialect differs in allowing the second VP deletion rule.

Speakers of some American dialects say *Have them come early!* where others would say *Have them to come early!* Some American speakers use *gotten* in a sentence such as *He should have gotten to school on time;* in British English, only the form *got* occurs. In a number of American English dialects, the pronoun *I* occurs when *me* would be used in other dialects. This difference is a syntactically conditioned morphological difference.

Dialect 1

between you and I

Won't he let you and I swim?

*Won't he let I swim?

Dialect 2

between you and me

Won't he let you and me swim?

The use of *I* in these structures is only permitted in a conjoined NP as the starred (ungrammatical) sentence shows. *Won't he let me swim?* is used in both dialects. Dialect 1 is growing and these forms are becoming Standard English, used by TV announcers, governors of states, and university professors, although language purists still frown on this usage.

In British English the pronoun *it* in the sentence *I could have done it* can be deleted. British speakers say *I could have done*, which is not in accordance with the syntactic rules in the American English grammar. American English, however, permits the deletion of *done it*, and Americans say *I could have*, which does not accord with the British syntactic rules.

Despite such differences, we are still able to understand speakers of other dialects. Although regional dialects differ in pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntactic rules, they are minor differences when compared with the totality of the grammar.

For the most part, dialects share rules and vocabulary to a large extent, which explains why dialects of one language are mutually intelligible.

The "Standard"

We don't talk fancy grammar and eat anchovy toast. But to live under the kitchen doesn't say we aren't educated.

Mary Norton, *The Borrowers*

Standard English is the customary use of a community when it is recognized and accepted as the customary use of the community. Beyond this is the larger field of good English, any English that justifies itself by accomplishing its end, by hitting the mark.

George Philip Krapp, *Modern English: Its Growth and Present Use*

Even though every language is a composite of dialects, many people talk and think about a language as if it were a well-defined fixed system with various dialects diverging from this norm. This is false, though it is a falsehood that is widespread. One writer of books on language accused the editors of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, published in 1961, of confusing "to the point of obliteration the older distinction between standard, substandard, colloquial, vulgar, and slang," attributing to them the view that "good and bad, right and wrong, correct and incorrect no longer exist."³ In the next section we argue that such criticisms are ill founded.

³ M. Pei. 1964. "A Loss for Words," *Saturday Review* Nov. 14:82-84.

Language Purists

A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere — no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and The Bible; and don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon.

George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*

Prescriptive grammarians, or language purists, usually consider the dialect used by political leaders and national newscasters as the correct form of the language. This is the dialect taught in "English" or "grammar" classes in school, and it is closer to the written form of the language than many other dialects, which also lends it an air of superiority (see chapter 12 on writing).



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Otto Jespersen, the great Danish linguist, ridiculed the view that a particular dialect is better than any other when he wrote: "We set up as the best language that which is found in the best writers, and count as the best writers those that best write the language. We are therefore no further advanced than before."⁴

The dominant, or **prestige**, dialect is often called the standard dialect. **Standard American English (SAE)** is a dialect of English that many Americans almost speak; divergences from this "norm" are labeled "Philadelphia dialect," "Chicago dialect," "African American English," and so on.

SAE is an idealization. Nobody speaks this dialect; and if somebody did, we would not know it, because SAE is not defined precisely. Teachers and linguists held a conference in the 1990s that attempted to come up with a precise definition of SAE. This meeting did not succeed in satisfying everyone as to what SAE should be. It used to be the case that the language used by national news broadcasters represented SAE, but today many of these people speak a regional dialect, or themselves violate the English preferred by the purists. Similarly, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) once used mostly speakers of RP English, but today speakers of Irish, Welsh, Scottish, and

⁴ O. Jespersen. 1925 (reprinted 1964). *Mankind, Nation, and Individual*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

other regional dialects of English are commonly heard on BBC programs. The BBC itself describes its English as “the speech of educated professionals.”

Deviations from the indefinable Standard are a language crisis according to some writers. Edwin Newman, in his best seller *Strictly Speaking*, asks, “Will Americans be the death of English?” and answers, “My mature, considered opinion is that they will.” All this fuss is reminiscent of Mark Twain’s cable to the Associated Press, after reading his obituary: “The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.”

The idea that language change equals corruption goes back at least as far as the Greek grammarians at Alexandria, of 200–100 B.C.E. They were concerned that the Greek spoken in their time was different from the Greek of Homer, and they believed that the earlier forms were purer. They tried to correct the imperfections but failed as miserably as do any modern counterparts. Similarly, the Muslim Arabic grammarians working at Basra in the eighth and ninth centuries C.E. attempted to purify Arabic to restore it to the “perfection” of the Arabic in the Koran.

For many years after the American Revolution, British writers and journalists railed against American English. Thomas Jefferson was an early target in a commentary on his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which appeared in the *London Review*:

For shame, Mr. Jefferson! Why, after trampling upon the honour of our country, and representing it as little better than a land of barbarism — why, we say, perpetually trample also upon the very grammar of our language. . . . Freely, good sir, we will forgive all your attacks, impotent as they are illiberal, upon our *national character*; but for the future spare — O spare, we beseech you, our mother-tongue!

The fears of the British journalists in 1787 proved unfounded, and so will the fears of modern-day purists. From a linguistic point of view, one dialect is neither better nor worse than another, nor purer nor more corrupt, nor more or less logical, nor more or less expressive. It is simply different.

No academy and no guardians of language purity can stem language change, nor should anyone attempt to do so since such change does not mean corruption. The fact that for the great majority of American English speakers *criteria* and *data* are now mass nouns like *information* is no cause for concern. Information can include one fact or many facts, but one would still say “The information is.” For some speakers it is equally correct to say “The criteria is” or “The criteria are.” Those who say “The data are” would or could say “The datum (singular) is.”

A standard dialect (or prestige dialect) of a particular language may have social functions. Its use in a group may serve to bind people together or to provide a common written form for multidialectal speakers. If it is the dialect of the wealthy, influential, and powerful members of society, it derives significance from that state of affairs that may have important implications for the entire society.

In 1954 the English scholar Alan Ross published *Linguistic Class-Indicators in Present-Day English*, in which he compared the speech habits of the English upper class whom he labeled “U,” with the speech habits of “non-U” speakers. Ross concluded that although the upper class had words and pronunciations peculiar to it, the main characteristic of U speech is the avoidance of non-U speech; and the main characteristic of non-U speech is, ironically, the effort to sound U. “They’ve a lovely home,” for example,

is pure non-U, because it is an attempt to be refined. Non-U speakers say "wealthy" and "ever so"; U speakers say "rich" and "very." Non-U speakers "recall"; U-speakers simply "remember."

No dialect, however, is more expressive, more logical, more complex, or more regular than any other dialect or language. Any judgments, therefore, as to the superiority or inferiority of a particular dialect or language are social judgments.

Banned Languages

Language purists wish to stem change in language or dialect differentiation because of their false belief that some languages are better than others, or that change leads to corruption. Languages and dialects have also been banned as a means of political control. Russian was the only legal language permitted by the Russian tsars who banned the use of Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Georgian, Armenian, Azeri, and all the other languages spoken by national groups under the rule of Russia.

Cajun English and French were banned in southern Louisiana by practice if not by law until about twenty years ago. Individuals over the age of fifty years report that they were often punished in school if they spoke French even though many of them had never heard English before attending school.

For many years, American Indian languages were banned in federal and state schools on reservations. Speaking Faroese was formerly forbidden in the Faroe Islands. A proscription against speaking Korean was imposed by the Japanese during their occupation of Korea between 1910 and 1945, and in retaliation, Japanese movies and songs were once banned in Korea. In a recent discussion among linguists via a computer network called Linguist Net, various degrees of the banning of languages and dialects were reported to exist or to have existed in many countries throughout history.

As recently as 2001 the *New York Times* reported that "Singapore's leaders want English, not Singlish." Although Standard English is the common language of Singapore's multi-ethnic population, many who do not learn English as their native language speak *Singlish*, a form of English with elements of Malay, Tamil, Mandarin Chinese, and other Chinese dialects (languages). They are the target of Singapore's "Speak Good English Movement."

In France, a notion of the "standard" as the only correct form of the language is propagated by an official academy of "scholars" who determine what usage constitutes the "official French language." A number of years ago, this academy enacted a law forbidding the use of "Franglais," which are words of English origin like *le parking*, *le weekend*, and *le hotdog*. The French, of course, continue to use them, and since such words are notorious, they are widely used in advertising, where being noticed is more important than being "correct." Only in government documents can these proscriptions be enforced.

The academy also disapproves of the use of the hundreds of local village dialects, or *patois* [patwa], despite the fact that some of them are actually separate languages, derived from Latin (as are French, Spanish, and Italian). This diverse, rich collection of dialects and languages of France have one thing in common: they are not officially approved French. There are political as well as misguided linguistic motivations behind the efforts to maintain only one official language.

In the past (and to some extent in the present), a French citizen from the provinces who wished to succeed in French society nearly always had to learn the Parisian French dialect. Then, several decades ago, members of regional autonomy movements demanded the right to use their own languages in their schools and for official business. In the section of France known as l'Occitanie, the popular singers sing in Languedoc, a romance language of the region, both as a protest against the official language policy and as part of the cultural revival movement. Here is the final chorus of a popular song in Languedoc (shown below with its French and English translations):

Languedoc	French	English
Mas perqué, perqué	Mais pourquoi, pourquoi	But why, why
M'an pas dit à l'escóla	Ne m'a-t-on pas dit à l'école	Did they not speak to me at school
La lega de mon pais?	La langue de mon pays?	The language of my country?

In the province of Brittany, there has also been a strong movement for the use of Breton in the schools, as opposed to the "standard" French. Breton is not a Romance language like French; it is a Celtic language in the same family as Irish, Gaelic, and Welsh. (We will discuss such family groupings in chapter 11.) It is not, however, the structure of the language or the genetic family grouping that has led to the Breton movement. It is rather the pride of a people who speak a language not considered as good as the "standard," and who wish to preserve it by opposing the political view of language use.

These efforts have proved successful. In 1982, the newly elected French government decreed that the languages and cultures of Brittany (Breton), the southern Languedoc region, and other areas would be promoted through schooling, exhibitions, and festivals. No longer would schoolchildren who spoke Breton be punished by having to wear a wooden shoe tied around their necks, as had been the custom.

In many places in the world (including the United States), the use of sign languages of the deaf was banned. Children in schools for the deaf, where the aim was to teach them to read lips and to communicate through sound, were often punished if they used any gestures at all. This view prevented early exposure to language. It was mistakenly thought that children, if exposed to sign, would not learn to read lips or produce sounds. Individuals who become deaf after learning a spoken language are often able to use their knowledge to learn to read lips and continue to speak. This is, however, very difficult if one has never heard speech sounds. Furthermore, even the best lip readers can comprehend only about one-third of the sounds of spoken language. Imagine trying to decide whether *lid* or *led* was said by reading the speaker's lips. Mute the sound on a TV set and see what percentage of a news broadcast you can understand, even with video to help.

There is no reference to a national language in the U. S. Constitution. John Adams proposed that a national academy be established, similar to the French Academy, to standardize American English, but this view was roundly rejected as not in keeping with the goals of "liberty and justice for all."

In recent years in the United States, a movement has arisen in the attempt to establish English as an official language by amending the Constitution. An "Official English" initiative was passed by the electorate in California in 1986; in Colorado, Florida, and Arizona in 1988; and in Alabama in 1990. Such measures have also been adopted by seventeen state legislatures. This kind of linguistic chauvinism is opposed by civil-

rights minority-group advocates, who point out that such a measure could be used to prevent large numbers of non-English-speaking citizens from participating in civil activities such as voting, and from receiving the benefits of a public education, for which they pay through taxes. Fortunately, as of this writing, the movement appears to have lost momentum.

The Revival of Languages

The attempts to ban certain languages and dialects are countered by the efforts on the part of certain peoples to preserve their languages and cultures. This attempt to slow down or reverse the dying out of a language is illustrated by the French in Quebec. Gaelic, or Irish, is being taught again in hundreds of schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and there are numerous first language learners of this once moribund language. But such “antilinguicide” movements should not include the banning of any use of a language.

A dramatic example of the revival of a dead language occurred in Israel. The Academy of the Hebrew Language in Israel undertook a task that had never been done in the history of humanity — to resuscitate an ancient written language to serve the daily colloquial needs of the people. Twenty-three lexicologists worked with the Bible and the Talmud to add new words to the language. While there is some attempt to keep the language “pure,” the academy has given way to popular pressure. Thus, a bank check is called a *check* /ʔek/ in the singular and pluralized by adding the Hebrew suffix to form *check-im*, although the Hebrew word *hamcha* was proposed. Similarly, *lipstick* has triumphed over *faton* and *pajama* over *chalifatsheina*.

African American English

The language, only the language. . . It is the thing that black people love so much — the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. It’s a love, a passion. Its function is like a preacher’s: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language.

Toni Morrison, interview in *The New Republic*, March 21, 1981

The majority of regional dialects of the United States are largely free from stigma. Some regional dialects, like the *r*-less Brooklynese, are the victims of so-called humor, and speakers of one dialect may deride the “drawl” of southerners or the “nasal twang” of Texans (even though all speakers of southern dialects do not drawl, nor do all Texans twang).

There is one dialect of North American English, however, that has been a victim of prejudicial ignorance. This dialect, **African American English (AAE)**, is spoken by a large population of Americans of African descent.⁵ The distinguishing features of this

⁵ AAE is actually a group of closely related dialects also called African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Black English (BE), Inner City English (ICE), and Ebonics.

English dialects persist for social, educational, and economic reasons. The historical discrimination against African Americans has created social isolation in which dialect differences are intensified. In addition, particularly in recent years, many blacks have embraced their dialects as a means of positive identification.

Since the onset of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, AAE has been the focus of national attention. There are critics who attempt to equate its use with inferior genetic intelligence and cultural deprivation, justifying these incorrect notions by stating that AAE is a "deficient, illogical, and incomplete" language. Such epithets cannot be applied to any language, and they are as unscientific in reference to AAE as to Russian, Chinese, or Standard American English. The cultural-deprivation myth is as false as the idea that some dialects or languages are inferior. A person may be "deprived" of one cultural background, but be rich in another.

Some people, white and black, think they can identify the race of a person by speech alone, believing that different races inherently speak differently. This belief is patently false. A black child raised in an upper-class British household will speak that dialect of English. A white child raised in an environment where AAE is spoken will speak AAE. Children construct grammars based on the language they hear.

AAE is discussed here more extensively than other American dialects because it provides an informative illustration of the regularities of a dialect of a major language, and the systematic differences from the so-called standard dialects of that language. A vast body of research shows that there are the same kinds of linguistic differences between AAE and SAE as occur between many of the world's major dialects.

Phonology of African American English

Some of the differences between AAE and SAE phonology are discussed in this section.

R-DELETION

Like a number of dialects of both British and American English, AAE includes a rule of *r-deletion* that deletes /r/ everywhere except before a vowel. Pairs of words like *guard* and *god*, *nor* and *gnaw*, *sore* and *saw*, *poor* and *pa*, *fort* and *fought*, and *court* and *caught* are pronounced identically in AAE because of this phonological rule.

L-DELETION

There is also an *l-deletion* rule for some speakers of AAE, creating identically pronounced pairs like *toll* and *toe*, *all* and *awe*, *help* and *hep*.

CONSONANT CLUSTER SIMPLIFICATION

A *consonant cluster simplification* rule in AAE simplifies consonant clusters, particularly at the ends of words and when one of the two consonants is an alveolar (/t/, /d/, /s/, /z/). The application of this rule may delete the past-tense morpheme so that *meant* and *mend* are both pronounced as *men* and *past* and *passed* (*pass* + *ed*) may both be pronounced like *pass*. When speakers of this dialect say *I pass the test yesterday*, they are

not showing an ignorance of past and present, but are pronouncing the past tense according to this rule in their grammar.

The deletion rule is optional; it does not always apply, and studies have shown that it is more likely to apply when the final [t] or [d] does not represent the past-tense morpheme, as in nouns like *paste* [pes] as opposed to verbs like *chased* [čest], where the final past tense [t] will not always be deleted. This has also been observed with final [s] or [z], which will be retained more often by speakers of AAE in words like *seats* /sit + s/, where the /s/ represents plural, than in words like *Keats* /kit/, where it is more likely to be deleted.

Consonant cluster simplification is not unique to AAE. It exists optionally for many speakers of other dialects including SAE. For example, the medial [d] in *didn't* is often deleted producing [dɪnt]. Furthermore, nasals are commonly deleted before final voiceless stops, to result in [hɪt] versus [hɪnt].

NEUTRALIZATION OF [ɪ] AND [ɛ] BEFORE NASALS

AAE shares with many regional dialects a lack of distinction between /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ before nasal consonants, producing identical pronunciations of *pin* and *pen*, *bin* and *Ben*, *tin* and *ten*, and so on. The vowel sound in these words is roughly between the [ɪ] of *pit* and the [ɛ] of *pet*.

DIPHTHONG REDUCTION

AAE has a rule

$$/ɔj/ \rightarrow /ɔ/$$

that reduces the diphthong /ɔj/ (particularly before /l/) to the simple vowel [ɔ] without the glide, so that *boil* and *boy* are pronounced [bɔ].

LOSS OF INTERDENTAL FRICATIVES

A regular feature is the change of a /θ/ to /f/ and /ð/ to /v/ so that *Ruth* is pronounced [ruf] and *brother* is pronounced [brʌvɚ]. This [θ]-[f] correspondence also is true of some dialects of British English, where /θ/ is not even a phoneme in the language. *Think* is regularly [fɪnk] in Cockney English.

Initial /ð/ in such words as *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* are pronounced as [d]. This is again not unique to AAE, but a common characteristic of many nonstandard, nonethnic dialects of English.

All these differences are systematic and rule-governed and similar to sound changes that have taken place in languages all over the world, including Standard English.

Syntactic Differences between AAE and SAE

And of his port as meeke as is a mayde
He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Prologue, 69–70

Syntactic differences also exist between dialects. They have often been used to illustrate the illogic of AAE, and yet these very differences are evidence that AAE is as syntactically complex and as logical as SAE.

DOUBLE NEGATIVES

Following the lead of early prescriptive grammarians, some "scholars" and teachers conclude that it is illogical to say *he don't know nothing* because two negatives make a positive.

Since such negative constructions occur in AAE, it has been concluded by some "educators" that speakers of AAE are deficient because they use language illogically. However, double negatives are part of many current dialects of all races in the English-speaking world. Multiple negations were standard in an earlier stage of English, as the triple negation in the second line of the quotation from the *Canterbury Tales* illustrates. Double negations are standard in many highly respected languages of the world such as French and Italian.

DELETION OF THE VERB "BE"

In most cases, if in Standard English the verb can be contracted, in African American English sentences it is deleted; where it can't be contracted in SAE, it can't be deleted in AAE, as shown in the following sentences:⁶

SAE

He is nice/He's nice.
 They are mine/They're mine.
 I am going to do it/I'm gonna do it.
 He is/he's as nice as he says he is.
 *He's as nice as he says he's.
 How beautiful you are.
 *How beautiful you're
 Here I am.
 *Here I'm

AAE

He nice.
 They mine.
 I gonna do it.
 He as nice as he say he is.
 *He as nice as he say he.
 How beautiful you are.
 *How beautiful you
 Here I am.
 *Here I

These examples show that syntactic rules operate in both dialects although they show slight systematic differences.

HABITUAL "BE"

In SAE, the sentence *John is happy* can be interpreted to mean *John is happy now* or *John is generally happy*. One can make the distinction clear in SAE only by lexical means, that is, the addition of words. One would have to say *John is generally happy* or *John is a happy person* to disambiguate the meaning from *John is presently happy*.

⁶ Sentences from W. Labov. 1969. *The Logic of Nonstandard English*. Georgetown University Round Table, No. 22.

In AAE, this distinction is made syntactically; an uninflected form of *be* is used if the speaker is referring to *habitual* state.

John be happy.	“John is always happy.”
John happy.	“John is happy now.”
He be late.	“He is habitually late.”
He late.	“He is late this time.”
Do you be tired?	“Are you generally tired?”
You tired?	“Are you tired now?”

This syntactic distinction between habitual and nonhabitual aspect occurs in languages other than AAE, but it does not occur in SAE. It has been suggested that the uninflected *be* is the result of a convergence of similar rules in African, Creole, and Irish English sources.⁷

History of African American English

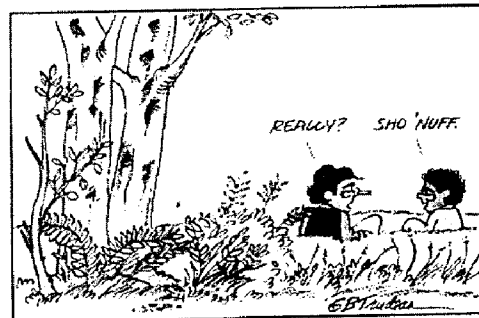
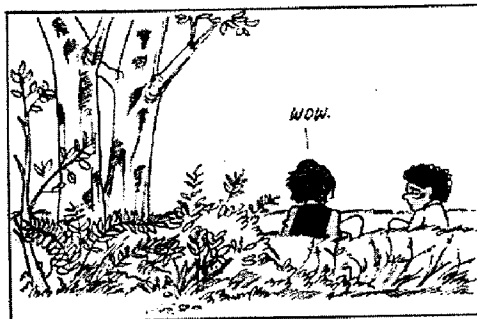
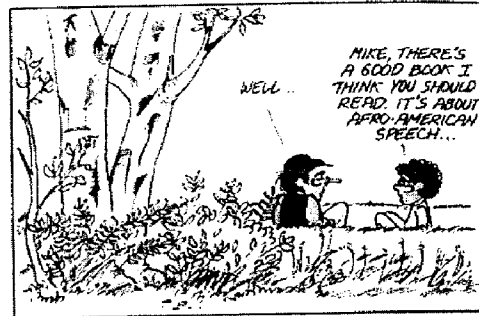
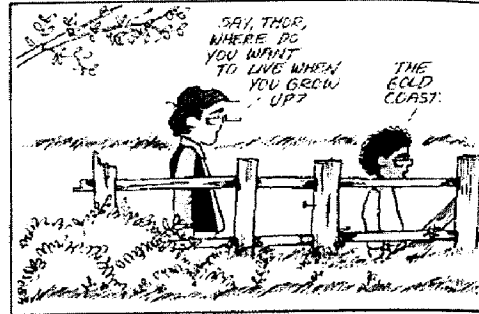
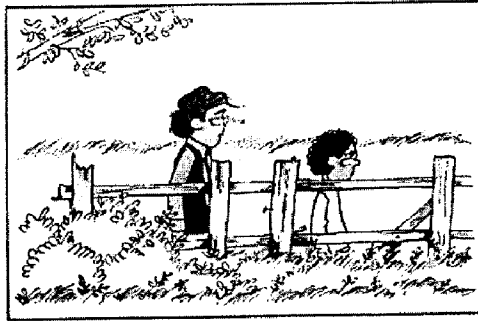
It is simple to date the beginning of AAE—the first black people were brought in chains to Virginia in 1619. There are, however, different theories as to the factors that led to the systematic differences between AAE and other American English dialects.

One view suggests that African American English originated when the African slaves learned English from their colonial masters as a second language. Although the basic grammar was learned, many surface differences persisted, which were reflected in the grammars constructed by the children of the slaves, who heard English primarily from their parents. Had the children been exposed to the English spoken by the whites, their grammars would have been more similar if not identical to the general Southern dialect. The dialect differences persisted and grew because social and racial barriers isolated blacks in America. The proponents of this theory point to the fact that the grammars of AAE and Standard American English are identical except for a few syntactic and phonological rules that produce surface differences.

Another view that is receiving increasing support is that many of the unique features of AAE are traceable to influences of the African languages spoken by the slaves. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Africans who spoke different languages were purposefully grouped together to discourage communication and to prevent slave revolts. In order to communicate, the slaves were forced to use the one common language all had access to, namely English. They invented a simplified form—called a pidgin (discussed below)—that incorporated many features from West African languages. According to this view, the differences between AAE and other dialects are due more to deep syntactic differences than to surface distinctions.

It is apparent that AAE is closer to Southern dialects of American English than to other dialects. The theory that suggests that the Negro slaves learned the English of white Southerners as a second language explains these similarities. They might also be explained by the fact that for many decades a large number of Southern white children were raised by black women and played with black children. It is possible that many of

⁷ J. Holm. 1988–1989. *Pidgins and Creoles*, Vols. 1 & 2. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.



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the distinguishing features of Southern dialects were acquired from African American English in this way. A publication of the American Dialect Society in 1908–1909 makes this point clearly:

For my part, after a somewhat careful study of east Alabama dialect, I am convinced that the speech of the white people, the dialect I have spoken all my life and the one I tried to record here, is more largely colored by the language of the negroes [*sic*] than by any other single influence.⁸

The two-way interchange still goes on. Standard American English is constantly enriched by words, phrases, and usage originating in AAE; and AAE, whatever its origins, is influenced by the changes that go on in the many other dialects of English.

Latino (Hispanic) English

A major group of American English dialects is spoken by native Spanish speakers or their descendants. The Southwest was once part of Mexico, and for more than a century large numbers of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries of South and Central America have been enriching the country with their language and culture. Among these groups are native speakers of Spanish who have learned or are learning English as a second language. There are also those born in Spanish-speaking homes whose native language is English, some of whom are monolingual, and others who speak Spanish as a second language.

One cannot speak of a homogeneous Latino dialect. In addition to the differences between bilingual and monolingual speakers, the dialects spoken by Puerto Rican, Cuban, Guatemalan, and El Salvadoran immigrants or their children are somewhat different from each other and also from those spoken by Mexican Americans in the Southwest and California, called Chicano English (ChE).

A description of the Latino dialects of English is complicated by historical and social factors. While many Latinos are bilingual speakers, it has been suggested that close to 20 percent of Chicanos are monolingual English speakers.⁹ Recent studies also show that the shift to monolingual English is growing rapidly. Furthermore, the bilingual speakers are not a homogeneous group; native Spanish speakers' knowledge of English ranges from passive to full competence. The Spanish influence on both immigrant and native English speakers is reinforced by border contact between the United States and Mexico and the social cohesion of a large segment of this population.

Bilingual Latinos, when speaking English, may insert a Spanish word or phrase into a single sentence or move back and forth between Spanish and English, a process called *code-switching*. This is a universal language-contact phenomenon that reflects the

⁸ L. W. Payne. 1901. "A Word-List from East Alabama," *Dialect News* 3:279–328, 343–91.

⁹ O. A. Santa Ana. 1993. "Chicano English and the Nature of the Chicano Language Setting," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 15(1):3–35.

grammars of both languages working simultaneously. Québécois in Canada switch from French to English and vice versa; the Swiss switch between French and German. Code-switching occurs wherever there are groups of bilinguals who speak the same two languages. Furthermore, code-switching occurs in specific social situations, enriching the repertoire of the speakers.

Because of the ignorance of code-switching, there is a common misconception that bilingual Latinos speak a sort of "broken" English, sometimes called Spanglish or Tex-Mex. This is not the case. In fact, the phrases inserted into a sentence are always in keeping with the syntactic rules of that language. For example, in a Spanish noun phrase, the adjective usually follows the noun, as opposed to the English NP in which it precedes, as shown by the following:

English: My mom fixes green tamales .	Adj N
Spanish: Mi mamá hace tamales verdes .	N Adj

A bilingual Spanish-English speaker might, in a code-switching situation, say:

My mom fixes tamales verdes .
or Mi mamá hace green tamales

but would not produce the sentences

*My mom fixes verdes tamales .
or *Mi mamá hace tamales green

because the Spanish word order was reversed in the inserted Spanish NP and the English word order was reversed in the English NP.

What monolingual speakers of English should realize is that these are individuals who know not one, but two languages.

Chicano English (ChE)

We have seen that there is no one form of Latino English, just as there is no single dialect of SAE or American English. Nor is the Chicano English dialect, spoken by a major group of descendants of Mexican Americans, homogeneous. With this in mind, we can still recognize it as a distinct dialect of American English, one that is acquired as a first language by many children and that is the native language of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Americans. It is not English with a Spanish accent nor an incorrect version of SAE but, like African American English, a mutually intelligible dialect that differs systematically from SAE. Many of the differences, however, represent variables that may or may not occur in the speech of a ChE speaker. The use of the non-standard forms by native speakers of English is often associated with pride of ethnicity.

PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLES OF ChE

ChE is, like other dialects, the result of many factors, a major one being the influence of Spanish. Phonological differences between ChE and SAE reveal this influence.