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# Language Variety in England

One thing that is important to very many English people is *where they are from*. For many of us, whatever happens to us in later life, and however much we move house or travel, the place where we grew up and spent our childhood and adolescence retains a special significance. Of course, this is not true of all of us. More often than in previous generations, families may move around the country, and there are increasing numbers of people who have had a nomadic childhood and are not really ‘from’ anywhere. But for a majority of English people, pride and interest in the area where they grew up is still a reality. The country is full of football supporters whose main concern is for the club of their childhood, even though they may now live hundreds of miles away. Local newspapers criss-cross the country in their thousands on their way to ‘exiles’ who have left their local areas. And at Christmas time the roads and railways are full of people returning to their native heath for the holiday period.

Where we are from is thus an important part of our personal identity, and for many of us an important component of this local identity is the way we speak – our accent and dialect. Nearly all of us have regional features in the way we speak English, and are happy that this should be so, although of course there are upper-class people who have regionless accents, as well as people who for some reason wish to conceal their regional origins. The vast majority of the population, however, speak in a manner which identifies them as coming from a particular place. They speak like the people they grew up with, and in a way that is different from people who grew up somewhere else. Of course, people may change the way in which they speak during their lifetimes, especially if they move around the country, but most of us carry at least some trace of our accent and dialect origins with us all of

our lives. Other people will use this information to help them decide where we are from, and will say things like ‘You must be a Londoner’, ‘You sound as if you’re a southerner’, ‘Whereabouts in Scotland are you from?’, ‘I can’t quite place your accent’, or ‘You’re from Yorkshire, aren’t you?’. And labels for people of different regional origins are freely used – you can get called ‘Geordie’, ‘Cockney’, ‘Jock’, ‘Taffy’, ‘Scouse’, and so on, depending on what you sound like when you speak.

This book on English dialects is about this variety in the way we speak English, and it is about the way *all* of us who are from England speak our native language, because *all* of us speak with an accent, and *all* of us speak a dialect. Your accent is the way in which you pronounce English, and since all of us pronounce when we speak, we all have an accent. Some accents, it is true, are more regional than others. Some people have very regional accents, so that you can tell exactly where they come from if you are clever enough at spotting accents. Other people have fewer regional features, and you might be able to place them only approximately – ‘You’re from somewhere in the West Country, but I can’t tell where.’ And yet other people may have very few regional features at all, so that you might be reduced to saying something as vague as ‘You’re a southerner.’ There are even a small number of people – probably between 3 and 5 per cent of the population of England – who have a totally regionless accent. These are usually people who have been to one of the big Public Schools, or who want to sound as if they have. This accent is sometimes referred to as a ‘BBC accent’ because readers of the national news on radio and television are usually selected from this minority of the population.

Similarly, everybody also speaks a dialect. When we talk about **dialect** we are referring to something more than accent. We are referring not only to pronunciation but also to the words and grammar that people use. Thus if you say

I haven’t got any

and I say

I ain’t got none

you and I differ in the grammar we use, and are therefore speaking different dialects. Normally, of course, dialect and accent go together.

If you speak Lancashire dialect, you will obviously speak it with a Lancashire accent. But it is worth making a distinction between accent and dialect because of what happens with the important dialect we call Standard English. Standard English is the dialect which is normally used in writing, and which is spoken by the most educated and powerful members of the population: probably no more than 12–15 per cent of the population of England are native speakers of Standard English.

The fact is that everybody who speaks with a BBC accent also speaks the Standard English dialect, like, say, Anna Ford or Alastair Burnett. But not everybody who speaks Standard English does so with a BBC accent. Most people who speak Standard English – perhaps 7–12 per cent of the population of the country – do so with some kind of regional accent, like Melvyn Bragg or John Kettle. This accent and this dialect do not therefore inevitably go together, and it is useful to be able to distinguish, by using the terms dialect and accent, between speakers who do combine them and those who do not.

Standard English is not often referred to as a dialect, but since it is a variety of the language that differs from others in its grammar, it is clearly just as much a dialect as any other variety. Standard English uses grammatical forms such as

I *did* it  
 A man *that* I know  
 He *doesn't* want *any*  
 She *isn't* coming  
 We *saw* him

The other, Nonstandard Dialects may use grammatical forms such as

I *done* it  
 A man *what* I know  
 He *don't* want *none*  
 She *ain't* coming  
 We *seen* him

Standard English also comes in a number of different forms around the world. The grammar of American Standard English is obviously a little different from English Standard English. English Standard English speakers say

I haven't written to him even though *I should have done*

Americans would say

I haven't written to him even though *I should have*

English speakers would say

It's *got* cold in here

American Standard English speakers would say

It's *gotten* cold in here

Scottish Standard English is a little different again, of course, and so is Irish Standard English. Within England, however, Standard English is written and spoken more or less the same over the whole country. Standard English speakers from the south of England are more likely to say things like

*I won't* do it    *We haven't* seen him

than speakers from the north of England, who are more likely to say

*I'll not* do it    *We've not* seen him

But what regional differences there are are very few.

It is important, too, not to confuse the issue of Standard English versus Nonstandard Dialects with the issue of formal versus informal language. All dialects can be spoken in less or more formal styles, depending on the nature of the situation. If someone says

I'm bloody sozzled

they are speaking an informal style of Standard English. If, on the other hand, they say

I be very drunk

they are speaking a more formal style but of some nonstandard dialect.

Like all other dialects, Standard English admits stylistic variation, including the use of swearing and highly informal vocabulary, or **slang**, such as *sozzled*.

In this book we shall not be saying very much about Standard English. Nearly all of the thousands of textbooks, grammars and dictionaries that have been compiled for the English language are already about Standard English, even though most people do not speak this dialect. This book will do only a little to redress this balance, but it is mainly about the *other* dialects of the language. Nor shall we have a lot to say in this book about slang. Rather, we shall be concentrating most closely on the nonstandard, regional dialects to be found in different parts of England, which, as we have seen, are spoken by the vast majority of the population, and which have to do, amongst other things, with where people are from.

Most often, in talking about these regional dialects, we will be concentrating on those social dialects which are most unlike Standard English. In any given area we find a social scale of dialects, with people at the top of the social hierarchy tending to speak Standard English, and with more and more nonstandard regional features occurring as we go down the social hierarchy. We shall be focusing our attention towards the most regional of the varieties.

We shall also be looking at two rather different sorts of dialects. **Traditional Dialects** are what most people think of when they hear the term **dialect**. They are spoken by a probably shrinking minority of the English-speaking population of the world, almost all of them in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. They are most easily found, as far as England is concerned, in the more remote and peripheral rural areas of the country, although some urban areas of northern and western England still have many Traditional Dialect speakers. These dialects differ very considerably from Standard English, and from each other, and may be difficult for others to understand when they first encounter them. People who say

*She bain't a-comin or Hoo inno comin or Her idden comin*  
'She's not coming'

are speaking Traditional Dialect. So are people who, for example, pronounce *bone* as 'bee-an' [bɪən] or 'bane' [beɪn] or 'bwoon' [bwɔn].

Mainstream Dialects, on the other hand, include both the Standard English Dialect and the Modern Nonstandard Dialects. Most native

English speakers speak some variety of Mainstream Dialect. These dialects are associated with native speakers outside the British Isles, especially in recently settled areas which speak mixed colonial dialects, such as Australia and most of America and Canada. In Britain, they are particularly associated with those areas of the country from which Standard English originally came – the southeast of England; with most urban areas; with places which have become English-speaking only relatively recently, such as the Scottish Highlands, much of Wales, and western Cornwall; with the speech of most younger people; and with middle- and upper-class speakers everywhere. The Mainstream Modern Nonstandard Dialects differ much less from Standard English and from each other, and are often distinguished much more by their pronunciation – their accent – than by their grammar. Mainstream Dialect speakers might say, for example,

*She's not coming* or *She isn't coming* or *She ain't comin*

They might also pronounce the word *bone* as 'bown' [bæʊn], 'boun' [bɔʊn] or 'bawn' [bɔ:n]. In this book we shall be discussing both the Mainstream Modern Dialects spoken by the majority of the population, and the older, minority Traditional Dialects.

The systematic scientific study of Traditional Dialects began rather late in this country compared to many other European countries, but much of what we shall be saying in this book about Traditional Dialects will be based in part on the very important work of the *Survey of English Dialects*. Inspired and conceived by Harold Orton, and based at the University of Leeds, the *Survey* has been recording and reporting on Traditional Dialects in England since the 1950s.

## Dialect Areas

People often ask: how many dialects are there in England? This question is impossible to answer. After all, how many places are there to be from? If you travel from one part of the country to another, you will most often find that the dialects change gradually as you go. The further you travel, the more different the dialects will become from the one in the place where you started, but the different dialects will seem to merge into one another, without any abrupt transitions.

There are no really sharp dialect boundaries in England, and dialects

certainly do not coincide with counties. Yorkshire Dialect, for instance, does not suddenly change dramatically into Durham Dialect as you cross the County Durham boundary. Indeed, the dialects of northern Yorkshire are much more like those of County Durham than they are like those of southern Yorkshire. Dialects form a continuum, and are very much a matter of more-or-less rather than either/or. There is really no such thing as an entirely separate, self-contained dialect. Dialectologists often draw lines on maps dividing areas which have a particular word or pronunciation from those which don't. If they then put all these lines together on a single map, they find that none of them are in exactly the same place. Dialects differ from immediately neighbouring dialects only slightly, and can be heard to change slowly and word by word, pronunciation by pronunciation, as you travel from one village to the next.

All the same, in this book we shall be talking about Traditional Dialect and Modern Dialect areas *as if* there were such things as separate dialects. This is a convenient thing to do. We realize that dialects form a continuum, but for the sake of clarity and brevity, we divide this continuum up into areas at points where it is least continuum-like. That is, we draw boundaries between dialect areas at places where we find a situation most closely resembling an abrupt transition. This has the advantage of fitting in with most people's perceptions of how dialects work. After all, if you can tell a Liverpudlian from a Mancunian by their speech, it will not necessarily worry you that there may be places between Liverpool and Manchester whose dialects you will have trouble in placing. However, in our discussions of dialect areas, it must always be borne in mind that these areas are not particularly firmly or permanently fixed, and that they can only be a simplified approximation to what actually happens in real life. The lines we draw on our maps dividing one dialect area from another cannot easily be located at any precise point on the M4 motorway, the London-to-Carlisle railway line, or anywhere else.

## Origins of Dialect Differences

One very interesting question that is often asked is: where do different dialects come from? Why are there dialects? Why is it that people in different parts of the country speak differently? This is a difficult as well as interesting question to answer, and one that we shall be tackling

in later chapters also. The question is probably easier to answer if we turn it round and ask: why doesn't everybody in every part of England speak the same? The answer is that English, like all other languages in the world, is constantly changing, and that different changes take place in different parts of the country. A change may start in a particular location and spread out from there to cover neighbouring areas. Some of these changes may spread so much that they eventually cover the whole country. More often, though, changes will only spread so far, leading to dialect differences between areas which have the new form and areas which do not.

Often the spread of changes will be halted by barriers to communication such as countryside which is difficult to cross. One of the most important dialect boundaries in England runs through the Fens, which until quite recently was an isolated, swampy area which was very difficult to get across. It is not an accident therefore that people in Norfolk say *laugh* 'lahf' /la:f/ and *butter* 'butter' /bʌtə/ while people in Lincolnshire say 'laff' /læf/ and 'bootter' /bʊtə/. As we shall see later, the Norfolk pronunciations are newer forms which are the result of changes which never made it across the Fens into Lincolnshire because very few *people* made it across, because of the difficulties of the terrain.

Language change is one of the most mystifying and fascinating phenomena that dialectologists and linguistic scientists encounter. Sometimes we can explain language change by reference to external factors: it is easy to account for the wholesale adoption by the English language of very large numbers of originally French words by referring to the Norman Conquest of England by French-speaking rulers in 1066. But more often than not there is no such explanation, and we have to say simply that it appears to be a natural characteristic of human languages that they change – in pronunciation and grammar as well as vocabulary. We are especially bad at explaining why a particular language change occurs when and where it does rather than in some other place and at some other time.

If we look far enough back in time we can see that it is often change in language that has led to the growth of different languages in the first place. The fact is that the languages we today call Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Faroese, German, Dutch, Frisian and English were, around 2,000 years or so ago, all the same language. These languages, which form what we now call the Germanic language family, are all descended from a common ancestor of which we have no



records. This original Germanic language, in its turn, is derived from an ancestor language which is often called Indo-European, which was spoken somewhere in Eurasia perhaps 6,000 years ago, and which is the parent language not only of Germanic but also of Hindi, Bengali, Persian, Sinhalese and nearly all the languages of Europe including Russian, Lithuanian, Greek, Albanian, Italian and Welsh.

The break-up of the original Indo-European language into its modern descendants, and of the original Germanic language into English, German, etc., were caused by the same phenomenon – language change. What happened was that the language changed but that it changed in different ways in different places. The more time that elapsed, the more the language changed, and the more the different varieties of the language drifted apart, until the descendants of people who long ago all spoke the same language today speak many different languages, most of which are totally mutually incomprehensible. We can see that, for example, Dutch and Norwegian come from the same family of languages as English when we notice the many similarities that exist between them, such as:

<b>Dutch</b>	<b>Norwegian</b>	<b>English</b>
twee	to	two
drie	tre	three
huis	hus	house
man	mann	man
brood	brød	bread

But English speakers can still not understand Dutch or Norwegian without first studying them. A thousand years ago they probably would have been able to.

This same mechanism has been at work within the English language itself ever since it was first brought to Britain by Germanic-speaking invaders and settlers about 1,500 years ago. Even then the language was not at all uniform. But over the intervening centuries the English language has changed enormously, with the result that the Old English or Anglo-Saxon language as written by King Alfred is no longer comprehensible to us, and the mediaeval Middle English of Chaucer is by no means easy to read, and would be even harder to understand if we could hear it spoken.

As the language has changed in this way, it has changed in different ways in different parts of the country, with the result that, as the

centuries have gone by, differences between the dialects have increased. The fact that English has been spoken in England for 1,500 years but in Australia for only 200 explains why we have a great wealth of regional dialects in England that is more or less totally lacking in Australia. It is often possible to tell where an English person comes from to within about 15 miles or less. In Australia, where there has not been enough time for changes to bring about much regional variation, it is almost impossible to tell where someone comes from at all, although very small differences are now beginning to appear.

## The Future

It is unlikely, however, that there will ever be as much dialectal variation in Australia as there is in England. This is because modern transport and communications conditions are very different from what they were 1,500 or even 100 years ago. Even though English is now spoken in many different parts of the world many thousands of miles apart, it is very unlikely that English will ever break up into a number of different non-intelligible languages in the same way that Indo-European and Germanic did. German and Norwegian became different languages because the ancestors of the speakers of these two languages moved apart geographically, and were no longer in touch and communicating with one another. In the modern world, barring unforeseen catastrophes, this will not happen, at least in the near future. As long as Americans and British people, for instance, are in touch with one another and want to communicate with one another, it is most unlikely that their dialects will drift so far apart as to become different languages.

It is equally unlikely, however, that we will ever all end up speaking the same dialect. From time to time, people who ought to know better predict that in fifty years' time all British and Australian people will be speaking American English just like the Americans. This is clearly nonsense. What is actually happening to the different varieties of English seems to be this. At the moment, American and English English are diverging in their pronunciation. In many respects, American and English accents are slowly getting more unlike one another. This is because changes in pronunciation are taking place in America which are not happening in England, and vice versa. To take just one example, there is a growing tendency in American English to pro-

nounce words like *man* as ‘mee-an’ [mɪən] which is not found at all in Britain. Similarly, there is a growing tendency in Britain to pronounce words like *better* as ‘be’er’ [bɛʔə], with a glottal stop (see p. 77), which is not found in America.

It may well be, therefore, that in 100 years’ time the different accents will take a little more getting used to, and a little more concentration, if we are to understand one another. It must be borne in mind, though, that familiarity always breeds greater understanding. When talking-films were first introduced into Britain from the United States, very many people complained that they could not understand them. This may seem very strange to us now, but of course until the 1930s the vast majority of British people had never heard an American accent. Now British people have no trouble in understanding the sort of American English that appears on television because it is so familiar to them.

The same tendency to divergence is probably also occurring in the case of grammar, although it is a little harder to tell what is happening here. The two varieties are in any case very similar grammatically, but it seems that one or two further differences are beginning to emerge, so that it may be that American and British English are moving slightly further apart grammatically, albeit extremely slowly.

On the other hand, American and British English are probably getting more alike when it comes to vocabulary. More and more words are crossing the Atlantic in both directions. Until the 1950s, most British people said *wireless*. Now most say *radio*. Many scores of words now used quite naturally by all British speakers were formerly considered ‘Americanisms’. Twenty years ago Americans never used the British and Australasian swear-word *bloody*. Now increasing numbers of them are doing so. And so on.

This difference between what is happening with accents and what is happening with words is quite easy to explain. It is a simple matter to learn new words and expressions and add them to our vocabularies, and all of us do this all our lives. We can even pick up words and phrases from the radio and television, and with so many television programmes crossing from Britain to America and vice versa it is not surprising that words and fashionable phrases cross with them. Pronunciation, on the other hand, is very different. Pronouncing our native dialect is something we all learn how to do very early in life, and it is a very complex business indeed, involving the acquisition of deeply automatic processes which require movements of millimetre accuracy and micro-

second synchronization of our lips, jaw, tongue, soft palate and vocal cords. Once this has been learned, it is very difficult indeed to unlearn, which is why nearly all of us have a foreign accent when we try to speak a new language. Accents do not therefore change nearly so readily.

What seems to be necessary for someone to change their accent, even if only slightly, is for them to be in frequent face-to-face contact with speakers with different accents. Scots probably hear London accents on television every day of the week, but they do not acquire any features of a London accent unless they move to London and spend large amounts of time talking to Londoners. Nearly all British people, similarly, are exposed to lots of American English, but the only British people who acquire any features of an American accent are those who spend time in America or otherwise spend a great deal of time interacting with Americans.

The same is true of the role of the electronic media in influencing the spread of linguistic changes within England itself. Television obviously plays a role in influencing the words and phrases people use, but it does not play any important part in influencing their accents or the grammatical structure of their dialects. The point about the television set is that you do not talk to it – and even if you do, it can't hear you.

The answer to the question of whether British and American English are converging or diverging is therefore a complicated one: in some ways they are converging, in other ways they are diverging. Either way, it is nothing to worry about.

## The Correctness of Dialects

We have to acknowledge, however, that there are plenty of people who *do* worry about language change. England seems to be full of people who write to the newspapers and the BBC complaining about the way in which the language is 'degenerating', without appearing to realize that the way they speak and write themselves is the result of thousands of years of language change. They complain about 'Americanisms' (which are by definition bad for these complainers), and about 'decay' and 'corruption' in the English language, as well as about 'sloppy speech' and 'bad grammar'. These complaints are a very interesting phenomenon, and one that seems to be repeated in every generation for every language. Although language change is, as we have seen, natural

and therefore inevitable, there always seems to be a minority of people who speak the language in question who do not like it. There is of course nothing that they can really do about language change, but they continue to complain all the same.

Sometimes we can explain their horror in social terms. Objections to ‘Americanisms’ are presumably really objections to what the objectors perceive to be symbolic of a threat to their culture and way of life. (After all, very few people object to the introduction of, say, French words into English, because French culture is not perceived as being threatening.) Similarly, if they object to the increasing use of glottal stops in words like *better* in English, this is presumably because the glottal stop was formerly a feature of lower-social-class dialects which is now beginning to find its way up the social scale in a way that some older middle- and upper-class people might find threatening. In other cases, however, we are simply reduced to saying that there will always be some people who will object to anything that is new just because it is new.

These intolerant people may also in some cases be the same people who are critical of all English dialects other than Standard English. There are a number of people who believe that Standard English is ‘correct English’, and that all other dialects are ‘wrong’. They seem to believe, in fact, that Standard English is *the* English language, and that all other dialects are in some way deviations from or corruptions of Standard English. Historically, of course, this is not true. Standard English has its origins in the older Traditional Dialects of the southeast of England, and rose to prominence because this was the area in which London, Oxford and Cambridge were situated, and which contained the royal court and the government. If the capital of England had been, say, York, then Standard English today would have shown a close resemblance to northern dialects of English.

The fact is that all dialects, both Traditional and Modern, are equally grammatical and correct. They differ only in their social significance and function. As a result of a historical accident, the Standard English dialect is today the dialect which is used in writing, and which, by convention, is used for official purposes. This is why we teach children in British schools to read and write in this dialect. This does not mean, however, that there is anything wrong or linguistically inferior about the other dialects, which, as we have noted, are spoken by, and will undoubtedly continue to be spoken by, the majority of the population of England.

All dialects of English have their own perfectly valid grammars, and we shall be looking at some aspects of these grammatical structures in more detail in chapter 4. The fact that these grammars may differ in some respects from Standard English does not make those grammars wrong or inferior, merely different. In some cases, differences between Standard English and other dialects are due to changes that have taken place in Standard English. An example of this is the retention in the nonstandard dialects of the older negative form, as in

*I don't want no dinner*

which has been lost in Standard English. In other cases, it may be that Standard English retains older forms which have been lost in other dialects, such as verb forms like

*I drew a picture*

where certain other dialects might have newer forms such as

*I drawed a picture*

There is nothing linguistically superior about Standard English. It is not more 'pure' or more correct than other forms of speech. It is not even legitimate to claim that it is more 'acceptable' than other dialects, unless we specify *who* it is acceptable to. There are very many people who find Standard English highly unacceptable, at least in certain situations. The superiority that Standard English has is social. As we said above, we shall not be discussing the Standard English dialect to any great extent in the rest of this book, since it has already been very well and thoroughly described and discussed in our grammar books and our dictionaries.

## Differences in Language Use between Dialects

As we have seen, dialects differ in their pronunciation – their accents – and in their grammar and vocabulary. All aspects of the language are important in differentiating between dialects, although, as we have seen, in the case of the Modern Dialects pronunciation is usually the biggest clue as to where someone comes from. There is also one other

difference between dialects, however, and one which is not so often discussed as the others. The fact is that dialects also differ in terms of how they are *used* by their speakers. There are different norms in different dialect areas as to how language is supposed to be used, and even what it is for.

Some urban dialect areas, for instance, are known for the ability of their speakers to conduct conversations containing quickfire wit and repartee. This is true, for instance, of Merseyside and of Cockney speakers. In other areas, such as East Anglia, slower speech styles and more sardonic wit is appreciated. This is part of a much wider pattern in the world's languages whereby different communities have different ideas about what is good and bad in the use of language. Differences can be found of many different types: how much people say, how quickly they speak, how loudly they talk, the degree to which they talk to strangers, when and whether they say please and thank-you, and so on.

Within England these differences are usually not big enough to cause serious problems of communication, but they do lead to stereotyping of speakers from certain areas as having certain characteristics. The skilled practitioners of Cockney-style conversations might be valued in London as amusing and interesting, but are readily perceived by speakers in neighbouring East Anglia as being arrogant and dominating. East Anglians are correspondingly perceived by Londoners as being taciturn and unfriendly, but will tell you if asked that they do not like to intrude conversationally where they are not wanted. And so on. Dialects differ in their conversational styles as well as in their accents, grammar and vocabulary. This often emerges in anecdotes and tales about different parts of the country. The following conversation could surely not have taken place in London or Liverpool:

I was lost in a Norfolk lane, so I stopped a man and I said to him: 'Good morning!'

He looked at me. 'Good morning,' I cried. 'Can you tell me if I am right for Norwich?'

He continued to look at me. Then, in an uneasy, suspicious way, he said: 'What d'ye want to know for?'

I might have been annoyed, but leaning out of the car and putting on an affable expression which I usually keep for tea-parties, I said: 'My dear old bor, I want to know because I want to get to Norwich.'

The ghost of a smile flitted over his rustic face, and he replied after some deep thought, rather reluctantly, and looking away from me: 'Well, you're right!'<sup>1</sup>

## Other Dialects and Languages

The dialects of English that we have mentioned so far are the Traditional Dialects of England; and the Mainstream Dialects, including Standard English and the Modern Nonstandard Dialects. These of course account for the majority of the population of the country. But they do not account for the entire population. Many other forms of English, and other languages, are also spoken in modern England.

There are many speakers of overseas varieties of English such as American and Australian present in the country for shorter or longer periods, and speakers of Welsh, Irish and Scottish forms of English are naturally especially numerous. Other forms of English are brought with them by foreign tourists, business people and other visitors such as Germans and Japanese who speak English with different degrees of proficiency, having learnt it for the most part at school as a foreign language, each individual usually aiming as best he or she can at the sort of English that English people speak without actually getting all the way there.

Different from these forms of English are those that have been brought to England by speakers from countries where English is not a foreign but a second language. In countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Tanzania, Singapore, Malta and many others, English is so widely used as the language of education, government and wider communication, even though there are no or very few native speakers, that distinctive, institutionalized forms of English have developed. Indian English, for instance, as spoken by highly educated Indians, has its own distinctive characteristic words and pronunciations in the same way that American English does.

Different again are the forms of English, now widely spoken in England, that are of Caribbean origin. Some forms are clearly English of a type which is Caribbean in the same way that Canadian English is Canadian and Australian English Australian. Other forms of Caribbean English, sometimes known as 'patois' or 'creole', are so unlike other forms of English that it would be better in some ways to regard them



as languages related to English rather than actually English. These fascinating varieties of language derive most of their vocabulary from English. Many of their grammatical structures, however, stem from African languages and from the creativity of speakers from all over West Africa who, during the early years of the Atlantic slave trade, had as their only common language a limited amount of English which they fashioned, out of their own mental resources, into normal languages of considerable subtlety and complexity which nevertheless have an abnormal history. In some parts of England new forms of creole-influenced English are spoken by some people of West Indian origin, and, amongst certain groups of young people, by their non-West Indian friends.

The poem 'Inglan is a Bitch' by the well-known Linton Kwesi Johnson, part of which is given here, is written in a form of English with a number of patois features.

well mi dbu day wok an mi dhu night wok  
 mi dhu clean wok an' mi dhu dutty wok  
 dem seh dat black man is very lazy  
 but if y'u si how mi wok y'u woulda sey mi crazy

Inglan is a bitch  
 dere's no escapin' it  
 Inglan is a bitch  
 y'u better face up to it

mi know dem have work, work in abundant  
 yet still, dem make mi redundant  
 now, at fifty-five mi gettin' quite ol'  
 yet still, dem sen' me fi goh draw dole

Inglan is a bitch  
 dere's no escapin' it  
 Inglan is a bitch fi true  
 is whey wi a goh dhu 'bout it?<sup>2</sup>

In addition to these forms of English, we have to recognize that many English cities are now very multilingual places, with London's schoolchildren in particular speaking, in addition to English, many scores of different languages as their mother tongue. Languages such as

Panjabi, Gujerati, Bengali, Italian, Greek, Maltese, Chinese, Turkish and many others are very widely spoken in different parts of the country.

These languages have come, of course, from overseas in relatively recent times, but England has a long history of being multilingual. It is a mistake to think of the country as having been entirely English-speaking until modern times. In the early years of this century, for instance, very many speakers of the Jewish language Yiddish were concentrated in the East End of London, and Yiddish still has a number of speakers in the country. Cornish was spoken in western Cornwall until at least the eighteenth century. And in earlier centuries, refugees speaking Dutch and French fled from religious persecution to England and were present here in many cities in very large numbers until they were gradually assimilated linguistically. Norwich, to take just one example, was more than one-third Dutch-speaking in the sixteenth century, and Dutch continued to be spoken there for over 200 years.

Earlier arrivals included the Gypsies, in late mediaeval times, who spoke an Indo-European language originally from northern India, closely related to Panjabi and Hindi, called Romany. Romany is probably not spoken in England any more, but it survives in Wales and is widely spoken by Gypsies all over Europe and in North America. What does, however, survive in England is a very interesting language called Anglo-Romany which consists of Romany words spoken with English grammar and English pronunciation. Here is an extract from St Luke's gospel (15.3-6) in Anglo-Romany:

Jesus pukkered them this parable: 'Suppose tutti's got a hundred bokros and yek of them's nasherdi. Is there a mush among the lot of you as would not muk the wavver ninety-nine in the bokro-puv and jel after the nasherdi bokro till he latches it? Karna he's latched it he riggers it on his dummer, well-pleased he is. Karna he jels home he pukkers his friends and all the foki around: 'Be happy with mandi, because I've found my nasherdi bokero.'<sup>23</sup>

In mediaeval times, too, England was a very multilingual place. In the twelfth century Norwich contained sizeable groups of speakers of English, French, Danish, Dutch and the Jewish form of Spanish known as Ladino. Very probably, England has not been a monolingual

country at all since the occupation of the originally Welsh-speaking country by the Latin-speaking Romans.

There is also one other indigenous language that we must mention. This is British Sign Language, the language used (although of course not spoken) by the deaf community in this country. It has gradually come to be recognized that this is a genuine language in its own right, with its own structures and expressive power, and that it does not bear a particularly close relationship to English. Like other minority languages, it has had a history of persecution at the hands of people who have believed that it was not a 'proper' means of communication and that the deaf would be better employed trying to learn English. But it is undoubtedly a rich and subtle means of communication for those who are congenitally deaf and without it their lives would be much the poorer.

British Sign Language has recognizable regional dialects, with small differences in the signs used in different parts of the country. We shall nevertheless not be discussing BSL in the rest of this book. Nor shall we be discussing the other languages of England, whether, like Cornish, they arrived here before English or, like Panjabi, they arrived after. This is a book about English, and we shall be looking only at dialects of English in England. We shall, however, acknowledge the debt that English owes to the other languages in its vocabulary. We will also be saying that England would be a poorer place without its rich pattern of regional dialects. The same is equally true of the rich pattern of different languages that characterizes England in the late twentieth century.