VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

Varieties of English

An introduction to the study of language

Dennis Freeborn
with
Peter French and David Langford

M
MACMILLAN

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Symbols

Words or phrases quoted as linguistic examples are printed in *italics*.

A symbol in pointed brackets, e.g. <d>, refers to its use as a letter in written English.

A symbol or word in slanting brackets, e.g. /u:/, /peg/, refers to sounds or pronunciation in spoken English, and uses the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (see chapter 4).

In transcribing conversation, pauses are shown in round brackets, either in terms of their approximate length in seconds, e.g. (2.0), or as a momentary break, or micropause (.). When an overlap of speaking turns occurs, the place where the overlap begins is shown as //.

The symbol Ø indicates a deleted element.

Note to teachers and lecturers: this book does not make use of the concept of the *phoneme* in discussing spoken English, although it is a fundamental part of the study of phonology in linguistics. Many students do not find the theory of the phoneme easy to grasp at first, and in the brief introductory survey of aspects of spoken English in chapters 4, 5, and 6, it was thought better to establish an uncomplicated approach to pronunciation, even though it avoids some basic problems.

This should not deter teachers from introducing the concept and using the term *phoneme* if they wish, especially if they are teaching the phonology of English as part of a wider syllabus in the study of the language.

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Oxford University Press for extracts from 'God's Grandeur' and 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' in *Selected Poems*, edited by Gardner.

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Introduction

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate how the formal study of language - linguistics - can be applied to written and spoken English in order to describe styles and varieties of language use precisely and accurately. The approach is **empirical**, that is, 'based or acting upon observation or experiment'.

Each text provides a distinctive sample of English in use. The descriptive commentaries show how a linguistic study can help to identify those features of a text which make it distinctive. The studies are not primarily concerned with evaluating the texts, to say whether they are good or bad of their kind, but will form a sound basis for critical discrimination where this is appropriate.

Chapter 1 looks at people's beliefs about, and attitudes to, good or correct English. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 discuss how English has changed in time over 1,000 years and more, and how it now varies according to geographical region and social class. Chapter 5 examines the differences between spoken and written English - that is, variations in the medium which we use to communicate with other people in the English language. Chapter 6 gives examples of the successive varieties of children's speech before they use, more or less, the English of their parents and other adults.

Finally, chapters 7, 8 and 9 present some familiar varieties of spoken and written English which are associated with specific functions, 'the language of . . .', styles of speech or writing which change to suit the occasion, the people addressed, and the topic under discussion. Studying the examples of style in English should help you to be much more aware of how you adopt an appropriate one.

In order to demonstrate this methodical approach to the description of style in sufficient detail, the number of topics has had to be restricted. There are many more varieties of English than those discussed in this book, but a similar process of analysis and description to that demonstrated here can be used on any other variety.

How to use the book

The chapters are subdivided into topics, and give exercises which should be discussed and worked before going on to examine the descriptive commentaries which follow. The commentaries are sometimes detailed, and are intended to teach important basic concepts about the language.

Some topics include further texts and exercises without commentary, but in the restricted space of a single textbook it is not possible to include many texts for additional study. Teachers and lecturers will be able to provide their own follow-up work.

It is not essential to follow the order of the chapters consecutively. Some teachers may prefer to select or to begin, for example, with chapter 5 on spoken and written English, rather than with chapter 1 on attitudes to good English.

The linguistic features which are described arise in an *ad hoc* way from the nature and style of each individual text. The book does not, therefore, cover all aspects of the sound and sentence patterns of English, since some may not appear in the selected texts. Others, on the other hand, occur more than once. When the linguistic features are identified, they are related to the meaning and function of the texts. It is hoped that teachers and lecturers will find the texts useful for other topics in English teaching which are either not mentioned in the commentaries, or only referred to in passing.

Teachers must decide for themselves how to relate this study of varieties of English to the necessary understanding of the phonology and grammar of the language which makes it possible. Theory and practice may be taught concurrently, with the teacher using the texts to demonstrate in greater detail those aspects of the sound or sentence structure that arise from them. Alternatively, the texts may be studied after an introduction to the phonology and grammar of English has begun.

In chapters 4 and 6 especially, students will need help from their teachers in learning to transcribe the sounds of speech and to distinguish the features of dialectal accent and children's language. The exercises provided are minimal, and limitations of space make it impossible to provide a more detailed, step-by-step approach to transcription. Chapter 4 is not in itself a complete introduction to the sound patterns of English, and presupposes additional teaching.

It is certain that only a limited understanding will be possible if the texts are studied without some model of language and its appropriate

terminology being available to the student. The terminology used in this book is largely traditional and well established. Only those terms which are necessary for a satisfactory analysis or description are introduced. The accompanying cassette tape is essential for a proper study of the transcription of spoken English.