VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

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VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE
Second Edition

Dennis Freeborn
with Peter French and David Langford

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Contents of the cassette tape

The *Varieties of English* cassette tape is essential for a proper study of the transcriptions of spoken English. The following list of contents provides reference to the first and second editions of this book. (The cassette tape is available from your bookseller: ISBN 0-333-40670-2.)

		<i>1st edition</i>	<i>2nd edition</i>
Section 1	Tom Leonard	Ch. 1 p. 18	Ch. 1 p. 18
Section 2	Wilfred Pickles reading the news	Ch. 1 p. 19	Ch. 1 p. 19
Section 3	Dialect sentences	Ch. 3 p. 55	Ch. 3 p. 50
Section 4	The Mango Tree	Ch. 3 p. 57	Ch. 3 p. 52
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Section 6	Mrs Cook	Ch. 4 p. 65	Ch. 4 p. 60
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Section 9	RP (i)	Ch. 4 p. 78	Ch. 4 p. 69
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Section 11	Ashington, Northumberland	Ch. 4 p. 78	Ch. 4 p. 71
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Section 13	London Cockney (ii)	Ch. 4 p. 81	Ch. 4 p. 73
Section 14	Romy	Ch. 5 p. 89	Ch. 5 p. 78
Section 15	Rebecca	Ch. 5 p. 98	Ch. 5 p. 86
Section 16	Pronunciation skills, Danny; Stages A, B, C	Ch. 6 p. 103	Ch. 6 p. 105
Section 17	Grammatical skills, Danny; Stages A, B, C	Ch. 6 p. 112	Ch. 6 p. 109
Section 18	Discourse skills, Mother and Stephanie	Ch. 6 p. 121	Ch. 6 p. 118
Section 19	Bedtime stories (i)	Ch. 7 p. 127	Ch. 7 p. 123
Section 20	Bedtime stories (ii)	Ch. 7 p. 134	Ch. 7 p. 128
Section 21	Unscripted commentary (i) Goal!	Ch. 7 p. 136	Ch. 7 p. 129
Section 22	Unscripted commentary (ii) Trooping the Colour	Ch. 7 p. 143	Ch. 7 p. 135
Section 23	Conversation (i) Tom B. and Mrs W.	Ch. 7 p. 147	Ch. 8 p. 152
Section 24	Conversation (ii) Heather and Mrs W.	Ch. 7 p. 148	Ch. 8 p. 153
Section 25	Conversation (iii) Tom, Marion and the Minister	Ch. 7 p. 149	Ch. 8 p. 155

Symbols

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

Written English

A symbol in caret brackets, e.g. <d>, refers to its use as a letter in written English. The symbol Ø indicates a deleted element.

Transcribing spoken English

The symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) are used to refer to the spoken sounds of English (see chapter 4, section 4.4.1).

- (i) A symbol in **diagonal brackets**, e.g. /æ/, /ŋ/, /ð/, refers to a member of the set of contrastive vowel or consonant sounds (**phonemes**) in spoken English, but without specifying its pronunciation in any particular context.

For example, there are references to ‘the sound /r/’ in chapters 4 and 5, but this ‘sound’ is pronounced, or ‘realised’, differently in the various dialectal accents of English – as [ɹ] in RP and other accents, as [r] in parts of Scotland, and as [R] in parts of Northumberland. Clearly, it is necessary to have heard and to know these pronunciations of ‘the sound /r/’ if the IPA symbols are to make sense.

- (ii) A symbol in **square brackets**, therefore, eg [ɔ], [ð], [ɹ], refers to the actual pronunciation of sounds (**phones**).

Note to teachers and lecturers

This book does not use the word *phoneme* in discussing spoken English, although the term is fundamental in 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 4–6, it was thought better to establish an uncomplicated approach to pronunciation, even though it avoids some problems. The word *phoneme* refers to an abstract concept, not to an actual sound.

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.

Transcribing conversation

For the conventional symbols used in conversation analysis, see chapter 5, section 5.2: Making a transcription.

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Introduction to the second edition

This second edition is a complete revision and enlargement of the first, with additional texts, commentaries and chapters. Since the publication of the first edition in 1986, two significant developments have taken place in schools in the field of English Language teaching – firstly the growing popularity of two English Language A-level syllabuses, and secondly the introduction of the National Curriculum, in which the study of the English language is an essential part of the curriculum for English, based on the *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Teaching of English Language* 1988 (the Kingman Report). The contents of this book are relevant to both developments.

The purpose of *Varieties of English* is to demonstrate how the formal academic study of language, linguistics and its associated disciplines, 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 that 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 2–4 discuss how English has changed in time over 1000 years and more, and how its vocabulary, structure and pronunciation vary 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.

Chapters 7 and 8 (expanded from chapter 7 in the first edition) present some familiar varieties of spoken English. Chapters 9 and 10 (from former chapter 8) contain examples of written English that are associated with specific functions, ‘the language of ...’. Chapter 9 focuses exclusively on news reporting in the press, and shows that an explicit understanding of how choices of vocabulary and grammar contribute to the making of meanings can more readily detect ‘selective perception’ and biased reporting. Chapter 10 is concerned with style in both literary and non-literary texts. Styles of speech or writing change to suit the occasion, the people addressed and the topic under discussion; studying these examples of different styles of written English should help you to be much more aware of how you adopt an appropriate one.

Chapter 11 (formerly part of chapter 9 in the first edition) applies some linguistic concepts to the study and appreciation of verse. Chapter 12 is new, and provides near-contemporary data on 'politically correct language', a controversial issue but one which any serious student of language must consider.

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 activities which should be discussed and worked before going on to examine the descriptive commentaries that follow. The commentaries are sometimes detailed, and are intended to teach important basic concepts about the language.

Some topics include further texts and activities 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, or make use of other books in this series.

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 that 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 and 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 and lecturers 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 4–6, students will need help from their teachers or lecturers in learning to transcribe the sounds of speech and to distinguish the features of dialectal accent and children's language. The activities 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 that are necessary for a satisfactory analysis or description are introduced.

Dennis Freeborn