

---

Roman Kritsberh, Ph.D., Professor, Chair, Department of Translation,  
Institute of Economics and Information Technologies, Kriviy Rig, Ukraine

Received September 28, 2013; Accepted October 19, 2013

**Abstract:** Standard of language is conditioned by its variation. The prescriptivism tendency in English, with British variety being the only prestigious form has gradually yielded to polycentrism – first American English then those of developing countries have formed standards of their own. British and American English have high social prestige and continue to exercise influence on other World Englishes. Two trends, divergence and convergence, the drive for national identity and that for integrity are typical of regional variation and crucial for changes of standard speech. British and American English both keep their distinctive markers and interact one with another. American influence on British English has been telling since the early 19<sup>th</sup> c., while now, the process is reciprocal. Often, the standard of language depends on subjective evaluation due to regional and social backgrounds. Social dialects are extremely mobile, both in respect of each other and standard variety. They replenish the prestigious forms and show a trend of making their way therein. Social, regional, and other variations of language are closely connected due to interaction of territorial, socioeconomic, gender, ethnical, etc factors and cannot be considered in isolation. In American English, a continuum of standardness is quite extended stretching from Formal or Prescriptive Standard through Informal Standard to non-standard forms, with vernacular dialects positioned more closely to the prestigious forms, comparing to British English. Standard in Modern English is in a state of flux, corollary of language variations – temporal, regional, social, and can be considered both between international varieties of English and within those.

**Keywords:** *dialect, language standard, prestigious form, regional variation, social variation.*

Variations and changes in language have crucial effect on its structure, usage, and standard. The numerous works of the field deal with language situation and policy in English-speaking countries, as D. Crystal [9], relations between socially prestigious and vernacular forms, as W. Wolfram and N. Schilling-Estes [26], development of New Englishes and their relations to American (AE) and British (BE) varieties, as Y. Kachru and C. Nelson [17], along with signatures of those and their interaction, as G. Rohdenburg and J. Schlueter [23], E. Finegan and J. Rickford [11]. The objective of this paper is to bring to light the relation between variation and changes in the language system and its standard. The corresponding textual sources from 18<sup>th</sup> through 21<sup>st</sup> cc. along with regionally marked items on all language levels serve as material for this paper. Its methodology is based primarily on that of descriptive analysis.

The category of language “standardness” has long been the Holy Grail in both linguistic science and popular belief. It started with utopian concept of “language of excel-

lence” contended by Sanskrit; after W. Jones “*more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity*” [20, p. 11].

Classical Hebrew and the Arabic of the Qur’an serve the examples as cases in point. German does, as well. J.G. Fichte in his *Addresses to the German nation* (1807) writes: “*German speaker can always be superior to the foreigner and understand him fully even better than the foreigner understands himself*” [10, p. 109]. French was the language of the society in the 17-18<sup>th</sup> cc. Europe. Voltaire visiting the court of Prussian king Friedrich II wrote: “*in Germany people speak French. German is spoken by horses and soldiers*” [18, p. 105].

English, after Th. Macaulay “... *stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West... It abounds with works of imagination,... with models of every species of eloquence... which ... have seldom been surpassed, and which... have never been equaled*” [19].

Efforts to put the English language into Procrustean bed have been afloat since 17<sup>th</sup> c. when J. Dryden, D. Defoe, and J. Swift represented the prescriptivism trend, the notion that one form of language should be a model to follow, a yardstick to be measured by. J. Swift, in 1712 in his *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* highlighted this view: "...the English tongue is not arrived to such degree of perfection... and if it were once refined to a certain standard, perhaps there might be ways to fix it forever... I see no absolute necessity why any language should be perpetually changing" [25, p. 16].

Dr. Johnson, in the *Preface* to his Dictionary in 1755, mocked this illusion by stressing that "When we see men grow old and die...we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life...and with equal justice" [15, p. 10], he continues, it is impossible to preserve words and phrases from mutability, or to embalm the language [ibid].

N. Webster in famous dialog with Captain Basil Hall in 1828 strongly advocated this view, as well: his countrymen "... had not only a right to adopt new words, but were obliged to modify the language to suit the novelty of the circumstances, geographical and political, in which they were placed ... it is quite impossible to stop the progress of language--it is like the course of the Mississippi, the motion of which, at times, is scarcely perceptible; yet even then it possesses a momentum quite irresistible. It is the same with the language we are speaking of. Words and expressions will be forced into use, in spite of all the exertions of all the writers in the world" [12, p. 203].

Then, there followed fierce and embittered debates between Americans and British whose language is 'proper', with tempers still flying high up today. Thus F. Cooper in *Notions of the Americans* 1828 claims that English spoken in the USA is "incomparably better English" than in the mother country: "In fine, we speak our language, as a nation, better than any other people speak their language." [6, p. 125] and "there is vastly more bad English, and a thousand times more bad grammar spoken in England than in America; and there is much more good English... spoken there than here..." [ibid, pp. 136-7]. He adds: "What shall, this standard be? ... an entirely different standard for the language must be established in the United States, from that which governs so absolutely in England" [ibid, p. 125].

Th. Hamilton in *Men and Manners in America* (1833) counters: "I deem it something of a duty to express the natural feeling of an Englishman, at finding the language of Shakspeare and Milton thus gratuitously degraded.... there can be no doubt that, in another century, the dialect of the Americans will become utterly unintelligible to an Englishman" [13, p. 230].

B. Mathews in *Americanisms and Briticisms with other essays on other -isms* (1892) reasonably notes that "...there is no basis for the belief that somewhere there exists a sublimated English language, perfect and impeccable.... To declare a single standard of speech is impossible" [21].

W. Archer wrote in *America To-day, Observations and Reflections* (1899): "The English language is no mere historic monument, like Westminster Abbey, to be religiously

preserved as a relic of the past, and revered as the burial-place of a bygone breed of giants. It is a living organism, ceaselessly busied, like any other organism, in the processes of assimilation and excretion" [1, p. 215].

Grouching on 'language pollution' is heard now from the both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, *The Guardian*, 12 May 2011, published angry responses of its readers to the article of the American journalist Sarah Churchwell (10 May). Two of them run: "Noah Webster may have produced the language that should be known as "American", but that should not be a reason...for British English to be altered to the American version.... American terms and spelling are imposed on us via the internet, but television and lazy journalism are also to blame.... Our English is a rich and varied language – it needs a strong defence... They [=the American words] are abominable not because they sound awful, but because they represent a depressed and depressing social status in England, on the one hand, and a bland, thoughtless, faux-classless, sold-by-the-yard cultural wallpaper from the US, on the other" [4].

Americans are keeping up with Joneses in this respect. The Telegraph, 07 Feb 2011, reports: "Americans are complaining about their own dialect being polluted by "Britishisms". New Yorker Ben Yagoda, a professor at Delaware University, is studying the invasion of traditional British lingo. ... Yagoda's biggest objection...is to words for which there are "perfectly good American equivalents, like 'bits' for 'parts' and 'on holiday' instead of 'on vacation' ". They are, he says, 'purely pretentious'. ... Yagoda thinks use of these overt Britishisms is simply part of an attempt to be 'cool'" [14].

Two trends, divergence and convergence, the drive for national identity and that for integrity are typical of regional variation and crucial for changes of standard speech. On the one hand, different ecologies of language engender its local markers on all levels, on the other, in the era of globalization, the need for communication and intelligibility dictate mutual influence within language systems.

Thus American influence on BE has been the subject of discussion since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. This trend is very strong and nowadays, with such Americanisms making their way into BE as *amusement park*, *battery* (instead of British *accumulator*), *ambulance chaser* (not British *accident tout*), *bell boy* (*buttons*), etc. However, in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> c., British words and phrases are staging a come-back to penetrate into AE, as: *hall of residence* (often instead of American *dormitory*), *down-market* (along with *downscale*), *gap year*, *busman's holiday*, *bad penny* (as *turn up like bad penny*), to name but a few.

It goes without saying that language standard depends on temporal variation and changes in diachrony. Thus in Old English, the bare infinitive was the most frequent of all forms, while in Middle English the to-infinitive becomes the commonest form, although there are no strict rules for many verbs between the bare and the to-infinitive [2, p. 316, p. 319]. However, in Present-Day English such usage has become fixed.

Nowadays, in the era of English domination world-wide, the issue of 'good' and 'bad' English has never lost its

bleeding edge. By the most average estimates, 400 million people speak English as a first language; from 300 million to 500 million use it fluently; and around 750 million use it as a foreign language [9]. New varieties emerged recently in Singapore, Nigeria, Caribbean, etc. Some scholars have apprehensions that English will eventually die, as Latin did, or will fragment into a family of dialects, or Englishes, but the majority of linguists don't share this skepticism. D. Crystal said "This is the first time we actually have a language spoken genuinely globally by every country in the world". J. McWhorter follows this lead: "English is dominant in a way that no language has ever been before... It is vastly unclear to me what actual mechanism could uproot English given conditions as they are" [22].

There is great interaction between varieties of English. D. Crystal, for example, thinks that the English spoken in fast-developing countries (India and China) will affect the global standard. "In language, numbers count. There are more people speaking English in India than in the rest of the native English-speaking world" [5]. The scholar predicts that English in future will become a family of languages. Indeed, English spreads around the world like wild fire to suit the local conditions, and some of new varieties (or dialects) are totally incomprehensible to British and American speakers. Some linguists speak of 'Panglish', a global language that will replace the English spoken today. This variety, according to that claim, may become a loose grouping of local dialects and English-based common languages for communication of non-native speakers. It is still unclear, whether there should be a single English with the dialects of its own, or varying Englishes, mutually unintelligible.

Whether English will fragment itself in future to become a family of languages totally incomprehensible to speakers of other varieties is a moot point. Or the World Standard English, the prestigious core dialect could prevent the language from dissolving into regional forms. The 'indexical signals', according to Ch. Pierce's semiotics, the form of usage that gives information about people's location, education, profession, age, class, etc, "are ideological because they are anchored in social and cultural normative perceptions of language and its appropriate use" [3]. That is why the BBC English and Standard American English will be appealing much more than local varieties in the time to come.

There are two models of approaching standardness in sociolinguistics. The first is External models in the Outer and Expanding Circles, i.e. Standard British English or General American English in the developing countries where English is spoken. The second is Internal models in the Outer and Expanding Circles [16, pp. 13-15] – acculturation of a language to a new context along with appearance of new standards is unavoidable. Although the two main branches of English, BE and AE enjoy high social prestige due to historical and cultural factors worldwide, still the supporters of Internal models are constantly gaining ground. Their arguments are that language cannot be used in narrow range of purposes or functions, the changes from below usually count, the actual usage of language by people and not codification per se is im-

portant, British and American varieties cannot represent various cultural environment of the world, language should be molded to the respective experience [ibid, p. 17]. The notion of standard in language has more to do with ideology than with pure linguistic factors. Language is never about the language only, but connected to political influence, immigration issues, commercialism, etc. Some new research on grammar issues show the dynamics of changes within AE and BE in such aspects as the formation of the preterite and the past participle, synthetic and analytic comparatives, reflexive structures, nominal complements, mandative subjunctive, etc. [23], to say nothing of less rigid language levels as phonology and lexis.

Often, the rating of standardness is subjective characteristic, dependent on regional, areal, and social backgrounds. Thus for BE speakers Standard AE with its signatures in phonology, lexis, spelling, and grammar will definitely appear as 'non-standard', and vice versa. E.g., *bomb* in BE means "success" while in AE it is "failure". Even within the same regional variety, frames of reference may differ. Boston English, for example, is non-mainstream dialect in AE ('*pahk the cah in Hahvard yahd*' = '*park the car in Harvard yard*'), while in Massachusetts, it enjoys high social prestige. Speakers of American South are regarded as non-standard in American North, etc.

Social dialects are extremely mobile, both in respect of each other and standard variety. Thus Estuary English, mixture of London speech with those of Kent, Sussex, and Surrey, along with Cockney features enriched by some ethnic influences from West Africa, Bangladesh, India, and South America, sometimes called Jafaicanhas has recently made tremendous impact on BBC English. As D. Crystal put it "*Estuary English may therefore the result of a confluence of two trends: an up-market movement of originally Cockney speakers, and a down-market trend towards 'ordinary' (as opposed to 'posh') speech by the middle class*" [7, p. 327].

Slang in the English language, as another example, since its birth has been making its way closer to the Standard English. In 1756, Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defined slang as "*the special vocabulary used by any set of persons of a low or disreputable character, language of low and vulgar type*" [24, p. 1787]. In 1801, another sense appeared with the edge blunted: "*the special vocabulary or phraseology of a particular calling or profession; the cant or jargon of certain class or period*" to end in 1818 as "*language of a highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of standard educated speech*" [ibid]. It is worth mentioning that modern sources often avoid reference to standard speech, describing slang as '*very informal, vivid, non-conventional*'. Despite all surrounding controversy, general slang is on its way towards Informal Standard English, especially in the USA, positioning itself on the frontier between standard and non-standard vocabulary.

Non-standard forms of language are also systematic and regular and have their own signatures. Thus habitual *be* is a major characteristic of African-American Vernacular (*He be running*), or *been* = *bin* as a remote past (*he been*

run = *he ran a long time ago*), or *done* as a marker of completion (*he done read*) [11, pp.80-82].

But even within socially prestige variety a wide range of variation exists. Thus standard English allows three pronunciations of *direction* (*di-*, *dai-*, *də-*), *drunken man* and *drunk man*, *less people* and *fewer people*, *commoner* and *more common*, etc.

Social, regional and other variations of language are closely connected due to interaction of territorial, socio-economic, gender, ethnical, etc factors. Norman French, e.g., from pure territorial dialect of Old French had changed into a social dialect, Anglo-French, since the Norman Conquest through the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> c., spoken by the court and nobles. The social-ethnic dialect African American English, despite numerous migration of the black population, still has its roots and 'catchment area' in the South. Chicano English, the dialect of young males in the Southwest of the USA, as another example, combines regional, ethnic, gender, age, and urban features.

And although the standardized form usually levels or filters the verbal features caused by social, ethnical, gender, age, etc. factors, still the latter often have considerable implications for the former. Thus, many originally non-standard words and phrases from different social dialects have made their way into Standard English, as *to tote* (first Black English, now Informal Standard AE), *gerrymandering* (from political-speak in the USA to World English), *chav* (from lexicon of rap-singers into mainstream BE).

Relations between the standard or prestigious dialect and non-standard or vernacular forms of speech within a given variety deserve special attention. This problem is closely linked with particulars of regional variation within system. Thus, in AE a continuum of standardness is quite extended stretching from Formal Standard AE (Prescriptive Standard AE) through Informal Standard AE to non-standard forms. As W. Wolfram put it, the first is codified in the language of established writers and grammar texts,

while the second, much more difficult to define, reveals itself in natural speech acts of educated native speakers [26]. Generally, vernacular dialects in AE are positioned more closely to the standard forms, comparing to BE. It is due to certain cultural and proper linguistic causes, such as large number of non-educated immigrants in the country history, high social mobility of its population, Westward expansion and the influence of the Frontier, AE 'hospitality' to general slang in texts of various functional styles, etc.

In Britain, regional and ethnic accents are regarded still as liability. Britons try to get rid of this handicap to acquire clipped cut-glass RP.

The hierarchy of standard and non-standard forms is different in AE and BE. The former seems to be more developed including well-established ethnic dialects, as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), ethnic-urban ones, as Jewish English of New York and Chicano English of Southwestern cities, regional dialects, etc. In BE, those are less pronounced.

Regarding regionalism, the models of English are quite different in the USA and UK, and that bears on the standards in both countries. The former is polycentric with at least 6 major regional types or dialect areas: Eastern New England, The North, The West, The South, The Midland, and Pittsburg [ibid, p. 122], although the number of such areas and boundaries are open to discussion. Moreover, what is regarded as 'standard' in one area is non-standard in another. For example, merger of /ɔ/ and /a/ as in *caught* and *cot* is the signature of The West, while in Eastern New England this feature is absent [ibid]. Otherwise, fronted /a/ as in *pot* and backed /ɛ/ as in *pet* are markers in The North, especially The Inland North area, while in The South they are absolutely unknown [ibid].

Summing up, it is seen that standard in Modern English is in a state of flux, corollary of language variations – temporal, regional, social, and can be considered both between international varieties of English and within those.

#### REFERENCES

1. Archer, W. (1899) *America To-day Observations and Reflection*. New York.
2. Blake, N. (ed.) (2006) *The Cambridge History of the English Language. Volume II. 1066-1476*. Cambridge.
3. Blommaert, J. (2005) Why we are as good or bad as our language // *The Guardian*, 21 October, 2005.
4. Churchwell, S. (2011) English: it's a neologism thang, innit // *The Guardian*, 9 May, 2011.
5. Clout, L. (2008) English will fragment into 'global dialects' // *Daily Telegraph*, 5 March, 2008.
6. Cooper, J. (1828, 1991) *Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*. New York.
7. Crystal, D. (1995) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge.
8. Crystal, D. (2000) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge.
9. Crystal, D. (2003) *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge.
10. Fichte, J. (1824) *Reden an die Deutsche Nation, Vierte Rede*. Leipzig.
11. Finegan, E. and Rickford, J. (eds.) (2004) *Language in the USA*. Cambridge.
12. Hall, B. (1829) *Travels in North America in the years of 1827 and 1828. Volume 2*. Edinburgh.
13. Hamilton, Th. (1833) *Men and Manners in America. Volume I*. Edinburgh.
14. Hinton, K. (2011) Americans are angry with us for polluting their language // *Daily Telegraph*, 7 February, 2011.
15. Johnson, S. (1755) *A Dictionary of the English Language*. London.
16. Kachru, B., Kachru, Y. and Nelson, C. (2006) *The Handbook of World Englishes*. Malden, MA and Oxford
17. Kachru, Y. and Nelson, C. (2011) *Asian Englishes Today. World Englishes in Asian Context*. Hong Kong.
18. Koenig, W. (2001) *Atlas Deutsche Sprache*. Muenchen.
19. Macaulay, Th. (1835, 1977) *Minute on Education*. Barcelona.
20. Mallory, J. (1989) *In Search of Indo-European*. London.
21. Mathews, B. (1892) *Americanisms and Britishisms*. New York.
22. Mydans, S. (2007) Across cultures, English is the word // *International Herald Tribune*, April 9, 2007.
23. Rohdenburg, G. and Schlueter, J. (eds.) (2009) *One Language, Two Grammars? Differences between British and American English*. Cambridge.
24. Simpson, J. and Weiner, E.(eds.) (1994) *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford.

25. Swift, J. (1712) *Dr. Swift's Letter to the Lord High Treasurer*. London.

26. Wolfram, W. and Schilling-Estes, N. (1998) *American English: Dialects and Variation*. Oxford.

### **Крицберг Р.Я. Языковая вариативность и норма в английском языке**

**Аннотация:** Норма языка обуславливается его вариативностью. Тенденция прескриптивизма в английском языке, когда британская норма была единственной престижной, постепенно сменилась полицентризмом – вначале американский вариант, затем варианты развивающихся стран сформировали свои языковые нормы. Британский и американский варианты являются наиболее социально престижными и продолжают оказывать влияние на другие национальные варианты. Две тенденции, дивергенция и конвергенция, стремление к национальной идентичности и одновременно к интеграции, являются типичными для региональной вариативности и определяющими для изменения языковой нормы. Британский и американский варианты сохраняют свои различительные маркеры и взаимодействуют друг с другом. Американское влияние в Британии было значительным, начиная с 19 в., в настоящее время это процесс взаимный. Нередко норма языка зависит от региональных и социальных факторов. Социальные диалекты очень мобильны, как относительно друг друга, так и относительно литературной формы языка. Они пополняют престижные формы и обнаруживают тенденцию сближения с последними. Социальные, региональные и другие виды вариативности языка тесно связаны друг с другом, в виду взаимодействия ареальных, социоэкономических, гендерных, этнических и пр. факторов, и не могут рассматриваться в отдельности. В американском варианте континуум нормы достаточно обширен и включает формальную или прескриптивную норму, разговорную норму и нелитературные формы, при этом устные диалекты расположены ближе к престижным формам, по сравнению с британским вариантом. Норма современного английского языка находится в процессе изменения, является следствием вариативности языка – временной, региональной, социальной, и должна рассматриваться как между региональными национальными вариантами английского языка, так и внутри них.

**Ключевые слова:** *диалект, норма языка, престижная форма, региональная вариативность, социальная вариативность.*