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The English Language in America

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1. INTRODUCTION

The number of English speakers in the world cannot be underestimated. As first language, English is spoken by over 300 million people, and by approximately the same quantity as a second language.[1] In addition, it has become a global phenomenon as 'lingua franca' [2], the term referring to the chosen foreign language of communication in English between speakers with different first languages, thus ELF is used among non-native speakers who neither share a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture.

The author of this thesis has a great interest in languages, its etymology, and its continual development in respect of dialects and language variation. The author of this paper is bilingual, that is to say, an equal capacity in two languages: Spanish and English. However, her knowledge of the English language and its linguistic variants has thus far been confined to the domain of England where she lived for many years.

Throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, America experienced a massive influx of immigration from various parts of the world, giving way to a multi-cultural society, which resulted in a great mixture of dialects. In this vein, and as principal objective, the author is of the opinion that research on American history, its language, its dialects and social varieties would be a fascinating journey of discovery and knowledge.

The paper has been structured in four parts. The first section is dedicated to the colonial history, the different varieties of English that the first colonists brought from the British Isles, the linguistic contribution from other languages, and a brief overlook of the linguistic changes that took place after the American War of Independence.

The second part provides a concise account of the history of American dialectology and a description of current regional phonological American dialects, including a set of sound changes identified as the "Northern Cities Shift."

The final part of this work shall analyse language from a sociolinguistic perspective, that is, the study of language in relation to social factors, focusing on social varieties such as class, ethnicity, and African American English, pinpointing the causes of language variation.

This thesis also aims to dispel some of the misconceptions attached to the concepts of "Language" and "Dialect", attempting to provide an accurate and fair account on why and when people opt to use different variants of the Standard language. Furthermore, linking with Standard and Vernacular languages, the concepts of Descriptivism and Prescriptivism shall also be explored.

Key words: Dialect, social, variation, American, English.

2. STATE OF THE ART

The American English language and its variants like all the languages in the world are experiencing constant changes. The study of dialects (Dialectology) is very important to be able to determine the different manifestations of human behaviour through language. As a social science, it can be extended to the fields of history, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, anthropology and geography. Thus, the study of language variation contributes to our understanding of diverse issues concerning the nature of human language. The interest in American regional dialects began with the formation of the American Dialects Society in 1889, which published a journal called *Dialect Notes*. Their investigations focused on pronunciation, grammar, phraseology, and geographical distribution, which at the time still reflected the earliest European American settlement patterns.

In 1929, a large-scale systematic study of dialect geography was carried out under the supervision of Professor Hans Kurath, which culminated in the creation of the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada*. This new survey aimed to establish correlations between dialect differences and separate social classifications: for example, how topography acts as a barrier to communication, which serve to preserve and emphasise linguistic boundaries, which at the same time restrain or slow down the process of dialect spreading from dominating centres or social groups due to lack of contact. Hence, dialect features used in New England and parts of the South have survived in the Appalachians and in the mountainous region of the Ozarks. The pronunciation of *hant* for *haunt*, *sarmint* for *sermon*, *poke* for *bag* or *sack*, and the expressions *three mile* and *acomin'* and *agoin'* are some examples of survival. (Kurath 1931)

One of the major goals set by the American Dialect Society over a century earlier was finally achieved by Frederic G. Cassidy, with the publication of the Dictionary of American Regional English, one of the most scholarly and comprehensive dictionaries ever completed.

The study of regional dialect variation culminated in the publication of the Atlas of North America English (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006) the most extensive pronunciation survey to date.

The methods undertaken by scholars in the 19th century in the analysis of data might seem somewhat updated. Nowadays, a more advanced and rigorous quantitative research is carried out in the collection of numerical data and the analysis of statistical material by utilising computational techniques. Likewise, using qualitative methods such as observation, questionnaires and interviews help to understand language variation from a social perspective.

From the early 1960s, the field of modern sociolinguistics pioneered by William Labov began to flourish. Sociolinguistics, like any empirical investigation, is the systematic study of the social uses of language though observation, which in turn, is applicable to many kinds of linguistic variation, focusing on language-related social problems, and how these issues can affect human behaviour and the way speakers talk. Labov stated on one of his dissertations: "my own intention was to solve linguistic problems, bearing in mind that these are ultimately problems in the analyses of human behaviour" (Labov 1966). Issues such as identity, ethnicity, and problems relating to America's lower social classes, gender-differentiated social roles, and not evenly proportioned relations based on sex and gender in society. In this vein, Labov mentions the alternation in the usage of *-ing* and *-in'*, like in *He's working* and *He's workin'* as a classic example of a *linguistic variable*, labelled (ING) to study the social stratification of English in New York City in 1966. This was the first systematic study of how speech varied regularly across social classes, ethnic groups and age groups.

Today more than ever, language and society are intrinsically linked. Language has a social function that not only transmits textual meaning, but also carries vital social information that represents different forms in communication, often reflected on the person's social status, background, region, gender and interpersonal exchanges.

3. METHODOLOGY

The writer of the paper has a great interest in history, language and geography, which she considers to be tightly intertwined. Although the author of this thesis is bilingual, that is, she speaks English and Spanish with equal proficiency and has a solid knowledge of England's cultural and linguistic history, she is not in the position of claiming the same understanding of American English. Thus, the criteria for choosing this subject have been influenced by a desire to research into this topic as a learning process.

The research parameters have been conceived from the premise of a historical diachronic stance as the impact that the first English language and its different variants brought to America by the first colonisers cannot be overlooked, and whose legacy still remains very strong in some parts of the American continent.

Taking into account that this subject had to be approached from scratch, the web has proven to be a useful tool in helping to locate information, primarily with regards to historical background. This has probably been the easiest part of the project as historical events are often documented and very seldom refuted.

Many hours of bibliographical research have been carried out. The author has intended to adhere to reputable material at all times. With regards to bibliographic sources and record collection of journals and articles, databases such as JSTOR and MLA International Bibliography have been used in the development of this paper. Similarly, the search engine Google Scholar. Although inquiries have been made in order to get relevant data from virtual and physical libraries, the result has not been entirely satisfactory.

The most important source of information has turned out to be books and encyclopaedias written by prestigious experts in the fields of linguistics and sociolinguistics and other scholars such as David Crystal, Walt Wolfram, and William Labov, Albert C. Baugh & Thomas Cable, and teacher and writer Brigit Viney.

When the situation has arisen where the information obtained has proven to be relevant, such details have been compiled and transferred into a file using RefWorks for conveniently accessible referencing.

The following steps have been undertaken with regards to data analysis, bearing in mind the contents of the paper, namely, collection of data, text reading, text analysis, interpretation of results, keep/discard, and note taking and jotting when applicable.

Finally, all the useful information gathered has been distributed into different sections and ready to be used accordingly.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN ENGLISH

Language is not stagnant. It is a dynamic process that is continually evolving, especially in this day of instant communication tightly connected with globalisation, where different languages come into contact with each other, that is to say, speakers of different languages (or different dialects of the same language) interact and influence one another.

English was brought to America by early colonists from England, and thus both countries share the same language. However, American English as all languages in the world is in constant evolution. In order to examine and understand all aspects concerning language variation from a diachronic perspective, we must look first at its historical background.

4.1 Historical Background

In the year 1584, Queen Elizabeth I granted Sir Walter Raleigh a royal charter to lead expeditions to the New World, but they were not financially viable to maintain a colony.[3] According to James Horn,[4] in 1587, the explorer John White and 117 men, women and children landed off the coast of North Carolina, on the island of Roanoke Island, hoping to establish the first colonial settlement, but unfortunately it appears that after returning from England with new vital aid supplies, he found that the colonists had mysteriously disappeared without trace. At

this juncture, it is noteworthy to mention that they were not the first Europeans to settle in America: Spanish had lived in Florida since 1565.[5] Nevertheless the first successful colony was established in 1607, when an expedition arrived in Chesapeake Bay, in the east coast of America. The colonists named the settlement Jamestown, after King James I of England, and they called this part of the country Virginia, in honour of Elizabeth I (the Virgin Queen). In 1620, a group of Puritans, later denominated the 'Pilgrim Fathers', and who were persecuted in England because of their religious beliefs, got onboard the ship *Mayflower* and landed at Cape Cod Bay, establishing a settlement which they named Plymouth, what is today Massachusetts, New England.[3] (p. 92) More and more people arrived from England, settling first around Massachusetts, thus it is estimated that by 1640 the population in New England had risen to about 25,000 inhabitants.[6] However, during the following years, groups in search of better living prospects began to move up and down the coast establishing new communities. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Pennsylvania was the focus of many arrivals, which included a group of Quakers, and a vast wave of immigration of Scots-Irish from Ulster (Northern Ireland) who from about 1720 had settled primarily in Philadelphia.[3](p. 93) Other newcomers from Europe who also arrived in Pennsylvania were German Protestants, who in 1683 had founded the first outpost named Germantown, and immigrants originating from other European countries such as France and the Caribbean also arrived.[1](p. 51) In addition, several European countries had engaged in slave trading. Commercial goods from Europe were shipped to Africa for sale and traded for enslaved Africans, who were then forcefully transported to the New World, where they were sold for raw materials, and returning back to Europe, hence completing an Atlantic triangle,[3] (p. 96) which is called the "Middle Passage." According to Heywood and Thornton, [7] England, unlike other European countries, did not engage in the slave trade from West and West Central Africa in 1619, although it traded with Africans for other materials. The

first “20.and odd Negroes” African Angolans who arrived in America in 1619 were most likely captured on the high seas from a Portuguese ship and sold to Englishmen in Jamestown.

Meanwhile, between 1607 and 1732, the expansion and settlement of the 13 colonies had been consolidated. The colonies occupied a long, narrow strip of land, west of the Appalachian Mountains, which extended from Maine to Georgia, the latter being the last colony to be sanctioned. Thus, it is estimated that by 1790, when the first census was taken, the population had grown to about 4 million people of whom 90 per cent came from various parts of the British Isles.[6] (p. 341)

During the course of the 19th century, large numbers of emigrants continued to flood in from Ireland, Germany, Italy, and many Jews from Central and Eastern Europe,[1] (p. 51-52) thus by 1900 the population had risen to about 75 million people in America. During the later part of the 19th century, people from Spanish speaking countries and Asia also arrived in America, and thus it is estimated that the population in the year 2000 had reached about 280 million.

4.2 Colonial English (s)

As mentioned previously, the early colonists brought their speech to America and transplanted it. However, it is noteworthy to mention that their language represented many dialects backgrounds with their own features and peculiarities; hence, their speech did not necessarily share a homogeneous unit, and as a result, it had different linguistic consequences. In this vein, the people who settled in Jamestown (Virginia) came mainly from England’s ‘West Country’, counties such as Somerset, Gloucestershire.[3] (p. 93) What is interesting about these early colonists is that their speech is similar to today’s American English, in comparison to actual British’s Standard because the linguistic changes experienced by British English during the 18th century had no impact on American English, most likely due to the vast geographical distance. Some of the characteristics of their accent are the voicing of *s* sounds, and *r* strongly pronounced after vowels and before consonants: words such as “Somerset Cider” are

pronounced as "Zomerset Zider". Similarly, words such as *cart* and *work* are uttered with their *r'*s, in opposition to English Standard pronunciation of *caht* and *wuhk*. Equally, the early colonists would have pronounced words like *path*, *dance*, and *can't* like the TRAP vowel [æ] of American English today. Some words with different semantic meaning which have been preserved by today's Americans and discarded by British speakers are *mad* in the sense of "angry", contrary to being "potentially insane"; *fall* instead of *autumn* and the participle of the verb 'to get' (gotten) instead of its British counterpart (got): *Has he gotten the apples yet?* Rather than *Has he got the apples yet?* Other early colonists came from South-eastern England, which was considered the home of Britain's cultural centre, London. Scholars refer to the language of this period as the language of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan era. Thus, these speakers would have spoken varieties of English close to the standard that was in progress at the time.

One of the characteristics associated with the new standard in England was the loss of *r* after vowels and before consonants (as in *fahm* for *farm*) and even though English was mostly *r*-pronouncing in the early 17th century, this peculiarity slowly became a marker of prestige. Needless to say, this feature represents one of the principal phonological differences between English and American English. This accent, which is associated with the region of Tidewater in lowland Virginia, can be heard is some isolated community areas such as Tangier Island and Chesapeake Bay, not to be confused with the upland region of Piedmont and mountain regions to the west of Tidewater, and also most of the varieties of American English today, which are *r*-full.[8]

By contrast, many of the colonists who settled in Plymouth (New England) came from counties in the east of England, particularly, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Essex, Kent, and London, with some from the Midlands and other places.[3] (p. 93) Following the British Standard, and also their counterparts' speech in the region of Tidewater, Eastern New England became *r*-

less, however, areas such as Western New England (west of the Connecticut River Valley) and New York State became *r*-pronouncing regions as occurred in upland Virginia. This variation can be attributed to factors such English-speaking settlement by *r*-pronouncing speakers, the decrease of dialect due to dialect and language contact, and also the comparative lack of contact with London in comparison to speakers in Eastern New England.[8] (p. 100)

As mentioned previously, immigrants such as Quakers who originated mainly from the Midlands and the north of England, and a large number of Scots-Irish from Northern Ireland settled in Pennsylvania bringing with them their own linguistic peculiarities. The Scots-Irish, were seen as frontier people, who spoke with a rather archaic form of Scots-English, which was strongly *r*-full. Many stayed along the coast, especially in the area of Philadelphia, but they were pioneering people and most moved inland through the mountains in search of land, venturing south and west.

In time, the colonists who had originally settled along the east coast began movements toward the west and other regions, bringing with them their own dialect distinctions, which will have a massive impact in the development of dialects in the United States. After the American Revolutionary War (1765-1783), and the subsequent independence of the Thirteen Colonies from the British, New England people, taking advantage of the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, begun heading west, and across the Great Lakes. Similarly, the people from the Midlands (Pennsylvania) spread throughout a vast, mid-western area, across the Mississippi and eventually into California, and the southerners made their way from Delaware, along the Gulf Coast and into Texas.[3] (p. 94) In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase opened up the first of the vast territories beyond the Mississippi and into the far west. Diverse groups of settlement with their own dialect characteristics followed the Oregon Trail into the Pacific Northwest and the Santa Fe Trail into the sparsely populated Spanish territory in the Southwest.[6] (p. 345)

Finally, as noted before, the first slave African Angolans arrived in Jamestown in 1619. When England fully embarked in slave trade in the late 17th century, great numbers of slaves were transported from the west coast of Africa and the Caribbean to work in South Carolina's rice plantations. It is estimated that by 1708, the population of Charleston had as many blacks as whites, and by 1724, there were three times as many blacks as whites. Although it is debatable, some linguists sustain that the contact among the various African languages and English resulted in a new contact-based language called Creole, which gave rise to vernacular American speech. However, other researchers believe that African American English (AAE) developed from British English like other American English dialects. Either way, there is a Creole language called Gullah which is spoken by African Americans in the Sea Islands area of coastal South Carolina and Georgia.[8] (p. 10)

4.3 Influences from Other Languages

Although the influence of British language established by the earlier colonists was to dominate the linguistic destiny of the United States, they were not the first to arrive in America. The contribution from other languages cannot be underestimated, particularly in its vocabulary and its practices of naming. Spain began its colonization campaign in America in the 15th century. The settlement of St Augustine in 1565, in Florida, is the oldest continually occupied city in the United States. Out of the 50 American states, 9 bear Spanish names,[3] (p. 145) not to mention cities founded by Spaniards such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Santa Fe, San Antonio, San Diego, San Jose, etc., and contributed with a wide array of words that are fully integrated and used in the American English language today. To mention just a few lexical borrowings of different nature, which were incorporated into English: *embargo, flota* (*flotilla*) *cacao, maize, alligator, armadillo, llama* and *machete.*[9]

The French were present in Louisiana, with the founding of New Orleans in 1717. The Creole language that later arrivals of black slaves developed in this area was based on French

rather than English, which is the ancestor of today's Louisiana Creole. Another important cultural group of French descent that arrived in Louisiana in 1765 were the Acadians, or Cajuns, who had been deported from the Canadian settlement of Acadia, what is today Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Their speech was more archaic than the one spoken in Parisian French in the 1700s. Today this speech in Louisiana survives as a variety of English known Cajun English.[8] (p. 106) Some words that the French colonists introduced into the American English speech were to mention but a few: *portage, chowder, cache, caribou, bureau, bayou,* and *levee.*[6] (p. 352)

After several voyages and explorations along the east shores of the newly discovered continent of America, the Dutch finally occupied the territory which they named New Amsterdam in 1614, what is today New York, and also New Jersey and some parts of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Rhode Island.[10] Some words of Dutch origin are: *cruller, coleslaw, cookie, stoop, boss,* and *scow.*[6] (p. 352) Furthermore, the names Brooklyn (from Breukelyn) Harlem (Haarlem) and the Bronx (Bronck's) are reminders of its Dutch beginnings.[1] (p. 53)

As already aforementioned, large number of Germans began to arrive at the end of the 17th century, settling primarily in Pennsylvania, and providing words such as *noodle, pretzel, smearcase* and *sauerkraut* among others.[6] (p. 352)

When the first colonists arrived in America, the continent was already inhabited by different indigenous peoples. It cannot be undervalued the important contribution that these Native Americans made to the development of American English through language contact, particularly words relating to their way of life such as *wigwam* (dwelling) *tomahawk* (axe) *canoe, toboggan, mackinaw* (type of short coat) *moccasin, wampum* (bead) *squaw* (derogative – American Indian woman, wife) and *papoose* (young child). Similarly, words in connection with

food were taken over such as *hominy* (maize) *tapioca, succotash* (dish of beans and sweet corn) and *pone* (Flat bread made with maize.) [6] (p. 352)

Language and dialect contact were not the only elements that contributed to the formation of a unique brand of English. When the earlier settlers arrived in America, they encountered a wide variety of unknown animals, flora, objects and natural phenomena for which they did not have words for. The colonists had to use their inventiveness in order to accommodate the new landscape. In this vein, new words were created. To mention but a few: *bluff, notch, watershed, underbrush*, and gave the name *turkey* to a unique American bird. Compound names such as *bullfrog, mad hen, groundhog* and *potato bug*. Homely words such as *apple butter, sidewalk, crazy quilt*, and *know-nothing*. Metaphorical expressions like *to be on the fence, to bark up the wrong tree, to face the music, fly off the handle*, and *bury the hatchet*, and so forth.[6] (p. 353) Overall, the main difference between American English and British English today is its vocabulary.

As mentioned previously, a large wave of immigrants originating from many parts of Europe arrived in America during the 19th century, bringing with them their own languages and dialectal distinctiveness. However, only a few words have been borrowed by American English. The reason for this is social. These newcomers' intention was to become American, learn the English language and integrate quickly into the American way of life. Nevertheless, some words and expressions have found their way into American English. To name but a few: *check* (*a bill for food and drinks*) and *kindergarten* (*a place where young children play and learn*) come from German; *pasta* and *spaguetti* from Italian; *schmuck* (*a stupid person*) and *phlep* (*to pull, or a long tiring journey*) from Yiddish, the language of the East European Jews. Finally, as mentioned before, African-Americans who had settled in parts of South Carolina and Georgia developed their own varieties of English, what today is known as African American English (AAE). In the 20th century they moved north in great numbers and as consequence,

some of their cultural words have become part of American English, namely, *jazz* (*a kind of music developed by African-Americans*) *cool* meaning *excellent* and *dude*, another word for *man*.[1] (p. 54-55)

4.4 A Sense of National Pride

The end of the American Revolutionary War (1783) and the subsequent break away from British rule brought a renewed sense of consciousness and a somewhat fervent patriotism to American people. They dreamt of a language they could call their own. America had already experienced many linguistic changes at this time. Some distinguished personalities like Thomas Jefferson had a tendency for coining new words: *belittle,* [8] (p. 108) in the sense of denigrating, is attributed to him. Similarly, Benjamin Franklin was in favour of spelling reform of American English. Others, like the cleric John Witherspoon, who had emigrated from Scotland, wished that American English would not follow the footsteps of the Scots by becoming just a provincial dialect. As he says: "Being entirely separated from England." [6] (p. 352) But the most enthusiastic to defend this stance was the lexicographer Noah Webster (1758-1843). To begin with, Webster was against any phonological reform in the language, but later changed his conceptions. In 1825, Webster completed *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, this work being preceded by *The American Spelling Book*.

Notwithstanding the staunch nationalism association that some historians bestow on Webster and the writing of his Dictionary, others disagree, considering their viewpoint rather simplistic. Although Webster was in tune with some of his contemporaries in sharing a strong sense of patriotism, the production of his Dictionary was not just motivated by nationalism, but it represented also the work of a lifetime.[11] Putting subjective opinions aside, everyone would agree on the massive impact that Webster had on American English with The American Spelling Book, his Dictionary and other works. He gave Americans such spellings as *honor* for *honour*, *color* for *colour*, *wagon* for *waggon*, *fiber* for *fibre*, *center* for *centre*, *theater* for

theatre, *defense* for *defence*, *offense* for *offence*, *ax* for *axe*, *plow* for *plough*, *tire* for *tyre*, *storey* for *story*, *czar* for *tzar*, among many others. With regards to pronunciation, one very distinguishable future is the clearness with which Americans pronounce unaccented syllables. Many polysyllabic words ending in –ory or –ary have besides the initial stress, a secondary stress on the penultimate syllable. They don't say secret'try (secretary) or audi'try (auditory) instead they pronounce them as secre'tary and audi'tory. [6] (p. 359-65)

5. MODERN AMERICAN ENGLISH

5.1 A Brief Insight into American Dialectology

The geographical model of regional dialects in America has been an ongoing source of discussion among dialectologists. Determining the geographical boundaries in the study of language variation has been overtly debated among dialectologists. Contrary to state and counties, which are demarcated by land, dialect boundaries are subjective concepts employed by linguists and open to diverse interpretations. In 1949, Professor Kurath published *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States*, based on lexical evidence, which he grouped into three main groups: The North, The Midland and The South. This geographical representation resembles the earliest American English dialect, even though the data represent the speech variety gathered from speakers in the 1930s and 1940s. In spite of the fact that Kurath's tripartite division was broadly accepted for many years, current investigations pertaining to the issue of isoglosses, that is, the boundary line that separate the linguistically conceived geographical regions, have led other dialectologists such as Craig M. Carver to put forward a main North-South linguistic boundary within The Midland dialect. These differences in terminology are most likely linked to culture and history.[6] (p. 367-68)

5.2 Typology of American Regional Dialects

For the purpose of this paper, the author has opted for the regional classification as per Albert C. Baugh & Thomas Cable,[6] (p. 368-71) and shall employ the terms Upper North, Lower North, Upper South, and Lower South. In addition, Eastern New England and New York City shall be treated as sub-regions within the Upper North due to their distinctive peculiarities.

Geographic distribution of six major dialects in the USA according to *A History of the English Language* by Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable

The boundary marking the main North-South division starts in central Delaware, runs westward near the line between Maryland and Pennsylvania and continues along the Ohio River, eventually extending south into Oklahoma and Texas. The line separating the Upper North (Kurath's Northern) from the Lower North (North Midland) runs across New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania and continuing progressively westward across the northern parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. As the boundary approaches the Mississippi in north-

western Illinois, it turns north and continues across the upper Midwest. The boundary between the Upper South (South Midland) and the Lower South (Southern) starts at the Atlantic Ocean at a midpoint on the Delmarva Peninsula, describes a northward arc through Maryland, and turns southwest, skirting the eastern edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia and North Carolina and turning west just north of Atlanta. To the east lie the Piedmont and the coastal plain. To the west the Midland-Southern line continues through Georgia and Alabama and then turns north into western Tennessee. West of the Mississippi, the boundary becomes more diffuse, but it can still be traced through Arkansas and east Texas.

1. Eastern New England.

This area is defined by the states that lie to the east of the Connecticut River in Massachusetts and Connecticut and east of the Green Mountains in Vermont. Although not all features of the dialect are uniform in their distribution, some of the characteristics are the retention of a rounded vowel in words such as *hot* and *pot*, which the rest of the country has unrounded to a shortened form of the *a* as in *father*. The use of a broad *a* in words like *fast*, *path*, *grass*, and the loss of the *r* in *car* and *hard* except before vowels as in *carry* and *Tory*. Boston is considered to be its focal area.

2. New York City.

Although often considered as part of the Eastern New England dialect, the speech of New York and adjacent counties is on the whole different. The words *co*t and *caught* are phonemically contrasted: [kɑt], [kɔt] because the *o* on words such as *co*t and *top*, before voiceless stops, is almost always unrounded. The pronunciation of *curl* like *coil* and *third* as *thoid* is the most distinctive feature of New York City. However, it must be noted that among cultivated New York speakers, *curl* and *coil* are phonemically distinct [kʌɪl, kɔɪl]. New York City English, as that of Boston, is *r*-less pronouncing. However, in New York as in the Boston

area, younger speakers are now becoming increasingly rhotic, especially amongst higher-class groups.

3. Upper North.

The area of Western New England, the north part of the state of New York and the basin of the Great Lakes share features of pronunciation that derive from the original settlement and the spread of the population westward through the water route of the lakes. Like the speech of Eastern New England, the Upper North dialect distinguishes [o] in words like mourning and hoarse from [ɔ] in morning and horse. Other features shared with Eastern New England are [ð] in *with*, [s] in *grease* and *greasy* and [ʊ] in *roots*.

The speech of the Upper North differs considerably from that of Eastern New England in its retention of postvocalic [*r*] and the pronunciation of the vowel [æ] in words such as *ask*.

4. Lower North.

As in the case of the Upper North, this dialect preserves the [*r*] in all positions and has [æ] in *fast*, *ask*, *grass*, and so forth. Within the lower North region, one of the two subareas is the Middle Atlantic, which includes the eastern third of Pennsylvania below the Northern-Midland line, the southern half of New Jersey, the northern half of Delaware, and the adjacent parts of Maryland. The speech of this area has the unrounded vowel in *forest* as well as in *hot*, the [ɛ] of *egg* in *care*, *Mary*, *merry*, and a merging of [o] and [ɔ] before [*r*] in *four* and *forty*. The other subarea includes the speech of western Pennsylvania and its derivatives in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Although closely related to the Middle Atlantic dialect, it has some differences of pronunciation such as the merging of the vowels in *co*t and *caught*. These two words are generally homonyms [kɒt] (same sound, different meaning).

5. Upper South.

This area includes all of West Virginia except the counties bordering on Pennsylvania and Maryland, the mountain regions of Virginia and North Carolina, and most of Kentucky and

Tennessee, with a small portion of the states to the north and south. Current investigations suggest that the dialect of the Upper South extends west of the Mississippi through Southern Missouri and northern Arkansas, into Texas, where it blends with that of the Plantation South. Even though the Upper South dialect has no unique features in itself, sharing a mixture of features from the Lower North and the Plantation South, there exist some peculiarities worth mentioning. The [*r*] is pronounced as in the Lower South, but the vowel [aɪ] as in *high* is generally pronounced as [aɛ] or in the southern part of the area as [aə, a] as in many parts of the South. Despite this mix, the speech of the Upper South and that of the Plantation South have much in common. Therefore, the variety of Southern English composed of the two large regions is a linguistic and cultural reality.

6. Lower South.

As this dialect expands a vast area, it would not be expected to find uniformity within. The Virginia Piedmont and the low country near the coast of South Carolina are its central areas. The Lower South dialect shares some characteristics with the Eastern New England in the loss of the final [*r*] as in *car*, and before consonants as in *hard*. In addition, and in opposition to the Eastern New England dialect, it goes one step further omitting the linking [*r*] before a word beginning with a vowel as in *far away* [fɑ: ə'we]. Likewise, it does not have the rounded vowel in words like *top* and *hot* or the broad *a* in *grass* and *dance*, preferring the vowels [æə, æɪ] for these words. Another distinctive feature of the Southern dialects is the treatment of the diphthong in *out*. Instead of the usual [aʊ] the Southern speaker begins this diphthong with [æ] before voiced consonants, while in Virginia and South Carolina takes the form of [əʊ, ʌʊ] before voiceless consonants instead. Another important feature is the so-called Southern drawl, namely, a particular slow way of speaking. In this vein, the word *yes* is pronounced as [jɛɪs] or [jɛjəs] the word class becomes [klæɪs] or [klæjəs] and so forth. It is also characteristic of this dialect the weakened articulation of final consonants groups in words such

as *last*, *kep*t and *find*, which are pronounced as *las*', *kep*', and *fin*', especially in non-standard use. In the areas of Charleston and New Orleans, *curl* and *third* are pronounced [kʌɪl] and [θʌɪd], as in New York City. Also, many speakers pronounce *Tuesday* and *duty* with a glide [tjus-, deju-] and there is not phonemic distinction between *pin* and *pen* [pɪn].

5.3 The Northern Cities Shift

Speakers of the regional dialects of American English now differentiate themselves principally by their vowel systems. During the late 1960s and early 1970s new sound changes were first observed by Fasold (1969) and further elaborated by Labov, Yaeger and Steiner (1972) and Eckert (1988).[12] Exploratory interviews were performed in Chicago, Detroit and Buffalo, which were later extended to New York City and Philadelphia. According to William Labov,[13] the profile of the most extreme speakers of these regional dialects is associated with mobile second and third generation of newly arrived ethnic young women moving up in society, who have tight connections within the local neighbourhood and multiple social relations outside the neighbourhood as well. These sound changes /æ, ɑ, ɔ, ɛ, ʌ, ɪ/ known as the "Northern Cities Shift" (NCS) form a complete circular chain, whereby each class shift one unit along the chain dislodging the next in a clockwise rotation. (See figure 1.) The initiating event appears to be the shift of the short-a in *cad*, *bat*, *tha*t, etc. to a front, raised position, a vowel very much like the vowel *yeah*. The raising of the short -a is familiar to speakers of any North American dialect when it is followed by a nasal consonant *m* or *n*, with the most extreme form of the girl's name *Ann* pronounced like the boy's name *Ian*. However, in Chicago, all short-a words undergo this change. The gap created by this shift is now occupied by the vowel of *got*, where extreme forms such as *cot*, *block* and *socks* sound like *cat*, *black* and *sacks* respectively. Similarly, the *bought* vowel moves down and front toward this position, along with other members of the "long open -o" word class: *law*, *talk*, *dawn*, etc. On the other hand, the fronted and raised short-a has moved dangerously close to short-e, which then shifts to the back toward

short-u, producing confusion between *desk* and *dusk*. Most recently, short-u has responded to this intrusion by moving back, producing the potential confusion between *buses* and *bosses, cud* and *cawed*.

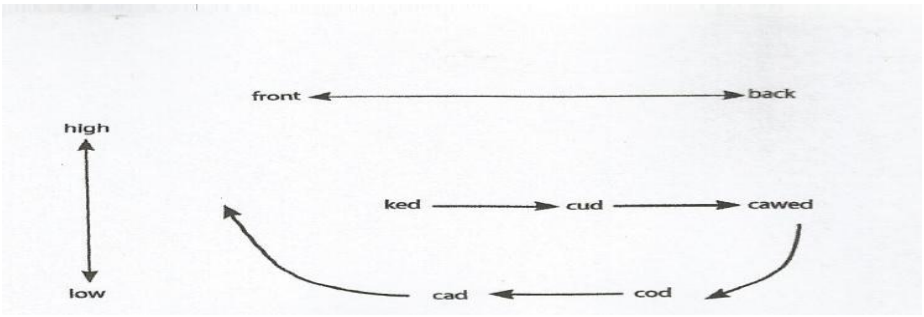

Figure 1 Northern Cities Shift (Labov)

6. LANGUAGE AS A TYPE OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

6.1 Defining "Language" and "Dialect."

For non-specialists, these terms, which are both popular and scientific, appear to be two distinguishable entities, but in reality they are simply difficult to define. In fact, it is a grey area of study which even linguists find it hard to agree upon. Hence, these terms have come to be used as separate concepts in order for linguists to distinguish different speech varieties worldwide. According to linguist Einar Haugen[14], "the use of these terms has imposed a division in what is often a continuum [...]" Haugen states that in classical Greece there was not a unified Greek linguistic norm, but a group of closely related norms, where "dialects" carried the names of different regions of written varieties of Greek, each one specialising in some literary uses, namely, Ionic for history, Doric for the choral lyric, and Attic for tragedy. However, during the postclassical period, these dialects disappeared giving way to a well-unified Greek norm called the *koiné* as a result of a linguistic convergence, which became the dialect of Athens. Thus, the differences between these dialects were wiped out in favour of a single, dominant language, based on the dialect of the cultural and administrative centre of the

Greeks. Haugen continues to explain that the Greek situation has provided a model for all later usage of the term “language” and “dialect” Nonetheless the non-clarity of these terms has resulted in ambiguity with their application and adoption into the technical terminology of linguistics. In this context, Haugen continues saying that in a descriptive, synchronic sense “language can refer either to a *single* linguistic norm or a *group* of related norms. In a historical, diachronic sense, “language” can either be a common language on its way to dissolution or a common language resulting from unification. A “dialect” is then any one of the related norms comprised under the general name “language,” historically the result of either divergence or convergence [...] “language” as the superordinate term can be used without reference to dialects, but “dialect” in meaningless unless it is implied that there are other dialects and a language to which they can be said to “belong.” Hence, every dialect is a language, but not every language is a dialect.”

In addition to the ambiguities provided by the synchronic and diachronic points of view aforementioned, increasing knowledge concerning linguistic behaviour has made the simple application of these terms much more difficult. Haugen continues by saying that a third term called *patois*, which applied principally to the spoken language, development in French usage. The term *dialecte* defined in the dictionary of the French Academy as “variété régionale d’une langue,” explicitly requires that a dialect “include a complete literary culture” (Littré, 1956). Also, as pointed out by Andre Martinet (1964) its usage reflects the special French situation, in which there were a number of regional written standards, which were then superseded by the written standard of Paris. In this regard, the French dialects were regional, like the Greek, and literary, but unlike the Greek, not functionally distinguished. Thus, when the dialects ceased to be written, they became “patois” and subsequently degraded: “Un patois est un dialecte qui s’est degradé” (Brun 1946) in the sense that it is a language norm not used for literary and official purposes, principally limited to informal situations. This distinction then raises the

question of the social functions of a language. In respect of the language-dialect differentiation, it could be said that a patois is a dialect that fulfil the needs of the people in its least prestigious functions. As a consequence, the contrast of patois-dialect is not one between two kinds of language, but between two functions of language. In this regard, Brun's definition overly suggests a pejorative attitude towards the patois, simply because of the fact that it does not longer carry "a complete literary culture."

Haugen concludes that there are two different scopes involved in the various uses of "language" and "dialect.": One of these is *structural*, that is, descriptive of language itself, including phonology, grammar and lexicon; the other is *functional*, namely, descriptive of its social uses in communication. The former is regarded by linguists as their central task; the latter is the one undertaken by sociolinguists.

At this juncture, it is noteworthy to mention that in English the term "patois" has never been adopted in the description of language, and "dialect" has carried both scientific and popular usage. In America, the stigma is not so much placed on local or regional dialects as on "bad" English, which is associated with a lower-class dialect. Situations may arise where people refer to others as having a "New England accent" or a "Southern accent," the term "dialect" here as elsewhere, suggests an informal of lower-class or rural speech. In general usage it remains undefined whether such dialects are part of the "language" or not. Furthermore, the dialect is often thought of as standing outside the "language": "That is not English." It could be said then that the dichotomy "good" or "bad" English is in fact the consequence of the implantation of a standard or mainstream language by the dominant and powerful elite, which lead to segregation between the two terms and the misconception in society that one is better than the other. The fact of the matter is that a "standard" or "mainstream" varieties constitute dialects just as those varieties spoken by socially disfavoured groups whose language are socially stigmatised.

Although there is a generalised awareness of language differences in American society, there is also a diffuse popular perception of what the term "dialect" really signifies, which can invariably lead to misconceptions and stereotypes. In America, there is a widespread tendency to presume that what people speak individually is "normal" English, while dialects are spoken by people from other areas simply because they speak differently. However, the reality is that everyone, consciously or unconsciously, speak some type of dialect. Sometimes comments can be heard, which can carry covert negative associations when describing other people's dialects as 'colourful', for example. Similarly, situations may occur where speakers select such words as 'bad', 'inappropriate', or 'deficient' when talking about other language varieties as a kind of corrupt or unworthy English. In truth, this perception formed on personal experience in what people assume to be the 'correct' way of speaking is often viewed as 'peculiar' in other places, and vice versa. A sentence such as *I might could do it* from a speaker in the South sounds strange to people from the North. By the same token, a sentence like *The house needs washed* sounds just as strange to people from the South, even though it is perfectly 'normal' to people in Western Pennsylvania and Ohio. When people order a co-cola, soda, pop, coke, tonic or soft drink, they are making a choice in speaking in some variety of English.[8] (p. 3)

6.2 Standards and Vernaculars.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a "standard language" is a variety of language used by governments, in the media, in schools and for international communication. There are different varieties of English worldwide such as British English, American English, Australian English, Canadian English, Indian English, and so forth. In some countries, such as Spain and France, language academies have been introduced in order for these institutions to be able to determine what forms are considered to be acceptable for the normative "standard." In America, such institutions do not exist, but the model of standardization is prescribed by recognised authority sources, such as grammar and usage books, dictionaries, and internet

grammar sites that people rely upon for the purpose of obtaining "proper" forms. The condition of standard, acting as a two tier level, that is to say, formal and informal, and Vernaculars can be summarised as follows: 1) Formal Standard English, which tends to be based on the written language of established writers, which is typically codified in English grammar texts and introduced in formal institutions such as schools. It also has an archaic outlook, with a conservative perspective and a resistance to any changes within the language which often border on obsolescence. Examples of this are the subjunctive *be* in sentences such as *If this be treason, I am a traitor.* Likewise, the conservation of the singular form of *data* as *datum* or the distinction *shall*/*will*, [8] (p. 11) which for the most part has disappeared from spoken language. Nonetheless, they can still can be found in prescriptive grammar books and guides and maintained in written language, even though they are hardly heard in everyday, conversational speech. These prescribed forms come under the umbrella of Prescriptivism, which generally "is the view that one variety of language has an inherently higher value than others, and that this ought to be imposed on the whole of the speech community. It is an authoritarian view propounded especially in relation to grammar and vocabulary, and often with reference to pronunciation."[3] (p. 366) Those who speak and write in this variety are said to be using language "correctly" or "properly" in detriment to those who do not. The alternative to a prescriptive approach is called Descriptivism, which is associated mainly with modern linguistics, and which aim is to describe and explain the patterns of usage which are found in all varieties of the language, whether they are socially prestigious or not. 2) Informal Standard English, which in the absence of a prescriptive authority, it is much more difficult to define. It exists as a continuum, with speakers ranging along the continuum between the standard and non-standard poles. The way people rate this continuum is rather subjective and flexible, with a whole spectrum of possibilities. For example, a Northern-born middle-class African American might rate a Southern white speaker as non-standard, while a native of the South might rate the

same speaker as standard. Similarly, a person from the Midwest might rate a native of New York City as non-standard while another New Yorker might rate the same speaker as standard. Furthermore, prejudices and misconceptions might take place as well. For example, a standard, non-standard rate might be assigned to the *same voice* depending on whether the speakers' voice belongs to a European American or an African American's face. Others judge it on overall notions such as "quality of voice," "tone of expression" or "correct grammar." Whichever way, it appears that for the most part, American speech rated as standard show a range of variations in pronunciation and vocabulary elements; however, they do not contain grammatical structures that are socially stigmatised. For example, if native speakers from Michigan, New England and Arkansas avoid the use of stigmatised grammatical structures such as "double negatives" as in *They didn't do nothing*, different verb agreement like *They's okay*, and different irregular verb forms as in the case of *She done it*, the likelihood is they will be considered standard irrespective of whether they have distinct regional pronunciations, lexical elements or not. Thus, if a person's speech is lacking social stigmatised structures, it will be considered standard or "mainstream." Generally, Americans do not assign strong positive or prestige value to any particular dialect of American English, but the basic contrast is between negatively valued dialects and those without. Hence, the likelihood is that when Americans comment on different dialects of American English, they will be talking about nonstandardness as in "That person doesn't speak correct English" rather than standardness, namely, "That person really speak good English." 3) Vernacular Dialects, which like standardness, exist on a continuum, where speakers may express speech in different degrees of vernacular. In opposition to standard varieties, they are mainly characterised by the *presence* of socially disfavoured structures that tend to have negatively valued or stigmatised features (like double negatives for example) while the so-called "standard" varieties are negatively defined as

lacking them. Often, the evaluation and subsequent social unacceptability has more to do with who speak vernacular dialects, rather than language itself.[8] (p. 11-13)

6.3 Social Varieties of American English.

According to Walt Wolfram, [15] when it comes to social varieties within American English, the stakes are higher than with regional dialects because people's capabilities such as intelligence and employability, and personal attributes like morality and sincerity may be judged purely on the basis of the person who is talking, rather than the meaning of what it is spoken about. Social dialects are associated with speakers who are simultaneously affiliated with a number of different groups that include a region, age, gender, and ethnicity. These dialects of English are strongly connected to varieties spoken by socially subordinate groups, in spite of the fact that technically speaking, the varieties spoken by the so-called dominant groups are undoubtedly varieties as well. These subordinate or linguistically inferior groups are often referred to as *vernacular dialects* in opposition to the official standard language of a multilingual country. As mentioned previously, these disfavoured social varieties tend to be popularly stigmatised and labelled as unworthy or corrupted. However, linguists stand together against this erroneous conception of unworthiness by demonstrating intricate patterns of language apart from its social valuation and the arbitrary link between linguistic form and social meaning. Although there is a popular perception that all members of a given social group use certain structures that other social groups never do, the fact of the matter is that in reality, it is more complex than that, because the definition of a social group is not one-dimensional, but it entails a whole array of social factors which often make distinctions between groups and which exist as a continuum. For example, among older speakers in Charleston, South Carolina, the absence of a *r* in words such as *bear* and *court* is associated with aristocratic, high-status groups (McDavid 1948) but in New York the same pattern of *r*-less is associated with working-class, low-status groups (Labov 1966). Such examples of opposite social interpretations of the

same linguistic feature demonstrate the subjectivity of the linguistic symbols that carry social meaning. The pattern of dialect distribution that most closely matches the popular perception of dialect differences is referred to as "group-exclusive usage," where one group of speakers uses a form but another one never does (Smith 1985) but this ideal pattern is very seldom maintained in dialects, because the various social factors that typify group affiliations are just too complex to define. In general terms, it appears that when it comes to group exclusive dialect features, there are forms of American English that are not shared across groups defined on the basis of relative social status. That is to say, some speakers from other groups do not use these dialect forms, rather than to say that all the members of a particular group use them. For example, grammatical structures such as subject-verb agreement in sentences like *We was down there* or the use of regularised past tense forms such as *We growed potatoes last year* may show group-exclusive social distribution in that only speakers of some low-status groups use these forms while speakers of high-status groups do not. In contrast to group-exclusive forms, *group-preferential* [43] forms are distributed across different groups or communities of speakers. However, members of one group are simply more likely to use a given form than members from another group. For example, empirical studies on the use of *-in*' [ɪn] versus *–ing* [ɪŋ] in such cases as *workin*' for *working* or *mornin'* for *morning* demonstrate that speakers of all social ranks use the variant *-in*' interchangeably with *-ing*. This fluctuation is not random and cannot be predicted in a given circumstance, because there are various factors that contribute to the increase or decrease of the uses of these variants. Thus, although social status is often a very important factor, it is not the only one involved. Other factors converge with social status such as age, sex, and ethnicity, for example. According to William Labov, this alternation is a classic example of *linguistic variable*, labelled (ING.) In his original study of social stratification of English in New York City (Labov 1966b) [2006] explains that in the evaluation of socioeconomic groups, namely, lower working class, upper working class, lower middle class

and upper middle class, a regular pattern is observed, which shows two different things about the speech community. For each style, social differentiation is observed in the use of (ING): the lower the social class, the more -*in*', and all social class groups decrease their use of -*in*' when attention to speech is paid. Labov continues by saying: "[...] people do not speak in an unpredictable and chaotic way, in New York or anywhere else. The -*in*' variant does not represent a loss of control, laziness or ignorance. It alternates with -*ing* as a stable linguistic variable. People throughout the country use the -*in*' form more when they are speaking informally, less when they are speaking formally [...] it does not interfere with communication." [13] (p. 9-16)

In addition, Walt Wolfram[15] (p. 61-62) states that although the symbolic effect of group-preferential dialect patterns may not be considered to be as socially marked as group-exclusive ones, there are some popular stereotypes that are treated as if they were, when in fact, they display a complex pattern that is really group-preferential and also highly variable. The characterisation of vernacular dialects of English in their use of *dese*, *dem*, and *dose* for *these*, *them*, and *those*, is such a case. On the whole, socially diagnostic pronunciations are more likely to show group-preferential patterns than grammatical features do. For example, in a given Southern community, phonological patterns such as the loss of the glide of the /ay/ vowel of *time* /taym/ or s*ide* /sayd/ as *tahm* [ta:m] or *sahd* [sa:d] or the deletion of *r* in words like *bear* and *court* will show a group-preferential pattern in which all status groups use these features to some extent, with a relative rather than absolute usage. In contrast, grammatical features such as the use of the completive *done* in *They done messed up* or the use of a regularised verb in *We growed beans* would show a group-exclusive pattern in that low-status groups use these features to some extent while high-status speakers avoid them completely.

Wolfram continues by saying that there exist additional factors that converge with social class, which are difficult to identify because the correlation of social status with language

variation relates to the ways in which social factors interact with each other in the effect of linguistic variation. One example is what he describes as *linguistic marketplace*, in which a person's economic activity, loosely defined, is associated with language variation. People of certain occupations such as teachers or salespeople may be more standard in their language than their social status peers in their occupations, who are not expected to use the standard variety. Another parameter intersecting with social class relates to the "social network," characterised by repeated interactions with the same people in several spheres of activity (e.g., work, leisure, church,) which tend to correlate with a greater concentration of the dialect features associated with that group (Milroy 1987) than those of looser affiliations. In addition, in small, isolated communities, the connection of language differences and socioeconomic differences may not be as remarkable as the ones experienced in urban communities where the degree of social distance among different kind of speakers is higher. For example, in the island of Ocracoke, off the coast of North Carolina, some of the most vernacular speakers are wealthy men, who after being educated away from the island, returned to become highly economically influential, and who still maintained a strong vernacular dialect as a wish to project a "traditional island" identity, rather than being associated with the middle-class or upper-class inlanders, who are typically linked to the standard speech forms.

In today's American English, stigmatization, rather than prestige, is what takes precedence when it comes to the vast majority of socially diagnostic structures. For example, grammatical features which include cases of multiple negation as in *They didn't do nothing*, regularised verb forms like *He knowed they were right*, different subject-verb agreement patterns as in *We was there*, and lexical shibboleths such as *ain't*. Thus, in the absence of multiple negation, to say *She didn't do anything* for *She didn't do nothing* is not particularly prestigious, it is simply not stigmatised. By the same token, the non-prestigious variant for either [iðɚ] is not necessarily stigmatised; it is simply not prestigious. These norms are usually

acknowledged across a full range of social classes on a community-wide basis. Thus, norms that are overtly maintained by means of standardisation in society, such as institutional language relating to teachers, the media, and other authorities are said to carry *overt prestige*. However, at the same time, another set of norms may exist, which relate primarily to solidarity with more locally defined social groups, irrespective of their social status whereby forms are positively valued apart from, or even in opposition to, their social significance for the wider society, which are said to carry *covert prestige*. Thus, it is possible for a socially stigmatised variant in one setting to have covert prestige in another. For example, a local young man who embraces vernacular forms in order to preserve solidarity with a group of friends shows the covert prestige of these features at a local level, even if these features stigmatise the speaker in a wider, mainstream context such as school. Likewise, stigmatised grammatical features previously mentioned such as multiple negation, etc., may function as positive, covertly prestigious features in terms of local forms, especially for vernacular speakers who do not wish to speak socially favoured dialects, and want to take a stand against them.

To summarise, although social rank is the most consequential aspect of language variation, social rank also converges with other social and psychological dimensions of people's positions in society, and with internal dimensions of the linguistic system itself.

6.4. Ethnicity and American English

Ethnicity invariably converges with other social factors and behavioural traits, thus, the correlation of ethnic groups with linguistic variation is not a clear-cut categorisation that can be assembled as a unitary, discrete system, but rather as fluid and multifaceted. Some groups, for example, are popularly linked to religiosity, regionality, age, as well other social and interactional factors as in the case of "Jewish English", while "African American English" is associated with social status, age, and Southern regional English, among other factors. Sarah Bunin Benor (2010) introduces the notion of *Ethnolinguistic Repertoire*, which is defined as a

"fluid set of linguistics resources that members of an ethnic group may use variably as they index their linguistic identity" (159,) [8] (p. 185) which emphasises an individual's choice in the use of features in social practice, rather than a unitary system that characterises a group of speakers. At the same time, what is popularly identified as "ethnicity" is also linked to other social notions as *race*. However, socio-political and social-psychological processes play an important role as well when grouping people into different racial groups. Thus, language variation in ethnic groups represents diverse sociolinguistic situations.

6.5 African American English

African American English (AAE) which has also been called "Black English," "Ebonics," and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is the archetypical example of ethnicity-based language diversity, because a majority of African American peoples speak a dialect very different from the rest of the population. The use of AAE and AAVE would be employed interchangeably in this section. The study of African American English has been subjected to heated debates relating to its status as language or dialect, which have resulted in a series of disputes, such as the so-called "Ebonics controversy," with the Oakland School Board's resolution to recognise "Ebonics" as the primary language of African American children. The idea that these children spoke a coherent dialect of their own was heavily condemned by some political and academic figures alike, curiously including African American leaders such as Reverend Jesse Jackson, who all described it as "bad English," "slang," and "ignorant and careless speech." In contrast, many linguists strongly support the resolution by the School Board stating that the knowledge of children's home dialect was essential for the effective teaching of Standard English. A resolution written by John Rickford was unanimously adopted by the Linguistic Society of America: "[...] the distinction between "languages" and "dialects" is usually made more on social and political grounds than on purely linguistics ones." William

Labov argues that "[...] AAVE is not simply a collection of deviations from standard English but a coherent and well-formed system of its own." [13] (p. 67)

There is much discussion among sociolinguists about the origins of African American English. Nonetheless, and according to Labov, they all appear to be in agreement in that AAVE shows strong substrate influences from the West African languages initially spoken by the slave populations who were transported to the rice plantations of the Southeast before the 18th century, where the Creole language Gullah still remains. However, the resemblance between Gullah and AAVE is slight, as it appears AAVE developed later, and it is nowadays considered a dialect of English rather than separate Creole language. Just before the First World War, wave movements, such as the so-called Great Migration began to take place with large numbers of southern blacks moving to northern cities, and expanding rapidly. Today, the largest population of African Americans are not longer found in the South, but in cities like New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Detroit, and Chicago, the homeland of AAVE.

Although early descriptions of linguistic traits pertaining to social groups of African American speech have been linked to black working-class urban youth who spoke a highly vernacular variety, Walt Wolfram and Schilling argue that many African Americans index ethnicity without the "full" set of vernacular phonological and grammatical structures, and some non-black speakers may use elements of AAE to index affiliation with African American ethnicity stereotyped traits associated with it, such as "coolness", "being street smart", and so on. In other words, a more authentic an inclusive definition would include a vernacular-standard continuum that transcend a wide range of social categories of speakers, rather than the strict association with working-class speakers.

According to William Labov, some of the most recognisable characteristics of AAVE which are absent in other dialects are: 1) HAD as an innovative indicator of simple past tense. In the general grammar of English, the expressions "He pushed me; I pushed him," The HAD

marker informs the listener that those two events took place in that order: *first* he pushed me, and *then* I pushed him. In addition, the standard past perfect marker HAD following simple past as in "He pushed me; I had pushed him," indicates that the second event happened before the first. However, in AAVE the use of HAD marks forward movement in time like a simple past tense. Here, the verb following HAD points to an event that happened *after* the one preceding. Here is an example of a child having a dream: "I saw this monster; then I HAD got the Super Nintendo, hit him with the head, but that didn't work, then I ran downstairs, then I woke up." 2) Habitual BE as in *She be here, but she isn't here now,* where the invariant BE of *She be here,* meaning "She is usually here," contrasts with *she isn't here*, which indicates "she is not here right now." 3) BEEN as the remote present perfect. This is a very complex grammatical device. Rickford (1975) discovered that when white listeners hear this stressed BIN, they think of it as the result of dropping the contracted auxiliary in "She's been married," that is to say, the deletion of *have* or *has* that derives from "She has been married." However, this is not the case in most uses of BIN, because the sentence "She has been married" has different combinations of meaning: a) This statement is true; b) It has been true for a long time; c) It is still true. 4) BE DONE as a marker of sequential tense. In the sentence "If you love your enemy, they be done eat you alive in this society," it would not make any sense to translate it as "If you love your enemy, they will have eaten you alive in this society." *First* you love your enemy, and *then* they eat you alive." Labov argues that the most reasonable translation would be "In this society, if you love your enemy it will follow as surely as the night the day that they will eat you alive," which indicates that a potential action or condition will lead to some inevitable result. This use of BE DONE is called *resultative*.[44] (p. 55-64)

In addition, Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schelling argue that the question of how distinctive AAE is from other dialects has been a subject of debate among dialectologists for a long time, however, some agreement exists. A partial list of features that might be shared with

other non-African Americans vernacular varieties can be summarised as follows: 1) Absence of copula for contracted forms of *is* and *are* as in *She nice* and *They acting all strange*. 2) Present tense, third-person *-s* absence, for instance, *She walk* for *She walks*. 3) Possessive *-s* absence, for example, Jack_ car for Jack's car. 4) General plural -s absence like *some dog* for *some dogs.* 5) Reduction of final consonants clusters when followed by a word beginning with a vowel, for example, *lif'' up* for *lift up*. 5) *skr* for *str* initial clusters as in *skreet* for *street*. 6) The use of [f] and [v] for final *th* as in *toof* for *tooth* and *smoov* for *smooth*.[8] (p. 221-23)

Wolfram and Schelling also point out that there exits other structures in AAE that appear on the surface to be very similar to those in other dialects of English, which upon closer examination turn out to have unique uses and meanings. These are called "camouflaged forms." For example, the form *come* in constructions with an *-ing* verb, as in *She come acting like she was mad* looks like the common English use of the motion verb *come* in structures like *She came running*, when in fact, this kind of auxiliary verb indicates annoyance or indignation on the part of the speaker. Another example of camouflaging can be found in sentences such as *They call themselves painting the room* or *Mary call(s) herself dancing,* which meaning is quite similar to the standard English of *call oneself* when attributing qualities or skills to themselves which they do not have. For example, *He calls himself a cook* or *She calls herself intelligent*. Thus, a person who calls himself/herself dancing is actually doing a very poor imitation of dancing. Furthermore, when discussing shared structures with other dialects of English, it must be noted that the call oneself construction does not commonly occur with the verb + *-ing* in most dialects of English. European Americans speakers, for example, use a sentence such as *She calls herself a painter*, but not typically *She calls herself painting*, whereas the likelihood is that African Americans speakers will use both kind of sentences. Also, it is noteworthy mentioning that in the studies of vernacular dialects of English, the use of *ain't* has been documented in a wide range of dialects. Generally, *ain't* is used for *haven't*/*hasn't* as in *She*

ain't been there for a while, and forms of *isn't* and *aren't* as in *She ain't home now.* The use of *ain't* for *didn't* as in *She ain't go there yesterday* is a unique feature of AAVE. In this vein, the uniqueness of African American Language lies more in the particular encompassed combination of structures, rather than a set of conceivably unique structures. In addition, some linguists (Labov 1998; Green 2011) argue that describing the vernacular variety in terms of an inventory of features undermines the overall structure of the system.

Although empirical studies show that a nucleus set of vernacular features exist in AAVE, regional, temporal, social, and individual heterogeneity are as integral to AAVE as they are to any other variety of American. Important sociolinguistic developments took place in the second half of the 20th century with regards to the ethnically distinct use of AAVE in highly populated cities in the United States. Wolfram and Schelling describe what it appears to be a "Supra-Regional Vernacular Form," [8] (p. 232) that transcends regional parameters and involves a set of distinctive traits that are shared wherever AAVE is used in America, which account for its uniformity and its enduring maintenance. One factor for this uniformity is today's patterns of mobility and inter-regional, intra-ethnic social relations, which help to maintain links with isolated rural regions in the South and to keep connected to their roots. Other factors include the legacy of slavery, the so-called Jim Crow laws, and the persistent segregation that African Americans have had to suffer, which serve to preserve this unique linguistic heritage. In addition, the lack of regular interaction between African Americans and European Americans in large urban cities gives way to a linguist environment for the growth of ethno-linguistic distinctiveness.

For a long time now, African Americans have exercised a strong sense of pride in their ethnic identity and cultural heritage, which at the same time has had a great impact on American popular culture and youth culture in general, in America and worldwide. African American identity is not just confined to the relations, behaviours, practices and attitudes

among themselves, but also the so-called "Oppositional Identity," [8] (p. 234) that is to say, their position against other cultural groups, especially dominant white society.

Finally, many researchers believe that the key to ethno-linguistic variation can be found in its functionality traits, rather the structural features of the language itself.

7. CONCLUSION

The author of this thesis has attempted to provide a concise account of American English from a diachronic perspective, hence taking into consideration the historical background of the first English settlers and the undeniable impact that their speech has had in America as a whole. A brief mention of the contribution made to English through contact with other languages has also been provided. The main purpose of this thesis, however, has been to explore the past and current situation pertaining to the subject of language variation, both phonologically and functionally, the latter meaning the way language is used from a social stance. There appears to be a strong common opinion that dialect differences in America are disappearing, given the people's exposure to a relative uniform broadcast in the mass media. Some linguists, as in the case of William Labov disagrees with this viewpoint. Furthermore, he believes that new sound changes in progress are driving the regional dialects of English further and further apart. As mentioned previously, the reality is that language is not stagnant; it is in fact a dynamic entity constantly in a state of evolution. Many linguists share the opinion that language is a property of the individual mind, and it is only natural for each individual to have constructed a different language of their own. The author of this paper is more inclined to agree with the sociolinguistic view that people are programmed to learn to speak in ways to fit the general pattern of our community, rather than an individual model, because language is the most important tool of communication among humans.

Although the social and cultural linguistic variants associated with sociolinguistics may be relatively easy to explain, the causes for sound change remain undetermined. To quote some comments in this regard: In 1856, the Indo-European scholar Rudolf von Raummer said that "[...] the process of change itself however has not yet been investigated enough." (1967, 67-86). Years later, Saussure declared: "the search for the causes of phonetic changes is one of the most difficult problems of linguistics [...]" (1959-147). Finally, Bloomfield, writing in 1933: "[...] the causes of sound-change are unknown." [13] (p. 34)

Current studies and initial observations carried out by some members of the University of Pennsylvania point out to a multiple process of "reversal-continuation-reorganisation" of the so-called "Northern Cities Shift" in Michigan. These findings are perhaps the clearest indication that language variation is very much an active and changing process.

The study of language variation, unlike mathematics, for example, is not an exact science, and consequently, like any investigation has pitfalls. As far as methodology is concerned, and in an effort to unite strengths and weaknesses, *real-time* studies,[16] namely, the evidence of empirical data collection obtained as a result of tracking linguistic variables over time, the *apparent-time hypothesis*, that is to say, the study of language change by comparing the speech of individuals of different ages at a particular point in time, and dialect reconstruction, complement each other, and when used in combination should come close to resolving the time problem in dialectology and sociolinguistics.

As language is an ever changing phenomenon, linguists, sociolinguists and dialectologists should also continue working united in an effort to find and implement the most accurate methodological tools to better understand language and language change in America.

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