

American English in the Sociolinguistic Contexts

The English language has spread far beyond the borders of England in its history and has widely extended the areas and spheres of its functioning because of different kinds of the colonial expansion made for political and economic reasons. Nowadays English has become a common language of international and intercultural communication in some professional spheres, for example, Business English, English used in academic, scholarly debates, in sea navigation and air flights, or in pop music. The most spread variety of English is American English that influences the mode of English speech behaviour not only in other English-speaking countries but also in different social, business, cultural spheres of international communication all round the world and the speakers of which are found far beyond the United States. American English is now steadily becoming one of the mostly used world variants of the English language supported by different forms of communication.

The origins of what we now perceive as American English can be found in a sociolinguistic event that took place in the seventeenth century when the English-speaking communities migrated to North America and the first colonies appeared on the east coast of the continent. The first colonists who came in 1620 on board the Mayflower spoke Elizabethan English with the East Midland accent as they mostly came from the central parts of England (Nottinghamshire). In later periods, more migrants speaking different dialects of English came from different parts of England and from Ireland. Their speech was influenced by sailor's jargon, by different types of pidgins that arose as a result of different and various social and ethnical contacts. Hence, the basis of American English is the speech of the English-speaking settlers who spoke Early Modern English of the seventeenth century. Consequently, American English preserves some old forms, words or the lexical meanings of the words that were in current

usage in the seventeenth – eighteenth centuries in England and shows some language differences, mainly in the lexis and pronunciation, sometimes in morphology and syntax. These language differences between the American English variant of English and British English are mainly due to different language and social characteristics of the original local and social accents of English-speaking migrants and settlers. On the American continent, English experienced the influence of the mixture of the languages of different ethnic minorities, such as, Indians, later Africans and others. The language peculiarities of American English can also be partly due to the separate development of speech communities in time and space and partly due to the influence of new conditions of the environment under which the speakers of English have lived. They can also be due to the separate development of science, technology and culture. Partly they are the result of various language contacts with different speech communities while new migrants came to the continent. The uniformity tendencies in American English developed already in the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century, the American English literary standard was established. The existence of the literary norm of American English is a peculiar feature of its development, the other being the creation of the American English dialects, both regional and social. Craig M. Carver in his essay “The Mayflower to the Model-T: The Development of American English” gives a challenging view on the present-day sociolinguistic contexts of American English: "But as American English became distinctive, so did its regional dialects (and much later its social varieties), so much so that one is hard pressed to find any such entity as "American English". Except perhaps in writing, there is no national or standard form of American speech. Southerners speak just as pure a version of American English as their Yankee cousins. The history of American English, then, is also the story of its regional settlement and the emergence of its cultures and dialects" [1:151].

A peculiar character of the political history of the United States with its democratic traditions is well reflected in the language regulations in the country, as the American population is multilingual, though new immigrants to the United States are rapidly becoming bilingual. Judith

Rodby writes that throughout most of U. S. history, the English language has been neither a national cause nor a nationalistic force. English was not built into the Constitution. [1: 182]. The language attitudes show different ways of solving the problem of the status of the language in different states in which some portion of the population speaks other languages. Some states of the USA declare no official language (Texas, Alaska, Connecticut, Louisiana, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont), some have no official language de jure, English functions as official de facto (Maryland, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, West Virginia). The following states declared the official status of English by passing an amendment to the state constitutions: California, Georgia, Alabama, Virginia, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, New Hampshire. Hawaii is a bilingual state with two official languages by the state constitution of 1978: English and Hawaiian. A demographic study of the population of the states show a motley collection of languages spoken in different states. In 2010, only 57, 02% of the population in California spoke English as their native tongue and 42, 98% spoke sixteen other languages than English as their primary languages at home, among them Spanish was spoken by 28, 5%, Chinese was spoken by 2, 8% and Tagalog by 2, 2%. In Louisiana, spoken languages are English 86, 0%, French 8%, Spanish 4%, Vietnamese 1, 8%. In New Jersey, spoken languages are English 69, 4%, Spanish 15, 9%, Indic (Indo-Iranian) 2, 7%, Chinese 1, 5%, Korean 1, 1%, French 0, 97%, Tagalog (the Philippine language) 0, 94%, Portuguese 0, 91%, Italian 0, 83%, Arabic 0, 76%, Polish 0, 72%, Russian 0, 57%. The language shift from the immigrants' mother tongues to the English language can be described as a dominant trend, and most children of the recent immigrants perceive English as their native tongue. To our mind, the main factor working in favour of this process is the necessity of rapid social, economic and cultural integration into the multinational community one of the molding forces of which is the English language. More to that, the social functions of American English as a variant of English widened on the global scale with the increasing perception of the world as a single

community connected by electronic communication systems (the global village) [2]. Thus, American English is steadily becoming a functional rival to British English on the global scale as a national variant of English in the sociolinguistic contexts of the modern world development.

СПИСОК ВИКОРИСТАНИХ ДЖЕРЕЛ ТА ЛІТЕРАТУРИ

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