

Lecture 13 African American Vernacular English. Spanish and English

African American Vernacular English (sometimes called Ebonics, and formerly called Black English) is a major social speech type. It refers to the variety of American English most shaped by African American culture. Historically, African American English has probably drawn some features from plantation creoles, but has drawn many more characteristics from the Southern American English associated with plantation culture.

Speakers of African American Vernacular English generally do not pronounce *r* after vowels, so that *door* may sound like *doe*, or *poor* like *Poe*. Words like *this* and *that* may be pronounced *dis* and *dat*. Groups of consonants at the ends of words are often reduced to a single consonant, as for instance in the pronunciation of *sold* as *sole*, or *walked* as *walk*. It is common for the linking verb, usually a form of the verb *to be*, not to appear in such sentences as *He happy* or *She doctor*. The use of *be* in the sentence *He be sick*, on the other hand, means that he has often been sick, or has been sick over a period of time.

During and after the Great Depression of the 1930s, many African Americans left farms in old plantation areas and moved to cities in search of work and opportunity. They maintained a strong common culture in the cities because of segregated housing, and African American Vernacular English was maintained as well, although some African American communities began to develop more local speech characteristics. As more and more African Americans moved away from segregated housing, they had less connection to the vernacular and more occasion to use other regional or social speech characteristics or to speak standard American English. Experts disagree about whether African American Vernacular English is becoming more different from regional and social varieties of Standard English or more like these varieties. This disagreement stems from differences in which African Americans they count as speakers of African American Vernacular English.

Large communities of Hispanic Americans have developed in the Southwest and in many cities throughout the United States. Spanish and English are both commonly used in these communities, but often for different purposes or in different settings. People sometimes also blend Spanish words into English sentences or English words into Spanish sentences, a process called code-switching. The English of such communities is enriched by many Spanish words, but the practice of code-switching is not the same thing as a social variety of American English.

32. Influence Of American English.

Most people around the world who learn English as a second language learn either American English or British English. The worldwide use of English began when Britain created a worldwide empire. Today, most people who learn English as a foreign language still learn British English. This happens because Britain has had a longstanding interest in teaching English and has publishers and institutions in place to

promote it. American English is taught more and more, however, because of the worldwide success of American business and technology. This success also leads speakers of British English—even in England—to adopt many Americanisms. English has truly become a world language in science and business, and over time it will come to have more of an American English sound.

It's never easy to pinpoint exactly when a specific language began, but in the case of English we can at least say that there is little sense in speaking of the English language as a separate entity before the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain. Little is known of this period with any certainty, but we do know that Germanic invaders came and settled in Britain from the north- western coastline of continental Europe in the fifth and sixth centuries. The invaders all spoke a language that was Germanic (related to what emerged as Dutch, Frisian, German and the Scandinavian languages, and to Gothic), but we'll probably never know how different their speech was from that of their continental neighbours. However it is fairly certain that many of the settlers would have spoken in exactly the same way as some of their north European neighbours, and that not all of the settlers would have spoken in the same way.

The reason that we know so little about the linguistic situation in this period is because we do not have much in the way of written records from any of the Germanic languages of north- western Europe until several centuries later. When Old English writings begin to appear in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries there is a good deal of regional variation, but not substantially more than that found in later periods. This was the language that Alfred the Great referred to as 'English' in the ninth century.

The Celts were already resident in Britain when the Anglo-Saxons arrived, but there are few obvious traces of their language in English today. Some scholars have suggested that the Celtic tongue might have had an underlying influence on the grammatical development of English, particularly in some parts of the country, but this is highly speculative. The number of loanwords known for certain to have entered Old English from this source is very small. Those that survive in modern English include brock (badger), and coomb a type of valley, alongside many place names.

Questions for lecture 12

- 1 What is the origin of African American Vernacular English?
2. What is the role of the African American Variation In American English?
3. How was African American spread?
4. What was the role of Great Depression of the 1930?
5. How is the spoken standard has become associated with education?