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2.2 New approaches

The indigenization of English in North America

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INDIGENIZATION is interpreted below as the adaptation of a language to the communicative habits and needs of its speakers in a novel ecology. Thus North American Englishes are as indigenized as those of Asia and Africa. The equation for indigenization is the same, although the outcomes vary according to geographical ecology, the nature of ethnolinguistic contacts, population structure, modes of language “transmission,” and the timing of particular changes. These factors and others account for variation not only from one colony to another but also within each colony. Traditional distinctions such as “native” vs. “indigenized” Englishes and “creole” vs. “non-creole” varieties are simply socio-ideological and can be dispensed with in studies of language evolution.

Keywords: indigenization, ecology, basilectalization, acrolectalization, Americanization

1. Introduction


In this paper I focus on some premises of the now widely accepted distinction between “native” and “indigenized Englishes”. Interpreting **indigenization** as a process whereby a language is adapted to the communicative habits and needs of its (new) speakers in a novel ecology, I argue that all English varieties spoken outside England have been indigenized. The adaptations entail structural influence from languages previously spoken by the new speakers as well as additive, substitutive, and subtractive alterations in response to the cultures of its new users as determined by the fauna, flora, and other geographical conditions they deal with. They also entail adjustments to the socio-economic structure that regulates the new speakers’ social behaviors. Thus, the ensuing changes include the obsolescence of some terms that correspond to nothing in the physical and social ecologies of the speakers, adaptations of the denotations of terms to denote somewhat different realities and/or concepts, and introductions of

new terms and phrases (often borrowed from other languages) that reflect aspects of the new cultures.

On the other hand, the process of indigenization cannot be dissociated from the population movements that bring the language to the new geographical space, which entail adaptations of the newcomers both to the new ecologies of the host populations and to cultural practices (including languages, if these survive) brought by some of the other newcomers. In the case of English in North America, this means the adaptation of the language not only to the North American geographical ecologies and to the indigenous cultures but also to some of the cultural traditions of the continental European, African, and Asian populations the English colonists came in contact with.

From the perspective of colonization in general, which has produced new, colonial varieties of English, the agency of indigenization is thus at least dual. They involve adaptations made not only by the indigenous speakers of the foreign, colonial language but also by its traditional speakers, who must manage to communicate in their language about the new geographical and social ecology of the colony, especially about aspects of the indigenous cultures. In the case of settlement colonies, things are complicated also by the presence of minority groups who, like the indigenous populations, faced socioeconomic pressures to shift to the dominant language and have likewise modified it to suit (some of) their traditional communicative conventions under the influence of the languages they had previously spoken. An important question is therefore whether every group influenced the adaptive evolution of English to the same extent and under what specific ecological conditions.

There are of course undeniable differences in the outcomes of the indigenization of English outside England, as made obvious by such national names as American, Australian, and Indian Englishes, as well as by such regional and ethnic names as (American) Southern English, Appalachian English, and African American (Vernacular) English. The same is also true of the traditional distinction between creole vernaculars (such as Gullah and Jamaican Creole) and other colonial English varieties (such as Nigerian and Indian Englishes), though much of the variation in this case also has to do with differences in the structural features of the English varieties that the non-European populations were exposed to and the particular mode in which “English” was “transmitted” to them. As explained in Mufwene (2001), the “transmission” typically occurred through naturalistic interactions in the case of creoles but through teaching in the classroom in the case of the varieties traditionally identified as “indigenized Englishes”.

However, if, as I argue in this paper, even so-called “native” varieties such as American and Australian Englishes have also evolved by indigenization, what other factors account for this differential evolution of what for all practical purposes has been considered the same language in the different colonial settings. The key vering this question lies, of course, in recalling that **linguistic indigenization** means adaptation to the local ecologies consisting of speakers and the broader geographical and cultural contexts in which they evolve, which vary geographically and historically.

Much of this can be captured largely by the factors articulated by Schneider (2007), in his very apt empirical elaboration of the ecological model outlined in Mufwene (2001). Focusing especially on North America, I show how a differential indigenization account is more adequate than the traditional suggestion that “indigenized Englishes” are consequences of restructuring mechanisms other than those involved in the evolution of “native Englishes”.

2. Working assumptions

This essay rests on the same working assumptions explained in Mufwene (2001, 2008), starting with the position that languages are complex adaptive systems. They are like viral species in not having an autonomous existence that is independent of their speakers (their hosts and makers), in constantly being reshaped to meet communicative needs of the latter, and in being influenced by the ecological conditions under which they are put into use. The latter includes languages previously spoken by the new speakers. Thus, indigenization may be considered as the outcome of this constant adaptation process, consistent with my other assumption that linguistic systems are basically what experts in complexity theory identify as “emergent patterns” (Mufwene 2005, 2008). They are cumulations and selective normalizations of adaptations that speakers have repeatedly made in various communicative events, **normalization** being the process by which particular features become part of the communal norm.

Language evolution is generally contact-driven, in the sense that contact causes the successive, concurrent, or interdependent changes that cumulate into evolution, although in some cases (most of) the varieties in contact are just dialects of the same language, as is true of Falkland Island and New Zealand Englishes, see e.g. Gordon *et al.* (2004), Schneider (2007), Trudgill (1986, 2004). To be sure, the emergence of new varieties from the contact of dialects of the same language has traditionally been identified as **koinéization**. Although this has been defined as leveling of differences among dialects of the same language, or, worse, as reduction of their structures to their common denominator, it is more adequately interpretable as the outcome of selection from among the competing variants (Mufwene 2001). The relevant restructuring process is fundamentally the same as what has been associated with the development of creoles, except that in the case of koinéization it may be a moot question to decide what particular dialect has prevailed, given so many similarities in the vocabularies and grammars of the dialects in contact, notwithstanding the fact that originally the *koiné* was based on Attic Greek, the dominant dialect. Koinéization proceeds by competition and selection from the current feature pool of the contact setting, the main difference lying in the fact that separate languages previously spoken by the new, xenolectal speakers influence the formation of creole vernaculars by contributing either new features or reinforcing particular native variants in the target language by congruence (Corne 1999).

Pace Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008), the above characterization of the development of creoles underscores the fact that the emergence of “indigenized Englishes” may be described likewise. Differences lie especially in the fact that in the latter case the target language varieties have been scholastic and transmitted artificially through teaching, whereas the target varieties for creoles were nonstandard vernaculars transmitted naturally through interactions by trial and error (Mufwene 2001, 2008). In both cases, the new speakers modify some features of the target language, which amount to the local adaptations identified above as indigenization and treated in Mufwene (2001, 2003, 2005, 2008), from the point of view of their outcomes, as divergence and speciation into new varieties.

Schneider (2007) articulates adequately the various ways in which post-colonial Englishes both differ from and resemble each other regarding the ecological factors that influenced the specific ways in which individual or regional / national varieties evolved their structural peculiarities. Ultimately the book highlights the family resemblance character of differences and similarities among post-colonial Englishes. I submit that the differences should not underrate the fundamental indigenization process that is identifiable in this differential evolution of English outside England. I articulate the rest of the story in the next section.

Regardless of whether the most salient structural features of the metropolitan or scholastic varieties introduced to particular colonies are standard or nonstandard, colonial varieties are marked by various degrees of divergence from the original targets. In the case of creoles the divergence process has been characterized as “basilectalization” (Chaudenson 1992, 2001, 2003), which essentially connotes the social ranking of the ensuing varieties rather than actual structural distance, contrary to the tradition that describes it as development toward structures that are the most distant from the acrolect. As observed by Irvine (2004), the local acrolect is itself divergent from the metropolitan varieties (including the relevant acrolect) and its features have been selected from the same pool that provided basilectal features.

The social characterization of **basilectalization** and the resultant **basilect** has to do largely with the low status of these new vernaculars and their speakers in the contact settings where they have evolved and are now spoken. It is also due to the fact that their structures have been compared unduly to the acrolectal varieties of the same languages, which can be related to the colonial upper class that spoke it and to scholastic reinforcement of their standard features. Given the high status that “indigenized Englishes” have usually assumed as official languages and as media of higher education in former exploitation colonies, it would be inappropriate to characterize the divergence associated with them as basilectalization. On the other hand, it is inaccurate to characterize it as “acrolectalization”, because, *pace* Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008), they did

not start as basilectal varieties.¹ The common evolutionary trend in the case of both “indigenized Englishes” and creoles is that they have diverged structurally from their respective standard / scholastic and nonstandard varieties targeted by the earlier learners. Both are outcomes of indigenization as adaptation to new ecologies under the communicative pressures of their new speakers and the substrate influence of the languages previously spoken by these populations.²

3. “Native Englishes” of North America as indigenized varieties

The above discussions of **indigenization** suggest that North American English varieties are as indigenized as the so-called “nativized Englishes” associated with former exploitation colonies, because they are spoken outside the original homeland of English, by populations whose majorities are from places other than England, and in ways that are different from those of the original homeland. They have diverged from British English largely because they have been adapted to the communicative habits and needs of new speakers and their evolution has been partly influenced by the languages previously spoken by some of the new speakers, although the latter are of European descent. They are thus not only outcomes of language contact, as explained above, but also varieties indigenous to the territories that their speakers now claim as their homes. They instantiate what evolutionary biologists would characterize as speciation under new ecological conditions.

The above characterization is consistent with the following other observations made in the literature:

1. “the emergence of locally characteristic linguistic patterns” (Schneider 2007: 5–6);

1. Mesthrie and Bhatt base their position primarily on the evolution of South African Indian English, which is more an argument for indigenization as discussed in this chapter than for its status as an “indigenized English”. It started indeed in a way similar to creoles (Mesthrie 1992) and was subsequently influenced by the fact that children of the Indian contract laborers, unlike those of slaves, were educated in English. Creole children of the 18th and 19th centuries did not have the benefit of education; nobody taught them explicit rules of “good” English pronunciation and grammar. By the time some of them had access to education, the Creole was already entrenched in the population as a vernacular and standard English was being learned as a second language, a lingua franca, so to speak. South African Indian English is thus a reminder that we should pay attention more to the actual ecologies of the differential evolution of the ancestor language than to labels such as “Creole”, “Indigenized English”, or “koiné”, which do not tell the real story.

2. Hall (1966) defines *creolization* not only as nativization of a pidgin, a position that I have argued against in my work since the early 1990s (along with Chaudenson 1979), but also as “indigenization”. To be sure, what he meant was that the modified European vernacular was then a variety indigenous to the colony. Nonetheless, this interpretation is certainly not at variance with the characterization of **indigenization** in the present discussion.

2. “localization” of the transplanted language (Omoniyi 2006: 173), which appears to be consistent with Chaudenson’s (1992, 2001, 2003) characterization of creole “autonomization” from the metropolitan varieties;
3. “acculturation” of the language to local social and physical ecologies of its speakers (Bolton 2006; Kachru 2005: 90, 99).

From the point of view of divergence, none of these characterizations distinguishes the varieties traditionally identified as “indigenized” or “nativized Englishes” from those labeled “native”. Even the factor of contact with other languages appears to shed no particular light on the distinction. Both “indigenized Englishes” and “native Englishes” are outcomes of language contact, especially in the colonies, where populations from different nationalities and ethnolinguistic backgrounds converged to settle, administer, or exploit the new territories. The challenge is to explain why “native Englishes” can be claimed to be less divergent than British varieties, if the claim is at all true.³

Even if one argues that most features of “native Englishes” have been selected from the European varieties, the same arguments can also be made about many features of “indigenized Englishes”, such as uses of the progressive and of periphrastic *do* for habitual states of affairs (Pargman 2002). An important evolutionary difference lies thus in the role that the substrate languages have played in determining what particular features of the dominant language would normalize in the new speech communities (Kachru 2005; Mufwene 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008), which is consistent with Corne’s (1999) idea of congruence regarding French creoles (see also Chaudenson 1992, 2001, 2003). Other differences lie of course in the kinds of varieties that were targeted by the new speakers (colloquial or scholastic only), the extent of structural / typological differences between their languages and those of the target language (determining how faithfully the target could be learned), the mode of transmission (through normal, naturalistic interactions or through the school system), the proportion of native speakers relative to the learning populations, and the degree of social integration of the populations in contact, see also Schneider 2007.

There is yet another factor that has not received much attention to date, *viz.* the time at which the various ethnic / national groups became integrated in a social fabric that has been Anglo-centric since the colonial period. It should help explain why, according to many, there isn’t as much influence of continental European languages on North American English varieties as there is African substrate influence on Gullah

3. It would not be unjustified to argue that the claim has been inspired, or influenced, more by the complexion of speakers of “indigenized Englishes”, as of creole vernaculars, than by actual differences in the natures of the restructuring processes (Mufwene 2008).

and, to some extent, African American Vernacular English (AAVE).⁴ This question, which will be addressed in the next section, is prompted especially by the fact that descendants of English colonists are today in the minority within the overall white American population. They consist of no more than 15–16% of the overall population, against 15% of descendants of Germans, 10–11% of descendants of (Scotch-)Irish, 5.5% of descendants of Italians, and 3% of descendants of French.⁵ This overall picture is reminiscent of the higher proportion of slaves relative to the European populations in the plantation settings where creole vernaculars emerged, with their divergences largely attributed to African substrate influence.


Note that similar demographic considerations also accounts for why AAVE is generally considered as closer to nonstandard American White Southern English (AWSE) than Gullah and Atlantic / Caribbean English creoles are. As explained in Mufwene (2000, 2001, 2005) AAVE is a byproduct of tobacco and cotton plantations, where the African slaves were generally not in the majority, whereas the creoles emerged on rice fields and sugar cane plantations, where the slaves were the overwhelming majority. As incomplete as the account still is (see below), the fact that race segregation was institutionalized early on the latter plantations and much later in places where tobacco and cotton were cultivated also helps account for the greater divergence of creoles.⁶ One can thus also argue that “indigenized Englishes” are so different from “native Englishes” because they evolved in settings where their non-European speakers have interacted more among themselves, in settings where they have always been the overwhelming majorities, than with speakers of the metropolitan varieties.

While the above account helps explain why Gullah and other English creoles are so distinctively different from the new English vernaculars that evolved among (descendants of) European colonists, it conceals the fact that English was not the mother tongue of all Europeans that were on the plantations. Many European indentured servants with whom the slaves interacted regularly came from Ireland, where vernacular English was just beginning to spread in the working class (especially through migrant workers), and in continental Europe, where usage of English was scarce even within

4. This statement is problematic if one takes literally the meaning of influence to apply not only in the sense of helping a variety diverge from the original target but also in the sense of congruence, whereby features shared by the varieties in contact become unmarked and more likely to normalize in the new speech community. The competition-and-selection model developed in Mufwene (2001, 2003, 2005, 2008) allows substrate influence to work in both cases, favoring those features that are the easiest for the new speakers to learn and use among them. Research on substrate influence has not focused much on congruence, especially regarding varieties spoken by colonial populations of European descent.

5. These statistics are from *Wikipedia* (2007). They compare well with discussions on ethnicity provided by Doyle (1994).

6. As first pointed out by Schneider (1995), outside the coastal Southeast, the Jim Crow laws were passed rather late in the 19th century, which reduced the impact of segregation on the divergence of AAVE.

the elite class. These European immigrants were experiencing as much language shift as the slaves and were as likely to influence the English being appropriated by the latter. This demographic peculiarity, s and plantations, can account for the particular salience of consuetudinal *be* (co-occurring with *V-in'* and negated with *don't*) in AAVE as in Irish English and for pronunciations such as [βɛl] *well*,⁷ [gwo:t] *goat*, and [bye:] *bear* which are attested (not unfailingly) in some creoles but need not at all be attributed to African substrate influence. Such examples make a convincing case for multiple causation in the divergence of colonial Englishes from the metropolitan varieties then spoken in England (which should not be confused with the British Isles, where many nonnative varieties were also spoken).

On the other hand, one must also ask why race segregation in the American South since the late 19th century has not caused AAVE to diverge more significantly from AWSE. Evidence for the continued structural kinship may be found in their similar prosodies, in the variable monophthongization of diphthongs, the merger of the vowels of *pin* and *pen* to [ɪ], in the pronunciation of words such as *four* and *before* (where /ɔɪ/ is produced as [o:]), the use of *ain't* for *is not* and *has not*, the confusion of *went* and *gone* (as in *I could have went on*), and the use of double modals. The answer to this question seems to lie in the likelihood that both varieties started and developed as the same, over the first two centuries and a half, before segregation was institutionalized, a period during which slaves and European indentured servants interacted regularly across race lines, though they had different legal statuses. The institutionalization of race segregation, which should not be confused with discrimination, would have been pointless if (descendants of) African slaves and European indentured servants had been living separately in the tobacco and cotton American South.⁸ There is thus no particular reason to assume that outside the rice fields, (descendants of) Africans must have spoken an English variety distinct from that of European indentured servants and yeomen.

Thus, race segregation was a post-formative event that has not born significantly on the speaking habits of American Southerners of both European and African descent, as AAVE and AWSE are still similar grammatically and phonologically. As pointed out by Wolfram (2008), this is where one can observe the lingering impact of the Founder Principle (Mufwene 1996, 2001). Although, later immigrations from


7. To my knowledge this variable pronunciation of *well* and similar words (including *very*) with a bilabial fricative is attested only in Gullah. In Jamaican Creole, one hears a bilabial stop instead of the fricative, which is consistent with the fact that the sound itself is rare in African languages. Note that Gullah is also unique in maintaining a schwa and [ʌ], as in *but* and *bug*, in its phonetic inventory. The sounds have been replaced by [a] or [ɔ], not respectively, in other English creoles.

8. One is also reminded of various laws that were passed in especially the 18th century to punish in various ways Europeans who formed unions or had children with African slaves. They coincided with a campaign undertaken by the colonial system to stop the "blackening" of the colony, which led to the shipment of prostitutes from the jails and streets of London to North America in hope to provide European "wives" to the European bachelors.

Europe and population movements within the American White population triggered some changes in AWSE, these have remained limited (Bailey and Thomas 1998) and not significant enough to make it different beyond the statistical frequencies of the “variables”. The history of migrations to the USA since the Civil War (1861–1865) suggests that AAVE may have remained relatively conservative (Krapp 1924), experiencing little influence triggered by contacts with other language varieties, because migrations from Africa and the Caribbean were statistically negligible from Emancipation to World War II. Moreover, post-War African immigrants have generally not been assimilated into African American communities.

Whether or not the common ancestor of AAVE and AWSE was influenced by African languages is an open question, especially if congruence effects are factored in. However, the fact that neither AWSE nor AAVE comes close to replicate a particular British English dialect, although their features can be traced back to similar ones in British English (see e.g. Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001), suggests that they have indeed developed by competition and selection, like creoles and “indigenized Englishes”, as explained in Mufwene (2001, 2003, 2005, 2008). Thus both AAVE and AWSE reflect the indigenization of English in the South in the way explained above, which started with earlier indigenization of English within the British populations themselves (Mufwene 2003).

Nonetheless, one cannot help wondering why the American South is linguistically so distinct from New England and the Midwest in particular. History is informative about this question, too. Until the late 19th century, the American Southeast relied almost exclusively on the plantation economy, which had relied on slavery and on white indentured servitude (50–75% of the European-American population then). For over two centuries, slaves and indentured servants had interacted closely with each other, developing what can be identified as the same American Southern dialect.

Thus, it appears ~~we know~~  that the cradle of AAVE was in the American South. Including Virginia, this region had the overwhelming majority of populations of African origin in North America. The present African American ghetto phenomenon is the outcome of the Great Migration, which brought to the North former slaves who were escaping the institutionalization of race segregation in the South with the introduction of the Jim Crow laws.⁹ They brought with them a Southern English variety which the segregated population structure of cities in the North and the West barely affected, just as it allowed very little influence of the latter on European American vernaculars (Bailey and Thomas 1998; Mufwene 1999; Wolfram 2008). AAVE and AWSE are so similar and also so distinct from other North American English varieties because, by the Founder Principle (Mufwene 1996, 2001), race segregation and

9. To be sure, the “Underground Railroad”, which had taken thousands of runaway slaves to the North earlier in the earlier 19th century, must have had a similar effect. However, the volume of the exodus was not comparable in magnitude to that the “Great Migration” of the first half of the 20th century, which took millions of African Americans to Northern cities’ ghettos. Segregated relocation patterns prevented extensive restructuring of AAVE, leading Labov (1972) to claim that the ethnolect was uniform throughout the United States.

different patterns of population growth since the late 19th century started too late to foster significant structural differences between the African American and Southern European American ways of speaking, though the story is definitely more complex. This conclusion is also consistent with Kretzschmar's (1996) and Wolfram's (2008) observation that changes over the past centuries in Southern and Northern varieties have nonetheless maintained the old antebellum linguistic division between the North and the South identified by Kurath (1949), albeit if AAVE is now considered somewhat diasporic relative to the South.

To be sure, the ecological and competition-and-selection model developed in Mufwene (2001, 2008) does not really make much allowance for claiming that some colonial varieties are less restructured away from British metropolitan varieties than others. The main reason is that their starting points were not identical, since the ecologies of the initial contacts by the founder populations were not identical from one colony to another. However, it is difficult to ignore the impression that some varieties bear less influence from other languages than others. This claim is certainly true of most urban European American English varieties; and it needs explaining, surprisingly in a way that is not so different from the segregation-based account proposed for creoles and AAVE. Note that segregation can be spatial, in the form of geographical isolation and/or social.

In the case of the European American varieties it is self-imposed segregation of the colonial period during which European North America actually consisted of several national colonies that were socio-economically independent from each other. They maintained their own languages all the way to the late 19th century and some, such as Scandinavians (Haugen 1953) and the Germans in the Midwest, all the way to the 20th century (Salmons 2003). Also, although it is now easier to see ethnic segregation in American cities in terms of ethnic groups of European and non-European origins, many of these large agglomerations also used to consist of neighborhoods identified as Irish, German, Italian, Jewish, *etc.*, before the relevant populations relocated and became more and more integrated, especially during the second half of the 20th century. More significant is also the case of earlier migrants such as the Dutch in the New Netherland (an area along the Hudson River and the lower Delaware River) and the French in the American Northeast and in early 19th-century Louisiana (a corridor between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi and from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico), who, since the 19th century, have been shifting gradually from their respective traditional vernaculars to English.¹⁰ Equally significant are the cases of Scandinavians in the Midwest and Swiss Mennonites in Pennsylvania, who stuck for long to their European traditions and even developed their own peculiar English varieties, including Amish English, which has received some attention lately (e.g. Keiser 2003). The pattern is not so different from what Clyne (2003) says about patterns of

10. New Netherland Dutch is extinct now, while French is generally moribund / almost dead in the Northeast.

European national, mostly rural, settlements in Australia in the 20th century, in the context of their gradual language shift to English.

All this suggests that for at least two centuries, several Europeans may have been monolingual in their national languages, attending school, doing business, and practicing religion in their own national languages. Benjamin Franklin is reported to have complained that the Germans were little interested in Americanizing, i.e. showing little interest in learning the English ways in North America (Bonfiglio 2002).¹¹ During its most formative stage, before the 19th century, American English varieties must thus have evolved largely independent of other European influences, except perhaps for the Scotch-Irish and the Welsh, many of whom came as indentured servants in the 17th and 18th centuries and interacted regularly with the English. This hypothesis is made more plausible by the fact that the European American population increased drastically during the 19th and early 20th century (Doyle 1994), after the founder populations had shaped what had then already been recognized as American English, separate from British English.¹²

According to Shenton (1991: 360), a typical pattern among immigrants was to immigrate to “ethnic villages”, where “[a]n infrastructure of businesses designed to meet their everyday needs created an economic mobility that was independent of the host [Anglo-American] society”.¹³ He also notes that shift to the Anglo-American culture, including the English language, was delayed by “national parishes” that not only offered religious service in the ethnic languages of the immigrants but also organized parochial schools.

It is only after the Anglo economic system prevailed in the late 19th century that the other competing economic systems gave way and Europeans of other nationalities started shifting to English in ways not so different from recent immigrants to North America. That is, adult learners of English spoke English with some European accent, just like adult continental European immigrants do today, while their children acquired (near-)native competence in the dominant, local accent, especially those who attended English schools and/or socialized with Anglo children. In time, the older L2 speakers died away with their xenolectal features, while the extant American accent continued, being influenced only minimally by the xenolectal varieties.

11. According to Doyle (1994: 37), “[e]arly in the 20th century, German culture vied with British culture in this area [stretching from eastern Pennsylvania to Montana, where they formed ‘a majority or a large minority’], so much so that there was even talk of a separate German national state”.

12. This is indeed a state of affairs that led Webster to publish his *An American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828.

13. This passage, which describes especially German and Irish settlements in the 19th century, could apply to patterns of Hispanic immigrations into Hispanic neighborhoods in recent years, delaying the expected shift of the immigrants to the dominant host language.

The above hypothesis does not at all deny the fact that some European ethnic varieties did indeed develop, traditionally identified as German, Italian, or Yiddish / Jewish English. However, the reality is also that these ethnic varieties have virtually all disappeared, reflecting the gradual integration of the European American populations.¹⁴ This also shows that the ghettoization of American cities and the present *de facto* race segregation of American society in general is the main reason why AAVE has survived, along with varieties such as the Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Mexican American Englishes, which are typically urban. The emergence and/or maintenance of other ethnic varieties such as Amish English, Cajun Vernacular English, and Lumbee English are evidence of the fact that the shift to English as the dominant vernacular has been gradual and continues to date among groups that have lived on the margins of the dominant Anglo-American socio-economic system.

We cannot deny that continental European immigrants have also made some contributions, lexical and structural, to American English, such as the classic *bring / take* NP *with*, which is associated with German and Scandinavian influence. The crucial argument of this paper is that, by the Founder Principle, they shifted to English too late to exert an influence as important as African slaves, who were among the very first non-native speakers to shift to English as their vernacular, especially in sugar cane and rice plantation settings where they were the majority and were segregated quite early in the early 18th century in the case of coastal South Carolina (Wood 1974). As noted above, it is largely because African Americans in the hinterlands were segregated rather late, in the late 19th century, that AAVE has remained structurally so close to AWSE, with which it shares ancestry.

One could thus conclude that populations which shift late to a dominant language and which the dominant population integrates socially are not likely to exert significant influence on the target language, unless they arrive in such large numbers that they overwhelm the host population demographically. However, although they evolved in the reverse order of the African American population, from spatial segregation to social integration, descendants of continental European immigrants achieved their demographic majority relative to descendants of the English only gradually, over a whole century, from the 1820s to the 1920s. A number of factors have contributed to the gradual obliteration of traditional ethnic boundaries and the decay of ethnolects formerly identified as German, Irish, Italian, and Yiddish / Jewish. They include the integration of European American populations into non-ethnic neighborhoods (segregated only by socio-economic class), the discontinuation of ethnic churches and parochial schools, and, among other factors, increased marriages across traditional ethnic boundaries. Whether or not AAVE, Hispanic English varieties, and other

14. Nor should my remarks be extrapolated into the conclusion that all European Americans speak alike. There are still social class differences and others correlated with geographical isolation, which makes it possible to single out Appalachian, Ozark, and Old Amish Englishes, among others, as quite distinct.

ethnolects such as Amish and Cajun Englishes will also disappear depends largely whether or not America will be completely desegregated *de facto* and one can again invoke the melting-pot ideology that applied to European Americans. Nonetheless all these American English varieties, so distinct from British English varieties, are evidence of the manifold indigenization of English in America.

4. Conclusion: The Americanization of English as indigenization

I am using the term **Americanization** here in the sense of ‘becoming American in character’. In the case of English, it means becoming different from British varieties by acquiring characteristics that make it particularly American. This is precisely the sense in which American English can be said to have indigenized, having adapted to the American ecology consisting of the American fauna, flora, and of socio-economic structures in which it is used, responding selectively to past speaking habits of some of its speakers and meeting their communicative needs in various ways. Both in terms of setting and agency of speakers, the evolutionary process is similar to what has produced the “indigenized Englishes” of Britain’s former exploitation colonies in Africa and Asia.

An important difference lies in the fact that native speakers have played a central role in the evolution of varieties spoken primarily by descendants of Europeans. Another lies in the fact that English functions primarily as a lingua franca in the former exploitation colonies but as a vernacular in the United States. What is common in both kinds of settings is that it has been exported to a new location and has been appropriated by speakers of other languages. The ecology of the appropriation determines the extent to which some of the languages that English came in contact with have influenced it. I have explained in this paper why it may be claimed that continental European languages have exerted limited influence on American English. Periodization and patterns of population increase underscore the role of the Founder Principle. In the case of the United States, continental European immigrants shifted to English after it had already Americanized. Since they did not all immigrate at the same time and thus did not overwhelm the extant American population speaking English, their impact on the emergent variety remains minimal, especially regarding its structures. Americans who had been speaking other European languages did indeed develop their own national or ethnic varieties, but assimilation to the dominant Anglo-American culture gradually weeded out the xenolectal element, in the same way the Americanization process proceeds among today’s immigrants.

Americanization has of course not been uniform and has also fostered diversity. In this respect, American English is not different from “indigenized Englishes” of former exploitation colonies. The contact history has not been the same in all parts of the United States and different immigrants have not all been assimilated in the same way. Interestingly, the gradual social integration of Americans of continental European descent has nearly coincided with the *de facto* segregation of African Americans and

Hispanics in particular. As many studies have shown, people who socialize together speak alike while those who rarely interact with each other are likely to develop different speech habits. This study underscores the role of social contact in language speciation and the complexity of ecological factors that bear on the process. Otherwise, the basic mechanisms that have driven the evolution of English around the world are the same, and indeed the same ones that have driven the evolution of any language anywhere in the history of mankind. Only the ecological specifics vary, including the specific varieties appropriated with modification by new speakers.

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