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978-0-521-13293-0 - Investigations in Sociohistorical Linguistics: Stories of Colonisation and Contact

Peter Trudgill

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Investigations in Sociohistorical Linguistics

In the last 500 years or so, the English language has undergone remarkable geographical expansion, bringing it into contact with other languages in new locations. This also caused different regional dialects of the language to come into contact with each other in colonial situations. This book is made up of a number of fascinating tales of historical-sociolinguistic detection. These are stories of origins – of a particular variety of English or linguistic feature – which together tell a compelling general story. In each case, Trudgill presents an intriguing puzzle, locates and examines the evidence, detects clues that unravel the mystery, and finally proposes a solution. The solutions are all original, often surprising, sometimes highly controversial. Providing a unique insight into how language contact shapes varieties of English, this entertaining yet rigorous account will be welcomed by students and researchers in linguistics, sociolinguistics and historical linguistics.

Peter Trudgill is Professor of Sociolinguistics at the University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway.

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Chapter 5: Peter Trudgill, Terttu Nevalainen and Ilse Wischer, 2002, Dynamic *have* in North American and British Isles English. *English Language and Linguistics* 6: 1–15.

Chapter 6: Peter Trudgill, 1999, A window on the past: “colonial lag” and New Zealand evidence for the phonology of 19th-century English. *American Speech* 74.3: 1–11.

Chapter 7: Peter Trudgill and Elizabeth Gordon, 2004, Predicting the past: dialect archaeology and Australian English rhoticity. *English World-Wide* 27.3: 235–46.

Chapter 8: Peter Trudgill, Margaret MacLagan and Gillian Lewis, 2003, Linguistic archaeology: the Scottish input to New Zealand English phonology. *Journal of English Linguistics* 31: 103–24.

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Prologue: Colonisation and contact

My friend, colleague and former doctoral student Professor David Britain once told me that, of the papers I had written, the ones he enjoyed reading most were those where it seemed as if I was telling a story – particularly, he said, where they were detective stories. I had never thought of myself as writing detective stories before, but I did come to realise that David had offered an insight about my work that I had never been clever enough to arrive at myself. Some of my writing has indeed consisted of articles which begin with a historical-sociolinguistic puzzle, and then attempt to come up with a solution on the basis of the available evidence. And they are, I now see, written in such a way that the reader is left waiting to find out what the solution to the mystery is until the very end of the story. Even if there is no punchline as such, there may well be a final punch-paragraph.

This book, then, is made up of a number of such historical-sociolinguistic tales of detection which I hope, individually, will tell a coherent story; and which will also, I hope, combine to produce an overall, more general story which is also coherent. This general story has to do, I suppose, with the belief that great explanatory power in finding the solution to linguistic mysteries is to be derived from the study of vowels, consonants and grammatical constructions in combination with the study of macro- and micro-level social factors and historical events. Happily, there are many linguistics scholars who have greater goals than this – linguists who seem to be most highly motivated by the very laudable desire to learn more about the very big picture: a quest for a greater understanding of the vitally important question of why human language is like it is, in terms, perhaps, of the nature of the human language faculty. For me, this question

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has always seemed to be far too hard, and I am happy to leave it to others. I have contented myself with doubtless less important questions, but those which I feel might be more within my capabilities. These questions, as asked in this book, are all of a particular type: I ask not so much why language is like it is, but more why is this *particular* language or dialect like it is? How did it get to be like that? Why does it have these linguistic characteristics and not others?

The chapters in this book all deal with varieties of the English language as it is spoken around the world: the British Isles, North America, the Caribbean, the Southern Hemisphere, the Pacific Ocean. I am concerned with issues such as why American English is like it is; how New Zealand English got to be that way; what factors led to the English of the Bonin Islands being as it is; why the English of my native East Anglia is not exactly like any other kind of English; and so on. There is always a historical explanation for such things, of course, but I have generally supposed that answers to this sort of question will also be as much sociolinguistic as purely linguistic-internal.

In all the papers in this volume, contact turns out to be a key problem for, and/or a key solution to, the riddles I have been trying to solve. This sometimes involves language contact, sometimes dialect contact, and often both. The English language has, in the last 500 years or so, experienced a remarkable history of geographical expansion which led it to undergo contact with other languages, indigenous and non-indigenous, in new locations. It also led to different regional dialects of the language coming into contact with each other in colonial situations, in a way that had never happened before. For example, new dialects of English developed on the east coast of North America as a result, in part, of contact between different regional dialects of English English. These new dialects then took part in further dialect contact processes with the westward journey of the language across the continent, as the colony itself began colonising. West coast varieties of American English must result from mixtures of mixed dialects which were themselves the result

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of dialect mixture of mixed dialects. One type of puzzle which I attempt to deal with in this book, therefore, is the unravelling of the different, complex strands involved in the mechanisms of contact and mixture which gave rise to the varieties under examination.

The book starts, however, with an examination of the very first process of colonisation in which English was involved, a process that began more than fifteen hundred years ago – with the original coming into being of the English language itself; and with the role that the study of contact has to play in producing explanations for why, even in the early centuries of its existence, the English language was like it was.