Introduction

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Over twenty years have passed since Peter Trudgill's first edition of *Language in the British Isles* (Trudgill 1984a). A great deal has happened in those years, both to the British Isles in ways which have had fundamental linguistic consequences, and in terms of the research which has been conducted on issues concerning the way people on these islands use language. This volume attempts to provide a snapshot both of the languages and dialects spoken and signed here, and of some of the implications for education of that linguistic diversity.

At the beginning of the century, almost 60 million people lived in the UK[1] and almost 4 million in the Irish Republic.[2] In the UK, around 4.6 million people claimed an ethnicity other than White[3] (and the White category included a large number of people claiming White Irish ethnicity and 1.3 million people who claimed an 'Other-White' ethnicity, of which only 20% were born in the UK (Gardener & Connolly 2005:7)), or roughly 7.9% of the total, representing an increase of 53% since the previous census in 1991.[4] Since the last British census in 2001, the non-White population has continued to increase. There has been a net inflow of population of at least 100,000 per annum in every year since 1998, and in 2004 the net inflow was 223,000.[5] The Irish Republic didn't ask questions about ethnicity in its 2002 census,[6] but 5.8% of the population had a nationality which was not Irish. These islands are, therefore, increasingly multiethnic. This volume consequently includes chapters which survey the histories and current sociolinguistic status of some of the larger ethnic minority languages of the islands: the Indic languages, Chinese, the

[1] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=6. This, and all other websites listed in this chapter, were last accessed on 11th April 2006.
[2] http://www.cso.ie/census/prelim_press_release.htm
[3] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=455
[4] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=273
[5] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1311
[6] Though its 2006 census did.

Englishes and creoles of the British Black community and the languages of European immigrants. Perhaps surprisingly, we know especially little about this latter European language group. Many Europeans have the automatic right to travel, live and work in the UK and Ireland because of their home countries' EU membership, but many are classed as 'White' in the census and so headline figures often misleadingly underestimate the size of the non-White British, non-anglophone community. A case in point here is the Portuguese community of the largely rural Norfolk district of Breckland, which most estimates put at around 15,000–20,000 strong (roughly 12–16% of the total population in a district of 124,000). The 2001 census data for the district, however, appear unaware of the Portuguese community[7] there because most of its members claim 'White' ethnicity.

Frustratingly for linguists, and surely for policy makers too, the British and Irish censuses do not collect information about language use (other than use of the indigenous Celtic languages in Wales, Scotland and Ireland), so our understanding of the numbers of speakers of spoken and signed languages other than English and the Celtic languages is actually extremely limited and often based on relatively crude calculations based on the size of the ethnic minority population.[8] Furthermore, and unlike in the USA and New Zealand in particular, we know very little indeed about the varieties of English spoken by the ethnic minority population (apart from that spoken by the British Black community), though a few studies are beginning to appear which address this issue (Fox 2007, A. Khan 2007, Khattab 2002a, 2002b).

The size and linguistic practices of one of Britain's longer resident ethnic groups is perhaps even less well understood. Unlike in Ireland,[9] the British census and the British authorities in general make little serious attempt to put an accurate figure to the traveller/Gypsy community,[10] and it is recognised as being one of the most deprived ethnic groups in the UK on a wide range of measures, such as health indicators and educational achievement, largely because of its invisibility and isolation. Yet in a number of parts of Britain it is claimed to be the largest ethnic minority

[7] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/33UB-A.asp

[8] On 8 March 2006, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the UK produced a news release saying that a 'strong case' had been made for a language question in the 2011 census to enable equality legislation to be properly monitored and for service provision to ethnic minority groups to be improved – http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/cenew0306.pdf

[9] The Irish Census of 2002 finds 23,000 Irish Travellers, and provides detailed coverage of their employment, health and housing status – see http://www.cso.ie/census/documents/vol8_entire.pdf

[10] The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister commissions twice-yearly 'Caravan counts' which, of course, ignore those of Gypsy/traveller ethnicity who are settled.

group, for example, in Cambridgeshire.[11] This lack of information is all the more surprising given that this community has felt the brunt of a swathe of recent government legislation which directly impacts it, such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003), the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994). Consequently we know very little indeed about their linguistic behaviour, including, for example, whether or not there exists a distinctive traveller/Gypsy variety of English (see Britain 2003). Included in this volume is a chapter on their ancestral language, Angloromani.

Angloromani as a living language is in a somewhat precarious position. Some languages of the British Isles which did fall into obsolescence are now undergoing attempted revivals (e.g. Cornish – see Sayers 2005). French in the Channel Islands clings on to life. The 2001 census for Jersey, for example, makes the seriousness of the decline of Jérriais quite clear: 'Jersey French was spoken by a total of 2,874 people (3.2% of the population). Of this total, two-thirds were aged 60 and over. The number of Jersey French speakers in 2001 was half the number recorded in 1989' (Etat Civil Committee 2002:23). Of this 2,874, just 113 claimed it as their first language.

In 2003, British Sign Language was recognised by the British government, alongside English and the Celtic languages Welsh, Gaelic and Irish. Woll and Sutton-Spence in this volume put the number of signers at between 30,000 and 60,000. It will be interesting to see what effect recognition has on the status and visibility of signed languages, and how resources and infrastructure will be targeted for a speech community that is not concentrated in clustered geographical locales.

The censuses of 2001 in the UK provided mixed news for the surviving Celtic languages. Overall figures for Welsh show a small increase in the number of speakers, but this hides quite considerable fluctuations. H. Jones (2005:7), comparing the 1991 and 2001 censuses, shows a marked increase by 2001 in the numbers of school-aged children claiming to be able to speak Welsh, but also a decline in the numbers of retired people who speak the language. Worryingly, in comparing the number of 15-year-olds who claimed to be able to speak Welsh in 1991, with the number of 25-year-olds a decade later, who also claimed to speak the language, he found that the number had dropped by a third (2005:5). He proposes a number of reasons for this decline, including inaccurate completion of questionnaires by parents on behalf of the 15-year-olds, and loss of confidence in the language. These comparisons are both useful and important, because they

[11] http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/community/travellers/

show the extent to which educational provision in Welsh is triggering (or not) long-term acquisition and maintenance of the language. The number of people in Scotland claiming to speak Gaelic was down by 11% in 2001 and the only areas showing an increase in speakers were those areas outside the traditional heartlands (Registrar General for Scotland 2005). The Northern Irish Census reports 75,000 people who can read, write and speak Irish, and a further 92,000 with a more limited competence in the language.[12] In the Irish Republic, approximately 40% of the population claimed to be able to speak Irish, but as Ó Riagáin warns in this volume, most of this number have but a moderate command of the language and their 'ability did not typically express itself in active use of Irish in conversation, but in passive, non-reciprocal activities'.

The British Isles also constitute a mobile population. One in every nine people had moved in the year before the 2001 census in the UK,[13] and the gradual population shift out of the large conurbations towards the suburbs and the countryside continues. Of all the English counties in the 2001 census, those which were growing the most were Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Wiltshire, all with population increases of over 7% since 1991,[14] with Merseyside, Tyne and Wear, Cleveland and the West Midlands all shrinking in population terms over the same period. This mobility has linguistic repercussions (see, for example, Trudgill 1986) and a number of the chapters on varieties of English in this volume point to mobility-induced linguistic changes such as dialect levelling. The book contains chapters on the Englishes of each of the main states and islands/island groupings of the British Isles, as well as one for standard varieties of English, and these contributions highlight ongoing changes, the social embedding of non-standard varieties, and the consequences, for example, of language contact on the grammars and phonologies of our Englishes.

The volume concludes with three chapters on applied sociolinguistic concerns. Given the rapid demographic change that was mentioned earlier, the final section begins with a chapter on language policy and planning, which tracks how policy makers have addressed the language issues that have arisen from large-scale immigration, commitments under Human Rights and other EU legislation and the call for increased educational provision to meet the needs of a diverse and multicultural population. The final two chapters address educational issues – of English speakers who do not speak Standard English as their first variety – a solid majority of the

[12] http://www.nicensus2001.gov.uk/nica/common/home.jsp
[13] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id = 1310
[14] http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid = 10605

Anglophones in the British Isles – and of those residents of these islands whose first language is not English.

Language in the British Isles has evolved rapidly since 1984, and continues to do so, in its diversity, in the number and the backgrounds of its speakers and in the repercussions it has had for political and educational affairs. This volume, I hope, provides a brief glimpse at some of the notable landmarks in this ongoing journey.

Part I

English

1 The history of English

James Milroy

Introduction

Typological change

During the past nine centuries, English has undergone more dramatic changes than any other major European language in the same period. Old English was moderately highly inflected for case, number, gender, tense, mood and other grammatical categories. Present English, however, has a vastly simplified inflectional morphology with total loss of inflections in, for example, adjectives and the definite article, and very considerable inflectional losses in other word classes. There have also been many phonological changes, and the lexicon has been altered from mainly Germanic to a mixed Germanic–Romance type. In syntax, a mixed SVO–SOV word order has become mainly SVO, and there have been great changes in the tense, mood and aspect systems of the verb. These changes, taken together, amount to a typological change from mainly synthetic to mainly analytic, and to considerable modification of the Germanic character of English. As a result, OE (Anglo-Saxon) is not immediately accessible to the modern native reader and can be acquired only through intensive study – as though it were a foreign language.

Origins and geographical spread

English is descended from the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Within this it is assigned to the West Germanic group, and its nearest relative is Frisian (still spoken by a few thousand people on the coasts and islands of northern Germany and the Netherlands), with which OE shared some common developments (for example, raising of Germanic (Gmc) /a/ to /æ/: 'Anglo-Frisian brightening'). It is also closely related to Dutch and Low German, and slightly less closely to High (standard) German.

The beginnings of English as a distinct language are conventionally placed at AD 449, at which date Angles, Saxons and Jutes from the

north-west European continent are reputed to have begun their settlement in Britain. They brought with them a series of related West Germanic dialects, which at this time could hardly have differed significantly from those that remained on the Continent. Thus, this conventional date depends on geography and politics, rather than on internal structural distinctiveness of Anglo-Saxon as a separate language. Those Germanic dialects that were spoken on British soil are retrospectively known as Old English (also as Anglo-Saxon). The first appearance of the name 'English' (*englisc*) for the language is in the late ninth century in King Alfred's writings.

By the seventh century, Anglo-Saxon dialects had been established in the several kingdoms in east and central Britain as far north as Edinburgh, while dialects of Celtic (Cymric) were still in use in the west from Cornwall to Cumbria and Strathclyde. Since then, English has continued to displace the Celtic languages, to the extent that some have disappeared, and there are now probably no monoglot speakers of those that remain.

Chronology

Scholars have traditionally distinguished three periods in the history of English. The OE period lasts from the first Anglo-Saxon settlements in Britain until just after the Norman Conquest, i.e. 1100–1150. The transition from OE to Middle English (ME) appears in the texts to be abrupt, even in the earliest extensive ME text (the final Peterborough continuation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, c.1154), although some areas retained more OE features than others. The break between ME and Modern English (ModE) is less clear. The conventional date for the transition (c.1500) is dictated, not by any substantial shift in linguistic form, but by cultural factors such as the introduction of printing in the late fifteenth century.

There is difficulty in assigning precise dates to specific changes. This is because most changes in spoken language occur first in specific speech communities, and not in the entire 'language' as represented by the written form. They may then diffuse more or less widely and may ultimately become changes in 'English' and recorded in writing. Traditionally, historians of English have tended to assign a late date to any attested change – the date at which it is completed in the whole language or well-defined dialect area. Work in sociolinguistics in recent years (see Milroy 1992) suggests that such a date is often the endpoint of the diffusion of a change that may have been completed considerably earlier in some specific speech community or locality. Therefore, many changes detected in written English at some particular date could well have originated much earlier. We shall bear this difficulty in mind.