1 Setting the scene

> . . . ask yourself whether our language is complete; – whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.
>
> (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967: 18)

Anyone proposing to write a history of the English language in the twentieth century begs a number of questions, which it is necessary to answer at the very outset of what might seem an excessively ambitious project.

Isn't the topic too vast and complex for a single author to tackle? If one bears in mind that in contrast to historians of Old and Middle English, who in general suffer from a poverty of evidence, the historian of recent and contemporary English is deluged with data and, in principle, needs to write separate histories of several richly documented standard and nonstandard varieties, and a history of contact and influence among them, the answer to this question is an obvious "yes." The only justification that the present writer is able to offer for undertaking the project against the odds is that he has narrowed the focus from the very start to one highly codified variety, namely the written standard which – in the twentieth century – was in use throughout the English-speaking world with minor local differences in spelling, lexicon, idiom, and grammar. The spoken usage of educated speakers in formal situations, which can be considered the oral correlate of this written standard, will be considered where relevant. While this restriction is problematical for many reasons, it is justifiable because of the social prominence of the standard in the present, and also because most histories of English covering developments from the late Middle English period onwards have – explicitly or implicitly – been histories of the standard, too.

2 Twentieth-century English

What about the observer's paradox? In a history of contemporary English, this paradox takes two forms. First, it might be impossible for us to identify and document recent and ongoing linguistic changes against the background noise of synchronic regional, social, or stylistic variation that surrounds us and in which these diachronic developments are embedded. Second, assuming that we can identify ongoing language change, we will still have to ask the question whether we can free ourselves from the social prejudices which have normally caused ongoing changes to be viewed negatively – as instances of erroneous or illogical usage or even as signs of decay or degeneration. As for the first manifestation of the paradox (our ability or inability to even perceive ongoing change), there is a long tradition of skepticism – exemplified, for example, in a much-quoted statement in Bloomfield's *Language*.[1] The optimistic tradition, by contrast, is a much younger one, going back to William Labov's 1960s work on extrapolating diachronic trends from synchronic variation, and is still largely confined to sociolinguistic circles. As a descriptive contribution to the history of English from around 1900 to the present, the current study will not be able to settle the dispute between the optimists and the pessimists in a principled way; rather, it has opted for a practical compromise by not concentrating on all aspects of linguistic change to the same degree. Little emphasis will be placed on the often futile search for the first authentic and/or unambiguous recorded instance of an innovation, or on speculations about possible reanalyses, rule reorderings, or other adjustments in speaker competence or the abstract system underlying the recorded data. Rather, the focus will be on the spread of innovations through varieties, textual genres, and styles, or on provable shifts in frequency of use in a defined period. In other words, the present study aims to exploit the full potential of the corpus-linguistic working environment that has become available to the student of English in recent decades – an environment which, in addition to corpora in the narrow sense (that is, machine-readable collections of authentic texts or natural discourse which have been compiled expressly for the use of linguists), now includes important electronic dictionaries such as the continuously updated online version of the *Oxford English dictionary* (OED) and a vast mass of digitized textual material not originally compiled for the purposes of linguistic study.[2]

[1] "The process of linguistic change has never been directly observed; we shall see that such observation, with our present facilities, is inconceivable" (Bloomfield 1933: 347). In Chapter 2 we shall see that Bloomfield's position – categorically negative in this passage – is modified elsewhere in his work and, more importantly, that there has been considerable improvement in "our present facilities."

[2] The corpora consulted for the present study and the methods used for their analysis will be discussed in the appropriate places, with a summary of the relevant information in the Appendix. Readers interested in a more general introduction to the thriving field of English corpus-linguistics are referred to introductory handbooks such as Biber et al. (1998) or Meyer (2002).

As hinted at above, the second manifestation of the observer's paradox in the study of ongoing linguistic change is the possible distorting influence of the prescriptive tradition. This is a serious problem which needs to be acknowledged. Of course, it is unlikely that professional linguists will repeat the often exaggerated and irrational value judgments on linguistic usage propagated by this tradition. The effect the prescriptive tradition exerts on research on current change is more subtle and indirect; it introduces a hidden bias into the study of ongoing change by setting the agenda of topics worth the researcher's attention. In this way, relatively minor points of usage and variation receive an amount of attention completely out of proportion to their actual significance (even if the linguist's intention may merely be to refute prescriptive prejudice), while much more important and comprehensive changes go unnoticed. To give a few examples, the literature on grammatical change in present-day English is rife with comment on the allegedly imminent disappearance of *whom* (a development for which there is very little documentary evidence – see Chapter 4) or the use of *hopefully* as a sentence adverb (which at least is a genuine twentieth-century innovation on the basis of the OED evidence, with a first attestation for the year 1932). This is so because these two points of usage have a high profile as linguistic markers in the community and are much discussed by prescriptivists. Measured against the sum total of ongoing changes in present-day English, however, both are mere trivia. Comprehensive and far-reaching developments, on the other hand, which affect the very grammatical core of Modern English, such as the spread of gerunds into functions previously reserved for infinitives, tend to go unnoticed because these changes proceed below the level of conscious speaker awareness and hence do not arouse prescriptive concerns. Again, the remedy here is the use of corpora. Corpora make it possible to describe the spread of individual innovations against the background of the always far greater and more comprehensive continuity in usage, and corpus-based studies of linguistic change in progress are therefore likely to correct more alarmist perceptions based on the unsystematic collection of examples or impressionistic observation, which are inevitably biased towards the strange, bizarre, and unusual.

Is there sufficient previous work on the recent history of English to write a survey such as the present one?

A mere twenty years ago, the answer to this question would have been in the negative. Throughout the twentieth century there was never a dearth of "state of the language" books aimed at the general educated public. Brander Matthews, the American man of letters, published his *Essays on English* in 1921. J. Hubert Jagger's *English in the future*, which – in contrast to what the title suggests – is mostly about English in the present, appeared in 1940. More recently, two collections of essays on the *State of the language* were edited by Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (Michaels and Ricks 1980, Ricks 1991). Most such works cover ongoing changes (whether perceived or real), but they tend to do so only very superficially. A more reliable source of in-depth

information on current change would thus seem to be the major scholarly histories of the language. However, until recently these tended to peter out at some point around 1800, leaving the history of English in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as largely uncharted territory.[3]

Over the last twenty years, however, the situation has definitely improved. There has been a surge of interest in research on the recent history of English, which has also resulted in several landmark publications offering at least partial surveys. The recent history of English, with a strong (and, in the first two cases, exclusive) emphasis on the nineteenth century, is dealt with in two book-length studies (Bailey 1996, Görlach 1999), and volume IV ("1776–1997") of the *Cambridge history of the English language*. In a broad sense, the present book is a chronological continuation of Bailey's and Görlach's monographs – albeit with slightly different priorities. In comparison to Bailey (1996), it will aim for a fuller coverage of the structural history of the language (particularly the grammar), whereas in comparison to Görlach the two major differences are that the treatment is not restricted to England exclusively and that, in compensation for the widening of the geographical scope, less emphasis will be placed on the didactic presentation and annotation of source texts. The most important point of reference for most chapters, though, will be volume IV ("1776–1997") of the *Cambridge history*. As will become clear, this work's treatment of nineteenth-century developments is admirable and provides a good foundation for the present study. Its coverage of the twentieth century, on the other hand, is less complete and will be expanded here.

More problematical sources than these scholarly linguistic works are the many popular works on the recent history of English and the state of the language. For one thing, the number of such publications is vast – from books written by non-linguists for lay audiences (e.g., Michaels and Ricks 1980, Ricks 1991, or Howard 1984) to works such as Barber (1964) or Potter (1969 [1975]), which are valuable as provisional surveys of the field by experts. Many of these "state of the language" books are informed by a spirit of traditional prescriptivism and/or cultural pessimism or more concerned with the ideological and political aspects of language standardization than the linguistic facts themselves. But even a work such as Barber's (1964) excellent survey of "linguistic change in present-day English" needs to be treated with some caution. The insights and claims it contains are generally based on the author's anecdotal observations and unsystematic collection of examples, which – as will be shown in Chapter 2 – is a notoriously unreliable methodology in the documentation of ongoing changes.

[3] This is partly a matter of author interest, which gave priority to earlier developments, and partly a result of publication date, as classic works such as Jespersen (1909–1949) have not really been challenged or even equaled in comprehensiveness of coverage and authoritativeness until recently.

Among all the relevant publications, the one closest in spirit to the present book probably is Bauer (1994), as this work emphasizes the use of corpora and empirical documentation in the study of ongoing change. It is not to deny the merit of Bauer's pioneering effort to point out that it is comprehensive neither in its coverage of the phenomena nor in its use of the available corpora and textual resources, thus leaving many important topics for the present study and others to explore.

Methodologically sound work on individual instances of change in progress is, of course, abundant in the sociolinguistic literature. Again, however, the overlap with the present study is minimal, as it will focus on the one variety of English which has been largely neglected in sociolinguistics, namely standard English, in its spoken and written forms. Furthermore, the study of phonetic change, which is usually the most prominent topic in sociolinguistic analyses of change in progress, is not the priority in the present book, whereas lexical and grammatical change, which are studied in detail here, play a lesser role in the sociolinguistic literature.

In sum, there is, thus, clearly room for a project such as the present one: a concise and comprehensive history of standard English in the twentieth century, written by one author in a single volume.

As we shall see, standard varieties of languages differ from others in that they combine spontaneous historical evolution with elements of conscious planning. As Milroy and Milroy (1991) have shown, standardization, the suppression of optional variability in language, is as much of an ideological as a linguistic phenomenon. This means that a history of standard English is, ultimately, part of the cultural and intellectual history of the English-speaking peoples. It is, of course, extremely risky to make generalizations about cultural and social developments over a whole century and a huge community of speakers, but there are some trends which are immediately relevant to the history of standard English. For the post-World War II United States, Baron has identified the following trends:

- reduced emphasis on social stratification and on overt attention to upward mobility
- notable disconnects between educational accomplishment and financial success
- strong emphasis on youth culture (Baron 2003: 90).

Similar trends have been in operation in most English-speaking societies in the industrialized world, and it is easy to see how all of them have worked against narrow and elitist definitions of the standard. Some of the ways in which these trends have affected the shape of standard English today will be studied in greater depth in Chapter 6.

In the introduction, it will be sufficient to sketch briefly the social and cultural context of standard English in 1900 (the point at which the present history opens) and compare it to the situation in 2000.

In many fundamental regards, there was no change at all. Standard English, in 1900 as well as in 2000, was a fully mature written standard, displaying all the pertinent metalinguistic infrastructure of dictionaries, usage books, grammars, and other linguistic reference materials. Pedagogical materials were available for those wishing to learn English as a foreign language at both points in time, and 1900 as well as 2000 saw a flourishing tradition of social commentary and debate on linguistic issues. It is, indeed, even surprising to see that – with the exception of language regulation in the spirit of "political correctness," of which there was very little in 1900 – even many of the topics and issues have remained the same. The use of *ain't* or double negatives was proscribed in formal writing and educated speech then as now; the word *booze* was a mildly offensive slang term hovering on the edge of respectability in 1900 and in 2000; and then as now the educated guardians of the language tended to argue about where to put the stress in polysyllabic words of Latin and French origin such as *controversy* or *comparable*.

There is continuity also in the geography of English. The hold of English on West Africa and the Asian subcontinent may have been more tenuous, restricted to small elites, in 1900 than it is now, despite the fact that these territories were under direct British rule in the days of the Empire. Purely in terms of geographical spread, however, English was a global language in 1900 as much as in 2000, with the language being the dominant one in the British Isles, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, and having established itself firmly in smaller communities throughout the rest of the globe.

However, important changes loom beneath this veneer of stability. The technologization of the spoken word was still in its beginnings in the nineteenth century. Radio, talking pictures, and television all profoundly changed the everyday life of the ordinary citizen in the twentieth century and had a profound impact on the norms of spoken usage. Sometimes, technology serves to support pre-existing trends towards an establishment and spread of a spoken standard – as was the case with the BBC championing "Received Pronunciation" in Britain and internationally in the 1920s and 1930s. More informal but no less successful standardization efforts were made by the national broadcasting networks in the United States (Bonfiglio 2002). At other times, technology subverted the authority of such standard norms by ensuring worldwide exposure to nonstandard speech – from the Beatles-inspired boom of northern English working-class accents in the 1960s to the global spread of stylized African-American vernacular English through rap and hip-hop music. The most recent technology-driven transformation of English has, of course, taken place in the course of the digital revolution and the rise of computer-mediated communication, which has infused into written English some of the spontaneity, informality, and immediacy of speech (Crystal 2001).

Progress was made in the course of the twentieth century also in the recognition of the pluricentricity of English. In 1900, London, or the English upper and upper middle classes, had already ceased to be the exclusive source

of linguistic prestige in the English-speaking world, even though this fact tended to be acknowledged in the United States rather than Britain at the time. By the end of World War I, there was widespread consensus that standard English came in two distinct but equal varieties – British (or English) and North American. Decolonisation started slowly with the establishment of internal self-government in the European-dominated "settler" colonies at various points of time in the early twentieth century and speeded up dramatically after World War II. In 1910, the British Empire was at the peak of its power, with direct control over a quarter of the earth's land surface and more than a quarter of its population. In 2000, three years after the return of Hong Kong, the last economically and demographically significant colony, to China, what was left of the Empire comprised around twenty minute and often isolated territories mostly in the Caribbean and the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, namely – in alphabetical order – Anguilla, Ascension Island, Bermuda, the British Antarctic Territory, the British Indian Ocean Territory, the British Virgin Islands, the Caymans, the Falklands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn (with Ducie, Henderson and Oeno), South Georgia and the South Solomon Islands, the Turks and Caicos, Tristan da Cunha, and St. Helena.

Not surprisingly, such far-reaching political developments were bound to have linguistic consequences. With a time-lag of about a century after political self-government, a degree of autonomy similar to that accorded to American and British English has now been attained by the Southern Hemisphere settler Englishes which have developed in Australia, New Zealand, and among the English-speaking community in South Africa. Australian English has even become an internationally relevant norm in language teaching especially in the South Pacific. This path of development from colonial dependence to growing autonomy is likely to be followed eventually by the Creole-influenced Englishes of the Caribbean, a region where norms of educated usage are now emerging in a three-way competition among a still powerful traditional British model, the currently dominant American norm, and local usage.

In principle, there is no reason why official or second-language varieties with a long history of institutionalization such as those found in West Africa or India should not be placed alongside these natively spoken varieties as legitimate new standards of English. In practice, the full recognition of these varieties is hindered by a feeling of linguistic insecurity among their own speakers and negative attitudes held by native-speaking outsiders. Speakers of these post-colonial non-native Englishes are often caught in a double bind. A too-perfect approximation to the former colonial norm is socially undesirable, especially in pronunciation, but many of the stable phonetic and grammatical features that have emerged still tend to be seen as interference-caused errors rather than potential harbingers of a new and legitimate local norm of English usage. In such a situation, rather than try and determine how many standard varieties of English there are – a pointless exercise unless one is willing to take on the Herculean task of investigating speakers' evaluation of their own

Table 1.1. *Population of major urban centers in the English-using world*

City	Population 1900 (in millions)	Population 2000 (in millions)
London	4.5	7.1
New York	3.4	8.0
Chicago	1.7	2.9
Los Angeles	0.1	3.7
Dublin	0.3	1.0
Sydney [metropolitan area]	0.5	3.9
Toronto [metropolitan area]	0.2	4.9
Kingston, Jamaica [metropolitan area]	0.1	0.7
Johannesburg [metropolitan area]	0.1	5.5
Singapore [state]	0.2	3.5
Bombay	0.9	12.5

practice and untangling the web of mixed loyalties to old metropolitan and new local norms in each community – it is instructive to trace shifts in the linguistic centers of gravity of the English-speaking world, such as are reflected, for example, in the population statistics in Table 1.1.[4]

Obviously, these figures are mere approximations, often hiding administrative boundary changes or, a typical phenomenon of twentieth-century US life, the flight to the suburbs. Thus, the population of the New York–New Jersey–Long Island CMSA ("census metropolitan statistical area") is considerably greater than the "mere" 8 million given in the table, namely 21.2 million. An even more drastic example is provided by Los Angeles, where the population for the LA–Riverside–Orange County CMSA is 16.4 million. Another thing worth remembering is that modern megacities are among the most multilingual communities in the world today, and that the figures for, say, New York or Los Angeles include large numbers of bilinguals or even people incapable of speaking English fluently.[5]

However, such possible distortions notwithstanding, the general trend is clear: London, New York City, and Chicago maintained their dominant roles throughout the period under review here, whereas the figures for Sydney, Toronto, and Los Angeles show formerly marginal regions developing into

[4] The figures in this table have been compiled from various sources, in particular the US Census website (http://www.census.gov), the Demographia database (http://www.demographia.com), the *Encyclopedia britannica*, and the *Cambridge international encyclopedia*.

[5] For New York, the 2000 Census gives a figure of 405,522 school-aged (5–17) children who spoke Spanish at home, which is almost 30 percent of the total school-age population in the city. In fact, at 52 percent, the monolingual-English school-age population is just barely more than half of the total.

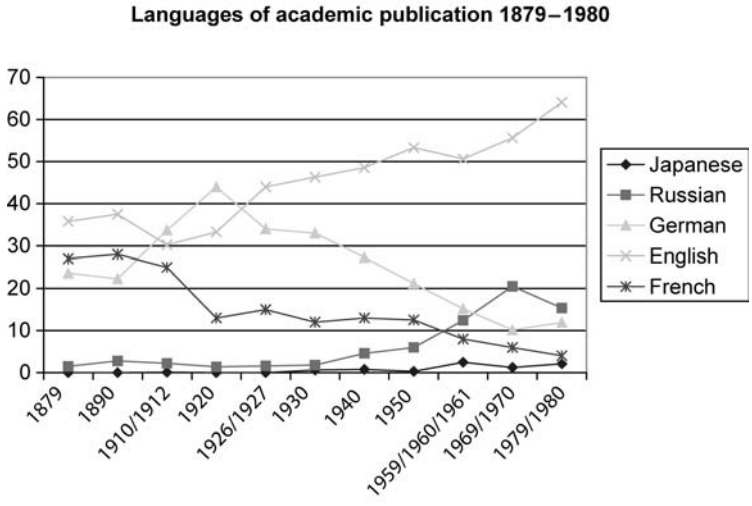

Figure 1.1 Languages of publication in five natural sciences (1879–1980) (Tsunoda 1983)

new demographic centers, both within their countries and regions (Australia, Canada, the western United States) and internationally. The figures for Kingston, Johannesburg, Singapore, and Bombay – all English-using, while definitely not monolingual English-speaking – would probably have been more difficult to predict by merely extrapolating 1900 trends, as would have been the fact that Creolized English emanating from Jamaica now has a speaker base in the Caribbean diaspora in Canada, Great Britain, and the US and, through reggae music and its derivatives, has become a formative influence on the language of global youth culture. What these figures also show is that English in 2000 is less "European" or "Eurocentric" and less "white" than it was in 1900.

A final noteworthy difference between the status of English in 1900 and 2000 is that, while English definitely was among the world's major languages in 1900, it was not the unrivaled world language that it is today. In international diplomacy it was second to French, and did not gain the lead until after World War I and the Treaty of Versailles, which was drafted in English and translated into French. As a language of publication in the natural sciences, it shared a prominent role with French and German in 1900, as is shown in Figure 1.1, whose figures were obtained from a representative sample of publications in five disciplines: biology, chemistry, physics, medicine, mathematics. It is interesting to note that English asserted its overwhelming role only in the third quarter of the century, at a time when – ironically – the political might of the British Empire was crumbling away and American power was at a temporary low ebb during the Cold War.

Table 1.2. *Percentage of languages in natural science publications, 1980 to 1996*

	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996
English	74.6	77.1	80.5	87.2	90.7
Russian	10.8	9.2	6.9	3.9	2.1
Japanese	2.3	2.5	2.1	2.3	1.7
French	3.1	2.4	2.4	1.6	1.3
German	3.5	3.3	2.9	1.6	1.2

Table 1.3. *Percentage of languages used in publications in the humanities, 1974 to 1995 (adapted from a graph in Ammon 1998a: 167)*

	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1995
English	66.6	69.1	69.9	70.6	71.7	82.5
French	6.8	6.6	5.9	5.9	5.9	5.9
German	8.0	5.2	6.0	5.4	5.7	4.1
Spanish	3.8	3.6	3.6	4.0	3.8	2.2

Building on Tsunoda's work, Ulrich Ammon (1998a: 152, 167) has followed developments to almost the end of the century (the year 1996, to be precise), when the proportion of English-language publications reached 90.7 percent and the four remaining languages were represented at levels between 2.1 percent (Russian) and 1.2 percent (German) – proportions which make a visual representation of the kind adopted in Figure 1.1 pointless. The figures for the sciences and humanities are given in Tables 1.2 and 1.3 respectively (compiled from a graph in Ammon [1998a: 152] by Mühleisen [2003: 113]).

At present, the position of English as the globally dominant language seems entrenched very firmly. It has a numerically strong and regionally diverse native-speaker base. It is an important second language in many former British colonies and American dependencies, and as an international lingua franca it is indispensable in prestigious domains such as business, trade, and technology, but in addition has a strong informal base in the global entertainment market and is associated with many civic and lifestyle issues – from "gender mainstreaming," the "sexual revolution," "gay rights," and "political correctness," all the way to "jogging," "[Nordic] walking," "all-inclusive package tours," and "wellness resorts" (these words being used as borrowings from English in many languages[6]).

[6] Compare, for example, the comparative documentation of English lexical influence in sixteen European languages provided in Görlach (2001).