

# 1 Introduction

---

DANIEL SCHREIER, PETER TRUDGILL,  
EDGAR W. SCHNEIDER, AND  
JEFFREY P. WILLIAMS

The structure and use of the English language has been studied, from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives, since the sixteenth century. The result is that, today, English is probably the best researched language in the world.

(Kytö, Rydén and Smitterberg 2006: 1)

Would anybody dare deny that English has been studied extremely thoroughly? Given the fact that hundreds if not thousands of languages around the world are barely documented or simply not researched at all, the massive body of research on English seems truly without parallel, so this is strong support for Kytö, Rydén and Smitterberg's (2006) claim. Indeed, so many studies have been carried out to enhance our knowledge of all aspects of the English language that it is impossible to attempt even a short summary here: the body of research that has been assembled over the last four centuries is substantial and constantly growing, from the treatises of orthoepists and grammarians produced throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, via English phoneticians (such as Henry Sweet) in the late nineteenth century and dialect geography in the early twentieth century, to variationist sociolinguists in the 1970s and computational linguists in the 1980s and 1990s, at research centres and university institutions throughout the world, on all levels of structure and usage, phonology, syntax, lexicon and discourse, in domains as distinct as syntactic theory, psycholinguistics, language variation and change, historical pragmatics, etc., a list that could be continued at leisure. One should add to this the massive work on the history and development of the English language itself (Jordan 1934; Bähr 1975; Mitchell and Robinson 1992; Barber 1994; Romaine 1998) from its origins in the fifth century to the present day, on the extensive contact history that has shaped its evolution, and on the patterns of diffusion, out of England into Wales, Ireland and Scotland and into the 'New' World, the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Australasia (Trudgill and Hannah 1982; Wells 1982; Cheshire 1991; Graddol, Leith and Swann 1996; Crystal 1997; Aceto and Williams 2003; Jenkins 2003; Hickey 2004; Schneider 2007). Taking all this into account, it is perhaps even an understatement to say that 'English is probably the best researched language

## 2 Schreier, Trudgill, Schneider, and Williams

in the world'; one should add that it is almost certainly also one of the best-known languages (and there is every reason to assume that this in itself is a consequence of the fact that it is the most widely *used* language in the world). How could it be any different, and why would it matter here?

From a bird's-eye perspective, it is unusual that one language should have been brought to so many locations outside its 'heartland', the British Isles, and that transplantation should have given rise to extreme diversification and the birth of countless 'new' varieties: *pidgins* and *creoles*, offspring varieties of language contact scenarios; *koinés*, varieties developing mainly through contact between mutually intelligible and structurally similar forms of one and the same language (dialects or sociolects); and more recently, varieties of English as a *Second Language* (ESL) and *Foreign Language* (EFL), which have gained in total number of speakers dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century, now representing the majority of English speakers around the world (and estimated at more than one billion; Crystal 2008). As Thomason and Kaufman (1988) point out, the 'export' of English is of great value for linguistic research, since the embedding of English into a multitude of contact settings (with countless co-existing language systems) entailed an unprecedented amount of contact-induced language change. As a consequence, the spread of English around the world went hand in hand with the development of countless offspring varieties.

Amassing knowledge is often a selective rather than a representative process, specific rather than global, and it is perhaps inevitable that some areas receive most of the attention whereas others are neglected or even ignored. This is explicitly recognized by Kytö, Rydén and Smitherberg (2006: 1) themselves, since the above quote is followed by the important qualification that 'the field [of English linguistics] is as unlimited as language itself, and therefore there will always be gaps in our knowledge of the historical development of English as well as of its time-bound, or synchronic, uses'. With regard to the study of languages (not only English, but also other world languages such as French, German, Russian, Hindi or Spanish), this means that we know a lot about some varieties but virtually nothing about others. This is stating the obvious and does not come as a surprise, given that the heterogeneity of English around the world is immense. In analogy to Orwell's well-known dictum: all languages (and language varieties) are equal, but some are more equal than others.

Our main motivation for editing a volume on lesser-known varieties of English was the following: we may know a lot about English as a world language, but just as there is a discrepancy in how much we know about English vis-à-vis other languages, there is a discrepancy in how much we know about certain varieties of English (regional or social) vis-à-vis others. Some have been documented fairly extensively (e.g. African American English or New Zealand English), whereas others are barely mentioned in the literature, let alone studied (e.g. the varieties that developed among British expatriates in

## Introduction 3

Argentina or in the whaling community on the Japanese Bonin/Ogasawara Islands). We are of course not the first to note this. The discrepancy was pointed out by Trudgill (2002: 29), who was probably the first to use the term ‘lesser-known varieties of English’ (henceforth LKVEs), which he used with reference to a fairly heterogeneous set of ignored varieties of English throughout the anglophone world. A volume co-edited by Richard J. Watts and Peter Trudgill, aptly titled *Alternative Histories of English*, introduced, among others, the history of some selected LKVEs in an attempt to respond to the fact that the history of English is traditionally focused on the standard variety/varieties (i.e. British and American English). Watts and Trudgill (2002: 27) claimed that

Non-standard dialects have histories too, and these histories are sometimes especially helpful because, as a result of the absence of standardisation, many of the forces of linguistic change are played out in these varieties in a much more unfettered and revealing way than in the standard dialect . . . the disregarding of varieties of English simply because the people who speak them are not White Englishmen who have for centuries been established in the southeast of England is also not only totally ethnocentric, anglocentric . . . and unjustifiable, but is also short-sighted in that it disregards an enormous mass of historical data from some of the most interesting and diachronically revealing varieties of the language in existence.

In the same volume, Mesthrie (2002) pointed out that English has always co-existed with other languages, so that non-native speakers played a more important role in the spread of English as a global language than is commonly recognized.

Our book is therefore an effort to somewhat redress the existing imbalance. We exclusively focus on varieties that have received less or no interest in the canon of English as a world language and give a long-overdue platform to those who have never made it centre stage. By doing so, we hope to demonstrate that ‘lesser-known’ does not equal ‘of lesser interest’ and that studying LKVEs can help us address some truly important issues in (socio)linguistic theory; to name but some: dialect obsolescence and death, language birth, dialect typology and genetic classification, patterns of diffusion and transplantation, contact-induced language change, conservatism vs. dynamic innovation, even the life-cycles and evolutionary paths of new varieties. Our viewpoint is that studying lesser-known varieties (of English for the present purpose, but of other languages also) is essential for gaining a more concise understanding of the mechanisms that underlie sociolinguistic diversification as well as principles of language birth and death, i.e. questions that loom large in the existing research body on English as a world language. LKVEs are as much part of the big picture as major (or standard) varieties are, and their study contributes considerably to language diffusion and spread.

#### 4 Schreier, Trudgill, Schneider, and Williams

A crucial point is of course how one is to assess and define the status of ‘lesser-known’. Apart from the obvious criterion (simply a variety that is lesser known, at least to the outside world, and that has not received much attention in the literature), a common denominator has guided us in our selection, if only tacitly. Most LKVEs presented here share the following set of characteristics (though in varying proportions and to different extents):

1. They are spoken as first languages and not as ESL or EFL varieties, often in environments where bi- or multilingualism is restricted;
2. They are identified as distinct varieties by their respective speech communities and other groups in their social environment;
3. They are associated with stable communities or regions;
4. They are typically spoken by minorities; they are usually delimited (not necessarily ‘isolated’ but socially or regionally distinct) to small communities which are embedded into a larger (regional) population ecology;
5. Many of them were originally transmitted by settler communities or adopted by newly-formed social communities that emerged early in the colonial era, so that they substantially derive from British inputs;
6. They were formed by processes of dialect and/or language contact (which makes it impossible to ascribe them genetic status, e.g. creoles or koinés, see below);
7. They frequently function as identity carriers for their respective communities;
8. They are very often endangered.

As minority varieties deeply rooted in their respective settings, the LKVEs provide model cases of natural language evolution and change ‘on the ground’, as it were, in the sense of the framework adopted in the *Alternative Histories of English* (Watts and Trudgill 2002), since they are for the most part fairly distant from ideologically overarching standard varieties yet often in competition with them.

What does all this mean for the status of an LKVE and for selection and possible inclusion in this volume? The most important consequence was that we placed emphasis on direct transmission by settler communities, since this meant that we had to exclude ESL and EFL varieties (though it does not of course mean that these are better known), i.e. varieties of English in multilingual contexts where English has no (or a restricted) historical role (Denmark, Japan, Israel, etc.). Second, we focused on varieties that have a time depth of several generations, i.e. that were founded or established in or before the nineteenth century. New-dialect formation is a lengthy process and the emergence and stabilization of new norms take time, so the LKVEs had to have at least some historical continuity. All in all, a total of sixteen varieties met these criteria (though to different extents)

## Introduction 5

and are introduced here; these come from different parts of the English-speaking world and are spoken in the *British Isles* (Shetland and Orkney, the Channel Islands), the *Americas and the Caribbean* (the Canadian Maritimes, Newfoundland and Labrador, Honduras/Bay Islands, White Caribbean, Bahamas, Dominica and Argentina), in the *South Atlantic Ocean* (the Falkland Islands, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha), *Africa* (L1 Rhodesian English and White Kenyan English), in *Australasia and the Pacific* (Eurasian English in Singapore, Peranakan English in Malaysia and Singapore, and Norfolk Island and Pitcairn varieties).

This list is by no means meant to be exclusive and it is our hope that it both triggers an interest in these varieties and encourages work on other LKVEs that might have been included as well (and that we were not aware of). In fact, we are already envisaging a second volume in which we will build on and expand the LKVEs presented here. With this in mind, we are aware of the (somewhat ironic) fact that some of these varieties are better documented and perhaps also slightly better known than others. Whereas research has been conducted on the Channel Islands (Ramisch 1989) or Newfoundland (Clarke 1997, 2004), varieties such as Dominican Kokoy or White Zimbabwean English are documented here for the very first time. LKVEs thus do not form a homogeneous entity amongst themselves (to draw on Orwell again: all LKVEs are lesser-known, but some LKVEs are less 'lesser-known' than others), and this has consequences for selection and description, a point of criticism we have to accept and live with.

It is equally important to determine how the LKVEs should be described and summarized and how they should be grouped and presented. The contributors, all experts of the variety (indeed, in most cases the only expert), were given a template with points to bear in mind so as to ensure a coherent presentation and to facilitate comparison and analysis to the benefit of our readership. They were asked to define and contextualize the variety (by place typically), by stating why it has status as an LKVE, to detail the sociohistorical origins of the variety (inputs, etc.) and to provide sociodemographic information as well (estimated speaker numbers, status of speakers and typical settings of the variety, esp. (if applicable) in comparison with other languages or varieties spoken at that location, i.e. in multilingual countries, diglossic settings, etc.). They were also asked to describe the features of the variety as accurately as possible: *phonetics/phonology* (using the standard lexical sets and terminology as developed by Wells 1982) as well as phonotactic, prosodic and other features of pronunciation, relating the features traceable to specific input varieties, if relevant; *morphology* and *syntax* (noun plural formation and other noun forms, pronouns, verb forms (principal parts, endings), adjective comparison, adverb formation; negation, interrogatives, expressions of tense, aspect and modality, verb complementation and clause patterns, etc.); and to provide some information on the *lexicon*, if at all possible. As a conclusion, contributors were asked to assess the future of the variety as an LKVE (its

**6 Schreier, Trudgill, Schneider, and Williams**

vitality, stability, etc.) as well as to discuss some additional points relevant to the variety (patterns of variation, for instance). We felt that this would provide a coherent guideline and a yardstick against which the varieties, as different as they are, can be compared for subsequent research. By and large, contributors adhered to the template fairly well, though they emphasized different aspects at their own discretion, partly due to availability of data or their previous research interests (some had carried out research on phonology only, since differences in this area are more salient and diagnostic than in the domain of morphosyntax). By the same token, lexical information was not always available and remains sketchy (for instance, the chapters on Tristan da Cunha and Pitcairn/Norfolk Island provide such information, many others do not).

Finally, as far as grouping and classification is concerned, the fact that the LKVEs display considerable heterogeneity in their social and contact histories made it difficult (in fact, nearly impossible) to assign them to separate categories on typological grounds. Some of the varieties were formed mostly via dialect contact (e.g. Falkland Islands English) whereas others underwent large-scale language contact (Pitcairn). The social integration and embedding (or lack of it) into a larger section of the speech community was not a practical criterion either. Some LKVEs were spoken by expatriate communities in post-colonial settings or elsewhere (White Kenyan or Anglo-Argentine English), in sharp contrast to others that developed on islands, far away from other communities or speaker groups. Consequently, the most reasonable option was to classify the LKVEs geographically, i.e. concentrating on where they evolved and on the place where they are now spoken. This may obscure some structural similarities (e.g. due to founder-effects or direct transmission) but turned out to be a more reliable criterion than contact history or social embedding/degree of isolation. Consequently, we classified the LKVEs into five geographic areas: the British Isles, the Americas and the Caribbean, the South Atlantic Ocean, Africa, as well as Asia and the Pacific. These are now briefly introduced and discussed.

**1 The British Isles**

For the first thousand years of its history, English was spoken only on the island of Britain, whence it started spreading to other parts of the world only about 400 years ago, so it is perhaps hardly surprising that British varieties of English are generally rather well known and therefore do not figure prominently in this volume. It must be emphasized that during those first thousand years, large areas of Britain were not English-speaking at all: it is only during the last four centuries that English has spread into Wales, northern and western Scotland, Cornwall in the far southwest of England, and off-shore islands such as the Isle of Man. It is therefore also hardly surprising that the two lesser-known varieties of English that we do treat

## Introduction 7

here are from off-shore islands that were not originally anglophone, and which have come into existence relatively recently as a result of language shift.

The northern isles, Orkney and Shetland, became politically attached to Scotland only in the fifteenth century, and as **Gunnel Melchers** and **Peter Sundkvist** explain, they had at that time been Scandinavian-speaking for many centuries as a result of Viking settlement. The rich interplay which then took place between Scots, English and Norn, as the Scandinavian variety was known, eventually leading to language shift and the ultimate language death of Norn, was a linguistically fascinating process which has given rise to a modern sociolinguistic situation, and to modern varieties of English – if indeed we agree that they are all of them English – with very characteristic phonologies, grammars and lexicons.

The English of the Channel Islands is even more recent. The original language of the inhabitants, which still survives in some areas, was a variety of Norman French. For the linguist, the linguistic and sociolinguistic developments which have led to the growth of the current varieties, as described by **Mari C. Jones**, represent an intriguing language-contact and dialect-contact puzzle involving Norman patois, Standard French, Standard English, and regional dialects from various parts of England.

## 2 The Americas and the Caribbean

The English of Canada is in our estimation one of the better-known varieties of the language. This applies, however, only to those relatively undifferentiated varieties which are spoken in the enormous land-mass of the country which stretches from the western borders of Quebec to the Pacific Ocean. The varieties spoken to the east of francophone Quebec have been much less studied, in spite of their considerable diversity and interest. A considerable amount of work has been carried out on the English of Newfoundland, notably by **Sandra Clarke**, who here, however, also includes a pioneering description of the origins and nature of the English of mainland Labrador. The linguistic history of this area includes the development of English varieties out of contact between the indigenous Inuit and Algonquian (Montagnais-Naskapi) inhabitants, and Europeans not only from England but also from other areas speaking lesser-known varieties of English as featured in this book, including the Orkneys and the Channel Islands. Also very clearly lesser-known are the varieties of English spoken in the Maritime provinces of Canada: New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia. **Michael Kieft** and **Elizabeth Kay-Raining Bird** here detail the amount of variation there is to be found across these provinces by concentrating their focus on three linguistically very different areas of Nova Scotia.



## 8 Schreier, Trudgill, Schneider, and Williams

Turning our attention to the southern part of the American continent, we of course come to the areas where varieties of English are not only lesser-known but where English is also very much of a minority and indeed endangered language, since it is embedded in an overwhelmingly Spanish and Portuguese linguistic environment. By the early years of the twentieth century, there was an established community of around 30,000 anglophones in Argentina, centring on Buenos Aires, with a variety of English of their own. **Julian Jefferies** describes a community whose language is now very much under threat, and whose variety is also very little known.

The English language was transported to the West Indies with the first permanent English settlements that were established in St Kitts and Barbados in the early part of the seventeenth century. This makes the West Indian varieties of English some of the oldest in the history of the expansion of English from the island of Britain. Shaped by the sociolinguistic forces of dialect and language contact over the centuries, we find founder varieties of English which still survive in the isolated, enclave communities of Euro-Caribbeans as well as transplanted varieties whose origins are linked to emancipation. In the case of Kokoy, it was emancipated Afro-Caribbeans who carried the variety, while for Bay Islands English, it was primarily Euro-Caymanians who brought their variety of English to the Bay Islands.

English in the Caribbean, by most linguists' standards, cannot be considered lesser-known. However, that estimation is based on a monolithic view of the well-known creolized varieties of the region, such as Jamaican and Guyanese. In spite of the fact that the documentation and analysis of creolized languages of the Caribbean has dominated the literature on Caribbean linguistics, there are many undocumented and underdescribed varieties, some of which are highlighted in this volume.

The subject of **Michael Aceto's** contribution is Kokoy, a restructured variety of English on the island of Dominica. Based on fieldwork in Wesley and Marigot, Aceto provides the first documentation of this variety. Kokoy was brought to Dominica from Antigua and Montserrat following emancipation in the English-speaking possessions, making it the oldest anglophone variety on a historically francophone island.

Although the Bahamas are one of the better-known varieties of the larger circum-Caribbean region, **Jeffrey Reaser's** contribution on the English varieties of the Bahamas fills further gaps in our knowledge of this complex sociolinguistic subregion. The Bahamas are far from sociolinguistically monolithic as Reaser demonstrates through his documentation of regional, ethnic and class-based linguistic variation throughout the archipelago.

As the smallest of the eighteen departments of the Spanish-speaking country of Honduras, the Bay Islands English-speaking heritage dates to the nineteenth century, as do many of the other LKVEs represented in this volume. For the Bay Islands, it was the event of emancipation that brought English varieties spoken by settlers and freed slaves. In his chapter



## Introduction 9

**Ross Graham** details the English varieties spoken by both European- and African-descended Bay Islanders.

The widely scattered descendants of the early anglophone founders are the subject of **Jeffrey P. Williams'** chapter on Euro-Caribbean English varieties. These varieties of English are the oldest in the Caribbean region, dating back to the middle of the seventeenth century, and they preserve a number of archaic features not found in any other varieties in the region.

### 3 The South Atlantic Ocean

The South Atlantic Ocean hosts three varieties, all of which meet the criteria to be classified as LKVEs: Falkland Islands English (FIE), St Helenian English (StHE) and Tristan da Cunha English (TdCE). The three varieties are strikingly different, both on sociolinguistic and historical criteria. First of all, they differ in *time depth*: StHE is in fact the oldest variety of Southern Hemisphere English (SHemE), as St Helena was established in 1658 by the East India Company and has had a continuous native-speaker population since 1672; it predates the major varieties of SHemE by more than a century. By contrast, FIE is one of the youngest nativized varieties of post-colonial English, since it formed around the mid-nineteenth century only, so it is about the same 'age' as New Zealand English. TdCE was established just a generation or two earlier than FIE, i.e. from the 1820s onwards.

Second, each of the three varieties formed in its separate and distinctive contact setting. FIE arguably comes as close as possible to a scenario of 'pure' dialect contact as we can possibly get, with input from two major population groups from the English Southwest and northern England; StHE evolved in a population ecology characterized by considerable language contact, since slaves were imported from various locations (the (Portuguese-speaking) Cabo Verde Islands, western and southern Africa, western India and the Maldives and most of all from Madagascar). TdCE, finally, had input from (New England) American English and early South African English, as well as from distinct varieties of British English (London, Hull, Devon; the founder of the colony was from the Scottish Lowlands); a number of ESL speakers were present as well (with Dutch, Danish and Italian as first languages). In addition, perhaps the most influential settler group arrived from St Helena in 1827, which entailed that the two varieties share a number of characteristics due to direct transmission from StHE to TdCE.

In their article on FIE, **David Britain** and **Andrea Sudbury** outline the history of the colony from the early 1840s to the present day. They describe a variety that has not been studied at all until Sudbury's pioneering (2000) study, which looked into contact mechanisms and processes of new-dialect formation such as levelling, regularization and reallocation that operated when FIE formed. They detail the social history of the community from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day and describe how the Falklands

## 10 Schreier, Trudgill, Schneider, and Williams

war (1982) changed life on the island. They describe the phonetics and phonology of FIE and assess how it fits into the overall patterning of SHemE, yet find that its morphosyntax is not particularly distinct from other varieties.

**Daniel Schreier** contributes to the other two varieties of South Atlantic English and reports on findings of fieldwork on the islands of Tristan da Cunha (1999) and St Helena (2003). Both were under-researched until very recently, Zettersten (1968) being the only study of TdCE before Schreier (2002, 2003) and StHE being barely documented (the exception being two overviews on phonology and morphosyntax by Sheila Wilson and Rajend Mesthrie, included in the *Handbook of Varieties of English* edited by Kortmann et al. 2004). With a mere 280 speakers, TdCE is one of the smallest native-speaker varieties sociodemographically. St Helena has a total population of approximately 4,000, though there has been considerable emigration since full UK citizenship was returned to all Overseas Territories in 1999. Both varieties have extensive contact histories, and these both link them and set them apart. The women who cross-migrated in the mid-1820s certainly affected the development of TdCE and the two articles show that a number of features make an appearance in both varieties, an attestation to the historical links between them. St Helena shares a number of features (copula absence, zero pluralization, TMA markers) with restructured varieties elsewhere (e.g. English-derived creoles in the Caribbean), which raises important issues for independent innovation in language change (Schreier 2008). Both contributions emphasize the importance of sociolinguistic and sociodemographic factors that trigger contact-induced language change and feature selection.

## 4 Africa

Africa has received some attention in the study of World Englishes, and so most varieties spoken on the continent are decidedly not ‘lesser-known’. The most familiar one of these is White South African English, spoken in various sociolects by descendants of settlers from Britain. Many others are second languages or increasingly moving from second to first-language status: Indian South African English has essentially completed the language-shift process; Black South African English and Cape Flats English in South Africa as well as the varieties widespread in West Africa (Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana) and East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda) have not. None of these varieties satisfies our criteria for inclusion in this volume, and most of them (except for Uganda) have been described fairly thoroughly anyway. In southern Africa, e.g. in Zambia, not much (though some) descriptive work has been carried out, but the L2 English spoken there fails to meet the criterion of direct transmission. In Namibia, for example, now strongly influenced by South Africa, English has gained a special status only recently, German having been more influential historically (it is estimated that some 50,000 native speakers of German still live in former German Southwest Africa,