

Lexical-Semantic Aspects of Dialects of American-English

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Abstract. *The article analyzes the lexical-semantic features of the dialects of American English by thorough study of widespread variations of English language. Despite the fact that many scholars have carried out research on American English, the determination of the linguistic evaluation criteria of the dialects of American English, the fact that their lexical-semantic system is not sufficiently studied, which determines the necessity of this research. The results obtained can serve as a reliable basis for future researches in this field.*

Keywords: *dialect, standard English, variety, dialect continuum, homogeneity, non-literary speech, social-situational norm, neologisms, borrowings, linguistic atlas, migration process.*

Introduction

Nowadays, the issue of language research in different aspects becomes a central object for scientific discussions. Development and expansion of interregional and international contacts, intensive migration, modern integration processes - these and other factors determine the growth of interaction and mutual influence of languages. Caused by global processes the unprecedented spread of the English language and its regional dialects meets the natural needs of international communication in the fields of economics, culture, science, high technology, commerce, etc. It performs the function of a universal contact language used in English-language communication, whose participants belong to different language communities. In this regard, we conclude, that a thorough study of widespread variations of English language, such as American English and its dialects assists in exploring its linguistic features in depth.

Literature review.

Linguists of the world and our country have conducted a series of research on investigating dialects of American English, its evolutionary development stages and sociolinguistic issues. Important scientific and theoretical views have been put forward by D.Crystal, W.Labov, N.Bulavin, M.Guxman, M.Makovskiy, B.Serebrennikov, J.Algeo, E.Ekwall, G.Krapp, H.Kurath, M.Montgomery, C.Prator, D. Roninett, R.Shackleton, C.K.Thomas, W.Wolfram. But modern tendencies and factors influencing the lexical-semantic features of American English dialects have not been studied thoroughly which remains as an actual issue in learning the English language.

Research methodology.

Vanishing of complicated features of language and its simplification is happening within American English dialects. Different social and regional factors influence the form of American English by introducing new words and by simplifying it. All these factors and languages create an enormous complex of dialects, jargons, slangs and other ways of speaking. This process occurs on the on internal level and has a permanent nature. System-structural, descriptive, semantic and component analysis methods were used to illuminate the research topic.

Analysis and results.

In studies devoted to the description of American socio-territorial dialects, Standard American English is usually used as a standard for comparison. This method is to a certain extent justified, since each dialect is characterized, as noted above, not so much by individual differential features, but by their combination. At the same time, this approach does not make it possible to distinguish those features that are specific to a given dialect from those that are inherent to an entire group of dialects or even adjacent dialect groups. Moreover, in American dialectology there is no fundamental distinction between dialects, on the one hand, and popular vernacular, on the other. The last category is generally absent in the nomenclature of American linguistic terms. As a result, individual dialects are assigned not only the characteristics of entire dialect groups, but also characteristics that characterize non-literary speech in general and have no territorial fixation. Thus, in many descriptions of American dialects, the so-called double negation of the type appears as one of the differential characteristics -They don't have no work to do in the winter [Wolfram, Christian 1976, 108-114]. However, this phenomenon is inherent not only in individual socio-territorial dialects, but also in general in the speech of Americans who do not speak a literary language.

At least six regional dialects in the eastern half of the country are prominent enough to warrant individual characterization, and three additional dialects of considerable importance extend over several regions:

1. *Eastern New England*. This includes the whole or parts of states that lie to the east of the Connecticut River in Massachusetts and Connecticut and east of the Green Mountains in Vermont.
2. *New York City*. Although often considered a part of the Eastern New England dialect, the speech of New York City and adjacent counties is on the whole quite different.
3. *Upper North*. Western New England, upstate New York, and the basin of the Great Lakes share features of pronunciation that derive from the original settlement and the spread of the population westward through the water route of the lakes.
4. *Lower North*. Like the dialect of the Upper North, that of the Lower North preserves the r in all positions and has [æ] in fast, ask, grass, etc.
5. *Upper South*. This area includes all of West Virginia except the counties bordering on Pennsylvania and Maryland, the mountain regions of Virginia and North Carolina, most of Kentucky and Tennessee, with a small portion of the states to the north and the south.
6. *Lower South*. The dialect of the Lower South covers a large area, the old plantation country, and it would be unreasonable to expect uniformity in it.
7. *African American Vernacular English*. One of the most intensively studied varieties of English during the past three decades has been the speech of many African Americans in the South and in northern cities.
8. *Hispanic American English*. Like African American Vernacular English, Hispanic American English is a social and ethnic variety, but like the Anglo dialects of the Southwest it is also a geographical variety for which isoglosses can be traced across the map.

Contact between Spanish and English will be a continuing source for the introduction of new or revived Spanish words into regional varieties of English and into larger domains. As Ronald Butters, the president of the American Dialect Society, observes, "Whatever social and political directions our linguistic future may take, Spanish is sure to play an increasing role, one that is different from anything we have ever experienced"[1].

An unofficial standard for *spoken* American English has also developed, as a result of mass media and geographic and social mobility, and broadly describes the English typically heard from network newscasters. Despite this unofficial standard, regional variations of American English have not only persisted but have actually intensified, according to linguist William Labov [2].

Southern American English is furthermore a rich source for lexical dialectology. DARE and other publications in a similar line are replete with 'Southernisms', which frequently receive labels such as '*colorful*', '*folksy*' and '*homely*'. As Carver (1987: 94) points out, it seems to be the relative insularity of the South after the initial waves of settlement that has given its language its distinctive inventory of features. There is an unusually high number of regionalized terms, including expressions that once were current throughout the U.S., or figured in older forms of English, and are now almost unique to the South (cf. also chapter 1.2.2.).

Lexical fields that are rich with Southernisms and Southern usages are, for example, those relating to cooking and foods (*corn cake*, *cobbler*, *hush puppies*, *jambalaya*), drinking (*white lightning* = *illicitly*

distilled liquor), health (*to take sick, granny woman = acting midwife*), farming/rural life (*overseer, juicing = milking*), children's play (*to play like, play pretty = toy*), religion (*mourner's bench, altar call*), as well as numerous regional plant and animal names.

'Famous' Southern usages include to carry for *'to lead, escort'*, and proud for *'pleased, happy'*. Euphemism is quite common in Southern speech (*male cow = bull, big = pregnant*), as is a certain tendency to be redundant (*hound-dog, preacher-man*).

Southern Mountain/AppE lexicon, like that of Southern American English in general, is rich with regionalisms - the labels attached here are usually *'quaint', 'picturesque', or 'droll'*, as is often the case with non-mainstream varieties. Only a few 'classics' shall be quoted for illustration. For example, AppE is replete with mostly Scotch-Irish archaisms such as *airish (windy, chilly), chancy (doubtful, dangerous), ill (in the sense of bad-tempered), to smart (to hit), noggin (head)*, and, stereotypically, *yonder (over there)*. But Appalachians are also more innovative than is commonly believed, which is attested in original Mountain terms such as *cuterments (scraps, odds and ends), slopdozzle (a sloppy or messy person), twinkles (pine needles), or wudget (the ball of hair on a woman's head)*.

Special Mountain usages include the well-known and potentially confusing *don't care to* in the sense of *'don't mind/object' ('I don't care to go to the movies')*, or *to get in the way of (to get in the habit of)*. The use of intensifiers is another stereotypical AppE feature - forms include *right ('I hollered right loud')* and *plumb ('That was plumb foolish')*.

The most numerous distinctive elements of Black English are in the field of vocabulary, where the segregation of the black population, its unification within the framework of social, religious, cultural and other communities - all this is reflected in some lexical units, sometimes performing a symbolic unifying function. An example of such dialectisms is the *Man*, a pejorative designation of a white man and a white society: *The Man systematically killed your language, killed your culture, killed your soul, tried to blot you out. . . (Time, 1970, April 6)*.

This also includes *soul*, used in the specific meaning of *"everything that evokes emotions and a sympathetic response and is associated with the culture of American blacks - their music, dance, visual arts"*:

It is his ability to articulate this tragicomic attitude toward life that explains much of the mysterious power and attractiveness of that quality of Negro American style known as "soul" (ibid., p. 55).

The word *soul* has become a core element in a whole series of stable phrases found in Black English: *soul food 'favorite ode of blacks', soul brother 'black', soul sister 'black woman', soul music 'synthesis of jazz and church music of blacks'*:

Black is feeling you'll really be free when they cast a soul brother in a deodorant commercial (The Atlantic, April 1971, p. 82);

He also exhorted American tourists to come bearing foods that the deserters missed - soul food and peanut butter, bagels and Fig Newtons (The New-Yorker, 1970, May 23, p. 44);

Soul music is small combo jazz, modern in style, but with emphasis on gospel music and the blues and played with the same feeling as gospel music (San Francisco Chronicle, 1962, April 8, p. 19); . .

.plate glass in Negro-owned establishments remained intact and displayed the words "Soul Brother" or "Soul Sister" (The New York Times, 1968, June 17).

In the Black English lexicon, synonymous rows of expressively colored units are distinguished. Compare, for example, a number of pejorative words with the meaning *"white"*: *honky, whitey, the Man, pale*. In a book devoted to describing the Black English lexicon, J. Dillard [Dillard 1977] identifies several main thematic areas, including: 1) religion and the church, 2) music and 3) the underworld.

Since the religious community was one of the first forms of social organization available to blacks, vocabulary associated with certain religious rituals occupies a prominent place among the lexical units specific to Black English. These include units such as *to come through, gravy sermon, gravy train preacher, shouting ritual dance, setting up wake or happy wake wake', live sweet 'lead a*

righteous lifestyle', etc.

In the field of jazz music, one of the main sources of which, as is known, was the folk art of blacks, Black English created a specialized vocabulary that had a significant influence on the American version as a whole. It was among the black performers of jazz music that such units as *swing 'style of jazz music', licorice stick 'clarinet', slush pump 'trombone', blowing 'playing any musical instrument', ragtime or rag 'type of syncopated music' were born', blues 'blues', gutbucket and barrelhouse 'early styles of jazz. music', fake 'improvise', etc.*

Many lexical units of Black English are associated with the criminal world and its activities in black ghettos. Compare, for example: *player 'pimp', numbers banker or bagman 'owner of an illegal lottery', numbers runner 'agent collecting bets', gunny, skoofer, stencil, black moat 'various types of marijuana', etc.*

Some of these units were both argotisms of the underworld and elements of Black English. These include reefers 'marijuana cigarettes', which arose, according to the Dictionary of American Slang by G. Wentworth and S. B. Flexner, among prisoners, drug addicts and in black ghettos. Wed. the following example from "The Autobiography of Malcolm X":

All afternoon between trips up front to rack balls, Shorty talked to me out of the corner of his mouth: which hustlers — standing around, or playing at this or that table — sold 'reefers', or had just come out of prison, or were 'second-story' men (The Autobiography of Malcolm X, 127).

In this example, the contextual environment of reefers attracts attention - the argotisms *hustler 'petty criminal' and second-story man 'burglar'*.

The doubts expressed above regarding the point of view of the "creolists", who attach paramount importance to the role of African and Creole elements in Black English, do not at all mean that in the speech of American Negroes there are no relict elements of those African languages spoken by their imported ancestors. slave traders on the North American continent. Such elements can be traced mainly in the vocabulary and represent Africanisms that penetrated mainly from Gullah into the speech of the black population of the American South. This includes units such as *buckra 'white man' < mbakara 'master' in the Ibibio language (Southern Nigeria), cooter 'turtle' < kuta in the Bambara and Malinke languages, goober 'groundnut' < <nguba in Kimbundu, etc.* [See: Turner 1975, 121-135]. However, many of these units, according to R. McDavid, penetrated into the speech of white southerners and ceased to be distinctive elements of the Negro dialect. Thus, *buckra* is noted in the speech of the white population of South Carolina and Piedmont in the meaning of "*poor buckra*", *goober* is found in dialect speech from Washington to Georgia, *cooter* is also used in the speech of southerners in the southeast coast of the United States [McDavid 1980, 23]. In general, these Africanisms occupy a marginal place in Black English and cannot in any way be considered one of its defining features.

A comparison of Black English with standard English and with other English dialects indicates that its distinctive elements, as well as the distinctive elements of other dialects, fall into two categories in terms of their diachronic status: they are either archaisms that have survived in a socio-ethnic community that occupies a marginal position in American society and is therefore less susceptible to the innovations of Standard English, or its own innovations that arise in speech that is not limited by the canons of Standard English and is ahead of the latter in the implementation of certain trends in the development of the English language.

Conclusions and Recommendations.

Basically four major dialect areas: the North, the Midland, the South, and the West - along with a number of subdivisions are identified. At least six regional dialects in the eastern half of the country are prominent enough to warrant individual characterization, and three additional dialects of considerable importance extend over several regions. In studies devoted to the description of American socio-territorial dialects, Standard American English is usually used as a standard for comparison. In American dialectology there is no fundamental distinction between dialects, on the one hand, and popular vernacular, on the other. As a result, individual dialects are assigned not only

the characteristics of entire dialect groups, but also characteristics that characterize non-literary speech in general and have no territorial fixation.

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