

THE FORMATION OF AMERICAN ENGLISH

Karimova Shakhloza Boykuzi kizi

Fergana state university, teacher of English Language department

shk_@22mail.ru

Annotation: Article discusses the formation of American English. Further, in the article some factors and other social life experiences to the formation of American English is given.

Key words: Americanism, industry, gold-rush, purists, idiolect.

The formation of the American version of the English language was most intense in such cultural, political, and economic centers of colonial America as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Richmond. One significant cause of the divergent processes underlying the regional variation of the American variant was the territorial separation and cultural isolation of the colonies and settlements from one another.

The War of Independence served as a powerful stimulus for the separation of the two English variants, in the sense that certain nationalistic tendencies and aspirations emerged, calling for independence from the metropolis in language as well. However, as we know, a separate American language never took shape. According to some scholars, if American colonization had occurred a few centuries earlier, we would have a separate American language now, rather than a variant of English. But colonization took place after the invention of printing. It should also be noted that English developed in America at a time when universal education was already well established and most of the books read in America came from England and were essentially of the British historical-philological tradition.

One should pay attention to the quantitative growth of Americanisms. It is to this period that the vast majority of the first examples of the use of words and phrases included in the historical dictionaries of Americanisms by Craigie and Matthews belong. Here, undoubtedly, the close connection between the history of language (and chiefly vocabulary as its most mobile part) and the history of society found its manifestation. Education in the United States, with its specific state and political system, with its new state institutions, political parties, and social organizations - all this, first, found its reflection in the emergence of political terminology.¹

The westward expansion and the so-called "gold rush" (gold rush) left a noticeable trace in the vocabulary and, especially, in the phraseology of English in the United States. The names of words and phrases that emerged during this period have survived only as historicisms (e.g., forty-niner - gold prospector who came to California during the "gold rush" of 1849).

The processes that took place in the nineteenth century also affected other layers of American vocabulary. During this period, a few lexical features of American colloquial speech developed. For example, various stable combinations with the adverb right (for example, right along - always, continuously, constantly, right up - immediately, right smart - a lot) are widespread in American speech.²

Among the words and phrases that entered circulation in the 19th century and lie outside the literary language, a significant part is accounted for by the so-called "slang". This includes several expressively coloured words and phrases reflecting many dark sides of the "American way of life", slush money - money to bribe officials, bum - tramp.

¹ Arbekova T.I. Lexicology of English. M., 1977

² Arakin V. D. History of English Language, 1985

In the 19th century works devoted to the language of the United States appeared. In 1816 a dictionary by John J. Pickering under the title "A Vocabulary, or Collection of Words and Phrases which have been supposed to be Peculiar to the United States of America" was published. This work is the first to collect Americanisms. At the same time, Pickering's position was pro-British: Pickering sought to remove from circulation what did not coincide with the British norm. Pickering was opposed by Noah Webster, who defended the right of Americans to create their own words.

The differences between English in America (AE) and English in Great Britain (BE) have been debated for a long time. The debate about whether or not AE should be considered an independent language, definitively separate from BE, continues today.

Perhaps the most hypertrophic portrayal of the specific features of AE was made by G.L. Mencken, the author of the famous book *American Language*. His work is of known interest as a collection of extensive factual material. However, the value of the facts he collected is greatly diminished by their obviously tendentious selection, subordinated to his earlier goal of proving the existence of a distinctive American language. In addition, the integration of linguistic facts in Mencken's book seems highly questionable in several cases (e.g., attributing to the specific features of A.E. such forms as *won't*, *ain't* double negation, etc.).³

The specifics of the linguistic situation of the period of the formation of the English-speaking community in North America in the 17th-18th centuries was the fact that by that time a national literary standard had already been formed in England itself, which served as a supra-dialect communicative system. An important factor contributing to the expansion of the social base of literary English in America was the high prestige of education and a certain conservatism of the American educational system, which for a long time was guided by the British norms.

According to A.D. Schweitzer, there is every reason to assume that the degree of variation in literary language at one or another level of its structure is related to the model of its formation. As an example, the author refers to the history of the formation of literary English in England and the United States. In England, the formation of the national literary standard took place around a single center - London, the language of which had a decisive influence on the processes of formation and stabilization of the national language norm. A.D. Schweitzer calls such a model of literary norm monocentric. The situation is different in North America, where, as mentioned above, at the earliest stage the standard of literary norm continued to be the language of London, i.e., the extracentric model with a center outside the given area operated. Then another model, connected with the formation in colonial America of such centers as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Richmond, where the literary norm was intensively formed, was superimposed on this model. The author defines this model as polycentric.

This polycentrism of the American variant manifested itself in different ways on different levels of the linguistic structure, most noticeably on the phonetic level.

The fact that Standard American English was formed under the influence of complex and contradictory factors under conditions of high geographical and social mobility of the population, oriented both on the norm of the British variant, on the regional norms of colonial centers, and on the most common variant, imposed a certain imprint on its status and structure. Its distinctive features are the vagueness and blurring of its boundaries and the considerable variability of its structure.⁴

³ G.L. Mencken. *The American Language*, 1919

⁴ A.D. Schweitzer. *Applied Linguistics*, 1995

Even in America, however, not all scholars were sympathetic to Webster's statement about the "equality" of the American version of English.

The American linguist John Pickersins urged his countrymen to put an end to the "spoiling" of English in America (as he called any deviation from the British literary model) and to restore its purity.

But despite the opposition of the purists, who ignored the new facts and trends of the living vernacular, the movement for the revision of literary norms and the development of a corresponding American pattern has won new supporters.

Washington Irving, Fenimore Cooper, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, O. Henry and Jack London deserve particular credit in this respect - many of the prominent American writers of this period were ardent advocates of a deep study of the treasury of vernacular speech and staunch opponents of the purists who equated any Americanisms with barbarisms.

However, along with the process of the separation of the two English variants, one cannot but note that already in the nineteenth century a certain tendency towards the rapprochement of the two variants was outlined. This tendency, which developed strongly in the 20th century, has so far manifested itself only to a small extent and was reduced mainly to the penetration of certain Americanisms into English speech.

The term "Americanism" was first introduced by John Witherspoon, Rector of Princeton University, and a politician during the War of Independence. In one of his articles written in 1781 Witherspoon gives as examples of Americanisms, in particular the use of "or" when the total number of subjects is greater than two.

It should be emphasized that the deviations from the British model that had emerged by that time were mostly dialectal in nature. America did not yet have its own national literature. The American version of literary English had not yet been established. American students were taught from English grammars, and the only more or less reliable lexicographical reference was S. Johnson's dictionary. Most Americanisms were equated with errors and barbarisms. And this point of view was shared not only by the English, but also by such prominent American figures as Benjamin Franklin, who fought to preserve the "purity" of the English language and against the "littering" of it with Americanisms.

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