



A Comprehensive Survey of the Foundations of American English

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A Comprehensive Survey of the Foundations of American English

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Abstract

American English is the English language of the United States as distinguished from that used elsewhere; more narrowly, it pertains to any word or expression that originated in the United States. Since it began as the language of the colonists in the seventeenth century, the language situation of these colonists must be taken into consideration whenever we take account of the development of American English. The subject, therefore, will be discussed at the outset of this paper.

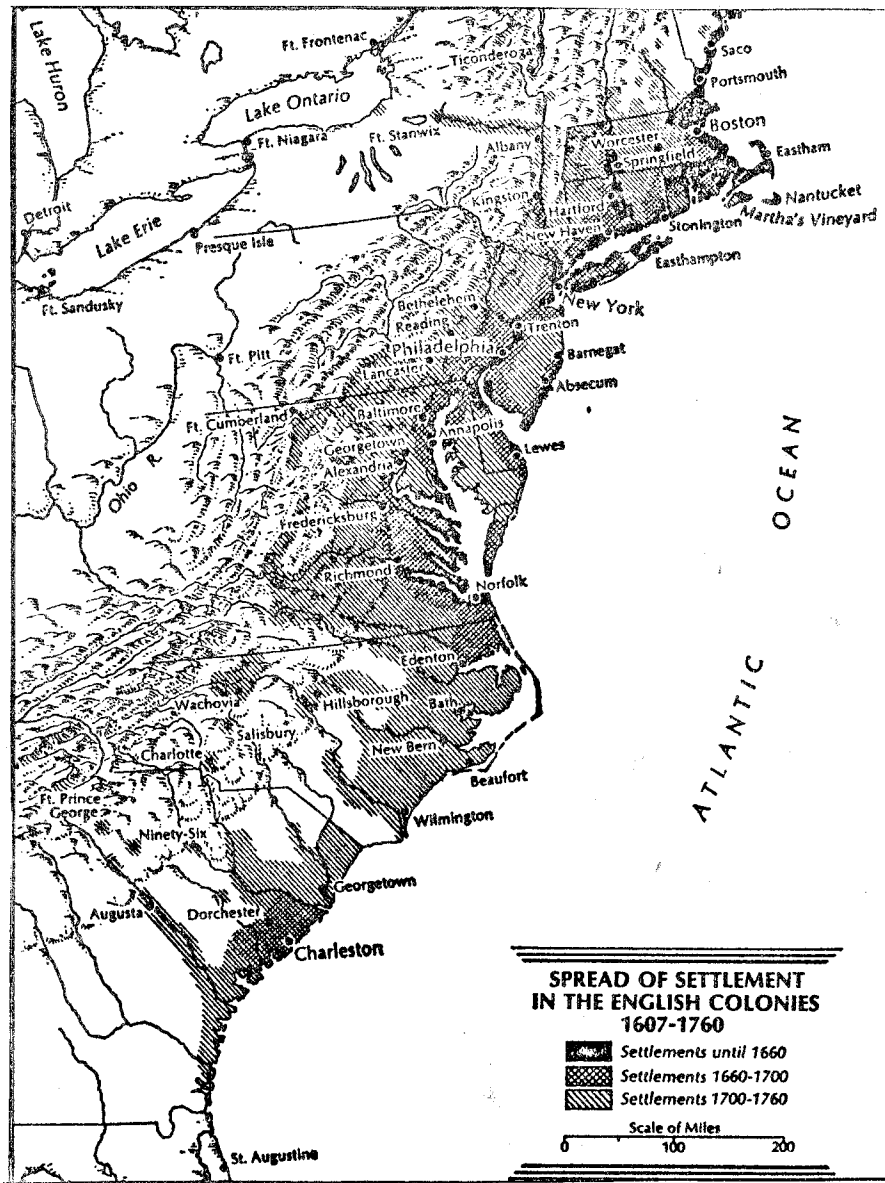
The language of the colonists, however, has diverged somewhat from that of British English in its subsequent development. Other colonists and later immigrants speaking other languages, environmental influences, native developments, international ideas—each has affected American English in interesting ways, and produced various new words to be entitled to Americanisms. They are classified into the following four chief kinds and will be discussed in the remaining chapters respectively: (1) foreign loan words taken into the English language in America; (2) new words coined in America; (3) forms or meanings surviving in current American use though no longer current in British use; and (4) new meanings developed in America for English words.

I. The Language of the Colonists

When we consider the history and development of American English we must remember that American English is fundamentally a colonial speech, and that it has been carried to that new continent by settlers; it was not used there before the settlers came. In this respect it is like Pennsylvania German, Australian English, South African Dutch, American French, Spanish, and Portuguese, and many other transported languages. In other words, the English language in America did not experience a new birth with the separation of the colonies from Great Britain, but that event nevertheless provides a reasonable starting point for the consideration of what we must from that time call American English.

Our first concern, therefore, is with the kind of English spoken by the settlers who ventured westward into the new land with Captain John Smith or on board the Mayflower, as well as those who followed them later in the seventeenth century, since they were predominantly English in origin. A bird's-eye view of settling movements of these colonists must now be attempted to ensure a sounder ground for discussing the subject.

The first wave of settlement came with the colonists at Jamestown in 1607 and at Plymouth in 1620. It was followed by the settlers in Massachusetts Bay in 1630, and by 1733 thirteen English colonies had been established in America. The following figure shows the spreading of settlement in these English colonies



from the beginning of settlement to 1760¹⁾.

What was, then, the state of the language they used in this colonial period? We must now turn our attention directly to the English of these colonists.

It was in 1616 when Shakespeare died. That was nine years after Jamestown had been settled as the first permanent colony in Virginia. And even if we think of the Plymouth colony and the Massachusetts Bay colony, we must realize that the adults in the groups who crossed the Atlantic had learned their English around 1600, just about when Hamlet was first performed and when Shakespeare, Ben

Jonson and many of the other great dramatists were at the height of their activity. The following table shows a comparison between the memorable dates of the early colonial history of America with those pertinent to the English literary scene throughout the seventeenth century²⁾.

SETTLEMENT OF AMERICA	ENGLISH AUTHORS	ENGLISH WORKS
1600	SHAKESPEARE	
1607 Jamestown, Virginia	BACON	Volpone 1606
	JOHNSON	Macbeth 1611
	JOHNSON	Authorized Version, Bible
1620 Plymouth, Mass.	JOHNSON	Anatomy of Melancholy 1621
1623 Dover & Portsmouth, N.H.	JOHNSON	First Folio Shakespeare 1623
1624 New Amsterdam, by Dutch	JOHNSON	
1630 Boston, Mass.	JOHNSON	L'Allegro, Il Penseroso 1634
1632 St. Mary's, Maryland	JOHNSON	Religio Medici 1635
1635 Hartford, Conn.	JOHNSON	Lycidas 1637
1636 Providence, R.I.	JOHNSON	
1638 Delaware, by Swedes	JOHNSON	
1641 York, Maine	JOHNSON	Arcopagitica 1644
	JOHNSON	Complait Anglor 1653
1655 Dutch defeat Swedes in New Jersey	JOHNSON	
1664 English capture New Amsterdam	JOHNSON	Essay Dramatic Poesy 1664
1670 Charleston, S.C.	JOHNSON	Paradise Lost (published) 1667
1675 King Philip's War	JOHNSON	Pilgrim's Progress 1678
1681 Pennsylvania, by Quakers	JOHNSON	Newton, Principia 1687
1700	JOHNSON	Battle of the Books 1697
	JOHNSON	Way of the World

IMPORTANT DATES IN
THE SETTLEMENT OF AMERICA AND ENGLISH LITERARY HISTORY

It has been estimated that in Shakespeare's time the population of England, excluding Ireland and Scotland was approximately 4,460,000. Of these, probably 200,000 lived in London in 1600. These people and possibly 25,000 more in the immediate vicinity spoke London English, the regional variety which was in the process of becoming a standard for the English-speaking world as a whole³⁾.

English, as well as other languages in the world has always been developing and changing, more or less, its form to meet the needs of the times, so it is quite natural to guess that the language spoken in those colonial days sounded somewhat

different from its counterpart of today. What did, then, the English sound like at that time? The following part of Portia's famous mercy speech in the *Merchant of Venice* will provide us with a partial explanation of the variations in pronunciation⁴⁾.

*The quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle dew from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest. It becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.*

We have every reason to believe that the word *quality* in this passage was pronounced as [kwæliɪ] in Shakespeare's time, but today in American English it has a vowel that is made with just a very slight rounding of the lips. Also, the word *beneath* is known to have been pronounced as [biné:θ] instead of [biní:θ].⁵⁾ The *-eth* forms of *droppeth* and *blesseth* are, again, the forms characteristic of Elizabethan English, and these forms are almost wholly restricted in the modern usage of American English⁶⁾.

For some more examples, many words which are now pronounced with the vowel of *meat* had, at the time of the earliest settlements in America, the quality of present-day English *mate*. In fact, Londoners were accustomed to hear both the *ee* and the *ay* sounds in such words as *meat*, *teach*, *sea*, *tea*⁷⁾, *lean*, and *beard*. The conservative *ay* pronunciation continued in the language as late as the time of Pope⁸⁾. On occasion Shakespeare was capable of rhyming *please* with *knees* and at other times with *grace*. Without this double pronunciation a speech such as that by Dromio, 'Marry sir, she's the Kitchin wench, & al grease (*grace*)' would have lost its punning effect⁹⁾.

It will be helpful, furthermore, to observe a selection of one of the earliest examples of American English to acquire a feeling for many of the differences between the language of today and that of the age of Shakespeare. The following passage from William Bradford's¹⁰⁾ *History of Plimmoth Plantation* will deserve our examination from this viewpoint.

In these hard and *difficulte* beginnings they found some *discontents* and *murmurings* arise amongst some, and mutinous speeches and *carriages* in *other*; but they were *soone* quelled and overcome by the *wisdome*, patience, and just and *equall* carrage of things by the Gov[erno]r and better part, which clave faithfully together in the maine. But that which was most *sadd* and lamentable was, that in 2 or 3 *moneths* time *halfe* of their company *dyled*, *espetially* in Jan: and February, *being* the depth of winter, and *wanting* houses and other comforts; being infected with the scurvie and other diseases, which this long voiage and their *inacomodate* condition had brought upon them; *so as ther dyled* some times 2 or 3 of a day, in the aforesaid time; that of 100 and odd persons, *scarce* 50 remained. And of these in the time of most *distres*, *ther was* but 6 or 7 sound persons, who, to their great comendations be it spoken, spared no pains, night nor day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their *owne* health, fetched them *woode*, made them fires, *drest* them meat, made their *beads*, washed their lothsome cloaths, *cloathed* and uncloathed them; in a word, did all the *homly* and *necessarye* offices for them which dainty and *quesie* stomachs

cannot endure to hear named; and all this willingly and *cherfully*, without any grudging in the least, *shewing* herin their true love *unto* their freinds and bretheren. A rare example and worthy to be remembered¹¹.

In this passage the italicized words are no longer current in American English today. The plural form of the abstractions *discontents* and *murmurings* would be unlikely to appear in present-day usage, as would *commendations*. *Carriages* would be replaced by *bearings* in the modern form, and *others*, instead of *other*, should be used as a plural pronoun. The parallelism of the phrases introduced by *being* and *wanting* is faulty. *Inacomodate* has become obsolete today. We would say '*so that there died*' for '*so as ther dyed*' and *scarce*, in an adverbial use, is lacking the *-ly* ending. In the second sentence there is the lack of agreement between subject and verb in '*ther was but 6 or 7 sound persons.*' *Clothed*, here meaning the specific act of dressing, has become more general in its use.

Even more striking than any of these features is the sentence structure. The first sentence in the selection contains fifty-three words, the second eighty-three, and the third attains a total of one hundred and six. These are all too long according to modern standards. Ironically enough, the third sentence is followed by an eight word fragment that does not fit the modern pattern of the conventional sentence at all.

One more fact that we must keep in mind is that the people of Great Britain in the seventeenth century spoke different local dialects. What we now consider to be standard English for England developed from the language of London and the near-by counties. But the settlers of America came not only from that region but also from many others. New England, for instance, was settled largely from the eastern counties, and Pennsylvania received a heavy immigration from the north of Ireland¹². English as it came to be spoken in New England and much of Pennsylvania thus naturally was not the same English that developed as the standard in England. The earliest form of the language used by settlers, then, the language that stemmed from the variable forms of London English and the other regional dialects of Elizabethan English spoken in the British Isles¹³.

As the American settlements expanded, more immigrants came from the different parts of Britain in a succession of mass movements, so that American English was continually influenced by British dialects of different times and regions. Thus the chances of immigration brought diverse effect to bear on the developing American regional dialects.

The English were, however, not the first Europeans to come to North America. Long before the colonies were settled, the Spanish and French explorers left evidences of their visits on great expanses of the American wilderness: the Spanish in a wide arc across the southern part of the country, from Florida, where they founded St. Augustine, the oldest city of the United States, in 1565, through Texas and New Mexico, to California; the French, up and down the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys¹⁴.

It is true that the English, the numerical majority of the first settlers, gave America the basic foundation of its institutions including the language, but America was by no means settled by the English alone; it was settled by immigrants from many countries, with diverse national ethnic and social backgrounds. In fact, the colonies welcomed all men, regardless of their origin or birth, so long as they could contribute to the building of the new country.

Thus, the Dutch settled New Amsterdam and explored the Hudson River. The Swedes came to Delaware. Polish, German and Italian craftsmen were eagerly solicited to join the struggling Virginia colonists in Jamestown. The Germans and Swiss opened up the back country in Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia and the Carolinas. French Huguenots took root in New England, New York, South Carolina and Georgia. The Scots and the Irish were in the vanguard that advanced the frontier beyond the Alleghenies. When Britain conquered New Amsterdam in 1664, it offered citizenship to immigrants of eighteen different nationalities.¹⁵⁾

Such being the case, it seemed at one time that the continent might ultimately divide into three language sections: English, Spanish and French¹⁶⁾. But the English victories over the French and the purchase of territories held by the French and Spanish resulted in the creation of an indivisible country, with the same customs and government as well as the language. Yet each ethnic strain left its own imprint on the new land.

These ethnic and linguistic backgrounds easily lead us to assume that American English in the colonial period had been more or less affected by other languages with which it came into contact. The early colonists has many dealings with Indians, first of all, who spoke various languages, and also with the speakers of Dutch, German, French and Spanish. Our next concern is, therefore, with the loan words which supplemented the word stock of American English as well as with coinages, new meanings and survivals of words.

2. Loan Words from Various Languages

The earliest examples of loan words from all the important languages in the new world were probably those from the various Indian languages¹⁷⁾—words, in the main, indicating natural objects and foreign cultures which were frequently quite different from what they had known in England. Thus, a good many native plants and foods bear names of Indian origin: *squash*¹⁸⁾, *succotash*¹⁹⁾, *pecan*²⁰⁾, *hickory*²¹⁾, *hominy*²²⁾, *pone*²³⁾ and *tamarack*. For animals and fish, there are: *moose*²⁴⁾, *skunk*²⁵⁾, *terrapin*²⁶⁾, *raccoon*²⁷⁾, *opossum*²⁸⁾ and *muskellunge*²⁹⁾. Other early borrowings from the Indian include *moccasin*³⁰⁾, *mackinaw*³¹⁾, *toboggan*. All these have long been standard and might be considered part of the current vocabulary of a large number of speakers of American English.

Some that have not reached this status are *cayuse*, *podunk* and *hooch*³²⁾, for what used to be firewater. Also, such words as *squaw*³³⁾, *wigwam*³⁴⁾, *tomahawk*³⁵⁾, *tepee*³⁶⁾, *wampum* retain the association with Indians. The Indians' ceremonies,

moreover, impressed themselves early upon American political life in such words as *powwow*³⁷⁾, *sachem*, *mugwump* and *Tammany*.

Besides the various Indian influences, American English reflects the other non-English cultures which the colonists and frontiersmen met in their conquest of the continent. In the westward expansion of their territory, the English-speaking colonists soon came into contact with the French. French loans, consequently, came in through early exploration; one of the most essentially American words is *prairie*³⁸⁾. *Portage*, *butte*, *cache*, *chute*, *levee*, and *rapids* are all reminiscent of the vast inland area which the French were the first white men to penetrate³⁹⁾. Other words which American English acquired from French explorers and colonizers include *calumet*, *chowder*, *shivaree*, *depot*⁴⁰⁾ and *a la mode*.

The French loan words are somewhat fewer than those from the American Indian languages and unlike the Indian loan words, at least half of which came into the language during the seventeenth century, the borrowings from the French appear chiefly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries⁴¹⁾.

The Spanish colonization and culture were more permanent and substantial than the casual French settlements which the English-speaking settlers had found in the Middle West. Consequently, Spanish has contributed more loans than French, and borrowing from the Spanish was considerably heavy during the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries⁴²⁾. Most of the Spanish words, however, were localized in the West and Southwest through direct intercourse with the Mexicans and Greasers, and they usually reflect the hacienda culture which typified the Spanish colonial occupation and the ranching and mining economies⁴³⁾.

The words still common in American English which may be traced to the Spanish in America, classified according to the aspect of life and field activity they represent, are as follows: topographical terms; *coyote*⁴⁴⁾, *cockroach*⁴⁵⁾, *mosquito*, *tuna*; names of plants; *alfalfa*, *marijuana*, *locoweed*; a number associated with cattle herding; *ranch*, *buckaroo*, *rodeo*, *lariat*, *bronco*, *corral* and *mustang*. Yet others are *pickaniuny*, *tornado*, *cafeteria*, and the rather slangy *bonanza*, *calaboose*, *hoosegow* and *vamoose*⁴⁶⁾.

Since contact with the Dutch colonists was established during the seventeenth century, it is not surprising to find that approximately one-third of the Dutch loan words bear dates prior to 1800⁴⁷⁾. It is true that relations between the English and the New Amsterdam Dutch were never very friendly; nevertheless from the languages of these Dutch settlers American English gained such basic Americanisms as *Yankee*⁴⁸⁾, *Santa Claus*⁴⁹⁾, *bakery*, *cole slaw*⁵⁰⁾, *cookie*⁵¹⁾, *scow* and *sleigh*⁵²⁾; these words are all accepted as standard.

In addition American English incorporated a number of colloquial words such as *boss*⁵³⁾, *cruller*⁵⁴⁾, *dope*⁵⁵⁾, *stoop*⁵⁶⁾, *snoop*⁵⁷⁾, *spook*⁵⁸⁾, *caboose* and *poppycock*. Many of these Dutch words were not used by writers until well into the nineteenth century, but we may be fairly sure that they occurred in English contexts much earlier⁵⁹⁾. It also well deserves mentioning that there are fewer changes in form and pronun-

ciation in these Dutch borrowings than in those from somewhat more remote and differently constructed languages. Dutch is, in this respect, most closely related to English of all the languages which have made a significant contribution to the American lexicon.

Despite the large number of Germans in America long before the outbreak of the Revolution, only few German words entered the American vocabulary until about the middle of the nineteenth century, when many new immigrants from Germany arrived. Although both *noodle*, first cited by the Dictionary of American English in 1812, and *sauerkraut*, in 1813, seem to have been used in England considerably earlier⁶⁰), there is every reason to believe that the American use of these words represents an independent borrowing⁶¹).

In general the German borrowings have been nouns, but it is of some interest to observe such interjections as *nix*, *ouch*, and *phooey* among them, and at least one scholar assumed *hurrah* to have been an early importation from the German as well⁶²).

Literary words from German, such as *heimweh*, *wanderlust*, *weltschmerz*, *hinterland*, are not peculiar to America, nor can they be said to have become popularized. Popular German words are in the main words which have to do with eating or drinking, as in *wiener*, *sauerkraut*⁶³), *hamburger*, *lager*, *smear case*, *rathskeller*, *stein*, *stube*, and *delicatessen*. In educational circles, *kindergarten*, *seminar*, *semester* are now current words in American English.

Other miscellaneous loanwords fully adopted as Americanisms are the African *voodoo*⁶⁴), *yam*, *okra*⁶⁵), *banjo* and *gumbo*⁶⁶). These are all accepted in American English as standard. Others include the regional *tote*⁶⁷), *goober*⁶⁸) or *pinder*, and the more recent *juke joint*, with its *jukebox*. *Tycoon* appears to be one of the few Americanisms from Japanese, and *chop suey* is from Chinese. Some slangy terms are *shebang*, of Irish origin, and *sosher*, *kibitzer* and *mazuma* of Jewish origin.

3. Coinages of American English

We have so far discussed about the influence of words from non-English stocks in the previous chapter, but of far more importance than this was the great stock of new words that the early colonists coined from the English language; sometimes by giving an English word a new meaning but oftener by arranging English elements in new combinations.

There are, for example, numerous derivatives such as *Americanism* itself, *auctioneer* and Thomas Jefferson's *belittle*⁶⁹). The word *Americanism* is believed to have been invented in 1781 by the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon⁷⁰), who defined it as "an use of phrases, or the construction of similar sentences in Great Britain"⁷¹). Compound words supply a very large group of new words which include *corn bread*, *cocktail*, *jackpot*, *hand-me-down*, *grab bag*, *deadwood*, *know-how* and *pipeline*.

Out of an entirely new mode of life and the new landscape formed a great number of new words which also were chiefly compounds. *Backwoods*, *back land*, and *back country* were all in common use before the Revolution, and *back street* has been traced to 1638⁷²). Out of an inventiveness somewhat urbane came *live oak*, *turkey gobbler*, *eggplant*, *copperhead*, *eelgrass*, *pokeweed*, *butternut* and so on. Echoic and sound-symbolic words include *fizzle*, *honk*, *bingo*, *goeey* (sticky) and its noun *geeyum*, the *jitters* (nervousness) and *jittery*—the latter few still colloquial.

New words produced by clipping off either end of words are also common. It is an old process; it was old, in fact, when Jonathan Swift inveighed against it⁷³), but it has contributed a great many words to the standard language. *Mob*, for instance, is now sound English, but in the eighteenth century it was violently attacked by purists, and though it survived their onslaught, they undoubtedly greatly impeded the formation and adoption of other words of the same category. There are, however, many more in Standard English, e.g., *patter* from *Paternoster*, *van* from *caravan*, *cab* from *cabriolet* and *curio* from *curiosity*.

In eighteenth century America they contrariwise went largely unchallenged, and multiplied⁷⁴). Some examples which have arisen in America include *gas*, *photo*, *pep*, *bike*, *ad*, *bunk*, *auto*, *prof*, *taxi*, *tux*, *con* (for *confidence*, as in *con man*, *con game*) and many others. *Acute* was beheaded to make *cute*, at first in the sense of sharp, clever, even tricky; now it is a counterword, a word with no exact meaning, used to show approval of almost anything and much favoured by women.

Words made directly from proper names include *lynch*⁷⁵), *maverick*, *buncombe*⁷⁶) (or *bunk*) and *bloomers*. *John Hancock*, the first signature affixed to the Declaration of Independence, means any signature (though it is changing to *John Henry*). Examples of folk etymology are *woodchuck* (from Algonkian *wejack*) and probably *hoecake* (from Narraganset *nokehick*), *carryall*, a light *carriage* (from French *carriole*), and more recently the Spanish *temblor*, an earthquake, has turned into *trembler*.

Blend words are also plentiful among the new American nouns. Some of them may be exemplified by *Amerindian* (*American Indian*), *gerrymander* (from *Gerry* and *salamander*)⁷⁷), *cablegram* (from *cable* and *telegram*), *motel* (*motorist hotel*), *smog* (*smoke fog*) and initial-words by *G. O. P.* (*Grand Old Party*, at first applied to the Democratic, later to the Republican party), *O. K.*⁷⁸) and *m. c.* or *emcee* (*master of ceremonies*).

Very numerous are functional shifts from one part of speech to another without change of form: to *corner* the market, a *combine* in business or as an agricultural machine, to *feature* or star an actor or actress, to *service* machinery. A mammoth exhibit illustrates both noun converted to adjective and verb converted to noun (unless *exhibit* is simply a lopped form of *exhibition*). The adjective *real* has become a popular adverb (*real* good, nice, sweet) exactly as *very* did five centuries ago in England.

Of the various kinds of Americanisms, new formations of words are by far

the most numerous.

4. New Meanings and Survivals of Words

The altered condition of colonial life, and later those of the new nation, furthermore, led to the use of English words in countless new senses. *Corn*, for example, means grain for human consumption, and especially *wheat* in orthodox English, but it means *maize* in America. As the staple grain of the new world, it soon became known as *Indian corn*, to distinguish it from *corn* in the English sense. But by the middle of the eighteenth century simple *corn* usually sufficed⁷⁹⁾.

To cite another example, *shop* originally designated a small retail establishment in colonial America, as it still does in England. But *store* had come in by 1721, and by 1741 it had yielded *storekeeper*. In England, even yet, *store* means primarily a large establishment, like what Americans call a *warehouse*, but the word in the American sense has been used for a co-operative retail store since about 1850, and recently there has been some currency for *department store*⁸⁰⁾.

Shoe, in England, meant (and still means) a topless article of footwear, but the colonists extended it to varieties coverings the ankle, thus displacing the English *boot*, which they reserved for foot coverings reaching at least to the knee. This distinction between English and American usage still prevails⁸¹⁾.

In like manner, *lumber* meant *rubbish* in England; in America it came to mean *timbers* and *boards*⁸²⁾; a *creek*, at first an inlet from the sea, turned into a small freshwater *stream*⁸³⁾; a *bug*, still specifically meaning a *bed-bug* in England, is the general American word for *insect*⁸⁴⁾.

The impact of a new landscape caused the early colonists to abandon several English topographical terms, e.g., *moor*, and use others that were rare or dialectal in England, e.g., *run* and *branch*⁸⁵⁾. They also invented new ones, usually by giving familiar English words new meanings, e.g., *divide* and *bluff*. *Bluff*, the first Americanism to be denounced in England⁸⁶⁾, was apparently borrowed from the Dutch in the seventeenth century, as an adjective describing blunt and nearly vertical ships' bows.

American English employs a small but highly interesting group of words and usages, sometimes regarded as Americanisms, which, are actually nothing more than survivals from the British English of older days. The word *fall* is a case in point.

Fall, a local word in England, was displaced by the foreign *autumn*⁸⁷⁾, but in America the old word had a new growth and by 1700 had become the standard term. *Quit* will hardly be encountered in England outside of legal usage; in America it is on everybody's lips—to *quit* work, a game, almost any activity, and its offspring include *quitting* time and the vigorous *quitter*⁸⁸⁾.

To guess in the senses "to suppose, to believe, to feel certain" is another American survival. It was the Englishman's comic stereotype for Yankee speech until an English scholar pointed out that Chaucer had used it regularly⁸⁹⁾. *To loan*, for another example, went out of use in British English in the eighteenth century,

but is still in wide use in American English⁹⁰⁾.

Homely, in the United States, always means ill-favored, but in England its principal meaning is simple, friendly, home-loving, folksy. The use of *homely* in the sense of commonplace in appearance or features, not beautiful, plain, uncomely has been rare in England since the eighteenth century, and the Englishman of today always understands the word to be complimentary rather than otherwise, but no American, without hostile intent, would apply *homely* to a woman⁹¹⁾.

So simple a word as the universal American *maybe* was described by The Oxford English Dictionary in 1906 as "archaic and dialectal," the English usage being *perhaps*⁹²⁾. Americanisms of this kind, though not numerous, illustrate the conservatism of language in colonies.

5. Concluding Remarks

In concluding this discussion on the foundations of Almerican English, we must here remind ourselves again of two important facts which lie at the basis of its historical glowth; first, that the colonists who crossed the ocean in the seven-teenth century were speaking the language current in the England of their day; and second, that language in general change from generation to generation, but not always in the same way in various places where the language is spoken.

As for the former the present writer attempted a comprehensive survey of the subject in the first chapter in which differences have been pointed out between the English of Shakespeare's time and that of today. To illustrate the latter, the borrowings from foreign languages have been discussed in the second chapter, in which is shown that the American form of the language was more or less changed by these loan words, whereas the English variety remained comparatively unaltered with respect to the particular items.

To explain the latter more fully, coinages as well as survivals and new meanings of words have been discussed in the third and fourth chapters respettively. These features of the language are attributed to the language situation of the early colo-nists, which was then such that one of the following possibilities could happen. First of all, it would be inevitable that a number of words, gramatical forms, and idioms lost in British English should survive in American English, and second, that American English should conversely lose certain features of earlier British English which have been retained in England.

It would equally be inevitable that the colonists should find new words, or adapt old words, to express concepts and to name institutions which arose in the new world, not to mention the more immediate task of finding verbal labels for topographical features and for flora and fauna which were new to English-speaking people.

The discussion which so far have been made in this paper presents, of course, only a segment of the whole picture of American English in its early setting. The present writer, on that account, expects to have another chance for a paper in

which some more detailed discussions might be attempted since a further inquiry into present-day American English inevitably follow the effort involved.

(Received Apr. 30, 1966)

Notes

- 1) from Morison, Samuel E., *The Oxford History of the American People*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 114. slightly modified.
- 2) from Marckwardt, Albert H., *American English*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 9.
- 3) Marckwardt, *ibid*, p. 11.
- 4) See Marckwardt & Quirk, *A Common Language* (British and American English), The British Broadcasting Corporation and The Voice of America, 1964, pp. 32-33.
- 5) For the pronunciation of Elizabethan English, see Hirooka, Hideo, *A Historical Survey of the Language of the English People*, Tokyo; Shinozaki Shorin, 1961. pp. 201-226.
- 6) Marckwardt quoted the following passage from *A Special Help to Orthographie* by R. Hodges, and went on saying that one must exercise due caution in interpreting the *-eth* spellings:

"Therefore, whensoever *eth* cometh in the end of any word, wee may pronounce it sometimes as *s*, and sometimes like *z*, as in these words, namely, in *boldeth it*, which are commonly pronounc't, as if they were written thus, *bolts it*, and *bolds it*: save onely in such words, where either *c*, *s*, *sh*, *ch*, *g*, or *x* went before it: as in *graceth*, *pleaseth*, *washeth*, *matcheth*, *rageth*, *taxeth*: for, these must still remaine as two syllables. Howbeit, if men did take notice, how they use to speak, in their ordinary speech to one another, they might plainly perceive, that in stead of *graceth*, they say *graces*, and so they pronounce al other words of this kinde, accordingly." Marckwardt, *ibid*, pp. 16-17.
- 7) In the seventeenth century *tea* was pronounced *tay* throughout all the English-speaking world. See Stewart, George R., *American Ways of Life*, New York: Doubleday Co., Ltd. 1954, p. 16.
- 8) It must be kept in mind, however, that the pronunciations of this kind reflect only the language practices of the inhabitants of London and its environs, constituting approximately 5 per cent of the five million who spoke English at that time. The remaining 95 per cent spoke the regional or provincial dialects. See Marckwardt, *ibid*, pp. 13-14.
- 9) Marckwardt, *ibid*, p. 11. For other examples, see Hirooka, *ibid*, pp. 224-225.
- 10) Bradford, William, 1663-1752, born in England, governor of Plymouth Colony. Reelected governor 30 times, he struggled hard to establish colony and discharge debts to London backers. *The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia*.
- 11) partly quoted from Marckwardt, *ibid*, pp. 17-18.
- 12) See Pyles, Thomas, *Words and Ways of American English*, New York: Random House, Inc., 1952, pp. 57-58. Also see Krapp, George P., *The English Language in America, Volume 1*, Tokyo: Senjo Publishing Co., Ltd., 1961, pp. 55-56 for the place of origin of early pioneers.
- 13) See Pyles, *ibid*, p. 64. He remarks: "Specific evidence is of course lacking as to the number of speakers of local dialects among our earliest settlers. There probably were not very many of them, despite the existence of a good many dialect words in unsophisticated American speech. In its grammatical forms and even in its pronunciation, the educated speech we use today resembles an older form of the English Standard to such an extent that we must conclude that those who did speak peasant dialects were persons of little prestige in the New World and consequently that their speech had little influence upon the development of American English other than to contribute a number of dialectal expressions to its vocabulary."

- 14) See Morrison, *ibid*, pp. 34-46.
- 15) Kennedy, John F., *A Nation of Immigrants*, New York: The Harper & Row Inc., 1964, p. 17.
- 16) Kennedy, *ibid*, p. 17.
- 17) The Indians spoke something like 350 languages belonging to some twenty-five families, which at the least were probably as different as the Germanic and Slavic, or the Celtic and Romance tongues. Among the principal families of Indian languages were the Algonquian, the Iroquoian, the Muskoghian, the Siouan, the Uto-Aztecan, and the Penutian. The Algonquian languages exercised the overwhelming influence on the language of colonists since these were the first to be encountered by the white men as they settled on the Atlantic coast. See Marckwardt, *ibid*, pp. 23-26.
- 18) *Squash* is a shortened form of a Narragansett Indian word which Weekley gives as *asquutasquash*, the original significance of which seems to have been any fruit or vegetable eaten green. It appeared in the early chronicles as *isquotersquash* and *squantersquash*, but had acquired its present form by 1683. Its derivatives include *squash-bug*, *-beetle*, *-borer* and *-vine*. Mencken, H. L., *The American Language, Supplement 1*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956, p. 176. (to be abbreviated as *AL 1* hereafter)
- 19) *Succotash*, derived by the DAE from the Narragansett *misickquatash*, signifying an ear of corn, designates an American dish invented by the Indians and borrowed by the white settlers of New England. It apparently came into popularity relatively late, for the DAE's first example of its use is dated 1751. *AL 1*, p. 176.
- 20) *Pecan* comes from one meaning any hard-shelled nut, and may have reached American English by way of Spanish. In the early days, it was spelled *peccane*, *pecanne*, *peccan*, *pecaun*, *pekaun* or *pecon*. *AL 1*, p. 174.
- 21) *Hickory*, according to Webster, comes from *pawcohiccora*, a word used by the Indians of Virginia to designate a dish made of the pounded nuts. The early colonists spelled it *pokickery* or *pohickery* and applied it to the tree, and presently it was shortened to *hiccory* and *hickery* and finally became *hickory*. It has produced many derivatives, e. g., *hickory-nut*, *-stick*, *-shirt*, *-shad*, *-elm*, *-borer*, *-pine* and *-pole*. *Hickory* was also the name of a strong cotton cloth formerly much in use for making worktrousers and shirts. *AL 1*, p. 172.
- 22) *Hominy*, according to the DAE, is derived from an Algonquian word, *rockahominy*; Webster 1934 says that the form prevailing among the Virginia Indians was *rokahamen*, a compound of three words—*rok*, meal; *aham*, pounded; and *mem*, grain; Weekley says that the original was *rockahomonie*, "of which the first element means *maize*." In the DAE's first quotation, from John Smith, *milke homini* is described as "bruized Indian corne pounded, and boiled thicke, and milke for the sauce." Smith added: "but boiled with milke the best of all." Among the other early spellings were *omine*, *homine*, *homminy* and *homonoy*. The later settlers used lye water to soften the hulls of the grain, and by 1821 *lye-hominy* was recorded. *AL 1*, p. 172.
- 23) *Pone*, most often encountered in *cornpone*, is derived from an Algonquian word signifying anything baked. John Smith, in 1612, wrote it *ponap*, but it had acquired its present spelling before the end of the seventeenth century. The DAE's first example of *cornpone* comes from Bartlett, 1859, but it must be much older. *Pone*, in the regions where it is still in common use, signifies especially a bread made in small oval loaves, flat on the bottom and rounded on the top. *AL 1*, p. 174.
- 24) *Moose* was apparently borrowed from the Passamaquoddy Indians of the Maine coast, but there were analogous forms in other dialects. The spelling, in the early days, included *mus*, *moos* and even *mouse*. The original Indian word seems to have had some reference to the animal's habit of stripping off the bark of trees for food. A number of derivatives are listed in the

- dictionaries, e, g., *moose-berry*, *-bird*, *-bush*, *-deer*, *-elm*, *-flower*, *-maple*, *-tick* and *-wood*, along with such obvious forms as *moose-hunter*, *-hide*, *-meat*, *-horn*, *-skin*, *-tongue* and *-yard*. *AL 1*, p. 173.
- 25) *Skunk* is derived by Weekley from an Algonquian word *sengankw* or *segongw*, the original significance of which was apparently "he who urinates." It is applied to several species of the genus *Mephitis*, all of them characterized by the ejection of a foul-smelling secretion when disturbed. *AL 1*, p. 175.
- 26) *Terrapin*, in its original Indian form, meant little turtle, and the DAE indicates that it was first borrowed by the whites in Virginia. In the early days it was variously spelled *terrapine*, *tarapin*, *tarapen* and *turpin*, but the modern spelling appeared so early as 1738.
- 27) The DAE says that *raccoon* is derived from the Algonquian word *arakunem*, signifying a creature that scratches with its hands. *AL 1*, p. 175.
- 28) *Opossum* is from a word that occurred in different Indian dialects as *apasum* and *eabassim*. On its first appearance in American records it was written *apossoun*, but *opassum* and *opposum* soon followed. The shortened form, *possown*, appeared by 1613, and *possum*, which is in almost universal use today, followed in 1666. To play *possum* is traced by the DAE to 1822, and to *possum* to 1846. *AL 1*, p. 174.
- 29) *Muskellunge* is the name of a pike much sought by sportsmen in the Great Lakes region. The DAE says that the name comes from the Ojibway word *mashkinoje* and Webster agrees. Its variants include *muschilongue*, *muskalonge*, *muskanounge* and *muskinnuge*. *AL 1*, p. 174.
- 30) *Moccasin* comes from a New England Indian word variously rendered by the early chronicles as *mockasin*, *mockison* and *mogasheen*. Weekley says that there were different forms in different dialects, and Webster 1934 cites *mohkisson* and *mocussin*. The object designated, a soft-soled shoe, seems to have been borrowed by the settlers along with the word: they quickly found by experience that it was better suited for wilderness travel than their leather boots. The name was eventually transferred to a flower and a snake. *AL 1*, p. 173.
- 31) *Mackinaw* was applied in the 20s to the gaudy blankets which the government provided for the Indians of the vicinity, and soon afterward was used to designate a *gun* and a *boat*. *AL 1*, p. 173.
- 32) It apparently comes, in fact, from *hoochino* (or *hoocheno*), a name of unknown origin originally applied to a crude fire-water made by the Indians of Alaska. On the advent of Prohibition this *hoochino* began to appear in the Northwestern coast towns, and soon its name was shortened to *hooch*, which quickly penetrated to all parts of the country. *AL 1*, p. 310.
- 33) *Squaw*, in its various Indian forms, signified any woman, but the early settlers seem to have given it the special significance of a wife. It was applied in the course of time to womanish men. Its derivatives include *squaw man* (the white consort of an Indian woman), *Squaw Winter*, and *squaw-ax*, *-berry*, *-bush*, *-cabbage*, *-corn*, *-fish*, *-flower*, *-huckleberry*, *-root*, *-vine* and *-weed*. *AL 1*, p. 176.
- 34) *Wigwam* is derived by the DAE from the Ojibway *wigiwam*, signifying a dwelling-place. The DAE notes that, though its use by the Indians seems to have been restricted to the East, it has been applied by whites to Indian habitations in the West also. The Western Indians actually used *tipi*, from which *tepee* is derived, or *hogan*, which is still in use among the Navahos. *AL 1*, p. 177.
- 35) *Tomahawk* was picked up by the settlers of both New England and Virginia in the earliest days; it seems to have come from a word common to all the Indian languages of the Eastern seaboard. *AL 1*, p. 176.
- 36) See 34).
- 37) *Powwow* comes from the Indians of the New England coast: it first appeared as *powah*, but

had acquired its present spelling by 1744. It was applied, at first, to an Indian medicine man, and was then transferred to a ceremonial rite by the Indians, and finally to any of their meetings. It began to be used to designate a meeting of whites early in the Nineteenth Century, and today usually has the special significance of a political palaver. The earliest meaning of the term is still preserved in the Pennsylvania German region, where a *powwow-man* (or *-woman*) designates a *witch-doctor*. *AL* 1, p. 175.

- 38) The use of the word *prairie* became general in the early nineteenth century, with the beginning of the movement of the population westward. It took on various popular spellings and pronunciations, often becoming a trisyllable, as in *prararee*. Krapp, *ibid*, Vol. 1, p. 134.
- 39) From the Canadian French *prairie*, *batteau*, *protage* and *rapids* had been borrowed during colonial days. After the Louisiana Purchase and the settlement of the Mississippi Valley and the Great Lakes region, there was a considerable accession of new French terms, not a few of them geographic. Mencken, *ibid*, *One-Volume Abridged Edition*, p. 190.
- 40) This came into English late in the eighteenth century, meaning first the act of depositing, then the deposit or collection itself, and later as a term for the place where virtually anything might be deposited—military stores, prisoners of war, or merchandise. About 1830, with the development of the railroad, the term was adopted for what the Oxford English Dictionary calls, 'a goods station at a terminus.' In America, however, the term was extended to freight depositories all along the line and not merely at terminal points. But also in America, particularly in the sparsely populated sections of the country where the railroad often pushed beyond actual settlement, the same small building was regularly used to store goods, sell tickets, and shelter passengers. Consequently, *depot* came to be used for a passenger station as well. There followed, then, possibly in the second decade of this century a period in which *depot* came to be regarded as old-fashioned, if not countrified, and a good deal of effort was expended in attempting to substitute station in its place, often with such amusing inconsistencies as having the Pennsylvania Railroad Station located on Depot Street. Finally, with the development of cross-country and transcontinental bus travel, depot seems to have come into its own again as the current term for a bus passengers' waiting room. It is worth observing, however, that depot wagon, used as early as 1908 for a horsedrawn vehicle, became station wagon as a result of the decline of the prestige of *depot*; here no tendency toward the reinstatement of depot has been apparent. Marckwardt, *ibid*, pp. 38-39.
- 41) Marckwardt, *ibid*, p. 37.
- 42) Marckwardt, *ibid*, p. 44.
- 43) See Marckwardt, *ibid*, p. 40.
- 44) *Coyote*, ultimately from the Nahuatl language of Mexico, designates a prairie wolf, *Canis latrans*, never encountered in the East, but Western fiction and the movies have made its meaning familiar to all Americans. Mencken, *ibid*, p. 189.
- 45) *Cockroach* is from the Spanish *cucaracha*, assimilated by folk etymology to *cock* and *roach*. It is first heard of in Captain John Smith's "General Historie of Virginia" (1624). Mencken, *ibid*, p. 124.
- 46) See Mencken, *ibid*, pp. 191-192. Of these words familiar to every American, *alfalfa* is traced to 1855, *bronco* to 1850, *calaboose* to 1792, *coraal* to 1829, *lariat* to 1832, *mustang* to 1808, *ranch* to 1808, *rodeo* to 1844. The Mexican War brought in a large number of Spanish terms, and the California gold rush brought in more.
- 47) Marckwardt, *ibid*, p. 49.
- 48) The DAE's first example of *Yankee*, then spelled *Yankey*, is dated 1683, as the proper name of one of the Dutch pirate commanders in the West Indies. By 1758 General James Wolfe was

- using it to belittle the New England militia in the Quebec campaign, and by the Revolution the English were using it to designate any American. During the Civil War, as everyone knows, the Southerners used it, usually contemptuously, of all Northerners, and in consequence its widened meaning became restricted again. Mencken, *ibid*, p. 122.
- 49) The NED says that *Santa Claus* comes from *Sante Klaas*, a dialect form of *Sint Klaas*, meaning St. Nicholas, the patron saint of children; the DAE gives its source as *Sinterklass*, "a corruption of *Sant Nikolaas*." All authorities agree that both the name and the gift-bearing old fellow it designates were introduced to America by the Dutch of the New York region. *AL 1*, p. 186.
 - 50) *Coleslaw* comes from the Dutch *Koolsla*, which is made up of *kool*, meaning *cabbage*, and *sla*, a shortened form of *salade*, meaning *salad*. It is traced by the DAE to 1794. Folk etymology frequently converts it into *cold slaw*. *AL 1*, p. 188.
 - 51) *Cookey* (or *cookie* or *cooky*) comes from the Dutch *koekje*, a small cake, and seems to have been borrowed independently in the Scotch Lowlands. The DAE's first example of its American use is dated 1786, *AL 1*, p. 189.
 - 52) *Scow* was borrowed from the Dutch, as the DAE shows, so early as 1669: the original form was *schouw*. *Sleigh*, from the Dutch *slee*, is traced by the DAE to 1703; in the early days it was spelled *slay*, *slae* and *sley*. *AL 1*, p. 189.
 - 53) *Boss* is obviously derived from the Dutch *baas*, but though it must have been familiar, at least in New York, in the Seventeenth Century, it did not come into general use until the Nineteenth. The DAE's first example is dated 1806. It was propagated by the proletarian self-assertion that preceded the opening of the first Century of the Common Man, with Jackson's election in 1828. *AL 1*, p. 121.
 - 54) *Cruller* is apparently related to the Dutch verb *krullen*, to curl or crisp. The DAE traces it to 1805, but it is probably older. *AL 1*, p. 189.
 - 55) *Dope* is derived by the DAE from a Dutch word, *doop*, signifying a sauce, but no such meaning for *doop* is recorded in any of the Dutch dictionaries at hand. The true meaning of the word is a baptism or christening. Weekley believes that *dope* really comes from the corresponding verb, *doopen*, which has the sense of to dip, and Webster agrees. *AL 1*, p. 189.
 - 56) *Stoop*, from the Dutch *stoep*, is traced to 1735 in American use. It means, ordinarily, the front steps of a house, but once had the additional meaning of a small porch with benches. *AL 1*, p. 190.
 - 57) To *snoop*, from the Dutch verb *snoepen*, meaning to eat sweets on the sly, is traced by the DAE, in its American sense of to pry or spy, to 1832. *AL 1*, p. 189.
 - 58) *Spook*, in the sense of a spectre, is from an identical Dutch word of the same meaning. The NED runs it back to 1801 in American use, but it is probably older. By the middle of the century it had been adopted by the English, who produced a number of derivatives, *e. g.*, *spookery*, *spookiness*, *spookish*, *spookism*, *spookology* and *spooky*, of which only the last is listed by the DAE. *AL 1*, p. 190.
 - 59) Pyles, *ibid*, p. 48.
 - 60) *AL 1*, p. 198.
 - 61) Marckwardt, *ibid*, p. 54.
 - 62) Marckwardt, *ibid*, p. 55. Unhappily, there has never been any really scientific investigation of their history, and only too often, especially since 1916, their discussion has been incommoded by partisan heat. See also, *AL 1*, pp. 313-318.
 - 63) The NED's first example of *sauerkraut* is from the "Itinerary" of Fynes Moryson, 1617, but Moryson recorded it as the foreign name of a foreign smack in England to this day. The thing itself seems to have been introduced to Americans by the Pennsylvania Germans, but the date

- is unknown, even approximately. *AL 1*, p. 314.
- 64) *Voodoo* seems to be derived from the African *vodu*, but it got into American English from the French of Haiti, and on its first appearance in print was spelled *vaudoux*. *Hoodoo* is a later form. *AL 1*, p. 199.
- 65) *Okra*, another name for the gumbo, is derived by Webster from *nkruman*, a loan from the Tshi people of Africa. *AL 1*, p. 199.
- 66) *Gumbo*, the common Southern name for *Abelmoschus exculentus*, is derived by the DAE from an Anglolan word, *kingombo*, and traced to 1805. In the sense of a Negro patois of French both the DAE and Webster 1934 say that it may be derived from a quite different word, *nkombo*, used by the tribes of the Congo region. The original significance of the latter was a runaway slave. *AL 1*, p. 199.
- 67) *Tote* is one of that sizable number of words of which the dictionaries can say only "org. uncert.," "unknown origin," or something to that effect. Professor Turner found possible African sources in Kongo and Kikongo *tota* "to pick up," with related words in other West African languages meaning "to carry." The fact that *tote* is used in Gullah does not rule out the possibility of an unknown English source, for very many English words are used by the Gullahs. It is likely, however, that if the word is not of African origin, its use has been reinforced, at least in the South and particularly among the Gullahs, by the African words. Though it is usually thought of as a Southernism, *tote* is of fairly frequent occurrence in parts of New England; it has also been found in upstate New York, northern Michigan, and northern Minnesota, occurring alone and in the combinations *tote road*, *tote wagon*, *tote team* and *tote sled*. See Pyles, *ibid*, pp. 47-48.
- 68) *Goober*, a Southern name for the peanut, is derived by Webster from the African *nguba*, but the DAE's first example of its printed use is dated so late as 1848. *AL 1*, p. 198.
- 69) This one, incidentally, was apparently his own invention, The DAE's first example comes from Jefferson's Notes on Virginia, written in 1781-2. *AL 1*, p. 4.
- 70) See Mencken, *ibid*, p. 6.
- 71) See Pyles, *ibid*, p. 5.
- 72) See Mencken, *ibid*, 4th ed. p. 115.
- 73) Pyles, *ibid*, p. 185.
- 74) Mencken, *ibid*, p. 203.
- 75) The honors for giving the term *lynch* to the world seem to be about equally divided between two men, Colonel Charles Lynch (1736-96) of Bedford County, Virginia, and Captain William Lynch (1742-1820) of Pittsylvania County, Virginia. The careers of these two worthies are parallel in so many ways that each might well be the father of *Lynch's law*, which in turn gave rise to *lynch* and its derivatives; *Lynch's law* is now obsolete, being supplanted by *lynch law*. The Colonel and the Captain, who were no kin whatever to each other, were county magistrates during the latter years of the Revolutionary War, at a time when their counties were being harassed by Loyalists and by bands of armed robbers. Pyles, *ibid*, p. 15.
- 76) Popular tradition indicates that *buncombe* was introduced by Felix Walker, representative from the western district of North Carolina (1817-23), where Asheville, the county seat of Buncombe County, is the principal city. During a debate—possibly on the Missouri Compromise—he appealed to Speaker Lowndes for five minutes more time to get into the newspapers some remarks directed to *Buncombe*. By 1827 "*talking to Buncombe*" was reported as an old and common saying in Washington. The English, who prefer *bunkum*, began to use the term about 1850, but they have stoutly resisted *bunk*, and to *debunk* arouses their indignation. The verb to *buncombe* appeared in 1855, but it seems to have been assimilated in the course of time to *to bunco*, an entirely different word. *To bunco* is traced by the DAE to 1875, and *bunco steerer* to the same year.

The short form *to bunk* appeared in Bartlett's fourth edition (1877). Mencken, *ibid*, p. 179.

- 77) *Gerrymander* as noun and verb is traced to 1812, following a redistricting of Massachusetts to assure the Jeffersonian party, led by Governor Elbridge Gerry, continued control of the state senate. The editor of a Federalist paper, possibly the same Russell who gave Pickering the story about caucus, hung over his desk, as a *memento irae*, a map of a serpentine-shaped new district in Essex County. Gilbert Stuart, best known for his portraits of Washington, affixed head, wings and claws and called it a salamander. "Gerrymander," said Russell, and the name stuck. Mencken, *ibid*, p. 179.
- 78) The word came in during the presidential campaign of 1828, and is commonly supposed to be from President Jackson's spelling of *all correct* as *oll korrekt*. Krapp, *ibid*, vol. 1, p. 117. For more detailed discussion, see Mencken, *ibid*, pp. 269-279.
- 79) See Mencken, *ibid*, pp. 217-220.
- 80) See Mencken, *ibid*, p. 217.
- 81) See Mencken, *ibid*, p. 222.
- 82) Mencken, *ibid*, p. 221.
- 83) Mencken, *ibid*, p. 221.
- 84) Mencken, *ibid*, p. 462.
- 85) Pyles, *ibid*, p. 6.
- 86) Pyles, *ibid*, p. 6.
- 87) Pyles, *ibid*, p. 21.
- 88) *AL 1*, p. 53.
- 89) *AL 1*, p. 78.
- 90) *AL 1*, pp. 224-225.
- 91) *AL 1*, pp. 495-496.
- 92) *AL 1*, p. 475.