

JULIE S. AMBERG AND DEBORAH J. VAUSE

AMERICAN ENGLISH

HISTORY,
STRUCTURE,
AND USAGE

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American English

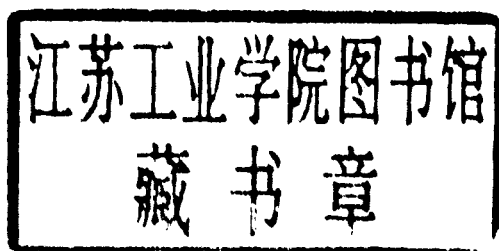
History, Structure, and Usage

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Preface

American English: History, Structure, and Usage developed from our individual experiences of teaching the subjects of History of the English Language and Linguistics to our students, who were primarily Secondary Education/English majors, Professional Writing majors, and Literary Studies majors. We recognized that the traditional approaches to these two subjects failed to meet the needs of this particular student population. Non-linguistics majors found the international approaches of linguistics study too broad and the content of the History of the English Language courses too narrow. To help students understand the relevance of language studies, the concepts needed to be grounded in the everyday experiences of their lives. To this end, *American English: History, Structure, and Usage* offers undergraduates content and exercises designed to engage them in understanding the forces that shape the production and usage of American English by applying current linguistic concepts and theories to contemporary situations drawn from American culture. Different from other textbooks in language and linguistics, *American English: History, Structure, and Usage* introduces and integrates descriptions of the history of English into explanations of the structure and usage of contemporary American English, revealing the ways in which the language has developed, as well as the ways in which it is constantly changing.

The textbook's goal is to help students learn how to:

- understand the systematic nature of language in general and American English in particular
- recognize that a living language changes and understand how it does so
- gain knowledge of methods of linguistic analysis
- recognize and appreciate American English language dialects
- be aware of the relationship between ideology and the power of language
- understand the historical forces that change language in general as well as the specific forces that have shaped American English.

Chapter 1 defines language and explores the complex ways in which language and identity are interconnected. It also introduces students to basic methods of descriptive linguistic analysis.

Building on notions of language and identity, Chapter 2 offers a history of American English, discussing the unique characteristics that make it different

from other English varieties. The chapter defines Standard American English and identifies privileged dialects in the United States. The chapter ends with a discussion of American English as a global language.

Chapter 3 continues the examination of American English by considering its morphology. The chapter then explores word formation and usage in American English.

Chapter 4 continues exploring the history of American English by contrasting the more modern language with Old and Middle English. The chapter explains the effects of geographical and social isolation on the English language over time and the resulting morphological changes.

Chapter 5 explores both historical and contemporary attitudes about English grammar and syntax. The chapter discusses prescriptivist and descriptivist approaches to the study of grammar and asks students to consider the implications of each.

Continuing the study of elements of American English, Chapter 6 introduces students to the basic principles of its phonology. The discussion then turns to the features of the American English spelling system and the fact of sound/spelling divergences.

Chapter 7 introduces students to the field of semantics and the various approaches linguists have taken to studying language meaning. Students consider meaning classification and change, as well as pragmatics.

Turning from the elements of language to its social context, Chapter 8 investigates dialect variation in the United States. After a brief description of linguistic approaches to dialect study, the chapter considers two widely spoken dialects of American English, Chicano English and African American English.

Chapter 9 traces the development of American language policies from the nineteenth century onward, especially as they affected indigenous, Spanish, and Hawai‘ian cultures. The chapter then explores the current national debate over mandating English as the official language of the United States.

Finally, Chapter 10 discusses several language topics in education. It begins by reviewing linguistic theories about second language acquisition and learning. It then contrasts two methods of second language learning, bilingual education and immersion programs, and evaluates each within the framework of linguistic study.

In each chapter, Critical Thinking exercises ask students to explore particular chapter concepts in more depth, and a Hot Topic provides a final example of how the chapter’s contents are relevant to contemporary life.

An additional resource for students and teachers is the accompanying website (www.cambridge.org/amberg-vause), which includes exercises, research topics, and further resources. Direct links to all URLs listed in the textbook appear on the website as well.

Acknowledgments

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1 Introduction: What is language?

Key terms

Idiolect
Language community
Language
Language conventions
Arbitrary sign
Iconic sign
Fluency
Communicative competence
Critical period
Universal grammar
Linguistics
Descriptive linguistics

Overview

In this chapter you'll learn about the complex relationship between language and identity. Language reflects both the individual characteristics of a person, as well as the beliefs and practices of his or her community. You'll also learn that languages are rule-governed systems made up of signs, so for an outsider to learn the language of a community, he or she must learn which signs are meaningful and which are not. The chapter will introduce you to the study of language and communication, as well as the methods of analysis used by those who work in this field. It also considers the complexity of language by examining various theories about how children acquire language. The fact that small children learn language in a relatively short period of time indicates that people may have innate language capabilities.

Introduction

How much time do you spend thinking about the language you speak? If you're like most people, you probably don't consider it much at all.