

American English Grammar

THE GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE OF PRESENT-DAY
AMERICAN ENGLISH WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE
TO SOCIAL DIFFERENCES OR CLASS DIALECTS

by

CHARLES CARPENTER FRIES



The Report of an Investigation Financed by the
National Council of Teachers of English and
Supported by the Modern Language Association
and the Linguistic Society of America

APPLETON - CENTURY - CROFTS, INC.

NEW YORK

Preface

The National Council of Teachers of English has come more and more to realize that in order to avoid the futile and even harmful teaching practices which have resulted from ignorance, satisfactory programs for teaching the English language in the schools must rest upon essentially sound views of language and a knowledge of the facts.¹ It has also realized that, in respect to the English language in America, the necessary facts have not yet been gathered and made available. To be sure, the great *Oxford English Dictionary* contains much valuable material, but it was the very deficiencies of the Oxford Dictionary in respect to American English that led Sir William Craigie to undertake, at the University of Chicago, the production of an *Historical Dictionary of American English*. When finished, this dictionary (together with the American Dialect Dictionary which we hope will eventually be pushed to completion) will provide the facts concerning our vocabulary and its development. In addition, the facts concerning American pronunciation have received considerable attention in Professor G. P. Krapp's *The English Language in America*,² and in Professor J. S. Kenyon's *American Pronunciation*.³ In general, however, those who have dealt with American English have slighted or neglected grammatical matters.⁴ The National Council of Teachers of English has, therefore, given generously of its funds in order to make possible the collecting of some materials upon which to base a preliminary sketch of the inflections and syntax of American English with especial reference to social class differences.

¹ See the report on "Training in English Language for English Teachers" published in the *English Journal*, XVII (December, 1928), pp. 825-835.

² Published for the Modern Language Association by the Century Company, 1925.

³ Published by George Wahr, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1924, and subsequent editions. *The Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* will eventually furnish the important details concerning the pronunciation of American English. See *Linguistic Atlas of New England*, Hans Kurath, director and editor. Three volumes and a Handbook, 1939+.

⁴ Of Professor Krapp's 730 pages given to the *English Language in America*, but fifteen are devoted to the discussion of inflections and syntax. Mr. H. L. Mencken, in his *The American Language* does treat grammatical matters, but his use of sources and evidence is such that it would be very difficult to use the material for the determining of a program for the schools. See below, page 35, note 2.

This work was begun in a tentative fashion in the summer of 1926 and more seriously attacked during the three months from June to September of 1927. Some additional materials necessary to complete the study were gathered during the summer of 1930. The writing of the report has been unavoidably postponed because of the interference of other matters, but the study of the collected materials has proceeded steadily if leisurely. A number of graduate students in English language at the University of Michigan have contributed to that study, and these contributions, especially the more important ones, will be acknowledged separately at the places in which their materials appear.

It may seem to some that the attempt to explain the significance of the facts presented is unnecessarily simplified and that a chapter such as the first is out of place in a report like this. It must be remembered, however, that the report here presented is written for the many English teachers in the schools and not primarily for the comparatively few who are well trained in the scientific approach to language. I hope the latter will overlook the elementary matters to view with good-natured but searching criticism the new material here gathered and that the former will be patient with the linguistic detail necessary to a sound approach to such a problem.

In a work of this kind it is difficult to record the sources of all the suggestions and the aid that I have received, but special acknowledgment must here be made for some particular contributions. A number of language scholars read portions of the manuscript and made helpful criticisms. Among the most important of these were the comments of W. F. Bryan, W. Cabell Greet, A. G. Kennedy, Roland Kent, J. S. Kenyon, Hans Kurath, R. J. Menner, Louise Pound, R. L. Ramsay, Stuart Robertson, L. L. Rockwell, J. M. Steadman, E. H. Sturtevant, and C. K. Thomas. In typing the manuscript and especially in dealing with the proof sheets and in making the index I have had invaluable assistance from Miss Aileen Traver who gave to the book many things of extreme value. Throughout all the work, however, from the collecting of the materials, through the long processes of recording the instances of each grammatical category examined and of analyzing the evidence, to the writing of the finished book I have had the constant help of my wife, Agnes Carswell Fries, whose devoted assistance made the work possible.

C. C. F.

Contents

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
CHAPTER	
I. THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE PRACTICE AND THE OBLIGATION OF THE SCHOOLS	1
II. OTHER ATTEMPTS TO DETERMINE WHAT LANGUAGE MATTERS TO TEACH	16
III. THE MATERIALS HERE EXAMINED AND THE SCOPE OF THE INVESTIGATION	26
IV. THE METHOD OF EXAMINATION, A CLASSIFICATION OF THE GRAMMATICAL PHENOMENA	34
V. THE USES OF THE FORMS OF WORDS: TWO MAJOR OR LIVE INFLECTIONS	40
VI. THE USES OF THE FORMS OF WORDS: FOUR MINOR INFLECTIONS, REMNANTS OF OLDER PATTERNS	72
VII. THE USES OF FUNCTION WORDS: WITH SUBSTANTIVES	108
VIII. THE USES OF FUNCTION WORDS: WITH VERBS	128
IX. THE USES OF FUNCTION WORDS: WITH ADJECTIVES AND WORD GROUPS. THREE MISCELLANEOUS FUNCTION WORDS	199
X. THE USES OF WORD ORDER	247
XI. SOME INFERENCES FROM THIS STUDY FOR A WORKABLE PROGRAM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOR THE SCHOOLS	283
INDEX	293

II

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE PRACTICE AND THE OBLIGATION OF THE SCHOOLS

"English" maintains its place as the most frequently *required subject* of our school and college curriculums because of the unanimous support given it both by the general public and by education authorities. This support rests upon the general belief that the mastery of *good English* is not only the most important asset of the ambitious, but also an obligation of every good citizen. There is, however, in many quarters, a very hazy idea of the specific elements which make *good English*. A great deal of vigorous controversy ignores all the larger problems of effective communication and centers attention upon the criteria to be applied in judging the acceptability of particular words and language forms. All of this controversy is direct evidence that there do exist many differences in the language practice of English speaking people; for no controversy could arise and no choice be offered unless differing language forms presented themselves in the actual practice of English speech. It is the purpose of this chapter to set forth the general character of these differences and to analyze their significance in relation to the obligations resting upon our schools. The chapter as a whole will therefore present the principles underlying this whole investigation and the point of view which has determined its material and method.

I

Underlying many of the controversies concerning words and language forms is a very common attitude which I shall call here the "conventional point of view." Frequently stated explicitly, sometimes only implied, it appears in most handbooks and manuals of correct English, in grammars and rhetorics, in educational

tests and measures, and in many editorials of the press. This conventional point of view assumes not only that there is a correctness in English language as absolute as that in elementary mathematics but also that the measures of this correctness are very definite rules. The following quotations are typical:

"A college professor rises to defend 'ain't' and 'it is me' as good English. The reed upon which he leans is majority usage. . . . 'Ain't,' as a legitimate contraction of 'am not,' would not require defense or apology if it were not for widespread misuse. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of 'it is me.' This solecism could not be given the odor of good English by a plurality as great as Warren G. Harding rolled up in 1920. . . . A vast amount of wretched English is heard in this country. The remedy does not lie in the repeal of the rules of grammar; but rather in a stricter and more intelligent enforcement of those rules in our schools. . . . This protest against traditional usage and the rules of grammar is merely another manifestation of the unfortunate trend of the times to lawlessness in every direction. . . . Quite as important as keeping undesirables out of the vocabulary is the maintaining of respect for the rules of grammar, which govern the formation of words into phrases and sentences. . . . Students should be taught that correct speaking is evidence of culture; and that in order to speak correctly they must master the rules that govern the use of the language."¹

"Grammar consists of a series of rules and definitions. . . . Since . . . ninety-five per cent of all children and teachers come from homes or communities where incorrect English is used, nearly everyone has before him the long, hard task of overcoming habits set up early in life before he studied language and grammar in school. . . . Such people are exposed to the ridicule of those who notice the error, and the only way in which they can cure themselves is by eternal vigilance and the study of grammar."²

"This is a test to see how well you know correct English usage and how well you can select the *rule or principle in accordance with which a usage is correct*. In the left hand column a list of sentences is given. In each sentence there are two forms in parentheses, one correct, and the other incorrect. In the right hand column a list of rules or principles is given, some one of which applies to each sentence. . . ."

¹ From an editorial in *The Detroit Free Press*, December 9, 1928.

² W. W. Charters, *Teaching the Common Branches* (New York, The Macmillan Co., rev. ed., 1924), pp. 96, 98, 115.

Sentences

Principles

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>() 1. (Whom) (Who) did you meet?</p> <p>() 2. He told John and (I) (me) an interesting story.</p> | <p>a. The indirect object is in the objective case.</p> <p>b. The subject of the verb is in the nominative case.</p> <p>c. The object of a verb is in the objective case.</p> |
|--|---|

"... Read the first sentence in Section I; then mark out the incorrect form. Read the rules in Section I, until you find one that applies to this first sentence. Place the letter of this rule in the square preceding the first sentence. . . ."³

"One purpose of this report is to describe and illustrate a method of constructing a grammar curriculum upon the basis of the errors of school children. . . . it is apparent that the first step is *to ascertain* the rules which are broken and to determine their relative importance."⁴

The point of view expressed in these quotations, assuming as it does that certain definite rules⁵ are the necessary standards by which to measure language correctness, also repudiates *general usage* as a valid guide to acceptability, even the usage of the so-called "educated." The following quotation represents dozens of similar statements:

"The truth is, however, that authority of general usage, or even of the usage of great writers, is not absolute in language. There is a misuse of words which can be justified by no authority, however great, and *by no usage however general*."⁶

From this, the "conventional point of view," the problem of the differences in our language practice is a very simple one. Only two kinds of forms or usages exist—correct forms and mistakes. In general, the mistakes are thought to be corrupt forms or illegitimate meanings derived by carelessness from the correct ones. In some cases a grudging acquiescence accepts some forms which are contrary to the rules when these forms are sanctioned by an over-

³ T. J. Kirby, *Grammar Test*, University of Iowa Standard Tests and Scales.

⁴ "Minimal Essentials in Language and Grammar," in *Sixteenth Yearbook* of the National Society for the Study of Education (Bloomington, Ind., Public School Publishing Co., 1917), pp. 86, 87.

⁵ For a statement of the development of this point of view see C. C. Fries, *Teaching of the English Language* (New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1927), Ch. I, "The Rules of Grammar as the Measure of Language Errors."

⁶ R. G. White, *Words and Their Uses* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., rev. ed., 1899), p. 14.

whelming usage, but here the view remains that these forms, although established by usage, are still *incorrect* and must always be incorrect. To this point of view these incorrect forms sanctioned by usage are the "idioms" of the language. In all the matters of differing language practices, therefore, those who hold this point of view regard the obligation of the schools as perfectly clear and comparatively simple—the schools must root out the *mistakes* or *errors* and cultivate the language uses that are *correct according to the rules*.⁷

Opposed to this "conventional point of view" is that held by the outstanding scholars in English language during the last hundred years. I shall call it here "the scientific point of view." Typical expressions of it abound.

"In considering the use of grammar as a corrective of what are called 'ungrammatical' expressions, it must be borne in mind that the rules of grammar have no value except as statements of facts: whatever is in general use in a language is for that very reason grammatically correct."⁸

"The grammar of a language is not a list of rules imposed upon its speakers by scholastic authorities, but is a scientific record of the actual phenomena of that language, written and spoken. If any community habitually uses certain forms of speech, these forms are part of the grammar of the speech of that community."⁹

"It has been my endeavor in this work to represent English Grammar not as a set of stiff dogmatic precepts, according to which some things are correct and others absolutely wrong, but as something living and developing under continual fluctuations and undulations, something that is founded on the past and prepares the way for the future, something that is not always consistent or perfect, but progressing and perfectible—in one word, human."¹⁰

"A Grammar book does not attempt to teach people how they ought to speak, but on the contrary, unless it is a very bad or a very

⁷ "Some better reason than a custom arising from ignorance . . . is needed for changing the English language. It would seem to be still the part of the schools to teach the language *strictly according to rule*, and to place emphasis on such teaching, rather than to encourage questionable liberties of usage." From an editorial in *The Christian Science Monitor*, Boston, February 23, 1923.

⁸ Henry Sweet, *New English Grammar*, Vol. I (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1891), p. 5.

⁹ Grattan and Gurrey, *Our Living Language* (London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1925), p. 25.

¹⁰ Otto Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar* (Heidelberg, 1909), I, Preface.

old work, it merely states how, as a matter of fact, certain people do speak at the time at which it is written."¹¹

In these typical expressions of "the scientific point of view" there is, first of all, a definitely stated opposition to the fundamental principle of the "conventional attitude." All of them insist that it is unsound to take the rules of grammar as the necessary norms of correct English and to set out to make all usage conform to those rules. In these expressions of the scientific view there is, also, a clear affirmation of the fundamental principle of the attitude that usage or practice is the basis of all the *correctness* there can be in language.¹² From this, the scientific point of view, the problem presented by the differences in our language is by no means a simple one. Instead of having to deal with a mass of diverse forms which can be easily separated into the two groups of *mistakes* and *correct language* according to perfectly definite measures, the language scholar finds himself confronted by a complex range of differing practices which must be sorted into an indefinite number of groups according to a set of somewhat indistinct criteria called "general usage."¹³ Those who hold this scientific point of view insist, therefore, that the first step in fulfilling the obligation of the schools in the matter of dealing with the English language is to record, realistically and as completely as possible, the facts of this usage.

This investigation and report assumes as its first principle this scientific point of view with its repudiation of the conventional attitude toward language errors. We shall, therefore, ignore the conventional classification of *mistakes* and *correct forms*, and attempt to outline the types of differences that appear in our American language practices.

¹¹ H. C. Wyld, *Elementary Lessons in English Grammar* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 12.

¹² This statement must not be taken to imply that *mere correctness* is to be considered the ultimate ideal of language. The scientific point of view does not in any way conflict with the artistic view of *good English*. See the discussion of "The Scientific and the Artistic Points of View in Language," in C. C. Fries, *The Teaching of the English Language*, pp. 102-121.

¹³ One should, perhaps, call attention at this point to the fact that the great *Oxford English Dictionary* is the outstanding document in this "scientific view of language." The principle underlying the production of the *Oxford Dictionary*, the very foundation of its method, was the insistence upon use or practice as the *sole* criterion of the legitimate meaning of words. Compare, for example, the treatment of the word *nice* (especially sense 15) in this dictionary with the usual statements concerning it as given in the conventional handbooks.

II

All of us upon occasion note and use for the purpose of identification the many differences in the speech of those about us. By differences in pitch of voice, for instance, we can usually tell whether the person talking to us over the telephone is a man, or a woman, or a child. By certain characteristic differences of pronunciation and of grammar, the speech of "Amos and Andy" as it comes over the radio makes us visualize two uneducated negroes. Through the speech of "Clara, Lou, and Em," we see three women of little education who have had a very limited range of social contacts. In similar fashion we should with little difficulty recognize the speech of a Scot like Harry Lauder as differing from that of a native of Georgia or Alabama. If one could conjure up Shakspeare or Spenser or Milton, he would find their English strange to his ears not only in pronunciation but in vocabulary and in grammar as well. The speech of Chaucer and of Wycliffe would sound even less like English. In other words, even if one ignores such details as separate the speech of every single person from that of any other, there are at least four large types of differences to be noted in our discussion here.

First, there are historical differences. Chaucer used, as we do, *they* as the nominative plural of the pronoun of the third person, but he did not use *their* as the genitive and *them* as the dative-accusative form. Instead, he used the forms *her* or *hir*, for the genitive plural, and *hem* for the dative-accusative or objective forms. In Chaucer's language it was still the practice to distinguish carefully between the singular and plural forms of the past tense of many verbs. He would say *I rood* (rode) but *we ride(n)*, *he sang* but *they sunge(n)*. In the late sixteenth century it was no longer the practice to distinguish between the singular and plural in the past tense, and Shakspeare therefore used *we rode* as well as *I rode*. For him, however, *learn* was often used with the meaning we give to *teach*, and *thou* was frequently used to address those of inferior rank or intimate friends. Thus the language forms of each age have differed in some respect from those of any other time. Constant change is the outstanding characteristic of a live language used by an intellectually active people. The historical changes do not come suddenly, nor do they affect all the users of a language equally. Thus

at any time there will be found those who cling to the older methods and those who use the newer fashion. Many of the differences we note in the language of today find their explanation in this process of historical change. These older forms constitute a fairly large proportion of the materials usually called errors by those who maintain the conventional point of view. The so-called double negative, as in "They didn't take no oil with them," is thus a perpetuation of an old practice exceedingly common in the English language for centuries. It was formerly the normal way of stressing a negative. The form *foot*, in such expressions as "He is six foot tall," "The height of the bar is now six foot and two inches," is again the perpetuation of an old practice in the English language which the modern fashion has abandoned. It is an old genitive plural following the numeral. A few other examples out of dozens of such historical differences are *clomb*, usually spelled *clum*, as the past tense of the verb *climb*, instead of *climbed*; *wrought*¹⁴ as the past tense of the verb *work*, instead of *worked*; *stang* as the past tense of the verb *sting*, instead of *stung*. Such differences belong not only in this group called "historical differences" but often also to some of the other three groups to be explained below. In fact, the four types of differences are not by any means mutually exclusive classifications but merely loose divisions with convenient labels.

Second, there are regional differences. In the south of England, in early Modern English, the inflectional ending of the verb in the third person singular present indicative was *-eth*, as in "God *loveth* a cheerful giver." In the north of England this inflectional ending was *-es*, as "God *loves* a cheerful giver." Late Modern English has adopted the form that was used only in the northern region. In the language practice of the United States, *gotten* as a past participle form of *get* is fairly general; in England it seldom appears. *You all* as a plural of *you* is especially characteristic of southern United States. In some colleges one takes a course *under* a professor; in others it is *from* one or *with* one; in still others it is *to* one. Some of the differences we note in the language practices of those about us find their explanation in the fact that the fashions in one community or section of the country do not necessarily develop in others. Regional or geographical differences show themselves more

¹⁴ One should note that in the case of *wrought* the old form has not the flavor of "vulgar" English as have the other examples here given but suggests super-refinement.

clearly in matters of vocabulary. That part of an automobile that is called a *hood* in the United States is called a *bonnet* in England. That which they call the *hood* in England we call the *top*. *Lumber*, to most of us in the United States means *timber*; in England it still means *rubbish*. In some sections of the United States a *paper bag* is usually called a *sack*, in others a *poke*. Such regional differences become especially noticeable when a person from one section of the country moves into another bringing with him the peculiar fashions of the district from which he comes. In the new community these language differences challenge attention and give rise to questions of correctness and preference.

Third, there are literary and colloquial differences. The language practices of conversation differ in many subtle ways from those used in formal writing. Most apparent is the abundance of contractions in the language of conversation. Thoroughly unnatural would sound the speech of those who in conversation did not constantly use *I'm*, *you'll*, *isn't*, *don't*, *aren't*, *they'd better*, *we've*, instead of the fully expanded *I am*, *you will*, *is not*, *do not*, *are not*, *they had better*, *we have*. And in similar fashion the formal writing that habitually employed such contractions would seem equally unnatural because of the impression of very informal familiarity which they would create. Apparent, too, although less obvious are the differences between conversation and formal writing in the matter of sentence completeness. Conversation abounds in groups of words that do not form conventionally complete and logical sentences. Many verbs are omitted; clauses are uttered which are to be attached to the whole context of the conversation rather than to any particular word in a parsable sentence; single words stand for complete ideas. In formal writing the situation demands much more logical completeness of expression, and most of the sentences appear to satisfy the demands of a conventional grammatical analysis. Less apparent but not less real are the differences which arise out of the fact that many perfectly familiar expressions occur practically only in conversational situations and are found very seldom in literary English unless they appear in attempts to report conversation in writing. Occasions seldom arise in anything except conversational situations to use *Who* (or *whom*) *did you call?* or *It is me* (or *I*).

Many assume that the language practices of formal writing are

the best or at least that they are of a higher level than those of colloquial or conversational English. When, therefore, they find an expression marked "colloquial" in a dictionary, as is the phrase "*to get on one's nerves*" in Webster's *New International Dictionary*, they frown upon its use. As a matter of fact, thus to label an expression "colloquial" is simply to say that it occurs in good conversation but not in formal writing.¹⁵ Unless one can assume that formal writing is in itself more desirable than good conversation, the language practices peculiar to conversation cannot be rated in comparison with those of formal writing. Each set of language practices is best in its own special sphere of use; one will necessarily differ from the other.

Fourth, there are social or class differences. Despite the fact that America in its national life has struggled to express its belief in the essential equality of human beings and to free the paths of opportunity from arbitrary and artificial restraints, there still do exist some clear differences between the habits and practices of various social groups. It is, of course, practically impossible to mark the limits of any social class in this country. It is even extremely difficult to describe the special characteristics of any such class because of the comparative ease with which one passes from one social group to another, especially in youth, and the consequent mixture of group habits among those so moving. Our public schools, our churches, our community welfare work, our political life, all furnish rather frequent occasions for social class mixture. All that can be done in respect to such a description is to indicate certain facts which seem generally true for the *core* of any social group, realizing that these same facts may also be true separately of many who have connections with other groups. There are, for example, those who

¹⁵ The word *colloquial* as applied to English words and structures is frequently misunderstood, even by teachers of English. Some confuse it with *localism*, and think of the words and constructions marked "colloquial" as peculiarities of speaking which are characteristic of a particular locality. Others feel that some stigma attaches to the label "colloquial" and would strive to avoid as *incorrect* (or as of a *low level*) all words and phrases so marked. The word *colloquial*, however, as used to label words and phrases in a dictionary like Webster's *New International Dictionary* has no such meaning. It is used to mark those words and constructions whose range of use is primarily that of the polite conversation of cultivated people, of their familiar letters and informal speeches, as distinct from those words and constructions which are common also in formal writing. As a matter of fact, even the language of our better magazines and of public addresses has, during the last generation, moved away from the formal toward the informal.

habitually wear formal dress clothes in the evening and those who never wear them. Many of the former frequent the opera and concerts of the best music; many of the latter find their entertainment solely in the movies. The families of the wealthy, especially those whose wealth has continued for several generations, ordinarily mix but little with the families of unskilled laborers; and the families of college professors even in a small city have usually very little social life in common with the families of policemen and firemen.

Just as the general social habits of such separated social groups naturally show marked differences, so their language practices inevitably vary. Pronunciations such as "*ketch*" for *catch* and "*git*" for *get*; and grammatical forms such as "He *seen* his mistake as soon as he *done* it" or "*You was*" are not the characteristic modes of speech of university professors, or of the clergymen who preach from the pulpits in our large city churches, or of the judges of the supreme court, or of the presidents of our most important banks, or even of those who habitually patronize the opera. Such language practices, therefore, if used in these particular social groups attract as much attention as a pair of overalls might at an evening gathering where custom demands formal dress clothes. In fact, part of the significance of the social differences in language habits can well be illustrated by a comparison with clothes. Fundamentally the clothes one wears fulfill the elementary practical functions of comfort by keeping one warm and of modesty by avoiding indecent exposure of one's person. These two practical purposes could just as well be accomplished by rather shapeless simple garments produced over a standard pattern for every one and worn upon all occasions. Such clothes could be made to fulfill their primary functions very efficiently with a minimum of cost. In such a situation, however, aside from the significance of differing degrees of cleanliness, the clothes would show us very little concerning the individuals who wore them. With our present habits of dress the clothes connote or suggest, in a broad general way, certain information concerning the wearers. Among other things they suggest the *circumstances in which we usually see them worn*. A dress suit suggests an evening party (or in some places a hotel waiter); overalls suggest a piece of dirty work or possibly a summer camp. In like manner language forms and constructions not only fulfill a primary function of communicating meaning; they also suggest the circumstances in which those

particular forms and constructions are usually employed. If, then, one uses the pronunciations and grammatical forms given earlier in this paragraph, they may serve to communicate his meaning unmistakably, but they will also suggest that he habitually associates with those social groups for whom these language forms are the customary usage and not with those for whom they are not characteristic. We must, therefore, recognize the fact that there are separate social or class groups even in American communities and that these groups differ from one another in many social practices including their language habits.

As indicated earlier the four kinds of differences in language practice here outlined are by no means mutually exclusive. Many historical differences and some sectional differences have become also social differences. For our purpose here the social or class differences are of most concern; other types of differences will be treated only as they bear upon these social or class dialects.

III

In order to grasp the significance of these social differences in language practice for the obligation of the schools one must understand clearly what is meant by "standard" English, and that can perhaps best be accomplished by tracing the course by which a particular kind of English became "standard." As one examines the material written in England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—a period from one hundred to two hundred years after the Norman Conquest—he finds a situation in which three things are of especial note:

1. Most of the legal documents, the instruments which controlled the carrying on of the political and the business affairs of the English people, were not written in the English language but in French or in Latin. This fact was also true of much of the literature and books of learning familiar to the upper classes.

2. Although some books, especially historical records and religious and moral stories and tracts, were written in English, there was no single type of the English language common to all English writings. The greatest number used what is called the Southern dialect. This particular kind of English had been centered in Winchester, which was the chief city of King Alfred and his successors until the time of the Norman Conquest.

3. There was, therefore, no "standard" English in twelfth and thirteenth century England, for no single type of the English language furnished the medium by which the major affairs of English people were carried on. Instead, English people used for these purposes French, Latin, and at least four distinct varieties of English. The particular kind of English spoken in southern England came nearest to fulfilling the function of a "standard" English because more writings and more significant writings were produced in this type of English than in any other.

In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, however, this situation changed. London had become the political and in some respects the social head of English life in a much more unified England. Many of the major affairs of the realm had to be handled in London. More and more the English language, the English of London, was used in the legal documents of politics and business. Solely because of the fact that more of the important affairs of English life were conducted in this London English rather than in Winchester English, London English became "standard" English. Naturally, then, the growing use of this particular type of English for the important affairs of English life gathered such momentum that even writers to whom other types of English were more natural felt constrained to learn and to use the fashionable London English. Gower, for example, a Kentishman, did not write his native kind of English but practically the same forms, constructions, and spellings as Chaucer, a Londoner born. Naturally, too, this London English gained a social prestige because of the fact that its use connoted or suggested relations with the center of affairs in English life, whereas the inability to use London English suggested that one did not have such social contacts. "Standard" English, therefore, is, historically, a local dialect, which was used to carry on the major affairs of English life and which gained thereby a social prestige.¹⁶

Many changes occurred in this dialect of English and these changes especially affected the usage of the younger rather than of the older generations in the centers of fashionable social life. Thus the continued use of the older forms rather than the newer changes

¹⁶ "Standard" French, "Standard" Italian, "Standard" Dutch, etc., have similar histories.

always suggested a lack of direct contacts with those who were active in the conduct of important matters. In this connotation lay the power of "standard" English to compel the ambitious to conform to its practices.

In America, however, we have had no one recognized center for our political, business, social, and intellectual affairs. More than that, the great distances between various parts of the United States made very difficult frequent actual social contacts in the earlier days. Our coast cities, Boston and New York, maintained direct relations with London long after the earlier settlers had moved west, but the middle western settlements had practically no relations with Boston and New York. This fact can probably explain the differences between our middle-western speech and that of nineteenth century Boston and New York. Because of the fact that New England so long dominated our intellectual life there has been a good deal of feeling in many parts of the United States that the language usages of New England connoted a connection with a higher culture than did the language of the Middle West. Hence the rather widespread attempt to imitate certain New England speech characteristics. On the whole, however, if we ignore the special differences that separate the speech of New England, the South, and the Middle West, we do have in the United States a set of language habits, broadly conceived, in which the major matters of the political, social, economic, educational, religious life of this country are carried on. To these language habits is attached a certain social prestige, for the use of them suggests that one has constant relations with those who are responsible for the important affairs of our communities. It is this set of language habits, derived originally from an older London English, but differentiated from it somewhat by its independent development in this country, which is the "standard" English of the United States. Enough has been said to enforce the point that it is "standard" not because it is any more correct or more beautiful or more capable than other varieties of English; it is "standard" solely because it is the particular type of English which is used in the conduct of the important affairs of our people. It is also the type of English used by the *socially acceptable* of most of our communities and insofar as that is true it has become a social or class dialect in the United States.