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ENGLISH CHANGES
IN PROGRESS

英语的变易

○主编：俞杰

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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前 言

语言是交流的工具，必然在交流中发展变化。社会生活的不断进步，科学技术的迅猛发展，国际交往的日益频繁，异族文化的相互渗透，都为语言的发展变化提供了土壤。对于历时性、渐进式的语言变化，本族语者往往比较敏感，易于接受，而非本族语者就有些迟钝或茫然了。避免落后于语言的变化、使用过时的词句，始终是外语学习者面临的一大挑战。因此，了解英语的发展历史，捕捉其变化的脉搏，揭示其变化的规律，追随其变化的步伐，与时俱进地学习“入时”的英语，自然成为众多英语学习者所追求的目标，这也正是编辑出版此书的根本目的之所在。

本书根据俞杰教授近年来在国内外二十余所大学讲学的讲稿、录音、录像加以编辑整理，经俞先生本人反复修改和审定，最终成书。俞先生从事英语教学与研究五十余载，以语音学、语义学和英语口语研究为专长，著述主要包括《英语语调的辩义功能》、《英语口语套语》、《最新英语口语词典》等。俞教授离休后侨居澳大利亚，今虽年逾古稀，但仍笔耕不辍，四处讲学。他的学术报告深受听众、特别是一些外国同行的好评。正如美国康州中央大学的 F. Don James 校长在《英语语调的辩义功能》的序言中所言，“Professor Yu's own use of English reveals the highest qualities of the language and a profound knowledge of its finest expressions. He is a Chinese scholar of the English language who ranks with the best of the American and British scholars of their own native language.” 作为一名教育工作者，他的辛勤耕耘培育出桃李满园。作为他的学生，我们每每谈及先生淡泊

名利、豁达乐观的人生态度和孜孜不倦的治学精神，无不为之感动。目前这本专门讨论英语最新变化的著作，就是俞先生长期搜集素材、多年潜心研究的成果，其中部分内容在先生近年来赴国内外多所高校所作的学术报告中已有论及。

《英语的变易》全书分5章28节，从宏观到微观全面展示了英语在词汇、语音、形态、语法四个层面上的最新变化。第1章“英语概况”分7节，概述了英语的发展历史、区域性变化、今日英语之现状以及中国人学习英语的主要问题等内容；第2章“词汇变易”含4节，分别论述了新词的不断涌现、词义的演化变易、替代的交互使用和“实话实说”的用词倾向；第3章“读音变易”分4节，深入讨论了元音、辅音、词重音、超切分特征方面的最新变化；第4章“拼写变易”分3节，集中阐述英语读音与拼写的差异、拼写改革方案和两派拼写改革者的不同主张；第5章“语法变易”分10节，主要讨论了英语基本语序的固化、语法结构的简化、进行时用法的延伸、规定语法和虚拟语气的萎缩、比较级表达方式的更迭、对一致原则的局部扬弃、结构用法的新颖变化等问题。

概括起来，本书具有四大特点：一是全面系统，详略得当。编者从历时语言学的角度全方位、多层面、有选择、有重点地展示了现代英语的最新变化，揭示了它的变化规律和变化趋势，粗线条地勾勒出一幅英语变易的动态画面。二是理论联系实际，阐释与示范结合。书中编有700多个饶有趣味的英语对话，将所论及的语言现象置于有着形象具体的社会情景和晓畅明了的语言的上下文之中，为读者提供了生动、实用的语言应用范例，使读者不仅可以从中获得丰富的语言知识，而且可以直接地学习和模仿具体的语言应用，这无论对于理解还是生成语言都是大有裨益的。三是内容新颖，资料丰富。本书的语言素材大多从中外各类书刊杂志、广播电视以及英语本族语者的街谈巷议

中搜集筛选而来，其中很多新词语、新用法或语音、语义、词性、结构的变易是国内一般语言工具书尚未收录的。书中有世界名人的箴言警句，有普通百姓的街谈巷议；有中古英语的词义探源，有今日英语的用法拾零；有土生土长的英语本族语，亦有外来语的兼收并蓄；有严谨规范的书面语，也有时下流行的口头语，可谓古今中外，雅俗共赏。四是全书采用英语行文，文笔流畅，语言洗练，可读性强。

本书集学术性、资料性、实用性和趣味性于一体，是我国英语工作者、大专院校学生、尤其是英语专业学生学习和研究英语的良师益友，值得一读。

李银仓

2004年12月

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Chapter 1 Something About English

1.1 A Brief History of English

It is a truth no one can deny that all things of creation develop in a process of perpetual change. Language as a tool of communication is no exception. Arthur Lloyd James is absolutely right when he has it, "A language is never in a state of fixation, but is always changing. We are not looking at a lantern slide but at a moving picture" (Arthur Lloyd James 1935). Leafing through an English etymological dictionary and tracing the history of some active words right up to their present-day usage, we are sure to be either enchanted or shocked by finding the dramatic differences between the English language in current use and the English language in the past, or, let's say, Old English. Old English refers to the language spoken by the earliest settlers in the British Isles—the Angles, Saxons and Jutes from the 5th to about the 12th centuries AD, well before and after the Tang Dynasty in China (618—907). Before the 5th century, these dominant invading tribes lived and procreated in a part of Europe which now encompasses the whole of Denmark and a part of Germany. Although they spoke different dialects, their language was Germanic in origin. In the 5th century, quite a number of the Frisians also came to Britain. They either joined voluntarily or were swept along by the expedition of the Anglo-Saxons who passed through their territory in the northwestern part of Europe to enter and occupy Britain. The Frisians were also noted as both traders and raiders during Viking times. They used a collection of dialects often unintelligible with each other. Nevertheless, the Frisian language as a whole was also Germanic in origin. The Frisian

language had a considerable impact on the formation of Old English, and that is why the current Frisian language is linguistically classified as the closest relative to English.

From the 8th to the 10th centuries the Vikings, also known as the Scandinavian pirates, attacked and sometimes settled along the coasts of northern and western Europe, including Britain. Their language, also Germanic in origin, had some sort of impact upon the form of English already existing when they arrived. The subsequent natural blending of the language of these invading tribes laid a solid foundation for the existence of German content in English. Which, I think, offers a good sense of correctness for some scholars' allegation that English is a sister language of German. Next chronologically came the Normans. No one can overestimate the significance of the historically known event—the Norman Conquest, i. e. the invasion of England by the Normans in the 11th century. The Normans who came from Normandy in France were descendants of the mixed Scandinavian and Frankish race. They were actually the northern French people. Their language was not a Germanic one but a Romance one, based on the spoken form of Latin of Rome. With the Normans becoming the new masters of the British Isles, it was a matter of course that their language was beginning to flood the English language at that time. Old English was soon relegated to be the language of the lower classes (peasants and slaves) and couldn't but make way for Norman French to be used exclusively by the propertied class. Bilingualism gradually became a necessity among those who had to do business with both upper and lower classes. However, this by no manner of means helped to hinder the extensive infiltration of Norman French into English. With the lapse of time, more and more French was invisibly added to English resulting in significant changes in inflection and pronunciation. And so in the year 1204 English was labeled the only home of the so-called Norman English. This, I think, affords another good sense of

correctness for some other people's allegation that English is more of a Romance language than of a Germanic one. By about the time of the Renaissance, the period in Europe between the 14th and 17th centuries, the language in question had gradually developed into what is known as Middle English. Modern English covers the long period from 1500 to the present. This period has witnessed a continuous influx of words and expressions from a great variety of sources. English has been going on assimilating them, creating thereby a reality that it now has the largest vocabulary of any language today all over the world.

1.2 The Emergence of New Varieties of English

Language never develops independently. It is closely related to the prosperity or the decline of the people who speak it. When its speakers thrive, their language is on the up and up. When they go down hill, their language is on the downgrade accordingly. By the beginning of the 19th century, Britain, enjoying exceptional advantages, had become a powerful industrial and trading country with which no other country could be put on a par. It had in possession the largest number of ships, including deterrent warships in the navy. It had succeeded in setting up colonies in all parts of the world, becoming thereby a so-called "country over which the sun never sets". Together with its traders, soldiers, sailors and rulers in particular, British imperialism had spread their language, which struck root among the broad masses just as soon as those colonialists swaggered down everywhere. And so English had gone from a native tongue of an island to a language of the world. The United States of America is richly endowed by nature. There is no hiding the fact that it has been developing incomparably quickly since the Independence Day in 1776. By the end of the 19th century its economy was already the most productive in the world. During the 20th century it developed by leaps and bounds and its political,

economic and military supremacy took the lead in maintaining the presence of the world. The prosperity of this new American upstart has given English preeminent status as a language of international communication. And now we see that where there is the American dollar, there is English. That's why it has become quite the go for educated people everywhere to try to have a good command of the English language.

The spread of English around the world has given rise to the emergence of new varieties of English. Opinions now do not vary as to the way of classifying people who use English today. They can be grouped under three headings:

- Native speakers of English: This refers to people from the traditional bases of English.
- Official language speakers of English: This refers to people from the earlier places of the spread of English where the English language plays an important second language role.
- Foreign language speakers of English: This refers to people from a large number of nations where English is taught as a foreign language.

It is estimated that nearly a quarter of the world's population is already quite at home in English, which means roughly about 1.5 billion people.

On this same topic, we can not but call to mind some special linguistic terms like GA (General American English), GB (General British English), fair dinkum Australian language (Australian English), Kiwi English (New Zealand English), Chinglish (Chinese English), Japglish (Japanese English), Germglish (German English), Frenglish (French English), Hinglish (Indian English) and so forth. It was absolutely understandable that linguists should have to worry

about the future of English. And in the long past the question raised as to whether the English language would inevitably split up with each going its own way repeating the history of Latin which led to the various mutually unintelligible languages such as French, Spanish and Italian over one thousand years ago. The first American dictionary was written by Noah Webster in 1828. In the course of writing his dictionary, it came as something of a surprise for him to find that hundreds of American words, which would find their way into his dictionary were totally alien to the British. And so in 1789 he prophesied that there would develop "in a course of time, a language in North America, as different from the future language of England, as modern Dutch, Danish and Swedish are from German or from one another." (David Crystal 1997: 134; Herry Morgan Ayres, Ph.D 1921). In 1877, British philologist Henry Sweet made a similar prophecy, saying: "A century later, England, America and Australia will be speaking mutually unintelligible languages, owing to their independent changes of pronunciation." (David Crystal 1997: 134)

1.3 The Expected Dissolution Did Not Come About

Noah Webster and Henry Sweet were undoubtedly great scholars of world fame, and few could match them in their contribution to the development of the English language. However, neither of their prophecies proved to be accurate. It is of course quite understandable that they should have thought so under the overall social conditions more than one or two centuries ago. But fortunately things haven't gone that way and the expected doom has not and most probably will not come about in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, due to the predominance of English mass media everywhere, due to the combined effect of British and American broadcasting via satellite, BBC and VOA in particular, which are easy of access even from the remotest regions of the earth 24 hours a day, and due to the acquaintance with the universally

acknowledged standard written English, in the form of a sea of newspapers from all corners of the world, we find that, instead of dissolution into a range of mutually unintelligible languages, English is now developing, I'd like to venture to say, in a way of convergence. Of course, no one can turn a deaf ear to the existence of quite a number of new spoken varieties (new Englishes) in different parts of the world. Difficulties of comprehension are sometimes unavoidable between various speakers of English, but people can find a way out of these difficulties with the help of the body language. In Noah Webster and Henry Sweet's times, any notion of English becoming so mutually intelligible on a world scale was but a dream. And now after one or two centuries—just a twinkling of an eye in the history of a language—this dream has come true.

1.4 English Has Become a Global Language

As I have mentioned above roughly about 1.5 billion people the world over speak English. This number includes 400 million native speakers of English, and this would mean people from USA, Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and some other Carribean countries. This number also includes 350 million official language speakers of English, meaning people from India, Ghana, Nigeria, Singapore, Vanuatu and some seventy other countries where English has sort of special status and is used as a medium of communication in governments, the law courts, the media, and the educational system. The rest of this number, roughly about 750 million, refers to the foreign speakers of English who are from more than 100 countries such as China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Japan, Egypt, Brazil and so on and so forth. In the case of official and foreign language speakers of English, the number is on the increase. English has been adopted as one of the working languages in the UN and all other international conferences. English has

acquired a special global status. It is so popular and wide spread that educated people can't do without it even for a day. We hear English on television spoken fluently by politicians, scientists and scholars whose mother tongue is not English. I think this simply signifies that English has really become a must, not only in so great a country like ours, but all over the world as well. In addition, there is no need to feel envious about it, because the success of English can by no means threaten the survival of our own language. For the time being, in order to do our bit in making our country rich and strong, we should be greatly motivated to improve our proficiency in the use of English as a foreign language.

1.5 Why Has English Become the Global Language Today?

This is a very fascinating question. The history of Latin, Greek, Arabic, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Russian which were once the dominant languages either in the world or in some parts of the world tells us an irrefutable truth—there is a close link between language dominance and a strong power-base, whether political or military. When Qinshihuang (First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty) united China in 221 B.C., he united the language Chinese. When the Romans conquered the other peoples and became the ruling class of the ancient Roman Republic, Latin became the sole dominant language and all the other languages were reduced to obscurity. Greek was considered unexcelled in the Middle East 2,000 years ago simply because of the military achievements of Alexander the Great. Why did Arabic come to be spoken by so many people across northern Africa and the Middle East? Study the battles waged by the Moorish armies. During the Renaissance period kings and queens in Spain, Portugal and France sent soldiers and sailors to different parts of the world and ruthlessly implemented their colonial policies which resulted in their respective languages finding their way into the America, Africa and the Far East. After the

Second World War the Soviet Union became one of the two super powers in the world, which accounts for the spread of Russian in East Europe and China. English, as we have talked before, has been no exception.

I have had the pleasure of talking about this question with some scholars from the English-speaking world. The ideas of a few of them made me panic. They claimed that the reason why English has become so internationally popular is the fact that there is really something inherently good about the structure of English. A more chauvinistic opinion came from an Australian scholar by the name of John Peterson who categorically said that man is the paragon of all animals and English is the paragon of all languages. In other words English is the most beautiful language in the world. This reminded me of the world famous Russian writer of the 19th century, E.S. Turgenev, who said that the Russian language is the greatest and most powerful language in the world. There is no need to blame those patriotic scholars. But I beg to disagree with them. I was born in the city of Lanzhou and I can speak the local Lanzhou dialect. Lanzhou dialect is easy on my ears. As far as I'm concerned, Lanzhou dialect is the most beautiful language in the world, though when I speak it the great majority of native speakers of Chinese will be all at sea. More often than not when we Chinese happen to talk about the beauty of a woman, we tend to call to mind the traditional saying, "Beauty is blind" or "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder." The same thing is true with language. I think I share the feelings of most of my readers when I say that the beauty of a language is in the mouth of the speaker or in the ears of the listener. It is more subjective than objective. Some other people are of the opinion that the reason why English has become a global language is that it is easier to learn English than some other important languages in the world. Another friend of mine, who is a Chinese teacher at a high school in Australia, said to me one day "Chinese is simply a murder

for me. It's much easier for you to have a good mastery of English". Again we argued over this topic for a long while and happily enough we arrived at a mutual understanding in the end. There are no inherently easy or difficult languages at all. Sounds like "th"/θ,ð/ in English, flap "t" /ɾ/ in American English, "r" sound by vibrating tongue in Russian, "r" sound by vibrating uvula in French all strike those as unnatural who have to learn them as adults. As for native children they are as easy as anything. That's why children of all languages learn to speak their language respectively over the same period of time. However, when I focus on the reality that why English has become a global language has little to do with its so-called beauty or easiness, I don't in the least want to deny that English really has some interesting aspects that do recommend it. Neither can I ignore that there are some linguistic features in English which seem to be internationally much less desirable.

1.6 As a Global Language English Cuts Both Ways

1.6.1 Merits

English has an alphabetical system of spelling. In this respect, it is one up on the pictographic languages like Chinese and Japanese. English also excels languages like French, German and Russian in its easiness of grammatical construction, total disregard of the distinctions of gender and copiousness of its expression. One important feature of the current English language which is worth noting is that it is a much less inflected language than the bulk of Indo-European languages. Word order plays a more important role. There are only a few word endings like the following:

- Possessive -'s

1. And now, ladies and gentlemen, the star of *tonight's* show, the one and only Rob Robertson.