THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE

On the whole, this book is interesting and useful to the student of the English sounds as well as the lover of Shaw's plays, and it may serve as a supplement to the preceding works by Franz, Stoffel and Storm. Only, from the standpoint of pure phonetics, the former section dealing with Counterfeit Vulgarisms is almost negligible, and more stress should be laid on the section of Genuine Vulgarisms. Even as it is, we should be grateful to the author for this elaborate work of investigation which is surely a valuable contribution to the history of the English sounds.

—SHIGETAKE SUZUKI

THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE

THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE: AN INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH IN THE UNITED STATES.


The book is divided into twelve chapters. The first two chapters (pp. 1–103) constitute the introductory part, in which the two opposite attitudes towards Americanisms—Anti-Americanism and Pro-Americanism—on both sides of the Atlantic are described, the general characteristics of American English are explained, and what subjects of study should be pursued by us students of the language is suggested. According to the author, the chief characteristics noted in American English are "first, its general uniformity throughout the country; second, its impatient disregard for grammatical, syntactical and phonological rule and precedent; and third, its large capacity for taking in new words and phrases from outside sources, and for manufacturing them of its own materials" (p. 90); and the difference of the American language from Standard English "is not merely a difference in vocabulary, to be disposed of in an alphabetical list; it is also a difference in pronunciation, in intonation, in conjugation and declension, in metaphor and idiom, in the whole fashion of using words" (p. 103).

The next three chapters (pp. 104–222) are devoted to a historical sketch of the American vocabulary, and it appears, from what the writer says, that the whole history is made up of three distinct periods, that is,
before the Independence, from the Independence to the Civil War, and after the Civil War. As for foreign elements, although the oldest and the most important are words borrowed from Indian languages, French and Dutch influences are nearly as old, and in the second period Spanish, German, Irish, and Chinese are to be noted, while in the third period increased hosts of immigrants from Europe and other continents added Swedish, Czech, Portuguese, Yiddish, Italian and Russian elements. Far more remarkable, however, in quality as well as in quantity, are neologisms, i. e., "new words of English materials." Of course the new circumstances required the new expressions, but it is clear that the people had a delight in word-manufacturing for its own sake, and many of the characteristics that separate American English from British English later on are already shown in the seventeenth century. The reader is particularly requested to pay attention to a great many railway terms (accommodation-train), political terms (landslide) and terms related to eating and drinking (bartender) that were adopted after the Independence, and also to the influence exercised on vocabulary by the newspaper headlines of recent years.

In chapter VI (pp. 223–318), after comparing the American vocabulary with that of England (elevator v. lift, store v. shop, corn v. Indian corn), and mentioning Americanisms introduced into England (caucus, log-rolling) and Briticisms favoured in America (shop, railway), the writer gives us detailed descriptions concerning American honorifics (professor, the Honorable, Mr.), euphemisms (realtor, mortician instead of real-estate agent, undertaker), forbidden words (cock, leg) and expletives (bol). The pronunciation of America is treated in the 7th chapter (pp. 319–78), and American spelling in the 8th chapter (pp. 379–415). In the former we learn that the chief characteristics of American pronunciation are the monotonous tone of low pitch, the nasal twang, the pronunciation of words as spelt, and the tendency to throw the accent upon the first syllable and to retain a secondary accent; and in the latter chapter we find that American spelling is on the whole more logical than British, and that we must thank Noah Webster for such simplified spellings as honor, traveler, wagon, plow, mold, and ax as well as for more reasonable forms such as center, defense (cf. defensive) and jail.

Proper names (personal and place names in America are full of variety—perhaps of greater variety than in any other country—and of much interest. Hence more than eighty pages allotted to them in the 10th chapter (pp. 474–554). Chapter IX the Common Speech (pp. 416–73)
and chapter XI American Slang (pp. 555-59) must not be skipped either, because the kinds of speech treated in these chapters are "the great reservoir of the language, and perhaps the forerunner of what it will be on higher levels, at least in one detail or another, in the years to come" (p. 103). But of the two we are more interested in the former chapter, in which many grammatical (both morphological and syntactical) peculiarities are alluded to, including expressions such as "I would of gave (=have given)" and "He hadn't oughter (=ought not to have) said that," and the disappearance of the future perfect tense and the misuse of shall and will.

Last but not least in importance, chapter XII (pp. 590-619) prophesies the future of the language, and according to Mencken, the English language, spoken by more than two hundred million people—191,000,000 as their native or everyday tongue and 20,000,000 as their second language—and remarkable for its clarity, directness, simplicity and force, is the most suitable language to be adopted as a universal language; but comparing the two branches of the language with each other, it is clear that the American form, which is clearer, more, rational, more charming, and used by a much greater number of people, is superior to the British form. It is probably the former that will win the leadership and prevail everywhere hereafter.

Such is a general outline of the great work. As everybody knows, this work was first published in March, 1919, the second edition was brought out in December, 1921, and the third edition in February, 1923, which last was reprinted five times before the appearance of the present edition. The fourth edition has about 300 more pages than the previous one, and it is not a mere revision or enlargement. It is a work undertaken on the author's retirement from the editorship of the American Mercury at the end of 1933 with the help of hundreds of letters from correspondents in all parts of the world, thousands of clippings discovered by the Durrant Press-Cutting Agency, the growing files of American Speech and Dialect Notes, and a large number of recent books and pamphlets (cf. Preface, v). We must admit, as the author claims, that "in the main, it is a new work," (id. vi), and undoubtedly it is a better work.

Henry Louis Mencken was born at Baltimore, Maryland, U. S. A., in 1890, and starting as a reporter to the Baltimore Morning Herald at the age of nineteen years, he cut a figure as a journalist, and occupied the post of the editor of the American Mercury from 1924 to 1933. He wrote many books, of which Prejudices and In Defense of Women are best-
known in our country. Of course, he is not a philologist by profession. The present book is his sole work on a philological subject. We are sensible of the vigour and expressiveness of his diction. But what we expect from a scientific work are accuracy, simplicity, and clearness. If we are allowed to speak frankly, we cannot but doubt whether the author was not overwhelmed by the too large amount of data that was poured on to his desk, and whether he had sufficient time to examine them closely, sift them properly, and arrange them in good order. Many of the errors in the third edition have certainly been corrected, but we fear that some others may still linger in the present edition (e.g., abolitionist and to ambition are not of American origin).

Then what is the strong point of the work? How can we make use of the book? According to the reviewer's opinion, the greatest merit that is to be found consists in the fact that the work makes a vast collection of bibliographical notes on American English, and that it may be regarded, so to speak, as an excellent variorum of the American language. So far as the American speech is concerned, this is the best book ever published that shows us what literature we have to refer to on such and such a subject, what is to be found in them on the subject, or how the subject has been treated by our predecessors. Thus as regards the origin of the favourite abbreviation O.K., stories of nearly a dozen kinds are collected together (pp. 205–208): (1) "The People is Off Kor Lect," painted on a streamer by a local handy-man in Ohio named Thomas Daniels for the Whig candidate William Henry Harrison (1773–1841) during the presidential campaign of 1840; (2) the initials of one Obediah Kelly, an early railway freight-agent, who signed them to bills of lading; (3) Keokuk, the name of an Indian chief, whose admirers called him Old Keokuk and usually added "He's all right"; (4) omnis correcta, supposed to have been once used by schoolmasters in marking examination-papers; (5) Aux Cayes, a port in Haiti, whence came the best rum in the early days; (6) O.K. (i.e., outer keel) No. 1, used by the early shipbuilders to mark the timber to be laid at the beginning of the actual building of their ship; (7) O.K., invented by the early telegraphers along with many others, e.g., G.M. (good morning), G.A. (go ahead), N.M. (no more); (8) O.K., marked by the elder John Jacob Astor (1763–1848) on bills presented to him for credit; (g) boacky or borkey, an archaic English word meaning the last load brought in from the field at harvest; (10) okeeh, a Choctaw word signifying "it is so"; (11) O.K., Amos, Andrew Jackson's endorsement on the pro-
nunciamentos drawn up for him by his literary secretary, Amos Kendall.

Misprints or other mistakes noticed include p. 53, l. 4 from bottom, change Reed into Read; p. 81, l. 19, add which after act; p. 88, l. 3, read Arakawa for Aarkawa; p. 252, l. 5, delete in; p. 285, bottom line, read be for be; p. 338, l. 22, change second into third; p. 359, l. 7 from bottom, change 4 into 3; p. 399, l. 5, add but one after section; p. 444, l. 5, delete have; p. 466, l. 11, read complete for incomplete; p. 500, l. 1, strike out one of the two to’s.

—H. SHIGEMI

"INTERIM REPORT ON VOCABULARY SELECTION"

INTERIM REPORT ON VOCABULARY SELECTION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

London: P. S. King & Son. 1936. 6s.

Nowadays it is almost trite to say that science or scientific method is gaining ground in every department of human activity. Still in the department of language-study it has been applied so far mainly to researches in the history and nature of languages. As to the art of teaching them, especially of teaching them as foreign languages, it is comparatively recent that any scientific approach has been made to the subject. The problem is in process of being solved along two lines, those of method and material. As to the method of teaching foreign languages we have now some fundamental principles laid down, according to which all practical methods should be worked out (cf. the reports issued in recent years by the Institute for Research in English Teaching). In the investigation of teaching material much attention is being at present paid to the question of vocabulary selection. A wise selection of a certain limited number of those most frequently and widely used words is a most important basis upon which the entire superstructure should be raised. The interim report here introduced is one valuable result of this sphere of activity. Hitherto several wordlists have been proposed by Thorndike, Horn, Palmer and others. The Carnegie Corporation of U. S. A. saw that the time had come for co-ordinating the efforts of individual workers. Accordingly two conferences were convened in New York (1934) and London (1935) under