

3 Vocabulary

The question of what is included in the vocabulary of a particular variety of English (or any other language) raises a number of questions. The first of these is at what point a word adopted from a contact language becomes a word of English. Consider a simple case of adoption from French in current British English. The word *baguette* is a relatively recent import into English. The long, crusty loaf (which is what *baguette* means in French) used to be called *French bread*. The term *baguette* was added to the ninth edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* published in 1995, with the meaning of a loaf of bread of a particular shape (the texture is frequently very different from the French original!). My own experience of the word *baguette* in England in 2000 was that it referred to a sandwich made with a piece of French bread, rather than to the loaf itself. I have since seen the same use of the word elsewhere. The question is: is *baguette* an English word? If it means a sandwich, it is no longer recognisable to the French, because its meaning has changed from the original (as well as its pronunciation, although the differences between the French and the English pronunciations are fairly subtle). So perhaps we can say that it is no longer a French word, but an English one. But what if it means the loaf of bread? Is it then a French word being used to denote a French cultural phenomenon, or has it become an English word, and how can one tell? When a word such as *baguette* moves from one language to another, we usually talk about ‘borrowing’ and ‘loan words’ (although hijacking might seem a more appropriate metaphor to some). Precisely when a word crosses the boundary from being a foreign word to being a loan word is an unanswerable question, although we get hints from the way the word in question is printed in text: if it is printed in italics, that marks it as being ‘other’; unchanged font indicates it is not seen as out of the ordinary. Ultimately, this depends on speakers’ attitudes to the word in question.

Perhaps more fundamentally, we have to ask whether an adopted word such as *koala* is a word of a particular variety of English (in this case, a

word of Australian English) or whether it is simply a word of English. Koalas are probably discussed more in Australia than they are elsewhere, and in rather different terms (they are more likely to be discussed because of the noise they make than because of how cuddly they look, for example). But English only has the word *koala* for the animal, and a child in Toronto is almost as likely to know the word as a child in Melbourne. This contrasts with a word like *bunyip*. Although bunyips, like koalas, figure in children's literature, the word is much more likely to be known in Australia than in Canada, and phrases such as the *bunyip aristocracy* are likely to be met only in Australia. English only has the word *bunyip* to denote bunyips, too, but the word is likely to be much more restricted in its geographical occurrence. Is it possible to distinguish between words like *koala* which are English, and words like *bunyip* which are Australian English? Again, it seems, not easily, and not by any easily applicable rule. With such words, it is probably less their existence which marks a text as Australian, than their concentration: many mentions of koalas and bunyips (and dingoes, kangaroos, and so on) may suggest an Australian text; an occasional mention may be found in a text from elsewhere.

In this chapter we will go on to consider ways in which varieties of English around the world have acquired new words, some of which (but not all of which) will be recognised in Britain. The use of the words marks a text as belonging to a particular variety only if the words are concentrated in the text.

3.1 Borrowing

3.1.1 *Borrowing from aboriginal languages*

The most obvious source of new words for new things in the colonial environment was clearly the language of the people who were already on the spot. Although all sorts of myths circulate about English speakers asking 'What is that?' and being told 'I don't know what you mean' and using the word for 'I don't know what you mean' as the name for the new object, there are no authenticated examples of this happening: generally people seem to have made themselves understood well enough. In some places the English speakers did not recognise that the aboriginal peoples spoke a variety of different languages and might justifiably have different words for 'the same thing', but that is a very different problem. Again, it is intuitively fairly obvious that the things newcomers are likely to ask the locals about are 'Where are we?' and then about the unfamiliar phenomena surrounding them, in particular flora, fauna and the arte-

<i>Name</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Original version if different</i>	<i>Original meaning</i>
Australia			
Noosa	Gabi-gabi	gnuthuru	ghost
Toorak	Woiwurung	tarook	black crows
Canada			
Manitoba	Ojibwa	manitobah	strait of the spirit
Quebec	Abenaki	quebecq	where the channel narrows
New Zealand			
Otago	Maori	Otakou	place of red ochre
Petone	Maori	pito-one	beach end
South Africa			
Bongani	Xhosa		give thanks
Manzimahle	Zulu		beautiful water
United States			
Chattanooga	Creek	Chatanuga	rock rising to a point
Ticonderoga	Iroquoian	Cheonderoga	between lakes

Figure 3.1 Some borrowed toponyms

facts and practices of the aboriginals themselves. These words will be considered as separate classes, simply because there are so many of them, before other, more general words are looked at.

TOPONYMS

The names of new towns and recently encountered physical features were often chosen by colonisers to remind them of Britain or of the names of their own great people (consider *Boston*, *Melbourne*, *Queenstown*, *Vancouver*, *Wellington*, and so on). But they also took over large numbers of aboriginal names, sometimes modifying them on the way. Some examples are given in Figure 3.1.

FLORA

A few examples of borrowed names for plants are given in Figure 3.2, along with the language they are taken from. Since the plants themselves are not necessarily known outside their own geographical area, these words may not all be known to you (see question 1 for this chapter), but the general principle is well-established, that local words are used for

<i>Word</i>	<i>Taken from</i>	<i>Original form if different</i>	<i>Original meaning if different</i>
hickory	Algonquian	pocohiquara	drink made from hickory nuts
kauri	Maori		
mulla mulla	Panyjima	mulumulu	
minnerichi	Garuwal	minariji	
mobola	Ndebele	mbola	
squash	Narragansett	asquutasquash	uncooked green
tsamma	Nama	tsamas	
toetoe	Maori		

Figure 3.2 Some borrowed words for flora

<i>Word</i>	<i>Taken from</i>	<i>Original form if different</i>	<i>Original meaning if different</i>
dingo	Dharuk	dingu	
kangaroo	Guugu Yimidhirr	gaṅurru	male grey kangaroo
kookaburra	Wiradhuri	gugbarra	
masonja	Shona	masondyā	
moose	Abenaki	mos	
raccoon	Algonquian	oroughcun	
skunk	Algonquian	segākw	
tsetse	SeTswana	tsètsè	
tuatara	Maori		
tui	Maori		

Figure 3.3 Some borrowed words for animals

unfamiliar local plants. Not, of course, in every case: sometimes familiar words are used for the new plants, and such cases will be discussed below.

FAUNA

Animals are treated in much the same way as plants, with the same range of possibilities for naming them. Some borrowed words for animals are given in Figure 3.3.

<i>Word</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Taken from</i>	<i>Original form if different</i>
boomerang		Dharuk	bumarin ^y
bora	initiation ceremony	Kamilaroi	buuru
mere	club	Maori	
muti	African medicine	Zulu	umuthi
mungo	bark canoe	Ngiyambaa	mangar
pa	fortified village	Maori	
potlatch	ceremonial giving away of property	Nuu-chah-nulth	patlatsh
powwow	meeting, gathering	Algonquian	powwaw
sangoma	witch doctor	Zulu	isangoma
teepee	conical tent	Sioux	tīpī
tokoloshe	evil spirit	Zulu	utokoloshe

Figure 3.4 Some borrowed words for artefacts and cultural practices

CULTURAL ARTEFACTS AND PRACTICES OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Just as unknown as the flora and fauna that are met in the colonial situation are the cultural practices of the local peoples and the physical objects used in them. Sometimes a local custom has an obvious equivalent word, for example a funeral. Occasionally, the local custom seems so foreign that such an equivalent does not seem justified, as with *powwow* (listed in Figure 3.4) or the Maori equivalent *hui*.

OTHER MORE GENERAL WORDS

Although there are obvious reasons for borrowing words for unfamiliar objects and practices, speakers also borrow words for more familiar things. Sometimes this is done because of the perceived foreignness of the object, sometimes it is done because the borrowed word appears particularly useful or suitable (sometimes for reasons which cannot easily be reconstructed). Some examples are given in Figure 3.5.

3.1.2 *Borrowing from other types of English*

The assumption here has been that speakers of standard British English

<i>Country</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Taken from</i>	<i>Original form and/or meaning if different</i>
Aus	billabong	blind creek	Wiradhuri	river which runs only after rain
Aus	budgereee	good	Dharuk	bujari
Aus	cooeee	call attracting attention	Dharuk	guwi
CDN	hyak	hurry up!, immediately	Chinook Jargon	
CDN	iktas	goods, belongings	Chinook Jargon	
NZ	kia ora	a greeting	Maori	
Aus	koori	Aboriginal man	Awabakel	guri: man
CDN	loshe	good	Chinook Jargon	
SA	mbamba	illicitly brewed liquor	Zulu	bamba: strike with a stick
US	mugwump	a great man	Algonquian	mugquomp: great chief
NZ	puckeroo	broken	Maori	pakaru

Figure 3.5 Some examples of other borrowed words

brought with them to the various colonies the words of standard British English, and enlarged upon that word-stock by borrowing from local languages. But of course that is a simplification. Not only did emigrants from many different regions settle in the new colonies, bringing with them their own non-standard words, there has been continual contact since settlement with the rest of the English-speaking world. For this reason a word that is only dialectal in Britain may nevertheless be standard (or at least widespread) in another national variety, and words which originated outside Britain may have become standard (or widespread) outside their home area (and sometimes in Britain, too). Some examples are given in Figure 3.6. A special case here is the large number of Americanisms, often overtly despised outside North America, but adopted anyway, which have spread not only to Britain but to the rest of the world. Some examples are: *disc-jockey*, *gangster*, *gobbledygook*, *hot-dog*, *itemize*, *joy-ride*, *mail-order*, *porterhouse steak*, *sky-scraper*, *trainee*, *usherette*, *vaseline*. The examples have been chosen to show how unremarkable

Country	Word	Original variety	Meaning
Aus	attle	Cornish	refuse from a mine
Aus, NZ	dinkum	Lincolnshire	work, <i>thence</i> true, genuine
SA	stroller	Scottish	street kid
Aus, NZ	stroller	US	pushchair
Aus	wild cat (mine)	US	a mine in land not known to be productive
Aus, NZ	youse	Irish	you (pl)

Figure 3.6 Words borrowed from external varieties of English

such innovations seem after several years of constant use. (For further discussion see section 7.1.)

3.1.3 Borrowing from other colonial languages

In Canada, English speakers met French speakers who were already colonising the region; in the United States English speakers met French speakers near the Canadian border and in Louisiana, and Spanish speakers in New Mexico, Texas and California; in South Africa they met Dutch speakers. These contacts also left their traces. Sometimes place-names are those given by other colonisers (*Bloemfontein, Detroit, Los Angeles, Montreal*, and so on). Sometimes English has adopted words for colonial phenomena from another colonial language: *meerkat, melkboom, moegoe* (/moxu/'country bumpkin', possibly from Bantu) are all taken into South African English from Cape Dutch/Afrikaans. Sometimes words from aboriginal languages passed through one of these other colonial languages before being borrowed into English. Again, words for flora and fauna are numerous in this process. Examples are given in Figure 3.7. Sometimes words were simply taken over from the other colonising language and applied to local phenomena: *armadillo, bonanza, canyon, coyote, palomino, lasso, sarsaparilla, sierra, yucca* are all from Spanish; *ratel, spoor* are from Dutch/Afrikaans; *mush!* (a command to sled dogs) and *gopher* ('ground squirrel') are both from French.

3.1.4 Borrowing from external languages

English is well known as being a language which is very open to borrowing, and this overall tendency remains just as important in colonial

<i>Word</i>	<i>Original Aboriginal language</i>	<i>Original meaning if different</i>
Via French		
bayou	Choctaw	stream
caribou	Mi'kmaq	snow-shoveller
Eskimo	Algonquian	eaters of raw flesh
pichou	Cree	
toboggan	Mi'kmaq	
Via Cape Dutch		
quagga	Khoikhoi	
Via Spanish		
sassafras	origin unknown	

Figure 3.7 Aboriginal terms borrowed into English via other colonial languages

<i>Word</i>	<i>Used in</i>	<i>Origin</i>
bandicoot	SA	Telugu <i>pandikokku</i>
depot ('railway station')	US	French
dime	NAm	French
echidna	Aus	Greek, meaning 'viper' (because of the shape of the animal's tongue)
malish ('never mind')	Aus	Egyptian Arabic
padrao ('inscribed pillar')	SA	Portuguese
panga ('cane-cutter's knife')	SA	Swahili
sashay	NAm	French <i>chassé</i>

Figure 3.8 External borrowings

Englishes. It is thus not unusual for just one variety of English to borrow from an external language (neither a local aboriginal language, nor a contact colonising language), and for that loan word to be a potential marker of the appropriate variety. Some examples are given in Figure 3.8.

<i>Word/expression</i>	<i>Translated from</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
land of the long white cloud	Maori <i>Aotearoa</i>	New Zealand
dreamtime	Aranda <i>alcheringa</i>	mythical era when the world was formed
marsh rose	Afrikaans <i>vleiroos</i>	
on one's nerves	Afrikaans <i>op sy senuwees</i>	tense and likely to get angry
now now	Afrikaans <i>nou nou</i>	a moment ago
stay well	Xhosa, Zulu, etc.	farewell
stockfish	Dutch <i>stokvis</i>	hake
treesnake	Dutch <i>boomslang</i> (also used)	
monkey's wedding	Portuguese	simultaneous rain and shine
mat house	Afrikaans <i>matjiesbuis</i>	

Figure 3.9 Calques

3.2 Coining

As well as borrowing new vocabulary from other languages, languages all have the ability to generate their own new words and expressions by a number of different means. These are the focus of this section.

3.2.1 Calques: coining on the basis of another language

Calques are also called 'loan translations', and are a kind of half-way house between borrowing and coining. Rather than borrowing a foreign word or expression as is, each part of that expression is translated into English to form a new English expression. South African English seems to have particularly open to this method of gaining new words. Some examples are given in Figure 3.9.

3.2.2 Compounds

By far the most common way of creating new words from the resources of English is by compounding: putting two words together to form a new word. A number of examples from different varieties of English around the world are given in Figure 3.10.

bellbird (Aus, NZ)	monkey orange (SA)	rhinoceros bird (SA)
bloodwood (Aus)	mousebird (SA)	soap opera (US)
boxcar (NAmeric)	murder house (NZ)	soapbush (SA)
cabbage tree (Aus, NZ, SA)	paper bark (Aus, NAmeric)	soda fountain (NAmeric)
catbird (NAmeric)	parrot fish (SA)	stickfight (SA)
copperhead (Aus, NAmeric)	rattlesnake (NAmeric)	wetback (US)
frost boil (CDN)	rest camp (for visitors at	
glare ice (CDN)	a game reserve) (SA)	

Figure 3.10 Examples of compounds formed in varieties of English from around the world

3.2.3 Derivatives

Although compounding is the most common way of forming new words to describe the new situations met by colonists, derivation is also used, perhaps especially in the USA. From Australia we find derivatives such as *arvo*, *barbie*, *bathers*, *watersider*; from Canada words like *hauler*; from New Zealand words such as *gummy*, *scratchie*, *sharemilker* and *ropable* (which is also used in Australia); from South Africa comes *outie*; and *accessorize*, *beautician*, *burglarize*, *hospitalize*, *mortician*, *realtor*, *winterize* are all from the USA.

3.2.4 Other word-formation processes

There are a number of processes besides compounding and derivation which can be used to form new words, and these processes can give rise to words which are identified with one particular variety of English. Clipping gives us *gas*, *gym*, *movie*, *narc*, *stereo* (all originally from the USA); blending gives us *motel* and *stagflation* (both originally from the USA); back-formation gives us *commute*, *electrocute* (both originally from the USA). Clipping with suffixation gives us New Zealand English *pluty* 'posh'. And imitation gives us Australian *mopoke* 'species of owl'. Every country has its own sets of initialisms and acronyms referring to local institutions.

3.2.5 Changes of meaning

As well as the creation of new forms, vocabulary expansion can take place by giving new meanings to old forms. Again, these new meanings

may be specific to one geographical area. For example, *ash* and *mabogany* are both used in Australia to apply to many eucalypts; *badger* was used in Australia to refer to marsupials, especially the wombat, and *mole* was sometimes used in the nineteenth century to refer to the platypus; *robin* is used to refer to a number of different species of bird in North America, Australia and New Zealand; a *barber* may be a sheep-shearer in Australia; in South Africa a *block* is a number of farms in a single unit owned by one person or company and an *excuse-me* is a derogatory term for an educated, middle-class person. *Bikkies* is used in Australia and New Zealand to mean 'money' especially in the phrase *big bikkies*, 'a lot of money'.

3.2.6 Changes of style

Sometimes it is not so much that the meaning of an existing word changes, but just that its style-level changes. In New Zealand, the word *untold* is not at all poetical, but an everyday word meaning 'many' (frequently with the stress on the first syllable), and, as in South Africa, the word *varsity* is an ordinary student word for a university, not just an upper-class word as in Britain.

The USA has seen the coining of a number of words which are intended as jokey words, words which have sometimes spread beyond the USA to other varieties of English. Examples are: *absquatulate*, *bodacious*, *caboots*, *catawumpus*, *hornswoggle*, *rambunctious*, *splendiferous*.

3.2.7 Descriptions

If all else fails, it is always possible to give a description of a new phenomenon, and let the description stand as its name. Some examples (from various countries) are given in Figure 3.11.

3.3 The results

3.3.1 Heteronymy

The term 'heteronymy' is from Görlach (1990b) and refers to the situation where the same item is referred to by a number of different words. A simple example is provided by what is called a *lorry* in Britain, which is called a *truck* in Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Equally what in Britain is called a *pavement* is called a *sidewalk* in Canada and the USA and a *footpath* in Australia and New Zealand. Each of these terms can be referred to as a heteronym. Although usage is changing

bald eagle	US
brown gannet	Aus
brown snake	Aus
lemon-scented gum	Aus
pallid cuckoo	Aus
spotted kiwi	NZ

Figure 3.11 Descriptions used as names

<i>USA</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>Australia/New Zealand</i>
garters (to hold up a woman's stockings)		suspenders
jumper		pinafore dress
knickers		plus-fours
panties	knickers	pants
pants		trousers
shorts		(under)pants
suspenders		braces
sweater		jersey, jumper
turtle-neck shirt	polo-neck shirt	skivvy
undershirt	vest	singlet
vest		waistcoat

Figure 3.12 Heteronymy in names for items of clothing

rapidly, articles of clothing used to provide a rich field for heteronymy, as illustrated in Figure 3.12. The situation is simplified in Figure 3.12 by ignoring variation in each of the areas considered and giving only the main word used (sometimes in rather conservative usage).

In Figure 3.12 it will be seen that words such as *suspenders*, *pants* and *vest* can have different meanings depending on where (or by whom) they are used. Görlach (1990b) calls such words 'tautonyms' – words with the same form but different meanings.

3.3.2 Polysemy

One result of extending the meanings of already existing words is an increase in polysemy; in other words, there are more words with several

meanings. Polysemy also arises through other types of coining, where the same form is coined in different places to refer to different objects. The case of the word *robin* has already been mentioned. The British robin is *Eritbacus rubecula*; the American robin is *Turdus migratorius* (that is, it is related to the thrush); in Australia there are several birds called a *robin*, including the dusky robin (*Melanodryas vittata*), the scarlet robin (*Petroica multicolor*) and the yellow robin (*Eöpsaltria australis*); in New Zealand there are two robins, the New Zealand robin (*Petroica australis*), and the Chatham Island or black robin (*Petroica traversi*).

There are bellbirds in Australia and in New Zealand; but while they are of the same family, the Australian bellbird is *Manorina melanophrys* and the New Zealand one is *Anthornis melanura*. There are also South American bellbirds.

The word *cabbage tree* in South Africa refers to members of the species *Cussonia*, in Australia to members of genera *Corypha*, and in New Zealand to *Cordyline australis*.

Exercises

1. Look up the words you do not know from Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.7. Which countries are they used in? What do they mean?
2. Look for some more heteronyms, this time in the names for items of food. Where is each of the labels used?
3. What variety of English is the following text written in? How can you tell?

The man seemed to sigh, stuck the boomerang into the strip of animal skin that was his belt and, in fact, the whole of his wardrobe, and stood up. Then he picked up a leathery sack, slung it over one shoulder, took the spears and, without a backward glance, ambled off around a rock.

...

'You want some grub?' The voice was almost a whisper.

R[.] looked around. A little way off was the hole from which last night's supper had been dug. Apart from that, there was nothing all the way to the infinite horizon but scrubby bushes and hot red rocks.

'I think I dug most of them up,' he said weakly.

'Nah, mate. I got to tell you the secret of finding tucker in the bush. There's always a beaut feed if you know where to look, mate.'

4. It was stated that the data given in Figure 3.12 was dated. For any one variety of English, see if you can discover how far the data presented was

and still is true. You can either try checking in dictionaries, or you can ask people of your own, your parents' and your grandparents' generations what they say or used to say.

5. Benor (1999) gives, among others, the following words borrowed from Hebrew, Yiddish and Aramaic, used by Ashkenazic modern orthodox Jews in North America.

maxlozet	argument	dəfkʌ	to spite someone with intent
talıs	prayer shawl	kipʌ	skull cap
kofjər	ritually acceptable (of food)	sfʌrim	religious books
fjər	lesson	ləvʌjʌ	funeral
mɪnhʌg	tradition	ʌsər	forbidden

To what extent can you see the same forces operating in these borrowings as in borrowings in the colonial setting, and to what extent are these different? Why?

Recommendations for reading

There are major dictionaries of Australian (Ramson 1988), Canadian (Avis 1967), New Zealand (Orsman 1997) and South African (Silva 1996) Englishes. Ironically, there is no dictionary of British usage (though there are specialist dictionaries of Scottish and Irish usage), since most British works include American usages, and vice versa. However there are dictionaries which provide translations for the uninitiated, and point out instances of tautonyms (Moss 1984; Zvidadze 1983); there are also useful lists in Benson *et al.* (1986).