

# CHAPTER 9, PART I



Modern American English and Its Politics

Note: World English section will be covered with the Chapter 12 lecture

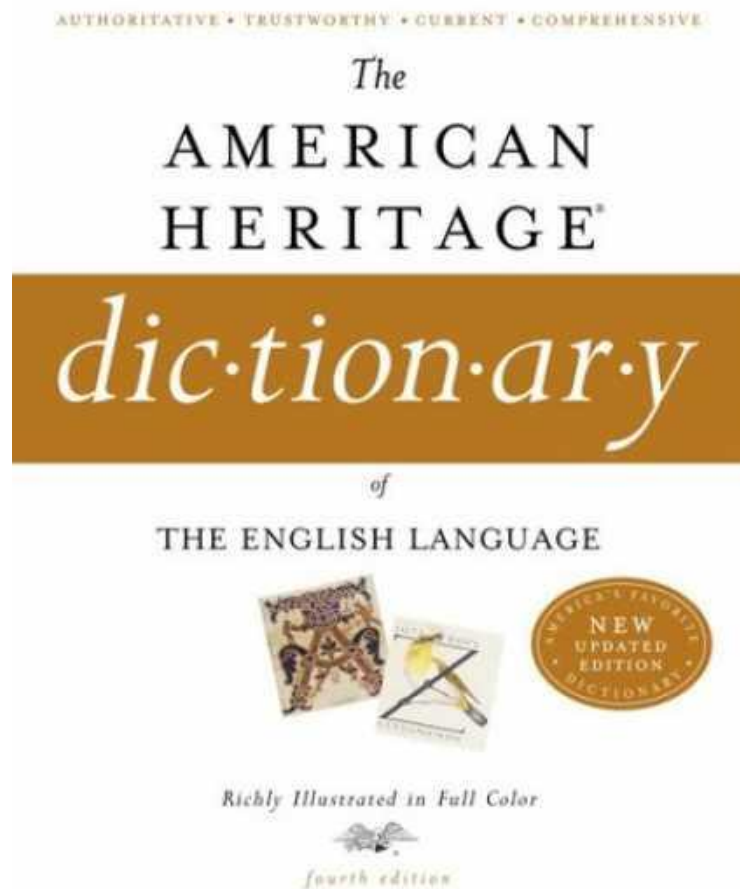
# Divergence of the Streams

- From late 17<sup>th</sup> century forward, English in the US diverged from English in the UK, mostly in vowel pronunciations
- Orthographic changes driven by patriots like Webster
- Conservatism from religious & philosophic antecedents
- Still a sense that British English was a prestige dialect and (from that) anxiety that American English may not “measure up”

# Linguistic growth, Linguistic anxiety

- Political, cultural, historical separation of two largest varieties of English leads to linguistic purism—which variety is “better”? Each side claims victory
- George Bernard Shaw: “We are two peoples separated by a common language.”
- For Americans, value judgments are encoded in linguistic fluency.
  - ▣ Descendent of 18<sup>th</sup> c. Scots Presbyterian schoolmastering, notion that quality of language was somehow connected to moral worth

# American Linguistic Anxiety is Reinforced by our Language Authorities



- Reintroduces usage labels created by panel of authorities (*de facto* American Academy)
- Linguistically conservative
- Hybrid prescriptive/descriptive methodology

# Cultural Arbiters



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- Americans have come to depend on dictionaries to tell them “what’s right”
- Much like Samuel Johnson’s role: lexicographers as determiners of right/wrong usage
- Lexicographers see themselves as word historians:  
<http://c2.com/doc/etymology.html>

September 2, 2009

Erik Anderson

Hackettstown, NJ 07840

Dear Mr. Anderson:

Thank you for your letter of June 1, regarding the usage of the word ironically in the Hackettstown Historical Society’s Web site and the Sara Lee Lucas article on Wikipedia.com. After reviewing the articles, the editors of The American Heritage Dictionaries have determined that their use of “ironically” is somewhat misleading.

In both “The Mystery of Tillie Smith” and “Fall into Halloween” the word irony is referring to a coincidence rather than an event “contrary to what was expected or intended” (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*). The use of ironic in the Sara Lee Lucas article is somewhat in line with our definition but is more of a folly than an ironic event. We would like to note, however, that the use of a word is entirely up to the publication and writer using it.

Thank you for taking the time to write to us, and for your interest in our products.

Best regards,

Mary Huot  
Dictionary Editorial Department  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company

Source: [http://thekingoffunnyfaces.blogspot.com/2009\\_10\\_01\\_archive.html](http://thekingoffunnyfaces.blogspot.com/2009_10_01_archive.html)

# We Rely on Books to Tell Us What is “Acceptable”

## Ain't (AHD 2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

lessly *adv.* — aim'less·ness *n.*

ain (ān) *adj.* Scot. Own.

ain't (ānt) *Nonstandard.* 1. Am not. 2. Used also as a contraction for *are not, is not, has not,* and *have not.*

**Usage:** *Ain't* has acquired such a stigma over the years that it is beyond rehabilitation, even though it would serve a useful function as a contraction for *am not* and even though its use as an alternate form for *isn't, hasn't, aren't,* and *haven't* has a good historical justification. In questions, the variant *aren't I* is acceptable in speech to a majority of the Usage Panel, but in writing there is no generally acceptable substitute for the stilted *am I not.*

**Al·nu** (ī'nōō) *n., pl. Alnu or -nus.* 1. A member of an aboriginal Caucasian people inhabiting the northernmost islands of Japan. 2. The language of the Ainus.

**ai·o·ll** (ī-ō'lē) *n.* A rich garlic-flavored mayonnaise, used esp.

## Ain't (Webster's 3<sup>rd</sup>)

ain't \ˈānt\ also an't \ˈ also ˈant or like AREN'T\ [prob. contr. of *are not, is not, am not, & have not*] 1 **a**: are not ⟨you ~ going⟩ ⟨they ~ here⟩ ⟨things ~ what they used to be⟩ 2 **b**: is not ⟨it ~ raining⟩ ⟨he's here, ~ he⟩ 3 **c**: am not ⟨I ~ ready⟩ — though disapproved by many and more common in less educated speech, used orally in most parts of the U. S. by many cultivated speakers esp. in the phrase *ain't I* 2 **substand** **a**: have not ⟨I ~ seen him⟩ ⟨you ~ told us⟩ **b**: has not ⟨he ~ got the time⟩ ⟨~ the doctor come yet⟩

# Consider these AHD usage notes...

## 'native,' 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

**native** (nā'tiv) *adj.* 1. Existing in or belonging to one by nature; innate: *native ability*. 2. Being such by birth or origin: *a native Englishman*. 3. Being one's own because of the place or circumstances of one's birth: *our native land*. 4. Originally living, growing, or produced in a certain place; indigenous: *a plant native to Asia*. 5. Of, belonging to, or characteristic of the original inhabitants of a particular place, esp. those of primitive culture. 6. Occurring in nature pure or uncombined with other substances: *native copper*. 7. Natural; unaffected: *native beauty*. 8. *Archaic*. Closely related, as by birth or race. — *n.* 1. One born in or connected with a place by birth. 2. One of the original inhabitants or lifelong residents of a place as distinguished from immigrants or visitors. 3. One belonging to a people of primitive culture originally occupying a country as distinguished from visitors or invaders. 4. Something, esp. an animal or a plant, that originated in a particular place. [ME *natif* < OFr. < Lat. *nativus* < *nasci*, to be born.] — *na'tive-ly adv.* — *na'tive-ness n.*

**Synonyms:** *native, indigenous, endemic, aboriginal.* *Native*, said of people and cultural products, indicates birth or immediate origin in a specified place without eliminating the possibility of foreign origin through an earlier generation or historical period: *a native American*. *Indigenous* goes further in eliminating introduction from outside. *Indigenous* is used in this strict sense in the life sciences, but *native* is also commonly applied by biologists in the same sense. *Endemic*, said of plant life and diseases, emphasizes restriction to a limited area in which an organism especially thrives. *Aboriginal*, applied principally to people, describes the earliest-known inhabitants of a place.

**Native American** *n.* An American Indian.

**Usage:** The term *Indian* has always been a misnomer for the first inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere. Many now prefer the designation *Native American*, but usage varies according to tribe and region. In Canada and Alaska, in particular, *American Indian* is still preferred as suggesting a useful distinction from Eskimos. *Native American* has also been used to refer to Hawaiians of Polynesian descent.

**native-born** (nā'tiv-bōrn') *adj.* Belonging to a place by birth.

**na-tiv-ism** (nā'ti-vīz'əm) *n.* 1. A sociopolitical policy, esp. in the United States in the 19th century, favoring the interests of native inhabitants over those of immigrants. 2. *Philos.* The doctrine that the mind produces ideas that are not derived from external sources. 3. The re-establishment or perpetuation of native cultural traits, esp. in opposition to acculturation. — *na'tiv-ist n.* — *na'tiv-is'tic adj.*

## 'shall,' 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

**shall** (shāl) *aux.v.* past **should** (shōod): 1. Used to indicate simple futurity: *I shall be 28 tomorrow*. 2. Used to express: **a.** Determination or promise: *He shall answer for his misdeeds*. **b.** Inevitability: *That day shall come*. **c.** Command: *Students shall report weekly to their tutors*. **d.** A directive or requirement: *The penalty shall not exceed two years in prison*. 3. *Archaic*. **a.** To be able to. **b.** To have to; must. [ME *shal* < OE *sceal*.]

**Usage:** In formal writing, as indicated above, *shall* is employed in the first person to indicate futurity: *I shall leave tomorrow*. In the second and third persons, the same sense of futurity is expressed by *will*: *He will come this afternoon*. Use of the auxiliaries *shall* and *will* is reversed when the writer wants to indicate such conditions as determination, promise, obligation, command, compulsion, permission, or inevitability; *will* is then employed in the first person and *shall* in the second and third. Thus, *I will leave tomorrow* (meaning, "I am determined, or obligated, or compelled, or fated to leave"). *He shall come this afternoon* likewise can express any of the conditions enumerated, such as promise, permission, command, or compulsion. Such, at least, are the rules of traditional grammar. However, these distinctions are only rarely observed in American English, even in formal writing. In general usage, *will* is widely employed in all three persons to indicate futurity: *We will be in New York next week* (acceptable to a majority of the Usage Panel as an example in writing on all levels). *Shall* is largely neglected, except in some interrogatives, such as *Shall we go? Where shall we take our vacation this year?* and in a few set phrases: *We shall overcome*. *Will*, in all three persons, is employed more often than *shall* in expressing any of the forms of emphatic futurity. In speech, the degree of stress of the auxiliary verb is usually more indicative of the intended meaning than the choice of *shall* or *will*. In writing, a condition other than mere futurity is often expressed more clearly by an alternative to *shall* or *will*, such as *must* or *have to* (indicating determination, compulsion, or obligation) or by

use of an intensifying word, such as *certainly* or *surely*, with *shall* or *will*. Informally, contractions such as *I'll*, *we'll*, and *you'll* are generally employed without distinction between the functions of *shall* and *will* as formally defined.

**shalloon** (shā-lōon', shā-) *n.* A lightweight wool or worsted twill fabric, used chiefly for coat linings. [Fr. *chalon*, after *Châlons-sur-Marne*, France.]



# Shibboleths & Linguistic Anxiety

**hope chest** *n.* A chest used by a young woman for clothing and household goods, such as linens and silver, in anticipation of marriage.

**hopeful** (hōp'fəl) *adj.* 1. Having or manifesting hope. 2. Inspiring hope; promising. —*n.* A person who aspires to success or who shows promise of succeeding, esp. as a political candidate. —**hopeful-ness** *n.*

**hopeful-ly** (hōp'fə-lē) *adv.* 1. In a hopeful manner. 2. It is to be hoped.

**Usage:** The use of *hopefully* to mean “it is to be hoped,” as in *hopefully we'll get there before dark*, is grammatically justified by analogy to the similar uses of *happily* and *mercifully*. However, this usage is by now such a bugbear to traditionalists that it is best avoided on grounds of civility, if not logic.

**hopeless** (hōp'lis) *adj.* 1. Having no hope; despairing. 2. Offering no hope; bleak. 3. Incurable. 4. Having no possibility of solution; impossible. —**hopeless-ly** *adv.* —**hopeless-ness** *n.*

**hop-head** (hōp'hēd') *n.* *Slang.* A drug addict.

- Denotation is ‘a test word, something that’s characteristic of a sect or group’
- Connotation (20<sup>th</sup> century) is ‘a prescriptive belief that’s held tenaciously, and usually unreflectingly’ (connected to *taboo*)
- These words become a “test case” to see which side a user is on



# Recent Changes in *AHD* Attitudes

## “Our Living Language” callouts

“*Ax*, a common nonstandard variant of *ask*, is often identified as an especially salient feature of African American Vernacular English. While it is true that the form is frequent in the speech of African Americans, it used to be common in the speech of white Americans as well, especially in New England. This should not be surprising since *ax* is a very old word in English, having been used in England for over 1,000 years ... the forms in *x* arose from the forms in *sk* by a linguistic process called metathesis, in which two sounds are reversed. The *x* thus represents (*ks*), the flipped version of (*sk*). Metathesis is a common linguistic process around the world and does not arise from a defect in speaking. Nevertheless, *ax* has become stigmatized as substandard, a fate that has befallen other words, like *ain’t*, that were once perfectly acceptable in literate circles.”—callout box in 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of *American Heritage Dictionary*

## Usage notes included in definitions

“*Momentarily* is widely used in speech to mean ‘in a moment,’ as in *The manager is on another line, but she’ll be with you momentarily*. This usage rarely leads to ambiguity since the intended sense can usually be determined on the basis of the tense of the verb and the context. Nonetheless, many critics hold that the adverb should be reserved for the senses [sic] ‘for a moment’ and the extended usage is unacceptable to 59 percent of the Usage Panel.”—Usage Note in 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of *American Heritage Dictionary*

# Who's on the usage panel? †

Roy Blount, Letitia Baldridge†, Jacques Barzun†, Annie Dillard, Howard Fast†, John Kenneth Galbraith†, Robert Hass, Sue Hubbell, Molly Ivins†, Alfred Kahn†, Justin Kaplan, Garrison Keillor, Jean Kirkpatrick†, William Least-Heat Moon, David Leavitt, Lois Lowry, William Manchester†, Richard Rhodes, Frank Rich†, Arthur Schlesinger†, Elaine Showalter, Ted Sorensen†, Wendy Wasserstein†, Tony Randall†, Eudora Welty†, A. Bart Giamatti†, Alfred Kazin†, Walter Kerr†, J. Anthony Lukas†, Wallace Stegner†, and Helen Vendler.

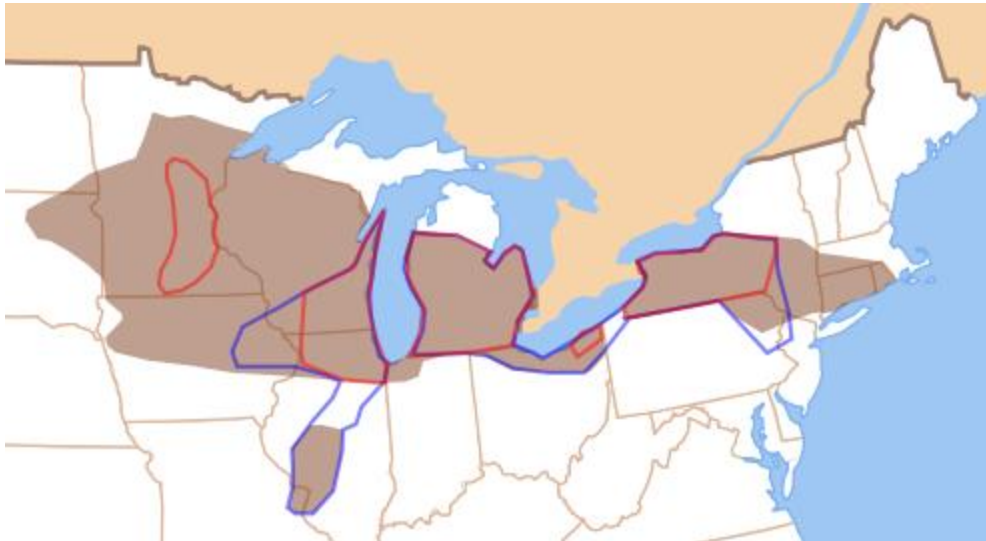
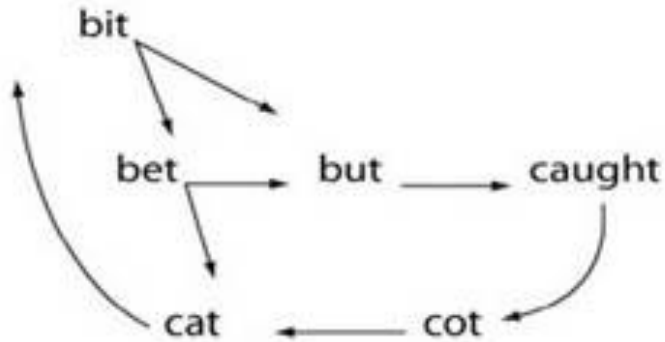
Sherman Alexie, Margaret Atwood, Rita Dove, Mark Doty, Robin Cook, Pat Conroy, Louise Erdrich, Henry Louis Gates Jr, James Gleick, Stephen Greenblatt, Mark Helprin, Oscar Hijuelos†, Douglas Hofstadter, Erica Jong, Tracy Kidder, Jamaica Kincaid, Maxine Hong Kingston, Maxine Kumin, Armistead Maupin, Alice Munro, Mary Oliver, Steven Pinker, Robert Pinsky, E. Annie Proulx, Judith Rossner†, Antonin Scalia, Mona Simpson, Susan Sontag†, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, Anne Tyler, Fay Weldon, and David Foster Wallace†.

# Registers & Correctness

- A **register** is a variety of a language used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting.
- Term introduced in 1956 to focus on way language was used in sociocultural situations, rather than on individual users' dialects.
- “Received Pronunciation,” also known as RSP (Received Standard Pronunciation), RP, or BBC English, is a **prestige register** of British English.
- During the 19th century, it became the accent of public schools, such as Eton and Harrow, and was soon the main sign that a speaker had received a good education.
- It spread rapidly throughout the Civil Service of the British Empire and the armed forces, and became the voice of authority and power.
- Americans tend to react positively to it.
- American “Broadcast Standard English” is similar but not as prestigious.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W68VaOuY6ew>
- Gives us a sense of “correctness” to imitate
- Pronunciation becomes another source of linguistic anxiety and linguistic discrimination.
- Peter Sellers demonstrates a range of British accents:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLsVh6QrpeW>



# American Sounds Are Still Changing



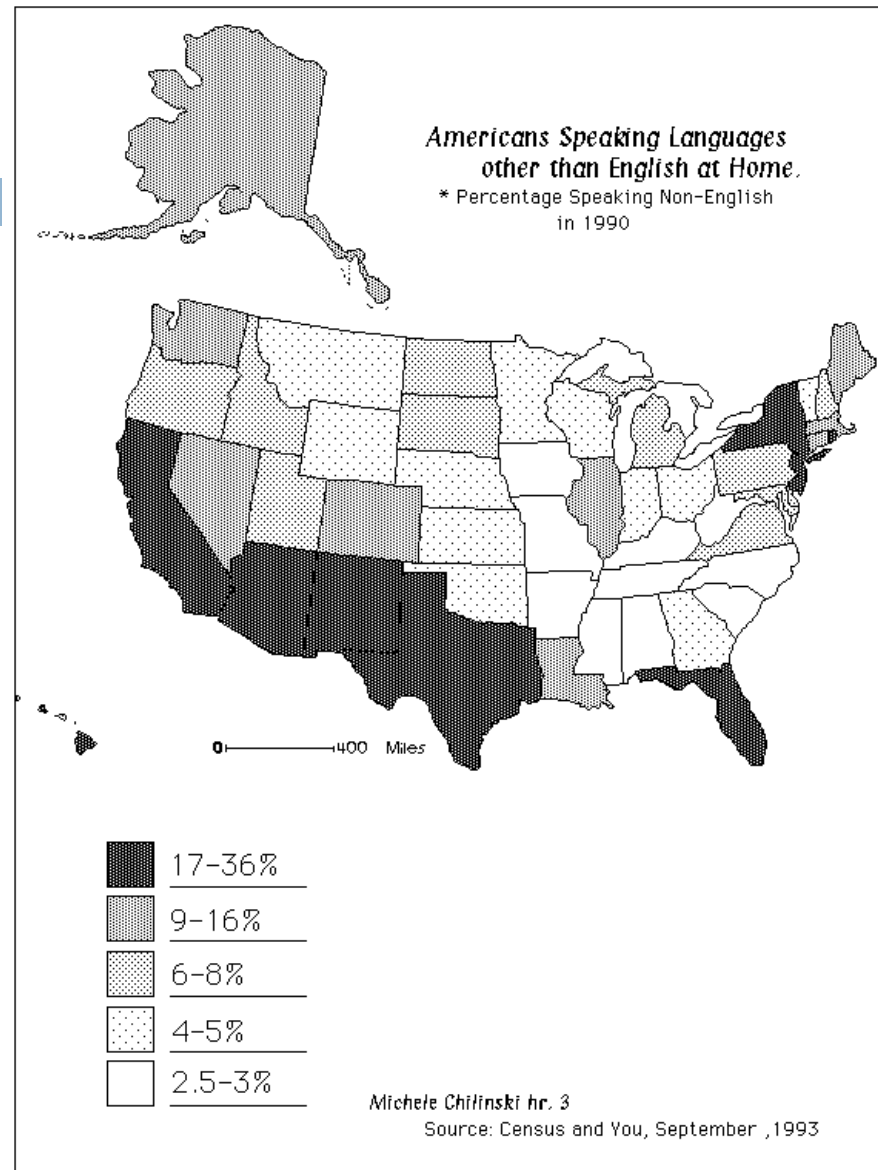
- Affects words like 'caught'/'cot,' 'dawn'/'don' and 'bet'/'bit'
- About 1950, the short vowels in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, Rochester, began to move. Also being documented in Northern California now.
- William Labov discusses the Northern Cities vowel shift: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UoJ1-ZGb1w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UoJ1-ZGb1w)
- Good general article on this: <http://slate.me/PCATMR>

# Anxiety over language may mask

- Anxiety over power shifts in society— “They’re not like us, so they’re inferior”
- Anxiety over changing socioeconomic conditions— “Those people are a threat to me and my family”
- Anxiety over challenges to accepted facts and beliefs— “This is what they taught me in school, so it must be right”
- Anxiety that some people are getting privileges other people are not— “Why are those people getting special treatment?”

## Remember....

- In Webster's time, 20% of Americans did not list English as their first language (census data). Linguistically, the United States is a multi-lingual nation, and statistics suggest this will continue to be the case.



<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/national/us-language-map/>

# Political ramifications of linguistic reality

- ◉ Increasing political & fiscal conservatism
- ◉ Post Cold-War resentment of things foreign
- ◉ Current sentiment toward immigration
- ◉ Resentment toward “political correctness”
- ◉ Impact of inflammatory media





# Languages Spoken in the United States

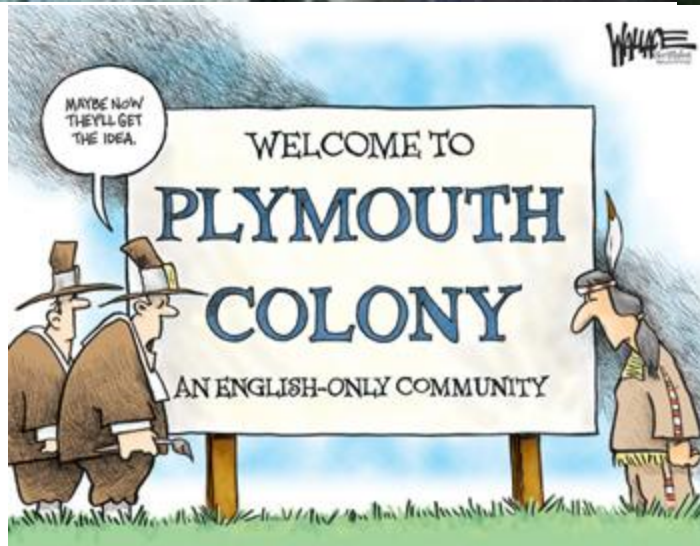
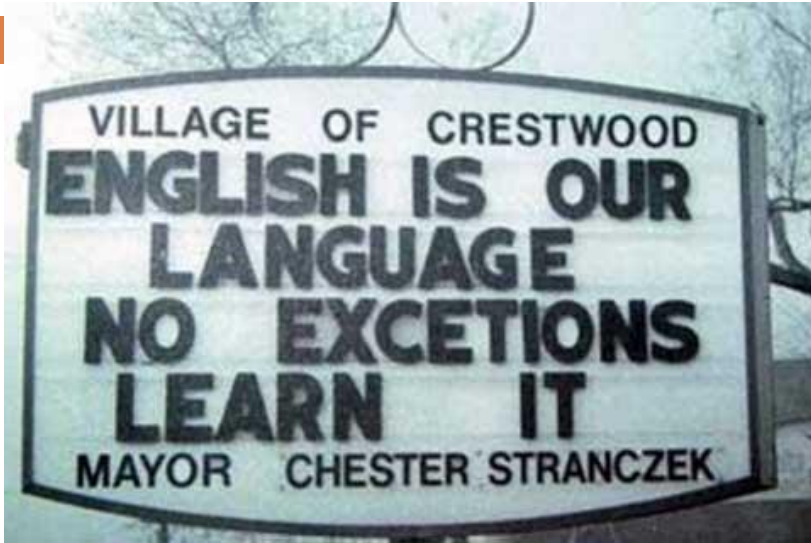
Source: U.S. Census, 2000



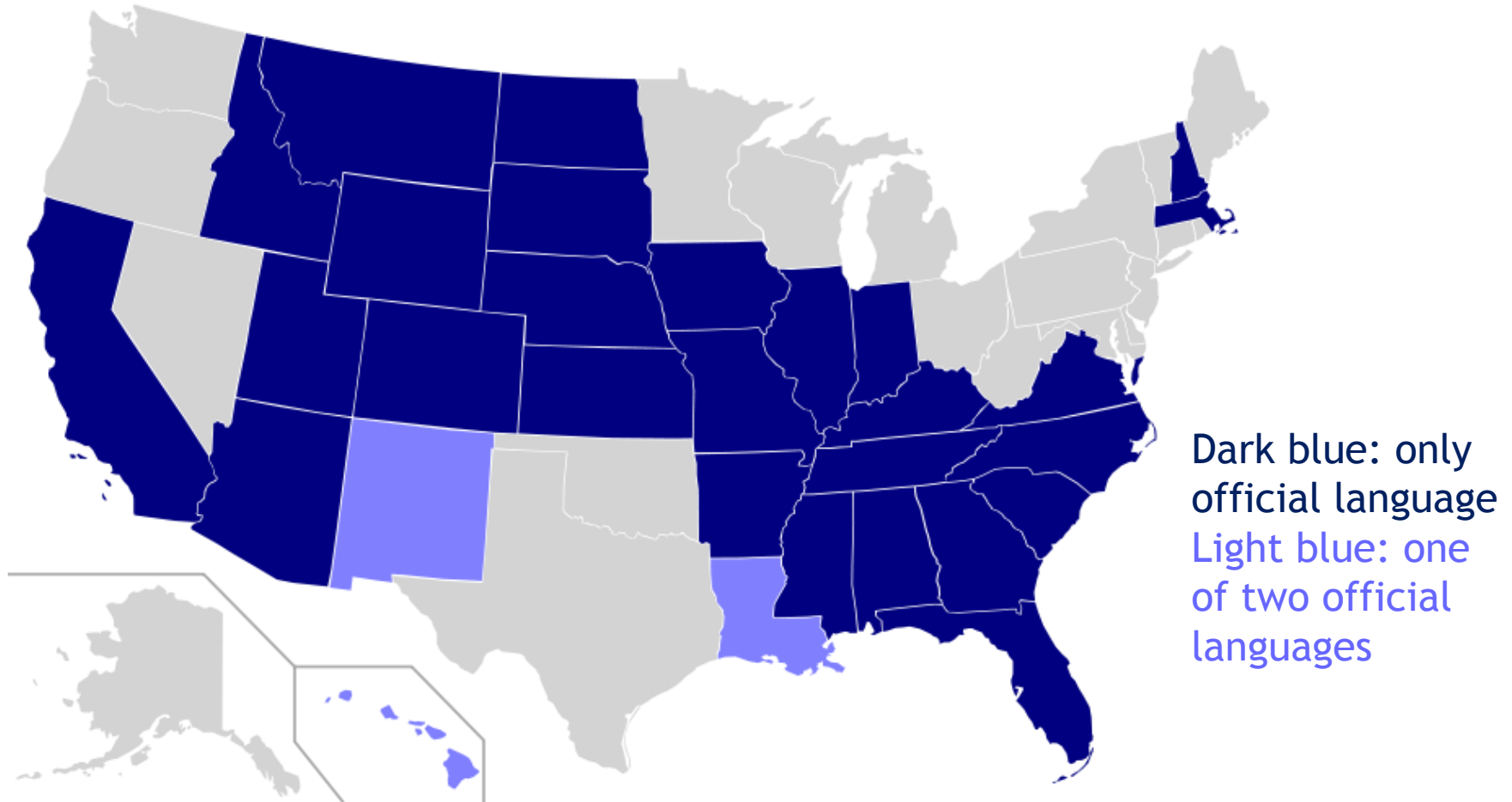
Source: Joe Heller, *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, March 27, 2001 (adapted)

|             |       |   |
|-------------|-------|---|
| 215,423,557 | 82%   | English                                   |
| 46,951,595  | 18%   | All languages other than English combined |
| 28,101,052  | 10%   | Spanish or Spanish Creole                 |
| 2,022,143   | 0.77% | Chinese                                   |
| 1,643,838   | 0.63% | French (incl. Patois, Cajun)              |
| 1,383,442   | 0.53% | German                                    |
| 1,224,241   | 0.47% | Tagalog                                   |
| 1,009,627   | 0.38% | Vietnamese                                |
| 1,008,370   | 0.38% | Italian                                   |
| 894,063     | 0.34% | Korean                                    |
| 706,242     | 0.27% | Russian                                   |
| 667,414     | 0.25% | Polish                                    |
| 614,582     | 0.23% | Arabic                                    |
| 564,630     | 0.22% | Portuguese or Portuguese Creole           |
| 477,997     | 0.18% | Japanese                                  |
| 453,368     | 0.17% | French Creole                             |
| 418,505     | 0.16% | African languages                         |
| 365,436     | 0.14% | Greek                                     |
| 317,057     | 0.12% | Hindi                                     |
| 312,085     | 0.12% | Persian                                   |
| 262,900     | 0.10% | Urdu                                      |
| 235,988     | 0.09% | Gujarathi                                 |
| 233,865     | 0.09% | Serbo-Croatian                            |
| 203,466     | 0.08% | Other Native North American languages     |
| 202,708     | 0.08% | Armenian                                  |
| 195,374     | 0.07% | Hebrew                                    |
| 181,889     | 0.07% | Mon-Khmer, Cambodian                      |
| 178,945     | 0.07% | Yiddish                                   |
| 178,014     | 0.07% | Navajo                                    |
| 168,063     | 0.06% | Miao, Hmong                               |
| 162,252     | 0.06% | Scandinavian languages                    |
| 149,303     | 0.06% | Laotian                                   |
| 120,464     | 0.05% | Thai                                      |
| 117,973     | 0.04% | Hungarian                                 |

# Linguistic anxiety, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Division

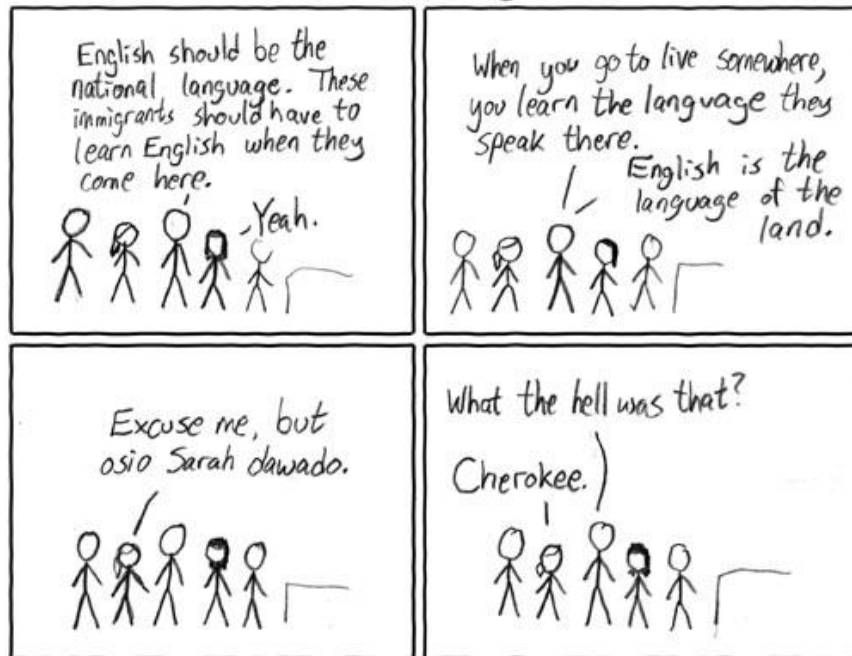


# States where English is the “official” language



# Causes of English-Only Linguistic Anxiety

This happened to my friend:



- Association of language fluency with political power, patriotism, economic status, class distinctions
- Exaggeration of the schoolmastering impulse to a hurtful degree

# Politics and the English Language

- Arizona moves to oust teachers with “ethnic” accents:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703572504575213883276427528.html>

- “No Child Left Behind” requires schools to hire multilingual teachers if student population requires them



# The Pygmalion Effect

- Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968/1992) defined the term.
- Basically, it says that people perform the way we expect them to perform.
- In linguistic terms, if we think that students who are dialect speakers will underperform, they tend to underperform.
- If we think that they are performing *differently* and target our instruction appropriately, they perform as well as speakers of more standard dialects.

# Why are we so obsessed with “Standard English”?

- W. Ross Winterowd: “The ability to write and speak Standard is money in your pocket and power in your hands.”
- *Do You Speak American?*  
<http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/standardamerican/>