A Social and Cultural History of English

S. Gramley, WS 2009-10
The 20th Century
Social, political, and cultural events and changes:

- the world wars
- the growth of a consumer society
- independence of Ireland
- loss of the Empire (de-colonialization)
- devolution
- 20th century immigration
- furthermore: new styles of music, types of food, religious orientations, and manners of dress

Text 25: Mid-Twentieth Century English: Extracts from Andrea Levy *Small Island*

Linguistic change:

- marginalization of the regional dialects
- continuing prestige of the standard accent and continuing pronunciation changes
- shifts in language awareness, e.g. consciousness of gender and of sexist language
- borrowing from more and more new sources
The linguistic effects of
• the world wars
  • increased dialect contact
  • increased class contact
  ➢ the process of leveling was reinforced

• the growth of a consumer society
  • national products
  • advertising
  • media language (radio, film, TV)
  ➢ greater language awareness
The linguistic effects of the independence of Ireland

There is “… the question why IrE developed so many new forms in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century? The answer is simple. This was the period when Irish was rapidly replaced by English in many hitherto relatively ‘untouched’ parts of Ireland, not the least because of the introduction of compulsory schooling. This favoured substratal influences, especially since the teachers were themselves bilingual.” (Fritz 2006: 298)
The linguistic effects of the independence of Ireland: the emergence of IrE, e.g.

- **after-perfects**
  We are just *after receiving* a letter from Kate of Farside (291)

- **modal object perfects**
  We will *have our wheat finished* in about another week. (294)

- **habitual *do***
  But Dear Joseph when you *do write* [emphatic] you mite say some thing to William as some like to be mentioned by Name for he is very Kind to Mary Ann. But your Bother in Law *does think* [habitual] that as you have no Brothers or Sisters in Ireland but Mary Ann and him. (295)

- **habitual *be***
  I am Surprised that Michael *does not be enquiring* after me, ... (296)

- **unbound reflexives**
  Seeing that they are elected by *ourselves*, and represent us, ... (286)
The linguistic effects of (the loss of) the Empire (de-colonialization) and 20th century immigration

• borrowing on a large scale
• export of English to the colonies and the independent states which grew out of them
• World War II and post-war movement of labor to Great Britain, bringing more and closer contact with non-British varieties of English

- English was becoming increasingly global; a language of international trade and scientific communication and the major library language everywhere, which meant that Standard English was becoming less parochial
The linguistic effects of devolution

renewed support for language revival movements:
  • Scottish Gaelic
  • Welsh
  • Scots
even languages already pronounced dead:
  • Cornish
  • Manx
began to undertake (modest) revival efforts
Linguistic change:
• marginalization of the regional dialects
  • rural dialects are increasingly recessive
  • urban dialects represent new centers of linguistic influence
• London English is the de facto standard
• the standard accent and continuing pronunciation change
  • RP continues to carry prestige but is clearly being modified towards a London base
• note Estuary English (more next week)
• shifts in standard, e.g. gender awareness in language
  • conscious shift away from sexist forms, e.g. *Miss, he* for generic reference
• borrowing from more and more new sources
Literature
