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THE EAST ANGLIAN DIALECT OF ENGLISH IN THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

In the 17th century, the English region of East Anglia contained many of the major population centres of the British Isles, not least Norwich, England's second city at that time. One might therefore predict that East Anglian dialects of English would have played a major role in determining the nature of the new colonial Englishes which were first beginning to emerge during this period. This paper considers some of the phonological and grammatical features of East Anglian English which can be argued to have been influential in this way.

Keywords: East Anglia; dialects; colonial English; Caribbean English; American English; Australasian English.

1. Introduction

At the time when the English language first left the British Isles and started being transported across the Atlantic, in the 1600s (Trudgill 2017), Norwich was the second largest city in England, Ipswich was the seventh, Great Yarmouth the eighth, Cambridge the tenth, and Colchester the twelfth (Hoskins & Hey 1984). It would therefore not be at all surprising to find that East Anglian English initially played an important role in the formation of the new Colonial Englishes which were soon to start developing in the Americas, and then subsequently in the Southern Hemisphere. In this paper in honour of Jacek Fisiak, who was a dedicated student of the older dialects of East Anglia, I examine some of the evidence that this was so, investigating both phonological and grammatical features.

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2. Bermuda and the Caribbean

The first location in which any sizeable group of native speakers of English became successfully established outside the British Isles was the Jamestown settlement in Virginia, in what is now the United States of America, founded in 1607 by the London Company, and with apparently very little East Anglian participation. However, the second episode of colonisation followed very soon after, on the hitherto uninhabited island of Bermuda (Ayres 1933). Here the first English speakers to arrive, in 1609, were travelling to Jamestown when they were shipwrecked on the island: Bermuda is about 900 km east of the American mainland; and Modern Bermudian English does indeed show some signs of some possible East Anglian input in its formation.

The LOT vowel in Bermudian English (see Trudgill 2019) is typically unrounded [ɑ], as in modern northern East Anglia, though that is of course a feature of most North American Englishes. More intriguingly, the consonants /w/ and /v/ are merged in Bermudian English. Because of the phonotactics of /w/ in English, this merger can only manifest itself in syllable-initial position, giving homonyms such as *wine* and *vine*, *Wales* and *veils*. The actual phonetic quality of the single merged consonant is [ß] or [ᵦ] – a voiced bilabial fricative or approximant. Ayres does write of an "apparent interchange of [v] and [w]" (1933: 9) in Bermuda but, as discussed in Trudgill et al. (2003), this is a typical misperception on the part of listeners who have the distinction in their own speech: what there is is not an interchange but a merger, as Ayres also finally concludes. Fascinatingly, the merger is also a feature of the traditional dialect of Charleston, South Carolina: Primer (1888) wrote that the Charleston dialect of his period was characterised by "coalescence of /v / and /w/, with resulting homonymy of *wail* and *veil*, etc" (McDavid 1955: 37).

This merger was very much a feature of southeast-of-England dialects in the 1700s and 1800s, particularly in East Anglia: Wright (1905wright1905: 227) wrote that "initial and medial v has become w in mid-Buckinghamshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Kent, east Sussex". However, according to Jordan (1975) there is evidence of a loss of contrast between /w/ and /v/ going back to the late 14th century. So it is perfectly possible that the merger was actually transplanted directly from England to Bermuda at the time of the first settlement.

The *v-w merger* also occurs today in Montserrat, which was settled by English speakers in the 1630s; the Bay Islands of Honduras, which were occupied by English-speaking buccaneers in 1642 (Davidson 1974); and the Bahamas, which saw settlement by dissident Bermudian anglophones also in the 1640s, as well as colonists from England (Trudgill et al. 2003).

3. New England

The third anglophone settlement outside the British Isles occurred in 1610, in Newfoundland (Clarke 2010); but the settlement was organised by the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers, which had been given a charter by King James I for establishing a colony on the island, and seems to have had no East Anglian involvement. However, the next episode of English-speaking colonisation beyond the British Isles chronologically was the well-known Puritan New England settlement carried out by the so-called Pilgrim Fathers, in Plymouth, Massachusetts, which began in 1620. Here it is rather well established that there was considerable East Anglian involvement.

The New England area of the northeastern United States – the modern states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut – today contains very many placenames which were in origin East Anglian toponyms: Norwich, Vermont was settled in 1763; Ipswich, Massachusetts dates from the 1630s; while Colchester, Vermont, also dates from 1763. Just a few of the additional Norfolk-origin names in New England include Attleboro [Attleborough in Norfolk, England], Burnham, Hingham, Lynn, Newmarket, Norfolk, Norwich, Rockland, Thetford, Walpole, Wayland, Windham [Wymondham], Wolcott [Walcott], and Yarmouth. Suffolk names include Brandon, Haverhill, Holbrook, and Wenham; from Essex we find, amongst others, Braintree and Dedham; and from Cambridgeshire there are Cambridge and Ely.

This of course does not necessarily indicate heavy East Anglian settlement of the area, but we do know that the Pilgrim Fathers who founded the eastern New England Massachusetts colony were predominantly from the radical Puritan eastern counties of England, and a high proportion of the adult pilgrims on the *Mayflower* who settled the Plymouth Colony came from Norfolk and Essex (Johnson 2006).

It would be surprising if this had not had some linguistic consequences, and there is good evidence that it did. For instance, the typical East Anglian pronunciation of *room* and *broom* with the FOOT vowel is also typical of New England (Francis 1959). More importantly, the phonological phenomenon of the *East Anglian short o* involves the usage of the FOOT vowel in GOAT words, as in *boat* /bʊt/, *home* /hʊm/. This is also a very well-known feature of New England English: the New England "short o" has been discussed in the literature on American dialects a number of times, e.g., Avis (1961); Kurath & McDavid (1961: 12). Avis (1961) tells us that the heartland of the New England phenomenon lies in eastern Vermont, New Hampshire, northeastern Massachusetts, and Maine, as well as in southwestern New Brunswick, Canada. And Kurath (1964: 150) writes:

> Only New England [in the USA] preserves the original [Middle English] distinction [of *ǭ* and *ou*], though to a limited extent. Here the old monophthong survives in checked position as a short and fronted mid-back vowel /ɵ/ as in *stone, road, coat* /stɵn, rɵd, kɵt/, contrasting with upgliding /o/, as in *know, grown*.

Kurath (1965) asks the question: "Is the survival of contrasting vowels in New England to be attributed to English folk speech?", and answers that: "New England usage in this matter probably derives from English folk speech or from a regional type of Standard British English reflecting folk usage". In an earlier publication (1928) he gives a more geographically detailed answer to the question: "The population of the seaboard of New England had come for the most part from southeastern counties of England"; and "the shortened vowel of *coat, whole,* and *home* is recorded for East Anglia".

However, there is an important difference between the East Anglian and the New England phenomena: the New England "short o" contrasts with the FOOT vowel as central [ɵ] versus back [ʊ], while in northern East Anglia the vowel is identical: *road* and *hood* are perfect rhymes, and have been at least since the late 1700s, as reported by Forby (1830: 90): "The long o ... has also in some words the common short sound of the diphthong *oo* (in *foot*), or that of the vowel *u* in *pull*", citing the examples of *bone, stone. whole*.

Another interesting point is that items listed by Avis (1961) as occurring with the New England "short o" include the following, which also demonstrate "short o" in East Anglia: *boat, bone, broke, coat, goat, home, most, oats, post, road, stone, toad, toast, suppose, whole.* However, Avis also cites a number of words which do not have "short o" in New England but which do have it in East Anglia: *coast, drove, froze, over, rode, yolk.* This can perhaps be explained in terms of the loss of this recessive feature in New England in these lexical items. We can suppose that these words formerly had "short o" in New England, but had lost them by the time the research on which Avis's paper was based was carried out in the 1930s – or, more prosaically, that the field worker simply failed to elicit this (stigmatised) pronunciation.

However, there are also two further issues which are problematic if we wish to establish a historical connection. First is the fact that, while in neither dialect can shortening occur in open syllables, for obvious phonotactic reasons, East Anglia retains a distinction in open syllables between the two original ME lexical sets, while New England does not, as Kurath acknowledges with his "to a limited extent":

	hood	*road*	*go*	*low*
East Anglia	/ʊ/	/ʊ/	/u:/	/ou/
New England	/ʊ/	/ɵ /	/ou/	/ou/

The number of problematical words involved here is rather small. GOAT items which have stressed syllable-final /u:/ in northern East Anglian English are rather few: *Coe, foe, go, Joe, no, roe, so, toe, woe*. Again we can perhaps therefore argue that this difference between East Anglia and New England can be accounted for by dedialectalisation in New England. We could hypothesise that New England English also formerly had a distinct vowel in open syllables, but that it has lost it under the influence of more mainstream forms of English.

To turn now to a different phonological feature, it is also possible to argue that East Anglian English was involved in the development of the *yod-dropping* which is widespread in North America. Unlike in most of the British Isles and the Southern Hemisphere, varieties of English in the USA and Canada outside the American "South" have yod-dropping after /t/and /d/, as well as after /n/, as in *tune, duke, new*. Modern northern East Anglia has taken the long historical process of the loss of /j/ before /u:/ to its logical conclusion, and now does not even have /j/ in *cue, huge, music* or *view*. A reasonable view, however, would be that at the time of the settlement of New England by East Anglians, yod-dropping had already progressed from the post-/r/ and post-/l/ contexts, as in *rule* and *lute*, to include all post-alveolar consonantal environments, as in *suit, nude, student, due*, and it was this stage which became established as English spread westwards across the American continent. The spread of the yod-dropping to post-velar, post-glottal and post-labial environments then occurred back in East Anglia after the New England settlers had departed.

4. The American South and African American English

According to Wells (1982: 529), "the best-known characteristic of southern pronunciation [in the United States] is the so-called southern drawl" which "involves relatively greater length in unstressed, accented syllables as compared to unstressed" with "a wider weakening of unstressed syllables than in other accents". McDavid (1968) agrees: the Southern drawl involves "prolongation of the most heavily stressed syllables, with the corresponding weakening of the less stressed ones". This is precisely the way in which the rhythmic phonology of East Anglian English has been characterised by Ferragne & Pellegrino (2007). Stressed syllables tend to be longer and more heavily stressed in East Anglian English than in most other accents, and that unstressed syllables are correspondingly shorter. Ferragne & Pellegrino showed that East Anglian English was the most stress-timed of all the fourteen British dialects which they investigated, with comparatively greater duration differences between stressed and unstressed vowels. Ferragne & Pellegrino (2007) demonstrate that the East Anglian dialect had the largest ratio of the length of stressed to unstressed

syllables of all the 14 accents investigated. It is possible, then, to see a role here for East Anglian dialects in leading to the development of the Southern Drawl.

However, there is one additional feature which almost certainly made its way from East Anglia to the American South, perhaps strengthening the hypothesis about the Southern Drawl. This is the grammatical feature in which, in the older traditional dialects of East Anglia, the obviously originally verbal form *do* functions as a conjunction which is approximately semantically equivalent to the conjunction *otherwise*. The *English Dialect Dictionary* shows that the usage was once found in the rural dialects of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, and northern Essex; but it is not found anywhere in the British Isles outside East Anglia. Nor, as far as I know, is it found anywhere else in the English-speaking world at all – with one exception; and that exception is provided by the southeastern United States.

The *Dictionary of American Regional English* cites a number of examples of conjunction *do* in the African American English portrayed in works set in northern Florida written by the novelist Zora Neal Hurston. Hurston was born in Eatonville, Florida, the first incorporated Black town in the United States, in 1903. She was a folklorist as well as a novelist, and she studied under the famous linguist and anthropologist Franz Boas ((1858–1942). There is every reason to believe that her renderings of her native Black Florida dialect are authentic. The *Dictionary of American Regional English* examples are as follows:

1. Dat's a thing dat's got to be handled just so, do it'll kill you (*Mules and Men*, 1935).
2. Don't you change too many words wid me dis mawnin', Janie, do Ah'll take and change ends wid yuh! (*Mules and Men*, 1935).
3. You got to have a subjick tuh talk from, do you can't talk (*Mules and Men*, 1935).
4. Yuh can't live on de muck 'thout yuh take uh bath every da – Do dat muck'll itch yuh lak ants (*Their Eyes*, 1937).
5. Git this spoon betwixt her teeth do she's liable to bite her tongue off (*Seraph*, 1948).

The *DARE* editors conjecture that the origins of this conjunctional *do* probably lay in an "abbreviation of *do you* (= *if you do*) etc. following negative statements or commands" (DARE: 94). But, as can be seen, while this explanation works for example 2., it does not for the others, which show progress towards the fully completed grammaticalisation also typical of East Anglia, in that *do* is employed where *don't* might have been expected.

Interestingly, we also have conclusive evidence that conjunction *do* is used elsewhere in the American southeast, and that it continues to be used to this day. In the 1994 field recordings carried out by Milton Tynch (see Tynch 1994), we find the following example from a Black speaker from the area of Edenton, Chowan County, in northeastern coastal North Carolina:

(1) And she come pull the covers back off that baby's face, don't that baby would have been dead.

Here we have the not yet fully grammaticalised negative form *don't*, though considerable grammaticalisation has occurred since *don't* is being used here in a past-tense context and is equivalent in meaning to "and if she hadn't". But Tynch (pers. comm.), who is a native of the area, further points out that not only does conjunctional *do* occur as well as *don't* in contexts similar to those in which it occurs in East Anglia, but that it also occurs in the speech of Whites in Chowan County. This is further confirmed by one of the informants of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, who writes that in eastern North Carolina, during the period approximately 1915–1930, "I remember hearing White people, speakers with moderate education, saying things like 'Shut the door tight, do it'll blow open before morning' and 'Leave the note in the middle of the table, do she won't see it'" (DARE: 94).

It is of course perfectly possible that East Anglian and southeastern US conjunction *do* represent independent developments. After all, if grammaticalisation can happen once, it can happen again. I have hypothesised that the grammaticalisation of *do* as a conjunction was ultimately due to phonological developments involving the loss of phonetic material. In Trudgill (2018) I argued that this loss of phonetic material, and hence rather extensive grammaticalisation of new conjunctions, was initiated by the extreme stress-timed nature of East Anglian dialects. East Anglian hyper-stress-timedness is relevant because, as Schiering (2010) has argued, the extent to which phonetic erosion occurs in linguistic change has to do with a rhythm-based typology, in which languages are grouped into mora-based, syllable-based and stress-based languages; and in which it is stress-based languages which show a significantly higher degree of phonetic erosion than the others. "Stress-based phonologies show a strong erosive force in reducing and deleting unstressed syllables" (Schiering 2005: 5). English is clearly a stress-based language as far as most of its mother-tongue varieties are concerned; and East Anglian dialects of English as just noted do show greater stress-effects than most others. But, as our discussion of the Southern Drawl above showed, certain dialects from the American South show equally great stress-effects, and would therefore be equally prone to grammaticalisation initiated by phonetic erosion.

However, a more likely scenario is that this feature, which has never been available in any form of Standard English, was brought to the American South by settlers who were speakers of East Anglian dialects. In (at least some parts of) the southeastern United States it was then not only retained in White nonstandard dialects of English but also acquired by speakers of African American English.

A final grammatical feature which has to be discussed in connection with the American South, and African American English, is third-person present-tense singular zero, as in *she like, he go*, which is a characteristic of East Anglian English. East Anglian dialects played a prominent role in the sociolinguistic literature in the 1960s and 1970s when one of the big sociolinguistic issues concerned the historical origins of African American English. To simplify rather considerably, there were two major groups of American academic linguists in competition on this issue. One group, the Creolists, argued that, to the extent that African American Vernacular English was linguistically different from White varieties of English, this was due to the fact that African American English dialects had their origins in an earlier creole similar to Gullah and to the other English-based Atlantic creoles (Bailey 1965). The other group, who we can call the Dialectologists, argued that, without denying that Black and White varieties of American English differed, it was not necessary to postulate a creole history. They argued instead that differences were due to differential loss and retention of original features of British Isles English, together with subsequent independent developments (cf. the presentations in Dillard 1970; Burling 1973). A number of features of American Black English were advanced as evidence for and against these hypotheses. One of these was the absence from verb-forms in these varieties of third-person singular present-tense *-s* (cf. Fasold 1972). The Creolists pointed out that loss of *-s* represented a typical case of regularisation or simplification of the sort which often happens in language contact situations, and that the Caribbean and other Atlantic English-based creoles also demonstrated this feature. If White American speech had *-s* and vernacular Black varieties had zero, then this was not surprising in view of the large-scale processes of language shift, pidginisation, and creolisation that the speech of the ancestors of modern Black Americans had been subject to as a result of their enforced transplantation from West Africa to slavery in the Americas (cf. Dillard 1972). The Dialectologists' view (cf. Kurath 1928) was that third-person singular present-tense zero was a feature of certain British Isles dialects, and the obvious explanation was that Black varieties had acquired and retained this original British Isles feature, while White dialects for the most part had not. The British Isles dialects in question, of course, were those of the English region of East Anglia.

So to what extent is it possible to suppose that third-person singular zero did arrive in varieties of American English from East Anglia? Although it is particularly associated with Black English in the USA, it also occurs in the speech

of many southern white Americans. A certain amount of research, however, has nevertheless suggested that we cannot necessarily ascribe this AAVE feature to an origin in white speech. It has been shown that, in Mississippi, there is a significant difference between the speech of black and white children from the lowest social-class groups with respect to this feature. All the white children studied used some *-s* in the appropriate verb forms, and the average score for the group as a whole was 85 per cent *-s* usage. On the other hand, only 76 per cent of the black children used any *-s*, and the overall average score for *-s* usage was only 13 per cent. There are two possible interpretations of these figures. One interpretation is that both varieties are inherently variable with respect to *-s*, and that it is simply the proportions of *-s* usage that are different. A second interpretation is that, leaving aside the variety spoken by the white children, the black children speak a variety of English which, like English Creoles, has no *-s*. The few cases where black children do use the Standard English form (13 per cent), this interpretation would hold, are the result of dialect mixture – the influence of Standard English. Even this second interpretation, however, does not necessarily indicate a creole origin for AAVE – Lower Working Class Norwich speakers too are almost invariable in the use of forms without *-s*. But this by no means rules out the creole-origin theory; and it is not all unlikely that third-person singular zero in fact made its way in to American Black English via both routes.

5. Australasia

The Southern Hemisphere Englishes have a much later origin than the Atlantic Ocean Englishes; but here too it is possible to suggest that there may have been East Anglian influence, at least insofar as phonology is concerned.

There is no doubt that East Anglian dialects did arrive in the Southern Hemisphere as part of the colonisation process, because we have direct evidence of this. In Trudgill (2004), I cite data from one particular speaker who was analysed as part of the *Origins of New Zealand English* project, carried out from the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. This speaker is a Mrs. German, who was born in 1867 in Clinton and lived in Balclutha, in the South Island of New Zealand. Her parents were middle-class people who came from Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk. Mrs. German preserves a number of obviously East Anglian features in her speech. She lived her entire life in New Zealand, but employs features which can only have been acquired from her parents – thus incidentally also telling us something about how East Anglian English was spoken by middle-class people born in the 1840s.

Mrs German's phonology does not at a first listening seem particularly East Anglian. It is, however, entirely compatible with her having acquired the East

Anglian phonology of her parents. For example, she has /ʌ/ rather than /ʊ/ in cup, and /a:/ rather than /æ/ in *last* etc. and is therefore clearly speaking a form of southern as opposed to northern English English. Moreover, unusually on these recordings (cf. Trudgill 2004), she is almost entirely non-rhotic. This then places her in the southeast rather than southwest of England. She also has none of the features stereotypically associated with the Home Counties and London – which leaves us, by default, with an origin in East Anglia.

There are, moreover, a number of features which, at a closer listening, are certainly due to her acquisition of English from her East Anglian father and mother and which are of considerable interest to students of East Anglian varieties of English. The vowel of the lexical set of LOT is unrounded [ɑ].This remains a feature of older northern East Anglian speech today, as mentioned above, but southern East Anglia including Suffolk these days has the more usual rounded vowel [ɒ]. Mrs German's pronunciation is thus a very good indication that the rounded vowel is a relatively recent newcomer into southern East Anglia and that it has over the past several decades been gradually moving its way northwards.

Mrs German also pronounces the words *home* and *homestead* with the FOOT vowel /ʊ/ rather than /ou/, so she retains the 'East Anglian short o'. And she also has distinct vowels in *snow* and *no*; and in *place* as opposed to *play*, reflecting the different origins these vowels have in Middle English. The speech of Norfolk – but not contemporary Suffolk – to this day preserves the vowels of *no* and *snow* as distinct, as /u:/ versus /ou/; while *place* and *play* were until quite recently distinguished as /e:/ versus /æi/.

In Mrs German's speech word-final /t/ is also quite often realised as [ʔ]. This is not a feature traditionally associated with New Zealand English at all. This is of considerable interest since, although it is often assumed that t-glottalling was an urban innovation, it is equally possible that it had its origins in East Anglia: the only area of England to have considerable amounts of glottalling in the records of the *Survey of English Dialects* is East Anglia. The fact that Mrs German has this feature suggests that it has probably been a feature of East Anglian English at least from the 1850s.

Hammarström (1980) argued that Australian English was simply transplanted Cockney; but an examination of Australian phonology makes it clear that, if Australian English was originally a transplanted dialect from somewhere in England, then it certainly would not have been from London. It is true that Cockney and Australian both agree in being non-rhotic; in having the FOOT-STRUT split; and in having Diphthong Shift (Wells 1982), i.e., wide diphthongs in GOAT and FACE. But they differ significantly in two important respects. First, Cockney typically has a back vowel, around [ɑ:], in the lexical sets of BATH, PALM, START whereas Australian and New Zealand English have a very front

vowel, around [a:]. Secondly, unlike Cockney, Australasian English has the Weak Vowel Merger. The Weak Vowel Merger is the term introduced by Wells (1982) to describe the phenomenon which occurs in those accents of English which have schwa rather than the KIT vowel in unstressed syllables in words such as *wanted, village, horses, naked, David,* so that *abbot* and *rabbit* rhyme. Cockney, on the other hand, does not have the merger, and does have the KIT vowel in *village* and *horses.*

It turns out that if we search the SED materials for areas of England which have wide diphthongs in GOAT, non-rhoticity, and the FOOT-STRUT split, but also schwa in *wanted,* and a front vowel in START then there is precisely one. This constellation of phonological features can be found grouped together only in the traditional dialects of parts of central and eastern Essex (Trudgill 1986: 137, map 4.3). If there *was* a single location in Britain from which Australian English was transplanted around the world, it would have had to be not London but rural Essex. But it would of course be ludicrous to suppose that rural Essex did in fact provide the sole input for a transplanted Australian English, and it is therefore safe to assume that this particular combination of features must have arisen as a result of mixture, as I argued in Trudgill (2004). There is, however, good evidence that East Anglia, including Essex, was *one* of the sources of the regional British Isles dialect input into Australasian English. For example, I argue in Trudgill (2004) that the presence of the Weak Vowel Merger in Australian English is due to the fact that this feature – rather than the Cockney absence of the merger – was the majority variant in the original dialect mixture that developed out of dialect contact in the new colonies, with Cockney being out-influenced with respect to the merger as a result of the combined inputs of Irish English, East Anglian English, the English West Country, and the far north of England, which all have the Weak Vowel Merger.

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