

INTRODUCTION

The evidence for this treatise on the folk speech of Southern England consists of the usage of 56 speakers in as many different communities. All of the counties along the English Channel and along the North Sea up to southern Lincolnshire are included; so are the western counties as far north as Worcester and Warwick. In most of the counties three localities were investigated. Though wide-meshed, this survey appears to suffice for a general view of the dialectal structure of this section of England.

The questionnaire contained a little over 400 items taken from the short version of the work sheets of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States, printed in the *Handbook of the Linguistic Geography of New England*, pp. 149–158 (Kurath-Bloch 1939). Nearly 250 of the items were intended to bring to light regional differences in phonology. The choice of words that may be expected to have general currency proves to be an effective device for securing such evidence. Examples are: *four, five, thirty; lane, way, house, home, barn, roof; hammer, harrow, plow, wheat, oats, grow; calf, boar, dog; frost, storm; ear, mouth, tooth, gums; answer, dance; Martha, Mary.*

The investigator, Guy S. Lowman, Jr., had unique qualifications for carrying out a field survey of the folk speech of Southern England. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, he spent three years in England, where he received the doctorate in phonetics (1931) at the University College in London. Daniel Jones was his master. When Lowman returned to America to participate in the Linguistic Atlas survey of the Eastern States, he spoke Standard British English with ease and elegance. This accomplishment was an important asset, when after four years of field work—from New England to South Carolina—he returned to England to carry out the survey of English folk speech on which the present monograph is based. A grant from the Rockefeller Foundation made this expedition possible.

The fact that Lowman used the same finely graded phonic notation—oriented toward the system of ‘cardinal vowels’ of Daniel Jones—both in America and in England greatly facilitates the task of relating American usage to that of Southern England with some assurance.

In analyzing Lowman’s findings, I refrain from referring to the

important evidence published by Harold Orton in his *Survey of English Dialects* (1962–71). Lowman's survey, carried out a generation earlier, offers an independent body of evidence and must be treated as such. Moreover, a safe comparison of the phonological data of the two surveys will not be possible until Orton's data are systematically analyzed.

The phonemes of the Middle English literary language (ME) of c. 1400 serve as a frame of reference for dealing with the present regional differences in English folk speech. The phonemic system of this type of ME is rather well known. It is briefly described in the *Middle English Dictionary: Plan and Bibliography* (Kurath and Kuhn 1954: 4–7).

By choosing three or more words containing the same ME parent phoneme, one can usually determine its normal development in the several regions of present-day England with some assurance. This is not surprising. Past experience in diachronic linguistics has shown that phonological change takes place with considerable regularity.

The use of the system of ME phonemes as a frame of reference for ordering the evidence furnished by the field survey is open to the objection that Chaucer's English was surely not the only kind of English current in his day. We know, for instance, that the western dialects still had two short and two long rounded front vowels, as in the words corresponding to Chaucerian *fillen* 'fill', *derk* 'dark', *fīr* 'fire', *lēf* 'lief', and that the vowels in 'street' and in 'stone' varied regionally. But such complications can be taken care of.

Treating literary Middle English as the "parent language" of the modern English dialects is not a novel operational device. Middle High German has the same function in German dialectology, reconstructed Proto-Romanic in the Romanic field, and Proto-Indo-European in dealing with the historical relationships between the languages of that family.

The sounds of the dialects are given in brackets. The context will usually make it clear whether the entities so presented are regarded as phonemic or as phonic, as structural or not. A clear decision is not always feasible as yet. In many instances the phonic range of phonemes, real or potential, is indicated.

The figures or sketch maps are of several kinds. Many of them show the regional reflexes of a ME parent phoneme in three or

more 'test words', speaker by speaker. This cartographic technique, hardly used hitherto, effectively displays areas in which any given feature is regular and others where it competes with variants. Focal areas and transition belts are thus brought to light, which may suggest a historical interpretation of the areal patterning.

The areal structure of the folk speech of Southern England is briefly outlined in Chapter II. As shown in Figure 33, a whole bundle of spaced heterophones, running a more or less parallel course, separates the West from the East. The West is relatively uniform in phonemic structure, while the East is more or less clearly divided into three subareas, which I refer to as South Central (the Home Counties), East Anglia, and North Midland.

A description of the phonic notation of vowels and diphthongs used in this treatise is presented in the *New England Handbook* (Kurath-Bloch 1939). Figure 3 of the *Word Geography* (Kurath 1949) shows the major dialect areas of the Eastern States with their subdivisions, to which reference is made in the text.