Usage Variants for a Planned American English Pronouncing Dictionary

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Introduction

This paper develops from the need for decisions to govern entries for a planned DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION (hereafter DAEP). Present plans include the compilation of information for a data base of pronunciations for approximately 100,000 English words. These will be entered, where deemed feasible, with their regional, social, and stylistic variants, as currently used by educated speakers on the North American continent (the United States and Canada). Among the numerous editorial decisions we must make are those concerned with the separate identification and labeling of variant forms, where pertinent and common, for both regular lexical items as well as for personal and place name entries that appear in current desk size dictionaries. This paper discusses the approaches we can take, and the tentative decisions made in identifying the numerous pronunciation variants that are part of educated North American English.

The need to indicate pronunciation variants in the pronunciation component of a general dictionary, or indeed even in a specialized pronunciation dictionary, may depend, in part, upon such practical considerations as size and purpose of the dictionary. For languages with a strong tradition of normative correctness, perhaps originating or centered in the usage of an elite or educated group and sanctioned by an academy of the language, it is entirely reasonable, for even the most comprehensive dictionary, to list only those pronunciations which have normative approval.

Procedures have evolved quite differently in America.

While there have been elite groups on the North American continent (particularly along the eastern seaboard, in some persons' opinions), these have never been taken as universally accepted pronunciation models for either the United States or Canada. This is not to say that North Americans have no evaluations of pronunciations as more or less formal, or even as more or less "correct". Rather, it is that there is considerable regional and social variation to be found within what Americans recognize as correct usage. This fact was recognized by the only extant dictionary of American English pronunciation, A PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ENGLISH (PDAE), which included pronunciation variants associated with the major regions of the United States. Yet, because the study of geographic variation had only just begun at the time of the publication of the PDAE, while the systematic study of social and stylistic variation was yet to begin, we recognize that the PDAE is an historical, rather than a current, descriptive record of American English pronunciation.

The Lexicographer and the Concept of Usage

The lexicographer's attempt to indicate (for the reader of the dictionary) how the English language *is* used by the many, varied speakers of the language (as opposed as to how it *should* be used) is now at least two centuries old. Users of dictionaries in the United States expect that such reference works will not separate these two concepts, and their expectations are linguistically respectable.

Lexicographers today know that what *should be* spoken is what *is* spoken by the educated speakers of the language. There will always be some, of course, whose desire is that the dictionary act as the arbiter of acceptability, regardless of what speakers say. These prescriptive critics have always been on the lexicographic scene, and they probably always will be. North American lexicography is, however, descriptively, not prescriptively, based.

The readers of any modern dictionary soon learn that there is no single (acceptable) way to pronounce all the entered words in the dictionary. Pronunciations used by educated speakers elsewhere, or of different ages, sex, or in different social situations, are equally acceptable. Those that are restricted in their use are (or should be) identified or labeled in some way, so that the reader is appropriately instructed. And the reader assumes that unentered pronunciations are those that are not in common use by educated speakers or that were unfortunately overlooked by the editorial staff of the consulted work.

Historical Background

Sterling A. Leonard's study of English usage in the 18th century (Leonard 1929) set off a whole series of other studies, guides, and dictionaries of English usage that reflected the descriptive approach of the then developing field of structural linguistics. By the end of the 1930's linguistic prescriptivism was in a state of recession and a number of usage guides to American English began to appear on all our shelves. Simultaneously, essays on American English usage began to appear in the front matter sections of all dictionaries so that readers could be apprised of the concepts behind acceptable or nonstandard usages and how the dictionary editors treated or identified such usages.

The peak of the permissiveness reflected in the dictionary publishing field in the United States seemed to be reached with the publication of WEBSTER'S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (W3), judged by the unleashing of what was obviously a backlash of criticism as well as by the sheer intensity of the response to such criticism in the literary and scholarly world. The seesawing hasn't stopped, of course, nor has the linguist's and lexicographer's concern with usage. The AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (AHD), was that company's challenge to what editor William Morris called "a deep sense of responsibility . . . to faithfully record our language . . ." by adding ". . . the essential elements of guidance . . . which intelligent people seek in a dictionary." (Introduction, p. vi). This was Morris' response to W3's decision to decrease the number and form of restrictive labels and their removal of the "colloquial" label from their list of "cautions" to readers. In turn, those decisions by Morris and the AHD came under very careful and thorough scrutiny in an ex-

tensive analysis by Thomas J. Creswell (1975). Creswell compared AHD's list of evaluated usages with decisions on those same locutions by nine other (then current) American English language dictionaries, published between 1934 and 1973 by four major publishing houses. (These were MERRIAM-WEBSTER, RANDOM HOUSE, WORLD, and FUNK AND WAGNALLS.) Creswell consulted, additionally, ten widely known guides to usage that appeared from G. P. Krapp (1917) to P. G. Perrin and W. R. Ebbitt (1972).

Creswell's 140 printed page analysis, plus appendices and notes, were undertaken, he says, in the hope "that careful analysis of the treatment of these 318 locutions . . . would reveal some underlying strain . . . of consistency in the treatment of the usages in question . . . or . . . some consistency among smaller, more homogeneous groups of works on usage. Instead this study has become a problem in the orderly documentation of chaos . . . no consistency has been found, and the failure of consistency to manifest itself has led to the unavoidable rejection of the claims to objectivity of any and all of the works analyzed." (p. 122).

Not to let matters on this subject lie dormant for too long, William and Mary Morris returned to the fray with their HARPER DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY USAGE with the assistance of 166 "istinguished consultants on usage." Their stated purpose was to show "by discussions and example the standards of linguistic usage adhered to by those who use the language well. In this undertaking we make every effort not to be dogmatic and, most essentially, not dictatorial. Even had we been so inclined, the reactions of our panelists and consultants would have convinced us otherwise, for, of the many scores of questions put to these panelists, only a very few received unanimous verdicts." (p. xix).

Just shortly prior, John Algeo (1983) had presented to the American Dialect Society (at its December, 1983 convention) a report on a survey of needed research in usage.

Algeo posited, among his ten conclusions "a series of studies . . . that distinguish various kinds of language (speech *vs.* writing, consultative *vs.* informal styles) . . . and the creative maintenance of a central file for usage data." Nor should one overlook the report of the specially convened panel on "Questions of Usage in Dictionaries (Marckwardt 1973: 172—178) that reviewed these matters at the New York Academy of Sciences conference on *Lexicography in English* in 1973. Of special interest in this volume was Virginia G. McDavid's essay (McDavid 1973:187—207) in which she categorized dictionary labels into five groupings: temporal (e.g. obsolete), national/regional (e.g. British, Australian), stylistic (e.g. informal), status (e.g. nonstandard, popular), and label qualities (e.g. sometimes, usually). Reactions to concepts of usage are, obviously, not wanting.

Dictionaries without usage labels would be unexpected today. Editors may (and do) differ in the number of such restrictive labels and even with the application of such labels. (Cf., for example, T. Creswell's comment in his previously cited *Usage in Dictionaries* that "the search for consistency among . . . dictionaries [in the matter of usage labels] in this study must be acknowledged a failure.") All current dictionaries, both unabridged and desk size, contain, by the inclusion of such labels, guides to the reader; the planned DAEP will be no exception.

A review of how these labels are used in some current dictionaries and how we plan to enlarge the number and types of such labels in a current pronouncing dictionary can serve a useful purpose. The list below is drawn from ten sources that

were readily available to us. They are widely circulated, desk size, dictionaries. Three are British (CHAMBERS TWENTIETH CENTURY DICTIONARY, COLLINS DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LONGMAN DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH; four are American: WEBSTER'S NINTH NEW COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY, WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY OF THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE, RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE and the AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE; one is Canadian: THE DICTIONARY OF CANADIAN ENGLISH: THE SENIOR DICTIONARY. Two pronouncing dictionaries were also checked: Daniel Jones's (EVERYMAN'S) ENGLISH PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY, and Kenyon and Knott's A PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ENGLISH. We have excluded all restrictive labels used in any of these dictionaries that would not be pertinent to a pronouncing dictionary (such as "taboo", "derogatory", "vulgar", "slang"). Not any one dictionary used all of these terms:

chronological labels: archaic, rare, now rare, becoming rare, old-fashioned, infrequent, obsolete. Note: the term "obsolete" was used by eight of the dictionaries consulted, and "archaic" by five. The other terms were found in only one or two sources.

stylistic labels: informal, colloquial, formal, pompous, nonstandard, substandard, regional, spelling, dialectal. Note: the terms "informal/colloquial" and "dialectal" were found in five of the sources consulted; the other terms were limited to four or fewer of the dictionaries.

Surely usage decisions on spoken (pronounced) forms may well lead to similar conclusions — i.e. experts will disagree on some matters of disputed usage, no matter how well qualified each of them is. That is not to say that dictionaries will omit usage labels because of such disagreements — they won't and they haven't. T. Creswell and V. McDavid (1987) very recently co-authored an elucidating essay on usage noting some of the above labels and usages (both written and spoken) in current American English. The dictionary we are planning will be guided, forewarned, and influenced by the above, but hardly prevented from making whatever its editors consider the most feasible choices in labeling the restrictive pronunciation usages to be entered.

Labels Planned for the DAEP

We propose a system of pronunciation usage labels, with examples of their use in representative entries that, we hope, will serve as an up-to-date and reasonably comprehensive guide to American English pronunciation. The inventory of usage labels above can, certainly, serve as a guide for those to be developed and used in the planned DAEP. We shall be concerned with attempting to develop a system of such labels consistent with the nature and state of current information about pronunciation forms and with the hope that the restrictive labels, when used, will represent careful judgements in applying such labels — based on the accumulated evidence of the past few decades. With this in mind, we project a tentative categorization of ten sets of pronunciation labels, as follows:

1. chronological labels
2. regional labels
3. social and/or group labels other than pronunciations peculiarly associated with ethnic groups
4. pronunciations associated essentially with domains (occupational forms)
5. foreign-language influenced pronunciations
6. pronunciations associated with different parts of speech
7. selected pronunciations of words in other "Englishes" that might be of special interest to speakers of American English
8. pronunciations associated with styles of speaking
9. local pronunciations of place names and their variants in other parts of North America.

The following samples represent the kinds of chronological pronunciations forms that will be entered in the dictionary. Pronunciations not restrictively time-labeled will, of course, be assumed to be the normal, current forms.

former: pronunciations formerly used but now obsolescent, with a different, current form. (e.g. *Maria* — as [məraɪə]; currently [məriə].

occasional, rare, becoming rare, or *old fashioned*: *humble* now usually [hʌmbəl] as [ʌmbəl], or *soft, often* as [saft, aftən].
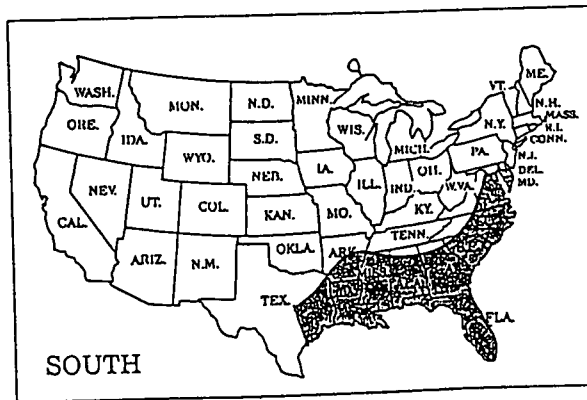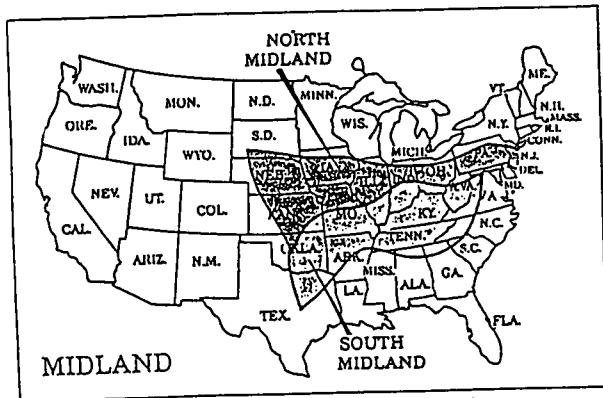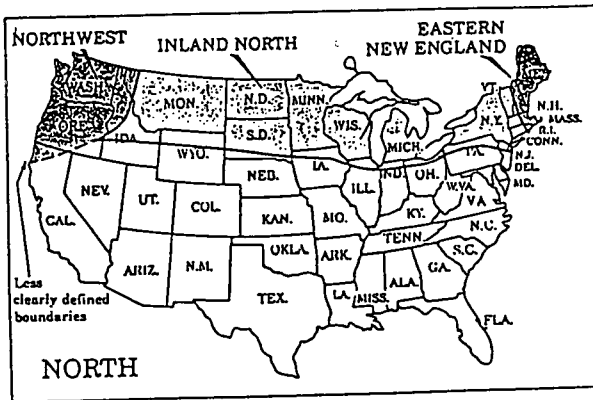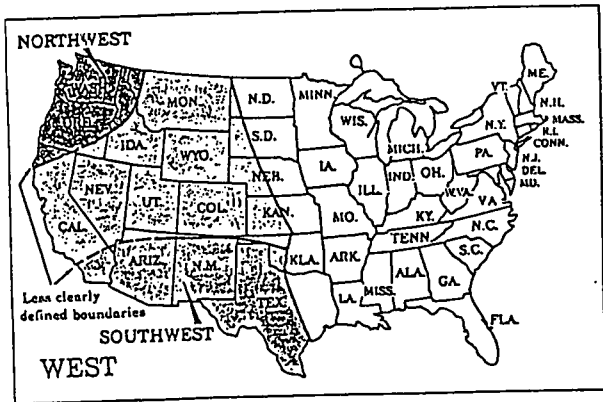
These pronunciations approach the "former" designation, but they still hang on, to some extent, in current use.

current: these are alternative entries to those where a "former" label is entered for the word. Variants of recent origin, like [prasəsiz] for *processes* (n., pl.) will be separately noted.

Regional Labels

These are surely the most widely used restrictive labels available and our acquaintance with such current forms is, in large part, due to the results of the published volumes of the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* for the Northeast, Middle Atlantic and Gulf States, and the Upper Midwest sections of the country, plus many spinoff and other phonological, sociolinguistic, and lexical studies of language and dialect use in individual localities of the country, since. More recently, the continued activity associated with the large DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN REGIONAL ENGLISH project (DARE) has continued to add to our sources of language use in the country. The DARE project describes its breakdown of dialect regions in the United States in two front-matter essays (Carver 1985, Hartman 1985). The regional maps below, appear on p. xxvi of the UNABRIDGED RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE pp. xxv-xxvi in a front-matter essay on "Dialects" by Craig M. Carver.

REGIONS OF AMERICAN ENGLISH

WEST

NORTH

MIDLAND

SOUTH

Smaller, distinctive regional-dialect subareas exist in all of these larger regions so that the dialect of the Hudson Valley area of New York is quite distinctive from that found in Metropolitan New York of the larger Northern region (in the above map), neither of which reflects the identical patterns of Philadelphia and Newark in the East or those of Fargo, North Dakota and Butte, Montana further west. Similarly, native speakers in coastal Tidewater Virginia and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, though both in the same large region of the above map, are clearly distinctive not only from each other but from speakers in the Cape May section of Delaware in the East and those near Galveston, in southeast Texas.

Canada's larger dialect regions are at least six in number — from Newfoundland and the Marine Provinces in the east to the Central and Prairie Provinces in the middle of the continent, to British Columbia in the west, and the entire Canadian North, which, though much less sparsely settled, possesses a large regional Canadian dialect distinctive enough to be separately labeled.

Stylistic and Status Labels

Such labels will be attached to entries where the pronunciations represent departures from typically heard ones, such as: *spelling pronunciation*, for "often" and "terror" as [ɔftən, ɔftɛn, tɛrɔr]: *nonstandard* for the pronunciation [ɛkˈsɛtərə] for *etcetera* and the metathesized [ˈnukjələr] for *nuclear*, and [pərˈtɛkt] for *protect;* also for such pronounced forms as [tɛtʃt] for *touched*, [fɪləm] for *film*, [biˈjutifəl] for "beautiful", and [bɛəjəd] for "bad". *Formal* will be used to identify special pronunciations typically associated with platform or pulpit speech, like [sɪtɪ] for *city*, (with fully voiceless /t/), [gɔd] for *God*, and [glooɑri] for *glory*, especially when such speakers do not typically distinguish the vowels in *for* and *four*. The labels *informal* or *casual* will be used for such pronunciations like [gʌvəmɪnt, ˈgʌvmɪnt] for "government", [gɔnə] for "going to" and [sʌmpm] for "something". The term *local* will be used to identify the different pronunciations for "Houston" as [haɑstən] for the street in New York City and [ˈhjustən] for the city in Texas. *Affected* will identify such a pronunciation as [fɑnsi] for "fancy", for which no "broad *a*" form exists historically or currently in standard American English.

Specially labeled forms will be used to identify those pronunciations associated with certain social groups. These would include such pronunciations as the different forms occasionally used by male vs. female speakers for certain words, like [biˈkʌz, biˈkɔz] for *because*, where some female speakers might use [biˈkɑz]; forms more commonly associated with young vs. older speakers, like [hʌnərt] for *hundred*; imitations of baby-talk forms, if common enough to be entered, like [wɪdu] for *little*; and those associated with certain domains, like pronunciations associated with certain occupations, (e.g. [ʃitɪŋ] for *sheathing* by construction workers, or [luərd] and [wɪndərd] for *leeward* and *windward*, by seafarers.

Most pronunciation entries will be unmarked, that is, the entered forms would not be accompanied by any usage label. These would be the expected, educated or standard pronunciation forms in general use throughout the country — like those for *lit, beep, sake*. The expected regional variations of certain sounds—like the loss of postvocalic /r/ in the South of the United States or the substitution of a "broader" *a* in works like *glass* and *dance* in Eastern New England—will be

marked; the raised /æ/ for *candy* or a lowered /eɪ/ for *fail* would not be marked. Front-matter discussion will account for these variant-decisions.

The pronunciation entries for all of the above will come from the large body of published materials available since the late 1940's, carefully sifted, evaluated, and categorized. Shields of lexicographic steel, reserved for editors, will have been prepared, for surely no readers will take kindly to any restrictive label attached to a pronunciation that appears commonly in their speech as a normal form. But that is nothing new, and never has been to lexicographers, who never manage to escape such jabs or digs. Neither lexicographers nor critics are always right, anyway. We'll try to satisfy criteria other than personal preference and hope that our readers will approach their decisions with equal impersonality.

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