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A Study of the Language of *Diary of Anna Green Winslow*

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I

Anna Green Winslow (1759-1779), a bright and sensitive twelve-year-old girl, was sent from Nova Scotia in Canada to Boston by her parents in 1770 to be educated in Boston schools. She kept a diary and it was not published until 1894 when it was issued with extensive notes and an introduction by a historian, Alice Morse Earle. From 18 November 1771 to 31 May 1773, Anna vividly described a rare view of colonial life seen through a little girl's eyes in her diary. It gives an historical picture not only of the domestic life of that day but of the English language in the eighteenth century.

This paper will show the general situation of the American English language in the colonial period, 1620 to 1783, and the eighteenth-century English language in Boston through studying Anna's diary. Early American English language retains certain features of British English at the same age as well as exhibiting some differences between British and American English.

II

Historically, American English began as seventeenth-century British English. The earliest English colonists in the New World were speaking Elizabethan English, the language of William Shakespeare, John Lyly, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Lodge, and Robert Greene, when they came to North America.[1] It was inevitable, however, that the subsequent development of the language should diverge somewhat from that of British English, that a number of words, grammatical forms, and idioms lost in British English should survive in American English and, conversely, that American English should lose certain features of earlier British English which have been in retained in England. It was equally inevitable that new words should be found, or old words be adapted, to express concepts and to name institutions which arose in America, not to mention the more immediate task of finding verbal labels for topographical features and

plants and animals which were new to English-speaking people.[2]

Before American Independence in 1783, America was a British colony, and the first settlers in America regarded the land as a remote region and Britain as their homeland. Naturally they followed the British people in many ways. British English, because of its continued prestige, seems to have acted as a focusing agent in America as well as other British colonies. Even today, there is a tendency among many English people to disparage any forms of English speech other than British English. This attitude has led to a reaction, especially in the United States, which causes British English to be regarded with hostility, and the hostility is reinforced on both sides by the common human tendency to distrust what is unfamiliar.[3] Since the War of American Independence, the people in the United States have had so much patriotism and nationalism and taken pride in their national language. A good deal of the discussion of the differences between the two types of English language has been vitiated by attempts to show that one of them is superior to the other.[4]

III

The most significant step in the progress of English towards its status as a world language took place in the last decades of the sixteenth century, with the arrival of expeditions commissioned by Walter Raleigh to the "New World."[5] That was one of the first steps in the English language becoming a global language. Many historical sources trace the movement of English around the world, beginning with the pioneering voyages to the Americas, Asia, and the Antipodes.[6]

The first permanent English settlement dates from 1607, when an expedition arrived in Chesapeake Bay (modern day Maryland and Virginia) and the first permanent settlement was founded in Jamestown. The first colony, Virginia, was founded in1609.[7] Then, in 1620, the next famous successful group of Puritan settlers known as the pilgrim fathers arrived on the *Mayflower* searching for a land where they could found a new religious kingdom outside England.[8] They landed at Cape Cod, and established a settlement in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The language of the colonial settlers is more conservative than that of the country they left. As the American settlements expanded, more immigrants came from different parts of Britain in a succession of mass movements, so that American English was continually reseeded with British dialects of different times and places.[9] Some features of American English, such as the widespread pronunciation of *r* in words like *cart* and *far*, might be attributed to the fact that *r* in such words was generally pronounced in Elizabethan English.[10] The Puritans, how-

ever, came mainly from East Anglia and the surrounding counties. Their accent was quite different, that is, lacking an *r* after vowels.[11] This area seems to have maintained close cultural and trade links with England and the British model of speech remained a powerful model of social correctness.[12] The tendency not to pronounce *r* is still a feature of the speech of people from New England.[13]

From 1681, Pennsylvania came to be settled mainly by Quakers, whose origins were mostly in the Midlands and the North of England. By 1700, the immigrant population of the continent had increased to around a quarter of a million.[14] In the early 18th century, there was a vast wave of immigration from northern Ireland. The Irish had been migrating to America from around 1600, but the main movements took place during the 1720s, when around 500,000 Irish and Scots-Irish immigrants arrived. By the time Independence was declared in 1776, it is thought that no less than one in seven of the American population was Scots-Irish.[15] By the time of the first census, in 1790, the population of the country was around four million, most of whom lived along the Atlantic coast.[16]

During the 1750s thousands of French settlers were deported from Acadia (modern Nova Scotia) in Canada, and were replaced by settlers from New England. The number of English speaking immigrants was then further increased by many coming directly from England, Ireland, and Scotland. The name *Nova Scotia* means "New Scotland,"[17] and the place was Anna Winslow's birthplace.

IV

Anna Winslow wrote, with evident eagerness and loving care, for the edification of her parents and her own practice in penmanship, this interesting and quaint diary, which forms a most sprightly record, not only of the life of a young girl at that time, but of the prim and narrow round of daily occurrences in provincial Boston. She described the daily society of her neighbours:

> Last Thursday I din'd at Unkle Storer's & spent the afternoon in that neighborhood. I met with some adventures in my way viz. As I was going, I was overtaken by a lady who was quite a stranger to me. She accosted me with "how do you do miss?" I answer'd her, but told her I had not the pleasure of knowing her. She then ask'd "what is your name miss? I believe you think 't is a very strange question to ask, but have a mind to know." Nanny Green—She interrupted me with "not Mrs. Winslow of Cumberland's daughter." (18-19)[18]

She vividly expressed the domestic life like the above, reporting the daily weather

regularly:

Feb.22d.—Since about the middle of December, ult. We have had till this week, a series of cold and stormy weather—every snow (of which we have had abundance) except the first, ended with rain.(32)

Anna sometimes informed her parents of some criminal cases at Boston, according to a popular gossip:

no sooner was the 29th Regiment encamp'd upon the common but miss Betty took herself among them (as the Irish say) & there she stay'd with Bill Pinchion & awhile. The next news of her was, that she was got into gaol for stealing: from whence she was taken to the publick whipping post. (36)

Now, we will see some features of the English language in her diary: spelling, archaism, apostrophe, and rare words and phrases.

1. Spelling

By the nineteenth century, the dictionary had taken the place of the seventeenth-century spelling book as recorder of the spellings most generally favoured by printing houses.[19] American public spelling was rather more fluid than British spelling in Johnson's day, "authorised" spelling of the reference books having a somewhat slighter hold on American printers and their public.[20] Since a good proportion of settlers could read and write, a press and publishing industry soon came into being. Though the people looked back wistfully to England and tried to write according to British standards, they could not keep their local speech from creeping into what they wrote.[21] The settlement of America occurred after the invention of printing, and continued through a period when the idea of universal education was making rapid progress. For a long time most of the books read in America came from England, and a surprising number of Americans read those books, in or out of school. Moreover, most colonists seem to have felt strong ties with England.[22]

Except for the Revolutionary period, books were imported into the colonies on a regular basis from England.[23] Probably Anna learned spelling by herself at home as well as being taught at school. She read British novels and books both for entertainment and for learning. She named some titles in her diary.

A Happy New Year, I have bestow'd no new year's gift, as yet. But have received one very handsome one, viz. the History of Joseph Andrews abreviated.(13)

My aunt Storer lent me 3 of cousin Charles' books to read, viz.—The puzzling cap, the female Oraters & the history of Gaffer too-shoes. (64)

Anna spelled several words differently from present-day English. The letters *i* and *y*

are interchangeable in such words as "pye," "Fryday," "sais," and "layd."

I shall make one pye at least. (1); I spent Fryday with my friends in Sudbury Street (4); She sais, she is glad I remember so much (51); She layd aside the biziness of flower making (35)

As for the *–ing* form of a verb, an *e* at the end of a verb is dropped before a vowel in the ending like *loving*, not *loveing*. In her diary, however, some verbs have their *–ing* form with *e*, like the instance "to excuse my useing the pen of my old friend just here" (20).

Some rare instances of spelling are found in her diary: "pocible," "particylary," "hart" (= heart), "ribbin" (= ribbon), "difaculty," "countraman ," "larnt" (= learnt), "git" (= get), and "latta." (= lattin). Those may have reflected Anna's pronunciation.

I chuse to wear as much of our own manufactory as pocible (32); particylarly by Mr. Beacon (4); A very handsome loket in the shape of a hart she gave me (13) [24]; Heartily thank you for the broad cloth, bags, ribbin & hat (5); She sais thro' more difaculty than ever (54); There was a countraman come along (30); Pray mamma who larnt you lattan? (58); I cannot git farther (11)

The author's preferences regarding *-ick*, *-ll*, or *-or*, conflict with present-day English conventions. The *OED* notes those forms *-ick* and *-ll* were popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The British kept the *u* in many words like *humour*, *honour*, and *colour* while the American gave it up: *humor*, *honor*, and *color*. American English regulates the ending *-our* to *-or*.

I danced to her musick (58); you'l never be truly beautifull (2); I have been carefull not to repeat in my journal (62); I had the honor to open the diversion of the evening in a minuet with miss Soley (16)

There are two forms of a word such as "fation," "dansing, " and "buziness." She probably misspelled them and tended to be indifferent to the standard spelling.

Dear mamma, you don't know the fation here (7); a full trimm'd negligee as the fashion is at present (14); We made four couple at country dansing; danceing I mean (6); She layd aside the biziness of flower making (35); His business last evening was to prove the divinity of the Son (48)

She probably misspelled the word "wrighteousness" on the analogy of the word *write*, in "All this he said was a part of that wrighteousness for the sake of which a sinner is justified" (51) The diary has the rare past tense form "keept" in "I keept Christmas at home this year" (11) and the rare present participle form "writting" in "the very pen I have now in my hand, writting this with" (29).

Anna used a variety of word abbreviations characterized by a small superscript replacing the truncated portion of a word in her diary.

Now, Hon^{d} Mamma, I must tell you something (41); D^{r} Byles returns respects to Mr W (38); This morn^{g} early(63)

2. Archaism

In Anna's diary, we can see a variety of archaic words and phrases which died out. Archaism is the retention or survival of linguistic features no longer generally current, usually in varieties that are themselves unusual in some way.[25] There are some verbs in archaic form: "chuse," "shew," and "sung." Anna kept using those forms throughout her diary.

My papa and you did not (I remember) chuse to partake (1)[26]; Mr.Hunt began with the first question and shew'd what it is to glorify GOD.(24)[27]; After tea Miss Becky Gridley sung a minuet.(58)[28]

There are rare past participles: broke, frighted, and wrote.

It is his right leg that is broke.(31)[29]; Aunt Deming would be frighted out of her Wits at the money it cost (14)[30]; I have wrote this account very badly (32)[31]

There are archaic variants of nouns: "recept" (= receipt), "scoller" (= scholar), and "scating" (= skating).

I mention'd the recept of Nancy's present (11)[32]; Aunt chuses to have me for her scoller these two days (10)[33]; Was entertain'd in the afternoon with scating (28)[34]

After the Elizabethan period an earlier *-eth* inflection for the third person singular of the verb changed to the *-s* forms characteristic of the language today. The *-eth* form remained in the colonist period. There is only one instance of *-eth* form in "For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people (2)." The use of the *-eth* form may have been influenced by the religious context here.

Her diary has both the adverb "ago" in "About two month ago a brother of the church sent" (38) and its archaic form "agone" in "Having departed sometime agone" (11)[35].

The indefinite article *a* or *an* sometimes represents older *on, to,* or *into,* hence is the reduced form of a preposition. This *a* occurs in *go* and gerund *-ing* constructions in her diary. The *OED* notes *a* with verb of motion is a preposition meaning *to* or *into* (s.v. *a* preposition 13. b).

When I went there a visiting (10); I went a visiting yesterday (58)

The plural form of the second person pronoun of "*ye*" or "*you*" is in her diary. *Ye* is an archaic form of *you.* The use of the old form was already highly recessive in the eighteenth century.

but I tell ye, you'l never be truly beautifull till you are like the King's daughter (2); to ye assembly at Concert Hall (20)

Today *do* is usual in questions and negative constructions except where other auxiliaries like *have, can, are*, etc. are present.[36] A negative construction in Anna's diary is *don't* construction in "I don't always write as well as I can" (48). By 1700, the use of *do* had been largely established in sentences negated by *not*. Non use of *do* remained particularly high with verbs like *know, think*, etc. and was the rule for *have*; no instances of *do not* are recorded.[37] The diary has only one instance of "know not" in "How long she was at his operation, I know not" (19).

3. Apostrophe

Apostrophe is a punctuation mark used to indicate the omission of letters. Anna made frequent use of the punctuation mark in many words. The frequent use of the apostrophe may have been the time's conventional orthography. The regular past tense, for example, was generally written *'d* (*liv'd, look'd, pull'd*), as in England in the eighteenth century.[38] In verbal inflections, "phonetic" spelling, inherited from Early Modern English, led to spellings like *chang'd*, *rebuk't*; this persisted all through the eighteenth century, before the morphological principle (with invariable *-ed* in regular verbs) was adopted.[39]

I happen'd in to a house (19); It seem'd so strange too (48)

The variants of *thought* are "thou't," and "tho't," and the variant of *received* is "rec'd" in her diary. This may be because of the length of the word.

They are not tho't qualified to administer Gospel Ordinance (37); She thou't would not be becoming to Miss Green's light complexion (42); I rec'd your letter dated Jan.11(32)

Other instances of the apostrophe marking omission are t'other, eno' (= enough), and out o' (= out of).

This is the disappointment I mentioned on t'other page (43)[40]; I have just daylight eno' to add (44); Col[n] Gridley was out o' the room (59)[41]

4. Rare words and phrases

Anna described daily life in her diary, using the word "journalising" in "I guess I shall have but little time of journalising till after thanks-giving" (1). The word in this sense appeared in the eighteenth century.[42] The rare adjective "unpolite" in "You think me very unpolite no doubt to address you in this manner" (2) was used with *impolite* during the eighteenth century.

There are some rare negatives "hant" (= have not), "a'nt" (= ain't), and "wa'n't" (= was not) in Anna's diary. Those negatives were used until the eighteenth century, and are

non-standard English words now.

She hant leisure now to help me any further; But a'nt time to put it down (15); I forgot the weather want fit for me to go to school last thursday (15)

In her diary, the use of "his" with "the sun" implies personification in "The sun gives forth his rays through a vapor" (29) The *OED* notes the use of *his* has been used especially since 1700 (s.v. *his* 3.d.).

Anna used the word "fall" in "I was treated so kindly last fall" (44) instead of *autumn*. In England *autumn* had been introduced by at least the fourteenth century for what was popularly the *fall of the leaf* (recorded from the sixteenth century). That English popular form became established in America—abbreviated to simple *fall*—and is now the regular spoken form throughout the United States. *Autumn* grew to be the term favored in England, so *fall* can be taken as a kind of *Americanism*.[43] In the eighteenth century, *fall* was already established in New England.

There is an interesting usage of hers in her diary: "I suppose she don't think I am worth an answer" (44). She used don't as a third-person singular verb. The usage is a so-called piece of *non-standard English*.

Thus we see the situation of Early American English in the colonial period and some linguistic features of Anna Green Winslow's writing through her diary. The young girl not only elaborately depicted the daily life in provincial Boston in the eighteenth century but let us know some features of the eighteenth-century English language in America. Her diary really gives to us an historical picture of the domestic life in the age in addition to a good and important material of early American English language of the eighteenth century.

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[1] Albert H.Marckwardt, *American English* (New York: OUP, 1958) 10-11.
[2] Thomas Pyles, *Words and Ways of American English* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1952) 4.
[3] G.L.Brook, *English Language* (1963; London: Andre Deutsch, 1972) 110.
[4] Brook 110.
[5] David Crystal, *The English Language* (1988; London: Penguin Books, 1990) 222.
[6] David Crystal, *English as a Global Language* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997) 24.
[7] Gunnel Tottie, *An Introduction to American English* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002) 29.
[8] Crystal, *Global*, 26.
[9] Donald J.Lloyd and Harry R.Warfel, *American English in its Cultural Setting* (New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1963) 28.
[10] David Graddol, Dick Leith, and Joan Swann, *English History, Diversity and Change* (London Routledge, 1996) 196.
[11] Crystal, *English*, 224.
[12] Graddol 196.

[13] Crystal, *Global*, 27.
[14] Crystal, *English*, 224.
[15] Crystal, *English*, 225.
[16] Crystal, *Global*, 29.
[17] Crystal, Global, 31.
[18] Anna Green Winslow, *Diary of Anna Green Winslow*, ed. Alice Morse Earle (1894 Boston: Houghton & Mifflin; Bedford: Applewood Books, 1996). The number in parentheses indicates the page number of the book.
[19] D.G.Scragg, *A History of English Spelling* (New York: Manchester Univ. Prs., 1974) 83-84.
[20] Scragg, 84.
[21] Lloyd and Warfel, 28.
[22] L.M.Myers, *Guide to American English* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963) 20.
[23] Richard L.Venezky, "Spelling," *English in North America*, ed. John Algeo, vol. 6 *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001) 341.
[24] The *OED* notes the form is in the 14th to 17th centuries.(s.v *heart*)
[25] Katie Wales, *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (London: Longman, 1989)
[26] The *OED* notes "*Choose* and *chuse* are used indiscriminately in the Bible of 1611 and the First Folio of Shakespeare: *chuse* was by far the prevailing form in 17th to 18th centuries, but has in the 19th century been gradually superseded by *choose*, which Dr.Johnson, following Bailey, took as his leading Dictionary form, although in his own practice he appears to have spelt *chuse*" (s.v. *choose*)
[27] The *OED* notes "The spelling *shew*, prevalent in the 18th century, and not uncommon in the first half of the 19th century, is now obsolete except in legal documents. It represents the obsolete pronunciation (indicated by rhymes like *view*, *true* down to about 1700) normally descending from the OE *sceaw-* with falling diphthong" (s.v. *show*)
[28] The *OED* notes "*Sung* was the usual form of the past tense in the 17th to 18th centuries, and is given by Smart in 1836 with the remark '*sang*. is less in use.' Recent usage, however, has mainly been in favour of *sang*" (s.v. *sing*)
[29] The *OED* notes "Of the past participle, *broken* is still the regular form, but from the end of the 14th century this was often shortened to *broke*, which was exceedingly common in prose and speech during the 17th to18th centuries, and is still recognized in verse" (s.v. *break*)
[30] The *OED* notes the form is now *rare* except poetic and dialectal, in ordinary language, and its place has been taken by *frighten*. (s.v. *fright*)
[31] The *OED* notes the form was in the 16th to 18th centuries. (s.v. *wrote*)
[32] The *OED* notes the word "recept" is *receipt*, and is now obsolete; it was chiefly used in 16th century. (s.v. *receipt*)
[33] The *OED* notes the form "scoller" is the 15th to 17th centuries' variant of *scholar*. (s.v. *scholar*)
[34] The *OED* notes the form "scate" was the early form of the verb *skate* in 17th to 18th centuries. (s.v. *skate*)
[35] The *OED* notes "The full form *agone* had been contracted to *ago* in some dialects long before this usage began, in end of 14th century; *ago* became the ordinary prose form from Caxton, but *agone* has remained dialectally, and as an archaic and poetic

variant to the present day" (s.v. *ago*)

[36] Dick Leith, *A Social History of English* (London: Routeledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1983) 110.

[37] Manfred Görlach, *Eighteenth-Century English* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter Heidelberg GmbH, 2001) 109.

[38] Venezky, 342.

[39] Görlach, 80.

[40] The *OED* notes "*The tother* is still in used in Scottish and in northern English dialects, but in general English is replaced by *the other*, and is often in familiar use by the simple *tother*, also written *t'other*" (s.v. *tother*)

[41] The *OED* notes "Formerly in many others, as in *Inns o' Court*, *man o' war*, *Isle o' Wight*, but in these of is now usually written, even when *o'* familiarly pronounced" (s.v. *o, o'* preposition 2. b).

[42] The *OED* gives the first citation of the word: 1775. (s.v. *journalize* 2)

[43] Frederic G.Cassidy and Joan Houston Hall, "Americanism" *English in North America*, ed. John Algeo, vol. 6 *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001) 191.