Variation in the Morphology and Syntax of Various Englishes
(based on Chapters 4 and 5 of Bauer 2002)

I. Introduction

An important question that we need to start this discussion with is whether the various Englishes will ever drift apart just like some Germanic dialects that have evolved into such languages as Dutch, Danish, Swedish, German, etc.

At this point, no signs of this are evident. However, contrasts between, for instance, British English and American English in various domains (e.g. the phonological and the lexical domain) are well known.

II. Differences in Morphology

The nominal domain

The contrast between singular and plural nouns

Lack of variation:

(1) a. English words: oxen, children, men, women, feet, geese, teeth, lice, mice BUT see woman in New Zealand English
   b. non-English words: tableaux, tempi, alumni, cherubim

Variation is observable in the case nouns ending in a voiceless fricative:

(2) a. roof – roofs (the prescribed regular plural) or rooves

Concept check: What is a prescribed form?

   b. dwarf – dwarfs (BrE) or dwarves (Tolkien)
   c. wharf – wharfs (BrE) or wharves (New Zealand English)

The verbal domain

1. Irregular verbs

Signs of variation are observable in the domain of irregular verbs. See Figure 4.1 on page 49 of Bauer (2002).

A typical contrast between AmE and BrE is illustrated by the past tense and past participle forms of the verb *burn*.

(3) a. AmE: burn burned burned
   b. BrE: burn burnt burnt
2. Derivational morphology

Concept check: Derivational morphology contrasts with inflectional morphology. How?

We would expect that this is an area that is ripe for variation. However, we find that this seems not to happen. Derivational affixes might be coined in a particular English, but they are then freely used elsewhere. This is exemplified by the Australian –o in words like garbo, journo, which is also known in Britain (see the words ammo and beano).

III. Differences in Syntax

Sentence structure

1. variation in the ordering of direct and indirect objects

(4) give me it (BrE according to Quirk et al. 1985) vs. give it me vs. give it to me (the preferred form)

2. concord

Collective nouns like government, committee and team may take either singular or plural concord, either on the verb or in agreement with a pronoun.

Some general tendencies:

(i) Singular concord is becoming more common in some types of British text.
(ii) Not all collective nouns have changed at the same speed. For instance, government is more likely to be used with singular concord than police.
(iii) Variation in singular and plural concord may have social implications in some places. In particular, singular concord is now the norm with some of the collective nouns in formal newspaper usage in the USA, England, Australia and New Zealand.

(5) Beyond that, states have served as pockets of resistance or innovation, attempting to weaken federal laws, or to advance new legislation that the federal government is not yet ready to consider.

July 16, 2013
The Federal Government Holds the Power
The New York Times

3. the subjunctive

Concept check: What is the subjunctive? What do we generally contrast the subjunctive with?

AmE uses the subjunctive more than BrE, which tends to use the modal should instead.

(6) a. Governor Cuomo will propose next week that New York State take over the supervision of criminals convicted of felonies and sentenced to probation instead of prison, top state officials said today.

January 1, 1984
Cuomo to Propose That State Direct Probation System
The New York Times

b. I order that all experiments in Mordon should cease forthwith and that the buildings should be bulldozed to rubble.

(Bauer 2002: 51, (4'))

4. the sentence-initial no
In South African English, a sentence-initial *no* is often used to contradict the assumptions made in the preceding part of the dialogue.

(7) Speaker A: Can you deliver it?
    Speaker B: No, sure, we’ll send it this afternoon.  
    (Bauer 2002: 51, (5))

**Auxiliary verbs**

1. *dare* and *need*

They can act either as main verbs or as modal auxiliaries. Consider (8) and (9).

(8)  
- a. He didn’t dare to look. (main verb)
- b. He didn’t dare look. (auxiliary)

(9)  
- a. Does she need to be here early? (main verb)
- b. Need she be here early? (auxiliary)

(Bauer 2002: 52, (7) and (8))

The auxiliary construction is rare in American English.

In New Zealand English and the English of England it matters whether *need* appears in an affirmative, negative or interrogative sentence.

2. *used to*

There is variation between the forms *use to* and *used to*, as illustrated in (10).

(10)  
- a. I didn’t (use)d to like milk.
- b. Did you use(d) to like milk?

There is also a stylistic difference between forms like (11a) and (11b).

(11)  
- a. I usen’t to like milk. (formal)
- b. I didn’ use(d) to like milk. (less formal)

**Complementation**

Concept check: What does the term ‘complementation’ refer to? The examples in (12) and (13) may serve as a hint.

(12)  
- a. I believed that he was guilty.
- b. I believed him guilty.

(13)  
- a. I suspected that he was guilty.
- b. *I suspected him guilty.

Variation characterizes complement options as well.

(14)  
- a. They appealed against the decision. (BrE)
- b. They appealed the decision. (Australian and New Zealand English)

(15)  
- a. Explain this to me.
- b. Explain me this. (South African English)

(16)  
- a. Please fill out this form. (AmE)
- b. Please fill in this form. (BrE)

(17)  
- a. We protested the decision. (AmE)
b. We protested against the decision. (BrE)
(18) a. He replied to me.
b. He replied me. (South African English)

Have

There is variation between have and have got, so that both (19) and (20) are possible.

(19) He has a new bike.
(20) He has got a new bike.

These are often synonymous. However, there could be a distinction between examples like (21) and (22).

(21) I have a new car.
(22) I’ve got a new car.

Also, consider (23) and (24).

(23) Have you (got) any fresh cod?
(24) Do you have fresh cod?

AmE seems to use do-support in questions and negatives far more than BrE does.

Prepositions

Choice of preposition is often variable. Consider the examples in (25) – (27).

(25) a. at the weekend (BrE)
b. on/during/over the weekend (AmE)
c. in the weekend (New Zealand English)
(26) a. Monday to Friday (BrE)
b. Monday through Friday (AmE)
(27) a. be in the team (BrE)
b. be on the team (AmE)

In many temporal expressions, AmE can omit a preposition that is necessary in other varieties.

(28) a. I’ll see you (on) Friday.
b. (On) Saturdays, we like to go fishing.
c. The term starts (on) March 1st.
d. He works (by) day(s) and studies (at) night(s). (NB: day(s) and night(s) become adverbs)

Adverbs

In some varieties of English, already and yet can co-occur with a past tense verb. In others, the present perfect is used.

(29) a. I ate already.
b. I have already eaten.
The major distinction is usually drawn between British and American spelling conventions.

These are the possibilities that we need to consider now:

(30) a. both varieties spell a word the same way: cat
    b. the two varieties spell a word in different ways: honor/honour
    c. AmE allows either of two spellings for a word, BrE allows only one: ax/axe
    d. BrE allows either of two spellings for a word, AmE allows only one: generalise/generalize
    e. both varieties allow variation in spelling for a word: judgment/judgement

Variation can be a matter of lexical distribution or it can be systematic.

*Lexical distributional differences*

(31) a. pajamas (AmE) vs. pyjamas (BrE)
    b. jail (AmE and BrE) vs. gaol (BrE)
    c. story (AmE) vs. storey (BrE)
    d. check (AmE) vs. cheque (BrE)
    e. tire (AmE) vs. tyre (BrE)
    f. gray (AmE and BrE) vs. grey (BrE)

For more examples, see Figure 5.1 in Bauer (2002: 63).

*Systematic differences*

(32) a. generalise vs. generalize
    b. colour vs. color
    c. centre vs. center
    d. travelled vs. traveled
    e. defence vs. defense
    f. encyclopaedia vs. encyclopedia

Sample tasks for the exam:

Tasks 1 and 2 on page 67 in Bauer (2002).