Generally, WC speakers have a front vowel in Norwich English, while MC speakers have a central vowel, but there are still, on average, fine differences of vowel quality which distinguish one class from another. Many other class differences of the same kind could be cited from almost any area you care to name. In Leeds, for example, middle-class speakers tend to have a vowel of the [a] type in words such as but, up, fun, while working-class speakers have a higher, rounder vowel, [u]; in London, name, gate, face are pronounced [nem] etc., [nem], or [nem] depending on social class (highest-class form first); in Chicago the vowel of roof, tooth, root is most often [u] but is frequently more centralized [i], in the speech of members of higher social-class groups; and in Boston, upper-class speakers have [ou] in ago, know, while other speakers have [o].

This method of investigating social-class dialects and accents – measuring the social class of informants and then correlating linguistic data with that – has proved very useful. There is, however, another way of doing it. It is equally possible to group speakers together on the basis of their linguistic similarity, and then to see what, if any, social features characterize these groups. The technique of ‘cluster analysis’ has been employed in, amongst other cases, the analysis of Newcastle English, in an attempt to discover, by clustering speakers together on the basis of measures of linguistic similarity, what are the varieties of Newcastle English, and what are their social correlates. In many ways a technique of this kind appears to be equivalent to the method developed by Labov. It has an advantage over Labov’s method in that social parameters of hitherto unsuspected importance may be revealed. On the other hand, it may be much more difficult to group speakers together on the basis of their linguistic rather than sociological characteristics.

3. Language and Ethnic Group

An experiment was carried out in the USA in which a number of people acting as judges were asked to listen to tape-recordings of two different sets of speakers. Many of the judges decided that speakers in the first set were black, and speakers in the second set white – and they were completely wrong, since it was the first set which consisted of white people, and the second of Blacks. But they were wrong in a very interesting way. The speakers they had been asked to listen to were exceptional people: the white speakers were people who had lived all their lives amongst Blacks, or had been raised in areas where black cultural values were dominant; the black speakers were people who had been brought up, with little contact with other Blacks, in predominantly white areas. The fact was that the white speakers sounded like Blacks, and the black speakers sounded like Whites – and the judges listening to the tape-recordings reacted accordingly. This experiment demonstrates two rather important points. First, there are differences between the English spoken by many Whites and many Blacks in America such that Americans can, and do, assign people with some confidence to one of the two ethnic groups solely on the basis of their language – this might happen in a telephone conversation, for instance – which suggests that ‘black speech’ and ‘white speech’ have some kind of social reality for many Americans. This has been confirmed by other experiments, carried out in Detroit, which have shown that Detroiters of all ages and social classes have an approximately eighty per cent success rate in recognizing black or white speakers (from unexceptional backgrounds in this test) on the basis of only a few seconds of tape-recorded material. Secondly, the experiment demonstrates rather convincingly that, although the stereotypes of black or white speech which listeners work with provide them...
with a correct identification most of the time, the diagnostic differences are entirely the result of learned behaviour. People do not speak as they do because they are white or black. What does happen is that speakers acquire the linguistic characteristics of those they live in close contact with. Members of the two American ethnic groups we have been discussing learn the linguistic varieties associated with them in exactly the same way that social-class dialects are acquired, and in those unusual cases where Whites live amongst Blacks, or vice versa, the pattern acquired is that of the locally predominant group.

This means— and it may perhaps still be necessary to emphasize this— that there is no racial or physiological basis of any kind for linguistic differences of this type. In the past, of course, it was quite widely believed that there was or might be some connection between language and race. For example, during the nineteenth century, the originally linguistic term Indo-European came also to have racial connotations. The term Indo-European was coined to cover those languages of Europe, the Middle East, and India which, linguists had discovered, were historically related to each other. Subsequently, however, a myth grew up of an imaginary Indo-European or Aryan race who had not only spoken the parent Indo-European language but who were also the ancestors of the Germans, Romans, Slavs and of others who now speak Indo-European languages. Unfortunately for adherents of this view, any human being can learn any human language, and we know of many well-attested cases of whole ethnic groups switching language through time—one has only to think, for example, of the large numbers of people of African origin who now speak originally European languages. There can, therefore, be no guarantee whatsoever—indeed, it is exceptionally unlikely—that groups of people are racially related because they speak related languages. We cannot say that Slavs and Germans are racially related simply because they speak related Indo-European languages. Ideas about languages and race die hard, however. The German language, for instance, was an important component of the Nazis’ theories about the Germanic ‘master race’; and false ideas about the possibility and desirability of preserving linguistic purity (i.e. defending a language against contamination) by loan words from other languages) may often go hand in hand with equally false ideas about racial purity. (This is one of the reasons for the replacement of German words like Geographie by the supposedly purer Erdkunde during the Nazi period.) Perhaps less harmful, but probably much more persistent, are references to, for example, the Rumanians as a ‘Latin’ people (with all kinds of implications about ‘national character’) for no other reason than that they speak a Romance language. It is true, of course, that Rumanian represents a historical development of Latin (with a considerable admixture from Slavic and other languages), but it simply does not follow that Rumanians are genetically descendants of the Romans. It is, after all, much more likely that they are more closely related genetically to their Russian, Bulgarian and Hungarian neighbours, with whom they have been mixing for centuries, than to the ‘Latin’ Spaniards and Portuguese.

There is, then, no inherent or necessary link between language and race. It remains true, however, that in many cases language may be an important or even essential concomitant of ethnic-group membership. This is a social fact, though, and it is important to be clear about what sort of processes may be involved. In some cases, for example, and particularly where languages rather than varieties of a language are involved, linguistic characteristics may be the most important defining criteria for ethnic-group membership. For instance, it is less accurate to say that Greeks speak Greek than to state that people who are native speakers of Greek (i.e. who have Greek as their mother tongue) are generally considered to be Greek (at least by other Greeks) whatever their actual nationality. In other cases, particularly where different varieties of the same language are concerned, the connection between language and ethnic group may be a simple one of habitual association, reinforced by social barriers between the groups, where language is an important identifying characteristic. By no means all American Blacks speak ‘black English’, but the overwhelming majority of those who do speak it are Blacks, and can be identified as such from their speech alone. In these cases the connection, although not inevitable, is something members of the speech community come to expect, and the breaking
of the connection may at first appear to result in incongruity: for this reason many people find it amusing to hear a white person with a West Indian accent or a black person with a Yorkshire accent. In any case, ethnic-group differentiation in a mixed community is a particular type of social differentiation and, as such, will often have linguistic differentiation associated with it.

Cases of the first type, where language is a defining characteristic of ethnic-group membership, are very common on a world scale. Situations of this type are very usual in multilingual Africa, for example. In one suburb outside Accra in Ghana there are native speakers of more than eighty different languages, including such major languages as Twi, Hausa, Ewe and Kru. In most cases, individuals will identify themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic group or tribe on the basis of which of these many languages is their mother tongue (although the majority of the inhabitants are bi- or tri-lingual). The different ethnic groups therefore maintain their separateness and identity as much through language as anything else. This is not only an African phenomenon, of course. The two main ethnic groups in Canada, for example, are distinguished mainly by language. For the most part, it is true, they also have different religions, different histories, cultures and traditions, but the most important defining characteristic is whether they are native speakers of English or French.

In cases of the second type – and these are in many ways more interesting – the separate identity of ethnic groups is signalled, not by different languages, but by different varieties of the same language. Differences of this type may originate in or at least be perpetuated by the same sorts of mechanisms as are involved in the maintenance of social-class dialects: we can suppose that ethnic group differentiation acts as a barrier to the communication of linguistic features in the same way as other social barriers. In the case of ethnic groups, moreover, attitudinal factors are likely to be of considerable importance. Individuals are much more likely to be aware of the fact that they are ‘Jewish’ or to consider themselves ‘Black’ than they are to recognize that they are, say, ‘lower middle class’. This means that ethnic-group membership may be an important social fact for them. Since, moreover, linguistic differences may be recognized, either consciously or subconsciously, as characteristic of such groups, these differences may be very persistent. An interesting example of this comes from Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia is a multilingual nation where language may act as a defining characteristic. Slovene, Macedonian, Albanian and Hungarian are spoken by ethnic groups (‘nationalities’ is the official Yugoslavian term) who go under the same name as the language. In other cases, however, different ethnic groups speak the same language, and here language may act as an identifying characteristic (although not, today, a particularly important one). This is true of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, where the three main ethnic groups in the city, Serbs, Croats and Moslems, all speak Serbo-Croat, the most widely used Yugoslavian language. Historically speaking, this ethnic-group differentiation in Sarajevo has to do with religion (Serbs are or were Orthodox, Croats Catholic) and partly to do with geographical origin (Serbia is to the east of Bosnia, Croatia to the west). Today these factors are of no very great importance, but individuals are still aware of their ethnic group membership. Often, moreover, it is possible to detect ethnic background from linguistic clues. We cannot say, any more than we can with social-class dialects, that members of the three groups in Sarajevo speak distinct varieties. The differences are really only tendencies, and they appear to be entirely lexical: different words tend to be used more often by particular groups. The following list gives a few examples of the types of difference involved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moslems</th>
<th>Croats</th>
<th>Serbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hleb</td>
<td>kruh</td>
<td>hleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voz</td>
<td>vlak</td>
<td>voz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pendier</td>
<td>prozor</td>
<td>prozor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>čaršija</td>
<td>grad</td>
<td>varoš</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sevdah</td>
<td>ljubav</td>
<td>ljubav</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>budžak</td>
<td>kut</td>
<td>čošak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It must be emphasized, too, that this list does not supply any hard and fast rules for usage by different groups, it merely gives indications of general trends. In most cases speakers from all three groups can and do use the other forms on occasions (except that...
Serbs and Croats are unlikely to use the Moslem words for love or window. The linguistic differences between the Serbs and Croats are largely geographical in origin in that the words they use tend to be those employed in Serbia and Croatia respectively. The typically Moslem words, on the other hand, tend to be loan words from Turkish, due to the influence of Islam and centuries of Turkish rule. In Sarajevo itself, however, these differences, whatever their origin, are today ethnic-group differences. They are perpetuated (in so far as they are maintained today) through members of each group associating more frequently with each other than with other groups, and perhaps more importantly, through the group-identification function that linguistic features often have.

In other cases of this sort, ethnic-group differences may be correlated with phonological or grammatical features, as well as or instead of with lexical differences. One of the interesting facts to emerge from Labov’s New York study, for example, was that there were slight but apparently significant differences in the English pronunciation of speakers from Jewish, Italian and black backgrounds. These differences, once again, are statistical tendencies rather than clear-cut, reliable signals of ethnic-group differences, but they are clearly due to the fact that the different races tend to form separate groups within the city. In origin they appear to be due, at least to a certain extent, to the continuing effect of what are often called substratum varieties—the languages or varieties spoken by these groups or their forbears before they became speakers of New York City English—Yiddish, Italian and southern-states English. In the case of Yiddish and Italian the interference of the old language on the new (a ‘Yiddish accent’ in English, say) in the first generation has led to hypercorrection of foreign features by the second generation. For example, one of the characteristics of New York English, as we saw in the previous chapter (p. 49), has been the development of high beard-like vowels in words of the type bad, bag. It seems that this development has been accelerated by the desire, presumably subconscious, of second-generation Italians to avoid speaking English with an Italian accent. Native speakers of Italian tend to use an [a]-type vowel, more open than the English sound, in English words of this type, and their children, in wishing to avoid this pronunciation, may have selected the highest variants of this vowel available to them, i.e. the ones most unlike the typically Italian vowel. Certainly, Italians now show a notably greater tendency to use the higher vowels than do Jews, and this may eventually lead to a situation where high vowels in bad, bag become a symbol of identification for New Yorkers from Italian backgrounds. Jewish speakers, on the other hand, tend to have higher vowels than Italians in words of the type off, lost, dog, and a similar pattern of hypercorrection may be responsible for this: many native Yiddish speakers who have learnt English as a foreign language do not distinguish the /a/ in coffee from the /æ/ in cup, so that coffee cup may be /kofɪ kɒp/. Second-generation speakers may therefore have exaggerated the difference between the two vowels, in order to stress the fact that they do make the distinction, with the result that higher vowels occur in coffee, dog [dɒg]. These high vowels are not the result of pressures of this sort, since high vowels are by no means confined to Jewish speakers, but they may well have been encouraged by this ethnic-group substratum effect.

A similar kind of substratum effect can be found in the English of Scotland. Most Scots today tend to think of themselves as simply ‘Scottish’, but historically speaking they represent descendants of two distinct ethnic groups. To simplify things somewhat, we can say that Highland Scots were Gaels, and spoke Gaelic (as many of them still do in the West Highlands and on the islands of the Hebrides), while Lowland Scots were English speakers. Now that English is spoken by nearly everyone in Scotland, this difference still survives in the type of English one can hear in different parts of the country. Lowland Scots speak either a local dialect or standard English with a local accent (or something in between). Highlanders on the other hand, speak either standard Scots English (which the group as a whole initially learnt as a foreign language) or something not too far removed from this—not nearly so far from it as the Lowland dialects, in any case. (Highlanders do not normally say I dinna ken, for example, but rather I don’t know.) There is often, however, a certain amount of substratum influence from Gaelic in the
English spoken by Highlanders which may identify them as coming from the Highlands. Native speakers of Gaelic, of course, will often have a Gaelic accent in English, but one can detect lexical and grammatical differences even in the speech of Highlanders who have never spoken Gaelic in their lives. Examples include differences such as the following:

West Highland English          Standard Scots English  
Take that whisky here.          Bring that whisky here.  
I'm seeing you!                  I can see you!          
It's not that that I'm wanting   I don't want that.       

In the English-speaking world as a whole one of the most striking examples of linguistic ethnic-group differentiation — and one where the postulated role of some kind of substratum effect is a controversial subject — is the difference we have already noted between the speech of black and white Americans. These differences are by no means manifest in the speech of all Americans, but they are sufficiently widespread to be of considerable interest and importance. It was recognized a long time ago that black Americans spoke English differently from the Whites. A British visitor writing in 1746 said of the American colonists, 'One thing they are very faulty in, with regard to their children ... is that when young, they suffer them too much to prowl among the young Blacks, which insensibly causes them to imbibe their manners and broken speech.' Differences, then, were noted, and were generally held to be the result of inherent mental or physical differences between the two ethnic groups. Since the English which black people spoke was felt, as the above quotation shows, to be debased or corrupt, the difference was also considered to be the result — and indeed proof — of the inherent inferiority of black people (a fashionable belief at the time). Blacks, it was thought, could not 'speak English properly' since they were simply not capable of it. This view has no basis in fact, but it cannot be altogether ignored, even today: it was at one time so widely held that it has affected the history of the study of black American English. Many developments in this field have to be viewed against this historical background, and the subject as a whole is in any case fraught with various social and political implications.

The influence of this earlier view lingered on in the following way: since differences in black speech had formerly been ascribed to racial inferiority, the recognition that there was in fact no inferiority seemed to imply to linguists who might have thought of studying black English that black speech was not (and could not be) different. This meant that no one could study black speech as such without appearing to be racist, and the subject was therefore neglected for many years. Eventually, however, linguists realized that this attitude was the ethnic-group counterpart to the view, recognized as false, that differences between social dialects implied linguistic superiority of one variety over another. If Blacks and Whites spoke differently, this simply meant that there were different (linguistically equally good) ethnic-group language varieties. Today, therefore, linguists are agreed that there are differences between black speech and white speech and, since there is no way in which one variety can be linguistically superior to another, that it is not racist to say so. The political and social climate is now such that this linguistic problem can be extensively studied and discussed. In fact, such a store of interesting data has been uncovered in the past several years that the study of 'Black Vernacular English (BVE)' is now one of the major preoccupations of many American linguists. This term is generally used to refer to the non-standard English spoken by lower-class Blacks in the urban ghettos of the northern USA and elsewhere. Black English, as a linguistic term, has the disadvantage that it suggests that all Blacks speak this one variety of English — which is not the case. BVE, on the other hand, distinguishes those Blacks who do not speak standard American English from those who do, although it still suggests that only one non-standard variety, homogeneous throughout the whole of the USA, is involved, which is hardly likely, in spite of a surprising degree of similarity between geographically separated varieties. Some of the more typical grammatical characteristics of BVE are exemplified in the following passages:
TWELVE-YEAR-OLD BOY, DETROIT: ‘Sometimes we think she’s absolutely crazy. She come in the classroom she be nice and happy ... the next minute she be hollering at us for no reason, she never have a smile, she’d be giving us a lecture on something that happened twenty years ago.’ (From the survey of Detroit speech led by Roger Shuy.)

FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD HARLEM BOY: ‘You know, like some people say if you’re good your spirit goin’ t’heaven . . . ’n’ if you bad, your spirit goin’ to hell. Well, bullshit! Your spirit goin’ to hell anyway. I’ll tell you why. ‘Cause, you see, doesn’ nobody really know that it’s a God. An’ when they be sayin’ if you good, you goin’ t’heaven, tha’s bullshit, ’cause you ain’t goin’ to no heaven, ’cause it ain’t no heaven for you to go to.’ (From a survey of New York speech led by William Labov.)

In any case, although BVE is now recognized in academic linguistic circles as a normal, valid and interesting variety (or varieties) of English, controversy still remains. While it is recognized that there are differences between BVE and other varieties, there is disagreement as to the nature of these differences and, in particular, to their origin. One view is that all features which are said to be characteristic of BVE can also be found in white speech, although not necessarily in the same combination, and particularly in the white speech of the southern states of the USA. Most features of BVE, this view claims, are therefore derived historically from British or other white dialects. They have come to be interpreted as ‘black English’ because black people have emigrated from the south to the northern cities of the USA, so that what were originally geographical differences have now become, in the north, ethnic-group differences. (There are parallels here, of course, with the Serbo-Croat of Sarajevo.) Furthermore, it is also possible that racial segregation and the growth of ghettos, which have meant that there has been only minimal contact between Blacks and Whites, have led to the development of the English of the two groups — that the two varieties have generated their own distinct linguistic innovations.

The other view claims that, many, at least, of the characteristics of BVE can be explained by supposing that the first American Blacks spoke some kind of English Creole. (I shall leave a full discussion of creole languages until Chapter 8, pp. 177–91.)

Simply put, however, the term creole is applied to a pidgin language which has become the native language of a speech community, and has therefore become expanded again, and acquired all the functions and characteristics of a full natural language. A pidgin is a reduced, simplified, often mixed language evolved for, say, trading purposes by speakers with no common language. Varieties of English Creole (that is, creolized Pidgin English) are widely spoken in the West Indies by people of African descent. In their ‘purest’ form they are not immediately comprehensible to English speakers, although the vocabulary is similar, and they show fairly considerable influence from African languages.) The hypothesis is, then, that BVE is not derived from British English dialects, but rather from an English Creole much like that of, say, Jamaica. This view would hold that the earliest American Blacks had a creole as their native language, and that this has, over the years, come to resemble more and more closely the language of the Whites. In other words, while the language of American Blacks should clearly now be referred to as English, those places where BVE differs from other English varieties are the result of continuing creole influence. Adherents of this view also suggest that similarities between the speech of Blacks and southern Whites may be due to the influence of the former on the latter, rather than vice versa. (There are some clear cases of lexical items which have been introduced into American English from African languages, e.g. voodoo, pinto 'coffin', goober 'peanut'.)

Let us attempt a short review of the evidence. We shall select some of the most frequently cited characteristics of BVE, beginning with certain phonological features, and then see how they can best be explained.

1. Many black speakers do not have non-prevocalic /r/ in cart or car. This feature can quite clearly be traced back to British dialects, and it is also, of course, a feature found in the speech of many American Whites. Many lower-class Blacks, however, also demonstrate loss of intervocalic /r/ (that is, /r/ between vowels) in words like Carol and Paris (Ca’ol, Pa’is), so that Paris and pass, parrot and pat may be homophonous (i.e., sound the
same). This feature, though not nearly so commonly, can be heard in the speech of certain southern Whites (British readers will perhaps be familiar with this sort of pronunciation from Westerns: Howdy she’iff?), and there are also speakers of British RP who can be heard, for example, to say very and similar words with no /r/: ve’y nice. Some black speakers also show loss of /r/ after initial consonants, in certain cases, e.g. f’om = from, p’otect = protect. This last may be peculiar to BVE.

2. Many black speakers often do not have /θ/, as in thing, or /ð/, as in that. In initial position they may be merged with /t/ (rarely) and /d/ respectively, so that this is dis, for example. This feature is also found, to a certain extent, in the speech of white Americans, but not, it appears, so frequently. It is worth noting that it is also a feature of Caribbean creoles. In other positions, /θ/ and /ð/ may be merged with /ʃ/ and /v/, so that pronunciations such as b’uvuh /bava/, for ‘brother’, may occur. This feature is well-known in London speech. It also occurs in other British varieties, and in the speech of Whites in Kentucky.

3. All English speakers, in their normal speech, simplify final consonant clusters in words like lost, west, desk, end or cold (where both consonants are either voiceless or voiced), where another consonant follows: los’ time, wes’ coast. Where a vowel follows, however, simplification does not occur: lost elephant, west end. In BVE, on the other hand, simplification can take place in all environments, so that pronunciations like los’ elephant, wes’ en’ may occur. This means that, in BVE, plurals of nouns ending in standard English in -st, -sp and -sk are often formed on the pattern of class: classes rather than of clasp: clasps. For example, the plural of desk may be desses, the plural of test, tesser. Consonant-cluster reduction of this type is also a feature of Caribbean creoles, but it appears, too, to be common in the speech of Whites in some parts of the South. However, there also seems to be at least one respect in which some types of BVE are unique. While some Whites say tes’ and others test, they all have forms like tester and testing: where the cluster is followed by a suffix beginning with a vowel, simplification does not take place. This is also usual with black speakers, particularly in the North, but there are some Blacks, particularly southern children, who have testing and tesser. In other words, the form of items of this type must be assumed to be tesser for these speakers since they never have a t in any context. We can say, then, that there are some BVE speakers who, like creole speakers, do not have final consonant clusters of the type -st.

4. A number of other features are characteristic of BVE pronunciation. They include the nasalization of vowels before nasal consonants and the subsequent loss of the consonant: run, run, rang = [rəŋ]; vocalization and loss of non-prevocalic /l/: told may be pronounced identically with toe; and devoicing of final /b/, /d/, /g/ (bud and but may be distinguished only by the slightly longer vowel of the former) and possible loss of final /d/: toad may be pronounced identically with toe. All these features, with the possible exception of the last, can be found in various white varieties of English.

Perhaps more central to this argument about the origin of differences between BVE and other forms of English are grammatical differences.

1. Many black speakers do not have -s in third-person singular present-tense forms, so that forms such as he go, it come, she like are usual. We saw in Chapter 2, however, that this is a feature of certain British dialects (it is widespread in East Anglia and in parts of the West Country), and also occurs in the speech of many (particularly southern) white Americans. A certain amount of research, however, has nevertheless suggested that we cannot necessarily ascribe this BVE 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 -as we have seen to be the case with class dialects - 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 BVE—we see in Chapter 2 that LWC Norwich speakers too are almost invariable in the use of forms without -s.

2. An important grammatical characteristic of BVE is the absence of the copula—the verb to be—in the present tense. This characteristic is central to the present controversy. In BVE, as in Russian, Hungarian, Thai and many other languages including, crucially, creoles, the following type of sentence is grammatical:

She real nice.
They out there.
He not American.
If you good, you going to heaven.

(Where the copula appears in ‘exposed’ position, as in I know what it is, or Is she?, it is always present.) What is the origin of this feature in BVE? Dialectologists point out that in some varieties of white English copula absence is grammatical. Creolists, on the other hand, point out that the English Creoles of the Caribbean have invariable copula absence. The creolists’ case appears to be strong. The same Mississippi study we discussed above, for example, shows that copula deletion in white southern speech, although it does occur, is hardly of the same order as this phenomenon in black speech. While black children deleted is in nearly 28 per cent of cases, white children lacked is less than 2 per cent of the time. Similarly, Blacks deleted are in 77 per cent of cases, while Whites showed deletion in only 21 per cent of cases. Advocates of the creole origin of copula deletion in BVE can therefore point to the fact (a) that copula deletion does not occur in British dialects, (b) that copula absence is a feature of English-based creoles spoken by Blacks in the Caribbean and (c) that it is much more common in the speech of American Blacks than American Whites. They might also like to suggest that copula deletion in white American—but not British—English is the result of influence from BVE. Opponents of this view, on the other hand, can point to another crucial problem: is copula deletion in BVE a grammatical or a phonological phenomenon? Is the copula, that is, ‘not there’ in BVE, or is it ‘there’ but not pronounced? BVE, as we have seen, is frequently characterized by absence of non-prevocalic /r/. Is, therefore, the deletion of are simply an example of this same phenomenon—is they’re > they or car > cah? A further point to bear in mind is that, as other linguists have pointed out, BVE deletes the copula only in those contexts where standard English contracts it—where is becomes ‘s or are becomes ‘re. It is therefore possible to conclude that copula deletion may be a phonological innovation of BVE which continues the older process of deletion, thus: he is > he’s > he; they are > they’re > they.

3. Perhaps the most important characteristic of BVE is the so-called ‘invariant be’: the use of the form be as a finite verb form. For example,

He usually be around.
Sometimes she be fighting.
Sometimes when they do it, most of the problems always be wrong.
She be nice and happy.
They sometimes be incomplete.

At first sight, this use of be appears to be no different from its occurrence in certain British dialects, where I be, he be etc. correspond to standard English I am, he is. There is, however, a crucial difference between BVE and all other varieties of English. As the adverbs usually and sometimes in the above sentences show, invariant be is used in BVE only to indicate ‘habitual aspect’—it is only used to refer to some event that is repeated and is not continuous. There is therefore a verbal contrast in BVE which is not possible in standard English.
Regional accent variation

As we have already seen, the accent of British English which has been most fully described, and which is usually taught to foreign learners, is the accent known as RP.

In this chapter we shall, first, give a brief outline of the main regional differences to be found in non-RP accents of British English and compare them with RP. We do not attempt to give a detailed account of all the regional and social differences in pronunciation to be found in British Isles English. In particular, we do not attempt at all to describe accents associated with Traditional Dialects, spoken by older people in rural areas (for these, see Wakelin, 1972). Rather we concentrate on urban and other regional accents of the type which are most widely heard as one travels round the country, and which are most likely to be encountered by foreign visitors. More detailed discussion of phonological features takes place in Chapter 5. Intonational and other prosodic features are not dealt with, but can of course be noted from the tape.

Regional accent differences

1 The vowel /ɔ/ /a/
(a) One of the best known differences between English accents is one of phoneme inventory—the presence or absence of particular phonemes (see p. 36). Typically, the vowel /ɔ/ does not occur in the accents of the north and Midlands of England, where /a/ is to be found in those words that elsewhere have /ɔ/. The vowel /ɔ/ is relatively recent, in the history of English, having developed out of /u/, and northern accents have not taken part in this development. The result is that pairs of words such as put: putt, could: cud which are distinguished in Welsh, Scottish, Irish and southern English accents are not distinguished in the north and Midlands, where words like blood and good, mud and hood, are perfect rhymes. (There are a few common words, though, which have /ɔ/ in the south of England but which have /u/ in much of the north of England. These include one, which rhymes with on in these areas, tongue, and none.)

Many northern speakers, under the influence of RP, have a vowel which is between /u/ and /ɔ/ in quality in words such as but (and sometimes in words such as put also). Generally, this vowel is around [a] (see table 4.1). This is particularly true of younger, middle-class speakers in areas of the southern Midlands. (Some speakers too, of course, hypercorrect—see Chapter 1.)

We can also note that many (particularly older) northern speakers, while they do not have /u/, do have /ɔ/ rather than /u/ in words such as hook, book, look, took, cook. They therefore distinguish pairs such as book and buck, which in the south are distinguished as /buk/ and /bɑk/, as /bʊk/ and /bɑk/. (All English English accents have shortened the original long /u:/ in oo words to /u/ in items such as good, hood; and all seem to have retained /u:/ in words such as mood, food. But in other cases there is much variation. RP speakers may have either /u/ or /a/ in room, brome; eastern accents have /u/ rather than /a:/ in roof, hoof; western accents, as well as those from parts of Wales, may have /u/ rather than /u/ in tooth, and so on.)

(b) It is usual, in descriptions of RP, to consider /a/ and /ɔ/ as distinct vowels, as in butter /ˈbʌtər/. This also holds good for accents of the south-east of England, Ireland, and Scotland. However, speakers from many parts of Wales, western England, and the Midlands (as well as some northern speakers—see above) have vowels that are identical in both cases: butter /ˈbʌtər/, another /ˈænəθər/ (see table 4.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1</th>
<th>/ɔ/, /u/ and /a/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>/a/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>/a/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western; modified northern I</td>
<td>/a/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified northern II</td>
<td>/a/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypercorrect northern</td>
<td>/a/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most English accents permit /r/ where it occurs before a vowel, as in rat, trap, carry. They vary, however, in whether they permit the pronunciation of /r/ after a vowel ('post-vocalic /r/'), as in words such as bar and bark. RP does not have post-vocalic /r/ and has bar /baː/, bark /baːk/. Scottish and Irish accents (like most North American accents) do have /r/ in this position.

Within England and Wales the position of post-vocalic /r/ in regional accents is quite complex, but we can generalize and say that the pronunciation with /r/ is being lost — post-vocalic /r/ is dying out — and that one is more likely to hear post-vocalic /r/ in the speech of older, working-class rural speakers than from younger middle-class urban speakers. Figure 4.2 shows those areas where post-vocalic /r/ still occurs in urban speech.

This difference between English accents is due to a linguistic change involving the loss of post-vocalic /r/, which began some
Thus Scottish speakers make no distinction between pairs of words such as the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Example Word</th>
<th>Actual Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>palm</td>
<td>/pæm/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pull</td>
<td>pool</td>
<td>/pʊl/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cot</td>
<td>caught</td>
<td>/kɔt/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 /h/
Unlike RP, most urban regional accents in England and Wales do not have /h/, or are at least variable in its usage. For these speakers, therefore, art and heart, arm and harm, are pronounced the same. Speakers in the north-east of England, including Newcastle, do however retain /h/, as do Scottish and Irish speakers.

7 [?] RP speakers may use the glottal stop (see p. 39) word-initially before vowels: ant [ænt]; or before certain consonants or consonant clusters: batch [bætʃ], six [sɪʃ], simply [sɪmˈplɪ] (Brown, 1977).

In most British regional accents, however, the glottal stop is more widely used, particularly as an allophone of word-medial and word-final /t/. It is most common in the speech of younger urban working-class speakers, and is found in most regions, with the particular exception of many parts of Wales. It occurs much more frequently in some phonological contexts than others:

- **most frequent**
  - that man
  - button
  - that apple
  - bottle

- **least frequent**
  - better

(In the *that man* context, the glottal stop can also be heard from many RP speakers, as we have already noted.)

In some areas, especially the north-east of England, East Anglia, and Northern Ireland, the glottal stop may also be pronounced simultaneously with the voiceless stops /p/, /t/, /k/ in certain positions, most strikingly when between vowels:

- flipper [flɪˈpɜr]?
- city [ˈsɪtɪ]
- flicker [ˈflɪkər]

8 /ŋ/
(a) Most non-RP speakers of English, particularly in informal styles, do not have /ŋ/ in the suffix -ing. In forms of this type they have /n/ instead:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Forms</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>singing</td>
<td>/ˈsɛŋ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walking</td>
<td>/ˈwɔːkɪn/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This pronunciation is also stereotypically associated (see also p. 40) with older members of the aristocracy, who are often caricatured as being particularly interested in huntin', shootin', and fishin'.

(b) In an area of western central England which includes Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, words which elsewhere have /ŋ/ and are spelt ng are pronounced with [ŋg]:

- singer [ˈsɪŋɡə]
- thing [ˈθɪŋ]

9 /ɹ/-dropping
At an earlier stage in the history of the English language, words like rude and rule, it is thought, were pronounced /rjuːd/, /rjuːl/. In modern English, however, the /ɹ/, where it occurred after /t/, has been lost, and the pronunciation is now /ruːd/, /ruːl/. The same thing is true of earlier /ʃw/ after /ɹ/: words such as Luke, which formerly had /ɹ/, are today pronounced /luːk/ (except that some – particularly Scottish – accents still preserve /ɹ/ in words like illumine, allude). Currently, too, /ɹ/ is being lost after /s/: most speakers have super /ˈsʌpər/, but many still retain /ɹ/ in suit /sjuːt/, for example (see p. 42). In RP and many other English accents, though, this is as far as the process has gone, and /ɹ/ can still occur before /uː/ after all other consonants. In certain regional accents, however, the change has progressed a good deal further. In parts of the north of England, for example, /ɹ/ has been lost after /ɹ/, so that enthuse may be /enθuːz/. In London, /ɹ/ is very often lost after /uː/: news may be /njuːz/ rather than RP-type /njuːz/. (And, as in a number of North American accents, /ɹ/ can also, at least in northern areas of London, be lost after /t/ and /d/: tune /tuːn/, duke /djuːk/, rather than /tjʊn/, /djuːk/ as in RP.) In a large area of eastern England, however, /ɹ/ has been lost before /uː/ after all consonants. This area covers Norfolk and parts of Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, and includes the towns of Norwich, Ipswich, Cambridge and Peterborough. In this
English Traditional Dialects north of the river Humber as it is of Fieber. This can be seen in some Traditional Dialect poetry from Cumberland. Note the spelling of long and wrong:

How lang I've fasted, and 'til hardly four;
This day I doubt 'ill ne'er be gitten owr,
And therer as fang a night, aleis! beside:
I lall thought fasts seek fearful things to bide.

Fie, Roger, fie! a sairy lass to wrang,
And let her aw this trouble undergang. 2

(Here lall means "little" and sairy means "poor".)

Personal surnames such as Lang or Laing and Strang are northern versions of the southern names Long and Strong, and there are many northern place names which also show this form, such as Langdale = "long valley" in Cumbria and Langcliffe = "long cliff" in Yorkshire.