Words, Meaning and Vocabulary

An introduction to modern English lexicology

Second edition

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6 Words in use

This chapter covers:

- the classification of words into a number of 'vocabularies' – core and specialist
- vocabularies associated with countries or regions
- vocabularies associated with occupations and other activities – jargon
- vocabularies associated with social groups – slang
- vocabularies associated with styles of speaking and writing – formality
- words severely restricted in usage – taboo and politically correct

6.1 Vocabularies

When we pick up an English dictionary, we imagine that we hold in our hands a representative collection of the words that exist in the English language, the vocabulary of an educated speaker of the language. All the words are, as it were, in one bag; all of a type; just as they are printed in an alphabetical list between the covers of a single book. When we open the dictionary and look more carefully at the entries, we see that quite a number of them are marked with labels of one kind or another, e.g. *botanical, baseball, slang, American English*. These labels indicate that the word is restricted in its use, and taken together, these labels indicate that there are a number of sets of words in English with a restricted use. It is these sets that we want to explore in this chapter.

6.1.1 Core and specialist vocabulary

In the 'General Explanations' at the beginning of the first (1933) edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the editors discuss the nature of the English vocabulary that the dictionary intends to chart and describe, offering a diagram to explain how they see the vocabulary of English (see Figure 6.1).

The editors explain the chart, also discussed in Stein (1999), in the following terms:

> The centre is occupied by the 'common' words, in which literary and colloquial usage meet. 'Scientific' and 'foreign' words enter the common language mainly through literature; 'slang' words ascend through colloquial use; the 'technical' terms of crafts and processes, and the 'dialect' words, blend with the common language both in speech and literature. Slang also touches on one side the
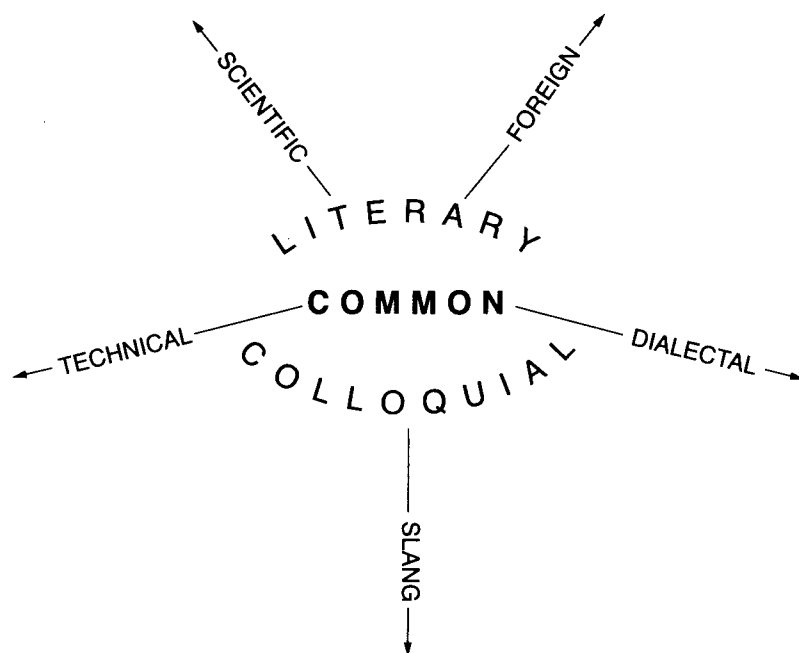
Figure 6.1 The vocabulary of English according to the OED (OED 1933), by permission of Oxford University Press

technical terminology of trades and occupations, as in 'nautical slang', 'Public School slang', 'the slang of the Stock Exchange', and on another passes into true dialect. Dialects similarly pass into foreign languages. Scientific terminology passes on one side into purely foreign words, on another it blends with the technical vocabulary of art and manufactures. It is not possible to fix the point at which the 'English Language' stops, along any of these diverging lines.

The OED's account of the vocabulary of English recognizes a fundamental distinction between words that belong to the common core of the language, and those that belong to particular specialist sub-sets. In fact, this distinction may apply not only between words, but also between the senses of a single word. While some senses may belong to the common core, one or more senses may be part of a specialist vocabulary. For example, *comeback* has the technical sense in Australian sheep farming of 'a sheep that is three-quarters merino and one-quarter crossbred' (*Collins English Dictionary* (*CED*) 1986: 315), *proof* has specialist senses in law, maths/logic, printing and engraving (see *CED* 1986: 1225).

6.1.2 Dimensions of variation

We have established that a distinction exists between those words, or senses of words, that belong to a 'common core' vocabulary and those that are restricted in their contexts of use. We now need to determine what types of context we can recognize as relevant for the description of vocabulary. The diagram from the OED suggests the following: dialect, slang, technical, scientific, foreign. It would be more useful, perhaps, to think in terms of dimensions of variation: the ways in which language varies according to context and how this leads to the development of specialist vocabularies.

One dimension of variation would be the historical one, charting the birth and death of words. At any point in time, there are words that continue to be recorded, even though they are 'obsolete', i.e. no longer in current use, but found only in older literature. There are also words that are 'archaic', still in use, but they have an old-fashioned flavour and are probably in the process of disappearing from the current vocabulary. This dimension of variation is not of much interest to us, since it does not define a specialist vocabulary. Such words could have been part of either the core vocabulary or a specialist vocabulary.

A dimension that is of relevance is the geographical one, represented in the OED diagram by 'dialect'. This dimension encompasses, however, not just the regional dialects of a single country, such as Britain, but also the national varieties of English, as spoken and written in the USA, Canada, Australia, India, West Africa, and so on. As such, we are reinterpreting the common core as the vocabulary of 'international English', the words that are common to all national varieties of the language. Alternatively, we need to recognize that each national variety has a common core, which includes many words that are shared with the common cores of other national varieties, but also some words that are restricted to that particular national variety. For example, the word *book* belongs to the common core of all national varieties, but while *faucet* belongs to the common core of American English, *tap* is the equivalent word in British English and other Commonwealth varieties, except that Canadian English has both terms (de Wolf 1996).

A second relevant dimension is that of occupation, which includes OED's 'technical' and 'scientific'. The term 'occupation' is interpreted broadly to include any pursuit, whether as part of daily work or a leisure interest, which develops its own specialized vocabulary. It encompasses scientific, religious, legal, political, and journalistic language (Crystal 1995), as well as the vocabulary associated with particular jobs and professions, sports and hobbies. Such specialist vocabulary is referred to, often disparagingly, as 'jargon'.

The language associated with identifiable social and cultural groups in society constitutes a third relevant dimension. This dimension is probably included under the *OED*'s 'slang' label. An example might be the vocabulary peculiar to youth culture, or to the criminal underworld, or to the CB (Citizen's Band) Radio fraternity, or to Internet surfers. There is perhaps some overlap with the occupational dimension, but the emphasis here is on a shared sub-culture rather than on an 'occupation'.

Fourthly, we can identify a dimension of variation related to the formality of the context, which influences the style of language that a speaker or writer uses. Certainly there are differences of vocabulary between 'formal' and 'informal' discourse. Compare:

> Patrons are kindly requested to deposit their outer garments at the wardrobe.
> Please leave your coats in the cloakroom.

Whether this leads to our being able to establish a specialist 'formal' (or 'informal') vocabulary is another question, which we shall need to explore. At the informal end of the spectrum, it shades into colloquialism, slang and taboo words, where we can more readily identify special sets of terms.

Some linguists would also recognize a dimension of variation that relates to the medium in which a particular message is communicated, with a basic distinction between the spoken medium and the written medium. Arguably, there are no specialist vocabularies of speech and writing, though there may be some words that we associate more readily with either the spoken or the written medium. To a large extent, though, this corresponds with the formal/informal dimension, except that we speak of informal and formal writing, or indeed speech. The broadcast media have made an interesting and complicating contribution to this dimension, with their use of much scripted or semi-scripted speech; and more recently, 'speaking' on the computer internet by means of electronic mail has added a further aspect to consider. But the vocabulary differences are perhaps less significant than other, especially grammatical, differences; and so we will consider this dimension to be subsumed under that of formality for lexical purposes.

One further topic, however, that we need to consider as we look at specialist vocabularies concerns the use of 'restricted languages', such as that which airline pilots speak when communicating with airport controls.

We have set the agenda for the chapter. Let us now proceed to a more detailed discussion of the points that we have raised.

6.2 National and regional vocabularies

McArthur (1987) accompanies his article discussing 'English languages' with a diagram called 'The circle of World English' (reproduced in McArthur 1992) (see Figure 6.2). The central circle implies a 'world' or 'international' English, which English speakers with differing national Englishes use with each other when they meet at conferences, business meetings, or on holiday. Crystal (1995) disputes whether such a variety yet exists (but see Gramley 1999). As far as vocabulary is concerned, it would not be clear, for example, whether *car* or *automobile* would be the preferred term. Nevertheless, Crystal agrees that when we meet English speakers from different national backgrounds, we take care not to use words that we perceive as
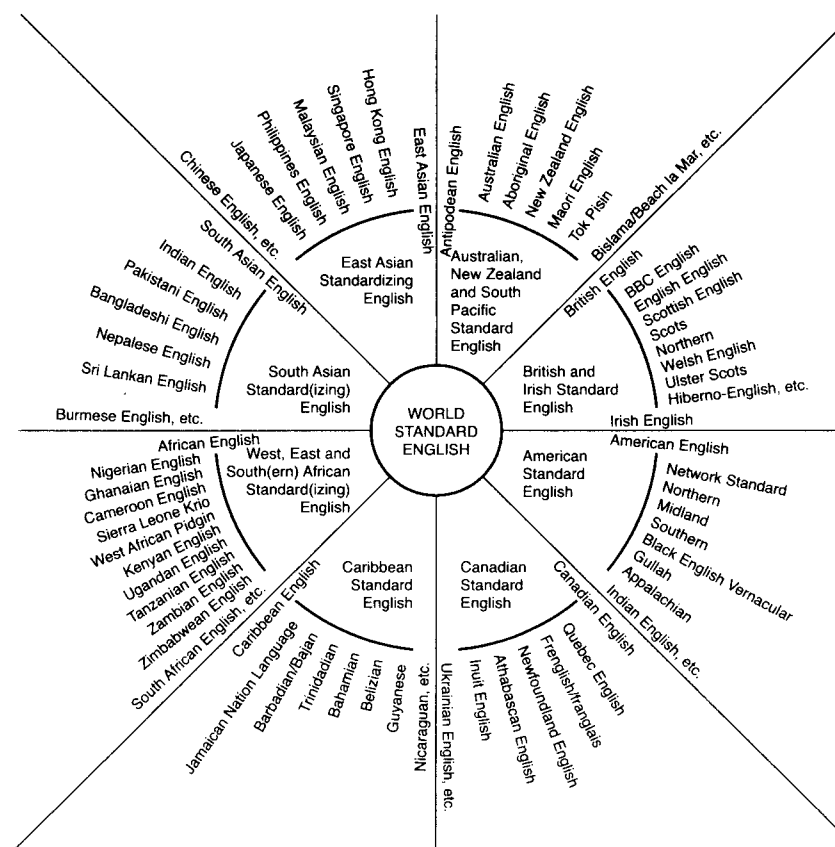

Figure 6.2 The circle of World English (McArthur 1987), by permission of Tom McArthur

peculiar to our variety; at the least, we check that our interlocutor has understood a word that we are not sure that they know.

The languages inside the segments of the larger circle in McArthur's diagram are the national and regional standards of English. Outside the circle are the regional varieties (languages and dialects) of these standards. This represents one method of diagramming the geographical varieties of English and their relationships; see McArthur (1992) for a discussion of alternative methods. In this book we shall be concerned mainly with the varieties listed within the larger circle; space precludes a more wide-ranging consideration. And we are concerned only with vocabulary, not with grammar or pronunciation.

6.2.1 British and American English (BrE and AmE)

The British and American varieties of English account for around 70 per cent of mother-tongue English speakers, with Americans outnumbering British by four to one (Crystal 1995). They are also the major players in the English-language teaching market (EFL and ESL). Although BrE speakers do not often like to think so, AmE is the dominant variety in the world today, as a consequence of the political, cultural and economic dominance of the USA. Because of the influence especially of American films and television series, as well as the pop music industry, many words that were formerly restricted to AmE are now well understood in BrE and in many cases are also part of many, especially younger, speakers' active vocabulary.

We need to account for the fact that some words are specific to either the American or the British variety and not used in World English, some are variety-specific but are used in World English, some have a sense which is variety-specific, and so on. Benson *et al.* (1986b) identify ten groups of lexical differences. The first five of these groups are:

I   Words that reflect cultural differences, with no equivalent in the other variety, e.g. *Ivy League, Groundhog Day* for AmE; *Honours Degree, Value Added Tax* for BrE.

II   Words that are variety-specific but which have an equivalent in the other variety, e.g. AmE *baggage room* = BrE *left-luggage office*, AmE *potato chip* = BrE *crisp*.

III Words that have at least one sense used in World English (WE), with an additional sense or senses specific to either or both varieties. For example, *caravan* has the WE sense of 'a company of traders or other travellers journeying together, often with a train of camels, through the desert' (*CED* 1986),

but it has the specific sense in BrE of 'a large enclosed vehicle capable of being pulled by a car or lorry and equipped to be lived in' (*CED* 1986), which is equivalent to AmE *trailer*. A further example is *homely*, which has the WE sense 'characteristic of or suited to the ordinary home; unpretentious', and with a BrE sense '(of a person) warm and domesticated in manner or appearance' but an AmE sense '(of a person) plain or ugly' (*CED* 1986).

IV   Words that have a single sense in World English and have an equivalent word in either AmE or BrE. An example is *ball-point pen*, with BrE equivalent *biro*; or *undertaker*, with AmE equivalent *mortician*. WE *filling station* has AmE equivalent *gas station* and BrE equivalent *petrol station*.

V   Words that have no World English meaning, but that have different specific meanings in the two varieties. For example, *flyover* has AmE meaning 'a ceremonial flight of aircraft over a given area', equivalent to BrE *flypast*. In BrE, *flyover* has the meaning 'an intersection of two roads at which one is carried over the other by a bridge' (*CED* 1986), equivalent to AmE *overpass*. In AmE *public school* is a free school financed by the state, whereas in BrE it is a fee-paying private educational establishment.

Crystal (1995) adapts Benson *et al.*'s (1986b) scheme to give a fourfold division in terms of the crossover potential of equivalent words between the AmE and BrE varieties:

1. no crossover potential from either side, e.g. (AmE words on the left, BrE on the right):

candy	sweets
cot	camp bed
diaper	nappy
freeway	motorway
grab bag	lucky dip
kerosene	paraffin
wrench	spanner
zip code	post code

2. crossover potential from AmE to BrE, but not from BrE to AmE; so the AmE word is in World English, e.g.

can	tin
crepe	pancake
eraser	rubber
French fries	chips

intermission	interval
leash	lead
stroller	pushchair
zero	nought

3. crossover potential from BrE to AmE, but not from AmE to BrE; so the BrE word is in World English, e.g.

ash can	dustbin
bathtub	bath
casket	coffin
drapes	curtains
fall	autumn
faucet	tap
line	queue
pantyhose	tights

4. crossover potential both from AmE to BrE and from BrE to AmE; so both words are in World English, e.g.

administration	government
antenna	aerial
baggage	luggage
dry goods	drapery
nightgown	nightdress
mail	post
sweater	jumper

All the above examples are taken from Crystal (1995: 309). They only begin to illustrate the vast differences in vocabulary between AmE and BrE, differences that have come about as the two nations have developed their own identities and pursued their own goals since the first settlers emigrated to America in the seventeenth century. Benson *et al.* (1986b) contains many more examples, including idioms, which may or may not have equivalents in the other language, e.g. AmE *shoot the breeze* = 'chat informally' (no BrE equivalent idiom), BrE *fall off the back of a lorry* = 'be stolen' (no AmE equivalent idiom).

The vocabulary of Canadian English is not the same as that of American English. While there has been steady cross-border contact with the USA, Canada has also experienced a continuous flow of immigration from Britain. Other factors include the bilingual influence of French in Quebec and contact with the Native American languages of Canada. Words for vehicles and their parts are usually AmE: *truck*, *hood*, *fender*, *trunk*, *station wagon*. Some BrE and AmE words co-exist, and may be more commonly used in some regions than others, e.g.

AmE *fry pan* and BrE *frying pan*, AmE *silverware* and BrE *cutlery* (de Wolf 1996). Words from French include *bateau* (flat-bottomed river boat), *brulé* (area of forest destroyed by fire), *habitant* (a French Canadian, especially a farmer) (*CED* 1986: xxiii). Words from Native American languages include: *bogan* (a sluggish sidestream) from Algonquian, *mowitch* (deer) from Chinook, and *hooch* (alcoholic drink) from Tlingit, which has now passed into World English.

6.2.2 Antipodean English

The first immigrants to Australia, at the end of the eighteenth century, were deported convicts from overcrowded British jails. Australia continued to be used as a penal colony well into the nineteenth century, although free emigrants from Britain also chose to make a new life on the other side of the world. Australian English has some ten thousand distinctive words, drawn from a variety of sources (*Macquarie Dictionary* 2001).

The convict language of the first settlers, drawn from a number of British English dialects, not to mention underworld slang, furnished Australian English with a number of its special words, e.g. *cobber* (friend), *dinkum* (genuine), *larrikin* (hooligan), *shake* (in the sense of 'steal'). As settlers spread out from the first point of arrival, they encountered new flora, fauna and geographical features in this vast country. Names were partly borrowed from the aboriginal languages, partly coined from English, e.g. *dingo*, *brolga* (bird), *morwong* (fish), *billabong* (stagnant pool in a stream), *dillybag*, *outback*, *backblocks*.

As the distinctive Australian sheep and cattle farming developed (on *stations*), so a distinctive vocabulary developed, e.g. *stockman*, *squatter* (sheep or cattle farmer), *rouseabout* (unskilled labourer), *sundowner* (tramp seeking shelter at sundown). When the gold rush started in the mid-nineteenth century, this produced its own crop of new words, e.g. *fossick* (search for gold in abandoned workings), *mullock* (waste material from a mine), *nuggety* (thickset or stocky).

Immigration to New Zealand took a different course from that to Australia. Although some settlement began in the late eighteenth century, it was not until after the Treaty of Waitangi with Maori chiefs in 1840 that a larger influx of settlers from Britain began to arrive. While NZ English (NZE) shares a number of words with Australian English (*sheep station*, *bowser* (= BrE petrol pump), *domain* (= BrE public park)), it also has two particular sets of words that contribute to a dictinctive NZE vocabulary.

One set comprises words borrowed from native Maori dialects. Some of these words relate to geographical features, flora and fauna;

e.g. *kowhai* and *totara* (trees), *kumara* (sweet potato), *takahe* (bird), *katipo* (spider), *tuatara* (lizard). Others relate to Maori culture, such as *ariki* (chief), *haka* (war dance), *pa* (village), *tangi* (ceremonial funeral), *tohunga* (Maori learned in traditional lore), *wahine* (woman or wife), *waka* (canoe). Others are more general words, taken over from Maori, such as *pakeha* (white person), *aroha* (affection, sympathy), *kuri* (dog, unpleasant person), *taihoa* (wait!).

The other set of distinctive New Zealand words comes from the adaptation and extension of BrE words to the culture of New Zealand as it has developed over the years. The NZ word for a holiday or beach cottage is *bach*, which is a clipped form of bachelor (McArthur (ed.) 1992). You might carry your picnic in a *chilly bin* (BrE cool box). Mail for rural areas is addressed to a *private bag* (i.e. P.O. Box) number. What in BrE is a council house is a *state house* in NZE. A university graduation is a *capping ceremony*.

It is estimated that NZE has some three to four thousand distinctive words or senses of words. Many of them can be found in the *New Zealand Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (Burchfield (ed.) 1986).

6.2.3 African English

Immigration to the African continent from Britain took place in the early nineteenth century, with several thousand settlers arriving in the eastern Cape from south-east England. This area had already been colonized by the Dutch in the mid-seventeenth century. Today around 10 per cent of the population of South Africa speaks English as a first language, with a substantial additional proportion using English as a second language. South African English (SAE) is a distinct regional variety, with a distinctive vocabulary drawn in part from Afrikaans (the South African variety of Dutch), in part from native African languages (such as Khoisan, Tswana, Xhosa, Zulu), and in part from developments and adaptations of English words. The *Dictionary of South African English* (Branford and Branford (eds) 1991) contains over five thousand items considered unique to this variety.

Some of the words from Afrikaans have made their way into World English, e.g. *aardvark*, *apartheid*, *eland*, *trek*, *veld*. Others remain restricted to the SAE variety, such as *bakkie* (basin, container), *kloof* (ravine or mountain pass), *lekker* (nice, enjoyable), *platteland* (area outside cities and main towns), *verkrampte* (conservative, narrow-minded), *voorkamer* (front room). Words from African languages that have entered South African English include: *gogga* (insect) from Hottentot, *indaba* (matter of concern or for discussion) from Zulu, *muti* (medicine) from Zulu, *sangoma* (witch doctor) from Zulu, *tsotsi*

(violent young criminal) from, it is thought, a Bantu language. Words from English that are peculiar to South Africa include: *bioscope* (BrE cinema), *bottle store* (BrE off-licence, AmE liquor store), *camp* (paddock), *matchbox* (small standardized dwelling), *robot* (BrE traffic lights).

Two other major varieties of English are found in Africa: West African English (WAfrE), and East African English (EAfrE). English is an official language in the West African states of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Cameroon and Liberia; and it is a 'second' language in the other eight states that comprise West Africa (McArthur (ed.) 1992, Todd and Hancock 1990). Peculiar to WAfrE vocabulary are: loans from local languages, e.g. *buka*, 'food stand' (from Hausa), *danfo*, 'minibus' (from Yoruba); loan translations, e.g. *bush meat*, 'game meat', *father* and *mother* for father's and mother's relatives; and local English words or local meanings for English words. Collins (1992) includes: *bush* (adjective), 'ignorant, stupid', *chop* (verb), 'eat', *coaster*, 'European resident on the coast', *day-clean* (noun), 'the time after first dawn when the sun begins to shine', and *linguist*, 'the spokesman for a chief'. (See also Awonusi 1990, Gyasi 1991, Bamiro 1994, Ahulu 1995.)

EAfrE describes the form of English used by educated East Africans in Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is used as a medium of communication in politics, business, the media and popular culture (McArthur (ed.) 1992). The lingua franca in this region of Africa is Swahili, an official language in Kenya and Tanzania; so English is an additional language for most speakers. Like WAfrE, EAfrE borrows from local languages, including Swahili, e.g. *duka*, 'shop', *shamba*, 'farm', *ndugu*, 'brother/friend'. It also has loan translations, e.g. *clean heart*, 'pure', *dry* (coffee), 'without milk or sugar'; and it has local English words or meanings of English words, e.g. *duty*, 'work or occupation', *refuse*, 'deny', *tea sieve*, 'tea strainer'. (See also Tripathi 1990, Sure 1992.)

6.2.4 Indian English

English has been spoken in the Indian subcontinent since the East India Company established trading 'factories' in the seventeenth century. It is now the associate official language of India, along with Hindi; and it is estimated that around 30 million people in India (4 per cent of the population) use English regularly (McArthur (ed.) 1992). Indian English has developed as a distinctive variety, including many unique vocabulary items.

A sizeable number of words has been borrowed into Indian English (IndE) from local languages, as well as from Portuguese.

Directly from Portuguese are *ayah, caste* and *peon*; from local languages via Portuguese. *bamboo, betel, curry* and *mango*. Directly from local languages into Indian English are: *anna, chit(ty), pukka, pundit, sahib*, etc. Among words borrowed from Arabic and Persian via local languages are: *mogul, sepoy, shroff* (banker), *vakeel* (lawyer). Loan translations include: *dining-leaf*, 'a banana leaf used to serve food' and *cousin sister*, 'a female cousin'.

Indian English vocabulary also has items (compounds) that are composed from one element of English origin and one element from a local language: *grameen bank*, 'village bank', *policewala*, 'policeman', *tiffin box*, 'lunch-box'. Some English words have also developed new senses or been adapted to new forms, e.g. *batch*, 'group of people' as in *batch-mate*, 'classmate', *drumstick*, 'green vegetable', *condole*, 'offer condolences', *head-bath*, 'washing one's hair', *prepone*, 'opposite of postpone'.

Indian English is not the only variety of the subcontinent, though many of its features are shared with Pakistani English (Baumgardner 1990), Lankan English (spoken in Sri Lanka) and the variety of English spoken in Bangladesh.

6.2.5 Other Englishes

What has been discussed so far should give a good flavour of the variety that occurs in the regional forms of English. We do not have space to mention other Englishes, such as those spoken in the Far East (Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore), or in the Caribbean (including creole varieties) but see McArthur (2002). Nor do we have space to reflect on the rich diversity of regional dialects, e.g. in Britain and America, which have been investigated by extensive projects such as the Survey of English Dialects (Orton *et al.* (eds) 1962–71) or the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (Cassidy (ed.) 1985).

EXERCISE 6/1

Can you think of a local (dialect) word in the area where you live, or where you come from, for any of the following? They all have variants in British English dialects.

gym shoe, bread roll, sandwich, attic, broom, beautiful, left-handed, excellent, tired out, lavatory, nothing.

6.3 Jargon

We are using the term 'jargon' to refer to specialist vocabularies associated with 'occupations' that people engage in, either as a mode of employment or as a leisure pursuit or for some other purpose. We all have access to a number of jargons, which we understand 'passively' and may use more or less 'actively', as a consequence of the routines of daily life that we engage in. Our daily work, whether in paid employment, in the home, or with a voluntary agency, engenders its own vocabulary. Our leisure time interests, whether sports or hobbies or some other activity, have their own vocabulary. If we are involved in religious observance, that too has its jargon.

The term 'jargon' often has a pejorative connotation. We use it in this way when a professional (e.g. doctor or lawyer) uses their specialized vocabulary in inappropriate contexts, either to display their knowledge or to obscure what they have to say. Jargon is impenetrable to the outsider, often deliberately so; only those inside the particular occupational group have access to its specialist vocabulary. You can become a member of the group only by learning the vocabulary, the jargon, and by using it appropriately. In part, that is what a professional training or an apprenticeship does: it familiarizes you with the jargon and then tests that you have acquired it sufficiently to be allowed to call yourself a member of the group (lawyer, electrician, or whatever).

In this section, we will take examples from the jargons of professional occupations and of leisure pursuits, and we will consider particularly religious jargon and that of the modern ecology movement.

6.3.1 Occupational jargons

Medicine and allied professions have created a jargon that is based on Latin and Greek, especially in the formation of neo-classical compounds (see Chapter 4). There are, for example, a number of *-ology* words – *angiology, enterology, haematology, psychology* – relating to the 'study of' various parts of human beings that may become diseased. Similarly, there are a number of *-iatry* or *-iatrics* words, relating to the 'treatment' of diseases or conditions: *geriatrics, paediatrics, podiatry, psychiatry*. A group of words with *-gram* or *-graph* relates to the measuring and recording of bodily functions or conditions: *angiogram, audiogram, cardiogram, electrocardiograph, encephelograph, mammogram*. A further group, with *-ectomy*, relates to the surgical removal of a part of the body: *hysterectomy, lobectomy, mastectomy, pneumonectomy*. Medical jargon has a pattern to it; becoming familiar with

it involves recognizing the patterns and learning the meanings of the Latin and Greek roots that form these neo-classical compounds.

Psychology and psychiatry, whose jargon has been derogatorily referred to as 'psychobabble', has a vocabulary composed partly of neo-classical compounds (*hedonics*), but also of words borrowed directly from Latin and Greek (*ego, id, eros, thanatos* in Freudian psychiatry; *persona, animus, horme* in Jungian), as well as ordinary English words either forming novel compounds or invested with a technical sense, e.g. *wish fulfilment, death wish* (Freud), *shadow, collective uncon-scious* (Jung).

The jargon of computing is largely of this last type: novel com-pounds formed from established English words, or new meanings for ordinary words. Among the compounds, consider: *central processing unit, disk drive, read only memory* (ROM), *touch sensitive screen, virtual reality, word processor*. Words with new meanings include: *chip, file, icon, monitor, keyboard, printer, scroll, setup, terminal, window*. What makes computer jargon especially difficult to under-stand is the extensive use of abbreviations and acronyms: ASCII, BIT, CPU, DOS, SQL, SSADM, WYSIWYG. (See Lynch 1991.)

Traditional industries also have their jargon. As an example we will take the mining industry. Here there is no erudite vocabulary from classical sources, but rather ordinary vocabulary extended in meaning or words taken from dialect for the purpose. Common core words used with a specialist mining sense include: *pack* ('a roof support, espe-cially one made of rubble'), *pulp* ('pulverized ore'), *sump* ('a depres-sion at the bottom of a shaft where water collects before it is pumped away'), *whim* ('a horse-drawn winch for drawing up ore or water'). Words with a local or dialect origin include: *swag* ('a depression filled with water due to mining subsidence'), *vug* ('a small cavity in a rock or vein' – from Cornish). Other words not in common core English are found in mining jargon, some borrowed from other languages: *culm* ('coal-mine waste'), *kibble* ('a bucket used for hoisting' – from Ger-man), *stull* ('a timber prop or platform' – from German), *winze* ('a steeply inclined shaft, as for ventilation between levels' – Dutch). A further type of jargon arises from word-formation processes producing novel lexemes: *millrun* ('the process of milling an ore or rock in order to determine the content or quality of the mineral'), *mucker* ('a person who shifts broken rock or waste'), *poppet head* ('a framework above a mine shaft that supports the winding mechanism'). (Definitions taken from *Collins Electronic Dictionary* 1992.)

Some occupational jargons begin to filter into the core vocabu-lary, because the professional areas concerned impinge more exten-sively on the lives of lay people and are mediated by newspapers and other journalism. This is the case, for example, with some medical jargon (*carcinoma, cardiac arrest*) and with financial jargon ('*bull*' and '*bear*' markets, *inflation, money supply*). The increasing use of word processors has brought printing jargon into everyday use: we now know about *fonts, point sizes, run-on text, justification, widows* and *orphans*. There still remains, however, much printing jargon exclusive to the printing profession, both formal (*mackle, quoin, shank, slug*) and informal (*screamer* (= 'exclamation mark'), *idiot tape*).

6.3.2 Sports jargons

It is not just our daily work that generates its own specialist vocabu-lary; our leisure time pursuits do also. This is the case with hobbies and cultural pursuits (music, theatre, cinema). Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the various sports that we may be involved in, either as players, or more often as spectators. Cricket fans across the Commonwealth will be familiar with a common jargon that is used in the game, nearly all of it involving the extension of the meaning of core vocabulary items or compounding of familiar words. Here is a selec-tion of cricket jargon, arranged under a number of headings:

> *General*
> wicket, stumps, bails, bat, crease, boundary, sightscreen
> innings, follow-on, declare
> over, maiden over
> opening batsman, middle order (batsman), tailender, nightwatchman
>
> *Field positions*
> leg side, off side
> slip, gully, cover, point, square leg, silly (mid-off), long (on)
> wicket keeper
>
> *Types of 'out'*
> bowled, lbw (leg before wicket), stumped, run out, caught and bowled, played on
>
> *Types of 'bowling'*
> pace, seam, swing, spin
> off-break, leg-break, googly, Chinaman, inswinger, outswinger, yorker, bouncer
>
> *Types of batting 'stroke'*
> on-drive, off-drive, cover drive, sweep, hook, edge, push, glance

Types of score
single, boundary, bye, leg bye, dot ball.

Such an array of specialist vocabulary, probably similarly derived mostly from core vocabulary, can be duplicated for other sports: football, baseball, athletics, and so on. There is no resort to neo-classical compounds, as with many of the professions; the vocabulary does not sound erudite; but for the outsider it can be equally baffling to hear familiar words used with an unfamiliar sense.

6.3.3 Religious language

A jargon that has been of considerable interest not only to linguists (e.g. Crystal 1964, Brook 1981) but also to theologians and philosophers (e.g. Donovan 1976) is religious language (Crystal and Davy 1969, Chapter 6). We are concerned here with the language of Christianity, which was brought to Britain initially during the period of Roman occupation during the first four centuries of the Christian era. The English language had not yet been established in Britain; the languages of the Roman subjects in Britain were Celtic. Only after the Romans left in the early fifth century did the Anglo-Saxon tribes invade and bring with them the language that would be English. The reintroduction of Christianity to Britain was needed; it was a two-pronged affair. From the south, a missionary thrust began with Augustine, who landed in Kent in 597, sent by Gregory I, Bishop of Rome; and from the north came Irish missionaries. Columba (died 597) established a centre on the island of Iona, from which Scotland was evangelized, and in the first half of the seventh century Aidan and Cuthbert continued the work of mission in Scotland and northern England. In due course the Irish Celtic form of Christianity was absorbed into the Roman form (Bede 731).

Because of the dominance of Rome, much ecclesiastical and theological vocabulary in English is borrowed from Latin. However, some religious words are of Anglo-Saxon origin, having been adapted to a Christian meaning; for example, *holy, ghost* (= 'spirit'), *sin, forgive, gospel* (from *god*, 'good' + *spell*, 'story'), *believe, heaven, worship*. The vast majority of religious terms in English have been borrowed from Latin. Until the first translation into English in the 1380s by John Wycliff and his associates, the Bible used was the Latin Vulgate translated by Jerome in the fourth century. Indeed, it was from the Vulgate that the Wycliffites translated into English, borrowing more than a thousand Latin words in the process (see 2.4.1).

One of the features of ecclesiastical life as established by Augustine and his successors was the religious house (*monastery* – itself a fifteenth-century word), where education and training for the priesthood took place and books were kept and copied. Some words dealing with monastic life were borrowed from Latin during the Old English period – *abbot, altar, cowl, mass, monk, nun, priest* – but many more entered English after the Norman conquest, during the Middle English period, when religious houses were revived and multiplied – *chapel, cloister, compline, convent, eucharist, offertory, office, prior, rule, tonsure.*

Parts of church buildings are mostly derived from Latin during the medieval period: *cathedral, chancel, choir, nave, transept, sanctuary, crypt, tower, buttress.* However, *steeple* is of Old English origin, as is the word *church*, though it is thought to be derived from Greek *kyriakon* ('belonging to the Lord').

Apart from words such as those already noted, like *believe* and *gospel*, the terms relating to Christian belief and theology also have their origin in Latin, if for no other reason than because, as in the case of the Wycliffite translation, early Bible versions into English were based on the Latin Vulgate. It was not until William Tyndale's version in the early sixteenth century that the Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament were used as the basis of the translation. Although we recognize them as 'technical' words of the Christian faith, we are no longer aware of the Latin origins of terms such as: *cross, faith, salvation, eternal, trespass, justify, scripture, confess, admonish, glory, praise, hymn, psalm, revelation, prophet, incarnation, resurrection, advent.*

Since this vocabulary has been in use amongst Christians over such a long period of time, it does not have the sound of an 'alien' jargon. It may seem strange to someone who has not grown up with it from childhood through Sunday school and church attendance. And it is true to say that it is the 'jargon' by which Christians talk about and share their common religious experience and understanding.

6.3.4 'Green' jargon

We will consider one further, very contemporary jargon, the one developed by the 'green', ecology movement, and which modern editions of dictionaries would claim to cover. In the two editions of the *Oxford Dictionary of New Words* (Tulloch 1991, Knowles and Elliott (eds) 1997), which chart neologisms of the 1980s and 1990s, 'environment' is one of the subject categories that is specially marked. The following items are marked as such: acid rain, additive, Alar, alternative energy/technology, alternative fuel, (environmentally) aware,

ecobabble, bio- (e.g. biodegradable, bio-diesel, bio-diversity), beetle bank, blue box (for collecting recyclable items), bottle bank, can bank, carbon tax, cat (= catalyser), CFC (chlorofluorocarbon), crop circle, cruelty-free, deforestation, desertification, dumping (of toxic waste), Earth Summit, eco- (e.g. eco-friendly, eco-tourism), ecology, ecological footprint, energy audit, E number, (the) environment, environmentally sensitive/sound, fly-tipping, -free (e.g. meat-free, lead-free, nuclear-free), fundie (= fundamentalist, i.e. a committed 'green'), Gaia, global warming, green, greenhouse (effect, gas), guppie (= green yuppie), heritage, horsiculture, irradiation, landfill site, monergy, mousse, nega- (negawatt, negamile), nimby, nuclear winter, organic, orimulsion, oxygenated (of fuel), ozone, PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl), recycling, red route, set aside (of land), speed bump/hump, sustainable, traffic calming, tree house, tree hugger, twigloo, -unfriendly (e.g. ozone-unfriendly), ungreen, unleaded, Valdez principles, veal crate, Waldsterben, wind farm, wise use, zero-emission vehicle.

Collins Electronic Dictionary (1992) includes some ninety words that are marked 'ecology' or have 'ecology' in their definitions, including: bionomics, consocies, eurytopic, halosere, lentic, microclimate, paralimnion, plagioclimax, xerarch.

From these lists, it will be clear that *Collins Electronic Dictionary* (1992) concentrates on the more technical vocabulary of ecology and the environment, with the words being mostly neo-classical compounds or based on classical roots. Tulloch (1991) taps the more populist vocabulary of the 'green' movement, which will be more familiar to the ordinary newspaper reader or television viewer, with the use of a variety of means of word formation, including meaning extension (global warming), blending (monergy), acronym (nimby, PCB), derivation (unleaded), borrowing (waldsterben).

EXERCISE 6/2

Write down twenty or so of the main items of specialist vocabulary from one of your leisure pursuits. Where does the vocabulary come from? What word-formation and semantic processes have been used to derive the terms?

Try the words out on someone who doesn't share your pursuit, to see if the words make any sense to them.

6.4 Sub-cultures

Within a society or culture, people who regularly associate with each other because they have some characteristic or interest in common may form a sub-culture that gives rise to its own special vocabulary. This vocabulary then becomes a badge of membership of the sub-culture; you learn and use the appropriate words to prove that you are a member and in order to associate with other members. Such a sub-culture can be found, for example, among young people – adolescents, teenagers. Indeed one such sub-culture has provided the word *Valspeak*: 'a variety of US slang which originated among teenage girls from the San Fernando valley in California and was later taken up more widely by youngsters in the US' (Tulloch 1991: 299). Two sub-cultures that have a long history of lexical innovation are the armed forces and the criminal underworld; both are well represented in Partridge (1984). Of more recent origin are the vocabularies associated with the sub-cultures of Citizens Band Radio users and of Rastafarianism.

6.4.1 Youth culture

Tulloch (1991) has over eighty words marked as associated with 'youth culture' and as having come into the language from that source during the 1980s. Knowles and Elliott (eds, 1997) do not have a separate 'youth culture' category; they include such words in a more general 'popular culture' category. Many of the terms associated with youth culture from the two dictionaries of new words fall into quite distinct lexical categories. One set comprises adjectives to express approval and disapproval, a set that is renewed by each succeeding generation of young people. This set includes, for approval: ace, awesome, bad, brilliant, crucial, fresh, kicking, mad, neato, phat, rad, safe, sorted, stonking, storming, tubular, wicked. And for disapproval: grody, naff, scuzzy, wack. Related is a set of nouns to refer to people you approve of or who belong to your crowd – crew, dude, homeboy, posse – or those that you despise – anorak, crumblie (older person), crusty, dweeb, geek, headbanger, headcase, nerd, otaku, propeller-head, saddo, scuzz, slapper, sleazebag, wazzock. A small set of verbs expresses interpersonal attitudes or personal reactions: blanked ('ignored, cold-shouldered'), diss ('put someone down'), gobsmacked ('very shocked or surprised'), gutted ('very disappointed, devastated'). It is, of course, also important to have 'street cred', or just 'cred', and to be 'sussed' (in the know); someone who has not made it may be instructed to 'get a life'.

Youth culture also regularly adopts a number of adverbs that are used to emphasize or intensify an adjective, and modern youth culture is no exception. Those noted are: drop-dead (e.g. 'drop-dead gorgeous'), max (as in 'to the max'), mega, mondo, serious (as in 'serious bad'), totally, way, well (as in 'well safe'). A couple of greetings are also noted: yo, cowabunga (originating in the 1950s but more recently popularized by the Teenage Mutant Turtles).

One of the largest sets of words associated with youth culture relates to the different styles of music listened to by young people. Terms noted by Tulloch (1991) and Knowles and Elliott (eds, 1997) include: acid house, acid jazz, ambient, baggy, bhangra, black metal, -core (e.g. hardcore, foxcore, queercore), electro, ethnic, funk, gabba, gangsta, garage, go-go, goth, grunge, handbag, heavy metal (also 'HM' and 'metal'), hip hop, house, indie, jungle, new jack swing, New Wave, ragga, rai, rap, Romo, scratch, soca, speed metal, swingbeat, techno, thrash metal, trip hop, zouk. Associated words relating to partying and dancing include: body-popping, breaking (or 'break-dancing'), lig ('gatecrash'), mosh ('dance violently and recklessly'), orbital (a party near the M25 London orbital road), rage ('to party'), rootsy (of music, 'down-to-earth'), slam dancing, stage diving, warehouse (party). After all this a young person may just 'spazz out' (lose physical or emotional control), especially if they are 'loved-up' (intoxicated by the drug ecstasy).

Words or senses of words adopted by a youth culture tend to be ephemeral; they disppear with that generation's progression to full adulthood. Such words or senses therefore rarely appear in general dictionaries, which usually only record neologisms that have demonstrated some staying power.

6.4.2 Underworld slang

Special vocabulary used by the criminal sub-culture has a long history. It was noted as 'thieves' cant' by eighteenth-century lexicographers, and it has been well documented by Eric Partridge in successive editions of his *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (e.g. Partridge 1984). We review briefly here some of the relevant 'slang' words to be found in *Collins Electronic Dictionary* (1992).

As might be expected, quite a large number of words are recorded denoting 'prison', such as: can, chokey, clink, cooler, nick, peter, slammer, stir. A further set refers to being sent to prison or being in prison: bang up, do bird, go down, be inside, do porridge, send up/down. Someone in prison may be a *star* (a first time prisoner) or a *lag*,

while a prison warder is a *screw*, before whom, if they are a *div* (stupid person), they may *cheese* (act in a grovelling manner).

The police are referred to by a number of slang terms, including: a bogey, the filth, the fuzz, the pigs. A police informer is a *nark*, who may *grass* (inform) and so *shop* (betray to the police) one of his colleagues, because he has decided to *go straight* (not engage in criminal activity). The head of a *mob* (criminal gang), each of whom will have a *form* (criminal record) unless they are a *cleanskin* (without a criminal record), is *Mr Big*, who may well have a *minder* (bodyguard), since he may be in danger of being *hit* (murdered) in fulfilment of a *contract* (killing). If caught, perhaps as a result of a *stakeout* (police surveillance), and taken down the *nick* (police station), he may produce a *verbal* (confession of guilt).

Rhyming slang is also thought to have originated as a criminal language, in London's Cockney-speaking East End. In rhyming slang, a usually two-word phrase rhymes with and provides the substitute for a normal English word. For example, the *hook* of *butcher's hook* rhymes with *look* and the phrase becomes the rhyming slang word for *look*. The connection may then be lost when the phrase is shortened to the first item; so, *butcher's*, as in the phrase *have a butcher's*, means '(have a) look'. It is unlikely that Cockney rhyming slang ever functioned as a fully fledged 'thieves' cant'; and it has been added to and embellished both by Cockneys themselves and by non-Cockney authors of novels and plays (e.g. Charles Dickens in *The Pickwick Papers*) and in television series like *Steptoe and Son* and *East Enders*. Further examples can be found in Exercise 6/3, and in Ayto (2002).

6.4.3 Rastafarian culture

Rastafarians are a group among the African Caribbean community who regard Haile Selassie, the former emperor of Ethiopia, whose Amharic title was 'Ras Tafari', as an incarnation of God (*Jah*). He will take the faithful from the black diaspora (in the Caribbean, UK and USA) out of *Babylon* (oppressive white society) to the promised land of Ethiopia. The movement began in the 1930s in Jamaica, and its distinctive language, Afro-Lingua (Bones 1986), derives from Jamaican Creole, but with many characteristic features of its own.

Perhaps the word most readily associated with Rastafarianism is *dread*, which derives from the Old Testament word 'dread', meaning 'fear of the Lord', but is the word used to denote a Rastafarian. The typical Rastafarian hairstyle is called *dreadlocks*. The word *dread* is also used as an adjective meaning 'excellent', something deserving Rastafarian approval.

Language is seen as very significant in Rastafarian culture. Bones (1986: 48) expresses it like this:

> According to Rasta doctrine and reasoning, a language must have great significance in terms of its words, sounds and 'powah', which means 'power'. Language must also relate to manifestations: it represents the ideal and the real. Language relates everything that is seen, heard, felt, imagined, known.

Rastafarians have gatherings for reasoning and celebrating Rasta identity, called *grounation*, and *reason hard* is the term used for 'argue'.

Equally, Rastafarian culture is acutely conscious of the positive and negative connotations of words, and so adapts words to change their connotation: *overstand* for 'understand', *crelove* for 'create', *apprecilove* for 'appreciate', *livealek* for 'dialect', *downpression* for 'oppression'. Rastafarians also have a creative use of the pronoun *I*, explained by Bones (1986: 46) as follows:

> We are told that in the context of grammar 'I' is the first-person pronoun and that the latter takes the place of a noun. We also know that other personal pronouns (you, he, she, they) are second- and third-person pronouns. Rastas say that this is a reflection of a class society where the blacks are seen as 'you', 'they' and so forth but never as 'I'. But since 'I' is the first person singular, 'I' is Jah Rastafari, Haile Selassie I, the one and only. Jah is black, so it follows that 'I' is black. Black, Jah and 'I' are now interchangeable terms, each meaning the same as the other. Each Rastaman is a 'Jahman'; equally each 'Jahman' is an 'I-man'. Hence an 'I-man' is also a 'you-man' (or 'human'). Now the 'I-man' is different from the 'you-man' or 'me-man' because he is the first person. So since Rasta is 'I', a plurality of Rastas become 'I-n-I'.

The 'I' then becomes used as a prefix with a positive connotation in the adaptation of words: *Iration* for 'creation', *Iginin* for 'beginning', *I-tal* for 'food fit to eat' (compare 'vital'), *Idrin* for 'brethren' (i.e. black brothers, fellow-Rastas).

Other associations of Rastafarian culture are 'reggae' music and 'rap', the latter with its emphasis on verbal artistry; and drug taking, especially marijuana or 'ganja', known as the *weed of wisdom*, which is smoked in a *chalice* (pipe). (See also the glossary in Sutcliffe 1982.)

6.4.4 CB talk

CB is the abbreviation for Citizen (or Citizen's, or Citizens') Band Radio, used initially by truckers (BrE lorry drivers) in the USA (CB-ers) to communicate with each other and inform each other of potential difficulties on the roads (AmE highways). CB talk, or trucker talk, developed a series of numerical messages (CB-10 codes) for routine operating information, e.g. 10–4, 'message understood', 10–9, 'repeat'. In addition it developed a jargon (also called CB slang), including the following items (mostly from Crystal 1987: 56):

affirmative	'yes'	anklebiters	'children'
bears	'police'	break	'access to a radio channel'
breaker	'CB radio operator'	doughnuts	'tyres'
eyeballs	'headlights'	five-finger discount	'stolen goods'
good buddy	'another CB-er'	grandma lane	'slow lane'
handle	'CB-er's nickname'	mobile mattress	'caravan'
motion lotion	'fuel'	rubber duck	'first vehicle in a convoy'
smokey	'policeman'	super cola	'beer'.

CB talk is an example of what Crystal (1987) calls a 'restricted language'. It was developed partly to facilitate the necessarily abbreviated and almost telegraphic messages passed from radio to radio with variable quality of reception; but it also became a kind of private language, binding truck drivers together in a fraternity. In this sense it fulfils the functions of a jargon.

EXERCISE 6/3

What do you think are the equivalents of the following rhyming slang terms? In some cases, they have been reduced to the first part of the expression, so the second, rhyming part is put in brackets.

Apples and pears, bird (lime), china (plate), half-inch, jam jar, pig's ear, porky (pie), raspberry (tart), Rosie Lee, tea leaf, tit for (tat), trouble and strife, Uncle Ned, whistle (and flute)

6.5 Style

Whenever we speak and write, we adjust our style to the context and audience of our communication. The note we leave for a friend confirming a social engagement ('See you for lunch at Chris's. Don't be late!') is not in the same style as an essay written for course assessment ('The convoluted structure of the fifth sentence substantially vitiates the flow of information in the text.'). The discussion of the football match in the bar or café is not in the same style as a committee meeting. Part of the distinctiveness of a style is achieved by the choice of vocabulary. A more formal context requires 'formal' vocabulary; an informal context will allow 'colloquial' vocabulary, perhaps 'slang'; a very informal context may even allow the use of 'taboo' vocabulary.

Dictionaries do not mark the vast majority of their words with any style or formality labels, though native speakers and non-native speakers alike know that a choice has to be made according to the formality of the context. Most words are deemed to be 'neutral' in their formality. Dictionaries tend to label words that are towards the extremes of the styles. Few words are marked as 'formal'; somewhat more are marked as 'informal' or 'colloquial' – the two terms are usually interchangeable; quite a number of general 'slang' words will be included; and a dictionary these days will usually also include a number of well-established 'taboo' words. We can thus identify a number of vocabularies in English along the dimension of style or formality.

6.5.1 Formal words

Some texts must by their nature and purpose be formal. Such is the case, for example, with legal texts. A large number of words that we associate with legal texts – hereinafter, hereunder, thereto, wherein, whomsoever – which have an archaic ring to them, are marked in dictionaries as 'formal', and in some instances with the occupational label (see 6.3.1) 'legal' as well (e.g. *Collins Electronic Dictionary* 1992, *Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1996).

Some formal words are the precise technical names for ordinary language words; they are usually derived from the classical languages. *Occident* (from Latin) and *orient* (also from Latin) are the formal terms for 'west' and 'east'; *carnivore* and *herbivore* (from Latin) are formal for 'meat-eater' and 'plant-eater'. A *philatelist* (from Greek) is a 'stamp collector', and a *toxophilite* (also from Greek) is an 'archer'; similarly, *cuneiform* (Latin), 'wedge-shaped', *horticulture* (Latin), 'gardening', *ornithologist* (Greek), 'bird watcher', *troglodyte* (Greek), 'cave dweller'.

Words that have been formed by abbreviation may have their unabbreviated form as a formal equivalent: *omnibus* for 'bus', *perambulator* for 'pram', *refrigerator* for 'fridge', *zoological garden* for 'zoo'.

A formal word may be a means of speaking appropriately about bodily functions and other matters that are not normally mentioned in public. The formal word has a distancing or euphemistic effect, such as *demise* or *decease* for 'death', *copulation* for 'sex(ual intercourse)', *defecate* for 'pass a motion'/'shit'.

Using a formal word may be merely a way of putting on airs or sounding posh or erudite. When, for example, might you use *ameliorate* instead of 'improve', *duteous* instead of 'dutiful', *explicate* instead of 'explain', *nescience* instead of 'ignorance', *pulchritude* for 'beauty', *reside* for 'live', *residuum* for 'residue'? Perhaps only if you are being ironically formal.

6.5.2 Colloquial and slang words

Towards the other end of the formality spectrum, though not at its extreme, are words marked in dictionaries as 'colloquial' or 'informal', and as 'slang'. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1996), for example, uses the labels 'colloq' and 'slang'; the difference appears to be simply one of informality, with 'slang' words likely to be used in more informal contexts, though the rationale for the lexicographer's dividing line is not always clear. For instance, *bellyache* as a noun, meaning 'stomach pain', is marked as 'colloq', while the verb, meaning 'complain' is marked as 'slang'; *booze*, meaning 'alcoholic drink' is 'colloq', but *booze-up* is 'slang'; *beanfeast* is 'colloq', while *beano* is 'slang' – both meaning 'party, celebration'; *bitch* (verb) is 'colloq', while *beef* is 'slang' – both meaning 'complain'.

The 'colloquial' category includes words that are abbreviated for informal effect: *agin* (against), *bicky* (biscuit), *brill* (brilliant), *brolly* (umbrella), *budgie* (budgerigar), *celeb* (celebrity), *champ* (champion), *choc* (chocolate), *comfy* (comfortable), *demo* (demonstration). Similar items involve coalescence and abbreviation, e.g. *cuppa* (cup of (tea)), *dunno* (don't know). Others involve reduplication, e.g. *arty-farty*, 'pretentiously artistic'; *dilly-dally*, 'dawdle'.

Other colloquial words have no obvious motivation for their informality, other than that they are conventionally restricted to informal contexts: *barney*, 'noisy quarrel', *bigwig*, 'important person', *bod*, 'person', *chunter*, 'mutter, grumble', *conk out*, 'break down', *doddle*, 'easy thing', etc.

The words that are marked as 'slang' are in part informal items that have perhaps not yet reached wide enough acceptance to be

labelled 'colloq': *ace, awesome* – both meaning 'excellent', *bash,* 'party', *bottle,* 'courage', *buzzword,* 'catchword, fashionable jargon word'. Other slang words are on the way to becoming 'taboo' (see next section): *bog* for 'lavatory', *bogey* for 'nasal mucus', *boob* for 'breast', *bum* for 'buttocks'. But the majority of 'slang' words are slang because they are used in contexts that are very informal, between people who know each other well, or for a particular effect: *barmy, belt up, burk, bilge, binge, blub, bonce,* etc.

6.5.3 Taboo words

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1996) defines *taboo* (borrowed into English from the Tongan language) as: '1 a system or the act of setting a person or thing apart as sacred, prohibited, or accursed. 2 a prohibition or restriction imposed on certain behaviour, word usage, etc., by social custom.' Taboo subjects or words may often be of a religious or cultural nature, the name of God, for example; or men may be prohibited from mentioning certain things associated with women.

In lexicology, the label 'taboo' is usually applied to words that would be extremely offensive if spoken in most contexts. Indeed, many dictionaries no longer use the label 'taboo' for these kinds of word: *Collins Electronic Dictionary* (1992) still does, but the *Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (LDEL) (1991) uses 'vulgar', and the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1996) uses 'coarse slang'. This is perhaps a recognition that such words, which would at one time have been almost unmentionable and even excluded from dictionaries, can now be found to a large extent in popular fiction and even in daily newspapers.

Taboo words in English are largely concerned with non-technical words for parts of the human anatomy associated with sex and excretion and for the act of sexual intercourse – some eighteen such terms are labelled 'coarse slang' in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1996). The topics that such words refer to were at one time taboo; now they are the subject of almost too much comment, at least in British and American society, but speakers and writers may have no choice between a relatively technical term, e.g. *penis,* and a number of slang alternatives. But as particular members of this group of words appear more frequently in print, their ability to shock diminishes, and they become less 'taboo': *crap* and *piss* might be cases in point. This may account for the disappearance of the 'taboo' label itself from dictionaries.

It is also the case that dictionaries do not agree among themselves on which of the labels 'colloquial/informal', 'slang', and 'coarse slang/

vulgar' should apply to particular words. For example, *booze* is 'slang' in LDEL (1991) and 'colloquial' in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1996), while *bugger* as an exclamation is 'coarse slang' in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1996) and only 'slang' in LDEL (1991).

> **EXERCISE 6/4**
>
> Give a 'neutral' term for the following 'formal' words. If you cannot even guess at the meaning, look the word up in a dictionary. They are all marked as 'formal' in *Collins Electronic Dictionary* (1992).
>
> hitherto, incumbent (adjective), inveracity, laudation, lavation, lubricious, manifold, mariner, natation, yesteryear

> **EXERCISE 6/5**
>
> Give a 'neutral' term for the following words, which are marked as either 'colloq' or 'slang' in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary Ninth Edition.* You might also like to see which label a dictionary other than *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* uses for these items.
>
> cold feet, floozie, footling, gamp, (play) hookey, lughole, miffed, piddle, slaphead, stroppy, twerp, unfazed, veggie, wag (verb), zilch, zit

6.5.4 Political correctness

The term 'politically correct', in its current sense, was coined in 1970; the abbreviation 'PC' in 1986, and the noun 'political correctness' in 1979 (Ayto 1999). Although often used in a disparaging way, this term reflects the sensitivities that have developed in the use of words that refer to women, people from minority ethnic communities, disabled people, older people, and so on (McArthur (ed.) 1992). It would be politically correct, for example, to refer to the person chairing a meeting as the 'chair' or 'chairperson', rather than 'chairman', since the latter implies a male. This applies to any term that has 'man' in it, e.g. 'policeman', 'fireman', 'salesman', 'newsman' – which should be replaced by 'police officer', 'firefighter', 'sales staff', 'reporter'. Similarly, any term that draws attention to the femaleness of the person is to be avoided, e.g. 'authoress', 'actress' ('author' and 'actor' will do); 'woman doctor', 'lady poet' ('doctor' and 'poet' will do).

In the field of disability, 'handicapped' is no longer an acceptable term, having been replaced by the more sensitive 'disabled', or in the case of mental disability by 'with learning difficulties'. Similar terms, such as 'cripple(d)' or 'invalid' should also be replaced by 'disabled (person)'. Likewise, 'spastic' becomes 'person with cerebral palsy', and 'mongol' becomes 'person with Down's syndrome'. It is considered unacceptable to refer to 'the blind' and 'the deaf', since these terms depersonalize; alternatives are 'blind/deaf person/people'. And the negative-sounding 'wheelchair-bound' is replaced by the more positive 'wheelchair user'.

Sensitivity is also needed in the area of race and ethnicity. Terms such as 'negro' and 'coloured', which were formerly used to refer to non-white people, are unacceptable. The term 'black' is now used to refer to people of African or Caribbean origin; and 'Afro-Caribbean' has replaced 'West Indian', as a more accurate term. Again, as in the case of disability, it is important to emphasize personhood; so, 'a black person/woman' rather than using 'black' as a noun.

What is at issue here is the dignity of human beings and the power of words to offend, especially when talking about and to those who are less powerful because they form a minority group within a society. Political correctness has acquired a bad name and become a term of disparagement in part because of some of the changes, bordering on the absurd, that have been suggested. We might include here the proposal that 'history' should be feminized to 'herstory', or the proposal by a retired teacher that pupils who had not reached the required pass mark in an examination should not be told that they had 'failed', but rather that it was a 'deferred success' (reported in the *Guardian* of 28 July 2005).

6.6 Restricted languages

Look at the following texts:

[1] 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6 5 Nb5 d6 6 Bf4 e5 7 Be3 Be6?! A dubious move order. If first Nf6 then 8 Nd2 is met by Ng4. 8 Nd2!? Nf6 9 Bg5 d5 10 exd5 Bxd5 11 Bxf6 gxf6 12 Bc4 Highlighting Black's central weakness; the white knights threaten to invade at c7 or d6.
   (*Guardian*, 'Weekly' 15.2.98, p. 34)

[2] Noon today: Lows N and P will fill as Low S runs north-east and deepens. Low R will move north-east. High G is stationary.

NW & SW England, Wales: Mostly dull, mild and misty. Drizzle in places. A light to moderate south-west wind. Max temp 10–12C (50–54F). Tonight, misty with drizzle. Min temp 7–8C (45–46F).
   Outlook: Windy in the north and north-west of the UK with showers. Elsewhere it will be dry, with spells of sunshine likely, especially in the east, and it will be very mild.
   (*Guardian*, 10.2.98, p. 15)

[3] Caring 38yo romantic – profess, caring & attract – with love of the arts & travel. WLTM attract, romantic & interesting n/s M 28–40. Ldn.
   TDH, profess M 42 into romantic evenings & country walks, GSOH, WLTM intellig F 25–35 E.Mids.
   (*Guardian*, 'Guide', 7.2.98, pp. 61–3)

Each of these texts requires some deciphering, if you are not a regular reader of such items. They each have a very specific function and a restricted vocabulary. The first [1] is the report of a game of chess, where the moves of the chess pieces are numbered (1, 2, 3 ...), the chess piece being moved is identified (Nf3, Nb5, etc.), and the square to which it is being moved is indicated (e6, d6). The second text [2] is more readily recognizable as a weather forecast, with its lows and highs, its positions and directions (NW, north-east, south-west), its abbreviations (max/min temp, C, F), and its typical vocabulary and collocations (moderate south-west wind, drizzle, spells of sunshine, mild). The third text [3] contains a pair of advertisements seeking friendship with a member of the opposite sex. Besides the conventional abbreviation found in small ads ('attract' for 'attractive', 'profess' for 'professional', 'Ldn' for 'London'), these particular advertisements contain their own set of conventions: 'M' and 'F' for 'male' and 'female', 'yo' for 'year-old', 'WLTM' for 'would like to meet', 'TDH' for 'tall, dark and handsome', 'GSOH' for 'good sense of humour', and 'n/s' for 'non-smoker'.

Other restricted languages can be found in recipes, knitting patterns, birth and death notices, card games. Some restricted varieties of English are used in international communication, e.g. 'airspeak' between aeroplane pilots and air traffic controllers on the ground, or 'seaspeak', its equivalent at sea (see Crystal (1987), pp. 56–7 and Crystal (1995), pp. 390–1). The restricted language of airspeak and seaspeak may be the only English that a pilot, captain or navigator has command of, rather than being just a particular variety of English that they know as part of a wider command of the language. Its very restrictedness is meant to facilitate communication between air and ground and between sea and land, both by being a limited set of words

to learn and speak, and by being a limited set of words and combina-
tions of words to hear and understand in radio transmission.

EXERCISE 6/6

Look at the following text, taken from an advertisement for a
personal computer (PC), and try to work out exactly what the
potential buyer is being offered by the specification:

Intel Pentium 4 Processor 630 with HT Technology (3.00 GHz,
2MB L2 cache, 800MHz FSB). 1024MB Dual Channel DDR2
RAM. 320GB (SATA) Stripe Raid 0 Hard Drive. 17" Analogue
Flat Panel Monitor (17.0" v.i.s). 128MB PCI-Express ATI
Radeon X300SE. 16x DVD+/-RW Drive.

6.7 Summary

In this chapter, we have tried to show that the vocabulary of
English is in reality a collection of 'vocabularies'. While all
speakers of the language share a 'common core' of words, each
one also has access, either solely as a reader/listener, or addi-
tionally as a writer/speaker, to a number of 'specialist'
vocabularies.

The specialist vocabularies can be identified along a number
of dimensions of variation, including: geography, giving national
and regional (dialect) varieties; occupation and interest, giving
'jargons'; sub-culture, giving types of 'slang'; and formality.

The chapter concluded with a brief look at restricted lan-
guages, such as those used for air and sea navigation.