1. Introduction

1.1 The name of the language

This paper presents a brief grammatical sketch of standard North American English.[1] The term *English* derives from the Indo-European root **ank-* meaning 'bent' or 'crooked'. The term *angle* was used by continental Germanic speakers to refer disparagingly to a Germanic people of North Western Europe who were forced to migrate to what is currently the British Isles in the fifth century AD. The language spoken by these people, along with other migrating groups such as the Jutes and the Saxons, came to be known as *Englisc*, and later *English*. Before and after the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the 5th century, the islands have been inhabited by Celtic speaking peoples. Britannia was the name of the Roman province that had been established in the Southern part of the Islands now known as Great Britain.

In 1066 AD the armies of William the Conqueror, from Normandy, invaded the islands and imposed the Norman French language. During the Norman occupation, lasting some 400 years, English remained the language of the lower class, while Norman French was the language of court and other official activities. Consequently, modern English contains many words and grammatical constructions that are borrowed from Norman French.

During the age of European colonization between the 15th century and about 1960, English was taken to many parts of the world by British, and later North American, explorers, colonists and military troops. English was the unofficial language of the British colonies established in North America in the 17th century. It became the official language of Australia, New Zealand and many other former British colonies when these became independent countries. It remains the unofficial national language of the United States of America as well as several other countries around the world.

1.2 Demography

Today, English is spoken as a first language by approximately one billion people worldwide, mainly in Africa, India, the British Isles, North America, Australia and New Zealand. It is spoken as a second language by about another billion people.

1.3 Previous research

The primary modern sources on American English are Chomsky and Halle (1968) and Quirk, et al., (1989). The references cited therein provide an excellent overview of the considerable history of linguistic work on English. The present sketch is designed to provide a brief grammatical outline of English from a typological perspective.

1.4 Genetic affiliation

English is an Indo-European language of the Germanic family (Baugh 1963, Quirk, et al., 1989).

1.5 Writing system

English has an indigenous writing system based on the Roman alphabet, but with complicated and irregular relation to modern pronunciation. All English forms cited in this sketch appear in the standard orthography (Quirk, et al., 1989).

1.6 Sociolinguistic situation

1.6.1 Multilingualism and contexts of use

Multilingualism is extremely rare among members of the culture group of the main consultant for this sketch (Urban, white, US North American, middle class). English is used in virtually all spheres of activity by all members of the culture.

1.6.2 Viability

Many children learn English as a first language, and receive all of their education in English. Therefore we can safely assert that English is not in imminent danger of extinction.

1.6.3 Loan words

As mentioned in section 1.1, a great deal of the vocabulary of Modern English is of Norman French origin. French vocabulary tends to occur in semantic domains having to do with scholarly or upper class activities, whereas Anglo Saxon vocabulary tends to occur in more mundane semantic domains. This is particularly clear in the domain of food. Barnyard terms used for foods are Anglo-Saxon, but the more refined terms used at the table are from French:

Mundane (Anglo Saxon)	Refined (Norman French)	Meaning:
big	*large*	'grande'
cow	*beef*	'rez'
cup/mug	*glass*	'vaso'
cupboard	*cabinet*	'armario'
die	*expire*	'morir'
dog	*canine*	'perro'
fall	*cascade*	'caer'
funny	*comical*	'gracioso'
pail	*vase*	'balde'
pig	*pork*	'puerco'
ship	*vessel*	'barco'
spit	*expectorate*	'escupir'
sweat	*perspire*	'sudar'
talk/speak	*lecture*	'hablar'
walk	*perambulate*	'andar'
etc.		

In addition to thousands of such French borrowings, many other lexical items have entered English through the various languages that have enriched the British and North American cultures. For example:

Word	Source	Meaning
boondocks	Tagalog	'monte'
canoe	Carib	'canoa'
helicopter	Greek	'helicóptero'
moccasin	Algonquian	'zapato de cuero'
morphology	Greek	'morfología'
mumps	Icelandic	'paperas'
nark	Sanskrit	'informante'
pajamas	Persian	'pillama'
safari	Swahili	'viaje/expedición'
shamrock	Irish	'trébol'
silk	Chinese	'seda'
silo	Spanish	'silo'
skate	Norwegian	'patina'
thug	Hindi	'asesino'
tobacco	Carib	'tobaco'
totem	Ojibwa	'tótem'
etc.		

1.6.4 Dialects

There are numerous dialects of the English language worldwide. The two most widely recognized dialect groups can be characterized geographically as North American and British English, though each of these groups represents many forms of speech that certainly qualify as dialects in their own right. Some dialects may be mutually unintelligible, but an exhaustive dialect survey has yet to be undertaken. In any case, all dialects are intelligible to one another with at most a minimal accommodation period.

British and US North American English are most obviously distinct in pronunciation, though significant vocabulary and some grammatical differences also occur. The following is a selection of vocabulary items that differ between the two dialect groups:

US	British	Meaning
eraser	*rubber*	'goma'
fender	*mudguard*	'guardabarros'
flashlight	*torch*	'linterna'
gasoline	*petrol*	'gasolina'
hood (of car)	*bonnet*	'capó (de auto)'
napkin	*serviette*	'servieta'
pants	*trousers*	'pantalones'

sidewalk	*pavement*	'acera'
toilet	*loo*	'wáter'
truck	*lorry*	'camión'
trunk (of car)	*boot*	'maleta (de auto)'
underpants	*pants*	'calzoncillos'
undershirt	*vest*	'camiseta'
vest	*waistcoat*	'chaleco'
etc.		

Noticeable grammatical differences include the use of subject-verb inversion for question formation (see section 12.1) in British English with the possessive verb *have*. This is strictly disallowed in North American English:

(1) Have you a match? British
tener:PRES 2SG INDEF fósforo
'¿Tiene Ud. un fósforo?'

(2) Do you have a match? North American
AUX:PRES 2SG tener INDEF fósforo
'¿Tiene Ud. un fósforo?'

Also, US North American English has the propensity to use the definite article, *the*, before certain noun phrases that are treated as proper names in British English. For example:

(3) She is in hospital. British
3SG:F ser:PRES LOC hospital
'Ella está en el hospital.'

. . . graduate-d from university.
graduar-PPAS desde universidad
'. . . graduada de la universidad.'

(4) She is in **the** hospital. US North American
3SG:F ser:PRES LOC DEF hospital
'Ella está en el hospital.'

. . . graduated from **the** university
graduar-PPAS desde DEF universidad
'. . . graduada de la universidad.'