Discussion questions for ‘Contact and the Development of American English’

One of the questions I asked in the little survey on the first day was this:

English in the United States has been significantly shaped by the immigrants and their languages.

This reading should give you an overview of how to start thinking about this very complex question.

Note on all articles for the course: One thing I’m really pleased with so far is your willingness to speak up. (OK, the first couple of questions raised didn’t get quick responses, but that’s forgivable!) For this class to succeed and for you to get the most out of it, we need robust discussion. You should come to every class prepared to answer questions and ask questions. (And you should feel free to ask challenging questions … there’s very little secure ‘wisdom’ in this area and our work this semester will advance knowledge more if we ask hard questions and challenge accepted positions, including my own.) You should also ask me before or after class about things and/or email me.

1. What’s a substrate?
2. How does ‘imposition’ work? (And why is the term preferable to ‘substrate’?)
3. How are borrowing and imposition different?
4. What’s koineization (also called ‘new dialect formation’)?
5. We argue that loanwords haven’t had much real impact on American English. Why?
   a. How are loanwords adapted or not into English? How can that reflect whether they came in through speaking or writing?
   b. What’s a hyperforeignism?
6. We give three examples of ‘American varieties shaped by bilingualism’.
   a. Why do we put ‘scare quotes’ around the names?
   b. Is there something we could call ‘American Indian English’? If so, how can that be?
   c. Word order of the ‘some milk you want?’ is often associated with ‘Jewish English’. How is this more complex?
   d. Why is the role of language contact in the development of African-American English complicated?
7. What’s ‘reallocation’?
8. Describe these basic patterns:
   a. interdental fricative stopping
   b. final fortition
   c. verbal particles
   d. modal-particle-like adverbs
9. **FINALLY**: How significantly has American English been shaped by other languages, immigrant and indigenous?