

## ELEMENTS OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

*This presentation deals with certain discrepancies between the two variants of the English language: the British and the American variants. The question of consideration is the discrepancies between the two variants in spelling and vocabulary.*

Our presentation discusses in a systematic way the differences and similarities between British and American English in spelling and vocabulary. Within each of these fields the most striking dissimilarities will be emphasised.

The idea of such systematic investigation arose as a result of the following: All materials in our secondary schools were England oriented, so recommended pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary standards used to be British. Now the tables are turned. The tourist

boom, TV, the cinema and a great number of American textbooks available — all this leads to Americanisation of the English language studied in our schools and universities. So, our students are more and more exposed to a strange, ridiculous "surzhyk." That is why a thorough comparison is needed between a standard British and a standard American English (further SB and SA). What is usually referred to as SB is the language spoken by the BBC radio announcers; in terms of geographical location and social status it is the language spoken by educated people centered in London and South of London. The definition of SA, however, presents much more trouble. The difficulty results primarily from the immense size of the country comprising a great number of dialects and the linguistic mixture of many European languages which have influenced the American language word stock in one way or another. That is why for our purposes it seems most adequate to define the term SA as the language, combining features which can be detected in the speech of the majority of educated speakers all over the territory of the USA. At this point some definitions of the status of SA must be set forth: is it a dialect of English or a different language? Since it has not gained the status of a separate language, for our purpose the term *VARIETY* seems to be most proper. It will imply the language used in the USA with its geographically, politically and economically conditioned characteristics.

In order to be able to explain the majority of forms of a language one has to be well acquainted with the various processes which have operated in it. Moreover, a detailed and appropriate description of a linguistic form often calls for a vast knowledge of cultural, economic and political background as well as the general environment that the language under consideration has been operating. To understand better the origin of the differences between SB and SA and the uniqueness of the American variety we must have some notion of the historical development of the nation and its language.

Two factors should be mentioned here when speaking about the origin of the American variety.

1) The language of Shakespeare. (Preservation of older linguistic forms).

The first party of courageous English-speaking people stepped on the American continent in 1607. A comparison of some historical events in America with those pertaining to British literature seems to be rather illustrative of the linguistic interdependence of the two cultures:

1606—1607 — *Shakespeare wrote King Lear, Macbeth, Anthony and Cleopatra*

1607 — foundation of Jamestown, Virginia

1623 — Shakespeare published his first volume

1624 — foundation of New Amsterdam etc. This random comparison helps us realize that the language spoken by the colonists in the early 17-th century was that of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. While some vocabulary items, grammatical categories and pronunciation standards have changed in Britain or have been replaced by other forms, in America they have remained unchanged and have been in current use till present time.

2) The "Melting pot" factor.

After the first settlers had reached America and gradually adjusted themselves to the new environment, it turned out that the New Land could give food and refuge.

To millions of people, brave enough to take the risk of going to the unknown. More and more people kept coming. Conditions in the virgin country were modifying the institutions which the English colonists brought with them from their homeland. Arrivals from non-English countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and France were similarly exposed to that new environment. American society, thus, was turning from a slightly modified England into a totally new blend of cultures, lifestyles, languages, melted into a distinctly new race with its own culture and language. Among the languages which played an important role in the forming of SA were the Indian languages, Dutch, French, Spanish and German.

The necessity of talking about new things, unknown plants, animals and objects, new qualities and operations, concepts and ideas led to a great number of borrowings, and first of all **Indian** borrowings, like *moccasin, racoon, totem, toboggan, moose, woodchuck, etc.*

**French** borrowings include examples like: *saloon, chute, bureau, depot, cent, etc.*

**Spanish** influence can be perceived particularly in the South where Spanish colonists had spread long before Mayflower arrived. The borrowings are: *cafeteria, lasso, wrangler, canyon, tornado, etc.*

**German** borrowings are also rather numerous, among them there are words like: *hamburger, noodle, pretzel, seminar, etc.*

**Dutch** loanwords also gained a fixed place in the vocabulary of SA: *Santa Claus, dope, spook, yankee, etc.* The *wordyankee* has many interesting etymological explanations. The one that seems the most credible is that given by Professor Marckwardt: The word comes from Dutch Jan Kaas (Kees) meaning "John Cheese", a contemptuous nickname for the Englishmen. This was mistaken for the plural by the English-speaking colonists, and by the process of back formation a singular Yankee was derived.

### Spelling

After the American colonies became independent, language reformers and revolutionaries suggested different changes in the spelling system of SA. In 1768 Benjamin Franklin elaborated *A Scheme for*

*New Alphabet and Reformed Mode of Spelling* with six new symbols. After Franklin there were other proposals aimed at simplifying the spelling system to the greatest possible extent. They included words like: *ritten* (for *written*), *woz* (for *was*), *wil* (for *will*) etc.

More and more spelling innovations were introduced. However, spelling was not so easy to reform,

that is why the extreme suggestions were not taken up. But some ideas to make pronunciation coincide with spelling, that is, to level the graphemic-phonetic correspondences, were taken up. That accounts for the existence of significant differences in spelling between SA and SB. These differences are classified below.

1. American -or	British -our	8. American single consonant	British double consonant
honor	honour	(before a suffix in unstressed syllables)	
armored	armoured	traveled	travelled
favor	favour	traveling	travelling
flavor	flavour	woolen	woollen
labor	labour	marvelous	marvellous
behavior	behaviour	labeled	labelled
harbor	harbour	dialed	dialled
humor	humour	focused	focussed
neighbor	neighbour	9. American double consonant	British single consonant
odor	odour	(in stressed syllables)	
parlor	parlour	fulfill	fulfil
2. American -z	British -s	fulfillment	fulfilment
emphasize	emphasise	skillful	skilful
organize	organise	10. American -g	British -gue
analyze	analyse	American -m	British -mme
criticize	criticise	American -e	British -ae, oe
3. American -er	British -re	American -f-	British -ph-
theater	theatre	American -u-	British -ou-
center	centre	(in words of foreign origin)	
meter	metre	dialog	dialogue
liter	litre	catalog	catalogue
4. American -se	British -ce	gram	<b>gramme</b>
defense	defence	program	programme
license	licence	anemia	anaemia
offense	offence	diarrhea	diarrhoea
pretense	pretence	encyclopedia	encyclopaedia
practise (noun)	practice (noun)	arsulfur	sulphur
5. American -i	British -y	mustache	moustache
tire	tyre	11. Miscellaneous.	
6. American in-	British en-	American	British
inquiry	enquiry	ax	axe
inclosure	enclosure	cozy	cosy
7. American -y-	British -i-	curb	kerb
gypsy	gipsy	judgment	judgement
gayety	gaiety	pajamas	pyjamas
		plow	plough

### Vocabulary

The differences in the vocabulary between SA and SB can be explained by environmental differences between the two countries, and, also by a great number of languages that influenced the American variety of the English language. It should be mentioned, though, that the differences in the vocabulary are much more exposed to changes than the differences in spelling or pronunciation. Due to various extra-linguistic processes more and more Americanisms are infiltrated into the British variety. Also, reverse processes can be noticed: a lot of Americans use Britishisms in their

speech. That is why the examples of differences in the vocabulary given below may be opposed by native speakers of both sides. So, it must be emphasised that the vocabulary differences have to be considered mainly in terms of individual preferences.

Besides, a number of the examples given below may no longer be valid due to tourist mobility, Mass Media, internet — the factors, that bring about the processes of the so called "unification" of the languages. Anyway, teachers and students of English may find the following list useful:

SA	SB	SA	SB
absorbent cotton	cotton wool	bath robe	dressing gown
ad	advert	beet	beetroot
apartment	flat	bill	banknote
attorney	solicitor	apartment block	block of flats
baby buggy	pram	broiled	grilled
to back up a car	to reverse	bus (interurban)	coach
	luggage	bug	beetle
bar, tavern	pub	bulletin board	notice board

SA	SB	SA	SB
buddy	chap	lumber	timber
cab	taxi	lunch counter	snack bar
cable	telegramme	mail	post
can	tin	mail car	postal van
candy	sweets	movies	cinema
car (railway)	carriage	near-sighted	short-sighted
cereal (for hot porridge)	porridge	oatmeal	porridge
check (in a cloakroom)	tag	doctor's office	surgery
check (in a restaurant)	bill	one-way ticket	single ticket
to check in/out (in a hotel)	to book in/to leave	packaged	packed
checkers	draughts	parking lot	carpark
cigar store	tobacconist's	patrolman	constable
city hall	town hall	quotation marks	inverted commas
chips	crisps	restroom, ladies' room, men's room, bathroom	toilet, lavatory, WC
campus	school/college grounds	railroad	railway
drugstore	chemist's	depot	railway station
clerk shop	assistant	rooster	cock
cookie	biscuit	salesman, clerk	shop assistant
corn	maize	round trip ticket	return ticket
eraser	rubber	shoe repairman	shoemender's
fall (season)	autumn	shoe shine	shoe polish
faucet	tap	sidewalk	pavement
to figure out	to arrive at a solution	sophomore	second year student
to fill out a form	to fill in a form	super highway (interstate)	motorway
first floor	ground floor	squash	marrow
flashlight	torch	egg-plant	aubergine
French fries	chips	street-cleaner	road-sweeper
freshman	first year student	subway	underground
garbage / trash can	dust bin	telephone booth	call box
gas, gasoline	petrol	ticket office	booking office
eyeglasses	spectacles	truck	lorry
grade (at school)	form	trunk (car)	boot
fix	repair	trillion	billion
elevator	lift	trillion	poloneck
grocery store	shop (selling food)	ntblturtleneck	subway
to guess	to think	underground pass	holidays
hood	bonnet	vacation	vacationer
Inc. (incorporated)	Ltd. (limited)	vacationer	vacationer
information	enquiry office	vest	waistcoat
line (of people)	queue	to throw up	to be sick, to vomit
liquor	spirits	windshield	windscreen
to loan	to lend		

In conclusion it must be said that the number of differences between the two varieties constitute only a small fraction of the whole body of the language and in fact are outweighed by the abundance of similarities in both spelling and vocabulary. A historical study of any language proves that languages are always changing. Some lexical items become extinct. New concepts and ideas are created, new lexical items are coined. Grammatical rules are violated, then changed, new rules are created and, if they survive, they become

standard after some time. These changes are rather unpredictable. However, as regards the number of differences between American and British varieties of the English language, certain changes can be foreseen. In view of the fact, that there exists a stable tendency to unification of the two varieties, we can make a conclusion that it seems likely the number of discrepancies will be further decreasing. The opinion expressed here is shared by many outstanding scholars all over the world.

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**ПОРІВНЯННЯ БРИТАНСЬКОГО ТА АМЕРИКАНСЬКОГО  
ВАРІАНТІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ**

*Презентація розглядає деякі відмінності між двома варіантами англійської мови: британським і американським варіантами. Порівнюються такі елементи як орфографія і вокабуляр.*