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Differences in American and British English Vocabulary

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with differences in American and British English vocabulary. The spoken forms of British English vary considerably, reflecting a long history of dialect development amid isolated population, In the United Kingdom, dialects, word use and accents vary not only between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but also within them. Received Pronunciation (RP) refers to a way of pronouncing standard English that is actually used by about two percent of the UK population. It remains the accent upon which dictionary pronunciation guides are based, and for teaching English as a foreign language. It is referred to colloquially as "the Queen`s English", "Oxford English" and "BBC English", although by means do all graduates of the university speak with such an accent and the BBC no longer requires it or uses it exclusively.

KEYWORDS: *vocabulary, accents, pronouncing standard, western territories, pronunciation, grammar, spelling, punctuation, idioms*

Regional dialects in the United States typically reflect some elements of the language of the main immigrant groups in any particular region of the country, especially in terms of pronunciation and vernacular vocabulary. Scholars have mapped at least four major regional variations of spoken American English: Northern, Southern, Midland and Western. After the American Civil War, the settlement of the western territories by migrants from the east led to dialect mixing and levelling, so that regional dialects are most strongly differentiated in the eastern parts of the country that were settled earlier. Localized dialects also exist quite distinct, such as in Southern Appalachia and Boston.

Chief among other native English dialects are Canadian English and Australian English, which rank third and fourth in the number of native speakers.

The English language was first introduced to the Americans by British colonization, beginning in 1607 in Jamestown, Virginia. Similarly, the language spread to numerous other parts of the world as a result British trade and colonization elsewhere and the spread of the million former British Empire, which, by 1921, held sway over a population of 470-570 people, approximately a quarter of the world's population at that time.

Over the 400 years the form of the language used in the Americas-especially in the United States-and that used in the United Kingdom diverged in a few minor ways, leading to the versions now occasionally referred to as American English and British English. Differences between the two include pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary (lexis), spelling, punctuation, idioms and formatting of dates and numbers, although the differences in written and most spoken grammar structure tend to be much less than those of other aspects of the language in terms of mutual intelligibility. A small number of words have completely different meanings in the two versions or are even unknown or not used in one of the versions. One particular contribution towards formalizing these differences came from Noah Webster, who wrote the first American dictionary with the intention of shoving that people in the United States spoke a different dialect from Britain, much like a regional accent.

Most speakers of AmE are aware of some BrE terms, although they may not generally use them or may be confused as to whether someone intends the American or British meaning (such as for biscuit). It is generally very easy to guess what some words, such as "driving licence", mean. However, use of many other British words such as naff (slang but commonly used to mean "not very good") are unheard of in American English.

Speakers of BrE are likely to understand most common AmE terms, examples such as "sidewalk" (pavement), "gas (gasoline/petrol), "counterclockwise" (anticlockwise) or "elevator (lift)", without any problem, thanks in part to considerable exposure to American popular culture and literature. Certain terms that are heard less frequently, especially those likely to be absent or rare in American popular culture, e.g. "copacetic (satisfactory)", are unlikely to be understood by most BrE speakers.

Words such as bill and biscuit are used regularly in both AmE and BrE but mean different things in each form. In AmE a bill is usually paper money (as in "dollar bill") though it can mean the same as in BrE, an invoice (as in "the repair bill was £250"). In AmE a biscuit is what in BrE is called a scone. In BrE a biscuit is what AmE calls a cookie. As chronicled by Winston Churchill, the opposite meanings of the verbs to table created a misunderstanding during a meeting of the Allied forces; in BrE to table an item on an agenda means to open it up for discussion whereas in AmE, it means to remove it from discussion, or at times, to suspend or delay discussion.

The word "football" in BrE refers to Association football, also once known as soccer. In AmE, "football" means American football. However, the standard AmE term "soccer", a contraction of "association (football)", is also of British origin, derived from the formalization of different codes of football in the 19th century, and was a fairly unremarkable usage (possibly marked for class) in BrE until relatively recently; it has lately become perceived incorrectly as an Americanism.

Similarly, the word "hockey" in BrE refers to field hockey and in AmE, "hockey" means ice hockey.

"Professor" has different meanings in BrE and AmE. In BrE it is the highest academic rank, followed by Reader, Senior Lecturer and Lecturer. In AmE "Professor" refers to academic staff of all ranks, with (Full) Professor (largely equivalent to the UK meaning) followed by Associate Professor and Assistant Professor.

"Tuition" has traditionally had separate meaning in each variation. In BrE it is the educational content transferred from teacher to student at a university. In AmE it is the money (the fees) paid to receive that education (BrE: tuition fees).

Transport/Transportation

Americans refer to transportation and British people to transport. Transportation in Britain has traditionally meant the punishment of criminals by deporting them to an overseas penal colony. In AmE, the word transport is mainly used only as a verb, seldom as a noun or adjective expert in reference to certain specialized objects, such as a tape transport or a military transport (e.g., a troop transport, a kind of vehicle, not an act of transporting).

Differences in terminology are especially obvious in the context of roads. The British team dual carriageway, in American parlance, would be divided highway. The central reservation on a motorway or dual carriageway in the UK would be the median or center divide on a freeway, expressway, highway or parkway in the US. The one-way lanes that make it possible to enter and leave such roads at an intermediate point without disrupting the flow of traffic are known as slip roads in the UK but US civil engineers call them ramps and both further distinguish between on-ramps or entry-slips (for entering) and off-ramps or exit-slips (for leaving). When American engineers speak of slip roads, they are referring to a street that runs alongside the main road (separated by a berm) to allow off-the-highway access to the premises that are there, sometimes also known as a frontage road – in both the US and UK this is also known as a service road. Specific auto parts and transport terms have different names in the two dialects, for example:

Accelerator gas [pedal], accelerator, Mudguard, wheel arch, wing fender, Hood, soft/hard top convertible top, Car park parking lot, Driving licence driver`s license, Dual carriageway divided highway, Estate car station wagon, Gearbox transmission, Hard shoulder shoulder, Hired care, hire carrental car, rental, Motorway freeway or highway, Pavement sidewalk, Roadwork construction zone, roadwork, Petrol gasoline or gas, Saloon sedan, Silencer muffler.

Dates are usually written differently in the short (numerical) form. Christmas Day 2000, for example, is 25/12/00 or 25.12.00 in UK and 12/25/00 in the US, although the formats 25/12/2000, 25.12.2000, and 12/25/2000 now have more currency than they had before the Year 2000 problem. Occasionally other formats are encountered, such as the ISO 8601 2000-12-25, popular among programmers, scientists and others seeking to avoid ambiguity, and to make alphanumerical order coincide with chronological order. The difference in short-from date order can lead to misunderstanding. For example 06/04/05 could mean either June 4, 2005 (if read as US format), 6 April 2005 (if seen as in UK format) or even 5 April 2006 if taken to be an older ISO 8601-style format where 2-digit years were allowed.

When using the name of the month rather than the number to write a date in the UK, the predominant modern, style is for the day to precede the month, e.g., 21 April. Month preceding date is almost invariable in the US. British usage often changes the day from an integer to an ordinal, i.e. 21 st instead of 21. In speech, "of" and "the" are used in the UK, as in "the21 of April". In written language, the words "the" and "of" may be and are usually dropped, i.e. 21 April. Meanwhile, the US would say this as "April 21 st". In written language, "the" and "of" may be and are usually dropped, i.e. 21 April. Meanwhile, the US would say this as "April 21 st". One of the few exceptions in American English is saying "the Fourth of July" as a shorthand for the United States Independence Day.

Phrases such as the following are common in Britain but are generally unknown in the US: "A week today", "a week tomorrow", "a week Tuesday" and "Tuesday week" (although this is also used in central Texas); these all refer to a day more than a week in the future. "A fortnight Friday" and "Friday fortnight" refer to a day two weeks after the coming Friday). "A week on Tuesday" and "fortnigh on Friday" could refer either to a day in the past ("it is a week on Tuesday, you need to get another one") or in the future ("see you a week on Tuesday"), depending on context. In the US the standard construction is "a week from today", "a week from tomorrow", etc. BrE speakers may also say "Thursday last" or "Thursday gone" where AmE would "last Thursday". "I`ll see you (on) Thursday coming" or "let`s meet this coming Thursday" in BrE refer to a meeting later this week, while "not until Thursday next" would refer to next week.

The 24 hour clock (18:00, 18.00 or 1800)is considered normal in the UK and Europe in many applications including air rail and bus timetables; it is largely unused in the US outside of military, police, aviation and medical application. British English tends to use the full stop or period (.) when telling time, compared to American English which uses Colons (:) (i.e. 11:15 PM or 23:15 for AmE and 11.15pm or 23.15 for BrE).

Fifteen minutes after the hour is called quarter past in British usage and a quarter after or, less commonly, a quarter past in American usage. Fifteen minutes before the hour is usually called quarter to in British usage and a quarter of, a quarter to or a quarter `til in American usage; the from a quarter to is associated with parts of the Northern United States, while a quarter `til is found chiefly in the Appalachian region. Thirty minutes after the hour is commonly called half past in both BrE and AmE; half after used to be more common in the US. In informal British speech, the preposition is sometimes omitted, so that 5:30 may be refered to as half five. The AmE formations top of the hour and bottom of the hour are not used in BrE. Forms such as forty are common in both dialects.

A number of English idioms that have essentially the same meaning show lexical differences between the British and the American version; for instance:

British English	American English
Not touch something with a bargepol	not touch something with a ten-poot pole
Sweep under the carpet	sweep under the rug
Touch wood	knock on wood
See the wood for the trees	see the forest for the trees
Skeleton in the cupboard	skeleton in the closet

A home from home	a home away from home
Blow one`s own trumpet	blow (or toot) one`s own horn
A drop in the ocean	a drop in the bucket, a spit in the ocean
Flogging a dead horse	beating a dead horse
Haven`t (got) a clue	don`t have a clue or have no clue
A new lease of life	a new lease on life
Lie of the land	lay of the land
Take it with a pinch of salt	take it with a grain of salt
A storm in a teacup	a tempest in a teapot

Concluding the topic one can realize the importance of teaching the differences in the use of vocabulary for a learner of English so that to avoid confusion in understanding the context, in passing the message for normal communication.

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