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Why Varieties of Spoken English?

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Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.

Albert Einstein

ABSTRACT

One of the problems that the English language learners are facing is the dealing with the differences between British and American English. British English is the standard usage of English language in the United Kingdom. Both the British English and the American English are considered as Standard English. Indian English refers to the English language that is used to write and speak in India**.** Although British English is the same language that is being spoken by the people of United Kingdom and India but there is a difference in the level of pronunciation and accent of certain words. Many people claim that Indian English is similar to British English. But there is a huge difference in the English we speak in India and what they speak in United Kingdom**.** This paper attempts to explain why varieties of English especially British and American English are the significant for the 21st century learners.

KEY WORDS: British English, American English, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Grammar

INTRODUCTION

The British actually introduced the language to the Americans when they reached there by sea during the 16th and 17th centuries. At that time, spelling had not yet been standardised. It took the writing of the first dictionaries to set in stone how these words appeared. In the UK, the dictionary was compiled by London-based scholars. Meanwhile, in the United States, the lexicographer was a man named Noah Webster. Allegedly, he changed how the words were spelled to make the American version different from the British as a way of showing cultural independence from its mother country. In terms of speech, the differences between American and British English actually took place after the first settlers arrived in America. These groups of people spoke using what was called rhetoric speech, where the ‘r’ sounds of words are pronounced. Meanwhile, the higher classes in the UK wanted to distinguish the way they spoke from the common masses by softening their pronunciation of the ‘r’ sounds. Since the elite even back then were considered the standard for being fashionable, other people began to copy their speech, until it eventually became the common way of speaking in the south of

England. An important point to make is that different doesn't mean wrong. Comments such as "American English is inferior to British English" or "American English is better than British English" have no solid basis other than the speaker's opinion. The truth is that no language or regional variety of language is inherently better or worse than another. They are just different. Users will often have very firm beliefs on which English they think is better, clearer or easier to understand. While it may be true for that particular individual, there is no evidence to suggest that one variety is easier to learn or understand than the other.

Materials and Varieties

If you are an American English speaker learning with a British course book or vice versa, what do you say when the book is different from your English? The answer here is to point out the difference. The differences are not so numerous as to overload the learners and often can be easily dealt with. For example, if you are an American English speaker using a lesson that has just included 'at the weekend', it takes very little time to point out that in American English people say "on the weekend". Accept either from your learners then. If you decide to go along with the book and say "at the weekend" yourself, you'll probably sound unnatural, and "on the weekend" might slip out anyway! In most international exams, both varieties of English are accepted. However, while writing for an international exam (or writing in English generally) students should try to remain consistent. That means if they favour (or favour) American spelling and grammar, they should stick to that convention for the whole piece of writing.

What is the Role of Varieties of English?

Although British and American varieties are the most documented, there are of course many other varieties of English. Scotland, Ireland, South Asia, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, West Africa, the Caribbean, South Africa all have their own regional variations of English. The decision whether or not to highlight aspects of these English would depend on two factors: (a) If the students are going to live, or are already living, in one of these places – in which case the need to understand specific aspects of that English is clear; or (b) If the teacher is from one of those places and therefore speaks a regional variation of English. In this case, it could be useful to occasionally point out differences between your English and that of your course book.

British and American English

American English differs from British English not only in pronunciation but also in vocabulary, spelling and grammar.

Pronunciation.

- When the American pronunciation is different from the British pronunciation it is given after the British pronunciation in the dictionary:
  tomato /tə'ma:təʊ; (NAME) tə'meitoʊ/.
- Some important differences: Stressed vowels are usually longer in American English. In **packet**, for example, the /æ/ is longer.

- In British English the consonant /r/ is pronounced only before a vowel (for example in **red** and **bedroom**). In all other cases the /r/ is silent (for example in **car, learn, over**). In American English the /r/ is always pronounced.
- In American English the‘t ‘between vowels is pronounced as a soft‘d’ /d/. So that writer and rider sound similar. British English speakers usually pronounce the t as /t/.

Vocabulary

The dictionary tells you which words are used only in American English or have different meanings in British and American English, for example cookie, elevator, trunk. The Americans and the British also have some words that differ from each other. The table below lists some of the everyday objects that have different names, depending on what form of English you are using.

British vs. American Vocabulary

British English	American English	British English	American English
anti-clockwise	counter-clockwise	biscuit	cookie, cracker
flat	apartment	chemist's shop	drugstore, pharmacy
cinema	movies	coffin	casket
crisps	potato chips	crossroads	intersections
cupboard	closet	dustbin	garbage can, trash can
driving licence	driver's license	dustman	garbage collector
engine	motor	ground floor	ground/first floor
film	movie	handbag	purse, shoulder bag
flyover	overpass	high street	main street
holiday	vacation	mad	crazy, insane
lift	elevator	main road	highway
lorry	truck, semi, tractor	maize	corn
maths	math	motorway	highway, freeway,
motorbike	motorcycle	pants, underpants	underpants, drawers
petrol	gas, gasoline	post-box	mailbox
motorway	freeway, expressway	pavement	sidewalk
pocket money	allowance	postcode	zip code
post	mail	postman	mailman, letter carrier
pub	bar	rubber	eraser
public toilet	rest room, public bathroom	rubbish	garbage
railway	railroad	shop	store
silencer *(car)*	muffler	sweets	candy

single *(ticket)*	one-way	taxi	taxi cab
solicitor	lawyer, attorney	tea towel	dish towel
telly *(informal)*, TV	television, TV	torch	flashlight
timetable	schedule	trousers	pants
tube *(train)*	subway	aeroplane	airplane
underground	subway	bank holiday	legal holiday/national holiday
vest	undershirt	casualty	emergency room
earth(electrical)	ground	financial year	fiscal year
engaged (of a phone)	busy	football	soccer
Footway	sidewalk	hoarding	billboard
full stop	period	indicator	turn signal
garden	yard, lawn	mobile	cell phone
mum	mom	postal vote	absentee ballot
number plate	license plate	power point	electrical out let
petrol	gas, gasoline	queue	line
trade union	labour union	curriculum vitae	resume
bill	check	fancy dress	costumes
fortnight	two weeks	play time / break time	recess
headmaster/ head teacher	principal	marking scheme	grading scheme
MD	CEO	phone box	telephone booth
game public school	play,match private school	overtake (vehicle) policeman	pass cop
state school	public school	cashier	teller
holiday	vacation	torch	flashlight
staff room	teachers lounge	bathroom toilet/	washroom
managing director/MD	general manager	director	manager
1st year	freshman	band aid	plaster

review	revision	proctor	invigilate
cafeteria	canteen	trousers	pants
sneakers	trainers	flat	apartment
pants	trousers	lorry	truck
soccer	football	holiday	vacation
thanks	cheers	crisps	chips
friend	mate	fizzy drink	soda
french fries	chips	post box	mailbox
apartment	flat	biscuit	cookie
vacation	holiday	chemist	drugstore
soccer player	footballer	shop	store
gasoline	petrol	football	soccer
freeway	motorway	watch out for	mind
to have sex	shag	shopping cart	shopping trolley
parking lot	car park	cord	lead
transportation	transport	sausages	bangers
somewhat like	quite like	vest	waistcoat
mail	post	closet	cupboard
truck	lorry	injections	jabs
package	parcel	carpenter	joiner
flash light	torch	oatmeal	porridge
hood (of a car)	bonnet	cotton candy	candy floss

trunk (of a car)	boot	prison guard	screw
cookies	biscuits	drunk	pissed
toilet	loo	male or friend	chap
gambler	punter	college or university	university
streetcar	tram	damn	bloody

Spelling

- The dictionary shows different spellings in British and American English. The following differences are particularly common:
- In verbs which end in 'l' and are not stressed on the final syllable, the 'l' is not doubled in the –ing form and the past participle: cancelling; (*NAME*) cancelling.
- Words which end in –tre are spelt –ter in American English: **centre**; (*NAME*) **center.**
- Words which end in –our are usually spelt –or in American English: colour; (*NAME*) color.
- Words which end in-ogue are usually spelt –og in American English: **dialogue**; (*NAME*) **dialog**.
- In British English many verbs can be spelt with either –ise or –ize. In American English only the spelling with –ize is possible: realize, -ise; (*NAME*) realize.

Spelling

British English	American English	British English	American English
Colour	Color	Humour	Humor
Favourite	favorite	theatre	theater
kilometre	kilometer	mum, mam or mom *	mom
cosy	cozy	realise	realize
dialogue	dialog	traveller	traveler
cheque	check	jewellery	jewelry
tyre	tire	neighbour	neighbor
centre	center	liter	litre
metre	meter	offence	offense
defence	defense	paediatric	pediatric
aeroplane	airplane	modelling	modeling
travelling	traveling	fulfil	fulfill
enrolment	enrollment	sizeable	sizable
grey	gray	dialogue	dialog
tonne	ton	programme	program
moustache	mustache	doughnut	donut

Grammar

Speakers of American English generally use the present perfect tense (*have/has + past participle*) far less than speakers of British English. In spoken American English, it is very common to use the simple past tense as an alternative in situations where the present perfect would usually have been used in British English. In sentences which talk about in the past that has an effect in the present.

American English (Am E) / British English (Br E)

- Jenny feels ill. She ate too much. (Am E)
- Jenny feels ill. She's eaten too much. (Br E)
- I can't find my keys. Did you see them anywhere? (Am E)
- I can't find my keys. Have you seen them anywhere? (Br E)

Present perfect/ Simple past

In American English the simple past can be used with **already, just**, and **yet.** In British English the present perfect is used.

- I have already given her the present. (*Br E*)
- I already gave her the present. (*NAME*)
- I've just seen her. (*Br E*)
- I just saw her. (*NAME*)
- Have you heard the news yet? (*Br E*)
- Did you hear the news yet? (*NAME*)

Verb agreement with collective nouns

In British English, collective nouns, (i.e. nouns referring to particular groups of people or things), (e.g. *staff, government, class, team*) can be followed by a singular or plural verb depending on whether the group is thought of as one idea, or as many individuals.

For examples:

My team is winning.

The other team are all sitting down.

In American English, collective nouns are always followed by a singular verb, so an American would usually say:

Which team is losing?

Whereas in British English both plural and singular forms of the verb are possible, as in:

Which team is/are losing?

Use of delexical verbs *have* and *take*

In British English, the verb *have* frequently functions as what is technically referred to as a delexical verb, i.e. it is used in contexts where it has very little meaning in itself but occurs with an object noun which describes an action. It means having little or no meaning in its own right, for example, take in take a photograph. Let's discuss more examples:

I'd like to have a bath.

Have is frequently used in this way with nouns referring to common activities such as washing or resting, e.g.

She's having a little nap.

I'll just have a quick shower before we go out.

In American English, the verb *take*, rather than *have*, is used in these contexts, e.g.

Joe's taking a shower.

I'd like to take a bath.

Let's take a short vacation.

Why don't you take a rest now?

Have/have got

Note that *have got* is possible in American English, but is used with the meaning '*have*', and *gotten* is the usual past participle of *get.* In British English it is possible to use **have got** or **have** to express the idea of possession. In American English only have can be used in questions and negative sentences:

- They have / have got two computers. (*Br E and NAME*)
- Have you got a computer? Yes, I have. (*Br E*)
- Do you have a computer? Yes, I do. (*Br E and NAME*)

Get/gotten

In American English the past participle of **get** is **gotten**:

- Your English has got better. (*Br E*)
- Your English has gotten better. (*NAME*)

Prepositions and adverbs

Use of prepositions

In British English, *at* is used with many time expressions, e.g. at Christmas/ at five 'o' clock, at the weekend

In American English, *on* is always used when talking about the weekend, not *at*, e.g.

Will they still be there on the weekend?

She'll be coming home on weekends.

In British English, *at* is often used when talking about universities or other institutions, e.g.

She studied chemistry at university.

In American English, *in* is often used, e.g.

She studied English in high school.

In British English, *to* and *from* are used with the adjective *different*, e.g.

This place is different from/to anything I've seen before.

In American English from and *than* are used with *different*, e.g.

This place is different from/than anything I've seen before.

In British English, *to* is always used after the verb *write*, e.g.

I promised to write to her every day.

In American English, to can be omitted after *write*, i.e.

I promised to write her every day.

Some prepositions and adverbs are used differently in British and American English, for example, stay at home (*BrE*); stay home (*NAME*).

Form of the adverb

In informal American English the adverb form ending in –ly is often not used:

- He looked at me really strangely. (*BrE*)
- He looked at me really strange. (*NAME*)

Use of auxiliaries and modals

In British English, the auxiliary *do* is often used as a substitute for a verb when replying to a question, **e.g.**
A: Are you coming with us?
B: I might do.
In American English, *do* is not used in this way, e.g.
A: Are you coming with us?
B: I might.
In British English, *needn't* is often used instead of *don't need to*, e.g.
They needn't come to school today.
They don't need to come to school today.
In American English, *needn't* is very unusual and the usual form is *don't need to*, e.g.
They don't need to come to school today.

Prepositions

The differences below are only a general rule. American speech has influenced Britain via pop culture, and vice versa. Therefore, some prepositional differences are not as pronounced as they once were.

American English	British English
I'm going to a party **on** the weekend.	I'm going to a party **at** the weekend.
What are you doing **on** Christmas?	What are you doing **at** Christmas?
Monday **through** Friday.	Monday **to** Friday.
It's different **from/than** the others.	It's different **from/to** the others.

Use of modal

Shall
Shall is not used instead of will in American English for the first person singular of the future:

- I shall/will be here tomorrow. (*Br E*)
- I will be here tomorrow. (*NAME*)
- I shall/will be there later. (*Br E*)
- I will be there later. (*NAME*)

In American English, *shall* is unusual and *will* is normally used.
Nor is it used in polite offers:

- Shall I open the window? (*Br E*)
- Should I open the window? (*NAME*)

In British English, *shall I/ we* is often used to ask for advice or an opinion, e.g.

Shall we ask him to come with us?
In American English, *should* is often used instead of *shall*, e.g.
Should we ask him to come with us?

Irregular verbs

Past tense forms

Below is a table showing verbs which have different simple past and past participle forms in American and British English. Note that the irregular past forms *burnt, dreamt* and *spoilt* are possible in American English, but less common than the forms ending in *-ed*.

Infinitive	Simple past (Br)	Simple past (Am)	Past participle (Br)	Past participle (Am)
burn	burned/ burnt	burned/ burnt	burned/ burnt	burned/ burnt
bust	bust	busted	bust	busted
dive	dived	dove/ dived	dived	dived
dream	dreamed/ dreamt	dreamed/ dreamt	dreamed/ dreamt	dreamed/ dreamt
get	got	got	got	gotten
lean	leaned/ leant	leaned	leaned/ leant	leaned
learn	learned/ learnt	learned	learned/ learnt	learned

Infinitive	Simple past (Br)	Simple past (Am)	Past participle (Br)	Past participle (Am)
plead	pleaded	pleaded/ pled	pleaded	pleaded/ pled
prove	proved	proved	proved	proved/ proven
saw	sawed	sawed	sawn	sawn/ sawed
smell	smelled/ smelt	smelled	smelled/ smelt	smelled
spill	spilled/ spilt	spilled	spilled/ spilt	spilled
spoil	spoiled/ spoilt	spoiled/ spoilt	spoiled/ spoilt	spoiled/ spoilt
stink	stank	stank/ stunk	stunk	stunk
wake	woke	woke/ waked	woken	woken

In British English the past simple and past participle of many verbs can be formed with –ed or –t, for example, burned/burnt. In American English only the forms ending in –ed are used:

- They burned/burnt the documents. (*BrE*)
- They burned the documents. (*NAME*)

When the past participle is used as an adjective, British English prefers the –t form, whereas in American English the –ed form is preferred, with the exception of **burnt**:

- a spoilt child (*BrE*)
- a spoiled child (*NAME*)
- burnt toast (*BrE and NAME*)

Go/ Come and...

In these expressions **and** is often omitted:

- Go and take a look outside. (*Br E*)
- Go take a look outside. (*NAME*)

On the telephone

- Hello, is that Dugu? (*Br E*)
- Hello, is this Dugu? (*NAME*)

Significant Grammatical Differences

1. Use of Certain Prepositions

In British English, you say that athletes play *in* a team. Americans, however, claim that athletes play *on* a team. The English say that students enroll *on* a university course, but Yankees say the students enroll *in* a course. In British English, one would say that Tom and Jerry work *in* Oxford Street *at* the weekends, but in American English, we state that Tom and Jerry work *on* Oxford Street *on* the weekends. In addition, the British say they will ring someone *on* a phone number while Americans say they will call someone *at* a phone number. Another example is *towards* the lake as written in British English and *toward* the lake in American English. These are just some of the most glaring differences in use of prepositions.

2. Use of Some Irregular Verbs

British English sometimes forms the past and past participle of verbs by adding *"t"* instead of *"ed"* to the infinitive of the verb. For example, the past and past participles of *learned, spelled,* and *burned* in American English are written as *learnt, spellt,* and *burnt* in British English.

3. Collective Nouns' Use of Singular or Plural Verb Forms

In British English, collective nouns take either singular or plural verb forms. Hence, the British will say and write that Oliver's *army are* on their way. In American English, all collective nouns take the singular verb form. Therefore, we say that the *army is* on the way. Another example is *"Spain are* the champions," said by the British, and *"Spain is* the champ." rendered by the Americans.

4. Collective nouns

There are a few grammatical differences between the two varieties of English. Let's start with **collective nouns**. We use collective nouns to refer to a group of individuals. In American English, collective nouns are singular. For example, *staff* refers to a group of employees; *band* refers to a group of musicians; *team* refers to a group of athletes. Americans would say, "The band is good." But in British English, collective nouns can be singular or plural. You might hear someone from Britain say, "The team are playing tonight" or "The team is playing tonight."

5. Auxiliary verbs

Another grammar difference between American and British English relates to auxiliary verbs. **Auxiliary verbs**, also known as helping verbs, are verbs that help form a grammatical function. They "help" the main verb by adding information about time, **modality** and voice. Let's look at the auxiliary verb *shall*. Brits sometimes use *shall* to express the future. For example, "I shall go home now." Americans know what *shall* means, but rarely use it in conversation. It seems very formal. Americans would probably use "I will go home now." In question form, a Brit might say, "Shall we go now?" while an American would probably say, "Should we go now?"

When Americans want to express a lack of obligation, they use the helping verb *do* with negative *not* followed by *need*. "You do not need to come to work today." Brits drop the helping verb and contract *not*. "You needn't come to work today."

6. Use of Shall and Will

For the first person singular, the British like to use *"shall*" whereas Americans prefer "*will*." Hence in British English, you say, "*I shall* go tomorrow," while in American English we say, *"I will* go tomorrow."

7. Use of Got and Have

"Got" and "have" have the same meanings; however, in sentences, the British will say, "Have you got a book," while Americans will say, "Do you have a book?" These are the main types of grammar differences I have noticed in using British and American textbooks and in my conversations with British teachers.

8. Past tense verbs

You will also find some small differences with past forms of irregular verbs. The past tense of *learn* in American English is *learned*. British English has the option of *learned* or *learnt*. The same rule applies to *dreamed* and *dreamt, burned* and *burnt, leaned* and *leant*. Americans tend to use the *–ed* ending; Brits tend to use the *-t* ending. In the past participle form, Americans tend to use the *–en* ending for some irregular verbs. For example, an American might say, "I have never gott*en* caught" whereas a Brit would say, "I have never got caught." Americans use both *got* and *gotten* in the past participle. Brits only use *got*.

9. Tag questions

A tag question is a grammatical form that turns a statement into a question. For example, "The whole situation is unfortunate, isn't it?" or, "You don't like him, do you?" The tag includes a pronoun and its matching form of the verb *be*, *have* or *do*. Tag questions encourage people to respond and agree with the speaker. Americans use tag questions, too, but less often than Brits.

10. Both British and American follows intonation and stress patterns.

Punctuation Differences

Minor differences in punctuation are seen in the following:

1. Abbreviations

In American English, Mister, Misses, and Street are abbreviated Mr., Mrs., and St. with a period following the abbreviation. In British English, there is no period following the abbreviations.

2. Use of Quotation Marks

In American English, double quotation marks (") are always used for representing direct speech and highlighting meanings. In British English, single quotation marks (') are very often used. For example, in American English, we would write the following sentence as:

Carefree means "free from care or anxiety." In British English, it would be written as:

Carefree means 'free from care or anxiety'.

Note that in American English the period is within the quotation marks, while in British English it is outside of the quotation mark.

Finally, there are different terms of punctuation marks in American and British English. Let's have a look:

3. Punctuation Differences between British and American English

Punctuation	American English	British English
.	period	full stop
( )	parentheses	brackets
[ ]	brackets	square brackets
{ }	curly braces	curly brackets

4. Rendering of Dates

In American English, the convention of having the month preceding the date is followed. Hence, August 15, 2022, is written and abbreviated as *8/15/22*. In British English, however, the date precedes the month. Thus, 15 August 2022, is written and abbreviated as *15/8/22*.

5. Telling of Time

There are some minor differences in the telling of time. British would usually say *"half past five*," American will say, "half five."

CONCLUSION

The two varieties of English - British and American are widely used in the world. So, it is, essential for learners to be aware of the major differences between them. The lexical differences are the easiest ones to notice. The knowledge of grammatical and phonological differences is useful not only for learners but also for the common fellows. Standard British English is the variety of English used in most EFL classes around the world with one specific accent that is the Receive Pronunciation (RP). Receive Pronunciation is the accent upon which dictionary pronunciation guides are based. The teaching of English as a foreign language is followed across the globe. Similarly, the teaching of American English is inevitable. The professionals have to move to the UK or USA for research and higher studies. They use the language accordingly. In the globalised world, learners, professionals, business executives and researchers depend upon the two varieties of English language. In a nutshell, it is presented that both the varieties are indispensable for us.

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