

## British and American English: What are the Differences?

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イギリス英語とアメリカ英語：その違いは？

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English has won the battle for paramount world language. It is the language used by the majority of the world's scientists, it is the language of the Internet, and most of the information stored throughout the globe on computers is in English. Its widespread use has resulted in the existence of many varieties, but most of these can be conveniently grouped into one of the two major 'families': British English and American English. In Japan, learners are exposed to both kinds, and my experiences as a language teacher here have prompted me to examine the differences between the two. The paper first of all investigates some commonly held attitudes and prejudices towards British and American English. After a brief look at the history of the English language and how the two varieties came to be different, the main differences between the two forms (of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and grammar) are examined. The pedagogical implications of these differences, whether fact or prejudiced opinion, are then considered.

### Key Words (キーワード)

Language Varieties (言語の種類), Prejudices (偏見), Language Model (言語様式), RP (イギリスのインテリ階層の英語(俗にBBC英語)), GA (アメリカで使われている標準英語)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Today, English is secure in the position of pre-eminent global language. It is the first language for more than 350 million people worldwide, and an estimated 600 million speak it as a second or foreign language. More than two-thirds of the world's scientists read in English, it is the language of the Internet, and 80 per cent of the world's information stored on computers is in English. Its widespread use has resulted in the existence of many varieties, but most of these can be conveniently grouped into either the British English or the American English 'family'. In most countries where English is taught as a second or foreign language there is a bias towards one variety or the other. This is the case here in Japan, with American English being favoured. However, Japan also has a

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long pre-war tradition of British English teaching, resulting in a somewhat confused situation where both British and American models are used. The following experiences and observations as a British English teacher in Japan have provided me with the motivation for an investigation into the differences between the two varieties.

- 1) Differences can trip up the unwary teacher. On several occasions I have corrected students' 'errors' only to discover later from an American colleague that what had been said or written is perfectly acceptable in American English.
- 2) I have found that many learners seem to have a personal bias towards either form of the language, believing that one form is in some way superior to the other.
- 3) My own personal experiences of communicating with Americans have sometimes resulted in confusion or embarrassing (although not usually irrevocable!) mistakes.
- 4) Students themselves have often shown interest in and asked me about the differences between the two kinds of English.

## 1.2 Aims and Scope

The paper first of all sets the scene by taking a look at the common attitudes and prejudices towards British and American English. This is followed by a necessarily brief outline of the history of English and how American English came to be different from its British counterpart. The main differences between the two forms (of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and grammar) are then examined in some detail. Finally, the paper considers the implications of the differences, whether fact or prejudiced opinion, for the EFL teacher and learner.

## 2 ATTITUDES AND PREJUDICES

In order to clear the way for an objective description of the main kinds of difference between British and American English (henceforth BrE and AmE) it is first necessary to look at the prejudices and opinions which cloud the issue. A number of beliefs and arguments are proffered for the superiority of both varieties, and we shall look at these in turn.

### 2.1 British English is Better!

The following arguments are often put forward by those convinced of the superiority of British English.

#### 1) '*BrE Has a Long History*'

The origins of English can be traced back to the fifth century, which means that British English has existed for about 1,500 years. American English, however, was not recognised as being distinct from British English until the eighteenth century, so it has a history of little more than two hundred years.

## 2) *'BrE is the Language of Great Literature'*

British English is the language of the great writers and poets of the past – Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Johnson, to name but a few. Inspirational works of literature have been written for more than a thousand years in BrE; these of course are now of immense historical and cultural importance. American English, on the other hand, is more commonly associated with the lowbrow, commercial pop culture of bestselling novels and cartoons.

## 3) *'BrE Has Been Influential Throughout the World'*

BrE is often considered to be more important because it has played a major role in the development of countries in all continents of the world, being spread by trade, colonisation and conquest. It has had a major influence in areas such as North America, the West Indies, the Caribbean, the Indian subcontinent, Australia, and more recently in South Africa, Singapore, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and many parts of Africa.

## 4) *'BrE is More Prestigious'*

In many countries which were previously part of the British Empire, BrE is a prestige norm, and in many countries in Europe, too, people express a desire to learn this variety. BrE is perceived by many as being the language of academia (e.g. Oxford and Cambridge) and respected cultural institutions such as the British Parliament, the Royal Family, and the British Museum. It is also considered by many of its supporters to be more 'beautiful' or 'pure' than AmE, which is often labelled 'sloppy' or 'unrefined'.

## 2.2 American English is Better!

Now let us take a look at some of the commonly voiced arguments in support of American English.

### 1) *'Far More People Speak AmE'*

Many people believe that AmE is superior to BrE simply because more people speak it. The U.S.A., with a population of about 250 million, is the largest English-speaking country in the world. The country contains nearly four times as many English-mother-tongue speakers as the United Kingdom, and the speakers of American English outnumber all other speakers of English by about two to one. It is influential in many important countries, including Central and South America, the Philippines, Japan, and South Korea.

### 2) *'AmE Has Economic Superiority'*

The United States, of course, is the most influential country in the world politically and economically. American English is the language of international trade and economics, and multinational corporations generally use it. AmE dominates in the entertainment industry: most of the English-language movies watched around the world are made in America, and it is the language of much popular music—and that includes songs written

or sung by British musicians.

### 3) '*AmE is the Language of Technology*'

It is the language of computers and information technology: words like 'disk', 'program', and 'analog', all American spellings, are used throughout the world. American-style usage is likely to become even more dominant with the increasing growth and importance of the Internet and other global computer networks. And American English, of course, is the only kind of English that has been spoken on the moon!

### 4) '*AmE is a Vital, Creative Language*'

AmE has a youthful, vibrant image, spread around the world by films, music, and television programmes. It is AmE which provides us with a wealth of imaginative new words and idioms—most of the entries in the British *Oxford Dictionary of New Words*<sup>1)</sup> are shown to have been coined in the U.S. In recent years, AmE has given us such memorable expressions as *cyberpunks*, *ghetto blasters*, *baby boomers*, *affluenza*, and *burn-out*.

## 2.3 Discussion

We have mentioned some of the most commonly voiced views on the respective merits of British and American English. How many of these are based on actual fact, and even if they are, does this necessarily make one variety 'better' than the other?

Regarding British English, yes, it has a long history (as we shall see in the next section) and it is indeed the language of Shakespeare and Chaucer, but what bearing do these facts have on the language *today*? British English nowadays is nothing like the English of Shakespeare, which in turn was quite different from that of Chaucer.

While it is true that British English had an early great influence throughout the world, it could be argued that if it were not for the dominant economic position of the U.S.A. today England most certainly would not have attained its present standing; as Bryson<sup>2)</sup> puts it, 'without America's contribution English today would enjoy a global importance about on par with Portuguese'.

For many people BrE is prestigious, but just as many would use the words 'dull' or 'staid'. Such views are usually the result of historical or geographical loyalties, or interest in a particular culture, rather than any inherent linguistic properties of the variety. In any case, what people are usually thinking of is 'BBC English' or 'the Queen's English', which in fact is spoken by only an elite few in Britain. And it is certainly not true that the English used in America is more slovenly or careless than BrE—in fact the opposite could be said to be true, with Americans speaking more slowly and precisely than their British counterparts (see Section 4.3.8).

Let us look again at the arguments in support of AmE. True, a far greater number of people speak it, but how does that make it a better language? By this reasoning, Chinese, which is spoken by more people in the world than any other tongue (about one billion), should be the prime contender for world language.

It cannot be disputed that many technological terms originate in the U.S., but most of these are rapidly absorbed into BrE. The same applies to newly coined words and idioms, with television and films quickly bringing the latest American slang and colloquialisms to the U.K. AmE is certainly 'creative', but many people would argue that too much change too quickly is not a good thing. Anyway, the traffic is not entirely one-way: *miniskirt*, *smog*, and *even cop* all originated in Britain.

By now it will be obvious that this type of argument is pointless. What it shows, hopefully, is that any notions of good or bad, right or wrong, are ludicrous. They are judgements based solely on social and cultural norms, and there certainly is no linguistic basis for believing that any language variety is intrinsically superior to another<sup>3)</sup>. However, we have to bear in mind that, no matter how misguided they may be, teachers and learners often do have such prejudices, with far-reaching consequences for the EFL classroom.

### 3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF ENGLISH

This section outlines the story of the rise of English from a language spoken by a very small number of people in its early history to its present position of world language with two great British and American families.

English is primarily a Germanic language, brought to Britain in the fifth century by invading Angle, Saxon, Jute and Frisian tribes of north-western Germany and southern Denmark. The history of the language can be conveniently divided into three periods: the Old English period (c.407–1100), Middle English (1100–1500), and Modern English (1500 onwards). For a more detailed history of the language, see Baugh and Cable<sup>4)</sup>, Barber<sup>5)</sup>, or Claiborne<sup>6)</sup>.

#### 3.1 Old English

The closely related languages of the Anglo-Saxons formed the basis of English, but it also borrowed from church Latin and Greek and Old Norse. The West Saxon dialect became the standard form as many translations of Latin works were made at Winchester during the reign of Alfred the Great in the second half of the ninth century. Viking invasions from AD 750 to 1050 resulted in large numbers of Scandinavian settlers, who greatly influenced the development of Old English by contributing several thousand common words. After the Norman Conquest in 1066, Norman French became the language of the aristocracy and the court, and it remained so for over two hundred years, with the result that many French words were absorbed into English.

#### 3.2 Middle English

The great literature of Geoffrey Chaucer contributed to the growth in prestige of London English, and this dialect eventually established itself as the standard. The influence of French resulted in the adoption of more than 10,000 loan-words, and seventy-five percent

of these are still in use. A major change was the loss of Old English word-endings, with the language changing from a highly inflected (Germanic) one to a very analytical (modern) one.

### 3.3 Modern English

#### 3.3.1 *Early Modern English (1500–1800)*

The printing press set up by William Caxton in Westminster Abbey in 1476 gave a major impetus to the formation of a standard written and spoken language. A great expansion of vocabulary in the sixteenth century resulted in the first dictionaries, the most notable being that of Samuel Johnson in 1755. By 1800, the publication of comprehensive grammars and dictionaries had resulted in a regulated language, with acceptable usage clearly specified. Spelling was standardised, and the 'Great Vowel Shift', an alteration in the quality of the long vowels, marked a major change in the transition from Middle English to Modern English. English was used as the national language for all purposes, but the rediscovery of the classics in Europe meant that it was still heavily under the influence of Latin, and to a lesser extent, Greek. Although words entered English from more than fifty languages (many at the time of expansion of the British Empire), the most important sources of new words were Latin and Greek, followed by French, Italian, and Spanish.

#### 3.3.2 *Nineteenth Century English*

During this time of the Industrial Revolution and the Victorian Age, there were events of great political and social importance, but there were no major changes in the language. Newspapers, the postal service, and improved means of travel and communication resulted in a spread in the influence of standard speech, with English dialect terms becoming standard English. Words began to come to England from the United States.

#### 3.3.3 *American English*

This variety was to become the chief rival of British English, and its history can be classified into three periods. These correspond to socio-political events which had important consequences for the language: (1) The Colonial Period, during which a distinctive American English was developing; (2) The National Period, during which AmE was firmly established and consolidated; and (3) The International Period, which has seen AmE increasingly influence and be influenced by other English varieties as well as other languages.

##### (1) The Colonial Period (1607–1776)

The first permanent English settlement was in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. The colonists were Elizabethan contemporaries of Shakespeare, Bacon, and Marlowe, but most had only a minimal education and spoke a far less elaborate and eloquent variety of English. Although the colonies were still dependent on England for authority and a

standard, the steady mingling of settlers from a variety of locations hastened the development of a new uniform, mutually understandable variety of English. Words took on new meanings, and many were borrowed from other groups, especially the Native Americans (*chipmunk*, *igloo*), Spanish (*pronto*, *stampede*), Dutch (*boss*, *dumb*), French (*bureau*, *prairie*), and African slaves (*voodoo*, *hoodoo*).

## (2) The National Period (1776–1898)

After the War of Independence (1776–83) and the resulting political autonomy came a desire for cultural independence. Noah Webster, in his book *Dissertations on the English Language* (1789), proposed the institution of a standard American language. ‘Our honor’, he wrote, ‘requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government.’ To this end, he published his *American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828, which was to have an enormous influence on American spelling in particular, as well as usage and pronunciation. The large numbers of immigrants from Europe, and contacts with Spanish speakers in Florida and the West, meant that foreign influences continued to be important. Towards the end of the period, improved communications, journalism, the expansion of education, and the publication of textbooks and dictionaries all helped to shape the language of the American people.

## (3) The International Period (from 1898)

Although The United States had hitherto followed a fairly strict isolationist policy, after the Spanish-American War in 1898 both the country and its language became internationally important. Overseas concerns proliferated, and after World War I, Americans played an increasingly influential role on the world stage. American English usage reflected this change, and the world was exposed more and more to U.S. customs and language through American movies and popular music, World War II, technological developments, and an insatiable appetite for all things American from Mickey Mouse to the Big Mac.

### 3.3.4 *Modern English (1900–Present)*

The present century has seen national, and most importantly, international varieties of English coming into prominence.

#### (1) National Varieties of English

Science and technology, the entertainment industry, and the automobile have all contributed words to the English lexicon. Many familiar old words have been given a new, technical meaning (a computer’s ‘mouse’, for instance). A large number of words like the French *chauffeur*, the Spanish *machismo* and the Indian *karma* have been borrowed from other languages. New words have been formed from Latin and Greek elements (e.g. *automobile*, from the Greek for ‘self’ and the Latin for ‘movable’). ‘Self-explaining compounds’ such as *skydiving* and *junk food* have been another source of new words. Many words have been deliberately coined, e.g. *dictaphone* and *brunch*, and acronyms like

'AIDS' (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) and 'TEFL' (teaching English as a foreign language) are being used ever more frequently. Slang is now playing an increasingly important role in the language.

## (2) International Varieties of English

The most significant development in the history of twentieth century English has been the emergence of new regional varieties throughout the world. As well as in the United States, standard forms now exist in Australia, New Zealand, the South Pacific, Canada, South Africa, and the Caribbean; standards are becoming established in East and South Asia, and West, East, and Southern Africa.

# 4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

Having seen how the English language developed and how the British and American varieties came to be different, we are now in a better position to consider the similarities and differences in terms of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and grammar.

## 4.1 Differences of Vocabulary

It is apparent that the greatest divergences between the two varieties involve vocabulary. Differences are numerous, with perhaps some 4,000 words being used differently in one country from the other, with the potential to cause quite serious comprehension problems. Some differences are well-known in both countries (e.g. *lift/elevator*, *biscuit/cookie*), but it is when the same word is used with different meanings that confusion arises. Trudgill and Hannah<sup>7)</sup> divide vocabulary differences into four categories: 1) Same word, different meaning; 2) same word, additional meaning in one variety; 3) same word, difference in style, connotation, or frequency of use; and 4) same concept or item, different word. In addition, it is possible to categorise lexical differences according to the semantic fields in which they are found. Todd and Hancock<sup>8)</sup> list these as: **Business and Finance, Clothes, Education, Food and Drink, Household and Accommodation, and Travel.** British and American idioms can also sometimes differ, with the idiom of one country often difficult or even impossible to understand in the other.

### 4.1.1 *Words with Different Meanings*

Fortunately there are not many words of this type, for they are potentially the most confusing. For instance, in British English *homely* means plain and simple, but also comfortable and welcoming, whereas in American English it means ugly or unattractive; *pants* are underwear in Britain, trousers in America.

### 4.1.2 *Words with Additional Meanings*

Words of this type are more common. In addition to a shared meaning, there is an additional meaning specific to one variety. A *caravan*, for instance, is 'a group of travellers



in a desert' in both British and American English, but only in BrE does it have the sense of 'vehicle towed by a car'. Similarly, a *school* in both countries is a place where children are educated, but in America it can also be a college or university.

#### 4.1.3 *Words Differing in Style, Connotation, or Frequency*

The word *autumn*, for example, is commonly used in both formal and informal styles in British English, but it is uncommon in informal American English (*fall* is used instead). In BrE, *clever* has a positive connotation, whereas in AmE it has the usually negative connotation of 'sly'. Although *flat* and *apartment* are used in both varieties, the former is frequent in BrE and the latter in AmE.

#### 4.1.4 *Different Words for the Same Concept or Item*

Most lexical differences between British and American English are of this type: the words have a single sense, and a synonym in the other variety. Some such words are widely recognised as being equivalent: AmE *gas* v. BrE *petrol*, or *sidewalk* v. *pavement*, for instance, but there are also words which are often known only in one country: *sophomore* is only used in AmE to describe a second-year university student, and *joint* (meaning roast meat, not marijuana!) is only known in Britain.

#### 4.1.5 *Idioms*

Many idioms differ only slightly between the two varieties, as in BrE *sweep under the carpet*, *a storm in a teacup*, *blow one's own trumpet*; AmE *sweep under the rug*, *a tempest in a teacup*, *blow one's own horn*. However, problems arise when the same phrase has different meanings. *What's up?*, for instance, is equivalent to 'what's wrong?' in BrE, but usually means 'what's happening?' in AmE. In Britain, *to table a motion* means to put it forward for discussion; in America, it means to put it aside. Probably the best known example is *to knock up*, which means to wake someone up in Britain; in America a woman who had been 'knocked up' would find herself pregnant! Other idioms have no real equivalent in the other variety, for example *hard cheese* (bad luck) in BrE, and *a bum steer* (bad advice) in AmE.

#### 4.1.6 *Differences According to Semantic Field*

The major semantic fields in which differences occur are listed below with some examples.

##### (1) **Business and Finance**

###### AmE

drugstore/pharmacy

sales clerk

bill (restaurant)

realtor

###### BrE

chemist's (shop)

shop assistant

check

estate agent

**(2) Clothes**AmE

sweater

purse

suspenders

pants

BrE

jumper

handbag

braces

trousers

**(3) Education**AmE

private school

public school

graduate

assistant professor

BrE

public school

state school

postgraduate

lecturer

**(4) Food and Drink**AmE

French fries

chips

eggplant

to broil

BrE

chips

crisps

aubergine

to grill

**(5) Household and Accommodation**AmE

apartment

yard

first floor

wash up

BrE

flat

garden

ground floor

do the dishes

**(6) Travel**AmE

parking lot

hood (of car)

intersection

trailer truck

BrE

car park

bonnet

junction

articulated lorry

**4.2 Differences of Spelling**

A number of spelling differences exist between British and American English (*theatre/theater, colour/color, tyre/tire* etc.), and it is primarily these which give away the origin of a text. Noah Webster, with his prestigious dictionaries, is chiefly responsible for standardising American spelling, although many spellings were in fact fixed by custom and usage. Some changes have taken place since Webster's day. The most

commonly occurring differences are categorised and given below.

#### 4.2.1 BrE: *-our*/AmE: *-or*

Common abstract nouns end in *-our* in the UK and *-or* in the USA: e.g. *behaviour/behavior, favour/favor, endeavour/endeavor*. However, both countries use *-or* for words signifying persons (e.g. *governor*) and for medical/scientific nouns (e.g. *tremor*).

#### 4.2.2 BrE: *-re*/AmE: *-er*

In words of this type, BrE has *-re* where AmE has *-er* (*theatre/theater, lire/liter, metre/meter, sombre/somber*, etc. In both countries, *-er* is used for people and for many verbs (*writer, builder, cater, peter out*, etc.).

#### 4.2.3 BrE: *-ae/oe-*/AmE: *-e-*

In words of Greek origin, the BrE spellings *-ae/oe-* are usually replaced by *-e-* in AmE, although the BrE spellings are often found in scholarly works. Examples of this type are *foetus/fetus, encyclopaedia/encyclopedia*, and *manoeuvre/maneuver*.

#### 4.2.4 BrE: *single -l-*/AmE: *double -l-*

Words or morphemes which end in *l* in BrE often have *ll* in AmE. Examples of these are *instal/install, fulfilment/fulfillment, and skilful/skillful*.

#### 4.2.5 BrE: *doubled consonant*/AmE: *single consonant*

In BrE, consonants are often doubled before the morphological endings *-ed, -ing* and *-or/-er*, which start with a vowel, and when the stress is not on the last syllable of the stem; the doubling is usually optional in AmE. Common examples are *travelling/traveling, worshipped/worshiped, kidnapper/kidnaper*, and *marvellous/marvelous*.

#### 4.2.6 BrE: *-ise*/AmE: *-ize*

Some verbs can only have *-ize* in both BrE and AmE (e.g. *seize, capsiz*e), and in some, only *-ise* is possible (*surprise, advertise*). However, in many, both endings are possible, and for such verbs, AmE uses *-ize* exclusively, whereas BrE has both *-ise* and *-ize* (e.g. *apologise/apologize, realise/realize, capitalise/capitalize*).

#### 4.2.7 BrE: *en-*/AmE: *in-*

In Britain, the prefix *en-* is often replaced in the USA by *in-*, as in *enclose/inclose, enquire/inquire, and endorse/indorse*.

#### 4.2.8 BrE: *-ce*/AmE: *-se*

In words such as *licence* BrE prefers the *-ce* ending whereas AmE favours *license*. However, both forms occur in AmE (e.g. *defence/defense, practice/practise*), and both countries have *immense, incense, and intense*.

#### 4.2.9 BrE: *-ogue*/AmE: *-og*

In words like *dialog(ue)*, *catalog(ue)* and *analog(ue)*, AmE often drops *-ue*. An exceptional case in BrE is *analog*, which when used in contrast to *digital* follows the American spelling.

#### 4.2.10 Informal spellings

In the USA there are a number of non-standard, simplified spellings which are often used to attract attention or to save space. Such spellings are becoming increasingly seen in Britain, too. They are acceptable in advertising or informal settings, but not in formal contexts in either country. Examples include *donut* (doughnut), *kwik* (quick), *tonite* (tonight), *thru* (through), and *thanx* (thanks).

#### 4.2.11 Miscellaneous spellings

There are many other words which are not included in the above categories but normally have different spellings in the UK and the USA. A sample of these is given in the following list:

<u>BrE</u>	<u>AmE</u>
programme	program (although cf. BrE computer program)
cheque	check
draught	draft
plough	plow
sulphur	sulfur
wagon	waggon
tyre	tire
whiskey	whisky
speciality	specialty
moustache	mustache

#### 4.2.12 Punctuation Differences

There are relatively few differences between BrE and AmE punctuation, but American punctuation is slightly more rigid and uniform. The main differences are as follows:

- 1) BrE uses *No.* for 'number' (as in *No.5*); the symbol # is preferred in AmE (which would write #5).
- 2) In the first word after a colon, AmE prefers a capital letter, BrE a lower case letter.
- 3) Commas and full stops are normally placed before quotation marks in AmE and after them in BrE:

*Presently* means 'now' in AmE; in BrE it means 'in a short while.' (AmE)

*Presently* means 'now' in AmE; in BrE it means 'in a short while'. (BrE)

- 4) Unlike BrE, AmE prefers to use a comma between clauses in compound sentences.
- 5) Whereas BrE favours *x, y and z* in a list of three or more items, AmE prefers *x, y, and z*.
- 6) BrE uses a raised dot for the decimal point; AmE uses an ordinary period.

### 4.3 Differences of Pronunciation

The distinctive pronunciation of American English is a result of the merging of the speech of the English colonists in the United States, with further changes being accelerated by the pidgin English of other European settlers. British and American speech sound very obviously different, but comparison is difficult due to the diversity of speech forms within both BrE and AmE. It is usual to base comparisons on the pronunciations shown in British dictionaries (Received Pronunciation, or RP, which is derived from educated speech in southern England) and those shown in American dictionaries (General American, or GA). There are several regular differences between the two varieties, and many words have individually different pronunciations. It is impossible to go into all the differences here, but some of the major ones are listed below.

#### 4.3.1 *The Treatment of R*

GA is rhotic and RP is non-rhotic, that is, in GA, post-vocalic /r/ is always pronounced, whereas in RP it is not pronounced unless a vowel follows (a longer vowel is used instead). In RP, therefore, /r/ does not occur finally in words like *car* or *over* unless the following word begins with a vowel. Interestingly, most English people at one time had rhotic /r/; they still do in the north of England and Scotland.

#### 4.3.2 *The Treatment of A*

RP has many words with /ɑ:/ which are pronounced with /a/ in GA (and Northern English, too). They include *after, dance, part, laugh, sample, and can't*. To complicate matters, however, there are some words in RP which may be expected to have /ɑ:/ but do not: *cant, grand, and hand*, for instance.

#### 4.3.3 *Other Vowel Differences*

- 1) In RP, *o* in words like *hot* or *dog* is pronounced with rounded lips and the tongue back, whereas in GA it is unrounded.
- 2) In GA, there is no /j/ glide before a stressed *u*-vowel, so the first vowel sound in words like *Tuesday, due, and news* is /u/; in RP, it is /ju/.
- 3) Words like *Mary, marry, and merry* tend to be homophones in GA, but not in RP.

#### 4.3.4 *T Moving Towards 'd' in GA*

In GA, the letters 't' and 'd' have a very similar light /d/ sound when they are not the initial consonant in a word; in some cases, 't' disappears altogether. Thus the words *rider* and *writer* sound almost the same, and *winner* and *winter* may also be identical.

### 4.3.5 Stress Differences

There are a number of words which are stressed differently in the two varieties. Speakers of RP, for instance, say *adver'tisement* and *labo'ratory*, never *advertise'ment* or *lab'oratory*. In Britain, it is *detail* and *research*, in America, *detail* and *research*. In words of four or more syllables, GA speakers tend to use more secondary and tertiary stresses than speakers of RP, so whereas the English say *sec'ret'ry* and *nec'ess'ry*, in America all the syllables are accented. In words like *ballet* and *beret*, RP has stress on the first syllable; GA stresses the second syllable.

### 4.3.6 Words Ending in -ile

Words ending in -ile tend to be pronounced /əl/ in GA and /ail/ in RP. The word *mis-sile*, for example, is usually pronounced /misəl/ in America, and /misail/ in Britain. Other words of this type are *fertile*, *mobile*, and *juvenile*.

### 4.3.7 Miscellaneous Differences

A number of individual words are pronounced differently in the two countries; some of the better-known of these are:

<u>Item</u>	<u>GA</u>	<u>RP</u>
route	rhymes with <i>bout</i>	rhymes with <i>boot</i>
shone	rhymes with <i>bone</i>	rhymes with <i>gone</i>
figure	fig + yer	fig + er
lever	rhymes with <i>ever</i>	rhymes with <i>weaver</i>
tomato	tom-ay-do	tom-ah-to
herb	'erb	herb
apricot	a-pricot	ay-pricot
vase	rhymes with <i>face</i>	rhymes with <i>cars</i>
privacy	pry-vacy	pri-vacy
leisure	leezure	lezure

### 4.3.8 Tone and Speed of Speech

Even if an American and a Briton were pronouncing their words in exactly the same way it would still be possible to tell them apart, primarily because of differences in the tone and rate of their speech. In general, the British speak quickly, while Americans, with their more distinct division of syllables, tend to speak more slowly, deliberately, and clearly. Speakers of British English use a greater variety of tone than American English speakers, whose speech often sounds flat and monotonous – laid-back? – to British ears. Many Americans also speak with a pronounced nasal 'twang', although there are regional and individual differences.

## 4.4 Differences of Grammar

### 4.4.1 Adjectives and Adverbs

- (a) In colloquial AmE adjectives are often used where BrE requires an adverb:  
*He works **awful** hard.*  
*That was a **real** good party.*
- (b) *Different* is often followed by *from* in BrE and *than* in AmE:  
*British English is different **than** American English. (AmE)*  
*British English is different **from** American English. (BrE)*
- (c) Speakers of BrE use the present perfect tense with the adverbs *already* and *yet*, whereas many American speakers choose the simple past:  
*Did you finish your homework **yet**? (AmE)*  
*Have you finished your homework **yet**? (BrE)*  
*They **already** went home. (AmE)*  
*They've **already** gone home. (BrE)*

#### 4.4.2 Articles

The following are some phrases in which article use tends to differ:

<u>AmE</u>	<u>BrE</u>
in <b>the</b> hospital	in hospital
go to <b>the</b> university	go to university
in <b>the</b> future	in future
be at table	be at <b>the</b> table

#### 4.4.3 Auxiliaries and Quasi-modals

- (a) **Dare** and **need** are less commonly used as quasi-modals in AmE:

<u>AmE</u>	<u>BrE</u>
I don't <b>dare</b> do it.	I <b>daren't</b> do it.
You don't have to stop.	You <b>needn't</b> stop

- (b) The use of the dummy auxiliary **do** tends to be different:

<u>AmE</u>	<u>BrE</u>
<b>Do</b> you have a car?	Have you (got) a car?
Yes, I <b>do</b> .	Yes, I have.

- (c) AmE generally has **will/won't** where BrE has **shall/shan't**:

<u>AmE</u>	<u>BrE</u>
I <b>won't</b> do it.	I <b>shan't</b> do it.
We <b>will</b> have to leave.	We <b>shall</b> have to leave.

- (d) In AmE, **would** is often seen as an equivalent to **used to** in BrE when denoting regular past actions:

*When I was young, I **would** listen to the radio every day.* (AmE)

*When I was young, I **used to** listen to the radio every day.* (BrE)

#### 4.4.4 Noun Forms

- (a) Collective nouns more often take a singular verb and pronoun substitution in AmE:

*The team **is** playing very well, **isn't it**?* (AmE)

*The team **are** playing very well, **aren't they**?* (BrE)

- (b) It is more usual for nouns to be used as verbs and vice versa in American than British English, reflecting more flexibility with regard to grammatical form:

<u>Noun</u>	<u>Verb</u>
<i>pressure</i>	<i>to pressure</i>
<i>garage</i>	<i>to garage</i>
<u>Verb</u>	<u>Noun</u>
<i>to know how</i>	<i>the know-how</i>
<i>to stop over</i>	<i>a stopover</i>

#### 4.4.5 Prepositions

There are several small differences in the use of prepositions, for example:

<u>AmE</u>	<u>BrE</u>
<i>It's <b>ten of</b> two.</i>	<i>It's <b>ten to</b> two.</i>
<i>It's twenty <b>after</b> nine.</i>	<i>It's twenty <b>past</b> nine.</i>
<i>Tuesdays I take a day off.</i>	<i><b>On</b> Tuesdays I take a day off.</i>
<i>Do you live <b>on</b> Baker Street?</i>	<i>Do you live <b>in</b> Baker Street?</i>
<i>I usually stay home <b>on</b> the weekend.</i>	<i>I usually stay <b>at</b> home <b>at</b> the weekend.</i>
<i>He moved <b>toward</b> the front.</i>	<i>He moved <b>towards</b> the front.</i>
<i>Could you fill <b>out</b> this form?</i>	<i>Could you fill <b>in</b> this form?</i>

#### 4.4.6 Verb Forms

The following are just some of the more common differences of the verb.

- (a) Perhaps the most distinctive of grammatical differences is that where AmE has the past participle **gotten** used in the sense of *acquired* or *obtained*, BrE has **got**.

<u>AmE</u>	<u>BrE</u>
<i>He's <b>gotten</b> a new car.</i>	<i>He's <b>got</b> a new car.</i>

- (b) AmE speakers are less likely to use **to** or **and** after **come** and **go**.

<u>AmE</u>	<u>BrE</u>
<i>Come <b>see</b> me in the morning.</i>	<i>Come <b>to see</b> me in the morning.</i>
<i>Do you want to go <b>see</b> a movie?</i>	<i>Do you want to go <b>to see</b> a film?</i>



Go *do* it now.

Go *and do* it now.

- (c) AmE makes more use of the subjunctive than BrE.

AmE

*I asked that he come at once.*

*It is necessary for them to be here.*

BrE

*I asked him to come at once.*

*It is necessary that they should be here.*

- (d) There are some differences in verb morphology, e.g.

AmE

*dived/dove*

*learned*

*snuck*

BrE

*dived*

*learnt*

*sneaked*

## 4.5 Discussion

We have seen that although the differences between BrE and AmE might be greater than expected, they are, on the whole, relatively minor. Different lexis, idioms and colloquialisms provide the greatest barrier to communication between speakers of the two varieties. Grammatical differences are relatively few and trivial, and although there are many spelling and pronunciation differences, they are generally systematic and easy to learn.

Trivial or otherwise, these dissimilarities have important consequences for both teachers and learners of English, as we shall see in the next section.

## 5 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

What, then, are the implications for the English language classroom of the prejudices and differences that we have discussed thus far?

### 5.1 Implications for Learners

#### 5.1.1 *Both Forms are Equal*

Of course many learners will be exposed to the 'other' form of English during their studies, through meeting other students, or through overseas travel. It is natural that they will form their own opinions on the relative merits of either variety, but they must be discouraged from expressing any biased views which could lead to animosity or disruption of the class. While it is good for learners to be aware of the existence of the different forms of English, reflecting different cultures, they have to understand that in no way is one form superior to the other. There is no place for prejudice or bias of any kind in the classroom.

#### 5.1.2 *It is Not Necessary to Learn Two Languages!*

Learners may be worried that they have to learn two languages, rather than one. However, they should realise that once they have acquired competence in either British

or American English, they will have little difficulty in understanding the other kind if they are given sufficient exposure to it. As mentioned previously, many of the differences are systematic and easy to learn. Moreover, although they can be expected to understand both forms, learners need only be able to *produce* in one.

## 5.2 Implications for Teachers

### 5.2.1 *A Model Should be Chosen and Adhered to*

In some cases, the teacher has no choice as to the language model he must use. If the teacher is able to choose, he should select and adhere to the model used most widely in his own particular language-teaching situation (which would mean AmE in most Japanese schools and colleges). A British English teacher such as myself would then be required to conform to American usage and spellings. Of course it will not be possible or even desirable for the teacher to change his pronunciation, but use of videos and cassette tapes can help to give learners more aural exposure to the target form.

### 5.2.2 *Personal Prejudices Must be Set Aside*

The teacher, too, must keep his personal prejudices out of the classroom. Feelings of pride in one's own language are natural and bound up with national identity, but any compulsion to disparage the other way of speaking must be resisted.

### 5.2.3 *A Knowledge of the Differences is Necessary*

We saw that although the two varieties are essentially the same, numerous differences do exist. Many of these differences are potentially highly confusing, and so it is vital that the teacher of English acquire a systematic knowledge of them. In Japan, this applies equally to an American teaching his own form of the language, because, as mentioned before, the 'dual tradition' means that there is a probability that many learners have been exposed to BrE too. (The teacher will be greatly assisted by the recent proliferation in AmE-BrE dictionaries and reference books which treat the differences between the two varieties.) Such knowledge will also enable the teacher to know whether to correct or not, and when to accept or reject variants which are not his own. By avoiding unnecessary 'correcting' of differences, the teacher will be able to utilise valuable classroom time more effectively.

### 5.2.4 *Differences Should Not be Stressed*

The teacher must be familiar with where the two forms are similar and where they diverge, but at the same time he should play down the differences and not bring them up unnecessarily. If possible, he should focus on usages which are common to both forms or where the differences are insignificant. It is important to remember and reinforce the idea that a learner with reasonable proficiency in one form can easily learn to understand the other.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In our investigation into the characteristics of British and American English we have found that while the two varieties are fundamentally very similar, there are still many divergences and opportunities for confusion. Differences of spelling and grammar are not likely to cause serious problems, and pronunciation differences, while distinguishing a speaker as either British or American, provide no real barrier to communication. However, lexical differences are considerable and potentially problematical. BrE and AmE, then, are different, but we saw that there is no basis whatsoever for maintaining that one variety is better than the other.

These findings have consequences for both language learners and teachers. We recognised that in the English language classroom potential problems can be minimised by treating BrE and AmE as equal and playing down the differences. For the teacher, a thorough knowledge of where the two varieties diverge is essential, and learners have to be reassured that once they are reasonably competent in either BrE or AmE, they can learn to understand the other form of English with little difficulty.

As for the future, it seems likely that the trend towards the increasing dominance of AmE will continue, at least for a while, although the interchange of TV programmes, films, novels, and scientific journals will help to even out the differences between the two varieties. Whatever happens, it is certain that English will continue its onward march towards world domination and an estimated one billion speakers by the year 2000. Ultimately, as Stevens<sup>9)</sup> points out, whether we teach our students British English or American English is of little concern. It is teaching *English* that matters.

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