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The Spelling distinction Between British and American English

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to trace the course of how British English differs from American English. That is, in comparing two varieties of a language, it is convenient to take one as the basis for comparison and to describe the other by contrast with it. The researcher will select about (100 words) that the two varieties are mostly different in spelling them. This study takes American as its basis and describes British in relation to that basis(John Algeo,2006).The results and conclusion of this paper revealed that American has more native speakers than British and is rapidly becoming the dominant form of English in non-native countries other perhaps than those of Western Europe. Much European established academic bias favors British as a model; but evolving popular culture is biased toward American. This widespread dissemination of the American variety makes it a reasonable basis for describing British.

Keywords: Spelling differences, British spelling, American spelling, informal spelling, prepositional differences, punctuation differences , one letter differences.

Background

There are many varieties of English other than British (here the English of the United Kingdom) and American (here the English of the United States). All of those other varieties are intrinsically just as worthy of study and use as British and American. But these two varieties are the ones spoken by most native speakers of English and studied by most foreign learners. They have a special status as the two principal national varieties of the language simply because there is more material available in them than in any other variety(John Algeo,2006).

The most obvious difference between British and American is in the “tune” of the language, that is, the intonation that accompanies sentences. When a Briton or an American talks, they identify themselves primarily by the tunes of their respective varieties. In singing, the prose tune is overridden by the musical tune, making it much



harder to distinguish British and American singers(John Algeo,2006). The main difference is that British English keeps the spelling of words it has absorbed from other languages, mainly French and German. Whilst American English spellings are based mostly on how the word sounds when it is spoken. English was introduced to what is modern day America in the 17th century by the British settlers. Since then the language has evolved and has been influenced by the many waves of immigration to the USA.

The spelling of British English words were cemented by Samuel Johnson in what is considered to be one of the most famous dictionaries in the world. It took Johnson, and six helpers, just over eight years to curate the 40,000 words that appeared in ‘A Dictionary of the English Language’, which was published in.(1755)

Similarly in America ‘A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language’ was first printed in (1806) and popularised the American English spellings that were being used instead of the British English spellings of words, such as color instead of colour. The author was Noah Webster who followed up the original dictionary in 1828 with his ‘An American Dictionary of the English Language’ which had over 70,000 words.

Review of Literature

“A British reader looking at a newspaper or magazine from Australia or South Africa would not find too many unfamiliar words. Not so with American English. Words such as caboose, bleachers, and busboy are everyday words in the US, but they would perplex the average speaker of British English”, Christopher Davies.(2005)

Many English-speaking people are not aware of the vast differences o distinction accounted between British and American English. It is advisable for English teachers and students who are interested in studying English and carry out greater research on English is to know the difference between British and American English.

According to Edward Carney(1997), “British English is the form of English now used in the country whence all other forms of English have ultimately derived. But present-day



British is not the origin of any other variety of the language; rather it and all the other varieties are equally descendant from a form of English spoken in the British Isles in earlier times. In some respects, present-day British is closer to the common ancestral form of the present-day varieties than is American or other varieties; but in other respects the reverse is true, and American, for instance, pre-serves older uses that became obsolete in British use. To mistake present-day British for the ancestor of all other forms of English is a logical and factual error.

Noah Webster, the well-known American lexicographer, fore-cast back in 1789 that eventually American English would be as different from British English as Dutch, Danish, and Swedish are from German, or from one another. This may sound preposterous, but Webster himself did initiate some of the biggest changes in American spelling. His American Dictionary of the English Language became the standard for spelling and word usage in America.

According to Christopher Davies(2005) British and American English probably reached their greatest divergence just before the Second World War and since that time have been getting closer, or at least better understood by the other country.

This paper will adopt the work of Davies, Christopher, (2005) in his book entitle” Divided by a common language : a guide to British and American Where his research was referred to ‘The American spellings below are those preferred by The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, while the British spellings are those recommended by the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, except in the case of words ending in- ise (seebelow). There are alternative ways of spelling some words:

Spelling differences

American English

British English



Abridgement	Abridgement
Accoutrement	Accoutrement
Acknowledgement	Acknowledgement
adapter +	Adaptor
Aging	Ageing
Aluminum	Aluminium
Ameba	amoeba+
Analyze	Analyse
Anesthetic	Anaesthetic
apologize +	Apologise
Appall	Appal
appetizer +	Appetizer
Arbor	Arbour
Ardor	Ardour
Armor	Armour
Armorer	Armourer
Armory	Armoury
Artifact	Artifact
authorize +	Authorize
Behavior	Behavior



Behoove Behove
Caliper Caliper
CalisthenicsCalisthenics
Canceled cancelled+
Candor Candour
capitalize + Capitalize
Catalog Catalogue
Center Centre
Chamomile Chamomile
check (bank) Cheque
ChilliChilli
civilization + Civilisation
civilize + Civilise
Clamor Clamour
Clangor Clangour
Clarinetist Clarinetist
ColorColour
Counsellor Counsellor
Cozy Cosy
curb (on a street) Kerb



Czar Tsar

defense Defence

Demeanor Demeanour

dependent (noun) Dependant

dialing Dialling

diarrhea Diarrhoea

disk Disc

distill Distil

dolor Dolour

draft Draught

economize + Economise

Enamor Enamour

endeavor Endeavour

Enrol Enrol

enthrall Enthral

equalize + Equalise

Favour Favour

favorite Favourite

favoritism Favouritism

Fervor Fervour



Fiber Fibre

Flavour Flavour

Fulfil Fulfil

Furor Furore

Gage gauge+

gemology Gemmology

Gray grey+

harbor Harbour

harmonize + Harmonise

Honor honour

honorable honourable

humor humour

initialize + initialise

inquiry + enquiry

installment instalment

instill Instil

jail jail/gaol

Jeweller jeweller

Jewelry jewellery

Judgment judgement



Labor	labour
License	licence
Liter	litre
Maneuver	manoeuvre
Marvellous	marvellous
Memorize	memorise
Misdemeanour	misdemeanour
mobilize +	mobilise
Mold	mould
Molding	moulding
Mom	Mum
Mustache	Moustache
Naught	Nought
Neighbour	Neighbour
Neighbourhood	Neighbourhood
normalize +	Normalise
Odor	Odour
organize +	Organise
Pajamas	Pyjamas
Paralyze	Paralyse



Parlor Parlour
pasteurize + Pasteurise
peddler + Pedlar
Percent per cent
Persnickety Pernickety
Plow Plough
polarize + polarise+
practice (verb) Practise
Pretense Pretence
Program Programme
pulverize + Pulverise
Rancor Rancour
realize + Realise
recognize + Ecognise
Rigor Rigour
Rumor Rumour
savor savour
savory Savoury
skeptic sceptic
skillfUl skilful



specter spectre
spilled spilt
splendor splendour
story (of a building) storey
succor succour
Sulphur sulphur
symbolize +symbolise
sympathize + sympathise
theater theatre+
Tire tyre
traveler traveller
Tumor tumour
utilize + utilise
valor valour
vapor vapour
vaporize + vaporise
vigor vigour
vise (tool) vice
willftil wilful"
worshiper worshipper



One letter differences

Some words of special interest are those whose American and British spellings differ by just one letter, which, however, makes a difference in pronunciation. For the explanation of the origin of the difference between American and British English as illustrated in the table below:

American English	British English
aluminum [a-loo-mi-num]	aluminium [al-yoo-min-ee-um]
carburetor [kar-bur-ay-ter]	carburettor [kar-bu-re-ta]
Costumer	costumier [cos • tyoo • meea]
Crotch	crutch (crotch is also used)
divorcé/divorcée [di-vor-say]	divorcee [di-vors-ee]
Doodad	Doodah
Greenskeeper	greenkeeper
hot flashes	hot flushes
Jimmy	Jemmy
Mom	Mum
muss up	mess up+
noodle (meaning "the head")	Noddle
Persnickety	pernickety
pita [pe-ta] (bread)	pitta [pi • ta]



plunk (down)	Plonk
Pudgy	Podgy
Putter	Potter
Salesroom	Saleroom
Sappy	Soppy
specialty [spesh-al-tee]	speciality [spe-shee-al-i-tee]
Tidbit	Titbit

Some difference in Prepositional Usage:

The preposition is used more readily in the US following the word alk e.g., all of my life, outside of the us. The use of the preposition up is not very common with the verb to phone. Most Americans would just say I phoned him. However, Americans do not use ring as a verb meaning "to call on the telephone, " as in such phrases as / will ring him tomorrow, although they might say/ will give him a ring. Sometimes Americans may say pass up instead of pass (e.g., We passed them up a mile back). Sometimes you may hear change out instead of change (e.g., We had to change out the oil pump last year), but this is not the preferred usage.

Here are some other differences in prepositional usage.

American English British English

clue in clue up

cut off (in traffic) cut up

do over (make over) do up



hold for ransom hold to ransom

hold up/wait up hold on+

in heat on heat

in tow on tow

sell out (property) sell up

top off top up

wait on (await) wait for+

wait on (tables) wait at

A plus sign [+] after a term indicates that the term is known in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

Some differences in the Use of Suffixes

British English and American English sometimes differ in the use of the suffixes -ing and -ed. In order to sound truly like a native, you should note the following differences.

American English British English

dance class dancing class

dial tone dialling tone

Drainboard draining board

driver s license driving licence

file cabinet filing cabinet+

fry pan frying pan+

headed for heading for+



race car racing car
race meet race meeting
Rowboat rowing boat
Sailboat sailing boat
sawed-off sawn-off
scrub brush scrubbing brush
swinging door swing door

A plus sign [+] after a term indicates that the term is known in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

Some difference terms for the Punctuation for Punctuation

The British and American names for punctuation marks and other writing symbols also differ. The decimal point in the US is the same as a full stop, unlike the British decimal point, which is usually positioned halfway up the line.

American English British English

[]brackets + square brackets

{ }curly brackets braces

()parentheses brackets

/slash + stroke, oblique

/check mark tick

!exclamation point exclamation mark+

.period full stop



” “quotation marks + inverted commas

A plus sign [+] after a term indicates that the term is known in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

Discussion

It is realized that when adding a suffix to a word ending with an / in the US, remember to double the last / only if the stress is on the second syllable of the root word, e.g., travel, traveler but patrol patrolling. In Britain one always doubles the / in these words, e.g., snorkel, snorkelling.

Most words ending in — our in British spelling end in or in American spelling. Words ending with -re in British spelling usually end with —er in American spelling. Theatre is often spelled the British way.

The suffix -ize is still preferred by some British dictionaries for the following common words: apologize, capitalize, equalize, finalize, legalize, mobilize, organize, pasteurize, popularize, realize, standardize, symbolize, and vaporize. However, most Britons prefer the alternate — ise suffix with these words, which reflects the French influence on British English in the last 200 years.

Edward Carney(1997) states that, “Some other common words that Americans spell with z, but Britons with s, include analyze, cozy, and paralyze, which are spelled analyse, cosy, and paralyse in British English. Most words that have an a directly followed by an e in British English, such as orthopaedics and anaesthesia, are spelled without the a in American English. Similarly, the o is omitted in words such as oedema, oestrogen, foetus, and oesophagus in American English.”

Conclusion:

The article will concludes that , American English or British English may not be the same language to many researchers , This has been realized in most of the printed books and



academic institutions where the distinction is noted. The truth is that although it's the same language and Brits and Americans, for the most part, have no problem understanding each other, for non-native speakers it's a lot harder. In this regard the researcher realizes that the issue of spelling differences between British and American English is making confusion to many students. Students and EFL/ESL need to know to differentiate between the two varieties. This is good as some of them will major in English.

Cristina Cabal (2017) states that, "English for most learners is not an easy language to learn. To start, there are so many exceptions to pronunciation rules they are almost not worth learning. Also, the huge numbers of new words added to dictionaries make it almost impossible to keep up. Add to this the fact that, though English is spoken everywhere in the world, Brits and Americans use different terms to refer to the same things. So with that in mind, guessing whether a word is misspelled or it's just American or British spelling is a nightmare."

There is probably a lot to say about it, but a key reason is because British English has tried for the most part to keep the spelling of the words it has borrowed from other countries. American English however has tried to adapt the spelling of these words to the way they are pronounced in English in an effort to make spelling easier. As Mark Twain once said: "Anyone who can only think of one way to spell a word obviously lacks imagination".



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