

HISTORY OF BRITISH VS. AMERICAN ENGLISH

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Annotation: *In this article we want to introduce some similarities and differences of English language in some cases, for example spelling, pronunciation, and using the equivalent of the words.*

Key words: *English slangs, English dialects, Spelling differences, Equivalent idioms, Different meanings, American and British accent.*

American English is the form of English used in the United States. It includes all English dialects used within the United States of America. **British English** is the form of English used in the United Kingdom. It includes all English dialects used within the United Kingdom. **Differences between American and British English** include pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary (lexis), spelling, punctuation, idioms, and formatting of dates and numbers.

Comparison chart

Differences — Similarities —

American English

American English is the form of English used in the United States. It includes all English dialects used within the United States of America.

British English

British English is the form of English used in the United Kingdom. It includes all English dialects used within the United Kingdom. It is also used in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India and other Commonwealth regions

Pronunciation differences

Am.E. Some words pronounced differently in the languages are Methane, Interpol	Br.E. Some words pronounced differently in the languages are Methane, Interpol
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Spelling differences	flavor, honor, analyze, color etc.	flavour, honour, analyse, colour etc.
Title differences	Mr. , Mrs.	Mr, Mrs

Different meanings	ace, amber etc.	ace, amber etc.
Equivalent idioms	not touch something with a ten-foot pole, sweep under the rug*, knock on wood, see the forest for the trees	not touch something with a bargepole, sweep under the carpet, touch wood, see the wood for the trees

The English language was introduced to America through British colonization in the early 17th century. It also spread to many other parts of the world because of the strength of the British empire. Over the years, English spoken in the United States and in Britain started diverging from each other in various aspects. This led to a new dialects in the form of American English.

American vs. British accent

Prior to the Revolutionary War and American independence from the British in 1776, American and British accents were similar. Both were rhotic i.e. speakers pronounced the letter R in hard. Since 1776, the accents diverged but English accent in America has changed less drastically than accents in Britain.

Towards the end of the 18th century, non-rhotic speech took off in southern England, especially among the upper class; this “prestige” non-rhotic speech was standardized, and has been spreading in Britain ever since. Most American accents, however, remained rhotic.

There are a few fascinating exceptions: New York and New England accents became non-rhotic, perhaps because of the region's British connections. Irish and Scottish accents, however, remained rhotic.

To be fair, both American and British English have several types of accents and there is no one true American or British accent.

Noah Webster and the Blue-Backed Speller

Even after America gained independence, American schools used textbooks imported from England. Noah Webster, an American lexicographer, nationalist and prolific political writer, found them unsatisfactory. He disliked the influence and control of British aristocracy over the English language and its pedantic rules for spelling and pronunciation.

So in the 1780s Webster wrote and published A Grammatical Institute of the English Language a compendium that consisted of a speller (published in 1783), a grammar (published in 1784), and a reader (published in 1785). The speller became very popular and over time, Webster changed the spellings in the book to be more phonetic (e.g. color instead of colour; defense instead of defence). Webster's changes greatly influenced American English because his grammar books were so popular and used in schools throughout the country.

This influence was further solidified by Webster's dictionaries, first published in 1806. Noah Webster was a spelling reformer who believed that the spelling of words should match their pronunciation as much as possible.

Differences in use of tenses

In British English the present perfect is used to express an action that has occurred in the recent past that has an effect on the present moment. For example: *I've misplaced my pen. Can you help me find it?* In American English, the use of the past tense is also permissible: *I misplaced my pen. Can you help me find it?* In British English, however, using the past tense in this example would be considered incorrect.

Other differences involving the use of the present perfect in British English and simple past in American English include the words *already, just* and *yet*.

British English: *I've just had food. Have you finished your homework yet?*

American English: *I just had food. OR I've just had food. I've already seen that film. OR I already saw that film.*

Differences in Vocabulary

While some words may mean something in British English, the same word might be something else in American English and vice versa. For example, *Athlete* in British English is one who participates in track and field events whereas *Athlete* in American English is one who participates in sports in general.

Rubber in British English: tool to erase pencil markings.
Rubber in American English: elastic, resilient.

There are also some words like AC, Airplane, bro, catsup, cell phone etc. which are common in American English and not used very often in British English. Some words widely used in British English and seldom in American English are advert, anti clockwise, barrister, cat's eye.

Differences in Spelling

There are many words that are spelt differently in both forms of English. Some examples are:

American English spelling	British English spelling
color	colour
fulfill	fulfil
center	centre
analyze	analyse
aging	ageing
dialog	dialogue
anesthesia,	anaesthesia

A majority of the spelling differences between American and British English fall into the following categories:

• **Latin-derived spellings**

- -*our* (British) and -*or* (American). e.g. colour vs color
- -*re* (British) and -*er* (American). e.g. centre vs center
- -*ce* (British) and -*se* (American). e.g. defence vs defense

• **Greek-derived spellings**

- -*ise* (British) and -*ize* (American). e.g. centralise vs centralize
- -*yse* (British) and -*zye* (American). e.g. analyse vs analyze
- -*ogue* (British) and -*og* (American). e.g. dialogue vs dialog
- Simplification of *ae* and *oe* in American English. e.g. gynaecology vs gynecology

Differences in the use of Prepositions

There are also a few differences between British and American English in the use of prepositions. For example: While the British would play **in a team**, Americans would play **on a team**. Another example: While the British would go out **at the weekend**, Americans would go out **on the weekend**.

Differences in Verb usage

American and British English may also use a base verb in different manners. For example: For the verb “to dream”, Americans would use the past tense dreamed while the British would use dreamt in past tense. The same applies to “learned” and “learnt”. Another example of differing past tense spellings for verbs in American and British English is “forecast”. Americans use forecast while the British would say forecasted in simple past tense.

Differences in Pronunciation

Some words that are pronounced differently in American vs British English are controversy, leisure, schedule etc. There are also some words like Ax (Axe in British) and Defense (Defence in British) which have the same pronunciation but different spellings in both languages.

Time telling in British vs American English

Both languages have a slightly different structure of telling the time. While the British would say quarter past ten to denote 10:15, it is not uncommon in America to say quarter after or even a quarter after ten.

Thirty minutes after the hour is commonly called half past in both languages. Americans always write digital times with a colon, thus 6:00, whereas Britons often use a point, 6.00.

Differences in Punctuation

While the British would write Mr, Mrs, Dr, the Americans would write Mr., Mrs., Dr.

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