

American English and Its Influence on British English

Sevinj Mammadzada¹

¹ Odlar Yurdu University, Baku, Azerbaijan

Correspondence: Sevinj Mammadzada, Odlar Yurdu University, Baku, Azerbaijan.

Received: August 30, 2022

Accepted: October 14, 2022

Online Published: November 7, 2022

doi:10.5539/ijel.v13n1p21

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v13n1p21>

Abstract

This article deals with the regional variants of English language and describes in detail the currently relevant reasons for the appearance of language dialects and their existence in modern English. The main theoretical basis of this research proves that one person's individual speech is the result of mixing the regional varieties and their features. The research analyses foreign linguistical discussions about American variant of English and its influence on British English within different aspects. Various materials of scientific discussions, different authors' ideas and various comments of Internet users are in the list of materials that were used in this article. Based on dynamic and temporal characteristics of a speech, the article highlights the key features of British and American English and their territorial varieties. It also examines the influence of American English on other regional variants on the pronunciation and grammatical norms. The main object of the study is English language with its regional varieties. Analysis shows that the language reflection stands for significant component of national and cultural self-knowledge of English people. The article expresses the influence of American English on British English: firstly, on everyday vocabulary, phrases and expressions. Secondly, in the case of the functional varieties, the American influence is present in the field of journalism, broadcasting (cinema, television, music and so on.), politics, travelling, economics and so on.

Keywords: American English, British English, regional variations, dialect, Standard English

1. Introduction

What is language? A language is a system of communication which reflects the human mind. It can easily and dramatically change its form with the changes in society, can choose its shape from different cultures and traditions and helps to keep communication between people. Today's society is trying to improve, to exchange with the practice between different nations, countries and continents. This process leads to removal of the borders between nations, cultures and languages. Despite that people try to unite under one human being, cultures, national characteristics and traditions are still being kept. Recently we can easily observe different processes happening in the cultures and languages of many countries. From one side, society is trying to globalize by improving relationships between nations (economical relations, social relations, political relations and so on), from the other hand, with the globalization new traditions and national borders are formed. In this situation the language and the culture follow the modern rules trying to enter into the modern social life.

The theme of given research is actual for recent society. The increase of migration in the U.S.A. and immigration processes influence to the country's dialect picture, new words are born. Another reason is appearing of new phonetical accents which have some ethnic roots (Campbell, 2006).

American English is the result of British occupation of America in the XVII century, then in the XVIII and XIX centuries huge amount of English speakers started to settle in the new country. During these centuries various British accents started to be heard at every American colony. Since then, American English has had various new dialects, regional and social accents and started to differ from other dialects grammatically, lexically and phonetically.

2. American English

As a result of social, cultural and psycho-lingual researches the people's accents, especially in American society play a great role in person's presentation. Experiments and studies prove that Americans are easily able to find out social status, moral characteristics, literality or literalness and the culture of another speaker according to his or her accent. Phonetical characteristics and pronunciation can draw the social picture or portrait of one person. English language is not only the language of 300 million people who live in America, it is also the native

language of England, Canada, New Zealand and so on. The main thought of linguists about the variations of English is as following. Despite that the English is the official language of the countries above, there are several ethnic groups who live in these countries. They have their own language and dialects. And such difference forms this or another variation of English language.

Some of us while choosing which language to learn (British or American English) meet with difficulties, because this language doesn't have any standarts. So, we need to learn both of these variants. British English and American English. Despite all cultural relations year by year pronunciation, lexicology and orthoepy differ more and more between these two variants. For example, if an englishman tells the American citizen "I got a flat" it will be understood as "something was wrong with my wheels", however in British English it is understood as "I bought a new apartment or flat." (a place to live in) Both of these two variants are used, but which of them is more dominant? It has been very difficult question for linguists to answer for many years, because they influence each other and it is difficult to separate them from one another.

While studying American English we can meet with such words that are written similar, but have different meanings in British and American English. For example, the word *pants* means trousers in American English, but underwear in British English. Intonation also plays a great role in studying the language. According to intonation a sentence can be understood differently. Example:

I have two. [I hæv tu]

I have too. [I hæv tu:]

I have to. [I hæv tə]

American English is much more easier than British English. It has been formed on the basis of European nations. The popularity of American English is being proved according to the following facts:

- 1) American English speakers are more than British English speakers in number.
- 2) Economical situation of America is stronger than British economical situation (business English).
- 3) American mass-media is stronger, can easily influence on the World policy than British mass-media (International policy) (Чичина & Хузрахимова, 2016)

Globalization mentioned before is trying to form the pronunciation norms of English language. Recently it is happening through mass-media. To get the results they are using specially trained speakers in order to follow Standard English. Today, the U.S.A. is a multinational country which has never had one norm of a language. That's why it has so many dialects and accents. American English has the following dialects:

- 1) The north-eastern accent
- 2) The southern accent
- 3) The mid-western accent

The southern dialects have a big specificity and differ from other American variants (Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 1997) Characteristic features of southern dialects:

- 1) [ɪŋ] ending replaces with [ɪ:n]
Going [gəʊɪ:n]
- 2) Diphthong [aɪ] is pronounced as long [a:]
I'm fine [a:m fa:n]
Taim [ta:m]
- 3) Long [u:] is pronounced as [ɪ:]
- 4) Appearance or disappearance of the sound [r] after the vowels.
Far [fa:] - [fa:r]

The north-eastern dialect is also called as New-York dialect (Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 1997). This dialect has its specific features and is guessed as non-prestige dialect because of the big stream of tourists and immigrants to this megapolis. They negatively influence on the language forms. Characteristic features of north-eastern dialect:

- 1) The sound [r] isn't pronounced at the end of the word.
Four [fo:]
- 2) The pronunciation of each letter in a word.

Through the history America and American English haven't had one standard form. Famous linguists like Hendrickson, Preston, Shuy mentioned about it in their researches. Informal standard of American pronunciation is accepted as Californian variation. This variety is frequently heard on TV, radio and social meetings.

Characteristic features of the south-western dialect:

1) The sound [t] isn't pronounced.

About [ə'bau]

2) The sound [h] isn't pronounced in words like *human*.

The tendency of keeping the dialectal features of language and their improvements is specific only for huge urban regions. Traditional rural accents eventually disappear from a language. They need popularity to continue their improvement and appearance. One main factor of improvement of spoken American English in the U.S. is the prestige of a dialect (Бродович, 1988).

According to Alan Metcalf, the professor of American Dialect Society, it can be the choice of a person: to choose the accent of his or her surrounding or to choose the accent of mass-media. (Sharkey, 1997) To prove the hidden value of using the dialects or accents scientists had different researches. For example, teachers always try to correct the learner's pronunciation mistakes, when students use simple words in their speech. This fact proves the hidden value of non-standard spoken accent.

One of the main and interesting dialects of American English is "Black English", the dialect that is used in different parts of the world, but mainly in America. Another name of this dialect is "African-American Vernacular English". Today, many scientists show their interest in this dialect and are making so many researches in order to study this dialect. The vocabulary of this dialect is being enriched by different ways: the first way is folk- proverbs and so on. The second one is music, mainly blues, hip-hop and so on. The improvement of this dialect also influences on other regional dialects of English language.

3. The Influence of American English on British English

Nowadays, American English is under the interest of several areas, including economics, politics, sociology and so on. Linguistics takes an important place in this line. Recently, various new directions of national variants of English language are improving in linguistical scientific discourse. It is important to note that the influence of American English on the other variants is not a new thing. The improvement of English language in America used to follow by the reflection of British people. Besides, American English was negatively accepted in Britain as a wrong language which influenced badly on British variant of English. American people were eager to create their independent language, tried to be absolutely independent in their language choice, to improve their language with their own desire. This point of view was strengthened by N. Webster, an author of "American dictionary of English language". With this dictionary Webster tried to prove that the language which is spoken in America is the own product of independent America with all its characteristic features. He hoped that in the "New World" there would be created new society and new science and after the relation between these fields the new language would be created and that language would be the Modern American Language. To prove his ideas Webster gave examples in his dictionary as "senate", "congress", "court", "assembly" and so on. These words are used in the U.S.A. and in England. But they are understood differently in both of the countries. He claimed that British English should not be an example to other variants of English, as its taste has already been spoiled and the general importance of this variant is recently decreasing (Webster, 1789).

When we talk about American English the first name that comes into our minds is Webster, the father of American English. He was the first person who created American English dictionary and placed all the differences of British and American English in his dictionary. He became famous not only for creating American dictionary, but also for creating American English itself. Nowadays the importance of this dictionary is enormous, because the differences between American English and British English are growing day by day. People in America belong to different nations and use different languages, but in general they use more recent and complete English than British people. This point of view has been claimed for centuries by British writer Virginia Woolf, who in 1925 announced that American variant of English was more dynamic and live, however, when British English had lost its ability to renovate. As a result, all British writers and authors had to use Americanisms in order to enrich the language of their novels. So, authors accepted the positive influence of American English on British variant from the point of literature.

Each year, more and more words that were once exclusively American are found in the spoken and written language of both Britain and the U.S. e.g., the words like *hot-air*, *bed-rock*, *come-back*, *foot-wear*, *crook* (*criminal*), *publicity* (*advertising*), *conservatory* (*musical*), *to blow in* (*to turn up*), *to get a move on*, *bell-boy*,

speed-way, horse-sense, frame-up, dance-hall, key-man, joy-ride. American English has a marked tendency to use nouns as verbs such as *pressure, interview, advocate* and so on. There are also slang words that found their way into the vocabulary with the influence through movies. For example, *dump* for stupid, *pass out* for die, *tube* for television, *shades* for sunglasses.

Each Americanism gives us the information about the history of America. For example, the word “stogy” gives us the information about Konestoga train of the XIX century. This form of transportation was used in the middle of the XVII century, however wasn’t known anywhere until 1800s. It was known only in Pennsylvania. Later it changed its meaning and became to be known as a “stogy” named after the cigarette that people used to smoke on that train during their trips. Recently, the variation difference between American and British English is decreasing. Because, the American words are gradually transferring into British dictionaries and their number is increasing rapidly. But we have to point out that the struggle between these two variations will continue for a long time.

American scientist and lexicologist Alan W. Read claims that the history of American English in America is divided into 4 periods, each of them has its own features.

The first period (1607–1812)—the first settlement of Englishmen in North America (Read, 2005). In this period the vocabulary of English language in America enriched with new words of other languages, especially with Indian words. They were the names of plants and animals (flora and fauna) of American continent. During this period different words like *cacao, potato, tobacco, tomato* entered into the vocabulary of British English. It was the period that British people became interested in American words like “wild rice”—the main food of Indian tribes. “Wild rice” or “Indian rice” was firstly taken to England in 1714 and became very popular as cosmetics which had some whitening and smoothing effects on skin (Read, 2005).

The second period is characterized with the improvement of American words in British English of the U.K. The main interaction between these two variants happened in the Universal Exhibition organized in 1851 in London where many Americans had been invited (Read, 2005). During this period new colonies helped Europeans to meet with new places and territories, to see new exotic places and to get acquainted with new cultures. New drinks like *hominy, anti-dogmatic, gum-tickler*, new games like *bowling, alley, ten-pins* became very interesting to them. According to Shveiser, new Americanisms became to appear in British vocabulary like *antagonize, reception, rout* and so on (Швейцер, 1967).

The third period of history is 1851-1900. During these years the vocabulary of British English continued to enrich with Americanisms. Especially with American food names like *cakes, green corn, succotash*, drinks like *eye-opener, smash, cocktail, cobbler* and so on.

Finally, the fourth period is the period from 1900 till recent times. The number of Americanisms during this period has dramatically increased as the U.S. got the main economical and political power in the world. It’s not a secret that the XX century was named as “American century” in the world history.

The use of Americanisms in British English is recently growing. The new period of American English is characterized with new linguistic discourse—the Internet. Linguistic discussions and processes nowadays are held in the form of groups, forums in different countries and are devoted to different aspects of language and its variations. For example: let’s analyze an interesting history of the word “trash” and its entry into British English. In 1999 the sign name *wastebasket* in the new version of Apple computers was changed into sign name *trash*. That change dissatisfied British people and most of them ignored to buy the new version of Apple. However, Apple didn’t change the sign name and British people had to accept the new name.

It’s important to mention that the problem of language influence is not only discussed in England, but also in other parts of the U.K. British words like *fish and chips, flat, sweets, shop, chemists* can be heard like *chips, fries, apartment, candy, store, pharmacy* instead. In the XIX century linguists in Great Britain were against to the terms “to advocate”, “to placate”, “to antagonize”. There are some words that their American roots had been forgotten and they mixed with English words. Now, it is impossible to say to which variation they belong to. Ernest Weekly says: “There are so many words in linguistics that it is difficult to find their roots. We can’t say that how many words have been transferred to English dictionary from American language. But I think that their number will increase within 50 or 100 years. English language will accept a lot of terms from different fields” (Weekly, 1986).

4. Method

Ethnographic method has been used in this research. The main objective is to reach the inside view of American English, in other words this article tries to interpret what is happening in American English and why it influences

on British English. The research also sees the beliefs of linguists involved in the study as a central part of the processes and results. Ethnographic study is essentially concerned with the culture and cultural view of the language under investigation. With ethnographic method different fieldnotes, transcripts of human interaction were used in this study.

5. Results

When talking about the transformation process of Americanisms into British English we should mention about the influence of television and movies of that period. Advertisements also played a great role in this transformation process. Recently the influence of American English on British English is so high that even Mr. Mencken, a famous linguist, mentioned in his book “The American English” (1936) that “British English is now showing resemblance to American English. Many variations in this book formed a lot of interest in this language. Later American English became the most important field of linguistics and different books began to be published about American English. From this time different conflicts according to this dialect started to rise in linguistics. “Some years later people in Britain while using British English will think as if they use a dialect of American English” (Mencken, 2009).

The reason that there is so much American influence in British English is the result of the following:

- a) Vastness of publishing industry in the U.S.
- b) Vastness of mass-media influence on a worldwide scale
- c) International economic and political power and position of the U.S.
- d) American culture and habits

All these facts lead to the conclusion that new words and idioms which are originally American words, became popular in so-called “worldwide English”.

6. Conclusion

So, overall, the given research reflects the influence of American English on British English and other variants of English. The changes that are going on inside the language also reflect economical, political and cultural factors that influence on the language variants. And such countries that have economical and political domination in the world may have the power to influence on other varieties of language. While differentiating these two variations we can meet a question: “Is English or English in America more conservative?” To our mind the language is the same, but people change the elements of language during their speech and create different varieties. It depends on character of the person who uses the words. The main purpose is not to spoil the standard form of pure English language.

Finally, it is important to mention that every linguistic process and changings are based on social processes. Language variation is a result of living confrontation in society. Language variations were used, are used and will be used in American and British English for many years. It is our ambition to keep and transfer our culture to our off springs, to future generation. It doesn't matter where we were born or where we grew up, our native traditions and culture, our roots will influence on our lifestyle and speech. And the language as a sociocultural object helps us to keep such kind of heritage.

References

- Brodovich, O. I. (1988). *Dialect variation of English language, aspects of theory* (p. 196)
- Campbell, L. (2006). *Sociolinguistics: An international Handbook of the science of language and society* (2nd ed., pp. 252–266).
- Chichina, N. V., & Huzrahimova, A. R. (2016). Features of American English.
- Labov, W., Ash, S., & Boberg, C. (1997). *A National Map of the Regional Dialects of American English*. Retrieved from http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/NationalMap/NationalMap.html
- Mencken, H. L. (2009). *The American Language: An Inquiry into Development of English in the United States* (p. 492).
- Read, A. W. (2005). Words Crisscrossing the Sea: How Words Have Been Borrowed between England and America. *American Dialect Society*, 80(2), 115–134. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-80-2-115>
- Sharkey, J. (1997). *Regionalisms in Plainspoken English* (p. 7). New-York Times/Joe Sharkey.
- Shveiser, A. D. (1967). *The differences between American and British variant of contemporary literary English language* (pp. 30-72)

Webster, N. (1789). *Dissertation on the English Language*. Boston. Retrieved from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/WebsterNoah-1789>

Weekly, E. (1986). *Old and new English*.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author, with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).