

The Specific Lingua-Cultural Features of the American English for English Learners

Vusala Aghabeyli¹

¹ Department of Lingua-Culturology, Azerbaijan University of Languages, Baku, Azerbaijan

Correspondence: Vusala Aghabeyli, Department of Lingua-Culturology, Azerbaijan University of Languages, Baku, Azerbaijan. E-mail: vusala_adu@rambler.ru

Received: December 20, 2014 Accepted: January 12, 2015 Online Published: January 27, 2015

doi:10.5539/ijel.v5n1p196 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v5n1p196>

Abstract

We know that English is the most widely-spoken language in the world and this world-wide language is spoken with a great number of regional accents, dialects with significant numbers of native speakers in almost every major region. In such a situation an understanding of the nature of English can be claimed unambiguously to be of world-wide importance. The English language is not a single, homogeneous, stable entity: it is a complex mixture of varying structures, and one unfortunate thing is that so many people look upon this as an unsatisfactory state of affairs and try to correct it. But preferable way is to get enough information about the regional varieties of the English language. It is difficult to comprehend such kind of differences for foreigners, English learners and for students doing a research, especially, on dialects. While learning English language they usually compare this language with their own. That's why in this article comparative method was used for differentiating the main points of the target languages. British English was compared with American English, some differences and similarities with the Azerbaijani language were intended to show in this article.

Keywords: American English, English language, regional varieties, differences, words, dialects, English learners

1. Difficulties for English Learners

Nowadays the English speaking world is full of people who want to make everyone else speak as they do, or as Shakespeare did. It is pity that the fact and fundamental role of variety in the English language cannot be accepted for what it is – an inevitable product of language development (Crystal, 1987).

English is an international language that's why a lot of nations, people from different countries try to learn it because of their jobs, their studies and communicating with the foreigners. Apparently, it is not so easy to learn foreign language. All languages differ from each others, in grammar, in vocabulary, in styles, etc. When it comes to English learners, plus to these features, there are some regional varieties of the English language which possess standard literary forms. More over those are spoken with regional accents are called variants of Standard English and it is also difficult to differ the varieties of English. Then what are these varieties? The kind of variation which people are most readily aware of usually goes under the heading of regional dialects. It is not difficult to cite examples of people who speak or write differently depending on where they are from (Crystal, 1987). However, it is not so easy both for foreigners and English learners to understand and differentiate the dialects from each other and to comprehend them.

It is clear that the main way of learning English language is learning Standard English, which is a universal form of English used in the English speaking countries by educated people (Hajiyeva, 2011). Standard English is the official language of Great Britain which is taught at schools and universities, used by the press, the radio and the television. It is used for public information and administration and it equally serves all the people speaking English. On the hand, if somebody has to meet a native speaker from any region or someone goes abroad for conferences, meetings, or watches the movies they can come across with unknown words, phrases, spellings, accents, etc. Local dialects are marked off from the English national literary language and from each other differ by some phonetical, grammatical and lexical peculiarities (Hajiyeva, 2011). However, local dialects coexist with the national literary language and serve as means of communication to the broad people's masses. Consequently, their role is different at different historical stages. It is on the basis of such dialects the national language was formed.

2. Regional Varieties and the Main Points

American English, Canadian English, Australian English, New Zealand English, etc. are the regional varieties of the English language. Each regional and social variety forms a contrastive set within the national pattern because the word study lends itself most easily to written description, dialect study traditionally concentrates on vocabulary, rather than pronunciation or grammar, as a matter of convenience. Dialect perception, however, invariably begins with the reception of the sounds of those words, the pronunciation of consonants and vowels realized in a distinctive intonational contour of stress, pitch and juncture. And as communication, dialect interpretation depends upon grammar for the organization and transmission of those words in syntactic structures. The union of these phonological, grammatical and lexical systems forms the dialects that distinguish speakers as Northerners, as Southerners, or as members of one social group or another (Magsudoglu, 2012).

As integrated linguistic systems, these dialects share essential structural characteristics realized in all varieties of Modern English. This common core includes phonemes (contrast give phonological units), a basic grammar and a general vocabulary that make communication possible among all English speaking people. Their shared cultural experience has given rise to the language itself. Defined as sets of dialects within national varieties, a language reveals its organization and substance through the expression of its regional and social patterns.

2.1 Main Points and Main Differences (Spelling Differences)

Three points should be noted in connection with regional dialects. The first is that this kind of variation is usually associated with variation in the *spoken* form of the language. The existence of a standardized, written form of English, which all people born into an English-speaking community are taught as soon as they begin to write, means that modern dialects get written down only by their introduction into a novel, or a poem for a particular characterization or effect. For example, many characters of Dickens, or of the “regional” novelists such as Joyce, indicates this point abundantly—but even here, only the vaguest approximation to the original pronunciation is made (Crystal, 1987).

In non-literary contexts, regional dialect forms are not common, though they are sometimes used in informal contexts and there are a few predictable examples, such the differing spellings of certain words between British and American English. Let’s compare:

Table 1. Spelling differences in British and American English

British	American
-ise vs. -ize	
terrorise	Terrorize
criticise	Criticize
memorise	memorize
-yse vs. -yze	
paralyse	paralyze
Analyse	Analyze
I vs. II	
appal	Appall
enrol	Enroll
Fulfill	Fulfill
-oe vs. -e	
diarrhoea	Diarrhea
our vs. or	
colour	Color
Favour	Favor
-tre vs. -ter	
Centre	Center
Theatre	Theater

Secondly, despite the association of regional variation with speech, dialect is term which should not be identified with *accent*. The regional accent of a person refers simply to pronunciation; dialect on the other refers to the totality of regional linguistic characteristics-idiosyncrasies of grammar and vocabulary as well as pronunciation. An accent is usually the most noticeable feature of dialect (Crystal, 1987).

2.2 Grammatical Differences

Thirdly, we must remember that dialects are not just local matters. The term “dialects of English” must be allowed to include these areas, whose importance will undoubtedly increase as regional forms of literature develop (Crystal, 1987).

Though there are main differences in spelling, we can find some grammatical differences that distinguish dialects from Standard English. Let’s compare some grammatical differences between British and American English:

Two different past tense examples:

Table 2. Past tense differences in British and American English

British	American
Forecasted	forecast
lighted	Lit
Dreamt	dreamed

Eighteenth century speakers of English generally formed the past participle of *get* “receive” as *gotten*, as in: (1) *Your brother has gotten my mail*. In nineteenth century, prestigious speakers in England began to drop “-en” ending: (2) *Your brother has got my mail*. Most Americans, however, continued using the older form *gotten* (Algeo, 2001).

One quite recent change in American English appears to have taken place not only in America, but simultaneously in various parts of English-speaking world. This is the use of what has come to be called quotative *go*, as in a sentence such as: (3) *The teacher looks and he goes “Spit out that wad of gum at once, Frank!”* This use of *go* where previous generations would have used the verb *say* has been reported in the colloquial speech of Australia, England, Canada and the United States (Algeo, 2001).

Another grammatical difference, for example, the British frequently use *to* with *different* and they have done so since before colonial times: *My gloves are differently to yours*. In the United States, however, *to* is known with *different*; instead speakers of American English often say and write *different than*. Handbooks of Standard English in both countries prescribe *different from* as the “preferred” or “correct” usage (Algeo, 2001).

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English lists the following different developments on either side of the Atlantic:

(4) *Dive* takes the past tense *dived* in British English, but *dove* in American.

(5) *Kneel* takes past tense and past participle *kneelt* in Britain, *kneeled* in America.

(6) *Leap* has *leapt* as past and past participle in Britain *leaped* in the United States.

(7) The British say *smelt*, *spelt* and *spilt*, whereas Americans say *smelled*, *spelled* and *spilled* (past and past participle) (Algeo, 2001).

(8) Then, Americans say, *Our team wins often*, whereas British English may have as either *win* or *wins*.

American English has evolved its own pattern of the use of definite articles with a few nonconcrete nouns; among the most common Americans are *in the hospital*, *to/at the university*; many Americans (particularly in the south) say *in the bed* (British and also American English *in bed*), and *one at the time* (British and also American English *one at a time*) (Algeo, 2001).

2.3 Lexical Differences

Apart from those, there are some words that have quite different meanings. Here follows some commonly confused words:

Table 3. words expressing different meanings

American	British
jumper	pinafore dress
sweater	Jumper
Eraser	Rubber
Pants	Trousers
Panties	Pants
Chips	Crisps
french fries	Chips
Soccer	Football
Candy	Sweets

Furthermore, there exist different words expressing the same meanings:

Table 4. Words expressing the same meanings

Cart	Trolley
Diaper	Nappy
Eggplant	Aubergine
Fall	Autumn
Line	Queue
snow peas	Mangetout
Trunk	Boat
Vacation	Holiday
Zucchini	Courgette

3. Lingua-Cultural Features of the American English and Their Influence on the English Language

Lingua-cultural factors are considered to be extra-linguistic factors, and they express linguistic and cultural features together. Art, traditions, religion, myth, music and folklore can be investigated as lingua-cultural factors. Speaking about American culture, it encompasses the customs and traditions of the United States, including language, religion, food and the arts. Nearly every region of the world has influenced American culture, as it is a country of immigrants. The United States is sometimes described as a "melting pot" in which different cultures have contributed their own distinct "flavors" to American culture. Just as cultures from around the world have influenced American culture, today American culture influences the world. The words connected with the American culture also impact on word stock of the English language. For example, there are a number of foods that are commonly identified as American, such as *hamburgers*, *hot dogs*, *potato chips*.

Denim, sneakers and cowboy hats and boots are some items of clothing that are closely associated with Americans. *Ralph Lauren*, *Calvin Klein*, *Michael Kors* and *Victoria Secret* are some well-known American brands.

American music is very diverse with many, many styles, including *rhythm and blues*, *jazz*, *gospel*, *country and western*, *bluegrass*, *rock 'n' roll* and *hip hop*.

3.1 American Idioms

Besides them, slangs and idioms that are used in poetry enrich the language, because some English journalists, some writers also use Americanisms, idioms in their writings, plays. Students also come across with such kind of words while watching movies, reading newspapers, though dialects have no literary form, many English writers include dialectal speech in their books (Hajiyeva, 2011). Let's look at some American idioms and their definitions:

(9) **Smell a Rat** (feel that something is wrong)

-How come the front door is open? Didn't you close it before we went shopping?

-I'm sure I did. I can't understand it.

-Frankly, I **smell a rat**.

-Me, too. I'm **convinced that something is definitely wrong** here.

-We'd better call the police.

(10) **Go to the Dogs** (become run down)

-Have you seen their house lately? It's really *gone to the dogs*.

-It's true that it has *become run-down and in serious need of repair*, but I'm sure that it can be fixed up to look like new.

-I guess with a little carpentry work and some paint it could look pretty decent.

(11) **Fishy** (strange and suspicious)

When the security guard saw a light in the store after closing hours, it seemed to him that there were something *fishy* going on. He called the central office and explained to his superior that he thought something *strange and suspicious* was occurring.

(12) **Take the Bull by the Horns** (take decisive action in a difficult situation)

Julie had always felt that she was missing out on a lot of fun because of her clumsiness on the dance floor. She had been putting off taking lessons, but she finally *took the bull by the horns* and went to a professional dance studio for help. She was tired of feeling left out and *acted decisively to correct the situation*.

(13) **Horse of a Different Color** (quite a different matter)

Eric likes to play jokes on his friends, but he makes sure that nobody is hurt by any of his pranks. A prank that hurts someone is a *horse of different color!* Being playful is one thing, but hurting someone by one's prank is *quite a different matter*. (www.docme.ru/doc/55007/short-101-american-english-idioms)

These are examples for daily used American idioms. Some idioms may be understood from the context, but in separate, it is difficult to catch their meanings. Some Americanisms are being changed into common used ones by English speakers.

3.2 *Influence of Americanisms on the English Language*

We can see the influence of some Americanisms that enter English vocabulary stock and making some grammatical changes. For example, differences between "have" and "to have got" in British English before the interrogative sentence for the sentence with "to have" was so: "I have a book" "have I a book?" But nowadays American's "to have got" influenced the English and made change: "I have a book?", "Do I have a book?" we can also see such changes in the sentences with "have to". British used to ask "When have you to leave?", but most they use "When do you have to leave?" (Tomahin, 1988).

4. **Comparison with the Azerbaijani Language**

Under these circumstances, it would be very interesting to compare the Azerbaijani and the English languages from our view point. Why? Because in the Azerbaijani language, there is hardly any variety of the language, though there exist some dialects, such as Shaki, Khazak, Nahchivan, Lankaran dialects. These dialects differ from the literary language of Azerbaijani in pronunciation, in intonation and sometimes in their lexical meanings. That's why there do not occur difficulties with dialects, because dialects are understandable or little bit different from literary language of the Azerbaijani and only some words or phrases may be incomprehensible. Furthermore, there are no grammatical variations between these dialects. In other words, from the context people can catch the meaning of some unknown words. People in other regions of Azerbaijan use common words close to the literary language, only, Shaki, Khazak, Nahchivan, Lankaran, as it was mentioned are remarked ones. Let's see some differences in the table below in Shaki dialect:

Table 5. Shaki dialect

Shaki dialect	The literary language of Azerbaijan	Translation
Ciyi	Ana	Mother
Haindi	Indi	Now
Dumba	qisaboy adam	stunted or short man
Kənto	Kobud	Rude
əhdaş	alət	Tool
Səllim	boş, işsiz	Unemployed
Lələyün	Açgöz	grasping, greedy man
Maytarax	Axsaq	Limping

Source: The department of culture in Shaki, 1983.

5. Conclusion and Result

In this article was tried to express how some Americanisms influence on the English language and enter the English vocabulary stock. On the other hand, making some grammatical changes they enrich the vocabulary stock. The aim of this article is to help English learners, students, especially people doing a research, to comprehend the main differences between American English and British English and their native languages. That's why the topic, theme and as well as words and idioms which are used here could be useful for students, especially, whose research work deals with the dialects and the varieties of the English.

As the result, we can see the great role of Americanisms in some grammatical changes of the English language. Some differences and changes are shown in this article by means of tables and detailed explanations with the variety of examples are provided as well. In addition to them, some colloquial Americanisms, idioms, dialectal words that are used in poetry, in literature, in newspapers, on TV by writers, journalists and eventually some of them enter the English vocabulary stock, too. English learners, students come across with such kind of difficulties while watching movies, reading newspapers, because, however, dialects have no literary form; many English writers include dialectal speech, idioms in their plays.

That's why the theme of this article is very interesting and challenging. The main and colloquial words, some idioms those are collected here could be useful for English learners, students doing research and also for Azerbaijani students.

References

- Akhundov, A. (1979). *General Linguistics*. Baku.
- Akmajian, A, Demers, R. A., Farmer, A. K., & Harnish. (2001). *An introduction to language and communication*. MIT Press.
- Algee, I. (2001). *English in North America* (Vol. VI). Cambridge University Press.
- Baugh, A. C. (1958). *A History of the English language*. New York.
- Cassidi, F. C. (1973). *Dialect Studies: Regional and social-current trends in linguistics* (Vol. X part I). The Hague: Mouton.
- Crystal, D. (1987). *Style: The varieties of English* (2nd ed.). London.
- Flexer, S. B. (1976). *I hear American Talking*. New York: Van Nostrand.
- Gonzales, A. E. (1923). *The Black Border*. Columbia: The State Co.
- Hajiyeva, A. (2011). *English Lexicology*. Baku: Knowledge and Education.
- Khomyalov, V. A. (1980). *Non-standard lexica in the structure of English*. Leningrad.
- Maqsudoglu, H. (2012). *Regional varieties of the English language*. Baku: Science and Education.
- Marcward, A. H. (1958). *American English*. New York.
- McDavid, R. I. (1980). *Varieties of American English*. Stanford.
- Menken, H. (1957). *American Language Preface* (4th ed.). New York.
- Patridge, E. (1970). *A dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. London: Routledge.
- Shakhbagova, D. (1982). *Varieties of English Pronunciation*. Moscow.
- The department of culture in Shaki. (1983). *Dictionary*. Shaki press.
- The Encyclopedia Britannica. (1932). 14th ed. USA.
- Tomahin, Q. D. (1988). *Realities of Americanisms*. Moscow: Vesshaya shkola.
- Vorno, E., Kasheeva, M., Malishevskaya, E., & Potapova, I. (1955). *English Lexicology*. Leningrad.
- Wentworth, H. (1944). *American Dialect Dictionary*. New York: Crowell.
- Wn.com/ American and British English spelling differences, part II. (2010). 08 December.
- Wn.com/American-and-British-English-spelling-differences, part I. (2010). 28 February edition.
- www.britannica.com
- www.docme.ru/doc/55007/short-101-american-english-idioms

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), 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/3.0/>).