

GLANCE AT AMERICAN AND BRITISH ENGLISH GRAMMAR DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

English is a global language. This paper emphasizes the major differences between British and American English. Both types of language structure are different in written and oral communication. This paper will increase the English learners' interest to study British and American English differences. The English learners will themselves know which English they speak and what they speak is correct or incorrect. They will be able to enjoy themselves both types of language structure fully. We find the grammatical differences between British and American English in terms of the usage of tense, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, vocabulary, spellings, adverbs, articles, pronouns etc. Sometimes a question arises in our minds that English we hear and speak around us, in movies, music and in chatting online is British or American English.

“England and America are two countries separated by a common language”.

- George Bernard Shaw

KEYWORDS: British English, American English, Grammar Differences, Study, Language etc.

INTRODUCTION

It is the fact that English language is globally used in the world nowadays. Many countries' governments practice English language as the formal language to carry out their jobs and to complete the paper works. We find many varieties of English speaking in different countries like Australian English, South African English, Indian English, British English, American English, Canadian English, India - Pakistan English, New Zealand English etc. But British and American English is the most influential and widespread all over the world. British English is called “Commonwealth English” which is mainly spoken in the United Kingdom, while American English is spoken in the U.S.A. British English is also spoken in the parts of Africa (Egypt and South Africa, Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand), as well as in Malta, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland. American English is also spoken in many parts of the East Asia (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines), the Americas and Africa.

It is very surprising that British English is also used in spelling in Canada but pronunciation and vocabulary are closer to American English. If we have a glance at the international organizations, the World Bank and the Organization of American States use American English, while the International Olympic Committee, N.A.T.O. and the World Trade Organization use British English. The aim of this paper is to explain the various differences between British and American English, which many times create confusions and misunderstandings.

Grammar Differences between British and American English

1. Use of the simple past and present perfect tenses

In British English, only the present perfect is used to talk about the past actions which have an effect on the present moment. In American English, both simple past and present perfect are possible with similar meanings.

Compare:

He has just gone to school. OR He just went to school. (American English)

He has just gone to school. (British English)

Lucy has already done her homework. OR Lucy already did her homework. (American English)

Lucy has already done her homework. (British English)

3. Do you have a car? OR Have you got a car? (American English)

Have you got a car? (British English)

2. Verbs

In American English the verbs burn, dream, lean, learn, smell, spell, spill and spoil are regular, while in British English these verbs are usually irregular. Regular verbs are also used in British English.

American English	British English
Burn – burned - burned	Burn – burnt - burnt
Dream – dreamed - dreamed	Dream – dreamt - dreamt
Lean – leaned – leaned	Lean – leant – leant
Learn – learned – learned	Learn – learnt – learnt
Smell – smelled – smelled	Smell – smelt – smelt
Spell – spelled - spelled	Spell – spelt - spelt
Spill – spilled - spilled	Spill – spilt - spilt
Spoil – spoiled - spoiled	Spoil – spoilt - spoilt

British English speakers use ‘can’ or ‘could’, while American English speakers use simple present in place of ‘can’ and simple past in place of ‘could’.

Compare:

American English	British English
She wrote a story.	She could write a story
I drew the pictures	I could draw the pictures.
You sing a poem.	You can sing a poem.
Mala reads English.	Mala can read English.

3. The past participle form of ‘get’

In American English, the past participle form of ‘get’ is ‘gotten’. In British English, it is ‘got’.

Compare:

He will have gotten an answer by noon. (American English)

He will have got an answer by noon. (British English)

4. Collective nouns

In American English, collective nouns (e.g. committee, team, army, family, jury etc.) are always followed by singular verbs. In British English, both singular and plural verbs are possible.

Compare:

The cultural committee organizes the dance competition next Sunday. (American English)

The cultural committee organizes the dance competition next Sunday. OR

The cultural committee organize the dance competition next Sunday. (British English)

My team is winning. (American English)

My team is winning. OR My team are winning. (British English)

5. The indefinite pronoun 'one'

In American English, the pronouns he, him and his can be used to refer back to one. In British English, this is not possible.

Compare:

One should respect his parents. (American English)

One should respect one's parents. (British English)

6. Prepositions

American English	British English
I met you on Diwali.	I met you at Diwali.
He works Monday through Saturday.	He works Monday to Saturday.
It's different from / than others.	It's different from / to others.
Our school starts June.	Our school starts on June.
My uncle will come Thursday.	My uncle will come on Thursday.
Jack is home. (home used as an adverb)	Jack is at home.

7. Articles

The "the" in the standard expressions in British English like "all the night", "all the month", "all the summer", "this time of the year" etc. are used in British English and usually omitted in American English.

Compare:

She will read all day. (American English)

She will read all the day. (British English)

British English uses articles in front of sickness like the flu, the measles, the chicken - pox, the jaundice, the leprosy etc. but American English doesn't. There are some exceptions that British English does not use articles but American English uses.

American English	British English
In the clinic	In clinic
At the university	At university
The next day	Next day
In the future	In future
Into the room	Into room

British English and American English vary from each other in the use of ‘a’ or ‘an’ with “half”. In British English, ‘a’ follows “half”, for example, “half a kilo”, “half an hour”, “half a dozen”, “half a year” and “half a month”. In American English, ‘a’ is used in front of ‘half’, for example, “A half kilo”, “a half hour”, “a half dozen”, “a half year” and “a half month”.

8. Spellings

There are hundreds of minor spelling differences between British and American English. We should thank American lexicographer Noah Webster for this. He began to reform English spellings in the late 1700s. Spelling reform was also a way for America to show its independence from England. We can see Noah Webster’s legacy in the following American spellings of words.

American English	British English	American English	British English
Analyze	Analyse	Defense	Defence
Anemia	Anaemia	Dialog	Dialogue
Apologize	Apologise	Diarrhea	Diarrhoea
Armor	Armour	Favor	Favour
Behavior	Behaviour	Fiber	Fibre
Caliber	Calibre	Gray	Grey
Catalog	Catalogue	Harbor	Harbour
Center	Centre	Honor	Honour
Check	Cheque	Humor	Humour
Color	Colour	Jeweler	Jeweller
Meter	Metre	Odor	Odour
Neighbor	Neighbour	Practice	Practise

9. Vocabulary

The most remarkable difference between American and British English is vocabulary. There are many words which are different.

American English	British English	American English	British English
Autumn, Fall	Autumn	Potato chips	Crisps
Bill, Check	Bill (<i>restaurant</i>)	Film, Movie	Film
Cookie	Biscuit	Apartment, Flat, Studio	Flat
Hat	Bonnet (<i>clothing</i>)	Ground, First floor	Ground floor
Parking lot	Car park	Vacation	Holiday
The movies	The cinema	Jug, Pitcher	Jug
Clothespin	Clothes peg	Highway	Main road
Math	Maths	Railroad	Railway
Diaper	Nappy	Garbage, Trash	Rubbish
Mail	Post	Shop, Store	Shop

10. Position of adverbs

In British English mid – position adverbs usually go after auxiliary verbs, after am, is, are, was, were and before other verbs. In American English, mid – position adverbs are often put before auxiliary verbs and am, is, are, was and were even when the verb is not emphasized.

Compare:

You certainly have made him angry. (American English)

You have certainly made him angry. (British English)

Jill always is late. (American English)

Jill is always late. (British English)

She never has spoken the truth. (American English)

She has never spoken the truth. (American English)

CONCLUSION

Even though these two are major varieties between American and British English, there is only one English language. It is presently spoken by more than a third of the world's population. It always remains as a matter of choice to speak and write American or British English. But a good English speaker should know how to recognize both types of structure. English is a world language so we can't say which one better or advanced. Any judgment or opinion that "British English is better or worse than American English" is biased and narrowed – minded ideology.

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