

# PROBLEM OF DEFINING THE AMERICAN VARIANT OF ENGLISH

## ПРОБЛЕМА ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЯ АМЕРИКАНСКОГО ВАРИАНТА АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

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**Abstract:** *American English is often considered to be incorrect British English, and we would like to show that this is a variant of a language if not an independent language, which has its own rules and laws especially in grammar, as grammar is the skeleton of the language on which the language develops. The research is determined by the fact that the differences in vocabulary and phonetics are studied enough while grammatical structure between the two variants are not well-outlined, and yet being aware of them is very important to any non-native English-user since knowing these differences one has a practical advantage in the English-language communication in all spheres of life by being able to differentiate between the variants and complying with the rules of one variant.*

**Аннотация:** Американский английский часто считается неправильным британским английским языком и мы хотели бы показать, что это возможно вариант самостоятельного языка, который имеет свои собственные правила и законы, особенно в грамматике, поскольку грамматика является основой языка на которой он развивается. Исследования определяются тем, что различия в лексике и фонетике изучены достаточно хорошо, в то время как грамматические различия между двумя вариантами не очень хорошо очерчены.

**Key words:** *a variant of a language; vocabulary; phonetics; grammatical structures.*

**Ключевые слова:** *вариант языка; вокабуляр; фонетика; грамматические структуры.*

English is one of the most important languages in the world with regard to both the number of speakers and its application in international communication. English is also considered important because of its history and the significance of the nations using it in modern times. It is clear that "the language of a powerful nation will acquire importance as a direct reflection of political, economic, technological, and military strength" [5, 23]. Extreme importance of English as a language for communication all over the world, its beauty and richness, and the endless amount of linguistic points, which are subject for investigation result in the fact that the English language is widely studied outside the countries in which it is spoken. The linguistic interest deepens even further when we understand that nowadays we deal with a number of varieties of English, which "claim" their independence as established variants with their own set of rules and linguistic laws. Of all the existing variants of the English language the greatest opposition is observed between British English and American English. As playwright George Bernard Shaw once noted jocularly that "England and America are two countries divided by a common language."

The English language was brought to America by English colonists in the 17th century. The language they spoke was the language spoken in Britain at that time. However, the colonists had different backgrounds. They came from different areas of Britain and from different social classes: most of them represented the lower or middle classes. There were many dialectical varieties from which the most frequent

alternatives tended to survive.

If the colonization had taken place a few centuries earlier, the language of the USA might have become as different from that of Britain as the French language differs from the Italian one. But the settlement occurred after the invention of printing, and continued through a period when the idea of educating everybody was making rapid progress. For a long time most of the books read in America came from England, and a surprising number of Americans read those books, in or out of school. Moreover, most of the colonists seem to have felt strong ties with England.

A good many Englishmen and some Americans used to condemn every difference that did develop, and as recently as a generation ago it was not unusual to hear all "Americanisms" condemned, even in America. It is only now generally recognized in the USA that they are not bound to the Queen's English, but have a full right to work out their own language habits. Even a good many of the English now agree with this, though some of them strongly object to the fact that Americanisms are now influencing the development of British English.

Even admitting that the both variants have a full right to existence and thus may present an interesting subject for investigation, the British variant is a little easier to handle since what is usually referred to as Standard British is the language spoken by the BBC radio announcers; in terms of geographical location and social status - the language of the educated class of people centered in London and the vicinity of the city.

American English in general presents much more trouble. The difficulty in stating what Standard American is results from three causes:

1. the immense size of the country that includes fifty American states,
2. the linguistic mixture of many European languages which influenced the American English (AmE) word stock in one way or another,
3. the existence of many socially established varieties of AmE which can by no means be denied the status of standard.

So, the term American English is combining features, which can be detected in the speech of the majority of educated speakers all over the territory of the United

States. American English acquired international significance after World War II, when the United States assumed a more global role and political, economic and technological developments promoted American influence worldwide. American English currently asserts a dominant influence on "world English" (cf. British English) largely due to a number of important factors such as the size of the US population (70% in the USA vs. 17% in the UK of all native English-speakers), wealth of the U.S. economy, magnitude of higher education, publishing industry in America, American mass media and media technology influence on a worldwide scale, appeal of the American popular culture on language and habits, international, political and economic position of the U.S.

The reason why the English spoken in the UK and in the USA, in particular, have been studied more than any other variant of English (Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, etc.) is that English has been institutionalized in the USA and no doubtedly in Great Britain longer than anywhere else. The British and the American variants of English have also been - at least until recently - the models for teaching the English language around the world.

Hence it is not surprising that differences, which exist in these variants of the English language, interest and puzzle many linguists, and non-linguists as well. There have been already a number of research works done on the topic of American English, on how different or similar it is to British English. However, one should note that a great deal of research and analysis was conducted mainly in the field of vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling as they are the most detectable features of the language.

The differences in grammatical structure are always somehow left out or scarcely mentioned in the study of the American variant. The most that we can expect even in the works of the most famous and prominent linguists is that grammar will only be given in a small chapter whereas the rest of the work will be dedicated to lexical and phonetic aspects of the variant in question.

Naturally it is much easier to spot any lexical difference as in this case we treat separate words, which could be quickly extracted out of the context. When we talk about structural differences, we have to analyze structures and even the whole texts in a big amount to discover one single difference, which at first glance may not even appear evident or essential.

The difficulty for presenting a comparison of American and British grammatical structures is created primarily by two factors:

1. Many occurrences, which are considered typical in AmE, can also be encountered in some dialects of British English (BrE).

2. Differences in the written language do not overlap those that show up in the spoken language. The number of instances pertaining to the written language is in fact very small.

The differences in grammatical structure are even fewer compared to those in pronunciation or vocabulary. Very often they intensify locally in dialects of the American variant in forms of separate expressions and idioms, and are absent in Standard American. Speaking metaphorically, grammar is the “glue” that holds a language together, and the ingredients of this “glue” may influence the parts it sticks together. However, one should not underestimate the importance of grammar for establishing the degree of independence of the variants in terms of structure as well as in phonetic and lexical peculiarities.

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