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Авшенко Н.М., МДП

### **Using Similarities and Differences of American and British English in the Process of Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

Most teachers of English as a foreign language in various countries throughout the world are acquainted with differences between the forms of the language which is used in the United States and that which prevails in England. At one time this caused little difficulty. British English was accepted as a form to be taught, and that put an end to the matter. Over the past 15 or 20 years the situation has changed because of the greater involvement of the United States in the international scene. As the result, the previously held theory that the British variant of English is the one to be taught in the schools has been challenged. Some teachers have recommended a shift from British to American English; others, feeling that the native form of the language is somehow more correct, have resisted change. There is no easy answer to this question.

We must be careful, not to overemphasize the differences between American and British English. What is so very frequently overlooked is the amount of similarity between these two forms of English.

It is not surprising that in a language spoken as a native by at least 300.000.000 people the common element should be so great and the differences so far. Differences in such grammatical features of the language as inflectional system and syntax reflect social or class rather than regional or geographic differences. It is true, that the speaker of British English may surprise an American by his pronunciation of the latter habitually uses. Likewise, the American's use of the singular verb in *The committee has adjourned would* sound strange to the Briton, who normally uses the plural form in such a situation.

The differences between American and British English are found principally in pronunciation and in certain sectors of the vocabulary. Let us consider first some differences in pronunciation.

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There are two characteristic features of the phonemes of American English, which are immediately noticeable to British English speakers. The first of these is the American use of the [ɹ] phoneme in words like *calf, bath, pass, aunt* where British English uses a retracted vowel [ɑ], often lengthened. It should be noted that this difference occurs when the vowel is followed by a voiceless fricative consonant and on occasion by the nasal [ŋ]. However, when the vowel is followed by the other consonants as in *cap, cat, cab, bad, back, bag, sand, hang* both British and American English use [ɹ]. Even here, the point of similarity significantly outweighs the point of difference.

The other principal difference between British and American in the phonemes is found in words like *team, core, fork, brother*. In American English the tongue has an upward glide in pronouncing the [r], producing a sound which phoneticians classify as retroflex. In British English the tongue remains flat in the mouth, resulting in the so-called [r] – less speech. But both American and British English pronounce initial [r] in such words as *real, race, rat, roll, run* with a downward movement of the tongue. In both variants of English an [r] between vowels, in words like *carry, forest, mural* consists of an upward and a downward tongue glide. In words like *secretary, dictionary, stationary, territory* American English has a distinct secondary stress upon the next to the last syllable. In British English the stress is weak. In this case American English preserves a feature of the language which has become archaic in England.

In fact all these three differences between British and American pronunciation which have been mentioned are alike in one respect: they represent older stages of the language features which have been replaced in England by new ones but which have remained characteristic of the speech of the United States.

Vocabulary differences between British and American English occur in certain situations, namely when they reflect differences in physical objects or features characteristic of the two countries, when they reflect different ways of dealing with things, and when they are product of institutional differences.

We may begin with differences in physical features and objects. It is easy to understand that the plant and animal life in England and America should differ to some degree. The United States is a large country with a greater range of climate and topography than England. There are trees and plants which grow in America but occur rarely if at all in England. Such words as *hickory, tamarack, squash* are all borrowings from American Indian languages. This is true also of such animal names as *moose, raccoon, caribou*. It is not surprising, that the United States has

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built up its own set of topographical terms, some of which were taken from the vocabularies of those European nations which were placed in America. Words like mesa, *savannah*, *patio*, have been taken from Spanish: *butte*, *bayou* came into American English from French. In addition such terms as *water gap*, *bluff*, *hog back* represent peculiarly American development of native English elements.

To select just one other aspect of life, we must recognize that even when the material or physical objects are quite alike in the two countries, they are not always dealt with in the same manner and again this leads to some differences in terminology. It is closely connected with food. Meat is cut quite differently. American never speaks of a *joint*, *a hunch*, *a collop*. He rarely eats mutton, and if he does he likely calls it *lamb*. And moreover he *broifs* a stick; but doesn't *grill* it. Although the sandwich was invented in England, it is the Americans who have developed it in all its variety from the *cheeseburger* to peanut butter and jelly or bacon, lettuce and tomato.

A totally different type of difference is found in the vocabulary of musical notation as it is used in the two countries. The American uses a mathematical terminology for the length of time that a note is held. He speaks of *full notes*, *half notes*, *quarter notes*, *eighteenth*, *sixteenth* and so on, following a pattern current in Germany. The British terms are wholly different. Note such terms as *breve*, *semibreve*, *crotchet*, *quaver*, *semiquaver*, *semidemiquaver*, *hemisemidemiquaver*, which is similar to that used in the various Latin countries of Europe.

Another type of situation in terminological differences occurs when a new invention strikes both countries at the same time. This was the case for example, with the *railroad*, as it is called in America, or the *railway*, as it is more likely to be called in England. The Englishman rides in a *coach*, the American takes his seat in a *car*.

Differences as extensive as this could be found in the vocabulary of the automobile, the radio, or wireless and television. The Americans *TV* is the Englishman's *telly*, just to mention a casual instance. The important thing is not so much the items themselves as a recognition of the situations in which differences are likely to occur.

Finally we come to the third type of situation likely to produce terminologies in the two countries, namely institutional differences. We may begin with the objects namely education. What is called a *public school* in England is known as a *private school* in the United States. The English university *stuff* (American *faculty*) lacks the academic ranking of instructor, assistant professor, and associate professor, and

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professor, which is characteristic of the United States. The Americans have no *dons* and they don't use the title *reader*.

When the United States was faced with the necessity of setting its own governmental system, it followed the English pattern, but in some important respects it differed. The term *cabinet* is used differently in the two countries. Moreover, American cabinet members are *secretaries* of one executive department or another. The English counterparts are *ministers*. An English candidate for office is named by his party, and he *stands* for election. The American is *nominated* and he *runs* for office. Actually, the differences here are considerable enough so that the dictionary of American political terms has been compiled.

According to the American linguist and educator from the University of Michigan Albert Marckwardt, it would be possible to live at equal length upon differences in the terminologies of religion, of law, of medicine, even of sports realizing that institutional differences produce differences in terminology. We may, however, note that England has a state religion, the United States have not. Thus, there are no *dissenters* in the United States, since there is no established church to dissent from.

The English distinction between *baristor* and *solicitor* goes back ultimately to a division between common law and equity which does not exist in the same form in the United States, hence the terminological difference has disappeared.

Another way of looking at these lexical differences is to consider them as illustrative of certain cultural processes which have served to differentiate life in America from that in the United Kingdom. It is known that American culture is a mixture of the many foreign cultures. At the same time, both the culture and the language in America tend to preserve certain traits which were originally English but have been forgotten in the mother country. American English, for example, retains the term *druggist*, which has been replaced by *chemist* in England at the end of the 18th century. The verb *guess* in the sense of *suppose* or *estimate* is now recognized as an Americanism, although it was used in this way by Chaucer.

We have already mentioned certain developments in American English which reflected the peculiar growth of American institutions. Many of these were connected with life on the frontier of European civilization in the new continent, a way of life which led to the development of native impatience with tradition. Such linguistic developments served to show, that what happens in a language doesn't occur by accident but is a result of the life of a people. The same factors account for such regional differences which are found within America as well as the differences

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between American and British English. This brings us back to the question which was asked at the beginning of this article – what type of English is to be taught as a second language in various countries.

The differences in pronunciation and in vocabulary which exist have been presented in terms of the historical and cultural background of these two great English speaking nations. This leaves only one criterion for approaching the question of which kind of English to teach, namely the cultural aspects of British and American life which the students are likely to encounter.