

LEXICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN VARIANTS
OF ENGLISH

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Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada Amerika va Britaniya ingliz tillari o'rtasidagi farqlar, xususan, har bir variantga xos bo'lgan leksik xususiyatlar tadqiq etiladi. Muallif Amerika ingliz tilining shakllanish manbalarini tahlil qiladi hamda Amerika ingliz tilini mustaqil til sifatida baholash borasidagi ilmiy munozaralarni ko'rib chiqadi. Shuningdek, maqolada faqat Amerika ingliz tiliga xos bo'lgan so'zlar guruhlari — amerikanizmlar turlariga qisqacha tavsif beriladi. Muallif ayrim turg'un birikmalar misolida ularning ingliz tilining har ikkala variantida qo'llanish o'ziga xosliklarini aniqlashga muvaffaq bo'lgan.

Kalit so'zlar: leksik farqlar, Amerika ingliz tili, Britaniya ingliz tili, xalqaro muloqot, madaniyat, grammatika, fonetika, lug'at boyligi, ko'p ma'noli so'z.

Annotation. This paper studies the differences between American and British English, in particular lexical peculiarities of each variant. The author tracks down the genesis of American English and explores the academic disputes on whether the American English is an independent language. The article also gives a brief description of different types of Americanisms — groups of words belonging solely to American English. The author managed to explore certain examples of set expressions and to determine the peculiarity of their usage in both variants of English.

Keywords: lexical differences, American English, British English, international communication, culture, grammar, phonetics, vocabulary, polysemantic word.

Аннотация. Данная статья посвящена изучению различий между американским и британским вариантами английского языка, в частности их лексических особенностей. Автор прослеживает истоки формирования американского английского и рассматривает научные споры о том, является ли американский английский самостоятельным языком. В статье также даётся краткое описание различных типов американизмов — групп слов, характерных исключительно для американского варианта английского языка. Автору удалось проанализировать отдельные примеры устойчивых выражений и определить особенности их употребления в обоих вариантах английского языка.

Ключевые слова: лексические различия, американский английский, британский английский, международное общение, культура, грамматика, фонетика, лексика, многозначное слово.

Introduction. English is the language of international communication and the most widespread language in the world. This had its own historical reasons. In the 18th century Britain has acquired the status of an Empire, establishing its authority over the one fourth of the Earth's land surface, creating colonies in many parts of the world. "The Empire on which the sun never sets" — such a statement was used about British Empire, referring to its limitless territories. These historical conditions launched the process of the appearance of the dialects of the English languages and regional varieties, including American English. This topic is especially relevant nowadays due to rapid globalization and the

dissemination of the American culture: literature, music and cinematography — and the American variant of English, while British remains an academic standard throughout the world. That is why it is of utmost importance to understand how these lexical peculiarities are forming specific features of both variants of English.

Materials. The study of lexical variation between British and American English has long attracted the attention of linguists, lexicographers, and sociolinguists. Research in English lexicology provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing vocabulary structure, word formation, semantic change, and regional differentiation. Foundational works by Antrushina, Afanaseva, and Morozova (2021), as well as Arnold (2022), outline the general principles of English lexicology and emphasize that vocabulary is the most dynamic subsystem of language, making it particularly sensitive to historical and cultural change. These theoretical frameworks enable scholars to investigate how national and regional varieties of English develop distinct lexical features while preserving a shared linguistic core.

Classical studies in English lexicology conducted by Ginzburg et al. (2019) and Zykova (2018) provide detailed classifications of lexical units, mechanisms of word formation, and semantic processes. These works stress that vocabulary evolution is closely connected with extralinguistic factors, including migration, technological progress, and sociopolitical development. Their approaches form the methodological basis for identifying Americanisms as a distinct lexical layer within the English language system.

Results. The American variant of the English language began its history when the first settlers from the British Isles moved to the unknown continent. However, at the same time, there were many migrants from other European countries: German, Dutch, French, Spanish and Russian native speakers inhabited the New World. As the colonies were being established under the rule of the British Empire, people used the English language as a mean of communication between each other. That is why American culture is often referred to as a unique “melting pot”, where plethora of different national cultures mixed with one another. While the new political institutions were formed and the American War of Independence took place, a new national identity appeared in the Western Hemisphere with its specific version of the English language.

Later the destiny of the English language in America became a subject of academic dispute, for the Americans wished to create their own unique national culture after gaining independence. They could do that by protecting the autonomy of their language, which was of great importance in the terms of political unification and eventual liberation from the power of the British Empire[7.269].

Thus, a theory of independent and separate American language appeared in the works of the American lexicographer Noah Webster who claimed that Americans needed not only their own administrative system, but also their own system of language. In 1828, his work, American Dictionary of the English Language, was published. It highlighted the

American standards and norms of using the words. Another significant proponent of the independent American language was H. L. Mencken, putting forward the idea that Americanized English possessed more advantages and was the language of a universal American civilization[12].

However, the statement that British English and American English are two different languages is invalid, for the grammatical systems of both American and British are identical, with minor divergences in grammar, phonetics, vocabulary. It is same for the assertion that American English is a dialect of the English language, because American English has its own literary variety, while the dialect is usually opposed to the literary variety of the language, and possesses its own local dialects. Therefore, the established viewpoint is that American English is a regional variety of the English language, which has peculiarities in grammar, sound system and, what is most important for us, lexis (lexical system).

The most palpable are the difference in phonetics, which is expressed in the distinctive rhythm and intonation of speech. The differences in grammar generally lie in the preference of a particular grammatical form or category. In addition, the orthography of American English is simplified, compared to the British English.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that both variants of the English language influence one another, British having the prevailing impact on American English up to 1914, and since then American English getting the predominant influence on British English because of the intensive flow of popular culture (films, music, etc.) from the USA to Britain. This led to the appearance of the opinion that American English will one day take over and be proclaimed as a standard form of the English language in Britain.

To sum up, the historical background and the geographical conditions determined certain characteristic features of American English, which would later bring to the appearance of particular differences. Nonetheless, these differences will not make American English an independent language, but rather a regional variety.

It is obvious that American English has its own specific vocabulary consisting of whole groups of words which belong solely to American English. These words are called Americanisms and they are one of the components defining the lexical differences between American and British English. Therefore, Americanisms can be divided into several groups, first of them being the Historical Americanisms. This type of Americanisms appeared when the first migrants reached the ground of the new continent, they were using the standard 17th century form of English and many words preserved their old meaning in the new environment, whereas in Britain their interpretation partially changed. For example, the noun fall was still used in America in its meaning “autumn”, the adjective mad in the meaning “angry”, sick in the meaning “ill” and the verb to guess in the meaning “to think”. While all of these words are present in both American and British English, these meanings were not exclusively made up in America, but used in

their outdated sense. These words can be met in their old meaning in the works of Chaucer and Shakespeare and other writers of XVI-XVIII centuries. Thus, in Britain these words are of bookish style, while in the USA they are of neutral style.

The second group of Americanisms are proper Americanisms. These words are unlikely to be found in British vocabulary, for they were coined in America due to the fact that there were no words in British English to describe many natural phenomena that the migrants encountered in the new land: animals, trees, plants, birds, etc. These are such words as mockingbird, catfish, sweet potato, eggplant, redbud, and bluegrass. As we can see, all of the words mentioned above are compounds, which were formed of familiar English elements and through the essentially English pattern of composition[1. 189-201].

There is a whole layer of Americanisms, which appeared later. Mostly they are connected with certain spheres of life. For example, railroad terminology: railroad — railway, engineer — driver, conductor — guard, baggage car — van, freight train — goods train, sleeper — sleeping car, tie — sleeper, switch — point. A wide range emerged in the USA to mark some unique political phenomena, some of them are straightly come from the names of historical personalities, e.g. to lynch (presumably this word comes from the name of judge Lynch, who was executing African-Americans without trial). To gerrymander (Gerry + salamander, the first part coming from the name of the governor of Massachusetts who was guilty of election fraud). Some words related to criminal world were coined in America as well. These are gangster and racket, which became international words afterward [6. 310-312].

Another type of Americanisms are American Shortenings, even though there is nothing specifically American in this way of word-building. However, these exact shortening were formed in America. These are dorm (for dormitory), gym (for gymnasium), n.g. (for no good), etc.

American English is as rich in borrowings as British English. It happened because the settlers historically interacted with many ethnic groups and thus specifically American borrowings appeared. These are borrowing from Indian: wigwam, canoe, tomahawk, raccoon, etc. Spanish borrowings: sombrero, canyon, mustang, ranch, etc. In addition, Negro borrowings, such as banjo and borrowings of French origin: prairie and caribou. There is also a wide range of translation loans, the majority of them of Indian origin: pipe of peace, paleface, warpath, etc. American English vocabulary certainly possesses some distinctive features, which is expressed in the existence of Americanisms. These words are used on both sides of the Atlantic, which, however, does not cancel the fact that they are perceived as Americanisms nowadays. These words create tangible lexical differences between American and British English.

Cases of lexical differences

There is a quite considerable amount of lexical differences between American and British English. We shall make an attempt to consider several cases of differences, concerning various aspects of words usage in these two variants of English.

The first case is when there is no equivalent in either British or American English. For example, such word as drive-in, which means a cinema or a restaurant, which a person can visit without leaving their car. This type of differences may include the American borrowings denoting different natural phenomena and unknown objects mentioned earlier: sombrero, skunk, etc. On the other hand, Proper Americanisms that find no analogues in British English.

The second case is when different words are used to denote the same subject, e.g. underground (BrE) — subway (AmE), biscuit (BrE) — cookie (AmE), luggage (BrE)-baggage (AmE), elevator (BrE) — lift (AmE), sweets (BrE) — candy (AmE), railway (BrE) — railroad (AmE).

The third case is when certain words are used in both American and British English, but more often in one of the variants. This relates to the pair of words shop and store, the first one is more frequent in British English, while the second word — in American English.

The fourth case is when one of the meaning of the words is more characteristic of one of the variants of English. We shall consider the word faculty, which can be encountered in American and British English. However, in its meaning “all the teachers or other workers in a college or university” it is used solely in American English. Usually one of its specific meanings has analogous version in British English. In this case it is teaching staff in British English.

The next case is when a polysemantic word is used more frequently in one of its meanings in British or American English. For example, the word brew is used in British English mostly in a sense of “a cup of tea”, while in American English the meaning of this word is “a beer or a coffee drink”[13.156].

The last sixth case is when the same word has completely different meanings in two variants of English. For example, the word homely has peculiar connotation in either of regional versions. In British it is used to denote a characteristic “home loving, domesticated”, while in American English it has quite the opposing, negative meaning “ugly, plain or unattractive in appearance”.

Another interesting example is the pair pavement (BrE) — sidewalk (AmE) that in this case of contrasting indicates the path alongside a road where pedestrians walk. Nonetheless, despite the fact that pavement is not used in the USA to denote a path for pedestrians, it is used for the road itself where the vehicles drive. Thus, this pair of words represents a complex case where different words imply the same subject, but at the same time one of its elements “pavement” is met in American English as well, though more frequently in a different sense.

Discussion. However, the lexical differences are expressed not only in words, but also in set expressions that have the same meaning but, nonetheless, endured some transformation in American English, acquiring either a slightly distinctive or a completely different form. The list of the examples is given in the table 1.

Table 1

Lexical differences in set expressions

British English Variant	American English Variant	Meaning
Cheese off	Tick off	To anger someone
Enough to make a cat laugh	Enough to make a horse laugh	Extremely ridiculous or ironic
To get one's cards	To get a pink slip	To lose a job
In top gear	In high gear	To be or become very exciting or active
To skive	To goof off	To avoid working or studying
To get the smelled head	To get the big head	To become arrogant
To keep somebody in suspense	To keep somebody in guessing	To hide the information from somebody
To take the bun	To take the cake	To be better or to outdo someone
To get in trouble	To get into a jam	To be in a difficult situation
Not to care a brass farthing	Not to care a red cent	Not to care at all
Not to worth a bean (a halfpenny, a farthing)	Not to worth a continental (a red cent, a cent)[13. 560]	To be worthless

The lexical difference can also be felt in everyday life, when using colloquial phrases. When finishing doing something a British person is likely to use a phrase "to go through with something", while American will say "to be through with something". A British will have a bath, whereas an American will take a bath. When asked, whether a person wants milk in their coffee, a British will be asked "Black or white?" and an American "With or without?".

Conclusion. The present study has demonstrated that American English, while sharing a common grammatical and structural foundation with British English, has developed a distinct lexical identity shaped by historical, geographical, and sociocultural factors. The formation of American English as a regional variety of the English language resulted from early colonial settlement, interaction with indigenous and immigrant communities, and the emergence of an independent national consciousness. These conditions contributed to the preservation of archaic meanings, the creation of new lexical items, and extensive borrowing from other languages, all of which enriched the American vocabulary.

The analysis of Americanisms revealed several layers of lexical divergence, including historical survivals, newly coined words for previously unknown realities, domain-specific terminology, shortenings, and borrowings. These elements reflect not only linguistic creativity but also the practical need to name new objects, experiences, and institutions. Furthermore, the classification of lexical differences between British and American

English illustrated that variation occurs through distinct word choices, differences in frequency of usage, divergence in semantic structure, and contrasting meanings of identical lexical units. Set expressions and everyday conversational phrases further highlight how cultural and communicative preferences shape language variation.

Despite these differences, mutual intelligibility between British and American English remains unaffected, confirming that both belong to the same linguistic system rather than representing separate languages. At the same time, ongoing globalization and the worldwide influence of American media continue to accelerate lexical exchange between the two variants, gradually reducing some distinctions while introducing new ones. Therefore, understanding lexical differences between British and American English is not only essential for linguistic research but also for effective intercultural communication, translation practice, and foreign language teaching. Future studies may focus on tracing newly emerging Americanisms in digital communication and examining their impact on global English usage.

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