

UNIT 66: CULTURAL DIMENSION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE WORLD. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH. ANGLICISMS. THE GROWTH OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SPAIN

Cultural Dimension of the English Language

Colonial Empire

- The British Colonial Empire underwent significant changes during the Industrial Revolution (1750-1850), which is believed to have spurred imperial expansion. The British government aimed to acquire the American continent and islands to establish a market for their manufactured goods and secure sources of products not readily available domestically.
- During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the first British Empire expanded into American territories previously controlled by the Dutch and Spanish Empires. This expansion led to conflicts with French colonial ambitions in Africa, Canada, and India. The American Revolution in 1776 marked the end of this initial empire.
- The second British Empire began with Captain Cook's exploratory voyages to Australia and New Zealand in the 1770s. It reached its zenith during the reign of Queen Victoria.
- Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the British Empire underwent both development and dismantling. The colonies in India gained independence in 1947, followed by Hong Kong in 1997. These events marked significant milestones in the dissolution of the British Empire.

The Commonwealth

- In 1931, the Statute of Westminster officially recognized the British Commonwealth of Nations.
- Initially comprising the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, the Irish Free State (which later withdrew in 1949), Newfoundland (which became a Canadian province in 1949), New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa (which withdrew in 1961), the Commonwealth expanded its membership after World War II. Its name was subsequently changed to the Commonwealth of Nations to include independent nations that had never been part of the British Empire but sought to join.
- The Commonwealth functions as a voluntary association of sovereign states committed to fostering friendship and cooperation.
- Symbolically, the British monarch serves as its head, while meetings of the over 50 Commonwealth heads of government occur biennially.
- Core principles include embracing diversity alongside a shared heritage in language, culture, and the rule of law; striving for consensus through consultation and shared experiences; and upholding certain fundamental principles.
- Key values encompass respect for diversity, human dignity, and opposition to all forms of discrimination; dedication to democracy, the rule of law, good governance, freedom of expression, and the protection of human rights; addressing poverty and promoting people-centric development; and prioritizing international peace and security, adherence to international law, and opposition to terrorism.

Main countries

- Canada: the majority of its population is of European origin. In linguistic terms, Canada has developed a type of Canadian English which is different from other North American varieties. The differences lie mainly in vocabulary and pronunciation.

- Australia: was long inhabited by Aboriginals until the first English settlement in 1788. Australian English starts in the second half of the eighteenth century when pidgin English appeared due to the interrelationship of settlers and Aboriginals. The number of Aboriginal words in Australian English (boomerang, jumbuck, kangaroo) is quite small.
- New Zealand: was originally inhabited by Polynesian population. The 19th century saw the arrival of catholic missionaries and English protestants and the two races achieved considerable harmony. In linguistic terms, the New Zealand language has been influenced by its Australian neighbours as well as by the Scottish language, namely in family names (Dunedin, Murray). From Australia, many Zealanders were influenced by the native Maori culture, hence many Maori words were borrowed to making reference to animals, plants and local trees (kiwi).
- In linguistic terms, the development of the English language in South Africa is related to the term 'pidgin', hence 'pidgin English' is commonly spoken in Africa. Traditionally, pidgin languages are defined as those auxiliary languages that have no native speakers and are used for communicating between people who have no common language.
- India: it was in the nineteenth century that, at the highest peak of the British Empire, there was a flood of English administrators, educators, army officers and missionaries who spread the English language throughout the sub-continent. Hence by the turn of the century English had become the prestige language of India. After a century, the Jewel of the Crown had added many Indian words into the English language. In addition, Indian English possesses a number of distinctive stylistic features. Nowadays, even after Indian's independence (1947), there are more speakers of English in India than in Britain (over 70 million). English became the official language of everyday life at any sphere.
- The Commonwealth Caribbean Islands: of all the varieties of Caribbean English, the most appealing is the Jamaican creole, defined as a language that has evolved from a pidgin language that has been nativised. So, we may differentiate two different types of language: on the one hand, standard English, used in newspapers and news reporting; and on the other hand, Jamaican English, which is virtually unintelligible to the outsider since this is the language of the streets.

English out of the Commonwealth

- English has risen to prominence as the foremost and most widely spoken language globally, owing to two primary factors:
- Historically, English's preeminence can be attributed to the extensive colonial holdings of the British Empire at the dawn of the century.
- Presently, its status as a lingua franca stems from the substantial military, economic, scientific, political, and cultural influence wielded by both the United Kingdom and subsequently the United States.
- English has attained the status of an official language within various international organizations, including the European Parliament, the EU Committee, UNESCO, NATO, and numerous others.
- According to Professor David Crystal's assessment in 2006, approximately 360 million individuals speak English as their native tongue, with an additional 400 million employing it as a second language, and a staggering 600-700 million utilizing English as a foreign language.
- The linguistic landscape of English comprises a multitude of varieties shaped by regional, educational, ethnic, attitudinal, medium, and subject matter influences. Regional variations are commonly referred to as dialects, exemplified by American English, Australian English, British English, Canadian English, Caribbean English, and so forth.

British English vs American English

Spelling

a) Word endings:

-our (BrE) vs. -or (AmE): colour/color, flavour/flavor, honour/honor.

-re (BrE) vs. -er (AmE): centre/center, theatre/theatre.

-gue (BrE) vs. -g (AmE): catalogue/catalog, dialogue/dialog.

-ise (BrE) vs. -ize (AmE): realise/realize, organise/organize.

b) Greek-derived words: mediaeval, encyclopaedia (BrE) vs. medieval, encyclopedia (AmE).

c) Doubled consonant: British English generally doubles final -l when adding suffixes that begin with a vowel, where American English doubles it only on stressed syllables. (British 'counsellor, equalling, modelling, travelled' vs. American 'counselor, equaling, modeling, traveled'. British also use a single 'l' before suffixes beginning with a consonant where Americans use a double: British 'enrolment, fulfilment, skilful' vs. American 'enrollment, fulfillment, skillful'.

d) Other special cases:

British English often keeps silent 'e' when adding suffixes where American English doesn't. British 'ageing' vs. American 'aging'.

Nouns ending in -ce with -se verb forms: American English retains the noun/verb distinction in 'advice / advise' and 'device / devise', but has lost the same distinction with 'licence / license' and 'practice / practise' that British English retains.

Vocabulary

a) Words with the same form and different meaning: the word 'pants' is referred to as 'underpants' (BrE) vs. 'trousers' (AmE).

b) Same form and additional meaning in one variety: the word 'leader' is referred to as 'one who commands guides and directs' both in BrE and AmE, but it may also have an additional meaning in British English as 'an editorial'; and similarly, 'dumb' as 'mute' in both varieties and 'stupid' as the additional meaning in AmE.

c) Same form and difference in style: 'autumn' is common to all styles in BrE, but it is namely used in poetic or formal writing in AmE.

d) Different form and same meaning: while (BrE) vs. whilst (AmE), cooker vs. stove, jug vs. pitcher, jumper vs. sweater, garden vs. yard, chemist's vs. drug store.

e) Miscellaneous changes:

Nouns of direction with -wards: British English 'forwards, upwards, afterwards' vs. American 'forward, upward, afterward'.

Prepositions: BrE 'round' vs. AmE 'around'; in a team vs. on a team; at the weekend vs. on the weekend.

Adjectives + preposition: 'different from' in BrE vs. 'different than' in AmE.

Grammar

- a) Plural formation processes: singular attributives in one country may be plural in the other, and vice versa. For example, Britain has 'a drugs problem' while the United States has 'a drug problem'.
- b) Names of rivers: the word river usually comes after the name in AmE (Colorado River), whereas for British rivers it comes before (River Thames).
- c) Verbal tenses in the past ending -t: 'dreamt, leapt, learnt, spelt' (BrE) vs. 'dreamed, leaped, learned, spelled' (AmE).
- d) Other verb past tense forms: note British English words such as 'fitted, forecasted, knitted, lighted, wedded' vs. American ones: 'fit, forecast, knit, lit, wed'. The former forms are also found in American. Also, the past participle 'gotten' is never used in BrE.
- e) The present perfect tense is much more common in British dialects than in American, where the simple past tense is usually used instead.
- f) The British use 'have got', whereas Americans say 'have' as the only form.
- g) American English allows do as a substitute for have. In the past, British English did not allow this, but it is becoming increasingly common. Compare BrE 'Have you any coins? Yes, I have' vs. AmE 'Do you have any food? Yes, I do.'
- h) In informal usage, American English often uses the form 'did' + infinitive where British English would use 'have/has' + past participle. For instance, 'Did you tidy your room yet?' would be usual American English where most British speakers would say 'Have you tidied your room yet?'.
- i) The subjunctive mood is more common in American English in expressions like 'They suggested he study for the exam' whereas British English would say 'They suggested (that) he should study for the exam'.

Pronunciation

- a) Specific words: 'either' and 'neither'.
- b) In British English we find the /r/ dropping at the end of a word in isolation (i.e. far, near) in contrast to the insertion of /r/ at the end of a word when next word starts by a vowel (i.e. far away, near us).
- c) Regarding common features of American English pronunciation:
 - Regarding vowels, American English generally has a simplified vowel system as compared to the British dialects: new, student.
 - Standard American English preserves the sound /r/ in all occurrences, whereas British English only preserves it when it is followed by a vowel (rhotic /r/).

Presence of English Language in Spain

Anglicism: word borrowed from English into another language.

- Words which have been fully adapted from English and keep the same form: 'penalty', 'CD', 'radio cassette', 'single', 'fashion', 'top-model', 'Internet', 'e-mail'.
- Words which have been adapted in form but differ in pronunciation: 'rugby', 'self-service', 'bungalow', 'hall', 'habitat'.
- Words which have been fully adapted from English and do not keep the same form: 'mitin' (from 'meeting'), 'estatus' (from 'status'), 'estándar' (from 'standard').
- Words which have lost their English appearance, and consequently, are to be felt to be Spanish: 'evento' (vs. event), 'canal' (vs. channel).
- Compound words, that is, compound English words adapted to Spanish: 'rascacielos', 'luna de miel'.
- Words which are misused due to the influence of journalistic language. These are words that exist in Spanish with a different meaning: 'sophisticated' (Spanish 'chic, modern' vs. English 'complex'), 'domestic' (Spanish 'referred to household' vs. English 'national affairs').