

A comparative study of British English and American English

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Abstract. As the universal language in the world, English is a language platform for us to communicate more with foreign countries, which can let us know more about the dynamics of the world and the most advanced knowledge. Now English has been applied to every corner of the world. If we can speak English well, we will have more chances to succeed. So, the number of people learning English has been growing rapidly. However, due to various factors such as history, culture, politics and economy, English has gradually evolved into all kinds of English, of which British English and American English are more commonly used, but they are easy to be confused. Through a comparative study of American English and British English, this paper is of great significance for a better understanding of English language and culture, and it is useful for better mastering English.

Keywords: British English; American English; contrastive study

1. Introduction

The difference between British English and American English exists objectively, and English learners will notice the difference between them. In fact, there are many kinds of English in the world. Even in the same country, there will be regional differences in pronunciation and grammar.

2. A comparison of the differences between British English and American English

2.1 Pronunciation

The differences in pronunciation between British English and American English are mainly reflected in the different pronunciation of vowel A, O and consonant R.

2.1.1 Consonant

R: The letter R represents almost all the differences between Britain and the United States. As a consonant, the difference is that when R is at the end of the first word and the second word begins with a vowel, British English treats r completely as a vowel, while American English will treat r as the consonant of the first vowel of the following word. For example, the phrase clear animosity, English will read clear / animosity, and American English will read clear-r animosity.

2.1.2 Vowel

When letter a before [m], [n], [ŋ], [s], [θ], [f], British English pronunciation is [a:], American English pronunciation is [æ], for example: ask, bath, aunt, example, advance, commander, castle, can't, glass, chance, half. American short o sounds like English short /ʌ/, at the same time, if there is r after the long sound o, it is usually Er Hua as mentioned in the previous paragraph. If there is no r, it will automatically become the pronunciation of a short sound o. /ɒ/-/ʌ/ situation: bottle, popular, knock; /ɔː/-/ɒ/ situation: plausible, applause.

The biggest difference between British English and American English lies in R whether to curl the tongue or not. The British voice does not curl the tongue, and the American voice curls the tongue. However, some students who are obsessed with the American voice curl the tongue too much. They curl the tongue where they shouldn't curl. They curl the tongue even worse than Americans, which is not good. The essentials of curling tongue are very simple. It mainly depends on whether R appears in the letter combination. If there is, it must be curled. If not, it must not be curled (except Mrs.). For example: spare-British voice: [speə]; American voice: [sper]; burglar-

British voice: ['bɜːglə]; American voice: ['bɜːglə-]; purpose- British voice: ['pɜːpəs]; American voice: ['pɜːpəs].

Pay special attention to words that should not be rolled but are often rolled, such as: idea- British voice: [aɪ'diə]; American voice: [aɪ'diə]; famous- British voice: ['feməs]; American voice: ['feməs]; breakfast- British voice: ['brekfəst]; American voice: ['brekfəst].

Another thing that is key to note that r here is at the end of the letter combination, it does not include r that appears at the beginning of a syllable in the form of consonant, if it is at the beginning, it should be rolled up whether English or American, because you must spell the following vowels, you can't complete it without rolling your tongue, for example: radio, road, rice.

After [l], [D], [n] and [t], the letter u and ew tends to read [u] in American pronunciation and [ju:] in English pronunciation. For example: student- British voice: ['stju:d(ə)nt]; American voice: ['studnt]; produce- British voice: [prə'dju:s]; American voice: [prə'dus].

2.1.3 Other

① In American pronunciation, when /t/ appears between two vowels and is in the non-stressed position, the pronunciation is similar to /d/. For example: city, water, pretty.

② Special pronunciation at the end of the word-ile, pronounced /l/ in American pronunciation and /ail/ in British pronunciation. For example: fertile, hostile.

③ The differences between British and American pronunciation of some words can not be included in the above rules, but there is a rule that American pronunciation is basically pronounced according to the spelling or the sound of the letter itself, while English pronunciation is not (the first of the following phonetic symbols is American and the last is English). For example: interesting-['ɪntərɪstɪŋ]/['ɪntrɪstɪŋ], often-['ɔftən]/['ɔfən], factory-['fæktəri]/['fæktəri].

④ The difference between British and American pronunciation is sometimes reflected in stress, such as: kilometer-[ki'lɒmi:tə]/['kilə,mi:tə].

⑤ Habitual pronunciation, words that have nothing to do with spelling, such as: neither-['ni:ðə]/['naiðə], either-['iðə]/['aiðə].

2.2 Date and number expression

In terms of date, there are differences between the two expressions. Take the day as the first and the month as the second, this is a British expression; the American expression is the opposite, with the month first and the date later. For example: 一九九六年三月二日, British expression: 2ndMarch,1996; American expression: March2,1996.

Their writing methods are also different: in American writing, st, nd, rd of 1st, 2nd, 3rd is not used. Due to the different written expression of the date, the reading method is also different. Such as 1987年4月20日: The British way of writing is 20th April, 1987, which is read as the twentieth of April, nineteen eighty-seven; The American expression is April 201987, and it reads April the twentieth, nineteen eighty-seven.

Similarly, when all dates are expressed in numbers, there are differences between British and American expressions. 2021年11月6日 should be written as 06/11/21 in British style and 11/06/21 in American style.

2.3 Reading method

There are also differences between British English and American English in digital oral expression. For example: \$175 (175美元). In British English, read a(one) hundred and seventy-five dollars; American English reads one hundred seventy-five dollars, often omitting and.

When expressing numbers with the same number in succession, British English is used to double or triple, which is not generally used in American English. For example, the telephone number 620442 is six two zero, double four two in British English and six two zero four four two in American English. However, Americans also read three consecutive identical numbers as three plus the plural of the number, such as 999 as three nines.

2.4 Spell

Americans are a nation that pays attention to practicality. They also adopt a pragmatic attitude in the spelling of their words. In the development of American English, there has been a similar movement in spelling to the simplified spelling movement in China, which deleted some letters that are not pronounced in the spelling of words. The difference in spelling is another difference between British English and American English.

The silent ending of an English word: -me, -ue.

公斤: kilogram (American English) / kilogramme (British English). 目录: catalog (American English) / catalogue (British English).

For words ending in -our in English, the silent letter u is deleted from American English.

举止: behavior (American English) / behaviour (British English). 颜色: color (American English) / colour (British English). 最爱: favorite (American English) / favourite (British English).

In English, it ends with -re, a word pronounced /e/.

中心: center (American English) / centre (British English). 公尺: meter (American English) / metre (British English).

In English, some words ending with -ence are changed to -ense in American English, and the pronunciation is still /ns/.

防御: defense (American English) / defence (British English). 执照: license (American English) / licence (British English). 犯法行为: offense (American English) / offence (British English).

The -ise verb in English is spelled -ize in American English.

组织: organize (American English) / organise (British English). 实施、实行: actualize (American English) / actualise (British English). 意识到: realize (American English) / realise (British English).

2.5 Grammar

2.5.1 Article

① When the British use articles, the Americans don't use articles. British English: It was a Tuesday and he wasn't back at work until the Wednesday.

② When Americans use articles, the British don't use. American English: The patient was in the hospital.

2.5.2 Preposition

British English: at the weekend.

American English: on the weekend.

British English: Some parents are talking about keeping their children off school.

American English: Some parents are talking about keeping their children out of school.

2.6 Word

In everyday vocabulary, British English and American English have their own expressions, which we can see from the comparison table.

电梯: elevator (British English) / lift (American English). 汽车: automobile (British English) / car (American English). 饼干: cookie (British English) / biscuit (American English). 足球: soccer (British English) / football (American English).

2.7 Letter

British letters are more conservative. Many British people like to use old-fashioned letters with formal and rigid words, while the American letter language is very lively, dynamic and simple in format. Therefore, when we write to Britain or its old colonial countries, we should use Queens English; if we write to the United States or areas under American influence, we should use American English. Of course, the British language and culture have also changed in recent years, but generally speaking, the difference between the two is very obvious.

2.7.1 Format

British English: the first word in each paragraph is indented, which is called indented or serrated.

American English: Business English letters are generally required to be printed neatly by typewriter or computer. The lines on the left start vertically, which is called vertical or flush. The vertical position and signature are in the border on the left. This format has been widely used in American companies that highly respect work efficiency.

2.7.2 Honorific

Honorifics should be used in English letters. The most common honorifics are Mr, Mrs and miss (for unmarried women). Britons often use ESQ (abbreviation of Esquire) after male names, but in business, they are slowly changing to Messrs (plural form of Mr) for more than two men, or for companies or groups composed of more than two men. Mr. MMES (plural form of madam), For more than two women. In British English letters, Mr, Mrs and Messrs do not add abbreviated periods. On the contrary, American English tends to be progressive and free, rather than adding abbreviated periods, such as Mr., Mrs. Messrs.

2.7.3 Terms of address

Equivalent to China's "respectful" or "cautious". If the letter is addressed to each company, not to a specific person. Use Dear Sirs in British English; Gentlemen (plural form) is used in American English. If the other company has only one person, Sir / Dear Sir must be used. Punctuation is generally used after the address, comma is used in English and semicolon is used in American.

2.7.4 Polite words

It is equivalent to "salute", "salute" and other sentences used at the end of Chinese letters. British English uses your sincerely, best wishes, kind awards and your faithfully. American English uses sincerely and best awards.

2.8 Tone

British English: British people's tone is cadenced and high pitched, which is somewhat similar to French (but they won't admit it), and British people laugh at Americans' weak, loose and rhythmic speech. American English: Americans speak relatively steady and low, and their sentences are usually in a falling tone and slower. Americans like to laugh at the slight hysteria and femininity of the British tone.

3. Causes and effects of the differences between American English and British English

What causes the difference between American English and British English? Let's first analyze the historical development of English in the two countries.

3.1 British English

Around the fifth century, the Germanic invaded the island of England, mainly including three ethnic groups: Anglo, Saxon and jute. Their dialect developed into old English. Old English was again influenced by Scandinavian invaders who spoke Old Norse. The internal development of Old English is moving towards simplifying word form changes, and old Norse has accelerated this process, especially in Northern dialects. Middle English and modern English in the Renaissance, English evolved into Middle English. In the 15th century, due to the great change of vowels, English further evolved into the so-called modern English. English has been absorbing foreign words until now, especially Latin and Greek. Because of this, English can be said to be the language with the largest vocabulary in the world.

3.2 American English

American English originated from English in the Elizabethan period. Its history is closely related to the history of American immigration. The history of American immigration can be traced back to more than 300 years ago. In 1607, the first 120 colonists, including John Smith, crossed the Atlantic Ocean in three large ships and established Jamestown at the James estuary in Virginia. Soon afterwards, in 1620, pilgrims from Norfolk and Suffolk in the east of England arrived at Plymouth in the southeast of Massachusetts on the ship "May Flower" and established a colony. Among the first pilgrims to immigrate to New England, more than 100 were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge universities. They separated Elisabeth English from British rule. Brought to the new world of North America and became the starting point of American English. From then on, two countries spoke Elizabethan English. Therefore, for a long time, there was no significant difference between American English and British English. The victory of the American War of independence (1775-1783) was a historic turning point, which marked the emergence of a new American English. Revolutionaries tried to break away from British rule in all areas of life.

Noah Webster is the most famous lexicographer in the United States. In 1828, he published the American Dictionary of English language, and Americans have a dictionary of their own pronunciation since then. As an immigrant country, the United States has always been known as the "nation of nations", but its mainstream culture is still Anglo-Saxon culture. Any new immigrants must accept or adapt to this mainstream culture in order to live in the new world. At the same time, the struggle of the American people for the independence and formation of their own literature and language is the continuation and development of the political struggle. The formation of American English is a long and tortuous process. The period before and after the first World War was a turning point in the relationship between American English and British English. Before that, American English deviated from British English, and after that, British English moved closer to American English.

4. Summary

In the world, the number of people speaking English has exceeded that of any language. English is the official language in 45 countries, one third of the world speak English, 75% of TV programs are in English, three-quarters of emails are written in English, and the computer keyboard is an English keyboard. Any conference that dares to be called an international conference must use English. In addition, the foreign trade industry also takes English as the common language. Foreign trade exchanges, international etiquette, letters and telegrams, import and export documents, and bank documents all take English as the standard common language. Universities and colleges in

most countries offer English language and literature majors. In China alone, hundreds of universities have English majors or English related majors. Computers and the Internet are also based on English. The language of this industry is English. In addition, it is closely related to English in the fields of medicine, architecture and literature.

The application of English is everywhere. We are already in an era and place where we can speak in English. Therefore, we must try to learn English well. Choosing to learn and know how to distinguish between American English and British English has become our compulsory course. The difference between American English and British English is not only in pronunciation, spelling and word choice, but also cultural differences. Americans seek innovation and wonder and are willing to experiment and create; The British tend to abide by the traditional format and strive to maintain a unified standard. This may be the response to the different attitudes and practices of different national spirits in the use of language in Britain and the United States, and it is also the main reason for the formation of variants of the same language in different regions.

Throughout the development of modern English, American English and British English interact and promote each other. Taken overall, American English has a major impact on British English. We learn English not only as a tool carrier for learning and communication, but also to understand the cultural and historical development of English-speaking countries, so as to lay a good foundation for better use of English in the future.

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