

American and British English variations and similarities

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Abstract

There are plenty of reasons why you should master an American accent. For starters, it will reduce communication barriers and improve your self-confidence, while also preventing mistakes caused by confusion or having to repeat yourself. It's important to keep in mind that the term “American accent” is a gross oversimplification as there are multiple accents even within a single region of America! With so many advantages of having an American accent, it's worth the effort to develop one. However, you'll need to work hard to make it happen. But before you can feel confident in your English speaking abilities and begin WOW-ing people who find out that English is actually your second language, you'll need a strategy in place to help you master the American English accent.

Key words: assistance, accent, multiple. Confusion, repeat, happen, improve, self-confidence, mind, repetition, single, oversimplification, preventing

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Отрывок

Есть множество причин, по которым вам следует овладеть американским акцентом. Во-первых, это уменьшит коммуникативные барьеры и повысит вашу уверенность в себе, а также предотвратит ошибки, вызванные путаницей или необходимостью повторяться. Важно помнить, что термин «американский акцент» — это сильное упрощение, поскольку даже в одном регионе Америки существует несколько акцентов! Имея так много преимуществ американского акцента, стоит приложить усилия, чтобы его развить. Однако вам придется приложить немало усилий, чтобы это произошло. Но прежде чем вы сможете почувствовать уверенность в своих способностях говорить по-английски и

“CONFERENCE OF NATURAL AND APPLIED SCIENCES IN SCIENTIFIC INNOVATIVE RESEARCH”

Issue 6. June 2024

начать удивлять людей, которые узнают, что английский на самом деле является вашим вторым языком, вам понадобится стратегия, которая поможет вам освоить американский английский акцент.

Ключевые слова: помощь, акцент, множественность. Путаница, повторение, случиться, улучшить, уверенность в себе, разум, повторение, одиночное, упрощение, предотвращение

By around 1720, Americans had begun to notice that their evolving dialect was different from the ol' mother tongue. The Scots and the Irish began to arrive in the United States, bringing new dialects and a distinctive accent. Swedish, Spanish, Dutch, and French speakers also began to arrive during the colonial era, helping shape new dialect areas throughout the colonies. It seemed as though American English was leaving certain aspects of British English behind, while at the same time welcoming new words from other cultures.

By the 1800's, there were three distinct dialect areas with different pronunciations, but similar vocabulary: Northern (New York, New England, and due west), Southern (Virginia to Georgia, out to Louisiana and due west), and Midland (Pennsylvania and the lower Midwest). The map below shows a similar pattern for modern-day U.S. English speakers.

Map of American English dialects

Image courtesy of UPenn

This evolution was primarily an intentional one, pushed along by people like Franklin, Paine, and other patriots. As Noah Webster would explain roughly 60 years later: “The reasons for American English being different than English English are simple [...as] an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government.”

These new words and phrases created throughout the centuries, referred to as “Americanisms”, signified the split from our English forefathers. As early as 1735, the English began to refer to American English, and our “Americanisms”, as barbaric, sneering and laughing at the hundreds of new American terms being used. It's believed the American Revolution was a turning point for embedding this new English, as rebels fiercely desired their independence from British rule.

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Issue 6. June 2024

One way American English began to differ from its British version? By continuing to use words that Great Britain had come to consider obsolete, like “wilt,” “allow,” “bureau,” and “fall” (instead of “autumn”). In other situations, we Americans just invented new words, like “groundhog” and “belittle,” which was first coined by Thomas Jefferson.

American English also came to be characterized by heavy use of contractions like “can’t” and “ain’t” — much to the dismay of certain British purists, who viewed these changes as “barbarous.” Contractions had been around for a while by this point (‘won’t’ had taken the form of ‘wonnot’ by 1580), but Americans were the first to really make the most of them, using these shortened phrases to improve both grammatical freedom and flow.

American English also gladly adopted words from other languages, among them more than a few (like moose, raccoon, and opossum) from different Native American tongues. Words were borrowed from the languages of Spanish, French, and German immigrants, too: armada from the Spanish, chocolate from the French, dollar and ouch! from the Germans.

The British actually introduced the language to the Americas when they reached these lands by sea between the 16th and 17th centuries. At that time, spelling had not yet been standardised. It took the writing of the first dictionaries to set in stone how these words appeared. In the UK, the dictionary was compiled by London-based scholars. Meanwhile, in the United States, the lexicographer was a man named Noah Webster. Allegedly, he changed how the words were spelled to make the American version different from the British as a way of showing cultural independence from its mother country.

In terms of speech, the differences between American and British English actually took place after the first settlers arrived in America. These groups of people spoke using what was called rhotic speech, where the ‘r’ sounds of words are pronounced. Meanwhile, the higher classes in the UK wanted to distinguish the way they spoke from the common masses by softening their pronunciation of the ‘r’ sounds. Since the elite even back then were considered the standard for being fashionable, other people began to copy their speech, until it eventually became the common way of speaking in the south of England.

Spelling differences

British and American English have some spelling differences. The common ones are presented in the table below.

British English

American English

-oe-/-ae- (e.g. anaemia, diarrhoea, encyclopaedia)

-e- (e.g. anemia, diarrhea, encyclopedia)

-t (e.g. burnt, dreamt, leapt)

-ed (e.g. burned, dreamed, leaped)

-ence (e.g. defence, offence, licence)

-ense (defense, offense, license)

-ell- (e.g. cancelled, jeweller, marvellous)

-el- (e.g. canceled, jeweler, marvelous)

-ise (e.g. appetiser, familiarise, organise)

-ize (e.g. appetizer, familiarize, organize)

-l- (e.g. enrol, fulfil, skilful)

-ll- (e.g. enroll, fulfill, skillfull)

-ogue (e.g. analogue, monologue, catalogue)

-og (e.g. analog, monolog, catalog)

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