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AMERICAN - BASED PRONUNCIATION STANDARTS OF ENGLISH

Jizzakh branch of the National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek
The faculty of Psychology, department of Foreign languages Phylology and foreign languages

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Annotation: This article explores the pronunciation standards of American English, focusing on the evolution and key features that distinguish it from other varieties of English, such as British English. It delves into the historical roots of American English pronunciation, highlighting the influences of European settlers and key linguistic reforms, particularly those introduced by Noah Webster. The article emphasizes the defining characteristics of American English pronunciation, such as rhoticity (the clear pronunciation of the "r" sound), vowel shifts, nasalization, and distinctive patterns of stress and intonation. It also discusses General American English as the standardized pronunciation used in formal settings, while acknowledging the rich diversity of regional accents across the U.S. In conclusion, the article underscores the importance of understanding American pronunciation standards for effective communication, while celebrating the diversity of regional speech patterns that enrich the language.

Key words: American English, pronunciation standards, General American, rhoticity, vowel shifts, nasalization, flapping, regional accents, Noah Webster, linguistic history, language diversity, American dialects, speech patterns, intonation, standard pronunciation, formal communication, language evolution.

American-Based Pronunciation Standards of English

Pronunciation plays a crucial role in how English is communicated, and in the case of American English, various standards and patterns have emerged as the norm for correct articulation. The American-based pronunciation of English is shaped by a blend of regional accents, historical linguistic influences, and educational standards that aim for clarity, consistency, and ease of understanding. This article explores the key features of American

English pronunciation standards, how they have developed, and the importance of these standards in global communication.

Historical Roots of American English Pronunciation

The evolution of American English pronunciation is deeply tied to the country's historical and cultural development. In the early years of European colonization, English settlers brought various dialects from Britain, including those from London, the West Country, and Scotland. Over time, these regional British dialects began to blend, influenced by indigenous languages, Dutch, French, and other immigrant tongues. As these influences merged, American English began to take on unique phonetic characteristics distinct from British English.

One of the most significant influences on American pronunciation came in the 19th century with the advent of Noah Webster, an American lexicographer who sought to standardize American English through his dictionary. Webster's reforms, which included changing British spellings (e.g., "colour" to "color") and encouraging certain pronunciations, helped form the foundation for a standardized American accent that diverged from British norms.

Key Features of American English Pronunciation

R-Influence (Rhoticity)

One of the most defining features of American English is its rhotic nature—meaning the "r" sound is pronounced clearly in all positions of a word. This is in contrast to many British dialects, such as Received Pronunciation (RP), where the "r" sound is often dropped at the end of syllables or words. For example, in American English, words like "car," "far," and "hard" all feature a strong, pronounced "r" sound.

Flapping and the "T" Sound

In many varieties of American English, the sound of the letter "t" (or sometimes "d") is pronounced as a quick, soft "d" in words like "butter," "better," and "water." This phenomenon is called *flapping*. Instead of a hard "t" sound, these words are often pronounced more like "budder," "bedder," and "wader," which reflects the tendency for American speakers to simplify and soften consonants for ease of speech.

Vowel Sounds

Vowel pronunciation in American English also differs significantly from other English varieties. For instance:

o   The "a" in "cat" is pronounced with a flat, nasal sound in most American dialects, compared to a shorter, clipped vowel sound in British English.

o   The "o" in "dog" is pronounced with a more rounded and open sound in American English.

o   The "a" in words like "father" and "ask" is pronounced more openly, as opposed to the more centralized vowel sounds found in many British accents.

Nasalization

American English tends to feature more nasality in speech, especially in regions like the Midwest and the South. This is particularly evident in the pronunciation of vowels before nasal consonants like "m," "n," and "ng." For example, the word "man" is often pronounced with a slight nasal resonance, which is less common in British English.

Word Stress and Intonation

The rhythm of American English is generally considered to be stress-timed, meaning that stressed syllables occur at regular intervals and are accompanied by a variation in pitch and volume. This differs from syllable-timed languages, where syllables are typically given equal time. American English also uses rising intonation patterns in questions and certain sentence constructions, giving the language a distinctive cadence compared to British English, which may use flatter intonation.

Standard American Pronunciation: General American

Within the vast array of regional accents across the United States, *General American* (GA) is considered the "standard" pronunciation for broadcasting, education, and formal contexts. General American is a neutral, non-regional accent that avoids the most extreme features of any one dialect. It is used by many newscasters, actors, and public speakers and is often considered the "ideal" pronunciation in the United States, especially in educational settings.

General American is characterized by:

- Clear pronunciation of consonants and vowels
- Rhotic "r" sounds
- Consistent vowel sounds that avoid regional variations like the New York or Southern drawl
- A relatively neutral tone, without regional intonations or speech patterns

It's important to note that there is no single "American accent" but rather a range of accents shaped by geography, culture, and individual experiences.

Importance of Pronunciation Standards

In the context of global communication, American English pronunciation standards serve an essential role in facilitating clear, understandable speech, particularly for learners of English as a second language (ESL). When people around the world aim to learn American English, they often study General American pronunciation to ensure they can communicate effectively with speakers from different parts of the United States and beyond.

Moreover, standardized pronunciation is crucial in professional settings such as international business, broadcasting, and academia, where consistency and clarity in communication are key. It helps to reduce misunderstandings that may arise from the vast array of regional accents and dialects in the English-speaking world.

Regional Accents and Diversity

While General American serves as the "standard," it's crucial to remember the rich variety of regional accents and dialects in the United States, including:

- Southern American English, with its distinct drawl and vowel shifts
- New York City English, known for its unique use of the "r" sound and other idiosyncratic features
- Midwestern American English, often cited as one of the "neutral" accents due to its relatively clear and neutral vowel sounds
- Western American English, which features a blend of influences from both the Midwest and the West Coast

These regional accents add color and diversity to American English, and each reflects the history and culture of the areas in which they developed. While General American pronunciation may be taught as the norm, understanding and appreciating regional differences is an essential part of the broader American linguistic landscape.

Conclusion

American English pronunciation standards have evolved over centuries, shaped by historical, social, and cultural influences. While General American remains the model for formal education and media, the rich variety of regional accents highlights the diversity and dynamism of English as spoken in the United States. Understanding these pronunciation standards, and how they compare to other English dialects, is crucial for both learners and speakers of the language, as it supports clearer communication and fosters a greater appreciation for the nuances of English pronunciation. In summary, the pronunciation standards of American English, particularly through General American, serve as a unifying force that promotes clarity and consistency in communication, both within the United States and on the global stage. However, it is important to recognize that pronunciation is not a rigid system, but rather a dynamic and evolving aspect of language shaped by cultural, regional, and social factors. While General American provides a standard for formal contexts, the richness of regional accents and dialects across the U.S. adds depth and character to the language, reflecting the diversity of the country's history and people. Embracing this diversity, while understanding the role of standardized pronunciation, allows speakers of English to navigate the complexities of language with greater awareness and appreciation for its varied forms. Ultimately, the beauty of American English lies in its ability to adapt, grow, and connect people across different cultures, backgrounds, and geographical boundaries.

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