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## VARIANTS AND DIALECTS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### ВАРІАНТИ ТА ДІАЛЕКТИ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

*Ідеться про два основні варіанти англійської мови (американський та британський), історію їх виникнення. Також аналізується різниця між розмовними варіантами мови у Великій Британії та США. Розглядаються різниці в граматиці, значенні слів та їх написанні, надаються приклади. Розповідається про науковий підхід американських та англійських лінгвістів до проблеми діалектів англійської мови.*

*Речь идёт о двух основных вариантах английского языка (американском и британском), истории их возникновения. Анализируется разница между разговорными вариантами языка в Великобритании и США, рассматривается разница в грамматике, значении слов и их написании, приводятся примеры. Также речь идёт о научном подходе американских и английских лингвистов к проблеме диалектов английского языка.*

*For historical and economic reasons the English language has spread over vast territories. It was enforced as a state language in Asia, Africa and America. This article is about the relationship between the English national language, its variants and dialects in other countries.*

It is but natural that English is not spoken with uniformity on the British Isles and in Australia, in the USA and New Zealand, etc. Close inspection, however, reveals that these varieties are essentially different in character. Only two have their own literary standards, i. e. their own generally accepted norms of speaking and writing—British English and American English.

Opinion differs as to the nature of these two main varieties of English. Some American linguists, H. L. Mencken for one, speak of two separate languages with a steady flood of linguistic influence first (up to about 1914) from Britain to America, and since then from America to the British Isles. They even proclaim that the American influence on British English is so powerful that there will come a time when the American standard will be established in Britain. Other linguists regard the language of the USA as a dialect of English.

Numerous investigations have shown that the most marked peculiarities of American English are to be found in slang and substandard language,

Quite a few, however, are typical of standard speech and are accepted as literally norms in the USA.

The differences between the two varieties of English are immediately noticeable in the field of phonetics. However, these distinctions are confined to the articulator - acoustic characteristics of some phonemes and to some differences in the use of others. The few phonemes characteristic of American pronunciation and alien to British literary norms are as a rule observed in British dialects. The variations in vocabulary, to be considered below, are not very numerous. Most of them are divergences in the semantic structure of words and in their usage. The dissimilarities in grammar are scarce. For example, *Am.* gotten, proven for *Br.* got, proved, the preference of Past Indefinite to Present Perfect, Subjunctive I to Suppositional, the formation of the Future Tense with will as the only auxiliary verb for all persons, and some others.

Since the two varieties have essentially the same grammar system, phonetic system and vocabulary, they cannot be regarded as different languages. Nor can the American variant be called a dialect. Indeed the two differ far less than the local dialects of Dewsbury and Howden, two English towns in Yorkshire some forty miles apart. Thus we must speak of two equitable variants of the English national language having different accepted literary standards, one spoken on the British Isles, the other spoken in the USA.

When speaking about the lexical differences between the British and American variants of English, philologists and lexicographers usually provide long lists of word pairs used in Britain and America for the same objects, such as flat—apartment, underground—subway, lorry—truck, pavement—sidewalk and the like. But the case is not as simple as that. From the point of view of their currency in Britain and the USA all lexical units may be subdivided into general English (those found on both sides of the Atlantic), Americanisms (those specific of present-day American usage) and Britishisms (typical of British English).

The bulk of the vocabulary belongs to "general English" (e. g. country, nation, language, person). In some cases a notion may have two synonymous designations used on both sides of the ocean, but one of them is more frequent in Britain, the other—in the USA. Thus in the pairs post—mail, timetable—schedule, notice—bulletin the first word is more frequent in Britain, the second—in America. So the difference here lies only in word-frequency.

Like full Britishisms, i. e. lexical units' specific of the British variant in all their meanings (e. g. fortnight, pillar-box), full Americanisms are not large in number (e. g. drugstore, mailbox, drive-in, supermarket). They may be subdivided into lexical units denoting some realia having no counterparts

in Britain (e. g. junior high school, senior high school) and those denoting phenomena observable in Britain but expressed there in a descriptive way (e. g. campus described in British dictionaries as 'grounds of a school or college').

Partial Americanisms, i. e. those typical of the American variant in one of their meanings, are much more numerous. Within the semantic structure of a word one may often find meanings belonging to general English, Americanisms and Briticisms, e. g. in the word pavement, the meaning—'street or road covered with stone, asphalt, concrete, etc.' is an Americanism, the meaning—'paved path for pedestrians at the side of the road' is a Briticism (the corresponding American expression is sidewalk), the other two meanings—'the covering of the floor made of flat blocks of wood, stone, etc' and — 'soil' (*geol.*) are general English. Very often the meanings that are general English are common and neutral, central, direct, while the Americanisms are colloquial, marginal, figurative, e. g. shoulder—general English—'the joint connecting the arm or forelimb with the body', *Am.* 'either edge of a road or highway'.

Less obvious, but no less important, are the lexical differences of another kind, the so-called structural variants of the words, i. e. words differing in derivational affixes though identical in lexical meaning (e. g. *Br.* acclimate—*Am.* acclimatize; *Br.* aluminum—*Am.* aluminium) and phonetic variants (e. g. *Br.* [ta'maitou]—*Am.* [ta'meitou]).

As to word-formation in the two variants, the word-building means employed are the same and most of them are equally productive. The difference lies only in the more extensive use of some of them in the American variant, such as the affixes *-ette*, *-ee*, *super-* (as in *draftee*, *kitchenette*, *supermarket*), conversion and blending (as in a *walk-out*—'workers' strike' from *to walk out*, *to major*—'specialize in a subject or field of study' from the adjective *major*; *motel* from *motor* + *hotel*, etc.).

Thus, the lexical distinctions between British and American English are intricate and varied, but they do not make a system. For the most part they are partial divergences in the semantic structure and usage of some words.

The lexical divergences between the two main variants of English have been brought about by several historical processes. In the first place quite a number of words that were once in current usage in England have survived in America after becoming obsolete at home. Such are the words *to loan* as 'to lend', *fall* as 'autumn', *guess* as 'think' or 'suppose', *homely* as 'ugly', 'crude', etc. At the same time new words were coined or borrowed from the languages with which the American variant came into contact, e. g. *Indian hickory*, *moose*, *raccoon*, *Spanish canyon*, *mustang*, *ranch*, *sombrero*. A number of words changed their meaning or acquired a

new additional meaning. For instance, corn which originally meant 'grain' came to denote 'maize' in America.

Modern times are characterized by considerable leveling of the lexical distinctions between the two variants due to the growth of cultural and economic ties between the two nations and development of modern means of communication. A large number of Americanisms have gained currency in British English, some becoming so thoroughly naturalized that the dictionaries in England no longer mark them as aliens (e. g. reliable, lengthy, talented, belittle). Others have a limited sphere of application. The influx of American films, comics and periodicals resulted in the infiltration of American slang, e. g. gimmick-'deceptive or secret device', to root— 'support or encourage a contestant or team, as by applauding

At the same time a number of Britishisms is passing into the USA, e. g. smog which is a blend of smoke and fog, to brief—'to give instructions'. This fact the advocates of the American language theory deliberately ignore. Sometimes the Britishisms adopted in America compete with the corresponding American expressions, the result being the differentiation of meaning or spheres of application; for example, unlike the American store, the word shop taken over from across the ocean at the beginning of the 20th century is applied only to small specialized establishments (e. g. gift shop, hat shop, candy shop), or specialized departments of a department store (e. g. the misses' shop). British luggage used alongside American baggage differs from its rival in collocability (luggage compartment, luggage rack, but baggage car, baggage check, baggage room). In the pair autumn-fall the difference is of another nature: the former is bookish, while fall is colloquial.

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