

## **14. Tendency of American English to be spread so rapidly throughout the world today**

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### **Abstract**

At present, American English is becoming more popular among the people all over the world and as a result it seems to have a great tendency to be spread so rapidly throughout the world. The objective of the present study is, therefore, to ascertain the reasons for this drastic breakthrough. Those, who used British English, gradually seem to be interested in using American English. This new trend can apparently be observed among the young people in Sri Lanka as well. The research problem of the study is why American English is becoming so popular among the people all over the world. All the other varieties of English such as Canadian English, Australian English and Indian English are not so more widespread than American English and British English. Of those two also, American English seems to have spread globally rather than British English. This study was entirely based on primary data and secondary data. Relevant web sites, journals, magazines, newspapers and books were the sources related to the secondary data, from where the required information regarding the subject was obtained. In addition to that, interviews, discussions and observations, which are related to primary data, were conducted in order to collect information regarding the subject. Samples were selected from the people, who communicate in English. Through the study, it was found that American

English is not as confused as British English. It is easy and simple to use not like British English.

Key words: American English, British English, spread globally, confused, simple

## **Introduction**

The English Language was first introduced to the United States of America (USA) by British colonization in 1607. It has been found that approximately two-thirds of the world's native of English lives in the United States.<sup>16</sup> They all speak American English. This indicates that the majority of the native speakers speak American English, which is the most common language in the United States and as a result, 28 states out of 50 use English as an official language. This is another reason for American English to be more popular among the people. It is, therefore, considered the de facto language of the United States because of its widespread use.<sup>17</sup> Since 1607, both American English and British English have developed all over their territories in different ways. Differences between the two languages include pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, idioms, formatting of dates and numbers. Noah Webster wrote the first American dictionary and published it in 1828. His purpose was to show the difference between two languages.

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<sup>16</sup> **Crystal, David (1997). English as a Global Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.**

<sup>17</sup> **Crawford, James. "Language Legislation in the U.S.A." languagepolicy.net. 2008-06-24.**

## Literary Review

It was revealed that immigrants from Southeastern England arrived in the North American continent in the early 1600's.<sup>18</sup> By the mid-1800's, nearly 3.5 million immigrants left the British Isles for the United States. Noah Webster felt the need for an American national identity with regards to the American English language. He wrote an American spelling book, *The Blueback Speller*, in 1788 and changed several spellings from British English (colour became color, theatre became theater, etc.) In 1828, he published his famous *American Dictionary of the English Language*.

The following table indicates the ethnic population in the American Colonies of 1775 according to the United States Historical Census Data Base (USHCDB) (2002).

Table 01: Populations in the American Colonies of 1775

Ancestry	Percentage
English	48.7%
African	20.0%
Scot-Irish	7.8 %
German	6.9%
Scottish	6.6 %
Dutch	2.7%
French	1.4%
Swedish	0.6 %
Other	5.3 %

Source: United States Historical Census Data Base (USHCDB), 2002

<sup>18</sup> [www.ielanguages.com/enghist.html-0201.2012](http://www.ielanguages.com/enghist.html-0201.2012)

According to the above table, it can be assumed that 48.7% of the people of the USA use English as their first language. In other words, approximately half of the Americans speak English and this will immensely contribute to the rapid growth of American English in the USA itself.

## **American Pop Culture**

At present, American English is particularly in vogue due to the American pop culture, which is more popular among the young people of the USA. Popular culture means everything taken from common culture, to folk culture and mass culture. Movies, television, radio, cyberspace, advertising, toys, nearly any commodity available for purchase, many forms of art, photography, games, and even group experiences like collective comet-watching or rave dancing on ecstasy come under pop culture.<sup>19</sup> It is now widely acknowledged that popular culture can be analyzed as a significant aspect of US material, economic and political culture. Pop culture has thus become one of the most lucrative export commodities in the USA.

## **Understanding the Culture**

Speaking English means not only using it grammatically, but also using it effectively. For this purpose, you are expected to understand the culture of the country or region, in which it is spoken.<sup>20</sup> Most Americans only speak English while it is true that more and more Americans speak Spanish. They are hardly worried to understand your native language and have difficulties understanding foreign accents. Many Americans are not used to foreign accents.

Americans are interested in talking about location. When speaking to a stranger, they ask them where they are from and then make a connection with that place. For example: "Oh, I have a friend, who studied in Los Angeles. He says it is a beautiful place to live. They also talk about the jobs

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<sup>19</sup> [english.berkeley.edu/Postwar/pop.html-01.01.2012](http://english.berkeley.edu/Postwar/pop.html-01.01.2012)

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Beare's article

of the people. Americans commonly ask, "What do you do?" It is not considered impolite as in some countries and is a popular topic of discussion between strangers. In conversations, Americans usually talk about sports now that they prefer sports very much. However, their interest seems to be with American sports.

It has been found that the United States is a multi-cultural society and especially in the last few years, Americans were trying very hard to be sensitive to other cultures and ideas. Talking about sensitive topics like religion or beliefs is often avoided so as to be sure not to offend someone of a different belief system. This is often referred to as being politically correct.

Americans often prefer using first names, even when dealing with people in very different positions. They generally say, "I will see you George next Monday." "Thanks Jane. I will call you tomorrow." and then they expect you to remain on a first name basis. This is a very attractive aspect of American English. In general, Americans also prefer informal greetings and using first names or nicknames when speaking with colleagues and acquaintances. And the other prominent feature of American culture is shaking hands with others when greeting each other. This is true for both men and women. Other forms of greeting such as kissing on the cheeks, etc., is generally not appreciated in the USA. At present, this is popular and highly accepted among many nations in the world. Americans also look each other in the eyes when they are speaking as a way of showing that they are sincere. In conversation, eye contact plays a vital role to make the expression very effective and attractive.

American English has grown steadily in international significance since World War II, parallel to the growth of U.S. political, economic, technological and cultural influence worldwide. American English is currently the dominant influence on world English largely due to the following:

1. Population
2. Wealth of the U.S. economy

3. Magnitude of higher education
4. Magnitude of the publishing industry in America
5. Magnitude of global mass media and media technology influence
6. Appeal of American popular culture on language and habits
7. International political and economic position of the U.S.

### **American and British English Spelling Differences**

The following differences can be observed in American and British English Spelling.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly , it is found that British spelling is more confused than American spelling.

#### **British English**

colour  
favour  
labour  
neighbour  
behaviour  
cheque  
dialogue  
monologue  
centre  
metre  
travelling  
stopping  
travelled  
stopped  
programme  
aesthetics  
amoeba  
anaemia

#### **American English**

color  
favor  
labor  
neighbor  
behavior  
check  
dialog  
monolog  
center  
meter  
traveling  
stopping  
traveled  
stoped  
program  
esthetics  
ameba  
anemia

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<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Beare

anaesthesia	anesthesia
archaeology	archeology
diarrhoea	diarrhea
encyclopaedia	encyclopedia
faeces	feces
foetal	fetal
gynaecology	gynecology
Leukaemia	gynecology
oesophagus	esophagus
orthopaedic	orthopedic
paediatric	pediatric
judgement	judgment
draught	draft
omlette	omlet
chilli	chili
sulphur	sulfer
storey	story

### **Grammar – Use of Prepositions**

American English - Please write me soon.

British English - Please write **to** me soon.

### **Grammar- Use of the Present Perfect**

In British English the present perfect is used to express an action that has occurred in the recent past that has an effect on the present moment. For example:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> [esl.about.com/od/toeflielts/bridge/a/dif\\_ambrit.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/toeflielts/bridge/a/dif_ambrit.htm)

I've lost my key. Can you help me look for it?

In American English the following is also possible:

I lost my key. Can you help me look for it?

In British English, the above would be considered incorrect. However, both forms are generally accepted in standard American English. Other differences involving the use of the present perfect in British English and simple past in American English include **already, just and yet.**

### **British English**

I've just had lunch.

I've already seen that film.

Have you finished your homework yet?

### **American English**

I just had lunch OR I've just had lunch.

I've already seen that film OR I already saw that film.

Have you finished your homework yet? OR Did you finish your homework yet?

### **Possession**

There are two forms to express possession in English. Have or Have got

Do you have a car?

Have you got a car?

He hasn't got any friends.

He doesn't have any friends.

She has a beautiful new home.

She's got a beautiful new home.

While both forms are correct (and accepted in both British and American English), have got (have you got, he hasn't got, etc.) is generally the preferred form in British English while most speakers of American English employ the have (do you have, he doesn't have etc.)

The following verbs have two acceptable forms of the past simple/past participle in both American and British English, however, the irregular form is generally more common in British English (the first form of the two) and the regular form is more common to American English.

Burn Burnt OR burned	Smell smelt OR smelled
Dream dreamt OR dreamed	Spell spelt OR spelled
Lean leant OR leaned	Spill spilt OR spilled
Learn learnt OR learned	Spoil spoil OR spoiled

### **Research Problem**

Research problem in the present study is why American English spreads rapidly throughout the world conquering British English. At present, there is a substantial trend for the people to learn American English. Some people seem to imitate Americans for their accent regarding pronunciation. Some use American spelling and words in their writing activities. This is, therefore, a critical issue regarding the examination purposes whether to accept American English or British English in accuracy of using English. Sri Lanka, too, has been confronted with this controversial issue. Hence, it is absolutely significant to ascertain the root cause for American English to be so renowned all over the world.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of the study is to find out the reasons for American English to be spreading faster than other varieties of English all over the globe. Earlier,

British English was leading and it possessed the monopoly of English all over the world. However, today the British monotony has been challenged by American English and the latter is becoming more popular among many countries.

## **Methodology**

This study was entirely based on secondary data and primary data. Relevant web sites, journals, magazines, newspapers and books were the sources related to the secondary data, from where the required information regarding the subject was obtained. In addition to that, interviews, discussions and observations, which are related to primary data, were conducted in order to collect information regarding the subject. Samples were selected from the people, who communicate in English and people, who like to communicate in English. It was closely observed that they use American English, British English and Sri Lankan English.

## **Results and Conclusion**

American English or U.S. English is the diverse form of the English language used mostly in the United States of America. It is the primary language used in the United States. According to the 1990 census, 97 percent of U.S. residents speak English "well" or "very well". Only 0.8% (8 people out of a thousand) speak no English at all, as compared with 3.6 percent in 1890. As of 2004, more than two-thirds of native speakers of English use the American dialect.

American English has further changed due to the influx of non-English speakers, whose words sometimes enter American vernacular. Many words have entered American English from Spanish, Native American languages, and so on.

American English has both spelling and grammatical differences from British English, some of which were made as part of an attempt to rationalize the English spelling used by British English at the time. Unlike many 20th

century language reforms (e.g., Turkey's alphabet shift, Norway's spelling reform) the American spelling changes were not driven by government, but by textbook writers and dictionary makers.

The first American dictionary was written by Noah Webster in 1828. At the time America was a relatively new country and Webster's particular contribution was to show that the region spoke a different dialect from Britain, and so he wrote a dictionary with many spellings differing from the standard. Many of these changes were initiated unilaterally by Webster.

Webster also argued for many "simplifications" to the idiomatic spelling of the period. Somewhat ironically, many, although not all, of his simplifications fell into common usage alongside the original versions, resulting in a situation even more confused than before.

Many words are shortened and differ from other versions of English. Spellings such as *center* are used instead of *centre* in other versions of English. Conversely, American English sometimes favors words that are morphologically more complex, whereas British English uses clipped forms, such as AmE *transportation* and BrE *transport* or where the British form is a back-formation, such as AmE *burglarize* and BrE *burgle* (from *burglar*).

Learning American English pronunciation is easy. Contrary to some beliefs, you don't need to memorize the signs and symbols of the American English phonetic alphabet to do so. After all, native speakers of American English learn how to pronounce words most often by listening and repeating and many of them have never even seen the phonetic alphabet. You don't need to enroll in a class or course to improve your American English pronunciation. Instead you can just take advantage of the many sources that abound on the Internet.