

THE TYPICAL DIFFERENT FEATURES OF GRAMMAR OF THE BRITISH ENGLISH (BrE) AND AMERICAN ENGLISH (AmE)

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Abstract

There are a number of varieties of English all over the world such as American, British, Australian, Indian, Singaporean, Philippine English, etc. However, there are only two varieties of English which are most widely and dominantly taught, learned, and used both spoken and printed around the world namely British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). In real sense, the two are often confusing for the non-native learners because they have some differences and uniqueness in some aspects such as spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Therefore, it is really important for students, teachers and speakers as well to be aware of the major differences between the two. This paper is trying to review some striking unique and different features of grammar of British English (BrE) and American English (AmE).

Abstrak

Ada macam-macam Bahasa Inggris yang ada di dunia seperti *American, British, Australian, Indian, Singaporean, Philippine English*, dll. Akan tetapi hanya ada dua macam Bahasa Inggris yang paling sering dan dominan diajarkan, dipelajari, dan digunakan baik secara lisan maupun tulisan di seluruh dunia yaitu *British English (BrE)* dan *American English (AmE)*. Di kehidupan nyata, mereka sering membingungkan *non-native learners* karena mereka memiliki beberapa perbedaan dan keunikan di beberapa aspek, seperti pengejaan, pengucapan, kosa-kata, dan tata bahasa. Oleh karena itu, sangat penting untuk siswa, guru, dan pembicara mengetahui dengan baik perbedaan utama antara keduanya. Tulisan ini mencoba untuk mereview beberapa hal unik yang menarik dan perbedaan tata bahasa yang utama pada *British English (BrE)* dan *American English (AmE)*.

Introduction

In daily communication and interaction either in business, political, education domains, etc., it is fact that most of the English speakers who use English as a non-native language get confused when they are communicating each other. For example, sometimes people say “*I have smelled something bad*” or “*I have smelt something bad*” or ‘ Sometimes they say “*The committee is already set up*” or “*The committee **are** already set up*” Or many of them say “*Will they still be there on the weekend?*” or “*Will they still be there **at** the weekend?*” etc.

In the classroom, it is also commonly found that the teachers of English also experience many difficulties which one to use and prefer to using when the students ask questions such as “*Sir, which one do I have to use ‘ground floor’ or ‘first floor’?*” or “*Sir, I always get confused sometimes people use the word ‘graduate’ or ‘undergraduate’, “Can you show me or explain to me which one is correct or which one do I have to use?”*”

In addition, the students are often confused and doubtful when they want to do writing work. Many of them get confused which one to write whether ‘*learnt*’ or ‘*learned*’ for the past form of the ‘*learn.*’ Or how to write “*Have you seen them anywhere?*” or “*Did you see them anywhere?*”? Or “*I promised to write to her every day.*” Or “*I promised to write her every day.*”

Such embarrassing or confusing circumstances happen because they are confronted with two English pattern dialects namely British English and American English. The two varieties of English have their own distinctive features. It is a fact that there are some differences in the way grammar is used.

In real sense, grammar is always changing and there are many new ways of using grammar in BrE come from AmE. These differences are due to the influence of American popular culture, American media and the internet. Also, the existing of the American English is due to that American wants to show that they are also innovative in the language (Dirgeyasa, 2015). In addition, the AmE may appear due to that the uniqueness of the American history and culture. This paper is trying to review some striking unique and different features of grammar of British English (BrE) and American English (AmE).

Discussion

The Past Tense Form

It is a fact that the form of past tense of English verb is often confusing the students, teachers, and language users of English who do not know that the past form of verb in English is different among the English varieties, especially British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). For examples, we often find the past form of verb ‘*burn*’ is sometimes ‘*burnt*’ or ‘*burned*’ or the verb ‘*learn*’ is sometimes in the form of ‘*learnt*’ or ‘*learned*’ or the verb ‘*saw*’ sometimes becomes ‘*sawn*’ or ‘*sawed*’ etc. Table 1 below shows for example, verbs which

have different simple past and past participle forms in American and British English. Notice that the irregular past forms *burnt*, *dreamt* and *spoilt* are possible in American English, but less common than the forms ending in *-ed*. Some examples of the past tense form are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. The list of Different Past and Past Participle Verbs of especially British English (BrE) and American English (AmE)

No	Infinitive	Simple Past British English	Simple Past American English	Past Participle British English	Past Participle American English
1	<i>burn</i>	<i>burned/ burnt</i>	<i>burned/ burnt</i>	<i>burned/ burnt</i>	<i>burned/ burnt</i>
2	<i>bust</i>	<i>bust</i>	<i>busted</i>	<i>bust</i>	<i>busted</i>
3	<i>dive</i>	<i>dived</i>	<i>dove/ dived</i>	<i>dived</i>	<i>dived</i>
4	<i>dream</i>	<i>dreamed/ dreamt</i>	<i>dreamed/ dreamt</i>	<i>dreamed/ dreamt</i>	<i>dreamed/ dreamt</i>
5	<i>get</i>	<i>got</i>	<i>got</i>	<i>got</i>	<i>gotten</i>
6	<i>lean</i>	<i>leaned/ leant</i>	<i>leaned</i>	<i>leaned/ leant</i>	<i>leaned</i>
7	<i>learn</i>	<i>learned/ learnt</i>	<i>learned</i>	<i>learned/ learnt</i>	<i>learned</i>
8	<i>plead</i>	<i>pleaded</i>	<i>pleaded/ pled</i>	<i>pleaded</i>	<i>pleaded/ pled</i>
9	<i>prove</i>	<i>proved</i>	<i>proved</i>	<i>proved</i>	<i>proved/ proven</i>
10	<i>saw</i>	<i>sawed</i>	<i>sawed</i>	<i>sawn</i>	<i>sawn/ sawed</i>
11	<i>smell</i>	<i>smelled/ smelt</i>	<i>smelled</i>	<i>smelled/ smelt</i>	<i>smelled</i>
12	<i>saw</i>	<i>sawed</i>	<i>sawed</i>	<i>sawn</i>	<i>sawn/ sawed</i>
13	<i>smell</i>	<i>smelled/ smelt</i>	<i>smelled</i>	<i>smelled/ smelt</i>	<i>smelled</i>
14	<i>spill</i>	<i>spilled/ spilt</i>	<i>spilled</i>	<i>spilled/ spilt</i>	<i>spilled</i>
15	<i>spoil</i>	<i>spoiled/ spoilt</i>	<i>spoiled/ spoilt</i>	<i>spoiled/ spoilt</i>	<i>spoiled/ spoilt</i>
16	<i>stink</i>	<i>stank</i>	<i>stank/ stunk</i>	<i>stunk</i>	<i>stunk</i>
17	<i>wake</i>	<i>woke</i>	<i>woke/ waked</i>	<i>woken</i>	<i>woken</i>

The Use of Tense

One of the uniqueness of English grammar is its tense types and form. There are 16 tenses which are well-known for the speakers of English across the globe. Because of its typical types, forms, and functions, the use of tense often lead to confusion and difficulties for the speaker in order to provide the tense properly and correctly. So it is not really surprising that they are often confronted with the different use of tense when they are communicating. For example, in many situation, speakers of American English generally use the present perfect tense (*have/has + past participle*) far less than speakers of British English. In spoken American English, it is very common to use the simple past tense as an alternative in situations where the present perfect would usually have been used in British English. In addition, 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: “*I’ve misplaced my pen.*” “*Can you help me find it?*” In American English, the use of the past tense is also permissible: “*I misplaced my pen.*” “*Can you help me find it?*” In British English, however, using the past tense in this example would be considered incorrect. In detail, the differences of the use of tense are shown by the following sentences as shown by Table 2 below.

Table 2. The Different of Use of Tense British English (BrE) and American English (AmE)

No	British English	American English
1	<i>Jenny feels ill. She’s eaten too much.</i>	<i>Jenny feels ill. She ate too much</i>
2	<i>I can’t find my keys. Have you seen them anywhere?</i>	<i>I can’t find my keys. Did you see them anywhere?</i>
3	<i>I can’t find my keys. Have you seen them anywhere?</i>	<i>I can’t find my keys. Did you see them anywhere?</i>

The other differences involving the use of the **present perfect** in British English and **simple past** in American English include the words *already*, *just* and *yet*. In British English it is stated “*I’ve just had food. Have you finished your homework yet?*” “*I’ve already seen that film.*” While in American English, it is said “*I just had food*”. Or “*I’ve just had food.*” Or “*I already saw that film.*” To have a comprehensive understanding of the two varieties of English in term

of **present perfect** and **simple past**, the simple dialogue shows how they are different.

A: *Are they going to the show tonight?*

B: *No. They already saw it.*

A: *Are they going to the show tonight?*

B: *No. They've already seen it.*

A: *Is Samantha here?*

B: *No, she just left.*

A: *Is Samantha here?*

B: *No, she's just left.*

A: *Can I borrow your book?*

B: *No, I didn't read it yet.*

A: *Can I borrow your book?*

B: *No, I haven't read it yet.*

The present perfect is less common in AmE than BrE. AmE speakers often use the past simple in situations where BrE speakers use the present perfect, especially with words such as *already*, *just* and *yet*: The British use the present perfect with these adverbs of indefinite time. In American English simple past and present perfect are both possible. Look at the examples below!

- *He has just gone home. (BrE)*
- *He just went home. OR He has just gone home. (AmE)*
- *I have already seen this movie. (BrE)*
- *I have already seen this movie. OR I already saw this movie. (AmE)*
- *She hasn't come yet. (BrE)*
- *She hasn't come yet. OR She didn't come yet. (AmE)*

The Difference Use in Verb Agreement with Collective Nouns

The American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) also often differ in their treatment of agreement with collective nouns, i.e. nouns with singular form but plural meaning, such as *committee*, *family*, *government*, *enemy*, etc. In British English collective nouns, (i.e. nouns referring to particular groups of people or things), (e.g. *staff*, *government*, *class*, *team*) can be followed by a singular or plural verb depending on whether the group is thought of as one idea, or as many individual. Or it depends on if the group can be identified as many individuals or a single group. Table 3 below shows how **to** use in verb agreement with collective nouns both in AmE and BrE.

Table 3. How **to** use in verb agreement with collective nouns both in AmE and BrE.

No	British English	American English
1	<i>My team is winning.</i>	<i>My team is winning.</i>
2	<i>The other team are all sitting down</i>	<i>No</i>
3	<i>The family of Air Asia aeroplane crash needs a clarification</i>	<i>The family of Air Asia aeroplane crash need a clarification</i>
4	<i>The class of TOEFL starts at 9:00 o'clock sharp.</i>	<i>The class of TOEFL start at 9:00 o'clock sharp.</i>

Referring to table 3 above, it is clearly stated that in American English (AmE) the collective nouns are always followed by a singular verb, so an American would usually say:

*My team **is** winning.*
*The family of Air Asia aeroplane crash **needs** a clarification.*
*The class of TEOFL **starts** at 9:00 o'clock sharp.*

However, *staff* and *police* normally take plural agreement in American English as well such as:

*The police **catch** the bank robber.*
*The staff of the White House **need** clarification soon.*

The Difference Use in Delexical Verbs have and take

It is common in British English that the verb '*have*' frequently functions as what is technically referred to as a delexical verb, i.e. it is used in contexts where it has very little meaning in itself but occurs with an object noun which describes an action, e.g.: "*I'd like to **have** a bath.*" Here the verb '*have*' is frequently used in this way with nouns referring to common activities such as '*washing*' or '*resting*', e.g.: "*She's **having** a little nap.*" Or "*I'll just **have** a quick shower before we go out.*"

Whereas, in American English (AmE), the verb **take**, rather than **have**, is used in these contexts, e.g.:

*Joe's **taking** a shower.*
*I'd like to **take** a bath.*
*Let's **take** a short vacation.*
*Why don't you **take** a rest now?*

Another difference between British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) is that in British English (BrE) the expressions of '**have got**' or '**has got**' are used when talking about possession, while Americans generally just use '**have**' or '**has**'. So, for example, in British English it's more normal to say: "*I've got a new car.*" While in American English we might say: "*I have a new car.*" The sentences actually have the same meaning that there's just a small grammatical difference that you might notice.

Differences Use in the Auxiliaries and Modals

The use of auxiliary and modals also often confuses the speakers of English. By grammar perspective, the use of correct and proper auxiliary and modal are truly important because the misuse tend to lead misunderstanding and deviation of meaning. Both in British English (BrE) and American English (AmE), the use of the two points above are necessary to know and understand how to use them contextually. The use of '**do**' vs without '**do**'; '**needn't**' vs '**don't need**,' or '**will**' vs '**shall**' are some important auxiliaries and modals those are commonly different in patterns both in British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) are described as follows. For example, in British English, the auxiliary '**do**' is often used as a substitute for a verb when replying to a question, e.g.:

A: *Are you coming with us?*

B: *I might **do**.*

While in American English, '**do**' is not used in this way, e.g.:

A: *Are you coming with us?*

B: *I might.*

Then, in British English the "**needn't**" is often used instead of **don't need** to, e.g. "*They **needn't** come to school today.*" But in American English **needn't** is very unusual and the usual form is **don't need** to, i.e. "*They **don't need** to come to school today.*" (Zhang, 2006).

In British English, **shall** is sometimes used as an alternative to **will** to talk about the future, e.g.: *I shall/will be there later.* In American English, **shall** is unusual and **will** is normally used "*I will be there later.*" Then, in British English **shall I / we** is often used to ask for advice or an opinion, e.g.: "*Shall we ask him to*

come with us?” While in American English **should** is often used instead of **shall**, i.g.: “**Should** we ask him to come with us?” (Azar & Hagan, 2006).

Different Use in Prepositions

Preposition is also important in the use of English language. Basically, there are also a few differences between British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) in the use of prepositions. For example: *The British would play **in** a team, Americans would play **on** a team*. Another example: *While the British would go out **at** the weekend, Americans would go out **on** the weekend*. As a matter of fact, in British English, the preposition **at** is used with many time expressions, e.g.: **at** Christmas, **at** five o’clock, and **at** the weekend. While in American English, **on** is always used when talking about the weekend, not **at**, e.g.: “*Will they still be there **on** the weekend?*” or “*She’ll be coming home **on** weekends.*” (Hoplaros, 2010).

Another example is the use of **at**. In British English, **at** is often used when talking about universities or other institutions, e.g.: “*She studied chemistry **at** university.*” Whereas, in American English, **in** is often used, e.g.: “*She studied French **in** high school.*” In addition, in British English, **to** and **from** are used with the adjective different, e.g.: “*The place is different **from/to** anything I’ve seen before.*” While in American English **from** and **then** are used with different, e.g.: “*The place is different **from/than** anything I’ve seen before.*” Finally, this is also important to note that in British English, **to** is always used after the verb write, e.g.: “*I promised to write **to** her every day.*” In American English, **to** can be omitted after write, i.e.: “*I promised **to** write her every day.*” (Shor, 2012).

Adjectives and Adverbs

It seems that it is quite true that British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) are different in many cases. The use of some adjective and adverbs also colours the difference of both varieties of English in terms of grammar. For example, the use of **really** vs **real**. In informal spoken AmE, speakers often use **real** instead of **really** before an adjective. This is considered non-standard by many AmE speakers: “*That’s **real** funny!*” (AmE) and “*That’s **really** funny*” (BrE).

The use of words **well** vs **good** is also slightly different between British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). See the example below:

How are you
*I am **good*** (AmE)
*I'm **well** or I'm **fine*** (BrE)

It is clear that AmE speakers often use *good* where BrE prefers *well*. However, the AmE form is becoming more common in BrE, especially after greetings such as *How are you?*, *How's it going?*: The use of the word 'likely' both in British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) are quite different. In AmE the word 'likely' can be as an **adjective** and it is in the same way as *probable*, *possible*, etc.), or as an **adverb** and it is in the same way as *probably*, *possibly*, etc.). While in BrE, 'likely' is normally only used as an **adjective**: To see how they are different in use and form, examples are given below.

*There **will likely be** other announcements before the end of this year*
(AmE).

Here *likely* as an adverb and BrE prefers to use the form "*there are likely to be*".

*The focus on the economy **will likely** continue when the new President takes office.*

Then, BrE prefers to use the form "*likely to continue*". However, in the sentence "*And what's **likely** to happen?*" the word *likely* as an adjective, also common in British English (BrE).

Compounds and Hyphens

The formation of compounds and the use of hyphens both in British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). The British English often prefers hyphenated compounds, such as ***counter-attack***, whereas American English prefers to using ***counterattack***. In case, so ***counterattack*** is much more common. Many dictionaries do not point out such differences. Canadian and Australian usage is mixed, although Commonwealth writers generally hyphenate compounds of the form noun plus phrase (such as *editor-in-chief*). *Commander-in-chief* prevails in all forms of English.

Another example of the compound words is ***any more*** or ***anymore***: In sense "*any longer*", the single-word form is usual in North America and Australia but unusual elsewhere, at least in formal writing. Other senses always have the two-word form; thus Americans distinguish "*I couldn't love you anymore [so I left you]*"

from "I couldn't love you any more [than I already do]." In Hong Kong English, *any more* is always two words. Traditional British English usage makes a distinction between **for ever**, meaning for eternity (or a very long time into the future), as in "If you are waiting for income tax to be abolished you will probably have to wait **for ever**"; and **forever**, meaning continually, always, as in "They are **forever** arguing." In British usage today, however, **forever** prevails in the "for eternity" sense as well, in spite of several style guides maintaining the distinction. American writers usually use **forever** regardless of which sense they intend (although **forever** in the sense of "continually" is comparatively rare in American English, having been displaced by *always*). The compounds **near by** or **nearby**: Some British writers make the distinction between the adverbial *near by*, which is written as two words, as in, "No one was **near by**"; and the adjectival **nearby**, which is written as one, as in, "The **nearby** house". In American English, the one-word spelling is standard for both forms.

Time Telling

Both languages have a slightly different structure of telling the time. While the British would say *quarter past ten* to denote 10:15, however, it is not common in America to say **quarter after** or even **a quarter after ten**. Thirty minutes after the hour is commonly called half past in both languages. Americans always write digital times with a colon, thus 6:00, whereas Britons often use a point, 6.00.

Different Use in the Punctuation

Punctuation or mechanics in American English (AmE) or British English (BrE) are also different and unique in use. Take for example, the use of punctuation within quotes. Many learners of English as a non-native language or even American students consistently confuse the rules associated with punctuating quotations. The uncertainty is so rampant, that the mystery tends to remain a significant issue during, and even after, the college years. So just where does that period go when there are quotes involved? The answer to this question changes, depending if you are looking at American English or British English grammar rules.

For example, the difference between American English and British English is the use of question marks. In British English you can only use single question marks ('x') for primary quotes while in American English you use double question marks ("x") for primary quotes. To make things more difficult, for quotes within quotes Americans use single question marks ('x') and British use double question marks ("x"). Even more confusing is the use of commas and periods inside question marks. In British English commas and periods are outside closing quotes and in American English are they placed inside closing quotes. For example in British English you would write: *My sister said, 'You should go out'.* When you want to write the same sentence in American English you have to write: *My sister said, "You should go out"* (Beare, 2013).

Another difference appears when writing a letter. When you write an informal letter in American English a comma follows after the salutation, for example (*Dear James,*). When you want to write an formal letter in American English a colon follows (*Dear James:*). In British English a comma follows in both cases, after the salutation of an informal or a formal letter. Then, the use of "*e.g.*" and "*i.e.*" are actually different, but many people think they are similar in use. In real sense, they both have a different meaning "*e.g.*" means *for example* and "*i.e.*" means *that is*. In American English a comma follows after you use one of the abbreviations. In British English there is no comma used.

Also the use of abbreviations is different between the two varieties of English. In American English, *a period* (.) is used after for example (*Mr. and Mrs.*). But in British English *comma* (,) is not used for example (*Mr and Mrs*).

Conclusion

Theoretically and empirically, the language changes over time. The aspects of changes of the language may be different from time to time or from language to language or from variety of a certain language. The grammar is one of the aspects of the language that could change due to many factors. Like another language; the English is always changing across time. The changes of the English lead to two poles i.e. the English of the British called (BrE) and the English of North America called (AmE). In terms of teaching and learning process, because of their own differences and uniqueness in grammar, it is therefore important for teachers to be

aware of the major differences between the two; the teachers have not only to be aware of, but also to be able to deal with should they come up in class.

Then, in this context, it is also important to note that those differences actually do not mean wrong. The point is that they are just different in pattern but they convey the same meaning. However, these differences sometimes lead to negative opinion and perception the speakers of English and one can be fanatic and over idiosyncratic to language. For example, one who honours BrE styles tends to say AmE style is wrong in the context of BrE or otherwise. In more radical context, one may say that BrE is more superior than AmE or using BrE is likely to show one is prestigious and honourable than the one, etc. One might also argues that British English is more complex than American English. On the other hand, another one says that American English is simpler than British English. These statements and argument or opinion may be true it of course depends on one point of view. As one says that “*so the trick is to use American grammar, which is simple, but talk with a British accent, which is impressive.*”

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