

Differences Between American English and British English in Lexicology

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As a universal language, English provides the opportunities for people from different countries to communicate conveniently. As language is changeable, English also develops constantly and produces many kinds of varieties among which, British English and American English are the two important ones. They have great differences in vocabulary, pronunciation grammar, and other aspects. The paper focuses on lexical differences between British English and American English. Although there are differences between them with the development of globalization and communication between the USA and UK, British English and American English are now influencing each other.

Keywords: British English, American English, lexical differences

Introduction

Since May Flower carried the first group of people from European continent to America, they brought their political system, traditional culture, as well as their languages. After that Americans set up their own policy, economy, and culture. During the 17th century, on the basis of British English, Americans created their own English which is now called American English. Although British English and American English are rooted in the same language, there are differences between them in aspects of grammar pronunciation and vocabulary. Therefore, the autor will introduce the difference between English ang British English, such as speeling, homonymy, lexicology, and so on.

Conservatism of American English

American English gradually formed making the American colonies established by British colonists as the basis in the early 17th century. In the colonies, Elizabethan English is a universal language. American English is the language the people in England used during this period, that is to say, the basis of the development of American English is the language people used in Bunyan, Milton, and Shakespeare. Therefore, early American English retained the part characteristics of British English in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in the 17th century. However, due to the Renaissance, the native language of UK has undergone earth-shaking changes to a certain extent, and at the same time, American society still does not have sparked the same change of basic conditions, namely not subjected to the obvious influence of the Renaissance. Therefore, compared with British

English, American English showed its conservatism and inheritance, retained the language features of British English which have ceased to exist in the Elizabethan. Such as Shakespeare's time, "fall" was commonly used to represent the autumn by British people, and then was replaced by Latin vocabulary "autumn", thus "fall" has lost its meaning, and the plural meaning "waterfall", but "fall" is used today in the United States. Thus it can be seen that American English is conservative, with a certain degree of conservatism.

Development of American English

Compared with other countries, the United States is the country following the concept of development, namely the concept of immigration has created the United States government. In the process of the formation of the US government, although influenced by European political change, it has always retained its own uniqueness. This has led to the American national character and social direction different from of England, and led to the fact that Americans have been good at in a bold way to create new words, in a flexible way to synthesize new words. For example, English vocabularies which are closely to the culture and way of life linked with the United States have: hippie/hippy, man-chauvinistic, etc. In addition, with the rapid development of the science and technology, all aspects of American society are influenced profoundly, and have promoted the change of English vocabulary to a certain extent, mainly show in the large number of new features of American, such as: cyber-space, geeks, fuzzy logic, pushdown, and other scientific class vocabulary. At the same time, the United States triggered by the westward movement, also leads to some proper nouns. Thus, even though the American English has the conservative and conservatism mentioned above, but it is also a timely innovation, promoting the enrich and develop their own language.

American English Absorbed Loan Words

Due to the migration of powers for all countries, the US belongs to the multinational country, therefore, people will often refer to American culture as the "melting pot", it is also reflected in English vocabulary. Since its inception of the United States, it introduced a large number of words in it from all ethnic groups, while British English does not have this kind of words. Among them, the introduction is the earliest Indian language in American English. At the same time, the native Indians of North America, from generation to generation in the work, also is the rightful owner of North America. Though Indian tribes are conquered by the English colonists, they still keep their cultural heritage, and profoundly affect the language and culture of the United States. Investigation has found that the current American English contains more than 1,800 Indian words, which suggests that American English has absorbed more foreign languages, so as to realize and promote the development of their own language. In addition, the Black culture in a certain extent, also promotes the development of American English, since Black trade, American Blacks still insist on their own part of the tradition and culture, and make a natural influence on American popular culture constituted through social activities. Then, the Black vocabulary also gradually fuses with the English vocabulary. For example, voodoo, break-dancing, jitterbug, etc.

Difference Represent Between American English and British English

Synonymy

Synonymy means that different words in American English and British English are used to designate the

same meaning. In process of 200 years' separation and communication with immigration from other countries, differences of synonymy become more and more distinct and also greater in number. Here are two examples.

In America, the first floor of the buildings and houses is called first floor and of course the second floor is called second floor. But in Britain people call the first floor of the buildings and houses, especially these with a long history ground floor. So the second floor of those is called first floor and the third floor is called second floor.

In Britain, people use the word "biscuit" to describe a small baked unleavened cake, typically, crisp, flat, and sweet. But in American English, the word "cracker" has the same meaning. In British English, the word "cracker" means a firework exploding with a sharp noise. British people may be surprised when American people say, "Do you like to eat some crackers?".

Homonymy

Homonymy refers to words or phrases that differ in meaning. Many words have totally different meanings or refer to different things in British English and American English.

The phrase "wash up" means that washing the plates knives and forks and so on in the UK. However, when American people say "wash up", they mean washing one's body. But when British people say "I will help you to wash up" to American people, American people may be very surprised because American people think that it means "I will help you wash your body". It may cause sort of misunderstanding. Yet another, the "pavement" refers to the road itself on which vehicles drive. Whereas, the British people call the path alongside of the road where pedestrians walk "pavement" and American people call the path "sidewalk".

Apart from totally different in meaning there are some words which have an additional meaning in American English or British English or both of them. In both American and British English the word "faculty" refers to talent and authority. But in American English, it also means teaching staff. For example, Harvard has an excellent mathematics faculty. In British English, it means university school or college. For instance, London University comprises London School of Economic and the teaching faculties of various hospitals.

The Special Word

Britain and the United States, the two countries also gradually introduce and create a lot of new words in the continuous development of their own. Some of the vocabulary for their own use, not for other uses, the most obvious performance is the proper nouns used to describe their national characteristics and things. For example, there is significant difference between Britain and the United States in climate, which leads the two countries to have many different kinds of plants and animals. Therefore, the proper noun used to represent this kind of plants and animals of the two countries is also completely different, such as hickory, moose, raccoon, etc. In addition, the building structure and style of the two countries is also different, which leads to the differences of language to a certain extent, such as family-room, ranch-house, and tri-level-house in American English, while no similar buildings in UK, which also does not contain the English vocabulary of English words. At the same time, because of the influence of the different political system of the two countries, American English vocabularies include: lobbyism, the state-house, division, electoral college, etc. But, these words do not exist in British English. Therefore, in the process of the development of American English and British English, some of their own unique vocabularies appear.

Difference in Spelling

Simplification of American English

In America, people use the word “specialty” instead of “specialty”. This shows that the letter “i” is missed in some words in American English. In addition, people rarely see the word “dialogue” but always see the word “dialog”. In British English, words end up with “-ogue” now ended with “-og” in American English, such as, analog and analogue, prolog and prologue. On the other hand, in American English, words usually use the end “-able” rather than “-cable”. The words “lovable” and “loveable”, “sizable” and “sizeable”, belong to this kind.

Changes of Alphabets

Besides American simplification, spelling differences between American English and British English are reflected on the aspect that a single alphabet or more alphabets are changed in a word. Different spelling may cause different connotation. For example, the words “matt” and “matte”, in the UK, “matt” refers to a non-glossy surface, and “matte” to the motion-picture technique. But in America, both of them have the same meaning. The word “ensure” is apt to the virtual guarantee, for example, the government has ensured the safety of the refugees. Whereas the word “insure” is the commercial sense of providing financial compensation in the event of damage to property.

Different Recognition Methods

Effective method of identifying vocabulary differences between American English and British English mainly includes: the judgment method according to the content of the statement and judgment method according to the syntactic relation. The former refers to stating according to the content. That is the statement method by analyzing the content and finding out the specific vocabulary of Britain and the United States to judge the statement belonging to what kind of English. For example: “She got up early to be ready for the post, and from the second floor flat she could see the postman”. Because the British people with a “flat” describe “apartment”, while Americans use “apartment” to describe “apartment”. In addition, British people use “post” to describe “email”, while Americans use “mail”. Therefore, the statement belongs to the part of British English. The later refers to stating according to the syntactic relations. If a word with the same meaning and unique meaning in the two classes of English at the same time, scholars can judge the word according to the syntactic relations. For example, in the two classes of English, the verb “rate” refers to “evaluate”, “tax”, etc., in American English, the word can be used as an intransitive verb, while in British English, the word only transitive verbs. For example, in the “What stunt did he ever pull that makes him rate?”, “rate” means “get high evaluation”; the behind of it cannot pick up the object directly, therefore, the statement should belongs to American English.

Conclusion

American English and British English originated from the same language form lexical differences. And the differences are showed in meaning spelling and usage in vocabulary. It is just the differences that cause inconvenience and misunderstanding to English learners and users. But as the communication and corporation between America and the UK are deeper and deeper, differences between American and British English are becoming smaller and smaller. On the one hand, due to leading position in politics, economy, culture, and military, a large number of American English words are introduced to British English. On the other hand, British

English also have an effect on lexical development of American English. As a universal communication tool by means of mutual permeation, American English and British English narrow their gaps gradually. As English learners, we should realize their differences and have right understanding of these differences.

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