



# The History and Role of American English in Modern World and Education

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**ABSTRACT**

The current article aims at providing general information about the history and role of American English and its importance in the history of the USA as well as in modern education. The article deals with the origin, development of the American English and its widespread usage in modern world. It also discusses the differentiation between British and American English

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As the USA has a long history the American English has also its own history which plays significant role in the development of the nation. In other words, the American English was born, grew up and developed in America.

It is clear that language is a powerful tool for communication, knowledge sharing, and cultural exchange. Among the many languages spoken worldwide, English has emerged as one of the leading international languages. Within English, American English has gained particular prominence because of the economic, technological, and cultural influence of the United States. Today, American English is widely taught in schools and universities and serves as a medium of communication in many international contexts and it plays important role in the global stage. That's why, we can say that American English has really become one of the most influential varieties of the English language in the modern world. Due to globalization, technological advancement, international communication, and the widespread influence of the United States, American English plays a remarkable role in education, business, science, and culture. Besides this, it has a long history which

influenced the world development and impact on global communication.

The English language was brought to America by colonists from England who settled along the Atlantic seaboard in the seventeenth century. It was therefore the language spoken in England at that time, the language spoken by Shakespeare and Milton and Bunyan. In the peopling of this country three great periods of European immigration are to be distinguished. The first extends from the settlement of Jamestown in 1607 to the end of colonial times. This may be put conveniently at 1787, when Congress finally approved the Federal Constitution, or better, 1790, when the last of the colonies ratified it and the first census was taken. At this date the population numbered approximately four million people, 95 percent of whom were living east of the Appalachian Mountains, and 90 percent were from various parts of the British Isles. The second period covers the expansion of the original thirteen colonies west of the Appalachians, at first into the South and into the Old Northwest Territory, ending finally at the Pacific. This era may be said to close with the Civil War, about 1860, and was marked by the arrival of fresh immigrants from

two great sources, Ireland and Germany. The failure of the potato crop in Ireland in 1845 precipitated a wholesale exodus to America, a million and a half emigrants coming in the decade or so that followed. At about the same time the failure of the revolution in Germany (1848) resulted in the migration of an equal number of Germans. Many of the latter settled in certain central cities such as Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and St. Louis or became farmers in the Middle West. The third period, the period since the Civil War, is marked by an important change in the source from which our immigrants have been derived. In the two preceding periods, and indeed up to about 1890, the British Isles and the countries of northern Europe furnished from 75 to 90 percent of all who came to this country.[1]

Those who are familiar with the pronounced dialectal differences that mark the popular speech of different parts of England will know that there is nothing comparable to these differences in the United States. This was the object of remark as early as 1781, when John Witherspoon, the Scottish president of Princeton University, observed of the common people in America that "being much more unsettled, and moving frequently from place to place, they are not so liable to local peculiarities either in accent or phraseology." [2]

Isaac Candler, an Englishman who traveled in America in 1822-1823, wrote: "The United States having been peopled from different parts of England and Ireland, the peculiarities of the various districts have in a great measure ceased. As far as pronunciation is concerned, the mass of people speak better English, than the mass of people in England. This I know will startle some, but its correctness will become manifest when I state, that in no part, except in those occupied by the descendants of the Dutch and German settlers, is any unintelligible jargon in vogue. We hear nothing so bad in America as the Suffolk whine, the Yorkshire clipping, or the Newcastle guttural. We never hear the letter H aspirated improperly, nor omitted to be aspirated where propriety requires it. The common pronunciation approximates to that of the well-educated class of London and its vicinity." We

must not be misled by his statement about the goodness of American English. He does not mean that equally good English was not spoken in England. What he says is that in America there was little local variation and in the matter of pronunciation there was a more general conformance to what he conceived to be an educated standard. At about the same time James Fenimore Cooper spoke to much the same effect. "If the people of this country," he said, "were like the people of any other country on earth, we should be speaking at this moment a great variety of nearly unintelligible patois; but, in point of fact, the people of the United States, with the exception of a few of German and French descent, speak, as a body, an incomparably better English than the people of the mother country. There is not, probably, a man (of English descent) born in this country, who would not be perfectly intelligible to all whom he should meet in the streets of London, though a vast number of those he met in the streets of London would be nearly unintelligible to him. In fine, we speak our language, as a nation, better than any other people speak their language. When one reflects on the immense surface of country that we occupy, the general accuracy, in pronunciation and in the use of words, is quite astonishing. [3]

When colonists settle in a new country they find the resources of their language constantly taxed. They have no words for the many new objects on every hand or the constant succession of new experiences that they undergo. Accordingly in a colonial language changes of vocabulary take place almost from the moment the first settlers arrive. When the colonists from England became acquainted with the physical features of this continent they seem to have been impressed particularly by its mountains and forests, so much larger and more impressive than any in England, and the result was a whole series of new words like *bluff*, *foothill*, *notch*, *gap*, *divide*, *watershed*, *clearing*, and *underbrush*. Then there were the many living and growing things that were peculiar to the New World. The names for some of these the colonists learned from Native Americans, words like *moose*, *raccoon*, *skunk*, *opossum*, *chipmunk*, *porgy*, *terrapin*; others they formed by a

descriptive process long familiar in the language: mud hen, garter snake, bullfrog, potato bug, groundhog, reed bird. Tree names such as the hickory and live oak, and the locust are new to colonial English, as are *sweet potato*, *eggplant*, *squash*, *persimmon*, *pecan*. Contact with Native Americans brought into English a number of words having particular reference to their way of life: *wigwam*, *tomahawk*, *canoe*, *toboggan*, *mackinaw*, *moccasin*, *wampum*, *squaw*, *papoose*. These are Native American words, but we have also English words formed at the same time and out of the same experience: *war path*, *paleface*, *medicine man*, *pipe of peace*, *big chief*, *war paint*, and *the verb to scalp*. Native American words for Native American foods were taken over in the case of *hominy*, *tapioca*, *succotash*, and *pone*. The latter is still heard in the South for corn bread, the kind of bread the Native Americans made. The individual character of our political and administrative system required the introduction of words such as *congressional*, *presidential*, *gubernatorial*, *congressman*, *caucus*, *mass meeting*, *selectman*, *statehouse*, *land office*. Many other words illustrate things associated with the new mode of life—*back country*, *backwoodsman*, *squatter*, *prairie*, *log cabin*, *clapboard*, *corncrib*, *popcorn*, *hoe cake*, *cold snap*, *snow plow*, *bobsled*, *sleigh*. [1]

By the time the United States became an independent country, people had been living in America for over a hundred years. They already spoke and wrote differently from people in Britain. Yet the only books that told the “correct” way to write and spell things were written by British people.

Noah Webster, an American lawyer and teacher, thought Americans needed their own guides to their language. So in 1783, 1784, and 1785 Webster published a grammar book, a reading book, and a spelling book. The speller, like Webster’s other books, was based on the way Americans used English. It became the basic textbook all over the country.

The success of his speller allowed Webster to devote all his time to books on language. He felt that the English language in America deserved its own dictionary. In 1806 he published the first edition of this dictionary. It had 5000 more words than any earlier

dictionary. It included words that Americans used and British people didn’t. It was the first dictionary that described what people actually said, instead of telling them what they ought to say. And it spelled many words in a new way. Webster felt that English spelling was too complicated. So in some words he left out letters that he considered unnecessary, such as the “u” in “honour”, and he spelled some others the way they were pronounced. Because of his influence, we know that a writer who signs a “cheque” and goes to the “theatre” is British, while one who signs a “check” and goes to the “theater” is American. [4]

The differences often pass unnoticed, partly because a number of English spellings are still current in America, partly because some of the American innovations are now common in England, and in general because certain alternatives are permissible in both countries. Although some of the differences have grown up since Webster’s day, the majority of the distinctively American spellings are due to his advocacy of them and the incorporation of them in his dictionary.

The difference between the British and the American lexicon today is lessened by the fact that many American words have made their way into British use, and their number appears to be increasing rather than diminishing. Often they have had to make their way against long and bitter opposition. The verbs *to advocate*, *placate*, and *antagonize* were buried under a literature of protest during most of the nineteenth century. This is not true of most of the early words adopted by the colonists from the Native Americans for Native American things. Other words associated with American things have at times been accepted fairly readily: *telephone*, *phonograph*, *typewriter*, *ticker*, *prairie* are familiar examples. Some American political terms, especially those associated with less admirable practices, have also been taken in: *caucus*, *logrolling*, *graft*, *to stump*, among others. It is easy to recognize the American origin of such words as *lynch*, *blizzard*, *jazz*, *joyride*, *bucket shop*, but in many other cases the American origin of a word has been forgotten or the word has been so completely accepted in Britain that the

dictionaries do not think it important any longer to state the fact. [5]

Generally speaking, it may be said that when an American word expresses an idea in a way that appeals to the British as fitting or effective, the word is ultimately adopted in Britain. It is difficult to determine how large the debt of English is to the American vocabulary, but in the last two hundred years it has probably exceeded the debt of English to any other source.

The Role of American English in modern world

If we speak about the importance of American English in education it really plays a crucial role in modern education. Many educational institutions around the world use textbooks, online resources, and academic materials written in American English. Students often learn American pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary because these forms are commonly found in educational content.

The growth of digital learning has further increased the importance of American English. Many online courses, educational platforms, and academic websites use American English as their primary language. As a result, students who are proficient in American English have greater access to educational opportunities and global knowledge. In addition, American English is frequently used in international examinations, academic research, and student exchange programs. Mastery of American English enables students to participate more effectively in global educational communities.

American English and Technology

As the technology is developing rapidly, it has strengthened the global position of American English. Many software applications, websites, and digital tools originate in the United States and are designed primarily in American English. All students, researchers, and professionals often interact with technology through English-language interfaces, making familiarity with American English increasingly valuable.

Furthermore, online communication platforms, social media networks, and digital libraries expose users to American English on a daily basis. This exposure helps learners improve their language skills and become

familiar with contemporary vocabulary and expressions. [6]

The Global Influence of American English

As it is known American English has become a major language of international communication. It is widely used in business, diplomacy, tourism, entertainment, and scientific cooperation. Professionals from different countries often rely on English, particularly American English, to communicate effectively in multinational environments.

A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country. This might seem like stating the obvious, but it is not, for the notion of 'special role' has many facets. To achieve such a status, a language has to be taken up by other countries around the world. They must decide to give it a special place within their communities, even though they may have few (or no) mother-tongue speakers. [7]

American media is influencing on our lives and it has also contributed to the global spread of American English. Films, television programs, music, podcasts, and online content introduce millions of people to American pronunciation and vocabulary. Consequently, many learners view American English as a practical and desirable variety of English to study.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite its benefits, the dominance of American English presents certain challenges. Some educators argue that excessive emphasis on one variety of English may reduce awareness of other English-speaking cultures and linguistic varieties. Therefore, language education should encourage learners to appreciate both American English and other forms of English, such as British, Australian, and Canadian English. Additionally, educators should promote intercultural competence alongside language proficiency. Learning English should not only involve mastering grammar and vocabulary but also understanding cultural diversity and effective communication across different contexts.

To sum up, American English may be the most prominent source of emerging global English, and yet it will be American English

deracinated and adapted in a utilitarian way to the needs of speakers whose geography and culture are quite different. To the extent that Americans think about the global use of English at all, it is often as a possession that is lent on sufferance to foreigners, who often fail to get it right. Such a parochial attitude will change as more Americans become involved in the global economy and as they become more familiar with the high quality of literature being produced in post-colonial settings.

Many earlier attacks on American English were prompted by the slang, colloquialisms, and linguistic novelties of popular fiction and journalism, just as recent criticism has been directed at jargon in the speech and writings of American government officials, journalists, and social scientists. Along with the good use of English there is always much that is indifferent or frankly bad, but the language of a whole country should not be judged by its least graceful examples. [5]

Generalizations about the use of English throughout a region or a culture are more likely to mislead than to inform, and questions that lead to such generalizations are among the least helpful to ask. In the United States, as in Britain, India, Ghana, and the Philippines, in Australia and Jamaica, one can find plentiful samples of English that deserve a low estimate, but one will find a language that has adapted to the local conditions, usually without looking over its shoulder to the standards of a far away country, and in so adapting has become the rich medium for writers and speakers of great talent and some of genius.

In terms of the role in education, American English plays a vital role in modern education and global communication. Its widespread use in academic resources, technology, business, and media has made it an essential tool for students and professionals worldwide. While recognizing the importance of linguistic diversity, educators should continue to equip learners with strong American English skills to help them succeed in an increasingly interconnected world. Through education and communication, American English will likely remain a significant force in shaping global knowledge and cooperation.

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