THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMERICAN AND BRITISH ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT
This paper deals with the major differences between American and British English. The researcher intends to shed light on the historical background that clarifies the establishment of the English language in America. The study will investigate the effect of Noah Webster in forming and developing the American English. It will focus on the differences between American and British English in pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, word choice, syntax and morphology.
1. Introduction

1.1 Historical Background

English language is first introduced to the Americans by British colonization, beginning in the early 17th century. The language spread to numerous other parts of the world as a result of British trade and colonization (Wikipedia. Free Encyclopedia, 2012:8)

Baugh (1935:106) illustrates that immigrants from different parts of Europe come to America running away from various crises in their homelands. Immigrants from Germany, England, Ireland, Scandinavian countries, Norway, Sweden and many other countries all settled together. This has affected the English language spoken there.

Pyles (1971:230) adds that people who settle in America are the ambitious and industrious members of the upper-lower and lower-middle classes. They are also the educated clergymen, lawyers and even a few younger sons of the aristocracy. This is the reason that explains why American English resembles another British type of speech. Many linguists believe that most American speech does lack the quality of elegance which still means much to the cultured (Ibid).

Halliday et al. (1974:293) points out that there is an increasing acceptance of American varieties of English. Now it is accepted side by side with BRITISH English or even in preference to it in a number of new countries.

1.2 Noah Webster and his Influence on the American English

A particular contribution towards formalizing the difference between American and British English comes from Noah Webster who wrote the first American dictionary. He intended to show that people in the United States speak a
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According to Baugh (1935:426), Noah Webster (1758-1843) is the best who represents and advocates for the new ideas. He sets about compiling books of grammar, spelling and pronunciation. But his famous and prominent product is **An American Dictionary of English Language** (1828) is published in two volumes. He intends to show that English language in America is distinctive, developing along its own lines, and deserving to be considered from an independent American point of view.

Webster says "We may better labor to speak our language with propriety and elegance as we have it, then to attempt a reformation without advantage". He is interested in American pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, etc. He is the major responsible for many innovations in the American English (Ibid 429). Webster as Pyles (1971:266) is regarded as a sort of linguistic Mahatma.

2. Differences between American and British English
2.1 Difference in Pronunciation

Fletcher (1990:67) states that the American English pronunciations are those appropriate to the variety accent known as **General American**. It is what is spoken by the majority of Americans, namely those who do not have a noticeable eastern or southern accent. It is the appropriate pronunciation for EFL learners who take American English as their model, rather than British English.

Baugh (1935: 434) points out that the most widely current pronunciation in American English may occur in standard British as a less frequently used variant from the time of the early colonist of America. But the pronunciation of English has undergone further change and a variety of southern English has
come to be recognized as the English Received Standard which differs widely from the American English.

Baugh (Ibid) states that one of the most noticeable differences is in treatment of the "r" sound. In Received pronunciation of English this sound has disappeared except before vowels. It is not pronounced when it occurs before consonant or at the end of a word unless the next word begins with a vowel. While in America English especially in the middle and west states the "r" is pronounced in all positions.

Pyles (1971:261) remarks that some of the prevalent American pronunciations of the words do not occur in standard English e.g. Figure /fiɡər/, leisure /li:ʒər/, vase /veiz/, tomato /təmeɪətu/. On the other hand, the prevalent British pronunciation of them are current in American English e.g., /fiɡə/, /le3ə/, /va:z/, /təmaːtəʊ/. Lyons (1981:26) states that there are many differences between the speech of the average of well-educated American and that of the well-educated British.

Swan (2005:43-44) clarifies the most important general difference between American and British speech as follows:

(i) Some words which are pronounced with /u:/ in most of American English have /ju:/ in British English. These are words in which the, d, t, or n (and sometimes s or l) are followed by u or ew in writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American Pronunciation</th>
<th>British Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>enthusiastic AmE /in.θuːzɪæstɪk/</td>
<td>humorous BrE /hjuːmərəs/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duty AmE /duːtɪ/</td>
<td>BrE /djuːtɪ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tune AmE /tuːn/</td>
<td>BrE /tjuːn/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new AmE /nuː/</td>
<td>BrE /nuː/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>illuminate AmE /ɪljuːmɪneɪt/</td>
<td>BrE /ɪljuːmɪneɪt/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*AmE: American English. BrE: British English
(ii) British English has one more vowel than American English.

This is the round short (/ɒ/) used in words like cot, dog, got, off, stop, lost. In American English these words are pronounced either with /a:/ like the first vowel in father or /ɒː/, like the vowel in caught. (This vowel is also pronounced rather differently in British and American English.)

(iii) Some words written with a+ consonant (e.g. fast) have different pronunciation: with /a:/, in standard southern British English, and with /æ/ in American and some other varieties of English.

(iv) In many varieties of American English, t and d both have a very light voiced pronunciation (/d/) between vowel –so writer and rider, for example can sound the same. In British English they are quite different: /raɪtə(r)/ and raɪdə(r)/.

(v) Words ending in unstressed -ile (e.g., fertile, reptile, missile, senile) are pronounced with /aI/ in British English, some are pronounced with /l/ in American English.

fertile AmE /fər'təl/ (rhyming with turtle)
BrE /fər'təl/ (rhyming with her tile)

(vi) Some long words ending in -ary -ery or ory are pronounced differently, with one more syllable in American English.

secretary AmE /'sekrətərI/ BrE /'sekrətərI/

(vii) Words borrowed from French are often stressed differently, especially if their pronunciation ends with a vowel sound. The final vowel is usually stressed in American English but not in British English.

pate AmE /pæ'teɪl/ BrE /'pæteɪl/
ballet AmE /bælɪt/ BrE /'balet/
2.2 Difference in Spelling

Baugh (1935:429) states that the American spelling often differs in small ways from that customary in England. The differences often pass unnoticed because a number of English spelling are still current in America and some of the American innovations are now permissible in both countries.

Noah Webster is the major responsible for exercising new innovation in the American spelling. Baugh (Ibid) says that the majority of the distinctively American spelling due to Webster advocacy and the incorporation of them in his dictionary.

Webster prints music, physic, phonetic….etc without a final 's'. he is responsible for exiting the 'u' from a great number words spelled in his day prevailingly in "our", for example: armor, color, behavior, favor, flavor, harbor, neighbor….etc. He is also responsible for the American practice of using -er instead of the customary British - re in a number of words such as:

fiber, center, liter, meter, theater (Ibid)

Pyles (1971:266-268) claims that Webster is credited with the American spelling practice of not doubling final "l" when adding a suffix except in words with final stressed syllable, for example: grovel, groveled, groveling but propel, propelled, propelling. On the other hand modern British spelling usually doubles "l" before a suffix regardless of the position of the stress, thus grovel, grovelled, grovelling.

Swan (2005: 549-550) states that many English verbs can be spelt with either -ise or -ize. In American English, ize is preferred in these case. Examples:

- mechanise /mechanize/ (BrE) mechanize (AmE)
- computerise /computerize (BrE) computerize (AmE)
- baptise /baptize (BrE) baptize (AmE)
- realise /realize (BrE) realize (AmE)
Most words of two syllables, and a few longer words, have –ise in both British and American English Examples:

Surprise (Not surprize)
despise
supervise
revise
compromise
televis
advise
exercise
advertise
comprise
improvise

Some more examples of the difference in spelling are the following:

axe (BrE) ax (AmE)
plough (BrE) plow (AmE)
tyre (BrE) tire (AmE)

2.3 Difference in Vocabulary

Baugh (1935:447) confirms that the differences in vocabulary and idioms of American English is a subject of wide controversy. The English in fact is only continuing to employ terms familiar in the 17th century which become obsolete in English.

The Americans being to defend their use of English from the 16th century till the present day. The American English has lost a lot of vocabulary items which have survived in British English. For example 'Waistcous' is a name of a garment that American English calls a 'vest'. It usually means undershirt in English. The topographical British terms like fen, spinney, copse, heath are not used in America (Ibid, 419)
Americans also adopt some foreign words from other languages. Form French colonists they learn portage, chowder, caribou, bureau. They also borrow 'cruller', 'coleslaw', 'cookie', 'stoop', 'boos' from the Dutch. (ibid).

In the field of politics the Americans need the introduction of such words us: congress, presidential, selectman, land office, statehouse, caucus...etc.(ibid).

2.4 Difference in Word Choice

Pyles (1971:249-250) states that there are many lists of words which are equivalent in British and American English. For example, automobile, which is equivalent of the British car or motor-car. In British English postman is perfectly used and mailman is more frequently used in America. Baggage is the American equivalent for the British luggage.

Pyles (ibid) illustrates that no American has ever said 'prom' for a baby carriage, 'mental', fro insane, 'petrol' for gas, lorry for truck, treacle for molasses, 'intermission' for interval, 'orchestra seat' for a seat in the stalls, a 'trillion' for billion or a raise, (in salary) for a rise(ibid).

Furthermore, what Americans call a trailer is a caravan in England; preparatory school is a public school; chain stores are usually multiple store; and sneakers are plimsolls (ibid).

Swan (2005:40-41) refers to list of words which are equivalents in British and American English. Examples:
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AmE
area code
busy
candy
cross walk
doctor's office
elevator
flash light
garbage
mean
parking lot
(potato) chips
railroad
raise
resume
stand in line
subway
vacation
gasoline
one-way (ticket)
wind shield

BrE
dialling code
engaged (phone)
sweets
pedestrian/zebra crossing
doctor's surgery
lift
torch
rubbish
nasty
car park
crips
railway
rise (in salary)
CV
queue
underground
holiday (s)
petrol
single (ticket)
wind screen (on a car)

2.5 Difference in Syntax and Morphology

Pyles (1971: 243) affirms that syntactical and morphological differences are as little as those in word choice and pronunciation. Some of the examples that clarify these differences are:

(i) There are a lot of differences in the a choice of prepositions, e.g., the Englishmen lives in a village. The American lives on it. The Englishman gets into or out of a car. The American gets on or of a car (ibid)
In British English at the weekend is used, while in American English on the weekend. The British says "please write to me soon". The American says "please write me soon". (Wikipedia, Free Encyclopedia, 2012:5).

(ii) With regard to collective nouns, the British English uses a plural verb form with them, while the Americans use the singular verb form with these nouns since they lack the plural –s. For example, the Government are still discussing the problem (ibid).

(iii) The past tense and past participle of the verbs: learn, spoil, spell, burn, dream, smell, spill, leap and others, can be either irregular (learnt spoilt ….etc) or regular (learned, spoiled …etc) in British English. But in Americans English, the irregular forms are never, or rarely used (except for burnt and leapt). (Wikipedia. Free Encyclopedia, 2012: 6).

(vi) The use of the present perfect: in British English the present perfect is used to express an action that has occurred in the present past that has an effect on the present moment, for example:

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 is considered incorrect. However, both forms are generally accepted in standard American English. (Wood lands-junior, 2011:1). Other differences involve the use of the present perfect in British English and simple past in American English include already, just, and yet.

**BrE**

I've just had lunch
I've already seen that film
Have you finished your homework yet?
AmE
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 Don’t you finish your homework yet? (ibid).

3. conclusions
In the light of the presented analysis, the researcher has arrived at a number of conclusions, the most outstanding of which are the following:
(a) The English language is admitted to America by colonists which cause a variety in it.
(b) Noah Webster has the main effect in reviving the language to achieve its independency away from the British English.
(c) There are many differences in pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, word choice, syntax and morphology that sometimes cause some confusing to the foreign students and the native speakers as well. However, the largest differences is that of pronunciation and word choice.
(d) These differences are not so essential or drastic to the point of being unintelligible for the others.
Bibliography
المستخلص

يتعاطى هذا البحث مع الاختلافات الأساسية بين اللغة الإنجليزية في بريطانيا ونظيرتها في أمريكا. يقصد الباحث هنا تسليط الضوء على الخلفية التاريخية التي توضح نشوء اللغة الإنجليزية في أمريكا. ويتذرى الدراسة عن الدور الفاعل لنحو وبستر وتأثيره في تشكيك وتطوير الإنجليزية الأمريكية. ويركز مشروع البحث هذا على الاختلافات بين الإنجليزية البريطانية والإنجليزية الأمريكية في مجالات التلفظ والإملاء والمرادفات واختيار الكلمات وفي علم التراكيب وعلم التصريف الكلمات.