

Americanisation within British English

Edwin de Jong - S5724759

Length: 3-4 pages

Abstract

English is the most spoken language all over the world. However, English hasn't always been the same. The arrival of American English has been an important factor on the change of the English language. Ever since America became the central country, a lot of countries have been Americanised. That's the reason why British English might have changed too. Previous research has primarily focused on the change on the spoken language. In this study, we focus on the change of written British English. There have been some studies about topic, however those were primarily focused on differences in spelling. We want to focus differences in complete words. So, we want to figure out whether there is a correlation between the growth of American English and the use of certain words in British English. The aim of this thesis is to find out whether the growth of American English has an impact on the frequency of Americanisms in British English written text. We will compare American English words to their British English counterparts. The results show that the frequency of Americanisms in British English increases around the time where American English was growing the most. This could be very valuable to take into consideration of what English variant we should teach our children.

1 Introduction

1.1 English variation

Most of us know how to speak English, since it's the most spoken language all over the world. This helps us communicate with people from all

over the world. Did you ever wonder how the English you most likely use, differs from original British English? Whether you have or not, it is most likely that you use an Americanised version of the English language. We call this American English. For example words as 'cookies' or 'pants' might seem more known for you, while their British English counterparts 'biscuits' and 'trousers' seem more complicated. This is because American English is used more frequently than British English. (Tomović, 2022) We want to understand why American English is used more. Understanding this phenomenon might help us figure out what form of English we should teach to our children. "British English is still the dominant variety in education in many European countries where English is taught as a foreign language." *Tomović (2022)*

1.2 Americanisms

In this study we want to figure out whether there is a correlation between the growth of 'American English' and the use of Americanised words in 'British English'. In other words;

- Can we find Americanisms in British English written text?
- Can we find a reason why these are used frequently in British English?
- Is this reason related to the growth of American English?

We think that there are multiple examples of Americanisms which are used more frequently in British English than their British counterparts. We also think that there is a relation between the growth of the importance of America and the frequency of the Americanised terms in British English. This means, we have two variables. The

more American English becomes important (independent variable), the higher the frequency of Americanisms in British English written text. (dependent variable)

2 Related Work

We collected and analysed previous work about the Americanisation of English. In this section we discuss these papers and we explain why these studies relate to our research.

2.1 Education of English

First, the article *Tomović (2022)* dives in the education of the English language. This peer-reviewed article focuses especially on the education in non-English speaking countries. It talks about the fact that British English is used more in education despite the fact that American English is used more frequently over all. It gives arguments for and against the use of both American- and British English. Besides that, it gives a short explanation of the phenomenon Americanisms within British English.

2.2 American English vs British English

Second, *Leotescu and Leotescu (2021)* talks about differences between American- and British English. This peer-reviewed paper is way more specific about those differences than *Tomović (2022)*. For example, *Leotescu and Leotescu (2021)* talks more about the differences in spelling and vocabulary. This article also talks about the growth of American English, this however is better explained by *Tomović (2022)*.

We've found another article which has a similar approach as that what we have. *Gonçalves et al. (2018)* does research on spoken language. This article uses N-grams and Twitter to find trends in the English language. They try to find those trends in both British English as well as American English. However, they use these trends to find the differences which are discussed in articles like *Leotescu and Leotescu (2021)*. This differs from the method we are using, but that means that this can be very useful to help us with difficulties of the method.

2.3 Increase of Americanisms

The last article, (*Morgner, 2021*) is not peer-reviewed. This article however, focuses on the Americanisation of spoken English, similar as *Gonçalves et al. (2018)*. However, we are doing

research on written English. This article has 4 different research questions. We only need to use the first one. this part talks about the cause of the increase of Americanisms in British English. This article goes further into details about the growth of American English than the other articles.

3 Data

3.1 Frequency of American English words

For this experiment we want to calculate the frequency of American English words in British English written text. To do this, we provided a list of American English words with their British English counterparts.

American English	British English
Apartment	Flat
Appetizer	Starter
Cookies	Biscuits
Cotton candy	Candy floss
Counter clockwise	Anticlockwise
Diaper	Nappy
Eggplant	Aubergine
Elevator	Lift
Full stop	Period
Pants	Trousers
Etc.	Etc.

Figure 1: Example of what the list looks like.

We also use the Google Books dataset. This dataset has data for books written in multiple languages. For example, it contains data of books written by British- and American English publishers. We are using the British English dataset, because we want to find the influence of Americanisms in the British English language. Google N-grams provides us the possibility to count the frequency of individual words used in those books. By using this technique, we can calculate the amount of times that American English words are used in British English written books. However, we can't really take conclusions with this information. That's why we created that list of words earlier. By comparing the frequency of American English variants of the British English words with the original English words we get a better perspective. We will put the words of our list in Google N-grams. This way, we get a result for both the American English word and the British English word. This creates our variable: The frequency of American English words used in British English written text

3.2 Growth of American English

To answer the question since when American English became popular, we need to dive in our history. We use previous research to help us provide an answer. The answer to this question will fill the variable: The growth of American English. The answer to this question will also be the restriction which we will use in the Google N-grams viewer. We only want to know the frequency of American English words in the period from the growth of American English until today. Anything written before that will not matter to our experiment. However, we make sure that there is a little bit of breathing room with this restriction. It is very likely that certain Americanised words are implemented later than others in the British English language. Besides, for us it is easier to find a trend if we can see a little before the trend actually happens. So the restriction will be slightly earlier than the time period we can find. If our hypothesis is right, we expect that we can also see the answer to this question back in Google N-grams.

3.3 Pre-processing

In this section we talk about how we will process our collected data.

3.3.1 List of words

We made a list of American English words with their British English counterparts. Here is how we created it. First, we made a combined list of separate smaller lists. The lists we used are: (Shah, 2014), (Eng, a) and (Eng, b). Within this list we deleted duplicates. we removed all the words with only differences in grammar, like "color" and "colour". In this thesis we aren't looking at grammar. After that we had to remove words that have a different meaning in the other variant of English. For example the word "chips" is a word in both American as British English. In this case "chips" (British) means fries and "chips" (American) is the word for crisps. The last thing we removed from the list are words that have a different meaning in the same language. For example, with the words "apartment" (American) and "flat" (British). The word "flat" is also used in American English, but in this case it is an apartment with a single door. After the removal of all those words we had our own usable list. We use ChatGPT to give us 30 random words from this list to do the experiment with.

American English	British English
Apartment	Flat
Appetizer	Starter
Cookies	Biscuits
Cotton candy	Candy floss
Counter clockwise	Anticlockwise
Diaper	Nappy
Eggplant	Aubergine
Elevator	Lift
Full stop	Period
Pants	Trousers
Etc.	Etc.

Figure 2: The list after the removal of difficult words.

3.3.2 N-Grams

We use the 30 random given words from the processed list of words in Google N-grams. This will result in a graphic which shows the frequency of the word in each year.

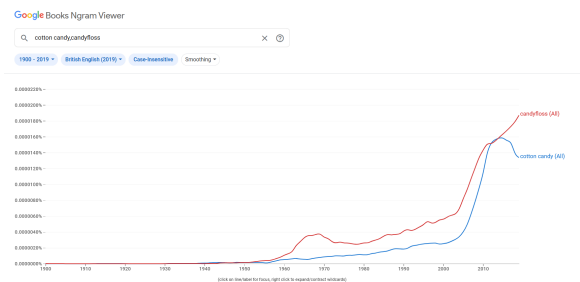


Figure 3: An example of what the graphic would look like.

With Google N-grams we also had to keep something else in mind. Some words have multiple meanings. To give a similar example with the words "apartment" and "flat" again: the word "flat" has 2 meanings. "Flat" as in the building and "flat" as in "a flat surface". We had to specify the type of word of for this problem. In this case the word "flat" that we are looking for is a noun. So, we use "underscore-NOUN" after the word "flat" to specify that the word we're looking for is a noun.

After all of these steps we will do the experiment and we will compare and analyse the results.

4 Predicted Results

4.1 Growth of American English

Leotescu and Leotescu (2021) and Morgner (2021) helped to give us an idea of the biggest

growth of American English. They both talk about the increasing impact of American English on British English. "English in general has always had the habit of borrowing items from different sources as long as they are considered useful." (Morgner, 2021). This validates the thought of British English borrowing sources from American English. Morgner (2021) also claims that American English has developed its own character throughout the centuries since the US declared independence. This was in 1776. Besides that, Leotesco and Leotesco (2021) says: "One of the most important figures that played a valuable part in what is called linguistic nationalism is Noah Webster." they go on with saying that Webster is regarded as the initiator of the most important changes in American spelling with his American Dictionary of the English Language (1828). Both of these things show us in which period of time we could find the most growth of American English.

4.2 Results in N-grams

Gonçalves et al. (2018) did similar research on spoken English. They did their experiment to look for grammatical differences between American and British English. Gonçalves et al. (2018) found that the variety in spelling between the American and British words has significantly increased in the last 200 years. They also say that they found that the beginning of this trend was around the time that Noah Webster wrote his dictionary (1828). For their experiment they used Twitter and Google N-grams. Since we also use Google N-grams, we expect to find similar trends. Although we are looking for complete differences in words instead of spelling, we expect that the increase of these words is around the same time.

4.3 Discussion

If we follow the trends we found with Google N-grams, it is very likely that the growth of Americanisms in British English is related to the growth of America. We also found that British English' borrowing behaviour is generally going for useful changes in the language. This means that the American English words we can find in the British English language are probably useful enough to be integrated in British English. Therefore, we think we should also teach this to our children.

5 Conclusion

This study aimed at finding a relation between the frequency of American English in British English text and the growth of American English. Since we already knew that British English tends to implement useful features of other languages, we expected this to be the case for Americanisms in British English as well. We've shown that American English is used in British English with Google N-grams. We believe that this is related to the growth of American English. With the help of previous research we can see that the trends we found start in the same period of time as that American English started growing. This means that our hypothesis was correct. The more American English becomes important, the higher the frequency of Americanisms in British English written text. There are still discussions about the way we teach English. We hope that this research will help us into the right direction. You can find our thesis at our Github.

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