

# American Britishisms: Why Some Americans Are Speaking Like Brits [B2]

È sempre più frequente sentire giovani americani usare parole e frasi tipiche del Regno Unito e imitarne l'accento. Perché succede?

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For years, British linguists have been [complaining](#) about Americanisms invading British English. But now the opposite is also occurring, as Britishisms — words and phrases that were once exclusive to British English — are becoming more popular among Americans, particularly members of Gen Z. Many American Gen Zers, who are now in their teens and twenties, are using Britishisms and even adopting British accents in certain situations, resulting in millions of related online posts and videos on social media sites such as TikTok.

## AS SEEN (AND HEARD) ON TV

The popularity of Britishisms among Gen Zers has been attributed primarily to the influence of British TV shows, beginning with the British animated TV series Peppa Pig. Many American Gen Zers grew up watching Peppa Pig, and in [the late 2010s](#), parents began [to notice](#) that their children sometimes spoke like the show's main character, by saying the British 'Mummy' instead of the American equivalent, 'Mommy', and pronouncing 'tomato' as 'to-mah-to', as most British people do, instead of 'to-may-to', which is the typical American pronunciation. This [trend](#) became known as the Peppa Effect. In time, of course, most Gen Zers [grew out of](#) Peppa Pig, but their speech continued to be influenced by other British TV shows popular among their generation. These included reality shows such as Love Island, The Only Way Is Essex, and Too Hot [to Handle](#), as well as the science-fiction series Dr. Who and the historical drama series Downton Abbey. In addition, Gen Zers had easy access to British news media, and so were frequently exposed to British English accents and colloquialisms.

## USED IN TOUGH SITUATIONS

So, has British English replaced American English among this young generation of Americans? No. Typically, Gen Zers limit their use of Britishisms, often accompanied by a British accent, to certain situations, particularly those in which they feel [awkward](#) or uncomfortable. They use Britishisms as a verbal tic, effectively embodying the persona of a British alter ego in order [to alienate themselves](#) from what they are saying. For example, they might feel uncomfortable expressing [anger](#) or frustration in their native American accent. So, they use British language and pronunciation as a means of distancing themselves from their emotion and [softening](#) the impact of their words.

## A NATURAL EVOLUTION

When the first generations of British people lived in what is now the US, they spoke British English — because American English didn't yet exist. At that time, many English-speakers in Britain used words that are now associated with American English, such as 'candy', which has since been replaced in British English by the word 'sweets', and 'fall' instead of 'autumn'. At the same time, many English-speakers in the US used words now associated with British English, such as 'trousers' instead of the modern American equivalent, 'pants', and ['fortnight'](#) instead of 'two weeks'. [Therefore](#), some words now considered examples of American English were once commonly used in British English, and vice versa. Over time, however, certain words [fell out of usage](#) on either side of the Atlantic Ocean and were replaced by others, and American English evolved as its own distinct variety, leading to the publication of the first dictionary of American English in 1806. The import of Americanisms into British English, and of Britishisms into American English is to some extent a reversal of this process and, one could [argue](#), part of the natural evolution of the English language.

## POPULAR BRITISHISMS IN THE US

Here are fifteen British English words and phrases that are being used by American Gen Zers. **chat up:** [to engage](#) someone in flirtatious conversation. **cheeky:** insolent or audacious. You might also hear the phrase 'cheeky monkey', used to refer to someone who is being [mischievous](#) or [playful](#). **cheers:** used when [toasting](#) a drink or to mean 'thanks' or 'goodbye'. **fancy:** to want to have or do something. Example: "Do you fancy going for a drink after work?" **flat:** an apartment. **\*\*ginger:** \*\*used to describe someone with red hair. The use of this word with this particular meaning has become more common in the US, almost certainly because of the popularity of the Harry Potter series, which features the [ginger-haired wizard](#) Ron Weasley. **gobsmacked:**[utterlyastonished](#). **innit:** a contraction of 'isn't it'. Example: "That film's [sick](#), innit?" **\*\*loo:** \*\*an informal word for a bathroom or toilet. **mate:** a friend. **mobile:** short for 'mobile phone' and equivalent to the American English 'cell phone'. **\*\*muppet/numpty/twit:** \*\*all of these words mean 'a stupid person'. **skint:** [penniless](#); [broke](#). **spot on:** exactly correct or accurate. **will do:** used to agree to do something that someone has asked you to do. Example: "Could you please get me a sandwich for lunch?" "Will do!"

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# Glossary

- **grew out of** = essere grande per
- **ginger-haired wizard** = mago dai capelli rossi
- **awkward** = scomodo
- **fortnight** = quindici giorni
- **fell out of usage** = cadere in disuso
- **playful** = giocoso, scherzoso
- **toasting** = brindare
- **astonished** = stupito, meravigliato
- **sick** = figo
- **to notice** = notare
- **trend** = moda, tendenza
- **to Handle** = gestire
- **Therefore** = perciò, quindi
- **argue** = argomentare
- **mischievous** = malizioso
- **utterly** = totalmente
- **penniless** = al verde, senza soldi
- **complaining** = lamentarsi
- **the late 2010s** = alla fine del decennio 2010
- **to alienate themselves** = estraniarsi
- **anger** = rabbia
- **softening** = attenuare
- **to engage** = intraprendere una conversazione
- **broke** = in bancarotta