

Differences between British English and American English



1. Grammatical Differences
2. Differences in Spelling
3. Differences in Pronunciation
4. Lexical Differences



1. Grammatical Differences



Verb Phrase

AmE

have

Do you *have* the time ?

I don't.

BrE

have got

Have you got the time ?

I haven't.



Conjugation

AmE : burn burned burned

BrE : burn burnt burnt

AmE : dream dreamed dreamed

BrE : dream dreamt dreamt



Tenses

AmE sometimes uses the simple past where BrE has the present perfect.

AmE

BrE

I just ate

I've just eaten

will / won't

shall / shan't



Noun Phrase

Some differences of word order

AmE

Hudson River

a half hour

BrE

River Thames

half an hour



Use of the article

AmE

BrE

In the future

In future

In the hospital

In hospital



Collective Nouns

AmE prefers collective nouns in the singular
whereas BrE allows also the plural

AmE

BrE

The government is....

The government are...



Clausal patterns...

...sometimes differ

AmE

BrE

Come take a look

Come and take a look

I asked that he go

I asked him to go



were / was

AmE prefers *were* to *was*

AmE

BrE

I wish she were here.

I wish she was here.



Adverbials and prepositions

AmE

I'll go momentarily
real good
backward
It's twenty of four
It's in back of the
building

BrE

In a moment
really good
backwards
It's twenty to four
It's behind the building



2. Differences in Spelling



Spelling

AmE

center

color

tire

mom, mommy

aluminum

BrE

centre

colour

tyre

mum, mummy

aluminium



3. Differences in Pronunciation



Pronunciation

- dance, chance
- data
- tune, duty
- bird, floor



4. Lexical Differences



There are three distinctions:

- words that are only found in AmE
- words that are only found in BrE
- words that are established throughout the world as part of World Standard English (WSE)



Words that reflect cultural differences, and are not part of WSE

AmE

BrE

Ivy League

A-levels

Groundhog Day

Giro

Revenue sharing

VAT



Words that are straightforward,
i.e. they have a single sense and a synonym
in the other variety

AmE

checking account
station wagon

BrE

current account
estate car



One WSE meaning and one or more additional meaning(s) in AmE or BrE

caravan in both languages:
„group of travellers through
the desert“

but in the sense of „vehicle towed by a car“:

AmE
caravan

BrE
trailer



One meaning in WSE and a synonym in one
or the other of the two varieties

both have „*pharmacy*“

AmE

drugstore

BrE

chemist's



No meaning in WSE

AmE

flyover

BrE

flypast



Effect of frequency

Words which are used in both varieties, but are much more common in one of them:

AmE

apartment

store

mail

BrE

flat

shop

post



Equivalent lexical items

AmE

airplane

baggage

cookie

BrE

aeroplane

luggage

biscuit



Quiz:

AmE

freedom fries

gasoline

expressway

first floor

subway

BrE

chips

petrol

motorway

ground floor

underground



Quiz:

BrE

holiday

racecourse

driving license

prawn cocktail

jumper

AmE

vacation

racetrack

driver's license

shrimp cocktail

sweater, pullover

