

# The Analysis of Influence and Cause of British English on American English and New Zealand English

Lei Liao<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

**Abstract:** English originated in Britain. Since the 17th century, with the colonial expansion of Britain, English has been brought to all parts of the world, forming many varieties of English such as British English, American English, Australian English and New Zealand English. As the population of the United States and its political and economic strength continue to increase, American English has greatly influenced other variants of English. This paper analyzes the influence of British English on various English variants in the fields of vocabulary pronunciations spellings and grammar, and at the same time explores British English influence on American English, New Zealand English, other regional variants and its effects on our learning of English.

## 1. Introduction

In this 21st century, the language systems of different regions of the world are becoming more and more developed. And there's no doubt that the changing and developing of the pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar of all the languages in the world happen every day. However, one kind of language can also be impacted when it has "travel" to other regions and different variants of the same language can also influence each other, the most obvious example would be the English language. About the English language, it used to be one of the dialects which are spoken by of Germanic nations. But with the development of Great Britain and the area of their colony, colonists brought English to new places such as North America and Antipodes. To adapt to the new environment, some changes have taken place in English, and today there are more than a dozen branches of English, such as British English, American English, Australian English, and New Zealand English. As the population of the United States and its political and economic strength continue to increase, American English has greatly influenced other variants of the English language (Quirk, 1985). Understanding the history and development of the English language would be necessary and good for the English learning of college students. So, in the following paragraphs of the essay, the analysis of the influence and cause of British English on American English and American English in New Zealand English would be provided. British English, focused on in this article, means the English system of the England people living in the British Isles, and is the official language of the United Kingdom mainland and the Commonwealth countries. Historically, along with the development of Britain as a Sunset Empire, British English spread rapidly and became accepted as a universal language in countries around the

world. Where English spread, an accurate standard of linguistic specification was required and British English was marked using the International Phonetic Alphabet, and developed a systematic set of standard British English pronunciation, namely Received Pronunciation, which is considered to be the generally accepted pronunciation.

As the crucial auxiliary booster, British English promotes the outstanding status of English which is acknowledged as a Lingua Franca. At the present, British English is still an official language in many Commonwealth countries, including Australia and New Zealand, and also contains a large number of non-native English speakers who have also adopted British English when learning English as a second or foreign language, such as learners in the European Union and Asian countries.

## 2. The influence of British English on American English

To begin with, American English is a kind of English language that has spread from Great Britain to North America. During the British colonial period in North America, the English started to be transferred to North America. In the 17th century, the first wave of immigration of native English speakers to the United States started. Meanwhile, Dutch, French, Spanish, and Swedish speakers had also arrived in America so a kind of "English" combined with a lot of different accents from Europe had been used in America for a while.

American English is viewed as a major variant of the English language. It has been used for nearly four hundred years in the special geographical environment of North America, influenced by the multiculturalism of American society and the constant innovation of the language. American English inherited the basic elements of British English, which were further enriched and developed on

\* Corresponding author: [sherryliao48@gmail.com](mailto:sherryliao48@gmail.com)

the American continent in the seventeenth century.

The uniqueness of American society and life has led to the formation of current American English. For geographical and historical reasons, American English also incorporated Indian, Dutch, German, French and Spanish words. In the three hundred years since the first European settlers arrived in the New World, differences between British English and American English have slowly begun to emerge. From the mid-twentieth century to the present day, because of the economic, military and political dominance of the United States in the world, American English has flourished increasingly, especially in the spread of many American cultural products, such as American English films, books and music, which have become popular in many countries and have replaced a large number of other English variants in the cultural industry.

Between British and American English, the proportion of all native speakers of English is 83%. In addition, they have historically been the origin of the whole gamut of worldwide English (Svartvik and Leech 2006). Based on the linguistic background, three aspects of impacts caused by British English are analyzed in the following.

The first major impact would be the phonetics influence which is made by British English on American English. Most contemporary North American English has retroflex and the segment [r] is also pronounced before a consonant. Retroflex sound is a special type of phonetic sound in which certain sounds are produced by rolling the top part of tongue upwards against the hard palate. In American English, there are two typical components of the retroflex sound, namely the sound [r] and the sound [l]. In most North American dialects of English, the "er" sound is in occur (stressed) and butter (unstressed), marked [ɜ] and [ə] in the IPA but is a retroflex vowel in American English (Menchen, 1948).

The second impact would be the influence of the spelling from the British on American English, part of which is that American English regularizes the irregular spelling in British English. The changing of the spelling in the United States is not driven by the government, but by the compilers of textbooks and dictionaries. So, in 1828, a lot of American English words are shortened from Standard British English, such as "colour" would be replaced by "color". Also, American English prefers longer words in pronunciation, while British English tends to be elliptical, whose example would be that "transportation" is commonly used in American English, and "transport" is commonly used in British English.

The last one is about the vocabulary differences between American and British English. As a newborn country, Americans want to change their language in a way different from the British. Then, they want to have a language that can be distinguished from British English and replace "rubber" with "eraser", and replace "gas" with "petrol" (Zhang, 1998).

### 3. The origin and development of New Zealand English

Regarding New Zealand English, it is derived from

Australian English and British English early and formed by fusing the accents of Australian, England, Scotland, and Irish immigrants so that the pronunciation of it would be similar to Australian English but closer to British pronunciation. This similarity results from its coming under crossfire from four directions: British, American, and Australian English, and also the native Maori language (Svartvik and Leech, 2006).

After Britain entered the European Community in the early 1970s, however, for commercial as well as cultural reasons New Zealand reoriented itself more towards Asia and the Pacific. English and Maori are the two official languages of New Zealand, and with the passage of the Maori Language Act in 1987, Maori was not only officially given the same status as English, but the New Zealand government also began to focus on the revival of the Maori language, with more and more Maori and New Zealanders receiving Maori language education in schools. With a systematic comparison, four points are concluded in the following.

Initially, New Zealand English retains some of the old rural dialect vocabulary of British English. New Zealand was once a British colony. With the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, New Zealand began to be officially a British colony. Historically, most of the initial influx of immigrants to New Zealand came from Britain, with those from other countries always being in the minority, so New Zealand English has retained features of British English, and it has generally been more influenced by British English than Australian English was by British English. Old rural words from the British dialect are not only still heard in rural New Zealand, but have even entered the common language. In contrast, such words are less commonly used by speakers of British English today. New Zealand English has become as amber as the old British English words of earlier times. For example.

- (a) A farm dog sheds a group of sheep.
- (b) Workers snigged logs of felled timber in the bush.
- (c) Farmers in this area spelled their paddock.
- (d) The hunter sooled on his dogs when confronted with a wild wolf.
- (e) Miners would like to take part in a Gavel.

The verb shed in sentence (a) means to separate something or somebody.

The verb snig in sentence (b) means to pull out the logs from the drag chain with a tractor (originally a bull).

In sentence (c), the word spell means to fallow.

In sentence (d), the word sool means to call (the dog) to bite.

Gavel in sentence (e) refers to the allocation of favourable mining positions to miners by lottery, which retains the meaning of the word formerly used in Yorkshire, England. There are hundreds of words like the examples above in New Zealand English.

The second one would also be the phonetics impact which is made by American English on English-speaking countries, including the pronunciation of some vocabulary. Though the British pronunciation is admired by the masses in New Zealand, American pronunciation like [sk], the beginning of "schedule" with the sound research on the first syllable, is steadily infiltrating New Zealand English. This study carried out a fieldwork to New

Zealand, and found that the locals demonstrate the stressful pronunciation of the word “research” on its first syllable. After that, the researcher searched the standard pronunciation of “research” in the web database and found that the pronunciation of “research” has both British and American pronunciations, which means that New Zealand English has been influenced by American English much more than the British one. In addition, the more obvious example would be the words “harass” and “harassment”, both American and New Zealand citizens would stress the second syllable of these two words rather than the first one like the people from Britain (Kiwitalk, 1995).

In terms of simplification of the phonological system, New Zealand speakers tend to pronounce the diphthong [eə] as [ɪə]. For example, share sounds like sheer, while chair sounds like cheer. in this sentence:

Many New Zealanders sit on chair just as readily as they cheer at a football match.

The pronunciation of chair is close to cheer, but not all variations in New Zealand speech tend to be simplified.

Words such as grown, thrown, mown, etc., add a non-stressed vowel [ə], a feature not found in British English speech. However, this change has no effect on another group of words, groan, throne, moan. New Zealanders are able to distinguish between these two groups of words in terms of spelling and pronunciation, whereas in British English they are spelt differently but sound the same.

With the exception of the South Island dialects of New Zealand, Standard New Zealand English is non-rhotic, meaning that it is r-less, non-curling or non-patronised. For instance, /r/ is not pronounced when it is at the end of a word or before a consonant, only /r/ is pronounced before a vowel. For example, in words such as car, bird, card and butter, the r is not pedalled as in American English. Although this variant is theoretically non-patronised, there are two vowel allophones, namely linking /r/ and intrusive /r/. The linking-r refers to the linking of a vowel to a vowel with an /r/. This is often found in British English. The second case of vowel-vowel linking is called intrusive-r, which is another case of linking with "/r/" and is also often found in British English. When the first word ends in a vowel /ɛ:/, /a:/, /ɔ:/, /ə/, and the second word begins with a vowel, a new "/r/" is often added to link the two. A simple way to distinguish between 'linking-r' and 'intrusive-r' is to look at the spelling of the previous word with or without the letter r at the end. If there is, it is linking-r and if not, it is intrusive-r.

Sometimes, even if there is no /r/ sound in the phonetic symbol of a word, an /r/ sound is added. This is the special intrusive R in R-linking, where a faint /r/ sound is added between a word whose vowel ends in /ɑ/, /ɔ/, or /ə/ and a word whose vowel begins with a vowel phoneme. When R-linking occurs, the r sound is pronounced twice, once with the /r/ sound at the end of the word and once with the /r/ sound produced when the word is connected. Here the r sound is very faint.

In New Zealand English, if the /r/ at the end of the word is immediately followed by a vowel, then the [r] is pronounced in both variants at this time. Thus, r is not pronounced in car and car lock, but is pronounced in car alarm, and the r in this phenomenon is called linking /r/.

Words like paw and pour are both pronounced [pɔ:] in the r-less variant, but pouring and pawing are both pronounced [ˈpɔ:rɪŋ]. Although there is no r in the spelling of the latter, the [r] is present when pronounced, which is intrusive /r/, and it tends to occur after non-high vowels (non-high vowels). In addition, due to the concentration of many Scottish immigrants on the South Island of New Zealand, the //r/ located after the vowel /ɜ:/ in the South Island dialect is sometimes pronounced, mainly after the vowel /ɜ:/, as in work and turn.

Another most striking feature of New Zealand English in terms of long vowels is that the long vowels [a:] in words such as start, part and father are fronted.

The long vowel [a:] in words such as start, part and father has its part of speech fronted. In other words, the tongue is moved a little further forward in the mouth than in the corresponding vowel in British English.

In other words, the tongue is moved a little further forward in the mouth than in British English. In words such as dance, chance, plant and sample, Australians sometimes move the in words such like dance, chance, plant and sample, Australian English sometimes pronounce the [a:] sound as [æ], similar to American English. However, New Zealanders never pronounce them this way.

Moreover, the vocabulary influence of American English on New Zealand English is that language is a significant cultural export of the United States in modern times, so the culture of America and changes in various industries have spread to the rest of the world through the media, and have been widely studied and imitated by people from all over the world. New Zealand is more open to American culture and language than other countries. In some cases, New Zealanders prefer American English terms to their British English counterparts. In New Zealand English the meaning of some British English words is challenged by the meaning of American English words like the word “billion” in American English and New Zealand English would be equal to “trillion” in British English. Some words are shared by both New Zealand English and American English such as: “sneaker, which means running shoes, “rumble”, which means group fighting, and so on (Zhang, 1998).

The third point is about the effect on the spelling and grammar between American and New Zealand English. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the spelling of American English has undergone several reforms. Some spellings of American English have long been accepted by the variants such as “music and public” instead of “musick and publick”, and “onto” instead of “on to”. The influence of grammar would be mainly on word collocation. Some usages of American English would also appear in books, newspapers, and magazines in New Zealand such as there’s no preposition after the verb “protest” and “appeal”; the word “to” in the phrase “Monday to Friday” would be replaced by “through” which will be “Monday through Friday” (Zhang, 2006).

The last point mentions the reasons why American English has so much impact on New Zealand English. In my opinion, as the population of the United States and its political and economic strength continue to increase,

American English impacts other English variants greatly. In 1607, English immigrants brought this English language to North America. By the time of the American Revolutionary War, 90% of American immigrants were of British descent; by the middle of the 19th century, the English-speaking population of the United States had surpassed that of the United Kingdom. Then, American English entered the center stage of world English variants. Since the 19th century, transportation and communication in the United States have been greatly developed and the whole world has become a "global village" so English has become the most important language for international communication and the type of English variants has increased a lot. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the first and second world wars, the influence of the United States has greatly exceeded the United Kingdom in policy, economics, and military. Australia and New Zealand are located in Antipodes which share the same Pacific region and both of them have colonial and pioneering experiences like America. Thus, after the "Gold Rush" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Australia and New Zealand have been closely connected with the United States in nearly every aspect (Gordon and Deverson, 1989).

#### 4. Conclusion

On the basis of the description and analysis above, the series of the diverse influence and cause of British English on American English and New Zealand English is fully explained.

With the development of Britain, British English had been spread to North America after 1607, and one of the variants of English which is American English appeared and become much more popular with the development of the United States. Then the countries in the southern hemisphere like New Zealand and Australia have also been affected by this kind of English variant in the aspects of phonetics vocabulary, spelling, and grammar. Nowadays, these two variants of English still have a profound impact on most of the languages in the world. So, analyzing the influence of British English on American English, New Zealand English, and other regional variants would have important implications for our English learning and help us communicate smoothly with people worldwide.

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