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Vai al contenuto multimediale



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The Americanization of English





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ISBN 978-88-255-2070-5

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Ist edition: December 2018

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The Prominent role of American English

The objective of this paper consists in highlighting the dominant character American English is endowed with in the 21st century. In order to fulfill this purpose, I shall demonstrate that the so-called *Americanization* of English implicates lexical, phonological, graphemical, and grammatical impositions on other varieties of English. The varieties of the English language that will be examined throughout this paper are British and Australian English.

Americanization is commonly correlated with globalisation. This is particularly true of its cultural dimension. But the United States representing globality is probably no more apparent than in the projection of its language globally. On the one hand, Americans are particularly notorious for their linguistic insularity, rarely exhibiting the foreign language proficiency so common elsewhere in the world. Yet, as well known, the American language, English, is a global import, inherited from the earlier global power, England. Hence, American English ownership of global English is more tenuous than its ownership of other global cultural icons, such as McDonald's or Disney (Sonntag 2003).

The principal reason leading to the Americanization of the English language ought to be searched in the large number of inhabitants the United States has; it contains nearly four times

as many native speakers of English as any other country in the world. Moreover, it has been ascertained that so much of the power which has fuelled the growth of the English language in the 20th century has stemmed from North America. It exercises a greater influence on the way English is developing worldwide than does any other regional variety, often to the discomfiture of people in the United Kingdom, in Australia, etc. who regularly express resentment in their national presses in relation to the onslaught of Americanisms (Crystal 1997: 127–128).

The influence of American English, however, has become ubiquitous. As a result, its reach is even felt in Europe, and in many Western European cities, such as Madrid, Paris, Amsterdam, and Berlin, where American English has considerable influence on vocabulary, albeit British English had been historically the norm (<https://www.theguardian.com/us>).

The prominent linguistic role of American English can be furthermore ascribed to America's economic and technological power. The US has been more involved with international developments in 20th century technology than any other nation. It is marked by a particularly successful economy which is surplus to basic requirements, and is thus devoted to the luxuries of leisure and entertainment. In addition, numerous American songs, movies, and television shows are produced by the American entertainment industry which inevitably influence native speakers both of British and Australian English. American English is also the leading language of many other domains, such as science, medicine, literature, popular culture, fine arts, and academic publication, dominating computer hardware and software, networking, email, and the vast creative chaos of cyberspace (McArthur 1998: 38). Given that

the USA has come to be the dominant element in a large number of domains, the future of English must be undoubtedly bound up with the future of that country.

Conversely, many linguists fear the disappearance of other varieties of English worldwide, especially due to lexical impositions from American English, which seem to be rather noteworthy. Now as we approach 2020, the American words the British have adopted, are in danger of taking over. It has also become possible to imagine a time — 2120 would be a probable and arithmetically neat guesstimate — when American English entirely absorbs other varieties of English, such as the British English version (Engel 2017: 3). According to recent claims the state of innocence once characterizing British English, has been “corrupted” by Americanisms (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/08/thats-way-it-crumbles-matthew-engel-review>).

But what seems to be somewhat bewildering and contradictory in relation to the enormous power and prestige of American English, threatening the preservation of other varieties of English, is that English is not the declared official language of the United States. It is the sole usual language of government, education, and administration, being a *de facto*, and not a *de jure* state of affairs. Hence, English has no statutory role at the national level (McArthur 1998: 38–39).

A further striking aspect consists in the so-called “Hispanic Reconquest and Assimilation” consisting of a threat, exerted by the Hispanic community residing in the United States. According to several linguists, it might cause a diminution of the great significance of American English, which seems to be losing ground, and is being gradually withdrawn, in comparison to Spanish, the “second unofficial language” in the United

States (MacNeil 2005: 91). A relevant statement in relation to this issue was expressed by Samuel P. Huntington, a political scientist at Harvard, according to whom the recent influx of large numbers of Spanish speakers to the United States also poses a serious menace to the national unity, because a common American identity is rooted in a shared culture and creed (Huntington 2004: 31–32). Huntington's view, however, has been rejected and discredited by numerous other linguists and social scientists, who claim that Hispanic families commonly do not maintain Spanish across generations, but they are evincing the opposite attitude today. The vast majority of children born to Spanish speaking parents in the US is growing up to prefer English as their dominant, if not sole language. And whereas the transition to English monolingualism among earlier immigrant groups often followed Haugen's classic "three generation model" (Haugen 1953), this process among Hispanics is undoubtedly more rapid than in the past being complete within two generations. Consequently, Spanish English bilingualism gives way rapidly to English monolingualism (Louden 2006: 128).

But these are solely internal factors which are not in favour of American English, and I do not intend to elaborate them going beyond the scope of this paper. But what really matters is that they certainly do not affect the noteworthy role American English has worldwide, comparable to other varieties of English. Thus, it has been maintained that American English is, and will be the "engine" driving the English language globally. The same statement has been expressed by McArthur in *The Oxford Guide to World English* according to whom "American English has a global role at the beginning of the 21st century comparable to that of British English at the start of the 20th –