

Aio

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British and American English

A Reciprocal Influence





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Index

<i>Introduction</i>	7
Chapter I	9
<i>Corpus analyses and lexicographic investigations</i>	
Chapter II	37
<i>The reciprocal influence between british and american english</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	47
<i>References</i>	53

Introduction

The main goal of this study is to emphasize the reciprocal influence between British and American English and also to delineate the differences (mainly lexical in nature) between both varieties. Great Britain and the United States ought to be considered two nations separated by a common language influencing each other.

In order to fulfil this purpose, I intend to expound on the British English lexical influence on American English vocabulary, but I also shall examine the reverse phenomenon. Thus, this survey, mostly consisting of statistical analyses, can be regarded as an in-depth study of my previous work “The Americanization of English” (Tondi 2018). The British English influence on American English is a recent trend that has been denominated the *Briticisation* of English, which has also been defined as *Britspeak* or *Anglocreep* — a disparaging term coined by the “Atlantic” magazine for the type of American anglophile who revels in dropping British lexemes into conversation.

The subtle flow of British lexical items, called *Britishisms*, into American English, is indeed relatively noteworthy. They have mainly appeared in American media so far, since writers are usually exposed to a large number of different sorts of expressions, being voracious readers. Most part of Britishisms have no direct equivalent in American English lexis, save a few terms, such as “flat” instead of “apartment”, or “lift” meaning “elevator”.

Using Britishisms, even slang, makes Americans often feel or sound more sophisticated, or cosmopolitan, because they are marking themselves as people who see the world beyond the United States. Ben Yagoda, professor of English at the University of Delaware, and author of the forthcoming book “How not to write bad”, set up a blog “not one-off

Britishisms” dedicated to spotting the usage of British terms in American English. So far he has found more than 150 Britishisms; and moreover, he has noticed slight changes in pronunciation, as well, for example the use of a sort of London glottal stop, dropping the letter “t” in words like “important” or “Manhattan” (<https://notoneoffbritishisms.com/>).

The principal cause for this trend ought to be ascribed to a reflection of a larger cultural shift. In an age of BBC livestreams and borderless web sites, Americans have the chance to track the “Middletons” in near real time via gossip sites, absorb the Queen’s English through televised imports like “Ramsay’s Kitchen Nightmares” and “Doctor Who”, and take newspapers like the “Guardian”, considered must – reads for numerous Northeast Corridor influencers, via their iPad apps. But it might be due solely to a pretension, an instance of long-simmering Anglophilia among the American striver classes bubbling over into full-fledged imitation or in the view of British observers, parody (Williams 2012: 1).

In the subsequent chapter, I intend to demonstrate the lexicographic influence of British English on American English vocabulary by undertaking lexicographic investigations and corpus analyses, as well. In order to conduct corpus analyses, I will use “The Corpus of Contemporary American English”, “The British National Corpus”, “The Corpus of Historical American English”, and “The Corpus of Web-Based Global English”.

The on-line dictionaries I will consult are “Merriam Webster’s Dictionary” and “The Cambridge Dictionary”.

Corpus analyses and lexicographic investigations

1.1. Corpus of Web–Based Global English (GloWbE)

Britishism	US	CA	GB	IE	AU	NZ	IN	LK	PK	BD	SG	MY	GH	KE
wonky	451	136	430	61	109	68	19	9	11	8	18	15	8	3
one–off	420	152	1375	286	452	265	110	50	46	35	68	63	36	61
bloke	319	57	4116	367	2806	717	117	53	48	13	49	81	61	54
bespoke	281	137	2276	302	224	121	127	49	28	32	162	77	76	42
dodgy	491	132	3970	746	1649	633	120	80	57	40	83	82	56	57
gobsmacked	134	54	366	91	170	62	10	4	5	1	10	7	3	5
easy peasy	101	38	125	42	68	31	10	2	1	1	23	25	0	1
twee	72	20	300	73	51	27	3	2	2		5	2	2	3
ginger	1448	799	2267	720	1096	655	535	389	98	153	613	454	198	160
go missing	135	48	333	60	75	41	46	33	17	14	9	17	13	12
kerfuffle	194	56	140	32	65	28	13	4	6	3	7	8	6	3
gutted	729	288	1796	265	253	283	110	34	50	71	38	32	77	37
bestie	87	29	36	20	94	15	6	2	7	0	30	29	5	1
bum	1314	376	1987	377	857	377	130	67	63	53	269	109	81	66
chav	29	4	486	31	15	2	6			1	2		2	4
cheeky	361	182	2010	368	672	274	105	57	56	19	162	127	58	65
Britishism	9	1	5	1							1			
frock	99	43	487	56	221	73	56	26	35	21	13	8	10	9
gap year	166	116	960	92	258	74	26	8	7	11	25	93	41	14
innit			1		1									
knickers	186	48	1063	219	213	83	49	14	12	7	18	25	22	25
loo	229	71	1574	244	288	164	113	64	21	9	146	165	37	78
numpty	16	5	226	19	26	11	2					2		
pop over	52	27	272	55	120	57	6	4	2	2	20	6	3	2
roundabout	438	302	1770	684	460	380	109	120	64	40	56	137	159	99
shag	150	38	507	109	121	126	15	9	4	5	15	9	9	20
skint	17	7	495	42	20	9	2	1		5	4	1	1	1
sussed	42	10	225	64	34	63	2	3	1	1	5	8	1	1

twit	455	75	381	45	170	40	65	6	8	4	11	20	6	13
off-licence		1	55	63	2	46				3			1	
nappy	157	29	1005	217	696	245	51	19	5	9	26	44	19	20
compere	10	3	106	24	33	13	6	16	4	7	10	4	4	15
plasterboard	10	2	88	88	40	51	5	2	1		2	2	3	
skirting board	1		46	21	2	2	3		1				1	
gastropub	26	10	62	13	6	8	2	2		1	6	1	2	1
muslin	237	41	233	98	159	57	55	28	31	165	24	46	1	4
babygros			20	6					1					
pushchair	8	3	411	17	8	34	2				8	4	1	
health visitor	2	6	444	13	8	3	2	2	7	12	1	9		2
gazumping			14	9	5	3							1	
gazundering			5		7									
snagging	105	34	85	21	35	16	14	6	4	5	11	9	4	6
lay bys			2	2	1									
monobrow		1	13	4	4				1					1
alcopop	4		41	3	41	6								
chugger		2	19	11	4	2						1		
trustafarian	4	1	21	1	1	1								
moobs	5	1	45	11	8	2	4			2	6	1	4	1
boyf	8	1	67	23	5	6			1	1	6	20	1	1
detectorist	3		31	1	2									
bestie	87	29	36	20	94	15	6	2	7		30	29	5	1
ladette	1	2	47	1	4				1					
BOGOF	1	1	58	2		1							1	6
quango	7	2	394	108	10	9	2			2			1	1
house share	2	1	55	20	7		1	3			1			
awayday	2		29			1			1					
longlist	33	61	137	41	9	8	32	2	9	2			1	
hotdesk			3											
fnar	2	3	18	8										
phwoar	1	1	52	4	10	4					3		1	
naff	87		477	60	48	60	9	3	1	9	3	1	5	9
plonk	54	22	188	35	102	43	18	7	5		17	17	4	1
bumf	4	1	16	3	4	2								
moreish	5	2	90	20	37	25		1			13	6		
marmite	56	7	569	43	32	317	5	9	1	5	15	7	2	3
bake off	6	3	229	41	6	8	2				1		7	
hobnob	23	7	50	4	5	1	9	15	3	2	3	2	3	2
PIN number	74	43	164	90	31	36	28	13	8	37	9	42	36	50
bookstall	1	2	30	3	1	5	5	9	2	2				
cheerio	60	22	87	11	50	7	8	7	8	1	6	8	1	4
eaterie	1		27	2		1	1				4	1	2	
toodle pip	2		27		3	2								
telly	191	53	2638	562	355	218	117	16	32	20	36	52	28	38

laddish	9	1	80	10	4	3		1			1	1		1
bumbershoot	24	9	4	2		1								
broolly	9		134	97	55	12	1	2		2	9	1	2	3
rumpy pumpy	2		14		2	1								
todger	4		41	3	4	1						1		
argie–bargie			8			1								
poppycock	82	15	93	12	31	14	9	12	2	3		6	4	1
sprog	12	6	71	11	22	1								3
dogsbody	11	1	38	8	4	5	1						1	
toff	29	3	274	16	47	12	1	1		2	1	1	2	
gobby	6	6	107	8	9	23			2			1		
tosh	471	68	753	66	102	42	9	20	7	1	14		27	51
codswallop	21	8	120	19	47	14		4	3		2	6	3	
cotch	2		4	2	4			1						
bonkers	327	63	1301	153	130	59	49	16	20	8	41	27	20	12
shag	150	38	507	109	121	126	15	9	4	5	15	9	9	20
squiffy	5	1	43	4	1	3		1				2	2	
knackered	31	14	739	92	77	64	14	8	5	2	13	9	5	9
bladdered	2		22	2	2	2								
half–cut	7	2	12	10	8	2	3	2	1			1		1
well–oiled	128	43	123	29	52	37	41	7	12	11	24	15	12	15
trollied			20	2	3	2		1						
pillock	10	2	120	8	10	7	1					2	1	
titbit	7	3	38	5	11	2	5	3			1	1	1	1
ladybird	24	15	135	32	51	11	5	3	3	8	32	10		40

The survey, conducted in the Corpus of Web–Based Global English, in which I examined Britishisms in 14 varieties of English, demonstrated a rather high frequency of Britishisms in British English, as compared with other varieties of English, mainly in Asian and African countries where English is spoken as a second language. In those countries the figure is often a low one. But surprisingly, it sometimes occurs that the figure of some Britishisms is a higher one in US English, and not in British English: for example, “wonky” has 451 entries in American English and only 430 ones in British English. The same statement can be expressed in relation to “twit” having 455 entries in US English and only 381 ones in British English. The highest number of hists in this corpus investigation concerns “bloke” having 4116 entries in British English.

1.2. Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

Britishism	Frequency	Examples
wonky	160	The other one is a little wonky and complex,
one-off	292	This was a one-off type of favor.
bloke	260	I'm more kind of this bloke what writes
bespoke	363	But it wasn't always limos and bespoke suits
dodgy	157	So, there's some dodgy stuff in there
gobsmacked	48	It's just that I'm incredulous, gobsmacked
easy peasy	10	Easy peasy , instead of having to tie the shoes
twee	113	The twee nonsense of flighty females?
ginger	7669	her wedding dress complemented her ginger hair
go missing	171	and having one go missing was more than
kerfuffle	73	While the tower kerfuffle has been the hot talk
gutted	1145	I then had it gutted and remodeled before I moved
bestie	28	My bestie , Jill Pettygrove, was on the ski team
bum	2470	With my bum snuggled into blue woolies I'm
chav	1	Chav cuisine # d Roadkill # 27 In response to
cheeky	398	impeccably dressed cheeky pirate of the seas
Britishism	5	gobsmacked "is my favorite Britishism . But as to
autumn	6791	their hair looked like a forest of autumn trees.
holiday	20242	a week-long holiday which commemorates the
film	75319	in connection with a film , an invention, art, or
frock	535	at Amelia's frock and gave a satisfied nod
gap year	48	European student visiting America on his gap year
innit		
knickers	273	forest green corduroy knickers that both
loo	329	bare feet walking down the corridor to the loo
muppet	214	the same name as a muppet on Sesame Street
numpty		
pop over	64	While you can pop over to a local health fair
roundabout	626	I'll stop there on a roundabout route home
shag	564	cross-legged on the orange shag in their
sussed	19	Okay, I've got the breaks sussed
bloody	10742	oh seven bloody hells! Blue eyes? Blue skin?
skint	13	Harass the kid with the skint head and hoodie?
flat	27148	kitchen sink installations for a flat fee of \$125,
cheers	3841	He had to wonder whether cheers would provide
kit	8157	Using this kit allowed for normalization of
mobile phone	786	he'd tried to use his mobile phone
mate	7777	before landing on his perfect mate
amongst	3448	a few laughs amongst a group of friends,
whilst	731	own safety whilst living in these sorts of buildings
twit	126	Or is that what I am, a twit ? Somewhere in there.

nappy	200	with the short hair like a nappy rug
off–licence	6	then I'll walk up to the off–licence .
compere	24	This afternoon he's playing compere –
plasterboard	30	to look for the plasterboard behind the wallpaper
skirting board	6	I feel like a rat crawling behind a skirting board
gastropub	38	Cask & Larder is a spin–off of a local gastropub
muslin	393	She was garbed in a white muslin shirt
babygros		
pushchair	17	One of the pushchair 's four wheels isn't rolling
health visitor	40	In the UK, the role of the health visitor is varied
gazumping		
gazundering		
snagging	347	hesitating only briefly before snagging the bill
lay bys		
monobrow		see my boyfriend, I don't want a monobrow ,
alcopop	2	one strong beer or one “ alcopop ,” contained
trustafarian	3	when a dreadlocked trustafarian wearing
chugger	11	wondered what the blazes was a “ chugger
moobs		
boyf	1	to a slideshow of her wee boyf on YouTube
detectorist	5	an English detectorist just north of London,
bestie	28	of the extra space and invite my bestie
ladette	6	Take “ Ladette ” Lizzie, the tomboy who tells
BOGOF		
quango	2	more appropriately be called a Quango .
houseshare		
awayday		
longlist	2	Her longlist of skills include sewing, carpentry
hotdesk		
fnar		
phwoar		Phwoar , wasn't she sexy tonight? “
naff		there's a word we have for it, which is naff
plonk		varieties of wine, two of which were plonk
bumf		
moreish		
marmite	34	five jars of marmite and six packets of caramel
bake off	15	long live The Great British Bake Off !
hobnob	65	where they may hobnob with other passengers
PIN number	67	And everyone uses a PIN number for security.
bookstall	18	the novel he picked up from a bookstall ,
cheerio	76	hey, officer, yes, glad to be of help, cheerio
eaterie	2	Westwood Gardens is an upscale eaterie with
toddle pip		
telly	286	The Liberty Press is reporting a telly audience
laddish	9	to an amused and laddish colloquial register

bumbershoot	14	to carry his brandy and bumbershoot and warn
broily	16	G-man bequeaths me his old green broily .
rumpy pumpy		
todger	2	(or some part of him) a "tiny todger .
argie-bargie		
poppycock	90	It is poppycock theology. Why would you even
sprog	3	If your sprog requires 4G data and/or you'd rather
dogsbody	15	had no wish to be a quarryman's dogsbody .
toff	48	he old toff unflappability cons no one any more
gobby	1	the wheezy sputum-jigs and gobby convulsions
tosh	139	Oh, pish tosh , "she said. "You proved otherwise
codswallop	14	I enjoyed the no codswallop segment with
cotch	8	but 1 cotch him wid a piece ob paper dat I found
bonkers	257	of course, going absolutely bonkers , and they
shag	564	We settled down on the shag rug among
squiffy	6	I want to be positively squiffy , I say, squiffy
knackered	22	I'm knackered . Going home to the missus.
bladdered	3	Once we're right bladdered we get them out
half-cut	20	half chopped (3/4 cup), half cut into chunks
well-oiled	23	Bart, Colleen and I were well oiled , and Bart knew
trollied	1	lided into the waiting room, as if being trollied ,
pillock	9	Listen, pillock , "said Blair with all his usual truculence
titbit	5	Idea prize titbit . Something detective read off
ladybird	59	Like ladybird used to come over every Friday and load
chap	1023	I would send our new chap , Davidson.
wazzock	1	Useless wazzock "# 8 Which phrase was used
E-fit		
bruv		
to flummox	19	but that may be long enough to flummox old fans.
peckish	26	I was feeling a bit peckish — that's a strange word

The corpus analysis on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) confirms a relatively high usage of Britishisms in American English. The highest number of hits concerns the word "film", having 75.319 entries, the figure was also a rather high one for "flat" (27.148 entries), "holiday" (20.242 entries), "bloody" (10.742). Some Britishisms could not be found in the above mentioned corpus: "gazundering", "gazumping", "monobrow", "bruv", ...etc. Thus, it can be deduced that they have not been configured with American English, yet.