Università di Firenze Dipartimento di Formazione, Lingue, Intercultura, Letterature e Psicologia a.a. 2019-20 Corso di Laurea magistrale 37 in Lingue e Letterature moderne europee e americane

Laboratorio di Lingua e Traduzione inglese

“Characteristics and Varieties of North American English” John Gilbert

**Handout 2: Differences British and North Am English**

* no great differences between BrE & NAE (except pronunciation):
* remarkable the small extent to which various standard Englishes differ from each other in **vocabulary, grammar & orthography**

- most importante differences (after pronunciation?): frequency index of individual words, syntactic constructions, expressions, co-occurences (collocations & combina- tory preferences), conventions & habits: “the way things are said”

 - also true for generational differences

* differences mainly in **pronunciation**

 - **consonant system**

 - fairly the same in all present day varieties with exception of the **rhotic /r/**

 - same **24 consonant phonemes** in both GenAm & RP

 - in RP (also New England, NYC, parts of U.S. South, BlackAmE, Australia, New Zealand), /r/ is only pronounced before a vowel (non-rhotic accent)

 - does not pronounce /**r**/ before a consonant or pause/at the end of a word (unless next word begins with a vowel)

 - in NAE (also IrishE, ScottishE, parts of SW England) /**r**/ is pronounced in all

 positions in a word, & it changes quality of vowel that comes before it (rhotic accent)

 - so words like  *car, turn, offer* sound very different

 - in NAE **post-nasal /t/**: e.g. *winter* -> *winner, intercity* -> *inner-city, twenty*

 - in NAE **intervocalic /t̬/**:e.g. “matter” /‘mæ dər/

 - in NAE “yod **/j/** dropping”: *new* /nju:/ -> /nu:/ *due, dew, tune, nude, tube, tumor*

 - **vowel system**

 - most **vowels** pronounced a little differently in BrE & AmE

 - GenAm & RP have a different number of phonemes (minimal unit of speech):

 - **RP** has **20 phonemes**

 - **NAE** (“**Gen Am”)** has 16 phonemes

 - missing **/**ɒ**/** (instead has /ɑ:/ or /ɔ:/)

 - e.g. *pot, lot, got, odd, palm*

 - no centring diphthongs (due to rhotic accent)

 - missing RP phonemes: **/ɪ**ə**/, /e**ə**/, /ʊ**ə**/**

 - GenAm has combinations: /ɪr/, /er/, /ʊr/

 - e.g. *here/lear, hair/lair, lure*

 - ***“bath”* words** (NAE /æ/; BE /a:/): *can’t, aunt, castle, fast, glass, staff, after, pass*

 - *“No”* NAE /əʊ/ BE /oʊ/

 - NAE vowels more nasalized

 - stressed vowels often lengthened more in NAE than BE so British think Americans “**drawl**” & NAms think British pronunciation is “**clipped**”

- maybe 1 of English’s greatest assets is no 1-to-1 relation between sound (substantial variance in varieties of English) & symbol/spelling (codified in 18th c)

 - accommodates differences in pronunciation

* **lexical differences**: estimated 4,000 words used differently in common speech

 - w/ few exceptions create no problems in comprehension

 - many scholars estimate more than a million words in English (probably language w/ most lexis)

 - Webster’s Dictionary: 470,00 words; Oxford 20-volume Dictionary: ca. 600,000 words

 - ENL speaker uses 20-30,000 words

* few **grammar differences**

 - NAE simple past or present perfect v. BE present perfect w/ adverbs of frequency: *I already ate//I’ve already eaten.*

 - verbs like *suggest, demand, require, insist* or *It is important/essential/necessary that…):* NAE subjunctive v. BE *should* or simple present*:* *I suggest that he study.//I suggest that he should study/studies.*

- NAE *to get/got/gotten* (*for to receive, become, etc.)*//BE *got*

 *- some verb forms* NAE regular *smelled, burned, learned, spelled, spoiled, spilled;* BE regular but more often irregular: *smelt, burnt, learnt, spelt, spoilt, spilt*

- NAE irregular verbs *fit, fit, fit (also quit, wet);* BE regular

- NAE use of preposition *like* instead of conjunction *as* for comparisons: *Do it like I do it.*

 - different uses of prepositions & adverbs w/ phrasal verbs: NAE *do something over,* BE *do something again;* NAE *fill in a form,* BE *fill in;* NAE *protest something,* BE *protest against something*

 - after *seem, appear, feel, look, sound* in BE there can be a noun; in NAE use *like* or *to be*

 - for the future BE can use *shall* as well as *will* for the 1st person

 - BE can use *do* to refer to an action already mentioned: *We don’t study as often as we should (do). You should call her. I already have (done).*

- BE possible to say: *I will do, I might do, I can do.* NAE *I will, I might, I can.*

 - in BE collective nouns can usually take a singular or a plural verb, in NAE only singular: *The government was/were unpopular.*

 - dates: NAE April 25, 1945 (April 25th, 1945); BE 25 April 1945 (the 25th of April)

 - NAE *around;* BE *round/around*

- NAE *different from/than;* BE *different from/to*

- NAE *on the weekend/weekends;* BE *at the weekend/weekends*

- time: NAE 10 *minutes past/after midnight;* BE *10 minutes past midnight*

- time: NAE *quarter to/of eleven;* BE *quarter to eleven*

* very minor **spelling differences** basically the same system

 - NAE *color, theater, realize, traveler*; BE *colour, theatre, realise or realize, traveller*

- also NAE/BE: *(bank) check/cheque; jewelry/jewellery; pajamas/pyjamas; program/ programme; specialty/speciality; tire/tyre*

* very minor **punctuation differences**:

 - terminology: NAE *period, quotation marks;* BE *full stop, inverted commas* or *quota*

 *tion marks*

 - Titles: in NAE *Mr., Ms.,* *Mrs., Dr.*, etc. all have periods. No periods in BE

 - Time: NAE 12:00 o’clock; BE 12.00 o’clock.

 - Quotations: NAE uses double quotation marks for quotations, and single quotation marks for a quotation inside a quotation. NAE also puts periods & commas that are not part of the quotation inside the quotation marks. BE does the opposite. For all other punctuation, in NAE & BE if the punctuation is not part of the quotation, it goes out-side the quotation marks.

* unmistakable **16th** & **early 17th c** characteristics still evident in NAE

 - NAE uses great number of words, expressions & pronunciations familiar in Elizabethan

 English (e.g. Shakespeare) but which have died out in BrE

 - *sick, maybe, gotten,* pronunciations of *“bath”* words, some subjunctive forms

- When a speech-community expands geographically, there is a tendency for the peripheral areas, although innovative in vocabulary, to be the most conservative linguistically, while otherwise the original homeland of the language tends to be the most innovative area

 - somewhat true for NAm & Br English

 - e.g. great majority of new words introduced into English over last 2 centuries from AmE to BrE