

1. Write a note on the differences between British English and American English.

Answer:

The English language was brought to America by the colonists from England who settled along the Atlantic seaboard in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was therefore the language spoken in England at that time, the language spoken by Shakespeare and Milton. That British and American English have diverged in the last three hundred years or so since the first settlements is obvious enough. Many of these differences are apparent to the speakers on both sides of the Atlantic. There are differences in vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation and spelling between the British English and American English.

The largest differences are perhaps in vocabulary. Expanding across a new continent, with new flora and fauna and different natural features from those of Europe, building up a new society, with its own political institutions, its own social customs, the Americans were impelled to adopt old words or invent new ones to meet their needs. The very names of topographic features evoke a specifically American atmosphere. The words like *gulch*, *bluff*, *creek*, *rapids* and *swamp* are American terms for British *moor*, *heath*, *fen* and *coomb* respectively.

The American English adopted many words from various languages which are found only in the American vocabulary. Thus, from the native Red-Indians they learned words like *moose*, *hickory* (a kind of tree) and *terrapin* (a small tortoise) . From the Spaniards they borrowed words such as *sierra* (mountain range with rugged peaks), *armadillo* and *cockroach*. The adopted French words include *prairie*, *pumpkin*, *cache*, *bureau*, *levee* (embankment) etc. From the Dutch settlers Americans borrowed words like *boss*, *snoop*, *cookie* etc. whereas from the Germans they learned words like *hamburger*, *noodle*, *semester*, *seminar* etc. Noah Webster included in his dictionary words like *selectman*, *senate*, *congress*, *court*, *assemble* etc. which did not belong to the British English.

In grammar and syntax, the difference between British and American usages is not very great. But there are certainly some minor differences. Americans use the form *dove* for the English *dived*. Americans can use *do have* where as an Englishman says *have got*. Again, the Americans have two forms— *I have got* (meaning ‘I have’) and *I have gotten* (meaning ‘I have acquired’), where the British English only the first form. An American can use impersonal ‘one’ and then continue with ‘his’ and ‘he’ as for example *If one loses his temper, he should apologise*. This sounds odd to an Englishman who replaces ‘his’ and ‘he’ by ‘one’s’ and ‘one’. Prepositions, too, are sometimes used differently: an Englishman lives *in* Oxford Street, whereas an

American will usually live *on* it; and an Englishman caters *for* somebody, while an American caters *to* him. But while examples of this kind could be multiplied, they are all minor things: in all essentials, British and American syntax are identical.

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