



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Triennale

in Lingue, Letterature e Mediazione Culturale (LTLLM)

Classe LT-12

Tesi di Laurea

British or American English? Awareness, preferences and use among university students of English

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Anno Accademico 2021 / 2022

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Introduction

The English language is known all around the world, being one of the most spoken languages globally. However, there is not just only one shade of English, but rather multiples. Australian, Canadian, American, Indian, Philippine, these are just a few of the many varieties that the English language has. This dissertation, however, is going to focus and analyze American English and British English, specifically. The two most known varieties of English are going to be compared, contrasted, and studied with regards to the preferences and use of Italian University students. Their awareness on British and American English is going to be tested and analyzed to better understand the grip that Italian students have on the English language. This dissertation is composed of three chapters, each presenting a distinct topic where the English language – American English specifically – is the main protagonist.

Chapter one presents an historical overview of the history of British English, how it arrived in the British Isles and how it developed over the years to become the language known today. The focus will then shift on the journey of the British language, which starts to have influence on the Native American speakers. The colonization of the United States is essential to this chapter to understand the developments of British English and how it came into contact with all the dialect or small languages present in the new territory. From here, the main protagonist is going to be American English, which became the distinctive language of the United States especially after the Declaration of Independence in 1776. A sociolinguistic perspective will be also given, quickly underlining the three main dialectal areas: North, Midland, and South. The role of English as a Lingua Franca is the last topic of the first chapter. The focus is on the role and impact that American English has all around the world and the advantages and disadvantages – especially for endangered languages – which it brings.

Chapter two focuses more on a deeper comparison between British and American English. A major figure who greatly contributed to what is known as “spelling reform” is Noah Webster, lexicographer who significantly changed American English spelling. Borrowings and loans are also an essential part of the progress which led American English to be written and known as it is today. Indian, French, and Spanish are some of the languages which mainly contributed to enrich the American English vocabulary. Differences in lexis and grammar are going to be deeply analyzed in this second chapter,

highlighting various aspects: from the spelling to lexical differences between American and British English, and from the use of Present Perfect to verb agreement with collective nouns.

Chapter three will focus more on the results of a questionnaire which was administered to Italian University students of English. The participants to the questionnaire answered almost 100 questions, useful to better understand their awareness of American and British English and their personal preferences of the two varieties. A short overview of similar work made by others is presented at the beginning of the chapter to have a deeper knowledge of what has already been done and what possible results could be found. The results of the questionnaire have been statistically analyzed to have more precise, defined, and easier to read results. The preferences and awareness of the Italian students have been analyzed in relation to their choices in the lexical and grammatical parts. Pie charts and diagrams have been used to have a visual representation of the results, which have been analyzed and further explained, giving a personal interpretation of the found data. A conclusion at the end of the analysis has been made to summarize and highlight whether expectations were met.

Chapter One

Historical overview

Before starting to talk about the differences that can be identified and highlighted between British and American English, the chapter will start by analyzing how the English language was born in the first place. It is safe to say that American English originated from British English, but how was British English born? Where does it come from? What are its roots and why are they important for the birth and development of American English?

1.1 History of British English

As far as the origins of English are concerned, it is safe to say that English belongs to the Germanic language family, which, as stated by Millward (2001) was first brought to the British Isles in the 5th and 6th centuries by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Like most languages, English has evolved through generations of speakers undergoing major changes overtime. Thanks to ancient literature and the continuous study and learning about the origins and evolution of languages, it is possible to trace the language from the present day back to its ancient roots. For instance, Modern English shares many similar words with Latin derived romance languages, such as French and Spanish. Most of the words that today belong to present day English were not originally part of Old English, instead, they started coming into the language when the Normans invaded England in 1066.

The Norman invasion was the last, most cataclysmic, and catastrophic event that changed and shaped England for the rest of its history. This conquest linguistically changed English by introducing a massive amount of Latin – and more specifically, French – vocabulary to the language previously spoken there. From a political and, more importantly, linguistical perspective, it really was a French conquest of the Island. Even though French was spoken by only a few thousand people in England, it still was more prestigious than English itself. As stressed by Millward (2001), the reason that stands behind this lack of prestige was the fact that the Normans acquired and gained power over the Island, and consequently, influenced every aspect of the country: politics, economics, religion, and even the cultural life of the nation. As one may expect, bilingualism was the result of this language encounter. In fact, it is important to take into consideration that the

nobility needed to speak and understand English in order to effectively communicate with their Anglo-Saxon subordinates. As a positive consequence, it is thanks to this invasion that today English speakers are familiar with words such as *tax, estate, trouble, duty, pay, table, boil, serve, roast, and din*, which all came from the French language.

However, French did not remain the official language of England for very long. Millward (2001) mentioned that among the less important reasons that led English to become the national language of the Island, there is the increased communication among English speakers of the various regions. As a consequence, many dialects started to change and mix, making way for a new standard English, based on the London dialect, which included features from the other dialects. Around the second half of the 14th Century, English regained its reputation of official language of the Island, due to the occurrence of two main important events. The first was the Black Death, of which the first cases appeared in 1348. For the following three hundred years, England was affected and condemned by the disease which was fatal to one-third of the England population only between 1348 and 1351. The high mortality rate of the Black Death caused labor shortages, which led workers to demand a higher pay and being treated with respect by their superiors and the ruling class in general. This respect towards the lower class increased the prestige of English, which was their only spoken language. The second event that made English become the official language once again was the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) which saw both England and France as protagonists. The conflict eventually ended in favor of France who subtracted all of England's continental holdings, except for Calais. This loss on the part of England led the French language to being no longer a priority since there were no practical reasons to understand and learn the language.

As far as the London dialect is concerned, it began to emerge more and more, superimposing itself upon all the other British dialects that were used in these years. This very London dialect was, and still is, the basis of not only Received Pronunciation, typical of the upper-class of the time in Britain, but also of the standard versions of American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, South African and Indian English. As highlighted by Millward (2001), this new London dialect gained more importance and became widely used among the whole population of England thanks to the popularity that printing acquired. In fact, printers' establishments were set up in the capital and most of the books were written and published in the London dialect.

When in 1588, Spain tried to invade England with the Spanish Armada but failed by being pushed back, England found itself being a major sea power in Europe. Thanks to their reputation and their power, the English managed to acquire many colonies such as Jamaica, the Bahamas, parts of Canada and America, India and so on (Momma and Matto, 2008). These new acquired territories were responsible for the introduction of thousands of loanwords – which are going to be further analyzed in the second chapter – into English from non-Indo-European languages. As one might expect, the colonization of different parts of the world and commerce that was gravitating around England, led to the spread of English all around the globe and, ultimately, to the present position of English being the most used and spoken language in the world, after Mandarin Chinese (Henretta, 2007).

1.2 Colonization, birth of the United States of America and its language

English started to spread in the United States when in 1492 Christopher Columbus sailed West from Spain with the intention to find a new trade route to the Far East, but, instead, ultimately landing in what came to be known to the Europeans as the “New World”. In the following decades more and more ships sailed from Europe to the West in order to establish colonies in the newly discovered territory. As mentioned by Henretta (2007), the Spanish began to build their “American” empire mostly in the islands, such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Hispaniola. France, instead, managed to found its colonies in eastern North America, some of the Caribbean islands and small parts on the coast of South America. Brazil was conquered and colonized by the Portuguese and, finally, the eastern seacoast was settled by English colonists in the 17th century along with smaller groups of both Dutch and Swedes. Jamestown was the very first successful English colony, established in 1607 on the James River in Virginia, followed by those of Plymouth, New England, founded in 1620, Boston and other places in Massachusetts some years later, in 1630.

Obviously, peace was not always the norm, conflicts happened from time to time between the English settlers and the Native Americans, who did not find their colonists’ presence very pleasant. However, this didn’t stop the American colonies to grown very rapidly. In fact, by the 18th century, due to low death rates and the presence of ample supplies of land and food, a heavy flow of immigrants arrived and settled in these new

colonies. Since this new territory had a great deal of land that could be used and cultivated but not enough people to take care of it, many African slaves were imported from the British colonies to the West Indies so that they could work, mainly, in tobacco and rice plantations. Around 12.5 million African slaves were imported in those years, leading the American population to be consisted of a fifth by Africans by the 1770s.

As far as the colonization of the territory is concerned, the colonizers kept moving and conquering the land, proceeded from East to West. At the same time, the different areas formed into separate colonies, founded by the end of the 18th century, which were only later joined together to give the states we know today. Among the earliest states were those of the historical area of New England (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut), those from the Middle (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware) and, lastly, those from the Southern area (Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia). British ruled and controlled these colonies until 1777, when, due to a disorganized and uncoordinated campaign against a rebellion started by the Americans, they lost every power over them, which led America to finally gain its independence (Henretta, 2007).

With respect to language perspective, the type of English spoken during the period of exploration and colonization was surely important to the history of American English. However, the English that was imported by England is not the only one we need to take into account, considering that the languages spoken by other immigrants and by the native American themselves took part into forming what American English is today. It is said that the first officially English-speaking group arrived in the Americas in the 1497, with the expedition of John Cabot, sent from Henry VII of England. However, there are also theories of European presence in the area before Cabot, or even Columbus, ever set foot in the new territory. This possibility about pre-Columbian exploration suggests the arrival in the land of fishermen likely to sail from either Breton or Bristol (Dillard, 1992).

As a matter of fact, as far as the arrival language is concerned, it is believed that a maritime variety, if not even a pidgin, was the first language that the Native Americans came into contact with. This hypothesis can be justified by the fact that this “language” was the one used by the Native Americans when the puritans arrived in the land in 1621. As stated by Goddard (1977, 1978) cited by Dillard (1992), this type of language – or variety – can be described as a pidgin English, which was widely spoken by Indians in

New England around the 1630s and 1640s, quite early considering when the Puritans arrived. To explain this phenomenon, we need to take into account the possibility that it was brought from elsewhere, such as South Africa. The earliest slaves were brought to the New World around the 1530s, which explains how natives had time to develop a special variety before the arrival of the colonizers. Obviously, opinions are divided on the matter, but it is safe to say that “documents indicate that American Indian Pidgin English was one of the earliest pidgin varieties” (Dillard, 1992:11) in the new territory.

With regard to English immigration to North America, which impacted on the already present variety even further, there had been several waves of English speakers who arrived in the New World, starting from the 20,000 or so Puritans who settled in Massachusetts between 1621 and 1640. After that, a smaller group of royalist cavaliers arrived in Virginia between 1642 and 1675, other migrants to the Delaware Valley between 1675 and 1725, and even more between 1718 and 1775 who settled in the Appalachian backcountry. Furthermore, it is important to remember that apart from Jamestown, successfully founded in 1607, the Pilgrims’ landing in Plymouth Rock in 1620 had great importance and impact on the language considering it made English gain “its real foothold in the New World” (Momma and Matto, 2008:252). This is to say that, from the time of the earliest English settlements, immigrants came from different parts of Great Britain, so the language that spread in any given area in America was really a dialectal potpourri of Early Modern English coming from the British Islands.

After the colonial period, for the whole 19th century, more migrants, especially coming from Europe, moved to the United States. As stated by Millward (2001), many German, Irish and English people migrated in order to escape from famine, rising taxes and job shortages, hoping they could find a better quality of life and economic support in the States. Germans would migrate to midwestern cities, where they could escape the chaos from the revolutions of 1848 and 1849, Scandinavians, instead, were more attracted to the upper Midwest. It is noteworthy that between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, a large number of eastern and southern Europeans moved to the United States. Among these, there were Italians, Hungarians, Poles, Serbo-Croatians, Greeks, Czechs, but also Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants moving to the West Coast, more specifically. This huge flow of migrants is believed to have had a strong influence

on the formation of regional dialects, permanently leaving a mark on what later became American English.

1.3 Independence of the country, independence of the language

After the seven years' war, Britain found itself in desperate need of money, despite coming out victorious. The British parliament passed the stamp act of 1765, imposing taxes on the colonies they had in north America. "No taxation without representation" was the rallying cry of American colonists; understandable since north America did not, in fact, have any parliamentary representation. Refusing to pay the taxes imposed by their colonizers, the Boston Tea Party in 1773 was the way of the Americans to make their position clear, and the episode that started the American Revolution. Not wanting to let its colonies gain too much autonomy, Britain decided to strip Massachusetts of its historical right of self-government and put it under army rule. Consequently, the leaders from the 13 colonies decided to take the situation into their hands, gather and create the first Continental Congress to coordinate their resistance against Britain. The Congress published a list of rights and grievances and petitioned the king to remedy for those grievances, but it wasn't enough to be taken seriously. A second Continental Congress was created in 1775 to organize the defense against the Britain Army, which was eventually defeated. The famous "American Revolutionary war" lasted from 1775 to 1783, year in which the United States were finally recognized their independence, proclaimed in 1776, and gained more territorial expansion than they expected. Finally, the expansion to the West began in 1803 when President Thomas Jefferson made a deal with France and bought the Louisiana territory.

Apart from being responsible for the expansion of the US territory, Thomas Jefferson is an important figure for writing the draft of the Declaration of Independence. This document, as Momma and Matto (2008) point out, is essential if we want to understand the type of English that was used back then. It was obviously written in English, but the English used for the Declaration of Independence differed from the English that was used in England. For instance, Jefferson uses both the form -ising and -izing for words like *organize*, *apologize*, without any apparent sense of contradiction, and alternated "-our" and -or for words like *honour* and *tenor*, underlining the distinctions between modern American and British English. It is also worth noting that neither in

Jefferson's draft nor in the printed text not one word could be thought of as an Americanism, at that time.

Distancing and separating itself from its oppressor in any possible way was a priority for the newly born state. In order to achieve this goal, this also meant getting a distance from a linguistical point of view. The most important lexicographer who is known to have done most of the work in shaping American English was Noah Webster. Webster fervently believed in the cultural independence of the United States, which meant having a distinctive American language with its own idioms, pronunciation, and style. He was a radical in the realm of language and the major challenger of the hegemony of British. In 1789 Webster published his book "Dissertations on the English Language" in which he suggested separating American from British English. Some years later, in 1806 he also published "An American Dictionary of the English Language", which is arguably the first significant American dictionary. As stated by Momma and Matto (2008:252), "the ideal of an American language has been a strong force in American history, serving in turn as a tool for practitioners of both class oppression and uplift, both expansion and unification", which was what Webster what aiming at. As far as the differences between American and British English is concerned, I am going to talk about them in more detail in the second chapter, where I will present some specific examples.

If we take a better look at the inner situation in the US, however, we realize that patterns of internal diversification developed between the North and the South. The Civil War between the North and the South of the US, which ended in 1865 with the abolition of slavery, brought soldier together from different regions of the state. As stated by Dillard (1992), this encounter was one of the first episodes that increased the level of awareness on the regional language differences. Today, unlike Great Britain or most Western nations, the United States does not have a single metropolitan center that can serve as the basis for an accepted standard language. In fact, for the US we talk about General American, which is the umbrella accent of American English spoken by the majority of people in the USA. It is considered to be a non-regional accent that cannot be associated with any ethnic or socioeconomic group. It may have evolved from Midwest accents or, at least, it is closest to the accent of this specific area.

1.4 A sociolinguistic perspective

The study of sociolinguistics – language and society – can be dated around the 1960s, when many linguists in America began to investigate English use in the US from a social point of view (Trudgill, 2002). Since there, there have been many publications on the topic, mainly in America and some time later even in Europe. In the 19th century, two important societies studying and focusing on dialects and language variation were founded. In 1873, the English Dialect Society was founded in England, followed by, some years later, in 1889, the American Dialect Society. From 1928 a group of researchers decided to undertake the compilation of a Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada from which seemed to emerge three major dialectal areas. As a result, the distinction of these three main areas cuts the eastern part of the country into lateral strips, labelled as North, Midland, and Southern part. This regional distribution did not have place for what linguists called “General American”, which was usually associated with the idea of standard practices. This “neutral” dialect concept of General American was, in fact, replaced by the Network Standard, which was used in television newscasters and, as stated by Dillard, (1981:139) it was also “the kind of English which Americans clearly admired more than any other”. The television field acquired its great importance in the 1960s and would only permit some comedians and sport casters to use “nonstandard” dialects; whereas everyone else had to disguise their own dialect and use the Network Standard, which was the only acceptable one.

Going back to the beginning of the 19th century once again, it is noteworthy to mention that many changes occurred that profoundly affected the situation of the American language. First, of great importance was the industrial revolution which was responsible for the growth of several industrial centers. These centers contributed to attract the farm population that migrated and poured itself into the big American cities. Additionally, railroad and other mechanical means of travel were developed and increased the mobility of the average, middle-class person. Therefore, local expression and pronunciation were brought into these cities and would be replaced by new, more accessible, and common forms of speech, typical of these cosmopolitan centers. Most of these “rural” varieties have been wiped out, however, there are still some speech forms which survived and still exist to this day. As far as varieties are concerned, it is significant to mention that, as Trudgill (2002) underlines when talking about Standard English, it is

only one variety of English among many. This statement is obviously true also for General American, which is only one variety among all the varieties that can be found and spoken in the world today.

1.5 English as a Lingua Franca: its role in the world

English is now the official language – paired with another language – in 53 of the world's countries and is the sole official language in 32 of these countries. As mentioned by Trudgill (2002), English is the most spoken language in the world, after Chinese Mandarin, with over 1.35 billion of people who know and speak it. It is safe to say that one of the reasons why English became so widespread all over the world is because of globalization. Globalization affects every aspect of our life, and it became extremely important over the years from an economic, political, and cultural point of view. English really became the language of science, from scientific publications, which can be published online and read by anyone, to international conferences. In addition, as pointed out by Gvelesiani (2011), about 35% of the world's mails are written in English, and approximately 40% of the world's radio programs are broadcasted in English.

English is the lingua franca of our times, the sole language that connects us on a global scale allowing us to communicate with one another. But how did English, and more specifically American English, become today's global language? According to Buchanan (2017), there may be multiple small reasons, but the major big reasons are 5. The first, and also obvious reason that justifies how English became widespread in the first place is because of the English Empire. As already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Britons were the only population to know and speak English, which was confined to the British Isles. However, when they started trading with Asia and Africa, and colonizing territories around the Isles, their language started to spread and gain some importance. At first it was only used in administration and business dealings, which also justifies why locals still spoke their own native language at that time. Nonetheless, when it came to gaining an education, English was the language adopted. English later became an elitist language, spoken only by those who could get an education and learnt about literature, philosophy, and poetry - just like French when it was widely spoken in England. The second reason that explains why English became so widely spread is the power and prestige that the USA gained after the two world wars. American businesses were

booming and started trading all over the world, just like Great Britain had already done the century before. On one hand, American English – specifically – started to spread in all those countries where America was doing trades. On the other hand, Americans were also exporting their culture through music and films. Jazz, rock n’ roll and the famous Hollywood movies infiltrated the culture of people all over the world, changing the status of English from being only the language of business, to becoming the language of entertainment.

On the side of fun and entertainment, English also became used to signify a specific lifestyle or way of living which would intentionally recall the American culture. English is, in fact, the most common language used in the entertaining industry, especially for movies and music. There are now many non-American or non-British artists that decide to produce music in English because it is known that any kind of English content will receive the attention of a wider audience. Similarly, the same happens with movies. Most of the movies in the world are produced by America, which really is the center of the global film industry. Moreover, America invented different types of sports, such as skateboarding, performing tricks and doing parkour with the BMX, or more simply, basketball. All these American-invented sports have a wide vocabulary consisting of English terms only, which spread and were not translated into the different languages in the world. If we take technology and computer inventions into consideration, the US has also been responsible for the invention of the Internet. Experts of the field had to create and invent new terms for computer and technology, all English terms which spread all over the world just like that, without being translated. From a scientific point of view, today English is, and always has been, the language in which scientists and institutions – like universities – would publish their papers and research (Buchanan, 2017).

English is now essential in our everyday life considering it is used and spoken all over the world and in any existing field. As already mentioned, English was established as the international language of business and commerce already a long time ago. Moreover, English is also implemented for mass media, – see all the influencers who, even if don’t come from an English-speaking country, still speak English – journalists, and writers, as it gives them the opportunity to reach a wider audience all over the world. As Seidlhofer (2004) underlines, it is the first time in history that a language truly reaches a global importance thanks to the Internet, social media and all other kind of technological

type of communication we have today. As mentioned by Trudgill (2002), outside Europe, English also became the predominant language of international politics. It was, in fact, extremely vital to have a common language when international organizations such as the United Nations, UNESCO and UNICEF or the European Union were founded, respectively in 1945, 1946 and 1993. Science and medicine are another important field in which English found itself to be the commonly used language: most of the technical terminology belonging to science is based on English words. Finally, English started to be taught in schools around the 18th century, and as we can see today, it still is, being the most taught language in the world.

Due to globalization, English became as essential as breathing air, the lingua franca of our times, but what do experts think about globalization and this Americanization of the entire world? According to Trudgill (2002), there are two opposite points of view on the matter: those who think that globalization and the role that English has nowadays have a positive impact on our lives and way of communicating, and those who think it caused the world to become homogenized. As a matter of fact, many argue against globalization and criticize the Americanization of all the cultures in the world that are inevitably influenced and affected by the American culture itself. As pointed out by Shimemura (2002), the more radical critics refer to this homogenization of the world culture as “Cultural Imperialism”, arguing that local and regional cultures are being totally erased and replaced with the American culture and way of living. Furthermore, as stated by Gvelesiani (2011), the predominance of English not only endangers multiculturalism, but also multilingualism. As far as Europe is concerned, the Council of Europe decided to adopt “The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages” in 1992, with the aim of protecting “smaller” and endangered languages that one day might disappear and become extinct once and for all (Crystal, 2000). As mentioned by Phillipson (2003), this process of extinction has already happened with many languages in the past. Today, it is still a great issue if one takes into consideration that more and more institutions or corporations, for instance, are starting to use only English to communicate (Phillipson, 2003). Surely, one could talk about “language death”, which is the term used by Crystal (2000) to identify a language that is not spoken anymore. A language is no more considered a “living language” when there are no fluent speakers to keep it alive, and it is considered as such even when writings or books in that language are found. However,

how many people are considered enough to keep a language alive? Crystal (2000) underlines that there is not a precise number, unfortunately. Everything depends on how many people there are left who can speak that language and how geographically close or far away they are to one another.

Interestingly, this process of Americanization and homogeneity of the world is not a problem only for Europe or other non-speaking countries since it also affects the US negatively. Some researchers underlined how the dominance of English all over the world makes the Americans feel entitled to being “monolingually arrogant”. Many Americans assume that they don’t need to learn another language because their native tongue already is the global language, known by many people and mainly used in business and international jobs. It can be described as a sort of “deglobalization” of the nation which is considerably decreasing its possibilities in the business world, and not only.

On the other hand, many others – myself included – consider English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) to be something positive, a way to be closer and communicate with one another, even if having a different native language and culture. The dominance of the English language – or “Linguistic Imperialism” as Phillipson (2003) refers to it – facilitates the uniformity of the world, making the borders of different country irrelevant and even a more abstract concept. English as a commonly spoken language gives individuals the opportunity to create social relationships and transmit and share one’s cultural expressions and practices. Knowing English allows people all over the world to get in contact with other languages and cultures as well, opening their personal horizons and increasing their self-awareness and understanding of their neighbours. It is safe to say that without languages as a means of communication and a way of bringing people together, globalization would have never been impossible.

As mentioned by Dillard (1981), English is believed to be an easy language to learn. What makes it an easy to learn language is probably due to its vocabulary which is composed of words coming from both Latin and Teutonic, making large portions of its range of words comprehensible to millions of speakers of other languages. Vocabulary borrowing, which are going to be dealt with more specifically in the second chapter, have been particularly heavy in the English language. For example, words such as “polyester” or “astronaut” have roots in Greek etymology, and, as an Italian, I can affirm that these words are extremely similar to the Italian terms. The same happens to many other

languages all over the world, languages that probably influenced and affected English with their own local words when it spread in the past centuries. English did it in the past, but to mention Dillard (1981) once again, it will surely keep on borrowing from all the other languages it comes in contact with, and probably will keep changing over the years.

On a different viewpoint, Trudgill (2002) talks about “Englishes” and the future of English itself which he considered to be endangered. He focuses on how journalists and writers took particular interest in two possible linguistic catastrophes that could befall the English language. What’s interesting, however, is how these two potential catastrophes are so different from one another that they are complete opposites. The first worry can be labelled as the “Americanization catastrophe”. Those who fear this catastrophe predict that the world will undergo a process of both cultural and linguistic homogenisation, brought by the influence of mass media. To give a more visual example, Trudgill describes a possible future in which everyone will be only eating at fast food chains, wearing baseball caps backwards and speaking a single form of United States English. Trudgill (2002) admits thinking that it could be a reasonable outcome of globalization, something that is likely to happen considering the recent development of the language and its ways of spreading. Communications and travel possibilities are increasing more and more and could be responsible for a radical change regarding the global language. The second scenario proposed by Trudgill (2002) can be labelled as “disintegration catastrophe”. According to this view, the attention is shifted on English being so widely used all over the world by many non-native speakers that the language will break up into a series of unintelligible dialects. The concept behind this view is based on the idea that non-native speakers are not careful or vigilant with others’ language, and they could be responsible for a rupture and cause the language to split up into many different languages. As already mentioned, English is one of the few languages in the world that is spoken more by non-native than native speakers. Historically, some languages are known to have broken up into dialects which later became languages – see English, German and Norwegian 2000 years ago. However, it is not reasonable to think that English could ever be homogenizing and disintegrating at the same time, proving that the two catastrophic theories on the future of English cannot be both true (Trudgill, 2002).

At a grammatical level, on the other hand, things are slightly different. Grammatical change is much slower than lexical change, and the process and results are much more

difficult to determine too. As a matter of fact, when a grammatical change occurs in, for example, American English many decades before the change could also occur in British English, it is not always easy – and sometimes correct – to say that the change has been introduced from the former into the latter. This is an “historical and anthropological problem of diffusion versus independent development”, as stated by Trudgill (2002), which can be illustrated and better understood by the word “hopefully”. Until the 1970s, “hopefully” was used in British English only as a manner adverbial, whereas in American English it had – for many decades – the function of a sentence adverbial. Around 1974, however, British speakers started using “hopefully” with the same function and meaning as the Americans’. At the beginning, this change received quite a lot of negative attention from British speakers, who were not used to it. Surprisingly, by 1978 most people had already forgotten about the word’s innovation, and everybody was already using it with its new meaning. As far as linguistic innovation is concerned, every day speakers learn new words and phrases from television, radio, reading on social media, “but sound changes require face-to-face contact for diffusion [...] to take place” (Trudgill, 2002:149). For their phonological and grammatical systems of language to change, speakers need to interact with one another, have face-to-face interactions and conversations, which is something one can’t do with the screen of a television or mobile phone.

According to Trudgill (2002), the conclusion to English’s fate has to be a mix between the two catastrophic hypotheses that have just been analyzed. At the level of lexis, English looks set to become more and more homogenized over the years, although there is still a long way to go before talking about a complete homogenization of the language. At the level of phonology, however, the dominant national varieties of the language are now slowly diverging from one another, especially taking into consideration that there is still little face-to-face contact between native speakers of American English, Australian or New Zealand English. If compared between one another, these varieties greatly differ from a phonological perspective, as much as that at first it could be difficult for non-native speakers to understand the Australian variety if they are used, for instance, to the American one. Yet why does Trudgill (2002) refer to English as an endangered language, English of all languages that is so widespread and spoken all over the world? Historically, there have been many languages which played an important role as

institutionalized lingua francas, such as Latin, lingua franca of the Roman Empire (Crystal, 2003). Latin is only one example, however, never before has a language been used as a lingua franca by so many people –non-native speakers especially – in so many different areas of the world. As just mentioned, anglophone people really fear the expansion of English because they don't trust non-natives handling their native language. Nevertheless, French, and German people invented words that did not exist in English, such as *lifting*, *wellness*, *handy* and *pullunder*, but became commonly used in the English language some time after. Surely, this shouldn't be a reason to consider English to be in danger, because on the contrary, it is interesting, and it doesn't make any difference that could inevitably change English forever. What is also interesting to see is whether English as a European lingua franca will acquire linguistic characteristics of its own, different from the English present in the US, and if and how the widespread international non-native use of English could influence native use of the language. Obviously, all languages change, a change brought by native speakers that probably take part into this process without even realizing it.

Chapter Two

Lexical and grammatical differences between British English and American English

In this chapter, a brief part on borrowed words from different languages into the English language is going to be presented. However, the main focus will be to explore some of the lexical and grammatical differences that can be encountered when comparing British and American English.

2.1 Historical overview of British and American English

Languages could be compared, in a way, to human beings, because they also go through the process of birth, growth, change, and death. English has changed its shape over the decades, from having Germanic origins to, for instance, borrowing and including in its vocabulary many Indo-European words. Borrowings and loans aside, languages inevitably change, also developing different varieties. This is exactly the case of English which, as mentioned by Yaman (2015), can be divided into two main varieties: British English (BrE) and American English (AmE).

British English and American English started to drift apart slowly when the United States became independent from Britain. The feeling of wanting their own language, distinguished from that in England was growing among the Americans, for example, Noah Webster. As underlined by Han (2019), Noah Webster is considered the father of American lexicography, focusing his work on changing American English spelling, in order to accommodate the written to the spoken language. This process was referred to as the “spelling reform”, which involved separating America from Britain linguistically. Among Webster’s books there are *The American Spelling Book*, which is one of his first works, published in 1786, and his *Dissertations on the English Language*, published in 1789. As far as the latter is concerned, Crystal (2003) recalls Webster’s words, stressing how it was a matter of honor to have a system, a government, and a language of their own, since they had become an independent nation. However, as also mentioned by Han (2019), the lexicographer Noah Webster is mostly known for the first edition of his dictionary, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1828. This dictionary can be considered to have revolutionized American spelling, with 70,000

entries, it was even larger than Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*, of 1755.

As anyone can see today by simply comparing the two varieties, there are many differences in spelling between British and American English. Most of these – which will be further analyzed later – are now still in use, such as the substitution of -er for -re in words like *theater* or *center*. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Han (2019), some changes that Webster tried to propose such as the new American spelling were not adopted. For instance, he stressed that words such as *soup* or *group* should be written *soop* and *groop*, replacing -ou with -oo. Webster also proposed modifying words such as *tongue*, making it become *tung*, and *women* which would become *wimmen*. Therefore, scholars started to use the term “Americanism”, which, as mentioned by Sanyal (2013), came into existence after the American Revolution. The term was coined by the first President of Princeton University, John Witherspoon, who explained that it referred to words or usages of supposed American origin. Moreover, he made it clear that by defining this term, he does not perceive British English words or usages to be wrong, but he felt it to be a matter of identity.

Furthermore, what is interesting and important to underline is that American English tends to preserve and have more archaic words in its vocabulary, words which became obsolete in British English instead (Algeo, 2006). Rohdenburg and Schlüter (2009) refer to this phenomenon as “colonial lag”, which was coined by Marckwardt (1958). The term itself was, and still is, used to stress that American English tends to be more conservative than British English when it comes to lexicon. However, Rohdenburg and Schlüter (2009) also quote Bryant (1907), who was one of those who believed that, apart from being conservative, American English was also innovative due to the changes in spelling and the differences in vocabulary from British English. As a matter of fact, one can talk about both “colonial lag” and “colonial innovation”. These concepts are interesting if one thinks about the consequence of the US becoming more and more independent from Britain, even on a linguistic level.

Thus, when did Americans stop “talking British” and started to use the variety that would accompany them up until today? According to Sanyal (2013), researchers say that American English started to gain importance around the time of the Revolutionary War, when, eventually, the US gained its independence in 1776. Since then, the two varieties

started to drift apart more and more, developing their own vocabulary and spelling. However, it would be incorrect to state that British English and American English never came into contact ever again. On the contrary, in the last decades, the influence that the two varieties have had on each other increased significantly, especially the influence of American over British (Sanyal, 2013). US films and television spread globally, considerably affecting the way British people talk. In fact, younger people, more than others, understand more and more Americanisms and make use of them on a daily basis. According to Sanyal (2013), the reversed pattern is less obvious, but British films and television programs also have their own importance in the US, where there is a certain awareness of vocabulary from Britain. Therefore, even though British English and American English have their differences, the two varieties still affect each other due to globalization.

2.2 Borrowings and loans in American English

As previously mentioned, when the first British people started to arrive in the New World, a great problem they faced immediately concerned language. As underlined by Dillard (1981), the members of the Smith and Bradford companies, who settled in Virginia and Massachusetts respectively, encountered many differences with respect to what they were accustomed to see and know.

2.2.1 Native American languages loanwords

The first languages that the British encountered were the native American languages, spoken by the inhabitants of new territory. To best understand the process of borrowing, it is important to underline that these native American languages – with all the different varieties depending on the territory – were obviously unknown to the English settlers. Nasalized vowels, pharyngealized and glottalized consonants were sounds to which the British were not accustomed, understandable since they were not typical of the English language (Dillard, 1981). That is why they had to slightly change the words, such as eliminating a consonant if there were too many in the same syllable or inserting a vowel between them. The domains from which the British settlers borrowed new words were several, including plants, trees, animals, colors, religion, and medicine (Ballard, 1982). These native American loanwords became more and more in use with time, being applied

to the unfamiliar flora, fauna, and new founded institutions, and remained in the language even when other words from other languages were encountered later on. As far as the native American loanwords are concerned, almost one-half concretely became part of the American vocabulary in the 17th century, whereas the other half became in use between the 18th and 19th century (Dillard, 1981).

According to Dillard (1981), in words borrowed from Romance languages, such as Latin, French, and Italian, there is often a close correspondence between the meaning of a word in English and in the language it was borrowed from. For instance, words such as *nocturnal*, *consommé*, and *cupola* have the same meaning in English that these words have in the language they are taken from. It is also interesting to notice that all the native American words that English borrowed are nouns, meaning that the type of borrowing that occurred was quite superficial, and, as mentioned by Dillard (1981), it does not reflect an intimate relation between the two cultures. The reason for this could be that the British settlers started to immediately impose the English language, not allowing further borrowings. Moreover, even though most of these borrowed words were nouns, such as *caucus* or *powwow*, they eventually started to be used even as verbs.

2.2.2 French loanwords

As reported by Phuong (2022), French is the language from which English has borrowed the most words and vocabulary, process which started when the Norman Conquest happened, in 1066. As Dillard (1981) underlines, when English-speaking colonists started to expand westward, they soon came into contact with French. Similar to the native American loanwords, also the French words were borrowed from the domain of plants and animals, food, but also furniture and building, and exploration and travel. It is evident that French loanwords cover a wide range of topics, with 10,000 French terms which entered the English vocabulary only in the 13th century, from law and administration to art, fashion, or the medical domain (Phuong, 2022).

According to Dillard (1981), the French borrowings tend to fall into two groups: the exploration and travel domain and the food domain. With regards to the former, terms such as *bateau*, *carry-all*, *cache*, and *voyageur* were introduced into the English vocabulary. On the other hand, the acquisition of food terms such as *praline*, *brioche*, *sazarac*, *aperitifs*, *starters*, *au chocolat* (Phuong, 2022) was significant evidence of how

superb chefs, confectioners, and bartenders were in the French world. Other terms introduced in the English language which are commonly known and used in everyday conversations are *déjà vu*, *vis-à-vis*, *elite*, *collage*, and *dossier* (Phuong, 2022). Furthermore, as Dillard (1981) underlines, the English language borrowed more words in the 19th century from continental French, than it even did at any time since the period of the Norman French influence. These English borrowings, however, were terms coming from the domain of art, literature, textiles, furniture, and cooking.

Unlike the Amerindian terms, French words were by no means as violently distorted in form and pronunciation. As stated by Dillard (1981), the changes in meaning of some French loanwords were, at times, more complex than the changes of the Amerindians, since some words represented a second borrowing of the same term. The word *portage*, for instance, had existed in English for several centuries, even with different meanings. When the word was borrowed in the present day, those meanings were already archaic and obsolescent, meaning that that word was not used anymore with its old meaning.

2.2.3 Spanish loanwords

Contact with the Spanish language and its speakers began when Cristopher Columbus arrived in the New World in 1492. As underlined by Kiddle (1952), most of the loanwords that American English included in its vocabulary are from the 16th century. As Dillard (1981) states, more common words, such as *amigo* and *hombre*, used for the first time in 1813 and 1630, respectively, are surely more known – even though they might not be too much used –, mainly thanks to the Western movies that became extremely known and popular. What is also interesting is that terms such as *alligator*, *avocado*, *banana*, *chocolate*, *palmetto*, and *potato* have Spanish-American origins, but they became current in British as well as in American English. Kiddle (1952) underlines how a phonetical adjustment was needed when Spanish words started to be used by English speakers. The unknown – Spanish – sounds were replaced by sounds that were more familiar and easier to pronounce for the English speakers.

“Hispanicisms” is what these lexical borrowings can be referred to as. Moreover, if one were to compare the number of Spanish loanwords in both American and British English, it would be interesting to highlight that American English has adopted more Spanish loanwords than British English (González, 2001). According to the Oxford

English Dictionary, over 1000 words and phrases are recognized to have a Spanish source, against over 2000 recognized by Webster in his “Third New International Dictionary” of 1961. Among the Hispanicisms there are, for instance, *vamoose*, *barbecue*, and *lunch*. As González (2001) underlines, the term *vamoose* derives from the word *vamos*, Spanish term to say, “let’s go”. A difference between the two terms can be noticed: *vamos* includes the speaker in the action, whereas, in English, it has a more imperative tone where the speaker is addressing someone else (González, 2001). Another word is *barbecue*, which also comes from a Spanish word, *barbacoa*. *Lunch* is another example these Hispanicisms, coming from the Spanish word *loncha*, which also used to mean light meal (González, 2001).

As underlined by Dillard (1981), among the term that presented the most complex changes in meaning is the word *creole*. In the Spanish colonies, the word *criollo* was used to refer to someone who was born in the region, but had European – more specifically, Spanish – ancestry. The word kept existing in the territory – Louisiana – even when it passed from Spanish to French control. The word began to be used also by the French, but it was used for a person born in Louisiana, but of French ancestry. The term kept changing once again, because when the Americans occupied that territory, the term was applied to the French dialect that was spoken there, to those who spoke it – at times people of mixed French and African ancestry –, and to those born in that same territory – America.

2.2.4 German loanwords

As already mentioned in the first chapter, the German migrations to America consisted of three or four major waves. Around 1683, immigrants from the southwestern cities of Germany began to settle in Pennsylvania, resulting in being 90,000 German immigrants in America by 1775. As Dillard (1981) states, the type of language that the Germans developed was a combination of their own various German dialects, and words and constructions from the English language. Dillard (1981) refers to this variety as the Pennsylvania Dutch – from Deutsch.

As far as the acquisition of German words into the English vocabulary is concerned, terms such as *pretzel*, *hamburger*, *gummy bear*, and *frankfurter* started to be used in 1874, 1884, and 1899 respectively, which is quite late considering when the first Germans

arrived in the US. The word *pretzel* was originally spelled *Brezel* in German, but with time and the development of the English language, it started to be written *pretzel*, and occasionally can be found as *bretzel* as well (Becker, 1992). *Gummy bear* is another interesting word which comes from German *Gummibär*, which kept a similar spelling in English (Zhou, 2016).

Among the suffixes and prefixes that the English languages borrowed from German, an interesting one is the suffix -burger. The term *hamburger steak*, for instance, was used for the first time in 1884, and shortened to *hamburger* only in 1901. According to Dillard (1981), since the element ham- was identical to an English word, burger came to be used for all the non-meat elements; it was possible, in fact, to simply order “a burger”. With time, lunch counter and drive-in restaurants began to also feature different types of burgers, depending on the ingredients. *Cheeseburger*, *chickenburger*, *turkeyburger*, *lamburger*, *fishburger*, *shrimp burgers*, were all terms that were implemented and started to get use by the Americans. Of these, only *cheeseburger* and *hamburger* remained in general usage, whereas fancier names were invented for the beef-filled burgers, with each fast-food chain having their own product name.

2.3 Lexical differences between BrE and AmE

The lexical differences that can be found when comparing British English and American English are many. However, the two main domain I am interested in analyzing are spelling and vocabulary differences used to indicate the same idea or object. As previously mentioned, the spelling of American English became a concern around the end of the eighteenth century, when the well-known lexicographer, Noah Webster, suggested that American English and British English needed to be linguistically separated.

2.3.1 Spelling differences

Due to the spelling reform actualized by Webster, the spelling of certain terms in American English differs from the spelling used in British English. As underlined by Lahey (2000), Webster was particularly interested in dropping those “unnecessary” letters that were not useful or practical when it came to pronunciation. For instance, words such

as *publick* or *musick*, were written with a -k before Webster decided to transform them into *public* and *music*, as we have them today.

More specifically, many words that in British English are written with -ou were changed by Webster in words having only -o. For instance, Lahey (2000) proposes a list of these terms, where we can find words such as *flavour* which later became *flavor* in American English, and the same happened with *colour* and *color*, *favour* and *favor*, *honour* and *honor*, and so on. Always on the same simplification pattern, -re was also replaced by -er in many words that are used today. Examples are *metre* which became *meter*, *theatre* became *theater*, *centre* became *center* and many more. Once again, the idea behind these changes was that Webster wanted to simplify as much as possible the way words were written, so that they could resemble more their pronunciation.

Another difference that can be seen when comparing British English and American English is how many words that end with -ce in British, end in -se in American. Examples are the words *defence* and *defense*, and *offence* and *offense*. However, as highlighted by Lahey (2000), some other words even differ in spelling in the same variety. For instance, British English has *licence* as a noun and *license* as a verb, whereas American English has *license* for both the noun and the verb. Similarly, the same happens with *practice* and *practise*: the former is used as a noun and the latter as a verb. American English, however, prefers the reverse, having *practice* as a verb and *practise* as a noun. Another big difference is the use of -se in British English and -ze in American English. For the spelling and the pronunciation to be as close and accurate as possible, some words started to be written to have a closer resemblance to the word's pronunciation. Words such as *apologize*, *civilize*, *naturalize*, *realize*, *criticize*, and *emphasize* are a great example. Of course, all of them exist in British English, but with the use of -s instead of -z. Additionally, as Lahey (2000) underlines, *advertise*, *advise*, *improvise*, and *surprise*, however, are used both in British and American English, with no distinction between the two varieties. Moreover, since American English keep spreading around all around the world, being the most known variety of English globally, the final -ze is becoming more and more acceptable in British English as well.

For some reason, instead of keeping certain terms how they were in British English, Webster decided to “complicate” some of them. Words such as *fulfil*, *enrol*, *fulness*, and *skilful* are all written in British English with only one l. American English, on the other

hand, presents a double l in all these words. Once again, Lahey (2000) makes his readers aware of the fact that, for instance, *tallness* and *dullness* are part of those terms that have a double l both in British English and American English. The same happens for *annul*, *compel*, *befall*, and *install* which are used this way in both the two varieties. The rejection of the doubled final consonants, however, is noticeable in words such as *travelling*, *traveller*, *cancelled*, *labelled*, *signalled*, and *marvellous*, which are terms all written with one single l in American English. To further demonstrate this, in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) a comparison between *cancelled* and *canceled* can be made. The difference in use between the two words is visibly noticeable, where *canceled* has been used more than *cancelled* for about 24 years. From 2015 to 2019, however, the term *cancelled* became more popular compared to the previous years but kept being used less than *canceled*.

Finally, *connexion*, *inflexion*, and *deflexion* are commonly used in British English, and differ from American English since the terms use -ct instead of -x. However, the use of -ct is getting more and more popular in Great Britain as well, and that is why many British people today prefer to write these words the American way. *Analogue*, *dialogue*, *monologue*, *prologue*, and *catalogue* present another significant difference that can be noticed in spelling. These terms are mainly used in British English. On the other hand, American English drops -ue, ending up with words such as *analog*, *dialog*, *monolog*, and so on. However, Lahey (2000) underlines how today the -ue spelling can be also found in American English. As a matter of fact, according to COCA, the use of *dialogue* in American English is considerably higher than the use of *dialog*, meaning that the latter is not as popular as one might think. Moreover, when the term *analog* is used in electronics, for instance, as opposed to “digital”, it is usually spelled without -ue in British English as well. All the terms just analyzed are the most common and known ones when comparing the two English varieties. As mentioned by Lahey (2000), some of these differences in spelling are not easy to spot, probably since their spelling does not influence pronunciation at all. They rarely create problems of recognition, and their difference in spelling does not change their meaning either.

2.3.2 Different word, same meaning

As already mentioned, apart from spelling, between British and American English there are also many differences concerning vocabulary. Once again Lahey (2000) presents a long list of differences in vocabulary between the two varieties. Many are the words that could be examined, however, for this thesis the focus is mainly going to be on three main topics: transport, shopping, and food.

Many differences between British and American English are related to transport vocabulary. For instance, if Americans talk about taking the *subway*, people in Great Britain will refer to it as *underground*. With regards to vehicle names, Americans usually would call for a *cab*, whereas in Britain, they would call a *taxi*. Similarly, *motorcycle* and *truck* are commonly used in the US, but *motorbike* and *lorry* are the popular terms used by British people. Other street terms such as *parking lot*, *sidewalk*, *crosswalk*, *stoplight*, and *gas station* are used by Americans, whereas in Great Britain their equivalents are *car park*, *pavement*, *zebra crossing*, *traffic lights*, and *petrol station*. As mentioned by Di Carlo (2013), *parking meter*, *pedestrian*, and *traffic* are, however, used in both American and British English, with no difference.

Shopping vocabulary presents even more differences that might be quite confusing for the two countries. Generally, what in Great Britain is called *shop*, in the US, its equivalent is *store*. However, the term *shop* is also used in US but has a different meaning from the one used in the UK. In America, as underlined by Di Carlo (2013), *shop* refers to a small retail establishment. People in the UK go to the *chemist*, while Americans go to a *drugstore* or *pharmacy* to buy medicines, cigarettes, or body care products. The differences concerning clothing are several, especially considering how the same word could have two different meanings depending on who is saying it. Americans use words such as *shopping cart*, *closet*, *swimming suit*, *sweater*, *pants*, and *underpants*. On the other hand, in the UK they have *shopping trolley*, *wardrobe*, *bathing suit*, *jumper*, *trousers*, and *pants*. What is interesting here is that both the two varieties have *pants* in their vocabulary, which has quite a different meaning depending on if it is said by an American or a British. *Pants* are used in American English to talk about the piece of clothing that covers one's legs, while in the UK *pants* is the equivalent of *underpants* or *underwear* in American English. Nonetheless, thanks to American English becoming

more and more known around the world, inconveniences or misunderstandings depending on this term are less frequent and more avoidable.

Food is another domain in which American English and British English differ quite a lot. *Cookie* and *biscuit*, for instance, can have different meanings depending on who uses the word. Specifically, *cookie* is the American equivalent of the British *biscuit*; however, the *biscuit* is also used in American English, and it refers to what in British English is a *scone*. Other well-known words that differ in the two varieties are *candy*, *cotton candy*, *eggplant*, *corn*, and *French fries*, which are used in the US. Their British equivalents are *sweets*, *candy floss*, *aubergine*, *maize*, and *chips*. As mentioned by Di Carlo (2013), some terms related to fish also differ from one variety to the other. For example, American English has *shrimp*, *canned tuna*, *crawfish*, and *fish sticks*, terms that are *prawn*, *tinned tuna*, *crayfish*, and *fish fingers* in British English.

The concepts, ideas or things that are represented by two different words in British and American English are many. *Sick* and *ill* are another great example. According to Dillard (1981), *sick* is generally used in American English, while *ill* in British English, however, the two terms are considered to have a slightly different meaning. For some reason, in the US, *ill* is considered more formal than *sick*, and it is usually used when referring to more serious, long-term health problems. On the other hand, *sick* has a more general meaning, normally used to describe a feeling of nausea. Thanks to COCA, further data can be analyzed, showing that in American English *sick* is used twice as frequently as compared to *ill*. *Fall* and *autumn* are another great example of these differences. Interestingly, *fall* was an archaic term used in British English referring to what today is *autumn* – Latin word that replaced the old term (Zheng, 2015). According to Dillard (1981), the term *fall* started to be used in the UK around 1545, however, today it is not used by the whole British population, but only just by speakers of some specific dialects. The term *fall*, in fact, was imported to the US and today it still is the term used. Additionally, according to COCA, in the US, *fall* is – especially between 2010 and 2019 – used ten times more than *autumn*, which is its British equivalent.

Apartment and *flat* are another example of how British and American English drifted apart and developed – or kept – their vocabulary. From 1641 on, in the UK, the term *apartment* referred to “a portion of a house or building consisting of a suite of rooms allotted to the use of a particular family” (Dillard, 1981:75). This is the meaning that the

word still has today in the United States. However, in England, from 1715, the word started to be used to talk about a single room only. The older sense of suite of rooms transformed into *flat*, which is the term used in England today. Using COCA to further support the evidence, in American English the term *apartment* is almost used twice as much compared to the term *flat*. Another set of terms that change over time are *baggage* and *luggage* (Dillard, 1981). *Baggage* came into the English language in the fifteenth century and meant what today is called *luggage* – suitcase or bags – in English. The word *baggage* survived in the United States but died out in England at the end of the eighteenth century, when *luggage* started to get used.

Among the differences between the two varieties of English is, for instance, *gas* – as previously mentioned – which, according to COCA, is considerably more used in American English, especially between 2000 and 2014. Similarly, *garbage*, which is commonly used by American speakers, is more frequent in American English than *rubbish*, which typically belongs to British English. According to COCA, *garbage* was frequently used between 1990 and 1999, with a constant decrease in the following years, up until 2019. As far as the terms *university* and *college* are concerned, from movies and tv series one might expect the term *college* to be more commonly used in American English, however, this is not the case. Thanks to COCA, it is noticeable that *university* is, in reality, used more than the term *college*. Additionally, the two terms are commonly used interchangeably by American speakers.

2.4 Grammatical differences between British and American English

Grammatical differences between British and American English may be less evident to a less expert eye, however, they still exist. As also mentioned by Lahey (2000), each individual has his own “idiolect”, that is, his own unique combination of vocabulary, pronunciation, use of grammar and so on. This is to say that each person has their own preferences when speaking English, but there are still some typical differences and grammar choices which can be pointed out and categorized being part of one of the two varieties of English.

2.4.1 The use of *have* for possession

According to Lahey (2000), *have* is a semi-defective verb, which means it can be both used as a defective and as a full verb. Both in American and British English, *have* is a full verb when used idiomatically, in expressions like “Do you have breakfast at *eight*?” or “Do you have a shower in the morning?”. However, when *have* has its root meaning of possession, the syntactic structure changes from one variety of English to the other. British speakers typically use *have* as a defective verb and would normally say “Have you got any butter?”. On the other hand, American speakers lean towards using *have* as a full verb, saying “Do you have any butter?”, which, to them, means exactly the same thing. As Han (2019) underlines, if British speakers were to use the “Do you have” structure, it would mean something quite different to them, that is “Do you habitually have”, and not “Do you possess at this moment of time”. Hence, if in American English one typically says, “Do you have a dictionary?” the response will be “No, I don’t”, whereas in British English “Have you got a dictionary?” is used and its response will be “No, I haven’t”.

2.4.2 The use of present perfect

Once again, American English tends to simplify the way something is expressed, and it can be easily seen in the use of present perfect and simple past. According to Lahey (2000), while in British English a past action that has relevance and affects the present is expressed using the present perfect, in American English, the simple past tense is generally used. For instance, a British speaker would say “The flowers look nice because Jane has watered them”, and its American equivalent would be “The flowers look nice because Jane watered them”. By using COCA to compare the differences in use between *have seen* and *saw* in American English, for instance, is evident how the past simple is used much more than the present perfect. It is noticeable that, from 1990 until 2019, the past simple of the verb *to see* is preferred five times more than the use of the same verb in present perfect.

Nonetheless, what happens when adverbs are implemented into the sentence? Adding the adverb *just*, for instance, would create no problem to Americans, who will say “I just saw John, he is in the office”. However, its British equivalent would be “I have just seen John, he is in the office”. Even the adverb *already*, as Lahey (2000) highlights, is used in colloquial American English with the past tense, “I already answered that

question”. The adverb *yet*, however, quite differs from the other adverbs. The use of *yet* with the past tense in sentences like “Did you finish your homework yet?” is quite used by American speakers, however, even in American English, it is considered a non-standard use of the adverb, if not even ungrammatical (Hundt and Smith, 2009).

2.4.3 Differences in the past participle

British and American English not only differ in the use of the present perfect – and if it is used or not – but also in spelling of the past participle used in in the present perfect. One popular example which comes to mind straight away is the difference in use – and meaning – between *got* and *gotten*. Typically, American English uses *gotten* for the past participle, while British English prefers *got*. American speakers would normally say “I wish I could have gotten here sooner”, whereas British speakers would prefer “I wish I could have got here sooner”.

Nevertheless, the division is not this simple. American English preserved the old past participle of the verb *get*, which is *gotten*. *Gotten* was popular and in use in Great Britain as well, up until the seventeenth century, when it was substituted by *got*. According to Lahey (2000), American speakers make a distinction in the use of the two participles. *Got* is generally used – like in British English – to express simple possession: “I’ve got some money, John hasn’t got any”. *Gotten*, however, is practically used for all the other sense of the verb *get*, but never for possession. Thus, the sentences “I have got some money” and “I have gotten some money” express two different things in American English. The first indicates simple possession of the money, the second, on the other hand, means that the money has been obtained or received in some way. Furthermore, as Lahey (2000) mentions, thankfully Americans agree with the British that *got* is the only possible choice when it is followed by an infinitive showing obligation. For instance, it is never going to be “We’ve gotten to finish this job”, but rather “We've got to finish this job" or "We have to finish this job." Another difference which concerns *got* and *gotten*, is how American speakers perceive *got* as a stronger alternative to the verb *have*. As a consequence, according to Lahey (2000), many Americans end up saying “I got some money”, where *got* is used as a synonym for *have*, uncommon in the UK.

Got and *gotten* are the set of past participles more commonly known when making a comparison between these two varieties of English, however, this is not the only

difference that can be found. Many are the past participles which differ from one variety to the other. The majority of British English verb has a *t*-inflection, while American English verbs tend to conform to the standardized *-ed* structure. This difference in spelling constitutes a subtle distinction in pronunciation, which means the major differentiation is done at a written level, indicating from which variety the text comes from (Akan, 2017). The verb *burn*, for instance, has two past participles: *burnt* and *burned*, both used in both American and British English (Akan, 2017). The same happens with the verb *dream*, which has *dreamed* and *dreamt*, used both in these two varieties of English. In those cases in which the American variety uses both the *-t* and *-ed* inflections, the latter is usually more common than the former either way (Akan, 2017). The two participles of other verbs, however, might not be used both in American and British English. For example, *smell* and *learn* behave the same way, having *smelled* and *smelt*, and *learned* and *learnt*, respectively, for British English, and only *smelled* and *learned* in American English. Thus, *-t* forms can be used by some Americans, but they surely have a preference for the *-ed* structure.

2.4.4 Plural verb agreement with collective nouns

Another noticeable difference between British and American English is how collective nouns are perceived by the two varieties, shown by the chosen verb. As Lahey (2000) highlights, British speakers have a different way of perceiving collective nouns from Americans. When the group represents a perceived unit, the British use the verb in its singular form: “This army is highly trained”. However, in British English, collective nouns are normally perceived as a number of individuals, which means that the use of the plural form of a verb is more common than the singular form: “The Government are deciding on new laws” or “The team are winning the game”.

On the other hand, it is the opposite for Americans, who prefer to use singular forms for collective nouns, automatically giving singular verbs to singular subjects. For example, Americans would say “The team is winning”, “The Government is deciding on new laws”, or “My family is coming for dinner tonight”. In American English, in fact, few are the nouns that are always plural, such as *people*, *police*, *clergy*, and *cattle* (Lahey, 2000). Likewise, in sports, if a team’s name is plural, American speakers will use the verb

in plural, e.g., “Chicago Bulls”, while if it singular, e.g., “Chicago”, it will have a singular verb.

Chapter three

Awareness, preferences, and use of American English among Italian students

This final chapter will explore Italian University students' awareness of and preferences regarding British English and American English. A questionnaire was conducted, and the results have been analyzed using a statistical approach.

3.1 English as a Foreign Language

The English language has many varieties and, as already mentioned, the most widely known and used are American and British English. However, it is interesting to make a distinction between the use of these two varieties to see if American English really is more frequently used and popular than British English. To be precise, the focus here will be on learning the language at school.

Lahey (2000) suggests students are usually exposed to British or American English when in the classroom, even when their teachers are not native speakers. He also underlines that the majority of magazines and newspapers are in English: British English especially in Western Europe, and American English in Latin American and the Far East, such as the Philippines. Lahey (2000) stresses that students in the classroom are mainly exposed to British English, since in many countries it is the variety that is taught in school – in Italy as well. On the other hand, outside the classroom students are mainly exposed to American English due to films and television programs (Lahey, 2000).

Lindell (2014) cites De Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor (2005) to explain the traditional definition of Foreign Language acquisition, which takes place in an environment where the language is not used or established in the community. As Lindell (2014) highlights, each individual has their own way of speaking, from phonetical to lexical and grammatical preferences, distinguishing each person from the others. Moreover, both internal and external factors may impact on the way people and students – of interest for this study – speak. This is due to each individual having their own experiences of languages (Lindell, 2014), which condition their preferences and use of specific term or grammar.

Modiano (1996) claims that American vocabulary is influencing the use of English in Europe (Lindell, 2014) more and more. Even in these last few years, American English is seen with another perspective, and it is more widely used, even in schools, by L2 learner

who are only somewhat aware of the differences between American English and British English. As Lindell (2014) underlines, this mixture of British and American English use in Europe might cause confusion among L2 learners. I will briefly mention the differences highlighted by Lindell (2014), which consist of three main categories.

The first category indicates different terms which share the same meaning but are normally understood by speakers of both varieties. Examples are American English terms such as *gas pedal*, *elastic band*, *fall*, and *gauze*, and their British equivalents *accelerator*, *rubber band*, *autumn*, and *bandage*. The second category focuses on non-interchangeable terms, thus, different terms with the same meaning. In American English there are, for instance, *amusement park*, *period*, *apartment*, and *roommate*, whereas in British English *funfair*, *full stop*, *flat*, and *flatmate* are commonly used. As far as this category is concerned, despite the different preferences of the two varieties, misunderstandings are neither common nor a significant issue. Finally, the last category indicates more complicated words which create failure in conversation due to the words having completely different meanings. *Sidewalk* and *pavement* are a good example to show these differences. The former is used in American English to indicate the part of street where pedestrians walk, and the latter is its British equivalent. However, in American English *pavement* means the part of the street where vehicles pass. *Second floor* and *first floor* are another example to show how confusing it can be to have different words to mean different things in different varieties of English. In British English, there are the ground floor, the first floor, second floor and so on. The *ground floor*, however, is called by American speakers *first floor*, creating quite a confusing situation. Lastly, are *soccer* and *football*. In American English, *football* refers to what British speakers would call *American football*, which is a completely different sport.

All this is to say that, apart for all those differences in terms which have already been explored and analyzed in the previous chapter, there are also terms which can prove confusing for learners of English. There are different words that are considered Americanisms which could be difficult to understand by British speakers or students who lean towards that particular variety. Nonetheless, as Lahey (2000) mentions, one cannot talk about Americanisms or Briticisms anymore since speakers from both varieties today know about words from the other variety and understand them.

3.2 Previous studies on students and native speakers

To remain on the topic of students learning the English language, an engaging point could be that of awareness and preferences. The question of awareness, preferences, and use of the different varieties of English – British and American specifically – is not something new. Many conducted questionnaires and did research on the matter. One of these is Alftberg (2009), who focused her research on preferences and awareness in use of the English varieties of Swedish secondary school students. The research reveals, as expected, that students visibly had a preference for American English rather than British English, despite British English being the variety used in the classroom from their teachers. Moreover, when directly asked about which variety they preferred, they were not aware of having a preference at all. What is interesting, however, is that there were also differences depending on the vocabulary: school-related words were more commonly expressed with the British variety, whereas for any other non-school-related term the American version was mainly chosen. Another study from Sweden was carried out by Hansson (2010), aiming to investigate, once again, secondary school students' awareness of grammatical differences between American and British English (Yaman, 2015). The results show that the students were neither able to distinguish the two varieties apart nor say which variety they personally used or preferred.

Another example of studies that have been conducted on awareness is Yamar's (2015) study, which focused on awareness of spelling, word choice and pronunciation among ELT students at university. Once again, despite studying to become English language teachers, the students were not aware of the differences between American English and British English in neither of the three categories proposed. As mentioned by Modiano (1996), the existence of these varieties of English may cause confusion among EFL students, yet surely nothing that could create serious problems, but only misunderstandings.

To further highlight this lack of awareness concerning the differences between British and American English, a study on native British speakers and native American speakers was conducted. Di Carlo (2013) aimed at exploring the awareness of the participant with regards to lexical differences between the two varieties of English. Both native American and British speakers were asked about their contacts and acquaintances that knew the other variety, and if they had ever visited, respectively, the UK and the US.

What emerged is that native British speakers had more contact with American speakers than the other way around, but fewer of them – with respect to the American sample – reported to have visited the country of the other variety. Surprisingly, Di Carlo's (2013) study reveals that even native speakers do not exactly know the differences between the two varieties of English, even though British speakers had a higher score in identifying terms of the American variety. Moreover, many British terms, *such as braces for suspenders, rubber for eraser or pavement for sidewalk* had a complete obscure meaning to Americans (Di Carlo, 2013). According to the researcher, what made British speakers understand more American terms – apart from them being more intuitive due to their construction – was how widespread American television series and movies are. If one thinks about it, this is surely pretty fascinating. On one hand, the results show that not even native speakers are able to tell the two varieties apart, and, on the other hand, they confirm what was previously said about American English being the most known variety of English all over the world.

3.3 A study on Italian University students

The next section will describe a study I personally conducted on Italian University students to find out about their awareness of and preferences concerning American and British English. The results obtained will be analyzed and conclusions will be drawn.

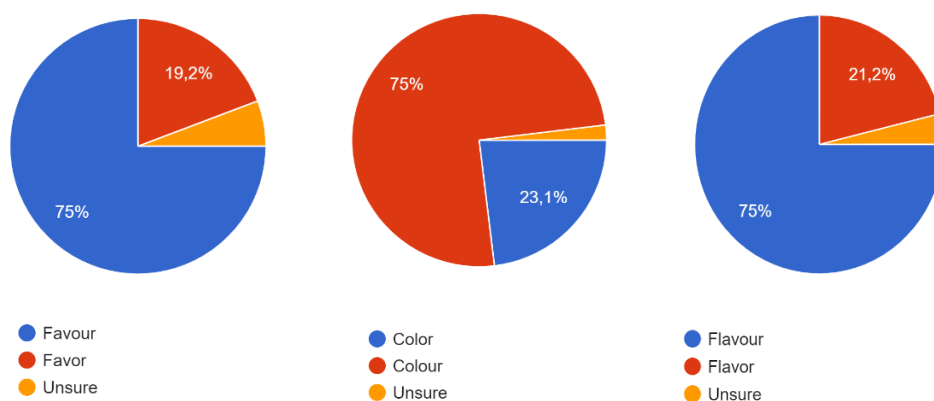
3.3.1 Methodology

The aim of my study is to examine and collect data from Italian University students to find out about their awareness, preferences, and use of American English and British English. To achieve my goal, I created a questionnaire which was administered to students studying English at University. The questionnaire is made up of 4 sections: the first one is on awareness and preferences; the second is on word spelling; the third is on different terms having the same meaning; and, lastly, the fourth one is on grammatical differences. The last section consists of 4 sub-sections being, in order, differences in verb usage, the use of Present Perfect, verb agreement with collective nouns, and use of delexical verbs – *have* and *take* more specifically. The number of participants who took part into the study is 52, with no distinction between male or female participants.

3.3.2 Expectations

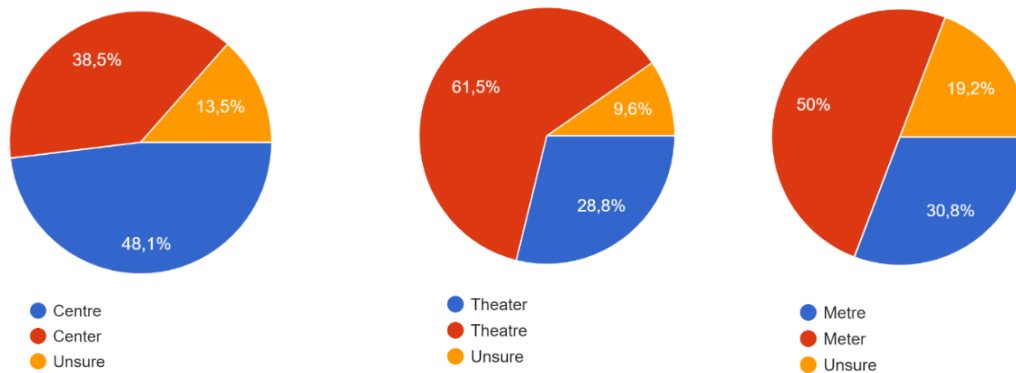
As far as expectations are concerned, I believed that the results would show the preference of Italian University students to be more towards American English. Even though Italy is in Europe, and students here are usually taught words and sentence structures of the British variety, it was thought probable that the British variety would not be the dominant one. Due to social media, Hollywood movies and the globalization of English in general, American English is a constant presence in young people's lives.

3.3.3 Spelling preferences



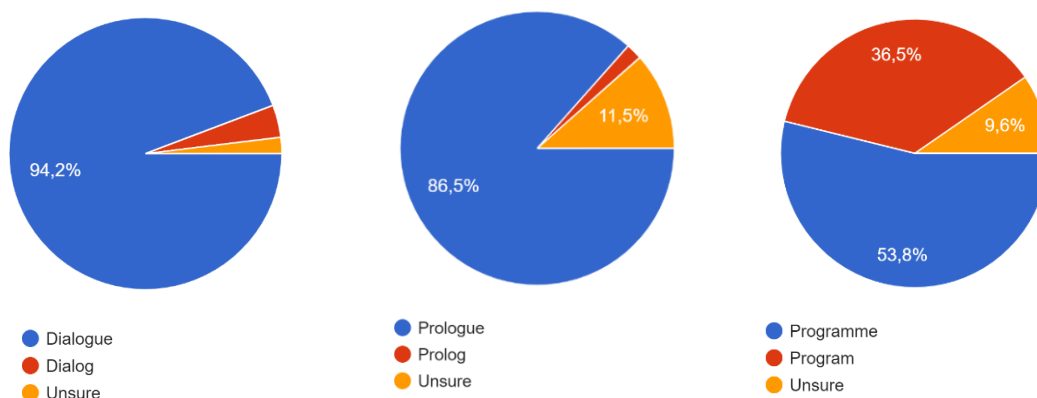
Picture 1: Pie charts of the preference of spelling words in percentage

The first category analyzed is the spelling category. The first few tasks asked the students to choose between words written in -our, British spelling, or in -or, American spelling. As it can be clearly seen in all three of these pie charts, 75% of the students selected the British spelling. Just a small percentage, on the other hand, were unsure about which item to choose, most likely because they do not have a preference and use both in different situations. It is not surprising, perhaps, that the majority of the participants selected the British option, considering that all these terms are easy and generally learnt in primary schools.



Picture 2: Pie charts of the preference of spelling words in percentage

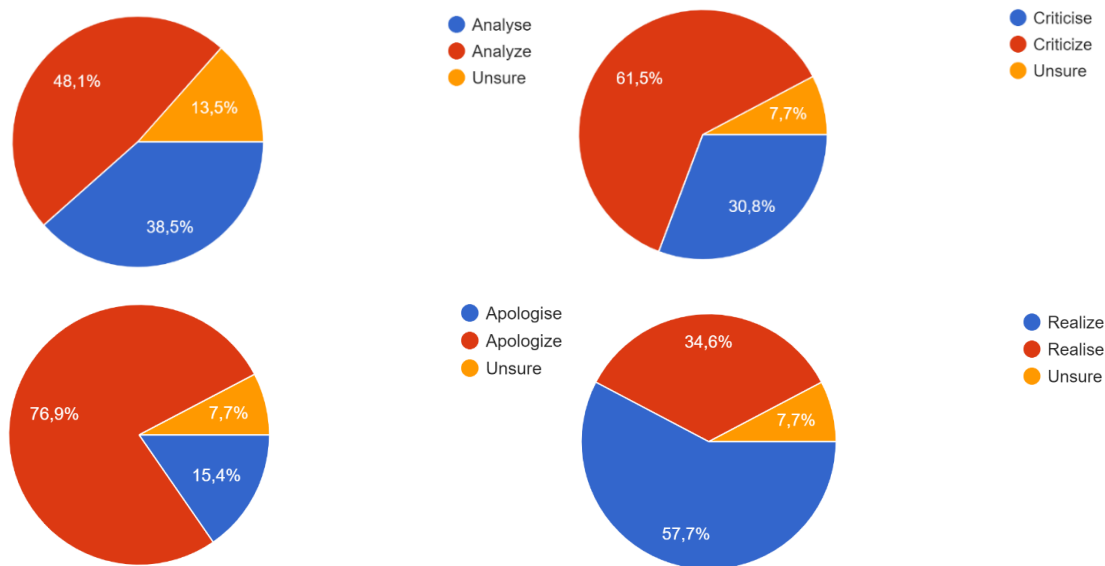
Another spelling difference on which the study focused is the difference in spelling between the British -re and the American -er. For this particular spelling difference, students were more equally divided. The results show that *centre* (48.1%) and *theatre* (61.5%) were selected by the majority of the participants. However, in both the questions, 13.5% and 9.6%, respectively, of the participants selected “unsure” as their option, meaning, once again, that they probably do not have a specific preference for one term, but rather use them both without realizing it. The third pie chart, however, has interesting results: the American spelling *meter* was selected by exactly half the students. Unlike from the other two, for *meter* the American spelling is preferred quite a lot more than its British equivalent, and 19.2% of the participants selected the unsure option, the highest percentage for the unsure option.



Picture 3: Pie charts of the preference of spelling words in percentage

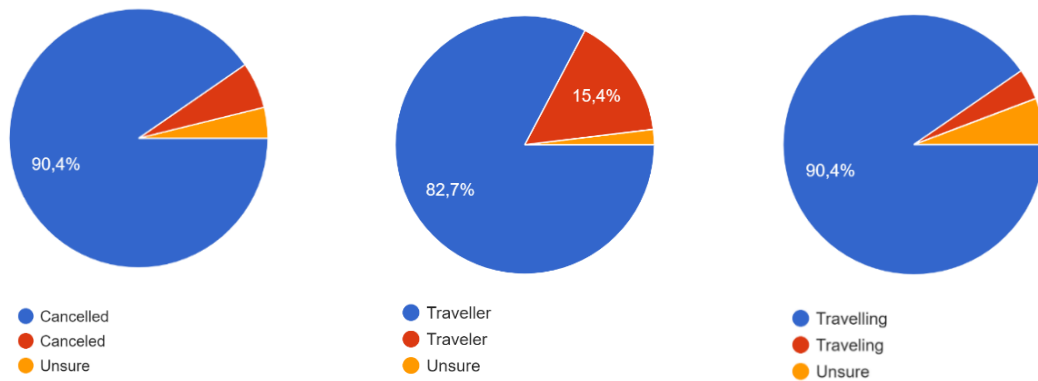
Looking at the pie charts above, it is evident that between the -gue and -g spelling, students lean more towards the British variety. It may be surprising to see a preference for British if one expected them to use the American terms more. Even though people and

young adults are more and more exposed to American English due to social media, it is likely that these terms were learnt when young, and thus, the British spelling has remained with the learners. Similarly, the British spelling – *programme* – is preferred by 53.8% of the students, probably because this term was also learnt in British, being the variety taught in Italy.



Picture 4: Pie charts of the preference of spelling words in percentage

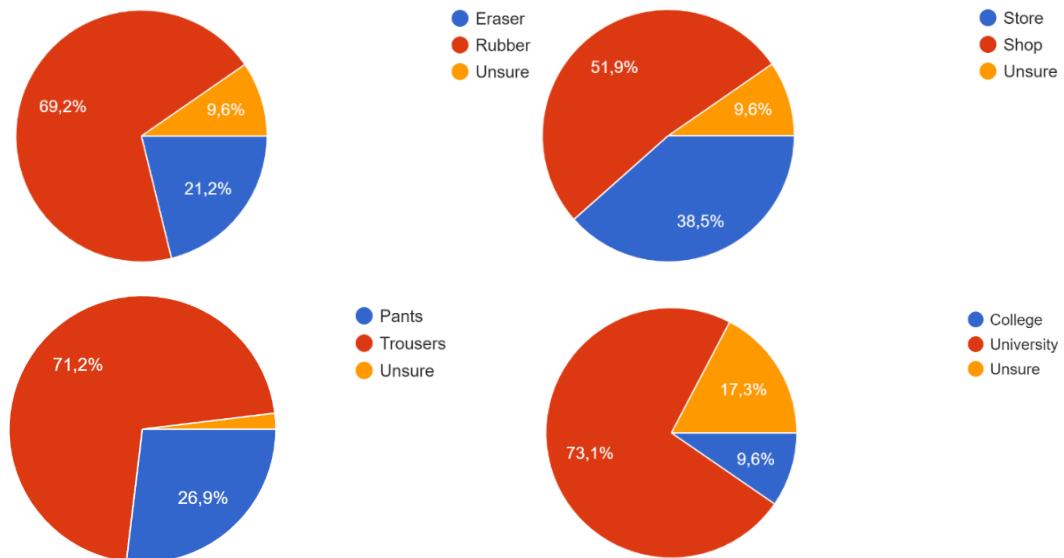
These pie charts, on the contrary, meet the expectations of students being exposed and visibly influence by American English. The words presented above differ in -ze and -se spelling. The American English option was selected considerably more than the British one. For instance, *analyze* is preferred by 48.1% of the participants, and 13.5% selected the unsure option instead. Once more, it is likely that the students use both the spellings probably depending on the situation or if they do not usually realize which form they prefer. *Criticize*, *apologize*, and *realize* were selected by 61.5%, 76.9%, and 57.7% of the students respectively. Noah Webster tried to make the American spelling as close to the pronunciation of words as possible, and here it is evident that he clearly succeeded. It is, in fact, it is likely that many students chose the American spelling because it resembles word pronunciation, making it easier to remember and write down.

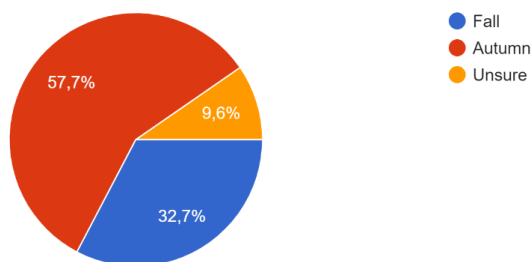


Picture 5: Pie charts of the preference of spelling words in percentage

On the contrary, this is not the case of words such as *travelling* or *cancelled*. The majority of the students preferred the British spelling over the American one. The American spelling presents some words, such as the ones just mentioned, which do not double their consonants at the end. Travelling or cancelled are easy words, taught from a very young age. The students are likely to be used to seeing these words spelled with a double consonant, and that would explain why, despite their constant exposure to American English, they still prefer the British spelling.

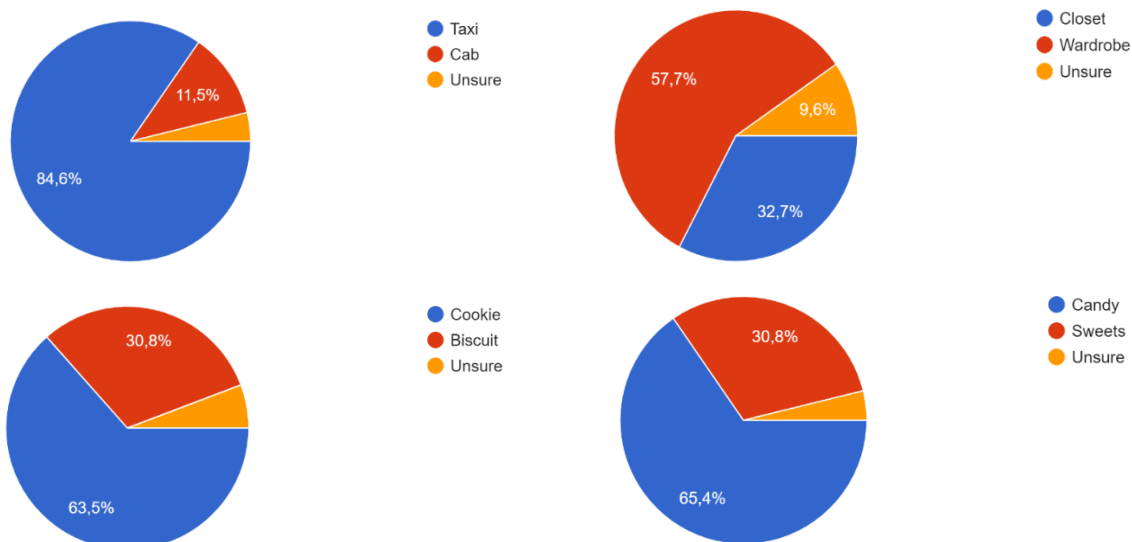
3.3.4 Vocabulary preferences

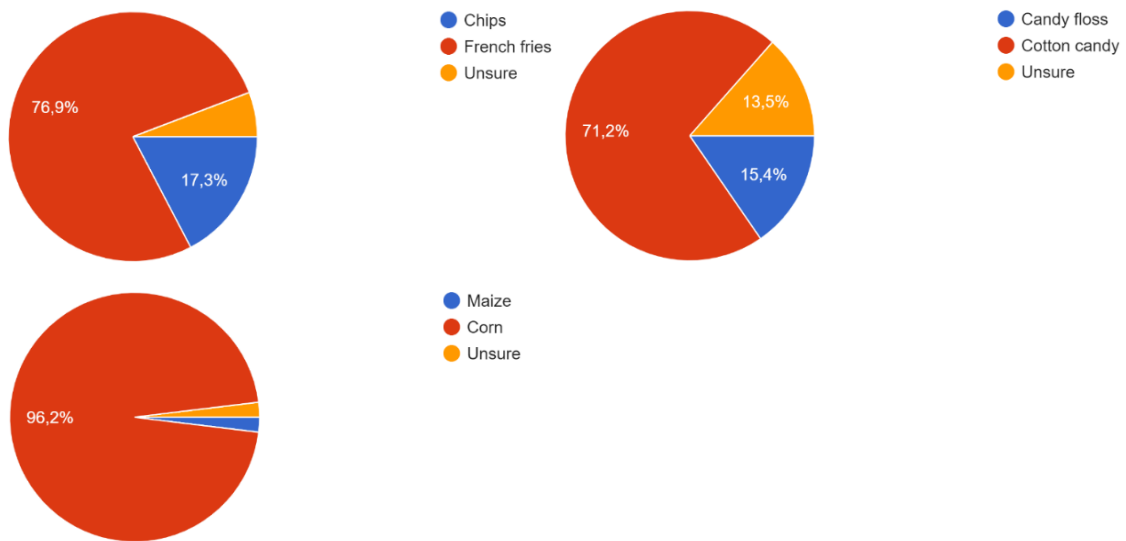




Picture 6: Pie charts of the preference of vocabulary differences in percentage

As far as the lexical differences are concerned, the results show different preferences for the vocabulary proposed especially depending on the topic. For instance, for school-related terms the preference was heavier on the British side. This is explicable since British English is the variety of English mainly taught in Italy. Thus, *rubber*, which is the only school-related term in the questionnaire, is preferred by 69.2% of the student, supporting what has just been said. Moreover, words which are usually part of a set of vocabulary taught in elementary school were used in the questionnaire. For instance, *wardrobe*, *trousers*, and *shop* are British terms usually taught in the first years of elementary school in Italy. That is why they were chosen, respectively by 57.7%, 71.2%, and 51.9% of the students who took part in the questionnaire. Similar British terms that are likely learnt in school and that were more chosen are *autumn* (57.7%), *University* (73.1%), and *taxi* (84.6%). For *University* and *taxi*, however, it is probable that the choice percentage is extremely high because in the Italian language these words are extremely similar if not identical, making it easier for Italians to memorize the British term.

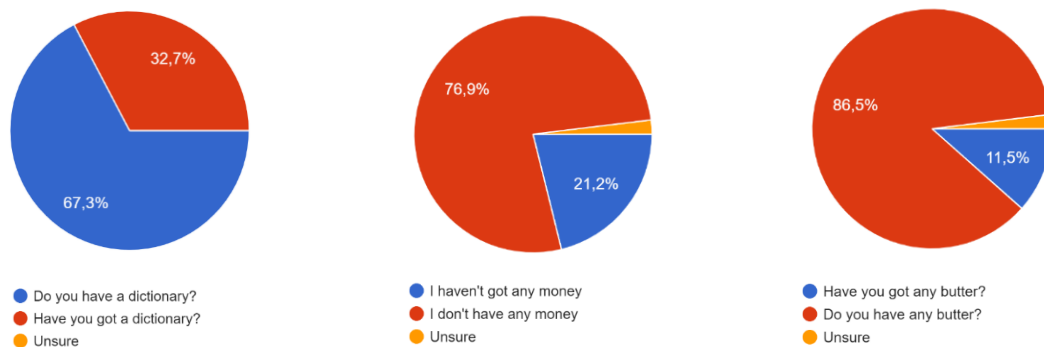




Picture 7: Pie charts of the preference of vocabulary differences in percentage

As far as food is concerned, it is visible that there is a higher preference for the American option over its British equivalent. The highest of all is *corn*, preferred to *maize*, with 96.2% students who selected it. French fries (76.9%), extremely popular and this global term is also more frequently selected than *chips*. The same happens for the words cookie (63.5%), candy (65.4%), and cotton candy (71.2%), being more widely selected than the British option.

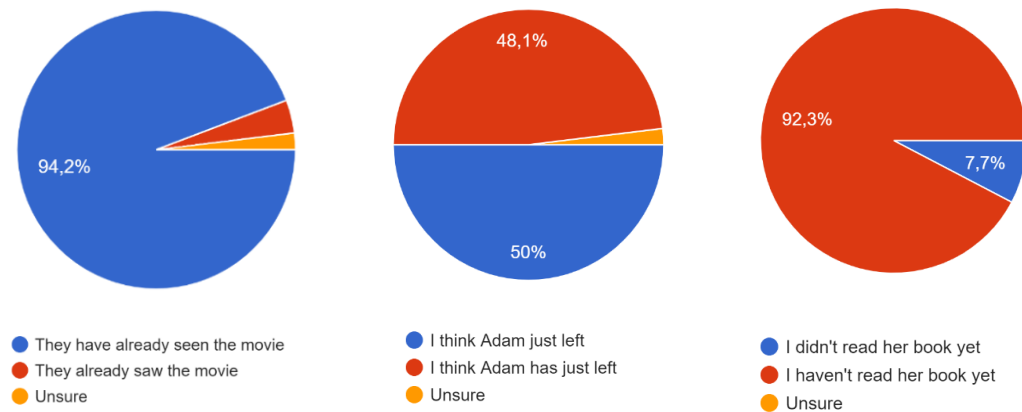
3.3.5 Grammatical preferences



Picture 8: Pie charts of the preference of the possessive in percentage

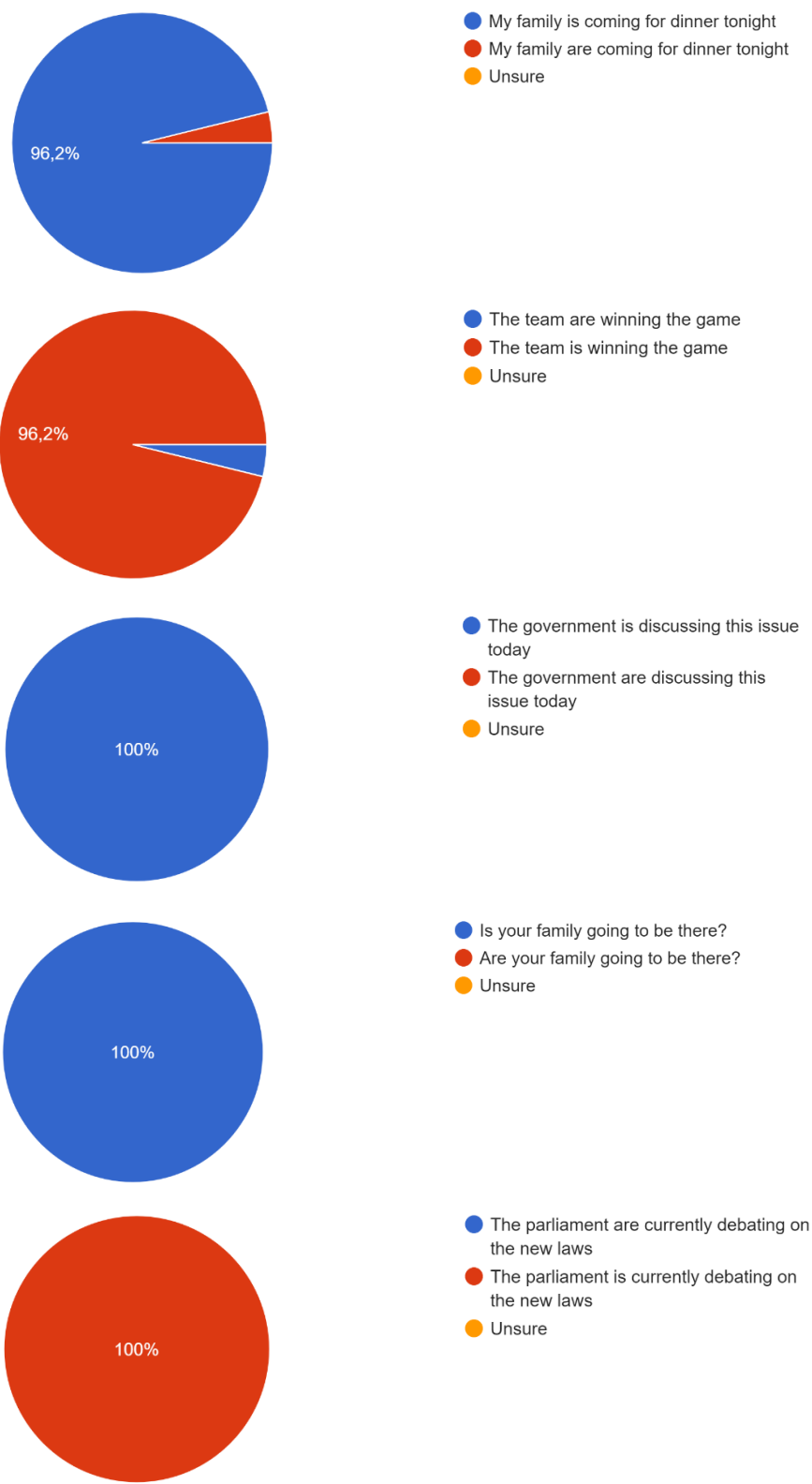
With regard to the grammatical differences, four categories have been analyzed. The possessive category is the first one, and students performed as expected. They were asked to choose between the American “Do you have” or “I do not have” construction or the

British “Have you got” or “I have not got” construction. As expected, most of the students leaned towards the American construction, which probably proves to be easier to Italian students. For instance, “I don't have any money” and “Do you have any butter?” were respectively chosen by 76,9% and 86,5% of the participants.



Picture 9: Pie charts of the preference of the Present Perfect in percentage

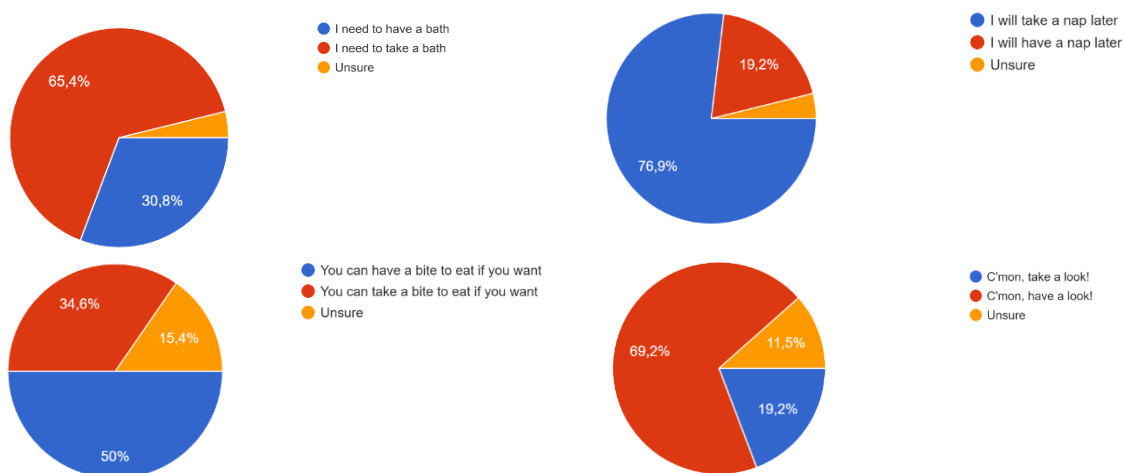
The second category of the grammatical differences is on the use of Present Perfect. Apart for the pie chart with “I think Adam has just left”, which is quite balanced between the American and the British option, the other two pie charts show a preference for British English. “They have already seen the movie” with 94.2% and “I haven’t read her book yet” with 92.3% were chosen by almost every single participant. This is probably due to the presence of the adverbs “already” in the first one and “yet” in the second. As already mentioned in the second chapter, adverbs do make a difference in the use of the Present Perfect or Simple Past. “Already”, for instance, was probably the reason why students chose the British variety with the use of the Present Perfect, as if they might have felt it has a sort of connection in the present. As highlighted in the second chapter, “yet” is generally considered grammatically wrong when using it with the Simple Past, which is likely the reason why a high percentage of students chose the option with the Present Perfect.



Picture 10: Pie charts of the preference of verb agreement with collective nouns in percentage

The third category focused on verb agreement with collective nouns such as *family*, *government*, and *staff*. In all the questions, the majority of the students chose the

American option, which does not see collective noun as a group of individuals, but as a unified group. This means that *family, staff, team*, all had the third person singular “is”. Surprisingly, however, those students who chose the British option in these questions, had a different point of view on questions like “The government is discussing the issue today” or “The parliament is currently debating on the new laws”. For these two tasks, specifically, 100% of the students chose the American option with the use of the third singular person. This is likely to be due to the fact that these students also perceived *parliament* and *government* as a unified group which requires “is” as verb and not “are”.



Picture 11: Pie charts of the preference of delexical verbs in percentage

Finally, the last grammatical category focused on *have* and *take* as delexical verbs. American English usually uses *take* in the cases presented in the pie charts. For some of these sentences, students had a preference for the American *take*, thus, “I need to take a bath” (65.4%) or “I will take a nap later” (76.9%) are quite more preferred over the other option. For some reason, “C’m on, have a look!” (69.2%) and “You can have a bite to eat if you want” (50%) are preferred over the American option. It is likely that these two sentences in particular sound better to the Italian ear with *have* rather than *take*. A hypothesis could be that, for instance, “take a bite” may sound too informal or aggressive, as if *take* meant “take with force”.

3.3.6 Preferences and awareness

In the first section, the participants were asked to answer to a series of fifteen questions concerning British and American English with the aim of seeing if they would acknowledge their preferences and awareness for one variety over the other. A statistical analysis has been carried out to study the correlation between the answers of the first section and the average student and their preferences and awareness of American English. The focus of this general analysis will be mainly on the questions number two, four, nine, and eleven.

First of all, the second question was “I have a preference for American English over British English”, for which 18 people agreed or strongly agreed, 12 were neutral, and the rest 22 disagreed or strongly disagreed. What is statistically significant is that those students who agreed – and strongly agreed as well – to the statement have, on average, a preference for American English. It is quite important to underline this relevance, since, according to their own opinion, they do, in fact, have a preference for the American variety. Likewise, those students who disagreed to the statement reveal a preference for British English.

The fourth question shows quite interesting results. Those who agreed to “I don't have a preference for a specific variety of English” lean more, on average, towards British English. This is interesting mainly because students who use British English and don't recognize it, are probably not aware of this due to British English being the variety they have always been taught and always known. Just like for the second question, those who, on the other hand, disagreed and thus recognize they have a preference, have a preference for American English.

“I prefer to speak American English because some words are easier to remember” is the ninth question the participants were asked in the questionnaire. On average, students who agreed and strongly agreed – only 20 in total – lean more towards American English. Those students who disagreed (22), on the other hand, have a preference for British English words, and they are aware of it due to their response to this question. Last statistically significant question is number eleven “I tend to use both British English and American English when I speak or write”. On average, students who agreed – 31 in total – have a preference for American English. This means that students who disagreed – 10 in total – either do not use American words or, if they do, they are aware of it.

Apart from an average analysis, a more specific study can be conducted in relation to the different categories previously mentioned. For instance, the first question asked, which was particularly significant, was “I have a preference for one variety of English over the others” with 37 out of 52 students agreeing (33) and strongly agreeing (4). Thus, according to this response, more than half the students acknowledged that they do, in fact, prefer one variety over another. This sentence is one among other sentences to be statistically significant with regard to the students’ preferences for either American or British English. This statement is statistically significant for the lexical differences category, where those who agreed tend to have, in that category, a preference for British English.

The second question is also statistically significant and is “I have a preference for American English over British English” for which 18 people agreed or strongly agreed, 12 were neutral, and the rest 22 disagreed or strongly disagreed. What is statistically significant for this second statement is that those who agreed and recognize that they do have a preference for American English, performed as expected in the category of spelling and lexical differences. This means that for these two categories, these people do, in fact, prefer the American terms over the British ones.

Other statistically significant questions which can be analyzed is number six “Most of the television shows and programs I watch are in American English”. This sentence is statistically significant in the category of lexical differences, possessive, Present Perfect, and delexical verbs. Those students who agreed – or strongly agreed – to this statement have a preference for American English, which is visible especially in the category of lexical differences, Present Perfect, and delexical verbs. This means that they would prefer, for instance, *store* over *shop*, or “take a nap” over “have a nap”. For the possessive category, however, it is different. The results show that the students who agreed to this statement, actually prefer British forms, such as “Have you got any butter?” over “Do you have any butter?”, in the possessive category.

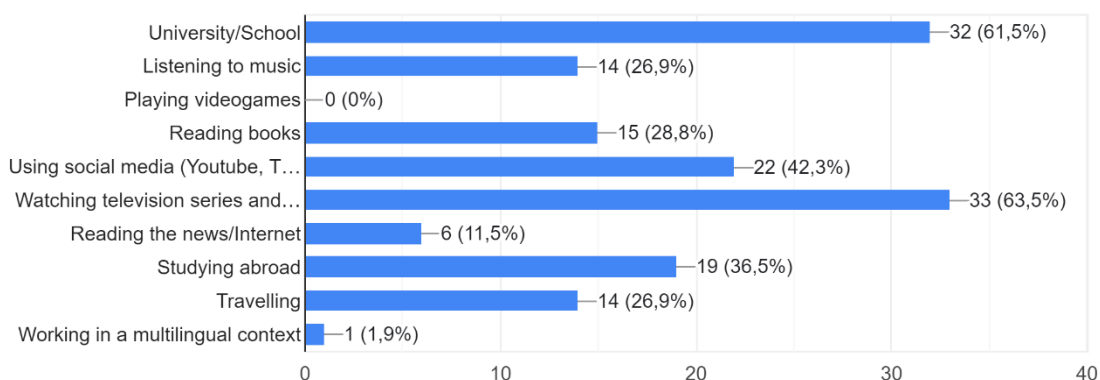
Question number seven is “When I have to learn a word, I tend to learn the British word rather than the American word”, which is statistically significant in the categories of spelling and Present Perfect. Students who agreed to the statement have, in fact, a preference for British English in these two categories. The contrary is also true, meaning

that those students who disagreed because they recognize they usually learn American words, do perform as expected in those categories.

The eight statement “I consider British English to be more correct to use than American English (grammar, vocabulary)” is also statistically significant with regard to lexical differences and the possessive. This means that those students who agreed with this statement, in the category of lexical differences preferred words such as *lorry* over *truck*, or *trousers* over *pants*, and so on. The same happened in the category of the possessive, where these students were more likely to choose the “Have you got” structure over the “Do you have” one.

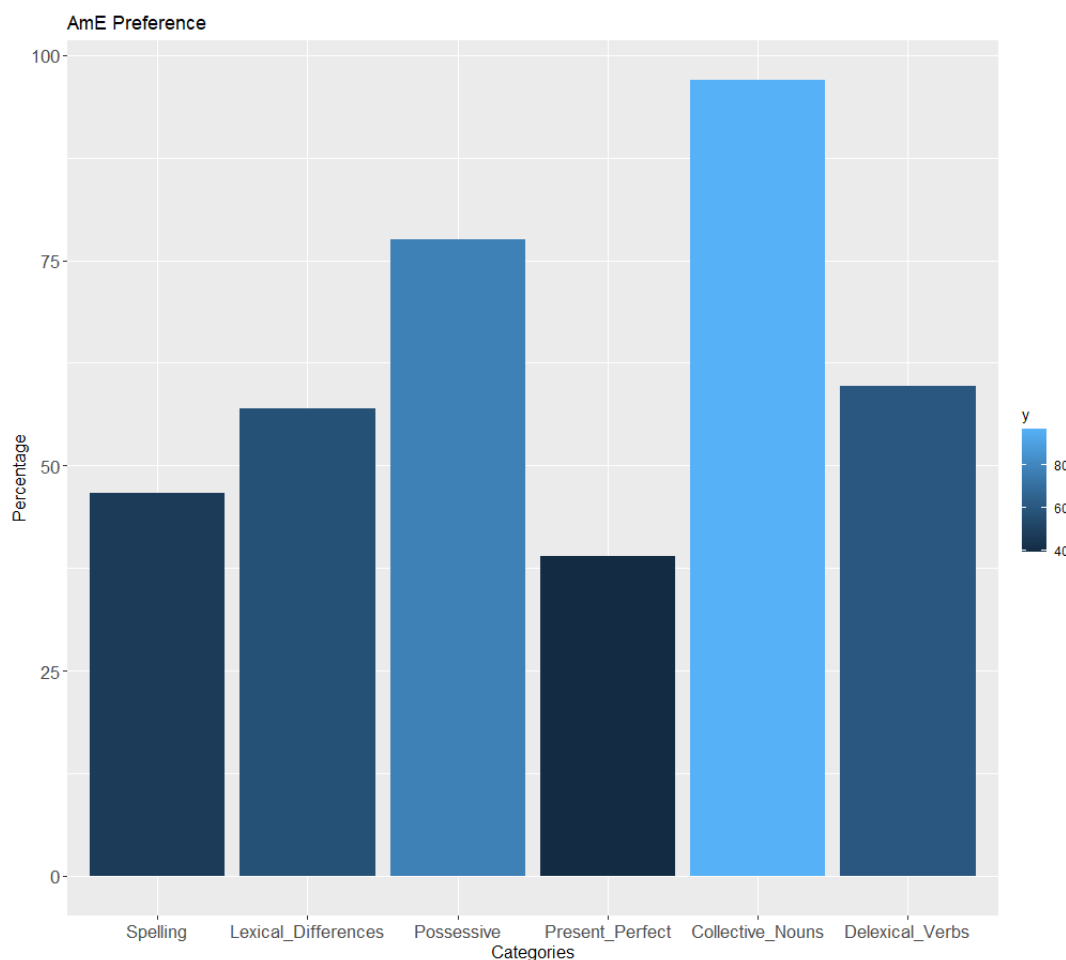
Lastly there is question number ten “I prefer to use American English because the words are easier to write”, statistically significant for the categories of lexical differences and delexical verbs. Once again, the students who agreed prefer to use words such as *cookie* over *biscuit*, *closet* over *wardrobe*, or *candy* over *sweets*. For the delexical verbs category the same happens: students who agreed preferred sentences like “Take a swim” and “Take a look” over “Have a swim and “Have a look”. As already mentioned, the opposite is always true, meaning that those students who disagreed prefer the British variety and perform as expected in most of the categories.

The second task of the first section was to choose a maximum of three items among nine alternatives to express, according to each student, what has impacted their learning experience the most. Participants could choose from Univeristy/school, listening to music, playing videogames, reading books, using social media, watching movies and TV series, reading the news and browsing on the internet, studying abroad, and travelling.



Picture 12: Diagram of influences on English learning of students

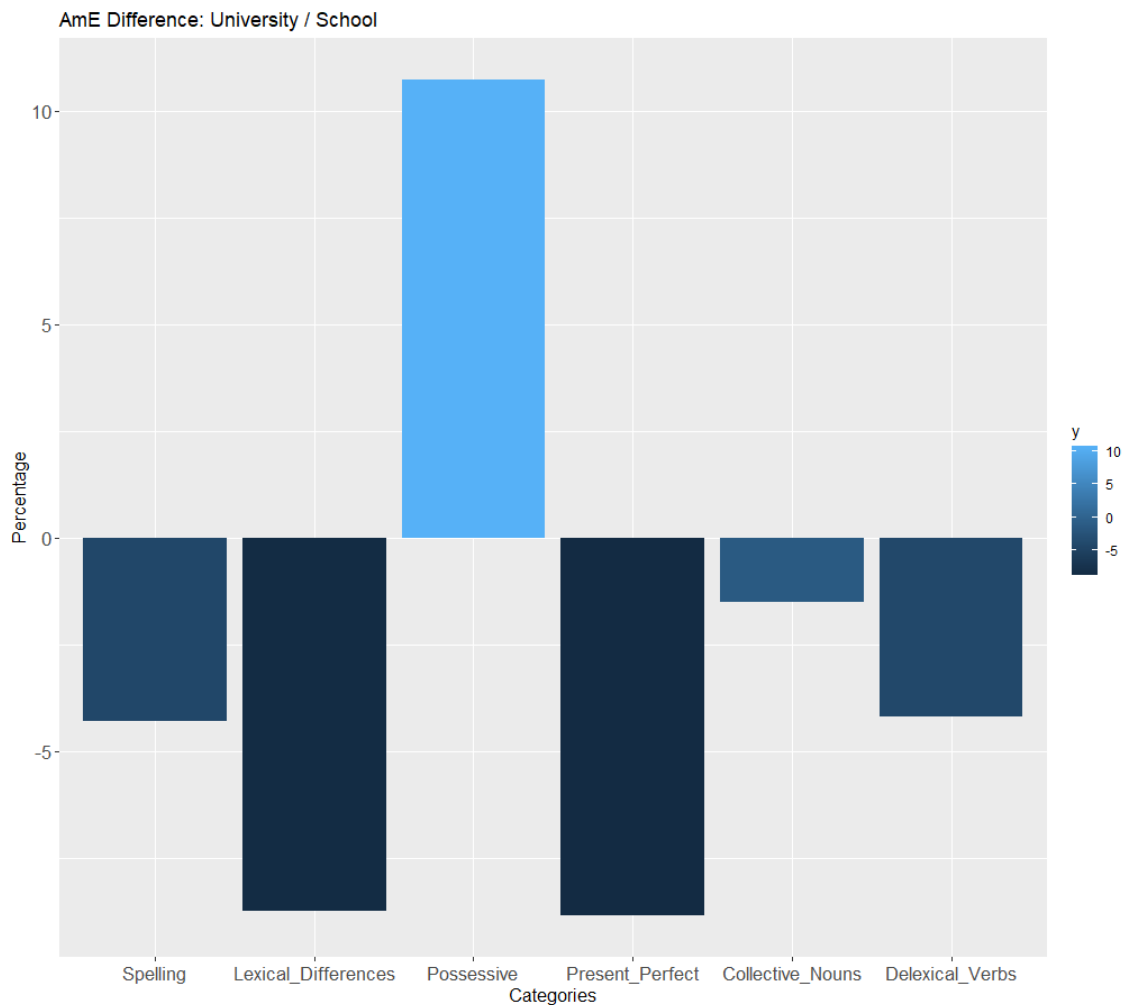
As can be clearly seen in the diagram, the three most frequently chosen options deemed to have influenced students' learning of English the most are watching television series and movies (63,5%), University/school (61,5%), and using social media (42,3%). What is clearly evident is that two of these three options include activities which are not-school related, and thus, it might mean that people who chose these options are more likely to have a preference for American English. This hypothesis comes from the idea that, as previously mentioned in chapters one and two, American English is the most widely spoken variety of English all over the world. It supposedly influences social media substantially more than British English, due to the fact that there are more native speakers of American English than of any other variety (Algeo, 2006). Moreover, a large proportion of the television series and movies that are produced in the world are American, spreading all around the world, becoming extremely popular globally and, thus, available to anyone (Buchanan, 2017).



Picture 13: Diagram of the overall preferences in percentage divided by categories. Made with R.

The diagram above is a general representation in percentages of the American preferences in each category. The categories are six in total: two for the vocabulary part – spelling and lexical differences – and four for the grammatical part – possessive, Present Perfect, verb agreement with collective nouns, and delexical verbs. Among the items to choose from, the students could select “unsure” as an option, but it was not taken into account in the diagram, meaning the comparison is made only between the American and British choices. It is visible that the categories in which there is a higher preference for American English are the categories of verb agreement with collective nouns, possessive, delexical verbs, and lexical differences.

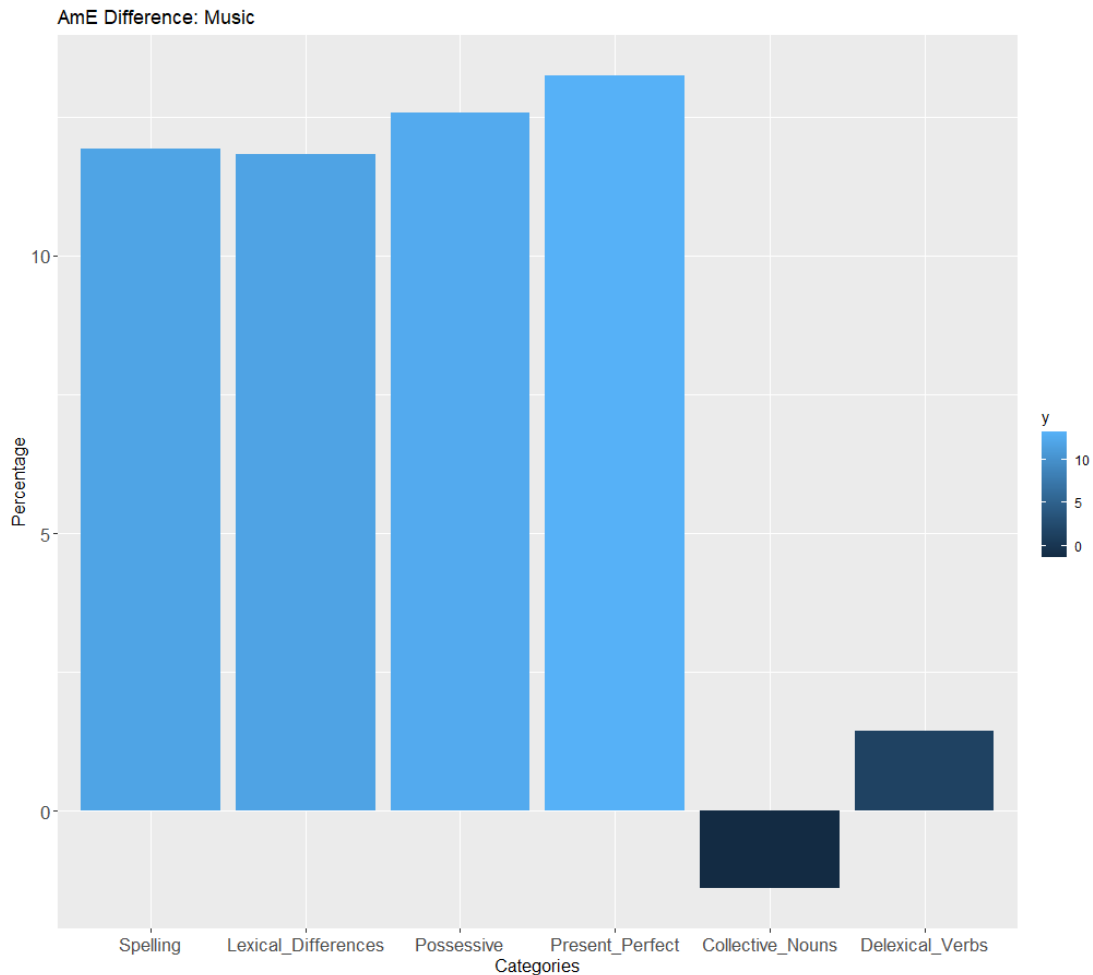
In the category of verb agreement with collective nouns, the American option has been chosen by almost every single student, meaning that “My family is coming for dinner tonight” is preferred to the British alternative with the second person plural “are”. The possessive category presents more than 75% of the participants to be leaning towards the “Do you have” structure rather than the “Have you got” one. For the delexical verbs, more than half of the students selected the American option, which means using the delexical verb *take* in “Take a look” over *have* in “Have a look”. And finally, the lexical differences category shows that more than half – around 55% of the participants – chose the American term over its British equivalent.



Picture 14: Diagram of the preferences in percentage divided in categories, based on the choice of University/School. Made with R.

Looking at the diagram above, it shows the preferences of American English in all of the six categories of those who selected University/school as one of their three options. Expectedly, these students have a preference for British English over American. This is likely to be due to British English being the variety taught in Europe and – more specifically – in Italy. The two columns that have more significance for British English are the ones of lexical differences and the use of Present Perfect. What this means is that when it comes to choosing between two words meaning the same object or concept, people who chose University/school prefer to use British vocabulary. The same occurs with the use of Present Perfect, which is justifiable since in Italy we are not only taught to use the Present Perfect whenever an action still has importance on the present, but also to use the *t*-inflection for the past participle, such as *dreamt*, *smelt*, and *burnt*.

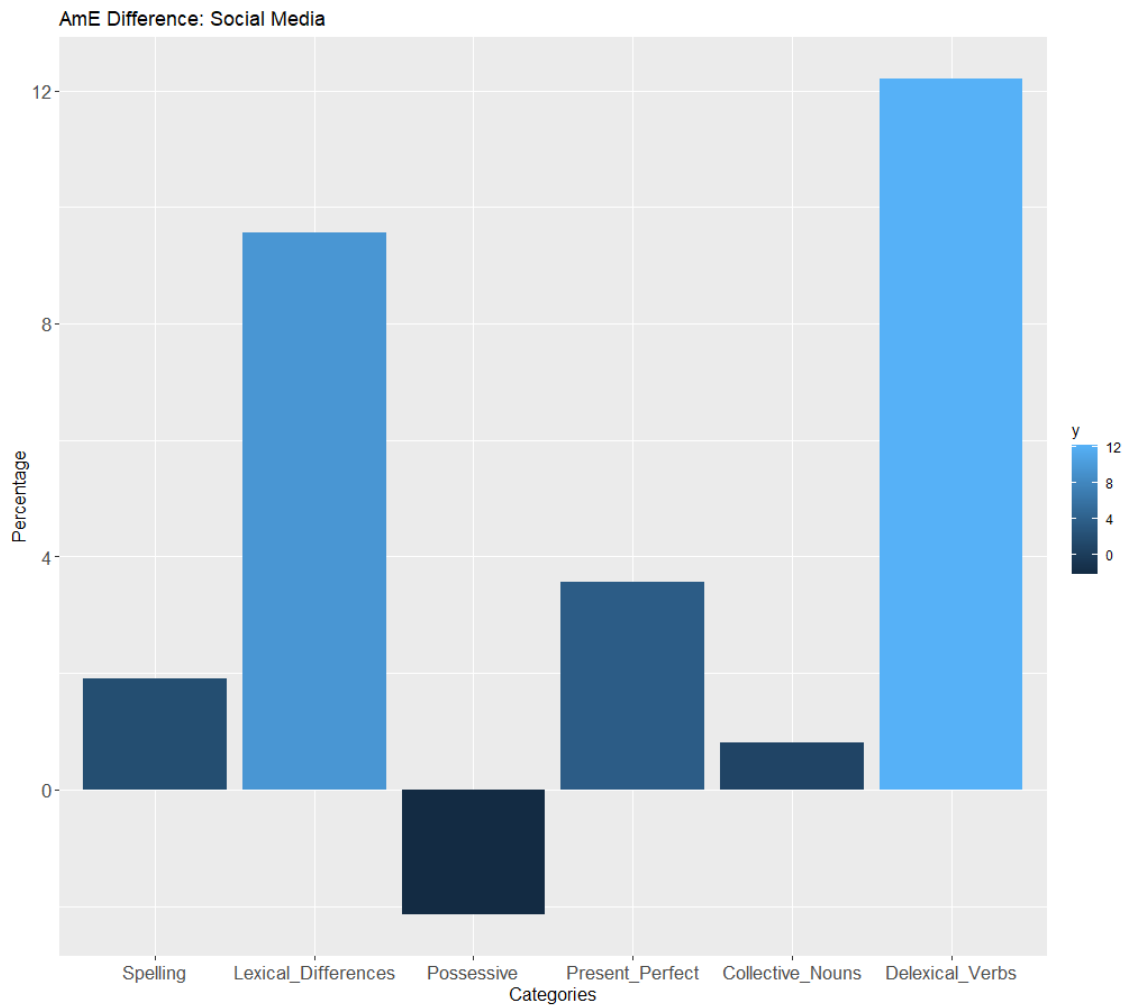
On the contrary, students who selected University/school among their preferences, despite being more influenced by British English, prefer the American alternative in the category of the possessive. This means that “Do you have a dictionary?” was selected more than “Have you got a dictionary?”. What could explain this phenomenon could be due to the American version being easier to remember for Italian students.



Picture 15: Diagram of the preferences divided in categories, based on the choice of music. Made with R.

The diagram above confirms, once again, what was already mentioned about American English being the most widely used variety, also in music. It is easily predictable that, like American movies, American popular music is listened to globally and more than English music. This can be said with no doubt thanks to the diagram, which shows that for four categories the participants who chose music to have influenced their learning of English the most prefer the American option over its British equivalent. It is evident that the American alternative is preferred when it comes to word spelling, –

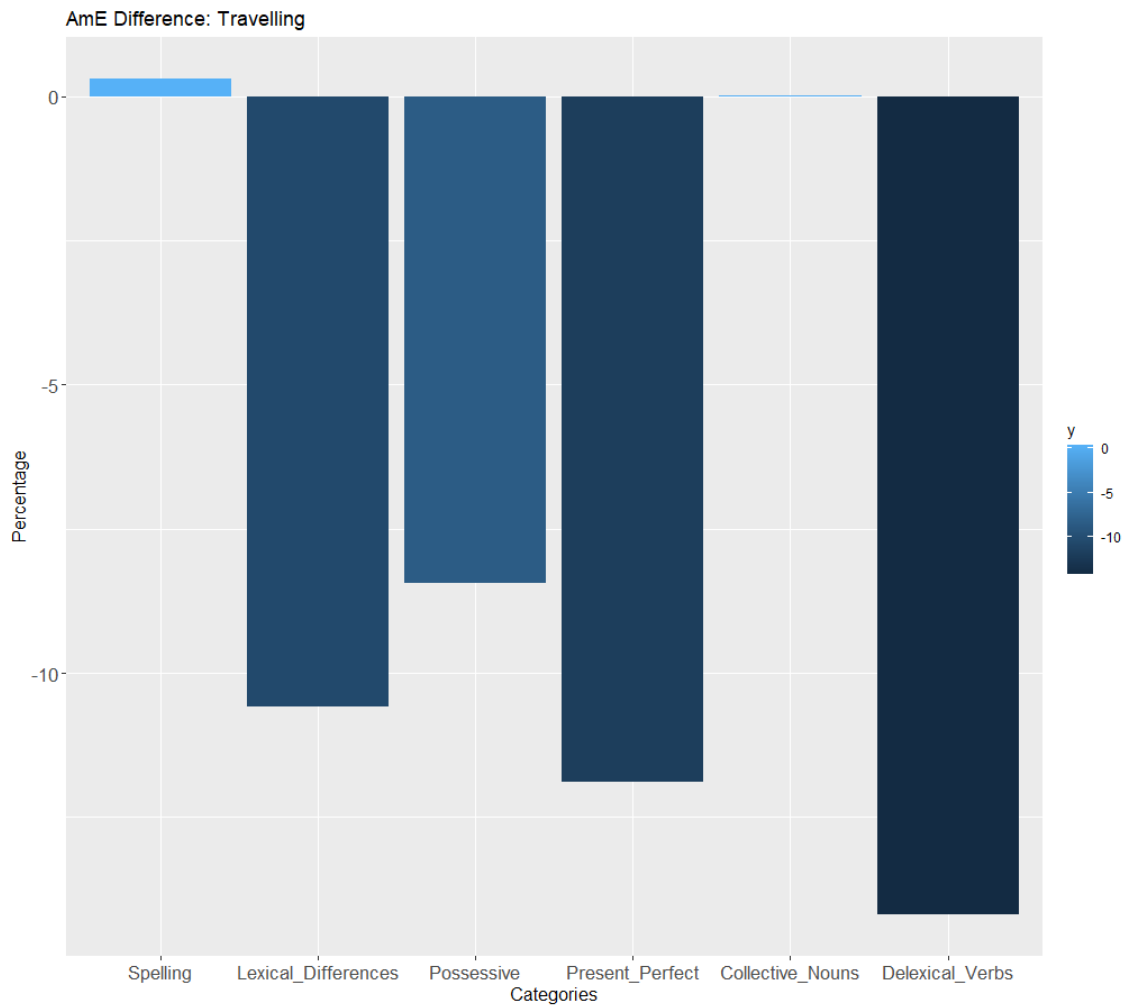
choosing *apologize*, *program*, and *color* over *apologise*, *programme*, and *colour* –, lexical differences – like choosing *truck* over *lorry*, *cookie* over *biscuit*, or *cotton candy* over *candy floss* –, possessive – choosing “Do you have” instead of “Have you got” –, and use of Present Perfect – “I have burned the letter” over “I have burnt the letter”.



Picture 16: Diagram of the preferences divided in categories, based on the choice of social media. Made with R.

In the diagram above, the two lexical and the four grammatical categories are analyzed with regard to the students who chose social media as one of their three options. Predictably, there is a preference for American English, especially for the lexical differences and delexical verb categories. This means that these students prefer to use words such as *store* and *pants* over *shop* and *trousers*. The same occurs with the delexical verbs *take* and *have*: students prefer to use “Take a shower” or “Take a nap” over “Have

a shower” or “Have a nap”. Once more, a higher use of American English is likely due to this variety being the one which globally influences social media users the most.



Picture 17: Diagram of the preferences divided in categories, based on the choice of travelling. Made with R.

Interestingly, when looking at the diagram which shows the preferences of those participants who chose travelling, the data is quite different. Apart from the spelling and the verb agreement with collective nouns categories, all the other categories show a preference in use of British English. The two categories of delexical verbs and the use of Present Perfect, followed by the lexical differences and possessive ones, definitely show that the British options are chosen more than the American ones, among those students who selected travelling. These results are not surprising at all considering that people in Europe are more likely to visit other countries in Europe, where – probably due to the proximity of England – British English still is the most used variety.

3.3.7 Conclusions

As expected, a good number of students who took part in the questionnaire appeared to have a preference for American English. The categories in which American English was the most chosen option are the category of verb agreement with collective nouns, possessive, delexical verbs, and lexical differences. The categories of spelling and Present Perfect present British terms as the most chosen over American English ones – resulting in being selected less than 50% in both these two categories.

What was unexpected where the preferences for each category which varied depending on the three options that the students had to choose from in the second task. The results brought by the social media and music were more expected, considering the importance that social media has today, with users from all over the world influencing one another. Music was also quite expected considering that most of the music present in the world is in English. The idea of constant influencing one another is also valid for music, where American English – specifically – is even used by non-native speakers in order to reach a wider audience. The travel option, on the other hand, was not expected to be influencing students that much towards British English. However, it is understandable considering that, being in Europe, it is both easier and more affordable to travel in the continent. Lastly, what was surprising and unexpected was seeing how students are quite aware of the differences in English varieties and their own personal preferences. Students who use and prefer the American terms, however, seemed to be more aware of their preferences with respect to their peers who use British English.

Conclusion

The American English language as we know it today has gone through many changes over the centuries. It was born from British English when the English men arrived in the New World and decided to colonize the territory. American English then became independent, just like its nation, borrowing from many different languages and enrich more and more its vocabulary. Today, it is one of the most spoken and known languages in the world, which can be both an advantage and disadvantage. English – American English, specifically – as a Lingua Franca can be problematic from the point of view of those small “endangered” languages which might, one day, completely disappear because of the giant language English is becoming. On the other hand, the English language allows people, scientists, and students to connect and keep in contact with one another by using a common language, breaking down the big barrier that a language can be.

American English, however, is not the only existing variety: British English is the other most known variety of English. Between British English and American English, however, many differences can be analyzed and studied. Lexical and grammatical differences have been analyzed, highlighting spelling difference in words such as *criticize* and *criticise*, or possessive differences such as using the “Do you have any butter?” structure over the “Have you got any butter?” one. These differences can be slightly controversial whenever an English speaker and an American speaker – native or not – find themselves talking with each other. Differences in meaning, for instance, can create humorous misunderstandings or just great confusion, for example in the case of “first floor” and “ground floor”.

The aim of my questionnaire and study on British and American English was not only to further highlight these differences that can be recognized between the two varieties, but also to shed light on awareness and preferences of Italian University students of English. The results of the questionnaire have been studied and statistically analyzed, presenting pie charts and diagrams connecting the students’ choices on preferences and awareness with the choices on lexical and grammatical differences. The students mainly performed as expected, supporting the expectations that there would have been preferences for American English over British English. As mentioned in the third chapter, the majority of students who selected non-school related options – music and social media mainly – to indicate what influenced their learning of English the most,

showed to have a preference for American English. This was explained and justified throughout the whole chapter by underlining the importance that American English has today on social media, TV series, movies, and music. These were, in fact, the categories in which students leaned more towards the American options, due to its great importance and popularity all over the world. Those students who selected University/school as one of the options which most influenced their knowledge of the English language also performed according to the expectations, showing a preference for British English – main variety taught in Italy.

As expected, vocabulary which was school-related and, in general, school-related topics were those in which the preference of British English was higher compared to other topics. *Trouser*, *wardrobe*, and *rubber*, for instance, had an almost higher choice percentage than any other word presented in the questionnaire. The grammatical category, however, was not expected and students did not perform according to the expectations. Many students selected the British option where it was not thought to happen. For instance, the category on possessive or on verb agreement with collective nouns was not expected to have the high percentages they received – 32,7% for “Have you got a dictionary?” against 67,3% of “Do you have a dictionary”. Perspective and points of view are surely personal and biased, likely being the reason why – having a preference for American English myself – some results came out unexpected and unforeseen.

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Riassunto in italiano

La lingua inglese presenta molteplici varietà o, come vengono definite da alcuni, dialetti. Tra queste varietà vi sono il britannico, l'americano, il canadese, l'australiano, il nigeriano e molte altre. Tuttavia, lo scopo di questa tesi è quello di analizzare ed evidenziare le differenze tra le due varietà di inglese più conosciute ed utilizzate al mondo: l'inglese britannico e l'inglese americano.

Prima di inoltrarsi nell'analisi di queste differenze, è necessario richiamare la storia della nascita della lingua inglese. L'inglese è una lingua cosiddetta germanica, che fu portata nelle isole britanniche dagli Angli, Sassoni e Juti tra il V e VI secolo. Ad aver avuto un enorme impatto sulla lingua inglese fu la conquista da parte dei Normanni nel 1066, che si insediarono nelle isole e portarono con sé la loro lingua. In questo periodo, il latino e il francese iniziarono a mescolarsi e a volte a prevalere sull'inglese presente nelle isole, causando una vera e propria conquista linguistica. A causa di questa conquista e dell'importanza che i Normanni (che parlavano francese) continuavano a guadagnare, sia politicamente che culturalmente, la lingua più prestigiosa in quel periodo era diventato il francese. L'influenza del francese in questo importante periodo portò ad una serie di prestiti nella lingua inglese di moltissime parole francesi, come, ad esempio, *estate*, *trouble* e *duty*.

Tuttavia, la lingua francese non rimase a lungo la lingua più parlata nelle isole britanniche. Nella seconda metà del XIV secolo l'inglese guadagna nuovamente il suo status di lingua ufficiale grazie a due principali motivi: la peste nera, che causò moltissime morti e la Guerra dei cent'anni (1337-1453), che vide vincitrice la Francia, riconquistando, dal dominio inglese, quei territori dove si parlava francese. L'inglese riguadagnò, così, il suo status di lingua ufficiale e iniziò a diffondersi per tutta l'Inghilterra con l'invenzione della stampa.

Nel 1492, Cristoforo Colombo sbarcò nel "nuovo mondo", provocando l'inizio di una delle conquiste e colonizzazioni più grandi e conosciute al mondo fino ad oggi. La prima colonia fu Jamestown, fondata nel 1607. Da qui, nei secoli a venire il numero di migrazioni fu sempre più elevato, con ondate migratorie provenienti da tutta l'Europa e, nel caso del commercio degli schiavi, dall'Africa. La lingua inglese si insediò nel nuovo territorio e, col tempo, iniziò a trasformarsi e a distinguersi sempre più da quella varietà

che arrivava dalle isole britanniche. Nel 1776, la Dichiarazione di indipendenza degli Stati Uniti d'America venne firmata, liberando definitivamente la nazione dal dominio inglese. L'indipendenza nazionale non era però sufficiente. Fu così che il lessicografo Noah Webster (1758-1843) decise che la lingua americana aveva bisogno di una rivoluzione: apportando numerose modifiche nell'ambito dello spelling di molteplici parole inglesi. Nacque, dunque, la lingua americana.

La lingua inglese, e maggiormente quella americana, è generalmente chiamata lingua franca, essendo una delle lingue più parlate al mondo che permette la comunicazione tra popolazioni e persone che non conoscono le rispettive lingue. L'inglese è la lingua più utilizzata al mondo, soprattutto su Internet e per le pubblicazioni accademiche, ma quale sarebbe il motivo? Dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale l'America divenne una potenza mondiale: tutto quello che aveva origine americana, dai prodotti alimentari, alla musica e dalla moda ai film, iniziò a diventare popolare anche nel resto del mondo, tutt'oggi influenzato dagli Stati Uniti. Questa globalizzazione che ha unito il mondo è vista, da un lato, come un processo positivo che ci permette di essere in contatto gli uni con gli altri e, dall'altro, è considerato decisamente negativo in quanto il mondo starebbe diventando sempre più "omogeneo". Inoltre, la posizione della lingua inglese come lingua franca ha causato la morte di molte lingue che, col passare dei secoli, si sono completamente estinte. Da un lato, alcuni studiosi pensano che questa globalizzazione porterà il mondo a diventare omogeneo, portando tutti ad avere la stessa cultura e a parlare la stessa lingua, dall'altro lato, invece, alcuni pensano che la globalizzazione ci dividerà sempre più, fino a rendere l'inglese solo una serie di molteplici dialetti.

Come già accennato, la lingua inglese ha preso in prestito termini e parole da moltissime lingue. Tra queste vi sono le lingue native americane, con le quali i colonizzatori entrarono in contatto arrivati nel nuovo mondo, il francese, che ha prestato moltissime parole sia durante la presenza dei Normanni in Inghilterra, sia durante il periodo di colonizzazione americano, lo spagnolo, maggiormente durante il periodo di colonizzazione americano e il tedesco, dovuto alle numerose ondate migratorie verso il nuovo territorio. Tuttavia, a rendere la lingua americana diversa dalla lingua inglese fu l'intervento del lessicografo Noah Webster che cambiò lo spelling di moltissime parole: da *publick* e *musick* a *public* e *music*, ad esempio. Questa "rivoluzione dello spelling" comportò il rimpiazzo di parole inglesi terminanti in -our, -re, -ce, e -se, che iniziarono a

terminare con -or, -er, -se, e -ze, come nel caso di *color*, *center*, *defense* e *realize*. Un'altra differenza che si nota tra l'inglese britannico e l'inglese americano è l'uso della doppia consonante l in parole come *enroll* e *fullness*, che, invece, presentano una singola l in britannico. Le differenze lessicali e grammaticali sono sicuramente di più e visivamente più evidenti. In ambito lessicale, vi sono molti termini per cui è necessario usare due parole diverse in britannico e americano per intendere lo stesso oggetto o concetto, come per esempio, *lorry* e *truck*, oppure *biscuit* e *cookie*. In contesto grammaticale, invece, le differenze che sono state analizzate sono il diverso modo di esprimere il possessivo, l'uso o non-uso del Present Perfect, l'uso del Past Participle, che può differire tra le due varietà, l'uso di delexical verbs, come il verbo *take* e *have*, e, infine, l'accordo verbale coi nomi collettivi.

Queste differenze tra l'inglese britannico e l'inglese americano sono state analizzate nello specifico in relazione alle preferenze degli studenti italiani dell'Università di Padova a cui è stato chiesto di compilare a un questionario. A partecipare sono stati 52 studenti, di cui i risultati sono stati analizzati per studiare le loro preferenze, usi e consapevolezza sulle diverse varietà di inglese. Precedenti studi sono stati fatti a riguardo, di cui i risultati hanno mostrato che grazie all'importanza dell'inglese americano dovuto al processo di globalizzazione, la maggior parte degli studenti ha mostrato di avere una preferenza per l'americano. Dal questionario fatto agli studenti italiani dell'Università di Padova, un risultato simili è previsto: anche la maggior parte degli studenti italiani avranno una preferenza per l'americano. Le aspettative vengono soddisfatte maggiormente nel contesto grammaticale. Per esempio, per il possessivo viene preferita la struttura americana "Do you have" alla struttura inglese "Have you got". La preferenza per l'americano è ancora più evidente nel caso della concordanza verbale coi nomi collettivi: "My family is coming for dinner tonight" è stato scelto dal 96,2% di partecipanti, contro il 3,8% che ha preferito "My family are coming for dinner tonight". Inaspettatamente, la maggior parte degli studenti ha preferito l'opzione britannica nel caso dello spelling, dunque le parole *dialogue* (94,2%), *theatre* (61,5%) e *colour* (75%), ad esempio, sono state scelte decisamente di più rispetto all'opzione britannica. Lo stesso è valido per le differenze su diversi termini che indicano la stessa cosa: *rubber* (69,2%), *trousers* (71,2%) e *University* (73,1%), termini britannici, sono stati selezionati

sostanzialmente di più rispetto alle opzioni americane *eraser* (21,2%), *pants* (26,9%) e *College* (9,6%).

I risultati ricavati dalla scelta tra termini britannici e americani sono stati analizzati in relazione con le preferenze che sono state ricavate all'inizio del questionario. I risultati hanno riportato che la maggior parte degli studenti che riconosce di avere una preferenza per l'inglese americano, al momento della scelta, preferivano l'opzione americana nella maggior parte dei casi. Al contrario, quegli studenti che non riconoscono di avere una preferenza per una specifica varietà di inglese nella maggior parte delle domande hanno selezionato l'opzione britannica. È interessante notare, invece, come coloro che hanno scelto l'Università come opzione che rispondeva alla domanda "Cosa credi abbia influenzato di più il tuo apprendimento dell'inglese?", generalmente, questi studenti hanno una preferenza per l'inglese britannico, ad esclusione della categoria sul possessivo. Per quest'ultima, infatti, la preferenza per l'inglese americano è decisamente elevata. La stessa analisi è stata fatta con l'opzione della musica e dei social media, per cui è evidente che la maggior parte degli studenti abbia selezionato più opzioni americane. Diversamente da quello che ci si poteva aspettare, invece, coloro che hanno selezionato l'opzione "travelling" presentano una preferenza per l'inglese britannico, specialmente nel caso dei delexical verbs, nell'uso del Present Perfect e nelle differenze lessicali.

La lingua inglese è, dunque, la lingua più parlata al mondo, dopo il Cinese Mandarino. Le sue varietà più conosciute e parlate sono il britannico e l'inglese che oggi sono particolarmente diverse dal punto di vista dello spelling, dei termini e della grammatica. Alcune differenze sono più evidenti di altre e gli studenti che decidono di imparare l'inglese non sempre ne sono consapevoli, come appena visto nel caso del questionario. L'inglese americano è estremamente diffuso e più parlato dell'inglese britannico grazie alla grande importanza acquisita negli anni, grazie anche al mondo di oggi estremamente interconnesso per via della globalizzazione.