

### The Britishisation of American English

based on an article by **Cordelia Hebblethwaite**

- 1 There is little that irks British defenders of the English language more than Americanisms, which they see creeping insidiously into newspaper columns and everyday conversation. But bit by bit British English is invading America too.
- 2 "**Spot on** – it's just ludicrous!" snaps Geoffrey Nunberg, a linguist at the University of California at Berkeley. "You are impersonating an Englishman when you say **spot on**. **Will do** – I hear that from Americans. That should be put into quarantine," he adds. And don't get him started on **the chattering classes** – its overtones of the elitist British class system make him quiver. It is not so much the masses who use these terms, says Geoffrey Nunberg, as arrogant snobs. Journalists and other media types, like advertising agencies, are the worst offenders, in his view. "The words trickle down rather than trickle up," he says.
- 3 His revulsion at the drip, drip, drip of Britishisms – to use an American term – crossing the Atlantic, is not shared by everyone. "I enjoy seeing them," says Ben Yagoda, professor of English at the University of Delaware. "It's like being a birdwatcher. If I find an American saying one, it makes my day." Last year Yagoda set up a blog dedicated to spotting the use of British terms in American English. So far he has found more than 150 – from **cheeky** to **chat-up** and **sell-by date**.
- 4 Kory Stamper, Associate Editor for Merriam-Webster, whose dictionaries are used by many American publishers and news organisations, agrees that more and more British words are entering the American vocabulary. For instance, there has been an increase, says Stamper, in the use of **ginger** as a way of describing someone with red hair. She sees this as clearly tied to the publication in the US of the first Harry Potter book. Dozens of words and phrases were changed for the American market, but **ginger** slipped through, as did **snog** (meaning "to kiss amorously") – though that has not proved so popular.
- 5 British TV shows like Top Gear, Dr Who, and Downton Abbey may be another reason more British words are slipping in, says Yagoda, as well as the popularity (and easy access via the internet) of British news sources, such as The Guardian, The Economist, The Daily Mail and the BBC. Still, the "balance of payments" language-wise is very much skewed the other way – with Americanisms used far more in Britain than the other way round, says Nunberg. We are not seeing a radical change to the

American language, says Jesse Sheidlower, American editor at large of the Oxford English Dictionary – rather a "very small, but noticeable" trend. And though a few people feel offended by the use of British words in American English, they are in the minority, he adds. "In the UK, the use of Americanisms is seen by some as a sign that culture is going to hell. But Americans think all British people are posh anyway, so no one would mind."

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## Tekst 5 The Britishisation of American English

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- 1p 19 Why does Geoffrey Nunberg (paragraph 2) dislike Britishisms?
- A He believes the people who use them think they are superior.
  - B He finds it very difficult to understand the people using them.
  - C He is afraid that American English will disappear because of them.
  - D He thinks American English is more flexible than British English.
- 1p 20 What is the function of paragraph 3?
- A to analyse the opinion presented in paragraph 2
  - B to counterbalance the opinion presented in paragraph 2
  - C to elaborate on the opinion presented in paragraph 2
  - D to illustrate the opinion presented in paragraph 2
  - E to support the opinion presented in paragraph 2
- 1p 21 What becomes clear about the first Harry Potter book in paragraph 4?
- A American dictionaries had to include typically British words as a result of its popularity.
  - B American readers found it difficult to relate to the British idea of romantic love.
  - C Kory Stamper was responsible for publishing a new version for American readers.
  - D Some English terms and expressions were replaced with American ones before it was published in America.
- 2p 22 Geef van elk van de volgende beweringen aan of deze wel of niet overeenkomt met de inhoud van alinea 5.
- 1 Britse televisieprogramma's hebben invloed op het taalgebruik in Amerika.
  - 2 Amerikanen vinden de kwaliteit van Britse kranten beter dan die van hun eigen kranten.
  - 3 Brits Engels en Amerikaans Engels groeien steeds verder uit elkaar.
  - 4 Amerikanen vinden Brits Engels intelligenter klinken dan Amerikaans Engels.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".
- “In the UK, the use of Americanisms is seen by some as a sign that culture is going to hell.” (alinea 5)
- 1p 23 Is al eerder in de tekst aangegeven dat er mensen ongelukkig zijn met de invloed van het Amerikaans op het Engels?  
Zo nee, antwoord "Nee". Zo ja, noteer het nummer van de alinea waarin dit is gebeurd.

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### Bronvermelding

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