

Cross-Dialectal Vocabulary Differences in English: Implications for International Communication and Misunderstanding”

Qian Chen

Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

*Corresponding author: jackieq.chen@mail.utoronto.ca

Abstract:

The following piece of research tends to explore the vocabulary differences between British and American English and their implications for international communication. Despite speaking the same language, the two dialects have developed different meanings for some terms, which could cause miscommunication when people from different cultures interact. In this study, the author concentrates on the example vocabularies of “Rubber,” “Pants,” and “Chips” and explains the distinctions between them in British and American English, as well as how these distinctions can lead to misunderstandings in casual speech. By examining the historical and cultural contexts behind these vocabulary variations, the research aims to provide insights into the relevant challenges and misunderstandings that may be caused in international communications. The author intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of how language differences can impact cross-cultural interactions through this research.

Keywords: English Language, International Communication, English Dialects.

1. Introduction

English, although not the most used language in the world by population, with the number of almost one billion natives as well as non-native speakers combined according to researches [1]. It is most definite a dominating *lingua franca* in terms of international communications [2]. And in the language of English, there is a wide span of dialects that spreads diversely in countless different English-speaking regions all over the world which many people call “accents”. American English and British English are the two primary examples. Examining these two dialects, one finds a plethora of specific instances of vocabulary that, although written similarly, have quite different meanings in American English than they do in British English. One particularly noteworthy example is the word “pants.” While in North America, underwear is more commonly referred to as bottoms or trousers, it is more common in the UK for people to refer to it as “pants.” In an increasingly globalized world, the communication across borders is more common than ever [3]. And the nuances of language play a critical role in people’s interactions. English, as a dominant global language has dialects, particularly British and American English, presenting notable differences that can lead to significant misunderstandings while engaging in communications. These differences are deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and societal con-

texts that have shaped the evolution of language in many distinct ways on both sides of the Atlantic. Vocabularies that may seem straightforward in one dialect can have an entirely different meaning in another, which would often lead to confusion, embarrassment, or even conflict in international communications. The author explains and looks at some word examples that could lead to misconceptions in the two distinct languages in the paragraphs that follow. She also makes some suggestions about the potential consequences of these examples for international communications. The goal of the study is to demonstrate how crucial linguistic and cultural knowledge is to reducing the difficulties caused by dialectal variations and, eventually, to more fruitful international interactions.

2. Vocabulary Examples and Relevant Misunderstandings

2.1 Examples of Vocabularies

There are countless examples of vocabularies that have different meanings when they are in British English versus when they are in American English. Consider a few words that are commonly used in people’s daily lives, such as the noun “rubber”. In the United Kingdom, a “rubber” is an eraser used to remove pencil marks from paper. When humans discovered that natural rubber could be used to “rub” away pencil marks, the term “rubber” was first used

to refer to an eraser in the 18th century. And ever then, “rubber” has been the accepted phrase to refer to an eraser. However, American English uses of the word “rubber” to mean an eraser are far less common. In North America, people often refer to erasers as “erasers” and refer to condoms as “rubber” [4]. Early in the 20th century, the rubber substance began to be associated with condoms, and the term has subsequently become slang.

Another vocabulary example here can be the word “pant” or its plural form “pants”. According to Cambridge English Dictionary, the term “pants” in the US English means “a piece of clothing that covers the lower part of the body from the waist to the feet, consisting of two cylinder-shaped parts, one for each leg, that are joined at the top”. In American English, “pants” can refer to various items such as trousers, jeans, shorts, and more [5]. In contrast to the US English language, the category “pants” in British English has significantly fewer types. A piece of “underwear covering the area between the waist and the tops of the legs” is referred to as “pants” in UK English. It comes from the word “pantaloon,” which refers to a style of snug clothing worn by men in the 1800s. Undergarments were referred to as “pants” for short over time. Although the word also originates from “pantaloon” in American English, it evolved to mean the outer garment rather than undergarments. This shift occurred in the 19th century as American fashion terminology developed independently [6].

The third example the author thought of while doing this research is the noun “chips” in terms of the dish of fried potatoes. A “chip” is a “long, thin piece of potato that is fried and usually eaten hot” in British English. The long, thin fried potatoes that are used as “chips” in “Fish and Chips,” one of the most well-known and well-liked dishes in the UK. which Americans like to refer to as “French fries.” However, in the US, “chips” refers to a completely different kind of fried potatoes. “A very thin, often round piece of fried potato, sometimes with a flavor added, sold especially in plastic bags” is what Americans refer to as a “chip.” which the British tend to refer to as “crisps.” According to documentaries, the British “chips” originated from Belgium. During the First World War, when the American soldiers came across them in and brought back the States from the French-speaking region of Belgium, they specifically called them French Fries due to the way it was cooked and the area it was from. While the same things are called “chips” in the UK. As they were small and looked like something fell from the vegetables. And the “chips” which British people often call “crisps” were actually originated in the USA. As a chef sliced the potatoes into tiny thin pieces after receiving complaints about his fries being too thick. He then called the sliced tiny pieces

“chips” as they were small pieces of potatoes which came off from bigger ones. And when the American “chips” were gradually gaining its popularity in the UK, British people realised that they already had something that are called “chips”, so since they are extremely crispy, the British people decided to call them “crisps” [7].

2.2 Relevant Misunderstandings in Daily Lives

With the differences in terms of meanings in the different dialects of the same vocabularies, various misunderstandings and misinterpretations can occur in daily conversations. Consider the following few examples:

The word “rubber” is often used in an educational setting, as erasers are often used in schools, classrooms and other similar places. Using the example of a US high school classroom, student A from the UK asks student B, a native American, for a “rubber.” Student B may be somewhat amused and extremely perplexed because they believe A is requesting a condom for the class. When student A realizes that an eraser is all they want to ask for, they may feel somewhat ashamed after knowing what an American English “rubber” means..

Same type of confusion can be caused for the vocabulary “pants”. Since the word “pants” in American English means regular bottoms but underwear in British English, just by saying “I have no pants on” can cause a lot of confusion and embarrassment in either dialect, and if the meaning is not properly conveyed or understood, it can easily become offensive to people.

“Chips” here would cause less embarrassments compared to the former two vocabularies, yet, consider a context of a restaurant. If a guest from the UK made an order of “chips” but received what they understood as “crisps”, or, an American customer ordered chips but was served what they see as “fries”, it would cause a good amount of miscommunication and frustrations for both ends of the customers as well as the restaurants.

3. Implications for International Communications and Suggestion

Taking all the above misleading examples upon to a global level, it is very much imaginable that misinterpretations in communications can cause a series of butterfly effects from a small misunderstanding to a large international communication issue. Such a butterfly effect could start with a small misunderstanding of a word, which would then spread false information to lead to an increasing number of incorrect interpretations and, ultimately, a misunderstanding snowball that would get larger and larger the more times this false information is spread. In cross-cultural cooperation, economic negotiations, and foreign

diplomacy, where accurate communication is crucial, it can have grave repercussions [8]. For instance, consider a minor linguistic misunderstanding in a diplomatic context, there can be cause tensions between nations when that simple misinterpretation create a chain reaction, a snowball of misunderstandings that are difficult to untangle. In an increasingly globalized world where intercultural communications occurs in all sorts of fields, and the amount of conflicts between people gradually uprises due to simple minor miscommunications, people should especially take this case more seriously and put effort in better the situation as well as reduce unnecessary disputes [9].

To overcome this issue of missteps in terms of interpretation in the cases of inter-cultural communications, it requires people to make clear and have a precise idea that a word they are going to use may carry a different meaning [10]. From this point on, ensure sure the people receiving the information are getting the correct ones when they communicate. Furthermore, information providers like dictionary publishers and institutions that teach English in all dialects ought to make it obvious to learners—or “knowledge receivers”—that the particular vocabulary they are acquiring may have distinct meanings in various dialects.

4. Conclusion

To summarize, the research explores the differences between British English as well as American English in terms of vocabulary meanings. The author focused on words such as “Rubber”, “Pants” and “Chips” and studied the variations of the meanings in both American and British English of each vocabularies. This paper addressed the pertinent misunderstandings of each term in a range of settings, such as casual discussions and business dealings. The author emphasizes how crucial it is to comprehend language variances in a global context, particularly with regard to international communications, by examining the historical and cultural roots of these variations in individual dialects. and offers advice on how to lessen the

likelihood of misunderstandings while enhancing clarity and efficacy in cross-cultural interactions. The suggestions the author expresses holds that educational sources or institutes such as schools as well as dictionary publishers, should identify the differences the same words can have in different dialects when teaching or explaining new vocabularies for learners. And that people should have a deeper awareness that same vocabularies in different dialects can contain totally different meanings, in order communicate and express their thoughts more accurately in a cross-cultural setting.

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