

remember that this does not mean an English that has been formally standardized by official action, as weights and measures are standardized, the term is useful and appropriate. In contrast with standard English, forms that are especially associated with uneducated (rather than dialectal) use are generally called NONSTANDARD.

Standard English

1.9 The degree of acceptance of a single standard of English throughout the world, across a multiplicity of political and social systems, is a truly remarkable phenomenon: the more so since the extent of the uniformity involved has, if anything, increased in the present century. Uniformity is greatest in orthography, which is from most viewpoints the least important type of linguistic organization. Although printing houses in all English-speaking countries retain a tiny element of individual decision (eg: *realize/realise, judgment/judgement*), there is basically a single spelling and punctuation system throughout: with two minor subsystems. The one is the subsystem with British orientation (used in most English-speaking countries other than the United States), with distinctive forms in only a small class of words, *colour, centre, levelled*, etc. The other is the American subsystem, with *color, center, leveled*, etc.

In grammar and vocabulary, standard English presents somewhat less of a monolithic character, but even so the world-wide agreement is extraordinary and – as has been suggested earlier – seems actually to be increasing under the impact of closer world communication and the spread of identical material and nonmaterial culture. The uniformity is especially close in neutral or formal styles of written English on subject matter not of obviously localized interest: in such circumstances one can frequently go on for page after page without encountering a feature which would identify the English as belonging to one of the national standards.

National standards of English

British and American English

1.10 What we are calling national standards should be seen as distinct from the standard English which we have been discussing and which we should think of as being supranational, embracing what is common to all. Again, as with orthography, there are two national standards that are overwhelmingly predominant both in the number of distinctive usages and in the degree to which these distinctions are institutionalized: American English <AmE> and British English <BrE>. Grammatical differences are few and the most conspicuous are known to many users of both national standards: the fact that AmE has two past participles for *get* and BrE only one, for example, and that in BrE either a singular or a plural verb may be used with a singular collective noun:

The government $\left\{ \begin{smallmatrix} \text{is} \\ \text{are} \end{smallmatrix} \right\}$ in favour of economic sanctions.

whereas in AmE a singular verb is required here.

Lexical differences are far more numerous, but many of these are familiar to users of both standards. Recent innovations tend to spread rapidly from one standard to the other. Thus while radio sets have had *valves* in BrE but *tubes* in AmE, television sets have *tubes* in both, and *transistors* and computer *software* are likewise used in both standards. Mass communication neutralizes differences; the pop music culture, in particular, uses a 'mid-Atlantic' dialect that levels differences even in pronunciation.

The United States and Britain have been separate political entities for two centuries; for generations, thousands of books have been appearing annually; there is a long tradition of publishing descriptions of both AmE and BrE. These are important factors in establishing and institutionalizing the two national standards, and in the relative absence of such conditions other national standards are both less distinct (being more open to the influence of either AmE or BrE) and less institutionalized.

One attitudinal phenomenon in the United States is of sociolinguistic interest. In affirming the students' right to their own varieties of language, many American educationalists have declared that Standard American English is a myth, some asserting the independent status (for example) of Black English. At the same time they have acknowledged the existence of a written standard dialect, sometimes termed 'Edited American English'.

Other national standards

Scots, with ancient national and educational institutions, is perhaps nearest to the self-confident independence of BrE and AmE, though the differences in grammar and vocabulary are rather few. On the other hand, the 'Lallans' Scots, which has some currency for literary purposes, has a highly independent set of lexical, grammatical, phonological, and orthographical conventions, all of which make it seem more like a separate language than a regional dialect.

Hiberno-English, or Irish English, may also be considered a national standard, since it is explicitly regarded as independent of BrE by educational and broadcasting services. The proximity to Britain and the pervasive influence of AmE, and similar factors mean, however, that there is little room for the assertion and development of a separate grammar and vocabulary.

Canadian English is in a similar position in relation to AmE. Close economic, social, and intellectual links along a 4,000-mile frontier have naturally caused the larger community to have an enormous influence on the smaller, not least in language. Though in many respects Canadian English follows British rather than United States practice and has a modest area of independent lexical use, in many other respects it has approximated to AmE, and in the absence of strong institutionalizing forces it would continue in this direction. However, counteracting this tendency in language as in other matters is the tendency for Canadians to