# Differences between North American English (NAE/GA) and Southern British English (RP)

### Resource 1: Preliminary test

*Translate the following words or sentences into English.*

| 1. Die Mannschaft hat einen neuen Trainer | 2. Der Bahnhof |
|---|---|
| | |
| 3. Er ist um die Ecke | 4. Hast du ein Auto? |
| | |
| 5. Sally kommt mit ihren Nachbaren gut klar *(get)* | 6. Wir brauchen uns nicht beeilen |
| | |
| 7. Welchen Weg sollten wir nehmen? | 8. Bitte schreib mir bald |
| | |
| 9. Der Kindergarten | 10. Bob nimmt ein Bad |
| | |
| 11. Sie ist im Krankenhaus | 12. Er -gestern- -sich- -verbrannt- |
| | |
| 13. Er hat wohl meine Nachricht nicht bekommen *(modal + -get my message-)* | |
| | |

*Read the following words with each other and decide if the <a> is pronounced /æ/ (b**a**t) or /ɑ/ (f**a**ther).*

**chance calf lance laughter rafter can pastor can't mast rancer rast cafter**

### Resource 2: Reading on British and American English differences

*Read the following article from the international newspaper* The Economist *and do the tasks below.*

## Let me know when you're good

Nov 3rd 2011, 20:45 by G.L. | NEW YORK | The Economist

"I SAY pr**ɒ**cess now," my friend said, with what I thought was a hint of pride.

"Really?" I replied. "I'm definitely still on pr**oʊ**cess."

One of the set-piece conversations that Britons living in America have with each other, besides how cold it is, how hot it is, or how interesting it is that people here don't talk about the weather all the time, is about which British words or pronunciations they have shed in favour of their American equivalents.

For many of us, the first to go are pronunciations so interchangeable that we can't even remember which version is which. For instance, *shedule* vs *skedule*, or *contROVersy* vs *CONtroversy.*

Next come words used so often that it becomes easier just to adopt local usage, especially if you suspect there'll be confusion otherwise. These include replacing *pavement* with *sidewalk* (what Americans call pavement we call tarmac; the Merriam-Webster dictionary doggedly insists that tarmac, or tarmacadam, is "a pavement constructed by pouring or spraying a tar binder..."), *holiday* with *vacation* (in America, it seems, the only kind of holiday is a tax holiday), *insect* with *bug* (if you want to eradicate bugs in Britain, you have to call in a specialised security firm) and *flat* with *apartment* (in America, the only thing small

enough to theoretically live in a flat would be an insect—sorry, a bug.)

Then there is intonation. Americans often turn a statement into a question. I went to Harvard? (This always sounds to my ear like false modesty: Harvard? Perhaps you've heard of it?) I work downtown? I took the subway to Brooklyn? But then there was a body on the line? And they had to evacuate us all on like Avenue four hundred? That kind of thing. The extent to which Brits lose their accents varies enormously—I've met some who have spent a decade or more in the States and still sound like they just finished doing a bit-part in *Eastenders* or *Coronation Street*—but even if they keep them, they often pick up American intonation without realising it.

Two things seem to be particular milestones in a Brit's Americanisation. One is calling the letter Z *zee* instead of *zed*. The other is replacing "I'm well" or "I'm fine" with "I'm good". Many grammar sticklers will insist that "I'm good" is wrong, as "good" is an adjective and should only be used to denote a quality of the person it's describing (ie, good as opposed to evil), while "well" and "fine" are (in this case at least) adverbs and describe the state that a person is in. Either way, the sense that "I'm good" is not merely different but actually wrong is no doubt what holds Brits back, which is why it signals a significant level of assimilation when they use it. (Myself, after two and a half years in the United States, I still waver.)

I still ask for water the British way at restaurants, but I often have to repeat myself. An American friend once reprovingly told me that "water" has an "r" at the end; I replied that it doesn't have a "d" in the middle. The conversation went no further.

Other changes will be specific to your environment. I worked for a while with teams making various things for the web, and at every meeting there were repeated references to the beta (ie, preliminary) versions. But *beeta* or *bayda*? Surrounded by people saying the latter, I found it impossible to stick to the former; but I also found it impossible to make what felt like a huge leap to the American pronunciation. I wound up adrift somewhere in the middle, with the American vowel (bay) and the British consonant (t instead of d), which just sounds ridiculous to everybody.

The o-as-in-hot *prɒcess* replacing the o-as-in-gold *proʊcess* (and likewise with *progress*) indicates a still deeper assimilation. Here there's no (or very little) risk of confusion, and the dissonance between them is a lot smaller than that between *beeta* and *bayda*. A Brit who uses *prɒcess*, I think, has either absorbed an American identity to a significant degree, or just has fewer hang-ups about maintaining a British one.

## TASKS

**Task 1:** *Scan the text for British and American English differences. Put them into two categories and list them. Can you add any more?*

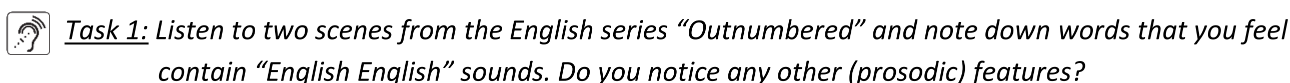
| | |
|---|---|
| | |

***Task 2:*** *Explain the following quotation to a person who has no experience with BE vs. AE: "An American friend once reprovingly told me that "water" has an "r" at the end; I replied that it doesn't have a "d" in the middle".*

***Task 3:*** *Summarize the situation he experienced at work. Can you think of other "intermediate forms"?*

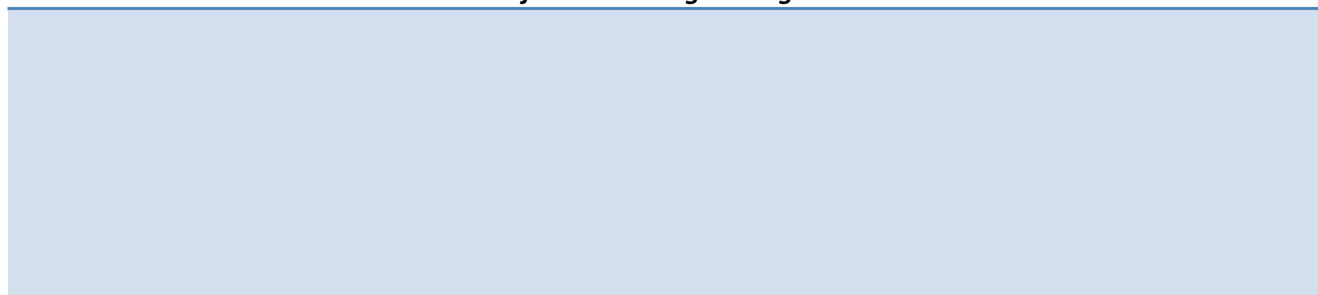
*Would you agree that adopting a dialect goes hand in hand with "cultural identification"? Or is it simply language and communication?*

### Resource 3: Vowels & diphthongs (with phonetic symbols)



*Task 1: Listen to two scenes from the English series "Outnumbered" and note down words that you feel contain "English English" sounds. Do you notice any other (prosodic) features?*

***Features of Southern English English***



*Task 2.1: Now look at the AE vowel list below. Which sounds are different in the two varieties, and how?*

*Task 2.2: Do you notice any systematic differences, as in phonological distribution rules?*

| Vowels & diphthongs | | | | | Further diphthongs | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| i | as in | 'see' | /si/ | (siy) | ɜr | as in | 'her' | /hɜr/ | |
| ɪ | as in | 'sit' | /sɪt/ | | ər | as in | 'letter' | /lɛtər/ | (lɛɒər) |
| eɪ | as in | 'say' | /seɪ/ | (sey) | | | | | |
| ɛ | as in | 'pen' | /pɛn/ | | aɪ | as in | 'buy' | /baɪ/ | (bay) |
| æ | as in | 'pad' | /pæd/ | | aʊ | as in | 'now' | /naʊ/ | (naw) |
| | | | | | ɔɪ | as in | 'coin' | /kɔɪn/ | (koyn) |
| u | as in | 'too' | /tu/ | (tuw) | | | | | |
| ʊ | as in | 'put' | /pʊt/ | | ir | as in | 'fear' | /fir/ | |
| oʊ | as in | 'go' | /goʊ/ | (gow) | er | as in | 'bear' | /ber/ | (beər) |
| ɔ | as in | 'law' | /lɔ/ * | | ʊr | as in | 'cure' | /kjʊr/ | |
| ɑ | as in | 'pot' | /pɑt/ | | ɔr | as in | 'for' | /fɔr/ | |
| ʌ | as in | 'but' | /bʌt/ | | | | | | |
| ə | as in | 'about' | /ə'baʊt/ | | | | | | |

* merged with /ɑ/ in many regions (/lɑ/ - law), but not in absolutely every word (e.g. /mɔθ/ - moth)