



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

# **TRABALLO FIN DE GRAO**

**GRAO EN LINGUA E LITERATURA INGLESA**

**MODERN AMERICAN ENGLISH  
GRAMMAR: A PRELIMINARY  
CORPUS-BASED STUDY**

Autora: María David Souto

Titor: Ignacio M. Palacios Martínez

Curso académico 2018 / 2019

Convocatoria de xuño



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A handwritten signature in blue ink is located at the bottom center of the page. The signature is stylized and appears to be the name 'David Souto'.

CUBRIR ESTE FORMULARIO ELECTRONICAMENTE

**Formulario de delimitación de título e resumo**  
**Traballo de Fin de Grao curso 2018/2019**

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SOLICITO a aprobación do seguinte título e resumo:

**Título:**

**Modern American English Grammar: A Preliminary Corpus-based Study**

**Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:**

Most of the existing literature has drawn our attention on the differences between British and American English by referring to contrasts in their pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary. However, the grammar of these two varieties has been very little considered from a contrastive and usage-based perspective.

This study is thus intended to discuss some main features of the grammar of modern American English, namely the use of the present perfect versus the simple past, some of the auxiliary and semi-auxiliary verbs, the frequency of question tags, the question of agreement with collective nouns, the use of some prepositions, etc.

To this end, I will firstly review the main works in the field and I will next refer to the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to investigate the actual use of these features and eventually compare them with their British English counterparts with the aid of the British National Corpus (BNC) since they can be regarded as comparable corpora.


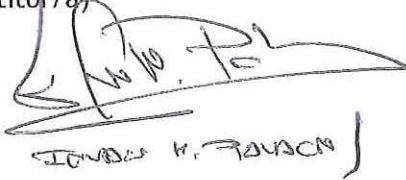
The selection of the American English variety can be justified by the fact that the American culture has to a large extent been imposed through cinema and television in such a way that it can be considered as the most influential variety in the world today.

The results obtained will hopefully allow me to arrive at some interesting conclusions and to see up to what extent the description of the grammar of American English corresponds with its actual use.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Most of the existing literature has drawn our attention on the differences between British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) by referring to contrasts in their pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary. However, the grammar of these two varieties has been very little considered from a contrastive and usage-based perspective.

This study is thus intended to discuss some main features of the grammar of modern American English, namely the use of the present perfect versus the simple past, some of the auxiliary and semi-auxiliary verbs, the frequency of question tags, the question of agreement with collective nouns, the use of some prepositions, etc.

To this end, I will firstly review the main works in the field and I will next refer to the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to investigate the actual use of these features and eventually compare them with their British English counterparts with the aid of the British National Corpus (BNC) since they can be regarded as comparable corpora.

The selection of the American English variety can be justified by the fact that the American culture has to a large extent been imposed through cinema and television in such a way that it can be considered as the most influential variety of English in the world today.

The results obtained will hopefully allow me to arrive at some interesting conclusions and to see up to what extent the description of the grammar of American English corresponds with its actual use.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Languages evolve and change over the years; their vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling and grammar are transformed thanks to the external and internal factors that their speakers suffer.

English, known as the most important and widespread language in the world today, has developed in such a way that at the moment has multiple varieties that differ among them depending on factors like the geographical or the social situation of the speakers. Despite this diversity, the two most widely studied varieties are the British English (BrE) and the American English (AmE), since they are the ones with the largest number of native speakers and those chosen to be studied by foreign learners. But what are the differences between these two?

With this work I want to focus on the main features of modern American grammar, even comparing them with their British equivalents. It is necessary to know that the biggest differences between American and British English stand out in their pronunciation, in the vocabulary and to a lesser extent in the spelling. However, even though in the field of grammar many distinctions are not acknowledged, I will exemplify several cases with the use of the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). The use of the present perfect versus the simple past, some of the auxiliary and semi-auxiliary verbs or the question of agreement with collective nouns are some of the features that I will analyse in order to illustrate in what context and how often they are used by speakers.

But before delving into the main objective of the work, it will be essential to explain the concept of language variation in order to go deeper into the variation of English. To continue I will make an approach to the concept of New Englishes, getting into those models that try to account for the different varieties of English.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Language variation

Since English is the most widespread language in the world today, it is impossible to expect everyone to speak and write it in the same way. English tends to vary depending on the linguistic and social environment and its different variations can be seen in pronunciation, vocabulary, spelling and grammar.

It can be complicated to understand the difference between *language*, *dialect*, *accent* and *variety*, that is why I consider they require an explanation. *Language* is a complex communication system, either spoken and written, that serves speakers to relate to each other and that normally characterises the population of a certain territory. *The dialect* and *the accent* are part of the language since they share the same structure. While a dialect is identified by the use of different words and syntactic structures, the accent is distinguished by the different pronunciations of the speakers according to their country, area, or social class. These two terms can have pejorative connotations. If standard English with a Received Pronunciation (a variety spoken in the United Kingdom, especially in its capital city London) is used, the speaker is considered most cultivated, as well as socially superior and even more elegant compared to other speakers who use other dialect or accent. So to avoid these prejudices, *variety* is used to illustrate the different variations of a language (Bauer, 2002: 3).

“A standard language is a variety of language that is used by governments, in the media, in schools and for international communication. There are different standard varieties of English in the world, such as North American English, Australian English and Indian English. Although these standard varieties differ in terms of their pronunciation, there are few differences in grammar between them.”

(Carter, McCarthy, Mark and O’Keeffe, 2011: 3)

### 2.2. New Englishes

Crystal (2003: 3) asserts that “a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognised in every country.”. English is a global language, a language which not only has millions of native speakers, but which is also considered a lingua franca that serves as a means of international communication. “A lingua franca is a specific kind of language

contact: lingua francas are vehicular languages, or contact languages, used when speakers do not share a first language.” (Mauranen, 2012: 8).

If we refer to the written features, it can be understood that there is only one standard form; however, as regards speaking there are many variations in terms of spelling, grammar and vocabulary. *New Englishes* or *World Englishes* is the name that these varieties have received. This term was created in the 80s by linguists who were aware of the changes that English was suffering at a constant rate and the plural is used to highlight the changes to which the language has been subjected and to leave behind the most purist currents where English was subject to standardisation and some certain status.

As Professors Mesthrie and M. Bhatt explain (2008: xii): “The major impact of international migration and globalisation in the late twentieth and current centuries has made World Englishes an essential part of modern culture and sociology.” In this same work they classify the different ways in which the rise of English can be studied, for example, as a macro-sociolinguistic topic *language spread* detailing the ways in which English and other languages associated with colonisation have changed the linguistic ecology of the world. One of the authors that most defends the importance of colonization when these varieties are studied is Edgar W. Schneider who assures (2007: 3) that “By and large, the relevant linguistic developments are products of the colonial expansion of the British Empire from the late sixteenth to the twentieth century.”,

Mesthrie and M. Bhatt (2008: 24) also study it as a topic in political and ideological studies, linguistic imperialism that focuses on how relations of dominance are entrenched by, and in, language and how such dominance often comes to be viewed as part of the natural order; or even as a topic in cultural and literary studies concerned with the impact of English upon different cultures and literatures, and the constructions of new identities via bilingualism

It was therefore necessary to find some cover terms for all varieties of English. Some main classifications have been suggested to categorise the varieties of worldwide English into broader types, with both looking at the functional and political role of English in a given country, and both assuming three classes.

### ***2.2.1. First models***

Tom McArthur was one of the first linguists to theorize about the classification of new varieties in English. He explains what he understands as new varieties.

McArthur uses a wheel model divided into three parts, a feature that will be shared by future models. The central part includes the idealization of English, that is, the use of perfect English and is called *World Standard English*. The following circle reflects the use of regional varieties or varieties that are still being developed and being studied. And finally, the outermost layer collects those most unusual varieties that in a way can resemble those of the previous level.

Although at the time this model could be really clear, some problems of congruence can be found since the second circle, where the varieties are collected according to the geographical area of which they are characteristic, combines three very different linguistic groups among them .

Mesthrie and M. Bhatt also pick up this incongruity in their work (2008: 27); on the one hand, in this second level the countries *English as a Native Language / ENL* appear, where English is the mother tongue of most of the population, countries like Britain, the US, or Australia. In turn, it also includes countries *English as a Second Language / ESL* such as Nigeria, India or Singapore among others, where English occupies a fundamental position in official institutions, education or the media despite having another native language. These societies tend to be characterized by their bilingualism. Finally, McArthur also includes the countries *EFL / English as a Foreign Language* where English is not recognized as the official language of the nation but it is used in fields highlighted by its internationality and its novelty such as technology or science as Egypt or Israel.

### **2.2.2. A language in circles**

Braj Kachru's model, which appeared in *English Today* in 1988 and which has probably become the most important one, develops a thought about Englishes more broadly and differently. Kachru (1985) classifies the speakers in each group according to the process of acquisition of the language and the function of English in society.

Native speakers located in three different geographical zones are classified in the *inner circle*. There are countries where English is the mother tongue of the speakers both in the American, as in the European continent; and in the southern hemisphere. The country with the largest number of native English speakers is the United States, where 215 million speakers live, out of the 320 million that can be classified in this group. This does not mean that it is the only language spoken in these countries, many of them are bilingual countries like Canada, or countries where English is of minority use as in South Africa. What all these speakers born in this inner circle share is that English is used to a greater or lesser extent but they know it and use it since they were born.

In the *outer circle* countries that at some time in history were part of the British colonies are classified, the language was not completely adopted there, leaving it only for administration, education and the media as a second language. In countries like India, where there are many languages, English is used as a lingua franca to communicate.

It can still be difficult to make a distinct between the *Outer Circle* and the *Expanding Circle* but the experts classify in this last group those English speakers who learn it as a foreign language because they consider it as lingua franca.

### **2.2.3. *Schneider Model***

According to Edgar W. Schneider (2007), the theorization of the new Englishes has only managed to group the countries where English is present and determine the role that language plays in these societies. On the contrary, this linguist proposes a new theory that explains the evolution of Postcolonial English throughout the world,; according to this theory, and despite the differences that can be given among the varieties depending on their geographical location, all these New Englishes experience the same series of phases that occur due to certain extralinguistic events. Although he also clarifies that each country can be found in different phases of the cycle.

Schneider does not share the same opinion as other authors such as the one mentioned in the previous section, Professor Braj Kachru, since he believes that considering different varieties as unique linguistic subjects that have undergone changes due to specific situations is an error. And despite making clear that colonization and other historical facts cannot be ignored when studying linguistic changes, he presents this model that defends the existence of a cycle that all languages experience when new varieties arise.

According to this theory, the development of the New Englishes is related to the evolution of the identity of speakers in a colonial environment.

First, reference must be made to the fact that it is in the changes of identity suffered by the colonized inhabitants and in how these changes can be related to the linguistic variations through a sequence of five stages that results in a new variety of the language is what this Schneider theory is based on. These phases are:

- Phase 1. *Foundation*: This is the first stage where English, taken by the settlers, appears in a new territory of non-English speaking. In this stage the differences between the individuals are

clear.

- Phase 2. *Exonormative stabilization*: After a process of adaptation the colonies are established and what was believed to be a temporary stay becomes a settlement, which leads to the use of English as a language for the most important institutions, such as administration or legislation. From this moment the natives try to adapt and also begin to carry out mixed marriages. Also the language begins to move towards the local variety as it acquires some vocabulary. This is the case of Indian English since India is a country where this language was associated with colonization and now it is associated with progress, which is why its inhabitants have to adapt.

- Phase 3. *Nativization*: Special attention must be paid to this phase since Schneider considers it the most important and the one that gives rise to the change. The difference between indigenous and settlers disappears at this point and both of them feel native and belong to the same place. Although English has to be acquired by all the inhabitants, each time they adapt more borrowed vocabulary, as well as the phonology adapts and the syntax of the native language adapts to English. This phase can be exemplified by Ugandan English where it is an official language and where English is affected to a large extent by the Swahili dialects.

- Phase 4. *Endonormative stabilization*: At this point there is already a stage of cultural self-reliance, which causes the desire for independence since the country is considered a nation by its inhabitants. Here the author speaks of a new recognizable and homogeneous linguistic variety. The first British colony on the African continent was the one that today is called The Republic of South Africa, they speak a variety of English very characteristic and solid influenced by the Afrikaans language.

- Phase 5. *Differentiation*: In the final phase the nation is established and is free both politically and culturally and therefore is also linguistically independent. Undoubtedly, this is the case of American English.

Continuing with the second part of the theory, Professor Schneider explains the importance of the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized and how the story varies depending on the point of view of each one. He himself names them as *threads*, “I call the settlers’ perspective the “STL strand” and the experience and situation of the indigenous populations the “IDG strand” (Schneider, 2007: 31). He also relates it to the notions of *ENL* and *ESL* mentioned above, since the settlers used to be native speakers of English while the indigenous people had to acquire the language as a second option due to the power of settlers exercised on them.

Both groups are distinguished due to the circumstances under which they acquire English, while the colonists inherit this language from father to children and it is transferred without fractures, the colonists must learn it gradually under the mandate of a dominant power, but it is precisely the differences that the author wants to highlight, but the similarities that both groups share and that lead them to share the same variety. Both the *STL strand* and the *IDG strand* share space, time and circumstances which leads to uniformity.

### **2.3. The pronunciation, vocabulary and spelling of American English**

Unlike grammar, there are many differences between American English and British English in the pronunciation and in the vocabulary, but above all in the spelling. This section will refer to the main differences between American English and British English as regards these features; attention will be paid to grammar in the next section

The differences in the spelling are mainly due to the desire felt by the inhabitants of the colonies to mark a break with the British crown and create their own identity (see section 3). While the differences that occur between the varieties in the vocabulary are due to the influence of other languages on American English, as well as the need to invent new words to describe things that were not previously known.

Many of the changes in spelling of American English have to do with the endings of words since there is a tendency to shorten the construction of the syllables due to the pronunciation, as, for example, in the following cases:

Those words that in British English end in *-re* in American English they do in *-er*, as *fibre/fiber*, *metre/meter* or *centre/center*.

There are also words that end in *-ence* in British English, while in the American English they end in *-ense*, as are the cases of *offence / offense*, *pretence / pretense* or *defence / defense*.

British English words ending in *-ogue* frequently end in *-og* in American English, for example *analogue / analog*, *catalogue / catalog* or *dialogue / dialog*.

American English also shortens and spells *-or* the endings of those words whose ending is spelled *-our* in British English as *neighbour / neighbor*, *flavour / flavor* or *colour / color*.

As for the verbs there are also two quite outstanding differences. The change of the British form *-ise* by the American form *-ize* is reflected in the endings of verbs like *apologise / apologize*, *organise / organize* or *recognise / recognize*.

When the suffix *-ing* is added to the verbs, the final consonant is duplicated in British English, while in English it is simplified and the consonant is not duplicated, for example: *fuelling / fueling*, *travelling / traveling* or *modelling / modeling*.

In British English those words that come from the Latin and the Greek preserve their original spelling *-oe-* and *-ae-*, while in American English some of these words are simplified and written with a *-e-*, words like *anaemia / anemia*, *gynaecology / gynecology*, *leukaemia / leukemia* or *paediatric / pediatric*.

As Svartvik and Leech explain (2006 : 155), there are particular cases of words that are spelled in different ways and which do not follow any rule, words like *pyjamas / pajamas*, *gauge / gage* or *mould / mold*.

As for the lexicon, Svartvik and Leech (2006: 153) refer to the words of Bill Bryson that says that of the 600,000 words that the *Oxford English Dictionary* collects, these two countries only differ in the use of some 4000 words, so they are not so many differences so that speakers cannot get to understand each other. Still, this list of words is decreasing since some of the words that were previously only found in American English are now also used in British English as, for example, *movie*, *jerk*, *cool* or *guys*.

Even so, many examples can be found. Both varieties share words but with different meaning, as is the case of *pants*; in American English it refers to the article of clothing that in British English is called *trousers*; the same word in the British variety means underwear. However, there are more cases in which different words mean the same as *flat* (BrE) / *apartment* (AmE), *fringe* (BrE) / *bangs* (AmE), *crisps* (BrE) / *chips* (AmE) or *nappy* (BrE) / *diaper* (AmE).

Svartvik and Leech point out (2006: 159) that many of the differences occur in different semantic fields such as transportation, for example *petrol* (BrE) / *gas* (AmE), *number plate* (BrE) / *license plate* (AmE) or *lorry* (BrE) / *truck* (AmE). There are also differences in the technological semantic field; this can be seen in words such as *lift* (BrE) / *elevator* (AmE), *underway* (BrE) / *subway* (AmE) or *mobile phone* (BrE) / *cell phone* (AmE). Finally, linguists also highlight the differences of vocabulary in education and in everyday life with examples such as *biscuits* (BrE) /



*cookies* (AmE), *cinema* (BrE) / *movies* (AmE), *comprehensive* (BrE) / *public school* (AmE) or *university* (BrE) / *college* (AmE) (2006: 161).

As regards pronunciation, there are also some differences that should be mentioned. The standard pronunciation of British English is called *Received Pronunciation* (RP), although it is also known as *Oxford English* or *BBC English*. In turn, the term *General American* (GA) refers to the American pronunciation. As the United States is a country so geographically wide and with so many inhabitants there are different accents but the GA picks up the accent that is normally used in movies and TV series.

Probably the most prominent difference between The Received Pronunciation and the General American is undoubtedly the use of the rhotic accent. While American English is rhotic, British English is not. It is called rhotic accent to the way in which the *-r* is pronounced after a vowel as for example in words like *hard* / *hɑ:d* / (RP) - / *hard* / (GA) , *bird* / *bɜ:d* / (RP)- / *bɜrd* / (GA) and *here* / *hɪə* / (RP) - / *hir* / (GA). In GA the sound / r / is pronounced in all cases, although sometimes the sound is not so strong. It should also be noted that there are exceptions such as the accent of the city of New York, which is non-rhotic and which preserves, in this way, the original accent of the settlers.

Another clear and well-known difference is the pronunciation of the t-sound between vowels. On the one hand, the alveolar stop / t / is pronounced as a *quick* / d / in words like *daughter* / *'dɔrər* / or even as a / r / in words like *computer* / *kəm'pjʊrər* / in GA. On the other hand, in RP the same sound between vowels is pronounced more thickly as in *water* / *'wɔ:tə* /.

In regard to the pronunciation of certain vowels there are also several differences. The most remarkable ones are the changes of diphthongs / əʊ / and / æ /, and the changes of the sound / ju: /. In GA the diphthong / æ / corresponds to the RP sound / ɑ: / in words such as *after* / *'ɑ:ftə* / (RP) - / *'æftər* / (GA), *path* / *pa:θ* / (RP) - / *pæθ* / (GA) or *dance* / *da:ns* / (RP) - / *dæns* / (GA). Continuing with the changes in the diphthongs, in American English the words like *go* / *gəʊ* / (RP) - / *gou* / (GA), *no* / *nəʊ* / (RP) - / *noʊ* / (GA) or *both* / *bəʊθ* / (RP) - / *boʊθ* / (GA) are pronounced using the diphthong / ou / instead of the diphthong / əʊ / as it is done in British English. Finally, the British sound / ju: / corresponds to the American / u: / as, for example, in words like *new* / *nju:* / (RP) - / *nu* / (GA), *due* / *dju:* / (RP) - / *du* / (GA) or *resume* / *ri'zju:m* / (RP) - / *ri'zum* / (GA).

To conclude, it can also be noted that there is a difference in the accentuation of words. American English preserves the original pronunciation of words borrowed from French by

accentuating the last syllable while British English accentuates the first as in the words *adult*/ 'ædʌlt / (RP) - / ə 'dʌlt / (GA), *detail*/ di:teɪl: / (RP) - / dr 'teɪl / (GA) or *buffet*/ 'bʌfɪt / (RP) - / 'bʌfət / (GA).

As said before, the General American makes reference to the most standard American variety, the one that more is used in movies for example. But as in all languages, the variety of American English has its own dialects and varieties. According to Wolfram and Schilling (2016: 2) a dialect is the variety of a language that is spoken by a group of people who share certain characteristics such as social group, age or geographical location. Considering this last aspect, William Labov, Sharon Ash, and Charles Boberg wrote *The Atlas of North American English: Phonetics, Phonology and Sound Change* (2006), a study that gives a general description of the dialects of the English of North America based on the pronunciation models, that is, the accents. Thanks to the interviews conducted by these linguists, several dialectal regions can be defined, such as the New York City dialect, which was mentioned before because it is not rhotic.

#### **2.4. The grammar of American English**

It is a fact that there is something similar to an English World Standard which is used in more formal situations but it is obvious that if attention is paid to more local varieties and especially in contexts where conversational English predominates, many more differences will appear and not only in pronunciation and spelling, which are the majority, but also in grammar, which is what concerns us here.

Although in the American grammar is where less differences with British English are found, many of them arise due to the different dialects that the settlers spoke when they arrived in the new continent, as well as because in a certain part these changes were affected by the amalgam of languages that existed in the colonies. Even so, it should be mentioned that, although it is usually thought that American English is more innovative than British English, in some cases they differ because American English still retains the most conservative forms.

This is known as *colonial lag*. Rohdenburg and Schlüter (2009: 13) explain that this term refers to the linguistic fact in which a variety, as is the case just mentioned, maintains more conservative structures than the variety that is spoken in what in its day was the mother country.

Below, some of the most remarkable and characteristic aspects of the American English

grammar will be exposed and exemplified:

### 2.4.1. *Verb and verb phrase*

Here I will describe features typical of the grammar of American English concerning the verb and the verb phrase.

➤ The most notorious characteristic, according to Svartvik and Leech (2006: 167) and that also takes into account Tottie (2002: 152), is the past participle of the verb *get*, *gotten*, although there is also a second variety, *got*. American grammar differentiates the uses of these forms: *gotten* is used to express the acquisition of something and *got* is used to refer to the possession of something. In the following examples we can appreciate the difference:

(1) We've gotten some information, but we need more. (COCA, News, Charlotte Observer)<sup>1</sup>

(2) I have got a meeting at ten. (BNC, FUJ, S\_meeting)

According to the studies carried out by Rohdenburg and Schlüter (2009: 22), the use of *gotten* occurs in colloquial situations with little frequency although it seems that it is recovering strength even in more variants of the English language.

➤ Also, the form *gotta* for *have got to* is used since the use of the bare form *got to* is very common too:

(3) I know it's hard, but you gotta. (COCA, FIC, New England Review)

(4) The council have got to try. (BNC, FY6, S\_interview\_oral\_history)

➤ American English also makes a distinction between the modals *will* and *shall*. While *will* makes reference to future actions, *shall* is only used in more formal situations as can be seen in the following examples:

(5) Shall we try this? (COCA, SPO, NBC: Today Show)

(6) Actually, I don't think it will increase the deficit. (COCA, SPOK, NPR: Morning Edition)

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the examples included in this work have been extracted from the *British National Corpus* (BNC) and the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA)

On the contrary, although almost disappeared, in British English both *shall* and *will* are used to express future situations.

(7) Yes, Pamela shall go and live with you. (BNC, FU4, W\_fict\_drama)

(8) I will give you a brief history of my passion for this dear girl. (BNC, FU4, W\_fict\_drama)

➤ Carrying on with the modals verbs, in American English the future form *going to* is replaced by *gonna*. As well as, in more informal conversations the form *I'm going to* is replaced by *I'm 'a*. According to Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999: 488) this semi-modal is the most common in conversation.

(8) You're gonna let it be. (COCA, NEWS, Washington Post)

(9) I'm'a buy some clothes. (example proposed)

➤ As for the verb complementation, in both varieties the verbs that express feelings like *like* or *can't stand* are accompanied by a verb in its gerund form, that is, with the *ing*-complement. In the latter case, *can't stand*, in American English is losing this use and the main verb tends to be accompanied by an infinitive. This hardly occurs in British English where the *ing*-complement use is regular.

(10) I can't stand to see her lying there looking so helpless. (COCA, FIC, Bk:DeadlyAffairBobtailRidge)

(11) Whereas she can't stand doing the pictures (BNC, KBW, S\_conv)

➤ In American English it is more common to use the verb *help* without the complementation of the infinitive marker *to* as can be seen in the following examples:

(12) I'd like you to help me find someone (COCA, FIC, Bk:KarolinasTwins)

(13) Well you can help me to cope with him (BNC, G3X, S\_demonstratn)

➤ The use of *do*-support is very common in British English, and sometimes it is used to replace another verb already mentioned, it is not like that in American English that simply ignores it. As, for example in the following cases:

(14) asks if she will be in it; Alyokhina promises her she will. (COCA, NEWS, New York Times)

(15) If it hasn't arrived yet we wait. (BNC, HTC, W\_fict\_prose)

➤ The American variety has a tendency to regularize the past and the past participle forms of verbs that are irregular in British English, although the use of irregular forms in both of them is more common in conversation. Verbs like *burn - burned - burned* or *spoil - spoiled - spoiled* that contrast with the British forms *burn - burnt - burnt* or *spoil - spoiled - spoilt*.

Rohdenburg and Schlüter (2009: 25) report that the use of regular forms was much more frequent in British English before it was used in the American language and they suggest that the re-use of irregular forms is due to “the currently more conservative nature of British English”.

➤ In American grammar, the use of the simple past is more common even when adverbs are used, although it is considered more appropriate to use this type of adverbs in sentences that are still in progress. However, in British English it is more common to use the perfect preterite.

This may be because the auxiliary of the present perfect is hardly pronounced in speech and in the written language it contracts more and more frequently. To this the tendency to regularize verbal forms in American English is added, causing the past form and the past participle to be the same. So, the difference between the simple past and the present perfect is much lower.

(16) We thought it just ended (COCA, SPOK, PBS: PBS Newshour)

(17) His holiday has just ended (BNC, AKE, W\_newsp\_brdsh\_t\_nat\_misc)

➤ What is known as active-passive constructions refers to those sentences whose active

transitive main verb is used as an intransitive verb, thus giving it a passive meaning. These sentences are another remarkable aspect of American grammar since as Tottie says (2002: 162) these constructions are used a lot in American advertising.

(18) The company works well with marble or granite (COCA, MAG, Sunset)

➤ Although in the Romance languages the subjunctive is a verb tense that is normally used, in English it only appears in fixed expressions like *Come what may*, *Heaven forbid* or *God forbid* or in some sentences that make reference to hypothetical situations such as the known *If I were you* construction. Nevertheless, a type of structure known as Mandative subjunctive is becoming popular among English speakers, especially in American English, where its use began to become popular in the twentieth century according to Svartvik and Leech (2006:163). It is a structure that express desires, commands and requirements and that usually takes place in subordinate phrases. It should be noted the absence of the auxiliary verb *do* in the negative sentences and how the particle *not* is positioned before the main verb of the subjunctive clause: *He demanded that she not speak*.

Rohdenburg and Schlüter (2009: 31) say that the Mandative subjunctive is not a case of colonial lag but of post-colonial revival. This term, post-colonial revival, can be applied not only to linguistics but also to architecture, art and culture in general. During the American Civil War, the country was submerged in a deep crisis that provoked the yearning of the peaceful past, for that reason it tried to recover those characteristics already lost, a colonial Renaissance.

#### ***2.4.2. Noun and noun phase***

Here I will describe features typical of the grammar of American English concerning the noun and the noun phrase.

➤ Another remarkable characteristic is the agreement between the collective nouns and the main verb. In American English grammar, the singular form of the verb is used, even though the noun refers to a numerous group of things or people. However, in British English the opposite is true.

(19) the crowd is suddenly silenced (COCA, SPOK, PBS: PBS Newshour)

(20) But the crowd are friendly and well-dressed (BNC, CD5, W\_pop\_lore)

In this case American English is the most conservative variety since, according to Marckwardt (1958: 77), originally these collective nouns were accompanied by the verb form in the singular form. All this was due to the fact that the idea of a group of individuals as a plural collective did not exist. When this concept began to grow, the verb began to be used in its plural form in British English, but not in American English that retained the oldest form.

➤ The genitive case is another feature whose use is changing, more typical of the variety of American English, although British English is being influenced by this change as well. To express the possession of an object the *s*-genitive is used as in *the boy's car*, as the grammatical norm says only animated nouns can possess things, while to make relations between inanimate objects the '*of*-construction' is used, for example *the windows of my house*. As has been said, this is changing in the variety of American English, and the *s*-genitive begins to be used with inanimate nouns, more precisely with abstract nouns.

### 2.4.3. *Adjective and adjective phrase*

Here I will describe features typical of the grammar of American English concerning the noun and the noun phrase.

➤ One of the main differences between British English and American English, according to Tottie (2002: 168), is the adverbial use of the adjectives *good* and *real*, since it is quite frequent in American English, much more than in the British English, let these adjectives work like adverbs. To understand why this happens, it can be explained that some adverbs are derived from adjectives and are formed by adding the suffix *-ly*, like *badly*, *effortlessly* or *generally*; but there are also adverbs without the suffix, like *here*, *early* or *now*. To this is added that, the use of an adjective instead of an adverb can be given thanks to the fact that both function as modifiers; the adverb not only modifies verbs, but also modifies adjectives and other adverbs.

(21) it was something that we did good (COCA, SPOK, NPR: How I Built This)

(22) Thereafter he did well to hold the round together (BNC, AJR,

W\_newsp\_brdsht\_nat\_misc)

(23) He wasn't going real fast (COCA, FIC, Bk:HouseDaniel)

(24) I bet it can go really fast (BNC, HSA, W\_fict\_prose)

➤ Another difference pointed out by Rohdenburg and Schlüter (2009: 86) is that which occurs in the formation of comparative adjectives. While American English tends to use the degree marker *more*, American English prefers the *-er* suffix. This is the case in comparative constructions like *more proud* instead of *prouder*:

(25) I couldn't be more proud of them. (COCA, SPOK, CNN: Anderson Cooper)

(26) I thought she was proud but aware that she should be prouder. (BNC, G06 W\_fict\_prose)

Although in formal situations the American variety uses the adjective formed with the suffix, in a more informal situation it prefers to use *more*-support since it is easier to identify that there is a comparison and to identify what is compared.

#### 2.4.4. Article system

➤ As Tottie explains (2002: 148) “The normal rule in American and British English is for the indefinite article to take the form *a* before a consonant and *an* before a vowel”. However, in American English, probably due to the influence of Black English, one of the varieties of American English, to use the indefinite article *a* also in front of words that begin with a vowel is increasingly common in spoken and informal language.

(27) then for dessert, a apple bread pudding with cinnamon. (COCA, SPOK, CNN\_YourHealth)

(28) Do you want Ann to go and whip you up an apple crumble? (BNC, KB7, S\_conv)



➤ Also there is a difference with the use of the definite article, since, in British English the nouns *hospital* and *university* are not accompanied by this article, but in the American English these nouns are used with the definite article *the*.

(29) John had to write an essay as an incoming freshman at the University (COCA, SPOK, CNN: New Day Sunday)

(30) A short time later at the hospital (COCA, SPOK, CBS: 48 Hours)

(31) Mike was at university. (BNC, KC0, S\_conv)

(32) That mister at hospital calls you a little lady. (BNC, KCX, S\_conv)

#### 2.4.5. *Pronoun system*

➤ As Svartvik and Leech explain (2006: 168) “one of the most interesting features of American dialect grammar is the used of second-person plural pronouns like *you all* in the South.”. These forms, much more common in American English than in British English, are used to clarify whether the speaker refers to one or several individuals, since in standard English the second person of the pronoun is the same in both its singular form as in its plural form, *you*. In other words, a duality is not used as in the case of *I - we* to differentiate the number of the pronoun. This is due to the extinction of the second singular form of the pronoun *thou* in early Modern English as Svartvik and Leech explain (2006: 168).

The abbreviation *y'all* is also used together with other forms such as *you guys* or *you people* as in the following example:

(33) That's what you guys are doing now. (COCA, SPOK, Fox: The Five)

➤ American grammar prefers to use the *-body* ending in pronouns, just as it pretends to avoid sexist situations by using the pronouns *they / their / them* when the sex of the people referred to is not known. For example:

(34) Everybody knows they're like that (COCA, FIC, FantasySciFi)

#### 2.4.6. *Preposition and prepositional phrase*

➤ Prepositions related to the expression of time can be mentioned. Firstly to assert duration of time, the American grammar prefers the preposition *through* to the form *from ... to* as in:

(35) this 7-acre farm is open May through June (COCA, MAG, Sunset)

(36) the target completion date has been put back from May to June (BNC, BMJ, W\_misc)

➤ In the same way it is more common to use the preposition *in* instead of the preposition *for*. For example: *She has worked in that company in decades* versus *She has worked for that company in decades*.

➤ Lastly, the prepositions *in* and *on* can be omitted in American English.

(37) She doesn't work Sundays and Mondays. (COCA, FIC, FantasySciFi)

(38) After I told them I would not work on Sundays (BNC, K5D, W\_newsp\_other\_report)

#### 2.4.7. *Questions*

Here I will describe features typical of the grammar of American English concerning the questions.

➤ In American English to express surprise in colloquial situations instead of using the interrogative particle *why* it is more common to use the phrase *how come?* However, in spite of expressing itself as a question, it is constructed as a statement.

(39) How come you didn't meet me halfway? (COCA, SPOK, NPR: Code Switch)

(40) Why don't you go and have a look?(BNC, FU6, W\_fict\_drama)

➤ Tag questions are a feature that both varieties share, although some of their uses differ a bit.

They can be called question tags or tag questions, these types of questions are given above all in the spoken language and they are tags in the form of a question that do not seek a response but rather seek the agreement of the recipient with whom the conversation is being maintained.

These tags are placed at the end of a sentence of which the question tag itself depends because to build it is needed to take into account the subject and the tense of the main sentence. When the main sentence is affirmative, the question tag is posed in negative and vice-versa, this is called reversed polarity as Rohdenburg and Schlsüter assert (2009: 310). If the verb of the main sentence is a non-lexical verb, in the question tag the form of the auxiliary verb *do* is used.

One of the differences that characterizes American English is its preference for the invariable tags like *yeah?* or *right?*, instead of the traditional tags that are still used in British English, although they are also decreasing due to the influence of the American English variety.

(41) It's a little bit weird, right? (COCA, SPOK, NPR: Fresh Air)

(42) It's a different one is it? (BNC, D95, S\_meeting)

Also, as Tottie explains (2002: 164), another difference has to do with the order of the words that is adopted when the question tags express astonishment or doubt. In British English the traditional inverted order of the questions is maintained, but in American English the noun-verb order is preserved. For example:

(43) Her sister just got married. -- She did!?

(44) Her sister has just got married. -- Has she!?

### **3. PILOT STUDY: BRITISH ENGLISH GRAMMAR VERSUS AMERICAN GRAMMAR**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

As can be seen above, there are many varieties of English classified and studied in different ways but without a doubt the varieties that are more widespread and that receive more attention are British English and American English. This is due to the position of power of both nations over the centuries. In the sixteenth century, with the beginning of the colonisation carried out by the British

Empire, the expansion of English throughout the world began and it continues today thanks to the influence of American culture. And it must also be kept in mind that these are the countries that comprise a greater number of speakers and that these varieties are those taught in foreign countries where English is not a native language.

The fact that both varieties are worldwide referents does nothing but causes the comparison between them continuously, although this rivalry was born many years ago. As Jan Svartvik and Geoffrey Leech (2006: 152) claim, “Someone – and nobody seems to be sure if was George Bernard Shaw, Winston Churchill or Oscar Wilde – described the United States and Britain as ‘two nations divided by a common language’.”.

1620 is a very important year for the history of America; that was year the first English Puritans travelled in the Mayflower ship, and reached the coast of America. These settlers traveled to the new world, fleeing from the inflexibility of the English Church and seeking the purest version of religion.

Large numbers of immigrants from all over Europe travelled in search of new opportunities, which caused a rapid growth of the population, and by the end of the sixteenth century the community would have increased more than ten times its original number.

The British government decided to impose new taxes on the thirteen colonies and its inhabitants felt that their rights and freedoms were being violated. This caused the desire for independence, which had been growing for years, to increase. The American Revolution began in 1775 with George Washington as commander-in-chief and in 1776 the Declaration of Independence was drafted, which was finally signed in 1789. The desire for independence was such that the rupture with the British crown was not enough, that is why they wanted to give their own identity to American English. In 1806 Noah Webster published his first dictionary *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* with the intention of standardizing American English and highlighting the differences with British English.

Nowadays, the influence of American culture is such that today we speak of Americanization of English. The Americanization of English is a precession that is taking place slowly but, as Leech, Hundt, Mair and Smith explain (2009: 259), this is not a process that will prevent the other varieties from developing autonomously and more in the case of British English, which still retains in a certain way the prestige of being the standard variety. In fact, Svartvik and Leech (2006: 156) refer to the term Americanism, defined for the first time by John Witherspoon,

which had negative connotations.

### **3.2. Research method and objectives**

The study is mainly corpus-based. I have selected three of the most common features of American English in order to analyze if their use in the spoken language corresponds with the description that the grammar gives about them. In addition, I will also compare the results obtained with the British English grammar in order to reach the conclusion of whether these two varieties are so different.

For this purpose, the COCA and the BNC will be used. *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) contains words from American English since 1990, becoming the broadest and most complete corpus of this English variety. Undoubtedly it is the most widely used corpus, it contains more than 560 million words and it classifies the words according to the type of text they belong to, fictitious texts, magazines and journals, scholarly and even spoken texts. Also, the *British National Corpus* (BNC) began to be created ten years before the COCA by the press department of the University of Oxford. And like its American counterpart, it compiles a vast number of words also collected from all kinds of texts. However, this number of words is much smaller than that of the American corpus, the British corpus contains 100 million words.

The objectives of this practical research are the following: to study some of the most remarkable uses of American English, as well as to evaluate their normalised frequency use and to observe if these features are, in fact, so common in the spoken language. Once this is explained, a contrastive analysis will be done, the analysed aspects of the American variety will be drawn with its equivalents in the British English variety, obtaining results that can exemplify the differences and similarities between the two most outstanding English varieties of the world.

The analysis of these features will pursue the following steps: first, I will select those characteristics that seem to me the most remarkable in American English. Later I will look for each of them in the COCA. Due to the large number of words that are registered in this corpus, I will narrow down my research to three of the most distinctive features of American English grammar, namely the agreement of collective nouns, the use of second person pronouns and the regularization of the past and the past participle of irregular verbs. Since the corpus contains about 560 million words, it would be impossible to analyse all the examples of these features. Consequently, I will select in each case a sample that can be regarded as minimally representative. The sample will be extracted from the spoken component of the corpus since it is in the spoken language where

changes in the language are most distinctive. Once these cases have been selected and analyzed, I will follow the same process in the BNC. Then, I will make an analysis regarding the frequency of use in both varieties, to finally share and obtain results that confirm or reject the hypotheses raised in section 2.4. *The grammar of American English*.

To obtain the frequency of use of each word, I will calculate normalised frequencies for each item per 10,000 words.

### **3.3. Contrastive analysis: Results**

#### **3.3.1. Collective nouns**

As Tottie explains (2002: 149) collective nouns are “nouns with singular form but plural meaning”. As explained above, the hypothesis states that in American English these nouns tend to agree with the main verb in its singular form; whereas in British English, the plural form of the verb is used because it is understood that these nouns are groups, that is, several people or things, so a plural is needed.

To carry out the study based on the corpus, I have selected the following five collective nouns since they seem to be the most frequent in both corpora: *crowd*, *government*, *team*, *group*, *audience* and *jury*.

- ***Crowd***

In this case the CBN only includes 162 cases with the collective noun *crowd*, so I will only analyze the first 162 cases of the total of 6,6662 tokens that can be retrieved from COCA.

The data had to be filtered since many of the cases retrieved by the corpus do not meet the necessary characteristics. To analyze whether American English and British English fulfill the hypothesis in the spoken language, it is necessary for the collective noun to be the subject of sentence so as to see if the verb agrees with its plural form or with its singular form. For that reason cases like the following had to be disregarded, because they do not fulfill that condition:

(45) I walked through the crowd. (COCA, SPOK, NPR: Fresh Air)

(46) Crowd cheering (COCA, SPOK, CNN: CNN Newsroom)

(47) In the crowd. (BNC, KBB, S\_conv)

(48) Then she caught sight of Mademoiselle's head in the middle of a crowd of girls (BNC, KCP, S\_conv)

As can be seen in table 2, of the six cases that were useful for my study, six agree with the verb in the singular, bearing out the hypothesis. But this is not the case in British English, since of the seventeen cases that I have been able to analyze, ten are accompanied by a verb in the plural, as the hypothesis proposes, but the other seven agree with the verb in the singular. Probably this is due to the great influence of American English on British English that causes that the characteristic uses of AmE begin to be common in the BrE too.

(49) My crowd is the junior league. (COCA, SPOK, NBC: Today Show)

(50) the crowd is suddenly silenced (COCA, SPOK, PBS: PBS Newshour)

(51) The crowd were getting at them last night. (BNC, KBD, S\_conv)

(52) A crowd of angry demonstrators were given the slip today (BNC, KRM, S\_brdcast\_news)

**Table 1:** Frequency of the collective noun *crowd* in the sample selected

	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	6662	0,54
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	162	0,16

**Table 2:** Singular and plural agreement of *crowd* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb in singular</b>	<b>Verb in plural</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	6	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	7	10

- **Government**

Twenty-nine words from the first two hundred met the requirements to be analyzed. All of them are accompanied by a verb in its singular form, which leads me to affirm that, again, as far as American English is concerned, the hypothesis is correct. But, the previous case is repeated again. When analyzing the thirty-one possible cases of this word in British English, it is observed that twenty-seven of them agree with the verb in the singular, while only four do so with the verb in the plural. It is clear that in this case, the rule has changed completely and that with the collective noun "government" it is more usual to use a verb in its singular form. These are some of the examples that are collected in both corpus:

(53) they show that the government was really frightened (COCA, SPOK, NPR: Fresh Air)

(54) But why does the government collect this data? (COCA, SPOK, PBS: PBS Newshour)

(55) the Government already controls the capital borrowing that we can make. (BNC, JS, S\_meeting)

(56) we now find that UK government are actually trying trade back some of that population (BNC, HYX, S\_meeting)

**Table 3:** Frequency of the collective noun *government* in the sample selected

	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	69090	5,92
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	3041	3,05



**Table 4:** Singular and plural agreement of *government* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb in singular</b>	<b>Verb in plural</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	29	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	27	4

- *Team*

In this case, once again the cases collected in the COCA prove that in American English the collective nouns agree with the verb in their singular form. As for British English, there is not a difference as great as in the case of *government* but the singular cases, which are those that go against the hypothesis, continue to overcome the plural cases, confirming once again that the use is changing.

(57) that team is principally working on implementing the Council's decentralization (COCA, D95, S\_meeting)

(58) the second team's still playing (COCA, KCH, S\_conv)

(59) The team has to have about five big ideas (BNC, SPOK, Fox\_Sunday)

(60) the team of us who were, you know, making the website and the marketing (BNC, SPOK, NPR: How I Built This)

**Table 5:** Frequency of the collective noun *team* in the sample selected

	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	19519	1,67
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	975	0,98

**Table 6:** Singular and plural agreement of *team* in the sample selected

	Verb in singular	Verb in plural
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	22	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	9	6

- **Group**

Analyzing the results of the search of the collective noun *group*, it can be observed that in none of the cases, neither in American English nor in British English, the hypothesis is fulfilled. As for the results of the British National Corpus are repeated once again, there are six cases where the collective noun functions as a subject and agrees with the verb in its plural form, but there are ten other cases that agree with the verb in a singular form.

For the first time, the hypothesis is not correct as far as American English is concerned. Fifteen of the cases are accompanied by the singular verb, but on this occasion I have found seven cases that agree with the verb in the plural. I have noticed that all the cases that are used with the plural verb are noun phrases modified by a prepositional phrase that refers to the plural number of that collective, and therefore, I believe that this is the reason why there is a tendency to agree with the verb in its plural form.

(61) That's because this group has reached the age (COCA, SPOK, CNN\_YourHealth)

(62) a group of hackers have brought down the CIA Web site (COCA, SPOK, IN THE ARENA)

(63) the Conservative group have been working actively hard and long and finding sites (BNC, KRL, S\_brodcast\_discussn)

(64) The ruling group, the labour party, refuses to do anything about this at all. (BNC, KGX, S\_meeting)

**Table 7:** Frequency of the collective noun *group* in the sample selected

	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	28187	2,41
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	2575	2,58

**Table 8:** Singular and plural agreement of *group* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb in singular</b>	<b>Verb in plural</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	15	7
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	10	6

- *Audience*

Again the same pattern is repeated as in the previous analyzed examples. In the cases analyzed in the COCA, it can be observed that, once again, American English uses the singular form, while the spoken language of British English, according to the records of the BNC, still retains certain uses with the plural form but there is no doubt that it is more usual to use the verb in a singular form.

- (65) audience applauds (COCA, SPOK, NPR\_ATC)
- (66) And the music swells and the audience is thrilled (COCA, SPOK, ABC\_Nightline)
- (67) I assume the audience knows as much about control (BNC, JSA , S\_unclassified)
- (68) our audience come from Birmingham. (BNC, HVC, S\_brdcast\_discussn)

**Table 9:** Frequency of the collective noun *audience* in the sample selected

	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	12343	1,06
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	244	0,24

**Table 10:** Singular and plural agreement of *audience* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb in singular</b>	<b>Verb in plural</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	17	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	12	8

- *Jury*

As was the case with the first word analyzed, the BNC includes only 176 cases of the collective noun *jury* in spoken speech. Therefore, I will only analyze the first 176 cases of the COCA so that these results can be compared.

Perhaps this is the case, together with the case of *crowd*, in which the hypothesis is more adapted to British English, since, of the seventeen cases that fulfilled the characteristics to be analyzed, in ten of them the collective noun agrees with the verb in its plural form, while seven of them agree with the verb in its singular form. The cases analyzed in the COCA continue fulfilling the hypothesis with the exception of two particular cases that are accompanied by the plural verb.

(69) the jury deal with the facts. (BNC, KRG, S\_brdrast\_discussn)

(70) the jury has been told how two the two eleven year old defendants tormented an elderly woman (BNC, HMA, S\_brdrast\_discussn)

(71) And if the jury doesn't get to know that this witness has made prior inconsistent

statements (COCA, SPOK, CNN\_News)

(72) quite a disadvantage to have the jury go back with only one side (COCA, SPOK, CNN\_News).

**Table 11:** Frequency of the collective noun *jury* in the sample selected

	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	16590	1,42
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	176	0,18

**Table 12:** Singular and plural agreement of *jury* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb in singular</b>	<b>Verb in plural</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	22	2
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	7	10

### ***3.3.2. Second person pronoun forms***

The next feature that I am going to analyze is the used of second-person plural pronouns like *you guys*, *you all*, *you lot*, *you too* and *you people* in American English. As Svartvik and Leech explain (2002: 168) “American dialects have come up with a plural form of *you*”.

Through the corpus analysis I will be able to observe the frequency use of these pronouns in the American English variety and in turn compare it with the use of these forms in British English, so in this way, I am going to test whether the hypothesis is correct by stating that these forms are more frequent in American English than in British English.

- *You guys*

In this case, the difference in the frequency of use of the form *you guys* clearly confirms that in British English it is hardly used. The BNC only includes twenty four cases in the spoken language, in contrast to the more than 10,000 tokens in the COCA.

In this case, I believe that the big difference may lie in the source from which the examples are retrieved. The first twenty-four cases that appear in the American corpus are examples taken from television programs. However, all BNC tokens are collected from informal conversations.

(73) there was some disagreement among you guys (COCA, SPOK, CNN: CNN Tonight)

(74) So you guys must've felt everything's coming together here? (COCA, SPOK, CBS: 48 Hours)

(75) See you guys Monday. (BNC, KDW, S\_conv)

(76) we don't have the class potential you guys have (BNC, KS2, S\_interview)

**Table 13:** Frequency of *you guys* in the sample selected

	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	10890	0,93
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	24	0,02

- *You all*

It is necessary to keep in mind this time that these two words, one after the other, do not have to be part of the same syntactic function in the sentence. With this I mean that of the first 200 cases that appear in the search result, we must subtract nine of them in both corpora, since in these examples *you* is the indirect complement and *all* is an adverb that is part of the direct object of the sentence.

The results from the COCA show that *you all* is used on multiple occasions in American English but this form is more frequent in British English according to the results from the BNC. Thanks to this information it can be proven that the hypothesis is wrong.

- (77) I want to thank you all (COCA, SPOK, Fox: Your World: Cavuto)
- (78) It may not even want to agree with you all the time (COCA, SPOK, CNN: Axe Files)
- (79) yes you all laughed when I asked a question last year (BNC, HM6, S\_meeting)
- (80) that would give you all the information (BNC, F7A, S\_meeting)

**Table 14:** Frequency of *you all* in the sample selected

	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	7284	0,62
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	746	0,75

- *You lot*

This is a special case without a doubt, and as can be seen in the table below, it shows that the hypothesis is completely wrong since in the COCA only two cases were retrieved. The British corpus does not include many examples either, but in comparison with American English it can be said that this form is much more frequent in British English.

- (81) here I am being interviewed by you lot. (COCA, SPOK, CNN\_Showbiz)
- (82) I don't know why you lot always have a go at him. (COCA, SPOK, CNN\_Showbiz)
- (83) Will you shut up you lot! (BNC, KB9, S\_conv)
- (84) when you lot got moved down there (BNC, KDA, S\_conv)

**Table 15:** Frequency of *you lot* in the sample selected

	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	2	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	126	0,13

- *You two*

Once again, the COCA gathers many more examples than the BNC, this means that its use is more common in American English.

- (85) You two have that in common (COCA, SPOK, NBC: Today Show)
- (86) You two stay save out there (COCA, SPOK, ABC: 20/20)
- (87) the way you two do the work it looks so fine (BNC, KHB, S\_conv)
- (88) I don't think you two have met (BCN, J8B, S\_meeting)

**Table 16:** Frequency of *you two* in the sample selected

	Number of tokens	Normalised frequency
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	1294	0,11
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	239	0,24

### 3.3.3. *The regularization of the past forms of irregular verbs*

The last hypothesis that I am going to the test is the one that ensures that the American English variety has preference for the regular forms of the past and the past participle of the verbs, whereas British English prefers irregular forms.

As Svartvik and Leech explain (2002: 150) “Some verbs are irregular only in that they can have [t] instead of [d] after a voiced consonant” as in *burnt*, *spoilt*, *learnt*, *smelt* and *dreamt*, which are precisely the cases that I am going to analyze. Using again both the COCA and the BNC, I will be able to observe how frequently the regular forms are used in American English, and how often irregular forms are used in British English. In addition, I will also analyze the forms of the verb *dive*, which do not follow this pattern of [t]-forms but which will help show other uses.



- ***Burned / Burnt***

After analyzing the results, it can be said that the hypothesis is correct since the normalized use of irregular forms in British English and regular forms in American English is much more superior to the use of their counterfactual forms.

(89) Part of a high school was burned (COCA, SPOK, PBS: PBS Newshour)

(90) The strip mall burnt to the ground. (COCA, SPOK, ABC: Nightline)

(91) It burnt the whole factory down for some reason (BNC, KBP, S\_conv)

(92) The bus has been burned (BNC, KDN, S\_conv)

**Table 17:** Frequency of *burned / burnt* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb form</b>	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	burned	2202	0,19
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	burnt	267	0,02
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	burned	42	0,04
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	burnt	195	0,19

- ***Spoiled / Spoilt***

In this case it must be first explained that the regular form used in American English is the same in the past and in the past participle. However, in British English the irregular form of the verb, *spoiled*, is different to the form of the past participle, *spoilt*. Even so, of the fourteen cases of the *spoiled* form that appear in the BNC, eight of them are past participles.

The COCA only contains a token that reflects the use of the irregular form, so it can be said that its use in the spoken language is null.

- (93) He spoiled me (COCA, SPOK, CBS: 48 Hours)
- (94) That's the first time I've heard it but I've spoilt it. (COCA, SPOK, NBC: Today Show)
- (95) See I've been spoilt really. (KST, S\_conv)
- (96) Christ God dealt with the problem which spoiled his image (KN6, S\_sermon)

**Table 18:** Frequency of spoiled / *spoilt* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb form</b>	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	spoiled	454	0,04
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	spoilt	1	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	spoiled	14	0,01
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	spoilt	47	0,05

- ***Learned / Learnt***

Once again, I can affirm that the hypothesis is correct according to the data analyzed in the corpus. However, it is a fact that the regular form is much more common in British English than the irregular form in American English.

- (97) It feels like we learned so much today (COCA, SPOK, CNN: CNN Tonight)
- (98) we should have learnt that lesson by now (COCA, SPOK, PBS: PBS Newshour)
- (99) I mean he's obviously leaned his lesson (BNC, KBF, S\_conv)
- (100) I learnt to write a fair hand (BNC, FY4, S\_interview\_oral\_history)

**Table 19:** Frequency of *learned* / *learnt* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb form</b>	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	learned	13080	1,12
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	learnt	30	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	learned	161	0,16
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	learnt	291	0,29

- *Smelled / Smelt*

Although, on this occasion none of the corpus provides much information, it is confirmed again that irregular forms are widely used in British English and regular forms in American English.

(101) The best breath I've ever smelled (COCA, SPOK, NBC: Today Show)

(102) you evaluate what you'e smelt (COCA, SPOK, ABC\_GMA)

(103) you've never smelled nothing like it (BNC, KCP, S\_conv)

(104) It smelt terrible didn't it? (BNC, KBY, S\_conv)

**Table 20:** Frequency of *smelled* / *smelt* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb form</b>	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	smelled	294	0,02
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	smelt	45	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	smelled	7	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	smelt	38	0,04

- ***Dreamed / Dreamt***

Unlike the case of *learn*, and although regular forms are still much more frequent in American English, there is also a fairly high use of irregular forms. However, the regular form in British English is hardly used according to the BNC.

(105) Better than I could have ever dreamed for literally (COCA, SPOK, Fox: Tucker Carlson Tonight)

(106) I just dreamt about being at her house (COCA, SPOK, ABC: 20/20)

(107) I haven't dreamed for years (BNC, KPV, S\_conv)

(108) And then I dreamt something weird about riding (BNC, KC6, S\_conv)

**Table 21:** Frequency of dreamed / *dreamt* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb form</b>	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	dreamed	811	0,07
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	dreamt	131	0,01
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	dreamed	12	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	dreamt	35	0,03

- ***Dived / Dove***

This case is particular since it is the form of American English that varies, the last form of the verb *dive* is inflected as *dove* and the form of the past participle as *dived*. In British English both forms are inflected as *dived*. The data obtained from both corpus show then that the irregular form is much more common than the irregular form in American English, while in British English the opposite happens.

(109) He dove into frozen waters of the Potomac River (COCA, SPOK, CBS, News Sunday Morning)

(110) So you can watch as they dived right in (COCA, SPOK, Fox: On The Record: Baier)

(111) there was one time I dove in (BNC, KE1, S\_conv)

(112) The seal dived away and a moment later two seals appeared (BNC, F72, S\_classroom)

**Table 22:** Frequency of *dive / dove* in the sample selected

	<b>Verb form</b>	<b>Number of tokens</b>	<b>Normalised frequency</b>
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	Dove	281	0,02
<b>COCA spoken subcorpus (116,748,578 words)</b>	Dived	33	0
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	Dove	10	0,01
<b>BNC spoken subcorpus (9,963,663 words)</b>	Dived	18	0,2

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, English is considered as the main lingua franca, a vehicular language that facilitates international communication for even those countries where English is not their native language (Mauranen, 2012: 8). As a consequence, new varieties of the language are born, not only in countries where English is an official language, but also in those countries where it is adopted as a foreign language. Since the English language has experienced such a large expansion, different linguists have proposed different classifications of the new varieties of English. As I explain in my work, Tom McArthur, Braj Kachru and Edgar W. Schneider propose three different models and although there are several differences when comparing them, all agree that both British English and American English are the two varieties of English most widely used and established at present.

The United States has experienced a gigantic evolution in less than five hundred years and what was once a colony that depended on the British crown, today is an autonomous nation and one of the most influential and powerful countries in the world. This evolution can be seen in all areas, and also in the linguistic field. When the inhabitants of the thirteen colonies wanted to become independent from the United Kingdom, they also wanted to get away in a certain way from British English, creating their own identity and a new variety of English.

The influence of American culture is such that today we speak of Americanization of English (Leech, Hundt, Mair and Smith, 2009: 259). However, although there is a tendency to follow the patterns of American English, that does not mean that this expansion of American English occurs systematically, and less so that all varieties will be the same.

This can be seen in the differences that I have explained in this work. Between American English and British English there are many differences in the field of lexicon, in pronunciation and in the spelling which has a tendency to shorten words due to variations in pronunciation. Perhaps the least given to change is the pronunciation, since this field has a lot to do with the geographical location of the speakers and it is difficult to change it by the influence of another variety. In terms of grammar, the cases are much more specific and many of them are still in the process of changing, because grammar has a lot to do with written language and grammar rules are much more difficult to modify. However, certain forms have already changed enough for British English to be influenced by the American language and to begin to change as well.

Thanks to the *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* and the *British National Corpus*, I have been able to analyze the normalized frequency of use in the spoken language of three common features in American English and I have been able to test whether the hypotheses raised by the American grammar about these features are correct. Besides, I have been able to observe if British English has been so influenced by American English that these features are also common in the spoken use of the British English variety.

On the one hand, I have to say that in only one of the three analyzed features you can see a clear influence of American English on British English. This is the case of the agreement of the collective nouns with the verb in its singular or plural form. The studied hypothesis affirms that the collective nouns agree with the verb in its singular form, whereas in British English they do it with the verb in its plural form. According to the data obtained, both in American English and in British English, it is more common for collective nouns to agree with the verb in the singular. In this case, this change in British English can be a consequence of the influence of American English, this form

is simpler and therefore it is easy to spread.

On the other hand, I have been able to observe that the other two hypotheses not only corroborate that they are correct but one of them shows that just the opposite happens. This last case is the use of second person plural forms. The hypothesis studied suggests that forms such as *you all* are more common in American English to refer to the second plural person of the pronoun. However, after consulting both corpora, we come to the conclusion that three of the four analyzed forms are equally used in American English and in British English, even one of them is only used in the British English, since in the American English very few cases are reported. However, there is an exception, the form *you guys* is clearly much more common in American English.

Finally, as I said, the third hypothesis I have tested is that which states that regular forms of the verbs in the past are more common in American English and the irregular forms are more common in British English. Indeed, according to the results obtained from the corpora, the irregular verbs are more common in spoken British English and the regular ones in spoken American English.

To sum up briefly and thanks to the based-corpus study, I can say that American English is a variety of English language that tends to simplify and innovate its forms, although it still has a preference for some more conservative features. I have also been able to appreciate thanks to the results obtained from the spoken subcorpora that these characteristics occur in a wide variety of contexts, from an informal conversation to television news, for example.

Regarding the difference between American English and British English, I believe that the more both grammars are analyzed, the more differences are found, even in spoken language, since British English has a more conservative tendency. However, it is clear that, more and more frequently, more features of American English are present in other varieties of English, even in British English.

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## 6. CORPORA USED

British National Corpus (BNC) (online). < <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/> >

Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (online). < <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/> >