

The Contribution of Linguistic Identification to Sustaining the American Identity

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Abstract

Identity and language bind several areas of knowledge like anthropology, philosophy and politics. It is assumed that no amount of knowledge will ever do justice to the term 'identity'. This paper seeks to demystify the relationship of language to identity. It also tries and highlight how the American identity is shaped by some linguistic identification elements. Since American English is different to other Englishes, there are striking specificities that make it stand flagrantly discrepant from, for instance, British English. That, in turn, contributes to the easiness with which an American can identify another American via mere use of English. The discussion entails the notion of identity and whether linguistic discrepancies contribute in shaping the American identity. Therefore, the research question revolves more around the American cultural, rather than personal, identity.

Keywords: Language, Identity, Cultural Identity, Personal Identity, American Identity, American English.

1. INTRODUCTION

Whether the term 'identity' subsists on conformist similarities or striking differences among the members of a given community is an issue that necessitates much debate. This is naturally the case, given the fact that, or if ever, a community will include multiple races, ethnicities and backgrounds. Identity can manifest personally or culturally. A personal identity is assumed to be defined on several contingencies: race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, political affiliation, nationalism, religion, etc. It is more of a passionate adventure of feeling rather than a solemn stance of intellectuality. For example, if consciousness of religiosity runs deep in an individual, that individual will define himself highly on religious bases.

How does the English language, as it is practiced, in the USA contribute to the American cultural identification is tackled in this paper. The hypothesis highlights the key contribution of linguistic identity elements in the USA to sustaining the American cultural identity.

The Relationship between Language and Identity:

Indeed, the relationship between language and identity remains quite unopen to full understanding. Thus, whatever explication is given to it, that will appear mere attempt, and the explication is simplistic. That being said, Zotzmann and O'Regan (2016) showed how language can be used socially to account for the collective identity rather than being a cognitive construct to partially define personal identities. This idea relates more to the areas of pragmatic, sociocultural, and strategic competencies than the separate linguistic competency exercised by individual users of the language.

Although the researcher does not intend to strategize a philosophical pursuit in investigating the concept of identity, he allows himself to entertain some philosophical thoughts round the matter. For a start, Bialystok (2009) links identity to the self via the thread of authenticity, "Authenticity appeals to the self's individual characteristics, affiliations, and commitments, which are best designated by the umbrella term 'identity'". That is to say, to point to a typical or authentic representative of a personal identity, various aspects of genuineness should come to play.

Should it ever be fair to consider personal identities essential parts of a given cultural identity, the latter will have to display layered manifestations of its reality? While it is sought in the present research to unearth facts about the American identity and how it is moulded by (the) linguistic identification(s), it cannot escape notice that identity branches into individualistic features and collectivistic ones. Nonetheless, the researcher will embark on both.

Personal identity as a concept cannot but be stamped by philosophical prints and psychological ones whereas cultural identity leans more towards the arenas of anthropological, sociological and/or nationalistic stances.

2. Language

The first generally common definition that language receives is that it is a tool for communication. Stamped by a pragmatic outlook, this view about what language really is is simplistic. The moment one looks at language from a psychological, philosophical, or metaphysical perspective, language proves difficult to define. Sapir (1921) stated, “Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.”

As indicated by the definition given by the anthropologist Edward Sapir, language is unique to humans; animals do not possess such a feat for communication. However, such a definition was challenged by John Lyons in his book (*Language and Linguistics*).

Lyons (1981) plays on the strings of the use of the words ‘ideas, emotions, and desires’ whatever broad construal is given to them. He argues that language is always of a broader reality, and that “‘idea’ in particular is inherently imprecise” (Lyons, 1981).

Language also enjoys a psychological dimension whereby the mind with its mental or cognitive capacity controls and regulates the use of language, initiates psychic consciousness of its spontaneous production, and enables its easy reception. There are even those who claim that mind is responsible for creating language. Steven Pinker in his book (*The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*) (1994) made it clear how mind creates language. Thus, language is species-specific. Pinker (1994) argues that language is not only a means of communication or a moulder of thought that arouses exuberance in us, but it is also ‘a part of our biological birthright’.

It should not sound hesitant to equate, or partially equate, the question ‘What is language?’ with the question ‘What is life?’ (John Lyons, 1981). Such profundity attributed to approaching language is arguably never vacuous. Despite the philosophical tinge that the latter question has, the former question is not remote from having the same philosophical load.

Lyons (1981) made it clear that the one who passionately concerns himself with the question ‘What is language?’ is the linguist. Again, it is debatable to claim that safely. A philosopher can show the same, or greater, zeal for analysing and understanding what language is, unless the term ‘Linguist’ can be metaphorically extended to mean ‘Philosopher of language’.

Generally, as Lyons (1981) states, “Philosophers, psychologists and linguists commonly make the point that it is the possession of language which most clearly distinguishes man from other animals.”

Nevertheless, another definition quoted by Lyons (1981) as cited in Bloch and Trager’s *Outline of Linguistic Analysis*, “A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates.” Such a definition entails three important aspects of language, but neglects others. It revolves around the assumption or assumed characteristic of language, namely arbitrariness. The second aspect is speech as indicated by the use of the word ‘vocal’. The third aspect is the social function of language. All such aspects are indeed inherently important to defining what language is; however, as Lyons (1981) claims, the definition “makes no appeal, except indirectly or by implication, to the communicative function of language”.

All that being said, the researcher too claims that it is highly reductionist to consider language on mere linguistic, cultural and interpersonal bases without turning attention to its philosophical and metaphysical natures. Some would argue that it is so difficult to rationalize any metaphysical nature about language, for there are no clear experimental or reasonable foundations for metaphysics. It is thus subjective and speculative to claim any sort of metaphysical nature to language.

Since language is deeply rooted in the very essential of human affairs biologically, psychologically, culturally, etc., it pushes any researcher to the extremes to conclude with confidence that language contributes highly in defining the individual.

2.1. Language characteristics

Due to the limited number of pages he intends to write in this paper, the researcher will give so brief a view about the characteristics of language. Although they cannot define it in its entirety, such features will help clarify a portion of the nature of language. The characteristics of language explained in this paper are taken from the book of George Yule (2010) (*The Study of Language*), 4th edition.

2.1.1. Reflexivity: Although it is easy to see how language can be used to reflect on, analyse, describe and account for language, we rarely, if ever, pay attention to that on a daily basis. “Humans are clearly able to reflect on language and its uses (e.g. “I wish he wouldn’t use so many technical terms”)” (Yule, 2010).

2.1.2. Displacement: Humans have an innate capacity to narrate the past, vocalise the present and speculate about the future. They use language naturally to maintain such affairs whereby their ideations are not only tied to the present moment but are displaced backwardly to the past and forwardly to the future. Yule (2010) made it clear that animals lack that capacity to move with language backwardly and forwardly; their communication is instantaneous.

2.1.3. Arbitrariness: Such a trait sprang from the idea that in most cases the signifier bears no natural or direct relationship to the signified. It is as though native speakers in Britain named the dog ‘A dog’ because it is not ‘A cat’. Clearly, the graphemes (dog) and the phonemes /dɒg/ do not relate naturally to the real sentient animal – dog. “The linguistic form has no natural or iconic relationship with that hairy four-legged barking object out in the world” (Yule, 2010).

2.1.4. Productivity: We might have the right to marvel at how language helps humans create an infinite number of novel expressions, thus the idea of open-endedness. Humans are capable of producing new utterances and creative syntactic constructions in various contexts. Language sets constrictions on the use of grammatical rules but naturally allows much latitude at making such rules *spawn* new and creative structures. “...the potential number of utterances in any human language is infinite” (Yule, 2010).

2.1.5. Cultural transmission: One essential component that transmits or hands down culture is language. As Yule (2010) seems to confirm that we genetically receive several physical traits from our parents while language defies genetics: “We acquire a language in a culture with other speakers and not from parental genes”. Language helps in transmitting culture in both ways, the spoken and written texts. And deeming language an element of culture, language too is transmitted culturally (Yule, 2010).

2.1.6. Duality: Sound and meaning are two levels that operate in any given human language. Individual sounds, known as phonemes, vowels and consonants, are meaningless on their own. And given that languages are different, there should be some permissible linguistic combinations in the language in question in order that a host of phonemes combined ought to make sense. For instance, /h/, /v/ and /t/ when structured in that order, give a meaningful lexeme, namely (hot). Yule (2010) pointed out that these two levels of duality entail ‘distinct sounds’ and ‘distinct meanings’, and that shows the ‘economical features of human language’.

2.2. Language functions

Since language is meant more for human communication, most of its functions have a communicative stamp. Such functions are sustained quite subconsciously in

human interaction that interlocutors rarely pay attention to the function they mean to express.

Basing our scrutiny of language functions on what Michael Halliday (2003) expounded, we shall agree that there are seven pertinent functions that language can maintain: Regulatory, Interactional, Representational, Personal, Imaginative, Instrumental and Heuristic.

2.2.1. Regulatory: The term itself almost intimates to the idea that the parties involved in the interaction are of different statuses. Interlocutor A commands or persuades interlocutor B in want of regulating or restricting B's behaviour.

2.2.2. Interactional: This function is more related to the phatic aspect of language; language is used for mere building of and solidifying relationships among individuals.

2.2.3. Representational: This function is meant for exchanging information about the world where reality that is observed is represented in words.

2.2.4. Personal: As the term suggests, this function relates to personality and its relevancies as identity, liberty and individuality.

2.2.5. Imaginative: This function entails creativity in language use where language can be used poetically and fictionally to bring about pleasure or stir various emotions that are purely human in character.

2.2.6. Instrumental: This is a pragmatic function that shows how language can be deployed to express the human needs and wants.

2.2.7. Heuristic: This function enables people to use language for the purpose of gaining knowledge and exploring phenomena.

3. Identity

One of the most controversial topics is the topic of identity, together with the concept of 'Self'. Another issue that renders the definition of identity more difficult is the idea of whether an outside observer should take into account how a given speech community characterize itself or that he should deem it sufficient to capitalize on his own observation solely. However, Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2004) asserts, "It is crucial to attend closely to speakers' own understandings of their identities. In addition, the concept 'identity' has piqued and still stirs vastly the interest and curiosity of a substantial number of scholars, those who have laboured galore at unraveling its mystery; however, the concept still proves impenetrable (Fearon, 1999). Since it naturally has a multitude of definitions, researchers or the corresponding field practitioners get lost in serious dilemmas as

how identity can be approached. Given the difficulty of defining or delineating what identity and self are, it will sound normal and logical for them to be schismatic about their definitions. “Self and identity are not simple concepts with widely agreed upon meanings” (Ashmore and Jussim, 1997). Another persistent problem is the claim that self and identity are not open to objective scrutiny. Holland (1997) supports such a claim. Thus, any serious study about both concepts will appear a mere approximation, more or less, to truth about them. There are even those who claim that identity is a mere imagination. Gönül Pultar in her book (*Imagined Identities: Identity Formation in the Age of Globalisation*), tackling personal identity, made it clear through the example given by Levi Strauss intimating to the idea that identity is an illusion or a mirage, “...there is no “I”, no “me”” (Pultar, 2014).

Contrary to the latter idea and the idea of the mysteriousness engulfing the concept ‘identity’, identity is also an “explanatory force”, as Fearon (1999) claims, due to its fundamentality in the “social sciences”

Another issue about identity that has such vehemence to itself is the idea that identity can be destabilised due to the two ways essentially present to it: our conception of who we are and people’s conception(s) of who we are. No matter how unconquerably unbending an identity is, it is usually the case that identity is threatened by external interactions and hence judgements. Certainly, with comparably varying degrees of restraint or conservativeness, identities are open to alterations, negotiations or adaptations.

There are two main areas where a researcher can navigate his way through the concept of identity. One area is the tacit agreement that identity can be viewed in two types: Personal identity and social identity. Fearon (1999) argues in favour of this view, “I argue that “identity” is presently used in two linked senses, which may be termed “social” and “personal””. Another area is the perspectives from which identity can be looked at: sociology, anthropology, psychology, politics and philosophy.

Each sound-minded individual would want to see due respect from his fellow human beings and that his dignity is recognised. Self-image is a serious construct in personal identity. Anything that stands menacing to self-image is minacious to personal identity. Personal identity, Fearon (1999) explains, “...refers to the sources of an individual’s self-respect and dignity”.

Social identity, on the other hand, as the name suggests, is the identity of a whole society or community as its members define themselves consciously to themselves and to others. Within the field of social psychology, social cognition is an elemental area that can explain how individuals “think”, “feel”, perceive, and judge themselves and others (Bless and Greifeneder, 2018).

Social identity is collective in essence, and it entails that a group of people tend to present themselves with almost homogenous social fabric to the *outside* world and gain recognition to their very existence, respect to their cultural possessions and heritage, and tolerance to their being different, usually differences that seem disapproving to outsiders. Further, within the community itself, the social identity is preserved via its members behaving in accordance with the norms and standards that are tacitly conventionalized (ibid). That is not to say that no mavericks or rebels should exist in a given community. It is quite natural to witness members who would not usually conform to those norms and standards, especially when such norms are felt to restrict their freedom, and given the fact that globalization has swept across almost every *nook* of the world, rebellion would not be surprising.

Bless and Greifeneder (2018) point out to the complexity and dynamicity of the social environment where individuals are required to understand possible “situations” so that their interactions will be successful. Such community’s in-group interactions may cause serious challenges to the way we tend to picture others in our mutual social identifications.

While there is a social reality about a given community whose members naturally identify with, individuals tend to “construct their own social reality” which is dependent on their own interpretations to many situations (Bless and Greifeneder, 2018). To illustrate, two members of the same community may behave differently to a situation with another member of their community or to an outsider. These two members pay allegiance to almost all their community’s norms and claim to share the same social identity, but they would display different social realities. Bless and Greifeneder (2018) refer to such social realities as being subjective directed towards translating objective situations.

Social identity can be threatened by the state of affairs that a given community aggregates several groups of different ethnicities, languages, sexual orientations, etc. The very presence of such distinctions among members of the same community is doomed to nurture hostilities and antagonisms, particularly in the absence of tolerance.

In this present brief research paper, the researcher intends to merge both areas and to select some perspectives or angles from which he can look at identity.

4. Language and Identity

The bond that language bears for identity is unquestionably formidable. No speech community can afford to ignore the crucial essentialness of its language in the formation of its identity. Although it is generally assumed that religion and nationalism respectively play the grandest role in making globally known a given identity, language can never be downplayed. Indeed, language is not all that is for a person to claim an identity or to be looked at with alterity, as Joseph (2004) asserted, "It is not the case that language entirely determines how we conceive of a person".

The seriousness of identity, personal, social or cultural, depends on the level of consciousness given to it as a whole. It can be argued that it is incorrect to assume that the components of identity are given equal importance in the individual's or community's awareness. It is safe to claim that some components receive higher significance, depending on the varied natures of different communities. For example, in a Muslim community, say, Saudi Arabia, religion is the component that signifies largely citizens as separate individuals and the community as a whole. Nonetheless, in many other Arab countries, disregarding the regime or the element of political power, almost all individuals define themselves more on religious fundaments.

The linguistics *manners* have a huge impact on how we picture them (Joseph, 2004). Joseph seems to ignore the fact that communities display a lot of discrepancies whereby one community is more nationalistic in its identity while another community is more religious in its identity. For instance, despite the fact that Arabic is a vitally essential element in Islam, a Saudi Arabian will get more offended when his religion is being ridiculed or lacerated than when it is the case with his language.

Depending on how a person A forms a mental image of a person B, person A will interact with or treat person B in accordance. According to Joseph (2004), largely linguistically, the mass of information or knowledge procured about a given person will determine the nature of the social encounter he is to witness or receive. Ironically still, the nature of that social interaction will also make known to the

parties involved who the interlocutor is (Joseph, 2004). Thus, the interlocutor does not only *size up* his treatment of that person, but he also consciously or subconsciously makes himself known to himself.

The above idea can be sensed almost akin to the idea propounded and expounded by John J. Gumperz and Jenny Cook-Gumperz in their book (Language and Social Identity). They made it clear how social identity is constructed and reconstructed via the exercising ‘power and control’ among interactants (Gumperz, 1982).

To speak of a static identity and deem its components rigid and invincible is tantamount to speaking of the non-ageing of human beings. Human beings *do* age, and identities *do* incur fluidity, tentativeness and change. Nevertheless, supposedly, identity could be *caught on the spot*, deemed intransient, able to be analysed almost as a totality, ethnicity, sociality and politics avail some understanding of it, but those need to be communicated, hence the role of language (Gumperz, 1982).

5. American English and American Linguistic Identity

There are several linguistic identifications that in part set American identity apart from other English-speaking nations’ identities. In our present article, we shall focus on one variety of English further contrastable with American English, and that English is British English. Generally put, it is rare – if not inexistent – to find laypeople of a given nation confer much seriousness of defining on their linguistic identifications against the other linguistic identifications of other nations of the same language. However, such a concernment can be sensed in the attitudes of the literati who are more conscious to language use and usage. That being said, it is also sound to claim that, generally speaking, American citizens take pride in that English in that America now is the first superpower globally. In his article titled: Language and Power: An Insight into American English Dissemination, Zhang Bingtian (2017) decides, “Language is not an objective, transparent medium, as claimed by linguists in the past, but a social practice and intervention force of social process. Instead of simply reflecting the society, language is directly involved in social affairs and relations”.

5.1. American English

Although English is one language, it is safe to speak of the existence of several Englishes recognised officially and globally. English as a Germanic language originated in Britain. Historically and socially, it witnessed radical transformations

owing to the meddling of other languages, particularly French. By the time it was allowed to label English with modernness, English had still to undergo some petty changes.

The famous Englishes around the world are British, Australian, Indian, New Zealand, South African, and American. The latter is named so because of the fact that the English Puritans and Pilgrims became masters in the New World and could impose their language. In fact, their language, due to the presence of and contact with the settlers from different European countries, had to meet some *mutative* processes. After such modifications, English in the New World became known as American English which proudly shows some distinctiveness from British English.

Given the fact that America was destined to become a highly populated country where various ethnicities were to found its social fabric, some analysts were led to believe that its language would eventually depart from that in Britain. Noah Webster believed

British and American English (BrE and AmE) would in the long run drift apart, just like other Germanic dialects that have evolved into the modern languages Dutch, Danish, Swedish, German, etc. ‘several circumstances render a future separation of the American tongue from the English, necessary and unavoidable’ (Webster, 1789, 20)

Indeed, American English now bears several differences to British English, but never to the extent of considering them two different languages. Such differences were not to distinguish America from Britain linguistically only; they bore a greater purpose: a distinction in identity.

Another point that confirms the huge discrepancy between American and British English on the levels of pronunciation and lexicon is that according to Tottie (2002), American English should supersede British English in international use, especially in educational matters. Her argument stands on the fact that America now is a “superpower” and its population is far greater than Britain’s. If the idea had rested on the linguistic fact that American English and British English are one language with some stark differences, Gunnell Tottie and the like-minded would not have bothered to seek authentic educational internationalization of American English. The matter is indeed beyond mere linguistic differentiation.

American English differs from British English on the levels of phonology, lexicon, orthography and syntax. While the former three have received a great deal of attention and scrutiny over the years, the latter has remained almost ignored (Tottie, 2002, as cited in Rohndenburg and Schlüter, 2009).

Rohndenburg and Schlüter (2009) pointed out to the fact that grammar differences between the two varieties of English have been downplayed. It would not be surprising if notice is paid to the way people, especially learners, around the world deal with English. The highest point that concerns learners of English is pronunciation. Many young learners relish in knowing, learning and debating phonological differences between American and British English. It is almost absent in the learners' minds to investigate the grammar or syntax differences between the two varieties.

5.2 .American Linguistic Identity

Language is elemental in the establishment of identity. In *Language and Identity: An Introduction*, John Edwards (2009) explicates, "The language we use forms an important part of our sense of who we are – of our identity". Still, the seriousness with which an American exerts in linguistically defining himself against, say, an Arab is more substantial than in defining himself against a Briton. An American and a Briton share the same language despite the differences in its linguistic rudimentary items. Thus, their disparate identities should capitalize more on something else than the shared tongue. That, however, will not disallow us to pursue the differentiations, however petty they could be claimed to be, in linguistic identification.

Although almost all nations honour their languages, maybe in different ways, giving a religious or nationalistic print to them, linguistic identifications are as such 'merely linguistic', as though no stretch of more significance could be sought after. Still, language knowledge is core to the sustenance and longevity of nations, as James Brown (1831), talking about the American nation in his book, *The American Grammar*, explained, "American statesmen must be acquainted with their own language, or this republic is of short duration".

To speak of an American identity is beyond the scope of any anthropological, psychological, philosophical or linguistic theories. It is just impossibility, sheer and stark. It is however conceivable to speak of American identities. That is, America, as are some other highly populated countries, is a collection of identities rendered

a unary national identity by political power. Such a political power would want to erect some politically substantiated principles which bond the American nation together. One principle they held *dear* was to proffer the English language a defining national language. Thus, to speak of an American linguistic identity is feasibly plausible, though America comprises a multitude of ethnicities which decreatively feature the English language differently.

In this article, the researcher seeks to highlight the linguistic identifications that set American identity quite tacitly contrastable to other English-speaking countries' identities. These identifications manifest in phonology, orthography, lexicon and syntax. To claim that all the discrepancies in those identifications were to occur on an unconscious or subconscious presence is a *terrible* error. Some of those linguistic identifications were intentionally operated, i.e., *the hands* of man did meddle with them.

5.1.1. Phonology

Who would absurdly claim to see no differences between the American and British and other English systems of phonology? Snezhina Dimitrova in his *British and American Pronunciation* stated, "In 1877, the British philologist Henry Sweet said that within a century "England, America, and Australia will be speaking mutually unintelligible languages owing to their independent changes of pronunciation." However, this claim by Henry Sweet was clearly a hyperbole; all the English-speaking nations can still lead reciprocally understandable interactions.

It is untenable to lay down all the American English phonological features within the spatial latitude allowed by the present small article. Few examples, therefore, will claim sufficiency in this context. These examples are intended for showing the disparity between both American and British pronunciation systems. We are to spot the distinctions in BBC or Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) which are Standard English(es). Albeit Elliott (2000) stated, "Unlike Great Britain and its Received Pronunciation (RP), the U.S. has no officially-defined standard American English pronunciation", our article will consider the prominent accent in America, the accent that is perceived as "perceived standard". Such will be the manner in which American linguistic identity glaringly features.

Treating the phonological aspects of a language is an embankment on the study of accent. According to Yule (2014), accent is "the description of aspects of pronunciation that identify where an individual speaker is from, regionally or

socially”. One monumentally stark feature is rhoticity. Generally, American accent is rhotic whereas British accent is not.

According to Elliott (2000), dialects or accents of English can be partially characterized by the state of the /r/ sound whether pronounceable or otherwise. It is obvious that most Americans pronounce the /r/ sound at the end of words and before consonants. This is generally not the case with British accent. Hence, America identifies in part itself with rhoticity in its nation’s overall pronunciation.

Other scholars like Peter Trudgill and William Labov thought that rhoticity can actually generally delineate the social class variably in both nations, Great Britain and America. While Trudgill arrived to the conclusion that non-rhoticity marked the upper-class in Britain, Labov met the opposite result in the case of the American society. This was documented in their experiments in both countries, Trudgill in Britain and Labov in America.

Another clearly defining feature of American accent is the pronunciation of the (t) as /d/ when the (t) is between two vowels, even if the (t) is doubled, that is (-tt-). In her book *A-Z Guide to American English Pronunciation*, Amanda Lillet stated, “Nobody thinks you’re trying to pretend you were born in the United States if you learn to pronounce the /t/ in “meeting” more like an English /d/”. Examples of these respectively are in the words (university, better). Hence, a Briton or a non-native speaker who has some knowledge of English can easily identify a fellow with *Americanness* via the presence of rendering (t) /d/. This latter feature is exclusively an Americanism.

We mentioned earlier that linguistic identifications had to have some meddling of a *conscious hand* of man; however, there is no substantiation to that claim with regard to the element of pronunciation. We are prone more to think that such a phonological identification happened naturally.

5.1.2. Orthography

The magnitude of scale to trace back the historical evolution of the English language spelling system is unutterably ineffable. David Crystal (2012) in his book (*Spell it Out*) pictured such a reality about the spelling system where several epochs such as the Anglo-Saxon era, the Vikings, the Normans, etc in manner of accumulation were to gear the pathway with their corresponding tongues to found the present-day spelling system of English.

The written form of languages has features that pertain to those languages. For example, English is written from left to right while Arabic from right to left. In addition, any given written form will dictate the nature of phonology to a given language. It is the case in English that the letter (c) can be pronounced /s/ in some loci and /k/ in others. For instance, it is pronounced /k/ and /s/ respectively in the word (conceive). Hence, a non-native speaker has to know how the English orthography or system of spelling relates to the English phonology.

It seems at first that no logic underlies the spelling system of English, given the sustainability of several examples where words which are spelt similarly with regard to vowels are pronounced differently. For instance, words like (steal, break and swear) which comprise (-ea-) are pronounced in dissimilar manners. Nevertheless, Fulford (2012) argues, “English spelling does indeed have logical rules that govern how the words are spelled”.

Indeed, there exist some rules which can be highly dependable to elicit correct spelling and naturally convenient corresponding pronunciation, but the quote above cannot fully be vindicated. That is the case, for there is not any fully homogeneous system of spelling to govern English towards a stable state of pronunciation.

The present system of spelling in all Englishes underwent several evolving phases where different languages were to play their roles. As Jurić (2013) indicated in her article about the English language system as a whole, “The sound, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary – every aspect of the language has a rich history of development, influenced by other languages during its journey towards standardization”

In our present article, we would not concern ourselves with the historical development of the English language system in its entirety, nor would we care to investigate the evolution of its spelling through history. What we intend to do is simply present some features of the modern American English spelling system and its distinctiveness to the modern British English spelling system. Actually, the distinctiveness in spelling, unlike pronunciation, should not be overrated, for generally, the two spelling systems are almost similar. Tottie (2002:8) claims, “Although most words are written in exactly the same way in the two varieties, there are a few eye-catching differences in spelling.”

Since it is not requisite in this small-sized article to account for the whole spelling system of American English, we will with presumption choose the two most flagrant examples that can showcase its distinction from the spelling system of British English.

The examples are –er *versus* –re and –or *versus* –our. Words like (centre, metre and litre) in British English are spelt (center, meter and liter) respectively in American English. Words like (flavour, colour and saviour) in British English are spelt (flavor, color and savior) in American English.

5.1.3. Lexicon

Words in a given language are varied in origin, formation and the capacity for meaning. There could, at least among the languages worthy of internationalization, no one language capable of claiming total originality in its body of vocabulary. There will always exist *lexical generosity* amongst these languages. Казань (2010), “Etymologically the vocabulary of the English language is far from being homogeneous. It consists of two layers - the native stock of words and the borrowed stock of words”. Assumedly, the native word-stock is from Anglo-Saxons while the borrowed word-stock is from other languages. For example, the English word (algebra) was loaned from Arabic, the English phrase (En contraire) from French, the English word (Kismet) from Turkish, etc. English, hence, is now a rich tongue whose lexicon calls attention to a colossal variety of intimately related tongues like German and other foreign tongues like Arabic.

Generally speaking, the languages that contributed colossally to the possible enrichment of the English language lexicon are the Germanic and Romance tongues. Lipka (1992) summarized, “According to Leisi, contemporary English is a unique mixture of Germanic and Romance elements and this mixing has resulted in the international character of the vocabulary”.

Lexicon may be used technically to mean various conceptions, as Lvivna et al (2020) remarked, “A lexicon is a list of words in a language or that a particular person knows – a vocabulary – along with some knowledge of how each word is used (a kind of mental dictionary)”. Nonetheless, in this article, we use it to mean simply the body of vocabulary of a given language, that is, the sum of words sustained in that language.

Thinking about lexicon leads us to think about two areas that are quite branching, namely lexicology and semasiology. These two areas are linguistic sciences that deal with the semantics and morphology of individual words. However, according to Ginzburg et al (1979), "...Semasiology has for its subject - matter not only the study of lexicon, but also of morphology, syntax and sentential semantics. This shows that semasiology, unlike lexicology, comprises the study of meaning of the sentential constructions.

Technically, lexicon, as the term taken to mean in this article, deals with the morphologi(es) and meaning(s) of individual words. The plural (morphologies) is used here advisedly, for, when dealing with the difference between American and British English, there appears to be some discrepancies with regard to affixation.

Thus, our concern will revolve around the variations between British English and American English apropos both affixation, mostly suffixation, which stems from the study of morphology, and lexemes which stem from the study of lexicology.

Affixation entails the three elements prefixes, infixes and suffixes. English does not have infixes. To take one example, the noun derived from (normal) is (normality) in British English but (normalcy) in American English.

As for lexicon, there are a lot of examples where American English departs from British English. One example is the word (truck) that is used in the stead of the British English word (lorry). Another word in American English is (jail) that mirrors in pronunciation, but differs in spelling from, the word (gaol), the word (gaol) being British. Last but not least, the word (elevator) in American English substitutes the word (lift) in British English.

5.1.4. Syntax

The study of phrasal, clausal or sentential constructions is known as syntax. Language bears an almost fixed linearity to the structuring of meaningful, communicative items in both forms: the written and the spoken. Aarts (2001) claims, "If you have thought about language, you will have realised that whether it is spoken or written, it has structure, and that it is not a hotchpotch of randomly distributed elements".

It amounts to some phenomenal miraculosity to witness such a systematic intricacy in the syntax of Language (capitalized advisedly). Humans do internalize the syntactic systems of their languages-proper; however, it is very hard to believe that humans are capable of creating spontaneously such underlying systematization that gears the whole language in processes of written and spoken interactions. We might clothe ourselves in some subjectivity and say: If any miracle should exist in Language, it ought to be syntax.

To claim that a person knows all the words that exist in the English language is beyond reason. To claim that a person knows almost everything about the English syntax is within the confines of reason. However, it is plausible to find a native speaker of English unable to explain a certain syntactic rule, however familiar it is, in his language, but he would have his ears agog from time to time to tell a non-native speaker of English that this is not the way English *behaves*. In his book, *Analysing Sentences: An Introduction to English Syntax*, Noel Burton-Roberts (2011), addressing native speakers, confirms, “You may have had the frustrating experience of knowing that something is wrong but not being able to say precisely what it is, beyond saying ‘We just don’t say it like that’”.

Due to the constraints on its size, this article will consider sentences only, overlooking phrases and clauses. In both varieties of English, British and American, sentence has a specific linear construction, depending on its patterns and types. Patterns are like Subject-Verb-Complement, Subject-Verb-Object, etc. Types are like simple, compound or complex sentences.

In his book, *English Syntax and Argumentation*, Bas Aarts gave three examples to show the grammatically allowable and disallowable structures of sentence:

- The President ate a doughnut.
- The President a doughnut ate.*
- oughnut President the ate a.*

The asterisk (*) symbolizes ungrammaticality. As can be noticed, English exhibits certain restrictions in its syntax; not any structure comprises an English grammatical sentence.

We hear a lot about the sheer differences in pronunciation and some vocabulary between British English and American English, but rarely do we hear of differences in syntax. Indeed, since syntax naturally involves intricacies that may tire the mind thinking about them, the majority of lay native and non-native speakers of English

alike seem to ignore syntactic differentiations between the two varieties, British and American. Such knowledge requires specialist literati.

Having sung the praises of the American grammar on one hand, James Brown (1831), on the other hand, castigated the British system of grammar as being based on no logical bases, lacking exactitude in its terminology, and wrought in *ridiculous* exceptions.

Let us turn a blind eye to such a subjective assumption, and consider some instances of difference in syntax between the two varieties. Two examples will be sufficient: the use of prepositions and tense.

It is commoner in British English to use the preposition (to) after the word (different) more than the preposition (from): Algeria is different to France. On the other hand, Americans use (from) more commonly. In addition, Americans sometimes omit the preposition, where in the same context with the Britons, the preposition will manifest: protest (against) injustice.

One example in the context of tenses where the adverb (just) features, Americans use the simple past where the Britons see it necessary to use the present perfect: (AmE) I just arrived; (BrE) I have just arrived.

6. Conclusion

Not having said it previously in the paragraphs laid above within the scale of this article, we feel it necessary to argue that the two concepts identity and identification are quite different, not only in meaning, but also in nature. Identity is of much perpetuity in the individual's consciousness than identification which is much of situationality or operationality. However, what we sought in this article was to show how an American can be identified via the marks of his use of language. To do that, we depended on four aspects of language capable of giving reliable identification markers; these were phonology, orthography, lexicon and syntax.

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