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## A Mid-Atlantic Lexical Register

Marko Modiano är amerikan och är verksam vid Högskolan i Gävle-Sandviken. I sin forskning har han ägnat sig dels åt D.H. Lawrence litteratur, dels, på senare år, åt frågan om brittisk kontra amerikansk engelska. I den här artikeln argumenterar han för att man i den internationella engelskan bör undvika ett utpräglat brittiskt eller utpräglat amerikanskt ordförråd till förmån för den ömsesidiga förståelsen.

Mid-Atlantic English, which is in the process of developing its own standard, and is fast becoming the most common form of English in the European Union, is characterized by the absence of pronunciation which is decisively British English (BrE). This holds true, not only in respect to both marked and unmarked RP, but also for features associated with regional accents and dialects. As to American English (AmE), while standard characteristics are acceptable, attributes associated with the few regional accents in North America are not. As a result, instead of speaking with a decidedly American or British accent, the speaker of Mid-Atlantic is difficult to place geographically. For non-native speakers, hints of their native tongue may be traced in their usage. Good examples of this form of Mid-Atlantic English can be found in the commentators on European satellite television.

Mid-Atlantic is the result of the ongoing Americanization of the English language. AmE has a profound impact on the English spoken not only in the UK and in Europe, but also throughout the world (see Matsuda, 1990). Moreover, English is the most preferred second language in the EU, especially among young people. While older generations often accept BrE as the educational standard, young people today appear to be more willing to use AmE. At the same time, the influence of BrE is on the decline. Nevertheless, BrE greatly influences the way in which Europeans speak English. As a result, many people in the EU use features from both major varieties of the language. This mixing, which was once scorned by the educational establishment, has found refuge in the movement for a Mid-Atlantic educational norm, and has now met with acceptance from many quarters.

The concept of Mid-Atlantic encompasses more than pronunciation. There is also a Mid-Atlantic "lexical register," which is comprised of the common terminology in both AmE and BrE. Because speakers of Mid-Atlantic strive to use language which is best understood by the interlocutor, their active vocabulary must be extensive. Thus, because there are words and phrases which are not readily understood by native speakers, for the simple reason that many words and phrases are not common usage in both of the standard varieties of the language, speaking Mid-Atlantic requires a good understanding of the lexical differences between AmE and BrE. Aware-

ness of the lexical items which are not understood by large groups of English speaking people is part and parcel of the Mid-Atlantic movement. In this article I will present a number of words which may cause misunderstanding. My position is that speakers of Mid-Atlantic need to be aware of the intricacies of the language so that they can select the most appropriate terms when communicating with others.

While many people in the EU believe that their usage of the English language is exclusively BrE, many linguists have observed the influence which AmE has exerted on Euro-English. Obviously, it has become increasingly popular for Europeans to incorporate Americanisms in their speech and writing. In respect to standards promoted by educational establishments, there are still some conservative language instructors who insist that the BrE "register" is the "best" English and should be preserved and kept "pure" (see Görlach and Schröder, 1985). Such attitudes belong to a generation which can no longer control or define the manner in which English language instruction is carried out. Instead, a new generation of English instructors are more aware of the implications of Mid-Atlantic, and are willing to promote a norm which best provides their students with communication skills. At this conjecture then, we need not debate the pros and cons of AmE and BrE, but instead accept the fact that Mid-Atlantic is in the process of becoming an educational standard.

In theoretical terms, lexical choices which a potential speaker of Mid-Atlantic makes require a good understanding of the language. This is because speakers of Mid-Atlantic are expected to know when various terms or phrases may not be quickly identified by the interlocutor. If we look at the communication between Americans and British people, for example, it is apparent that a great many words and phrases common to everyday life in the UK are virtually unknown to a large number of Americans. When Americans and British people meet, the American may have a difficult time comprehending their new friend if she or he insists on using language which specifically belongs to the BrE register and is uncommon in other varieties of the language. On the other hand, British people, for a number of reasons, are more familiar with AmE. As a result, Americans are, for the most part, more likely to be understood when visiting the UK (that is, as long as they do not speak a strong variant of a regional accent, or use non-standard terminology). As to second language speakers, their active and passive vocabularies often consist of words from both AmE and BrE. In practice then, the speaker of Mid-Atlantic English is careful, when communicating with other second-language speakers of English, to avoid words which are specifically common to only one variety of English (obviously, it is logical to use AmE terminology when speaking with Americans and BrE terminology when dealing with British people). In definition, Mid-Atlantic, as a medium for cross-cultural communication, is characterized by internationally recognized terminology. An important effect then of the development of Mid-At-

lantic English in the EU is that this movement promotes the establishment of a global standard for the language.

We may begin by looking at some common BrE terms which are not readily understood by speakers of AmE. A term such as *barrister*, for example, which is a common lexical item in BrE, and not understood by speakers of AmE, should be ruled out and replaced by an equivalent more universally understood, (in this case the term *lawyer* is understood not only by Americans but is also used internationally). Note, however, that the BrE term *solicitor* is also unknown to most Americans.<sup>1</sup> Keep in mind that the definition of words is, in some cases, closely connected to aspects of culture, and in some cases further explanation is required. When *lawyer*, for example, is sufficient, one need not refer to the distinction between BrE *barrister* and *solicitor*. There may be times, however, when a more thorough explanation is called for.

Further examples are BrE *caretaker*, *hoarding*, *industrial action*, *noughts and crosses*, *plaster*, *sideboards*, and *biro* (all of which, in the context here intended, are for the most part not used or understood in North America). Seeing as 70% of all native speakers of the English language speak AmE, it is likely that Europeans will have the opportunity to communicate with people who do not know or understand these terms. When speaking with people who speak Mid-Atlantic or AmE, one should use *janitor*, *billboard*, *strike*, *tick-tack-toe*, *band aid*, *sideburns* and *ballpoint pen*. The AmE words listed here are understood internationally. In contrast, two examples of AmE terms not understood by speakers of BrE are *gubernatorial* and *caucus*, the first of which is simply an adjective for *governor*, and the latter a political meeting to decide policy or to draw up a list of candidates to be endorsed.<sup>2</sup> Another term, *condominium*, while commonly used in the US, is obscure in the UK (the word is used for an apartment which is privately owned). As such, it is apparent that there are words which are exclusively the property of either AmE or BrE, and speakers of Mid-Atlantic need to be aware, not only of this fact, but also of the equivalent in the other major variety.

In the next category, we have terminology where the words are not only different, there is also possibility for misunderstanding because the corresponding term has another meaning in the other variety. One example is the BrE word *torch*. In both AmE and BrE this term is used for a short stick which can be lit on fire at one end. However, in BrE it also means a hand-held battery-powered object used to provide light. In this capacity the AmE term is *flashlight*, which is also more common internationally. Remember that *torch* in AmE is not synonymous with *flashlight*. It is not uncommon

<sup>1</sup> In BrE there are two distinctions in the legal profession. A solicitor gives legal advice, can appear in the lower courts, and prepares cases for a barrister. A barrister, on the other hand, has the right to speak in the higher courts.

<sup>2</sup> The origin of the word *caucus* is assumed to be native American (Algonquin).

that people unaware of this intricacy of language ask someone for a *torch* and are not comprehended as requesting a *flashlight*. Another example is the BrE term *braces*, which is AmE *suspenders*. The term *braces* in AmE, however, means a network of supports and wires used to straighten the teeth (in AmE this term is always plural). In this sense the BrE term is *brace*, or, alternatively, *braces*. (Note, however, that in BrE, the first and most common definition of the term is as a synonym to AmE *suspenders*.) Furthermore, please keep in mind that *brace* is also commonly used for supportive structures in medicine and engineering. The BrE term *tea* is used to describe the evening meal in everyday British life. In AmE *dinner* is used. *Tea*, in AmE, is only used for something one can drink. Thus, someone speaking AmE may be very surprised to find a meal served when they had assumed that they had been invited to drink tea. Speakers of Mid-Atlantic, because of their expertise in the differences between AmE and BrE, would be expected to understand such variance.

Lastly, we have cases where two equivalents are mutually understood but where there is a preferred variant, such as *fall*, which is favored in AmE, and *autumn*, which is more common in the UK. Other pairs of words which fall into this category are (with the preferred AmE term first) *movie theater/cinema*, *gas pedal/accelerator*, *bartender/barman*, *check/bill*, *phone booth/call box*, *parking lot/car park*, *teller/cashier*, *first name/Christian name*, *information/directory inquiries*, *busy signal/engaged tone*, *trade union/labour union*, *mail box/letter box*, and *gasoline/petrol*. With the terms *check/bill*, we refer here to payment made in a restaurant. With *information/directory inquiries*, the definition refers to the use of a telephone. This category is perhaps the least significant. Nevertheless, the question of style is not unimportant. The choices we make when selecting one or the other say quite a lot about ourselves as individuals. Keep in mind, however, that the system is breaking down, so that one can no longer say that British people always use specific words over AmE alternatives. Instead, because of the ongoing Americanization of the English language, the distinctions in this category are becoming increasingly tenuous. This means, quite clearly, that speakers of Mid-Atlantic have a great deal of freedom. *Fall* or *autumn*, both terms are readily understood on either side of the Atlantic.

Mid-Atlantic English offers several advantages over the exclusive use of either AmE or BrE. First of all, as the focus is on comprehension, the speaker is given an opportunity to regard the language from the listener's point of view. Clarity is stressed, not only in pronunciation but also in respect to sentence structure and grammar. Lexical items are chosen according to a basic tenant, that they are readily understood. What evolves as people strive to incorporate understanding of the language on a broad scale is the internationalization of the language. English, undoubtedly, is the *lingua franca* of our age. A variety of the English language should be available which is politically neutral, as well as easily comprehensible to the largest

number of people. Mid-Atlantic meets these requirements. The most commonly understood word is selected as opposed to more esoteric lexical items which are obscure or incomprehensible to some people. Switching can be used, that is, the use of more than one word to describe the same thing, as a method to explore the listener's frame of reference. The widening of the active vocabulary establishes a foundation which, in cross-cultural terms, facilitates the best possible conditions for rewarding and effective communication.

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## CURRENT RESEARCH

A new doctoral dissertation in English literature from Uppsala University:

Hedda Friberg, *An Old Order and a New: the Split World of Liam O'Flaherty's Novels*.

In the Irish author Liam O'Flaherty's novels, two societal forms, or sub-cultures, meet and clash. One, called the Old Order, is rural, "primitive", indigenous, sometimes colonized, and linked to the cycles of nature. The other—the new Order—is urban, modernity-marked, "civilized", and sometimes colonizing. It is "imported" and marked by technological progress and a cash-nexus economy. In addition to the cultural division, psychological and social splits are also apparent in O'Flaherty's novels. Some protagonists have dual or multiple personalities and some undertake, or attempt to undertake, a "class journey"—a journey across class boundaries. A class journey is also discernible in Liam O'Flaherty's own life. In the study, which is based on O'Flaherty's fifteen novels and three autobiographies as well as on biographical material, O'Flaherty's shifting positions between an Old Order and a New during the course of his authorship are explored. Finally, the reasons for O'Flaherty's waning productivity have been reassessed.

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## TNC — The Swedish Centre for Technical Terminology

I denna artikel ges en presentation av Tekniska nomenklaturcentralens arbete. Förf. är språkligt utbildade terminologer som båda har medverkat i utarbetandet av TNCs ordlista *EGs ord och uttryck*. De svarar idag för en del av TNCs kontakter med EG-kommissionen.

#### Some definitions:

##### term

designation consisting of one or more words which denotes a given concept in a special language

##### concept

unit of knowledge constituted through combining characteristics

##### terminology

set of terms belonging to one special language

##### nomenclature

set of designations structured according to pre-established rules

##### terminology work

work concerned with the systematic collection, description, processing and presentation of concepts and their designations

(Definitions from the ongoing work on ISO 1087-1 "Terminology work - Vocabulary - Part 1: Theory and application")

#### Organisation

The Swedish Centre for Technical Terminology (TNC) was founded in 1941 to meet the growing need for adequate technical terminology in Swedish. Terminological activity in Sweden had, however, been in progress since 1936 when the Academy of Engineering Sciences set up a standing committee to deal with technical terminology, or nomenclature, as it was called at that time. Sweden already had a longstanding tradition of work with nomenclature; the well-known scientists Linnaeus and Berzelius were important pioneers within the fields of botany and chemistry in the 18th century.

TNC today is an independent non-profit association with about 70 governmental agencies, organisations and industrial enterprises as members. Among them are the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden Post,