

Week 12. British and American English

(i) BrE and AmE; RP and 'General American'

Shared development until about 1750. Thereafter, reciprocal influence.

(ii) **Spelling** differences (not implying differences in pronunciation)

colour/color, ensure/insure, anaesthetic/anesthetic, centre/center, defence/defense, traveller/traveler, fulfil/fulfill, cheque/check, plough/plow, axe/ax

(iii) **Grammar**

it fit(ted) me perfectly; he dived/dove into the water

I'd like (for) you to do it

England have/has won, the Government are/is going to...

the river Thames/the Hudson River

two hundred (and) ninety

(iv) **Vocabulary**

lift/elevator, trousers/pants, pavement/sidewalk, boot/trunk
sporting metaphors

Pronunciation (read Accents of English, vol 1, p. 242–252)

I. Absence of RP's post-1750 innovations (e.g. r dropping, BATH broadening)

- **Historical /r/ retained:** *beer, square, north, nurse, persuade, farmer*
- **/æ/ in BATH words:** *bath, staff, laugh, pass, after, master, dance*

II. Own innovations (some perhaps with British/Irish dialectal origin)

1. the LOT vowel

1.1 unrounding $\text{ɒ} \rightarrow \text{ɑ}$ *lot, Tom, bother, wash*

1.2 lengthening $\text{ɑ} \leftrightarrow \text{ɑ:}$ *bother/father*

= general loss of distinctive length, retaining other quality distinctions

...so transcription of American English does not usually employ length marks

2. vowels before /r/

2.1 laxing $\text{i:} \rightarrow \text{ɪ}$ *beer, beard, serious*
nearer/mirror

$\text{eɪ} \rightarrow \text{ɛ}$ *fair, scarce, Mary*
sharing/herring

$\text{u:} \rightarrow \text{ʊ}$ *poor, cure, jury*

$\text{oʊ} \rightarrow \text{ɔ}$ *four, force, story*

2.2 mergers $\text{æ} \rightarrow \text{ɛ}$ *marry/merry*