

Lesson 9

AMERICAN AND BRITISH ENGLISH

A. READING

General Comprehension

The following text introduces the topic of American and British English. Look at the way it is constructed. Then look at the following questions and read through the text quickly to find the answers. Remember, you do not have to understand every word in order to answer the questions.

1. What is the main idea of the first paragraph?
2. What is the main idea of the second paragraph?
3. In what respects does the text mention differences between British and American English?
4. Why do an American speaker and a British speaker understand each other when they speak English?



When listening to a conversation between an American and an Englishman, a person will become aware of the most significant differences between the two varieties of the English language. While the Englishman does not pronounce *r* sounds before a consonant sound or at the end of a word, the American does. This might lead to a rather humorous misunderstanding if, when asked by the American what his job was, an Englishman answered that he was a *clerk* (pronounced *clock* to the American ear). Failure to use the *r* sound at the end of a word might also lead to confusion between words like *paw* and *pour*. Moreover, a noticeable difference exists between the basic words used to express the same thing. The American might want to know the price of *gas* in London, but the English man will answer him by using the word *petrol*. Unlike the American, who wears an *undershirt* when the weather is cold, the Englishman wears a *vest*. The American wants to know where the *elevator* is, while the English man asks the location of the *lift*.

The similarities found in this hypothetical conversation, however, will far outweigh the differences. The meanings of most words are, of course, exactly the same. The pronunciation of the consonant sounds, the rhythm, stress, and intonation systems in both American and British English closely resemble each other. In grammar, the similarities are numerous. British English makes a distinction between count and mass nouns, and so does American English. They both have the same verb and tense systems. The grammar of both languages is similar in that they both form and compare adjectives and adverbs in the same way. In fact, the similarities between the two languages – or, more precisely, between these two forms of the same language – are such that there is rarely any serious breakdown in communication between an American speaker and a British speaker.

Detailed Comprehension

Read carefully through the text, looking up anything you do not understand. Then answer the following questions.

1. Mention the word(s) used to show contrast in paragraph 1.
2. Mention the word(s) used to show additional information in paragraph 1.
3. Mention the phrase(s) use to make an emphasis in paragraph 2.
4. Why might *clerk* and *clock* lead to a humorous misunderstanding between an Englishman and an American?
5. Why might the British pronunciation of *paw* and *pour* confuse an American?
6. What is the American expression for the British *vest*?
7. What is the British expression for the American *elevator*?
8. In vocabulary, why is British English similar to American English?
9. What items does the text mention regarding pronunciation of both American and British English?
10. What items does the text mention regarding grammar of both American and British English?

B. VOCABULARY

American versus British English

The first paragraph of the above texts mentions some differences between American and British English. The following examples are some common American words with their British equivalents.

Travel and on the Street

American English	British English
gasoline	petrol
truck	lorry
baggage	luggage
blow-out	puncture
sidewalk	pavement
line	queue
vacation	holiday
trunk (of a car)	boot
hood (of a car)	bonnet
cab	taxi
freeway	motorway
round trip	return
railway car	railway carriage
engineer (on train)	engine driver
baby carriage	pram

In the Home

American English		British English
antenna		aerial
elevator	lift	
eraser		rubber
apartment		flat
closet		wardrobe
drapes		curtains
faucet		tap
kerosene		paraffin
Scotch tape		sellotape
yard		garden
cookie		biscuit
candy		sweets
garbage		rubbish
diaper		nappy
panti-hose		tights

Exercise 1

If you saw words spelt in the following way would you expect the writer in each case to be British or American? Why?

labor	centre
hospitalized	movie theater
favour	thru
night	plow
programme	dialog

Exercise 2

Translate the following into British English.

1. I had a blow out.
2. Pass me the cookies.
3. It's in the closet.
4. Open the drapes.
5. We've run out of gas.
6. It's in the trunk.
7. One-way or round trip?
8. He left the faucet on.
9. We're leaving in the fall.
10. I hate waiting in line.

C. GRAMMAR

Verbs and Verb Phrases

Verbs

It has been stated in the previous section that a verb is a word which expresses the action carried out by the subject of a sentence or connects the subject of a sentence to things about the subject. Depending on the basis for the classification, verbs can be categorized into finite and non-finite verbs, transitive and intransitive verbs, regular and irregular verbs, main and auxiliary verbs, and linking verbs.

1. Finite and non-finite verbs

A finite verb has a subject and its form changes when:

- a. the subject is changed from singular to plural

*My friend **wants** to go to Jakarta today.*
*My friends **want** to go to Jakarta today.*

- b. the time of the action is changed

*My friend **wants** to go to Jakarta.*
*My friend **wanted** to go to Jakarta yesterday.*

The above examples show that *wants*, *want*, and *wanted* are finite verbs. However, *go* is a non-finite verb because it remains the same when we change the subject or the time of the action. In English, every sentence must have a finite verb. A group of words without a finite verb is not a complete sentence.

2. Transitive and intransitive verbs

A transitive verb is a verb which takes an object.

*My son **bought some candies**.*
*The students **are attending a meeting**.*

An intransitive verb is a verb that does not take an object. It does not require an object to complete the meaning of the sentence.

*My son **is sleeping**.*
*The boy **ran**.*

We can see that *some candies* is the object of *bought* and *a meeting* is the object of *are attending*. The verbs *is sleeping* and *ran* are not followed by objects. So *buy* and *attend* are transitive verbs, whereas *sleep* and *run* are intransitive verbs.

3. Regular and irregular verbs

Verbs are divided into regular and irregular verbs on the basis of their forms. Regular verbs are verbs whose forms, especially the past tense and the past participle, can be predicted by rules (e.g. *walk, wash, plan*). Conversely, irregular verbs are verbs whose past tense and past participle are not predictable by rules (e.g. *drink, cut, eat*).

4. Main and auxiliary verbs

A clause may have a single verb (*My son **sleeps** at 9 p.m.*) or a verb phrase (*My son **is sleeping** at the moment*). The verbs *sleeps* and *sleeping* in these examples are the main verbs. The verb *is* is an auxiliary verb. So, the main verb is either the only verb in the clause or the final verb in a verb phrase. The auxiliary verb is a helping verb (such as *will, may, is*). It is important to distinguish main verbs from finite verbs. When a clause has a single verb and not a verb phrase, the main verb is the finite verb. Look at the following examples:

*My friend **sits** here.*
*My friends **sit** here.*
*Yesterday they **sat** here.*

The main verbs in these sentences are finite verbs. In a verb phrase, the finite verb is either the only auxiliary verb or the first auxiliary verb in the verb phrase. The main verb is the final verb in the verb phrase. Look at the following examples:

*My friend **will** have gone.*
*My friend **could** have gone.*
*My friend **has** gone.*
*My friends **have** gone.*
*My friend **is** sitting here.*
*My friends **are** sitting here.*

In these sentences the finite verb is either the only auxiliary verb or the first auxiliary verb in the verb phrase. The main verb is the final verb in the verb phrase (*gone* and *sitting*).

5. Linking verbs

Linking verbs are verbs which link the subject and complement of a clause (e.g. *be, become, seem, appear*). They must be followed by a complement (a completing word or phrase). A group of words consisting of only the subject and the linking verb is not a complete sentence.

Verb Phrases

A single word in a sentence can be expanded into a verb phrase. Remember that when a sentence has only a single verb, the verb must be a finite verb and it is the main verb. To construct a verb phrase, we can add other types of verb to the main verb in a sentence. The other types of verb are auxiliary verbs. We can use one, two, three, or four auxiliary verbs to make a verb phrase, depending on the meaning we want to add to the main verb.

Auxiliary verbs or **auxiliaries** are often known as **helping verbs**. They are words which help a main verb to form a verb phrase. There are two types of auxiliaries: **primary auxiliaries** and **modal auxiliaries**.

Primary auxiliaries include various forms of:

- *be* (e.g. *am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been*)
- *have* (e.g. *have, has, had*)
- *do* (e.g. *do, does, did*)

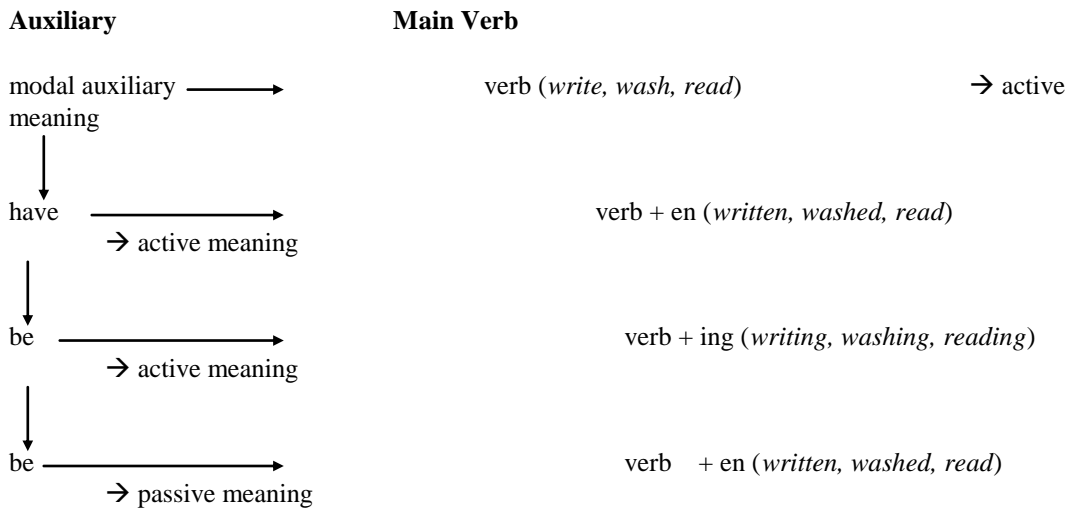
Modal auxiliaries include: *can, may, shall, will, must, could, might, should, would, used to, dare, ought, need*.

Unlike most modal auxiliaries, all the primary auxiliaries (*be, have, do*) can be used as main verbs. Look at the following examples:

*My friend **is** an engineer.*
*My friend **has** a large shop.*
*My friend **does** the work.*

In these sentences, *is, has, and does* are the main verbs.

We can construct verb phrases by using the following diagram:



We can construct verb phrases with one, two, or three auxiliaries and one main verb:

- **will write, can wash, may read, have written, is writing, are read**
- **will have written, may be washing, can be read, have been washing, had been read, is being read**
- **will have been reading, might have been washed**

Note that we have to follow the directions of the arrows in order to construct verb phrases. We can jump but have to follow the arrows.

Exercise

Now revise the incorrect verb phrase in each of the following sentences.

1. The music for Don Giovanni was compose by Mozart.
2. Unfortunately many elderly people cannot affording telephones.
3. The minutes of the last meeting will read by the secretary.
4. Whatever you do you must not told anyone about it.
5. Our guests were took for a drive yesterday.
6. We cannot be certain how an unfamiliar word should been pronounced.
7. The teacher had already give a quiz when I got to class.
8. I was been studying for three hours so that I was getting tired.
9. My friend could not answer the question because he was daydream.
10. I am not quite ready to go, but you can to leave if you are in a hurry.