

## **Just how different is British English from American English?**

Did you know that in the United States you can walk into a beauty parlor (hairdressers) and ask for a SHAG with complete impunity? They will understand that you want a layered haircut. Similarly Americans in the UK have to be careful about how they use the word FANNY - to them it's a harmless word meaning bum. Likewise heterosexual British smokers should avoid using phrases such as 'I fancy a FAG' or 'I could murder a FAG' whilst in the States. In America the word is only slang for homosexuals not cigarettes.

These are just a few examples of words that look innocent enough, are shared by British English and American English, yet can easily be confused. Other examples include JUMPER, BOOT, RUBBER, PANTS, PECKER, CHIPS, COWBOY, and GEEZER.

Fortunately help is at hand with a brand new book being published by Oxford University Press on 24 April 2003. *Mighty Fine Words and Smashing Expressions* by Orin Hargraves, a lexicographer who has lived on both sides of the Atlantic, is a practical and engaging guide to understanding the differences between British and American English. The book is the only one available that treats the differences between the two main dialects of the world's most important language in a systematic way and from a culturally neutral point of view.

Thematically arranged the book covers: Sport and Leisure; Food Clothing, and Shelter; Education; What You Don't Say; and The Stuff of Life. The Stuff of Life chapter explains cultural references including TV programmes and personalities. CILLA BLACK "UK - chirpy Liverpudlian hostess of Blind Date and many other entertainment programmes," CORONATION STREET "UK - long-running and popular prime-times soap set in north west England; thought to exemplify working class life," and LEAVE IT TO BEAVER "US - sitcom from the 1960s, exemplifying family life". The chapter also explains words used to characterize people so you can tell whether you are being insulted or not. For example in the US, a CHROME DOME is a bald headed person, a GEEZER is an old, usually lecherous man, a KLUTZ is a clumsy or awkward person.

"My hope is that I have been able to impose a measure of order for British speakers on the steady stream of American English that comes their way. My book should help decipher quite a lot of messages that seem to be encrypted but are in fact just ordinary Yank-speak," said the author Orin Hargraves.

Orin Hargraves will be in the UK from 21st to 23rd April. For more information or if you would like to interview Orin Hargraves please contact Claire Turner on 07803 044586 or [claire.turner@oup.com](mailto:claire.turner@oup.com). Alternatively you can contact Kate Farquhar-Thomson on 01865 353423, [kate.farquhar-thomson@oup.com](mailto:kate.farquhar-thomson@oup.com).

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## Commonly confused words

American	British
Jumper	Pinafore Dress
Sweater	Jumper
Rubber	Condom
Eraser	Rubber
Pants	Trousers
Panties	Pants
Chips	Crisps
French Fries	Chips

## Different words for the same thing

American	British
Arugula	Rocket
Cart	Trolley
Diaper	Nappy
Eggplant	Aubergine
Fall	Autumn
Line	Queue
Rutabaga	Swede
Scallion	Spring onion
Snow peas	Mange tout
Trunk	Boot
Vacation	Holiday
Zucchini	Courgette

## Fascinating facts

English is the first language of 380 million people, and the second language of another 250 million.

Native speakers of American English make up 70% of the people whose first language is English

Today, 750 million people are learning English

By the year 2050 it is expected that half of the world's population will be proficient in English

85% of the world's international organizations use English as an official language

More than 90% of websites that are linked to a secure server (for the purposes of e-commerce) are sites written in American English