

EPISODE 9: THE US VS THE UK

A: Would You have said back in the day, are you American?

C: Yes.

A: Are you, but are you from America?

C: Yes.

A: You would've said that. Okay.

C: Yes,

A: But I, okay. To me that sounds a little bit like marked speech. It's a little little **out of my norm**, I think, at least growing up. But the, are you American, for sure. Right. I think the first thing, obviously we're alluding to the fact that there are different, there's North America, Central America, South America, um, and those are all Americas. Right? However, in Spain, do you know how many, when they study geography, how many American continents are there?

C: Maybe just the one.

A: Just the one. Right. Because they, they study compared to what we studied in the US, we follow plate tectonics. In fact, for geography, for us, it's two Americas because of the way the plates are. So for us, we learn that there's seven continents. Here I think, if I'm not wrong, they usually learn there's five continents. So immediately, if we think about the fact that language represents our reality

C: Right

A: If for them, the Americas is one continent, it makes sense that they would also be more sensitive to the fact that the word America would refer to anyone from any of the Americas.

C: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

A: Versus for us, which of course were from the US so we believe that we're the center of the world. At least many people in the US believe that

C: Of course you are.

A: That's why it's the only America. Right.

C: But again, would you, would you refer to yourself as American? I'm from the United States, or would you refer to I'm from Chicago?



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A: There you go. I definitely say I'm from Chicago now. Is my mental process that I don't want to say I'm American because it's too vague, or am I really saying I'm not from certain parts of the United States to immediately eliminate a whole myriad of questions and conversations about different unique characteristics to each of our, our home countries. I think, I say Chicago cuz people know where it is. Sounds pretty cool.

C: And which it is.

A: Probably helps. Well, I mean, you know, that's debatable. I, I think it is. But I understand why people from New York, you know, **poo poo** Chicago. Cause it's not super cool. But yeah, I think I agree with what you say, also about the trend now towards saying, are you from the US, right? Versus are you American? But I, I would, my instinct as a linguist tells me that this is probably more prevalent among people who speak a language where you have "America" like in Spanish or Catalan where you have, the word is much more common, you know, to refer to all of the continents.

C: Uh, what's the difference for you between the UK and England?

A: Um, do I have to answer **on the record**? Um, I mean, in my mind, my mind map

C: Right

A: is that, um, England is kind of like California and Texas together. It's like a really big kind of state, but it's more than a state.

C: Yeah.

A: But it's not the entirety of the UK. It's a part of it. The problem is, I think when you say States, you're immediately including a conversation about certain governmental rights. Whereas I have absolutely... I think in conversations we've had, I've asked you please to explain exactly what's an analogue to the UK in the world. Like the UK is not the US of, of Europe, because that's not an adequate description.

C: I think, uh, for me, this is the thing is like, again, maybe when we were younger, so people refer to England, Scotland, Wales, and now I find more and more of my friends from England who want to be politically correct, refer to themselves as "I'm from the UK" because they want to separate themselves a little bit from being English?

A: So they're kind of doing what I do by saying Chicago.

C: Exactly.

A: But instead of getting more specific, they're getting the other way around. Exactly.

C: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. It's a little bit more politically correct in a way. I mean the United Kingdom is Great Britain and Northern Ireland.



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A: Right. So then we go from being to slightly smaller stuff. Great Britain. What is Great Britain?

C: Great Britain is England, Scotland and Wales.

A: Right.

C: Without Northern Ireland.

A: Right. So is Scotland a country?

C: Of course.

A: Is Wales a country?

C: Yes.

A: So it's three countries there form in one Kingdom?

C: Country? Kingdom. Exactly.

A: So I mean, sorry, form the

C: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

A: Okay, so sorry. So those three countries form Great Britain. Great Britain plus Northern Ireland is the United Kingdom is the United Kingdom.

C: And then you've got Ireland

A: And then you've got rights.

C: The Republic of Ireland

A: The Republic of Ireland

C: Is a bit south of Northern Ireland,

A: Which is part of the European Union.

C: Of course <laugh>

A: Unlike the rest of that

C: Unlike the rest of it nowadays!



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A: Yes.

C: I think it's, yeah, it's, it's difficult for some people to **get their heads around it**, even from the British Isles.

A: Sure. I'm not convinced you fully understand it.

C: I don't <laugh>.

A: Okay. Well let's think about language, **cuz** I always like to get it back to language. So everybody in the UK has a similar accent, right? I mean,

C: No, not at all!

A: In America, that's what we think. Right? <laugh> Wait, there's not just one over. Everybody doesn't speak like Hugh Grant?

C: Every 30 minutes, every 30 miles traveling <laugh>, there's a different accent. Completely different. Yeah. Yeah. Now we don't understand each other.

A: Yeah. What for you is the most difficult accent to understand? Uh, or one of the more difficult ones?

C: Newcastle.

A: Yeah.

C: Newcastle...

A: That where the consonants just start to disappear?

C: I don't know what happens there, but I need **subtitles**.

A: Okay. <laugh>.

C: I really need people just a, it very, very difficult, uh, **Glaswegians**, people from gla...

A: Yeah, that's, that's a great demo, great adjective of origin.

C: Glaswegians, um, when drunk, uh, are probably the most difficult to understand.

A: Okay. You've seen Trainspotting?

C: Yes

A: Have you watched it with subtitles? Have you needed to watch, watch it with subtitles?



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C: I believe that actually they had subtitles in the United States when they showed the movie.

A: I don't know, but I've definitely watched it. I've chosen to watch it with subtitles.

C: Yes.

A: I, I saw the first three or four times I saw it was without subtitles and then I was like watching and, it was like a whole other movie inside the movie when I watched it with subtitles.

C: It's because they've got different words for different things. One of, a very simple ones, um, we use a lot in the north, I would include Ireland, Scotland, North of England. Uh: **wee**, do you understand?

A: The French affirmative?

C: Uh, no. No. Okay. <laugh>. We, we, no. Um, here is wee is meaning something small.

A: Ah, wee like w – e - e

C: Yeah. Yeah. So just a wee cup of tea...

A: Like the wee baby Seamus

C: A wee baby. Exactly. And that is very, very common.

A: Okay.

C: And maybe the, the south of England, it wouldn't be as common.

A: Okay.

C: So there's a lot of things happen,

A: But the same meaning?

C: The same meaning. Yeah.

A: Right. It, it's, it's kind of like the diminutive suffix -ito in Spanish.

C: Exactly. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Sure. Because it doesn't really mean that it's small. It's, it's just making it nice.

A: It's the center of "cariño"

C: Yeah, exactly.



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A: In the US it'd be like little but **Lil**. Yeah. Yeah. You know, like you've seen in a lot of hip hop names like Lil Kim who is a, you know, like that little, it's a, a term of affection.

C: Okay.

A: Or in the show Parks and Rec, that I think we mentioned in another episode, one of my favorite shows.

C: Yeah.

A: There's one of those miniature ponies, like a, like a, you know, like a, a pony, but it's like tiny, like the size of a large dog. It's a real thing that they, that exists. And his name is Lil Sebastian, not little, but Lil Sebastian, which is like Sebastiancito <laugh>, you know? So it's totally the same thing. It's a common, common linguistic occurrence.

C: I found it really interesting. The first time I traveled to the States, I went to New York.

A: Of course you did.

C: Tourist, uh, apologies to Chicago.

A: That's all right <laugh>. We don't want you there, anyway, so...

C: One of the things I know this was, um, for me was the **register** of the way people speak. I mean, it's

A: It's much more formal than, uh, the UK

C: Uh, no <laugh>. Oh, Quite the opposite.

A: Wait. So kid, for those who might not know, what does register mean in this case?

C: Register in this case, formal language, informal language.

A: Okay.

C: And I've got one, one great example, it's always stuck in my mind is when, uh, the US captured Bin Laden.

A: Okay.

C: And they made the press conference about this. So very formal situation.

A: Yeah.

C: Huge.



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A: Yeah. And who was speaking? Who was speaking?

C: An American

A: But which one?

C: I'm not sure who, some military general, an important person.

A: But Military, from the military branch.

C: Of course. Yeah.

A: Known for their way with words

C: <laugh> and the exact words. I remember this, just sums everything up "Ladies and Gentlemen, we got him", "Ladies and Gentlemen", the formal

A: Sure, sure.

C: Uh, "We got him" this really informal...

A: That sounds like a line directly out of a Michael Bay action movie <laugh>.

That that's what, what they're going for, for sure. And I think that in that case, I would argue with no way to prove it or not. I think that that type of speech is influenced by the movies and not that the movies were influenced by real life.

C: Yeeeah

A: Think it's sounds, like's this twisted, modern, you know, **spin on**, on the way things are and the way they play on TV. Cuz it's still on TV. So even though he is not an actor, he's still acting.

C: But it sounds like an action movie. "we got him!"

A: Exactly. Yeah, yeah.

C: it's this kind of really, uh, powerful Bruce Willis hero.

A: Exactly.

C: Another one that kind of , stuck with me was the uh," Yes, we can" slogan.

A: "Yes, we can".

C: Now that to me is super, super American!



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A: Because it's the, what should it be? "Yes, we are able to accomplish our goals" That's kind of long for a poster.

C: No, it's because I always find there's this kind of, uh, you know, always optimistic positive attitude.

A: Of course.

C: And I find I would be a little bit more, um....

A: "Let's see if we can do something about it "

C: "Perhaps we might?" Right? Not "Yes, we can."

A: Okay.

C: "Let's be realistic". Yeah.

A: I think since we're, since we started this conversation talking about differences between the US and UK

C: Yeah.

A: That sums it up right there. I mean..

C: That sums it up

A: For better or worse, neither one actually reflecting any reality. Just reflecting the

C: Optimistic, pessimist.

A: <laugh>. Exactly.

C: We should meet halfway.

A: Exactly.

C: Literally. Literally. Why?

A: I mean, what that's in Parks and Rec also Rob Lowe's character, you know, Rob Lowe, the, the beautiful male actor. Yeah. He's this very sweet, very upbeat, he's the ultimate optimist in that show.

C: Right.



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A: And he says “**literally**”, and he says it that way and he says it all the time. And he actually has a podcast that's called “Literally”.

C: Literally.

A: Yeah.

C: Yes. But this is, I mean, now in the UK you all the young kids are using all these expression “Literally”.

A: “Literally” all the young kids.

C: My favorite was, I think it was my nephew said, I “literally died when I heard the news”. So I...

A: Sure.

C: I'm talking to a ghost.

A: Sure. Well, there you go. But there, you're getting into another linguistic process. When you think about the changing of meaning of words when a, when a word again, in fact mean the exact opposite.

C: Right.

A: Like bad. Like we don't use it as much, but like, especially in the jazz world, if you ever read the Miles Davis autobiography

C: Something that's **bad** is

A: but he's like, that MF was bad. That dude was bad. Right?

C: Meaning cool.

A: Right? But depends how you say it's like, man, he was bad.

C: <laugh>

A: Like really bad.

C: Yeah. <laugh>.

A: Right. So that, that's the difference between, you know, uh, the five year old playing trumpet and Miles Davis. One is bad and one is bad.



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C: But I don't really think there's any difference anymore between people going about American English and British English. This elevator-lift.

A: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

C: I think all that is just really old-fashioned for me, I think nowadays is just interchangeable. Really. So would you say elevator?

C: I would, could do that. Yeah.

A: I would never say lift. Well, nobody in the US would ever say lift or they would be ridiculed for being a pompous ass.

C: <laugh>. Okay.

A: And that gets back to the question and register. In the US we view, okay, here's the thing. I think in general, US Americans, um, generalize the British accent to Hugh Grant. Right? And something, I don't even know what his accent really is, but something posh. Right? Which I know he doesn't always play a, I think he always plays a posh character, doesn't he?

C: Yeah.

A: But you know, they, they associate it with, you know, uh, the official, you know, RP etcetera, etcetera. That's the association for most Americans. They're like, oh no, but the British accent sounds so intelligent.

C: Oh, okay.

A: And so **classy**. But then you ask them about other British accents that they're familiar with.

C: Yeah.

A: And they're like, oh yeah, no, not that one and not that one. But, but the British accent in general is quite classy. I think that if you were to play a proper, you know, upper class British accent for most Americans, and ask them if that person was smart or classy, they would say yes and yes.

C: I get that. I mean, I think when I go there as well, there, there there's this feeling that the British are more intelligent or something? Like I've been, I've been talking to some people who say like, "I, I've been to a museum", you know, like I'm not, I'm not challenging you, I'm not quizzing you. It's okay.

A: In America we say that

C: Yeah, yeah,



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A: Yeah, yeah. Okay. But, you know, could be their best. There's a reason that they think that you might think, or that other people from other countries might think they don't go to museums.

C: Right.

A: And that's because, I mean, a huge part of the US is still rural. I mean, geographically, I don't know what percentage it's gotta be. 75% of the country is, is still rural. Not 75% of the population by any means.

C: Yeah.

A: But It's a giant country. There's space everywhere.

C: Again, I think growing up, I would've thought the United States was New York.

A: For sure.

C: All of the United States was like that.

A: And for me too Chicago. It's like, wait, wait. The whole country's not like Chicago? I mean, I know that you have LA but it's like Chicago on the west coast.

C: Yeah.

A: And you have San Francisco, but it's the same thing in

C: All that bit in the middle. It's just, we don't understand.

A: Well that, but Chicago's in the middle, so I get, I get very angry people talk about the "Flyover States". This is a great, did you know this expression?

C: I didn't. No. What is It?

A: Damn it. That should have gone in our impending, uh, game show challenge that we'll have one day.

C: Yeah.

A: The "**Flyover States**" are people who fly from New York to LA

C: Okay.

A: One side to the other side. And everything in those just fly over states. States that you fly over.



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C: Yeah.

A: And Chicago's right in the middle of that.

C: Okay.

A: Chicago's definitely not flyover material, but that's also why Chicago calls itself oftentimes "The Third Coast", because we have Lake Michigan

C: Uhhuh, <affirmative>

A: And it's a coast. We've got the West Coast, the East Coast, and the Middle Coast, the Third Coast.

C: Coming back a little bit to this idea, elevator-lift, you would never say lift, things like that. rubbish, trash. Would you say rubbish?

A: No. Never. Only hard. Making fun of somebody talking poshly.

C: And I think what's going on here is like we, as in people from the UK or Ireland, we're exposed to the American culture so much.

A: Sure.

C: As kids.

A: A hundred percent that

C: Sesame Street. I mean, this is, oh, Sesame Street, which is fantastic.

A: Yeah.

C: Um, do you know the origins of Sesame Street? It's brilliant, this.

A: No

C: Basically it was, uh, very working class, the whole concept, because...

A: Well, sure. Look at where it was. It was set. It was like, but Brooklyn, It looked like Brooklyn in the, the seventies.

C: It was, the idea was that, you know, some families wouldn't be able to, uh, look after their kids.

A: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>



C: You know, if the kids were sick or something and had to stay at home, couldn't go to school. Parents had to often, single parents had to still go to work.

A: Sure.

C: So the idea was if we could leave a TV show on at home, that could entertain them, all day.

A: Yeah.

C: And that's kind of the origins of Sesame Street.

A: That's interesting. It's it's both progressive and depressing at the same time.

C: Yeah. <laugh>. Exactly.

A: <laugh>, okay. It's what the US used to be. <laugh>. It's with now it's just without the progressive.

C: Progressive, yeah. "Yes, we can"

Vocabulary bank

out of my norm = unusual to me

To poo poo something = to dismiss something as inferior

To answer on the record = to make declarations that you will publically acknowledge as your thoughts, beliefs or opinions

get their heads around it = to understand clearly

Subtitles = captions (at the bottom of a screen) that provide dialogue or narrative

Glaswegians = People who come from or live in Glasgow (Scotland)

Wee = Small amount (informal adjective)

Register (of speech) = how formal or informal speech is

(a) spin on (things) = to interpret a story in one certain way

Literally = in a literal manner, but often (misused) to express emphasis

Bad = sometimes informally used to mean "cool" instead of the more general meaning of "not good"

Classy = stylish and sophisticated

Flyover States = a part of the United States that is passed over by flights and not regarded as a popular destination

