

TRENPK2 (FAST-US-1) Introduction to American English Exam

Department of Translation Studies, University of Tampere

(Sample Past Exam — See disclaimer below)

INSTRUCTIONS: This exam is worth 50 points, with 30 points required to pass. Answer (a) **one** of the two questions in **Section One**, and (b) any **four** questions from **Section Two**. *Time: 2 Hours*. Please put your name and student number on your answer paper(s), and return these questions with your answers (you can get all the papers back later).

Section I. Differences Between American and British English (10 points).

(A) With the underlined words in five of the following sentences, explain (a) what would usually be meant in context with standard American English usage **compared to** (b) what would usually be meant with British English usage. There are thus two answers for each item. For each, (1) label your American definition as "USA" and (2) your British definition as "GB."

1. Scholarships are available for post-graduate students.
2. The interregional project was budgeted at slightly more than one billion euros.
3. Ralph had to write an essay for his university course.
4. The performance of that play was a real bomb.
5. Rajib married a homely young lady.
6. The clerk gave a biscuit to the solicitor. [pick 1 of the 3 terms in this sentence]
7. That American gave me an odd look when I told him, "keep your pecker up!"
8. Those damned Yankees can sure do strange things with the English language!

(B) The class material included studies on Harry Potter books, which were originally published in Britain and then re-published in the U.S. according to American English conventions, and **The Great Gatsby**, which was originally published in the U.S. and re-published in the U.K. according to British conventions. Since the books were all written in "English" by native-English-speaking authors, and both countries are English-speaking, why were the original versions changed? What kind of changes were involved? What problems might such changes present, for translators (or anyone else)?

Section II. General Influences in American English. (40 points, 10 max. per answer).

1. The meanings of words change through the years, in accordance with social and political change. For **five** of the following, describe what changes in meaning or usage have taken place, and when and why the change occurred. There are thus three parts of each answer.
 - a. Grandma served us liberty cabbage and Salisbury steak for lunch.
 - b. Rupert and Francis were having such a gay time that they didn't want to come out!
 - c. The report said Siegfried died in 1830 from a specific ulcer.
 - d. Schools are required to have special facilities for visually-challenged students.
 - e. When I started work in 1950 I was a stewardess, but now I'm a flight attendant.
 - f. Colored people (cf. 'people of color') comprise less than 15% of the U.S. population.
2. Explain the connotations or other associations of **five** (only) of these terms or phrases which are often associated with American Black English or Black cultural references.
 - a. "calling a spade a spade"
 - b. a "blood"
 - c. Sambo
 - d. "threads" and "glad rags"
 - e. "the beer be warm and the food be cold"
 - f. grits
 - g. peckerwood (or) cracker
 - h. "He the baddest cat around"

3. Are "four-letter words" the same as, or different from, "forbidden" language? In what sense is such language "absolute" or "culture-specific" (relative to regional differences within the U.S. or differences in variants of World English)? Discuss several examples. How is such language of increasing concern to translators?
4. Explain the standard SAE references/meanings/implications/connotations for five of the following. Of what are they examples? Why might these terms have been used instead of more standard options? [There are 3 parts to this answer]

I'm in a hot tub with Ben and Jerry	Get me a six-pack of PBR tallboys
[Let's go and visit] The Colonel	Jell-O
"Forrest, go out and get me some <i>Ripple!</i> "	an Oreo
Our youngest daughter, <i>Tiffany</i>	<i>Canola</i> oil

5. In what way has American English been formed and/or changed by the national history of the United States? How has such change contributed to the distinctiveness of American English as a variant of World English?
6. Following is a session overview from the January 2003 Conference of the American Dialect Society. Comment on the relevance of status, formality, politics, or any other points from the overview which involve the two major world varieties of English from your position as a student of, and professional communicator in, English in an international context.

"You Say /tometo/, I Say /tomato/: Preference for American or British English." Mary Morzinski, Univ. of Wisconsin-La Crosse. — This is an ongoing study of perceptions that non-native speakers of English have for the British and American varieties of English ... Respondents were asked for their overall perceptions of British and American and for their preference for either variety, as well as reasons for that preference. Here are some preliminary conclusions from 205 responses:

Overall, the perceptions of British English were that it is more formal and correct, but the formality was considered to be positive by some respondents and negative by others. Conversely, American English is considered to be less formal and more idiomatic; but as with the perceptions of British, these features were seen positively by some and negatively by others. Those aspiring to the field of education favored British whereas those interested in the field of business and international relations slightly favored American. Only a few respondents stated that personal feelings toward British or American political policies influenced their perceptions of the language.

NB: These questions from past exams are intended only to give an idea of what type of questions have been asked in the past. Bear in mind that as the course material changes each term, so will the questions.

* * * * *