

"How the British Say it" can Add Problem To Cross-Cultural Communication

By Jason Alter

Foreign students who come to the United States to study often come from areas where British influence has been preponderant, especially in the realm of English-teaching. For example, many students tend to say "zed" for "Z," etc. Such students may maintain that they are therefore less well-equipped to handle English proficiency tests given on our shores.

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Rather than take a position on this issue, the writer merely presents excerpts from a story in the Jan 30, 1971 copy of *The New Yorker*, "The Night Out," by Ted Walker.

Items for comparison are underlined, followed by a likely American-English equivalent. Many of the expressions are distinctly different, and would make for varying degrees of difficulty in communication.

1. "put the invitations in the post"
cf. "in the mail"
2. "The cheek of it..."
cf. "nerve"
3. "if you ring back now"
cf. "call"
4. "a simple case of having the sulks"
cf. "feeling moody," "feeling blue"
5. "as a matter of bloody annoying fact"
cf. zero (used for emphasis)
6. "I'm sorry, love, I've let you down."
cf. "dear"
7. "I shan't bother"
cf. "won't"
8. "the annual bun-fight at the club"
cf. "dinner," "feed"
9. "That was Mum and Dad"
cf. "Mom"
10. "a fat lot of good that did"
cf. zero (used for emphasis)
11. "They've fixed up for her to come over"
cf. arranged"

12. "The film's going to start in a minute."
cf. "movie's"
13. "I daresay they asked us..."
cf. "really think"
14. "bother about collecting her"
cf. "picking her up"
15. "Elsie Roak was a good sort"
cf. "a good sport," "cooperative"
16. "we'd not have to"
cf. "we wouldn't"
17. "You've still not seen to your chair"
cf. "taken care of," "fixed"
18. "It'll have to do service one more time."
cf. "be used"
19. "between two minicars"
cf. "compacts"
20. "I'll follow on"
cf. "come along."

While the items above are not unintelligible, most would tend to be marked as "unnatural" to a speaker or listener in the other vernacular. The language teacher is well-advised to be aware of these differences, that he may prepare his students to cope with them at least on a recognition level. At issue here, partially, is how "fluently" the foreign student wishes to fit into the environment.

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