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SHOULD WE ANALYSE OR ANALYZE BRITISH AND AMERICAN SPELLING DOUBLETS IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN ENGLISH?¹

Abstract

This paper analyses the use of British English and American English spelling doublets in contemporary Canadian English. The corpus analysis was conducted on the *Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbe)* which contains approximately 1.9 billion words of text from twenty different English-speaking countries. This corpus was primarily chosen because it is the only balanced corpus available that allows direct comparison of BrE, AmE and CanE. The paper focuses on the three distinct categories of spelling doublets – those ending in (1) *-our/-or*, (2) *-re/-er*, and (3) *-ise/-ize*. Having selected ten most frequent words in each category, we proceeded to analyse their distributions in both spelling versions in all three varieties of English. The paper will show that Canadian speakers are under an enduring influence of their next-door neighbours despite the fact that Canadian normative grammars and dictionaries traditionally favour British orthographic norms.

Keywords

spelling doublets, Canadian English, British English, American English.

Introduction

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Canadian English is a variety of English with peculiar linguistic background. Its identity is a mixture of features drawn from, predominantly, four influential sources: British English, French, a collection of aboriginal languages and, more recently, American English (Brodowski 2012). British English was a linguistic starting point for the newly colonised North American region. However, historical circumstances have steered the northern colonies (present-day Canada) and the rest of North America (present-day USA) in the opposite directions. While the US colonies fought for independence, striving to sever ties with their British roots, Canadian colonies maintained loyalty. The language was thus a means of achieving political goals, a marker of (dis)loyalty to the Crown: American disloyalty resulted in American English; Canadian loyalty resulted in strong dedication to the preservation of British English. Nevertheless, the proximity to the United States, coupled with a prosperous economic and cultural exchange, have made this goal very challenging.

To date, some varieties of English have been recognised as linguistically distinct; others are treated as sub-dialects of the better established ones (Krautová 2006). The latter seems to be the case with Canadian English. It has been repeatedly equated with either British English (BrE) or American English (AmE) while its distinct features have, for the most part, been ignored or made a passing reference to. Consequently, it is debatable whether Canadian English is a distinct variety of English, or a sub-dialect of BrE or AmE. Canada has been torn between its British historical and political tradition and its more recent multi-level interactions with the US.

Canadian spelling is a unique mixture of British and American orthographic forms. Dictionaries, as well as the results of linguistic studies, appear to be inconsistent in this regard. The inconsistency in normative literature and the liberty in making choices regarding spelling variants, have contributed to the lack of agreement regarding the use of BrE and AmE spelling doublets in contemporary CanE. The aim of this paper is to shed light on this issue by conducting an analysis of the *Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbe)*. We will focus on the three distinct categories of spelling doublets, namely those ending in (1) *-our/-or*, (2) *-re/-er*, and (3) *-ise/-ize*, to see whether AmE is gaining foothold in what was once a British territory.

English in Canada or Canadian English?

Bloomfield (1951: 13) once stated that English in Canada was “general American English with a few modified sounds usually paralleled in American sub-dialect and with some vocabulary variations”. In his view, English in Canada was an integral part of the North American dialectal chain. We must note, however, that his comment refers to pronunciation and vocabulary. When other aspects of the

language structure are taken into consideration, the authors are less adamant in classifying Canadian English as a sub-dialect of AmE.

For instance, Schneider (2006) classifies English in Canada as a variant of North American English. Instead of equating it with American English, he admits that the language shares certain features with both American and British English. The author notes that after WWII there was an urge to build a unique Canadian identity, and, consequently, to acknowledge Canadian English as an independent variety. Even so, he manages to identify a handful of distinct linguistic features of CanE: Canadian Raising (the pronunciation of /aɪ/ and /au/ before voiceless consonants with a raised, central onset), particle *eh* (inviting approval) and a small portion of distinct Canadian vocabulary (e.g. *chesterfield* for *couch*). Several authors, Šurbertová (2010) included, claim that Canadian English represents a distinct variety – a unique and novel combination of American and British English (Jurčić 2003, Borberg 2005, Kratochílová 2006).

Canadians themselves might disagree with American linguists who, like Bloomfield, see Canadian English as a regional variant of American English. In the past, when there were strong emotional ties with “the Empire on which the sun never sets”, they would certainly rather have had their variety labelled as a British English one (Kratochílová 2006). Canadian educational system has been exclusively based on British models (Šurbertová 2010). As Hultin (cited in Kratochílová 2006: 9) put it, American English was regarded as “illiterate, coarse and rude and the people who used it as little better.” Loyalty to the British roots could not prevent CanE from gradually falling under American influence though. Economy and industry, media and the Internet, film and music can all be seen as vehicles that have transported AmE across the border.

Canadian spelling

The dichotomy between BrE and AmE in CanE is perhaps most easily noticed in spelling. Spelling doublets first appeared in 1826 in Noah Webster’s *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. Webster introduced alternatives for British words ending in *-our* (e.g. *behaviour, labour, colour*) and *-re* (e.g. *centre, theatre, fibre*) by replacing the final *-our* and *-re* with *-or* and *-er*, respectively (e.g. *behavior, labor, color, center, theater, fiber*). He also transformed words “such as *musick* to *music*, *defence* to *defense*” and respelled “anomalous British spellings, writing *goal* as *jail*, and *plough* as *plow*” (Jurić 2011: 33). During the struggle for independence, Webster’s reform was supported by the political elite. Having been backed up by the officials of the new country, it was easily adopted by citizens who had long craved for a means of emphasizing their individuality.

The Webster reform was not as welcome further north. The official orthography “taught in Canadian schools is and always has been British” (Šurbertová 2010: 9). The British standard has been obligatory in all official correspondence (Orkin 1971), dating back to 1890 when Canadian officials elected it as the model (Kratochílová 2006). American spelling variants have, in due course, managed to penetrate into CanE, spreading across all domains but the official one. The press is supportive of this trend while scholarly journals and school textbooks still heavily rely on the British standards (Crystal 1995; Kratochílová 2006). A seminal study that revealed spelling preferences in Canada was conducted by Irelands (1973). She claimed that, at the time, British forms were found to be favoured in some words, American forms in others, or there was equal preference for both forms. These results suggest that the inclination towards BrE or AmE spelling is not consistent and, more importantly, does not hold for groups of words sharing the same orthographic features (e.g. *colour* is preferred over *color* whereas *honour* and *honor* are equally favoured). The data can, nowadays, be considered outdated, and should be put to test given that the pace and the way the life have changed dramatically over the last fifty years. Modern technological devices have rendered music videos, films, books or commercial products available to people all over the world. With the spread of globalization and mass consumerism, it is reasonable to believe that AmE will be gaining popularity in younger generations. Along similar lines, Josijević (2015) recently showed that the BrE and AmE spelling forms were more or less equally favoured in the Hong Kong variety of English only two decades after the province had gained independence. The results of our study will, hopefully, contribute to an improved understanding of the current linguistic situation in Canada.

Methodology

The corpus analysis was conducted on the *Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbe)* which contains approximately 1.9 billion words derived from texts originating from twenty different English-speaking countries. This corpus was chosen because it is the only balanced corpus available that allows direct comparison of CanE, BrE and AmE. The sub-corpus of Canadian English is not regionally limited. Since *GloWbe* is web-based, we may assume that the speakers were unburdened by any genre-specific conventions.

We will examine three distinct categories of spelling doublets – those ending in (1) *-our/-or*, (2) *-re/-er*, and (3) *-ise/-ize*. The following words from each group had been selected for the corpus analysis:

-our/-or	-er/-re	-ise/ize
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behaviour/behavior	centre/center	analyse/analyze
labour/labor	theatre/theater	criticise/criticize
colour/color	fibre/fiber	finalise/finalize
honour/honor	metre/meter	globalise/globalize
humour/humor	calibre/caliber	localise/localize
harbour/harbor	litre/liter	organise/organize
neighbour/neighbor	spectre/specter	paralise/paralyze
favour/favor	lustre/luster	prioritise/prioritize
flavour/flavor	amphitheatre/amphiteater	realise/realize
endeavour/endeavor	sabre/saber	recognise/recognize

Table 1: The selected words and their variants

The main criterion for selection was word frequency. Our primary goal was to select the words that frequently appear in all three varieties of English so valid conclusions could be drawn.

The frequency of each variant is expressed as the probability of its appearance with respect to its doublet by using the following formulas:

$$p_1 = \mu_2 / (\mu_1 + \mu_2)$$

$$p_2 = \mu_1 / (\mu_1 + \mu_2)$$

where, p_1 is the probability of appearance for a BrE form relative to its American doublet, and μ_1 and μ_2 are absolute frequencies of the two forms, respectively. This analysis uses absolute frequencies (the total number of examples in the given corpus) because relative frequencies (the total number of hits divided by the total number of words in the corpus) could differ among the aforementioned varieties and affect the results.

The distributions of both spelling versions were compared in all three varieties of English. The main reason for this lies in the fact that many institutions in all three countries are nowadays international. Transnational institutions, whose collaborators originate from nations the world over, increase the linguistic contact between BrE and AmE. Consequently, a certain proportion of AmE spellings can be expected in BrE and vice versa (cf. Josijević 2015). This phenomenon must be taken into consideration when the preferences for BrE or AmE are analysed in varieties of English, as any results obtained for a singular variety may seem more drastic than they really are. In other words, the 30% share of AmE alternatives in any post-colonial variety may seem striking when observed in

isolation. However, the perspective changes if these alternatives make up 20% of the word usage in BrE. Therein lies the main motivation for contrasting all three varieties in this study.

5. Results

5.1. *-our vs -or*

Table 2 presents the results obtained for *-our/-or* spelling doublets in contemporary Canadian English in declining order of p_1 (probability of a BrE spelling alternative relative to its American alternative).

Canadian English					
	μBrE	μAmE	Total	pBrE	pAmE
Labour	10733	3426	14159	0.758034	0.241966
Harbor	1857	785	2642	0.702877	0.297123
Honour	4667	2422	7089	0.658344	0.341656
Favour	4511	2467	6978	0.64646	0.35354
Flavour	1724	963	2687	0.641608	0.358392
Neighbour	1689	997	2686	0.628816	0.371184
Endeavour	882	565	1447	0.609537	0.390463
Humour	2137	1377	3514	0.608139	0.391861
Behaviour	7645	5220	12865	0.594248	0.405752
Colour	7143	5252	12395	0.576281	0.423719
<i>Total</i>	42988	23474	66462	0.646806	0.353194

Table 2: *-our versus -or* in Canadian English

As we can see, the total number of BrE spelling forms relative to AmE forms is approximately 65%. This proportion varies within the group though. For the words *colour* and *behaviour*, BrE and AmE spellings are almost equally preferred. In the words *labour* and *harbour*, British spelling equivalents amount to 75% and 70%, respectively. Although the proportion of 65% of AmE spelling alternatives may seem substantial, it is not as striking if we are to compare it with the results obtained for British English (see Table 3).

British English					
	μBrE	μAmE	Total	pBrE	pAmE
Labour	72794	4159	76953	0.945954	0.054046
Flavour	4766	777	5543	0.859823	0.140177
Humour	8903	1632	10535	0.845088	0.154912
Neighbour	5364	1029	6393	0.839043	0.160957
Favour	20303	4102	24405	0.83192	0.16808
Colour	26443	5801	32244	0.820091	0.179909
Endeavour	2859	677	3536	0.808541	0.191459
Harbor	3975	1053	5028	0.790573	0.209427
Honour	10376	2985	13361	0.776589	0.223411
Behaviour	3560	7572	11132	0.319799	0.680201
Total	159343	29787	189130	0.842505	0.157495

Table 3: *-our* versus *-or* in British English

American spelling alternatives account for 15% of the total number of examples in British texts. Hence, we can conclude that the British spelling system also seems to be undergoing Americanisation. In addition, some interesting similarities can be observed between contemporary CanE and BrE. For example, the word *labour* appears to be immune to Americanisation in both CanE and BrE. On the other hand, the word *behaviour* is among the most affected words in both varieties, and its results in BrE are quite unexpected – the British alternative was recorded in 32% of the examples in BrE texts, which practically means that the British alternative is more frequent in the CanE texts than in the BrE texts (59% versus 32%) in the selected corpus. Nevertheless, we must note that *behaviour* appears to be an exception to the rule. In BrE, it ranks as the 10th on the scale with 32% of BrE forms, yet its share is significantly lower than the share of the word *honour*, ranked 9th (approximately 78%). The differences between the remaining pairs of words are less conspicuous. The variations within word categories are lower in CanE than in BrE; in the former, the ratio of British spelling alternatives ranges from 58% to 76% (18% divergence), while in the latter this ratio ranges from 32% to 95% (63% divergence).

The impact of American English on British English is hardly surprising. The US imposes its variety of English via modern technology, the Internet, the film and music industry, on all the World Englishes, and British English is no exception. Moreover, the presence of AmE in BrE can also be seen as an outcome of multinational collaboration and migration. The following data for spelling doublets in AmE lend support to this hypothesis:

American English					
	μ BrE	μ AmE	Total	p BrE	p AmE
Endeavour	984	2930	3914	0.251405	0.748595
Behaviour	5791	37791	43582	0.132876	0.867124
Humour	1560	10461	12021	0.129773	0.870227
Labour	4327	29969	34296	0.126166	0.873834
Honour	2437	17145	19582	0.124451	0.875549
Favour	3121	22320	25441	0.122676	0.877324
Neighbour	1037	8128	9165	0.113148	0.886852
Harbour	607	5012	5619	0.108026	0.891974
Colour	3669	31126	34795	0.105446	0.894554
Flavour	501	5205	5706	0.087802	0.912198
<i>Total</i>	24034	170087	194121	0.123809	0.876191

Table 4: *-our* versus *-or* in American English

Only a slight difference can be perceived between the number of British spelling alternatives in AmE (12%) and American spelling alternatives in BrE (15.7%). Accordingly, we cannot in all honesty speak of the Americanisation of British spelling. Rather, it ought to be called a collaboration – an import/export of the working force and their spelling habits. Academic mobility, nowadays oriented towards the US, has paved the way for BrE spelling forms. It is interesting to note that the word *colour*, which was amongst those most affected by Americanisation in CanE, exhibits the least intense tendency towards British orthography in AmE. On the other hand, the word *behaviour*, which was the most Americanised word in CanE and BrE, is amongst those words that most frequently appear in the BrE form in AmE. The variations within this word group are lower in American English (16% divergence) than in CanE and BrE (18% vs 16%, respectively).

5.2. *-re* vs *-er*

In Canadian English, the total number of British *-re* spelling alternatives relative to their American counterparts spelled with *-er* is approximately 69% (Table 5), which is slightly higher than that of the *-our/-or* spelling doublets (about 65%).

Canadian English					
	μBrE	μAmE	Total	pBrE	pAmE
Theatre	7492	1134	8626	0.868537	0.131463
Litre	456	115	571	0.798599	0.201401
Amphitheatre	104	29	133	0.781955	0.218045
Calibre	858	336	1194	0.718593	0.281407
Spectre	170	76	246	0.691057	0.308943
Centre	26052	12856	38908	0.66958	0.33042
Fibre	1226	925	2151	0.569967	0.430033
Sabre	76	60	136	0.558824	0.441176
Lustre	80	66	146	0.547945	0.452055
Metre	512	1180	1692	0.3026	0.6974
Total	37026	16777	53803	0.688177	0.311823

Table 5: *-re* vs *-er* in Canadian English

Overall, it appears that the tendency of using American spelling alternatives is lower with the *-re/-er* words. While the most frequent *-our* form makes up 75.8% of all the cases, there are three *-re* words with higher percentages. However, we must note that not all the members of the word groups comply with similar generalisations. The last word on the *-our/-or* scale (i.e. *colour*) has a share of 57.8% while there are as many as four *-re/-er* words with lower shares of British spelling alternatives (*fibre*, *sabre*, *lustre*, *metre*). Therefore, the divergence within this word group (ranging from 30% to 87%) is significantly higher than that of the *-our/-or* spelling doublets (58% to 76%). British spellings are well preserved in words such as *theatre*, *litre* and *amphitheatre* (87%, 89% and 78%, respectively), while the word *meter* is the most affected by Americanisation, with its AmE spelling amounting to approximately 70%.

The results obtained for BrE once again show that the words which are the least prone to Americanisation in CanE are the words which exhibit a similar tendency in BrE (*theatre, litre, amphitheatre*) (see Table 6). Also, the words that occur with BrE spellings least frequently (*sabre, lustre, metre*) coincide in the two varieties.

British English					
	μBrE	μAmE	Total	pBrE	pAmE
Theatre	19016	1701	20717	0.917894	0.082106
Amphitheatre	364	33	397	0.916877	0.083123
Litre	1609	217	1826	0.881161	0.118839
Spectre	895	165	1060	0.84434	0.15566
Fibre	3337	803	4140	0.806039	0.193961
Centre	67780	16347	84127	0.805687	0.194313
Calibre	1631	422	2053	0.794447	0.205553
Sabre	347	113	460	0.754348	0.245652
Lustre	297	97	394	0.753807	0.246193
Metre	1976	2425	4401	0.448989	0.551011
Total	97252	22323	119575	0.805687	0.194313

Table 6: -re versus -er in British English

The total share of the British spelling variants in BrE texts amounts to approximately 80%. In line with the aforementioned conclusions about CanE, we should be careful when making generalisations. There is only one *-our/-or* (*labour*) word with a share of British forms higher than that of the word *theatre* (ranked here as the first). Furthermore, there are seven words on the *-our/-or* scale ranked lower than the word *lustre*. Once again, the divergence within the group is to blame. The British orthographic forms are more frequent in BrE than in CanE by no more than 10%. As was the case with the previous group of words (i.e. the word *behaviour*), there is only one word in BrE texts that appears more frequently with an American spelling (*meter*) than with a British one (*metre*). In both cases, there is a more drastic leap from rank 9 to rank 10 on the scale than is the case within other pairs on the scale. In other words, the ratio of BrE forms steadily decreases until it reaches the last place on the scale where the decrease is more drastic. Surprisingly, the word *metre* appears in the AmE form in 45% of the examples in BrE texts and in 30% of the examples in CanE texts.

In paraphrase, the Americanisation of the word *metre* is more noticeable in BrE than in CanE. Finally, the variance within this group of spelling doublets is more extreme than in the previous group (45% to 91%).

British *-re* spelling alternatives in AmE were detected in approximately 13% of all the cases, which is slightly higher than with the *-our/-or* doublets (Table 7):

American English					
	μBrE	μAmE	Total	pBrE	pAmE
Theatre	6591	11772	18363	0.358928	0.641072
Sabre	135	351	486	0.277778	0.722222
Amphitheatre	78	208	286	0.272727	0.727273
Spectre	384	1301	1685	0.227893	0.772107
Lustre	93	323	416	0.223558	0.776442
Calibre	400	1521	1921	0.208225	0.791775
Litre	103	502	605	0.170248	0.829752
Metre	244	2768	3012	0.081009	0.918991
Centre	5947	70140	76087	0.078161	0.921839
Fibre	286	3583	3869	0.073921	0.926079
<i>Total</i>	14261	92469	106730	0.133618	0.866382

Table 7: *-re* versus *-er* in British English

Contrary to BrE and CanE, AmE exhibits a certain level of consistency in this generalisation that can be applied to all members of the set. There are no exceptions to the rule. The main reason for this is that the fluctuations in doublet use are the least drastic in American English – the British spellings are most frequent with the word *theatre* (around 35%) and least frequent with the word *fibre* (approximately 7%) which makes the divergence within the class 29% (compared to 47% in BrE, and 57% in CanE). Similar to CanE and BrE, the *-re/-er* spelling doublets exhibit more variance than the *-our/-or* word group (28% vs 16%). The total number of BrE spellings in American English is slightly lower than the total number of AmE spellings in BrE (13% vs 19%). Interestingly, the words *theatre* and *amphitheatre* which in both CanE and BrE exhibit the most intense tendency towards preserving their British spellings also top the scale in AmE (approximately 35% and 27%, respectively).

5.3. *-ise(-yse) vs -ize(-yze)*

Verbs ending in *-ise(-yse)*, i.e. *-ize(-yze)*, are most affected by Americanisation in both CanE and BrE. The total number of American forms in Canadian English ranges from approximately 84% to 100% (Table 8). On average, American forms have a share in the vicinity of 94%.

Canadian English					
	μBrE	μAmE	Total	pBrE	pAmE
Analise	322	1677	1999	0.161081	0.838919
Paralyse	7	56	63	0.111111	0.888889
Criticise	78	930	1008	0.077381	0.922619
Finalise	17	231	248	0.068548	0.931452
Organise	163	2529	2692	0.06055	0.93945
Realise	650	11761	12411	0.052373	0.947627
Recognise	425	8100	8525	0.049853	0.950147
Globalise	1	26	27	0.037037	0.962963
Prioritise	16	578	594	0.026936	0.973064
Localise	0	41	41	0	1
<i>Total</i>	1679	25929	27608	0.064487	0.935513

Table 8: *-ise(-yse) versus -ize(-yze) in Canadian English*

For eight words, the share of British spelling alternatives is below 10%. Hence, we can safely conclude that the process of Americanisation is in its final stages in the case of *-ise/-yse* verbs. With respect to the previous two orthographic changes, the fluctuations within this group are the least intense (14%), i.e. this class is the most stable in manifesting consistent inclinations towards AmE.

This group of words is the most affected one by Americanisation in BrE as well. British forms were found in approximately 72% of all the cases (Table 9):

British English					
	μBrE	μAmE	Total	pBrE	pAmE
Prioritise	1422	315	1737	0.818653	0.181347
Finalise	412	121	533	0.772983	0.227017
Criticise	3768	1290	5058	0.744958	0.255042

Organise	5352	1854	7206	0.742714	0.257286
Analise	4145	1440	5585	0.742167	0.257833
Realise	26932	9371	36303	0.741867	0.258133
Recognise	15873	5632	21505	0.738107	0.261893
Localise	91	40	131	0.694656	0.305344
Paralyse	123	70	193	0.637306	0.362694
Globalise	25	20	45	0.555556	0.444444
Total	58143	20153	78296	0.718897	0.281103

Table 9: *-ise(-yse) versus -ize(-yze) in British English*

The share of British spelling alternatives ranges from 56% to 82%, which makes the divergence within the group 26%. As in the case of CanE, this group exhibits the least intense fluctuations and is more stable than the other two groups. The word *prioritise* is at the top of the scale with approximately 82% of BrE forms. The verbs most affected by Americanisation are *localise*, *paralyse* and *globalise* with 69%, 64% and 56% of British forms, respectively. Once again the words at the bottom of the scale coincide with those in CanE, i.e. the same group of words (i.e. *localise* and *globalise*) is the most prone to Americanisation in both BrE and CanE.

As indicated, verbs ending in *-ise(-yse)* are the most affected by Americanisation in both CanE and BrE. Not surprisingly, this class of words has the least tendency towards British usage in AmE. In total, the British forms appear in only about 7% of the cases in AmE texts. Their share ranges from 2% to 10%, making the divergence within the group merely 8% (Table 10).

American English					
	μBrE	μAmE	Total	pBrE	pAmE
Analise	590	4952	5542	0.10646	0.89354
Paralyse	19	188	207	0.091787	0.908213
Criticise	408	4470	4878	0.083641	0.916359
Realise	3372	41440	44812	0.075248	0.924752
Localise	11	139	150	0.073333	0.926667
Finalise	29	371	400	0.0725	0.9275
Recognise	1468	21410	22878	0.064166	0.935834

Organise	376	5652	6028	0.062376	0.937624
Prioritise	76	1288	1364	0.055718	0.944282
Globalise	1	44	45	0.022222	0.977778
<i>Total</i>	6350	79954	86304	0.070745	0.929255

Table 10: *-ise(-yse) versus -ize(-yze) in American English*

British forms of all the selected words were recorded in no more than 10% of the examples, except for the word *analyse*. Thus, *-ise(-yse)/-ize(-yze)* exhibits more consistency and stability than the previously discussed orthographic doublets, not only in AmE, but also in CanE and BrE. Interestingly, the total ratio of the British forms is slightly lower in CanE (approximately 6%) than in AmE (approximately 7%).

6. Discussion

The corpus analysis has shown that despite any existing historical bias towards BrE, English spelling in Canada has been increasingly Americanised. This may reflect a change in the attitudes of more recent generations who may not identify themselves as British, as Canadians have traditionally done, and/or who may consider identification with Americans no longer a mark of a “disloyal” Canadian.

The analysed categories of orthographic doublets do not exhibit the same degree of Americanisation. The words ending in *-our/-or* and *-re/-er* show an increasing tendency of being used in both forms with equal frequency. The words ending in *-ise(-yse)* have, for the most part, been abandoned, and are more frequent in American forms in CanE than in AmE. The British forms are so rare that they are on the verge of extinction. The *-ise(-yse)* doublet can be freely separated from the remaining two in that it exhibits the most consistency and a virtual lack of exceptions to the rule. The results of the contrastive analyses have shown that the same tendency is observable in all three varieties of English (Table 11):

	<i>-our/-or</i>	<i>-re/-er</i>	<i>-ise(yse)/-ize(yze)</i>
Canadian English	65%	69%	6%
British English	84%	80%	72%
American English	12%	13%	7%

Table 11: The average share of British forms in CanE, BrE and AmE

Across all three varieties, the *-ise(-yse)* verbs have the strongest tendency towards AmE forms, while there is virtually no difference between the *-our/-or* and *-re/-er* doublets.

In the first two analysed word groups, there are more variations, so no generalisations can be made. Table 12 summarises the results for CanE for the *-our/-or* and *-er/-re* spelling alternatives in a declining order of BrE forms.

	Selected words	British forms (%)
1.	<i>Theatre</i>	0.868537
2.	<i>Litre</i>	0.798599
3.	<i>Amphitheatre</i>	0.781955
4.	<i>Labour</i>	0.758034
5.	<i>Calibre</i>	0.718593
6.	<i>Harbour</i>	0.702877
7.	<i>Spectre</i>	0.691057
8.	<i>Centre</i>	0.66958
9.	<i>Honour</i>	0.658344
10.	<i>Favour</i>	0.64646
11.	<i>Flavour</i>	0.641608
12.	<i>Neighbour</i>	0.628816
13.	<i>Endeavour</i>	0.609537
14.	<i>Humour</i>	0.608139
15.	<i>Behaviour</i>	0.594248
16.	<i>Colour</i>	0.576281
17.	<i>Fibre</i>	0.569967
18.	<i>Sabre</i>	0.558824
19.	<i>Lustre</i>	0.547945
20.	<i>Metre</i>	0.3026

Table 12: The scale of *-our/-or* and *-re/-er* spelling doublets

The words ending in *-re* occupy both the top and the bottom of the scale, and there seems to be no regularity and consistency in CanE. The same inconsistency

is noticeable in BrE. The Americanisation of the spelling is far less prominent in BrE, but words such as *behaviour* and *meter* are, for example, more frequently Americanised in BrE than in CanE in this corpus material.

Despite the fact that the Americanisation of spelling appears to be non-systematic, there are certain regularities that cannot be considered coincidental. For example, the words *localise*, *globalise*, *behaviour*, *sabre*, *lustre* and *meter* are the most prone to American use in both CanE and BrE. On the other hand, the words *theatre*, *litre*, *amphitheatre* and *labour* are less likely to be so. This in turn begs the question – what could the factors that predetermine a word's inclination towards American spelling be? In terms of word frequency, less frequent words are more prone to language change than more frequent ones (Bybee 2002, Glushko 2003, Bybee 2007, Liberman et al. 2007). However, a closer look at our data reveals that frequency does not seem to be an issue of some relevance. There must be at least one more factor which is more influential in this context. If we focus once more on the words *theatre* and *amphitheatre*, we will notice that in all three varieties they rank the highest on the scale, which means that they have the strongest tendency towards British spelling in the observed varieties. Both words belong to the lexical field of drama and theatre, in which Great Britain reigns supreme. For this reason, *theatre* and *amphitheatre* appear in BrE forms even in AmE.

In conclusion, the tendencies in spelling can be linked to the power-dynamics in different domains of life. This may also explain why the words *litre* and *metre*, which belong to the same lexical domain (i.e. metric units), exhibit opposite tendencies. The word *metre* is among the words with the highest, and the word *litre* with the lowest inclinations towards American spelling in both BrE and CanE. We must note that neither the British nor the Americans use these terms in general language – both are most frequently used in scientific and specialised discourse. The degree of Americanisation in the word *meter* may be attributed to the American domination of hard industry and engineering.

7. Conclusion

Canadians may be exceedingly British with the mouth and exceedingly American with the voice (Hultin 1972). We might as well add that they are exceedingly insecure about spelling. Our research showed that individual words differ in terms of inclinations towards the two competing orthographic norms, e.g. the word *theatre* was used in British spelling in 86% of all the cases, but the word *localise* was used in none.

The tendencies towards the Americanisation of orthography in varieties of English are not surprising. They have been detected in all former British colonies

(Josijević 2015). They even seem to be present in British texts. Rapid linguistic changes may be directly linked to the American dominance in the economic, social and cultural aspects of life. In the case of Canada, two political and cultural shifts may have hastened the process: the lack of motivation to identify with Britons, and the lack of motivation to differ from Americans. Bearing in mind that younger generations are the heralds of change, it is quite possible that the favourable sentiments towards their southern neighbour will continue to be nourished, leading young Canadians to become more eager to identify with Americans, adapting their spelling preferences as they do so.

Canadian English has long been marginalised and under-researched. We strongly believe that the time has come for a more systematic study. It might be true that Canadian English does not possess a sufficient number of distinctive features to be treated as an independent variety, yet it is definitely worthy of linguistic attention as a unique blend of British and American English.

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