

Britain According to Uncle Sam

by Jonathan Sidor

The USA and UK may share a common language, but culturally speaking, the two countries are worlds apart. Just what do Americans think about their British brethren across the pond? *English Matters* goes west to zero in on Britain's biggest virtues and vices in the eyes of Americans.

While reading the article, pay attention to the following adjectives:

- smug
- hoity-toity
- run-of-the-mill
- courteous
- urbane
- refined
- swanky
- quaint
- lousy
- bizarre

The British and American variants of English can be vexingly divergent, but the dissimilarities definitely don't stop with the dictionary. The two countries are separated by centuries of culture and thousands of kilometres, so it's natural for gaping differences to pop up. The ►

• according to sb | według kogoś

to share sth | dzielić coś

to be worlds apart | być całkowicie różnym od siebie

brethren | bracia

across the pond | po drugiej stronie oceanu

virtue | zaleta

vice | wada

1 vexingly | irytująco

divergent dai'vʌ:dʒənt / dai'vʌ:rdʒənt | rozbieżny

definitely | zdecydowanie

gaping | tu: ogromny

to pop up | wyskoczyć, tu: pojawić się



On the Screen

Here are some popular Hollywood caricatures of Brits over the years:



Mary Poppins, 1964
American icon Dick Van Dyke puts on a hilarious Cockney accent that's been called both amusing as well as appalling.



Ocean's Eleven, 2001
American actor Don Cheadle plays a wise-cracking thief from England.



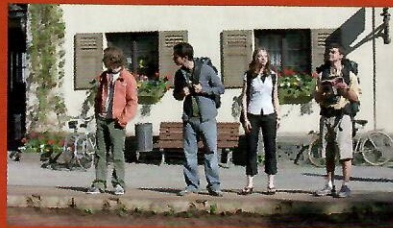
European Vacation, 1985
Eric Idle portrays a bumbling, down-on-his-luck Londoner who is just too darn restrained and considerate.



The Italian Job, 2003
In this American remake, Jason Statham plays a tough guy who has a way with the ladies.



Austin Powers, 1997
Austin showcases Swinging London mod culture and has atrocious teeth.



EuroTrip, 2004
A band of Manchester United football hooligans is depicted as heavy drinkers with an elaborate network of slang expressions.

hilarious | hi'læriəs / hi'lɪəriəs | zabawny
appalling | ɒkroʊpni | okropny
bumbling | niɛwɪdɑ:ʒɔni, niɛudɔlnɪ
down-on-his-luck | prɛʒɛjvɑjɑ:ncɪ okɾɛs niɛpɔwɔdʒɛn
darn | ʧɔlɛɾniɛ
restrained | pɔw'sciɑ:glɪwɪ
considerate | rɔzwɑʒni

to showcase sth | pɔkɑʒɪvɑ:ʧɔs
mod | subkultura mɔdɔw ʧɑɾɑkɛɾɪstɪkɪstɪʧnɑ dɫɑ wɪɛlkɪj bɾɪtɑniɪ lɑt 60.
atrocious | prɛzɛrɑʒɑjɑ:ncɪ, pɔtwɔɾni
wise-cracking | dɔwɪcipni
to have a way with sb | dɔbrɛ sɔbɛ rɑdʒɪʧ z kɪm's, umɛɛʧ pɔstɛpɔwɑ:ʧ z kɪm's
heavy drinker | ɔlkɔhɔlɪk

UK's European neighbours are in close contact with British culture, but isolated Americans have dreamt up an image of Britons all their own.

American Appreciation

Americans have concocted a number of flattering stereotypes towards Brits. For instance, Yanks often equate an English accent with overt politeness. For whatever reason, the British come across as more appreciative, apologetic and accommodating than your run-of-the-mill American. Popular caricatures depict Londoners as profusely courteous and reserved. Moreover, many Americans believe Brits to be more intelligent, urbane, and sophisticated. British men act like James Bond, always dressed to the nines and the centre of attention in any situation.

This notion may come from the assumption that the entire UK speaks eloquently with a quintessential English accent, just like the Queen. Americans are, of course, relatively unacquainted with less refined dialects like Cockney or Geordie.

2 appreciation | dɔcɛniɛniɛ, uznɑniɛ
to concoct sth | wɪmɪ'sli:ʧɔs
flattering | pɔʧlɛbnɪ
to equate sth with sth | utɔʒsɑmiɑ:ʧɔs ɔz ʧɪm's
overt | wɾɑʒnɪ, jɑwnɪ
politeness | grɛʧɛɾnɔ'sɔʧ
to come across as | wɪpɑdɑ:ʧ, bɪʧ pɔstɾɛgɑnɪm jɑkɔ
apologetic | tu: skɔnɫni do pɾɛpɔsɪn
accommodating | ɔpɾɛjɛmɪ, ɔʧɪnɪnɪ
run-of-the-mill | pɾɛʧɛjɛtnɪ
to depict sb | pɾɛdɛstɑwɪɑ:ʧ kɔgɔ's
profusely | wɪɫɛwnɪɛ
courteous | 'kɔ:ti:əs / 'kɔ:rti:əs | grɛʧɛɾnɪ
reserved | zɔdɪstɑnɔwɑnɪ
urbane | ɔ:'beɪn / ɔ:r:'beɪn | grɛʧɛɾnɪ, ɔpɾɛjɛmɪ, wɪtɔwɾnɪ
assumption | zɑɫɔʒɛniɛ
relatively | wʒgɫɛdnɛ
unacquainted with sth | niɛzɑznɑjɔmɪɔnɪ z ʧɪm's, niɛ znɑjɑ:ncɪ ʧɛgɔ's
refined | wɪtɔwɾnɪ
Cockney | gwɑrɑ uʒɪwɑnɑ pɾɛzɛz mɪɛʒkɑnɔ'ɔw w'sʧɔdnɪgɔ lɔndɪnɪ
Geordie | dɪɑɫɛk z ɔkɔɫɪc Nɛwɑstɛɫ

Speaking of the Queen, Americans also get the impression that the British are utterly obsessed with the royal family. If goings-on at Buckingham Palace make headlines in the States from time to time, then Brits must be fixated on every little detail surrounding Kate's latest dress or Harry's nuptials.

Royalty from the realm of entertainment is on the minds of several Americans as well, especially females. They are all too familiar with heartthrobs like Harry Styles, David Beckham and Hugh Grant. In turn, countless American women would go gaga after meeting any man from the isles. The typical British chap must be a regular Adonis, after all. This works both ways though, as female stars like Keira Knightley, Emma Watson, and Adele have become icons in the US as well.

When it comes to the British way of life, Americans frequently picture a romanticised regimen. Everyone in London has a posh, swanky flat. Rural residents dwell in quaint country cottages. Children are

remarkably well-behaved, thanks to strict nannies à la Mary Poppins. Americans take great pride in their own compact history, so Brits must fawn over their beloved land as well. They spend their free time watching the BBC on the telly, reading Shakespeare, and merrily drinking pints at the local pub.

Britain's Bad Side

American grumbles aimed at the UK are a mixed assortment. First, the weather in Britain has a dreadful reputation. The sun is apparently a rare sight to behold. Instead, an American's depiction of the British landscape is replete with rain and fog. Next, food from the UK is commonly the target of American ridicule. Traditional fare like shepherd's pie or bangers and mash leave much to be desired. Greasy fish and chips isn't very inspired either. Scottish haggis and head cheese receive even less fanfare in the United States.

The British dedication to decorum also rubbs numerous Americans the wrong way. Brits may say they're simply observing ►

- 3 **utterly** | zupełnie, całkowicie
goings-on | wydarzenia
to make headlines | trafiać na pierwsze strony gazet
fixated on sth | zwariowany na punkcie czegoś
nuptials | uroczystości ślubne
female | kobieta
heartthrob | łamacz niewieścich serc
countless | niezliczone
to go gaga | *tu: pot.* oszaleć (na czymś punkcie)
chap | *pot.* facet
posh | wytworny, z wyższych sfer
swanky | *tu:* elegancki
to dwell in sth | zamieszkiwać, mieszkać w czymś
quaint | dziwaczny, osobliwy
4 **remarkably** | niezwykle, bardzo
well-behaved | grzeczny
strict | surowy
to take great pride in sth | być z czegoś bardzo dumnym
to fawn over sth | nadszakiwać czemuś, przymilać się do czegoś, *tu:* być dumnym z czegoś
telly | *pot.* telewizja

- merrily** | wesoło
pint | około pół litra piwa, duże piwo
grumbles | narzekania
aimed at sb | wymierzony w kogoś
apparently | najwidoczniej
to behold sth | ujrzeć, zobaczyć coś
instead | w zamian
replete with sth | pełen czegoś
ridicule | kpiny, szyderstwo
fare | *tu:* pożywienie, potrawa
shepherd's pie | potrawa z mielonego mięsa i ziemniaków
bangers and mash | kielbaski i tłuczone ziemniaki
greasy | tłusty
fish and chips | ryba z frytkami
either | również
haggis | potrawa z podrobów baranich, zaszytych w owczym żołądku
head cheese | salceson
decorum | dobre maniery, stosowne zachowanie
to rub sb the wrong way | nadepnąć komuś na odcisk, wkurzać kogoś
numerous | liczni
to observe sth | przestrzegać czegoś

tradition and good manners, but Americans often accuse the British of being smug and hoity-toity. The fact that people in the UK can still hold titles of nobility in this day and age baffles many Americans, and they believe a sort of aristocratic spirit pervades much of UK society.

Americans go so far as to stereotype the physical characteristics of the British. The lack of sunlight leaves Brits looking unflatteringly pale. If you see a group of tourists on a sun-drenched American beach, all looking as white as a sheet, many Americans would venture to guess that they call the UK home. On top of this, the lingering myth of lousy British dental hygiene persists in the minds of countless Americans. Brits are the butt of incessant jokes, and more than a few Londoners are suspected to sport discoloured or crooked teeth.

Stereotypes Out of Left Field

There's the good, the bad, and then the plain wacky. Some American beliefs towards Brits are neither positive nor

5 **to accuse sb of sth** | oskarżać kogoś o coś
smug | nadmiernie zadowolony z siebie, próżny
hoity-toity | zadzierający nosa
to baffle sb | zdumiewać kogoś
to pervade sth | przenikać coś
lack of sth | brak czegoś
unflatteringly ^{ʌn'flætətɪŋli} | niepochlebnie, *tu*: nieatrakcyjnie
pale | blady
sun-drenched | zalany słońcem, słoneczny
to venture to do sth | ośmielić się coś zrobić
lingering | utrzymujący się
lousy | kiepski
hygiene ^{'haɪdʒi:n} | higiena
to persist | utrzymywać się
butt | cel, obiekt
incessant | nieustający
crooked | krzywy
out of left field | *pot.* nie z tej ziemi
(the plain) wacky | *pot.* (po prostu) odjechane, zwariowane

negative, but they've stuck around nonetheless. For example, Americans assume every British citizen is addicted to tea. There's nothing wrong with tea, but it appears as if Brits have to sip or slurp it any chance they get. It also appears as if an entire culture has developed around imbibing tea in the UK. There's teatime, and there are dozens of tea varieties that are completely novel to Americans. The practice of drinking tea with milk is flat-out bizarre for Americans too.

Britain's passions frequently leave Yankees flummoxed as well. The UK's pastimes have never made it above niche status in the United States. While the English fuss over football, the Welsh relish rugby, and the Scots go crazy for curling, these sports never really caught on in the US. Brits' fascination with these odd sports also makes them look a little fanatical.

A final quirk Americans attribute to Britons is a stodgy, unfunny sense of humour. Whether it's *Monty Python*, *Only Fools and Horses*, or *Blackadder*, Americans often pan British comedies. Something about the sarcasm, deadpan

neither...nor... | ani...ani...
6 **to stick around** | przylgnąć
nonetheless | tak czy inaczej
addicted to sth | uzależniony od czegoś
to sip sth | sączyć coś, popijać małymi łykami
to slurp sth | siorbać coś
to imbibe sth | lubić coś wypić, upajać się czymś
dozen of sth | tuzin czegoś
flat-out | po prostu, wprost
bizarre | dziwaczny, osobliwy
flummoxed | skołowany
pastime | rozrywka
to fuss over sth | poświęcać czemuś wiele uwagi
to relish sth | zachłystywać się czymś, zachwycać się czymś
to catch on | chwycić, przyjąć się
quirk ^{kwɜ:k / kwɜ:rk} | dziwactwo
to attribute to sb | przypisywać komuś
stodgy | *tu*: przeciężkowy
to pan sth | krytykować coś
deadpan | *tu*: opowiadanie żartów z udawaną powagą

delivery, or self-deprecation doesn't click for audiences out west. At the other end of the spectrum, slapstick comedies like *Benny Hill* and *Mr. Bean* were ridiculed for being too simplistic. Whatever the reason, Americans typically assume Brits will have a noticeably disparate approach to jokes, which may not be the case in actuality.

Fact or Fiction?

Most of these generalisations can't be applied to the entire British population, but they likely stem from some kernel of truth. Even if some American stereotypes towards UK residents seem a tad harsh, most Americans take them with a grain of salt and don't hold anything against the British. The truth is, the US and UK share tight cultural bonds too, and the similarities immensely overshadow any differences. Brits have their own preconceptions regarding Americans too, but you'll be hard-pressed to find someone from either country getting bent out of shape over a few misinformed opinions. ■

7 **self-deprecation** | pomniejszanie własnych zasług
audience ^{'ɔ:diəns} | publiczność
slapstick comedy | komedia slapstickowa
ridiculed for sth | wyśmiany za coś
disparate | odmienny, różny
approach to sth | podejście do czegoś
applied to sth | zastosowany do czegoś
to stem from sth | wynikać z czegoś
kernel of truth | ziarno prawdy
a tad | odrobinę
harsh | ostry
with a grain of salt | z przymrużeniem oka
immensely | w ogromnym stopniu, znacznie
to overshadow sth | przyćmiewać coś, przysłaniać coś
preconception | z góry przyjęta opinia, uprzedzenie
regarding sb | względem kogoś
hard-pressed | przyciśnięty do muru
to get bent out of shape | *AmE, pot.* wkurzać się, denerwować się



What the British Say about the Americans

by Owen Williams

The British have a lot to say about the Americans, from the respectful to the resentful. Here's *English Matters'* guide to all the flattery, and defamatory words.

Globalisation is a major part of today's world. With cheap flights, nonstop social media, and omnipresent Internet, the world has definitely become a smaller place.

- o **resentful** | pełen urazy
- flattery** | pochlebstwa
- defamatory** | oszczerczy, szkalujący
- 1 **globalisation** ,gləʊbələɪ'zeɪʃn / ,gləʊbələ'zeɪʃn
| globalizacja

In that shrunk world though, the USA is still a super power.

America leads the way in media production, with its shows and producers permeating the globalised world of ►

- flight** | lot
- omnipresent** | wszechobecny
- definitely** | zdecydowanie
- 2 **shrunk** | skurczony, zmniejszony
- to permeate sth** | przenikać coś

our day. The result of this huge **influence** of American media on the western world has had a **twofold** effect on Brits; **on the one hand**, Britons are **unconsciously** assimilating American culture. **On the other hand**, however, the people of Britain are being reminded more often of America, its culture, people, mannerisms and customs. This has certainly **affected** what the Brits say about the people of the United States of America, with a fair amount of **animosity**, a **decent** **helping** of amusement, but also a certain portion of admiration.

A Look at Language

A lot of the things which **annoy** Brits about the Americans **relate to** the **common** language and the different ways the two nations use it. The more traditional, patriotic, or pedantic, Brits out there **claim that** it's their language; it is called English, not American after all! These people can **get annoyed at** spelling differences like colour and color, different words used for the same thing such as pants and trousers, differences in pronunciation as in 'route,' and even more so by some of the expressions Americans use. Typical expressions popular in the USA which **rub Brits up the wrong way include**: way to go, have a nice day, and I'm good (**instead of** I'm well). 'Have a nice day'? How could something so pleasant be annoying to the Brits, you may **wonder**. Well, it's not the meaning

behind the phrase that **bothers** members of the British public (they're not sadists!) but rather the time, frequency, and perceived **lack of sincerity** with which the phrase is used. It's a standard **farewell** message in America, typically **dished out** by 'greeters' in shops **displaying** the positive, enthusiastic **attitude** that the Americans are known for. For people used to British culture though, such overly friendly **behaviour** can seem over the top, too informal, and in your face.

Star Spangled Banner

That brings us on to the next thing which **riles** many British people; the **tremendously** enthusiastic nature of American society. Everything is bigger, better, faster, stronger, in America... or so the Americans will tell you with great pride. Some British people get the impression that their **neighbours** '**across the pond**' feel everything has to be that way in the US, and even if it's not, that they must claim it to be anyway. Everyone is always smiling, telling each other that they 'can do it', whatever 'it' **actually** is. It's an absurd attitude in the minds of some Brits. Something they laugh at, like a child laughs at a silly **cartoon**. It's not so funny for other British people **though**, "where's the space for modesty and **refined humbleness**?" they ask. To them, the American world seems to be plastic (the biggest and best plastic of course).

3 influence | wpływ
twofold | dwójaki
on the one hand | z jednej strony
unconsciously ʌn'kɒnʃəsli / ʌn'kɑːnʃəsli | nieświadomie
on the other hand | z drugiej strony
to affect sth | mieć wpływ na coś
animosity | niechęć, uraza
decent 'diːsnt | tu: porządný
helping | porcja
to annoy sb | irytować, drażnić kogoś
to relate to sth | odnosić się do czegoś
common | tu: wspólny
to claim that... | twierdzić, że...
to get annoyed at sth | zdenerwować się na coś/z powodu czegoś

to rub sb up the wrong way | źle na kogoś działać, nadepnąć kogoś na odcisk
to include sth | obejmować coś
instead of sth | zamiast czegoś
to wonder | zastanawiać się
4 to bother sb | przeszkadzać komuś
lack of sth | brak czegoś
sincerity sɪn'serəti | szczerowość
farewell | pożegnanie, pożegnalny
dished out | tu: rozdawany
to display sth | okazywać coś
attitude | nastawienie
behaviour | zachowanie
Star Spangled Banner | flaga państwowa USA
to rile sb | irytować, wkurzać kogoś
tremendously trə'mendəsli | ogromnie, niesamowicie

Buzzword: Englishes

The development of so many **varieties** of the English language has led linguists to create a pluralised form of the word 'English'. **In other words**, English has become **countable**! "How many Englishes are spoken in the world?"

variety | odmiana
in other words | innymi słowami
countable | policzalny

There's a lack of **authenticity** in the **hyped up** culture, and often in the people too. Everything is presented as though it's **star-studded**, that it's glorious because it's in or from the USA. Basically, these Brits think that Americans believe they're the best at everything; whether it's true or not isn't important, it's the fact that wanting to be the best at being the best, without compromise, lacks a certain **dignity** found in British culture which Britons are proud of...silently.

The Best Way to Be

This American attitude, however, is something which can **divide** British opinion and **cause** a debate, as a lot of Brits actually like this aspect of America. Those **in favour of** the culture and overt positivity of the land of the free admire the way

neighbour | sąsiad
across the pond | po drugiej stronie oceanu
actually | w rzeczywistości
cartoon | bajka, kreskówka
though | tu: jednak
refined | dystyngowany
humbleness | pokora
5 authenticity ɔːθən'tɪsəti | autentyczność, prawdziwość
hyped up | nadmiernie ożywiony, podekscytowany; rozreklamowany
star-studded | pełen gwiazd, z gwiazdorską obsadą
dignity | godność
to divide sth | po/dzielić coś
to cause sth | s/powodować coś
in favour of sth | za czymś

American Exports

The USA is exporting media globally, but what other things are the country's biggest exports?

- machinery and electrical equipment
- aircraft and other vehicles
- oil
- medical equipment and pharmaceuticals
- plastics
- precious metals
- chemicals

aircraft | statek powietrzny
vehicle | w:ra:k / 'vi:hkl | pojazd



Americans believe they can do anything. Some Brits long to live the American dream; to be able to achieve anything, to have everything, and live in the happy world of the stars and stripes. There's something so innocently honest and unashamedly simple about the American attitude to life. It's refreshing for these Britons to see a nation which wears its heart on its sleeve: what you see is what you get, in a straightforward way where the world is an open book. In this culture, the desire for success, and consequent attainment of it, is applauded by fellow citizens, not frowned upon or laughed at, as could be the case in the UK.

Say it Loud

So British opinion is split over what their friends on the other side of the Atlantic are really like. Unlike in America, it's part of British culture to keep quiet about over complimentary or extremely defamatory opinions, so actually hearing a Brit talking about an American is quite unlikely. Perhaps this is where Americans have the advantage: perhaps this is why American media plus the culture and language which comes with it, is infiltrating the globalized,

or globalised world – Britain included. Maybe if the Brits were as loud as they often consider the Americans to be, they would be better able to resist the things they dislike about America? It seems the Brits are presented with a paradox: to prevent the influence of Americans, be more like the Americans! ■

6 to achieve sth | osiągnąć coś

the stars and stripes | flaga państwowa
USA

unashamedly | bezwstydnie

to wear one's heart on one's sleeve | mieć
serce na dłoni

in a straightforward way | mówiąc wprost
attainment of sth | zdobycie, osiągnięcie
czegoś

fellow citizen | współobywatel

to frown upon sth | krzywo na coś patrzeć,
nie pochwalać czegoś

split over | podzielony

unlike | inaczej niż

complimentary | pochlebny

extremely | wyjątkowo

advantage | tu: przewaga

7 X included | włącznie z X

to resist sth | opierać się czemuś

to prevent sth | zapobiegać czemuś