Katarzyna Machała

STILL ONE LANGUAGE? WHY BRITS AND AMERICANS SWEAR DIFFERENTLY

1. Uwagi ogólne

Materiał został przygotowany dla studentów zarządzania kulturą i mediami na II stopniu studiów, ale może zostać wykorzystany również na innych kierunkach, ponieważ dotyczy ogólnych kwestii językowych.

2. Poziom zaawansowania: B2+, C1, C1+

3. Czas trwania opisanych ćwiczeń: 90 minut

4. Cele dydaktyczne

Zasadniczym celem tych zajęć jest rozwijanie u studentów sprawności rozumienia ze słuchu oraz rozumienia autentycznego (jedynie skróconego) tekstu pisanego. Aby studenci mogli osiągnąć te cele, teksty oraz materiały wideo zostały wzbogacone o zadania wymagające dyskusji oraz wyciągania wniosków na podstawie przeczytanego/usłyszanego fragmentu mimo braku możliwości zrozumienia każdego słowa.

Dodatkowym celem jest uwrażliwienie studentów na istnienie różnych dialektów oraz zróżnicowanych rejestrów językowych, na co powinni zwracać szczególną uwagę na tak wysokim poziomie zaawansowania.

5. Uwagi i sugestie

Proponowany schemat lekcji

Lekcja koncentruje się na zasadniczych różnicach między językiem angielskim używanym po przeciwnych stronach Atlantyku, ale przedstawia je w sposób humorystyczny, wprowadzając przy okazji elementy typowe dla komedii brytyjskiej. Punktem wyjścia jest dyskusja (ćwiczenie 1). Po niej następuje krótkie ćwiczenie na słuchanie (ćwiczenia 2 i 3) oraz podsumowanie tego, co studenci już wiedzą na temat różnic między tymi dwoma dialektami.

Druga część lekcji (ćwiczenia 4–7) skupia się na czytaniu dłuższego tekstu i wyciąganiu wniosków. Praca nad artykułem polega na odpowiedzi na pytania oraz zdefiniowaniu podkreślonych w tekście słów. Całość zakończona jest filmikiem ze słynnej brytyjskiej serii, podsumowanym krótką dyskusją.

Trzecia część lekcji (ćwiczenia 8–11) to praca nad synonimami, pasującymi lub niepasującymi do kontekstu, oraz poruszenie kwestii „lost in translation": czy skoro te odmiany są tak różne, możliwe jest wzajemne zrozumienie? Jeśli brakuje czasu, można pominąć fragment dotyczący Monty Pythona (ćwiczenia 9–10) i przejść bezpośrednio do dyskusji na koniec.

STILL ONE LANGUAGE? WHY BRITS AND AMERICANS SWEAR DIFFERENTLY

I. Look at the meme.
What does it tell us about
the differences between the speakers
of the two varieties of English?

II. Match the British and American slang
expressions with their meanings.
Then watch the video to check.

1. flossing	a) chat
2. chin wag	b) a young kid / woman
3. ba-donka-donk	c) showing off
4. chuffed to bits	d) sexy butt
5. shawty	e) delighted

Find the video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYmrg3owTRE&feature=player_detailpage.

III. Discuss in pairs/small groups.

1. What differences between British English and American English do you know of in:
   a. grammar?
   b. spelling?
   c. pronunciation?
   d. vocabulary?
5. Why are there so many differences?
6. Is it still one language?
7. Which variety do you find easier to learn? Why?

IV. Why do Brits and Americans swear so differently? Discuss in pairs, then read the book excerpt to check your ideas.

When Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street* was released in 2014, it had the questionable distinction of containing more F-bombs than any other drama – 2.83 per minute, a total of 506. Only a documentary about the word itself exceeds it in cinematic history, with 857 instances. But this is far from unusual for American films, in which profane words frequently number in the hundreds. Television tends to have stricter standards.

The influence of American films and television on British culture is strong. Any British person who hasn't visited America could be forgiven for assuming that America is one giant cluster-cuss, its citizens dropping F-bombs like Eliza Doolittle dropped her Hs. But this isn't necessarily so. There is a real puritanical streak in America that is much discussed – but little understood – by the British. It manifests itself in unpredictable ways, like an unwillingness to use seemingly **innocuous** words (the word 'toilet,' for example) and a certain gentility when it comes to swearing.

For example, Americans consider it a big deal when a public figure is caught swearing. After President Obama declared his intention to "find out whose ass to kick" in connection with the BP oil spill, *Time* magazine published a Brief History of Political Profanity, saying that although "the comment wasn't particularly vulgar …….. **coarse language** always seems shocking when it comes from the mouth of a President." Americans – even presidents – use all kinds of language, but in real life swearing retains more of its shock value than you would imagine, if your primary contact with American culture were its movies.

It is not unusual, in the real America, to meet a graduate of the Ned Flanders School of Swearing. 'Gosh darn it!' 'What the dickens?' 'What the flood?' 'Leapin' Lazarus!' Writer Julie Gray describes the phenomenon: "I recently said to someone that I'd be shocked as pink paint if something didn't happen. My mother used to describe either a person or a situation that was **going downhill** as 'going to hell in a hand basket.' My grandmother used to say 'good NIGHT' when something surprised or shocked her …….. I don't know where I picked it up but I will sometimes say 'H-E double toothpicks' or 'fudge'. Even Nicholson Baker, in his book House of Holes, has his characters say things like "for gosh sakes," "golly," and "damnation" as well as the f-word, just to keep it real.

No matter what age they start, the British seem far more fluent at swearing than Americans. They are more likely to link colourful language with having a sense of humour than with coarseness or vulgarity. Some even have the ability to make a word sound like a swear word when it isn't. Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie once performed a comedy sketch based on the idea that if the BBC wouldn't let them swear on the air, they'd simply make up their own curse words, "which are absolutely pitiless in their detail …….. and no one can stop us from using them. Here they are:

STEPHEN: Prunk.
HUGH: Shote.

STEPHEN: Cucking.
HUGH: Skank.
STEPHEN: Fusk.
HUGH: Pempslider.
STEPHEN: No, we said we wouldn't use that one.
HUGH: Did we?
STEPHEN: Yes, that's going too far.
HUGH: What, "pempslider"?
STEPHEN: Shut up.

Even without making up new words, the British definitely have, and make use of, a larger vocabulary of swear words than Americans. Americans mostly find it funny – as if the British were swearing in another language – but Ruth Margolis, writing for BBC America's blog Mind the Gap: A Brit's Guide to Surviving America, warned them that Americans might find their language offensive: "To get on in polite company, try to avoid …….. friendly-offensive **banter**. Brits exchange jovial insults because we're too **uptight** and emotionally stunted to say how we really feel. The stronger your friendship, the more you can lay into each other and still come away with a warm feeling. This is not how Americans roll. Tell your US pal he's a moron or anything stronger and you likely won't get invited to his wedding."

Indeed, there are some words the British use casually that are considered more offensive or insulting by Americans. As Margolis notes, for example, in Britain one might plausibly tease a friend of either sex by calling them a twat (rhymes with cat) or the four-letter c-word, which is all but unsayable in the United States – and which linguist John McWhorter (while not at all against swearing in principle) has lumped in with the n-word as one of Americans' most taboo. Americans find it really shocking to hear it used carelessly.

There are also words the British use that are actually 'swearier' – even less polite – than they sound to the American ear, simply because they are unfamiliar. Hugh Grant gets a huge laugh saying, "Bugger! Bugger!" to express frustration in *Four Weddings and a Funeral,* but, as Philip Thody describes in *Don't Do It! A Dictionary of the Forbidden*, 'bugger' is a term of bigotry and abuse with a long and nasty history: "Rarely used in a literal sense in modern English, and scarcely used at all in the USA. Similarly, 'bloody' is an all-purpose intensifier that, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, once qualified as the strongest **expletive** available in just about every English-speaking nation except the United States. In 1914 its use in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* was hugely controversial.

Misunderstandings abound, but one thing is for sure. If you choose to swear, and you want your swearing to be understood on both sides of the Atlantic, you can't go wrong with the classic, the universal, the little black dress of swear words: f***. As Audrey Hepburn once said, "Everything I learned, I learned from the movies."

Extracted from: *That's Not English: Britishisms, Americanisms and What Our English Says About Us* by Erin Moore, published by Square Peg, http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20151109-english-speakers-or-not-brits-and-americans-swear-in-different-languages.

V. Answer the questions.

1. What's the difference in the language used on American TV and in American films?

.....

2. Is the actual spoken American English similar to its film counterpart?

.....

3. What is the Ned Flanders School of Swearing? Give examples.

.....

4. How does British English compare to American English when it comes to swearing?

.....

5. How can you avoid misunderstanding when you want to swear on either continent?

.....

VI. Explain the words/phrases in bold in the text.

VII. Watch a video (*A Bit of Fry & Laurie*) showing the use of strong language as described in the excerpt above. How do you like it?

Find the video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm0LnZOf_O0.

VIII. Why is English full of silly-sounding words? Discuss in pairs, then read the article to check.

"That wazzock dared to gazump me; I'm gobsmacked by this sticky wicket full of codswallop that's gone pear-shaped!"

That sentence may not sound serious. But the situation it describes is. Translated into standard English, it would be something like "That idiot dared to offer more money for the house after my offer already had been accepted; I'm shocked by this tricky situation full of nonsense that's gone awry!" Shakespeare, this isn't. The first sentence sounds so (1) *bizarre / peculiar / proper* to certain ears not just because of the mangling of parts of speech. It's also full of words, with origins ranging from the 1700s to the 1980s, that have two qualities in common: they're all rather silly-sounding, and they're all British English.

British English is full of (2) *whimsical / unusual / unpredictable* terms like these. They reflect the UK's cultural appreciation of wit, a long tradition of literary inventiveness – and Britain's (3) *undecided / fluctuating / varying* global influence over the centuries. These types of (4) *word formation / coinage / minting* aren't unique to English, (5) *let alone / not to mention / not interfering with*

British English. But the relative simplicity of English words (many of them monosyllabic – 'come', 'go', 'take', 'big', 'laugh') may lend itself to this kind of play, says Anatoly Liberman, professor of languages at the University of Minnesota. Especially characteristic of these formations in British English is the way they (6) *take after / reflect / demonstrate* a certain kind of humour. Pop anthropologist Kate Fox has written about the English pervasiveness of humour in social interaction. This humour is of a particular kind: self-deprecating and given to understatement and irony.

There's a long tradition in British English of inventing words just for the fun of it. While whimsical British terms have been coined in every era, certain periods have been especially (7) *blooming / abounding / fruitful*. According to David Crystal, linguistic inventiveness, particularly of a playful kind, seems to have peaked in the Elizabethan era. This is partly due to the enduring influence of (8) *wordsmiths / polyglots / men of letters* like Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists. Since Shakespeare, British writers from Charles Dickens ('whiz-bang') and Lewis Carroll ('mimsy') to JK Rowling ('muggle') have continued to (9) *enliven / refresh / gladden* English vocabulary.

Adapted from: http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20170619-why-british-english-is-full-of-silly-sounding-words.

IX. Read the text again and ~~*cross out*~~ the word/phrase which couldn't be used.

X. Lost in translation. Discuss, then answer the questions about the recording.

1. Have you ever got "lost in translation" (i.e., misunderstood something or were misunderstood in a foreign language)?
2. What was the problem? How did you get round it?

Now watch a short video (0–2:00) and answer the questions:

Find the video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAQJHHf3i1o.

a) What place is it?

……

b) What does the man (with a phrasebook) want?

……

c) What does he actually say?

……

d) How does the other man react?

……

XI. Discuss in pairs/small groups.

1. Have you ever used a phrasebook and/or Google translate? What do you think about them?
2. What's the attitude of Poles to swearing? Are they closer to Brits or Americans?
3. Can you think of any silly-sounding words in Polish? Or some Polish idioms that sound funny when translated directly?

KEY

I. Look at the meme. What does it tell us about the differences between the speakers of the two varieties of English?

Mem znajduje się w linku poniżej. Przedstawia królową Elżbietę oraz podpis: "There's no such thing as American English. There's English, and there are mistakes."

https://pics.me.me/american-english-there-is-no-such-thing-as-american-english-14734197.png .

Odpowiedzi własne studentów, sugerowana:
Some British people seem to think that the dialect they speak is the only correct version of English. It also serves as a reminder for the non-native users of English that sometimes there are different spellings / pronunciation / words / grammar forms possible but **you need to stick to one dialect and use it consistently in your speech and writing**.

II. Match the British and American slang expressions with their meanings. Then watch the video to check.

1. flossing – *c*	a) chat
2. chin wag – *a*	b) a young kid / woman
3. ba-donka-donk – *d*	c) showing off
4. chuffed to bits – *e*	d) sexy butt
5. shawty – *b*	e) delighted

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UWAGA!
Przedstawiony w tym filmiku wywiad został nagrany w czasie, kiedy Hugh Laurie (słynny aktor brytyjski) święcił triumfy na całym świecie jako złośliwy Dr House – genialny lekarz z Bostonu, mówiący z amerykańskim akcentem. Jego wymowa na ekranie była tak doskonała, że wielu fanów tego serialu było zdumionych na wieść o tym, że naprawdę pochodzi on z Wielkiej Brytanii.

V. Answer the questions.

1. What's the difference in the language used on American TV and in American films?
Strong language is typical for the films, the TV has stricter standards.

2. Is the actual spoken American English similar to its film counterpart?
Not at all – there is "a puritanic streak" in American, they tend to avoid swearing in real life.

3. What is the Ned Flanders School of Swearing? Give examples.
It's a tendency to replace bad words with something innocent, e.g. "Darn it!", "What the flood?". The name comes from a character in The Simpsons*, Homer Simpson's next-door neighbour, a righteous citizen who never uses bad language and replaces it this way.*

4. How does British English compare to American English when it comes to swearing?
The British use stronger language but they often do it with humour.

5. How can you avoid misunderstanding when you want to swear on either continent?
Use "the little black dress of swear words" – the F-word, understood in every English-speaking country.

VI. Explain the words/phrases in bold in the text:

- innocuous – *harmless, innocent*
- coarse language – *vulgar language, full of swear words*
- going downhill – *deteriorating, getting worse*
- banter – *chat, informal talk*
- uptight – *stiff, serious*
- expletive – *offensive term*

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UWAGA!
Przygotowując to ćwiczenie, posłużyłam się słownikiem synonimów. Warto zwrócić uwagę studentów na ten fakt, ponieważ jasno tu widać, że nie każdy synonim pasuje do danego kontekstu – powinni na to uważać, szukając synonimów we własnych tekstach.