

Institution: University of Sussex		
Unit of Assessment: 27 – English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Developing and supporting the practice of copy editors and English language teachers through greater understanding of the differences between American English and British English		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): M. Lynne Murphy	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Linguistics	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: Jan 2000 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 Aug 2013 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Murphy's study of national identity through the emergence of 'nationlects' – distinct language identities – between British English and American English has challenged preconceptions about language, dialect and linguistic discrimination. Through her distinctive and influential public profile and highly visible online presence, Murphy's research and knowledge have been accessed by both Further Education teachers of A-level English (UK), high school English (US / Sweden) and Higher Education (Japan) to inform and enable curriculum development; and by copy editors and translators in the US and UK to aid their recognition and elucidation of authentic textual voices and justification of editorial choices.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Taking a broad range of approaches to lexical (word-level), pragmatic (talk-in-interaction), and social (linguistic ideologies) phenomena, Lynne Murphy researches how dictionaries are made and used, how words and meaning are represented in the mind, and how words vary meaningfully. Such variation can cause misunderstanding and lead to stereotyping on the basis of language differences. Murphy's work examines the incongruities between linguistic capacity and assumptions about language, particularly how those assumptions often result in poor models of language. Murphy shows that commonly held beliefs about English and other languages often interfere with progress in thinking about language.</p> <p>Models of how word-knowledge is stored in the mind have often relied on linguists' intuitions and psycholinguistic experiments, such as word association. Murphy's early work argues that such evidence is metalinguistic in nature and therefore generates misleading notions regarding how linguistic knowledge is stored. Instead, Murphy has offered a model of semantic relations (e.g. synonyms, antonyms) that distinguishes the roles played by linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge [R1]. Divorcing linguistic models from metalinguistic beliefs involves eschewing linguistic intuition in favour of concrete evidence, through use of corpus analysis alongside other linguistic tools. For instance, Murphy and her colleagues investigated discourse functions of antonym pairs in Swedish and English, identifying the additional role of culture and attitude in influencing antonym functions, alongside context [R2].</p> <p>From 2013, through academic work, public writing and talks, Murphy has turned this focus on the gap between linguistic beliefs and reality to the ways in which the stereotyping of American and British varieties of English conflicts with their realities [R3, R4, R5, R6]. One example of this is her 2015 British Academy/Leverhulme [G1] funded work on US/UK dictionary cultures, which explored the culture of the dictionary in the US and UK [R3]. Using publishers' archival materials, Murphy has shown how the marketing strategies for dictionaries in the US and Britain</p>		

exploit transatlantic differences in the role of the written word and have established different roles for the dictionary in each society.

In 2016, Murphy was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Public Scholarship [G2] to write a general-audience monograph on the differences, interactions and attitudes between British and American English. *The Prodigal Tongue* [R4] combines original corpus and archival research with sociolinguistic analysis to challenge academic and non-academic audiences in their assumptions about the origins, status and future of national Englishes. In the journal *Dictionaries*, Orin Hargraves wrote that Murphy 'has written a book that will stand as a definitive reference on the US and UK English divide for the foreseeable future' (39.2, 2018).

The focus of Murphy's recent research on politeness has enabled an exploration of the mismatch between what people believe about polite words and how they use them to achieve politeness [R5, R6]. Developed from original blog posts on the word 'please', research with Rachel de Felice using a corpus of US and UK workplace email identified different cultural norms for making context-appropriate requests via corporate email [R5]. They developed a detailed picture of the linguistic context of 'please' and established how its use interacts with different levels of imposition to better understand the culture and form-context pairing. Murphy argues that reliance on common knowledge about 'please' and 'thank you' has led to their consistent misrepresentation in dictionaries [R6] and calls on dictionaries to pay more attention to the form-context pairing in order to support language learners in avoiding offence.

As a 2020 NEH Public Scholar [G3], Murphy's current work draws on public talks on the small words 'the', 'be' and 'of' to develop an innovative study of the social, historical, psychological, and communicative import of function words and discourse markers.

3. References to the research

- [R1] Murphy, M. Lynne (2003) *Semantic Relations and the Lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ISBN 9780521780674 (translated into Korean and also published in China). Available on request.
- [R2] Murphy, M. Lynne, Paradis, Carita, Willners, Caroline, & Jones, Steven (2009) Discourse functions of antonymy: a cross-linguistic investigation of Swedish and English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(11), 2159-2184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.09.040> ISSN 0378-2166.
- [R3] Murphy, M. Lynne (2018) Contrasts in American and British dictionary cultures: The view from marketing. *Dictionaries* 39:3, 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dic.2018.0017> ISSN 0197-6745.
- [R4] Murphy, M. Lynne (2018) *The prodigal tongue: the love-hate relationship between British and American English*. London: OneWorld, Published in North America as Murphy, L. (2018) *The prodigal tongue: the love-hate relationship between American and British English*. New York: Penguin <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/552013/th> ISBN 9780143131106. Submitted to REF2.
- [R5] Murphy, M. Lynne, & De Felice, Rachele (2019) Routine politeness in American and British English requests: use and non-use of *please*. *Journal of Politeness Research* 15, 77-100. <https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2016-0027> ISSN 1612-5681.
- [R6] Murphy, M. Lynne (2019) Defining your Ps and Qs: politeness, prescriptivism and polysemy. *Dictionaries*, 40, 61-92. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dic.2019.0014> ISSN 0197-6745.

Key Research Grants

- [G1] Murphy, M. Lynne [PI], (2016 – 2017) British and American Dictionary Cultures. British Academy/Leverhulme, Small Grants Programme GBP3,620.
- [G2] Murphy, M. Lynne [PI], (2016) How America Saved the English Language. National Endowment for the Humanities, Public Scholar USD50,000.

[G3] Murphy, M. Lynne [PI], (September 2020 – March 2021) Small Words. National Endowment for the Humanities, Public Scholar USD30,000.

4. Details of the impact

As an academic and public linguist, Murphy challenges transatlantic language stereotypes through accessible evidence-based writing and talks on the differences between American English (AmE) and British English (BrE). Through research, a social-media presence, and public speaking, Murphy connects with the public, the media, language professionals, students and academic linguists, stimulating debate that enhances learning, cultural understanding, and professional practice. She regularly writes for mainstream media outlets in the US and UK, including the *Wall Street Journal* (2017) and *The Guardian* (2018, 2019, 2020), and appears on UK and US radio and podcasts. Her press pieces can generate up to 500 responses from a public eager to engage in debate about language diversity and change **[S10]**. Since August 2013 Murphy's blog, 'Separated by a Common Language', has maintained between 60,000 and 70,000 views per month and, with an increased focus on Twitter, she has amassed a following of 21,100 in 2020 **[S1a]**. *The Prodigal Tongue* (2018), has been widely excerpted and positively reviewed in specialist and mainstream media in the UK, the US and beyond, and was selected as *The Economist's* language Book of the Year **[S1b]**. Publishers in US/Canada alone have shipped over 27,000 paper and e-books **[S2]**. Through this highly visible online presence, Murphy's work has been accessed by FE and HE education professionals looking to enhance course content; and she has been invited to speak to specialist audiences (copy editors and translators) whose professional work has directly benefitted from her research.

Enriching and enhancing English language teaching

Murphy's work has introduced the idea of 'nationlects' to non-native English speakers, often for the first time. For example, Kalle Larsen, a secondary school teacher in Stockholm, stated 'I have been teaching this level of English for 10 years and in 2018 I wanted to deepen the learning in this area – for myself who had a basic understanding and awareness of language difference and its relation to culture and attitude, and for my students for whom this is a new area.' Following some research on the internet, he 'came across Professor Murphy's blog and her book, *The Prodigal Tongue* and reached out to connect with her. I was particularly attracted to her work on the cultural difference in the use of 'thank you' and 'please' by American and British speakers'. For Larsen, the research 'offers insights beyond the basics of difference in vocabulary and is more about pragmatics. This caught my interest and I felt it would be useful for my students to have this in-depth exploration and understanding of language codes and structures' **[S5]**. Following the introduction of Murphy's work to the students (66 over the past two years), feedback was very positive: 'In their evaluations the students specifically referred to Professor Murphy's Skype sessions as a highlight in the program area. I saw evidence of the influence of Professor Murphy's input in some of the films submitted for examination, with some focussing on the cultural differences in the frequency and use of 'thank you' and 'please', and in one film that explored the cultural use of swear words in American and British English' **[S5]**.

Thanks to Murphy's research, student and teacher understanding of language variation now extends to include pragmatics and sociolinguistics, moving beyond a basic focus on vocabulary and grammar **[S5]**. At Kanda University of International Studies, Japan, a 15-week course centring on Murphy's book was offered in both semesters of 2020. Murphy's book tackles a gap in international student knowledge with 'her scrutiny of ideologies and prejudices related to the nationlect [offering] relatable concepts for my learners that they likely lacked exposure to' **[S6a]**. With topics on linguistic prejudice and national identity/linguistic choices, students developed skills in critical thinking which they applied to 'evaluating their own idiolect and attitudes to regional dialects of Japanese', leading some to admit to 'holding both positive and negative perceptions about other regional Japanese varieties' **[S6a]**. Clare Bowers, a lecturer at Kanda, stated that 'Professor Murphy's work has been central to developing the course aims and content. The principal course objective is based on a key message I discerned from *The Prodigal Tongue*: to highlight the robustness of English and to celebrate its variations rather than criticise them. I relied on extracts from *The Prodigal Tongue*, utilized the TEDx Talk on British and American politeness, made reference to the 'Separated by a Common Language' blog, and also used other articles citing Professor Murphy'. The initial course ran for 30 students and its

success means that it has been confirmed to run in future years. Students reacted positively to their learning: for example, ‘the students expressed surprise to phenomena like the respective inferior and superior attitudes of Britain and America because not only was this new information, but it conflicted with their prior knowledge’ [S6a, S6b].

At a Georgia high school in the US, *The Prodigal Tongue* has been embedded into the syllabus of the Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition course. The AP teacher Diane Benjamin created a unit, ‘Language and Argument’, designed around Murphy’s book as the core text [S4b]. Linguistics is new to students at advanced level, and Murphy’s book has proven invaluable. Benjamin notes that ‘not a lot of books on linguistics are accessible, particularly for a readership of 17-year-olds, and *The Prodigal Tongue* offers a substantial piece of reading that introduces new concepts to students that they wouldn’t access otherwise. The linguistics piece – how language works, why it works and how it changes – is unique, and I am not aware of other texts that do that. I have followed Professor Murphy’s blog for many years and so was aware of the book as soon as it was published’ [S4a]. Ethnic diversity is high in the class with many students having first-hand experience of how language shapes identity and how prejudice can arise. Studying linguistics through *The Prodigal Tongue* ‘gives them a language with which to articulate and to understand their own issues’, as well as study others’ [S4a].

Since new A-level exam specifications in 2016, Murphy’s work supports A-level English Language teachers’ professional development and curriculum delivery in the UK, with *The Prodigal Tongue* on the AQA list of recommended reading for teachers (AQA covers an estimated 80% of the A-level English Language market) [S3b]. Teachers draw on Murphy’s writing to engage students with linguistic ideologies and to interrogate popular representations of language change through historical evidence. Murphy’s work – featured in the AQA revision guide, in edited texts including the Cambridge Topics in English Language Series (2018), the English and Media Centre’s (EMC) Language Handbook (2018) and in articles written for EMC’s *emagazine* (distributed to 1156 schools and other institutions) – stimulates classroom debate and develops students’ skills in discourse evaluation and critical thinking. Author, teacher and AQA examiner Dan Clayton notes how Murphy’s approach in her book is applied to studying public discourse, contributing ‘towards the development of the students’ skills in critical thinking... particularly useful and more widely applicable in a time of fake news and media disinformation’ [S3a].

Impact on the professional practice of copy editors in AmE and BrE usage

Murphy has delivered professional development in the language industry through speaking at annual conferences for the Institute of Translators and Interpreters (ITI, 2018), Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET, 2019) [S7], and the Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading (CIEP, 2016, 2017, 2018, membership over 3000) [S8]. Mark Allen, copy editor and board member of the Society for Copy-Editing (ACES, 2018, membership over 4000) in the US, writes that he edits, ‘for a variety of clients, including some outside the United States and for international organizations. It is important when editing to be aware of the voice of the client and readers’ expectations’. For him, ‘Murphy’s blog is one of my best sources of information about British and American differences, along with the Oxford English Dictionary and *The Guardian* and *Observer* Style Guide.’ He continues: ‘Copyeditors are embracing linguistic knowledge to keep up with change in language and dialect. Professor Murphy is a resource for AmE and BrE difference and is also a voice and resource for helping copy editors do their jobs.’ Her work has become ‘even more valuable’ in recent years ‘as publications become increasingly international, particularly online. It also applies more obviously among fiction editors who might find American authors writing British characters or vice versa. Professor Murphy’s work on politeness protocols in particular are essential for authors and editors interested in giving characters a natural voice’ [S7].

Murphy cultivates an open dialogue with editors and translators who contact her directly and her work is widely recognised as a ‘go-to’ reference on AmE and BrE. Trainer and freelancer Karen Tkaczyk recommends Murphy’s work in her international training sessions on localisation [S9a], both ACES and CIEP promote Murphy’s work as a key resource, and CIEP members discuss and recommend her work in their members’ forum [S7, S8]. Tkaczyk comments that ‘although clients generally trust me to speak to the audience for whom I am writing, it is important in the

profession to be able to justify clearly to a client the choices and changes I make to a text, and Lynne Murphy's work provides a robust source of evidence when needed' [S9a]. Language professionals cite Murphy to explain and justify editorial changes and text choices to clients, and to better understand client needs [S8, S9b], and turn to her blog 'as a practical resource to check usage of particular words, to help explain differences between British English and American English, and to more deeply appreciate the ways in which our language is evolving' [S7].

Beyond her impacts in the classroom and on copy-editing practice, in the US Murphy's work is part of a call for change, helping to support a wider shift in the editing profession towards openness to language diversity and a 'greater embrace of nuance, dialect and register' [S7]. In the UK Murphy's research engages with diverse constituencies to tackle historical transatlantic prejudice, challenging myths sustained in the UK around perceived Americanisms [S8].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [S1] Twitter (<https://twitter.com/lynnequist>) and media. **a.** Screenshots from 22 December 2020 of blogger data showing site views and responses, and Twitter analytics for the 28-day period prior to download; **b.** For lists of reviews and citations, and broadcast media coverage see <https://separatedbyacommonlanguage.blogspot.com/p/events-and-media.html> and <https://theprodigaltongue.com/reviews-and-media/>
- [S2] US/Canada publishers' direct sales and shipping statistics downloaded on 13 January 2021
NOTE: Figures given in the text are lower than actual figures provided, to account for period 1–13 January 2021.
- [S3] **a.** Testimony from Dan Clayton, author, AQA examiner, editor of revision guide/Cambridge series and EMC Language Handbook; **b.** tweets showing featured material and extract from Language Handbook.
- [S4] **a.** Testimony from Diane Benjamin, US teacher and course designer for Advanced Placement English and Composition in Georgia; **b.** class task to develop a 'teaching guide' for *The Prodigal Tongue* demonstrating impact of Murphy's book on unit design and student learning and skills
- [S5] Testimony from Kalle Larsen, Upper Secondary Teacher of English, Blackebergs gymnasium, Stockholm.
- [S6] **a.** Testimony from Clare Bowers, course designer and English lecturer, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan; and **b.** Syllabus outline for 'The Relationship Between British & American English', Japan.
- [S7] Testimony from Mark Allen, Executive Board member of Society for Copy-editing (ACES) and freelance copy editor (US), on the impact of Murphy's work on the profession in the US.
- [S8] Testimony from Beth Hamer, conference director for Chartered Institute of Editors and Proofreading (CIEP, formerly SfEP) and freelance proofreader (UK) on the broad impact of Murphy's work on the profession in the UK.
- [S9] **a.** Testimony from Karen Tkaczyk, freelance translator, editor, and international trainer who recommends Murphy's book in training; **b.** tweets from international professionals recommending Murphy's book to peers.
- [S10] Public debate in *Guardian* pieces attracting 453 (2018) and 581 (2019) responses: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/02/us-britain-msm-while-words-2018-english#comments ; www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/26/britain-politeness-english-speakers-gratitude#comments