# THE IMPACT OF ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT ON CANADIAN ENGLISH

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# Introduction

In the turbulent 1960s, the United States controversial involvement in the Vietnam War brought about heightened feelings of anti-

mood within the era, we will in the second part of the paper discuss the methodology of our research and how we examined these spelling variants within the two types of publications. In the third part of the paper we will compile the results of our research and in the final part sum up the findings and present our analysis.

## 1. Analyzing the Times - Canadian Anti-American Sentiment in the Vietnam Era

In order to argue that there was a change in the preferred spelling of words in Canada due to feelings of anti-Americanism, we first examine the relationship between the two countries during the Vietnam War era.

In the early years of the war, Canada seems very similar to the U.S. in opinion towards war as well as other matters; however, the support of the Vietnam War by many Canadians was only tentative. The Vietnam War, especially the United States involvement in it, became a highly controversial topic in the 1960s among Canadians (Granatstein, 1996). While there was certainly some ongoing Canadian support for the actions of the U.S. government by Canadians, there was also a tremendous amount of loudly voiced criticism, especially on the part of young Canadians (Owram, 1996). Protests of the war in Canada drew large crowds, including many teenagers (Granatstein, 1996:180). Referring to what had been a strong friendship between neighbouring countries, one historian said "the 1960s soon brought painful division to the U.S.-Canada relationship" (Thompson & Randall, 2002: 229). In the 1960s and 1970s there was a "burgeoning nationalism and anti-Americanism" (Granatstein, 1996:171): "the anti-war and the anti-American anger in Canada continued to grow slowly and to reinforce each other" (Granatstein, 1996:177).

The era saw the rise of popular Canadian musicians such as Neil Young, Bruce Cockburn and Joni Mitchell, all of whom preached an anti-war message in their lyrics (Granatstein, 1996:177). These lyrics helped to enforce a degree of anti-Americanism among Canadians. For Canadians, their consciousness of the Vietnam War, and their deep desire to not be involved in it, made them feel their separateness from the U.S more than they had felt it at any time since the Second World War (Granatstein, 1996:191). And we argue that, due to these feelings of separateness, Canadians may have wanted to further distinguish themselves through preferences in spelling, such as in *-our/-or* variants. If the two spelling variants, *-our* and *-or*, represent a British preference and American preference, respectively, Canadians might steer away from the American preference as a way of demonstrating the strength of their anti-American sentiment.

# 2. Methodology

Our paper looks at two different types of publications: those that we call "formal," which follow a style guide and those that do not. The research examines *The Toronto Star*, a well-known national Canadian news publication, which follows a style guide, and

The Gateway, the student newspaper from the University of Alberta. For both papers, we looked at articles from three separate years, in order to examine which spelling variant was preferred before (1955), during (1965), and after (1986) the Vietnam War. (Regular U.S. combat units fought in Vietnam from 1965 to 1973.)

Within both *The Toronto Star* and *The Gateway*, we looked through selected issues to find each example of a word that could vary between the "or and "our spelling. For each occurrence (or token) of the word within the paper, we marked down how the paper spelled it and whether it was the American or British variant of the word. In *The Toronto Star*, we examined approximately ten tokens per year. In *The Gateway*, we examined approximately thirty tokens per year. Appendix A and Appendix B list all of the words that we used in our research.

### 3. Results

## 3.1. Results of Analysis of The Toronto Star

Within *The Toronto Star*, we saw very consistent results which showed a clear preference in all three years for the American spelling of the words (see Figure 1). In 1955, 62.5% of the variable words in the papers were spelled using the American

variant (see Figure 3). While the British variant was certainly used, the American variant was clearly the preferred variant. In 1986, however, the data was quite different from the previous years. Following the Vietnam War, the British spelling variants were heavily favoured in *The Gateway*. For 1986, 80% of the tokens we examined in the research used the British – *our* rather than the American - *or*.

Figure 3: A comparison of the percentage of -or and -our variants occurring in informal Publications (*The Gateway*).

#### 4. Conclusion

By examining both "formal" and "informal" sources in our research, we were able to support both parts of our hypothesis. First, our study of the articles from *The Toronto Star* showed that within "formal" publications, there was considerably less use of the British spelling of these variant -or/-our words within any of the three years referenced. In fact, in the "formal" source, following the Vietnam War the *American* variant was the preferred variant in Canada. However, in our research we also discovered that the variant used in these wide circulation daily newspapers was not necessarily the choice of the citizens. At the same time as the "formal" sources were moving decisively toward use of American spellings, the "informal" sources were making more use of the British spelling of the same words. In addition, our research in *The Gateway* shows not only a shift towards the British spelling but a dramatic one. In just over twenty years, the paper went from strongly favouring the American variant to overwhelmingly use of the British spelling.

The research certainly suggests that the heightened tensions between the United States and Canada during the Vietnam War could be an underlying factor in the sudden Canadian

| Appendix B                                    |
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| Variants in Informal Publication: The Gateway |

| 1955 | 1965 | 1986 |  |
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