

EH-VADA KEDAVRA¹ FINDING A CANADIAN HARRY POTTER

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1.1 Introduction

The Harry Potter series, written by best-selling author J.K. Rowling, describes the adventures of magical children attending a British boarding school for witches and wizards. Spanning seven books, the Harry Potter series has remained popular among children and adults alike. Film adaptations of the books, production of merchandise and the imminent opening of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Orlando, Florida, all attest to the continued popularity of the series.

When the first book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was released in the United States, the American editors changed the title to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and replaced many British terms to appeal to an American audience. Scholastic Books distributes the American editions of the Potter series in the United States. In Canada, Raincoast Books distributes the Canadian editions, which are identical to the UK editions.²

1.2 Objectives and Hypotheses

Having been drawn into the magical world of Harry Potter ourselves, we decided to study the text with a uniquely Canadian twist. Examining the lexical differences between the Canadian/UK and American versions of the first Harry Potter novel, we attempted to ascertain which version would have been more appropriate for Canadians. Territorial copyright laws prevent the sale of the American edition in Canada. We designed a study to reveal whether these laws were the main determinant of the readership of the Canadian/UK edition in Canada.

Our hypothesis was twofold: we expected respondents to prefer the American lexemes; nevertheless, we expected them to choose to purchase the Canadian/UK edition over the American edition.

1.3 Method

¹ *Avada kedavra* is the killing curse in the Harry Potter series; we have taken the liberty of "Canadianizing" the spelling for our title.

² Canadian book covers and copyright pages bear the imprints of both Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Raincoast Books.

In order to gather information about the attitudes and preferences of Canadians, we decided to construct and distribute a survey. In creating the survey, we had two main goals: to discover the lexical preferences of Canadians and to discover any ideological preferences regarding the Canadian/UK and American versions. In order to examine the lexical preferences of our respondents, we asked them in the first portion of our survey to choose between British and American lexemes. All of the 36 lexemes which we included, ranging from "car park" and "parking lot" to "sherbet lemon" and "lemon drop," came from the Canadian/UK and American editions of the first Harry Potter novel. We created pairs of corresponding lexemes and asked respondents to mark their preference in each pair. At the end of the first section of the survey, we revealed to respondents that all of the "A" terms were from the Canadian/UK edition and that all of the "B" terms were from the American edition. (The survey is reproduced in the **Appendix.**)

To test our second hypothesis, we created two open-ended questions for respondents to consider. One of these questions asked respondents to provide reasons for whether or not their lexical preferences in the first portion of the survey would affect their decision to buy an American version over a Canadian/UK version. The second question asked respondents to provide reasons for whether or not they would buy the Canadian/UK version over the American version, regardless of their lexical preferences. We included the second question to give respondents the opportunity to explain any ideological basis for their choice.

At the beginning of the survey, a short introduction reminded respondents of their anonymity and requested that they record their email addresses should they wish to know the results of the survey.

1.4 Target Group

Publishers released the first three Harry Potter books in Canada during the late 1990s, starting in 1997. Since the distributors and publishers released the novels as children's books, we surveyed a particular age grouping (born in 1986-1990), as these individuals were the initial target audience of Canadian publishers. We distributed the survey to 40 undergraduate students at Queen's University who were 19 to 23 years of age in 2009 since they represented the first wave of Harry Potter readers. Since we did not have access to mail delivery by owl (dominant delivery method in the series), we resorted to distributing the surveys by hand in hard copy.

2.1 Results: Part One

Overall, the results in the first section of the survey demonstrated that the respondents preferred the American lexemes over British lexemes. While there was division in preferences for the majority of lexeme pairs, the respondents overwhelmingly chose the American lexical variants (see **Figure 1** for an exact tally).

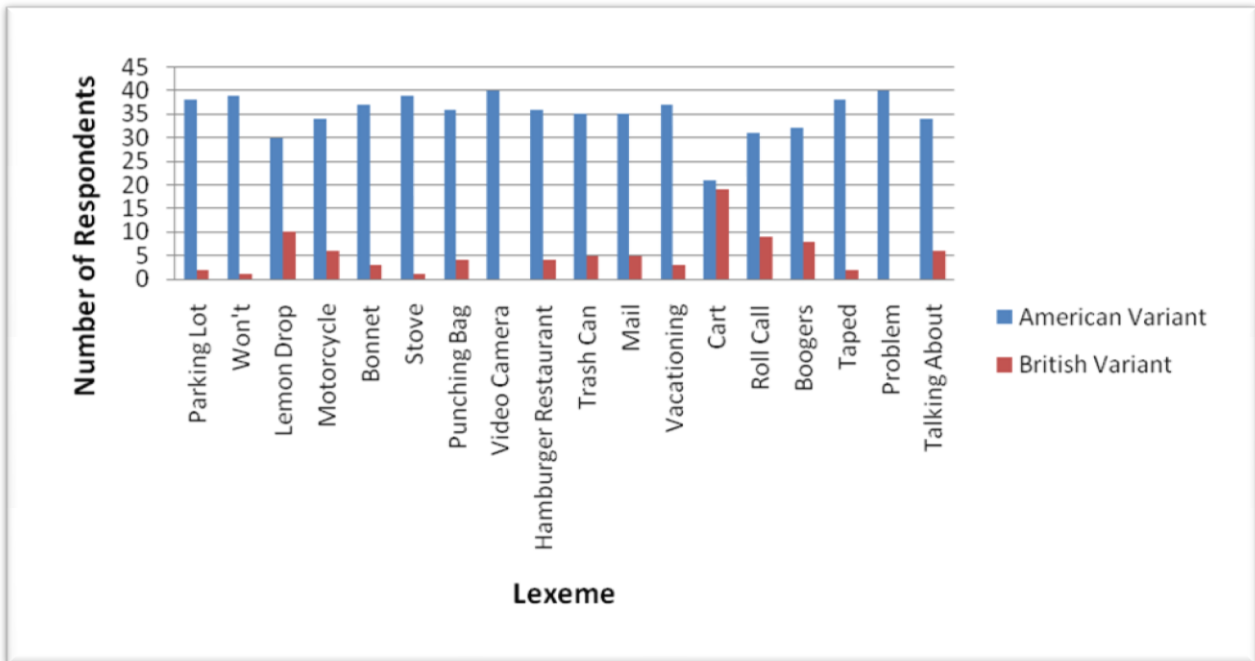


Figure 1: Respondent preferences for American vs. British lexical variants

Note: the American lexemes, left in the double columns along the x-axis, label the pairs. For a complete list of the lexeme pairs, including the British lexemes, see the **Appendix**.

While we had predicted that most respondents would choose the American lexemes over the British lexemes, when tallying the results of the first section of the survey, we were astonished by the number of respondents who chose British lexemes. The lexeme pair which had the most equitable division of preferences was “trolley” and “cart.” With this pair, the number of respondents who preferred the American lexeme (“cart”) when referring to the device they used to carry their luggage was almost equal to those who preferred the British lexeme (“trolley”). In fact, the American lexeme was chosen by only two more respondents than “trolley” (see **Figure 1**).

In Canadian English, “trolley” is typically used to refer to a street car. We examined Canadian and British usages of the term “trolley” in the Strathy Corpus of Canadian English and the British National Corpus respectively to see if Canadians’ use of the term was changing and if that change paralleled the results of our survey. We discovered, however, that Canadians still primarily used the term “trolley” to refer to a street car. There were some uses of the word to refer to a dessert cart, hospital cart or book cart, yet no references to a luggage cart. There were only 17 instances of the word “trolley” in total in the Canadian corpus, which was fewer than the number respondents in our survey who said they preferred the term (Strathy, 1981). There were, however, multiple instances of the word “cart” in the context of carrying one’s luggage. Looking at the British corpus, the word “trolley” was used far more commonly. It referred to buses powered from overhead electric wires, shopping carts, and various types of dollies, gurneys, and carts, including devices for wheeling one’s luggage. The word “cart,”

however, was never used for a luggage carrier (Davies, 2004). Unfortunately, this comparative data did not shed light on why almost half of our respondents preferred the word "trolley" to "cart." We speculate that this result was merely due to the prevalence of Harry Potter culture in the group that we surveyed.

The two pairs of lexemes which exhibited no division in preferences were "cine camera" versus "video camera" and "lookout" versus "problem." For both of these sets of lexemes, the American variant received all votes from respondents.

2.2 Results: Part Two

While the results of the first section of our survey provided easily quantifiable data, the results of the two open-ended questions in the second half of the survey were complex. Only one respondent expressed no preference for either edition. Although the other respondents gave clear indications of their preferences for one edition over the other edition, their reasons for doing so were varied.

The first question ("Based on your preferences, would it be more logical to purchase an American version than to buy a Canadian/UK version? Why or why not?") demonstrated the greatest division in preference. Taking into consideration their lexical preferences in the first section of the survey, 14 of 40 respondents chose the American edition. Comments from respondents who chose the American version included "easier to understand," "I speak American," and "Identify with American language." These three quotations represent the general sentiment of the respondents who chose the American edition in this question: purchasing an American edition would result in "easier" comprehension of lexemes and would be a logical choice.

Surprisingly, however, 25 of 40 respondents chose the Canadian/UK edition, despite having chosen many of the American lexemes in the previous portion of the survey. This decision to purchase the Canadian/UK version in spite of lexical preferences suggested that for many respondents, the divergence between their personal vocabulary and the vocabulary of the Harry Potter series was not a major factor in their decision to purchase one edition over the other. We identified four major trends in the reasoning of respondents who chose the Canadian/UK version in this question and these were authenticity, exoticism, anti-American sentiment and a duality and flexibility in language. We will discuss these four trends in relation to the responses to the second open-ended question.

2.3 Results: Part Three

The second question ("Regardless of which terms you chose, would you be more likely to purchase a Canadian/UK version than an American version? Why or why not?") demonstrated that respondents overwhelmingly preferred the Canadian/UK version. While only one respondent chose the American edition, 38 of the respondents chose the

Canadian/UK edition. The single respondent to choose the American edition stated that the American version allowed for "quicker reading time." Significantly, this sentiment was an anomaly.

As for the first open-ended question, only one respondent had no preference. This low level of indifference indicated that the ideological reasons behind respondents' decisions were strong. The same trends as in the first question appeared in the respondents' reasons for choosing either the American or Canadian/UK version of the book: authenticity, exoticism, anti-American sentiment, and a duality and flexibility of language. The most common reason why respondents preferred to read the Canadian/UK version of the book was authenticity. These individuals wanted to experience the text in its original format, as the author intended it to be read. The responses following this trend included: "I'd prefer to read the book the way the author intended it," "I like the flavour better – seems truer to Rowling's background," and "it adds a certain authenticity that would be lost in translation if omitted." All of these reasons centred on the idea that the language in which a book is written is intrinsic to its value as a work of literature.

Another group of respondents cited the exotic nature of the British language as the reason why they preferred the Canadian/UK version. They attributed positive qualities to British English, perceiving the language and the people who spoke it as interesting and cultured. One respondent wrote that "part of the charm of reading a book set in a foreign country is the flair the local wording gives it." Another respondent thought that the fact that "British people are delightful" was justification enough to read the Canadian/UK version. For these people, literature gave the opportunity to escape and experience another culture, an experience they would not have had when reading the American version.

Another reason for choosing the Canadian/UK version that appeared in our survey responses was an anti-American sentiment. Even though the Canadian/UK version of the text was not uniquely Canadian, nor was it written in Canadian English, by reading it, many Canadians saw themselves as creating an identity in opposition to the United States and promoting and defining a Canadian English. Some respondents were blatantly opposed to the United States, claiming that "reading an American translation would be wrong" and that the "Americanization" of literature was a travesty. Other respondents saw the Canadian/UK version of the book as promoting a Canadian nationalist agenda, stating that "[i]t is important to maintain a distinct Canadian English in opposition with the American English."

The final group of responses alluded to a duality or flexibility in Canadian English: some respondents did not see the British words and phrases in the Canadian/UK version as posing a problem in comprehension, and even suggested open-mindedness to learning these new expressions. For example, one respondent said, "I understand all the [UK] terms but just don't use them myself," and another respondent said that "it would be nice to learn some alternate words/terms."

3. Analysis

We examined the trends evident in the responses to the open-ended questions in terms of current scholarly linguistic research to explore how our study related to broader themes in the study of Canadian English. We attempted to discover how the trends we identified in our survey related to current perceptions of language as marking a national identity, as well as perceptions of Canadian English more specifically.

The trend of exoticism which we discerned was articulated in Sandra Clarke's study, "Nooz or nyooz?: The Complex Construction of Canadian Identity." In her article, Clarke examined perceptions of the phonological variant, "glide deletion" in words such as "news, tune, introduce, and astute" (Clarke, 2006, p. 229). While glide retention is common in British English and used to be the norm in Canadian English as well, now the American glide-less variant is gaining ground in Canada (Clarke, 2006, p. 230)³. Clarke wanted to find out if Canadians used one variant over the other depending on their feelings toward Britain or the United States. What she discovered was that both variants had lost their national associations (Clarke, 2006, p. 243). Instead, either variant could be perceived as exotic or appealing depending on which variant a person used in their everyday speech. For example, Canadians who heard the glide-less variant in their local dialect attributed meanings of "culture and erudition" to the foreign pronunciation (Clarke, 2006, p. 243). Similarly, residents of the southern United States, who more commonly used glide retention, saw the glide-less form as "progressive and prestigious" (Clarke, 2006, p. 237). In our results, we saw a similar construction of exoticism surrounding British English. Many respondents perceived the vocabulary in the Canadian/UK version of Harry Potter to be more interesting, or as adding an important facet to the book simply because it was foreign, or different from their own vocabulary.

Elaine Gold and Mireille Tremblay, in their study "Eh? and Hein?: Discourse Particles or National Icons?" examined the manner in which Canadians used language to oppose themselves to a perceived American threat. This idea about the role of language was present in the responses to our survey as well. Some respondents cited an anti-American sentiment as the reason they would prefer to read a Canadian/UK version of Harry Potter. Gold and Tremblay argued that in Canada, "collective identity as well as linguistic identity are defined primarily with respect to the United States, which is geographically and culturally close" (Gold and Tremblay, 2006, p. 259). While their study examined "eh," arguing that English Canadians use this discourse particle to define a Canadian identity, we argue, based on the responses to our survey, that the Canadian/UK version of Harry Potter performs a similar function. While Canadians could be seen as aligning themselves with Britain in reading the Canadian/UK version of *Harry Potter*, we think that Canada's distance from the United Kingdom reduces the threat to

³ In other words, the pronunciations *nooz* (news), *toon* (tune), and *astoot* (astute) are now more common in Canada than pronunciations that contain the glide /y/: *nyooz*, *tyoon*, and *astyoot*.

a collective Canadian identity which American culture poses. For our respondents, reading the Canadian/UK versions of the Harry Potter series was just another way of saying, "I'm Canadian, eh!"

Corroborating the trend in our survey responses of linguistic duality and flexibility is an article by T.K. Pratt, "The Hobgoblin of Canadian English Spelling." In it Pratt highlighted the open-mindedness of Canadians in terms of language. In attempting to define a standard Canadian spelling, Pratt realized that the beauty of Canadian English was that it had no standard—and that Canadians did not care whether or not such a standard existed. He asserted that, because they were open to many different spellings and variations, "Canadian spellers might claim to be among the most broad-minded people writing English today" (Pratt, 1993, p. 59). It was perhaps for this reason that Canadians were able to accept a British version of Harry Potter, not only because Canadians navigated between British and American spellings and lexemes with ease, but also because they very willingly accepted new linguistic variations.

4. Problems

In the course of administering our survey we discovered problems with its wording. While in the first part of our survey we asked respondents to "please circle your preference for each pair," we should have asked "please circle the term in each pair that you would prefer to use in everyday speech." The wording confused some of our respondents, as they thought that they were supposed to choose the term which they would prefer to hear Harry Potter say. Fortunately, we were able to clarify this distinction verbally for our respondents before they filled out the survey.

In addition, while we chose our cohort of respondents because they were the target audience for the books as they were first released, it would have been beneficial to gather information from this group in the late 1990s. By examining the responses of the target audience at the time of the books' release, we could have achieved a clearer indication of why the publishers chose to distribute specific editions. However, we were unable to locate a time machine or Time Turner (featured in the Harry Potter series) to go back in time and collect this information.

5. Future Studies

In our study, we focused primarily on understanding the trends in the open-ended questions of our survey, which dealt with broad conceptions of language as tied to the different versions of the books. It would be interesting to take a closer look at the specific lexical differences between the two works. One could examine why American editors specifically chose to change certain words in their edition. One could also follow up on the lexical results of our survey, examining why certain respondents chose the British term over the American, and looking into the significance of specific British terms gaining ground in Canada.

Examining Canadian and American publishing more broadly, another study could compare how publishers have dealt with other books by British authors. It would be interesting to discover whether British lexemes have consistently been kept by Canadian publishers and changed by American publishers, or whether Americans made their changes in anticipation of the overwhelming popularity of the Harry Potter series.

6. *Conclusion*

Through our study, we discovered that most Canadians, although they preferred to use the terms found in the American version of Harry Potter in their everyday speech, still preferred to read the Canadian/UK version. What struck us was the fact that while most of the respondents preferred the American terms, some individuals indicated that the British lexemes were part of their vocabulary, disproving our hypothesis that all respondents would choose American lexemes. Our lexical results were telling of the duality and flexibility of Canadian English, and this duality was then a common theme in many of the responses for the open-ended questions in our survey. We discovered that conceptions of language played a major role in our respondents' preferences for one edition or the other. A preference for a certain dialect was not necessarily dependent on an individual's complete comprehension of that dialect but on the values that dialect represented. For some, the British terms connoted a sense of the foreign or exotic, while for others they signified home, by defining a distinct Canadian identity. Yet, for everyone, the language of Harry Potter amounted to far more than just words on a page. Reading a different vocabulary meant understanding a magical new world.

Appendix

Eh-Vada Kedavra: Survey

This survey is being conducted for an undergraduate study in LING 202*. In taking this survey, your anonymity is guaranteed. You may choose to end your participation at any time. If you wish to be contacted with the results of the survey, please record your email address.

Year of Birth: _____

Email: _____

The Harry Potter series, written by best-selling author J.K. Rowling, describes the adventures of magical children attending a British boarding school for witches and wizards. When the first book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was released in the United States, the American editors changed the title to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and replaced many British terms to appeal to an American audience. In Canada, Raincoast Books continues to distribute the UK version.

We have taken the following pairs of terms from the two versions.
Please circle your preference for each pair.

1) You park your car in a:

A) car park

B) parking lot

2) When you refuse to do something, you say that you ___ do it.

A) shan't

B) won't

3) A flavoured hard candy:

A) sherbet lemon

B) lemon drop

4) A rebellious young adult would ride a:

A) motorbike

B) motorcycle

5) A hat made for babies is called a:

A) bobble hat

B) bonnet

6) You boil water on a:

A) cooker

B) stove

7) Harry Potter is a _____ for his cousin Dudley.

A) punch-bag

B) punching bag

8) You record important life events with a:

A) cine-camera

B) video camera

- 9) To buy a hamburger, you would go to a:
A) hamburger bar **B) hamburger restaurant**
- 10) You throw garbage into a:
A) dustbin **B) trash can**
- 11) Letters and bills are sent through the:
A) post **B) mail**
- 12) Aunt Marge was _____ on the Isle of Wight.
A) holidaying **B) vacationing**
- 13) At the train station, you put your belongings on a _____ and wheel it out the door.
A) trolley **B) cart**
- 14) At school, you _____ to track attendance.
A) take the register **B) take the roll call**
- 15) A synonym for phlegm is:
A) bogies **B) boogers**
- 16) Harry Potter _____ his glasses together.
A) sellotaped **B) taped**
- 17) If you've made a mistake, that's your _____.
A) lookout **B) problem**
- 18) If you require clarification in conversation, you may say:
A) What are you on about? **B) What are you talking about?**

All **A)** terms are from the UK version. All **B)** terms are from the American version. Please answer the following questions as if territorial publishing rights do not apply.

Based on your preferences, would it be more logical to purchase an American version than to buy a Canadian/UK version? _____ Why or why not? _____

Regardless of which terms you chose, would you be more likely to purchase a Canadian/UK version than an American version? _____ Why or why not? _____

Thank you for your participation.

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