

Spelling Variation in Inner-Circle Englishes

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English is the language with the largest number of speakers in the world, when both native and non-native speakers are included. With an estimated 1,268 million users around the globe, linguistic variation is bound to occur. Research on World Englishes focuses on the study of this variation, though it has systematically disregarded the linguistic level of orthography. This neglect has operated under the assumption that most contemporary varieties must adhere to British English spelling norms. Nevertheless, recent studies on the Americanisation of English worldwide (Mair 2013; Gilquin 2018; Gonçalves et al. 2018) have brought the question of spelling variation back to the fore. The present paper thus analyses the distribution of the most distinctive spelling variants—i.e. *-our/-or*, *-rel/-er* and *-isation/-ization*—in the varieties of the inner circle from a synchronic perspective. By means of a corpus-based investigation of English online, this study will outline the spelling usage patterns for the aforementioned varieties and will analyse the highly-likely Americanisation process in spelling on the Internet.

Keywords: orthography; spelling variation; World Englishes; American English; British English; inner-circle varieties

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La variación ortográfica en las variedades del círculo interno en inglés

El inglés es la lengua más hablada del planeta, incluyendo a hablantes nativos y no nativos. Con unos 1.268 millones de usuarios por todo el mundo, es inevitable encontrar variación lingüística. La investigación en torno a las variedades del inglés en el mundo se ha centrado en el estudio de dicha variación, aunque la ortografía se ha ignorado de manera casi sistemática. Esta falta de atención emana de la suposición de que la mayor parte de las

variedades actuales deben seguir el estándar ortográfico del inglés británico. Sin embargo, ciertos estudios recientes sobre la americanización del inglés en el mundo (Mair 2013; Gilquin 2018; Gonçalves et al. 2018) han puesto de relieve esta cuestión. Este artículo, por tanto, analiza la distribución de las variantes ortográficas más distintivas—que son *-our/-or*, *-rel/-er* y *-isation/-ization*—en las variedades del círculo interno y desde una perspectiva sincrónica. Mediante una investigación basada en un corpus de inglés online, este estudio resume los patrones de uso ortográfico en las variedades mencionadas y analiza el posible proceso de americanización de la ortografía en internet.

Palabras clave: ortografía; variación ortográfica; inglés en el mundo; inglés americano; inglés británico; variedades del círculo interno

I. INTRODUCTION

Descriptions of Present-day English—henceforth PDE—spelling show polarisation between British English—BrE—and American English—AmE—both in academic sources (Huddleston and Pullum 2002; Peters 2004, 2007; Baker 2017; Gramley et al. 2021) and non-academic ones (see among others English Club n.d.; Confused Words n.d.; Lăpuşeanu 2020). Underlying this dichotomy is the assumption that the remaining World Englishes will adhere to either one written standard or the other. This obviously includes the other inner-circle varieties: external norms also govern the spelling of Australian English (AusE), Canadian English (CanE), Irish English (IrE) and New Zealand English (NZE). On account of their shared colonial pasts and their persisting cultural links, these varieties are expected to follow BrE, with anecdotal occurrences of AmE forms (Trudgill and Hannah 2008; Melchers and Shaw 2011). Nevertheless, actual distribution patterns are not so straightforward. While spelling in IrE and NZE (Melchers and Shaw 2011) has not received much scholarly attention—probably due to their stable selection of British variants (Melchers and Shaw 2011; Hickey 2012a)—AusE is described as exhibiting a blend of British and American spellings (Peters 2004, 2007; Fritz 2010), as well as CanE (Pratt 1993; Dollinger 2011; Grue 2013). These states of affairs contrast with the findings in Gonçalves et al. (2018) where BrE forms are claimed to be overwhelmingly dominant in these varieties in spite of national dictionaries and publishers' style guides endorsing different norms. AusE best illustrates this last point: there is on the one hand the *Macquarie Dictionary* (n.d.), which favours BrE spellings and, on the other, a number of newspapers and magazines that prefer the AmE variants (Peters 2007). The picture becomes more intricate in light of recent studies on Americanisation.

Although “[AmE] spellings clearly differentiate [it] from other world varieties” (Kretzschmar 2010, 106), the isoglosses dividing one variety from another are becoming blurred. The U.S. dominance in all aspects of culture and social life has permeated all levels of language (Pennycook 2010; Mair 2013; Gilquin 2018), spelling included. Mair (2013, 259) claims that “[t]oday, the American standard has a global reach and the potential to affect all other—standard and non-standard—varieties of English.” Indeed, research on the distribution of *-ise/-ize* worldwide (Calle-Martín 2021) and *-our/-or* in Asian Englishes (Pacheco-Franco 2020) in the Global Web-based English—or GloWbE—corpus and the broader study of a microblogging corpus in Gonçalves et al. (2018) also points towards the overall Americanisation of spelling in general, if not in the aforementioned varieties. These studies are framed within a broader line of investigation where the extent of Americanisation is also studied at the lexical, phonological and grammatical level (Hay et al. 2008; Peters et al. 2009; Gilquin 2018) among others, most of which conclude that the influence of AmE is triggering significant changes.

The papers on spelling variation mentioned above are all based on the investigation of language online, a medium which has become a key feature in the study of

Americanisation and of spelling. For one thing, the selection of spelling variants on the Internet conveys sociocultural information. Though speakers typically project their identity via pronunciation (Hickey 2019, 40), these cues for linguistic identification are not enabled on the web, which naturally leads to a re-evaluation of spelling as the vehicle for speakers' distinctiveness (Cook 2004). On this point Sebba (2000, 5) argues that "orthographies are less shaped by the phonological facts of the language concerned than by social and cultural factors," thus developing on Lipski's (1975, 46) claims that "orthographic variation is used as an instrument of linguistic nationalism." The selection of spelling variants online thus takes on a symbolic significance.

Research into the Americanisation of language online is also meaningful as users are more likely to select either comprehensible forms that are not necessarily standard or, in the case of spelling variants, whichever are most often used around them, which statistically would be American—and therefore non-standard—(Crystal 2011; Hickey 2019; Pacheco-Franco 2020). Indeed, Mair places AmE at the hub of his World System because of its potential for influencing language online: "[i]n the anonymous and deterritorialised 'spaces' opened up by the participatory digital media, nonstandard and vernacular linguistic resources assume enormous importance for linguistic self-styling" (2013, 257). The issue of the web's size and volume and of the updates and interactions between users are also meaningful for the present study: the Internet enables more written exchanges among people and at a faster pace than the traditional written medium (Cook 2004; Warschauer et al. 2010; Crystal 2011). This does not mean that written, online English "bring[s] about changes in language forms, but rather amplif[ies] trends already underway" (Warschauer et al. 2010, 494). Research into the online medium therefore facilitates the study of early symptoms of change, which will eventually "feed back into the writing system as a whole" (Crystal 2011, 56).

In light of these issues, the present paper strives to analyse the distribution of the spelling variants *-our/-or*, *-rel/-er* and *-isation/-ization*—see section 2.1 below—in the inner-circle varieties of English. The data for this corpus-based investigation come from the GloWbE (Davies 2013) corpus, which has been chosen in light of its quantitative and qualitative features. The aim of the study is to verify whether the varieties under consideration are undergoing Americanisation or not and to assess its significance if so.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Linguistic Material

There exist several spelling variants that illustrate the tensions between BrE and AmE, but none show it better than *-our/-or*, *-rel/-er* and *-isation/-ization*, the latter being a further take on the analysis of *-ise/-ize* in Calle-Martín (2021). The first variant in each pair most typically appears in BrE and was the dominant form until the emergence of AmE, led by Webster's spelling reform (Webster 1806; Cummings 2016). Gramley et al. (2021, 278-79) describe the (re)introduction (see Algeo 2003) of *-or* and *-er* as

regularisations: instead of having the spelling *-or* for words like *doctor* and *actor* and *-our* for *colour* and *labour*, these were regularised into one form; and the same occurs with *-er* in *singer* and *painter* and *-re* in *centre* and *metre*. As for the third change, the AmE preference for *-ization* results from its reflection of etymology and of pronunciation: the verbal suffix *ize* derives from Greek *-ίζειν* (OED 2000a) and best reflects the voiced /z/ (Gramley et al. 2021, 279). Though the configuration is fairly simple, there arise some exceptions. In the first place, the regularisation *-our* into *-or* only occurs when the syllable is unstressed, meaning that words like *amour* and *contour* continue to have this spelling in AmE (OED 2000b). Secondly, there are some words that may retain their BrE spelling in AmE for stylistic reasons, such as *honour*, *saviour*, *theatre* and some instances of *centre* (Trudgill and Hannah 2008; Gramley et al. 2021, 279). Finally, *-ization* may also occur in BrE as its usage is endorsed by the Oxford style guide, among others (OED 2000a). Nevertheless, usage guides and other corpus-based studies point to a predisposition for selecting *-ise* and *-isation* on the part of BrE (Peters 2004; Tieken-Boon Van Ostade 2009; Baker 2017; Calle-Martín 2021).

2.2. Corpus and Research Design

The study is based on the distribution of the spelling variants that best represent the tensions between BrE and AmE, described in section 2.1: *-our/-or*—as in *colour/color*—*-rel/-er*—*centre/center*—and *-isation/-ization*—*organisation/organization*. The data have been gathered from the GloWbE corpus (Davies 2013), which contains 1.9 billion words of written material in the online medium from twenty varieties of English, the six inner circle varieties among them. Compiled by Mark Davies at Brigham Young University, the GloWbE also incorporates data from 1.8 million websites, which are divided into general websites—around 70% of the total word count—and personal blogs—the remaining 30%. The corpus allows for searches by variety and by text type, as well as a combination of both. Moreover, the corpus is POS-tagged, which facilitates the process of retrieving items by part-of-speech and by lemma. These features make the GloWbE an outstanding tool for the study of spelling variation in contemporary online English (Davies and Fuchs 2015).

The data were collected in a three-staged process. First, the complete lists of occurrences with either spelling variant were retrieved and the items in them crosschecked. Then, for *-our/-or* and *-isation/-ization*, the twenty-five most frequent words were selected as the input for the study, such as *colour*, *labour*, *honour*, *organisation*, *civilisation* and *realisation*. For *-rel/-er*, all of the items and their most common compounds—those with a raw frequency of at least one hundred occurrences—appearing in both sets, like *theatre*, *centre* and *metre*, were incorporated as well. Finally, the complete set of items were run through the corpora by means of the lemma tool, which ultimately renders the base words along with their inflectional forms, which retrieved 1,980,565

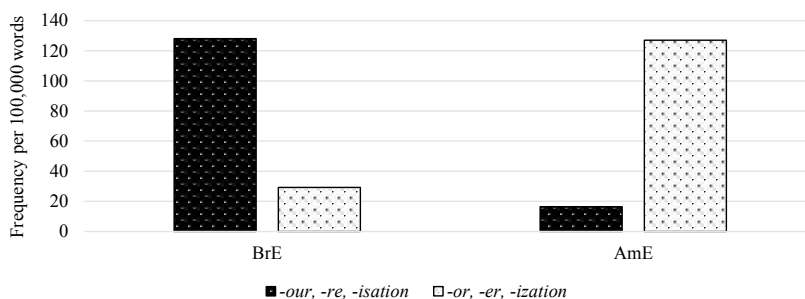
tokens.¹ The data were then handled in two different ways. On the one hand, they were normalised to a common base of 100,000 words to allow for analysis and comparison. On the other, the raw frequency of the variants was transformed into percentages in order to measure ongoing changes, and to contrast the data with other studies. The most relevant of these percentages is the Marked Variant Percentage Rate—MVPR henceforth—, which refers to the non-standard spellings: that is, to British spellings in AmE and to American spellings in AusE, BrE, CanE, IrE and NZE. These two measures—normalised frequency and MVPR—will be central to the study.

3. ANALYSIS

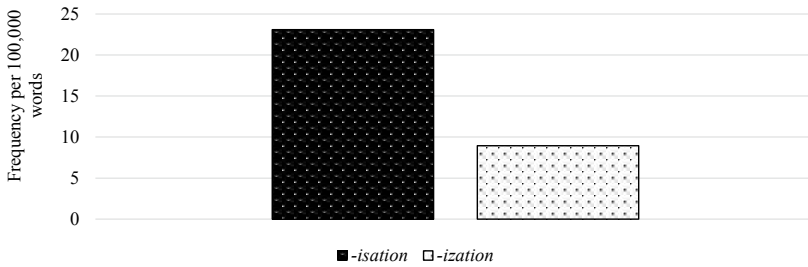
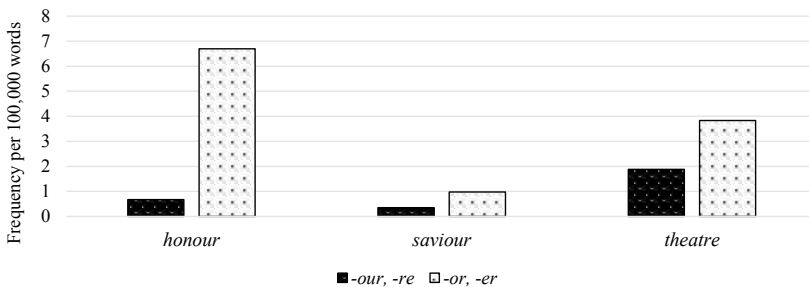
3.1. Spelling in British and American English

In terms of spelling variation, BrE and AmE are endonormative or norm-providing varieties. This endonormativity does not imply that these varieties do not exhibit spelling variation. Indeed, the conventional representations of linguistic features along a continuum point to the prevalence of variability within individual varieties, be it in the selection of lexical, phonological or even spelling variants (for specific examples see Trudgill and Hannah 2008; Gilquin 2018; Gramley et al. 2021). The frequencies of marked variants, however, do not tend to be substantial. Nonetheless, looking into the distribution of *-our/-or*, *-rel/-er* and *-isation/-ization* in these varieties is crucial on two accounts: first, the descriptions of spelling cited above ought to be empirically corroborated and secondly, measuring the extent of variation in BrE and AmE will provide insight into the degree and significance of variation in the exonormative varieties, analysed in section 3.2. Figures 1, 2 and 3 thus present the normalised frequencies of *-our/-or*, *-rel/-er* and *-isation/-ization* in BrE and AmE, along with the exceptions given in section 2.1 above.

FIGURE 1. Distribution of the spelling variants in BrE and AmE in the GloWbE (n.f.)



¹ Some of the items in the *-our/-or* and *-rel/-er* sets functioned either as nouns, verbs or adjectives. In turn, the inflectional endings included within the data were *-s*, selecting both plural nouns and verbs in third-person singular present tense; *-ed*, selecting verbs in the past tense and in participial form and verbal adjectives; and *-ing*, selecting both present participles and verbal nouns. For the remaining items, only the plural forms were incorporated.

FIGURE 2. Distribution of *-isation* and *-ization* in BrE in the GloWbE (n.f.)FIGURE 3. Distribution of *honour/honor*, *saviour/savior* and *theatre/theater* in AmE in the GloWbE (n.f.)

The figures above verify, for the most part, the accounts on the distribution of the spelling variants presented earlier. Starting with figure 1, the normalised frequencies are as expected: there is a vast majority of *-our, -re* and *-isation* in BrE, while *-or, -er* and *-ization* are dominant in AmE. This means that the occurrence of marked variants is in the minority, although there is nearly a 13-point difference in normalised frequency between these forms in BrE and AmE, which is statistically significant.² This may be due to two factors: first, the concurrence of *-isation* and *-ization* in BrE ought to be considered as an endonormative phenomenon to some extent. Although figure 2 corroborates the claims that *-isation* is overtly preferred in BrE, the *-ization* items amount to 8.94 of the normalised frequency on the overall distributional pattern. If we eliminated these data from the study, the difference between the marked variants of the two varieties would be reduced to 3.8 points, a distinction which might be attributed to the worldwide predominance of AmE and to the apparent insignificance of BrE, especially in the U.S. (Mair 2013, 259). The data in figure 3 further substantiate this last claim. Though all of the British forms are statistically relevant in AmE,³ there

² The level of significance for all of the variants in BrE and AmE is ($\chi^2 518,806.47, p < 0.0001$).

³ The distribution of the variants in BrE and AmE show different levels of significance depending on the linguistic item in question: *honour* ($\chi^2 19,397.351, p < 0.0001$), *saviour* ($\chi^2 1,063.21, p < 0.0001$) and *theatre* ($\chi^2 16,310.08, p < 0.0001$).

seems to be competition only in *theatre*, where the ratio of the *-re* and *-er* forms is 1:2, respectively. The preference for *savior* in contemporary AmE has already been highlighted and discussed in Pacheco-Franco and Calle-Martín (2020, 176). Similarly, the *honour* variant is rare and its collocations do not indicate that it is preferred in some contexts over its *-or* counterpart (Trudgill and Hannah 2008; Gramley et al. 2021). Despite shedding some much-needed light on the configuration of PDE spelling, the translation of the normalised frequencies into the MVPR not only facilitates the analysis of the data, but also its illustration along a continuum, as in figure 4 below. Nevertheless, the issue of *-isation/-ization* in BrE warrants more discussion.

FIGURE 4. Percentage rates of marked variants in BrE and AmE in the GloWbE

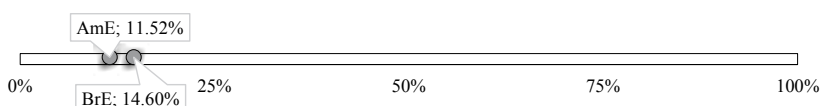


TABLE 1. Percentage rates of marked variants for AmE and BrE, data drawn from GloWbE

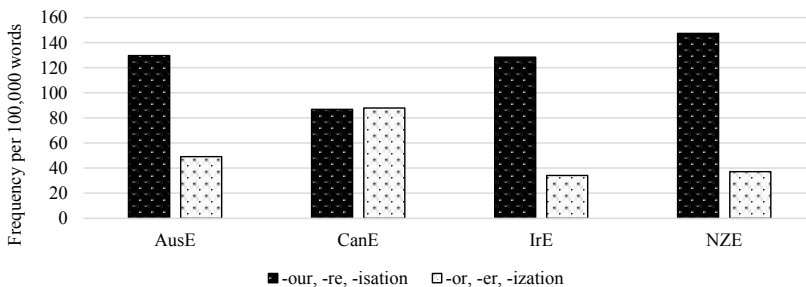
MVPR	AmE	BrE
<i>-our/-or</i>	12.79	14.96
<i>-re/-er</i>	13.18	18.98
<i>-isation/-ization</i>	6.35	27.91

Figure 4 shows the continuum of marked spelling variants and the situation of BrE and AmE along it and table 1 the MVPR for each of the variants. The position on the continuum is based on MVPR, 14.60% for BrE and 11.52% for AmE, which was calculated after filtering out some of the tokens for the *-ization* set. In fact, 83.16% of the items selected for the *-ization* variants were disregarded, as they were considered to be representative of BrE and not instances of Americanisation. The decision to retain the remaining 16.84% of occurrences is not random. Rather, this percentage was reached after calculating the average of the MVPR of the other spelling variants, which was 14.96% for *-our/-or* and 18.98% for *-re/-er* (see table 1). This treatment of the data will also be applied to other varieties. The point of figure 4, however, is not simply to illustrate this modification, but rather to represent the marked variants in a way that they may be reinterpreted as reference points to assess the extent of potential diversions in other varieties. Consequently, if norm-providing BrE and AmE exhibit these percentages of marked forms, then the remaining exonormative varieties—which would naturally be more inclined to external influence—ought to present higher percentages of variation to qualify for Americanisation. Section 3.2 will address this issue.

3.2. Spelling in Australia, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand

Spelling in the remaining, or non-normative, varieties of the inner circle is assumed to follow the BrE model due to these countries' historical and cultural connections, namely the colonialism enabled by the British Empire and the contemporary Commonwealth of Nations, Ireland excluded (Hickey 2019; Schneider 2020). Nevertheless, the actual configuration of their spelling does not follow such clear patterns, as mentioned in section 1: not only do these varieties present American forms, but these are also statistically significant.⁴ The discussion evinced that these varieties might exhibit spelling variation to different degrees, especially since each has undergone distinct evolutionary processes as discussed by Schneider (2007) in his Dynamic Cycle for the sociolinguistic development of postcolonial Englishes. Indeed, AusE has recently emerged as a model of English for varieties in the outer and expanding circles (McArthur 1996; Cox and Palethorpe 2012; Ishikawa 2016), along with NZE (Trudgill and Hannah 2008; Hickey 2019; Schneider 2020), both having reached endonormative stabilisation and internal differentiation (Schneider 2007, 125) and codification in authoritative works (*Macquarie Dictionary* n.d.; Deverson and Kennedy 2005; see Milroy and Milroy 1999 on codification). CanE follows a similar developmental process (Schneider 2007, 247), codification included (Considine 2003), though its geographical proximity to the U.S. seems to be hindering its potential for exonormativity (Mair 2013; Gilquin 2018). Similarly, BrE seems to be casting a shadow over IrE and its development, most likely as the latter remains under-researched as a variety and uncoded (Hickey 2012a, 2019). Nevertheless, and regardless of their position along Schneider's cycle, these varieties ought to seek external models of spelling in BrE and AmE, the aim of this paper being to determine which. Figure 5 shows the normalised frequencies of the spelling variants in AusE, CanE, IrE and NZE, while table 2 presents each of their MVPRs.

FIGURE 5. Normalised frequencies of spelling variants in AusE, CanE, IrE and NZE in the GloWbE



⁴ The chi-square test shows different levels of significance for the varieties under study: AmE vs. AusE (χ^2 310,958.64, $p < 0.0001$), AmE vs. IrE (χ^2 293,395.9, $p < 0.0001$), AmE vs. NZE (χ^2 286,497.84, $p < 0.0001$) and AmE vs. CanE (χ^2 136,724.08, $p < 0.0001$).

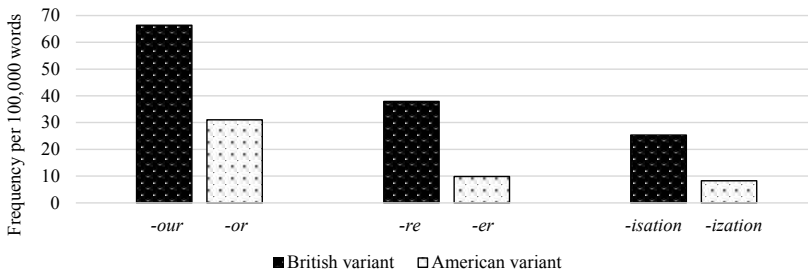
TABLE 2. Percentage rates of marked variants in AusE, CanE, IrE and NZE in the GloWbE

	AusE	CanE	IrE	NZE
MVPR	27.48%	50.29%	21.03%	20.15%

Figure 5 and table 2 *a priori* point to the fact that most spelling variants remain under the influence of British spelling norms, though to varying degrees. In the first place, the distribution of spelling in NZE and IrE is rather conservative, as their MVPRs are 20.15 and 21.03, respectively. AusE and CanE show the most variation, although not to the same extent. AusE has an MVPR of 27.48%, whereas CanE's is 50.29%, though both are clearly leaning towards the American forms. These findings, however, do not completely coincide with the characterisations of spelling in these varieties alluded to in section 1 and discussed at length below. In light of this, thorough analyses will be carried out on the distribution of *-our/-or*, *-re/-er* and *-isation/-ization* in these two varieties. Likewise, IrE and NZE will be analysed in the same fashion, though the lack of literature on spelling variation for these varieties ought to be considered a setback. In the end, the data from all the varieties will be considered along the continuum in figure 4. Nevertheless, these will not be displayed until the end of the discussion since the occurrences of *-ization* will be substantially reduced in the light of their acceptability by both AmE and BrE (see section 3.1).

AusE is the variety with the second highest MVPR, 27.48%. This is not entirely surprising since AusE spelling has often been described as a blend of British and American norms (Peters 2007; Fritz 2010). Nonetheless, preferences among these variants are clearly demarcated in dictionaries and usage guides. As per the *Macquarie Dictionary* (n.d.), the spelling variants *-our*, *-re* and *-isation* are commonly preferred among AusE speakers and this is evident in the entries of the items under analysis. These entries are always headed by the BrE form—see, for instance, *colour*, *theatre* and *organisation*—and the AmE variants are typically featured either at the bottom of the page or in a different entry without any other information but with a link to the former. This does not mean that American forms are dismissed as, for example, “[*-or*] is often used and certainly occurs consistently in a large number of magazines and newspapers” (*Macquarie Dictionary* n.d.). Indeed, Peters (2007, 580) agrees that these two types of publication are vessels for *-or* variants, whereas book publishers and the Australian government—along with all those organisations and institutions adhering to its style guide (Delbridge 2001)—show preference for the *-our* form. However, this variability only applies to *-our/-or*, whereas the *-re* and *-isation* variants are consistently preferred across genres and publications in AusE (Peters 2007, 430, 680; Fritz 2010, 240, 262). Figure 6 below presents data pertaining to each of the spelling variants individually, in order to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the issue.

FIGURE 6. Distribution of the spelling variants individually in AusE in the GloWbE (n.f.)



The figure illustrates the normalised frequencies of the variants separately, evincing—as will happen too for the other varieties—that the *-our/-or* set of items is the most recurrent. Despite revealing a strong preference for the British variants in all pairs, the occurrence of the American forms is also significant. Table 3 contains the data on online texts from Fritz (2010), along with those from the present paper, and it shows a significant increase in the use of AmE forms in all of the variants over the span of ten years.⁵ Fritz had already discussed the “much-lamented ‘Americanization’ of Australian English [...] in the web,” with an “obvious trend towards AmE spelling variants [...] restricted to informal use” (2010, 278). Despite the changes in distribution, it should be noted that *-or* presents the highest rate of all marked forms, which coincides with the accounts in the literature on the selection of the *-our/-or* spelling variants.

TABLE 3. MVPR in the web, retrieved from Fritz (2010) and from the GloWbE corpus

MVPR	Aus. sites November 2003	Aus. sites November 2008	GloWbE (2013)
<i>-or</i>	17.6	19.6	31.9
<i>-er</i>	9.2	17.8	20.7
<i>-ize</i>	9.0	11.7	24.5
All spelling variants	13.04	19.25	27.48

As stated above, there seems to be much disagreement in AusE about the selection of *-our* or *-or*, an issue that seems to have originated early in the history of the variety as “immigrants to early Australia brought with them great variability with <our>/<or> [...] and] even used it to show functional and semantic distinctions” (Fritz 2010, 256). The item *labor* best exemplifies this differentiation: although the *-or* spelling does not

⁵ Because Fritz (2010) does not include the variants *-isation/-ization* in his analysis, my data for these variants have been compared to his data for *-ise/-ize*, since the selection of *-ise/-isation* and of *-ize/-ization* typically go hand in hand (Peters 2004). Indeed, the data in Calle-Martín (2021) for *-ise/-ize* show a similar distributional pattern: the *-ize* forms have an MVPR of 25.25%, whereas *-ization* derivatives amount to 24.53%.

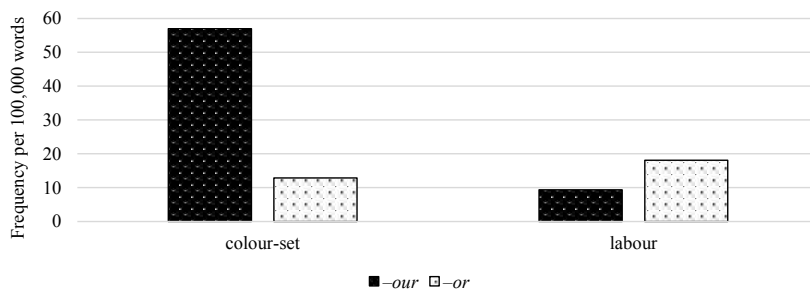
have its own entry, it is highlighted in four out of sixteen senses of the word *labour* (see examples 1-4) (*Macquarie Dictionary* n.d.). This spelling was also adopted by the Australian *Labor Party* in 1912 (McMullin 1991; Peters 2004), as corresponding to sense (4) and the *New Zealand Oxford Dictionary* (Deverson and Kennedy 2005) describes its usage as both American and Australian.

- (1) “bodily toil for the sake of gain or economic production.”
- (2) “to perform labour; exert one’s powers of body or mind; work; toil.”
- (3) “to work hard and long at; elaborate: don’t labour the point.”
- (4) “favourable to progress and social reform, especially in the interests of workers in their trade and political affiliations.”

(*Macquarie Dictionary* n.d.)

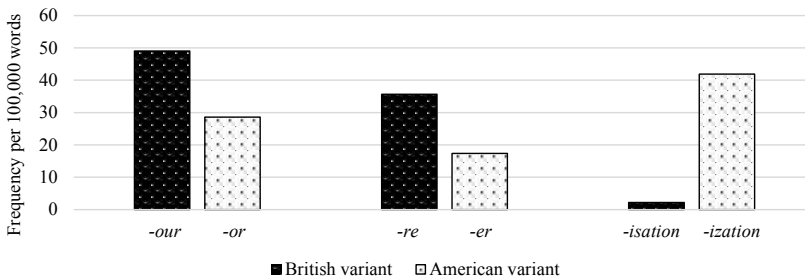
Given that *labour* is the highest-ranking item in the Australian section of the GloWbE and that its *-or* spelling has such explicit features as exemplified in (1-4) above, figure 7 presents one further fragmentation of the data, where *labour/labour* is separated from the remainder of the words under study, labelled the ‘colour-set’. Its impact on the distribution of the variants altogether is significant, since taking out the *-or* forms results in a decline of 9.04 points in the colour-set: from an MVPR of 27.48 to one of 18.44. In contrast, the frequency of *-or* has increased for *labour/labour*, since the latter form doubles its *-our* counterpart in frequency. The data thus indicate that *-our/-or* variability in AusE does not depend on the word, as Melchers and Shaw asserted (2011, 104), but is rather limited to *labour*, whereas the remaining items clearly lean towards *-our*. Indeed, the MVPR in the GloWbE now presents a slight decrease from the data in 2008—cf. table 2—, probably due to Fritz’s inclusion of the *labour/labour* data. This does not entirely dismiss the notion of Americanisation, but it definitely hinders it. If the raw frequencies of *labour/labour* are also removed from the data in figure 5, the MVPR decreases to 20.49. That said, the steady growth of the marked variants online over time suggests that the Americanisation of AusE spelling may well be taking place, though it still seems to be at an early stage.

FIGURE 7. Normalised frequencies of *-our* and *-or* in GloWbE-AusE, with *labour/labour* singled out



CanE is the variety with the highest degree of variation and—as will be shown in the present discussion—of Americanisation, with an MVPR of 50.29%. According to the Canadian Government’s Translation Bureau, “[p]artly as a result of our historical links with Britain and our proximity to the US, Canadian spelling has tended to waver between the forms used in these two countries, so that, to this day, there is no clearly established Canadian standard” (2015). Indeed, CanE spelling has often been described as “[taking] a subtle third position” in between BrE and AmE, which speakers do not seem to mind (Pratt 1993, 48–49) or as a system where it is “perfectly acceptable to use a mixture of British and American forms” (Boberg 2012, 160). Nevertheless, the notion of a Canadian standard in terms of spelling seems to endure in the collective imagination (Brinton and Fee 2001; Boberg 2010; Dollinger 2011; Grue 2013). Some distinctly Canadian dictionaries, such as the *Gage Canadian Dictionary* series and most importantly the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (Baker 2004), provide speakers with tools for the selection of spelling variants, among other issues. Moreover, the Translation Bureau itself has published an article entitled “Why Canadian Spelling is Different” (Ethier 2017), thus elaborating their own standard. All of these publications seem to agree on the adoption of the *-re* variant rather than *-er*, since it also refers to French usage in bilingual Canada (Gage; Pratt 1993; Baker 2004; Ethier 2017; cf. Kallen 2016, on linguistic landscapes) and of *-our* instead of *-or*, which has been regarded as an indicator of Canadianness (Pratt 1993, 50; Dollinger and Clarke 2012, 454).⁶ Despite their adherence to BrE thus far, the *-ization* forms are preferred in CanE. This selection on the part of Baker (2004) may be due to the Oxford recommendations cited above, whereas in the remaining sources it may be seen as a sign of Americanisation. Figure 8 and table 4 below present the data for each of the variants in CanE in order to verify whether the current state of affairs reflects dictionaries and other recommendations.

FIGURE 8. Distribution of the spelling variants individually in CanE in the GloWbE (n.f.)



⁶ Pratt (1993), Brinton and Fee (2001) and Grue (2013) claim that preference for BrE or for AmE forms depends on the province in question: the prairie provinces leaning towards American forms and the peripheral provinces towards British variants. Given that the GloWbE does not provide this sort of information, these claims have been ignored and spelling variation in Canada is studied as a whole.

TABLE 4. Percentage rates of marked variants for CanE, data drawn from GloWbE

MVPR	
<i>-or</i>	36.87
<i>-er</i>	32.74
<i>-ization</i>	94.95

Figure 5 shows the clear dominance of the *-ization* forms over their counterparts, a distributional pattern that was expected and which entirely matches Calle-Martín's (2021, 5) account of *-ise* and *-ize*. This does not necessarily mean that Americanisation is unfolding within these variants, since preference for *-ization* may be a result of British influence as well and seems to have already taken on a Canadian character of its own. Nevertheless, the 50.29% MVPR is not solely a result of the distribution of this form. The obvious competition between *-our* and *-or* and *-re* and *-er* are indicative of the impact that American forms have on CanE spelling. The MVPR for these variants is 36.87% and 32.74%, respectively (see table 4). Moreover, looking more closely into the data does not shed light on other underlying issues as it did in the case of AusE and the distributional properties of the word *labour*. The uniformity in distribution therefore suggests that the causes of this configuration—with Americanisation under consideration—must be sociocultural.

The physical and cultural proximity between the U.S. and Canada has resulted in the Americanisation of CanE on different linguistic levels (Gilquin 2018). Since its foundation by English loyalists and other American citizens, Canada has held an Anglo-American duality which has led to a “more flexible, variable standard than exists in some other countries” (Boberg 2012, 160). Though at first this translated into adherence to BrE—especially as AmE had not yet been codified—CanE now seems to lean more towards its neighbour's variety (Boberg 2012; Dollinger and Clarke 2012), though never erasing the other variant entirely from the system. This development is undoubtedly fostered by the situation of AmE at the hub of World Englishes (Mair 2013). It seems, however, that this back-and-forth occurs in CanE in a way that Americanisation has not necessarily increased over time. The quantitative data in Pratt (1993)—where seven items allowing for *-our/-or* variation are analysed—show an MVPR of 50.99%, whereas in the present study the rate for the same items has significantly decreased to 43.58%. Furthermore, two studies have recently tackled the changing attitudes towards spelling in CanE. Heffernan et al. (2010) and Grue (2013) analyse how spelling variants are selected on the basis of cultural factors: namely, popular opinion and ideology. The authors noted an increase of BrE forms whenever the socio-political circumstances in the U.S. reflected poorly on Canada and vice versa. This does not only suggest that there is a strong connection between spelling and national identity in CanE, but also demonstrates that there is Americanisation in this variety and that speakers are well aware of the variants that they select.

Accounts of spelling variation in IrE are not necessarily rare, though they tend to focus on spelling pronunciations that are characteristic of Hiberno-English rather than on the selection of the spelling variants under consideration here (Hickey 2012a). Similarly, the only dictionary for IrE, Dolan's *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English* (2012), also leaves these issues aside and instead centres on the distinctive lexicon of the variety. Its virtual lack of codification, together with the dearth of literature on the issue of spelling, seemingly points towards the conservatism of IrE, which translates into adherence to the British norm. This 'radio silence' is only ever interrupted by broad statements on the characterisation of spelling such as Hickey's (2012a, 99) assertion that "there are practically no differences in grammar and spelling between formal usage in Ireland and England." The implications of this state of affairs are represented in figure 5 and table 2 above, where IrE shows an MVPR of 21.03%. This rate suggests that there is not much variability within this variety, which could be a result of Ireland's geographical proximity to the UK. Much like the U.S. exerts influence over CanE on the basis of its physical location, the UK may hinder American influence over IrE for the same reasons (Gilquin 2018). Figure 9 below presents the normalised data for each of the variants in order to enable exhaustive analysis and the MVPR is shown in table 5.

FIGURE 9. Distribution of the spelling variants individually in IrE in the GloWbE (n.f.)

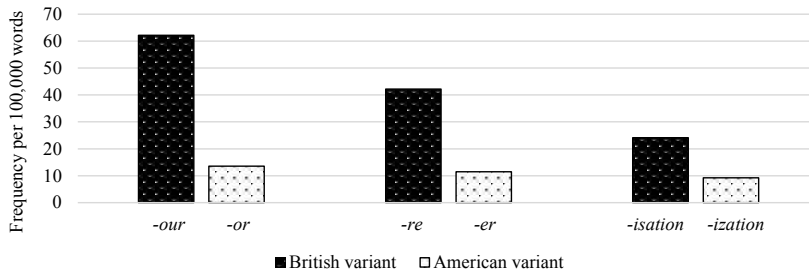


TABLE 5. Percentage rates of marked variants for IrE, data drawn from GloWbE

MVPR	
<i>-or</i>	17.92
<i>-er</i>	21.33
<i>-ization</i>	27.60

The figure corroborates the notion that the British variants are always selected over their American counterparts in IrE, though to varying degrees. Although the normalised frequency of the marked forms remains rather stable—ranging from 13.58 to 9.2—the MVPR shows that occurrences of *-ization* are substantial, as opposed to those of *-or* and *-er*. Indeed, *-ization* forms amount to 27.60% of all *-isation/-ization* tokens. Despite this looking like an early

symptom of Americanisation, BrE acceptability of the *-z-* forms should be born in mind here. The same issue already appeared in relation to the BrE data and will consequently be dealt with here in the same fashion. By calculating the average of the MVPR of *-or* and *-er* forms, the percentage rate of the *-ization* variants decreases to 6.96 and the overall MVPR to 17.27. As Ireland's MVPR is only 2.67 points above Britain's, Americanisation can be disregarded in this variety. Considering the only other account of IrE spelling in Gonçalves et al. (2018, 11), a similar configuration of the spelling paradigm is found: IrE leans more towards the British variants than BrE itself. Nevertheless, Americanisation should not be entirely dismissed. Hickey has referred to “[t]he pervading influence of the USA [...] in the linguistic influence of American English on young people's speech in Ireland” (2019, 40), and, as such, there may be some forthcoming changes in usage.

NZE is the variety with the lowest MVPR, at 20.15%. Despite being the most recent inner-circle variety, NZE has already reached the differentiation stage in Schneider's cycle (2007, 132) and has also been codified (Peters 2007, 544). Spelling in this variety has not received as much scholarly attention as AusE and CanE, which seems to be due to its overall uniformity. Indeed, NZE “follows British conventions [and] alternative spellings are only given for certain nonstandard entries and Maori words” (Melchers and Shaw 2011, 110). This consistent usage is reflected in Deverson and Kennedy (2005), which systematically favours the *-our*, *-re* and, quite surprisingly, *-isation* spellings. Whereas selection of the first two variants follows common practice in the Oxford style sheet, preference for the *-s-* forms breaks away from this set of conventions. Indeed, the *OED*'s preference cited above is disregarded here, which may be due to the fossilisation of the *-ise* and *-ization* forms in NZE. Nonetheless, figure 10 and table 6 seem to point elsewhere.

FIGURE 10. Distribution of the spelling variants individually in NZE in the GloWbE (n.f.)

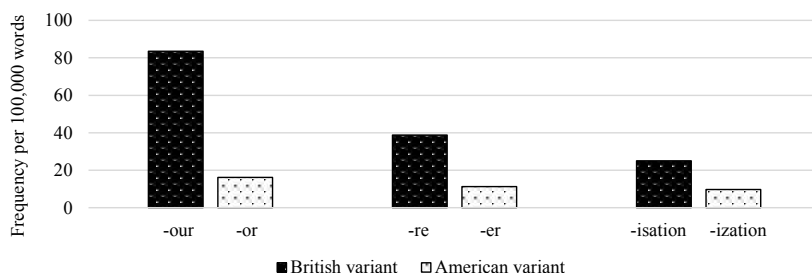


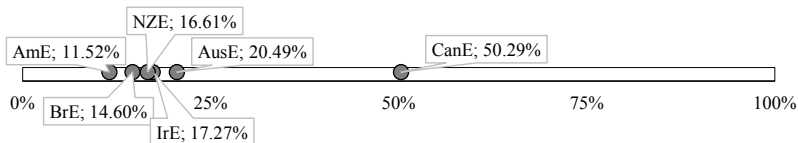
TABLE 6. Percentage rates of marked variants for IrE, data drawn from GloWbE

MVPR	
<i>-or</i>	16.24
<i>-er</i>	22.55
<i>-ization</i>	27.91

The data in figure 10 for NZE are comparable to the data for IrE in figure 9: the British variants are also the majority and the normalised frequency of the marked variants ranges from 16 to 9.7. Nevertheless, translating these normalised frequencies to the MVPR (table 6) also raises the issue discussed above: the *-ization* forms have the highest MVPR at 27.91. Seeing as these variants are also contemplated in Deverson and Kennedy (2005) and as their usage is not considered characteristic of the U.S., the data may be managed in the same way as with BrE and IrE. When half of the *-ization* forms are thus disregarded, there are some significant changes: the MVPR for this variant drops to 6.98% and the overall rate decreases to 16.61%. The same argument can be applied to IrE and NZE: just because these figures are not indicative of Americanisation in spelling today does not mean that there will not be any changes in the future. Bauer (1994, 419) claimed nearly three decades ago that “American influence [in NZE] is a relatively new phenomenon” and described “Americanisms [as] being both hated and loved (possibly by the same people!) at the same time.” It remains a possibility that Americanisation has not yet permeated spelling, but it could also be the case that it may never change since spelling has already been codified as NZE and has been put forward as a national convention at this point (Gordon and Deverson 1998, 175; Schneider 2007, 132) and not as a British norm.

The situation of the inner-circle varieties in the continuum of marked variants after the treatment of the data above is illustrated in figure 11. In the end, none of the varieties showed clear signs of competition and, therefore, of Americanisation except for CanE, which used 50.29% of AmE variants, whereas for the rest of the varieties the MVPR ranges from 16.61% to 20.49%. As argued above, this state of affairs does not necessarily mean that spelling is not being Americanised elsewhere, but that the process is more well-developed in the Canadian variety than in the others. CanE’s place along the continuum contrasts with that of AmE, which presents the lowest MVPR of all the varieties in the inner circle, closely followed by BrE. AmE’s disinclination to spelling variation corroborates its position at the hub of the World Englishes system today (Mair 2013), from where it exerts influence over the rest of the system.

FIGURE 11. Percentage rates of marked variants in the inner-circle varieties in the GloWbE



4. CONCLUSION

The present paper has outlined the distribution of the spelling variants *-our/-or*, *-re/-er* and *-isation/-ization* in the inner-circle varieties. The ultimate goal of this study was to verify whether PDE is undergoing Americanisation at the level of spelling

and the conclusions are two-fold. On the one hand, evidence of Americanisation has been found in CanE and in AusE, though to different degrees. The distribution of spelling variants in Canada presented much fragmentation, the percentage of marked variants reaching fifty percent. This indecisiveness on the part of Canadian speakers has become a distinctive feature of the variety, probably due to the country's cultural and historical proximity to the UK and to its vicinity to the U.S. As the fluctuations on the distributional pattern over time have shown, the Americanisation of CanE spelling has taken on explicit relevance among language users, who seem to be well aware of their own linguistic selections. Although the reanalysis of AusE findings eventually showed less variation than originally expected, the data—in addition to those of previous studies—also showed an increase of the American variants over a ten year period. This led to the conclusion that Americanisation may be having an impact on AusE spelling, albeit at a slow pace. On the other hand, IrE and NZE did not show any signs of change, neither quantitative nor qualitative. Nevertheless, the door was not entirely closed on the Americanisation of these varieties due to scholars' perceptions of the changing attitudes to language. As claims that other linguistic levels are being Americanised increase in number, it would be reckless to assert that spelling in these varieties is and will remain invariable.

The nature of the corpus employed for this study might imply that these findings are only representative of English online. Indeed, the Internet as a medium is characterised by its own set of features, some of which have facilitated the present paper. Nevertheless, the decision to study English spelling online was not made at random, but in light of Warschauer et al. (2010, 494), who claim that language online amplifies “trends already underway.” The Internet thus seems to have opened up a channel for endorsing and promoting linguistic variation in a way that written language cannot afford. As language online has challenged the conventionalism of spelling—more clearly seen in the spelling pronunciations and other types of Netspeak—it has also created a whole new academic discussion. There is yet much work to be done in this area and more specifically on spelling variation, as other variants, varieties and text types have yet to be examined.⁷

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