

## ENGLISH, BUT WHICH ENGLISH?

### AMERICAN PHRASES

by Nick Clowes

<http://naukabezgranic.pl/podcasty/english-language/>

You've likely heard these bewildering utterances leave the mouths of your American acquaintances, but that doesn't make them any less perplexing. (Note: many Americans are equally baffled by some of the atrocities below.)

"I feel like..."

If an American wants to soften an uncomfortably direct statement, they might front-load it with this fluffy, passive-aggressive pronouncement. Whatever it is they really meant to say has had its edges rounded off and now sounds like something someone would say in couple's therapy: "I feel like you're being manipulative right now."

"I could care less"

This monstrous idiom—where the opposite is in fact true — continues to perplex Brits. Would it be so hard or inefficient, America, to add an "n't" onto your gratingly misleading "could"? Two little letters, plus a teeny tiny apostrophe, would improve our opinion of anyone uttering this phrase immeasurably.

"Often times"

Often times I wonder what "times" is doing in this sentence. What's it for, exactly? "Often" on its own tells us everything we need to know. Perhaps the people who say it think it makes them sound quaint, melodious or smart. News flash: NO IT DOES NOT. Get it out of my sight, America.

"My bad"

Your bad what? English?

"You do the math"

Let's get something straight. "Math" is not the name of that subject with the numbers taught mostly by gentlemen who wear corduroy trousers and have never had a girlfriend. That would be "maths." I'm not sure what

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“math” is. Possibly an annoying way to shorten the name Matthew. So no, since you ask, I will not “do” it.

“I’m going to visit with...”

So, you’re not just visiting someone, you’re visiting “with” them. Did this person somehow accompany you to visit themselves? Thought not.

“Different than...”

No, no, no. And further more: no. This goes way beyond baffling and its utterance makes me, and I suspect many other Brits, want to funnel tile grout into our ears. It’s “different from,” people.

“Swap out”

Is this somehow different from simply swapping an item for another? If not, for the love of syntax, remove the extra word!

“Write me”

Here’s one that’s actually missing a word. You mean, “write to me,” surely. Actually, I don’t think an American person has ever deployed this phrase to demand correspondence from me (I live in hope), but if they do I’m going to reply with one word: “me.” Yeah, that’ll learn ‘em.

“Reach out”

It’s not just the “out” that’s baffling. It’s the whole thing. How has an ugly corporatism ended up being something real people say to each other in friendly conversation? Suggest to a Brit that they “reach out” to you for anything (except perhaps for the million dollars you’re inexplicably dangling in front of them) and they will most likely decline — not necessarily politely.