

ENGLISH HUMOUR VS. AMERICAN HUMOR – IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Humour is a phenomenon which is influenced by culture. It can be difficult to determine what aspects define a certain sense of humour. A nation's wit is linked to the **historical development** of the country. How funny somebody finds a certain incident depends on many factors including **age, personal experience, level of education** and **geographical location**. Therefore humour is something which is not always transferrable in another country. What somebody from one area may find hilarious may not be amusing at all to somebody from another location. Whether or not someone gets a joke is determined by their interpretation, filtered by the cultural context.

What about when both countries speak the same mother tongue? Does that mean that they will then share the same sense of humour, or can differences still occur? Let's take the example of **Britain** and **America**. Time and time again, people say that Brits and Americans don't 'get' each other's sense of humour. To what extent is this true, if at all?

It is often argued that **one of the most common differences between the British and American sense of humour is that Americans don't understand irony**. Simon Pegg explores this topic in depth in his article [What are you laughing at?](#) He concludes that this statement isn't true and I am inclined to agree with him.

One of the major differences seems to be how often both nations use irony. Brits use irony on a daily basis, whereas it is not the foundation of American humour. I think **Americans** understand British irony (most of the time anyway!), **what they don't understand is the need to use it so frequently.** When **Americans use irony** they tend to state that **they were "only kidding"**. They feel the need to make a joke more obvious than Brits do, maybe this stems from **a fear of offending people**.



The **American** sense of **humour** is generally more **slapstick**(χονδροειδής κωμωδία) than that in Britain. I think this arises from a **cultural difference between the two**. Their **jokes** are **more obvious and forward**, a bit like Americans themselves.



British jokes, on the other hand, tend to be more **subtle**(λεπτό) but with a **dark** or **sarcastic** undertone. There is usually a **hidden meaning**. This may stem from the fact that **British** culture is more **reserved** than American culture.



Certain American comedies have gained huge success in Britain and vice versa. Therefore, **although there are differences between both comic styles, there is still an appreciation and understanding of the other sense of humour**. Both the British and America versions of the comedy The Office are hugely successful on both sides of the Atlantic. Both shows have their own cultural differences, yet they portray a lifestyle which both Americans and Brits alike can relate to.

<http://www.lexiophiles.com/english/english-humour-vs-american-humor-is-there-a-difference>

Take this exchange that took place between **two friends** of mine, **one British (B), the other American (A)**:

B: "I had to go to my grandad's funeral last week."

A: "Sorry to hear that."

B: "Don't be. It was the first time he ever paid for the drinks."

A: "I see."

Now, my **American** friend was being **neither thick(stupid) nor obtuse(annoyingly slow in understanding)** here; **he simply didn't** immediately register the **need to bury emotion under humour**. (Simon Pegg, theguardian)

I guess I would sum the whole thing up as the British are essentially **miserablists**(enjoy being depressed), but this is tempered by their ability to **find humour in everything, including themselves**. Whereas **Americans** generally have a more **positive attitude to life**, but this is tempered sometimes by their tendency to **take themselves too seriously**.

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<http://fromsheeptoalligators.blogspot.gr/2012/02/american-humour-vs-british-humour-whats.html>