

## Dynamics of Editorial Changes in American Editions of *Harry Potter* Books

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### Abstract

The paper compares editorial substitutions in the early American editions of the first book to the penultimate book of the Harry Potter series, namely, *Sorcerer's Stone* and *The Half-Blood Prince*. Specifically, at the hub are the changes that American editors made based on the grammar, vocabulary, morphology, and spelling. A frequency count is employed to extract the rates of substitutions in individual units of text, which are subsequently converted into percentages and contrasted with the substitution rates of the same units in the two texts. The analysis shows three vectors of alteration dynamic: decline, steadiness, and rise. Furthermore, of all the variations in both pairs of editions, orthographic changes remain the most consistent, maintained at one hundred percent in both early and late books, while vocabulary substitutions are found to have largely disappeared in the later sequels.

**Keywords:** American English, British English, Harry Potter, Editorial changes, Dynamics

### 1. Introduction

Owing to its commercial and cultural success, the *Harry Potter* book series has been one of the most striking examples of American editors having a hand in a book written by a British author, its early American edition still being the subject of linguistic and literary debate. J. K. Rowling's first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, which appeared in Britain in 1997, began to be published in the United States under the title *Sorcerer's Stone* in a bluntly Americanized form. Significant transformations were also found in the second two parts, before both critics and readers stepped up their complaints about the Americanization of the popular book (Nel 2002:263). As a result, a number of changes decreased in the sequels that followed.

A good deal of discussion has been given to the changes in the American version with regard to linguistic and cultural differences that certainly played a role in editors' decisions. Ongoing regional adaptation points to a rigid boundary between American and British English tradition, considering that, in addition to *Harry Potter*, a number of modern works also underwent editing, such as *The Cloud Atlas* by D. Mitchell, *The Martian* by E. Weir, or *The Hunger Games* by S. Collins. This boundary is marked by a set of grammatical, orthographical, and lexical features. However, it is not homogeneously strict: some language variations are more stable, while others are more volatile. In this regard, the concise analysis presented below attempts to determine the degree of stability of some British-American variations reflected in fiction. In the process, we tried to establish which elements that had been adapted in the first book were kept unchanged in the latter, and which still vary in the two editions.

### 2. Literature overview

It may be useful, at least by way of introduction, to account for various takes on American editors tending to make heavy changes to British books. Several studies address comparison of the British original and the American editions, Nel (2002), Eastwood (2011), and Pilière (2011), the former two specifically targeting Harry Potter; also Murphy (2018) dedicates a chapter in her book to British-American editorial changes. Discussions presented in these publications mostly hover within cultural and ethical issues surrounding editorial policies. By far, the most heated discussions revolve around Harry Potter as a victim of Americanization of British literature in general. A classic discussion is given by Nel (2002) who gathered a selection of examples of American "translations" of British literature to show that Scholastic's job on Rowling's books is just a drop in the ocean, a reflection of a general trend. However, Nel importantly acknowledges that the changes dropped significantly after the first three parts, following public ire at Americans' disregard for the original language (Nel, 2002:262).

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In his strongly negative critique of what he calls a “failure”, Eastwood (2011) brings the whole issue down to American nationalist mentality. His paper presents an open rebuke of American editorial practices – and Editor-in-chief Arthur Levine – that allegedly deprive American children of a chance to experience British culture through the novel whose world of make-believe is painted over English reality, with references to British geography, nationalities, institutions, and entertainment. A failure to take this into account reveals American linguistic imperialism, a policy of “American English seek[ing] to represent itself as a universally accessible language, one with the authority to impose itself upon other Englishes and yet which operates under a guise of neutrality” (Eastwood, 2011:5). In the end, echoing Nel’s observation, Eastwood admits the fact that the subsequent books of the series were subjected to far less editing, and suggests that the book’s growing popularity may have been a factor of this change:

A more comprehensive study of the evolution of Levine’s editorial practices over the course of the Harry Potter series might take up the effects of the increasing popularity of the texts on transatlantic publishing practices. (Eastwood, 2011:185)

What is also important is that changes did not cease completely. Like US editions of British literature in general, adjustments continue to be made in places where the text has to be brought in line with the regional standard.

For all the backlash American editors have received, it has not been without a note of reconciliation. More recently, Murphy (2018) in her discussion of reciprocal editorial changes on both sides of the Atlantic, explains the changes by the difference in priorities on the part of Americans and the British. She believes that American editorial policy is far more stringent toward grammar rules, while the British favor an author’s personal style above many things, including their own standard (Murphy 2018).L. Pillière(2011, 2013), a translation theory expert, takes a broader look by examining Harry Potter along with similar cases of heavy edits from the standpoint of intralingual translation, using R. Jakobson’s term, that is, translation between varieties of the same language. Her approach is strictly linguistic, and by that virtue mostly devoid of political statements about imperialism and hegemony. Among other things, she analyses changes in grammatical forms and accounts for subsequent changes in emphasis and meaning, which she often finds to be flawed or mistranslated, yet without necessary linking these failures to American cultural ignorance or imperialistic proclivities.

It is the dynamics of these effects, and the solidity of this standard pitted against the preservation policy, that this paper seeks to explore, and which original language features withstand commercial pressures. Importantly, we try not to engage in the discussion over linguistic and literary quality of the adaptations, or ethical and cultural issues surrounding them, but rather to find and interpret verifiable data. For this purpose, a corpus approach seems to be an obvious choice as it allows extraction of purely technical data that makes it possible to substantiate what is already understood in terms of why these editing practices in Harry Potter have shifted. Since a number of publications have already attempted to process *Harry Potter* through a corpus analysis for various purposes and with varying results (Goatly 2004, Hunt 2015, Ebehardt 2017), below we present our application of the corpus method when it is not just two versions of the same book that are compared but they are also compared to two versions of another book of the same series.

### 3. Methodology

For this analysis, we chose two pairs of editions of the first and the penultimate books of the series, published eight years apart: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (*Sorcerer’s Stone* in US), 1997, 1998 (henceforth B97, S98) and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, respectively, 2005 (henceforth B05, S05) by British publishing house Bloomsbury (B) and American Scholastic (S). We look at these two books as such that mark the early and later stages in the editorial treatment of the book, leaving out the other books for the sake of concision. We did not choose the last book because of too few changes in it, studying which would be, albeit purely subjectively, a rather tedious pursuit.

At the outset, we made the changes visible by joining two pairs of editions (BS97-8 and BS05) in Microsoft Word (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. A sample of merging the British and American texts of *Harry Potter***

Nearly ten years had passed since the Dursleys had woken up to find their nephew on the front step, but Privet Drive had hardly changed at all. The sun rose on the same tidy front gardens and lit up the brass number four on the Dursleys' front door; it crept into their living-room, which was almost exactly the same as it had been on the night when Mr. Dursley had seen that fateful news report about the owls. Only the photographs on the mantelpiece really showed how much time had passed. Ten years ago, there had been lots of pictures of what looked like a large pink beachball wearing different ~~coloured~~ ~~bobble hats~~ — colored bonnets—but Dudley Dursley was no longer a baby, and now the photographs showed a large, blond boy riding his first bicycle, on a ~~roundabout~~ carousel at the fair, playing a computer game with his father, being hugged and kissed by his mother. The room held no sign at all that another boy lived in the house, too.

Yet Harry Potter was still there, asleep at the moment, but not for long. His Aunt Petunia was awake and it was her shrill voice ~~which~~ that made the first noise of the day. Up! Get up! Now!!!"

Harry woke with a start. His aunt rapped on the door again. Up!!!" she screeched. Harry heard her walking ~~towards~~ toward the kitchen and then the sound of the frying pan being put on the ~~cooker~~ stove. He rolled ~~on~~ onto his back and tried to remember the dream he had been having. It had been a good one. There had been a flying ~~motorbike~~ motorcycle in it. He had a funny feeling he'd had the same dream before.

Data was collected by means of a raw count of linguistic items that had undergone changes in American editions of the two books. Of these, we made a selection of the most consistent pairs of equivalents in B97 in various categories - grammar, vocabulary, idiom, morphology, and spelling. Consequently, tokens of both variants were counted, which can be demonstrated using *round/around* functioning as a preposition or an adverb (Table 1).

**Table 1. Comparison of substitution rate of *round* and *around***

|               | Total tokens<br>(percent ratio) |            | % subs | Total tokens<br>(percent ratio) |            | % subs | Difference   |
|---------------|---------------------------------|------------|--------|---------------------------------|------------|--------|--------------|
|               | B97                             | S98        |        | B05                             | S05        |        |              |
| <i>around</i> | 137 (90.1)                      | 142 (91.6) | 1.5    | 233 (74.3)                      | 297 (94.6) | 20.3   | <b>+18.8</b> |
| <i>round</i>  | 15 (9.9)                        | 13 (8.4)   |        | 81 (25.7)                       | 17 (5.4)   |        |              |

We proceeded by adding up all instances of *round* and *around*, e.g. 314 tokens in B05 and S05, which we further converted into ratios. Then we obtained the number of substitutions by subtracting the percentage values of B97-B05 and S98-S05. For example, the number of *around* tokens is 1.5% higher in S98 (142) than that in B97 (137); accordingly, *round* displays an inverse proportion, i.e. 1.5% lower. Moreover, there is a difference of 20.3% between B05 and S05. Finally, subtracting the percentages of *round/around* in the two pairs of texts, we found the difference in the number of substitutions: +18.8. Thus, we have determined that the substitutability of *round* to *around* is higher in S05 than in S98.

The algorithm described above may be presented in the form of a simple equation:

$$C = (b_1 - a_1) - (b_2 - a_2)$$

where  $C$  is change consistency;  $b_1$  and  $b_2$  indicate Bloomsbury editions;  $a_1$  is for the Scholastic edition of the early British original while  $a_2$  represents the American edition of the British sequel.

The data was further processed and compared to corpus references such as the Cambridge International Corpus (CIC), the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen (LOB), both drawn upon by Swan (2002), Peters (2004) and Algeo (2006) in his important work on the comparison of British and American usage through the respective corpora.

#### 4. Analysis

We applied the above algorithm to the sample and devised a table in which we tried to reflect the approximate difference in the degree of variation.

**Table 2. Percentage of substitutions in the editions of the 1st and 6th books, indicating the difference in substitution rate**

|   | B97-S98<br>% subs | B05-S05<br>% subs | BS97-8 – BS05<br>difference, % |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Spelling</b>                             |                   |                   |                                |
| <i>realise</i> > <i>realize</i>             | 100               | 100               | 0                              |
| <i>colour</i> > <i>color</i>                | 100               | 100               | 0                              |
| <b>Morphology</b>                           |                   |                   |                                |
| <i>forwards</i> > <i>forward</i> (adv.)     | 5                 | 95,2              | +90,2                          |
| <i>towards</i> > <i>toward</i>              | 100               | 100               | 0                              |
| <i>round</i> > <i>around</i>                | 1,5               | 20,3              | +18,8                          |
| <b>Grammar</b>                              |                   |                   |                                |
| Prepositional phrases                       |                   |                   |                                |
| <i>stop nv-ing</i> > <i>n from v-ing</i>    | 100               | 25                | -75                            |
| <i>in the team</i> > <i>on the team</i>     | 50                | 0*                | -50                            |
| <i>in the street</i> > <i>on the street</i> | 25                | 0                 | -25                            |
| Past and past participle verbs              |                   |                   |                                |
| <i>have got</i> > <i>have gotten</i>        | 16,4              | 0,6               | -15,8                          |
| <i>learnt</i> > <i>learned</i>              | 100               | 0                 | -100                           |
| <i>leant</i> > <i>leaned</i>                | 100               | 16,4              | -83,6                          |
| <i>was/were</i> with <i>as though</i>       |                   |                   |                                |
| <i>was</i> > <i>were</i>                    | 5,6               | 1,17              | -4,43                          |
| <i>were</i> > <i>was</i>                    | 0                 | 7,6               | +7,6                           |
| Relative pronouns                           |                   |                   |                                |
| <i>which</i> > <i>that</i>                  | 54                | 3,7               | -50,3                          |
| <b>Vocabulary</b>                           |                   |                   |                                |
| <i>lesson</i> > <i>class</i>                | 17,3              | 0                 | -17,3                          |
| <i>holiday</i> > <i>vacation</i>            | 21,4              | 0                 | -21,4                          |
| <i>queue</i> > <i>line</i>                  | 16,6              | 0                 | -16,6                          |
| <i>timetable</i> > <i>schedule</i>          | 100               | 87,5              | -12,5                          |

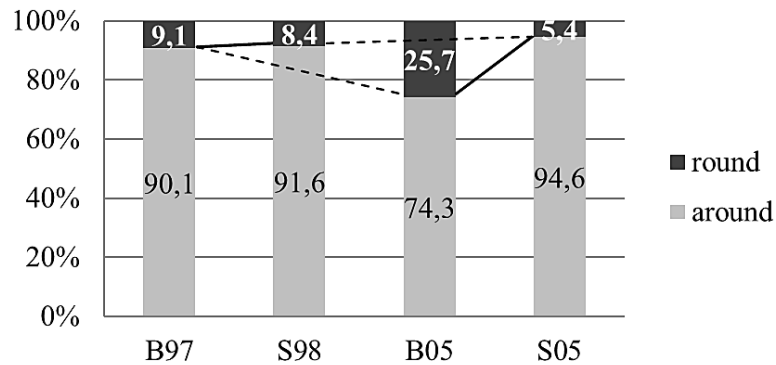
In each case, BS97-8 and BS05 mean the percentage of replacements for the sum of variants in a pair. The numbers in the right-hand column represent the difference in the rate of substitutability between BS97-8 and BS05. “+” means there are more substitutions in BS05 than there are in BS97-8, and vice versa, while “-” indicates less variability in BS05, an increase or decrease in substitution.

The data, as it was supposed, shows that the cases of reduced substitutability are the most numerous, whereas the other two are consistency and increase. We will describe these three below.

#### 4.1. Increase in substitution

Increase is least common. Some examples found in the text include the morphological adverbial variants *forward/forwards* and *round/around*. In the case of the latter, such a large difference is explained by the fact that in B97 *forwards* makes up only 5% compared to *forward*, while in B05 this form is in the absolute majority. Like other-*wards* adverbs, this variant is dominant in BrE, while *-ward*, in AmE (Algeo 2006:145, Swan 2002:611), although Peters indicates that the suffix *-s* is outdated in BrE (Peters 2004:572). However, *Harry Potter* does not demonstrate Peters’ point: at the beginning of the series *forward* prevails, while in the later book it is exclusively *forwards*. In turn, there is an overall high frequency in *forward* in both of the Scholastic editions: 87.5% in S98 and 100% in S05. Regarding the variation of *round/around*, the situation is similar, but in both originals there is mostly *around*, which also has a higher rate of occurrence in the American Brown corpus with a 40:1 ratio (ibid, 48). As it can be seen in the graph below (indicated by a dotted line), the percentage of tokens of *around* in S98 and S05 is approximately at the same level - within 90%, while in the British versions the difference is 15.8%. In other words, the latter book varies more between the two forms, preferring *round* more often than in S98.

Figure 2. Ratio of round and around in versions of the 1st and 6th parts of *Harry Potter*



#### 4.2. Substitution consistency

By editorial consistency we imply an absence of change in the substitution rate in the later book compared to the first one. The greatest consistency of substitutions is present among orthographic variations. These include the spelling variants *-ise/-ize*, *-re/-er*, *-our/-or*, etc., all of which represent absolute oppositions in both pairs of texts. That is, the spelling of such words as *realise*, *behaviour*, *centre*, in 100% of occurrences is replaced with *realize*, *behavior*, *center*. Some morphological substitutions also demonstrate absolute consistency, such as *as, towards*, which in BS05 always corresponds to *toward*, in line with corpora. In CIC, the ratio of *towards* in Bloomsbury is 14:1, while in Scholastic's versions it is 1:4.4 (Algeo, 2006: 192), supporting the observation that the *-s*-form is more typical of BrE.

#### 4.3. Reduction

Finally, most of the pairs examined display a reduction in substitutions in varying degrees, ranging from a slight drop to complete disappearance. The former includes insertion of regularized *leaned* in place of *leant*. The prepositional phrase *on the team* appears in S98 instead of *in the team*, while in B05 the original follows the more commonly American version with *on*. A combination with the same preposition - *in the street* (also *in the Privet Drive*, etc.) - has the opposite tendency and remains unchanged in S05. Another curious example is the constructions *stop n v-ing* and *stop n from v-ing*. Bloomsbury is resolute in its adherence to the non-prepositional variant, while the American edition reveals a variation between the two. In all cases *from* is added to the construction *stop n v-ing* in S98, as in the following excerpt:

- (1) Hagrid got out and had to lean against the wall to **stop his knees trembling**. (B97, 58)      (2) Hagrid got out and had to lean against the wall to **stop his knees from trembling**. (S98, 58).

Some variation can be seen within BS05 itself, where the *from* pattern is used 3 times to 9 instances without *from*. LOB, however, notes the prevalence of the prepositional variant in a 3:2 ratio (Algeo, 2006: 246). J. Algeo mentions a variation with *prevent*, indicating that the prepositional version began to appear relatively recently in BrE, but is never found in the American editions (Ibid.). B05 features both forms, but with a prevalence of *prevent n v-ing*, with 8 out of 11 cases:

- (3) Harry hastily stuck out his foot to **prevent it closing** (B97, 149).      (5) Harry hastily stuck out his foot to **prevent it from closing** (B97, 149).

- (4) ... the Ministry of Magic ... **prevented the non-magical population from getting** wind of them (B05, 5).

In grammar, most substitutions affect verb forms in terms of regularity. Out of 122 uses of *have got* in B97, 20 are replaced with *have gotten*, while in BS05 there is only one substitution out of 184, meaning "stand up": (6) "Snape had *gotten* to his feet" (ibid, 32). Forms of past simple *learned*, *lean* are more prevalent in AmE, corresponding to *learnt*, *leant* forms (Algeo 2006). In the American edition of the first book, this variation is fully reflected: *learnt*, *leant* B97 - 100%, S98 - 0; *learned*, *leant* B97 - 0, S98 - 100%. However, in BS05 these forms undergo no substitution whatsoever.

The *Harry Potter* lexicon sees the most noticeable drop in substitutions. As mentioned earlier, only a few lexical units were replaced in S05 with Americanisms, compared to S98 that displays more than seventy lexical

substitutions, such as *holiday/vacation*. MWD marks *holiday* as the British version of *vacation* in the sense of “a time away from work”, while the primary meaning of *holiday* is given as an established non-working day to celebrate something. Of the fourteen cases that forms of *holiday* are used in B97 three are replaced with *vacation* in S98. Two of them are in phrases with *on holiday* (S98, *on vacation*) and one is in *holidaying* (S98, *vacationing*). The plural *holidays* in postpositions to the attributes *Christmas*, *Easter*, *summer* has not changed. In BS05, the variability is given up in favor of *holiday*. The only variation that is preserved with almost complete constancy in BS05 is the *timetable/schedule*, where there are 7 substitutions out of 8. One case in which *timetable* is not replaced occurs the direct speech of a character using a pairing technique for playing words:

(7) “Ar, I always knew, I couldn’t find it,” he said, pouring them out. “Even if yeh applied fer Time-Turners” (Rowling 1997:231).

In general, in the area of vocabulary there are several main usage trends between BS97-8 and BS05.

- i. Substitutions are present in BS97-8, but are eliminated in BS05. That is, Britishisms such as *dustbin*, *crisps* in the sense of “potato chips”, as well as *holiday* are intact in S05.
- ii. Substitutions take place in BS97-8, but are absent in BS05 in favor of the American version. For example, *cooker* in S98 is replaced with *stove*, but in B05 only the latter is found.
- iii. Variation is retained (*jumper - sweater*, *fortnight - two weeks*, *timetable - schedule*).

In addition to those presented in Table 1, occurring more than five times in the two parts, there is a number of singular instances: *hoover*>*vacuum*, *rucksack*>*backpack*, *newsreader*>*newscaster*, and others. Additionally, several regionally labeled units only appear in one of the pairs of the book. In the British original several alleged Americanisms occur, such as *counterclockwise*, *detour*. Also in the American versions *weet*, *shop*, *spectacles*, *treatle tart* are preserved.

In some aspects, the direction of substitutions is bilateral. These include the construction *asthough* N-sing. *was/were*, which demonstrates both a reduction and increase in singular *was* changing to *were*. In S05, 13 substitutions of *were* for *was* are made while none in S98. Two-way substitutions are also particularly noticeable regarding a solid, hyphenated, and spaced fashion of writing of word combinations. In both editions there are all three ways, shifting seemingly sporadically: hyphenated to solid (*lunch-time/lunchtime*), solid to hyphenated (*half exasperated/half-exasperated*), or spaced to solid (*fruitcake/fruitcake*). In some cases, a British solid form corresponds to spaced in the American text (*earwax*, B97, *earwax*, S98); in others, on the contrary, separate writing gives way to solid (*crybaby*, B97, *crybaby*, S98). Although corpus data does not indicate exact semantic or phraseological patterns of most of such substitutions (Algeo 2006:119), it shows the spelling asymmetry to be geographical. For example, the *any more* version prevails in BrE, while *anymore* is dominant in AmE (ibid. 41), similar to the *Harry Potter* versions, where in BS97-8 and BS05 the separate spelling is replaced by the solid.

## 5. Discussion

Taking the data one step further, we ask ourselves the question what this has to say about the present relative dynamics of BrE and AmE. It has become evident that the degree of mutual sharing has increased since the advent of the Internet. Nowadays, the so called American invasion is nearly equally matched by *Anglocreep* (a phenomenon particularly explored by Murphy (2019), referring to subtle incursions of Britishisms into AmE), with words like *trousers* and *bloody* now sounding more acceptable in America. On the other hand, while American admirers of Rowling’s works would prefer to read *Harry Potter* with all of its original British vocabulary; not many of them seem ready to give up *stove* for *cooker* or *backpack* for *rucksack* in their own speech. Thus, the reasons for maintaining the original language are rather based on literary aestheticism. To wit, BrE may be perceived as an integral element of the story’s medieval-esque, fairy-tale atmosphere, where Americanisms would only be a disruption, due to their sounding too commonplace to those who use them natively. The calls for keeping in original wording, therefore, should be treated not as a sign of American English speakers falling under influence of BrE, but rather as a reinforcement of the perception of BrE features as something exotic, reinforcing the book’s local color.

On the other hand, how to account for the orthographic and morphological changes that remained at one hundred percent in both books? One answer could be that these aspects are not considered to be integral to the story or the style, but are rather treated as technical props, similar to font or cover design. In Rowling, for instance, there is apparently no indication of her deliberately using *-ise* and *-our* spelling to emphasize the Britishness of the characters or their accents. It is what she does routinely, following her customary orthographic standards.

Apparently, the writer does not place any importance on spelling to emphasize speech variation in her book, which may be owing to an implicitly monocultural community of Hogwarts where all characters are generally perceived as speakers of BrE.

Although the latter parts of the series were subjected to much less adaptation, mainly under pressure from the author and the public, however, as the analysis has shown, the differences weren't eradicated completely, a number of text elements still undergoing editorial revision. Today, it seems, regional adaptation of English literature is not related to the language barrier, but to the fact that, since this kind of literature is aimed at the general reader, for commercial purposes, publishers are guided by literary norms and didactic rules of the language. There are other reasons, such as historical and political. For example, the spelling reform carried out by Noah Webster in the 19th century, in the period of the rise of American nationalism, somehow approved the national version as special, separate from the "outdated" British norm (Gustafson 1992:313). This desire to secede, to isolate itself still survives as a certain declaration of independence from the Old World and, perhaps, as a tribute to Webster, who sought to emphasize American self-consciousness through the isolation of the language norm, and it manifests itself in American editorial policies. Thus, while there are differences in the norms of language and speech of the English-speaking world, controlled by extra-linguistic forces, some regionally mediated editorial substitutions continue to take place, which, some would argue, may even be necessary in order to preserve some identity in the context of globalization.

Those decisions, therefore, reflect peculiarities of the American variety of English. I dare say that the first US edition holds value for research purposes as a more accurate reflection of AmE, showing natural attempts to accommodate an average American reader. The criticism on the part of American *Harry Potter* fans and the reduction in changes that followed was, on the other hand, a reflection of fantasy winning over tangibility, where BrE is an essential component of the make-believe world, while AmE is seen as a boring and detestable reality.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis has established three trends of textual replacements: reduction, increase, and consistency, of which decline is the prevailing trend. Additionally, two significant points can be drawn from the findings. One is that spelling variations demonstrate the strongest consistency of substitution. It can be said that the spelling component, along with some morphological units, is the most stable and reliable in determining the boundaries between the varieties in a written text. The other point is that most of the variations in the American and British editions of the book seem to mirror regional differences between BrE and AmE, as indicated by the data of corpus reference sources and dictionaries.

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