

Hey guys! Are you aware of adopted American words?

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I now know that, as I was growing up in the 1950s, I was unwittingly using words that previous generations had considered to be Americanisms.

I didn't know then that what I called a battery had previously been known as an accumulator; or that my father had originally called his briefcase a portfolio. And I have written evidence, in the form of teenage diaries that, some time after 1960 and without being aware of what I was doing, I stopped saying wireless and started using the American word radio.

Now, many years later, I am very aware, as many younger people presumably are not, that words and phrases currently being employed by many British people today were just a few years ago used only by Americans.

Tough, for example, is now very widely used instead of hard or difficult. Children who used to be clever have in the last decade or so become smart – although our use of American dumb to mean the opposite of smart is lagging behind somewhat.

For decades, everybody in this country knew that Americans didn't say lorry, they said truck, but nobody here ever said that; now they do. Airplane has perhaps become as common as aeroplane. Broadcast jour-



■ Is it a fire truck or a fire engine?

Photo: ARCHANT

nalists now often say fire truck when I would say fire engine.

Britons now eat brownies, cookies and fries. And it is very hard to buy a bun these days – what you get are “muffins”. Some of us don't go to the pictures but to the movies.

Quite a lot of British people have goose bumps rather than gooseflesh. Blokes and chaps have become guys. Schoolchildren are no longer pupils but students. And we are more and more saying gift rather than present.

People call their friends on the phone rather than ring them. Children are now often raised rather than brought up. Footballers play on a team on the weekend

rather than in a team at the weekend. Musicians increasingly play piano rather than play the piano.

And many British people say “June twenty-fifth” instead of “June the twenty-fifth”.

This is a process which has been going on ever since the advent of recording and broadcasting brought the sound of spoken American English to this country.

But the written word, going back to the eighteenth century, has also been very influential: who now remembers that words like belittle, lengthy, overcoat, graveyard, half-baked, handy, hunch, influential, mileage and jeopardise were also originally American rather than British?