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Table of contents

BRITISH ENGLISH VERSUS AMERICAN ENGLISH PREFERENCE BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF EFL 6
Ana Koceva, Dafina Kostadinova, Tanya Tabutova

INVESTIGATING L2-L1 TRANSFER AMONG BILINGUAL STUDENTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA 11
Stojanoska Marija, Shalevska Elena, Talevska Marija

AI LANGUAGE MODELS, STANDARDIZED TESTS, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: A CHAT (GPT) 17
Elena Shalevska

EXPLORING EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS: INTEGRATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM 26
Dushko Talevski, Elena Shalevska

JUXTAPOSITION OF THE SOUND SYSTEMS OF THE ENGLISH AND MACEDONIAN AND THE POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERFERENCE 31
Stela Bosilkovska, Violeta Janusheva

THE IMPERATIVE FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES – A LITERATURE REVIEW 41
Denis Arsovski, Tanja Jovanovska, Viktorija Prodanovska-Stojchevska, Izabela Filov, Domnika Rajchanovska, Angelka Jankulovska, Daniela Petkovska

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEACHER IN ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY AMONG THE GIFTED STUDENTS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION 46
Vesna Stojanovska

PANNONIC LEGENDS – ATTRIBUTION 49
Anita Angelevska

COMPARISON OF SPEAKERS LIZ TRUSS AND BORIS JOHNSON 53
Sofija Trampevska, Biljana Gramatkovski

USING STEM EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS 62
Josif Petrovski

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Faculty of Education – Bitola

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BRITISH ENGLISH VERSUS AMERICAN ENGLISH PREFERENCE BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF EFL

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Abstract

For decades English has been considered a global language used as not only a native language, but as an official language, a second language in many countries and taught as a foreign language worldwide. Herein, English includes numerous varieties, regional and local dialects, professional speech, slangs, jargons etc. The variety of English is an important feature for learners of EFL, especially for future teachers of English. The constant exposure to different types of English through television, movies, online content etc. might hinder the fluency of EFL learners. Therefore, EFL teachers need to help their students and prevent any ambiguities due to the differences between American and British English. In this research, we have analysed the preference of students between British English and American English vocabulary. The analysis includes 60 first year students of English language and literature from the University "Goce Delcev" in North Macedonia and the South-West University in the Republic of Bulgaria. The results provide an insight on both the knowledge and linguistic preference of students between the two standardized English varieties and enable teachers, university professors and English coursebooks authors to determine their approach in class and help students master fluency.

Key words: EFL, British English, American English, vocabulary.

1. Introduction

English has been described as a global language, a lingua franca and one of the languages spoken by most people around the world. Since English is a widely used language, it derives even greater changes and varieties than other less common languages. Students often refer to English as a singular communication tool that they aim to master. However, English encompasses numerous varieties, dialects, accents, slangs etc. The variation of the English language refers to both spoken and written English, standardized and non-standardized varieties, regional dialects, local slangs, professional jargon etc. The multiple English varieties are referred to as "New Englishes" or "World Englishes". These different varieties can be further classified based on their origin and use. In this paper we will focus on the two standardized varieties of the English: British English and American English, which belong to the inner circle of "Englishes", in accordance with the classification made by Kachru (1985).

2. British English & American English

One of the major and most common distinction that arises in the usage of English as a foreign language is the regional variation between British and American English. The differences between British and American English appear in pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary. The pronunciation difference is can be easily distinguished, but different spellings of words and application of different vocabulary for the same entities creates confusion even to advanced learners of English as a second or a foreign language. In all stages of education, vocabulary is central to learning content (Novari,

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Maryani, Rostiana, 2021, p. 30). As Raihan (2021) points out, exposure to American television programmes and movies is one of the factors for increased use of American tokens. American TV series, Hollywood's blockbusters, as well as famous American musicians, comedians etc. are highly popular among the younger generations in North Macedonia and Bulgaria, which means these young people spend hours, days, and months by constantly listening to American pronunciation, as well as expressions and other vocabulary in American English (AE). On the other hand, these same young people are usually (although not always) provided with instructions in British English (BE) during their lessons at official education institutions (primary and secondary schools, universities), where they are expected to learn, and practise BE pronunciation, vocabulary, and spelling. The difference between AE and BE can be a problem to beginners, especially if they are learning English for academic purposes (Paga, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to stabilize a variant and maintain consistency in usage (Akindele, Fabunmi, 2023, p. 81).

One might say that in today's global world and online world, it is not possible to limit your exposure to different English language varieties, which is undoubtedly true. Moreover, "native-speaker-hegemonic English must not be the only eligible variety to teach, but also non-standard varieties" (Amorim, 2023) Also, if the aim of the EFL student is to achieve a certain level of proficiency for personal needs and even professional needs, the use of a sort of a mixed variety of English might not create any miscommunication. However, when the students are future teachers of EFL or ESL, this mild obstacle becomes larger. In order to avoid and prevent any perplexity among EFL learners, it is important to use teaching materials in accordance with the specific variety whether it is British or American (Herlina & Faridah, 2021). It is by no means acceptable to have a language teacher who is unable or unwilling to follow only one language variety in their teaching lessons. Successful teaching can be acquired if there is knowledge on the similarities and differences between British and American English (Sembiring, 2021). Therefore, we were motivated to conduct a quick and short screening on our first and second-year students, in order to review their language habits in relation to BE and AE usage and adapt our own teaching depending on the present results.

3. Methodology

The main hypothesis of this research paper is that university students of the English language tend to use British English vocabulary rather than American English. The hypothesis derives from the fact that the coursebooks that are officially used in primary, secondary and tertiary state education in both North Macedonia and Bulgaria are mostly written in British English. Since university students have passed around 10 years of formal education in British English, we believe that it has a larger impact on their vocabulary regardless of any external input such as social media, television etc. The focus was specifically on the vocabulary that includes words that completely differ between British and American English. The participants in the research are 60 university students that are currently in their first or second year of studying the English language. One sample group is formed by students from the Faculty of Philology at the University "Goce Delchev" in Shtip, North Macedonia, while the other sample group are university students from the Faculty of Philology at the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.

The participants received a short text in their native language (Macedonian/Bulgarian) and were asked to translate it into English. The students were presented with this translation task as a simple additional activity during their regular lessons without any indication of the aim of our research, so that their responses are not influenced or manipulated in any aspect. Furthermore, the collected responses were anonymous.

The text and the key words included were intentionally on an A2 level to prevent any difficulties in the translation process by the students. There are total of 26 specifically employed words within the text; 24 of the words are expressed with a completely different form in the two types of English and 2 words have a different spelling. These key words or focus words and their original forms from the text in Macedonian and in Bulgarian, as well as their appropriate translations in British English and American English are presented in table 1. After the collection of the data, each translation has been quantitatively and qualitatively analysed with a special focus on the key words.

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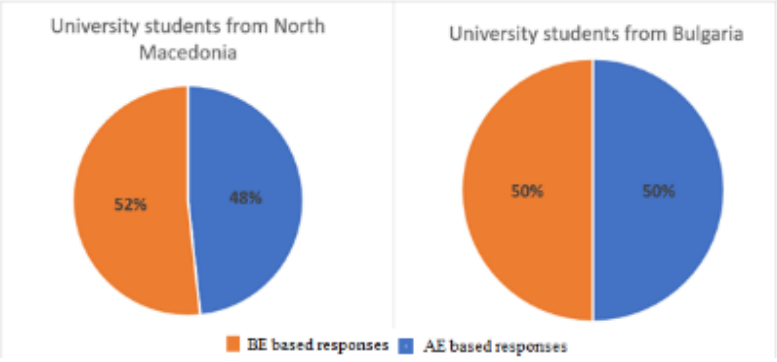
Macedonian	Bulgarian	American English	British English
Хауба	Капак	Hood	bonnet
Гуми	Гуми	Tires	tyres
Багажник	Багажник	Trunk	boot
Згради	комплекс от сгради	apartment blocks	block of flats
фудбалско игралиште	футболно игрище	Field	(football) pitch
Фудбал	Футбол	Soccer	football
Чанта	Чанта	Purse	handbag
Плакар	Гардероб	Closet	wardrobe
Двосед	Диван	Couch	sofa
Фрижидер	Хладилник	refrigerator	fridge
Градина	Градина	Yard	garden
Предјадење	Предястие	appetizer	starter
главно јадење	основни ястие	Entrée	main course
миење садови	мия чинии	do the dishes	do the washing up
Ѓубре	Боклук	Garbage	rubbish
Продавници	Магазини	Stores	shops
перење облека	Пера	do the laundry	do the washing
Книжара	Книжарница	bookstore	bookshop
Театар	театър	Theater	theatre
Кино	Кино	movie theater	cinema
Сив	Сив	Gray	grey
Панталони	Панталони	Pants	trousers
Патики	Маратонки	sneakers	trainers
Омилен	Любим	Favorite	favourite
Сметка	Сметка	Check	bill
Есен	Есен	Fall	autumn

Table 1: Focus words included in the translation task

4. Results and discussion

The quantitative analysis of the responses of the two sample groups did not show large variation in relation to the preference of either AE or BE. The frequencies of usage of each variety is presented in graph 1. However, the further qualitative analysis of the vocabulary employed by the two groups of participants within their text translation showed that they use a combination of both British and American English vocabulary. Although this realization wasn't presupposed, it was not surprising since other researchers Raihan (2021) have confirmed the simultaneous use of American and British tokens.

It is shown in graph 1 that in one translated text the Macedonian participants used an amalgamation of 52% of BE vocabulary and 48% of AE vocabulary in their translations. On the other hand, the Bulgarian participants used 50% of BE and 50% of AE vocabulary in their translations.



Graph 1: Percentage of used varieties

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Another significant notion that derives from the results is that the two groups of participants showed a usage of a combination of BE and AE vocabulary within one sentence.

Examples:

(1) There are many *shops* nearby such as a *bookstore*, a *theater* and a *cinema*.
[BE: shops, cinema; AE: bookstore, theater;]

(2) Sam is amazed by the *garden* and it is his *favorite* place for watching *football*.
[BE: garden, football; AE: favorite;]

In accordance with the results, it can be claimed that the university students at the Goce Delchev University and the South-West University use a variable vocabulary that includes the two varieties of English. Herein, our hypothesis that students show preference for British English vocabulary proved false. Furthermore, the results suggest that the university students at the two universities are not able to clearly distinguish between the two English varieties.

5. Conclusion

The role of English as a global language or a lingua franca has been confirmed by many research papers. Also, its great variability represented with many standard and non-standard varieties has been vastly analysed. However, our research shows that university students are not familiar or more precisely do not pay attention to this variability. The reasons for this can be many: from the coursebook to the external media influences on the students. Therefore, it is very important to constructively incorporate the language variability in our teaching process on a university level, but also in secondary-school education. The English teachers should apply explicit teaching methods and adapt their teaching materials, so that students understand the different usage of the English standard varieties and their socio-pragmatic characteristics. Furthermore, teachers need to increase the practice material that will provide their EFL students with appropriate amount of experience for future correct conduct of both English varieties analysed in this paper. It is especially important for our future EFL teachers and translators as well, to be able to differentiate between the English varieties, to maintain communication and writing in one variety and to successfully transfer their knowledge on their future students regardless of the environment.

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Appendix A

Translation task for the Macedonian respondents:

Здраво Сара, не можев да те добијам на телефон па ти пишувам овде. За жал не успеавме да го земеме автомобилот. Сем ја отвори хаубата но не успеа да сфати што не функционира, а и гумите беа доста издишани. Па така набрзина ја зедов чантата од багажникот и тргнавме рано. Куќата е помеѓу комплекс на згради и фудбалско игралиште. Најмногу ми се допаѓаат огромниот плакар и црвениот двосед во дневната соба. Исто така кујната е голема и со нов фрижидер. Сем е воодушевен од малата градина и тоа му е омиленото место за гледање фудбал. Се уште не одиме на работа па секој ден минувам доста време во кујната приготвувајќи предјадења и главни јадења. Секако Сем е задолжен за миењето на садовите и фрлањето на ѓубрето, а јас ја перам облеката. Во близина има доста продавници како и книжара, театар и кино. Во главно може да се каже дека сме задоволни.

Те молам испрати ми го сивиот куфер (имам неколку панталони и патики во него) го заборавив во гаражата. Доколку има и некои нови сметки стави ги и нив внатре. Поздрави ги сите и се надевам дека ќе се видеме оваа есен.

Твојата сестра, Луси.

Appendix B

Translation task for the Bulgarian students:

Само отворих капака, но не можах да разбера какво не е наред, а гумите бяха доста меки. Така че бързо взех чантата си от багажника и тръгнахме рано. Къщата е между комплекс от сгради и футболно игрище. Най-много харесвам огромния дрешник и червения диван в хола. Кухнята също е голяма, с нов хладилник. Сам е възхитен от малката градина и това е любимото му място за гледане на футбол. Все още не ходим на работа, затова всеки ден прекарвам много време в кухнята, приготвяйки предястия и основни ястия. Разбира се, Сам отговаря за миенето на чиниите и изхвърлянето на боклука, а аз пера. В близост има много магазини, както и книжарница, театър и кино. Като цяло можем да кажем, че сме доволни.

Моля те, изпрати ми сивия куфар (имам панталони и маратонки в него), забравих го в гаража. Ако има нови сметки, сложете и тях вътре. Поздравете всички и се надявам да се видим тази есен.

Сестра ти Луси.