

THE INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRITISH ENGLISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH ON SUDANESE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT: *This study aims to investigate the differences between British and American English in some different levels and aspects regarding (semantics, syntax, and phonology). Also, the paper attempts to reveal the problems which may face English language learners who do not use it as a first language, especially Sudanese English language learners. The theoretical framework of the study consists of many studies previously conducted in the field of the study. The results and findings assume that there are some differences between American and British English in some language levels and aspects, which may cause many problems for those who use the English Language as a second or a foreign language. The study includes some recommendations which may be beneficial in solving the problems which the Sudanese ESL/EFL learners encounter as a result of these differences.*

KEY WORDS: foreign language (FL), second language (SL), British English, American English, the differences, Sudanese learners.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of the English language around the world began with the Pioneering voyages to America and Asia, and continued with the 19th century colonial developments in Africa and the South Pacific, and took a significant further step when it was adopted in the 20th century as an official or semi-official. English is now the official language in so many countries in the world. It is this spread of representation that made the application of the term “World Language” a reality.

In some parts of the world, the English language is used as a second or a foreign language, and not as a mother tongue, it is either British or American (the two main varieties of English language).

Statement of the problem

The history of the English language is significant because English is spoken more frequently than any other language except Chinese. It's spoken by a large number of people all over the world as mentioned earlier. English is the principal language of publishing, science, and technology. In different countries, the English language used is either British or American, and there are some differences between the two varieties, and these differences cause some confusion. Often students of the English language are influenced by these differences, and they find that the rules that govern these differences are often complex or non-existent. Students, whose mother tongue is not English, face pronunciation, spelling, grammatical, and vocabulary problems caused by the diversity in the two dialects. For these reasons, this study is going to investigate the distinctions between British and American English.

Questions to be answered by the study

This study is going specifically to provide answers to the following questions:-

- 1-To what extent is American English different from British English?
- 2-At what levels of language (semantics, syntax, or phonology) are they different?
- 3-What are the influences of differences between the two varieties on English language learners in countries that use it as a second or a foreign language, and particularly in Sudan?

Basic hypotheses

This study assumes that there are some differences between American and British English at some language levels (semantics, syntax, and phonology). It also proves that the differences are of particular difficulty to the Sudanese learners of the English language or at least for the learner whose mother tongue is not English. It was noted that for historical reasons the British English has been deeply rooted in Sudan therefore, the American dialect causes great difficulty and confusion for the language learner, bearing in mind that American English is quickly gaining ground in the technical, communicative [internet, computer] and cultural fields. These differences cause difficulties because the learner is unaware of the differences between these two varieties, and this research investigates these problems

Significance of the study

As a result of people's migrations from different parts of the world to England, several invading groups joined the original settlers of England; bringing with them their language and culture. This made English become a mixture of languages that adapted to the circumstances and the needs of people. England eventually commanded an empire, thus, spreading the language around the world. When the British Empire broke down, the United States of America continued to spread the English language because of its political and economic power. American English now is the world language of technology, but there are differences within the American English dialect itself. So, this study may be beneficial for those who are interested in American and British English and would enable the learners of English as a second or a foreign language (non-native speakers) to become better aware of the variations which are regarded as errors by the uneducated people. Therefore, the researcher believes that such a study would go some way to remove these misunderstandings, given that America regards its culture and language as leading feature to dominate the world.

The paper also is important to enhance the students' awareness of differences between American and British English, so the knowledge of these distinctions is significant in education and in other fields such as mass media, communication, and teaching.

Limitations of the study

This study investigates three areas of contrast between the two varieties of English (the British variety and the American variety):-

phonology: In phonology, the study concentrates on the pronunciation of the vowels and consonants in both British English and American English. For example, most U.S. speakers pronounce the postvocalic /r/ in the word bird as /b ɜ: (r) d/ while in British English the same postvocalic/r/ is not pronounced.

Vocabulary: As far as vocabulary is concerned, the study concentrates on the meaning. Some words mean different things in the two varieties, for example, the word "*mean*" in British English means *not generous* it also means *tight*. The same word means *angry* in American English. Also, there are some differences between British and American spelling some of which are the spelling of the words "*colour*" and "*humour*" which are British English, in American English, these words are written as "*color*" and "*humor*".

syntax: The main grammatical differences are found in the use of parts of speech as verbs, nouns articles, pronouns, and prepositions. An example of the differences in a preposition is:-

on the weekend in American English and **at** the weekend in British English.

Methodology and Procedure Of The Study

The researchers used a descriptive methodology in this study.

The following data collecting tools included in this study:-

1. Collecting data from various forms of mass media, which include the internet. The researchers assume that the internet will be of great value in the field, mainly because it is one of the most valuable sources of information nowadays.
2. Testing some Sudanese English language learners to find out the influence of these differences on them.
3. Using recordings to test the pronunciation differences between American and British English on Sudanese secondary school students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English language varieties:

The recognition of English's role as a world language has continued to grow. World English is developing a distinctive form of its own. This particular form of the language has no geographical markers and has been described as standard international English. It is used by international organizations like the European Free Trade Association; pilots and air traffic controllers; international traders; land by police involved with international investigations. Although each of these varieties has its specific distinctive characteristics', linguists see the many common features as evidence that 'standard world English' is emerging.

In discussing the English language in general, the term variety permits the identification of differences, for example, standard usage is no more or less evidence variety than non — standard usage.

Varieties of English fall into two types: (1) Users of the language, associated with particular people and often places, such as Black English (English as used by blacks however defined and wherever located, but especially African - American in the USA), and Canadian English (English as used in Canada). (2) Uses of the language, associated with functions such as Legal English (the language of courts, contracts, etc.) and literary English (the typical usage of literary texts, conversations, etc.). Users and Uses of the English language can be characterized in terms of

variation in the region, society, style, and medium. Regional variation is defined in terms of such characteristics as phonological grammatical and lexical features, as when American English is contrasted with British English. Social variation represents differences in ethnicity, class, and caste. As in Black_English_in the US and Anglo - Indian English in India. Stylistic variation is defined in terms of situation and participants (such as formal and colloquial usage) and function (as with business English). Variation according to medium is defined in terms of writing, speech, and the use of sign language for the deaf where there are, for example, differences between American English and British English.

British English and American English:

British English and American English are both variants of world English, more similar than different, especially with educated or scientific English. They are the foremost varieties of the English language and the reference norms for other varieties; they have often been compared and contrasted. Such comparison and contrast are complex matters because the boundaries between them are often not clear. For example, to say that the spelling of the word “colour”_is British English means that it is used widely in the UK, and is not widely used, or no longer used In US To say that the spelling of the word “color” is American English means that it is widely used in the US, and is not widely used, or no longer used in Britain.

The terms British English and American English are used in different ways, by different people, for different purposes. They may refer to (1) Two national varieties, each subsuming regional and other sub-varieties, standard and non - standard. (2) Two national standard varieties, each excluding the national non - standard varieties. Each is only part of the range of English within its own state, but the most prestigious part. (3) Two international varieties, focused on particular nations, but each subsuming other varieties, and each is more than a national variety of English. (4) Two international standard varieties that may or may not subsume other standard varieties. Each serves as a reference norm for users of the language elsewhere. Furthermore, whether British English and American English are understood as national or international varieties, there is so much communication between them that items of language pass easily and quickly from one to the other often without clear identification as primarily belonging to one or to the other, or to some other variety.

Differences between British English and American English:

English language sounds different and is spelled differently and the word in English means different things, depending on which English — speaking country you are in. Every language can be broken down into many components, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and also the written form with its symbols, spelling, and punctuation. American and British varieties are different in each of these components, and they make sense when examined separately but form an amusing whole in everyday speech and writing. When American and British persons meet, the first obvious difference is the accent - the pronunciation of words. The next obvious difference is vocabulary - the occasional different words for something or different words for the same thing. However, more complex differences can be seen in the syntax - the arrangement of certain words, the position of certain words, or the inclusion or lack of certain words. Not only are these differences reflected in writing, but writing also brings out differences in spelling and punctuation. All those are taken together from distinctive American English or British English.

There are two ways language can look at. In the first case, the function of language is to communicate, and this is accomplished by sounds, gestures, and symbols. The way the sounds are pronounced creates the accent, and the symbols are our writing system, which then invokes spelling and punctuation. In the second case, the components of language are words and their arrangement. The words are our vocabulary, which includes idioms, and their arrangement is syntax or grammar. So now we can know where the differences are, and we find that differences occur in each of these language components.

The reasons for differences between American and British English:

Differences between American English and British English are mainly due to the novel conditions, new environment, and new experiences the colonists confronted, although names for the new things encountered in America had begun to enter English already during the phase of exploration. Later on, the new political and administrative system also required the invention of new words. A great number of words introduced to the language were borrowed from other languages. The colonists learned many words from the Native Americans, words like moose, raccoon, and skunk for certain animals peculiar to North America (the internet).

Most divergence is due to differences in national history and national cultural development, varying regional and local idioms and colloquialisms, and influences of media and advertising. There are some other factors that make language change through ages, some of which are

inheritance, innovation, and isolation. Language as an evolving process is readily apparent when considering how the English language has changed from Anglo- Saxon to Chaucer to Shakespeare to the present day. It is the effect of these processes over the last 400 years that gave the rise to the differences between British and American English.

The influence of the differences between American and British on the Sudanese English language learner:

The first introduction of the English language in Sudan, dates from 1898, with the Anglo - Egyptian rule. The result was the widespread adoption of the English language in education, as well as in other fields of life. It can, therefore, be seen that the development of English language education in Sudan can be traced back quite a long time (Sandell, 1982: 15). British English began to be considered and used as a second language in Sudan since then, and American English seems to cause the greatest confusion and misunderstanding for the Sudanese English language learners because he is unaware of the differences between the two varieties British and American, and so considers these differences as errors. However, the influence on the Sudanese language learner is not very big, in particular, in earlier stages of education, because the learner is not expected to be exposed to sources of American English in these stages, but the effect can still be found and observed as the learner advances in language learning. Another influence can be observed as a consequence of the remarkable development in education technology and teaching techniques including the computer, which is an American invention and uses American English, so people using these techniques may be embarrassed unless they are familiar with these distinctions.

METHODOLOGY

This paper relies upon the descriptive methodology. In this study, the researchers aim at providing an account of the methods used to carry out the present study. It begins with a description of the population needed for the research.

The researchers describes the data collecting techniques which include interviewing native speakers (British and American). They also include a test that is limited for secondary school students (third class students). The chapter also consists of a description of the procedure that the researcher has followed to collect the wanted information.

Participants

The population of this study consisted of two groups, the English language native speakers in Sudan and secondary school students in Khartoum State in which the study sample was chosen. Since this research aims at investigating the differences between the two main varieties of English language (British and American), and the expected difficulties which might face Sudanese English language learner -in secondary school - as a result of these differences, the sample chosen for the study consisted of two groups; the first group was some native speakers (British and American) who live in Sudan. The sample was of different ages and both sex as well as of different occupations (teachers, journalists, students, and housewives). The second group of the sample consisted of Sudanese secondary school students (particularly, third class students) in Khartoum State. All of them have the same linguistic background as Arabic Language native speakers. They all started to learn English as a foreign language at the age of 10 (Since the fifth class of the basic level school).

Data collecting tools:

Interview

The tools used in the research included an interview for American and British native speakers who live and work in Sudan. They were interviewed to find out the differences in spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation that can be found between American and British English. The interview consisted of eight questions that clarify some areas of differences. The interview helped in identifying some of these differences especially in the areas of vocabulary, phonology, and syntax.

The test

Since this study is an attempt to discover the problems which face Sudanese secondary school students when dealing with the American variety of English language (because the British variety is adopted in Sudan) a test was limited to assess the areas that might cause confusion to Sudanese learner, that is to say, areas of phonology, syntax, and vocabulary. The test consisted of three questions, each one was designed to specify the differences in a certain level of the English language (phonology, syntax, and vocabulary).

Data Analysis, Result, and Discussion

This study is concerned with investigating differences between American and British English (the two main varieties of English language) at the levels of semantics (meaning and spelling), phonology (pronunciation), and syntax (grammar rules).

It is also concerned with the influences of these differences on Sudanese English language learners at the secondary stage.

This part consists of the results the researcher came to reach at the end of the investigations as well as analysis and discussion of these results.

The findings of the study:

One of the hypotheses of this study stated that ‘differences between American and British English may cause difficulties or some confusion to non - native speakers’ especially for Sudanese English language learners. To prove this, the researcher conducted a test for Sudanese secondary school students especially (the third year

students in Khartoum State), third-year students were chosen because they are more likely to be mastering the English language better than other secondary and basic stages, In addition to a group of second class students for the control group.

The test consisted of three questions; each is concerned with the differences within a certain level of English language to see the influence of these differences on Sudanese English language learners. The results are shown in the following tables:

Question one: spelling

Underline the way of writing you prefer to use from the following, and explain why?

1.	a- airplane	b-aero plane
2.	a- tyre	b-tire
3.	a- centre	b-center
4.	a- behavior	b-behaviour
5.	a- color	b-colour
6.	a- programme	b-program
7.	a- grey	b-gray
8.	a- apologize	b-apologise
9.	a- defense	b-defence
10.	a- employee	b-employee
11.	a- theatre	b-theatre
12.	a- organize	b-organize
13.	a- skillful	b-skilful
14.	a- traveled	b-travelled
15.	a- cigarette	b-cigarette
16.	a- judgment	b-gudgement
17.	a- alright	b-all right
18.	a- any more	b-any more
19.	a- cooperate	b-co-operate
20.	a- dialogue	b-dialog

The results:

The Word	Experimental group		Control group	
	American Choices	British Choices	American Choices	British choices
1	20	80	18	82
2	22	78	25	75
3	16	84	20	80
4	9	91	11	89
5	7	93	13	87
6	56	44	58	42
7	4	96	5	95
8	11	89	8	92
9	21	79	22	78
10	23	77	23	77
11	53	47	47	53
12	74	26	77	23
13	15	85	22	78
14	11	89	17	83
15	24	76	23	77
16	13	87	15	85
17	9	91	7	93
18	41	59	44	56
19	6	94	11	89
20	16	84	13	87

The figures above indicate the numbers of students who chose either of the two ways of writing (American or British). The table contains the performance of the two groups experimental and control.

When looking at the figures, it could be seen that the students' tendency is more likely to be towards British spelling in most of the words. For example, in word number (1) 80 students chose the British way of writing or spelling, while only 20 students chose the American spelling. In few cases however, students selected the American spelling to be their favourite way of writing as in words number 6, 11 and 12. That means, for some items the American spelling is adopted in Sudan although not very much as in the spelling of apologize, organize and skillful. This may be due to the fact that in former Sudanese English language syllabuses, some American spelling and vocabulary were applied.

The above mentioned results are true for both of the two groups experimental and control.

As for the reasons for their choices, the students mentioned the following

- 35 % of those who chose the British spelling said that they were familiar with this way of writing.
- 50 % considered their choices to be the correct spelling.
- 15 % said that their selections were easier than the other ones and that which made them prefer British spelling.

It is clear from the reasons for the students' preferences that they considered the American spelling to be incorrect or difficult, and that their unawareness of the American spelling confirms the assumptions of the study.

In question (2) which is concerned with grammatical distinctions between American and British varieties, the researcher asked the students to mention the preferred expression for them whether British or American and to identify their justifications.

Question: two Grammar

Put a check mark (✓) in front of your preferred expression from the following, then explain the reason for your choice.

1. a- I' ve lost my key, can you help me look for it ? ()
b- I lost my key can you help me look for it ()
2. a- I have already saw that seen that film. ()
b- I already saw that film. ()
3. a- Have you finish your homework yet? ()
b- Did you finish your homework yet? ()
4. a- Do you have a car? ()
b- Have you got a car? ()
5. a- Give it me. ()
b- Give it two me. ()
6. 6:10 the time is ()

- a- Ten minutes past six. ()
- b- Ten minutes past six. ()
- 7. a-They are here, aren't they? ()
- b- They are here, are they? ()
- 8. a-Don't let us argue. ()
- b- Let us don't argue. ()
- 9. a- At the week end. ()
- b- On the week end. ()
- 10. a- please write to me soon. ()
- b- Please write me soon. ()

Results:

2- **Table (4 - 2): results of question (2)**

The word	Experimental group		Control group	
	American Choices	British choices	American choices	British choices
1	3	97	8	92
2	2	98	12	88
3	6	94	3	97
4	14	86	20	80
5	-	100	4	96
6	-	100	2	98
7	3	97	4	96
8	12	88	21	79
9	8	92	14	86
10	10	90	8	92

Table (4 - 2) above shows the students' attitudes towards American and British grammar. It is clear from the figures that the number of students who selected the British expressions - which involve grammatical rules - is more than those who selected the American expressions.

Students' responses in this question obviously tend to be more positive towards British English more than towards American English. It is clear that students' British choices are much more greater than their American choices, this means that Sudanese English language learner is not familiar with American English (particularly American grammar rules). This will be more proved when looking at their justifications for their reasons.

- 65% stated that their British choices were correct and that the American ones were incorrect.
- 25% said that their selections were similar with the grammatical rules which they had been already taught.
- 10% said that they had chosen the expressions with which they were already familiar.

For some expressions however, all the students preferred the British choices and said that their choices were the correct ones as in expressions number (5) and (6).

Question (3) concerning vocabulary differences between the two varieties , was the last question in the test, it was designed to measure the influence of American / British divergences on Sudanese secondary school students . The students were asked to identify their favourite English equivalents for the twenty Arabic items given, and to clarify the reasons for their options. The results are in the following table.

Question three: Vocabulary

Underline the English equivalent (the word with the same meaning) for the following Arabic items.

1- مصعد كهربائي

a- Lift

b- elevator

2- علبة

a- tin

b- can

3- مجنون

a- crazy

b- mad

4- فصل الخريف

a - autumn

b- fall

5- مريض

a- sick

b- ill

6- فرن

a- stove

b- cooker

7- لوري

a- truck

b- lorry

8- دكان

a - store

b- shop

9- صيدلية

a- drugstore

b- chemist's

10- سيارة

a- auto

b- car

11- محامي

a - lawyer

b- solicitor

12- بريد / بوستة

a- mail	b- post
13- مرآة	
a- mirror	b- glass
14- فيلم	
a - movie	b- film
15- سينما	
a- movie theater	b- cinema
16- كرة القدم	
a- Soccer	b- football
17- بخيل	
a- stingy	b- mean
18- قطن	
a- thread	b- cotton
19- أسبوعين	
a- two weeks	b- fortnight
20- صفر	
a- zero	b- nil

Results

Table (4 - 3): results of question (3)

The word	Experimental group		Control group	
	American Choices	British choices	American choices	British choices
1	11	89	13	87
2	29	71	30	70
3	37	63	33	67
4	-	100	1	99
5	44	56	36	64
6	21	79	17	83
7		100	6	94
8	3	97	25	75
9	21	79	25	75
10	6	94	4	96
11	9	91		100
12	8	92	12	88
13	44	56	49	51
14	18	82	21	79
15	4	96	7	93
16	11	89	8	92
17	10	90	11	89
18	3	97	4	96
19	97	3	97	3
20	68	32	71	29

By looking at the figures above, it could be noticed that the numbers of students who preferred the British choices are far more than those who chose the American ones. This is true for both the experimental and control groups. What does that mean? It clearly means that students are more aware of the British vocabulary than the American vocabulary, and that they consider the British items to be correct words that have the same meaning of the Arabic items given .Their justifications

may confirm this. However, for some certain items, students seemed to put on American English side as in words number (19) and (20) where they tended to choose the American words to be the correct equivalents. This may be due to the existence of some American items in the prior Sudanese English language syllabuses as it was formerly mentioned.

For some items however, students choices were divided almost equally e. g words number (5) and (13). This may indicate the fact that American English is applied in Sudan in some ways - although not widely spread - it is more obvious in

the level of spelling and vocabulary and with those who learnt English language sometime earlier.

So, American English may be difficult and cause some kind of confusion and misunderstanding for those who use English as a foreign or a second language. We can make sure of this if we check the reasons by which students has justified their options:

- 83% stated that their British selections were the correct English equivalents for the Arabic items given.
- 15% said that their British choices were familiar and well known to them.
- 2% chose the British choices because they had the same pronunciation as the Arabic words given as in film and lorry.

The researchers gave the same test to the same sample (experimental and control) again to make sure of the reliability of the test and that the test was suitable for the sample. The choices of re-test are shown in the following three tables ; question (1) which concerned with the influence of the spelling difference between American and British English on Sudanese secondary school students , question (2) which confined to the influence of the grammatical differences , and question (3) which concentrated on the vocabulary difference.

CONCLUSION

The present study is intended to investigate the differences between American and British English (the two main varieties of English language) in three levels of language, that is to say levels of semantics (meaning of the words and phrases), syntax (grammar rules) and phonology (pronunciation).

All the findings and results obtained by the researchers at the end of the investigations, supported the research hypothesizes and assumptions, and they answered the study questions.

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