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The problem of mixing phonological and structural differences between American English and British English to support language perfection at secondary schools student in sheikan locality

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Abstract

The study investigates the attitudes of teachers of English language at secondary schools in Sheikan locality towards the British or American English in the Sudanese syllabus. The study aimed at tracing the phonological and structural differences between the two varieties to support language perfection. It also aimed to find out whether these varieties are reflected in the Sudanese syllabus. The study hypothesized that mixing American and British English in educational institutions hinders developing a linguistic competence. The study has been conducted during (2022 – 2024) in University of Kordofan. The descriptive Analytical approach has been followed, for the data collection and analysis; the tool was a questionnaire. The sample of the study was (30 out of 120) English language teachers and university professors. For the validity and reliability, Pearson (r) and the standard deviation were used. Varieties of English occur in the Sudanese syllable because English is spoken in different parts of the world differently, all respondents agreed, the main varieties of English language in the Sudanese syllable are British and American 70.00% of respondents agreed, 30.00% were disagreed. 86.70% of respondents agreed that the Received Pronunciation (RP) is suitable for the comparison between varieties of spoken English Worldwide, 10.00% were disagreed, and 03.30% were not sure. 33.3% were agreed that mixture of British English and American English threatens English Language Learning, 53.40% were disagreed and 13.30% were not sure. 56.70% of respondents were agreed that confusion and misunderstanding is created due to the use of British English and American English, 40.00% were disagreed and 03.30% were not sure. The Study recommended; native speakers are important in the field of teaching English. Teachers and learners should trace one English variety in the same context. Teachers should be trained to strict on one variety of English. Courses, seminars and workshops in the varieties of English for English language teachers' good opportunity to refresh the linguistic knowledge.

Key term: Phonological structure, British English – American English – semantic structure – international language.

Introduction

English as universal and international language has its own variations; Varieties occur because English is spoken in different parts of the world through colonialism, territorial expansion, urbanization and close cultural contact. Therefore English shows changes among native speakers. Among the main varieties of English language are the British English and the American English. Both are variants of the English language more similarly rather than different, especially scientific English. While there are certainly many more varieties of English language such as Australian English, Indian English, Canadian English, etc..., American English and British English are the two varieties that are

taught in most ELT/EFL programs in Sudan. However, there are certain references in use. The most important rule of thumb is to be consistent in usage. Careful attention is paid to Received Pronunciation (RP) which considered as basis for comparison between varieties of spoken English. On the other hand, American English, in the US, is used with careful attention paid to General American English (GA).

American English has acquired its international significance when US assumed a more global role and political, economic, and technological development promoting US influence worldwide.

People consider American English asserts dominant influence on 'World English' or British English largely due to: American native



population, wealth, magnitude of higher education, publishing industry, mass media and technology, influence of language on culture and habits, and international political and economic position of US. Differences of variety, dialect, accent, register, and style in British English differ from those of American English in some ways. If those differences are not well understood, the English users in Sudan interpret English incorrectly in some aspects. Among the principle differences between British and American English are vocabulary, spelling, number, business letter, grammar, and pronunciation. Besides some other important linguistic features that would be covered investigating this study. The problem also happens when an author writes a book whether scientific or educational in which diction is crucial. Therefore the English users must learn and apply the vocabulary differences. The grammatical rules of British English differ from the American ones in some aspects.

As the learners of English do not separate the Grammatical Differences between British and American English, it would be difficult to write or to speak English grammatically as demanded. Furthermore, teachers' pay little attention to those differences resulting in difficulties for the learners to differentiate them in a context so as to use the English language appropriately. There are many problems on account of the alternative use of both American and British English in the same stretch. The most important thing to remember is to be consistent and sticky, with the kind of English that is to be used in teaching, handling, presentation and lectures delivering in theoretical and methodological dimensions.

Phonological and Structural Differences of American and British English.

English has developed as a global language with diverse regional varieties, the two most influential being British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). The problem of mixing phonological and structural differences between these varieties presents a serious challenge for learners seeking language perfection, especially at the secondary school level in multilingual contexts such as Sheikan locality. According to Crystal (2003:41) stated that, the variation between British and American English occurs at several linguistic levels, including pronunciation, grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. Such differences often confuse learners who are exposed to both varieties through teachers, textbooks, and media. Phonological variation is one of the most noticeable areas of difference. Roach (2009:77) stated that, British English tends to preserve certain vowel distinctions that are often neutralized in American English. For instance, the word "hot" is pronounced with a more open vowel sound /ɒ/ in British English, whereas American speakers use the back vowel /ɑ:/. Similarly, "schedule" is pronounced /'ʃedju:l/ in British English and /'skedʒu:l/ in American English. These inconsistencies create confusion among students who may imitate mixed forms unconsciously, leading to unstable pronunciation patterns that hinder their oral proficiency. Gimson (2014:112) stated that, accurate pronunciation is fundamental to intelligibility, and consistent phonological modeling in schools is essential for maintaining language clarity.

Structurally, learners also face difficulties due to differences in grammatical usage between the two varieties. For example, Quirk and Greenbaum (1985:132) stated that, American English prefers the past simple form ("I just ate") where British English often uses the present perfect ("I have just eaten"). Moreover, collective nouns such as "team" or "government" are treated as singular in American English but can be plural in British usage. These structural variations become problematic when secondary school students mix both systems, producing hybrid grammatical constructions that deviate from standard usage.

The influence of global media and digital communication has intensified this problem. Trudgill and Hannah (2013:88) stated that, exposure to American television, movies, and online content causes learners to adopt American spelling and expressions such as "color" instead of "colour", and "center" instead of "centre." However, local curricula and examinations in Sudan, including Sheikan locality, are largely based on British English standards. Consequently, students who adopt American forms may lose marks in written tests, leading to reduced academic performance. Jenkins (2007:54) stated that, inconsistency in exposure and instruction results in what she called "linguistic insecurity," where learners feel uncertain about which form of English is correct. In addition, teacher inconsistency is a contributing factor. Many English teachers in secondary schools are themselves products of mixed-language exposure. As a result, they unconsciously switch between British and American forms in the classroom. Swan and Smith (2001:65) stated that, teachers play a crucial role in stabilizing learners' linguistic models; inconsistency in instruction can lead to permanent confusion. Therefore, there is an urgent need for training programs that sensitize teachers to maintain uniform standards in pronunciation and grammar. To support language perfection, the solution does not lie in promoting one variety over the other but in developing awareness of both. Learners should be explicitly taught the key phonological and structural distinctions so that they can recognize and apply them appropriately. As Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt (2012:103) stated that, conscious exposure to language variation enables learners to achieve flexibility without losing accuracy. Thus, educational policy in Sheikan locality should encourage systematic pronunciation instruction, comparative grammar practice, and consistent teacher modeling. Only through guided exposure and correction can bilingual learners reach high levels of linguistic competence and language perfection.

Statement of the problem

The study is tackling down the problem of confusion and misunderstanding English language and the effects of mixing American English and British's within secondary schools in Sheikan locality.

The objective of the study

The study aimed at tracing the phonological and structural differences between the two varieties to support language perfection. It also aimed to find out whether these varieties are reflected in the Sudanese syllabus.

Material and Methods

The study followed descriptive analytical approach, data were collected through different sources including primary such as a questionnaire and secondary including references, library book and the internet. Data were analyzed through SPSS – Statistical package for social science.

Data analysis and Discussion

Table (1) Varieties of English occur in the Sudanese syllable because English is spoken in different parts of the world differently.

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Agree	30	100%
Disagree	-	-
Not Sure	-	-
Total	30	100.0

In table (1) all respondents (100%) agreed that Variety occurs because English is spoken in different parts of the world in different ways as a result of the mother tongue influence and other factors.

Table (2) the main varieties of English language in the Sudanese syllable are British and American.

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Agree	21	70%
Disagree	9	30%
Not Sure	-	-
Total	30	100.0

In table (2) (70%) of the respondents agreed that, in Sudan the main varieties of English language are British and American, (30%) of English language learners disagreed. This clarifies that, the essential varieties of English language were British and American.

Table (3) Received Pronunciation (RP) is suitable for the comparison between Varieties of spoken English Worldwide.

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Agree	26	86.7%
Disagree	1	3.3%
Not Sure	3	10%
Total	30	100.0

In table (3) shows that the (86.00%) of respondents agreed that, Received Pronunciation (RP) is the base for comparison between all the varieties of spoken English Worldwide, (10.00%) of English language learners disagreed and (3.30%) were not sure. From the

results it is clear that English learners and practitioners believe that RP English is Number one and prior to the other English's.

Table (4) Mixture of British English and American English threatens English Language Learning

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Agree	10	33.3%
Disagree	4	13.3%
Not Sure	16	53.4%
Total	30	100.0

In table (4) (33%) of respondents agreed, Mixture of the two versions (British English and American English) endangers English Language Learning process, (13 %) of English language learners disagreed about that, and (53%) of them were not sure. This means teachers should be aware when selecting the variety they should use.

Conclusions and Results

1. Mixing British and American English in the writing process results in poor text which is not British neither American. One needs to be accurate in the use of the variety suitable for the context according to the audiences
2. Mixture of the two versions British English and American English endangers English Language Learning process. This means teachers should be aware when selecting the variety they should use.

Recommendations

1. Native speakers are important in the field of teaching English.
2. Teachers and learners should trace one English variety in the same context.
3. Teachers should be trained to strict on one variety of English.
4. Courses, seminars and workshops in the varieties of English for English language teachers' good opportunity to refresh the linguistic knowledge.

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