

AMERICAN ENGLISH Vs. BRITISH ENGLISH

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The present study, using a totally direct method, investigates, within the framework of sociolinguistics and foreign language teaching in Iran, whether teachers of English prefer British or American variety of English language, and whether their preference corresponds to their performance on a related test. Thirty Iranian English language teachers participated in this study voluntarily. A 20-item test was administered. The results indicated that 73.3% of the teachers preferred American English to British English, while correct performance rate was 63.4% to 59.4%. Thus, it can be inferred, even if most of the teachers prefer one variety to the other; they are not as proficient as it is required.

Languages show a great deal of variation. A recognition of variation implies that we must recognize that a language is not just some kind of abstract object to study but some thing that people use (Wardhaugh, 1986). English as an international language recognizes the existence of varieties of English (i.e., British, American, Indian, Australian, ...) which may be taught/learnt in different societies. There are grammatical, lexical, phonological, and spelling differences between British and American English. "Linguists agree and insist that all languages and all varieties of particular languages are equal" (Wardhaugh, 1984) whereas many people believe that some languages or varieties are better than the others.

In the past the selection of a standard or norm in teaching a foreign language, tending to be in absolute terms, was based on unquestioned tradition and was prejudiced for or against different varieties (Stern, 1983). Some insisted on teaching British English while rejecting American English as less pure. The variety of language chosen to be taught or learnt must be suitable for the learner to facilitate communication. Language teacher must be aware of distinctions in communicative situations. He faces the problem of many social and regional variations of language use when he asks himself whether to teach a language as it is spoken or whether he should confine his teaching to an idealized standard variety. "Language in social context is closer to real life, but variations make-the teaching-learning task more complex" (Stern, 1983).

"Individuals in bi-and multilingual communities make language choices on the basis of both linguistic and social environments" (Preston, 1989). The social significance of linguistic forms or linguistic implications of social facts have not been sufficiently taken into consideration in text books until recently, nor have they played a significant role in the language teacher's own education to be adequately represented in language teaching. Language pedagogy is now taking a more positive view, than it did in the past, of existence of language varieties, dialects, and sociolects, within a speech community. Fasold (1984) has stated that "If everyone in the group spoke exactly the same as everyone else in the group, there would be no

such things as the sociolinguistics of society" (p. 1). Wardhaugh (1984) has further asserted, "It seems fairly well-established that the code you choose does have important consequences for how you are viewed by others" (p.108).

Apparently many speakers are not aware that they have used one particular variety of a language rather than another or sometimes even they have switched languages. Rivers in her book on teaching has said, "Persons who are not native speakers of a language can easily cause offense and give wrong impressions by mixing elements from several registers in speech and writing" (1981, p.85). The speech community of teachers of English as a foreign language in our country is an impossibly difficult concept to define. However, according to Beeman (1986), "The basic dimensions of Iranian society are not terribly complex in a structural sense, but they provide for a rich play of linguistic expression" (p.10).

Attitude studies conducted in education have been of two types: 1) language attitudes of teachers, and 2) language attitudes of foreign language learners. "Attitude research sheds light on the status of language varieties as indicators of group identity, but not always in the most straight forward way" (Fasold, 1984). Hearers of a language respond to the personal, ethnic, national, gender, class, role, age and other identities of speakers. Such responses are language attitudes, and there is a considerable history research and interest in this area, particularly among social psychologists (Preston, 1989). Evidence suggests that attitudes about language affect second language learning (Lambert et al., 1968 in Fasold, 1984).

Wardhaugh (1986) has made special references to quantification in discussion of linguistic variables and has written that:

Quantification is useful in showing what kinds of behavior you may expect to find among groups of people and trends in that behavior across various dimensions such as time, space, sex, age, and social class. But any resulting claims are claims about the behavior you can expect of groups, or of sub-groups. In that respect, they are statements about an 'idealized typical member', whoever he or she might be. In actual fact, individuals are never 'typical', and certainly their behavior is never 'ideal' by almost and criterion. (p. 363)

Method

Subjects: The Subjects were 30 English teachers (18 males and 12 females) in Kerman and Isfahan. They participated in the study voluntarily.

Materials and Design: The test consisted of twenty items (6 grammar, 6 lexical, and 8 spelling) with two choices (British and American varieties). The items were mixed and randomly ordered from 1 to 20 (see Appendix).

Procedure: The subjects were instructed to answer the test according to their preference, i.e., British or American English variety.

Results

Preference: The preference results revealed that twenty-two subjects (73.3%) preferred American variety to that of British (Eight subjects and 26.7%). Further analysis of the data indicated that out of 18 male-subjects, 13 (72.2%) preferred

American to British (5, 27.8%), and for 12 female-subjects, the results were 9 (75%) to 3 (25%).

Performance: The subjects who preferred American English performed better on the test with a mean of 12.682) and 63.4% correct items, comparing to that of the other group with a mean of (11.875) and 59.4% correct items (see Appendix).

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary results of this study demonstrate that most English language teachers prefer American variety to British variety, and this preference is not influenced by sex or age. However, it seems that younger teachers have more tendencies towards American variety which needs to be further studied in respect with other social and international factors.

The second part of the results demonstrates that it seems English language teachers are in a state of flux regarding their knowledge of English and consequently its varieties: First, the text books which they teach at schools or institutes are not systematically British or American variety- oriented, but they are somehow mixed. Secondly, normal changes in language use and cultural differences may be considered as another reason. Finally, we may state that we are moving towards another variety of English and that of Iranian English which is not oriented towards any of the present dominating varieties and is a specific variety of its own, which needs more manipulation, exploration, and research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I. The Test

No. 55	Age.	Sex	Preference	American	British
1.	John	(a. just	b. has just)	left his office.	
2.	Would you like some	(a. biscuits	b. cookies)?		
3.	This country lacks an effective party of the (A. centre	b. center).		
4.	(a. Do you have	b. Have you got)	any idea?		
5.	Carl keeps them in the (a. cupboard	b. closet).		
6.	They stood in silence as a mark of (a. honour	b. honor).		
7.	Did you (a. stay	b. stay at)	home yesterday?	
8.	Use the (a. subway	b. underpass)	to cross the road.	
18.	Antibodies are the body's (a. defense	b. defence)	against infection.	
19.	Are you paying in cash or by (a. check	b. cheque)?		
20.	I need a pencil sharpener and a/an (a. rubber	b. eraser).		

