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BRITISH OR AMERICAN ENGLISH IN SERBIA, OR BOTH?

It is the fact that English can well be regarded the *lingua franca* of the world that gathers linguists and other experts related to language learning and teaching to discuss the issue. Since the language, by its nature, is liable to modifications and changes due to numerous factors, there appears to be mutual interrelations and overlaps of not only different languages but also varieties within a single language.

The two most prominent varieties of English, ie American and British, influence other languages but one another as well. That is the reason why the authors of this work conducted research in Serbia to determine how these changes affect foreign learners themselves. Consequently, we obtained some inevitable results, such as the fact that the highest percentage of the examined participants 'mix' the varieties, but also some unexpected ones, such as those that there was quite a discrepancy between teachers' view on the variety they use and the actual 'outcome' in the assessment sheet. Finally, we will conclude that this occurrence seems natural if we take into account an enormous impact of the media in today's *information society*, but also draw attention to the need of being consistent in using one specific variety.

Key words: foreign language, 'mix' of varieties, British English, American English.

1. Introduction

The language, being the most influential factor in the civilised world, can either prompt or prevent communication. English, as one of most frequently used modern languages, in all its varieties and dialects, seems to enable people throughout the world to overcome the language barrier.

Moreover, there is not one sphere of life not influenced by the language. It can help us or unable us to understand each other. At the same time, the language changes, as does the society. In the mid-nineteenth century it was even foreseen that in a hundred years' time the British and Americans would not be able to understand each other. (Crystal 1987:

1 - 5) That is the reason why we conducted research in order to analyse the *preferred* variety in Serbia, not to declare one of them as superior, but to present the present state of affairs, taking into account some potential factors/reasons of such a *preference*.

Here, we will conclude which of the two most widespread and influential varieties, ie British or American, is more used in Serbia, and try to determine the underlying reasons for the occurrence. In the first part we will deal with the subjective point of view of the examinees and consequently compare them with the 'reality', with an emphasis on the situations when the examinees actually *switch* to another variety, so as to provide a better insight into the understanding of the language and mutual changes, impacts and/or overlaps of British and American.

2. *Method*

The main subject/aim(s) of the conducted research was, first of all, to determine which variety of English is more frequently used in Serbia. This task was set up to make a distinction between the genuine use of a certain variety, as well as the personal/subjective opinion on using it. In addition, we tried to establish predominant reasons why a particular variety is more used and whether the subjective opinions of the examinees actually correspond to the real occurrences identified in the research.

2.1. *Sample*

The sample consisted of the experimental and control group of 160 examinees in total.

On the one hand, the experimental group included 130 examinees from four different towns in Serbia (Belgrade, Niš, Kragujevac and Zrenjanin) and was consequently divided into three categories, namely:

a) Ts/English teachers (ie those teaching in *Grammar Schools*- 30 examinees),

b) Ss/teenagers (ie those attending a *Grammar School*, with a high level of English- 50 examinees),

c) Os/Others/adults (ie those who have not attended either *Philology Grammar School*, course: *Living Languages* or *Faculty of Philology*, Department: *English Language and Literature*, but use English in their private or professional life - 50 examinees).

The reason for this classification is the fact that groups under a) and b) can be considered representatives of 'more serious' English language 'consumers'. However, the group under c) is also important since they provide a useful balance to the previous two, in order to make an appro-

priate balance between formal and informal education in the use of the English language.

On the other hand, the control group included 30 examinees from both British and American speaking areas, with no degree in English language. The reason for this kind of sampling was to confirm the validity of the assessment sheet and of the issue of a precise distinction between the varieties, ie whether native speakers themselves on certain occasions mix BE and AE, no matter the reasons (eg loan words, assimilation, etc).

2.2. *Organisation/Plan of the Research*

The research was carried out within a month in the abovementioned towns. The experimental group was tasked with filling in the questionnaire and assessment sheet. The questionnaire included the category of the examinee, the variety to choose (BE, AM, 'Mix'), reasons for the choice, as well as the various factors which may have resulted in the variety they use (media, education, reference books, social environment). As far as the assessment sheet is concerned, it consisted of 30 questions (both open and cloze) concerning the grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, situational language, etc. As a standard for distinguishing the two varieties, RP and GA were used as the parameters.

2.3. *Hypotheses*

We assumed that American English and 'Mix' are more frequently used in all three categories of the experimental group. Even those who would state that they use British English, would actually use the 'mixture' of the varieties. We also anticipated that the predominant factor is the issue of globalisation/the media with prevailing American contents.

3. *Results*

In analysing the gathered data, **descriptive statistics method** ('**cross-tabs**') for the questionnaire and qualitative analysis for the assessment sheet were implemented. Only the most significant data/results will be presented in the tables below.

		VARIETY		'TEST' SCORE				REASONS			
		BE		AE		Mixed		easier	like it better	people around	other reasons
English teachers	%	60,0%	26,7%	10,0%	/	30,0%	73,3%	/	46,7%	3,3%	50,0%
Grammar school students	%	12,0%	/	16,0%	4,0%	72,0%	96,0%	22,0%	34,0%	26,0%	18,4%
Others	%	20,0%	/	16,0%	4,0%	64,0%	96,0%	28,0%	18,0%	20,0%	33,3%
Total	%	26,2%	6,2%	14,6%	3,1%	59,2%	90,8%	19,2%	30,8%	18,5%	31,5%

Table 1

Almost 60% of the examinees stated that they ‘mix’ the two varieties, and the total percentage of the examinees which actually ‘mix’ them is 90,8%. However, there are certain differences among examined categories, namely 60% of Ts chose BE as the variety they would most frequently use, whereas only 26,7% use it according to the assessment sheet, in contrast to the other two categories which chose ‘Mix’ (Ss: 72%, Os: 64%), which matches to a significant extent the analysed data (Ss: 96%, Os: 96%). An interesting finding is that almost through all categories AE has the least percentage of all.

When giving reasons why they use a particular variety, most examinees stated that *they like it better* (30,8%), and *other reasons* (31,5%). Quite important was the percentage of Ss who also recognised the influence of *people around them* as a significant factor of their choice, whereas Os added that *it is easier* to use the chosen variety.

		SWITCH	
		yes	no
Teachers	%	73,3%	26,7%
Students	%	44,0%	56,0%
Others	%	52,0%	48,0%
Total	%	53,8%	46,2%

Table 2

When asked whether they sometimes ‘switch’ to another variety, different from the one they stated, notable 73,3% of Ts chose *Yes*, which correlates with the actual percentage of those who use *Mix* (in the final score). Other two categories have balanced answers, which additionally supports the assessment sheet results in these two categories. The most frequent reason for a *switch* was *the social environment* of the examinees.

		EDUCATION			MEDIA			ENVIRONMENT		
		BE	AE	both	BE	AE	both	BE	AE	both
Ts	%	40,0%	/	60,0%	10,0%	23,3%	66,7%	3,3%	40,0%	56,7%
Ss	%	66,0%	2,0%	32,0%	/	62,0%	38,0%	2,0%	52,0%	46,0%
Os	%	68,0%	2,0%	30,0%	12,0%	52,0%	36,0%	8,0%	50,0%	42,0%
Total	%	60,8%	1,5%	37,7%	6,9%	49,2%	43,8%	4,6%	48,5%	46,9%

Table 3

The gathered data showed that the greatest number of the examinees were taught in BE (60,8%), whereas the rest of them were taught in both (37,7%), and AE (surprising 1,5%). As for the reference books, probably due to the fact that they are closely linked to education, the results are similar. The greatest number of the examinees using BE ones includes Ss (74%) and Ts (53,3%), who also, together with Os, frequently use both. In contrast to education, as a probable result of general globalisation, AE was predominant when it comes to the media, namely Ss with 62% and Os with 52%, whereas Ts considered to use the media in both varieties (66,7%).

Finally, as one of the most significant factors of everyday usage of a foreign language, there is the social environment, ie people around us. Expectedly, the results show almost equal distribution between AE (48,5%) and *both* (46,9%).

The **qualitative analysis** was carried out for the assessment-sheet part, with British English as the standard. The examinees were consequently divided into the three categories, ie BE, AM and Mix, based on their final score under the following *rating scale*: from 1 to 7 'points': AM, 8 – 22: Mix and 23 – 30: BE. Further analysis was performed by analysing frequencies/counts in different language fields (spelling, situational language, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, etc) and it resulted in the following observations:

- 'British English group' (those belonging to BE according to the abovementioned scale) do not deviate from the *standard* at all in *spelling*, and expectedly, they deviate most in *vocabulary*, whereas *grammar* takes the second place, which can be regarded quite unusual;

- 'American group' stay within their variety most firmly when it comes to *vocabulary* and they also show a strong inclination in *grammar*, *situational language* and *pronunciation*;

- 'Mix group' also has a great tendency towards AM in *vocabulary*, and quite a strong inclination in *pronunciation* and *situational language*. On the other hand, their *spelling* rather inclines to BE.

Apart from the experimental group, the control group, ie native speakers of English, were also 'assessed' with the assessment sheet. The

results show that they all stay within their categories with slight irrelevant statistical deviations.

4. Discussion

The hypotheses of the research are to a great extent confirmed by the results. Nevertheless, apart from expected results, there were some quite intriguing findings.

First of all, if we look into the subjective view of the examinees of the used variety, on the one hand, and the actual outcome, ie their results in the assessment sheet, on the other, we can make the following observations:

- it seems, at first glance, that Ss and Os are more aware of the fact that they 'mix' the two varieties. Most probably, the reasons for such a match are due to the *central tendency fault*, ie the fact that people usually tend to choose neutral answers when set to choose between two extremes. Moreover, there is also a strong possibility that the examinees belonging to these two groups, ie students and others, cannot really make clear distinctions between the two varieties, and therefore chose 'golden mean' in order to be on the safe side;

- the results of Ts, however, are quite unexpected. It appears that none of the examined participants within this group use AM, whereas most of them 'mix'.

Secondly, if we further go into the reasons for choosing certain variety and its correlation with the external factors ('imposed' by the media/education in general/social environment) which influence the use of a foreign language, we may conclude that the personal reasons are most probably the result of these factors. Furthermore, there are two opposite tendencies among factors influencing the choice of a particular variety. On the one hand, there is formal education, and on the other, the media and social environment which, in this context, by itself is pretty much influenced by the media. According to the examinees, BE is most frequently used in formal education and reference books (or both), whereas AM, and to some extent *both*, is most frequent in the media (the Internet, music, films, etc). Additionally, the results of the qualitative analysis match the data to a great extent: the examinees deviated from the *standard* least in respect to *spelling*, whereas they deviated most in terms of *vocabulary*. Unexpectedly, *grammar* did not prove completely to incline to the *standard*, which may have resulted from the fact that Ts themselves use both varieties. Bearing in mind these opposite tendencies, it seems natural that so great a number of the examinees 'mix' the varieties.

To conclude, both varieties seem to be used in different areas of life

no matter in what form. According to Algeo 'both Americans and the British innovate in English pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar' (Algeo 1998: 182). Thus, we assume that further changes in the development of these occurrences in the English language in Serbia will heavily depend on current and future socio-political trends in our country (ie the education system and culture/media), but also on external factors, ie American and/or British mission/projects on 'language distribution', since the politics and economy greatly affect the number of people using the language of a certain country (Crystal 1987: 5), together with strategies and prominence of publishers and language/culture institutions which promote the language (Kretzschmar: 2002) .

5. Conclusion

The language is characterised by creativity and structural complexity which cannot be found in natural communication behaviour of other species. (Crystal 1987: 395). Thus, it is natural that different languages/varieties have mutual effects on one another. French, for example, greatly influenced English in the past, whereas nowadays there seems to be a growing tendency in the opposite direction. In the same way, different varieties may affect one another in various ways, due to geographical, historical, cultural and other trends. According to Algeo the colonist, on the one hand, and the English speakers in England, on the other, both were changing the language in their own, different ways (Algeo 1998: 179). Hence, it appears that those influences greatly affect learners of a foreign language as well.

Although Americans and the British do understand each other still, contrary to some past predictions, it is evident that there are essential differences between the two. In terms of a great complexity of the issue, it is quite natural that foreign language learners have difficulties in distinguishing them and 'sticking' to a particular one.

Nonetheless, we believe that those differences are quite important since, as it was already mentioned, the language can lead to some more or less serious misunderstandings. That is the reason why we believe that all foreign language learners should be tolerant to different varieties, but at the same time, try to choose a certain variety and consequently be consistent in using it.

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БРИТАНСКИ ИЛИ АМЕРИЧКИ ЕНГЛЕСКИ У СРБИЈИ, ИЛИ И ЈЕДАН И ДРУГИ?

Резиме

Чињеница да се енглески може окарактерисати као *lingua franca* међународне комуникације подстиче лингвисте као и остале језичке стручњаке да се баве овом тематиком. С обзиром на то да је језик, по својој природи, подложен модификацијама и променама из различитих разлога, стиче се утисак да су међусобне интеррелације и преклапања присутна не само код различитих језика, већ и варијетета унутар једног истог језика. Два најзаступљенија варијетета енглеског језика, тј. амерички и британски, утичу не само на остале језике већ и међусобно један на други. Из тог разлога су аутори овог рада спровели истраживање у Србији како би установили како ове разлике утичу на оне који уче енглески као страни језик. Као резултат, добили смо неке очекиване податке, као што је чињеница да највећи број наших испитаника „меша“ варијетете, али и неке неочекиване, попут оних да постоји велики несклад између мишљења професора који варијетет користе и крајњег „исхода“ на тесту. Најзад, закључићемо да је ова појава природна уколико узмемо у обзир огроман утицај медија у данашњем *информационом друштву*, али и нагласити неопходност да се остане доследан при коришћењу једног одређеног варијетета.