

Јелена В. Грубор, Дарко В. Хинић
Друѓа крађујевачка гимназија, Крађујевац
Државни универзитет у Новом Пазару, Нови Пазар

PRONUNCIATION TENDENCIES TOWARDS BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH IN EFL TEACHERS IN SERBIA: ARE TEACHERS IMMUNE TO GLOBAL INFLUENCES?

The way we pronounce things has always been a distinguishing mark in terms of social, geographical, historical and cultural characteristics of a certain accent. The authors of this paper have conducted research in order to determine which variety, in terms of pronunciation, is most frequently used in Serbia. The examined group included 50 English language teachers from different parts of Serbia, age ($M=35.24$, $SD=6.06$), mainly female, who were tasked with a questionnaire and assessment sheet, specifically designed for this occasion. In analysing the gathered data, descriptive statistics, χ^2 and t- test were applied, as well as qualitative analysis. To conclude, the results gathered have shown that the formed groups, according to the assessment sheet results, tend to stay within the chosen variety, with the Mix group having great tendency towards American English. Moreover, there is a significant difference between the participants' subjective view and the assessment sheet results (BrE: $p<.05$; AmE: $p<.01$). This difference has appeared dependent on the bivalent influence (BrE: education; AmE: the media).

Keywords: American English (AmE), British English (BrE), EFL teachers, pronunciation tendencies.

1. Introduction

The spread of English as an international language may as well be regarded just as another consequence of *globalisation* (Jenkins 2003; Dor 2004; Salverda 2002; Yano 2001). It is the trend of ever-increasing globalisation that makes native speakers of a language start accepting or assimilating certain words or phrases, or even accents, mainly untypical of their language/ variety (*Hutchinson Encyclopedia* 2008; Wells 2000). The matter is getting even more complicated if we take into consideration the process of learning or acquiring a foreign language (cf. *The English*

Today debate in Acar 2007: 42-43; Yýldýrým, & Okan, 2007), with particular regard to the *information society* that we live in. It appears that not one person can resist these overall changes, mutual influences and growing overlaps.

Since a language can both help and prevent us from understanding each other (Kristal 1995: 1), the authors of this survey tried to determine to which extent a better understanding or avoiding misunderstanding can lead foreign language speakers to alter their choice of the variety of English, as well as the underlying reasons for the occurrence. That is the reason why we have conducted an additional survey focusing on the matter of pronunciation only, so as to compare the gathered data with the results of the basic research (Grubor, Bjelogrić, Hinić 2008) aimed at determining which of the two varieties in general people in Serbia would most naturally use.

Finally, we will conclude in this work which of the two most widespread and influential varieties, i.e. British or American English, is more dominant in certain spheres of life in Serbia, and also present potential general pronunciation tendencies within the formed groups themselves, namely the British/ American group.

2. Method

The main subject/aim(s) of the conducted survey was, first of all, to determine general pronunciation tendencies in Serbia towards British and American English. This task was set up to make a distinction between the genuine use of a certain accent, as well as the personal opinion on using it. In addition, we tried to establish predominant reasons why a particular accent is more used and to what extent the subjective opinions of the participants actually tally with the real occurrences identified in the survey, as well as to compare the gathered data with the basic/ initial research results, which actually initiated this supplementary study.

We assumed that the results of the basic research (Grubor et al 2008) would correspond to a great extent with this survey. Furthermore, we presupposed that the participants' subjective point of view on using certain variety would be in quite a discrepancy with the results in the assessment sheet. We also anticipated that the predominant factors of these potential disparities are the issue of globalisation, on the one hand, and formal education, on the other.

2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of the experimental group of 50 EFL teachers in total, aged from 25 to 45 ($M=35.24$, $SD=6.06$), mainly female due to the fact that the majority of English teachers in Serbia are female. The sample was stratified by the five regions of Serbia (Vojvodina; city of Belgrade; Eastern, Western and Southern Serbia).

The reason for this kind of sampling lies in the fact that English teachers can be regarded as direct 'conveyors of knowledge' who, on their part, may affect all other groups (e.g. students and others included in the previous research). Moreover, teachers are more conscious of and therefore more fluent to tell the differences, and thus are probably the only group able to read phonetic transcription since the survey was carried out in written form.

2.2 Measures and Procedures

The research was conducted within a month in various towns of Serbia. The experimental group were tasked with filling in the questionnaire and assessment sheet, specifically designed for this occasion. The questionnaire included the variety to choose (BrE, AmE), reasons for the choice and a potential switch, as well as the external factors which may have influenced their choice and the actual outcome (media, education, social environment). As far as the assessment sheet is concerned, it consisted of an optimal number of questions, varied in type, due to the concentration span. These questions were primarily taken from the reference books (Gimson 1989, 2001; Hlebec 2004; Wells 1990, 1992, 1993) and consisted of lexical-incidental (e.g. *tomato*) and lexical-distributional differences (e.g. *contrasting vowel phonemes /ɑ:/ and /æ/*), and stressing, at the word level, the only prosodic characteristic used therein (e.g. *decade, address*). So in this respect we touched the matter of vowel quality, since the location of stress has implications for vowel quality (Well 1992: 88). As a standard for the varieties we used RP and GA. The standards will be defined, as Richards, Platt and Weber (1985: 271) have put it, as:

"The variety of a language which has the highest status in a community or nation and which is usually based on the speech and writing of educated speakers of the language.... A standard variety is generally: a) used in the news media and literature, b) described in dictionaries and grammars, c) taught in schools and taught to non-native speakers when they learn language as a foreign language".

3. Results

In analysing the gathered data, the SPSS 11.0 statistical programme was used, within which the following analyses were applied: descriptive statistics, χ^2 and t- test. Qualitative analysis was also implemented both for the questionnaire and the assessment sheet. Only the most significant data/ results will be presented in this work.

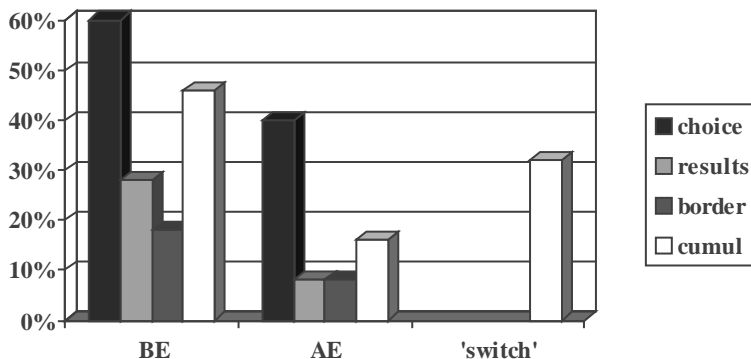


Diagram 1 The choice of variety and a potential switch

In the questionnaire, 60% of the participants stated that they would most naturally choose to speak BrE, whereas 28% of them stayed within the framework of the British English group (i.e. scored 16 and more points out of 20 in the assessment sheet). This time we included the border group, which accounted for 18% in this case. Therefore, we can conclude that 46 out of 60% of the British English group genuinely use the chosen variety ($\chi^2(1)=4,083$; $p=0,043$). In regard to comparison, 60% of examined teachers in the basic research, which included different language fields beside pronunciation, also stated that they choose BrE, however the difference to the actual test outcome was somewhat smaller ($\chi^2(1)=2,222$; $p=0,136$). As for the American group, 40% stated that they use AmE, and only 16% of them really use it according to the results, which is in quite a discrepancy with their subjective view ($\chi^2(1)=12,000$; $p=0,001$). As for the basic research results, we cannot hereby make any comparison due to the fact that the number of teachers who indicated that they choose AmE was significantly smaller since the great majority decided upon Mix variety.

In contrast to the basic research, the mix variety was not included due to the fact that the authors wanted to avoid the central tendency fault, i.e. the tendency to choose a neutral option over extremes in order

to be on the safe side. Furthermore, we wanted to find out where that 'mix' really 'goes'. However, we did include the question concerning the situations where our participant make a switch to the variety other than the one used, and the statistical data has shown that 32% of the participant in total switch to the other variety.

Most frequently stated reasons for a *switch* are as follows:

- 1) better understanding/ avoid misunderstanding when speaking to people who use a different variety;
- 2) when they explain differences between the two varieties to their students at school; and
- 3) when they talk to native speakers, held up as models of how one *should* speak.

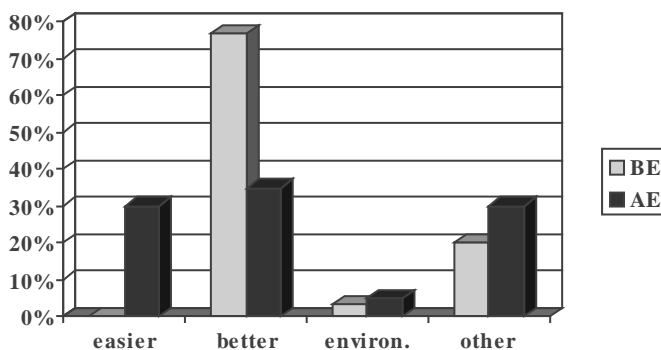


Diagram 2 Reasons for choosing a certain variety

When giving predominant reasons why they chose to speak a particular variety, not one person from the British and 30% of the American group stated that *they find it easier*; 77% of the British and 35% of the American group stated that *they like it better*, whereas the influence of the social environment seems to be insignificant according to our participants (3.3% of the BrE, and 5% of the AmE group). In the cumulative percentage of 50% of our participants, there are other reasons for choosing a certain variety.

Most frequently stated reasons are as presented below:

- 1) personal preference: *it sounds better, it is more melodic, it's more dynamic* etc;
- 2) external factors: they were taught that variety at school/ university, so they kept on using it;

- 3) exposure: they have been exposed to that variety more and had more opportunities to speak to the native speakers of that very variety (again modelling themselves upon native speakers);
- 4) external influences (e.g. *music, films*) and social environment (*people around them use it*).

As in the basic research, we wanted to look into the external influences on the participants' choice. The results of the basic research seem to tally with these results, with BrE dominance in the field of education and AmE in the social environment and the media (Diagram 3).

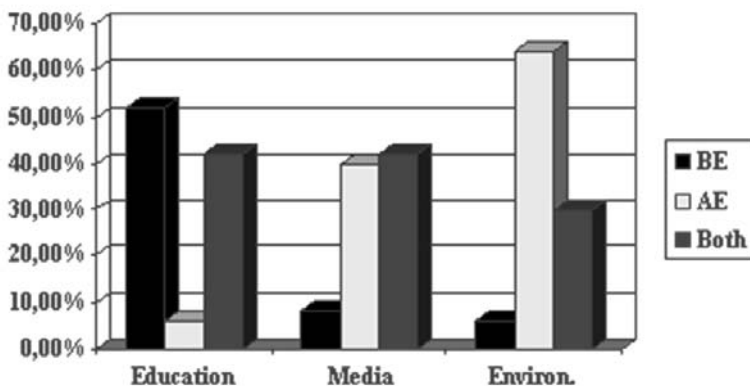


Diagram 3 The influence of external factors

In other words, 52% of our participants stated they had been taught BrE at school/ university (compared to 60.8% in total from the previous study), whereas 64% stated that people around them use AmE (compared to 48.5% from the basic research) and 40% most frequently use the media in AmE (compared to 49.2%).

Apart from the statistical data, we performed qualitative analysis of the assessment sheet itself, with an aim of determining general tendencies within the groups themselves, without further analysing the mix group.

To conclude, the gathered results have shown that the formed groups, according to the assessment sheet results, tend to stay within the chosen variety, namely the British group within BrE and the American within AmE, with the mix group having high tendencies towards AmE, which corresponds to the results from the previous research.

We will present some of the most frequent tendencies, within the groups themselves, i.e. provide concrete examples gathered, in Figure 1 below:

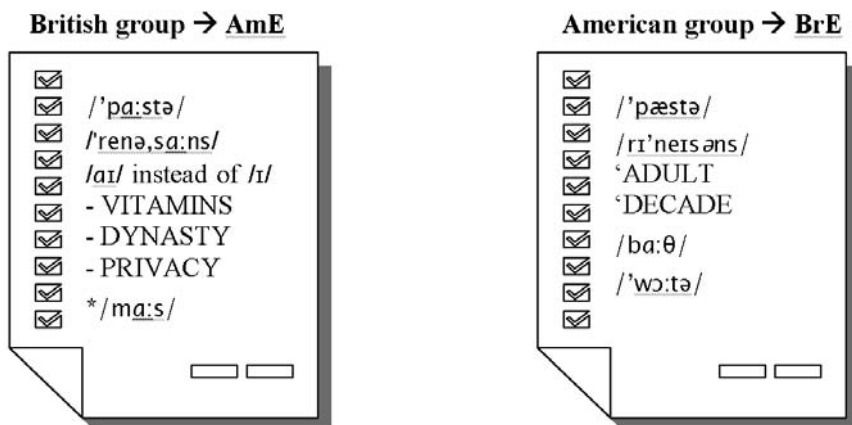


Figure 1 Some examples of dominant tendencies within the groups

It seems that our teachers tend to stay within the chosen variety to such an extent that they seem to overuse particular sounds primarily characteristic of a certain variety.

If we take the example of the contrasting vowel phonemes /ɑ:/ and /æ/, what can be noticed is that the British group tend to overuse 'long A', therefore they would choose /'pɑ:stə/ over /'pæstə/, and /'renə,sɑ:nz/ over /rɪ'neɪsənz/, even placing the sound where it does not exist, such as in the words */mɑ:s/ and */'pɑ:sɪndʒə/, with the similar tendencies within the American group but just in the opposite direction.

As for the 'split' in the words like *vitamins*, *dynasty* and *privacy*, we attribute the occurrence of /aɪ/ instead of /ɪ/ to the *simplification of AmE*, which is what our participants stated when asked to give their attitudes towards the varieties, i.e. AmE in this very instance. Similar tendencies, but not as frequent as within the British group, could be noticed here as well (a significant percentage of the American group also stated that they would pronounce these words with /ɪ/).

As for the stress placement, the American group seem to have made an analogy with the word *address* (with the stress on the first syllable) and the words *adult* and *decade*. Moreover, quite unexpectedly, a great percentage of the American group chose /bɑ:θ/ and /'wɔ:tə/, which is probably due to the fact that those two words were introduced at an early stage of their language learning, and as most of our participant stated they had been taught BrE at school/ university (cf. Diagram 2).

4. Discussion

The main idea behind this survey was to investigate a potential prevalence of a specific variety in certain spheres of life in Serbia. Therefore, it is the sociolinguistic perspective, in the first place, and sound patterning that mattered most to the authors. As already mentioned, it appears that BrE keeps its dominance in school and university education, which matches the results gathered in the basic research, whereas AmE seems to play an important role in the media that our participants most frequently use, and in the social environment to a much greater extent. What draws our attention here is that the British English group seem to be more aware of the characteristics of their variety (cf. Diagram 1) than American. We may attribute this occurrence to the following: a) most of our participants were taught BrE at school/ university, b) the general policy of the education system promotes BrE in terms of coursebook choice, as well as official testing, which again maintains BrE as the standard in scoring the results, c) our participants were not as much exposed to the external factors from an early age as were the students from the basic research, who thus can be the representatives of new generations (namely, in the previous research our students, in a great percentage, were classified under the mix group according to the test scores), and d) much higher disparity within the American group may be the result of fashionableness, since Americanisms seem more dominant in informal situations. Moreover, since this study builds on the initial one, we could conclude that the mix group from the basic research, which was quite large in number (90.8% in total), may find its place in personal preference of AmE (cf. Diagram 1), as this survey may be showing.

However, the basic conclusion of this survey is that our participants tend to stay within the chosen variety, with slight deviations from their standards. These *deviations* could be explained with the rising issue of globalisation, which also affects the native speakers of English. As many surveys so far have shown, it seems that native speakers themselves are sometimes inconsistent in their preference of a most natural pronunciation (Wells 1992: 35; 2001: 4–13).

On the other hand, these changes seem to be much slower in countries where English is taught as a foreign language than in English-speaking countries, hence the choice of RP and GA as the standard forms, although some authors question their status as such (Jenkins 2003, 2006; Kachru 1992; Strevens 1992) need not necessarily be questionable here, because those are the standards upon which foreign learners in Serbia are taught English.

4.1 Limitations

The resultant sample is unrepresentative of the general population of teachers in Serbia, since there is no official Register of Teachers which could constitute a genuine representative sample selected in accordance with accepted statistical methods (Wells 1992: 38). Therefore, these results are applicable to our sample only, so we could not, with a high degree of certainty, apply our results to the whole population of Serbia. However, our study was exploratory and descriptive in character, and had an aim to describe potential tendencies in foreign language development and alteration, rather than to explain them. In that respect, it rather raises some questions than reaches definite conclusions. As such, it may serve as a foundation for potential future research on this occurrence, not only in Serbia but in other European countries as well.

In addition, the survey made use of a written questionnaire and assessment sheet, and therefore could not examine sound qualities, which would be the subject of more sophisticated research in terms of technical equipment, financial support and networking. Nevertheless, this method may be acceptable according to Wells (2001: 1) since our primary aim was to determine pronunciation *preferences* and observe the phenomenon from the sociolinguistic aspect in the first place.

5. Conclusion

In 1780 John Adams wrote: “English is destined to be in the next and succeeding centuries more generally the language of the world than Latin was in the last or French in the present age” (as cited in Algeo 1998: 182).

Apparently, this statement may not be regarded as outdated or completely overstated. It is quite evident that English can well be perceived as *lingua franca* (Dor 2004; Jenkins 2000, 2006; Kristal 1995; Seidlhofer 2001, 2004), universal/ global language (Yıldırım, Okan 2007), or international language (McKay 2002; Modiano 1999a, 1999b) of the world.¹ As for British and American English, in this very instance, it can be wildly maintained that those two varieties have a great impact on the rest of the world owing to the world’s globalisation and modern information society (Canagarajah 2006; Grubor et al 2008). The British appear to take precedence in the sphere of education and science, whereas Americans seem to play an important role in the entertainment world and computer systems (Algeo 1998; Grubor et al 2008).

1 However, it should be emphasised here that different authors differently perceive these terms. In other words, these terms have been used to refer to different entities (Acar 2007).

In this work we tried to establish to what extent the effects of the ‘global village’ are present and/ or can influence foreign language speakers. As Wells (2001: 1) put it when carrying a survey into the British people’s pronunciation preferences, “There is a problem for lexicographers in deciding which variant to prioritize”. Therefore, if native speakers themselves find it difficult to *decide* upon a variant, and consequently lexicographers, it is even harder for foreign speakers not to *go astray* in choosing certain pronunciation variants.

To sum up, although this survey cannot be taken as conclusive or final, it may serve as one to trigger some further research in this field or rather raise awareness of the importance of the external factors in foreign language teaching and learning (Grubor et al 2008; Kristal 1995). In addition, the direction of potential future tendencies in this respect may depend not only on sociopolitical trends in Serbia, but also the projects on language distribution of these two speech communities and prominence of publishers and cultural institutions responsible for promoting the language/ variety (Grubor et al 2009: 129).

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Јелена В. Грубор, Дарко В. Хинић

**ТЕНДЕНЦИЈЕ ИЗГОВОРА НАСТАВНИКА ЕНГЛЕСКОГ
ЈЕЗИКА КА БРИТАНСКОМ И АМЕРИЧКОМ ЕНГЛЕСКОМ У
СРБИЈИ: ДА ЛИ СУ НАСТАВНИЦИ ИМУНИ НА УТИЦАЈЕ
ГЛОБАЛИЗАЦИЈЕ?**

Резиме

Начин на који изговарамо речи одувек нас је јасно одређивао у погледу друштвених, географских, историјских и културних карактеристика. Аутори овог рада спровели су истраживање како би утврдили који је варијетет, по питању изговора, најчешће коришћен у Србији. Испитани узорак се састојао од 50 наставника енглеског језика из различитих делова Србије, узраст ($M=35.24$, $SD=6.06$), углавном женског пола, а испитаници су попуњавали упитник и „тест“, који је посебно био сачињен за ову прилику. При анализирању прикупљених података коришћена је дескриптивна статистика, примењени су χ^2 и t- test, као и дескриптивна анализа. Да закључимо, добијени резултати показују да формиране групе, према резултатима „теста“, имају тенденцију да остану унутар одабраног варијетета, док „микс“ група има велику тенденцију ка америчком енглеском. Поред тога, постоји и статистички значајна разлика између субјективног става испитаника и резултата „теста“ (BrE: $p<.05$; AmE: $p<.01$). Ова разлика се показала зависном од бивалентног утицаја (BrE: образовање; AmE: медији).

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