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THE PRESENCE OF THE BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH VARIETY AMONG THE FIRST- YEAR STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZENICA

Abstract

Due to a large number of World Englishes spread around the world, the impact of the 'core', long considered norm-providing, English varieties is being slowly reduced. Still, the influence of the two varieties, namely Standardised British English and Standardised American English, seems to be spread across the world and throughout all the varieties, in particular the peripheral or, in Kachruvian terms, outer-circle varieties. However, since these two varieties differ in their demographic weight and the institutional support they get, they are not equally represented, with American English being greatly present through the mass media and British English being dominant in foreign language teaching. The simultaneous exposure to both varieties is expected to lead to the inconsistent use of the varieties in different language aspects by foreign language learners, Bosnian learners of English in particular. The current paper reports on the project completed by the authors with the aim of investigating whether the first-year students at the University of Zenica tend to use both varieties intermittently through different aspects, namely pronunciation, spelling, grammar and vocabulary choice or whether they consistently use only one of the varieties in different language aspects, for which the results obtained by descriptive and inferential statistical analysis will be employed. Furthermore, the research will provide an insight into the students' attitudes regarding the use of the aforementioned varieties. The main goal of the paper is to raise awareness of English language teachers and students in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to prompt them to start thinking about the language they use.

Key words: World System of Englishes, Standardised American English, Standardised British English and consistency.

Introduction

The prospect of the emergence of a *lingua franca* or a *common language* to be used in the whole world for various purposes transpired somewhere around the mid-twentieth century (Crystal, 2003, p. 12). Thus, since 1950s different languages have been striving to acquire this privileged status, but with 400 million 'native' speakers and 1.6 billion non-native speakers (Crystal, 2011; 2015), the English language seems to have tacitly achieved it and is now being universally used in different international domains (Graddol, 2000, p. 8). Its huge international spread as well as its massive expansion and diverseness (Schneider, 2014) have prompted the rise of a huge number of 'World Englishes' in different non-native contexts, which called for a precise systematisation of native and non-native English language varieties. Thus, different classifications came into the existence (Kachru, 1985; Mair, 2013, 2016; McArthur, 1987; Schneider, 2003, 2007 etc.) with the central core made up of native English varieties,

Standardised British and Standardised American English in particular, wielding considerable influence over the other varieties spread around the world. The presence of both of these varieties in different contexts has been detected, with British English receiving strong institutional support and thus being more represented in foreign language teaching (Bieswanger, 2008; Mollin, 2006; Syrbe & Rose, 2016; Trudgill & Hannah, 2013) and American English assuming dominance in the popular US culture (Deshors & Götz, 2017; Hilgendorf, 2007; Mair, 2013), via the Internet and popular American movies (Crystal, 2003; Webb, 2010).

The theoretical model that neatly captures the current situation with respect to the influence these two varieties exert as well as the mobility of the modern world and the change triggered by the process of economic and political globalisation is Mair's World System of Englishes (Mair, 2013, 2016), which is adopted as the theoretical framework of the paper. In this model, all standardised and non-standardised English varieties are ordered into four hierarchical layers. Standardised American English stands at the hub of the World System of Englishes and it has the potential to influence all the other varieties in the remaining three layers, especially in the aspect of vocabulary, as Americanisms are expected to be used in other varieties as well (Mair, 2013). The next layer comprises standardised and non-standardised super-central English language varieties (Standardised British English, Australian English, South African English, Indian English, African Vernacular English, Jamaican Creole English etc.), among which Standardised British English stands out as the core one. The third layer is composed of central varieties, e.g. Irish English, Scottish Standardised English, New Zealand English etc., whereas the fourth layer includes the varieties such as Maltese English, Cameroonian English and others, which are called peripheral due to the fact that they depend on 'external support of some kind' (Mair, 2013, p. 261). Two most notable varieties in this elaborate system are the hyper-central variety Standardised American English and the super-central variety Standardised British English. Their prominence can be ascribed to two social measures, i.e. demographic weight and institutional support (Mair, 2013, pp. 258-259), with American English having heavy demographic weight and being supported by significant social factors and British English having lighter demographic weight but strong institutional support through foreign language teaching (Mair, 2013).

The use of these two varieties in different non-native contexts has been researched but not that extensively as expected owing to the fact that the research has been upstaged by focusing on different World Englishes and their respective properties. One of the studies researching the intermittent use of these two varieties was carried out in the Danish context (Ladegaard, 1998). The research findings indicated that a large number of the participants (91%) employed RP pronunciation, which, to a large extent, matched their attitudes towards RP as a prestigious variety, with 27% of Danish speakers aiming to achieve GenAm pronunciation, but still employing RP pronunciation in their speech. A greater disparity between the participants' attitudes and their actual use of the varieties seems to exist in the other EFL contexts. For example, the Turkish ELT participants' claim that they use Standardised British English (52%) did not match their results, as they seemed to employ both varieties equally frequently, with 210 words pronounced with RP accent and 210 words with GenAm accent (Yaman, 2015). Similar results were obtained in the Balkan region, namely the countries neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, the research results obtained in Dazdarević

(2007) showed that Serbian EFL students used both varieties in pronunciation and spelling almost equally, even though they claimed strict adherence to the properties of either the British or American variety. The results also indicated a greater use of British English spelling (55.6%) than American English spelling (44.5%) and a more frequent use of GenAm accent (57%) than RP accent (43%). Likewise, Grubor et al.'s research findings (2008) showed that almost all the participants (90.8%) mixed the two varieties, despite the fact that only 60% of them claimed that they believed they actually mixed them. The participants who stated that they used British English, consistently used this variety only in the aspect of spelling, while the participants maintaining to be using American English, consistently employed Americanisms only in the aspect of vocabulary. It is rather interesting that the group who claimed to be using the mixture of the two varieties, actually tended to use American English in the aspect of vocabulary and pronunciation and British English in the aspect of spelling.

The concurrent presence of both varieties in different non-native contexts inevitably leads to the inconsistency in their use, in particular in the EFL context, as can be noticed by the analysis of the above mentioned studies. Since English used in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a peripheral variety, it is highly dependent on two varieties most prominent in Mair's World System of Englishes, namely the hyper-central Standardised American and super-central Standardised British English variety. With consistency still being considered important in ELT in Europe (Trudgill & Hannah, 2013) and likewise in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in spite of the existing uncertainty about this and about whether English native varieties should be used as model varieties in English language teaching (Trudgill & Hannah, 2013), this paper aims to observe whether Bosnian learners of English are consistent in their use of the two varieties in all or some language aspects or whether the English language used in this particular context also displays the properties of both varieties, still deemed 'production goals' (Mollin, 2006, p. 30) of many non-native speakers, Bosnian speakers of English as well. Thus, the paper is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1 What are the students' attitudes towards the British and American variety of English?

RQ2 Which variety do the students prefer in the aspect of pronunciation?

RQ3 Which variety do the students tend to use in the aspect of spelling?

RQ4 Which variety appears to be dominant in the aspect of grammar?

RQ5 Do the students prefer the target vocabulary structures more common to the British or American variety of English?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in the present study were 266 first-year students studying at different faculties (Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Metallurgy and Material Sciences, Faculty of Polytechnics, School of Medicine) at the University of Zenica. Prior to carrying out this research, 11 participants had been learning English for 0 to 5 years, 144 from 6 to 10 years and 93 of them had been learning it for 11 or more years.

Instrument

The instrument used in the project was very comprehensive and it was based on the instrument primarily developed by Dubravac et al. (2018), but due to the length limitation of

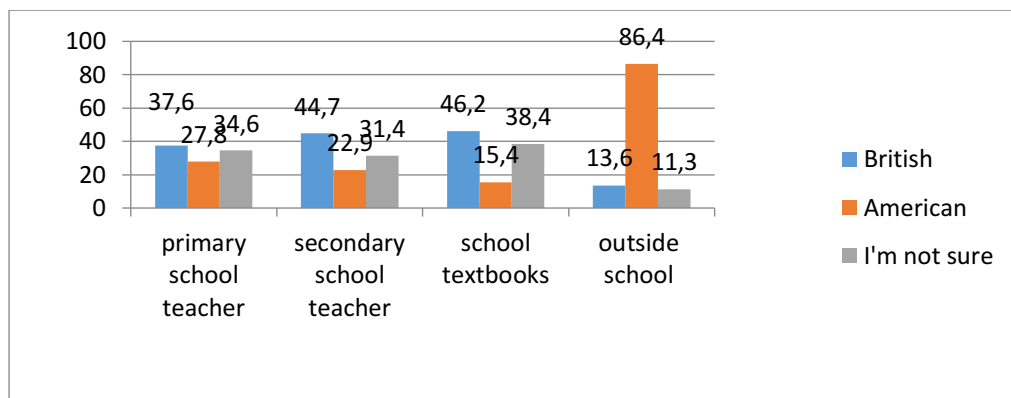
this paper, only partial results are presented here. The first part comprised a background questionnaire, revealing demographic data about the participants and their attitudes towards the two aforementioned varieties. The main part of the instrument examined their preferences for one of the varieties in pronunciation, spelling, grammar and vocabulary. The words and the constructions employed in the instrument were selected by relying on the reference books, some of which are Biber et al. (2007), Modiano (1996), Trudgill and Hannah (2013) etc.

With regards to pronunciation, the students were asked to choose the way in which they pronounced a set of words related to the presence of rhoticity in British and its absence in American English (in the words *door, morning, answer, better* and *opportunity*) as well as the realisation of the vowel sound /ɑ:/ in British corresponding to /æ/ in American English (in the words *half, dance, can't, glass, answer, fast, bath, class* and *past*). Although the phonemic transcription was offered for all the words, the researchers pronounced the words in two different ways to help the participants make their choice.

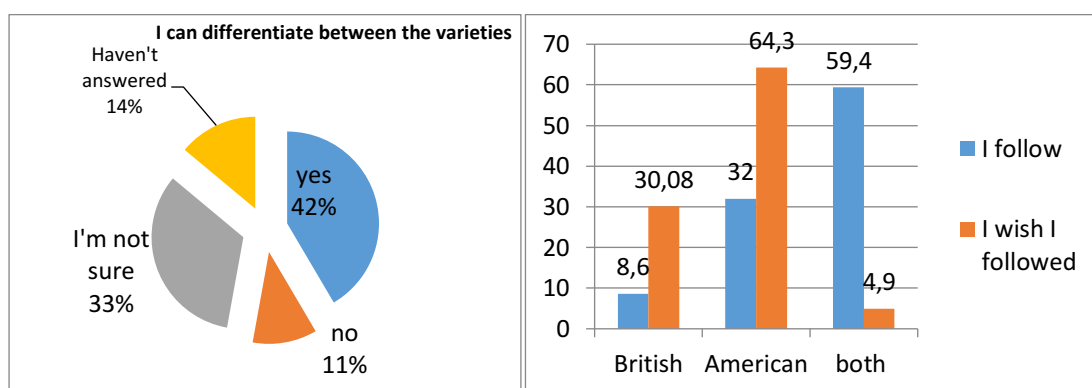
Spelling, grammar and vocabulary were explored through the translation task, namely the participants were presented with the sentences in Bosnian and they were offered a few choices, one demonstrating the use of the target structure in British English, the other in American English, while in the case of sentences with more than one target structure two more options were included illustrating the mix of both varieties. The spelling aspect focused on the following differences: the realisation of *o* (e.g. *favorite, color, neighbor*), *er* (e.g. *theater, center*) and *ize* (*analyze, criticize, organize*) in American English, compatible with *ou* (*favourite, colour, neighbour*), *re* (e.g. *theatre, centre*) and *ise* (*analyse, criticise, organise*) in British English. In terms of grammar differences, the research investigated the use of the Present Perfect Tense and verb *have got* in British related to the use of the Past Simple Tense and verb *have* in American English as well as the use of different prepositions in the two varieties (*at/on the weekend; in/on the test*). Furthermore, the paper also explored vocabulary preferences for the following pairs of words (*trainers/sneakers; jumper/sweater; chips/French fries; biscuits/cookies; sweets/candies; flat/apartment; chemist's/pharmacy–drugstore; lorry/truck; rubber/eraser*) more commonly used in the British or American variety respectively.

Results

Graph 1, Graph 2 and Graph 3 show the students' attitudes towards the two varieties. The majority stated that they had been exposed primarily to the British variety through the formal education in primary and secondary schools, including the textbooks they had been following (Graph 1). However, outside school the majority claimed they had been exposed to American English. When asked whether they could differentiate between the varieties, the greatest number (44%) claimed they could, while only 11% stated they could not (see Graph 2). Graph 3 reveals that while the prevailing number of the participants considered they used both varieties, the smallest number would like to be doing so. The data shows that the largest number (64.3%) would like to follow solely the American variety of English.



Graph 1. Students' perceptions about their exposure to the varieties



Graph 2. Can the participants differentiate between the varieties?

Graph 3. Which variety do the participants follow and which do they wish they followed?

Although a relatively high percentage of students claimed that they could differentiate between the two varieties a closer inspection of the results indicated that none of them were consistent in the use of one or the other variety through all the analysed aspects. However, the preferences for one of the varieties seem to vary markedly across the aspects.

A chi-square goodness of fit test, performed to check whether the students tended to use both varieties equally in the aspect of pronunciation, revealed a stronger preference for the American variety (Table 1). American English was preferred in all the words with rhotic r: *morning* ($\chi^2(1) = 133.1, p < .001, \phi_c = .71$), *door* ($\chi^2(1) = 160.1, p < .001, \phi_c = .79$), *better* ($\chi^2(1) = 54, p < .001, \phi_c = .46$). However, when it comes to the other target structures, the American variety was statistically significantly dominant in four words: *dance* ($\chi^2(1) = 159.1, p < .001, \phi_c = .79$), *can't* ($\chi^2(1) = 75.4, p < .001, \phi_c = .54$), *answer* ($\chi^2(1) = 118.2, p < .001, \phi_c = .68$) and *bath* ($\chi^2(1) = 27.1, p < .001, \phi_c = .33$), while British was dominant in only one word: *half* ($\chi^2(1) = 55.8, p < .001, \phi_c = .47$), and no significant difference was observed between the preferences for the two varieties in the words: *fast* ($\chi^2(1) = .315, p = .575, \phi_c = .03$), *past* ($\chi^2(1) = 3.8, p = .053, \phi_c = .01$).

Word	British		American		X ²	P	Effect size
	Pronunciation	N (%)	Pronunciation	N (%)			
half	'ha:f	189 (73.3)	'hæf	69 (26.7)	55.8	<.001	.47

dance	'da:ns	28 (10.8)	Dæns	231 (89.2)	159.1	<.00 1	.79
can't	'kɑ:nt	60 (23.1)	'kænt	200 (76.9)	75.4	<.00 1	.54
morning	'mɔ: nɪŋ	37 (14.2)	'mɔ:rnɪŋ	223 (85.8)	133.1	<.00 1	.71
door	'dɔ:	28 (10.8)	'dɔr	232 (89.2)	160.1	<.00 1	.79
answer	'ɑ:nsə	42 (16.2)	'ænsər	217 (83.8)	118.2	<.00 1	.68
fast	'fɑ:st	133 (51.8)	'fæst	124 (48.2)	.315	.575	.03
better	'betə	70 (27.1)	'betər	188 (72.9)	54	<.00 1	.46
bath past	'bɑ:θ 'pɑ:st	87 (33.7) 144 (56)	'bæθ 'pæst	171 (66.3) 113 (44)	27.3 3.8	<.00 1 .053	.33 .01

Table 1. Preferences in the aspect of pronunciation

In terms of spelling, the analysis indicated that the students tended to follow the spelling patterns more common to British English (Table 2). It was used significantly more in three words: *favourite* ($\chi^2(1) = 30.6, p < .001, \phi_c = .35$), *theatre* ($\chi^2(1) = 7.1, p = .008, \phi_c = .17$), *neighbour* ($\chi^2(1) = 40, p < .001, \phi_c = .39$) and insignificantly in two *colour* ($\chi^2(1) = 2.1, p = .151, \phi_c = .01$) and *analyse* ($\chi^2(1) = 1, p = .313, \phi_c = .06$). Conversely, American English was chosen by a significantly larger number of the participants in the word *centre* ($\chi^2(1) = 31.4, p < .001, \phi_c = .35$) and insignificantly in two words *criticize* ($\chi^2(1) = .097, p = .756, \phi_c = .02$) and *organize* ($\chi^2(1) = 1.4, p = .234, \phi_c = .07$).

Word	British		American				
	N	%	N	%	X ²	p	Effect size
favourite/favorite	174	67.2	85	32.8	30.6	<.001	.35
colour/color	140	54.5	117	45.5	2.1	.151	.01
theatre/theater	152	58.2	109	41.8	7.1	.008	.17
centre/center	84	32.6	174	67.4	31.4	<.001	.35
neighbour/neigh bor	181	69.6	79	30.4	40	<.001	.39
analyse/analyze	134	53.2	118	46.8	1	.313	.06
criticise/criticize	127	49	132	51	.097	.756	.02
organiser/organ izer	118	46.3	137	53.7	1.4	.234	.07

Table 2. Preferences in the aspect of spelling

The dominance of the American variety was furthermore confirmed in the aspect of grammar, where the participants expressed a strong preference for all the structures more common to the American variety (see Table 3), whereas the British variety was just insignificantly preferred in the structure *at the weekend* ($\chi^2(1) = 1.73, p = .188, \phi_c = .08$)

Target structures	British		American				
	N	%	N	%	X ²	p	Effect size
have lost/lost	104	40.6	152	59.4	9	.003	.19
has come/come	84	32.4	175	67.6	31.99	<.001	.35
have eaten/ate	103	39.9	155	60.1	10.48	.001	.20
have you got/do you have	88	34.1	170	65.9	26.06	<.001	.32
at the weekend/on the weekend	138	54.1	117	45.9	1.73	.188	.08
in the test/on the test	63	23.7	196	73.7	68.30	<.001	.51

Table 3. Preferences in the aspect of grammar

The results related to the aspect of vocabulary choice were very item-specific, with American variety significantly preferred in five words *sweater* ($\chi^2(1) = 8.2, p=.004, \phi_c = .18$), *cookies* ($\chi^2(1) = 9.6, p=.002, \phi_c = .19$), *pharmacy/ drugstore* ($\chi^2(1) = 185.2, p<.001, \phi_c = .85$), *truck* ($\chi^2(1) = 75.4, p<.001, \phi_c = .54$), *apartment* ($\chi^2(1) = 38.8, p<.001, \phi_c = .39$), and British in four words *trainers* ($\chi^2(1) = 96.8, p<.001, \phi_c = .62$), *sweets* ($\chi^2(1) = 91.2, p<.001, \phi_c = .59$), *rubber* ($\chi^2(1) = 38.4, p<.001, \phi_c = .39$) and *chips* ($\chi^2(1) = 182.8, p<.001, \phi_c = .84$).

Target structures	British		American				
	N	%	N	%	X ²	p	Effect size
jumper/sweater	106	41.1	152	58.9	8.2	.004	.18
biscuits/cookies	105	40.4	155	59.6	9.6	.002	.19
chemist's/pharmacy,drug store	20	7.7	239	92.3	185.2	<.001	.85
lorry/truck	60	23.1	200	76.9	75.4	<.001	.54
trainers/sneakers	208	80.6	50	19.4	96.8	<.001	.62
sweets/candies	207	79.6	53	20.4	91.2	<.001	.59
flat/apartment	81	30.8	182	69.2	38.8	<.001	.39
rubber/eraser	177	69.4	78	30.6	38.4	<.001	.39
chips/French fries	239	91.9	21	8.1	182.8	<.001	.84

Table 4. Preferences in the aspect of vocabulary

Discussion and conclusions

This paper observed whether English used in the Bosnian EFL context is characterised by the properties common to either Standardised British or Standardised American English. The analysis of the language use was performed through different aspects, namely pronunciation, spelling, grammar and vocabulary choice.

The results showed that Bosnian learners claimed to have been exposed primarily to the British variety through their formal education, whereas outside school the majority believed to have been exposed to American English, which appears to be in line with the current views on the presence of these two varieties in different contexts worldwide (Bieswanger, 2008; Crystal, 2003; Deshors & Götz, 2017; Hilgendorf, 2007; Mair, 2013; Mollin, 2006; Syrbe & Rose, 2016;

Trudgill & Hannah, 2013; Webb, 2010). Although a great number of students claimed that they could differentiate between the two varieties, the results indicated that due to such a simultaneous exposure to both varieties they were highly inconsistent in the use of one variety through all the explored aspects. However, the overall dominance of one or the other variety was noticed in different domains.

When it comes to pronunciation, the study revealed students' stronger preference for the American variety of English. The pre-eminence of the same variety was also confirmed in the aspect of grammar, where students tended to choose the structures more common to American English. Even though the preference for the American variety in pronunciation was expected (due to the aforementioned influence), the preference in grammar has come as a surprise, if we consider the fact that British English is dominant in foreign language teaching in Bosnian schools. However, the stronger dominance of the mass media could be the reason of such unexpected results. Nonetheless, the impact of the mass media seems to be lessened in terms of the preferences expressed in the domain of spelling patterns, as the Bosnian students favoured the patterns more common to British English over those more typical for the other variety.

However, the study showed that the choice of vocabulary structures was rather item-specific, with the American variety preferred in five word structures and the British variety in four. The words such as *rubber*, *chips* and *trainers* are typically introduced in primary school classrooms, therefore the students' choice seems to be justified. On the other hand, the students indicated preference for the American variety in *apartment*, *sweater* and *pharmacy*, the words which could have easily been acquired from watching TV or listening to music.

Unlike the participants in Ladegaard (1998) the greatest number of our participants claimed that they would like to follow solely the American variety of English. However, although a greater tendency for the use of American English properties was revealed, the overall results indicated that the students were inconsistent in the use of the two varieties across language aspects, which seems to characterise the English users in other similar EFL contexts (Dazdarević, 2007; Grubor et al., 2008; Yaman, 2015). Keeping in mind that consistency in using one variety is still considered very important in ELT in Europe (Trudgill & Hannah, 2013), the results of this project are expected to inspire English language teachers and English language learners to start thinking about all the aspects of the language they use.

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ZASTUPLJENOST BRITANSKOG I AMERIČKOG VARIJETETA ENGLESKOG JEZIKA KOD STUDENATA PRVE GODINE NA UNIVERZITETU U ZENICI

Sažetak

Zbog velikog broja varijeteta engleskog jezika diljem svijeta, uticaj onih centralnih, koji su dugo vremena predstavljali uzor svim ostalim, polako slabi. Ipak, čini se je uticaj dva varijeteta, naime standardiziranog britanskog i standardiziranog američkog engleskog, prisutan širom svijeta i u različitim varijetetima, posebno u perifernom ili, slijedeći Kachruovu terminologiju, u varijetetima spoljašnjeg kruga. Međutim, kako se ova dva varijeteta razlikuju u prostornoj rasprostranjenosti i institucionalnoj podršci, nisu ravnomjerno prisutna, pa je tako američki engleski uglavnom prisutan u mas medijima, a britanski u procesu podučavanja engleskog kao stranog jezika. Očekuje se da će ovakva istovremena izloženost učenika stranog jezika, u ovom slučaju bosanskih učenika engleskog jezika, i jednom i drugom varijetetu rezultirati nedosljednom upotrebom istih u različitim aspektima jezika. Ovim radom se predstavljaju rezultati projekta kojeg su sproveli autori s ciljem da se, kroz deskriptivnu i inferencijalnu statističku analizu, istraži da li student prve godine na Univerzitetu u Zenici teže koristiti oba varijeteta naizmjenično u različitim aspektima upotrebe jezika, naime izgovoru, pisanju, gramatici i vokabularu, ili su dosljedni u upotrebi jednoga kroz različite aspekte. Uz to, istraživanjem će se dati i uvid u stavove učesnika o upotrebi već spomenutih varijeteta. Osnovni cilj rada je podići svijest kako nastavnika engleskog jezika u Bosni i Hercegovini tako i njihovih učenika, te ih podstaknuti da počnu analizirati jezik koji koriste.

Ključne riječi: svjetski poredak varijeteta engleskog jezika, standardizirani američki engleski, standardizirani britanski engleski i konsistentnost.