

Contrastive Analysis of British and American English in Relation To Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This research was a descriptive research which was aimed at finding out the similarities, dissimilarities and the contributions of the contrastive analysis on teaching English as a foreign language. The data of this research were collected through library and internet sources. The researchers use comparative descriptive method to analyse the data. The obtained results was the comparison of American and British English in vocabulary, grammar, spelling, pronunciation and the contributions of them in teaching English as a foreign language. The research finding shows that British and American English are very similar in many aspects. Even though British and American English are mostly similar, they also have some differences. The difference of British and American English can be found in terms of vocabulary, grammar, spelling and pronunciation. Among them, vocabulary is the largest one. It is suggested that lecturers and teachers aware of the similarities and differences between British and American English in teaching English as a foreign language so that it will lead to the successful teaching of English including its varieties.

Keywords

contrastive analysis;
British English;
American English



I. Introduction

Native speaker of English consist of about 700 million of people. By this number, English of course has many varieties in its use. In some continents people use different kinds of English varieties such as Australian English, Ireland English, American English, and British English. Those varieties appeared as there are different function and speaker of English. Commonly there are two standard English used in the world. Standard English means English that used widely in formal event. The two standard English are American and British English which are used universally in education, mass media, politics, and trade.

Munjin (2008:2-3) elaborates that English like all language change with time being. When the change really happens, it causes systematic differences of language due to dialect differences including pronunciation, vocabulary distinction and syntactic rule differences. This is why languages become difference, including British and American. Further, Munjin also elaborates that these differences will, grammar or spelling, bring characteristic problem in successful communication and it will be a big problem if they are related to the teaching English as a foreign language. The differences of American and British English can be found in vocabulary, grammar, spelling and pronunciation.

Related to the phenomenon above, the teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia should not neglect its varieties, especially British and American English. Therefore, when we teach English to the students, we should inform the two varieties properly in order not to find them upset in learning English. The examples below show the varieties than can make students upset in terms of vocabulary, grammar, spelling and pronunciation.

Table 1.The Differences of American English and British English

American (AmE)	British (BrE)
Vocabulary	
Apartment	Flat
Period	Full stop
Grammar	
Have you got a problem?	Do you have a problem?
get, got, gotten	get, got, got
Spelling	
Programme	Program
Centre	Center
Colour	Color
Pronunciation	
Class /a:/	Class /æ/
Grass /a:/	Grass /æ/
Bath /a:/	Bath /æ/

Based on the background of the study, the writers are interested in conducting a research entitled “A Contrastive Analysis of British and American English in Relation to Teaching English as a Foreign Language”. This research is expected to elaborate the contrastive analysis of British and American English in vocabulary, grammar, spelling and pronunciation. Knowing the differences and similarities between the languages will bring the students and lecturers into a successful English learning.

II. Research Methods

This study is conducted to find out the similarities, dissimilarities and the contributions of the contrastive analysis on teaching English as a foreign language. Thus, the researchers use comparative descriptive method to analyse the data. Comparative method is a linguistic method to compare and contrast two languages. Tavakoli in Sulaiman and Yuliani (2017: 130-131) explain that a descriptive research is similar to qualitative research because it deals with naturally occurring phenomena, using data which may either be collected first hand or taken from already existing data sources such as data from other studies, student records, and so on, without intervention of an experiment or an artificially contrived treatment. It differs from qualitative research in that it often begins with preconceived hypotheses and a narrower scope of investigation and uses the logical methods of inductive or deductive reasoning to arrive at the generalizations, and it is sometimes divided into correlational research and ex post facto research, and other descriptive research that is neither correlational nor designed to find causation but describes existing conditions, such as survey research and case study. From the stated theory, it is known that descriptive research is like qualitative research which uses description and interpretation of the indication in linguistics components, especially English varieties or accents.

The study was conducted at library of Catholic University of Saint Thomas Medan which is located at Jl. Setiabudi No. 479F Tanjung Sari Medan. There were two reasons why the researcher chose the university as the location of the research. First, the researcher has been working and teaching the students in the campus. The second, there has never

been any research about the contrastive analysis of British and American English. The study was conducted in January-June 2020.

The source of the data in this research were qualitative data. The data of this research were collected through library and internet sources. The writers conducted library research to collect the data. Then, the writers analysed the data through descriptive analysis (i.e. identifying, classifying, interpreting, predicting and drawing conclusions) (Syahri, et al., 2017, p.95). The obtained results was the comparison of American and British English in vocabulary, grammar, spelling, pronunciation and the contributions of them in teaching English as a foreign language.

III. Results and Discussion

The dissimilarities between British and American English cover the area of vocabulary, grammar, spelling and pronunciation.

3.1 Vocabulary

This vocabulary is classified into some categories with examples as many as possible.

British	American
Clothing	
Trainers	Sneakers
Pants	Trousers
Jumper/pullover	Sweater
Vest	Undershirt
Suspenders/braces	Garters
Polo-neck	Turtle-neck

3.2 Grammar

Grammar is the rules of how sentences are arranged. It is unlikely to produce good sentences correctly without sufficient knowledge of grammar. Below some aspects of grammar between British and American English grammar are presented.

Indicating possession or external force

British English	American English
Have got	Have
1. John has got a car	John has a car.
2. Have you got to go now?	Do you have to go now?
3. They have got to be here at 5 p.m	They have to be here at 5 p.m
4. It's got to be done soon	It has to be done soon.

The Use of the verb "have"

In British English the verb "have" is used modal auxiliary whilst in American English it is used as a full verb.

British English	American English
1. I haven't time to go.	I don't have time to go.
2. Have you time for me?	Do you have time for me?
3. Has he money for the concert?	Does he have money for the concert?
4. Paul hasn't any idea about that.	Paul doesn't have any idea about that.

3.3 Spelling

American English tends to simplify the spelling based on the pronunciation whereas British English retains it.

British English	American English
Ageing	Aging
Aeroplane	Airplane
Analogue	Analog
Amoeba	Ameba
Anaesthesia	Anesthesia

3.4 Pronunciation

Pronunciation is one of the most important aspects in learning English. Some sounds are absent in the students' native language that makes it difficult for them to pronounce them such as [θ], [v], [ə] in the words, think, thank, very, van, and ago, about. American English tends to change some pronunciations of the British English with the following sounds.

British English	American English
1.[a:] back low unrounded	[æ] front low unrounded
Class [kla:s]	Class [klæ:s]
Grass [gra:s]	Grass [græs]
Glass [gla:s]	Glass [glæs]

3.5 Confusing Words

There are some confusing words between British and American English in the equivalence of Indonesian meaning.

Indonesian	British English	American English
Sekolah Negeri	Public School	Public School
Sekolah Swasta	State School	Private School
Celana	Underwear	Pants

3.6 The Contribution to the Teaching of English

The difference between British and American English does not give any bad impact in teaching English because it is not so great that it can disturb or hinder the process of learning-teaching in the classroom. On the contrary, it can enrich the teacher's and students' knowledge.

The teacher should master the difference between the two in the first place. Then, he can introduce it to the students little by little when necessary. The teacher should give the students freedom whether to use British or American English as far as it is correct. While they practicing conversation, for example, the teacher should let them choose which style they using, and the teacher just tries to improve their pronunciation if they mispronounce the word. It is hard to be consistent in this case because American English itself is not consistent with the changing of [a:] into [æ]. There is not fixed rule to follow when it is changed.

There are also some vocabulary differences which are most likely to come up include:

- Clothes (the different meanings of "jumper", etc)
- Food and drink (the meaning of "chips", etc)
- Transport and travel ("hand luggage"/ "carry-on baggage", etc)

- Places (the names of stores such as “chemists”/ “pharmacy/ drugstore, etc).
- Education (the meaning of “public school”, etc)
- Describing people (appearance words like “fringe”/ “bangs”, personality words like “mean”, etc)
- Crime, law and punishment (nicknames for the police, etc)
- Medicine (the different meanings of “surgery”, etc)

In addition, there are things which are different but could be considered more or less equivalent in the other place, such as “prime minister”/ PM “president/ POTUS”, “Number 10 Downing Street”/ the White House”, “greasy caff”/ “dinner” and “digestive”/ “graham cracker.” In contrast, there are also things that exist in one place which don’t have any near equivalent and might not be understood by speakers of other the form of English such as “Twinkie”.

Function which vary between British and American English include:

- Requests (Could I possibly...?”/ May I...?”), etc)
- Checking/ Clarifying (“Pardon?”/ “Excuse me”, etc)
- Dealing with complaints and apologising
- Small talk topics, questions and replies (“How’s it going?”/ “How are you doing?”, etc)
- Greetings (“Merry Xmas”/ “Happy holidays”, etc)
- Invitations
- Thanking (“Cheers” in British English, etc)
- Giving directions (“Hang a left” in American English, etc).
- Opening and closing letters and emails (“Yours faithfully” in British English, etc)
- Starting and ending phone calls
- Restaurant language
- Congratulating (“Well done”/ “Good job”, etc)
- Responding to someone sneezing

The most well-known differences on the topic of dates and other numbers include:

- Americans saying and writing the month before the day (“January twenty seventh nineteen seventy”, etc)
- The British adding “and” between hundreds and tens (“a hundred and twenty one”, etc)
- Americans being more fond of “.....hundred” to talk about numbers over a thousand (“thirty two hundred”, etc)
- The British using “nought” and “oh” for “zero”

There are also aspect of dates which could be said to be more related to vocabulary and grammar such as “fortnight” in British English,” at the weeken”/ “on the weekend” and “Monday to Friday”/ Monday through Friday”.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the findings elaborated in the previous chapter, some conclusions are drawn as follows:

1. British and American English are very similar in many aspects. There is no huge difference of British and American English.
2. Even though British and American English are mostly similar, they also have some differences. The difference of British and American English can be found in terms of vocabulary, spelling, grammar and pronunciation. Among them, vocabulary is the largest one.
3. Knowing the similarities and differences between British and American English to the teaching English as a foreign language lead to the successful teaching of English including its varieties.
4. Both British and American English are formal.

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