

ENGLISH STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF AMERICAN ENGLISH AND BRITISH ENGLISH DIFFERENCES

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Abstract

English is the most used language in the world. For this reason, there are varieties of English, namely American English and British English. These varieties have some differences that are very important and make it easier for us to learn English. The purpose of this research is to find out the English students' knowledge of American English and British English. The data were collected from two instruments; firstly, the tests about American English and British English differences in spelling and vocabulary, and secondly, the questionnaire regarding the use and preferences of English varieties by using a qualitative method. The participants in this study were 55 English students at As-syafi'iyah Islamic University who had been learning about grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary. The result shows that the students have shown a higher level of understanding about American and British English, yet somehow they get some difficulties in distinguishing the two versions. They are also able to answer all tests, although not all of their answers are correct. This research concludes that the students use both American English and British English.

Keywords: American English, British English, students' awareness

Introduction

Today, English is the most commonly used language in foreign language countries. Almost all countries learn English as it is considered the communicator language of one country to another. English has become an influential language in the world. According to Hazen (2015), there are at least 350.000.000 people who learn English since they were kids. The author goes on to say that there are probably

1.000.000.000 speakers of some kind of English, leading to a lot of varieties of English, such as American, British, or Australian. However, American English and British English are currently the most used English in other countries. British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) are utilized as a reference in learning English, particularly in Indonesia, where English is a foreign language.

American and British English have some differences. Darragh (2005) argues that there are some differences in the speech, namely accent, tempo, intonation, pronunciation, idiom, vocabulary, and syntax. Moreover, Davies (2005) claims that approximately 4,000 words of everyday English in England are different from the words in daily use in America. Such differences make American English and British English have their own characteristics, especially in linguistics. Therefore, countries that use English as a foreign language should be familiar with American and British English as a reference in learning English, as well as knowing the differences to make students understand the meaning in written and oral forms.

This notion indicates that it is crucial for people whose foreign language is English to be familiar with the most used English varieties and the differences in order that they can understand the meaning well. Further, if the students are not aware of American and British English, they will speak both versions and cause problems. For instance, the students will be confused when they find a word from American and British English with the same meaning, yet different spelling, e.g., *colour* and *color*. They cannot identify which spelling they have to use since they assume that one of the words is incorrect. Another example is that when we talk to American people with British English vocabulary, it will cause misunderstanding because they may not recognize British English vocabulary. Due to the importance of understanding the American and British English, this research is devoted to discovering the students' awareness of American English and British English differences.

Literature review

American English and British English are two varieties of English, which are considered the most widespread varieties that exist. British English comes from Great Britain, and American English is from the United States of America. According to Algeo (2006), American English and British English are the most spoken languages and studied by most foreign learners. These two versions become the most influential languages to the countries with English as a foreign language.

American English and British English have some differences in culture, pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and other things. Nonetheless, the most distinct difference is in the tune of speech (Algeo, 2006).

This study focuses on the English students' understanding of American and British English vocabulary and spelling. On that ground, the literature review will show the American English and British English differences.

Pronunciation Differences

Pronunciation is the most distinguishable aspect. If one has a difficulty to find written differences, s/he can immediately see the differences in pronunciation. When American and British people speak in a conversation, it can be quickly guessed that they are from different countries. British English pronunciation sounds more formal than American English pronunciation. Besides, the most different pronunciation that one can hear is the consonant 'r' in a word. In British English, people tend not to pronounce the consonant, unless there is a vowel sound before it.

Example:

WORDS	PRONUNCIATIONS	
	British	American
Horse	/hɔ:s/	/hɔrs/
Teacher	/ti:tʃə/	/ti:tʃər/
Peter	/pi:tə/	/pi:Dər/

Spelling Differences

Another difference is spelling. OxfordDictionary.com states that British English adapts the spelling of words from French. Meanwhile, American English words are spelled as they are. There are many differences in spelling between American and British English. The most frequently faced are:

American English	British English	American English	British English
-or	-our	-og	-ogue
flavor	flavour	analog	analogue
humor	humour	dialog	dialogue
Color	Colour	catalog	catalogue
-ter	-tre	-yze	-yse
center	centre	analyze	analyse

theater	theatre	catalyse	catalyze
meter	metre	paralyse	paralyze

Vocabulary Differences

In addition to some differences between British English and American English that can be found in how they are spoken, there are also some glossary differences. Jeff Kolby (1996) mentions that American and British English have many words in the list of vocabulary which are different from one another. For example:

British English	American English
Toilet	Bathroom
Shop	Store
Holiday	Vacation

Grammar Differences

The grammar of American and British English has different arrangements. According to Bin Zhang (2008), the differences revolve around the use of prepositions, auxiliaries, verbs, articles, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, tenses, and subjunctive mood.

Methodology

This study relied on a qualitative method to investigate the students' knowledge of American and British English differences. In order to examine which English varieties the students prefer, this study employed tests about the differences between American and British English vocabulary and spelling, and a questionnaire regarding the use and preferences of English varieties. The research data were collected at As-syafi'iyah Islamic University in August 2018. The sample involved in this study was ten students from the second semester, 17 students from the fourth semester, and 28 students from the sixth semester of English Education Study Program who had learned about grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and spelling. The test instrument comprised four parts, including vocabulary, spelling, preferences of vocabulary, and preferences of spelling

1. The vocabulary test consisted of 25 words from American and British English. The participants needed to distinguish which ones are British and American

English. The test was adapted from Christian Lindell in her study on the awareness of the differences between American and British English vocabulary and spelling.

2. The spelling test comprised eight fill-in-the-blank sentences. The participants had to fill in the blank with the right words in English. The test was adapted from Christian Lindell's research on the investigation of awareness of the differences between American and British English vocabulary and spelling.
3. The preferences of vocabulary consisted of 13 words of American and British English. The participants had to choose which words they would use or be familiar with. The test was adapted from Zuzana Jurigová (2011) in her study on American and British English.
4. The preferences of spelling comprised 13 words of American and British English. The participants had to choose which words they would use or be familiar with. The test was adapted from Zuzana Jurigová (2011) in her study on American and British English.

The questionnaire consisted of ten questions about the use and preferences of American and British English. The participants were supposed to answer which English variety they prefer to listen to or watch on television, and to use for themselves. The questionnaire was adapted from Christian Lindell's research on the investigation of awareness of the differences between American English and British English vocabulary and spelling.

Results

The results of the study are presented and discussed in five parts: vocabulary test, spelling test, vocabulary preferences, spelling preferences, and the questionnaire about the use and preferences of American English and British English. The participants are from As-syafi'iyah Islamic University. They are 55 students of the English Education Study Program, consisting of ten students from the second semester, 17 students from the fourth semester, and 28 students from the sixth semester.

Vocabulary test

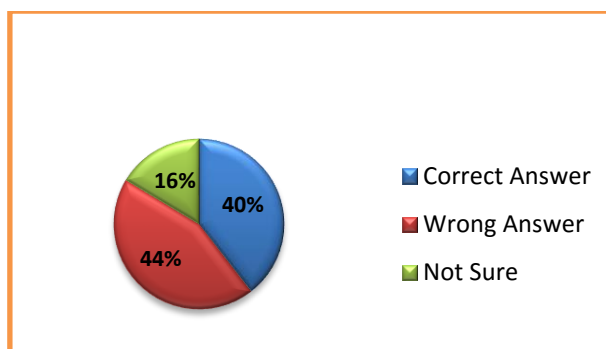


Figure 1. The result of English students' awareness of the differences between American and British English vocabulary

Figure 1 shows the result of the English students' awareness of the differences between American and British English vocabulary. The test comprises 25 multiple-choice questions. The test asks the students to decide whether the vocabulary is from American or British English. Option A is "British English", option B is "American English", option C is "American and British English", and option D is "not sure". The label "correct answer" refers to the participants who answer the test correctly. On the other hand, the label "wrong answer" relates to the participants who answer the test incorrectly. The "not sure" label refers to the participants who are confused about the answer.

Of 55 participants who answer the test, approximately 44 percent of the participants answer the vocabulary test correctly, 40 percent answer incorrectly, and 16 percent are not sure about whether the vocabulary comes from American English or British English.

Spelling Test

This section explains about spelling test that consists of eight questions. The test asks the students to fill in the blank sentences with their choices of British or American English vocabulary. The following pie diagrams present the number of answers of each category. The "red colour" refers to the participants who choose British English vocabulary, the "blue colour" is the participants who opt American English vocabulary, and "green colour" pertains to the participants who answer the test incorrectly or misspell the provided words.

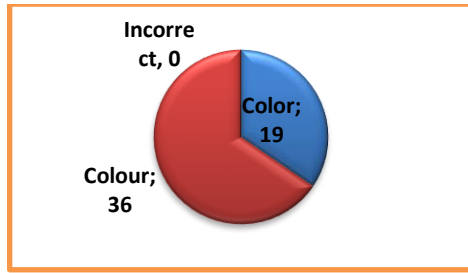


Figure 2. Color/Colour

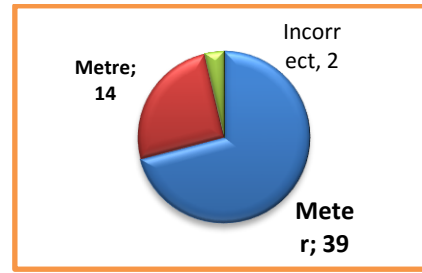


Figure 3. Meter/Metre

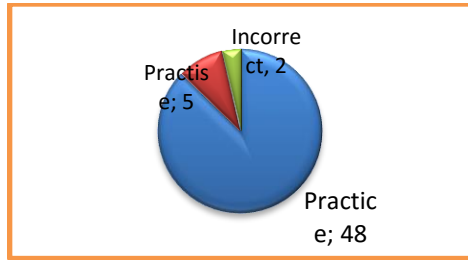


Figure 4. Practice/Practise
Favorite/Favourite

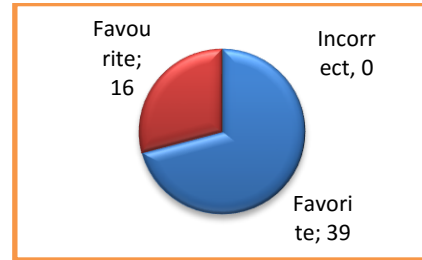


Figure 5.

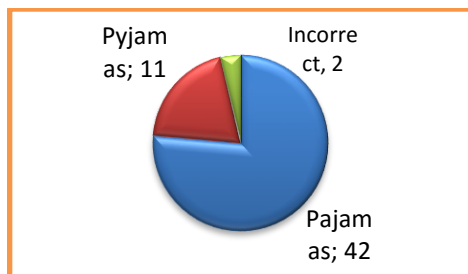


Figure 6. Pajamas/Pyjamas

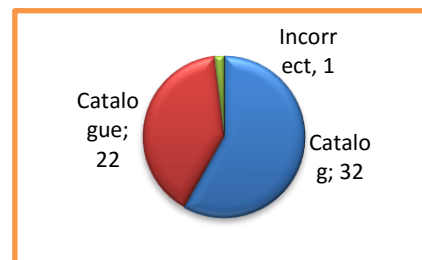


Figure 7. Catalog/Catalogue

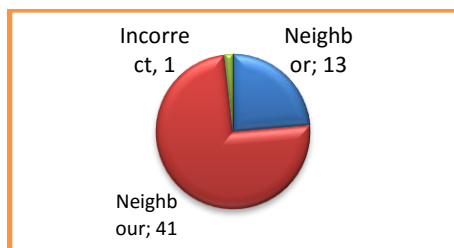


Figure 8. Neighbor/Neighbour

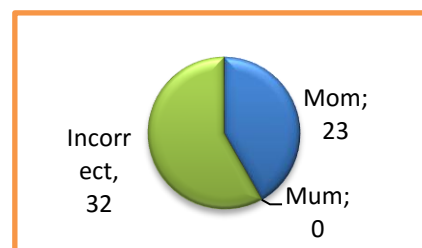


Figure 9. Mum/Mom

From the above eight pie diagrams, almost each pie diagram had the words with American English. Except number 2 and number 8, the participants choose British spelling. As many as 36 participants use “colour” instead of “color” in the pie

diagram 2. Meanwhile, 41 participants use “neighbour” instead of “neighbor” in the pie diagram 8.

From the above pie diagrams, only a few participants answer the test incorrectly. Almost all participants answer the test with British English spelling or American English spelling.

As many as 32 participants answer the test incorrectly in the pie diagram 9, in which they use “mother” instead of “mum or mom”. Further, 23 participants answer the test with American English spelling; they use “Mom” and no one uses British English spelling.

Vocabulary Preferences

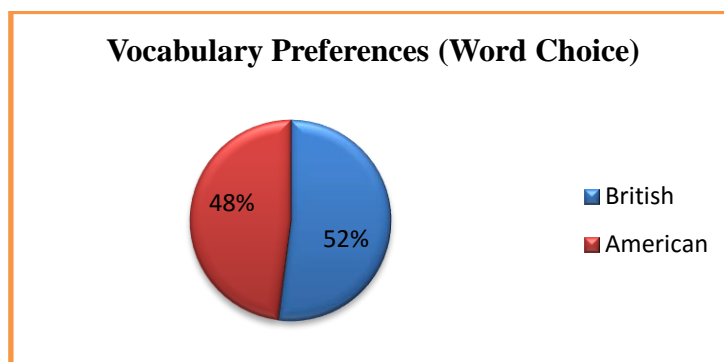


Figure 10. The result of English students’ vocabulary preferences between American English and British English

This section reveals the result of vocabulary preferences or word choices. The vocabulary preferences test consists of 13 words in American and British English. The participants are asked to choose the English variety they prefer to use. The result shows that 52 percent of the participants have been using British English vocabulary while 48 percent of the participants chose American English vocabulary.

Here is the result of each preference between American and British English vocabulary. The bold words are the chosen vocabulary by the participants.

British English Vocabulary:

1. **Lift** (40)
2. **Autumn** (53)
3. **Biscuit** (39)
4. **Holiday** (47)
5. Film (16)

American English Vocabulary:

- elevator (15)
- fall (2)
- cookie (16)
- Vacation (8)
- movie** (39)

6. Shop	(25)	store	(30)
7. Mobile	(31)	cellphone	(24)
8. Toilet	(27)	bathroom	(28)
9. Chips	(3)	french fries	(52)
10. Taxi	(51)	cab	(4)
11. Car Park	(22)	Parking lot	(33)
12. Petrol	(28)	gas	(27)
13. Sweets	(2)	candy	(53)

Based on the result, the participants choose seven words from British English vocabulary and six words from American English vocabulary. It is shown that some words are more preferred than the other variety of words. For instance, the word “autumn” is used by 53 participants, the words “french fries” are utilized by 52 participants, the word “taxi” is used by 51 participants, and the word “candy” is applied by 53 participants. The participants choose those words because they are more familiar and used more often.

Spelling Preferences



Figure 11. The result of English students’ spelling preferences between American English and British English

This section presents the result of spelling preferences. The test consists of 13 spellings from American English and British English, in which the participants are asked to pick the spelling they prefer. The result indicates that 67 percent of the participants have been using American English spelling, and only 33 percent choose British English spelling.

Here is the result of each preference between American English and British English spelling. The bold words are the chosen spelling by the participants.

British English Spelling

American English Spelling

1. Colour	(42)	color	(13)
2. Centre	(14)	center	(41)
3. Programme	(7)	program	(48)
4. Aeroplane	(3)	airplane	(52)
5. Neighbour	(44)	neighbor	(11)
6. Labour	(31)	labor	(24)
7. Analyse	(7)	analyze	(48)
8. Dialogue	(36)	dialog	(19)
9. Metre	(13)	meter	(42)
10. Catalogue	(18)	catalog	(37)
11. Cheque	(0)	check	(55)
12. Theatre	(13)	theater	(42)
13. fulfil (6)		fulfill	(49)

From the above result, the participants select four words from British English spelling and nine words from American English spelling. American English spelling seems to be more preferred by the participants than British English spelling. For example, no participants use the British English spelling “cheque”. They prefer to use the American English spelling “check”. In addition, the spelling “fulfill” is utilized by 49 participants, and the spelling “program” is used by 48 participants.

Nevertheless, there are still some participants who use British English spelling, such as “colour” that is used by 42 participants, “neighbour” by 44 participants, and “labour” by 31 participants. As resulted from the analysis, the spelling that ends with “-our” is more preferred by the participants.

Questionnaire

This section elaborates on the use of and preferences between American English and British English. The questionnaire consists of ten questions, and each question represents the students’ language use and preferences.

Participants’ languages

Number of participants	Traditional/Local languages	Indonesian	Another language besides Indonesian
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(English)			
55	40	55	55

Table 1. The result of English students' languages

Table 1 shows the result of the questionnaire regarding the participants' language. There are 40 participants who can speak their traditional languages out of 55 participants. According to the questionnaire result, the majority of the participants' traditional languages are Sundanese, Javanese, and Betawi. Another result signifies that all participants speak Indonesian and can also speak English.

The Participants' Questionnaire Results

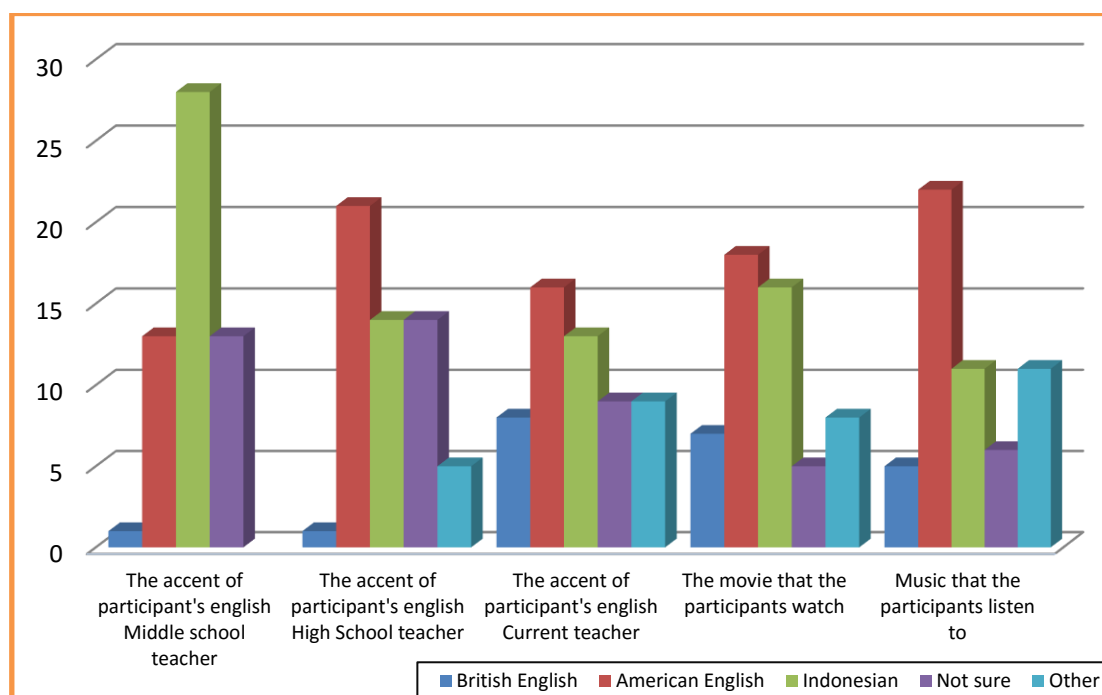


Figure 12. The result of the students' English teachers' accent, movie, and music lyric preferences

Figure 12 represents firstly the accents of the participants' English middle school teacher, secondly the accent of the participants' English high school teacher, thirdly the accent of the participants' English current teacher, fourthly the television program or movie that the participants watch, and the music they listen to.

The first question is about the accent of the participants' middle school English teacher. As many as 28 participants answer that their English teacher uses the Indonesian accent, and 13 participants state that their teacher speaks with the

American English accent. There is only one participant who answers the British English accent as the version his/her teacher uses. Additionally, five participants answer “not sure” about whether the teacher speaks with American English, British English, or Indonesian accents.

The second question relates to the accent of the participants’ high school English teacher. It is revealed by 21 participants that their high school English teacher uses the American English accent; by 14 participants that their teacher speaks with the Indonesian accent; and by one participant that the teacher uses the British English accent. However, 14 participants answer “not sure” about whether their English teacher uses American English, British English, or Indonesian accents. There are also five participants who respond “other” because the teacher mix British English, American English, and Indonesian.

The third question is about the accent of the participants’ current English teacher. As many as 16 participants answer that their English teacher uses the American English accent; 13 participants state that the teacher uses the Indonesian accent, and; eight participants respond that their English teacher speaks English with the British accent. Nevertheless, there are nine participants answering “not sure” about whether the teacher talks with American English, British English, or Indonesian accents. Moreover, nine participants respond to “other” which means that their English teacher mix British English, American English, and Indonesian.

The fourth question asks the movie the participants watch on TV and elsewhere. The results bring out the fact that 18 participants watch American movies, 16 participants watch Indonesian movies, and seven participants watch British movies. Nine participants, however, answer the questions with “other” because the movies they watch are American, British, Indonesian, and also Korean movies. Besides, five participants respond “not sure” about whether they watch American, British, or Indonesian movies.

The last question from the diagram is about the participants’ preferences of music lyrics they listen to. It is shown that 22 participants listen to American music, five participants listen to British music, and 11 participants listen to Indonesian music. In contrast, 11 participants answer “other” because they listen to American, British, and Indonesian music, and music from other countries as well. Nonetheless, six participants answer “not sure” about whether they listen to American, British, or Indonesian music.

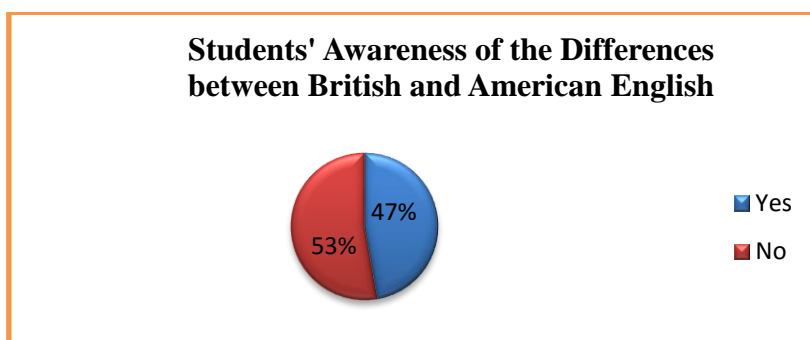


Figure 13. The result of English students' awareness of the differences between American English and British English

Figure 13 presents the students' awareness of the differences between American English and British English. The result shows that 53% of the participants can see the differences between American English and British English. On the contrary, 47% of the participants find it challenging to identify the differences between American English and British English. Despite the fact that some participants are already familiar with the existence of American English and British English, they do not understand the differences.

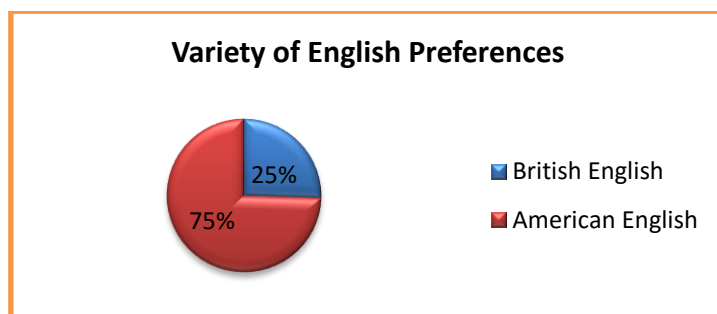


Figure 14. The result of English students' variety of English preferences

Figure 14 shows the preferences of American English and British English. The result brings out the fact that 75% and 25% of the participants prefer American English and British English, respectively.

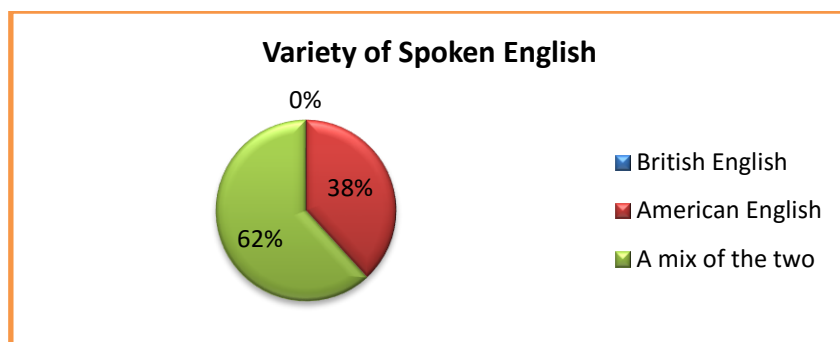


Figure 15. The result of English students' variety of spoken English

Figure 15 presents a variety of English that the participants speak. The result shows that 62% of the participants mix American English and British English in their speaking. Meanwhile, 28% of the participants speak American English, and no one uses only British English when they speak.

Discussion

This study utilizes some tests to examine students' knowledge of American English and British English, in which the tests have different results. The first test (vocabulary test) indicates that some participants are not aware of the differences between American English and British English vocabulary. This is proven by the result that some participants answer the test incorrectly because they cannot distinguish the vocabulary between the two varieties of English. Further, they are also not sure whether the words are from British English or American English vocabulary.

Although more students answer the test incorrectly, some of them (40%) can respond to the test items correctly. It implies that at least 40 percent of them are aware of the differences between American English and British English vocabulary. In Indonesia, students are not aware of American English and British English differences since they only recognize and learn English as a foreign language. English is only taught in schools, but it is not used in social life (Broughton et al. (2003). This problem makes them unaware that English has a variety, including American English and British English.

The second test is a vocabulary preference test, in which participants prefer British English to American English. Conversely, the participants choose American English over British English in the spelling test and spelling preferences because British English spelling is considered more complicated than American English

spelling. Collom (2016) notes that British English serves as the most difficult variety, specifically the spelling and grammar rules.

The results reveal that the participants are not consistent in choosing between American English and British English; they sometimes prefer to use British English, and vice versa. According to Broughton et al. (2003), learners of English as a foreign language have a choice of language variety to a larger extent than the second language learners. For this reason, there is no consistency of Indonesian students as foreign language learners in using the variety of English, e.g., they use British English vocabulary with American English spelling. Sutrisno (1997) opines that the environmental factor is one of the factors that affects students' English ability in learning English as a foreign language. For instance, the place where they learn English determines their use of vocabulary and spelling as in line with the English they listen to and are familiar with.

Suryabrata (1998) states that English teachers play an essential role in influencing their students. For example, English teachers who teach English as a foreign language give their students a mixed language between American English and British English. This leads the students to use a mixed language as well. There is no consistency in using the variety of English. As resulted from this study, the participants express that their middle school English teacher, high school English teacher, and current English teacher mix the American English and British English. Some of them even state that the teacher used Indonesian when they teach English. On the other hand, learners of English as a second language tend to choose which variety they will use between American English and British English, along with having a targeted variety when they learn English.

The survey result reveals that the mother tongue of all the participants is Indonesian, making it spoken in their environment. They speak English only in the classroom so that they become inconsistent in using English variety between American English and British English, or even get confused about the English they use.

In watching movies and listening to music, some participants pick British movies and music, some choose American movies and music, and some go with Indonesian movies and music. As mentioned earlier, there is no consistency in using American English or British English, yet American English reaches the highest percentage in all aspects.

Even though the students tend not to notice the variety of English they use, 75 percent of them prefer American English, as shown in the questionnaire. This indicates that they desire to use or learn about American English variety instead of British English variety. Nevertheless, the result signifies that 62 percent of the students mix American English and British English; 28 percent use American English; no one uses only British English. Their preferences are influenced by the TV programs they watch, the music they listen to, and their middle school, high school, and current English teachers.

Conclusion

This study summarizes that the participants are not aware of the differences between American English and British English. The result of the study reveals that they answer some of the test items incorrectly. In addition, the participants are already familiar with both American and British English, yet they cannot distinguish the differences between the two versions. Based on test results, the participants still get confused about their answers, whether it is British English or American English.

This study indicates from the findings that some participants have chosen British English, and some prefer American English. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the participants mix both varieties of English in the classroom.

This study aims to show the English students' awareness of the variety of American English and British English. There is no such thing that one variety is better than the other one because we can use any varieties that we are interested in, either British English or American English. However, English teachers can also utilize the results of this research to concern about students' knowledge of the differences between American English and British English, especially those majoring in English. It is because they learn about this language more specifically, so that they are supposed to understand the differences between both versions.

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