

Influence of Americanism on the Writings of Students: The Case of Students of Aminu Saleh College of Education Azare, Bauchi State

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Abstract: The gradual dominance of American English has been noticed even in England not to talk of the other areas where the British Standard English is adopted as a model of speech and writing. On this note, this paper examined the scenario in Nigeria particularly through investigating the English writings of NCE students of Aminu Saleh College of Education Azare, Bauchi State. One hundred students, twenty from each of the five schools, were selected and instructed to write English essays on the topic of their choices. The essays were marked and three hundred and sixty seven (367) Americanisms were identified in the students' use of spelling, vocabulary and grammar. American spelling happened to be prevalent in the students' writings, representing 67.1% of the total number of Americanisms identified. Vocabulary came second with 23.4% and lastly grammar with 9.5%. That confirms the influence of the American English in their English writings perhaps as a result of their inevitable use of American-based computers and websites in the internet. The findings also show that the students have little or no idea on the differences between British English and American English. It has been therefore suggested that the departments of General Studies in our higher institutions of learning should establish a course in which the varieties of English would be made known to the students.

Keywords: Variety, Language, Americanism

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I. INTRODUCTION

The spread of English language around the world began with the British colonial powers in America, Asia and Africa. English was essentially the language of commerce, religion, administration and education. In most of the colonies, English was made compulsory in school and became a major requirement for social advancement or privileges. Individuals had no choice but learn English if they wanted to make any progress. Upon the attainment of independence, many of the former British colonies adopted English as their official language. In effect, English became a global language and as a global language, various varieties evolve across the regions and cultures of the world (Crystal 2002). However, The America's ever rising and dominant political and economic position in the world acts as a major attraction to international politics, trade and allied businesses. Individuals, organizations and countries (Nigeria inclusive) wishing to develop international links with the America are thus under considerable pressure to either learn American English or work with it.

However, people may have little background knowledge about this development and may also not be fully aware of existence of different varieties that refer to the different manifestations of the language. On this note, this paper attempts to give a clear picture of the English language, particularly the two dominant varieties: British and American English and how the latter is gradually overtaking the former and its pedagogical implications in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching and learning situations.

Language and Variety of a Language

Language is seen a human activity which involves sounds and speech patterns (for speaking); signs, symbols and letters (for writing); gestures and other paralinguistic means all for a purposeful communication. Variety in the other hand is a term used to refer to any kind of language production, whether it is viewed as being determined by region, gender, social class, age or inimitable individual characteristics (Yule, 1996:240).

Americanism

Americanism is a term used to refer to a word, phrase of American origin or spelling that is typical of American English, and not so much elsewhere. The term emerged based on the fact that American English differs from British English, Australian English, and other national varieties in many of its pronunciations, words, spellings and grammatical constructions.

Difference between British and American English

Being one of the new mother tongue varieties that have had some influence on a number of world Englishes, the American English (AmE) deserves to be studied through looking more closely at its features and how the features distinguish it from the British English (BrE). In order to properly see the extent of the difference from the British English particularly in writing, the American English has to be placed side-by-side with the British one and then to look at both from the levels of spelling, vocabulary and grammar. Although pronunciation is another level in which the two varieties differ, it will not be considered here as the target of this paper is to investigate the influence of the American English in the students' writing not their speech. Below are some of the differences:

American English	Differences in Spelling	British English
(or) Color Favor honor		(our) colour favour honour etc.
(dgment) acknowledgment judgment		(dgement) acknowledgement judgement etc.
(o) Mold Smolder		(ou) mould smoulder etc
(er) Center Liter Theater		(re) centre litre theatre etc
(e) fetus medieval maneuver		(ae/oe) foetus mediaeval manoeuvre
(se) defense license offense		(ce) defence licence offence
(in) indorse insure		(en) endorse ensure etc
(single consonant) counselor libelous quarreling		(double consonants) counsellor libellous quarelling
(double consonants) fulfillment installment skillful		(single consonant) fulfilment instalement skilful

Others Spelling Differences

Check	cheque
Draft	draught
Gage	gauge
Mustache	moustache
Plow	plough

Differences in Vocabulary

American English	British English
Faucet	tap
Muffler	silencer
Candy	sweets
Driver's license	driving license
Generator	dynamo
Zero	nought, nil
Line	queue
To ring	to call
Game	match
Soccer	football
Gas	petrol
Airplane	aeroplane
Casket	coffin
Cookie	biscuit
Corn	maize
Diaper	nappy
Drapes	curtains
Bookstore	bookshop
Living room	sitting room
etc.	

Differences in Grammar

American English	British English
I'll see you at the weekend	I'll see you during the weekend
It's twenty after four	it's twenty past four
I haven't seen her in ages	I haven't seen her for ages
Monday through Friday	Monday to Friday inclusive
Sundays we go to church	On Sundays we go to church
I looked out the window	I looked out of the window
Half the cash goes for clothes	Half the cash goes on clothes
They live on Broad street	They live in Broad street
I moved toward the car	I moved towards the car
Do you have the time?	Have you got the time?
The house was burned down	The house was burnt down
It's a half hour	It's half an hour
We shall see in the future	We shall see in future
She is still in the hospital	She is still in hospital
The government is democratic	The government are democratic
I'll go momentarily	I'll go in a moment
I feel real good	I feel really good etc.

The Ideal Variety for Students in Nigeria

Nigeria like the other countries colonised by the British Empire, adopted the Standard British English (henceforth SBE) as a model of speech and writing. The SBE in such places performs a number of functions, such as being the official language, language of instruction in schools, language of media and other cooperate environments. In Nigeria for instance, two important documents – the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the National Policy on Education (1977, revised 1981) both uphold the continued use of English

(obviously the SBE) in schools and any other formal gathering. This situation therefore consolidates the choice of the SBE as a model of teaching, learning and use of English language in Nigeria.

Possible Reasons for Gradual Dominance of American English

Although the Britain has a longstanding interest in teaching English and also possesses publishers and institutions to promote it, however, that does not prevent it from facing tough challenges particularly from the American English. Several researchers have attributed the continued success and dominance of the American English to the worldwide success of American business and technology. It has been claimed that such success leads speakers of the SBE even in England to adopt many Americanisms. In places where the SBE is taught, learnt and used as a Second Language, the challenges there are even tougher. This happens as a result of people’s inevitable contact with American computers, cell phones, movies and other technologies. The situation is further worsen by people’s partial comprehension of even the SBE which provides them with inadequate knowledge of differentiating it from others.

II. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The data were collected from English essays of one hundred (100) NCE II students of 2018/2019 academic session, twenty (20) from each of the five schools namely: School of Arts and Social Science (SASS), School of Early Child Care and Primary Education (SOECPE), School of Languages (SOL), School of Science (SOS) and School of Vocational and Technical Education (SOVTE). Their large number necessitated a selection of a sample for a smooth conduct of the research. The choice of the students of that level was based on the fact that they are neither new in the system nor also occupied with the multi-tasking activities of the year of graduation. The selection of the sample was guided by two different types of sampling techniques. These are *stratified sampling* and *random sampling*. The former enabled the researcher to categorise the selected students based on their schools while the latter was used to ensure that each NCE II student within a school has an equal chance of being selected.

III. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

While marking the students’ essays, three aspects were considered in examining the extent of the influence of the American English in their writings. The aspects are: *Spelling*, *Vocabulary* and *Grammar*. As anticipated, Americanisms featured in all the three aspects. It was realised that almost all the words whose spellings end with ‘-se’ were written with ‘-ze’. Other American spelling include: center, offence, traveler, behavior, check, judgment etc. Under vocabulary, words like soccer, movie, vocation, stove, line were identified. The issues under grammar were found in the students’ use of *collective noun* and *present perfect tense* where the former is used with singular verbs as in “the committee *has*” in American English but used with both singular and plural verbs in British as in “the committee *has/have*”. The latter was realised in places where the students used simple past tense instead of present perfect as it is done in American English. The below table shows the number of Americanisms recorded against each of the three aspects and according to the schools of the college.

A Table Showing the Number of Americanisms Recorded Against Each of the Selected Aspects

S/N	SCHOOL	ASPECTS			TOTAL
		SPELLING	VOCABULARY	GRAMMAR	
1	SASS	51	17	8	76
2	SOECPE	47	19	7	73
3	SOL	45	13	6	64
4	SOS	53	21	6	80
5	SOVTE	50	16	8	74
GRAND TOTAL		246	86	35	367
PERCENTAGE		67.1%	23.4%	9.5%	100%

The above table presents the distribution and percentage of the Americanisms recorded in each of the schools and shows the numbers that have been found under each of the selected aspects. In the hundred essays, two hundred and forty six (246) American spellings were recorded, representing 67.1% of total number of the Americanisms identified. American vocabularies recorded eighty six (86) times, representing 23.4% and thirty five (35) constructions representing 9.5% were identified with the American English grammar.

IV. CONCLUSION

The research revealed that American English is gradually having a greater influence on world English than any other variety. It has also been noticed that most of the learners of English as a second language are not fully aware of the differences between the American English and the British one. In effect, their usage becomes a hybridised one in which the two varieties are mixed up in areas of spelling, vocabulary and grammar. It is therefore suggested that departments of General Studies in the higher institutions of learning should establish a course in which the differences between the prominent varieties, if not all, would be taught. That definitely would help the learners take the differences into consideration and stick to the use of the ideal variety.

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