Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies
Vol.6, No.1, April 2010

Dominance of Americanization in a Translation Task: A Pilot Study in the Iranian University Training

Nematullah Shomoossi **Amin Marzban**
nshomoossi@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present study aims to examine the predominant use of American English in the current language use of studetns of English in Iran. The participants in the study consisted of 40 students of English at Shiraz Islamic Azad University, Iran, who were chosen randomly. A written translation task consisting of two separate lists of 20 Persian words was used. The first list was intended to check their choice of either British or American *spellings*. The second list, however, tapped their choice of *lexical equivalents* in either American or British varieties. Statistical analyses were run within the framework of *within* and *between* type effects, and the results indicated the priority of American spelling and lexical equivalents over the British variety. The results of the present study would shed light on the current language teaching and learning practices especially when it comes to a choice of international English textbooks available on the market.

Key Words: Americanization; Spelling; Lexical Equivalent; Unconscious Use.

1. Introduction

English has been used throughout the world as a widely accepted language. In addition to American and British versions, other varieties are also at play. Some linguists (e.g. Kachru, 1996) call English the pluricentric language simply because of multiple standard varieties. On the other hand, globalization (Americanization specifically) has brought economic, technological, cultural and linguistic bearings to the fore. Although ELT is no longer supposed to prepare learners to achieve intelligibility for NS receivers (Jenkins, 2002) or to develop the kind of communicative competence based on a native-speaker model (Kuo,

2006), we still believe that the final repertoire of language one develops needs to resemble either British or American English. The globalization of English in diverse contexts, particularly in the postcolonial, post-communist, western European settings as well as in Asian countries is one such interconnected strand in the asymmetrical flow of products, ideas and discourses (Phillipson, 1998). As it might have been observed by most non-native speakers of English, living in a world where 70% of the movies watched are of an American origin and the impressions like global village and culture plus global customers that deamnd global services by global suppliers may converge into a reduction of local cultural space (Hamelink, 1994).

In the present world, the imagined community of the nation-state is being superseded by global and regional alliances and organizations, which might appear to be either governmental or private. It is now the world that is being imagined and shaped, by the media magnets, transnational companies, drafters of human rights documents, and organizers of "international" conferences. At the heart of globalization is the "tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization" (Appadurai, 1990: 295). Since languages expand and contract, and because English is so influential, it is important to identify the agents responsible for its spread and to attempt to shed light on the interests that globalizing English serves. English can serve benign or pernicious purposes. In a world of increasing globalization, militarization, and widened gaps between haves and have-nots within countries in the North and South, and between rich and poor countries, it seems absolutely important to recognize what goals the increased use of English is serving. Generally, a globalized language like English can be seen as opening doors to a world of mass communication in which people feel at ease to convey messages. The case of American variety is even stronger as political, cultural and artistic issues show up.

1.1. Americanization in Iran

Iran as a case of postcolonial community, where American culture and education used to manifest dominance before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, can be an impeccable instance of how this effect has lingered through and still manifests itself in multiple pedagogical respects. After the Islamic Revolution, there has been continuous effort to eradicate instances of American culture such as the revision of high school textbooks, university conferences, film making industry and news broadcasting. On the contrary, American impact on the educational context and language learning was too great to vanish in a limited period. English Institutes

such as the former Iran-America Society (Iran Language Institute abbreviated as ILI and available through www.ili.ir), as an advocate of American English and the most well-known center for English teaching and learning in the country is a further proof to this fact.

Unlike school teachers, university professors mostly seem to be proponents of the American accent, spelling and style as far as writing and speaking are concerned. Interestingly, the reason may appear multi-faceted: their own previous academic training and possibly individual interests in American variety for the sake of its being better compatible with Farsi sounds and pronunciation (e.g. US *freeway* versus UK *motorway*). Surprisingly, the overall trend inside Iran seems to have evoked a kind of enthusiasm in the youngsters to follow American movies, culture and methods of education. School textbooks, on the contrary, promote the British variety.

The present study seeks to examine the predominant use of American versus British English in Iran. This may originate in the fact that no earlier study has ever investigated the superiority of American variety over the British in Iran, simply because the discrimination of the two has not been regarded as necessary by most English educators and learners and many have been constantly exposed to a coward mixture of both, even though they finally develop a repertoire resembling the American variety. The results of the present study, as a small representative of Iranian learners' English learning, would shed light on the current language teaching and learning practices especially when it comes to a choice of international English textbooks available on the market.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants in the study consisted of 40 students of English at Shiraz Islamic Azad University, Iran. They were chosen randomly and proportionately from among male and female students. The justification for choosing these participants is that during their four-year program in the university context, they had been exposed to a sufficient corpus of both formal and informal English as their foreign language. Thus their exposure to the media, textbooks and incidental learning related to a particular variety act as a determining factor in choosing one of the two popular varieties used in Iran, namely American and British English. The

participants' age ranged from 19 to 22 but they all came from a similar socioeconomic background.

2.2 . The Task

A written translation task consisting of two separate lists of 20 Farsi words was used. With the first list (See Appendix One), participants were required to write the English equivalents of words in the space provided where *two different spellings* (British or American) were possible. For example, the Persian word /te'a:tr/ can be written as *theater* in US English; while, the same word is likely to be written as *theatre* in the British variety. With the second agenda (See Appendix Two), every word could have two various translated equivalents in either American or British varieties. For example, the Persian word /x□dr□:w/ can be translated and written as *automobile* in American English but in British English it may be written as *car*. Participants were asked to write the one they think was more appropriate and in line with their individual learning.

2.3. Procedure

Participants were provided with the list of words and spaces to write the corresponding translations separately in a 10-minute interval; they were asked to transfer the answers onto the question papers. As far as the administration procedure was concerned, every participant was given sufficient time (45 seconds per word) to let them thoroughly process their *unconscious knowledge* without using a dictionary or other sources. Coordinators collected the first answer sheets and distributed the second papers with a 10-minute interval; they were trained not to offer aids of any sort during the exam.

3. Results

Having obtained the findings and results from the raw data, statistical analyses were performed within the framework of *within* and *between* type effects.

3.1. Within Type Effects

Below, we will present the results of a set of paired t-tests run for each set of translated words. This was done to examine the significance of differences observed between the use of the two varieties within each set of words.

3.1.1. Translation task to investigate *spelling* differences

The result of a paired t-test carried out on this type of agenda to check if the participants unconsciously preferred American style over British English indicates that the difference between the use of the two varieties was significant (**P<0.000**) as far as the *spelling* was concerned (See Table 3.1.).

Table 3.1. Within Group analysis of the use of American vs. British spelling

Variable	Number of Pairs	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Level of Significance
American English	40	6.4634	1.485	6.14	40	.000
British English		3.5854	1.533			

3.1.2. Translation task to investigate American or British Lexical Equivalents

The result of a paired t-test carried out on this agenda to check if the participants unconsciously preferred American lexicon to British words indicates a significant difference (P<0.05) between the two (See Table 3.2.).

Table 3.2. Within Group analysis for the choice of American or British Equivalents

Variable	Number of Pairs	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Level of Significance
American English	40	4.6341	1.475	6.65	40	0.05
British English		3.6341	1.655			

3.2. Between Group effects

The design of the analysis of between group effects was another paired t-test. The means obtained from the two groups were compared, and the results indicated a significant difference (p<0.000) between the two sets.

Table 3.3. Between Group analysis for the choice of American *Spelling* and *Lexical Equivalents*

Variable	Number of Pairs	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Level of Significance
Americanized Spelling	40	6.4634	1.485	6.55	40	.000
Americanized Lexical Equivalents		4.6341	1.655			

4. Conclusion

The results of the comparison revealed the priority of American English over the British. Iranian university students, as expected by most instructors including the authors of this paper, tend to apply American English in numerous contexts. Their knowledge of English was manifested unconsciously in their use of American spelling and lexical equivalents through the translation task. Thus, to conclude, one might assert that certain contextual policies along with a unanimous interest in American media and film industry would give rise to the unconscious and automatic use of the US English in an EFL context like Iran.

The important implication of this pilot study may relate to the practice of language teaching in Iran and similar EFL contexts where a more careful selection of textbooks and channels of learning are required. Although majority of English teachers and students apply American English in daily usage for many purposes, there is just very limited effort to choose an appropriate variety to be taught in EFL academic settings. There is now a better potential to investigate this trend in learners' spoken discourse too. While this study was a small-scale research done on the translation of words into English, we would recommend further research at longer stretches of discourse, as well as enquiring into the mental representation of the dominant variety through qualitative procedures. Also, Coupland and Bishop (2007) have conducted and recommended an ideology-based study in the UK context; we recommend similar studies to be conducted in EFL contexts like Iran with special attention to sociological variables.

References

Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. In Featherstone M. (Ed.), *Global Culture: nationalism, globalization and modernity* (pp. 295-310). London: Sage Publishers.

Coupland, N., and Bishop, H. (2007). Ideologised values for British accents. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 11(1): 74-93.

Hamelink, C. (1994). *Trends in World Communication: on disempowerment and self-empowerment*. Penang: Southbound and Third World Network.

Jenkins, J. (2002). A sociolinguistically based, empirically researched pronunciation syllabus for English as an international language. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(1): 83-103.

Kuo, I. (2006). Addressing the issue of teaching English as a lingua franca. *ELT Journal*, 60(3): 213-221

Kachru, B.B. (1986). *The Alchemy of English. The spread, functions and models of non-native Englishes*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Phillipson, R. (1998). *Globalizing English: Are Linguistic Human Rights an Alternative to Linguistic Imperialism?* Oxford: Pergamon.

Nematullah Shomoossi (nshomoossi@yahoo.com) is a PhD candidate in TEFL at the University of Isfahan, Iran. He is also the coordinator of English programs at Sabzevar School of Medical Sciences. His areas of expertise and interest include research in writing, translation studies and written discourse analysis. He has published in many journals.

Amin Marzban is a PhD candidate in TEFL at the University of Isfahan, Iran. He is also a faculty member of Azad University in Shiraz and Sepidan, Iran. His areas of expertise and interest include skills as well as research in Discourse and translation studies.

Appendix One: Translation task checking the priority of American or British Spelling

No.	Persian Word	Spelling	
		American	**British**
1	تئاتر	Theater	Theatre
2	مرکز	Center	Centre
3	رنگ	Color	Colour
4	دفاع	Defense	Defence
5	زندان	Jail	Gaol
6	تمدن	Civilization	Civilisation
7	جهانی شدن	Globalization	Globalisation
8	شوخ طبعی	Humor	Humour
9	رفتار	Behavior	Behaviour
10	سازمان دهی	Organize	Organise
11	انالوگ	Analog	Analogue
12	ماده بیهوشی	Anesthetic	Anaesthetic
13	کاتالوگ	Catalog	Catalogue
14	شدت بخشی	Catalyze	Catalyse
15	تمرین	Practice	Practise
16	برنامه	Program	Programme
17	مدل	Modeler	Modeller
18	متر	Meter	Metre
19	لاستیک	Tire	Tyre
20	چک	Check	Cheque

Appendix 2: Translation task checking the priority of American or British Lexical Equivalents

No.	Persian Word	Lexical Equivalent	
		American	**British**
1	خودرو	Automobile	(motor) car
2	آپارتمان	Apartment	Flat
3	وکیل	Attorney	Solicitor
4	هر کجا	Anyplace	Anywhere
5	تاکسی	Cab	Taxi
6	قوطی	Can	Tin
7	کمد	Closet	Cupboard
8	کیف پول	Coin-purse	Purse
9	داروخانه	Drug store	Chemist's
10	دیوانه	Crazy	Mad
11	آسانسور	Elevator	Lift
12	پاک کن	Eraser	Rubber
13	پاییز	Fall	Autumn
14	شیر آب	Faucet	Tap
15	چراغ قوه	Flashlight	Torch
16	ازاد راه	Freeway	Motorway
17	سطل زباله	Garbage can	Rubbish bin
18	رفتگر	Garbage collector	Dustman
19	چهار راه	Intersection	Crossroad
20	پست	Mail	Post