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Yabancı Dil Öğretiminde Türk Öğrencilerin Kültürel Tercihlerine İlişkin Olarak İngiliz ve Amerikan İngilizcesi	The British and American English in Relation to Turkish Students' Cultural Preferences in EFL Context

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ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, öğrencilerin İngiliz ve Amerikan İngilizcesi sözcükleri (ve onların yazılış ve hecelenişleri) arasındaki ayrımı yapabilme yetenekleri ve öğrencilerin İngiliz ve Amerikan kültürlerine olan tutumları ve ikisi arasındaki tercihleri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektir. İngiliz ve Amerikan aksanları olmak üzere telafuz modelleri tercihleri de araştırılmıştır. Çalışmaya Ege bölgesinde bir Devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim görmekte olan % 41.4'i erkek and % 58.6'sı kız olmak üzere toplamda 140 öğrenci katılmıştır. Bulgular, öğrencilerin İngiliz ve Amerikan İngilizcesi sözcüklerini ayırt etme yetenekleri ve onların İngilizce yetenek seviyeleri, İngilizce öğrenmek için geçirdikleri yıl sayısı ve İngiliz ve Amerikan kültürlerine olan tercihleri arasında pozitif ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Diğer bulgularsa İngiliz ve Amerikan kültürlerine olan tercihler, Türk ve İngiliz/Amerikan kültürleri arasındaki farklılıklar arasında makuldan kuvvetli tercihlere varan sonuçlar vermiştir. Ayrıca, Türk öğrencilerin Amerikan aksanını İngiliz aksanına nazaran daha çok sevdikleri görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Britanya Ingilizcesi, Amerikan Ingilizcesi, Kültürel Tercih, Telafuz

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to examine the relationship of students' capability of making distinctions between British and American English words (and their spelling) with their attitudes and preferences toward British and American culture. The preference of pronunciation patterns (i.e. the British and American accents) was also investigated. There were 140 Turkish students (out of which 41.4% males and 58.6% females) studying at a State university in Agean region who participated this research. The findings revealed the positive relationship of students' capability of the distinction between British and American English words with levels of English competencies, years spent learning English, and preferences toward British and American culture. The other findings yielded moderate to strong preferences toward British/American cultural heritage and differences between Turkish and British/American culture. Additionally, Turkish students liked the American accent more compared to the British accent.

Keywords: British English, American English, Cultural Preference, Pronunciation

Introduction

Like other languages, English did not remain unchangeable through history and in different parts of the world. There are many factors influencing its development: social, political, economical, educational, psychological, etc. This is why we can notice some differences, for instance, between American English (AmE), Australian English (AuE), Canadian English (CanE), and British English (BrE).

Because this article dealt with (among other things and topics) differences between British and American English, our attention was focused on these two varieties of the same language. A couple of examples of these differences in the daily usage of this language were provided by Zhang and Jiang (2008, 70-71): "John has *got* much better during the last week" (BrE) vs "John has *gotten* much better during the last week" (AmE); "Have you any children?" (BrE) vs "Do you have any children?" (AmE); "in the list" (BrE) vs "on the list" (AmE); "at Christmas" (BrE) vs "on Christmas" (AmE); "The new term begins on September 1" (BrE) vs "The new term begins September 1 (AmE); "I've forgotten my husband" (BrE) vs "I forgot my husband" (AmE).

Some differences are due to different words used to denote the same concept (Davies, 2005): taxi rank (BrE) vs taxi stand (AmE), petrol (BrE) vs gas/gasoline (AmE), cash machine (BrE) vs ATM (AmE), takeaway food (BrE) vs takeout food (AmE), bill (BrE) vs check (AmE), chips (BrE) vs (French) fries (AmE), trainers (BrE) vs sneakers (AmE), fresher (BrE) vs freshman (AmE), flyover (BrE) vs overpass (AmE). Other differences encompass distinct spelling rules (Jurigová, 2011): labour, colour (BrE) vs labor, color (AmE), centre, metre (BrE) vs center, meter (AmE), apologise, realise (BrE) vs apologize, realize (AmE), fulfil (BrE) vs fulfill (AmE), defence (BrE) vs defense (AmE), organise (BrE) vs organize (AmE), enquire (BrE) vs inquire (AmE), programme (BrE) vs program (AmE), signalled (BrE) vs signaled (AmE), etc.

As for idioms, British and American English could differ in prepositions and their objects or in both of them (Algeo, 2006). Some examples are (as given by McArthur, 1992, 44-45): "a home from home" (BrE) vs "a home away from home" (AmE), "at a double" (BrE) vs "on the double" (AmE), "give *sb* a new lease of life" (BrE) vs "give *sb* a new lease on life" (AmE), "go with a bang" (BrE) vs "go over with a bang" (AmE), "be at a loose end" (BrE) vs "be at loose ends" (AmE), and "on second thoughts" (BrE) vs "on second thought" (AmE). It is suggested that more time should be allocated to the consolidation of the major differences between different varieties of English (British and American and, if possible, other varieties) under courses like Vocabulary and Listening and Pronunciation in the ELT curriculum adopted by Turkish universities (Yaman, 2015). Presumably, it can be derived from many different factors. The perceived comprehensibility is significantly correlated with speech properties, such as pronunciation, speed, intonation and fluency for most of

the English accents under investigation (Zhang, 2020). However various varieties show difference in its own discourse, vocabulary, grammar, accent, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and have its respective traits in pronunciation, intonation, tone, spelling etc. Although there are some differences in phonetics, vocabulary and grammar between British English and American English as discussed above, the basics of the phonetic system, word stock and grammar still make it clear that British English and American English are just two regional varieties of one language, not two different languages (Han, 2019).

The next topic covered by this article included intercultural psychology and social anthropology. Within these fields of academic study, there are attitudes and preferences toward cultures that are different from ours (in our case, from Turkish culture). Cultures can be roughly divided into two broad categories – individualist and collectivist cultures. Hofstede (2011), one of the most prolific authors in this branch of social sciences, listed the following ten differences between individualist and collectivist cultures (the first characteristic is typical for individualist, whereas the second one defines collectivist cultures): 1) people are part of extended families (clans) which protect them in exchange for loyalty *vs* everyone takes care of himself/herself and his/her family only; 2) "I" *vs* "we" – consciousness; 3) speaking one's mind is allowed *vs* harmony has to be always maintained; 4) everyone has right of privacy *vs* belonging is highlighted; 5) others are classified and regarded as individuals *vs* in-group or out-group; 6) "one person – one vote (opinion)" *vs* votes and opinions are predetermined by in-group; 7) the word "I" is indispensable *vs* it is avoided; 8) the main purpose of education is learning how to learn *vs* how to do; 9) tasks are more important than relationships *vs* relationships are more important than completing tasks; and 10) transgression of norms in such cultures produces the feelings of guilt vs. shame feelings.

Thus, collectivist cultures value and appreciate interdependence over independence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). English and American culture are regarded as individualist (they are Western cultures), while, for example, East Asian cultures are considered to be collectivist. Turkish culture is a modern collectivist culture; that is, it has some elements of individualist cultures as well. In individualist cultures people are regarded as independent and autonomous. Individualistic cultures are the ones emphasizing the needs of the individual over the needs of the group as a whole in the society. Unlike collectivist cultures, the individualist cultures are inclined to

define themselves in terms of their unique personal characteristics. Hence, coming from and individualist or collectivist culture also determines the way we choose the lexis we use in our daily lives.

Cultural attitudes and preferences are very important variables because they are indicators of perceived differences ("distances") between various cultures. For instance, general attitudes toward American pop culture, ideas, science and technology are positive (Pew Research Center, 2012). Another example is that of Turkish EFL students and teachers who reported a high level of interest in British culture (Kahraman, 2016). Cultural attitudes and preferences could be associated with preferences of languages (especially those which are considered as global). Generally speaking, Turkish students had positive attitudes toward the English language (Gömleksiz, 2010). Another researcher obtained similar results: the cognitive, behavioral and emotional component of attitudes toward the English language indicated a high degree of interest and preference toward this language (Eshghinejad, 2016).

There is a dearth of research on students' ability to differentiate between American and English words and their spelling, especially when cultural preferences and differences are investigated along with it. To this end, the problem of this study is to examine Turkish students' capability of making distinctions between British and American words and investigate their cultural attitudes/preferences (along with linguistic preferences).

The following research statements were set:

1.   Students have a strong preference for British and American culture (accompanied by positive attitudes). That is, the distributions of their preferences are so negatively asymmetrical that are statistically significant.

2.   There are statistically significant correlations between years of learning English, level of English competencies, and the capability of making distinctions between British and American English.

3.   There is a statistically significant correlation between attitudes/preferences toward English/American culture and the capability of spotting British and American English differences.

4.   The difference between Turkish (mostly collectivist) and British/American (individualist) culture, estimated by Turkish students, is great. This result is statistically significant.

5.   More students prefer the American English accent over the British English accent. This difference is statistically significant.

Method

This study was a cross-sectional one because participants gave their answers in a specific point of time. It can also be labeled as a correlational study due to the examination of the relationships between the aforementioned variables.

Sample

A total of 140 Turkish students participated this study. Their average age was $M = 21.10$ ($SD = 2.28$). The youngest student in our sample was 18 while the oldest one was 27 years old. There were 58 males (i.e. 41.4% of the total sample) and 82 females (i.e. 58.6% of our sample). Sample structure by participants' level of English competencies (knowledge and skills) was shown in Figure 1.
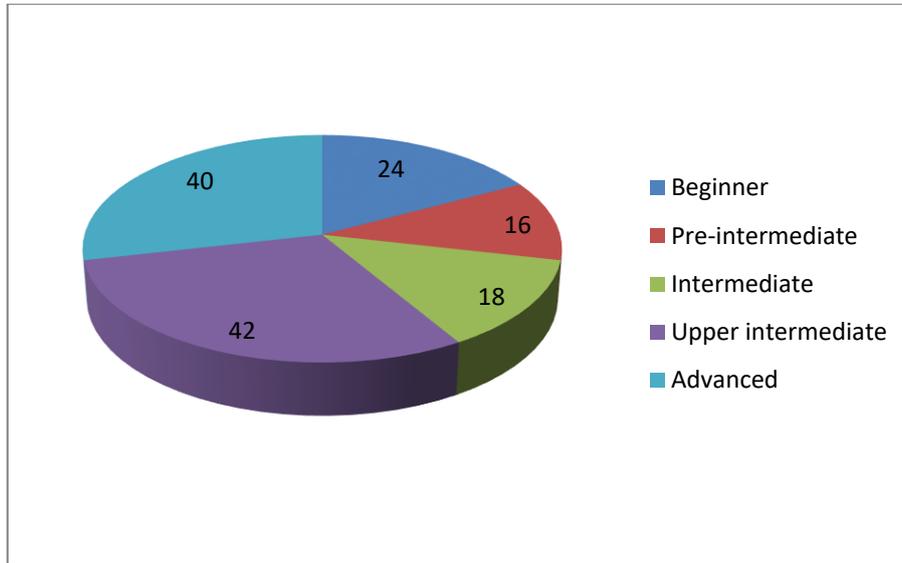

Figure 1. Number of participants per each level of English competencies

As displayed in Figure 1, most of our participants were at the upper intermediate level of English competencies ($N = 42$, i.e. 30% of the total sample) and at the advanced level of English competencies ($N = 40$, that is, 28.57%). Twenty-four participants (17.14%) estimated their English level as the beginner's, 18 participants (12.86%) expressed their English skills and knowledge were at the intermediate level, whereas 16 participants (11.43% of the total sample) indicated the pre-intermediate level.

Instruments

A measuring tool used for the purposes of the present study included questions on gender, age, level of English competencies (beginner's, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced level), and the number of years spent learning English.

Next, it included 20 words to be labeled as either British or American English words (color, liter, cooker, elevator, petrol, queue, torch, pants, pavement, pub, garden, chips, cookie, restroom, program, travelling, airplane, neighbour, mum, and can). From now on, it will be referred to this set of words as British/American English differences test (BAEDT). For each correct answer, participants were awarded one point whereas the incorrect one was worth zero points. The maximum score that can be obtained was 20 and the minimum one was zero.

The third part of the questionnaire encompassed questions on cultural attitudes and preferences (along with preferences towards accents). These questions were as follows: "How much do you like British films, music, literature, customs and other forms of this cultural heritage (e.g. customs, traditions)?" (ranging from 1 – "totally dislike" to 7 – "absolutely like"); "How much do you like American films, music, literature, customs and other forms of this cultural heritage (e.g. customs, traditions)?" (ranging from 1 – "totally dislike" to 7 – "absolutely like", as the previous one); "Please, estimate the extent to which Turkish culture differs from British culture..." (1 – "very small difference", 2 – "small difference", 3 – "average difference", 4 – "huge difference", 5 – "extremely big difference"); "Please, estimate the extent to which Turkish culture differs from American culture..." (1 – "very small difference", 2 – "small difference", 3 – "average difference", 4 – "huge difference", 5 – "extremely big difference"); "Which accent or pronunciation sounds more interesting to you or which do you like better?" (American, British, both of them, none of them); "If you had a chance, where would you prefer to travel?" (the USA, the UK, both of them, none of them); "Which accent are you used to?" (American, British, both of them, none of them); "Do you have antipathy towards American or British accent since primary school?" (yes/no).

Research procedure and data processing

It took participants approximately 20 minutes to answer the questions from our measurement tool. During the research process, the author of this study followed ethical standards of his profession. The imperative of anonymity and confidentiality

of data and personal information received by students was expressed fully and clearly by the researcher.

Data were processed by using SPSS for Windows (version 23.0), where the database was created. Both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were conducted in order to organize and display the obtained results as well as to draw the appropriate conclusions based on the check of statistical significance. Correlation coefficients, as well as chi-square test and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were used to analyze relationships between variables and frequencies to establish valid and reliable research results.

Findings

Table 1. Descriptive statistical values of the main variables in the present study

Variables	N	*Min*	*Max*	M	*SD*
Number of years spent learning English	140	6	14	8.93	2.06
British/American English differences test (BAEDT)	140	6	16	12.69	2.96
Preferences of British culture	140	2	7	5.24	1.67
Preferences of American culture	140	1	7	4.96	1.88
Difference between Turkish and British culture	140	1	5	3.84	1.05
Difference between Turkish and American culture	140	1	5	3.81	0.99

Referring to the figures in Table 1, the average number of years spent learning English (by Turkish students in our sample) was $M = 8.93$ ($SD = 2.06$). Participants' average score on British/American English differences test – BAEDT was $M = 12.69$ ($SD = 2.96$). To be more specific, average participant correctly answered 63.4% of the test questions. In general, Turkish students liked British ($M = 5.24$) and American ($M = 4.96$) cultural heritage (traditions and customs) as well as their popular culture. Hence, their attitudes toward British and American movies, music, literature, customs, etc. were positive. In participants' opinions, there was moderate to great difference between Turkish and British/American culture ($M = 3.84$ vs $M = 3.81$).

Table 2. Normality check of the distributions of British and American culture preferences.

Variables	N	Skewness	$SE_{skewness}$	$z_{skewness}$	K-S z	P
Preferences of British culture	140	-0.989	.205	-4.824	.374	.000
Preferences of American culture	140	-0.971	.205	-4.737	.239	.000

As displayed in Table 2, both distributions were different from the normal curve. By looking at the sign of the skewness indicators (in our case, it is the "minus" sign), we concluded that they are negatively asymmetrical. According to Bulmer (1979), if skewness is somewhere between -1 and -0.5, a distribution is moderately skewed, as was obtained for both distributions. According to Cramer (1997), if z-value of skewness (which is skewness divided by standard error – SE) is below -2, it is statistically significant). Again, when we consider z-value of preferences of British culture ($z_{skewness}$ = -4.824) and American culture preferences ($z_{skewness}$ = -4.737), we see that both of them were really skewed.

Furthermore, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality indicated statistically significant results (K-S z = .374, p < .001 and K-S z = .239, p < .001). Hence, the first hypothesis was confirmed. That is, Turkish students had strong preferences toward both British and American culture.

Table 3. Correlations between years spent learning English, level of English competencies and the capability of making distinctions between British and American English words.

*p < .01; **p < .001*

As noted in table 3, years spent learning English were in a small, positive, and statistically significant correlation with students' capability of making distinctions between British and American words (r(138) = .256, p < .01). Moreover, level of English competencies was in a strong, positive and statistically significant

correlation with students' results on BAEDT ($r(138) = .821$, $p < .001$). Hence, the more years spent learning English and the higher level of English competencies, the

	Years spent learning English	Level of English competencies	BAEDT
Years spent learning English	1	.131	.256*
Level of English competencies		1	.821**
BAEDT			1

better capability of the correct distinction between British and American English words.

However, years spent in learning English were not in a statistically significant correlation with students' levels of English competencies ($r(138) = .131$, $p > .05$). This is to say that the second hypothesis is partially confirmed.

Table 4. Correlations between English/American culture preferences and BAEDT scores.

	Preferences of British culture	Preferences of American culture	BAEDT
Preferences of British culture	1	.851*	.770*
Preferences of American culture		1	.792*
BAEDT			1

* p < .001

As seen in Table 4, students' preferences of British culture were strongly and positively related to preferences of American culture ($r(138) = .851$, $p < .001$). As it was just noted, this correlation was statistically significant. In other words, students who liked British culture had also positive attitudes towards American cultural heritage. Additionally, BAEDT scores were in strong, positive and statistically

significant relationships with preferences of British culture ($r(138) = .770$, $p < .001$) as well as of American culture ($r(138) = .792$, $p < .001$).

Thus, preferences (and positive attitudes) of British and American culture influenced Turkish students' capability of making distinctions between British and American English words (along with their spelling, e.g. theatre (British English) – theater (American English), travelling (British English) – traveling (American English)). Hence, the third hypothesis was completely confirmed.

Table 5. The normality check of distributions of differences between Turkish and British/American culture.

Variables	N	Skewness	$SE_{skewness}$	$z_{skewness}$	K-S z	p
Difference between Turkish and British culture	140	-0.801	.205	-3.907	.216	.000
Difference between Turkish and American culture	140	-0.511	.205	-2.493	.217	.000

As displayed in Table 5, both distributions had negative values of skewness and their z-values were statistically significant (-.801, $z_{skewness} = -3.907$ vs -.511, $z_{skewness} = -2.493$). Hence, both of them were negatively asymmetrical. The size of this asymmetry was moderate (because skewness was between -1 and - 0.5). All things considered, differences between Turkish and British/American culture were estimated as large. As a result of it, the fourth hypothesis was confirmed.

Table 6. Frequencies within questions on accent preference and traveling to the UK and the USA

	British English (the UK)	American English (the USA)	Both	None	χ^2	*P*
Which accent or pronunciation sounds more interesting to you or which do you like better?	40	50	28	22	13.371	.004
Which accent are you used to?	36	52	32	20	14.971	.002
If you had a chance, where would you prefer to travel	54	72	2	12	95.657	.000

As noticed from the figures shown in Table 6, all chi-square values were statistically significant (χ^2 = 13.371, *p* < .01 for the accent preferences; χ^2 = 14.971, *p* < .01 for the accent students were used to; and χ^2 = 95.657, *p* < .001). Hence, there were statistically significant differences between frequencies of answers related to each question. We also noticed that in all cases participants preferred the American accent and the USA to the British accent and the UK.

Fifty participants thought the American accent was more interesting compared to 40 participants who liked the British accent more. Next, there was a greater number of participants (*N* = 52) who were more used to the American accent compared to those who chose the British accent (*N* = 36). In the end, 72 participants wanted to travel to

the United States of America, while other 54 participants wanted to travel to the United Kingdom. Therefore, the last hypothesis was confirmed.

Table 7. The frequency of answers with regard to the question: "Do you have antipathy toward American or British accent since primary school?"

	Yes	No	χ^2	*P*
Do you have antipathy toward American or British accent since primary school?	32	108	41.257	.000

As indicated in Table 7, there were more Turkish students who did not have antipathy toward the American or British accent since primary school ($N = 108$), compared to the number of those who had this kind of antipathy ($N = 32$). The difference between these two frequencies was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 41.257$, *p* < .001). These results pointed out Turkish students' positive attitudes toward the British and American accent (pronunciation).

Discussion

Turkish students liked both American and British culture. They were interested in them and wanted to learn English (while they prefered the American accent over the British one). Hence, they like British and American movies, customs, traditions, and other types of their cultural heritage. On average, they were able to make distinctions between British and American words (and spelling differences with regard to some of them).

Moderate to high preferences toward British culture was in accordance with the result obtained by Kahraman (2006) and such preferences of American culture were congruent with the findings of Pew Research Center (2012). This is probably due to the fact that the UK and the USA are wealthy and prosperous countries which have a strong impact on the worldwide popular culture. Participants in our sample were young people and their perceptions are shaped and influenced by modern, contemporary music, movies, science, social networks, etc. Moreover, most of these segments of popular culture are spread and disseminated in English.

As anticipated, years spent learning English and students' level of English competencies were in positive relationships with their capability of differentiating between British and American English words. To be more specific, if percents of

shared variance are calculated (by squaring coefficients of correlation and multiplying the obtained results by 100), 6.55% and 67.40% will be gotten, respectively. In other words, years spent learning English explained more than 6% of the variance of BAEDT scores while students' level of English skills and knowledge accounted for 67.40% of their variance.

Those students who had positive attitudes and high level of preference toward British and American culture achieved better scores on BAEDT compared to students who did not share the same attitudes and opinions. That is, they were more able to make distinctions between British and American words. American culture preferences accounted for a somewhat greater percentage of the variance of BAEDT scores (62.73%) compared to British culture preferences (59.29%). British/American English differences test (BAEDT) included same types of terms (words) listed by Davies (2005) and Jurigová (2011).

Differences between Turkish and British/American culture were noticed by Turkish students and estimated as fairly large. This result emerged from the differences between collectivist and individualist cultures. To mention it again, Western cultures are characterized by "I" consciousness, individual opinion (which matters more compared to collective opinion and customs) and highly valued right of privacy; while in Eastern cultures extended families, "we" consciousness, and traditional norms are underlined (Hofstede, 2011).

The last portion of findings points to students' preference to the American over the British accent. This is probably because they are exposed more to the American accent (mostly on the Internet and TV). Additionally, Turkish students like both accents and only a few of them had antipathy toward them.

There were two chief shortcomings of this study. The first one was socially desirable responding (which is one of the common issues in social sciences and humanities). The second was the fact that generalizability of the obtained results was limited (because only students from one Turkish university participated this study).

Some practical implications of the present study were as follows: 1) students who like British and American culture are better at differentiating British and American words (and their spelling rules); 2) British/American English differences test (BAEDT) could be used as an objective measuring tool of English knowledge; and 3) English lessons based on British or American cultural heritage (no matter if it is traditional or modern culture) can be regarded by most Turkish students as

interesting and enjoyable. The main contribution of this study was the investigation of the relationship between English knowledge (in particular, making distinctions between British and American words) and cultural/language preferences. Hence, contributions were made within sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, cultural studies, social antropology, social psychology and educology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Turkish students were interested in British and American culture and liked the British and American English accent. Additionally, lots of them wanted to travel to the United Kingdom as well as to the United States of America. Those who had positive attitudes toward British and American culture were more able to spot differences between British and American words (and their distinctive spelling in some cases). Students perceived that there are differences between Turkish culture and British/American culture. However, these differences did not make students hostile, reserved or indifferent toward such western cultures.

Further research should shed light on students' capability of differentiating between British and American idioms. Apart from that, a researcher can ask his/her participants to estimate the difference between Turkish and British/American culture with regard to ten pairs of features stated by Hofstede (2011). Other researchers could also examine the relationship between the social distance (e.g. between Turkish and American culture) and ability to differentiate between British and American slang.

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