

**AMERİKAN VE İNGİLİZ İNGİLİZCESİ ARASINDAKİ  
FARKLILIKLAR: ÖĞRENCİ-ÖĞRETMENLER AÇISINDAN  
ZORLUKLAR: KAFKAS ÜNİVERSİTESİ ÖRNEĞİ**  
**Differences between American and British English: Difficulties in Respect with  
Learners and Teachers: A Sample of Kafkas University**

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**Abstract**

*American English and British English are the varieties most commonly spoken in the world and taught as a second or foreign language. In Turkey too these two varieties are taught commonly, however, due to differences between them some difficulties occur during the education process. This study, carried out on students studying at Kafkas University, in the Department of English Language and Literature, showed that the students are well aware of the pronunciation differences, however, most of the time they cannot distinguish between the differences. As the students in the department of English Language Literature will work as language teachers after graduation, besides working in different fields, they should be taught these two varieties comparatively in order for them to be aware of the differences.*

**Keywords:** *American English, British English, varieties of English, Kafkas University, grammatical differences, vocabulary differences, pronunciation differences.*

**Özet** *Amerikan ve İngiliz İngilizcesi şuanda dünyada en çok konuşulan ve ikinci dil veya yabancı dil olarak öğretilen dildir. Türkiye'de de bu iki İngilizce türü çok yaygın öğretilmekte, ancak öğrenim sırasında zaman zaman farklılıktan kaynaklanan sıkıntılar çıkmaktadır. Kafkas Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümünde okuyan öğrenciler üzerinde yapılan bu çalışma öğrencilerin telaffuz farklılığının tamamen farkında olduklarını ancak; diğer farklılıkları çoğunlukla anlayamadıklarını göstermiştir. Mezuniyet sonrasında değişik alanlarda görev almanın yanında, İngilizce öğretmeni olarak da görev yapacak olan bölüm öğrencilerinin bu farklılıklardan tamamen haberdar olabilmeleri için bu iki tür İngilizce karşılaştırmalı olarak öğrencilere öğretilmelidir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Amerikan İngilizcesi, İngiliz İngilizcesi, İngilizce*

*Türleri, Kafkas Üniversitesi, dilbilgisi farklılığı, kelime farklılığı, telaffuz farklılığı.*

### **1. Introduction**

Much as there are various types of English all over the world, the most common used ones are American (AE) and British English (BrE). BrE has had a much longer historical period than that of AE, for BrE started its growth during the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century by the settlement of Anglo-Saxons in the British Island, experienced some changes during the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century through the Scandinavian invasion, and changed radically during the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the Norman Invasion. As for AE, it first came into use in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century by the arrival of the immigrants to America among whom were English speaking people. ‘The first English-speaking permanent settlers founded the South Atlantic colonies (beginning with Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607) and New England (where the Mayflower landed the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620). Many of them were Puritans and came as religious dissenters, not because of poverty; their region of origin was primarily southern England (Schneider 2006: 59). However, later this group was followed by the immigrants from northern and western England, Scotland, and also Ireland, and they tended to be of less affluent origins. The 1803 Louisiana purchase, followed by the Lewis and Clark expedition, ultimately opened the inland and western parts of the continent for westward expansion and the continuous spread of the region settled by British and European immigrants (Schneider 2006: 60). So, it is clear that since these new comers were from different parts of England as well as of other European countries, this new English, which was formed by the people having different languages and cultures, was different from BrE in many respects. However, the differences between AE and BrE are not, most of the time, the sources of difficulties for both Americans and British people. Because even if they do not use some areas of the language in the same manner, they are conscious of such differences.

On the other hand, these varieties of English pose difficulties sometimes for Turkish students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) (Çelik, 2008) as well as for the students of other nationalities. The students who are not well aware of such differences may not be able to sometimes distinguish between what an instructor who uses an American variety of English and an instructor who uses a British variety of English. So such students may think, at least until they reach a level where they have fully noticed such differences, that one teacher teaches the correct form of the language, whereas the other one teaches the incorrect one. In Turkish society, students rely highly on teachers, for they think that the teacher

knows everything, however when they think that s/he is not competent in the subject area fully, they do not rely on them. Thus, Turkish students who cannot distinguish between American and British English think that certain instructors are using the correct forms, whereas others aren't, as these two groups are using different varieties. So, the objective of this study is to give an account of the basic differences between AE and BrE and to make both instructors and learners more aware of such differences as well as to enable them to be more confident about using both varieties appropriately.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Differences between American and British English**

AE and BrE are different from each other in some aspects and not all the differences can be clearly understood as there is no definitive survey of all the differences between AE and BrE. The only safe statement is that there are far more of them than are usually recognized (Crystal; 2001: 264) however, there has been some research on certain aspects of AE (Carver, 1987; Iyeiri and Michiko & Hiroko, 2004; Kretzschmar, 2004; Tottie, 2002; Walt & Schilling-Estes, 1998), BrE (Peters, 2004; Zvidadze, 1983) as well as on the comparison of AE and BrE (Algeo, 1988; Algeo, 2006; Heacock & Carol-June, 1998; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Kyto & Suzanne, 2000; Moss, 1984; Strevens, 1972) and on other varieties of English (Eagleson, 1989; Hundt, 1998a; Jenkins, 2003; Peters, 2001; Taylor, 1989; ) over the last few decades. Such differences are mostly on grammar, spelling, vocabulary and pronunciation.

### **Grammatical Differences**

There are various grammatical differences between British and American English, however, '...few of them are great enough to produce confusion, and most are not stable because the two varieties are constantly influencing each other, with borrowing both ways across the Atlantic and nowadays via the Internet' (Algeo, 2006: 2). So Algeo maintains that 'when a use is said to be British, that statement does not necessarily mean that it is the only or even the main British use or that the use does not occur in American also, but only that the use is attested in British sources and is more typical of British than of American English' (Algeo, 2006: 2).

In Table 1, it is possible to see some basic grammatical differences of AE and BrE.

*Table 1. Grammatical Differences between AE and BrE*

AE	BrE
Do you have the time?	Have you got the time?
It didn't rain yet.	It hasn't rained yet.
She already went home.	She has already gone home.
We work hard on the weekends.	We work hard at the weekends.
He is ill, so he is in the hospital.	He is ill, so he is in hospital.
March 10 <sup>th</sup>	March the 10 <sup>th</sup>
Turkey has decided to...	Turkey have decided to...

As seen in Table 1, “yet” and “already” are used in present perfect tense in BrE, whereas simple past tense is also used in AE for these adverbs. Again “at” is used with weekends in BrE, however, “on is used in AE. Definite article “the” is used before hospital, school and prison to show that the person is there as s/he is ill, a student, or prisoner in AE, while in BrE it is not necessary. On the other hand one can have the opportunity of learning such differences through grammar books ( Huddleston and Pullum, 2002; Peters, 2004).

### **Spelling**

Although similarities between American and British English outweigh the differences in spelling, differences seem to attract more attention. Some differences have been given in Table 2.

*Table 2. Spelling Differences between AE and BrE*

AE	BrE	AE	BrE
czar	tsar	color	colour
inclose	enclose	inquiry	enquiry
center	centre	defense	defence
traveled	travelled	check	cheque
pajamas	pyjamas	program	programme
realize	realize	fetus	foetus

It is clear from Table 2 that spellings of certain words in AE and BrE are quite different.

### **Vocabulary**

British English has some verbs lacking or comparatively rare in American English, many of which are denominal (Algeo, 2006: 11).

*Table 3. Vocabulary Differences between AE and BrE*

AE	BrE	AE	BrE
apartment	flat	bar	pub
can	tin	call	ring
cracker	biscuit	pants	trousers
dessert	sweet	diaper	nappy
cab	taxi	railroad	railway
drugstore	chemist	first floor	ground floor
elevator	lift	gas	petrol
line	queue	movie	film
sick	ill	sidewalk	pavement

Vocabulary differences have been very widely noted between the two varieties, and they are fairly extensive, although also often subtler than most lists of supposed equivalences account for (Algeo, 2006). It is possible to add to this list hundreds of words.

### **Pronunciation**

There are certain differences of pronunciation between these two languages. Because of the media such differences can be easily distinguished by the learners. Some of these differences are given in Table 4.

*Table 4. Pronunciation Differences between AE and BrE*

Word	AE	BrE
answer	/ænsə(r)/	/ɑ:nsə /
go	/gə/	/gəu/
little	/lɪdə/	/lɪtə/
matter	/mædə(r)/	/metə/
either	/iðə (r) /	/aɪðə/
again	/æɡeɪn/	/ɪɡeɪn/

It is clear from Table 4 that in AE /æ/ is used for certain sounds instead of /a:/, /o/ instead of /ɒu/, /i/ instead of /ai/ and flapping of /t/ as /d/.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Subjects***

Subjects of this study were 42 students attending to Kafkas University, English Language Department regularly. The subjects were selected randomly from 182 students. The level of the students was from upper-intermediate to advanced.

### ***Instrument***

A test showing the differences between AE and BrE, consisting of 5 parts, was administered to the subjects. The test was adapted from various grammar books and sources. First part contained a list of the words used in AE or BrE (**Appendix A**), second part contained list of the words spelled different in AE and BrE (**Appendix B**), third part contained past participle differences in BrE and AE (**Appendix C**), fourth part contained grammatical differences between AE and BrE (**Appendix D**), and fifth part contained pronunciation and stress differences between AE and BrE (**Appendix E**).

### ***Procedure***

The study was carried out during the first term of 2008-2009 education year. The test was administered to 42 students during a regular class hour. Only the students who didn't come during the hour when the test was administered did not participate in the study.

## **RESULTS**

The correct and incorrect responses of the students to varieties of AE and BrE have been given in Table 5. According to Table 5, 4 participants (9%) accepted the AE spelling as correct, 38 as incorrect ( 91%), whereas 40 (95%) accepted BrE spelling as correct and 2 as incorrect (5%). As for vocabulary in AE, 12 (28%) of the participants decided correctly that the given words were in AE, however 30 (72 %) thought that they were incorrect, whereas 18(43%) of them decided that they were correct in BrE and 24 (57%) that incorrect. For the past participles given in AE, 14 (33%) accepted correctly that they were in AE ,but 28 (67%) incorrectly. However, for BrE 42 (100%) accepted the past participles given as correct. As for the grammar given in AE, 02 participants (5%) accepted as correct and 40 (95%) as incorrect, however, 41( 97%) of the participants accepted the grammatical structures given in BrE as correct and only 01 (3%)as

incorrect. Thus, it is quite clear that the participants can decide on BrE more easily. This maybe because of their being educated according to BrE structures and vocabulary.

On the other hand 40 (95%) of the students regarded the pronunciation of the words given in AE and 41(97%) in BrE as correct and only 2 (5%) and 1 (3%) as incorrect, respectively. Here both AE and BrE are quite high percentage on behalf of correct choices. This can stem from both participants' encountering American films in their lives and their having formal education basing on authentic British English materials.

*Table 5. Students' Responses to Type of Differences between AE and BrE*

	Spelling(N=42)				Vocabulary(N=42)				Past Participle(N=42)				Grammar(N=42)				Pronunciation (N=42)			
	C. %	IC %	C. %	IC %	C. %	IC %	C. %	IC %	C. %	IC %	C. %	IC %	C. %	IC %	C. %	IC %	C. %	IC %		
AE	04	09	38	91	12	28	30	72	14	33	28	67	02	05	40	95	40	95	02	05
BrE	40	95	02	05	18	43	24	57	42	100	00	00	41	97	01	03	41	97	01	03

Note:N= number of the items in AE or BrE; C.= correct; IC= incorrect

### CONCLUSION

AE and BrE are mostly similar to each other rather than being different. However differences sometimes pose difficulties in the foreign language situation. Thus in this study it is clear that students at Kafkas University are taught BrE rather than AE. Therefore the results of the responses of the participants show that they can handle the vocabulary, grammar and spelling in BrE more easily than in AE. The results, also, showed that they can distinguish between American and British pronunciation easily, maybe because of hearing the voices of both nationalities from Tv or other media.

Depending on the result of the study, it is clear that students have difficulty in using the American forms of grammar, vocabulary as well as spellings, thus it is recommended that the students at Kafkas University should be taught, at least, the basic American English explicitly in parallel with equivalent BrE rules and their education be supported by authentic materials such as the texts of mainstream American culture, American short story, grammar in context and vocabulary.

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## Appendix A. List of the words used in AE or BrE

Word	AE	BrE			
1.trousers				43.luggage	
2.pants				44.baggage	
3.underground				45.highway	
4.subway				46.mainroad	
5.crash				47.maths	
6.wreck				48.math	
7.autumn				49.diaper	
8.fall				50.nappy	
9.crossroads				51.pavement	
10.intersection				52.sidewalk	
11.cracker/cookie				53.pub	
12.biscuit				54.bar	
13.dustbin				55.restroom	
14.trash can				56.toilet	
15.drugstore				57.post code	
16.pharmacy/ chemist's				58.Zip code	
17.garbage collector				59.queue	
18.dustman				60.Line	
19.engine				61.railway	
20.motor				62.railroad	
21.elevator				63.store	
22.lift				64.shop	
23.cinema				65.dessert	
24.the movies				66.sweet	
25.flat				67.cab	
26.apartment				68.taxi	
27.garden				69.semester	
28.yard				70.term	
29.ground floor				71.timetable	
30.first floor				72.schedule	
31.second floor				73.tin	
32.first floor				74.Can	
33.sick					
34.ill					
35.intermission					
36.interval					
37.vacation					
38.holiday					
39.Jumper/pullover					
40.sweater					
41.lorry					
42.truck					

## Appendix B. List of the words spelled different in AE and BrE

Word	True	False
1.pajamas		
2.pyjamas		
3.flavor		
4.flavour		
5.center		
6.centre		
7.defence		
8.defense		
9.airplane		
10.aeroplane		
11.chegue		
12.check		
13.tire		
14.tyre		
15.travelling		
16.traveling		
17.realise		
18.realize		
19.all right		
20.alright		
21.ageing		
22.aging		
23.aluminuim		
24.aluminum		

## Appendix C. Past Participles

Word	Past Participle	Past Participle	AE/BrE
broadcast	broadcast	broadcasted	
burn	burnt	burned	
dream	dreamt	dreamed	
dwel	dwelt	dwelled	
learn	learnt	learned	
leap	leapt	leaped	
smell	smelt	smelled	
spell	spelt	spelled	
spill	spilt	spilled	
spoil	spoilt	spoiled	

**Appendix D. Grammatical Differences**

Sentence	T	F
I <b>have just</b> finished my work.		
I <b>just finished</b> my work.		
They <b>haven't</b> returned <b>yet</b> .		
They <b>didn't</b> return <b>yet</b> .		
<b>Have you got</b> a pencil?		
<b>Do you have</b> a pencil?		
We are going to sell the house <b>on the weekend</b> .		
We are going to sell the house <b>at the weekend</b> .		
The boy is <b>in</b> a team.		
The boy is <b>on</b> a team.		
He is in <b>the hospital</b> as he is ill.		
He is <b>in hospital</b> as he is ill.		
This book is <b>different from</b> that book.		
This book is <b>different than</b> that book		
Turkey <b>have</b> played very well.		
Turkey <b>has</b> played very well.		
We live <b>in</b> Kazımkarabekir street.		
We live <b>on</b> Kazımkarabekir street.		
I <b>talked with</b> the policeman.		
I <b>talked to</b> the policeman.		
The bank is <b>opposite to</b> the hospital.		
The bank is <b>opposite of</b> the hospital.		
My brother is a <b>football player</b> .		
My brother is a <b>footballer</b> .		
The girl walked <b>towards</b> her father's office.		
The girl walked <b>toward</b> her father's office.		

**Appendix E. Pronunciation and Stress Test**

Word	Pronunciation		Pronunciation	
	True	False	True	False
ask	/a:sk /			/æsk/
plant	/pla:nt/			/plænt/
Little	/lidl/			/litl)
matter	/metð/			/medðt/