

# **Students' Lexical Choice Tendency and Ability to Distinguish British and American English Lexical**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the lexical choice tendency and ability to distinguish British and American English lexical. The participants were 20 students of the English Education Program in one of the state universities in Bandung. This research used a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the data. To collect the data, this research used tests as a technique. The lexical that were examined in the tests were based on (Sukmawati, 2017). The participants were given tests that were split into two parts in the form of multiple choices to examine the lexical choice tendency and measure the ability to distinguish British and American English lexical. The number of questions was 30 for each test, so the total number was 60 questions. The computation for the current study used simple calculation central tendency which was mean score, also a percentage, and tendency formula. The results show that the English Education Program students were able to be consistent in their lexical choice with most of the students tending to American English at the rate of 60%, followed by British English at the rate of 25% and the rest 15% were still not able to be consistent in their lexical choice as they tend to Mix. The students were also able to distinguish British and American English lexical as they can attribute the examined lexical items to the right variety with the mean score of 58.5 that categorized into an average level. This indicates that the result of the current study is in contrast with (Lindell, 2014) who revealed the students tend to mix and are unable to distinguish British and American English lexical.

**Keywords:** Ability, American English, British English, Distinguish, Lexical choice.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

As one of many varieties, English has been progressively developing since the early 19th century, which is prominent through the spread of English and the great number of speakers (Bauer, 2002). Numerous varieties of English exist such as Australian English, Canadian English, New Zealand English, South African English, and many more (Janicki, 1977). However, two pioneers considered as major national English varieties are those of the United Kingdom and the United States—British English and American English. (Algeo, 2009). In another work, (Algeo, 2006) stated that most native speakers speak British and American English as well as most foreign learners' study British and American English. It explained what is behind British English and American English as the national varieties of English.

Despite the same language and the massive growth, it turns out that they have dissimilarities. In 1789, Noah Webster the well-known American lexicographer predicted that American English would eventually be different from British English (Davies, 2005). One of the prominent, main, and huge differences are the lexical or vocabularies (Darragh, 2000). It is estimated that 4000 daily used words in Britain have a completely different meaning or are differently used in the US (Davies, 2005).

Nevertheless, the rapidly increasing number of lexical differences between the two varieties is still a minor concern yet. Those differences might not be as much as the similarities, but they might cause great confusion, misinterpretation, and misunderstanding. Particularly, Indonesians who are in the position of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners whose English do not tend to one variety, British or American English. “Commonly, Indonesian English material and teaching do not differentiate between British English and American English and sometimes both are mixed” (Zuhri, 2016). Therefore, they practically would think that ‘*football*’ and ‘*soccer*’ are the same things and use them interchangeably when it is not as simple as it might seem. Those situations may not be a major big deal for a regular English learner, but for someone who is prepared and expected to be a prospective and competent English teacher, it may cause a greater problem. The ignorance of the lexical differences between the two varieties would unwittingly lead to a situation where they mix both varieties and generate inconsistencies in their English.

The inconsistencies and the lack of knowledge about the differences would be disadvantageous if they are expected to be an English teacher. Because as cited in (Triyadi, 2019), Nancy Salama (1976) said “... teaching English in the twentieth century (Kustijono & Zuhri, 2018) demands an accurate awareness of differences between British and American English, because of the influence of both varieties throughout the world”. Even now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the influence of both varieties throughout the world are still huge, so exposure to the differences is majorly still needed.

Meanwhile for someone who is an English user, in general, would also be at a disadvantage because through knowing British and American English differences, they might simultaneously broaden their socio-cultural experience regarding life and institutions of English-speaking countries and advanced students can obtain a kind of framework to organize their existing English knowledge and to ensure its use (Stelzerová, 2014).

Thus, studies on the lexical differences between British and American English have been undertaken by many researchers worldwide using a multiplicity of perspectives and approaches. Those studies fall under three major areas based on the methods that they used, namely 1) survey method: (Lindell, 2014), Thörnstrand (2008), and (Halldórsdóttir, 2014), 2) contrastive method: (Sukmawati, 2017), (Sulaiman & Yuliani, 2017) 3) corpus method: (Wilkinson, 2014).

Meanwhile, this study is the closest to (Lindell, 2014) who concluded that the students tend to mix the two varieties and they were not aware of the differences in vocabulary, however, there is a divergence shown in the Swedish students' knowledge. Despite being aware of the differences of some students, only an average of 30% of students were able to successfully attribute the words to the correct variety. The findings indicated confusion between the two varieties and the inability to use them properly.

This study research focuses on lexical choice tendency and ability in distinguishing British and American English lexical. (Lindell, 2014) concluded her study that students tend to mix British and American English lexical and could not be able to distinguish them and attribute them into the proper variety. This current study is different from (Lindell, 2014) in the use of participants and the limitation of British and American English lexical items. While (Lindell, 2014) used Swedish Upper Secondary School students, this study used Indonesian EFL learners who study in university majoring in English Education Program. In terms of limitation of the lexical items, (Lindell, 2014) used a general lexical difference of British and American English, this study only used a lexical item that belongs to the lexical category of a noun that has a similar or exact meaning in both varieties.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

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

Originating from a different region that has a different social, cultural, and historical background makes British and American English different despite it being the same language of English. (Janicki, 1977) summed up all the differences into different fields which were pronunciation, stress, intonation, spelling, vocabulary, phraseology, grammar, and morphology.

Meanwhile, (Darragh, 2000) showed a slight difference from Janicki. He said that British and American English differs in an accent which covers pronunciation, tempo, and intonation, vocabulary, idiom, syntax, for the written one there are spelling and punctuation, and the last one is cultural divergences. Then, (Tirban & P tr uţ , 2012) stated the major differences between British and American English lie in the aspect of spelling, semantics, grammar, and pronunciation.

In line with the previous theories, (Fares, n.d.) mentioned the differences lie in more than one linguistic area that can be found in phonology, especially vowels and intonation, vocabulary, semantics, and morphology and syntax that are less than the other differences.

However, the differences between British and American English in this study were concluded from the study of (Tibenská, 2012) entitled Comparative Analysis of British and American English, the study done by (Sulaiman & Yuliani, 2017) entitled A Contrastive Analysis between British and American Varieties: A Case-study of English Accents, and journal of (Fares, n.d.) entitled British English and American English: History and Differences. The differences are listed below as follow:

## **1. Pronunciation**

The most noticeable feature that is easily recognized from the two different varieties of English is pronunciation. The standard pronunciation of British English is called Received Pronunciation (RP) meanwhile for American English is called General American (GA).

- a. Differences in the pronunciation of vowels and diphthongs
- b. Differences in the pronunciation of consonants

## **2. Grammar**

Several grammar rules are differently used in both varieties. The dissimilarities are listed as follow:

- a. The use of auxiliary verbs
- b. The use of present perfect tense and past simple tense
- c. Irregular Verb
- d. The use of a preposition

### 3. Spelling

- a. Words ending in -ise or -ize
- b. Words ending in -se or -ce
- c. Words ending in -our and -or
- d. Words ending in a consonant followed by -re or -er
- e. Doubling final consonants

### 4. Lexis

As cited in (Fares, n.d.) the differences between British and American English lie in three main semantic areas which are food, clothing and transportation (Millward & Hayes, 2012).

Words are such a vital and fundamental thing when it comes to language and communication. Everything that exists in a language must have a relation with words. In linguistics, there is a term of lexis or what we call lexical in the form of an adjective that is related to a word. (Finch, 2000) stated that the lexis of a language is its vocabulary and is usually found in its adjectival form which is lexical. A similar definition came from (Crystal, 2008) who defined that lexis is a linguistic term that means vocabulary of a language and used in a varied technical term.

There is also a definition stating that lexis is the vocabulary of a language along with its study (Brown & Miller, 2013). Meanwhile, another one said that "lexis is the words of a language, usually not distinguished from the individual speaker vocabulary" (Liamas et al., 2007). In addition, lexis is defined as a vocabulary of the language that differs from its grammar (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

It can be simply drawn from all the definitions above that lexis or lexical in the adjective form is a linguistics term meaning vocabulary of a language used for various technical terms. This study is using the term lexis or lexical instead of vocabulary because "linguistics uses this (vocabulary) term in its everyday sense, reserving for its technical study the use of terms beginning with lexi-..." (Crystal, 2008). But it is still possible for this study to mention vocabulary in an appropriate condition. Furthermore, there are dozens of terms that are related to lexis. One of the terms that will be extensively used in this research is a lexical item or lexeme.

## Type of Lexis

There are dozens of types of lexical terms that explain and hold different functions. But here, this study will be exposing some of the lexis related terms that are commonly used. Firstly, *lexicon*, according to (Brown & Miller, 2013) lexicon are the set of lexemes, a dictionary especially classical Greek, dictionary, and vocabulary of a language. Secondly, *lexical semantics*, (Richards & Schmidt, 2002) defined lexical semantics as one of the semantic fields concerning the meaning of words. Lastly, *lexical item* refers to a unit of vocabulary that is synonymous with the term of the *lexeme* (Crystal, 2008).

Moreover, the term that will be extensively used in this study is the lexical item that will relate to the lexical item differences between British and American English.

## Lexical Item

Lexical item is one of the terms that are related to lexical. According to (Brown & Miller, 2013) definition, a lexical item or lexeme is a word that expresses things, beings, events, abstract ideas, and many more which are occasionally reflected in capital or lowercase in a surface form. Meanwhile, (Richards & Schmidt, 2002) stated that lexical item is another term for lexeme that is an abstract unit which is the smallest unit in a language that can take many different forms in a spoken or written sentences and still count as the same lexeme even when it is inflected.

A statement came from (Crystal, 2008) who stated that a lexical item or lexeme is a unit of vocabulary in a general reference. There is also a similar definition stating that lexical item or lexeme is a frequently used term instead of the term word in linguistics that means a vocabulary unit (Finch, 2000). Whereas (Cruse, 2006) defined lexical item or lexeme as a fundamental unit of lexical semantics that corresponds to the everyday uses term of 'word'.

Lexical item or lexeme may sound close and similar to the term 'word', but they differ. According to (Rajimwale, 2006) what differ a lexeme from a word is lexeme can take many different forms and even be inflected but still counted as a lexeme whereas a word will be counted as another word when it gets infected although it has the same meaning.

In that case, this study will be using the term lexical item or lexeme interchangeably instead of the term word to avoid the ambiguity that may occur in the process of the study and more focus on the lexical item differences between British and American English.

## METHOD

This study chose to use qualitative, specifically descriptive, qualitative methods as the research design because it aims to describe the students' lexical choice tendency and their ability to distinguish British and American English lexical in terms of EFL (English as a foreign language) learners.

According to (Lavrakas, 2008), qualitative research is inductive and context-specific research that focuses on observing and describing the existence of specific phenomena, behaviour, opinions, or events to yield new research hypotheses and theories. And through descriptive research, the researcher could also obtain information about the average member of the group regarding the average member or average performance of a member of the particular group being studied (Marczyk et al., 2005).

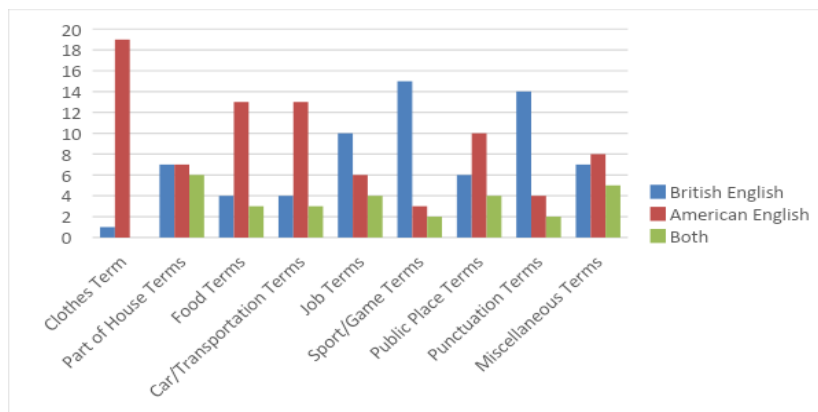
In collecting data, this study employed a test instrument as a technique to collect the data to find the students' lexical choice tendency and their ability to distinguish British and American English lexical. The type of test item used in this study is a fixed response item that is also called a closed-ended response in the form of a multiple-choice item to yield needed data that was divided into two parts: Part 1 and Part 2. The tests then were distributed through Google Form. As (Walliman, 2011) stated that internet is one of the three methods for distribution which is the most affordable and saves time in delivering it. Therefore, this study chose *Google Form* in the case of the instrument distribution. The instruments were shared in the link <http://bit.ly/PenelitianTanti>.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

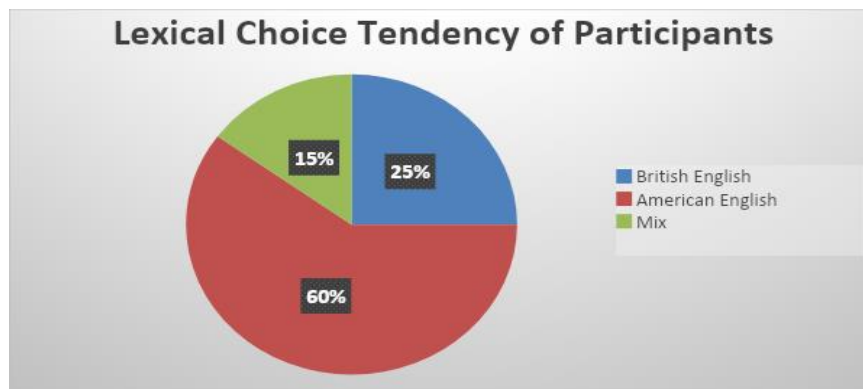
#### Finding on Part 1 Test

There are some charts in form of a column chart and pie chart to explain the findings in the lexical choice tendency of English Education program students below.



**Figure 1 Lexical Choice Tendency in Terms of Category**

The figure above it showed that the participants tend to choose American English lexical in Clothes term, Food term, Car/Transportations term, Public Place term, and Miscellaneous term questions. Meanwhile, British English lexical was dominantly chosen by the participants in Job term, Sport/Game term, and Punctuation term questions. And last, in Part of House term questions British English and American English were shown to be equally chosen by the participants.



**Figure 2 Lexical Choice Tendency of Participants**

The pie chart above it explained that out of 20 participants the lexical choice tendency of English Education Program students were 12 or 60% of students tend to American English, 5 or 25% of students tend to British English, and 3 or 15% of the students tend to Mix in their lexical choice.

Meanwhile, the lexical choice tendency level of students who tend to American English were 6 students or 50% who level High, 4 students or 33% who level Moderate, and 2 students or 17% who level Low. On the other hand, the lexical choice tendency

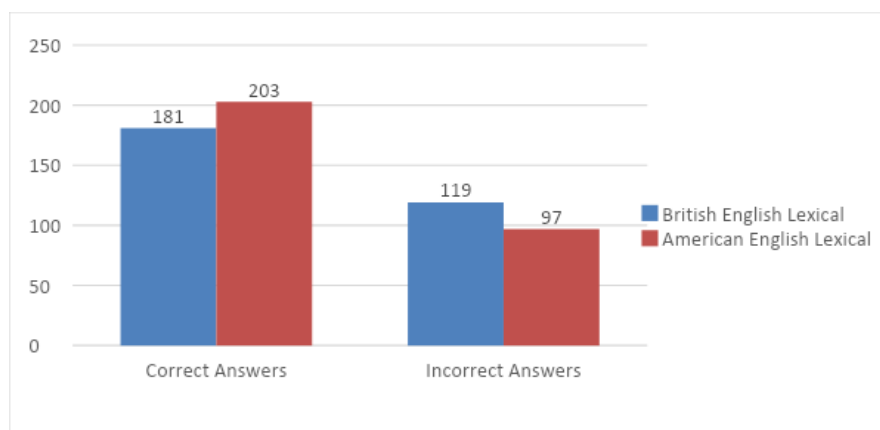


level of students who tend to British English were 2 students or 40% who level High, 2 students or 40% who level Moderate, and only 1 student or 20% who level Low. Lastly, the lexical choice tendency level of students who tend to mix were 2 students or 67% who level Moderate and 1 student or 33% who level low. An average can be concluded that the lexical choice tendency of participants which were the English Education program students was in the level of Moderate and so were the participants who tend to British English, while the students who tend to mix in their lexical choice were in the level Low.

Thus, the data above showed that the English Education Program students' mostly could be able to be consistent and stick to one variety of English in their lexical choice with American English on the top and followed by British English. Even though they are not completely consistent with their choice and still mix the British and American English lexical. On the other hand, only a few students could not be able to be consistent in their choice, but maybe through some more exposure, they could be able to be consistent in their lexical choice.

### **Finding on Part 2 Test**

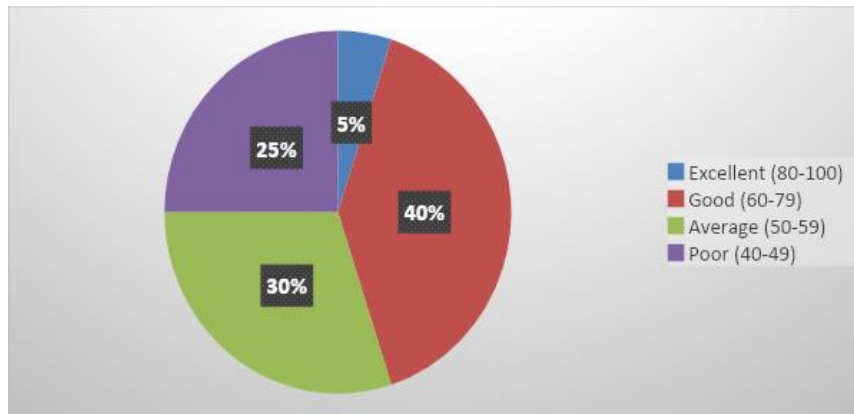
There are some charts in form of a column chart and pie chart to explain the findings in the ability of English Education program students below.



***Figure 3 Participants' Distribution of Answers in Ability Test to Distinguish British and American English Lexical***

The column chart above it explained that the participants are mostly able to distinguish British and American English as the total of correct answers are the highest. The correct answers about American English lexical is on top with the frequency 203

which means that mostly the participants could be able to recognize American English lexical as they could attribute the given lexical to the right variety. On the other hand, the participants mostly could not be able to recognize British English lexical as the incorrect answers were dominant in British English which has the frequency 119 rather than American English which only has 97.



**Figure4 Participants Ability to Distinguish British and American English Lexical**

Moreover, from the figure above it can be concluded that from 20 participants of English Education Program students were as follows:

1. There was 1 student who obtained a score of 80 – 100 with a percentage of 5% and the category is excellent.
2. 8 students obtained scores of 60 – 79 with a percentage of 40% and the category is good.
3. 6 students obtained scores of 50 -59 with a percentage of 30% and the category is average.
4. 5 students obtained scores 0 – 49 with a percentage of 25% and the category is poor.

The mean score from the English Education Program students' ability test to distinguish British and American English lexical is 58.5 which is categorized into the level of Average. Meanwhile, the highest frequency of incorrect answers occurred in the questions about American English lexical.

It can be concluded that the participants which were the English Education program students still could not be able to attribute the examined lexical to the right variety of English in the case of British and American English lexical. And the participants were also happened to be able to give correct answers mostly about American English lexical and incorrect answers about British English lexical.

## Discussion

Regarding the study conducted by (Lindell, 2014), this present study yielded results that contradict Lindell's. In the study of (Lindell, 2014), it was shown that the students tend to mix British and American English lexical and were found to be unable to distinguish them and attribute them into the proper variety. Meanwhile, in this study, the students were revealed to tend to use American English in dominant and followed by British English even though there is still a mixture of both British and American English, and only a few tends to mix. The participants who were the students were also mostly able to distinguish British and American English lexical although it was in the level of Moderate.

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to answer the questions of students' lexical choice tendency and their ability to distinguish British and American English lexical. The following are the conclusions of this study which are structured into two main points:

Firstly, this study revealed that the lexical choice tendency of the participants which were 20 students majoring in English Education program in one of the state universities Bandung were 12 or 60% of them tend to use American English lexical in daily basis terms. Meanwhile, 5 or 25% of them tend to use British English lexical in their use of daily basis terms. Lastly, 3 or 15% of them tend to mix between both varieties which is British and American English lexical. However, the level of their lexical choice tendency whether in British English or American English were Moderate while in Mixture were in the level of Low. However, it can be concluded that most of them could be consistent in their lexical choice although they still mix between both varieties and are still at the level of Moderate

Secondly, for the students' ability to distinguish British and American English lexical it was found that the participants are mostly able to attribute the given lexical into the right variety of English in the case of British and American English lexical of daily basis terms. There were only 1 student who obtained a score of 80 – 100 with the percentage 5% and the category is excellent, 8 students who obtained score 60 – 79 with the percentage 40% and the category is good, 6 students who obtained score 50 -59 with the percentage 30% and the category is average, and 5 students who obtained score 0 –

49 with the percentage 25% and the category is poor. However, the participants of English Education program students could only reach the ability level of Average with the mean score of 58.5 where the highest frequency of incorrect answers was in the questions about British English lexical.

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