

# BURSA 3rd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMANITY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

## REGIONAL VARIETIES OF ENGLISH & LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS



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# Introduction

**Learning English as a foreign language includes acquisition of four essential skills:**

- Reading, listening => receptive skills
- writing, & speaking => productive skills

## **Listening comprehension**

- Affects the other skills,
- Complex skill, should be developed consciously,
- is influenced by many factors, especially by:
  - variable pronunciation and
  - speed of speech.



# Regional variation

- a long process that involves differences in grammar usage, lexical items and **pronunciation**.
- Geographical differentiation: **British / American / Australian**.
- the two traditional or standard accents: Standard British & General American.

## General American

- style applied by English speakers in the USA.

## Standard British

- the Received pronunciation in Great Britain.

## Differences:

- a different vowel inventory: nasalized vowels in GA, not in SB.
- British non-rhotic /r/ vs. American rhotic /r/,
- British /z/ vs. American /s/...

# Materials

**PHASE 1** : collection of data through official documents published by the Ministry of Education in North Macedonia.

- **Textbooks used in Secondary Schools**

Year of study at a Secondary school	No. of lessons per week	Textbook	Variety of English used in the book
first	2 or 3 times per week	Close Up	American
second		Think 2	British
third		Think 3	
fourth		<b>Focus 4</b>	

# Materials

**PHASE 2** : an anonymous questionnaire.

- exercises extracted from British Focus 4 (that is used in our country) and in the American Focus 4 textbook.

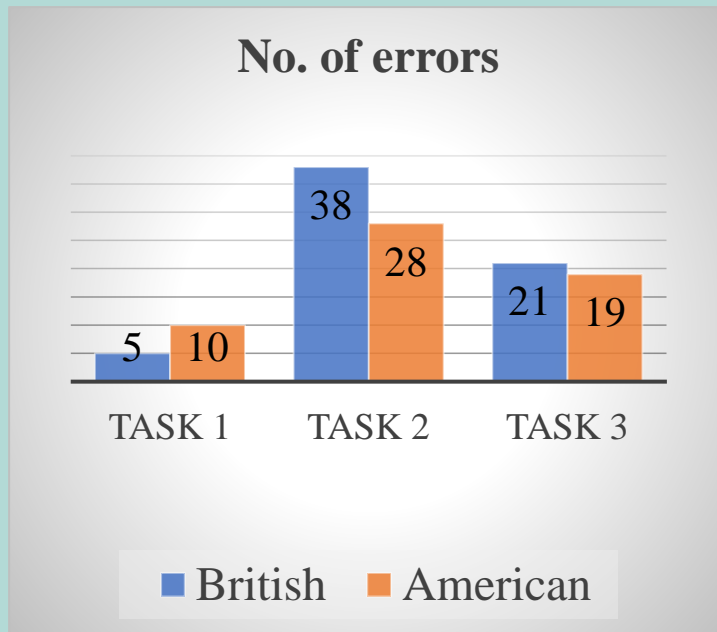
Participants: 50 university students currently enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> year at the Faculty of Philology.

**main hypothesis:** University students of English language and literature have difficulties in comprehension of American English pronunciation.

# Questionnaire

Activity no.	Topic	Speakers	Pronunciation	Task
1	people talking about classes they attend	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup>	American	Match the speakers with the suitable topic from the list (A-F)
		3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup>	British	
2	people in six different situations	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup>	British	Multiple choice – choose the correct answer (a, b or c)
		4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup>	American	
3	an interview with a mystery shopper	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup>	British	Multiple choice – choose the correct answer (a, b or c)
		3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup>	American	

# Results



- number of errors that occurred for British and American varieties are very close in number without any significant changes;
- the errors become more frequent in the tasks that include multiple choice activities,
- the errors are the highest in the multiple-choice activity with different context for each speaker that asks for specific information.

# Discussion

- ❑ Participants in the study have:
  - a higher level of English that surpasses the difficulty of the listening tasks;
  - large daily exposure of our participants to Standard British English in official educational environment throughout their studies;
- ❑ Increased number of errors were detected in the activity where there is a continuous change of:  
**the speaker, the speaker's pronunciation and the topic of speech.**
- ❑ Difficulties are derived from the lack of the ability of the participants to adapt quickly to all of the changes.
  
- ❖ The hypothesis that Macedonian university learners of EFL have difficulty in comprehending American English pronunciation was disproved by the results.



# Conclusions:

- ❖ The textbook as a learning tool represents only one element of the study process for students that are learning English and its influence is only partial;
- ❖ Listening comprehension process is influenced by:
  - the pronunciation style of speakers,
  - the topic and the knowledge the hearer has on that particular topic;
  - hearer's level of English or proficiency and
  - the level of development of the hearer's listening skills.
- Further research is needed to detect other elements that influence and cause difficulty in listening comprehension for EFL students.

❖ **University students of EFL show low level of difficulties in listening comprehension overall regardless of the regional variety.**

- The minor difficulties in relation to the differences between British English and American English show that it is not an insurmountable problem for students of EFL;
- More practice should be made available for the students as part of the lessons in Contemporary English;
- The main aim for professors: to implement at least some basic knowledge of British and American English pronunciation differences;
- The focus: to enable our students to differentiate between the regional varieties of English and to be able to listen and comprehend any kind of official English speech;

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