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		2	RENKLİ SIR TEKNİĞİNE ÇAĞDAŞ YAKLAŞIMLAR	Tuğçe DİLBER
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		4	LIFE, FICTION AND PARANOIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE: WHERE ARE WE IN TERMS OF DYSTOPIAN FILM LANDSCAPES AND HUXLEYAN PROPHECY?	Prof. Dr. HÜSEYİN KÖSE
		5	FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE : GÖSTERGEBİLİM, GÖSTERGENİN DEĞİŞEBİLİRLİĞİNİ KÜLTÜRLER ARASI BAĞLAMDA İNCELEME	Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Rüveyda Hicran ÇEBİ Gökhan KALENDER
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<b>HALL / SALON 2</b>	<b>Doç. Dr. Ulvi SANDALCI</b>	1	DA LAT THROUGH THE EYES OF DOMESTIC TOURISTS - UNDERSTANDING DESTINATION IMAGE AND TRAVEL EXPERIENCES	My-Kim Thi LE Que-Nhu DUONG Nam-Khang Tri NGUYEN
		2	A STUDY ON THE SELECTION OF SHIP MANAGEMENT COMPANIES	Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Ozan Hikmet ARICAN
		3	RECOGNITION OF BEARER PLANTS UNDER TAS 16 TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS STANDARD: APPLICATION IN A GRAPE PRODUCTION ENTERPRISE	Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Mehmet Murat GUTNU
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		5	STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN ATTEMPT AT A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF SOFT AND SMART POWER	Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ali ÇIÇEK
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		7	SOSYAL HARCAMALAR İLE YAŞAM MEMNUNİYETİ ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİYE YÖNELİK BİR ARAŞTIRMA	Doç. Dr. Ulvi SANDALCI Doç. Dr. İnci SANDALCI

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		2	ERKEN ÇOCUKLUK DÖNEMİNDE UYGULANAN STEM VE STEAM ETKİNLİKLERİNİN 21. YÜZYIL BECERİLERİNE OLAN ETKİSİNİN İNCELENMESİ	Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, EMİNE DERYA KORKMAZ Doç.Dr. ALİ KAHRAMANOĞLU
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## REGIONAL VARIETIES OF ENGLISH & LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

**Ana Koceva, PhD**

Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University, Stip, North Macedonia

**Natka Jankova Alagjovska, PhD**

Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University, Stip, North Macedonia

**Sashka Jovanovska, PhD**

Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University, Stip, North Macedonia

**Simona Serafimovska, MA**

Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University, Stip, North Macedonia

### ABSTRACT

Learning a foreign language requires acquiring the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Therefore, we focused our research on the listening skill and its representation in textbooks used at secondary schools in North Macedonia, specifically in relation to the two main regional varieties of English: British English and American English. We applied a qualitative analysis on the officially assigned EFL textbooks in secondary schools; and a quantitative analysis on a questionnaire distributed among university students of English language at the Faculty of Philology in Stip, North Macedonia. The questionnaire was anonymous and included listening comprehension tasks with multiple choice, which were partly in American English and partly in British English. The data from the questionnaire showed that a small number of errors occurred in all three listening tasks, and surprisingly the errors for the activities in American English and British English are very close in number. Our paper offers an insight into the abilities of the university students of English language at the Goce Delcev University and offers a short review on the materials used in secondary education; all in relation to the skill of listening as one of the essential skills in language learning.

**Keywords:** American English, British English, comprehension, listening.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language involves acquisition of four essential skills which are reading, writing, listening and speaking. Reading and listening can be classified as receptive skills, while writing and speaking are classified as productive skills. Listening and successful listening comprehension have a great impact on the fluency of EFL learners and their language

competence. It is an intricate skill due to the many varieties of English that are used on a global level.

Frequently, textbooks and other resources for teaching and learning EFL include activities divided in accordance with these skills. The process of acquiring these skills means that the students gain the ability to comprehend the material through a specific skill set. Hence, a student has gained the listening skill in English if he/she has a successful listening comprehension on various topics. “Listening comprehension is a complex skill that should be developed consciously” (Gilakjani, Sabouri, 2016, p. 1674). Moreover, it is an extremely effective skill since “listening comprehension levels affect the capacity for improvement in other language skills such as speaking, reading, writing and translating” (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011, p.986).

Calub, Garcia, Tagama & Calub (2018) have determined many aspects that can influence the listening comprehension process for learners such as: the texts’ linguistic features, concentration, psychological characteristics pertaining to their interest, attitude towards the text, and their confidence, the listener, the speaker/reader, and content of the text. Others (Tran, Duong, 2020) have shown that students can struggle with the English pronunciation or the speed of the spoken material which consequently creates perception and comprehension problems (p.94).

The English language is a global language spoken in numerable and variable contexts which results with different varieties, dialects, jargons etc. of the language. The initial division that was made in order to emphasise the difference that occurs in the English language was based on geographical differentiation. Herein, we can discuss the regional varieties of English: American, British and Australian. Regional variation is a long process that involves differences in grammar usage, lexical items and pronunciation (Holmes, 2013). Beside the many varieties of English, the most influential and the most widely used pronunciations are American English and British English (Fu, 2020, p.242). The general pronunciation differences between British and American English are represented through variations in vowels and consonants. General American and Standard British have a different vowel inventory (Cubrovic, 2021). Specifically, vowels are often nasalized in American English but not in most British pronunciation (Mirzaie Hosseinzadeh, Kord Zafaranlu Kambuziya, Shariati., 2015). On the other hand, the differences related to consonants involve: British non-rhotic /r/ vs. American rhotic /r/, British /z/ vs. American /s/ etc. (Mirzaie Hosseinzadeh, Kord Zafaranlu Kambuziya, Shariati., 2015, p.654). Here, it has to be emphasized that when we say General American, we refer to the most common or classic pronunciation style applied by English speakers in the USA; and when we refer to Standard British, we mean following the Received Pronunciation in Great Britain. As Dimitrova (2010) explains, the General American in the USA and the Received Pronunciation in Britain are considered as the two traditional or standard accents that are used as a model accent by learners of EFL. All the other variations within each regional variety such as slangs, dialects, jargons etc. is not taken into consideration and is not part of our research.

Usually, EFL teachers follow one of the two pronunciations and use textbooks in correlations to it. The official EFL textbooks in North Macedonia are generally in British English, and consequently all the listening activities involve standard British pronunciation. However, the

exposure of students to the language is not restricted to a specific educational institution. Since English is present in numerous contexts and students are often in contact with the language and other pronunciations. The American regional variety and the American pronunciation is without doubt the most frequent one to which learners are being exposed through music videos, tv series, popular shows, cartoons etc. Therefore, in this paper we focus on these two regional varieties of English, their pronunciation features and their influence on EFL university students in North Macedonia.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The collection of data for analysis was conducted in two separate phases. In the first phase we collected data through official documents published by the Ministry of Education that are available online on their official website. Then, in the second phase we collected our data through an anonymous questionnaire. The total number of participants in the second phase were 50 university students that are currently in the first or second year of their studies of English language and literature at Goce Delcev University.

**Table 1: Listening comprehension activities**

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	

The questionnaire consists of three listening comprehension activities extracted from the textbook for 4<sup>th</sup> year secondary school students. Each exercise is available in both the British Focus 4 (that is used in our country) and in the American Focus 4 textbook.

The initial idea for using easier activities from a lower level is in order to prevent comprehension problems derived from the level of individual knowledge of English by the participants in the study. Therefore, the only difference that occurs in each activity is the pronunciation. The main hypothesis is that university students of English language and

literature will have difficulties in comprehension of American English pronunciation. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that in almost all of their secondary education and their university studies, the students were learning, speaking and listening to the standard British pronunciation.

### 3. RESULTS

In the first stage of the data analysis, we determined the official textbooks used in Secondary Schools in North Macedonia and the variety of English used within the textbook. It was determined that the number of lessons is not the same in all secondary schools, since Gymnasiums are state secondary schools that follow a general 4 - year curriculum and include English lessons 3 times per week; on the other hand, all the other Vocational schools follow a 3 - year study curriculum that includes English lessons 2 times per week. Hence, not all secondary school students are exposed to the same number of listening activities.

**Table 2: 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		Focus 4	

However, the participants in our study all come from 4-year study programmes at State secondary schools, which means they have covered all 4 textbooks and listening materials as presented in Table 2.

The second stage of the analysis involved an analysis of the entries of each participant in the questionnaire. We determined the number of errors that appear, the specific task in which they appear and whether they are in the part of the task where the speaker uses British or American English. The results are presented in figure 1.

**Figure 1: Error frequency**

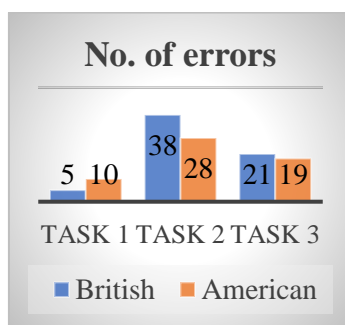


Figure 1 shows the errors made by the participants in the questionnaire. It is evident that the number of errors that occurred for British and American varieties are very close in number without any significant changes. However, if we view each task separately it is evident that the errors become frequent in the tasks that include multiple choice activities, and also the errors are the highest in the multiple-choice activity with different context for each speaker that asks for specific information.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The listening skill and the overall listening comprehension process is influenced not only by the pronunciation style of speakers, but also by the topic and the knowledge the hearer has on that particular topic; also, hearer's level of English or proficiency and the level of development of the hearer's listening skills. Since the participants in the study have a higher level of English that surpasses the difficulty of the listening tasks that were used and since it includes materials they have practised in the past, it was expected that the only variable left is the different pronunciation or accent of speakers. Due to the large daily exposure of our participants to Standard British English in official educational environment throughout their studies, it was expected and hypothesized that Macedonian university learners of EFL have difficulty in comprehending American English pronunciation. The results from the quantitative analysis disproved this hypothesis. The results determine that university students of EFL show low level of difficulties in listening comprehension overall regardless of the regional variety. A more thorough examination showed that the difficulties increase in the activity where there is a continuous change of the speaker, the speaker's pronunciation and the topic of speech. Therefore, we believe that the increased number of errors in this specific activity (task 2) are derived from the lack of the ability of the speakers to adapt quickly to all of these changes. Certainly, more research is needed to further analyse the influence of these variables and moreover to check the influence of American English and the students' daily exposure to it.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

There are several conclusions that can be derived from the results of our analysis. First, 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. When we say ‘a textbook’ we also mean all of the listening materials provided within that book and all of the supplemental materials that accompany it. Second, 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, but it also hints that there are other elements that influence this lack of difficulty within listening comprehension, which need to be further researched and analysed. Third, the difficulty that arises for our students in listening skills that include variety of unrelated contexts and different speakers alerts us that more practice should be made available for the students as part of the lessons in Contemporary English. A very efficient method as Liu (2015) suggests is to enable the students to learn the concept of Received Pronunciation and General American differences and to help them distinguish those difference (p.492).

Overall, the two regional varieties of English represent a major part of learning, speaking and comprehending the English language. Therefore, the main aim for professors and students of EFL should be to look at acquiring fluency in English as a global language implementing at least some basic knowledge of British and American English pronunciation differences. The focus must not be on adopting a single accent or using the language without a single mistake, but it should be to enable our students to differentiate between the regional varieties of English and most importantly to be able to listen and comprehend any kind of official English speech.

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