

English spelling variants – the writing tendencies of EFL students in North Macedonia

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Introduction

- English has been long established as the lingua franca, consequently it has secured its position as an obligatory subject in schools and universities around the world.
- However, being an international and global language often conveys the wrong impression of being a unified communication tool.
- English is a global language with many varieties, shaped by history, culture, and local usage.
- All the variations whether regional, national, dialectal etc. include their own unique features.

National Standards of English

- British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) are the two dominant national standards of English.
- The differences appear in spelling, grammar and vocabulary.
- British English (standard British) is variety of English that is used and developed in Britain Isle.
- American English (General American) is variety of English that is used and developed in United States.
- British English has more formal characteristic, while American English has informal characteristic.

British vs American spelling

- English has a minimal phonetic spelling i.e. the spelling does not always represent the pronunciation
- British tends to be more conservative, while the American English spelling tends to be unsettled.
- While both forms are mutually intelligible, they follow different spelling conventions in key areas such as word endings, vowel usage, and consonant doubling.
- These variations are not mistakes, but rather standardized forms adopted in different English-speaking regions.
- Understanding these standards helps ensure clarity and consistency in writing, especially in academic, professional, and international contexts.

British vs. American Spelling Variations

1. -our vs. -or

- British: colour, honour, labour
- American: color, honor, labor

2. -re vs. -er

- British: centre, metre, theatre
- American: center, meter, theater

3. -ce vs. -se

- British: licence (noun), defence, practise (verb)
- American: license (noun & verb), defense, practice

4. -ise vs. -ize

- British: organise, realise, recognise (though "-ize" is acceptable in Oxford style)

- American: organize, realize, recognize

5. Double consonants in verbs

- British: travelled, labelled, cancelled
- American: traveled, labeled, canceled

6. ae / oe vs. e

- British: anaemia, encyclopaedia, manoeuvre
- American: anemia, encyclopedia, maneuver

7. Dropped silent letters

- British: programme, catalogue
- American: program, catalog

8. Different consonant usage

- British: tyre, gaol, cheque
- American: tire, jail, check

Methodology

- Stage 1: Qualitative analysis of official textbooks.
- Stage 2: Quantitative analysis of DCT responses.

Participants:

- 60 fourth-year **secondary school students**
- currently enrolled at Secondary Vocational school “Kole Nehtenin”
- learning English on a B1 level.
- Age range 17 – 19.
- 60 first-year **university students**
- currently enrolled at UGD – Faculty of Educational Sciences.
- learning English on a B1 level.
- Age range 19 – 21.

Instrument: An anonymous discourse completion task (DCT).

☐ Questions:

➤ How do you learn new words ?

- Textbook / teacher / Tv series / Internet / other (state)

➤ At school/university we learn:

- British / American / both / don't know

➤ How often do you read/hear/listen... English content?

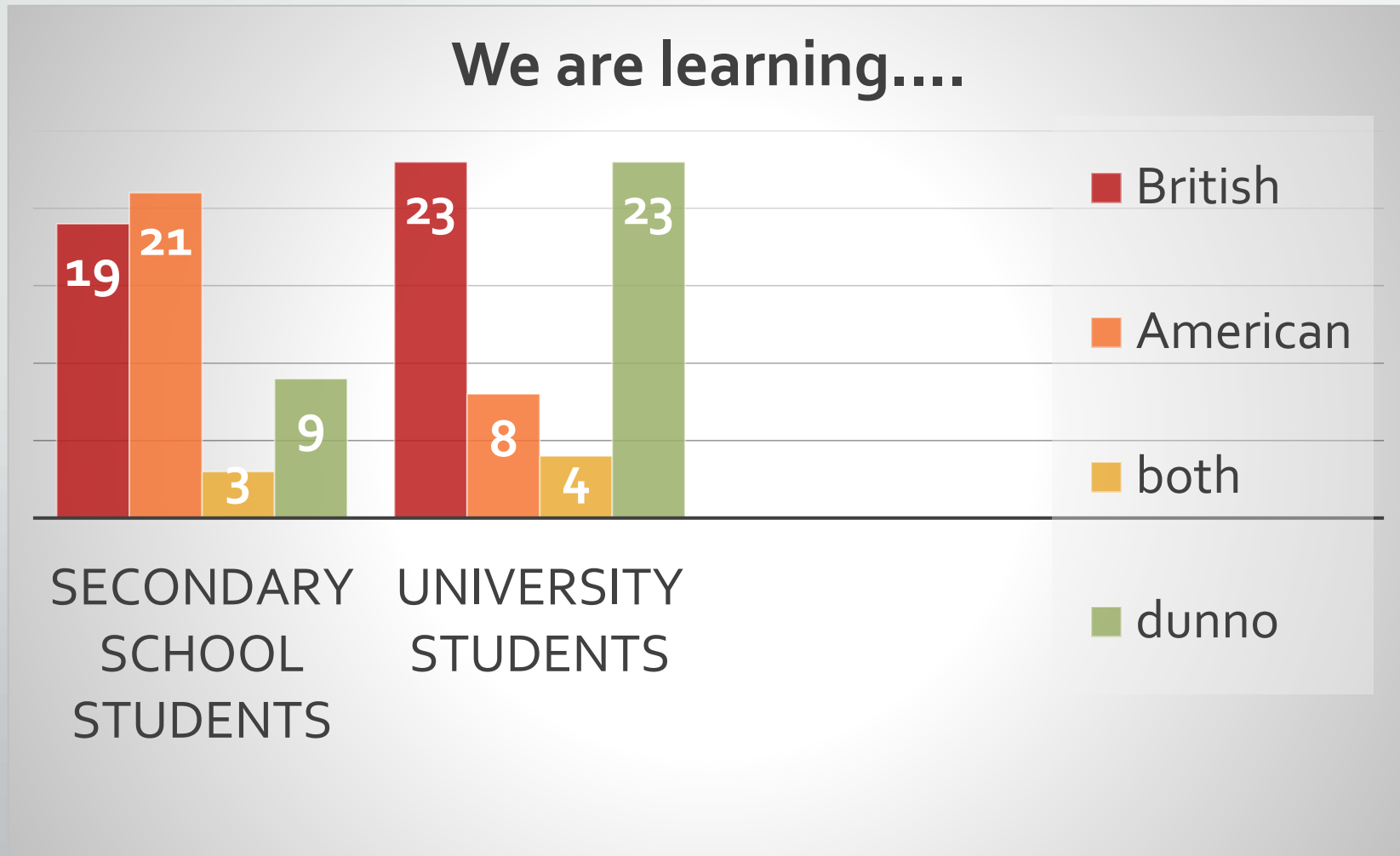
- Rarely / Never / Sometimes / Often / Very often / Every day

Main
question:

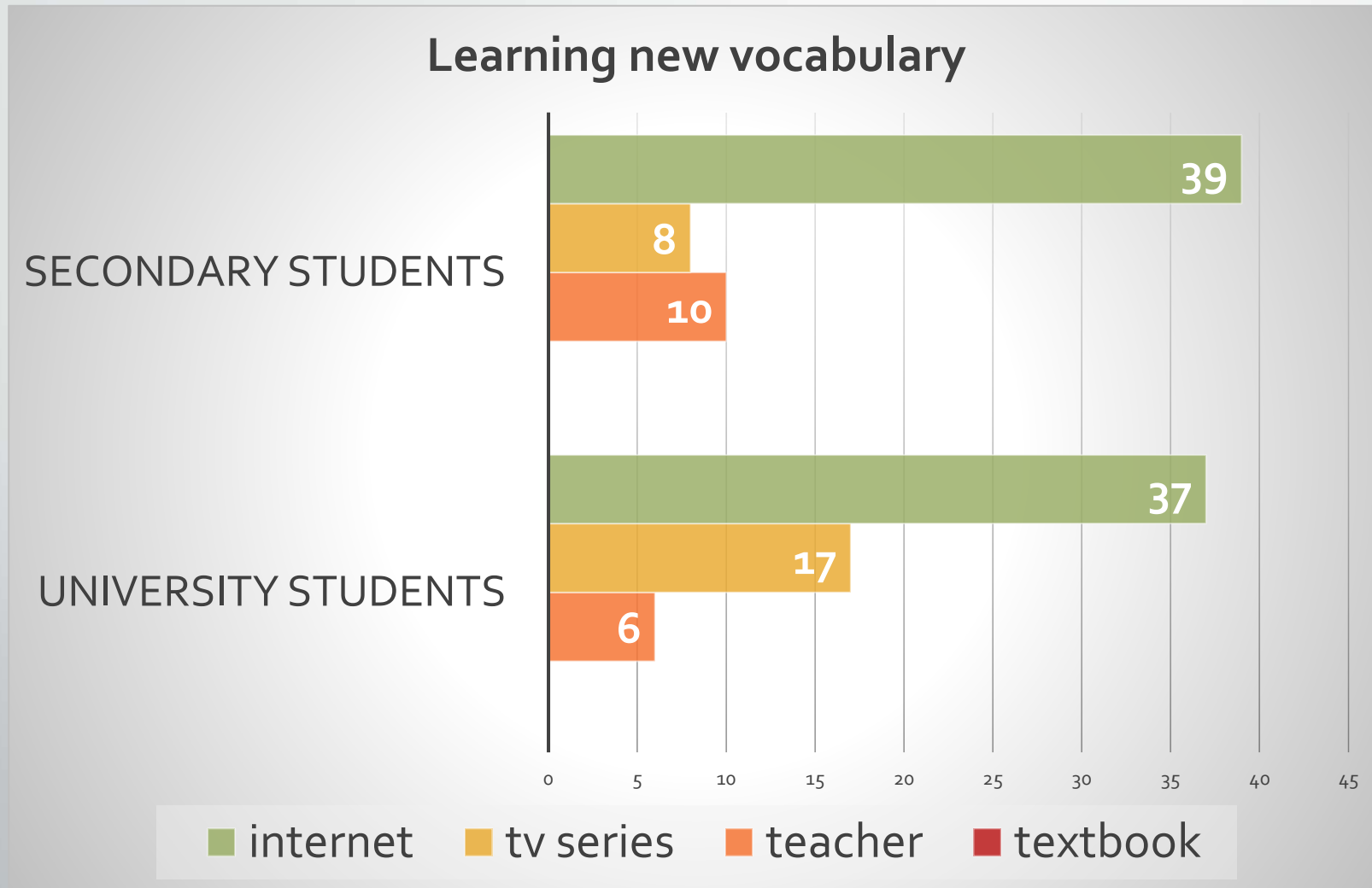
translate
the word
in
brackets

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. He lives in the city _____. | [центар] |
| 2. We had to drive 180 _____ | [километри] |
| 3. I never go to the _____ | [театар] |
| 4. They skipped the _____ | [дијалог] |
| 5. Please try to _____ yourself better. | [се организира] |
| 6. The model made her own _____ | [каталог] |
| 7. It was an _____ to be part of the group. | [чест] |
| 8. My _____ singer is Shakira. | [омилена] |
| 9. I am so happy that I got my driving _____ | [дозвола] |
| 10. In her _____ I saw the whole incident. | [одбрана] |
| 11. I really don't like my _____ | [соседи] |
| 12. Turn off that TV _____ | [програма] |
| 13. John and Jane always _____ too much. | [анализираат] |
| 14. They never _____ my action | [критикуваат] |
| 15. That bag is _____ | [сива] |
| 16. You should put 1 _____ of water. | [литар] |
| 17. I have never liked that _____ | [боја] |
| 18. We _____ playing the violin every day. | [вежбаме] |

Results & Analysis

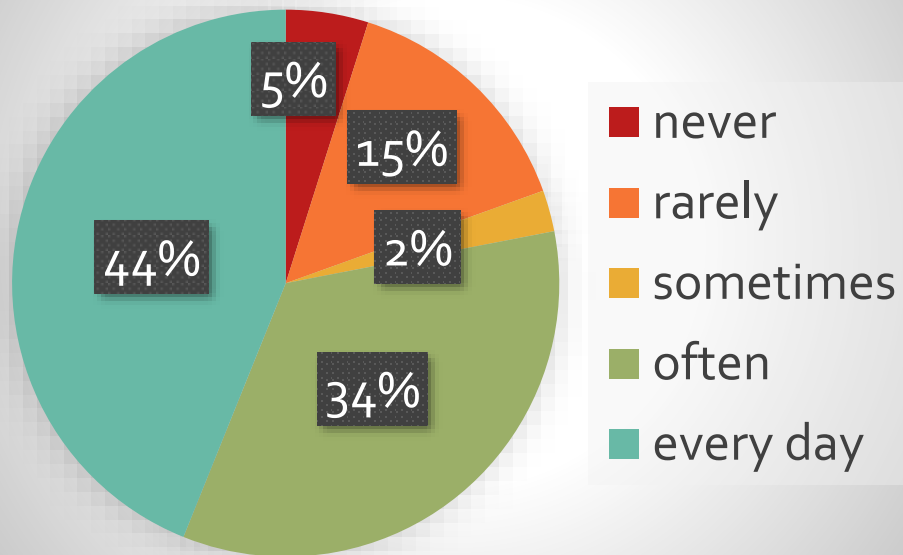


I learn new words mostly from.....

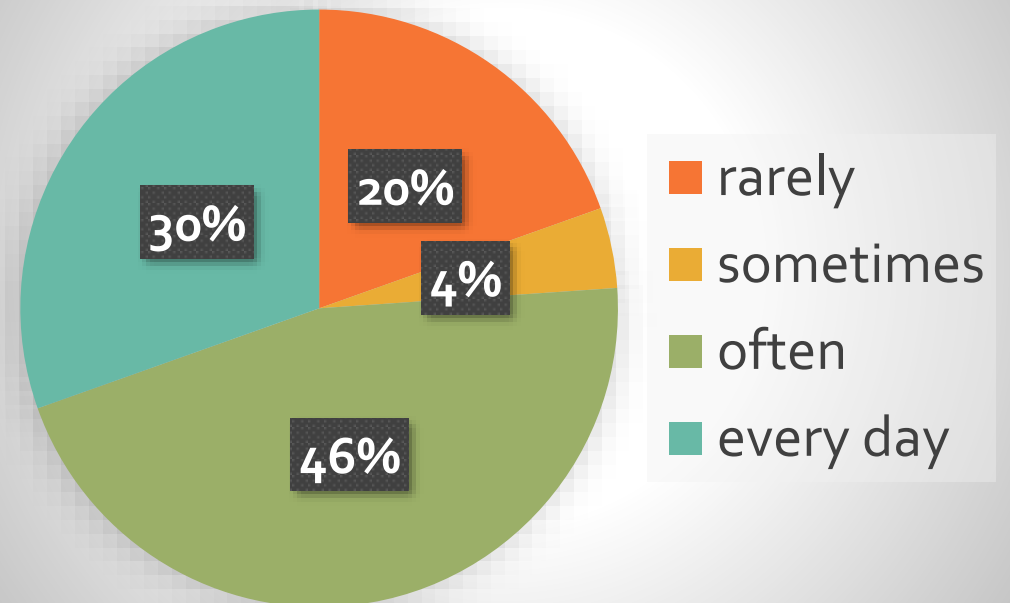


How often do you listen/read/watch English content outside of school?

Secondary school students



University students



Results - Translate the word in brackets

CATEGORY / FREQUENCY	AMERICAN	BRITISH
-our vs – or	120	49
-re vs -er	134	33
-ce vs -se	75	31
-ise vs ize	95	34
dropped letter	94	35
other variation	5	33
Secondary students		

dominant British spelling of gray/grey !

CATEGORY / FREQUENCY	AMERICAN	BRITISH
-our vs – or	160	68
-re vs -er	202	19
-ce vs -se	103	45
-ise vs ize	130	30
dropped letter	124 *	43
other variation	27	29
University students		

* one exception in the spelling of dialog / dialogue

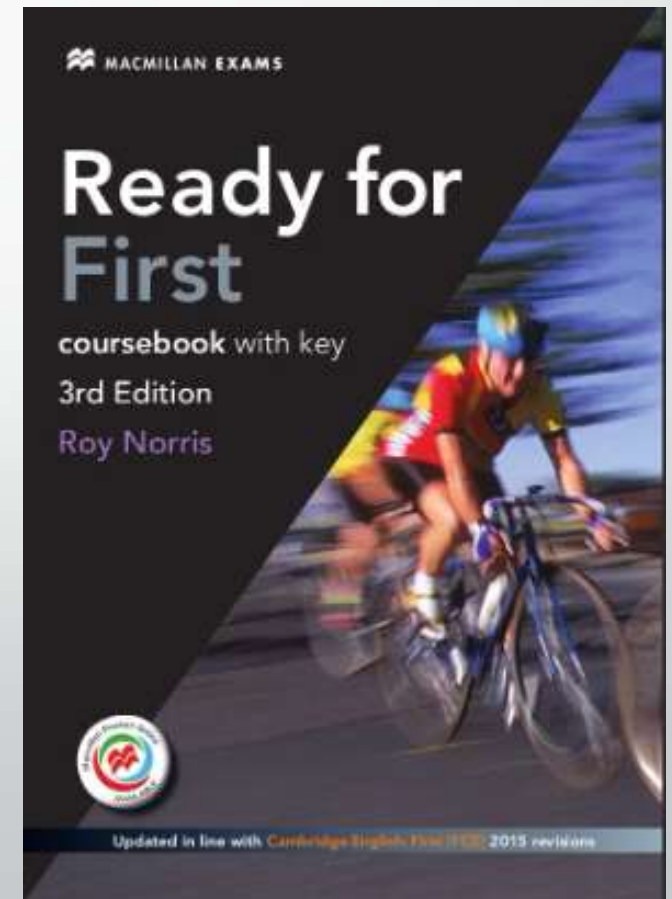
Qualitative analysis – officially used textbooks

- **Secondary school students** use the textbook **Focus 4** by Sue Kay, Vaughan Jones, Daniel Brayshaw, and Beata Trapnell – PEARSON.
- students are introduced to pairs of words that differ between British and American English in a few units
- By comparing aspects of life in the UK and the USA, such as cost of living, house sizes, and healthcare, students gain insights into how language reflects cultural differences.
- It effectively integrates regional English variations into its curriculum, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of how language differs across regions.



Qualitative analysis – officially used textbooks

- **University students** use the textbook **Ready for First (3rd Edition)** by Roy Norris, published by Macmillan.
- it is designed to prepare students for the Cambridge English: First (FCE) exam.
- While the primary focus is on British English, the coursebook acknowledges regional variations in English, particularly between British and American English, to enhance students' understanding and adaptability in real-world contexts.



Discussion

- Although both secondary and university students rely on British textbooks as their official learning materials, there's a notable disconnect between the prescribed variety and students' awareness of it.
- Less than half of the students can correctly identify which variety they are learning.
- Interestingly, students across both groups are turning to the internet—rather than textbooks as their main source of new vocabulary.
- Exposure to English content is regular for both groups, though secondary students engage with it more frequently on a daily basis. This greater exposure, combined with online influences, may explain their stronger tendency toward American spelling.
- On the other hand, university students, despite their less frequent exposure, also show American influence in spelling.

Conclusion

- ❖ Differences in spelling do not impair mutual intelligibility and therefore the two varieties are neither inferior nor superior to each other.
- ❖ However, it is important for learners to be aware of the major differences between the two standard varieties for consistency in their writing.
- ❖ The findings highlight the complex interplay between formal instruction, self-directed learning, and the evolving role of digital media in shaping language use.

Recommendations for EFL Teachers

➤ Raise Awareness of Language Varieties:

- Explicitly teach students the differences between British and American English, especially in spelling, vocabulary, and usage, to help them understand which variety they are learning and why.

➤ Integrate Internet-Based Materials:

- Since students primarily acquire new vocabulary from online sources, teachers should incorporate authentic digital content into lessons to align with students' real-world exposure.

➤ Clarify Textbook Limitations:

- Encourage critical engagement with textbooks and supplement them with up-to-date materials that reflect current language use.

➤ Promote Reflective Language Use:

- Guide students to be more conscious of the language variety they adopt in writing and speaking, especially in academic and professional contexts.