BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY
IN RELATION TO TEACHING ENGLISH
AT STAIN PURWOKERTO

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Abstract: Materi dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di Indonesia pada umumnya tidak terlalu memperhatikan perbedaan antara bahasa Inggris model British dan America, bahkan ia merupakan campuran antara kedua bahasa. Memang kedua bahasa tersebut pada umumnya hampir sama, namun beberapa hal yang agak prinsip, perbedaan yang ada antara lain terletak pada sedikit tata bahasa, ucapan, dan yang paling banyak pada kosa kata. Dengan adanya perbedaan tersebut diharapkan bagi para pengajar di perguruan tinggi (STAIN) dapat memberikan penjelasan secukupnya kepada mahasiswa terhadap perbedaan tersebut sehingga dapat mengurangi kebingungan mereka.

Kata Kunci: English Amerika, British, Tata Bahasa, Ucapan, Kosa Kata.

I. PROBLEMATIC BACKGROUND

Many areas of the world are populated by people speaking different languages. In such areas, groups desire social or commercial communication. One language is often used with common agreement, and is usually called Lingua Franca¹, it rises when people residing in one part of the world want to communicate to the people in another areas. So, it is relevant to what Mauris Simatupang said in his book entitled Ilmu dan Budaya, “tampaknya ilmuwan seluruh dunia telah secara diam-diam sadar atau ditak sadar meresmikan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa perantara semacam Lingua Franca”⁵.

It is known that native speaker of English consist of about 700 million of people including those with their American English. Since America is well-known as prominent country in high technology, trade and diplomacy, and confirms in communication among nations in the world, what has been decided in Washington D.C or Wall Street in New York, for instance, will influence the other places of the world.

So far, Naglis Dalal says that:

The United States as a separate nation speaking English but influenced by the many immigrants who have made it their home and with a position of world influence in politics, science, trade, and the popular art began to coin many new words that either had a parallel vocabulary in British English (lift elevator, pavement-sidewalk, petrol-gas) or were completely into language as international currency.⁶

In relation to the use of language as a means of communication, it of course has a system in which the speaker and the listener will understand each other and both abide by the same set of rules. This means that the receiver and the sender use the same form language. This set of rule (form of language component) is divided into three parts, namely phonology, morphology, and syntax. Phonological feature includes articulation, voice
and rhythm. While morphological feature is (making up) the grammar of the language including lexicon and grammatical morphemes (inflection).\(^4\)

As we all know language change with time being, likewise, English, as the international language which composed of the two major varieties, British and America English, they may change in dialects or another component of language. When the change really happens, it, of course, causes systematic differences of language due to dialects or another component of language.\(^5\) And they may change in dialects\(^6\) or another component of language. When the change really happens, it of course, causes systematic differences of language due to dialect differences including pronunciation, vocabulary distinction, and syntactic rule differences. This is why languages become difference, including British and American.

Related to the phenomenon above, the teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia should not neglect its varieties, especially British and American English, since English language is composed of two national standard, as Randolph Quirk and Sidney Green Baum say:

There are two national standard that are overwhelmingly predominant both in number of distinctive usage and in the degree to which these distinctions are institutionalized: American English and British English. Grammatical differences are few and the most conspicuous are widely known.\(^7\)

So, when we teach English to the students, we should inform the two varieties properly in order not to find them upset in making questions. The examples below show the varieties than can make students upset.

- Should they say : “Do you have a problem?”
- Or they must say : “Have you got a problem?”
- Or it should be : “Have you a problem?”
- They say : “Used he to smoke?”
- Or they say : “Did he use to smoke?”

In spelling : programme, programe, or program? Theater, theatre, or both? Color of colour?

These differences will, grammar or spelling, bring characteristic problem in successful communication, and it will be a big problem if they are related to the teaching English as a foreign language. According to Albert H. Mackward, the differences will cause real problem of intelligibility, as he says:

The perceptible but minimal differences that distinguished American from English of United Kingdom (British) seem likely to cause any real problem of intelligibility.\(^8\)

Based on the phenomenon above, it is very important for us, especially English teachers, to master, at least to know, their differences. By mastering it, we can explain that problem faced by students and give chance for them to choose what they like. Because when we look at the material written in English curriculum of senior or junior high school, it does not intend for these differences issued recently by many linguists. And we often find that the material contained in the English curriculum at STAIN Purwokerto mix English willy-nilly, between British and American. There is no absolute information which English is formally used, British, American or both. This is to be lectures’ responsibility to solve the problem. If they are lack of understanding, their teaching will, in turn, be unsuccessful. Will teaching English in millennium era should be detail and is aware of that differences as Nancy Salma says “… the teaching English in twentieth century demands an accurate awareness of differences between British an American English, because the influence of both varieties throughout the world.”\(^9\)
A. Confirmation of the terms

British English is a kind of English variety which comes from Britain or England, and it is well-known as Received Pronunciation (RP). It denotes the speech of educated people living in London and Southeast of England and of other people elsewhere who speak in this way. While American English is the English language of the United States as distinguished from that used elsewhere more narrowly, it pertain to any word or expression that originated from United States. The dialect of English which man American almost speak is called Standard American English (SAE) but it is not defined precisely. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is an activity of teaching English formally carried out in senior or junior high school. In this study, it is not focused on the activity of teaching itself, but it just give some technique what English teachers should do to face the problem.

Comparative study is a study which endeavors to analyze the differences and similarities between two phenomena. But in this writing, it concentrates on the differences of the languages especially in grammar, vocabulary and spelling.

B. Formulation of the Problem

The formulation of this writing, based on the explanation above, consists of:

1. In written language, what do the differences between British and American English consist of?
2. Do these differences lead to rise the problems for learners?
3. In the context of Teaching English at STAIN Purwokerto, what should the English lectures do to solve the problems?

C. The Objectives of Study

In this writing, the researcher wants to know:

1. the differences between British and American English;
2. the problem rising caused by the differences for learners;
3. what the English teachers/lectures should do in facing the differences.

D. The Benefits of Study

This writing will give some information to the readers about the differences, so they can make their mind what the English dialect they choose in arranging in order that they can teach English properly related to the differences contained in the English material, especially in junior and senior high school.

E. Theoretical Consideration

1. Terminology of Language

In general, language definition is divided into two large group. First, those who agree on the term that language is an instrument of cultural activity, and the other, those who agree on the term that language is product of cultural activity itself. As logical consequence of the former, they consider that language is an independent variable for cultural activity. On the other hand, the latter who consider that language is a product of cultural activity think that it is a dependent variable for cultural activity. This different viewpoint is caused by the theory of the language they used in interpreting it, and the writer would like to give more explanation.

There are many linguists who consider that language is an instrument of cultural activity. Among those...
who have the same notion are Ronald W. Langaker who states that language is a system of communication\textsuperscript{15}. They use the same term *communication*, but they use the word *communication* in different way. Langaker uses *instrument* and Lado uses *system*, both of them give general definition.

The other definition that makes language possible different is stated by Francis Nelson. He Says, “A language is an arbitrary system of articulated sounds made use of by a group of human as a means carrying on their affair of their society.”\textsuperscript{16} Because of an arbitrary, the language is almost different from one area to the others. The concept of “a place for “sit”, for instance, Indonesian people say “Kursi” but English “Chair”. Why does it happen? The answer is that it is just an agreement between them.

2. *Language Component*

Language contains two systems, that is, a system of sound and a system of meaning and according to Lado they are called expression and context.\textsuperscript{17} These components are the most important in a language, since talking does not consist of parroting sentences that have been heard before.\textsuperscript{18} Meanwhile Bloom and Likely identify that language has three major components, namely, content, form, and use.\textsuperscript{19} The content relates to the knowledge and ideas which is called “nonlinguistic categories” including semantic of language. While, “form” is described in term of phonology, morphology and syntax and the “use” of language includes the reason for speaking, strategies used to obtain interaction and control in a speaking situation and listener’s interpretation of what he or she heard.\textsuperscript{20}

Related to the meaning of the content of language, it always relates to the “context of situation”, since the meaning (message) in the core of communication takes into account to the total social context of communication situation.\textsuperscript{21} While something related to the form of expression of language which closely connects to the system of sounds, language is utterance that puts the content of knowledge which learners of speakers have concept into words, phrases, and sentences.\textsuperscript{22}

3. *Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL)*

Teaching English will much depend on how we define the essence of language and on how language itself develops, - whether language is an instrument of cultural activity or product of cultural activity. When we consider that language consists of “form” and “function” or “Expression” and “content”, the consequence is that the ultimate of language learning, however is not simply in the mastery of forms in order to accomplish the communicative function of language.\textsuperscript{23} Since forms are manifestation of language and function or content are the realization of the form. Thus the final and objective of the teaching English as a foreign language is the pragmatic purposes of language, - the use of sign and symbols for communication.

Related to the objective of teaching English, Wilga M. River sets down in some order of priority in their long range objective in the teaching of a foreign language, and these priorities prescribed to these categories of objective will vary from country and from period to period. The objective are:

a. to develop the students’ personal culture through foreign language study,

b. to increase the students’ personal culture through the study of the great literature and philosophy to which it is the key,

c. to increase the students’ understanding of how language functions and bring him through the study of foreign language to greater warning of the functioning of his own language,

d. to teach the students to read the foreign language with comprehension so that he may keep a breast of
modern writing, research and information,
e. to bring the students to a greater understanding of people across national barriers by giving him a sympathetic insight into the ways of lives and ways,
f. to provide the students' with skill which will enable him to communicate orally and to some degree in writing, with the speakers of another language and with people of other nationalities who have also learned this language.

II. SOURCE AND METHOD

A. Source

The writer, in finding the data and the problem of diversity of the language, uses some references related the study. They are categorized into five. The most important of them are as mentioned below.

1. Linguistics Book

   a. Language Teaching Analysis; Introduction to Language, written by William F. Mackey in 1965, and publishing by Longman in Britain.
   c. An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics, written by H.A. Gleason in 1975, and published by Holt and Sanders in Great Britain.

2. Grammar Books

   c. Language Teaching Analysis, written by William Mackey in 1965 and published by Longman in Great Britain.

3. Encyclopedias

4. Magazines

Teaching English Forum; Insania: Active Methods and Modern Aids in Teaching of Foreign Language; Hallo, etc.

B. Method

In this study, the writer uses the qualitative method by using comparative analysis approach. It implies an emphasis on process and meaning that are not rigorously examined, or measured. Its work deals with the comparison between British and American English, especially related to the structure, spelling and vocabulary. Inductive and deductive methods are used in arranging conclusions. The former is the method used when general fact is pulled down to classification and it, of course, is based on the similarities and differences that are recognized not on ones that reality exist. While the latter is a method used when the particular data are implicated to the general of generality, so it can be called as generalization.

To search data from the lecturer dealing with the way taken to solve the problem, the writer uses in interview method. The lecturer interviewed are Mrs. Muflihah S.S. and Mrs. Rina Heriyanti, M.Hum.

C. Writing System

In arranging this study, the writer systematizes it into five chapters and it will be divided into subchapters, started from general up to particular one. The first chapter is introduction which contains pages of formality. The second chapter will discuss the teaching foreign language. It begins with the language description and the diversity of language. The third chapter talks about differences in grammar spelling and vocabulary. The fourth chapter will discuss the problem of differences related to the teaching English as a foreign language and the fifth chapter will enclose this study which contain conclusion, suggestion and closing.

III. THE RESULT OF THE RESEARCH

A. The Significance of the Differences in the Teaching English

There is a difference, as we discussed by above, between American and British English. This difference will influence in formulating the objective of second language target, especially in technology, tourism, diplomacy, since English transferred by foreign language learners has two language standard. So which one should be transferred. While standard dialect is in no linguistic superior. It is important to be considered in planning English teaching, moreover in contrastive analysis as current method used in foreign language teaching using concept of model in which standard is employed.

We learn a foreign language pragmatically to communicate with the people residing in other countries with different culture, in other words, we use language (sign and symbol) for communication, and this is what Kachru says as Communication Competence.

Pragmatic function of language is always referred to contextual theory because the study of language should be in spoken language which is used in daily life. And the aim of this study is to solve meaningful aspect of language in order that linguistic aspect can be related to non linguistic aspects, like social situation. Beside that, the context, like discourse and cultural context, is also very important in analysis or study, because without it, the study would be difficult to communicate.

As mentioned above, the difference of phrases like “do something over” (AM. E) and “do something again”
(Br.E) is belongs to class categories, it is caused by contextual situation based on the user of English which are usually termed local, or social varieties or dialect. There are however variations to use, how to talk or write, what kind of language we use depends not only on what we are talking about on the use we are putting language to and other circumstance of immediate situation of utterance. It may be why between American and British are significant, especially in the context of language classroom.

The analysis of discourse in relation to social varieties or dialect, style and registers to be more important in English language teaching program. As American and British English further more is always related to the term of local varieties or dialect.

What we have to be underlined here is the word such as systematic differences and context of register in relation the audience and formality of the occasion, in which the differences become significant in language learning teaching English. Since our objective for learning English is for pragmatic purposes or communicative competence. So the difference between the should be learned to gain communicative competence.

In teaching of syntax, a part of morphology, it refers to the appropriate ordering words in connected discourse and refers to the rules for the way words and expression which are combined in clause and sentences. But what will happen, if there are two standard rules in this case. We will see some words that can disturb student in solving the grammatical problem. For example the word one, as indefinite pronoun, it is used in the beginning of a sentence and his, or himself are often used to refer back to one. Some people of England would like to prefer one’s and oneself and American prefer his and himself. The use of one in a sentence can be seen as below.

1. One cannot succeed at this examination unless he tries hard. (America).
2. One cannot succeed at this examination unless one tries hard (British).
3. One should be careful in taking to his collegues. (America)
4. One should be careful in taking one collegues. (British)
5. One should try do the best for himself. (America)
6. One should try do the best for oneself. (British)

From the sentences above, we can say that sentences expressed in British or American style concern in the same ideas of meaning but difference structure. So it is true that meaning is first not lied on the linguistic pigment but it lies on sentences or the whole utterance and it contributes to the sentences where it lies. That difference is very significance for the teacher in order that he can help the students to solve the problem. Related to this statement Nancy Salama says.

Differences in British and American English are significance to good teachers. The teacher should know the differences as thoroughly as possible and should not keep the secret form his students... in order function confidently and successfully in English. 

So, it is undeniable that understanding the differences is very important for the lecturer, because the material arranged comes from both of them. Or when the lecturer gives a task to arranged a syllabus, it is better for him to give an explanation to the material which consists of one of the styles. By this explanation, students will know that both of the styles are formal and they can choose which one they like. Without explanation, students will be upsets to make up their mind.

B. The Task of the English Teacher Related to the Differences

English is, in Indonesia, considered as a foreign language, and it belongs to the type of international purpose, since Indonesian students should seek to which style more appropriate is, or they should look at the style used
when they will finish a task of grammar.

In facing the problem of the variety of English standard, the English teacher should, of course, know the appropriate from to be taught. He has to explain both of the types. Because we all know that English Language taught in Indonesia does not tend to one variety, British or American.

When look at the curriculum of English lesson from basic school up the university, the language components, grammar, vocabularies and structure, does not consists of one style, but both. Moreover, the English curriculum of STAIN Purwokerto just gives the teachers basic competence which should be mastered by students and the materials taught to the students depend on the teachers. So, there is may be, a difference material from one teacher to another, especially in reading.

As an English teacher, the writer always explains both of them, English and American, to the student. It is meant to avoid an unstructuraly construction. For example, in structure especially in using have. The students may be confuse whether it belong to auxiliary or verb. And most of the student regard that it just belongs to auxiliary. So, when they make a question, they just move the have into the front of the sentence. The error which is usually done by the students is like this. The substitution from the affirmative sentence. They have a big house into question, the students will arrange into have they a big house?. Why does this happen? The students maybe confuse with the sentence “They have done their work” – Have they done their work”. The question sentence have they a big house is, of course, uncorrect, because have is verb, and it is different from the sentence Have they done their work. Have here is an auxiliary verb.

Related the case above, the writer, as an English teacher, usually tells to the student in two ways. Since we know that the verb have can be different function between British and American. American still regard that have always stands as a verb, so when we want to change it into question sentence, we must put “do” as auxiliary then it will be “Do they have a big house?” on the contrary, British regard that have as an auxiliary of participle from, so we always add got that has own meaning in the question sentence, and it will be “Have they got a big house?”. Two varieties, Do they have a big house? or Have they got a big house?, are formally standard. Having explained detaily, the students can choose which style they prefer and will not make an ungrammatically question one, like have they a big house.

In vocabulary, the writer always tells to the students both of them. For example, when we talk about reading text containing a word can, I always explain that the words can belongs to American style. It can stand as modal or noun which has meaning kaleng in Indonesia. This may cause the students upset, because of its dual function. So, to avoid misunderstanding, I give them both style or just give the word which has the same meaning and used in British. In this case British prefer tin.

So, the teaching English at a higher class should be more clear and detail, moreover the teaching English for special purpose. It demands on how the teacher masters those differences in order to enable the students use the English adequately. This is relevant to the Nancy’s statement:

Teaching English language in the twenty century demands an accurate awareness of differences between British and American English, because of the influence of both varieties throughout the world. 29

Based on how important to know the differences between American and British is, the first task prepared by the English teacher is to take an approach which can concern to the native speaker. For this case, TSEL (Teaching English as Second Language) offers us two approaches, Integrative and Instrumental Approach”. Kachru give
us two choices, Didactic and Dynamic Approach. Didactic approach is approach when facing the label of English and it prefers to use Common Core. While dynamic approach always entails rejection of native model concept and acceptance of a polymodel concept.

In fact the concept of model is directly to language intelligibility a to be determined reference to participant in various contextual units), since one acquires a language naturally plays an important role in language pedagogy. Therefore one cannot deny that in the teaching of English the question of model has importance both in the native context for dialect speaker and non-active context for language learners of English as second language.

With this viewpoint, to know British and American English is the same important as English teaching, since our purpose in teaching and learning English is a pragmatic purpose, that is, communicative competence. For this reason Nancy says:

The assertion that there are few differences between two varieties of English and that student has to learn only English not both the American and British varieties, does not help the teacher or students of English as a foreign language, students abroad would be better served if they had been taught or at alerted to common difference.

According to Muflihah, S.S., one of the English teachers at STAIN Purwokerto, the English teacher at a university like STAIN should, in relation to the British and American English, appropriately handle the class, at least with for steps, and it is what she always does when she is teaching English.

1. Encouraging students such problem not to be confused with such differences;
2. guide students to use one between the two styles as their main choice, better if they are consistent in using one of them;
3. explain briefly, if necessary a bit detail, about the differences between English and American British, so that the students can understand both in spite of their one preference;
4. especially in writing, she usually has the students write exactly in one style because writing can be more seriously prepared.

From the statement above, Muflihah also takes the same step with the writer in facing the problem of two differences, that is, she always explains first both of them appropriately and then gives to the students to make up their mind.

It is true that the differences should not be a handicap for the student, since both of them are formal. But when the students have to, sometime, finish grammar task, they should be aware which the questions of grammar tend to, British or American.

Why should we not be upset with the differences? Because English in Indonesia serves international purposes, in which it does not develop which has identifiable characteristic and does not form a recognizable element of cultural identity for Indonesian, since English is not mother tongue and it is unlike international purpose. So, what should be done by the English teacher is to seek native speaker models in which Indonesian-English learners can use the English adequately and properly.

IV. CONCLUSION

Having discussed, the writer can take conclusions as below.

1. The difference between American and British consists of grammar, spelling and vocabulary. Among
them, vocabulary is the largest one. It may consist of two types;  
2. The difference will sometimes lead to the problem for students because the material (books written in English) does not give special characteristic which style is used in it.  
3. Related to the differences, lecturer’s task is that he has to explain to the students both of them appropriately, and encouraging them not to be upset with such differences. When he is given a task to arrange a syllabus, and he meets a word, grammar, or spelling which are just used in America, British or both, he has to give more comment in order to make it clear.

ENDNOTE

1 Lingua Franca is typically a language with abroad base of native speaker, likely to be used and learned by person whose native language is in the same language family… so the term of Lingua Franca was generalized to other language similarly used, this any language can be lingua franca. See Victoria Fromkin and Robert Rodman, An Introduction of Language, London: Copyright by Hold, 1978, p., 268.
6 When dialects become mutually unintelligible, they are different language and can be used, nevertheless to define mutually intelligible itself is a difficult task. See Victoria Fromkin, ibid., p., 258.
10 There is difference between England and (Great) Britain. England is one part of Britain, the others are Scotland, while Britain is supposed to be the name of the land mass which includes English, Scotland, and Wales, see Michael Swan, Practical English Usage, Oxford University Press.
20 Tina E. Bangs, Language… ibid., p., 17.
21 To the limitation of a unit of language according to its composition is giving a positive and clear and elements of language form, thus we can conclude that the composition of language are component of phonology, component of morphology, component of phraseology, and component of syntax. See Jos Daniel Parera, Pengantar… ibid., p., 27.
23 Tina E. Bang, Language… ibid., p., 17.
28 Nancy Salama, Perspective… ibid., p., 40.
29 Nancy Salama, Perspective… ibid., p., 40.
30 Braj. B. Bachru, ibid., p., 29.
31 Nancy Salama, ibid., p., 40.
32 Interview with Ms. Muffikhan, on October 25th 2004.
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