

A Contrastive Study Of British and American English Pronunciation for Students

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ABSTRACT

English is a language used all around the world, and it has many different ways of being spoken depending on where people are from. The two main ways are British English and American English. These two versions are especially important in schools, media, and international communication. This paper examines the pronunciation differences between British and American English, and how these differences may impact students' language learning. Rather than conducting experiments, this paper draws upon theories and descriptions from established studies in phonetics and linguistics. The paper focuses on differences in vowels and consonants, how words are stressed, how sentences go up and down in pitch, and processes like rhoticity and flapping. It also gives examples of how these differences show up in classrooms, especially for Indonesian learners who are often exposed to both versions through books, online content, and language learning tools. In the end, the paper suggests that learning pronunciation should focus on making speech clear and understandable, rather than sticking strictly to one way of speaking.

Keywords : Pronunciation, British English, American English, phonetics, rhoticity, ESL education, linguistic variation, speech intelligibility, phonological features, classroom application

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INTRODUCTION

Beyond just mechanically making sounds, pronunciation is a way to identify someone, a way to communicate meaning, and a crucial part in making communication understandable. One of the most difficult things for second or foreign language learners to learn is often pronunciation because there are so many various ways that English is spoken around the world. One of the most popular and significant is American English (AmE), followed by British English (BrE). These variations have distinct cultural meanings and viewpoints in addition to differing phonetic patterns.

From elementary school to university, English is explicitly taught in Indonesia. Students are rarely given instructions on which pronunciation standard to adhere to, though, which may cause misunderstandings or uneven usage. The dual learning paradigm produced by exposure to American-based entertainment and British-based textbooks can occasionally lead to irregular or hybrid pronunciation. This poses significant queries: Is it appropriate for students to select just one model of pronunciation? What makes the two different from each other? Can you learn both at the same time?

This essay seeks to address these questions by analyzing and assessing the phonological differences between British and American English from a theoretical perspective. Without requiring fieldwork or statistical analysis, the study aims to provide educators and students with a comprehensive understanding of these inequities and how to address them in the learning process.

RESEARCH METHOD

This essay employs a qualitative descriptive approach to library research as its methodology. The phonological and phonetic secondary data sources employed in this study include teaching manuals, dictionaries, textbooks, and linguistic periodicals. The basics of sound systems, phonemic charts, stress rules, and pronunciation instructions for both BrE and AmE are all included in these resources.

Prominent books by John Wells, Peter Ladefoged, David Crystal, and Peter Roach are important sources. Instead of using statistical comparison, the analysis takes a contrastive approach, pointing out differences, finding patterns, and making conclusions that can be applied in the classroom.

- Segmental phonemes (vowels and consonants)
- Suprasegmental features (stress, intonation, rhythm)
- Phonological processes (flapping, glottalization, connecting)

Pronunciation and intelligibility Implications for education in classroom settings

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Variations in Vowels

The most noticeable distinction between BrE and AmE is frequently found in vowels. Despite having the identical set of fundamental vowel phonemes, they are realized differently: Vowel for Bath: In BrE, words like "bath," "grass," and "path" use /ɑ:/, but in AmE, they use /æ/. /bɑ:θ/ in BrE, /bæθ/ in AmE

Lot Vowel:

AmE uses /ɑ:/, while BrE uses /ɒ/ in words like lot, hot, and not. AmE: /la:t/, BrE: /lɒt/ BrE for

goat diphthong:

/əʊ/ (For instance, go, home) AmE: /oʊ/

Near Diphthong:

AmE: /ɪr/ — the vowel is shorter and the /r/ is spoken, while BrE: /ɪə/ in ear.

Although these differences are frequently missed in writing, if they are not acknowledged and practiced, they may cause miscommunications in conversation.

2. Rhoticity and the Pronunciation of /r/

One of the defining characteristics of American English is its rhoticity. In this system, /r/ is pronounced in all contexts, including word-final and post-vocalic positions. In contrast, most British English varieties, especially Received Pronunciation (RP), are non-rhotic, meaning the /r/ is not pronounced unless followed by a vowel.

1. Car:

BrE: /kɑː/

AmE: /kɑːr/

2. Teacher:

BrE: /'tiː.tʃə/

AmE: /'tiː.tʃər/

This difference also affects linking and intrusive /r/ rules in BrE, where /r/ is inserted for smooth transitions (e.g., the idea of it → /ði aɪ'diə.rəv ɪt/)

3. Glottalization and Flapping

Flapping: In AmE, a /t/ that comes in between two vowels frequently turns into a flap, which is a rapid, gentle /d/-like sound.

Water → /'wɑː.dər/

Better → /'be.dər/

Glottalization: /t/ may become a glottal stop [ʔ] in certain BrE dialects, such as Cockney or Estuary English.

Bottle → /'bɒʔ.l/

Glottalization is becoming more popular among younger speakers and is frequently regarded as informal or regional, even though it is less prevalent in formal BrE (RP).

4. Word Stress and Intonation

Stress placement varies in a few words across the two dialects:

Adult: BrE /'æd.ʌlt/, AmE /ə'dʌlt/

Address: BrE /ə'dres/, AmE /'æd.res/

Additionally, British English intonation tends to be more melodic, with noticeable pitch variation, while American English intonation is often flatter or level. These patterns influence how emotions and attitudes are conveyed.

5. Phonetic Examples and Classroom Application

Teachers can utilize contrastive examples to guide learners through auditory discrimination and pronunciation practice. Suggested classroom activities:

Minimal Pair Drills:

e.g., cot vs caught, heart vs hurt, writer vs rider

Transcription Practice:

Write the IPA of given words in both accents.

Shadowing Exercises:

Imitate audio clips from BBC (BrE) and CNN or VOA (AmE).

Recording Assignments:

Students record themselves reading dialogues in both varieties.

Listening Logs:

Students keep notes on pronunciation features while watching TV shows or films.

Examples Were Discussed in Class

Word	British English	American English	Note
Water	/ˈwɔː.tə/	/ˈwɑː.dər/	Flap in AmE
Tomato	/təˈmɑː.təʊ/	/təˈmeɪ.doʊ/	Diphthong and stress
Schedule	/ˈʃed.juːl/	/ˈske.dʒuːl/	Consonant difference
Zebra	/ˈze.brə/	/ˈziː.brə/	Vowel shift
Mobile	/ˈməʊ.bail/	/ˈmoʊ.bəl/	Syllable deletion
Laboratory	/ləˈbɒ.rə.tri/	/ˈlə.brə.tɔː.ri/	Stress shift
Route	/ruːt/	/raʊt/	Homograph
Either	/ˈaɪ.ðə/	/ˈiː.ðər/	Vowel difference

CONCLUSION

The difference in pronunciation between British and American English goes beyond just sounds; it represents a variety of languages, worldwide interaction, and cultural identity. Learners studying English outside of native environments will frequently encounter both forms together. Instead of forcing a choice between the two, teachers should focus on clarity, exposure, and flexibility.

This research shows that even though the contrasts between British and American English pronunciation can be quite pronounced, they are not beyond reach. With mindfulness and targeted practice, learners can grasp and reproduce both pronunciation systems. The essential aspect is to ensure consistency and clarity while valuing the differences as a vital part of the English language's richness.

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