

‘Women should not wear pants’: Reflections from Kenyan English Speakers in a Strait between American and British English

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Abstract : This paper examines the lived experiences of Kenyans caught between the two main varieties of English and the communication challenges they often face. The paper aims to provide evidence for the challenges that Kenyan speakers of English have experienced as a result of the confluence between British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). The study is explorative thus, qualitative and a descriptive research design was used. The objectives were to describe the communication challenges Kenyans encounter due to the differences in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and pragmatics between AmE and BrE and, to illuminate these variations to enable the Kenyan English learner to communicate appropriately. The purposive sample consisted of sixty five subjects, all who were from a top girls national high school in Kenya, therefore, many are in high-end positions nationally and internationally and well-travelled; in fact, seven are based in the USA, two in the United Kingdom and one lives in Australia. Using interviews, they were asked about their experiences with the different varieties of English, and their responses recorded. Autoethnography, a qualitative research method that involves introspection and cultural analysis, was also used. Thematic content analysis was used to extract the themes and group them for data analysis. The theoretical framework used is World Englishes by Kachru. The results indicate that there is indeed some communication breakdown due to linguistic varieties, but the differences are largely understood by speakers of the different varieties. Attitude plays a major role in communication challenges between the different Englishes, especially among teachers. The study urges acceptance of different varieties of English so long as communication takes place. This has implications for teaching English to Kenyan and speakers of other languages to whom English is taught as a Second Language or Foreign language.

Keywords : American english, british english, kenyan english, englishes, teaching of english to speakers of other languages (TeSOL)

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