

*Primjedba.* Prije nego pristupe planiranju nastavnog gradiva, preporučuje se nastavnicima da pročitaju: Vl. Poljak, »Sadržaj obrazovanja u nastavi« i »Pripremanje nastavnika za nastavu«, *Didaktika*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb 1970.

Vrijedne sugestije o planiranju mogu nastavnici naći u knjigama D. Petković, *Metodika nastave engleskog jezika*, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, Beograd 1970. i M. Tanović, *Savremena nastava stranih jezika*, Svjetlost, Sarajevo 1972. (Vidi prikaz, *Strani jezici*, I (1972), 3, 234—235.)

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#### ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE — AMERICAN OR BRITISH?

As an American who has lived in Europe for many years I have occasionally had someone say to me: »I can't understand you because I only know British English.« In every case a truer statement would have been: »I can't understand you because I don't know English very well.«

In Belgrade I have had the opportunity of working with a talented English teacher who was for several years in charge of the English program for foreign children at the Belgrade International School. When a pupil questioned our American pronunciation or, occasionally, grammatical usage, he would simply reply: »British or American, it's the same. One is as good as the other.« This is not only practical in our school which has British and American teachers, it reveals the basic truth of the situation.

English is one language which, because it is living and dynamic, varies with time and space. To emphasize differences is to distort reality. To assume that one manifestation of the language is »better« than another is both unscientific and parochial.

There is a great deal of justification for teaching either the Received Standard form of British English or that which is commonly called General American. The guidelines could probably be best defined negatively since there is variation even within these forms of English. It would certainly be a disservice to students to teach a dialect that varies widely from these norms. It would be impractical to have a Yugoslav student taught to speak the dialect of the American deep south or the dialect of Yorkshire. Added to the problems of interference from his own language, this could well result in general unintelligibility. If the teacher speaks Received Stan-

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dard, it could broaden the student's knowledge greatly to expose him to General American pronunciation, and vice versa. There are always tapes if native speakers are unavailable.

I have a suggestion for an experiment which might or might not work. In our Belgrade school the pupils are encouraged to stop one another, or the teacher, if they hear a sound that seems to them to be wrong. Concentrating on the sounds themselves makes the pupil's ability to hear English sounds acute. It would be interesting if some teachers in Yugoslav schools would try the same thing with their classes. Let the students hear the same passage in different forms of good English while concentrating on the variations in pronunciation. It is possible that this would increase the ability to hear English and hearing is the first step toward reproduction.

A foreigner speaking what he considers to be British English could be more bewildered by the English spoken in much of London than by many American dialects. Time is equally disruptive. Let a native speaker live outside his homeland for a few years and upon his return he will hear many expressions that have no meaning for him.

The whole concept of British versus American English is at variance with the idea of language as a part of life. Like flowing water, language happens in time and reflects the reality around it even as it modifies that reality. People in Middletown USA in 1973 are as much a part of the English language experience as were the people of Elizabethan England.

Then what is the teacher to do? I think the wise choice would be to teach either Standard Received or General American English, depending on what is most practical in terms of personnel and resource materials. It would be good if students could hear varieties of English other than that of his teacher. An important goal would be to make the student supple enough in understanding to be able to fill in gaps in understanding by grasping the context of situations. (Is there a better way to build a strong base of passive knowledge other than by wide and varied reading?)

One expert with whom I discussed this said he thought a weekend seminar, no more, could be fruitfully devoted to the subject »differences in British and American structure, vocabulary and pronunciation.« Most of the points could be covered by a competent teacher in the natural course of things. It is simple for the teacher to say: »In hospital, or, as the Americans say, in the hospital; elevator, or, as the British say, lift.«

Thus, in my opinion, stressing the differences in British and American English is something of a waste of everyone's time. It is a subject for the specialist in the field of English dialectology, not for the general student.