English Varieties in Swedish Upper Secondary School

An analysis of Listening Exercises in Swedish National Tests

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to find out what varieties of English that Swedish upper secondary school students are exposed to in the classroom and to what extent they are exposed to different varieties. This was conducted by looking at preparation exercises for the listening part of the Swedish National Tests. These exercises are created by Göteborgs Universitet and are available online for everyone and show how the real national test will be done. By listening and analyzing every speaker’s variety they were sorted into British, American, Mid-Atlantic, Australian or New Zealand varieties. A total of 91 speakers were analyzed and the results showed that Students are exposed to mostly British English with half of the speakers using a British variety. One fourth of the speakers used American English while the rest were divided into Mid-Atlantic, Australian or New Zealand varieties.

Keywords

Listening Exercises, English Varieties, Upper Secondary School, English as a Second Language (ESL), Swedish National Tests, British English, American English, Mid-Atlantic English, Australian English, New Zealand English
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

English is a major language and is the most widespread lingua franca in the world. With the current globalization, having a good knowledge of English and English varieties is important. In upper secondary school in Sweden there are three English courses in different levels available. The first course offered is English 5 which is mandatory for all students of all programs. The second course is English 6 which is required within some programs and the third one is English 7 which could be added as an extra course. These days students get in touch with English in many forms, through movies, music and on the Internet, but English courses are still important for student development. The curriculum that was adopted by Skolverket, The Swedish National Agency of Education, in 2011 states that “Students should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in functional and meaningful contexts, to develop all-round communicative skills” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 1). Since there are many different varieties of English, students should have the opportunity to interact with different varieties. The course plans for English 5 and English 6 state that the course should cover “Spoken language, also with different social and dialect features, and texts that instruct, relate, summarise, explain, discuss, report and argue, also via film and other media.” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 2). This means that students should, after finishing these courses, have knowledge about different pronunciations, spellings and varieties of the English language.

Teachers will have different pronunciations and accents depending on where and how the teachers learned English in the first place. Some teachers may use a strictly British variety while others will use an American variety or a blend between the both. The students then need to be given the opportunity to learn about other varieties.

For every course, students are required to take the Swedish National Test which is a standardized test. All students in Sweden take the same test. These tests and the practice material for them can therefore be assumed to be normative for the English varieties that the Swedish National Agency for Education wants students to learn. This test has a part where students’ listening comprehension is tested. The project will focus on the listening sections of the national test.
1.2 Aim & Research Questions

The purpose of this project is to investigate what varieties of English students are exposed to during the National tests listening section. To get an understanding of this a few questions need to be answered.

1) What variety of English are students exposed to in National Tests?
2) Are the exercises focusing on standard varieties of English or do they focus on accents and vernacular too?

2. Literature Review

In order to conduct this research project, it is important to distinguish some differences between the different English varieties. Traditionally in Europe students have been taught a variety of British English which in vocabulary and grammar assumes the Standard English spoken by educated people in England. The pronunciation traditionally taught is similar to the “Received Pronunciation” or RP for short, which is only used by 3-5 percent of the population of England (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 2). The other common variety is North American English, which is spoken by educated people in the United States of America and Canada. In the recent past learning Standard British English was more common in Europe while learning North American English is more common for learners in North America and in Latin America. At European schools’ students used to be required to learn and use Standard British English, no other varieties were allowed (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p.2). This is not the case these days as the course plan for English 5 and 6 in Swedish upper secondary school states “Spoken language, also with different social and dialect features...” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 2). However, what variety students use is not as strict anymore (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 2).

2.1 British Variety

The RP (Received Pronunciation) accent of Standard British English is an accent that does not have a certain region of England connected to it. RP is understood throughout the country and is common in radio and TV broadcasts. It is however related to social status and is more common among upper class and upper middle class people (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 9). RP developed from the establishment of the British education system. In 1870 the Education Act was passed and English public schools were created, where upper and middle classed
worked side by side for the first time. A reaction to this was that preparatory schools
developed and the higher upper class were brought together and educated separately. The
segregation created change in speech patterns. Using non-standard English became a sign for
lack of education. Standard pronunciation was required, the so called Received Pronunciation
(Fennell, 2001, p. 185). The RP uses more diphthongs than other accents (Trudgill & Hannah,
RP has four diphthongs that do not appear in rhotic dialects where /r/ is used instead. These
diphthongs are [ɪə] as in here, [ɛə] as in there, [ɔə] as in more and [ʊə] as in poor (Fennell,
2001, p. 187). The vowels in RP are different between what is known as “conservative” and
“advanced”. The first version is associated with older speakers while the second version is
associated with younger speakers, this is known as marked and unmarked RP. The distinction
between /ɔə/ and /ɔː/ is now gone (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 10).

2.2 American Variety

The differences in writing between Standard British English and North American English are
very small. The pronunciation differences are much larger. The American equivalent to RP is
known as Network English and is used in TV and radio broadcasts (Tottie, 2002, p. 13).
Network English is close to educated Midwestern English. American English have a more
level intonation than British English (from now on referred to as BrE). Another part of
pronunciation where American English (from now on referred to as AmE) differ is stress
(Tottie, 2002, p. 16). Intonation is the variation of pitch used in a language variety. It is hard
do describe intonation and there is not much research done in the area (Tottie, 2002, p. 16). It
is hard to give information on differences in intonation. However, generally AmE tend to
have a more level intonation than BrE. BrE on the other hand tend to have greater differences
in pitch (Tottie, 2002, p. 16). Pronunciation differences in individual sounds between AmE
and BrE can be divided into two categories. These are systematic sounds and non-systematic
sounds (Tottie, 2002, p. 16). There are systematic differences in consonants. In AmE there is
a tendency to pronounce post-vocalic /t/ sounds. This means that words like year, father,
board and pleasure are pronounced with an audible /t/ or a retroflex r-coloring of the vowel,
meaning that the tip of the tongue is turned back against the roof of the mouth (Tottie, 2002,
p. 16). Another characteristic in AmE pronunciation is the intervocalic /t/ sounds. In BrE /t/ is
articulated with a voiceless stop while in AmE it is a voiced tap. A tap is a quick articulation
of a stop. AmE pronounce /d/ in the same way as intervocalic /t/. An example of this is words
like *matter, batter and butter*, which tend to be pronounced with a /d/ sound. Since /d/ is also pronounced in the same way there are certain words that become homophones and sound the same in AmE. Words like *bidder* and *bitter or medal and metal* are pronounced the same way.

For some speakers the /l/ sound tends to disappear after the /n/ sound, so *winter* and *winner* are homophones (Tottie, 2002, p. 16-17). Another systematic difference regarding consonants is the /l/ sound. There are two ways of pronouncing /l/ in English depending on if it occurs before or after a vowel. Words like *little* will therefore have two different /l/ sounds. If /l/ comes before a vowel it is called light l and if it occurs after a vowel it is called dark l. This difference between /l/ sounds is common in BrE while speakers of AmE tend to use only the dark l (Tottie, 2002, p. 16). The AmE have a different way of pronouncing vowels. The pronunciation of words like *half, dance and bath* have a noticeable difference between BrE and AmE, BrE uses an [a] sound while AmE uses an [æ] sound for these words. Therefore, the words *ant* and *aunt* are homophones in AmE (Tottie, 2002, p. 17). Rounded back vowels differ between BrE and AmE. BrE have three different back vowels in words like *caught, cot* and *calm [ɔ, o, ɑ]* while AmE have two different back vowels, *caught [ɔ] and cot and calm [ɑ]* (Tottie, 2002, p. 18). AmE tend to have a narrower range in diphthongs than BrE. This mean that the start and the end-point of articulation is shorter than BrE. For example, *name, pale* and *home* are closer to being monophthongs than diphthongs in AmE (Tottie, 2002, p. 18).

There are also some non-systematic differences in pronunciation between AmE and BrE. Certain words have different pronunciation that does not follow a pattern. Some examples of non-systematic differences in pronunciation are; *banana* AmE: [bəˈnænə] and BrE: [bəˈnænə], *rather* AmE: [ˈræðər] and BrE: [ˈræðə] and *schedule* AmE: [ˈskedjul] and BrE: [ˈʃedjul] (Tottie, 2002, p. 20).

### 2.3 Mid-Atlantic Variety

Mid-Atlantic English is an English variety with features from both BrE and AmE. An increasing number of native speakers are using this variety and many second language speakers, particularly in Europe, speak this mixture between the two varieties (Modiano, 1996, p. 5). The Mid-Atlantic variety developed from the linguistic Americanization of the BrE in the 1990’s. The variety replaced BrE as the most used spoken form in Europe (Modiano, 2009, p. 105). The start for Mid-Atlantic English in Sweden came in 1994 when the Swedish National Agency for Education made AmE and BrE standard for upper secondary school (Modiano, 2009, p. 105). The variety of Mid-Atlantic English is based on an
idea that speakers should know the difference between AmE and BrE in order to become proficient cross-cultural communicators. This is done by adapting one’s use of English to the situation they are in (Modiano, 2009, p. 105). Modiano (2009) states that “Mid-Atlantic English can be defined as a usage in which decidedly British or excessive American pronunciation is avoided” (p. 106). Pronunciation within Mid-Atlantic English is hard to describe. Speakers of Mid-Atlantic English will try to avoid certain pronunciations that are notably BrE or AmE. Mid-Atlantic speakers are encouraged to avoid BrE pronunciations, since BrE has so many attributes that are exclusively British. This means that a lot of pronunciations will be similar to those of AmE. However, many AmE pronunciations are more accepted internationally meaning that Mid-Atlantic will take these pronunciations instead of the BrE counterparts (Modiano, 1996, p. 12). For example, the word schedule is pronounced /ʃedju:l/ in BrE and /ˈskedʒəl/ in AmE and the word laboratory is pronounced /lo̞bərɔrɪ/ in BrE and /læbərɔrɪ/ in AmE. Mid-Atlantic speakers will in this case use the AmE pronunciation. English language features that are notably British should be avoided but characteristics that are prominent in American accents and dialects should also be avoided. The reason for Mid-Atlantic English using so much from AmE is because the standard variety of AmE comes within the parameters of Mid-Atlantic English when spoken at a moderate speed and careful diction (Modiano, 1996, p.13).

2.4 Australian and New Zealand Varieties

There are many different varieties of English all over the world. However, this project will focus on the most common ones. Australia and New Zealand have some distinct yet common varieties. Australian English (AusE from now on) have about 15 million native speakers and is phonologically very similar to RP while phonetically there are some bigger differences especially for speakers with a broad AusE accent (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 16). Although very similar, there are some phonological differences between AusE and RP. AusE use /iː/ instead of /ɪ/ in words like very and many. This is similar to the accents of southern England. AusE is also similar to non-RP accents from south England by having /a:/ rather than /ɪ/ in unstressed syllables. This means that /a:/ occurs in the final syllable of wanted and horses as well as naked and honest. It also occurs in the unstressed syllables of begin (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 16). AusE have, just as RP, /a:/ in path and grass but differ from RP by having /æ/ in dance, sample, branch and plant. However, there are both regional and social variations of this and /a:/ forms are considered more prestigious than /æ/ forms (Trudgill &
Phonetically there are considerable differences between RP and AusE. This is more noticeable in broad Australian accents. The most distinctive differences occur in the case of vowels. AusE tend to have its front vowels closer than in RP, this means that the tongue is closer to the palate. Diphthongs tend to be wider than in RP, this means that the difference between the open and closed element is greater (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 17). Diphthongs also tend to be slower, with a longer first element, than RP. AusE have a very front [a:] sound for the /ʌ/ vowel compared to other varieties of English. In AusE there is also much more lip-rounding on the /ɒ/ vowel (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 18). For consonants there are also some differences. AusE is non-rhotic and has linking and intrusive /r/. The AusE /t/ is also strongly retroflexed, more than BrE. The intervocalic /l/ as in better and city may take the voiced flap [d], which is common in AmE, although this is not as common as in AmE and [t] is also common in this environment. It is also common in AusE to have an /l/ that is darker than RP (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p.18).

There are also some other features in pronunciation that is common in AusE. The word assume could be pronounced /əʃuːm/ rather than /əsjuːm/ or /əʃjúːm/. In certain areas /ɔ:/ may be heard in off and often more often than in RP. Words like Australia and salt are always pronounced with /ɒ/ in AusE whereas it can be pronounced with /u:/ or /ɔ:/ in RP. AusE speakers pronounce the days of the week with /ɛɪ/ rather than /ɪ/ as RP does. In words like brilliant the sequence /lj/ often become /ʃ/. The word memo is pronounced /miːmou/ in AusE rather than /mɛmou/ as everywhere else (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 18).

Another variety of English is the New Zealand variety (from now referred to as NZE). NZE is spoken by about 3 million people in New Zealand. The NZE variety of English is phonetically and phonologically very similar to AusE. In fact, “mild” AusE accents and NZE accents are hard for non-native speakers to tell apart (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 23). One of the most noticeable differences between AusE and NZE is the /ɪ/ vowel as in bid, in NZE /a/ is used instead. This means that in AusE bid is pronounced [bid] and in NZE it is pronounced [bəd]. Therefore, the RP vowel /a/ does not correspond to /ɪ/ but rather to /æ/. The two front vowels /ɛ/ and /æ/ as in bed and bad are closer than in AusE, meaning that bed is pronounced [bed] and bad is pronounced [bad] (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 24). Speakers of NZE tend to merge /æ/ with /ɛ/ meaning that words like beer and bear is pronounced in the same way. It

is also common that vowels in front of /l/ and /r/ merge together. This is especially the case with the vowels /ɒ/ and /ou/ so *doll* and *dole* are pronounced identically. It is also the case with other vowels so *pull* and *pool* and *will* and *wool* are identical. /ɒ/ is the same as other varieties of English, meaning that it is unrounded and differ from AusE (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p.24). Some consonants also distinguish NZE quite well. The intervocalic /t/ as in *city* is a voiced flap. The word *with* is pronounced /wɪθ/ rather than /wɪð/. This pronunciation is similar to some forms of AmE and the Scottish variety (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 25).

2.5 Attitudes Towards Different Varieties

Different people will have different opinions about what English variety they prefer to use. Modiano (2009) presents the attitudes that students and teachers in Sweden have towards different varieties. In the 1990s Swedish students in upper secondary school claimed that they preferred to use BrE while nowadays students claim that they prefer to use AmE. There is also a difference between female students and male students. A greater number of female students prefer BrE while male students tend to prefer AmE more (Modiano, 2009). However, most students blend AmE and BrE. Swedish students do not know much about the differences between AmE and BrE (Modiano, 2009). The number of teachers that accept both BrE and AmE is low but is increasing, while only a small number of teachers prefer AmE and teach it before BrE (Modiano, 2009). These attitudes are limited to students and teachers in Sweden. However, Modiano (2009) states “It is also the case that people working in ELT across Europe are aware of the fact that AmE is on the rise, and that interest in BrE is declining, and this is usually attributed to the increased exposure learners have to various forms of media, especially television and the Internet “(p.134). This could be one reason that students these days are more likely to use AmE than BrE since it is AmE that they are exposed to the most.

3.Material and Method

This segment will present the material used and the method. It will also explain how transcriptions of spoken language will be transcribed.

3.1 Material

The overall aim of this study is to get a better understanding of what varieties of English are used in English courses in upper secondary schools in Sweden. In order to distinguish differences of variety in a language, listening is most conductive. By studying English
varieties in listening exercises developed for English 5 and English 6 a better knowledge of what varieties that are used will be obtained. Listening exercises are used throughout the courses but different teachers will use different exercises from textbooks and other learning material. To get an overall idea of what English varieties are taught in Swedish upper secondary school, a material used by as many as possible is necessary. The national test is a test that all Swedish students are required to take. The test is exactly the same for every student. This means that all students in Sweden get involved with these varieties in the tests as well as in the preparation material for the tests. The national tests are confidential and there is no way of accessing them. However, the Swedish National Agency for Education publishes material that can be used for practice. This practice material as well as the tests themselves are created by Göteborgs Universitet for the Swedish National Agency of Education. These practice tests are developed to be the same as the actual tests and are therefore a relevant material to study in this project. The practice tests might not be used by all teachers but the tests are mandatory so there is a likelihood of a widespread use of the practice tests, which can be assumed to have a normative effect. There will be 6 listening exercises for English 5 and 5 exercises for English 6 used in this research project.

The listening exercises consist of different recordings of the English language. English is heard through conversation, news segments, radio shows or people presenting a topic. They can be divided so that one exercise contains many different news segments or that one exercise is based on an entire feature presentation from a radio show. Students are required to answer a set of questions which mostly are multiple choice questions. Throughout the listening exercises there are pauses where students are allowed to answer the questions. During these pauses they are usually not required to answer more than 2-3 questions at a time. In other exercises students get to listen to different conversations or presentations. They have to listen carefully to figure out what topic they are talking about or where the people having the conversation are. During these types of exercises, the students get a pause after each conversation in order to answer the corresponding question. In the exercises that are for English 6 the students are only allowed to hear the recording once. In English 5 they are mostly only allowed to hear the recordings once but during longer recordings they are allowed to hear it twice, with the second time being played without pauses.

3.2 Method

In order to get the knowledge about what language varieties are used in the practice tests of
English a linguistic analysis will be executed. The linguistic analysis will be conducted by
to the different exercises and marking what kind of English variety the presenters are
speaking. The varieties that will be in focus are British varieties, American varieties, Mid-
Atlantic varieties, Australian varieties and New Zealand varieties. Since it is a listening
exercise the focus will be on pronunciation as well as choices in words from different
speakers. 11 listening exercises will be analyzed. 6 exercises are constructed for English 5 and
5 for English 6 but since students should hear different varieties in both courses there will be
no differences made in the analysis.

3.3 Transcriptions

In order to show what varieties are used and how it is determined what variety a speaker is
using some parts of the listening exercises have been transcribed. These transcriptions contain
pronunciation of certain words or sounds that determine what variety is used. For transcribing
a method from Cornell University is used. If content is inaudible this will be shown with a *
(Forester, Peters & Hittleman, 2005). Words in italics were pronounced in a certain way, the
phonetic symbol after the italic word shows how the word was pronounced. This will indicate
a certain rule or way of pronouncing that is related to a certain variety of English. Each
pronunciation will then be explained to show what rule is used in order to determine a certain
English variety.

4. Results

This section will present the results that are found after conducting the linguistic analysis. All
11 exercises feature different amounts of speakers. Therefore, every speaker has been
analyzed and sorted into which variety said speaker uses. In the analysis there have been a
total of 91 speakers.

4.1 English Varieties in Listening Exercises

The following table shows the percentage of speakers using the different varieties. There was
a total of 91 speakers.

11
4.2 Instructions

For each exercise there is an instruction. The instructions are clear and they make sure that students understand what is expected of them. The instructions are given by different speakers but are mostly done by the same speaker. The varieties used in the instructions are British English and Mid-Atlantic English. 9 instructions were made by speakers using a British variety. However, the instructions are clear and the speaker speaks slowly in order for students to get a clear understanding of what is expected of them. 2 instructions were made using Mid-Atlantic English.

4.3 British Varieties

British Varieties are common in the listening exercises and the majority of the speakers have some sort of BrE that they use. 51.6% of the speakers use a British variety which is a total of 47 speakers. The accents are fairly standard but distinctly British both in pronunciation and certain word choices.

Below is a transcription made from an exercise called *What’s the Topic?* (Skolverket, 2015c). It shows an example of BrE.
After [ɑ] laying [ai] almost untouched in the vaults of an Italian university for 500 years. A book on the magic arts written by Leonardo DaVinci’s best friend and teacher, has been translated into English for the first time. It was written in Italian by Pacioli between 1496 and 1508 and contains the first ever reference to card [ɑ] tricks as well as guidance on how to juggle, eat fire and make * dance [ɑ]. It is also the first work to note, that DaVinci was left handed. Although the book has been described as the foundation of modern magic and numerical puzzles, it was never circulated and has languished in the archives [ɑ] of the university of Bologna, seen only by a small number of scholars since the middle ages.

In this exercise a woman is talking about a book that was found in an Italian University. The woman uses a British pronunciation which is noticeable on certain words. First of all, she uses the BrE back vowel [ɑ] on words like after, card and archives. Second of all, she uses the typical RP diphthong [ai] on the word laying. Dance was pronounced with an [ɑ] sound indicating that it is a British pronunciation, an American pronunciation would have used an [æ] sound.

4.4 American Varieties

American varieties are the second most common variety used in the listening exercises. 25 speakers out of 91 use an American accent. This is about 27.4% of the speakers. The AmE used is of standard variety and there are no distinct regional influences.

The second transcription is from an exercise called Where are they? (Skolverket, 2015d) It is a conversation between three people, two of them use AmE and one use BrE.

Man 1: Can I help you?

Woman: Yes, we just got here [r] we’d plan to travel on to Somerby but we spent much more time at Crowhurst Castle than we planned on and it’s getting a bit late.
Man 2: So, if you could give us some advice about accommodation

Man 1: How large is your party?

Woman: There are five of us. The children are nine, six and three.

Man 1: Would BnB do?

Woman: Absolutely, fine

Man 1: Okay, I'll call [ɔː] Mrs. Banks, she lives just across town and she accepts children.

Man 2: What’s the charge? [r]

Man 1: No charge (no [r]) really, I'll ring through and if she accepts you, you give me five pounds which is deducted from your bill.

In this exercise a woman and a man are trying to find accommodation and are asking a man working at a tourist’s information office. The woman uses AmE, this is shown by the way she pronounces the word here. She pronounces this using a post-vocalic [r], which is something that is common in AmE. Man 2 is also using AmE. This can be heard when he says charge because he also uses the post-vocalic [r] sound. Man 1 on the other hand uses BrE. He also says charge but he does not pronounce the post-vocalic [r] indicating that he has a British variety. Man 1 also uses a typical RP pronunciation on the word call which has a distinct [ɔː] sound, something that is common in RP BrE (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 11).

4.5 Mid-Atlantic Variety

Some speakers have a variety that tend to have Mid-Atlantic features. A total of 10 speakers or 10.9% of the speakers use a Mid-Atlantic variety. These speakers have no distinct accent. They do not use any BrE or AmE pronunciations. They use words that are standard or mix words that are common in BrE with words that are common in AmE.
The following transcription is taken from the listening exercise *News Items* (Skolverket, 2015a) It shows a woman talking about the apes of Gibraltar, she is using Mid-Atlantic English.

Gibraltar’s Barbary apes, central to the myth that the British empire would fall if they ever left the rock are breeding so fast that they may have to be called. The Gibraltar government is likely to cut their numbers either by contraceptives or lethal injections. The apes, which originate from Morocco and Algeria, have lived on the rock for centuries and are Europe’s only free roaming apes. In the dark days of the Second World War, when Britain faced defeat, Winston Churchill had apes imported from Morocco to boost the falling population of the famous rock apes of Gibraltar. In the past few years however, their numbers have grown rapidly.

The woman speaks a very clear variety of English, where there are not any noticeable characteristics of any certain varieties. This is common in Mid-Atlantic English. She does not use any special BrE pronunciations or AmE pronunciations. Her language is clear and all the words are pronounced very well. However, Mid-Atlantic English is a variety where characteristics of BrE and AmE sometimes are mixed and this can be noted. The woman uses the word *empire* and she pronounces it with an audible /r/ which is used in AmE. On the other hand, when she says the word *falling* she uses the light /l/ which is never used in AmE but only in BrE.

**4.6 Australian and New Zealand Varieties**

This section will focus on English varieties that are not BrE, AmE or Mid-Atlantic. Although there are many other English varieties not many are present in the listening exercises. Only 9 speakers used another variety. The varieties present were AusE and NZE seven speakers or 7.6% used AusE and two speakers or 2.1% used a NZE.

The following transcription is taken from the listening exercise *Ten Journeys of a Lifetime* (Skolverket, 2015b) and shows an example of a person speaking a mild form of AusE
Named after the tough Afghan camel drivers who brought trade and provisions to the heart of the continent. The Ghan has always evoked the romance of the *Australian [ɒ]* outback. The long awaited link to Darwin from *Alice [ɒ] *Springs opens next month, making it possible for the first time to cross the country from Adelaide by the silver train, with its steel carriages. Starting in the green hills of the Temperate wine growing region the train snakes’ through to the harsh red outline of the Macdonald ranges before encountering the lush emerald rainforest of the top end.

The speaker is talking about a trip tourists could take while visiting Australia. He talks with a mild accent and AusE is only noticeable on the vowel [ɒ]. The speaker uses this pronunciation on the words *Australian* and *Alice*. This vowel sound is typical for AusE and is most noticeable on the /ɒ/ vowel in the word *Australia* which is something that this speaker also says.

This transcription is taken from the listening exercise *Ten Journeys of a Lifetime*. Here a man is talking about the Milford Track in New Zealand. The man tends to use NZE.

Traversing the heart of south island’s wild fjord country, the Milford Track is often described as the finest walk in the world. Famed for spectacular sogginess Milford in the rain, when torrents of water rush down the * mountains was the eighth wonder of the world according to Kipling. Highlights include a possible encounter with [wɪθ] a genuine kiwi, blue glacial lakes, sheer granite canyons and mystical mossy forests, very *Lord of the Rings*. On sunny days, you can swim in icy water holes. The trek culminates in a boat trip on Milford Sound, home to fur seals and bottle nose dolphins.
The man uses NZE when he speaks. This variety is very similar to AusE and it is hard for non-native speakers to hear a difference between the two. However, the man says the word *with* and he pronounces it [wɪθ]. This pronunciation of *with* is specific for NZE.

5. Discussion

According to the course plans for English 5 and English 6 students should be exposed to spoken language that have different dialect and social features (Skolverket, 2011, p. 2). To find out what varieties the Swedish National Education Agency wants students to learn the focus on the research project was on the listening part of the national tests, that all upper secondary school students in Sweden are required to take. A linguistic analysis of 11 listening exercises was conducted. These exercises are provided to teachers by the Swedish National Education Agency. The purpose of these exercises is to practice for the national tests. Since all teachers in Sweden are able to use these and they have the same content as the national tests they will accurately show what varieties the Swedish National Education Agency wants the students to be exposed to. However, not all teachers will use these exercises it still shows what varieties that students get to interact with.

The results of the research project show that students are exposed to different varieties of English. The English varieties that were used in the listening exercises were of standard variety. There were not any difficult accents used. All speakers did of course not sound the same within the varieties. But it was not possible to hear any certain regional accents or pronunciations that could not be classified under standard varieties. The varieties used were however limited. The English language is well spread all over the world with many different varieties. The varieties used in the exercises were the most common and standard ones. These varieties include BrE, AmE and Mid-Atlantic English. A small portion of the exercises were done in AusE and NZE. Students does not get a chance to be interact with English varieties from India, Jamaica or the varieties spreading over Africa. Although containing both AusE and NZE it is only used by the speakers talking about their own countries. When BrE, AmE and Mid-Atlantic English is used the speakers can talk about anything and sometimes they interact with speakers of other varieties. But the AusE and NZE speakers have to present different tourist attractions from their respective countries. That way these varieties are seen as exotic and not so common as they actually are.
The results of the research project show that the most common varieties to be used were BrE and AmE. This was expected as these are the more traditional ones and the ones people in Sweden will be most likely to come in contact with outside of the classroom. The results showed that 52% of the speakers in the listening exercises used a BrE variety while 28% used an AmE variety. Three fourths of the speakers used either BrE or AmE while one fourth of the speakers used Mid-Atlantic, AusE or NZE varieties. What is interesting here is that over half of the speakers use BrE. This could indicate that the Swedish National Agency of Education wants students to understand and possibly use BrE varieties. However, the curriculum states that “Spoken language, also with different social and dialect features, and texts that instruct, relate, summarise, explain, discuss, report and argue, also via film and other media” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 2).

The students are exposed to different varieties but not to the extent as expected. They get exposed to mostly BrE. Half of the speakers are using BrE and the reason for this could be attitudes that teachers have towards the different varieties. According Modiano (2009) most teachers in Sweden speak Mid-Atlantic English and are able to tell BrE and AmE apart. However, Modiano (2009) also mentions that teachers in Swedish primary, secondary and upper secondary schools tend to prefer the BrE variety over other varieties. Since the national tests are created by teachers this could impact the content. Hence the tests contain more BrE than any other variety.

The impact of BrE is also shown by the way the instructions for the exercises are made. Nine out of ten instructions were made using BrE while the last two were made using Mid-Atlantic English. For instructions they have chosen even more speakers to use BrE than in the exercises. This shows the power that the BrE variety have over the other varieties. The BrE variety becomes normative and this also shows the attitudes that teachers have towards the BrE variety. This means that students only get to interact with other varieties in the exercises and BrE is shown as the English variety that is preferred. Another reason for students getting exposed to all this BrE could be that they do not get to interact with it as much outside of the classroom. It is more common for students to watch TV-series and movies that use AmE. The National Agency of Education could possibly use more BrE speakers in order to even out level of interaction with different varieties that students get. According to Modiano (2009) teachers in Europe are aware that the interest for BrE is declining and that AmE is gaining more support. The reason for this is the increased exposure to media like TV and the Internet.
This research project has one major problem with its validity. All the results are based on what I interpreted as different varieties. Sometimes it can be hard to interpret what variety a speaker is using and there is a possibility that minor errors in interpretation could have been made. The differences in pronunciation and the major differences between the varieties were presented in the literature review and have acted as the base for classifying every speaker’s variety of English. The overall result should be accurate since most speakers have had distinct pronunciations indicating what variety they used.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to find out if Swedish upper secondary school students are exposed to different varieties of English in the classroom. The aim was also to find out what varieties, and how much of each variety they get to interact with. The project focused on listening exercises within the material. The reason for this was that by listening to people speak made it easier to determine how they pronounce certain words and therefore easier to classify what variety of English each speaker used. Listening exercises used as practice for the national test were chosen because the test is something that all upper secondary school students in Sweden take part in. Since the tests are created by the Swedish National Agency of Education this would show what varieties they want the students to learn and interact with. The results show that students are exposed to different varieties of English. The listening exercises contain all the major English varieties. These include, BrE, AmE, Mid-Atlantic English, AusE and NZE. All speakers used a standard variety and no major regional accents could be found. The main focus of the exercises was on the two major English varieties, BrE and AmE. Three out of four speakers used either BrE or AmE and two out of four speakers used BrE. The reason for so many of the speakers using BrE or AmE could be because these are the two major varieties and are the ones that students will most likely get in contact with in their life. Half of the speakers used a BrE variety which could be two because of two reasons. Either the National Agency of Education chose to have that many BrE speakers because students are more likely to encounter AmE in their everyday life, since basically all TV-series and movies that teenagers watch come the US and will therefore have strictly AmE speakers. By having more BrE speakers in the listening exercises it would give students a chance to interact with that variety in the classroom while they interact more with AmE outside of the classroom. Another reason for half of the speakers using BrE could be the
attitudes towards the different varieties that teachers have. Modiano (2009) explained that most teachers in Sweden preferred to use the BrE variety and since the tests essentially are created by teachers their attitudes towards the different varieties could have an impact on what varieties of English are used in the national tests.
7. References


7.1 Material


