



AKADEMIN FÖR UTBILDNING OCH EKONOMI  
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# British English versus American English in a Swedish School

-an investigation about attitude, preferences and reality among  
students, teachers, and National Tests.

Marith Arvidsson

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English C

Supervisor: Ph. D Marko Modiano  
Examiner: Ph. D Henrik Kaatari

## **Abstract**

This essay is an investigation of varieties of English used, learned, and taught, in a Swedish school. The age of the students is 15-16 and they attend grade 9. The hypothesis of this essay is that American English is the variety most students prefer and use, and that British English is the variety mainly preferred by teachers and the school system. This do not collaborate with the 'learner-centered learning' pedagogical view (Modiano 2009:172). The data is mainly collected in three areas. 1: a teacher survey, to determine the teachers' views and opinions of the varieties of English. 2: a student survey, to examine whether the students prefer one variety to the other, and if they are even aware of what variety they are speaking, and 3: the data gathered from transcribing this year's English National Test to determine what types of English that are represented in the test.

The result of this essay confirms the hypothesis that AmE is the variety both preferred and used by younger students in Sweden today, and that these students do find that they are allowed to use any variety they wish while learning in school. BrE is still the variety preferred by teachers and the school system, however AmE is catching up. Furthermore, the students do have a high level of participation in their own acquisition of English.

## **Keywords**

AmE, BrE, American English, British English, listening exercise, English National Tests, grade 9

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## Introduction

This essay examines the roles of British English and American English in a Swedish school and investigates which variety is taught and presented to the students by the teachers. It also investigates the material approved by The Swedish National Agency for Education, specifically the National Tests produced by the University of Gothenburg by an observation of the listening part of the National Test. Are the students exposed to different varieties and do they have the opportunity to procure their language acquisition within the variety of English that they choose?

This essay also investigates the pedagogical process regarding how much the students can participate in their own acquisition of the language. One contention which is encouraged, and supported by The Swedish National Agency for Education, is participation by the students. This does not solely apply to learning languages, but for the entire educational system. “Pupils should be given influence over their education. They should be continuously encouraged to take an active part in the work of further developing the education and kept informed of issues that concern them” (National Agency for Education 2001: 17). It is best for the pupils if they are involved in their own learning process and that they are allowed to affect how they gain knowledge. Certainly, there are things not up for debate and that is the content of the curriculum, but the process should be an open issue. Historically, the English taught in Swedish schools has been of the British variety, but that is changing, most likely due to the powerful impact of technology and media. When English first was starting to be taught in Swedish schools, teachers were influenced by British English and that was considered to be the correct type of English. (Modiano 2009: 105) The change of this came because of the break-through of technology. Suddenly, the major influence for the population did not come from Britain, but from the United States. The type of English the students are exposed to is mostly American English, at least outside the school environment and in their everyday lives. “Preference for and exposure to American popular culture does make a difference to the English-language attitudes of Swedish school students” (Mobärg 1997: 216).

By three types of investigations, this essay will find out what type of English is preferred by the pupils, teachers, and The Swedish National Agency for Education. This is conducted by surveys with the pupils and the teachers, and an observation analysis of the listening part of the National Test carried out in the spring semester in 2017.

There are of course many more varieties of English than British English and American English and extensive dialectal differences within different types, but this essay will focus on standard versions of BrE and AmE. These abbreviations, BrE for British English, and AmE for American English, will be used throughout the essay. The term Mid-Atlantic English also called Trans-Atlantic English will be mentioned in the essay and they can be seen as a mixture of BrE and AmE, frequently used in Europe. Modiano defines Mid-Atlantic English accordingly “random mixture of British and American English” (Modiano 2009: 61).

As a starting point, the essay presents some background information regarding the role of English in the world and particularly the role of English as a foreign language in Sweden today. Furthermore, it gives an account of the surveys carried out with the pupils and teachers. According to The Swedish National Agency for Education in the curriculum for compulsory school, written in 2011, the students should be given the opportunity to develop skills to communicate and understand different varieties of the English language. Does the Swedish school system teach the pupils the above? Are the students aware of differences between different varieties of English, and what are their preferences? And how much can the individual student affect their own learning?

### **Aim and purpose**

The aim of this investigation is to find out whether the students are aware of the difference between the two varieties, AmE and BrE, and if they can develop within their preferred variety.

Nowadays we see a clear change from students solely receiving knowledge from their teachers to students being involved in retrieving knowledge by themselves. This change in acquisition is a good thing for most pupils, but not all. Some do not have the ability and maturity required to take responsibility for their own learning. Those students need help making decisions, but also training to increase that ability in small steps. The extent of their own responsibility must be based on the individuals' ability and on age. Modiano speaks of ‘learner-centered learning’ (Modiano 2009: 172) and that is as stated above; students themselves taking responsibility for their own development. Modiano goes on to say that student centered learning “implies that the very goals of the instruction are based on learners' preferences and needs” (Modiano 2009: 172). In the overall goals in the curriculum developed by The Swedish

National Agency for Education it is stated that schools have the responsibility to encourage students to “develop in accordance with their own capacity, and are at the same time stimulated into using and developing all their ability” (National Agency for Education 2001:16). There is also a section on the responsibility and influence of pupils and this section speaks of the importance of pupils’ own power of their education to stimulate a curiosity for learning not only during school years but also for the rest of their lives (National Agency for Education 2001:17).

Furthermore, this essay investigates if the hypothesis that American English is preferred over British English among young students in Sweden is correct or not. Do the children learn the type of English (BrE or AmE) that they want, or are they coerced into using a particular variety, due to preferences by their teachers, school material, and national tests?

### **Previous research**

There has been research carried out in this area prior to this essay, however, previous studies have mostly focused on older students, upper secondary school, on the design of the national tests, on people who have already finished school or from the perspective of teachers. This essay focuses on younger pupils’ preference of variety and their right to choose which variety of English they learn in school.

Mats Mobärg Ph.D. at the University of Gothenburg is one researcher that has had great impact of this field in Sweden. He has over the years conducted several studies regarding the English language in Sweden and studied the relationship between British English and American English in Swedish schools. His publication *RP or GA? On Swedish school students’ choice of English pronunciation* is one example. He claims that British English is more commonly used for words that are related to school and that American English is more often used for words that is linked to every-day life. This essay proclaims that conclusion. The pupils are more likely to use American English in a more relaxed situation, whereas British English in a more formal situation. (Mobärg 2002: 127) This brings us to the issue of learning or acquiring, the pupils learn by “conscious attention to form and rule learning” in a formal setting and the acquisition takes place outside the formal setting by being exposed to the language by media and other channels of input. (Lightbown and Spada 2006: 36)

In the essay regarding teachers' attitude towards different varieties of English and how they teach their students in this matter, it was found that several varieties were used in the classroom and that all teachers found it important to present different varieties to the students (Ainasoja, 2010).

Another essay targets the issue of English usage at an adult age. How common is it that adults that are no longer in school use English and particularly which variety do they use? Does this group of Swedes think that English is a threat to Swedish as the main language of Sweden? The conclusion for this was that the overall attitude of English is positive and Swedes do not think that English will challenge Swedish in the future. This group of informants, as well as the pupils in my investigation, claim that most of their input of the English language comes from media (Lidblad, 2009).

Yet another essay focuses on the different varieties of English in the National Tests for upper secondary school. The University of Gothenburg is the producer of all National Tests in Sweden. In this essay, there is also a section investigating the National Tests, but the difference between the two essays is the age of the students. The researcher for this other essay concluded that the British variety clearly dominated the test, with 50 percent, 25 percent represented an American variety while the rest was divided between Australian, New Zealand or Mid-Atlantic (Lingemyr, 2017).

These examples of essays are just some among many over the years and most of them come to the conclusion that AmE is the variety most frequently used among young students in Sweden.

## **Method**

To test the hypothesis of this essay, several investigations have been conducted. Two surveys, one with students of the school and the second one with the English teachers of the same school. The survey with the students was conducted in the classroom. The students were given the survey as displayed in appendix 1 and with the instructions to answer each question as honest as they could. The pupils understood that there was no right or wrong answer and did not feel any pressure to perform. When handing in the survey they were asked to read a few lines in English. This is all stated in the section about student survey further down. The teachers were e-mailed the survey and returned their answers with e-mail as well. The surveys as a whole are included here as appendix 1 and 2. The examples of differences between BrE and AmE which are displayed in the

survey carried out with the teachers are taken from *A Mid-Atlantic Handbook, American and British English* by Marko Modiano (1996).

The 2017 listening part of the English National Tests was also analyzed to find out what varieties are presented to the students. This investigation took place live during the tests and two teachers assisted on determining the varieties heard in the National Test. Each of the teachers were equipped with an observation sheet to document which variety of English they heard in the National Test. On The Swedish National Agency for Education's web site, one may find practice exercises and those sound files were also listened to for analysis for this essay. So, for the National Tests investigation there are two years analyzed and presented in this essay.

The curriculum for compulsory school, 2011, was studied to determine how important The Swedish National Agency for Education thinks that the issue of pupils taking responsibility for their own learning is. All facts regarding the curriculum are stated from the 2011 edition and that is the current regulation that schools in Sweden follow. The translation to English of the curriculum was made in 2011 and has not been revised since.

## **Background**

In the following three sections, a brief presentation of different aspects of English will be presented. The purpose of this is to create an understanding of the role of English as a world language and why it has a significant importance in Sweden today. The information presented here will create a deeper understanding on how English has developed into its important position as world language, both global and national in Sweden, and perhaps the direction of the language for the future.

## **English in the world today**

When looking at statistics of languages in the world we need to make a distinction between native speakers and foreign language speakers. Looking at native speakers, Chinese/Mandarin is clearly the largest, followed by Hindi, in third place English and forth is Spanish (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/>). David Crystal claims that there are two major reasons why English have come to this position of world language. "The present-day world status of English is primarily the result of two factors: the expansion of British colonial power, which

peaked towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic power of the twentieth century”. (Crystal 2003: 59)

English is the native language of approximately 375 million people worldwide. However, bringing in those that speak English as a foreign language to the sum, it is the largest language in the world with up to 1.5 billion speakers. These numbers were retrieved from Statista.com, a platform for statistics launched in 2008, head-quarter is based in Hamburg, Germany. There are some factors in the statistics that could make room for some errors. What is considered English? What about those countries that have English as their official language whereas the people of that country are native speakers of some other language? It is a complex situation, but extensive research has been conducted within the subject and a well-known theory is Braj Kachru’s Concentric Circles of world Englishes, a theory many language academics refers to as they conduct their own studies. Shortly explained, his theory is built on three circles: The Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle (Stevens in Kachru 1992: 38). This is how Marko Modiano explains the theory in his book

*Language Learning in the Multicultural Classroom:*

the inner circle is comprised of native speakers from the British Isles, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The outer circle is for those L2 users of English who speak second-language varieties, such as Indian, Singaporean, Nigerian and Hong Kong English, and the expanding circle is for those who use English as a foreign language, which according to Kachruvian sociolinguistics would include regions such as Europe and South America (Modiano 2009: 15-17).

The spread of English from the British Isles around the world started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The colonization began and Britain along with Spain, Portugal, Holland, and France were strong naval powers (Modiano 2009: 28). Where the explorers from these countries sailed, and settled is easy to see today by what language is spoken in that country or part of the world. English in the USA, Canada, Australia etc. Spanish in South America except for Brazil where Portuguese is the spoken language, and French in some parts of Africa. Crystal explains the spread of English in the world with colonization, “Why did Spanish, Portuguese, and French find their way into the Americas, Africa and the Far East? Study the colonial policies of the Renaissance kings

and queens, and the way these policies were ruthlessly implemented by armies and navies all over the known world”. (Crystal 2003: 9)

After the first excursion trips, immigrants from the British Isles began to move to the New World, and this “is referred to as the first Diaspora” (Modiano 2009: 29). English “came to replace nearly all of the heritage languages spoken by the indigenous peoples of what are present-day Canada and the United States” (Modiano 2009: 29). But it was not only immigrants from the British Isles that came to the New World, also other nations came to bring their culture and languages to blend together in this melting pot that America was and still is in some way. Since those days, the world has become more accessible by increasing numbers of people moving from one country to another, and because of this movement, languages have spread and established in different places. Due to the need for a common language for communication between people with different native languages, English has increased as a foreign language and has for a long time been used as a lingua franca.

A lingua franca is defined by David Crystal as a ‘common language’ used for communication between people that do not speak the same native language (Crystal 2003: 11). Some lingua francas are regional and some are international, but one thing all lingua francas have in common is that they have developed out of a need to communicate and as a necessity for people to function together. Historically, lingua francas developed when people started to travel to foreign places of the world to conduct trade and especially during the slave trading era. After World War II, English gained importance with the foundation of the United Nations and many other international bodies (Crystal 2003: 12). The importance of English as a language of communication around the world has continued to increase and today some variety of English is used in several areas; business, diplomacy, aviation and maritime communications, science, politics, and the Internet to list a few.

### **English in Sweden today**

In today’s world, it is almost a necessity to have some level of knowledge in English. It truly is the lingua franca of our time and Sweden is no exception. Children learn English from the age of approximately 8-9 and it is along with Swedish and mathematics one of the three core subjects in the Swedish educational system. This means that to get accepted to any program at upper secondary school, students need to have a passing grade in those three subjects at the completion of grade 9.

When it comes to English as a foreign language in Sweden, it is hard to measure to what extent it is spoken and understood. However, Crystal claims that the Scandinavian countries along with the Netherlands are considered the best at English among all countries of Europe (Crystal 2003: 6).

Learning English became a priority within the Swedish school system in the mid-nineteen-hundreds, but then it was strictly BrE taught in schools. The school system and some teachers imposed to their pupils that “AmE was less valued in comparison to BrE, and in this manner coerced their students into conforming to a BrE conceptualization of the language”. BrE variety kept its advantage over AmE up until the mid-1990’s when both varieties were allowed in school (Söderlund and Modiano 2002: 147). This focus on English in Swedish schools has borne fruit and as stated above Swedes do have good knowledge of the language, and the younger the person is the more likely it is that he or she speaks and understands English well. The age-group this essay is targeting is a generation that has been brought up with all the advantages the technology of today has given them. The influence of English and particularly American English is present in everyday life for this generation. Movies, music, TV-shows and of course the Internet is only a click away. The fact that Swedish TV does not dub foreign programs into Swedish but instead has subtitles has been an advantage for all Swedes when it comes to comprehending English.

This specific group of pupils has, from the age of 10, had access to a touchpad of their own provided to them by school as a working instrument. They are truly the first generation that is constantly connected to the world by technology and therefore also surrounded by English. Overall, this constant input of English is part of the reason Swedes are so comfortable hearing, reading and writing English. Despite this increasing importance of English in Sweden, Swedish still is the main language spoken in Sweden and is not at this time threatened by English. Moreover, English is the language many Swedes feel content to use when conversing with people from other countries.

### **English in the Swedish school system**

According to The Swedish National Agency for Education in the curriculum for compulsory school, written 2011, the students should be given the opportunity to develop the ability to communicate and to understand different varieties of the English language. The students should also have “the opportunity to develop their skills in

relating content to their own experience, living conditions and interest” (National Agency for Education 2011: 32). This is a formulation that shows the importance of pupils being able to actively participate in their own learning. The overall interpretation of the entire curriculum is that the pupils should be given the opportunity to grow and develop their knowledge of English, independent of what type of English they use or for that matter, independent of the type their teachers use. Modiano says; “A seemingly neutral instructor is better positioned to assist in this type of learning process as opposed to instructors who base their teaching on a culture-specific prescriptive grammar and the promotion of native or near-native proficiency” (Modiano 2009: 158-159). The aim for the teachers must be to educate the pupils on a broad basis and in the preferred variety of the pupil, this to build the pupils’ confidence in language acquisition and to lay a solid foundation for further studies. Especially for this age group that this study is targeting, it is important to allow the pupils to use their own type of English so that they can feel as comfortable as possible while learning.

This issue on students’ confidence is also pointed out in the curriculum as an important aspect for teachers to provide students. As one teacher represented in this investigation said; “I’m happy that they say anything at all”. Thus, seeing as it is challenging to motivate Swedish learners to express themselves, this would perhaps be easier to accomplish if the students felt that they were active agents in making choices about which variety of English is the target for their own personal development. For further reading, the curriculum for English is stated as appendix 3 (National Agency for Education, 2011: 32 and 34-35).

## **Results and discussion**

In this section, the results of each of the surveys, together with the analysis of the National Tests will be presented separately; first students, then teachers and finally the National Test analysis. This will be directly followed by an analysis and results drawn from the investigation.

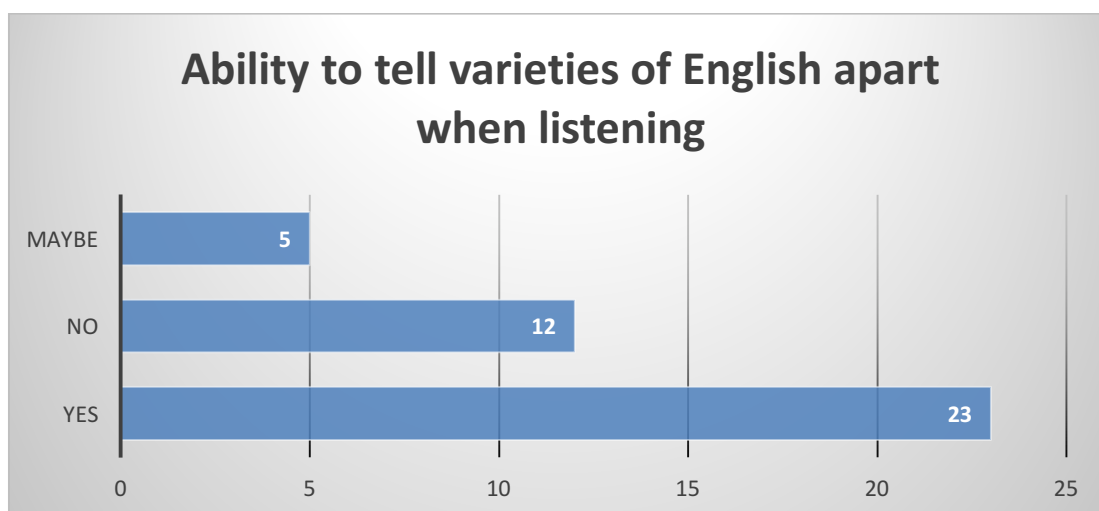
### **Student survey**

The survey with the students was made in two 9th grade classes with a total of 40 students. The distribution between genders are: 18 girls and 22 boys. They are all native speakers of Swedish and all speak Swedish at home and in their daily lives. The fact that they all are born here in Sweden was not a deliberate choice, but simply just a

coincidence. It is a small town and just a few immigrants attend this school. These students' free time are spent exercising, playing sports, computer games and socializing with friends.

On-line gaming is an activity that is claimed to increase acquisition of English. In this survey, it is interesting to note is that on the question of whether the students do on-line gaming, none of the girls answered yes and thirteen of the boys said that they do. Out of those thirteen, nine said that they do communicate with English speaking people on-line and three said that they do that only occasionally. On the questions regarding music, movies, and TV-shows all students said that they listen and watch media daily and that the languages they meet in these activities are mostly AmE and Swedish. Only one mentioned BrE in the movie question.

The next question was if they consider themselves having the ability to hear the differences between AmE and BrE when listening to other people talking. Twenty-three of the students are certain that they can tell the two varieties apart when listening, twelve said that they cannot and five said maybe. See diagram below.



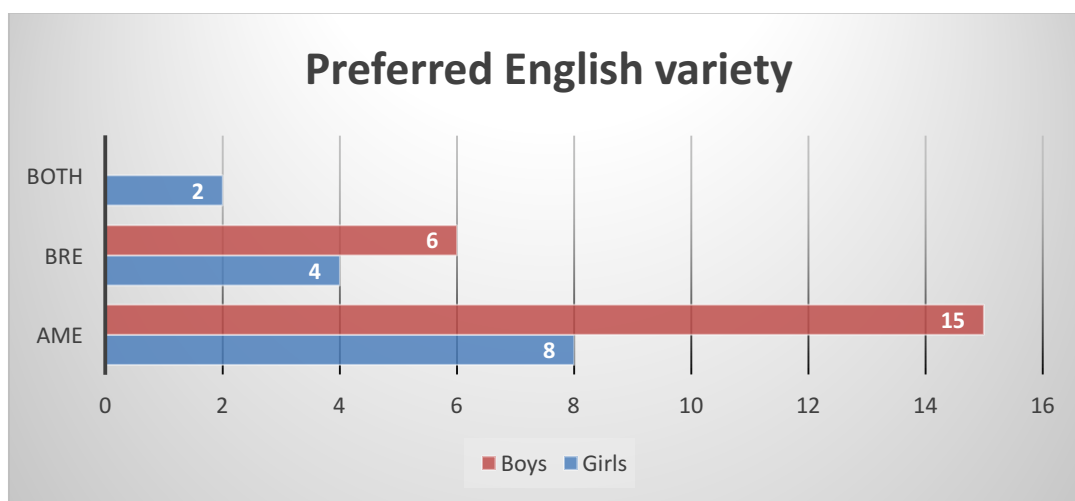
Some of the dissimilarities between the varieties that the students are aware of are pronunciation, words, and spelling. Many students also wrote about the sense of style they feel when listening to AmE and BrE and they said that AmE sounds more relaxed and BrE is more correct and snobby.

When the students were asked to evaluate their own speech and state if they speak AmE or BrE, about 60% are certain that they speak American English, only one student said BrE, but as much as 40% are unsure of how to label themselves. On the question of why they speak that variety many pupils agreed that it is because that is the

type they mostly hear. A huge amount of input from media and so on is of the AmE variety. Also, they find it more natural for them to mimic what they hear.

Looking at the question of whether they learn the differences between the two types in school, the students answered accordingly: eight said yes, we do learn differences, six are under the impression that they do learn a little bit but not so much and mainly because they have asked their teacher about this issue. Four said that they do not know or left the question unanswered. Finally, seventeen claims that they have not been taught about the differences. This matter of the students not considering that they are taught about the differences between types goes directly against how the teachers all said that they do teach about the dissimilarities.

The answers to the question in the survey considering what type that they would like to speak came as somewhat of a surprise. As many as six boys and four girls said that they would like to speak BrE, two girls said both varieties, with the explanation that they are interested in language and that they think it would be fun to broaden their knowledge. The rest, 28 students, said they wanted to speak AmE. Perhaps the surprisingly high rate for BrE is a wish for being different and not to follow the stream of Americanization. The diagram below shows this.



To round up the investigation with the students, they were asked to read a few sentences, so that I and their teacher could determine which variety they use. The lines stated: - I can't dance. - Everybody can dance! AmE was used throughout, with only few exceptions of three students pronouncing 'can't' with a British /ɑ:/ sound, but then they fell in to the AmE pronunciation [æ] in the word 'dance'.

The survey with the students did not bring any unexpected information. It proves that AmE is the type both preferred and used. It is also the type the students are exposed to the most, both in school and outside of school. Meanwhile the wish of some students to learn more of the BrE variety was the only surprising information that was revealed.

Furthermore, while interviewing a few of the students on how they look at their ability to participate in the learning process most of them feel that they do to some extent have the power to affect their studies. They brought up examples of how they can choose among different words when practicing vocabulary and that they sometimes can choose how to present what they have learned, orally, written etc. However, some of them also find that too much responsibility or freedom to make their own choices is hard. This is the struggle this pedagogical theory of learners-centered teaching is facing. It is great for those students that have the ability and maturity to cope with this responsibility, but hard for those who do not. The ultimate goal is to make the students motivated to learn. Modiano says in his preface; “The instructor, assured that those they instruct have been involved in this important decision-making process, can for this reason expect the learner to be more motivated” (Modiano 2009: 11).

### **Teacher survey**

A total of six teachers answered the survey. Five females and one male in the age range from 36-50. Their collected years of experience in teaching English is an impressive 88 years divided accordingly; 25, 23, 17, 13, 8 and 2. All but one said that they prefer a British variety over an American one. However, that is for their own use of the language. When it comes to how they view the pupils’ right to use any type the pupils’ would like, they all agree that it is a certainty that the pupils can use which type they are the most comfortable with.

On the question whether they have stayed in any English-speaking country for any longer period of time, five said that they have. England or other parts of the UK is most represented, but also the USA, Australia and New Zealand are on the list of countries these teachers have lived in. There is a strong connection between countries lived in and what type of English they prefer for their own use. For instance, one teacher who has lived in both the USA and the UK, claims that she prefers BrE and gives the explanation that the UK was where she most recently lived and that it has been more than twenty years since she lived in the USA. This shows that as a second language learner you are most likely to build your own language on the surroundings during the time you acquire

knowledge of the language. In Stephen Krashen's hypothesis regarding acquisition-learning there is a difference between learning and acquisition. We learn through "conscious attention to form and rule learning", however the acquisition takes place when we are exposed to language in a natural setting," in much the same way children pick up their first language -with no conscious attention to language form" (Lightbown and Spada 2006: 36).

When asked on their opinions of AmE some of the answers were; "what most of my students use, not my choice. I have nothing against it but it sounds too colloquial. Not a big fan." On the other hand, from the one that did say she preferred AmE the opinion stated was that "It is easy to understand and sounds nice and more relaxed." Moving on to the views of BrE the teachers said; "Sounds proper and a bit more conservative. It is what I am used to. What I was taught in school. Too much "upper class". It is interesting that the views and opinions the teachers bring up, on both side of the coin, are almost identical to what the pupils said. Although, the students think that BrE sounds more proper and nice, they still prefer AmE. This must be because generation plays a role in how learners look at language. BrE is, by the students at least, considered old fashion.

The next question asked was the one regarding which type of English the teachers' teach or at least use themselves in the classroom and the answers to this are linked to the teachers' preferences. Three answered that they teach both types and out of those three one also mentioned Australian English. Two use BrE and one AmE in their profession. One teacher says that she is aware that she is mixing the two types in question and that she in university was taught Transatlantic English and that she now 'lives' and teaches accordingly.

Neither of the teachers has experienced any pressure from their employers to choose one particular type of English. They all say that it is up to them to teach whatever variety they feel the most comfortable with. However, they are obliged to follow the guidelines from The Swedish National Agency for Education of giving the students the opportunity to learn either type and to educate the students of the differences. On this matter, all teachers say that they do so. They point out differences such as spelling, vocabulary, and pronunciation. They allow all types of varieties that the pupils might use and mostly they do not correct the students if they are mixing types. Some of the teachers says that they might inform the students of the mistake, but

that it is not to be regarded as an error. “That depends on what level they are, how advanced their English is. Sometimes there are far more important things to work with.”

There is a total agreement among the teachers on what type of English they believe the students prefer and that is AmE. The reasons for this are, according to the teachers, that AmE is what the students mostly hear through media, music, Internet, TV, and films. All these factors are what influence the pupils to feel more comfortable with AmE than BrE. Also, here the issue of which generation you belong to was brought up as a factor for the students choosing AmE.

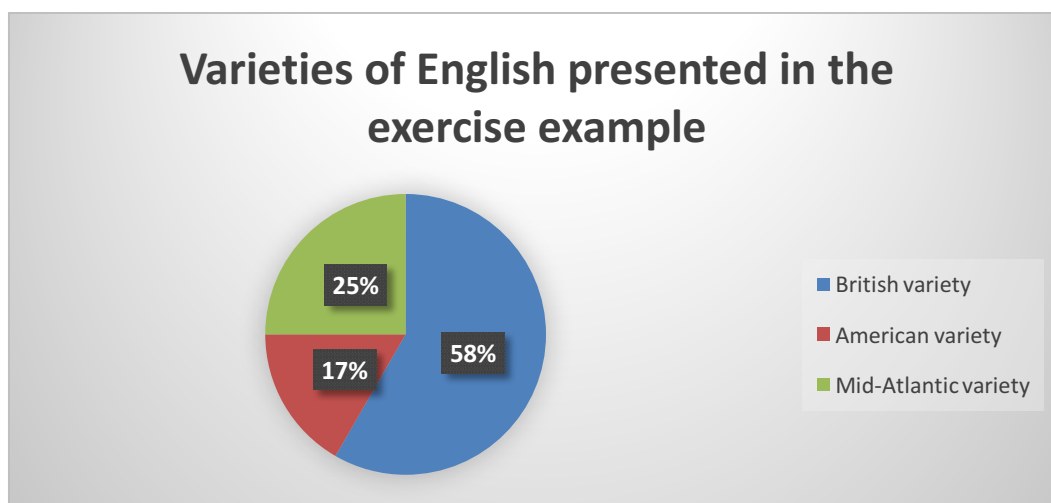
The final part of the teachers’ survey was a short test to determine what type of English the teachers actually use, to find out if their perception of themselves as either BrE users, AmE users or perhaps a little bit of both, was correct. This test was designed so that the teachers encircled different grammatical forms and choose between words which differs in AmE and BrE. The instruction was that they should choose which alternative they would teach their pupils. These words and sentences were taken from Modianos book *A Mid-Atlantic Handbook, American and British English* (1996). The result was that they all mix and match between the two varieties. One of the teachers that claimed to be fairly strict about BrE wrote her own reflections of this final part, and what she wrote sums it up very well. “I just realised how influenced I am by AmE when doing the above! I also just realised that our new teaching material *Awesome* which claims to be very “English as a world language” uses a lot of BrE vocabulary!”

The surveys with the teachers show that there are no clear lines between the varieties, the type taught in Swedish schools is a mix between the two varieties and the overall preference of the students is AmE. It is up to each teacher to educate the students so that the students will gain a good understanding of the language in whatever variety that might be and to make the pupils aware of the differences so that they from that platform can evolve in their choice of type. This brings diversity to the classrooms, which is good for the development of the students.

### **Listening part of the National Test**

On the web site for The Swedish National Agency for Education they present exercises for the listening part of the National Test. Those exercises have been analyzed and the results show that a great majority of the voices heard in the recordings are BrE. The first part “What’s It All About” has 12 short spelling and out of those 12 spelling 7 are

spoken with a distinctive BrE accent, 2 are in AmE and the remaining 3 were hard to determine, perhaps a Mid-Atlantic variety of English. See diagram below.

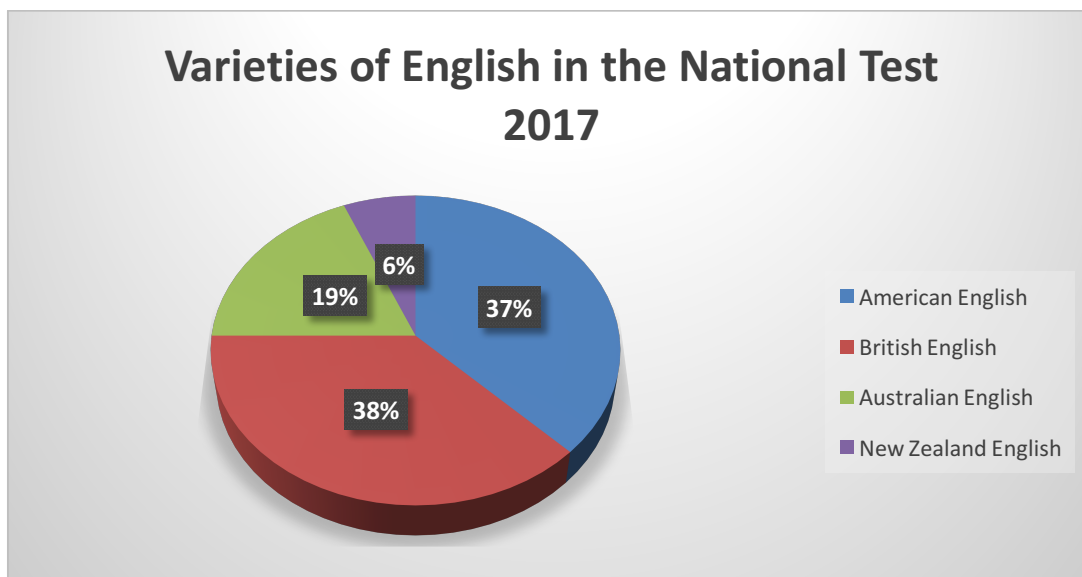


The next exercise is called “Environmental news”. That piece of news was read by the same woman and she spoke with a BrE variety. The content of the news was from different countries, but that is not relevant for this research. In the last exercise “Think Twice” it was the same as the former, a BrE variety used throughout.

In this year’s National Test, the time was more equally distributed between BrE and AmE. It consisted of three parts, precisely as the exercise example. The first part “Open House” was the setting of a radio program and the woman leading the program spoke a broadcast AmE. A correct English but still with distinctive characteristics for AmE such as audible /r/, post-vocalic [r] and [æ] sound. In the radio program, the woman talked to some guests and the first voice was a man with AmE, a broader accent than hers. In the next episode, a guest reporter with a hint of a Latino accent spoke about a Latino radio station, and in the final part of the radio program an Australian woman spoke about her horse. It is interesting that every time any other variety of English than AmE or BrE is spoken within the test the context of what those people are saying are clues or even straight out told of what country it is set to be.

The second part “The Great Beaver Drop” was a story told by a man speaking AmE. Here the instructions were given by a woman in BrE, her voice is heard every now and then instructing the student on what to do. The third and final part consisted of nine short news stories. Out of those nine: four were told in BrE, two in AmE, two in AusE and one with a New Zealand accent. Instructions in this part were made by the same BrE speaking woman as in the second part. To summarize, out of 16

different voices six were AmE, six BrE, three AusE and one New Zealand. If we consider how much time each speaker was heard during the test the AmE was most represented. The diagram below shows the summary of voices heard. This shift from BrE dominance of last year to this year's more equal distribution can be a sign that AmE is becoming more accepted even in institutions that have historically been dominated by BrE. The instructions before the test and giving guidance within the test were spoken with a correct British English. It is interesting to consider why all instructions in the test are given in BrE? Is BrE still considered more important and correct than AmE? Is it a question of power and leadership? Or is it simply because they want the instruction voice to be as neutral and understandable as possible?



## Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to determine if the students prefer any specific variety of English (AmE or BrE) or if they are even aware of the differences between the two. Furthermore, the essay investigates the role teachers and material produced by the University of Gothenburg on behalf of The Swedish National Agency for Education, more specifically the listening test of the National Tests, have in presenting different varieties for the students.

From the pupils' perspective, the conclusion is that there is a major advantage for AmE, both when it comes to the students' preferences and of actual use. AmE is the variety they both prefer and the variety they use. However, as an observant I must say that most of the pupils probably mix more than what they think and this mixing is mirroring how English is used in Sweden. A study conducted 2000 shows that

“as many as 69% of the students mix features from the two varieties” (Axelsson 2002: 137). That being 17 years ago the numbers may not be totally accurate now, however they show a tendency for language development. Swedes may have good knowledge of English, but most of them are not near-native speakers. The pupils had good self-recognition to why they are more influenced by AmE than BrE, and could all recognize that media is of great impact and influence on which variety they use. Today’s society brings the world together and the language this generation meet on a daily basis is English and mostly the American version. Because of the young age of the students in this investigation, most of them have not yet had the opportunity to travel for any longer period of time or have lived in an English-speaking country yet and therefore their influence is brought to them by media.

The pupils are under the impression that they are allowed to acquire the language in which variety they prefer and have not been imposed to any type. But there is a disagreement between the pupils and the teachers when it comes to the issue of how much the pupils are taught of the dissimilarities between different types. The students argue that they are not provided with that knowledge, whereas the teachers argue that they do teach on this matter.

On the issue of learner-centered learning, the pupils find that they have the opportunity and that it also is expected of them that they take responsibility in their own learning process. The focus is on the student or learner and the teacher is there to help provide the knowledge but the actual learning is up to the student. Participation is the catchword here.

We also see a change in which variety that is being taught by the teachers. Although, most of those that participated in the survey said that they prefer the British variety, they all concluded that they too are influenced by AmE and that this mixture of the two (or more) types is what they present to the pupils in their classrooms. For learners at this level, the most important thing is to provide them with a solid foundation for further acquisition and therefore the teachers are aiming wide instead of narrow. Modiano speaks of how it is important that students of English at this level, not specific to any age group, but as foreign language learners should “work on acquiring knowledge of ‘common-core international English’ in lexis and pronunciation, along with the grammar of standard English” (Modiano 2009: 166). This is what the investigation in this essay has shown. The teachers must meet the students on their level and adapt the acquisition of English on a wide basis.

The investigation of National Tests also shows signs of change. This year's tests had more representation of AmE than last year's, which was dominated by BrE. Historically the National Tests formed by the University of Gothenburg have been strongly influenced by BrE and maybe the reason for that is to act as a counterweight to all the AmE that the students are exposed to by other channels or it is also possible that the University of Gothenburg still prefers BrE over AmE and thinks that BrE is the correct English.

The result of this essay is that it is true that the hypothesis that AmE is the type both preferred and used by younger students in Sweden today and that these students do find that they are allowed to use any variety they wish while learning in school. Furthermore, they do have a high level of participation in their own acquisition of English. The schools and more specifically the teachers provide the pupils with a wide base of knowledge in English as a foreign language at the level the students need at this stage. It is and should be a foundation for language learning later in life and at a higher level.

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## Appendix 1 Student survey

Gender      Male          Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Language spoken at home: \_\_\_\_\_

What do you do on your free time?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you listen to music? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you watch movies? If so what language do they speak in the movie?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you watch TV shows? If so what language do they speak in the show?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you do on-line gaming?

\_\_\_\_\_

If yes, do you communicate with English speaking people on-line?

\_\_\_\_\_

When listening to spoken English, can you tell if the person is speaking BrE or AmE?

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you think the difference is?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you know if you speak BrE or AmE or any other variety?

\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think you speak that certain variety?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Which variety would you like to speak/learn? BrE or AmE

\_\_\_\_\_

Why would you prefer that variety?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think you learn differences between the two in school?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2 Teacher survey

Gender: M / F      Age \_\_\_\_\_

Year/-s teaching English: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been in any English-speaking country for a longer period?    Yes      No

If yes, in what country and for how long? \_\_\_\_\_

1. What are your opinions about American English? Write as much as you like and anything you like

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2. What are your opinions about British English? Write as much as you like and anything you like

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3.1. What variety of English do you use in the classroom, teaching your students?

British    American    Both    Other? \_\_\_\_\_

3.2. Why are you using that variety?

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3.3. Do you find that your school and schools in general in Sweden, let the teachers decide what variety they want to use in the classroom? Or have you ever been “pushed” in either direction?

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4. What variety do you think the students would prefer to learn? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5.1. Do you teach your students differences between varieties of English? Yes No

5.2. If yes, what differences? (spelling, vocabulary, pronunciation)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

6. If your students mix varieties when they speak or write, is that fine or do you correct them?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7. What is your overall view of which variety, British English, or American English, is preferred among your student and in society?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

9. Encircle which form you would teach your students:

a) There is a restaurant *round/around* the corner.

b) I need to go to *the/---* hospital.

c) We can meet *a week tomorrow/a week from tomorrow*.

d) The hotel is *on/in* High Street.

e) He *smelled/smelt* the perfume.

f) *I suppose/I think* so.

g) It is *on/in* the cards.

h) Such a nice *colour/color*.

10. Encircle the word you would teach your students as your first choice:

a) lägenhet	apartment	flat
b) bagage/väskor	luggage	baggage
c) hav	ocean	sea
d) nota	check	bill
e) lastbil	truck	lorry
f) höst	autumn	fall
g) rulltrappa	moving staircase	escalator
h) biograf	cinema	movie theater
i) semester	holiday	vacation
j) fotboll	soccer	football
k) efternamn	surname	last name
l) soptunna	trash can	dustbin
m) parkering	car park	parking lot
n) trottoar	sidewalk	pavement
o) småkaka	cookie	biscuit

### Appendix 3

Language is the primary tool human beings use for thinking, communicating and learning. Having a knowledge of several languages can provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contacts and greater understanding of different ways of living. The English language surrounds us in our daily lives and is used in such diverse areas as politics, education and economics. Knowledge of English thus increases the individual's opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in international studies and working life.

#### Aim

Teaching of English should aim at helping the pupils to develop knowledge of the English language and of the areas and contexts where English is used, and also pupils' confidence in their ability to use the language in different situations and for different purposes. Through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills involve understanding spoken and written English, being able to formulate one's thinking and interact with others in the spoken and written language, and the ability to adapt use of language to different situations, purposes and recipients. Communication skills also cover confidence in using the language and the ability to use different strategies to support communication and solve problems when language skills by themselves are not sufficient. In order to deal with spoken language and texts, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop their skills in relating content to their own experiences, living conditions and interests. Teaching should also provide pupils with opportunities to develop knowledge about and an understanding of different living conditions, as well as social and cultural phenomena in the areas and contexts where English is used. Teaching should help pupils to develop their skills in searching for, evaluating, choosing and assimilating the content of spoken language and texts from different sources. They should also be equipped to be able to use different tools for learning, understanding, being creative and communicating. Teaching should encourage pupils to develop an interest in languages and culture, and convey the benefits of language skills and knowledge. Teaching in English should essentially give pupils the opportunities to develop their ability to:

- understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts,
- express themselves and communicate in speech and writing,
- use language strategies to understand and make themselves understood,
- adapt language for different purposes, recipients and contexts, and
- reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used.

#### In years 7–9

##### Content of communication

- Current and subject areas familiar to the pupils.
- Interests, daily situations, activities, sequences of events, relations and ethical questions.
- Views, experiences, feelings and future plans.
- Living conditions, traditions, social relations and cultural phenomena in various contexts and areas where English is used.

##### Listening and reading – reception

- Spoken English and texts from various media.
- Spoken English with some regional and social variants.
- Oral and written instructions and descriptions.
- Different types of conversations, dialogues, interviews and oral communications.
- Literature and other fiction in spoken, dramatised and filmed forms.
- Songs and poems.
- Oral and written information, as well as discussions and argumentation for different purposes, such as news, reports and newspaper articles.
- Strategies to understand details and context in spoken language and texts, such as adapting listening and reading to the type of communication, contents and purpose.
- Different ways of searching for, choosing and assessing texts and spoken language in English from the Internet and other media.
- Language phenomena such as pronunciation, intonation, grammatical structures, sentence structure, words with different registers, as well as fixed language expressions pupils will encounter in the language.
- How texts and spoken language can be varied for different purposes and contexts.
- How connecting words and other expressions are used to create structure and linguistically coherent entities.

#### Speaking, writing and discussing – production and interaction

- Different ways of working on personal communications to vary, clarify, specify and adapt them for different purposes.
- Oral and written narratives, descriptions and instructions.
- Conversations, discussions and argumentation.
- Language strategies to understand and be understood when language skills are lacking, such as reformulations, questions and explanations.
- Language strategies to contribute to and actively participate in conversations by taking the initiative in interaction, giving confirmation, putting follow-up questions, taking the initiative to raise new issues and also concluding conversations.
- Language phenomena to clarify, vary and enrich communication such as pronunciation, intonation and fixed language expressions, grammatical structures and sentence structures.

