



Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

British or American English?

- Attitudes, Awareness and Usage
among Pupils in a Secondary School

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out which variety of English pupils in secondary school use, British or American English, if they are aware of their usage, and if there are differences between girls and boys. British English is normally the variety taught in school, but influences of American English due to exposure of different media are strong and have consequently a great impact on Swedish pupils. This study took place in a secondary school, and 33 pupils in grade 9 participated in the investigation. They filled in a questionnaire which investigated vocabulary, attitudes and awareness, and read a list of words out loud. The study showed that the pupils tend to use American English more than British English, in both vocabulary and pronunciation, and that all of the pupils mixed American and British features. A majority of the pupils had a higher preference for American English, particularly the boys, who also seemed to be more aware of which variety they use, and in general more aware of the differences between British and American English.

Keywords: British English, American English, vocabulary, pronunciation, attitudes

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1. Introduction

The English language has a history of conquest and power, and British English has often been seen as the most prestigious variant of English. “Until not so long ago, American English was seen as less educated, less cultured, less beautiful than British English”, and European teachers were not allowed to teach with an American accent. The text-books that are used in schools in many countries today are still mostly British English-oriented (Tottie 2002:1-2). Nowadays Swedish pupils have contact with English-speaking cultures all around the world, and Axelsson (2002:144) claims that “it is clear that a one-accent-only approach is not the best alternative for the teaching of English today”. The majority of the world’s native speakers of English are Americans, and much more American than British English is used in international business and computing (Tottie 2002:2). It has been argued that it is American political and economic power “that accounts for the dominant position of English in the world today”, more than the former British history of colonization (Barber 2000:236). It now seems as if American English is beginning to gain ground in Swedish schools, and the American influences from film, television and other media may have an impact on Swedish pupils’ speech and which variety of English they use. A study from 2000 shows that “as many as 69% of the students mix features from the two varieties” (Axelsson 2002:137).

British English, the standard accent known as RP, is normally the variety taught to pupils who are studying English (Trudgill and Hannah 1994:9). However, influences from American English due to exposure of different media are strong, and an interesting question is which variety has the strongest affect on Swedish pupils today. This study examines pupils’ awareness and usage of British and American English along with their attitudes to these varieties. 33 pupils in grade 9 in a secondary school in Bollnäs took part in the investigation.

1.1 Previous research

The varieties of English that pupils use and their attitudes towards these varieties have been under investigation for some years now, and researchers have come to various conclusions. A recurrent common finding, however, seems to be the increasing influences of English through media which mainly have an effect on the use of, and attitudes towards American English (Axelsson 2002:141; Söderlund and Modiano 2002:153). Another finding is that the variety selected also seems to be dependent on specific vocabulary items, some of which are “school” related and therefore influenced by British English, whereas others are “non-school” related, mainly exposed through media, and mostly influenced by American English (Mobärg 2002:127).

The mixture of British English and American English in pupils’ speech tends to

increase. A study made by Margareta W. Axelsson about students' usage and attitudes in 2000, shows that 69% of the students mixed features from these two varieties when they were reading a text aloud. Another interesting finding in her study is that 80% of the pupils placed television and film as the strongest factor of influence concerning their pronunciation, while school as a factor of influence was mentioned only as the third strongest factor (Axelsson 2002:132-146). The major influences are clearly from American English, and that matches the findings in Marie Söderlund and Marko Modiano's study in an upper secondary school in Hudiksvall in 1999. They found that most students, 74.8% to be exact, experienced that they were highly exposed to American English. They also investigated students' attitudes towards American English, British English, and Mid-Atlantic English, which is a mixture of American English and British English which, according to Modiano, most second language speakers in Europe (and elsewhere) have begun to speak (Modiano 1996:5). They found that 61.3% of the students preferred American English. The study shows certain gender differences, with a higher preference for American English among the males: 68.1% of the males and 54.8% of the females preferred American English. Söderlund and Modiano give a possible explanation for the result by referring to the choice of words used in the investigation: young men in general being more interested in technology, computers and American sports, and therefore more exposed to words connected to American English (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:147-168).

A study made by Mats Mobärg on pronunciation in seven different schools in Gothenburg in 1999-2000, investigated whether Swedish school students chose a British or an American pronunciation pattern. His study shows that RP dominated, but about a third of the test words were pronounced in American English. The "BATH" vowel which is pronounced /ɑ:/ in British English and /æ/ in American English in words as *bath*, *chance* and *dance*, had the clearly highest frequency among these, as many as 43% of the students used American English pronunciation (Mobärg 2002:119-131). Mobärg found that many students used the varieties inconsistently, and suggests a comparable explanation to Söderlund and Modiano, namely that this could be explained by the choice of words, which are acquired in various ways. Some words are "school-related" and therefore influenced by British English, and these words "tend to become fossilized in the form taught" (Mobärg 2002:127). Others are acquired through different media and mostly influenced by American English. The way language is learnt, or acquired, seems to be of major importance. According to Stephen Krashen's *acquisition-learning hypothesis* there is a contrast between learning and acquisition. We learn through "conscious attention to form and rule learning", whereas we acquire as we are

exposed to language,” in much the same way children pick up their first language -with no conscious attention to language form” (Lightbown and Spada 2006:36). Mobärg (2002:126) suggests a related explanation, namely that the choice of BrE or AmE pronunciation is caused by “the learning of individual words in specific circumstances”.

1.2 Aim and scope

The aim of this essay is to find out to what extent male and female pupils in secondary school use British or American English, and if they are aware of their usage. I have chosen to focus entirely on differences in vocabulary and pronunciation, even though there are further differences. I have decided to leave out grammar and spelling in this investigation, partly to limit the topic, but also because the differences are more obvious in vocabulary and pronunciation, and that makes these features more interesting to investigate. Since I am referring to standard forms of British and American English, regional and social differences in vocabulary and pronunciation within these varieties are naturally left out. From now on I will refer to British English as BrE and American English as AmE in this essay.

2. Theoretical framework

The English language developed on the British Isles and spread all over the world to all continents through British colonization and conquest. English became a world language, one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. This spread of English, however, means that there now exist a number of English varieties around the world. The English of the United States has remained quite close to standard British English, though (Barber 2000:236). “English is unmistakably one language, with two major national varieties: British and American” (Pyles and Algeo 1993:212). At the time of the American Revolution, there were little difference in British and American English, but following the Revolution, the Americans broke with English traditions and linguistic, social and political differences became more obvious (Barber 2000:255). The English language changed on both sides of the Atlantic, but the English spoken in America nowadays has retained many characteristics of earlier British English that are now gone in British English (Pyles and Algeo 1993:213).

2.1 Differences in vocabulary

According to Trudgill and Hannah (1994:87) the most noticeable differences between AmE and BrE are found in vocabulary. They claim that the differences are due to several factors: new objects and experiences in North America needed new names and therefore the creation of new words was necessary. Another reason was cultural and technological developments,

e.g. terms for different sports (AmE baseball terms as *home run*, BrE cricket terms as *pitch*), different terms for institution of education (AmE *high school*, BrE *public school*) and parts of cars (AmE *trunk*, BrE *boot*). Influences from other languages were naturally also a contributing factor for this development. AmE borrowed many words from American Indian languages, Spanish, African languages and Yiddish. There may also have been “independent linguistic change within each variety” (Trudgill and Hannah 1994:88). One variety has retained words that the other has lost, or introduced old words with new meaning.

2.2 Differences in pronunciation

There are various differences between BrE and AmE pronunciation, and I will deal with some of them in this study. Mobärg (2002:123) argues that among Swedish learners of English, the BATH vowel, which is pronounced /ɑ:/ in BrE and /æ/ in AmE in words as *bath*, *chance* and *dance*, “is the best known difference”. Another noticeable difference is T-voicing, the t-sound that tends to be pronounced like /d/ in AmE, for example the word *better* is pronounced as ‘*bedder*’ (Mobärg 2002:122). The pronunciation (or not) of postvocalic /r/, that is the /r/ sound after a vowel in words as *car*, *store* and *father* is another clear difference between BrE and AmE pronunciation. Speakers of BrE often drop the /r/, whereas speakers of AmE pronounce it (Modiano 1996:15). Many words also differ in stress, such as *magazine*, *address* and *cigarette*, where speakers of BrE put the stress on the last syllable and speakers of AmE put it on the first (Trudgill and Hannah 1994:54).

2.3 Attitudes

We are all affected by our emotions and attitudes to certain variants or dialects of a language. BrE has often been seen as more prestigious in Western Europe, and that is “based partly on its use as the language of the former British Empire and partly on its centuries of cultivated products, including great works of literature” (Pyles and Algeo 1993:212). BrE has been seen as the educational standard, and some teachers have let their students know 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” (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:147). A study from 1992 shows that many students expressed very positive attitudes towards BrE. The variety was seen as more polite, correct and charming, with “beauty and pleasantness of its sound”. The general attitudes towards AmE on the other hand were that it was associated with “incorrect, slangy and sloppy” English. The positive attitudes towards AmE were expressed as “more relaxed”, “not so posh and snobbish” and that it sounded better because it was not as “strict as BrE” (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:142-143). However, there seems to be an

ongoing Americanization and possible change in attitudes among students. A study in 1999 shows that most of the students, 61.3%, preferred AmE (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:152).

3. Method

To examine which variety of English pupils use, British or American, I constructed a questionnaire with BrE and AmE differences in vocabulary and questions about their usage of English and their attitudes towards these varieties. I also prepared a list of words for the pupils to read aloud, in order to analyze their speech and determine whether they use British or American pronunciation. For practical reasons, I decided to examine pupils from my teaching practice school, a secondary school in Bollnäs, since I already knew the pupils and the teachers there. As they were used to my presence, the investigation did not cause much tension among the pupils, but could be performed as a natural part of a lesson. Two of the classes in grade 9 were randomly selected for this purpose. When selecting vocabulary items for the questionnaire, I chose items that I assumed were familiar to all pupils. That was important both in the vocabulary test and in the pronunciation test, since unfamiliar items would give invalid answers and affect the results. I decided to ask the questions in the questionnaire in Swedish to eliminate any risk of misinterpretation.

3.1 The test

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) included three parts. The first part consisted of concepts whose lexical realization differs in British and American English, and the pupils were supposed to mark the alternative they prefer to use, for example if they would choose to use BrE *flat* or AmE *apartment*. The next part consisted of five questions about their usage of and exposure to the English language in their leisure time. That part was included to show possible influences that were not school related, but caused by other factors, such as frequent use of the Internet, computer games, television etc. Finally there were five questions concerning the pupils' attitudes towards British and American English. The pupils were supposed to answer which variety they prefer to listen to/watch on television and which variety they prefer to use themselves. They also responded to whether they believe that any of these varieties has superior status, and is more correct to use than the other. For the final part they were supposed to qualify their answers briefly.

The pronunciation part (see Appendix 2) consisted of a list of 13 words. 16 randomly chosen pupils read the words out loud, and their pronunciation of them was noted and analyzed. Four notable differences between British and American pronunciation, mentioned above were investigated, namely: the BATH vowel, T-voicing, postvocalic /r/ and

the position of stress. This part of the investigation took place in isolation, and the pupils could not hear the others' pronunciation of the words.

3.2 Participants

33 pupils in a secondary school took part in the investigation. They were all in grade 9 and came from two different classes, with two different English teachers. 23 boys and 10 girls participated in the investigation (10 boys and 6 girls in the pronunciation part), and I decided also to examine the differences in gender, as an extra-linguistic variable.

3.3 Hypotheses

Earlier research has shown that pupils tend to mix features from BrE and AmE, and my hypothesis is therefore that the pupils in this investigation will mix British and American features to a high degree. The influences from AmE tend to be stronger than the influences from BrE, according to some previous studies mentioned earlier in section 1.1. Since these studies took place ten years ago approximately, another hypothesis is that this pattern is even more established today: I expect the pupils to use more AmE than BrE, and that the boys will use this variety to a higher extent than the girls, since earlier research has shown that boys in general tend to be more exposed to AmE due to television, video games, the Internet, sports etc. I also expect most pupils to prefer AmE, because of these strong influences and since youth culture is connected to this variety.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the investigation will be presented and discussed in this section. They will be presented in three parts: vocabulary, pronunciation and attitudes/awareness. Possible influences of English language, caused by frequent usage of the Internet, computer games, television etc. in the pupils' leisure time, will also be discussed in relation to the results.

4.1 Vocabulary

The questionnaire consisted of 12 concepts whose lexical realization differs in BrE and AmE. The pupils marked the alternative they prefer to use. 33 pupils filled in the questionnaire, 23 boys and 10 girls. Since some of the pupils claimed to use both alternatives to the same degree, they marked both (appeared 16 times), and one concept was not marked at all by one student. The total number of concepts analyzed are therefore 411 (396+16-1), and their distribution is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Vocabulary - number of concepts analyzed and their distribution

	BrE	AmE	Total
Girls	57	70	127
Boys	104	180	284
Girls and boys	161	250	411
Percentage girls	44.9%	55.1%	100.0%
Percentage boys	36.6%	63.4%	100.0%
Percentage girls and boys	39.2%	60.8%	100.0%

Table 1 shows that the pupils select mainly the American alternatives. Both girls and boys use more American alternatives than British alternatives, but there is a gender difference in that the boys select American alternatives to a higher extent (63.4%) than the girls (55.1%), while the girls select British alternatives to a higher extent (44.9%) than the boys (36.6%). The results of this section of the investigation indicate that pupils tend to use American English more often than British English. In 60.8% of the cases American vocabulary was preferred by the pupils. Preferred usage of each concept in the vocabulary test is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Vocabulary - preferred usage of each concept

Word	Options BrE/AmE	Girls and boys				Girls				Boys			
		BrE		AmE		BrE		AmE		BrE		AmE	
lägenhet	flat/apartment	1	3.0%	32	97.0%	0	0.0%	10	100.0%	1	4.3%	22	95.7%
hiss	lift/elevator	10	30.3%	23	69.7%	7	70.0%	3	30.0%	3	13.0%	20	87.0%
trottoar	pavement/sidewalk	8	24.2%	25	75.8%	2	20.0%	8	80.0%	6	26.1%	17	73.9%
bensin	petrol/gas	16	48.5%	17	51.5%	4	40.0%	6	60.0%	12	52.2%	11	47.8%
semester	holiday/vacation	20	57.1%	15	42.9%	9	81.8%	2	18.2%	11	45.8%	13	54.2%
suddegummi	rubber/eraser	24	70.6%	10	29.4%	6	60.0%	4	40.0%	18	75.0%	6	25.0%
affär	shop/store	22	59.5%	15	40.5%	6	46.2%	7	53.8%	16	66.7%	8	33.3%
höst	autumn/fall	28	84.8%	5	15.2%	10	100.0%	0	0.0%	18	78.3%	5	21.7%
film	film/movie	4	11.1%	32	88.9%	2	18.2%	9	81.8%	2	8.0%	23	92.0%
godis	sweets/candy	3	8.8%	31	91.2%	2	18.2%	9	81.8%	1	4.3%	22	95.7%
motorcykel	motorbike/motorcycle	18	51.4%	17	48.6%	8	80.0%	2	20.0%	10	40.0%	15	60.0%
lastbil	lorry/truck	7	20.0%	28	80.0%	1	9.9%	10	90.1%	6	25.0%	18	75.0%

Some of the concepts in the investigation showed similar distribution patterns among the pupils, for example the AmE word *apartment* was preferred by 97% of the students, while the British equivalence *flat* was preferred by 3%. 84.8% of the pupils preferred to use the BrE word *autumn* while 15.2% preferred the AmE word *fall*. Actually none of the girls preferred to use the AmE word *fall* in this study. The finding is comparable with the finding in the study made by Söderlund and Modiano in 1999, where 73.4% of the students chose the BrE word *autumn*, and 12.4% used the AmE word *fall* (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:158). Another similar finding is the use of *sweets/candy*. This study shows that 91.2% of the pupils chose the AmE word *candy*, while 8.8% chose the BrE word *sweets*. Söderlund and Modiano's study shows that the AmE word *candy* was used by 81.2% of the students and 7.8% used the BrE word *sweets*. They explain the tendency to use this particular word "most likely due to the strong influence of American media. If the pupils were more exposed to British culture, it is likely they would use the BrE word" (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:160).

The preference for either BrE words or AmE words seems in general to show the same pattern for boys as for girls, with a few exceptions. The divergent results are marked in bold style in Table 2. There are two major exceptions, namely: *lift/elevator* and *motorbike/motorcycle*. The girls had higher preference for *motorbike*. 80% chose the BrE word, while only 40% of the boys preferred this variant, with higher preference for the AmE word *motorcycle*. 87% of the boys used the AmE word *elevator*, while only 30% of the girls chose this word, with higher preference for the BrE word *lift*. A possible explanation for this considerable difference might be the type of words this vocabulary is connected to. Earlier studies have explained this phenomenon by referring to interests, young men in general being more interested in sports, cars, technology etc, and therefore more exposed to AmE vocabulary (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:152).

4.2 Pronunciation

The pronunciation part of the test consisted of 13 words, and 16 randomly selected pupils read aloud from a list. 10 boys and 6 girls participated in this part of the investigation.

The four differences in pronunciation investigated were:

- The BATH vowel which is pronounced /ɑ:/ by speakers of BrE and /æ / by speakers of AmE, exemplified by *dance*, *pass*, *bath*, *can't* and *chance*

- T-voicing, the t-sound that tends to be pronounced as /d/ in AmE, exemplified by *better* and *butter*
- The dropping (or not) of postvocalic /r/ exemplified by *car*, *father* and *store*, where speakers of BrE tend to drop the /r/ whereas speakers of AmE pronounce it
- The position of stress exemplified by *magazine*, *cigarette* and *address*, where speakers of BrE put the stress on the last syllable and speakers of AmE put it on the first.

The test consisted of 13 words and 16 pupils read the words out loud, which means 208 words to analyze. The non-valid results are words pronounced in a totally incorrect way and thus not selected as belonging to either of the varieties. The number of words analyzed and the results are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Pronunciation – number of words analyzed and their distribution

	BrE	AmE	Non-valid	Total
Girls	24	52	2	78
Boys	45	85	-----	130
Girls and boys	69	137	2	208
Percentage girls	30.8%	66.7%	2.5%	100.0%
Percentage boys	34.6%	65.4%	–	100.0%
Percentage girls and boys	33.2%	65.9%	0.9%	100.0%

Table 3 shows that the pupils in the investigation tend to use mainly American English pronunciation: in 65.9% of the cases AmE pronunciation is used. There are no clear differences between boys' and girls' usage of these varieties, but the girls tend to use to some extent more AmE pronunciation than the boys, while the boys use slightly more BrE pronunciation than the girls. I found this a bit surprising, since one of my hypotheses was that the boys would use more AmE than the girls, concerning both vocabulary and pronunciation.

All of the pupils in this study were inconsistent in their usage of BrE or AmE pronunciation, they mixed features from both varieties. Margareta W. Axelsson's study in 2000 shows that 69% of the students mixed BrE and AmE pronunciation (Axelsson 2002:143), and this tendency seem to have increased. The students in her study claimed that "television is to be 'blamed' for the American part of their mixed accent", while the main

source of the BrE pronunciation is “the Swedish school and its teachers, among whom BrE pronunciation is favoured” (Axelsson 2002:141).

The individual results for each pupil in the pronunciation test (6 girls and 10 boys) are given in Appendix 3, Tables 4 and 5. When analyzing each feature separately, it is seen that only 6% of the pupils used consistent pronunciation of the BATH vowel. For example, 50% of the pupils used AmE pronunciation for *dance*, but at the same time BrE pronunciation for *can't*. There seem to be the same pattern for boys as for girls, concerning the BATH vowel. The study made by Mats Mobärg in 1999-2000, points out the BATH vowel as “the clearly highest incidence” of American pronunciation among the features investigated in his study. An explanation is that the BATH vowel is “a strong-syllable vowel”, which is “bound to certain lexical items”. “BATH words will thus be learnt and reinforced as they are heard”, in media usually in AmE (Mobärg 2002:128). The word *dance* is likely to be a word heard in connection to American media and therefore pronounced in AmE, whereas *can't* might have been learnt in school, probably in BrE, and has “become fossilized in the form taught” (Mobärg 2002:127).

The analysis of T-voicing showed that 69% of the pupils were consistent in usage. They used either BrE pronunciation or AmE pronunciation. Most pupils had higher preference for BrE pronunciation with /t/, 62.5% used BrE pronunciation, while only 6% used AmE pronunciation with /d/. Among the girls, the usage was even more consistent, they used BrE pronunciation at 83%. Mats Mobärg's study in 1999-2000 shows a similar result of the pronunciation of T-voicing. He found that 78% of the students used RP- the British standard form, whereas only 18% used AmE pronunciation (Mobärg 2002:122). Still, the study at hand shows that 31% of the pupils mixed BrE and AmE inconsistently concerning T-voicing.

The pronunciation (or not) of postvocalic /r/ showed a totally consistent usage however. 94% of the pupils used AmE pronunciation with /r/ constantly, and 6% used BrE pronunciation consistently without pronunciation of /r/. 100% of the girls used AmE pronunciation constantly versus 90% of the boys.

Concerning stress, 62.5% of the pupils used AmE pronunciation constant with the stress on the first syllable, while 6% used BrE pronunciation with stress on the last syllable. 31% of the pupils mixed these varieties, and there was no clear difference between boys and girls related to this feature in the investigation. The distribution of each word separately in the pronunciation test is given in Appendix 3, Table 6.

4.3 Attitudes and awareness

The final section of the questionnaire consisted of a part concerning the pupils' usage of and exposure to the English language in their leisure time, where they marked the frequency of usage of television, video games, Internet/on-line games, music and other factors. They could choose between *daily*, *several times a week*, *once a week*, *seldom/never* and *I don't know*. Finally there were five questions about the pupils' attitudes towards BrE and AmE, and their possible preference for any of these varieties. For the final four questions the pupils were supposed to qualify their answers briefly. There was an option to choose "*I don't know*", and for the final two questions the option "*No*" was selectable as well.

The five questions were:

- What programs do you mostly watch on television, American or British?
- Which one of these varieties do you prefer, American or British English?
- Which variety of English do you mostly use yourself, American, British or a mixture of both varieties?
- Do you consider any of these varieties having superior status than the other, American or British English?
- Do you consider any of these varieties being more correct to use, American or British English?

The findings in this part of the test showed that 64.7% of the pupils mostly watch American programs on television (45.5% of the girls and 73.9% of the boys). Only 2.9% claimed to watch most British programs, and 32.4% did not know whether they watched British or American programs (45.5% of the girls and 26.1% of the boys). It seems as if the boys are more aware of what variety they are exposed to, and that they also have a higher preference for American television. The TV-programs preferred and their distribution are given in Appendix 3, Table 7. The frequencies of exposure in leisure time for both girls and boys are given in Table 8.

Table 8. Exposure to English in pupils' leisure time - frequency and distribution

	daily		several times a week		once a week		seldom/never		I don't know		No answer	
Television	19	57.6%	13	39.4%	1	3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Video games	3	9.1%	7	21.2%	5	15.2%	14	42.4%	3	9.1%	1	3.0%
Internet/on-line games	17	51.5%	9	27.3%	3	9.1%	4	12.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Music	24	72.7%	9	27.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Other influences	1	3.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	31	93.9%

Table 8 shows that most of the pupils are exposed to English on a daily basis in their leisure time. 57.6% are exposed to English through television every day and as many as 72.7% listen to music every day. An interesting finding is that all of the girls are exposed to music every day, but only 60.9% of the boys. The girls also watch television more often, 80% of the girls are exposed to English through television every day, whereas only 47.8% of the boys. The boys seem to be more active in Internet/on-line games activities instead. 56.5% of the boys take part in these activities daily, whereas only 40% of the girls. The last part "Other influences" consisted of activities as: "*when I speak to my siblings*" and "*speaking to foreigners*". Exposure of English in leisure time for girls and boys separately (frequency and distribution) is given in Appendix 3, Tables 9 and 10.

The pupils were asked to select the variety they prefer, BrE or AmE, and the results are given in Table 11.

Table 11. Preferred variety of English among pupils

	BrE	AmE	I don't know	Total
Girls	0	3	7	10
Boys	2	15	6	23
Girls and boys	2	18	13	33
Percentage girls	0.0%	30.0%	70.0%	100.0%
Percentage boys	8.7%	65.2%	26.1%	100.0%
Percentage girls and boys	6.1%	54.5%	39.4%	100.0%

Table 11 shows that AmE is the variety mostly preferred among the pupils in this investigation. As many as 54.5% of the pupils preferred AmE. The study made by Margareta W. Axelsson in 2000 shows a higher preference for BrE among the students, 54% of the students preferred BrE whereas only 25% preferred AmE. The results of the current study, nine years later, where 54.5% of the pupils preferred AmE and 6.1% preferred BrE, could indicate an ongoing change in attitudes towards these varieties of English. The exposure of media in young peoples' lives seems to increase and consequently change the attitudes and awareness of English language. Again a major difference in gender is seen, where the boys had a considerably higher preference for AmE (65.2%) than the girls (30%). Most of the girls (70%) did not know which variety they preferred, and some of them did not know the difference between BrE and AmE, and could consequently not separate them. It seems as if the boys are more aware of the differences between these varieties (even if 26.1% of the boys did not know which variety they preferred). According to Söderlund and Modiano's study in 1999-2000 (2002:163), "a slight difference can be observed between the sexes where the males reached better results in distinguishing the two varieties". This could be explained by the findings in earlier studies, which have shown that boys in general are more interested in and exposed to AmE due to television, the Internet, sports etc (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:152), and this exposure will most likely affect their awareness and attitudes. Mobärg (2002:119) points out that "there is empirical evidence showing a strong positive correlation between media preference and language attitudes". The preference for AmE was stated by the pupils in diverse ways, and below are a few selected quotes:

"It is the variety you hear most and use most"

"You are more used to it because of TV-programs"

"It is coolest"

"AmE sounds best"

"It is easier to pronounce"

"British English sounds too classy"

"They do better films than the Brits"

The attitudes towards AmE seem to be strongly affected by media, and consequently closely connected to youth culture. Several of the pupils claimed to prefer AmE because they hear it most on television, and some of them also regarded American films as "better than British films". These statements confirm the close connection between media exposure and attitudes. The preference for BrE on the other hand was justified in these ways:

“It sounds more important”

“It does not sound so country”

The pupils were supposed to answer whether they speak with a British or an American accent, or a mixture of both. The results of their self-reported accent are given in Table 12.

Table 12. Self-reported accent of English among pupils

	BrE	AmE	Mix	I don' know	Non-valid	Total
Girls	0	2	6	1	1	10
Boys	5	7	9	2	0	23
Girls and boys	5	9	15	3	1	33
Percentage girls	0.0%	20.0%	60.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Percentage boys	21.7%	30.4%	39.1%	8.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Percentage girls and boys	15.2%	27.3%	45.5%	9.1%	3,00%	100.0%

Table 12 shows that 45.5% of the pupils (60% of the girls and 39.1% of the boys) think that they mix features from both BrE and AmE. This is interesting since the results in section 4.2 showed that all of the pupils mixed features from both varieties. This finding indicates a lack of awareness among the pupils, since many of them (42.5%) seem to think that they use one variety consistently, either BrE or AmE. A similar result was found in Margareta W. Axelsson's study in 2000. Only 36% of the students in her study recognized themselves as mixers, whereas the recordings showed that 70% belonged to this category (Axelsson 2002:144). Some of the mixers in the study at hand responded that they mix BrE and AmE because *“I am sloppy”* or *“I am not very good at English, so it get a bit mixed”*. These are interesting statements, and suggest that the pupils believe they must use one of these varieties consistently, and when they are unable to, they feel ignorant and insufficient. Axelsson's study in 2000 investigated students' attitudes, and a similar tendency was found: *“many students are aware of their lack of consistency and regret that they cannot reach their ideal, a pure, unmixed national accent”* (Axelsson 2002:133). Söderlund and Modiano's study in 1999-2000, shows that 47.8% of the students thought that they mix BrE and AmE, while 27.3% thought that they spoke AmE and only 10.6% that they spoke BrE (Söderlund and

Modiano 2002:153). This finding is comparable with the results in the study at hand: 27.3% of the pupils in this investigation thought that they spoke AmE, on the grounds that:

“That is the variety you hear most, and use most”

“More use to it because of television and computing”

“BrE sounds strange, too classy”

“Coolest”

“Better movies”

15.2% of the pupils thought that they spoke BrE and their statements were:

“You learn it in school”

“It is easier to understand”

Once again we see a recognizable pattern: the connection between BrE and school, and the connection between AmE and media, as the reasons for using AmE involve words as *“television, computing and movies”*.

The pupils also responded to whether they believe any of these varieties, BrE or AmE has superior status than the other. The results of their answers are given in Table 13.

Table 13. Attitudes – selected variety concerning superior status

	BrE	AmE	No	I don't know	Non-valid	Total
Girls	1	2	5	1	1	10
Boys	5	3	4	10	1	23
Girls and boys	6	5	9	11	2	33
Percentage girls	10.0%	20.0%	50.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Percentage boys	21.7%	13.0%	17.4%	43.5%	4.3%	100.0%
Percentage girls and boys	18.2%	15.2%	27.3%	33.3%	6.1%	100.0%

Table 13 shows that most pupils in this investigation do not have an opinion about BrE or AmE having superior status than the other. 33.3% answered that they do not know and 27.3% of the pupils do not believe that either of these varieties has superior status than the other. A

typical statement for this answer was: *“They are both English”*. However, 18.2% believed that BrE has superior status, because:

“It sounds so noble/royal”

“It feels classier, AmE has more slang”

“Brits are more snobbish, but BrE has more status because it is snobbish”

15.2% of the pupils believed that AmE has superior status because:

“It is cooler”

“It sounds better, more usual”

“Most people use AmE”

The equivalent level of status for BrE (18.2%) and AmE (15.2%) among the pupils in this investigation could indicate a change in attitudes. BrE has a history of power, and has been seen as the most prestigious variant of English, with superior status, whereas AmE has been seen as less educated (Tottie 2002:1). AmE now seems to gain higher status among adolescents, which could be explained by its connection to youth culture. Teenagers are members of their own prestigious culture, and the language related to this culture carries covert prestige, that is “hidden” status which has high value in specific groups.

The final question in the questionnaire was if the pupils consider any of these varieties, BrE or AmE, more correct to use. The results of their answers are given in table 14.

Table 14. Attitudes – selected variety concerning correctness

	BrE	AmE	No	I don't know	Non-valid	Total
Girls	0	0	5	4	1	10
Boys	5	2	14	2	0	23
Girls and boys	5	2	19	6	1	33
Percentage girls	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	40.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Percentage boys	21.7%	8.7%	60.9%	8.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Percentage girls and boys	15.2%	6.1%	57.6%	18.2%	3.0%	100.0%

Table 14 shows that most pupils do not consider either of these varieties of English more correct to use than the other. This answer was given by 57.6% of the pupils, on the grounds that:

“It is the same language, with different pronunciation. You understand each other anyway”

“They are both correct to use”

“It depends on who you are talking to”

“They are two different dialects, everybody has different opinions”

15.2% believed that BrE is more correct to use because:

“AmE are more slang”

“AmE are sloppier”

6.1% believed that AmE is more correct to use because:

“It sounds better”

“Sounds more right”

18.2% of the pupils did not have any opinion about this at all. An interesting finding is that none of the girls chose any variety of English to be more correct than the other, and as many as 50% of them answered that neither of the varieties was more correct to use. 40% of the girls did not know and 10% of them did not answer this question at all. Most of the boys did not consider either of these varieties being more correct to use neither, but still 21.7% considered BrE most correct. A possible explanation might be the connection between BrE and school, which makes this variety seen as more formal and consequently also more correct to use. Some of the opinions among the pupils in this study seem to match the opinions in Söderlund and Modiano’s study in 1992: the attitude that AmE is “sloppier” and “slangy” is still visible (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:142).

5. Summary and Conclusion

It has been shown that the secondary school pupils investigated in the present study tend to use American English more than British English. This is seen in both vocabulary and pronunciation. The boys use more American vocabulary than the girls, whereas the girls use slightly more American pronunciation than the boys. This is unexpected since my hypothesis was that the boys would use AmE to a higher extent than the girls both in vocabulary and pronunciation. The strong influences from AmE through different media seem to be the main reason for this increasing tendency, and the study evidently shows that most of the pupils,

both girls and boys, are exposed to English through television, music and Internet/on-line games on a daily basis. As expected, the majority of the pupils in the investigation at hand had a higher preference for AmE than BrE, and a clear difference in gender is seen, where the boys had a considerable higher preference for AmE than the girls. The boys also preferred American TV-programs to a much higher degree, and they were constantly more aware of the differences between BrE and AmE. A possible explanation is that American culture is seen as more prestigious among the boys, and they are thus stronger affected by AmE influences.

There also seems to be a clear difference between words learnt in school and words acquired outside school. The preferred variety seems to be dependent on specific vocabulary items, where some items are “school related” and mostly influenced by BrE, and others are “non-school related” and mostly influenced by AmE. Consequently this makes pupils mix features from BrE and AmE inconsistently, and many of the pupils in this survey were not aware that they were mixing these varieties. Their self-reported accents show that some of them think that they speak with a British or an American accent, but in fact they mix these varieties. My hypothesis was that the pupils would mix BrE and AmE to a high degree, and this is supported by the result that 100% of the pupils mixed features from both varieties in the pronunciation test, which is surprisingly high. The status for AmE seems to have increased during the last decades, even if some of the attitudes seem to be the same as in earlier studies. The “sloppy” and “slangy” AmE now seems to be valued almost as high as the “noble” and “royal” BrE, at least among the pupils in this study. This could be explained by youth culture’s connection to AmE, which carries covert prestige in these groups. Most pupils did not consider any of these varieties more correct to use, even if some of the boys had an opinion about this, most of them considered BrE more correct.

This study consisted of a rather small sample, only 33 pupils took part in the investigation, and it is not possible to draw any conclusions beyond the present data. Still, many of the findings in the study at hand match the pattern in earlier research, and the tendency of increasing usage of AmE and changing attitudes towards BrE and AmE among pupils seem to be confirmed. The questionnaires were anonymous, which is preferable if you want straightforward answers and cause as little tension as possible among the pupils. But that procedure also has disadvantages, because it was not possible to match the questionnaire answers with the pronunciation test, which would have been interesting, since further patterns might have been possible to discover. Furthermore, the investigation was a constructed situation, reading a list of words might not be representative of the English used in a natural setting, the pupils are aware that they are being studied, and can make a conscious effort to

pronounce words in a way they think are expected from them. It would have been interesting to investigate their speech in a more natural and relaxed context, but that situation is logically not easy to achieve, and could also have been too time consuming to perform. In addition, it would have been interesting to study the teachers' usage of and attitudes towards BrE and AmE, since they naturally have an impact on the pupils' usage and attitudes. However, since it was necessary to limit the topic, I chose to focus entirely on the pupils in this survey.

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Appendix 1

Ringa in det ord du helst använder av de två alternativen:

<u>lägenhet:</u>	flat	apartment
<u>hiss:</u>	lift	elevator
<u>trottoar:</u>	pavement	sidewalk
<u>bensin:</u>	petrol	gas
<u>semester:</u>	holiday	vacation
<u>suddegummi:</u>	rubber	eraser
<u>affär:</u>	shop	store
<u>höst:</u>	autumn	fall
<u>film:</u>	film	movie
<u>godis:</u>	sweets	candy
<u>motorcykel:</u>	motorbike	motorcycle
<u>lastbil:</u>	lorry	truck

I vilka andra sammanhang utanför skolan kommer du i kontakt med engelska, och hur ofta?

Ringa in det som stämmer bäst!

TV-program:	dagligen	flera ggr/v	en gång/v	sällan/aldrig	vet ej
TV-spel:	dagligen	flera ggr/v	en gång/v	sällan/aldrig	vet ej
Internet/					
online-spel:	dagligen	flera ggr/v	en gång/v	sällan/aldrig	vet ej
Musik:	dagligen	flera ggr/v	en gång/v	sällan/aldrig	vet ej
Annat:					
_____	dagligen	flera ggr/v	en gång/v	sällan/aldrig	vet ej

1. Vad ser du mest på TV?

amerikanska program brittiska program vet ej

2. Vilken variant av engelska tycker du bäst om?

amerikansk engelska brittisk engelska vet ej

Varför?

3. Vilken variant använder du mest själv?

amerikansk engelska brittisk engelska blandat vet ej

Varför?

4. Tycker du att någon av dessa varianter av engelska har högre status än den andra?

amerikansk engelska brittisk engelska nej vet ej

Varför?

5. Tycker du att någon av dessa varianter är mer korrekt att använda än den andra?

amerikansk engelska brittisk engelska nej vet ej

Varför?

Jag är tjej []

 kille [] och går i klass_____

Tack så mycket för din hjälp!! Anki ☺

Appendix 2

dance

magazine

butter

car

pass

cigarette

bath

better

father

can't

address

chance

store

Appendix 3

Table 4. Girls - Individual results of each word in the pronunciation test, section 4.2

	Girl 1		Girl 2		Girl 3		Girl 4		Girl 5		Girl 6	
	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE
BATH vowel												
Dance		X		X		X	X			X		X
Pass		X	X			X		X		X	X	
Bath		X	X			X	X		X			X
can't	X			X	X		X			X		X
chance*		X		X	0	0	X		0	0		X
T-voicing												
Butter	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Better	X		X		X		X			X	X	
Postvocalic /r/												
Car		X		X		X		X		X		X
Father		X		X		X		X		X		X
Store		X		X		X		X		X		X
Stress												
Magazine		X		X		X	X			X		X
Cigarette		X		X		X		X		X		X
Adress	X			X		X	X			X		X

* chance = 2 non-valid answers

Table 5. Boys - Individual results of each word in the pronunciation test, section 4.2

	Boy 1		Boy 2		Boy 3		Boy 4		Boy 5	
	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE
BATH vowel										
dance		X		X		X		X		X
pass		X	X			X		X		X
bath		X		X		X		X	X	
can't	X		X		X		X			X
chance		X		X	X		X			X
T-voicing										
butter	X		X			X	X		X	
better	X			X		X		X		X
Postvocalic /r/										
car		X		X		X		X		X
father		X		X		X		X		X
store		X		X		X		X		X
Stress										
magazine		X		X		X		X		X
cigarette		X		X		X		X		X
address	X			X		X	X			X

	Boy 6		Boy 7		Boy 8		Boy 9		Boy 10	
	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE	BrE	AmE
BATH vowel										
dance		X	X		X			X		X
pass		X	X			X		X	X	
bath		X	X		X		X		X	
can't		X		X	X		X		X	
chance		X		X	X			X	X	
T-voicing										
butter	X		X		X		X		X	
better	X		X			X	X		X	
Postvocalic /r/										
car		X		X		X		X	X	
father		X		X		X		X	X	
store		X		X		X		X	X	
Stress										
magazine	X			X		X		X	X	
cigarette		X		X		X		X	X	
address	X			X		X		X	X	

Table 6. Pronunciation – distribution of each word separately, section 4.2

	Girls and boys				Girls				Boys			
	BrE		AmE		BrE		AmE		BrE		AmE	
BATH vowel												
dance	3	18.75%	13	81.25%	1	16.7%	5	83.3%	2	20.0%	8	80.0%
pass	5	31.25%	11	68.75%	2	33.3%	4	66.7%	3	30.0%	7	70.0%
bath	8	50.0%	8	50.0%	3	50.0%	3	50.0%	5	50.0%	5	50.0%
can't	10	62.5%	6	37.5%	3	50.0%	3	50.0%	7	70.0%	3	30.0%
chance*	5	31.25%	9	56.25%	1	16.7%	3	50.0%	4	40.0%	6	60.0%
T-voicing												
butter	15	93.75%	1	6.25%	6	100.0%	0	0.0%	9	90.0%	1	10.0%
better	10	62.5%	6	37.5%	5	83.3%	1	16.7%	5	50.0%	5	50.0%
Postvocalic /r/												
car	1	6.25%	15	93.75%	0	0.0%	6	100.0%	1	10.0%	9	90.0%
father	1	6.25%	15	93.75%	0	0.0%	6	100.0%	1	10.0%	9	90.0%
store	1	6.25%	15	93.75%	0	0.0%	6	100.0%	1	10.0%	9	90.0%
Stress												
magazine	3	18.75%	13	81.25%	1	16.7%	5	83.3%	2	20.0%	8	80.0%
cigarette	1	6.25%	15	81.25%	0	0.0%	6	100.0%	1	10.0%	9	90.0%
address	6	37.5%	10	62.5%	2	33.3%	4	66.7%	4	40.0%	6	60.0%

* 2 non-valid answers by girls (=33.3% of the girls and 12.5% of total)

Table 7. TV-programs preferred among pupils, section 4.3

	BrE	AmE	I don't know	Total
Girls	1	5	5	11*
Boys	0	17	6	23
Girls and boys	1	22	11	34*
Percentage girls	9.1%	45.5%	45.5%	100.0%
Percentage boys	0.0%	73.9%	26.1%	100.0%
Percentage girls and boys	2.9%	64.7%	32.4%	100.0%

*One of the girls chose both BrE and AmE TV-programs

Table 9. Girls - Exposure to English in pupils' leisure time - frequency and distribution, section 4.3

	daily		several times a week		once a week		seldom/never		I don't know		No answer	
Television	8	80.0%	1	10.0%	1	10.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Video games	0	0.0%	2	20.0%	1	10.0%	6	60.0%	1	10.0%	1	10.0%
Internet/on-line games	4	40.0%	4	40.0%	0	0.0%	2	20.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Music	10	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Other influences	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	10	100.0%

Table 10. Boys - Exposure to English in pupils' leisure time - frequency and distribution, section 4.3

	daily		several times a week		once a week		seldom/never		I don't know		No answer	
Television	11	47.8%	12	52.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Video games	3	13.0%	5	21.7%	4	17.4%	8	34.8%	2	8.7%	1	4.3%
Internet/on-line games	13	56.5%	5	21.7%	3	13.0%	2	8.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Music	14	60.9%	9	39.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Other influences	1	4.3%	0	0.0%	1	4.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	21	91.3%