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# Perspectives on the Teaching of English in Swedish Upper-secondary Education

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## **1. Introduction**

This essay deals with the current state of English teaching in Sweden with regards to an international perspective. The first, theoretical, part discusses ways in which a departure from the traditional way of teaching English as a Foreign Language towards more recent theories emphasising communication might be beneficial. A brief overview of these different theories with regards to Swedish conditions is given, followed by a short rundown of the history of the Swedish curriculum.

The second part presents deductions on current attitudes towards the study of English in Swedish schools based on a survey conducted among students and teachers at an upper-secondary school. It will be shown that despite changes in the national curriculum over the years, much of the English teaching is still treading the same path as the last decades, due to longstanding sentiments with students and teachers alike. There are also indications to show that traditional teaching has not kept up with the emergence of virtual communities, where students regularly engage in written communication with people from all corners of the world.

## **2. Discussion**

In the discussion of English Language Teaching (ELT) in general, and the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in particular, there are a number of predominant theories. At the heart of a lot of scholarly study is the question of whether English is a language to be learnt as-is, or if it is merely a tool for communication, subject to continuous revision and molding by its users. This dichotomy is the main focus of the theoretical discussion of this study, which will attempt to provide an overview of a few of the main theories involved.

## 2.1 Kachru's Three Circles of English

Linguist Braj Kachru, pioneer within the field of World Englishes studies, devised a model of the language consisting of three concentric circles:

\* The *Inner Circle*, encompassing traditionally English-speaking countries, e.g. The United Kingdom, The United States, and Australia. Has a normative role, as it sets the standards for English spoken everywhere.

\* The *Outer Circle*, consisting of countries where English is an official language but is not the native tongue, e.g. in many of Britain's former colonies, such as India, Kenya, or Malaysia. In these multilingual communities, English serves as a lingua franca. According to Kachru, this circle is "norm-developing" - creating an influx of linguistic change to the Inner Circle.

\* The *Expanding Circle*, where English is used to communicate with people from abroad. "Norm-dependent", in Kachru's terms, as it is simply utilising the language norms dictated by the Inner Circle.

Widely cited within the field of research, this model is acknowledged both by those who believe that the integrity of the English language is best preserved by maintaining the core values and practice of the Inner Circle, as well as by the opponents of this, who maintain that the evolution of a language cannot be restricted to a select few of its practitioners.

## 2.2 English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

The traditional approach view of ELT in the classroom setting of non-English-speaking countries (i.e. non-native speakers (NNS) as students, as opposed to native speakers, NS) has been that of teaching English as a Foreign Language, or EFL. Hence, students will have a native language, L1, other than English - their second language, L2. At the heart of EFL, in line with Kachru's language model, is the notion of the idealized standard inner-circle

English, usually British English (BrE) or American English (AmE), with a corresponding correct pronunciation. Most teachers of EFL are themselves Non-Native Speaking English Teachers (NNESTs).

Teaching English as a Foreign Language, or TEFL, is the practice most people are used to when it comes to English studies. In many cases, the mere mention of the phrase "English class" to your average NNS will conjure up mental images of grammar and pronunciation exercises, textbooks with excerpts of Shakespeare plays, photos of London taxis and bobbies or New York's 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and schematics of the different branches of American government.

Embracing and utilizing Kachru's model of a normative Inner Circle, the EFL method is intuitive and, as most teachers would probably concur, immensely practical, both in terms of planning actual lessons and in the assessment of the students' proficiency. Standard English becomes the blueprint for the students' performance and, consequently, their language learning is best characterized as an endeavour to approximate the Platonic ideal of the native speaker and the final grade as a measure of their shortcomings.

Practical considerations aside, the inherent problems of this so-called "native model" are manifold. The NS as an unattainable model of perfection is "reducing NNSs to perennial language *learners* and depriving them of recognition as legitimate language *users*" (Cook, referred to in Llurda 2009, 129, original emphasis). Hence, the NNS are "denied any voice in determining their use of the language and they are naturally often invited to imitate NS models, which become the ultimate target of the learning process" (Llurda 2009, 129).

Llurda also argues that NNESTs themselves have internalized this mimicking of NS, mainly due to their not being exposed to any forms of English deviating from the standard during their training programs (123). This is then passed on to the students, whose language role model in the classroom is the teacher. Llurda also points out that many NNESTs with

lifelong careers in ELT would never choose a NNEST for language training themselves if given the choice (129).

This reverence for NS models is not limited to teachers, however. A study conducted by David C. S. Li among Hong Kong students proved them to be less sympathetic towards local speakers of their own accent, and generally biased towards the received pronunciation (*RP*) of a native speaker. Li also references a survey by Luk (1998) yielding the same results, attributing this to the participants' branding the local accent "stigmatized" and "the prestige of the *RP* accent in teaching materials" (Li, 83). For a student listening exclusively to native speakers, a feeling of inferiority and insecurity about their own performance is sure to follow, even though, as reported by Llurda, "listeners claim to understand native speech better than they can, and understand nonnative speech better than they claim" (124). Aspiring to an unattainable ideal is sure to lead to a feeling of inferiority.

States Cem Altepkin, "Communicative competence, with its standardized native speaker norms, is as utopian as the notion of the idealized native speaker-listener" (59). This, coupled with the fact that, "[t]hose who actually speak *RP*, the proposed pronunciation standard [. . .], are a tiny minority" (Modiano (2003, 37), and with NNSs themselves now outnumbering NSs, would make a change in all of this seem both necessary, natural, and inevitable.

### 2.3 English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

Not to be confused with EFL, ELF is the term for English as Lingua Franca, a field of study that has been expanding greatly over the last decade. Here, emphasis is put upon the communicative qualities of English, and basically ignoring the syntactical issues of not conforming to standard English. Whereas traditional models of communication would assume one part to be a native speaker, the ELF model acknowledges that most interactions

in English take place between non-native speakers, and, as such, do not necessarily benefit from precise inner-circle language usage but rather from an understanding of the linguistic and cultural background of one's interlocutor. ELF does not refer to one particular variety of English, and as such should not be confused with terms like "International English" or "World Englishes", which suggest one or more specifically defined instances of the language (Jenkins 2006, 159).

## 2.4 English as an International Language (EIL)

A newer perspective is the view upon English as an International Language, EIL. On the basis of the majority of English speakers residing outside the Inner Circle, this legitimizes deviations from the traditional norm, making regional varieties of English languages in their own right, as opposed to being regarded as second-rate versions of proper English.

To a certain extent, the terms EIL and ELF are used interchangeably in the field of research. A distinction made by Modiano (2009) is that EIL would include all speakers of English, including NSs, globally, whereas ELF is exclusive to NNSs, and on a more regional level, such as inside the European Union. Throughout this essay, however, both terms will come into play.

## 2.5 Towards an International English

The call for teaching a more international English challenges the cultural and linguistic hegemony of the inner-circle English-speaking countries and emphasizes the communicative qualities. As Barbara Seidlhofer (2001) points out, "the 'E' in *English as a Native Language* is bound to be something very different from the 'E' in *English as a Lingua Franca*, and must be acknowledged as such" (137-8, original emphasis).

As it does not describe one particular variety, this fleeting nature of ELF, detached from the weight of standard English to restrain it, raises concerns about the evolution of English as we know it. At best, it becomes a tool enabling people from all over the world to communicate without the yoke of a set of linguistic rules dictated by a select few. At worst the ultimate result is a watered-down lowest common denominator brute version of the language.

According to its proponents, however, there is no cause for concern. The only thing at stake is the hegemony of Anglo-American culture with its prescriptive ambitions, and its subsequent marginalization of NNSs. What it takes, according to Llorca, is just for NNSs to "become aware of their status as speakers of EIL" and "native speaker control of the language will disappear" (320). In a reversal of roles, then "native speakers will need to learn the conventions of EIL in order to communicate successfully with the larger community of English language speakers" (ibid).

For the teacher in the brightly-lit reality of the classroom setting, the inherent lack of norms for support might pose a problem. Presumably, one of the reasons EFL teaching has persisted in the current shape with its rights and wrongs, dos and don'ts is that it is easily quantifiable. For example, points are deducted from the test overall for adding the plural '-s' to uncountable nouns, the inclusion of superfluous or wrong prepositions, or verb forms not matching the subject, while extra credit is given for the usage of idiomatic expressions. Whereas everyone within the current EFL paradigm would agree that this basically makes sense, Seidlhofer maintains that the main reason for communication breakdown, and the only thing among these examples to cause any problems, is what she refers to as "unilateral idiomaticity", i.e. when one party to the conversation uses an expression unfamiliar to the other (2004, 220).

For instance, a Swedish NNS dining with a German student might describe the meal as "cracking", "delectable" or even "the bee's knees" and get nothing but a blank stare in return, whereas an expression like "swine-good" would receive a nod of agreement. Both speakers will recognize this expression from their mother tongues – "svingott" and "saugel" in Swedish and German, respectively – however, there is no corresponding English idiom. Whatever the reason for the lack of pork-related emphasis in standard English, here we have the facilitation of communication through a mutual cultural basis, or maybe just similar L1 idiosyncrasies, outside the realm of the native speaker. It's not too far-fetched, however, to assume that both diners would be penalized by their teachers if using the word in question on a test.

In fact, you would probably be hard-pressed to find any teacher at all willing to accept this within the scope of a course and in a classroom setting, as the case in point serves to highlight two of the major obstacles for ELF gaining acceptance – the NS as a yardstick against which everything is measured, and teachers automatically assuming their students wanting to become as near perfect speakers of standard English as possible.

These attitudes are evident in the grading guidelines for the Swedish national tests of English, according to which the above example would fall into both the "unintelligible to a native speaker of English" and the "Swenglish" categories of inadequacy. Contrary to these conventions, Seidlhofer argues that the question of intelligibility to NSs is irrelevant, and what should really be asked is whether something "... *has* [ . . . ] *been* said and understood in English as a lingua franca" (2001, 150, original emphasis).

### 2.5.1 On correctness

ELF's proposed abolition of standard English as the actual standard against which all other varieties are to be judged raises concerns about the future of ELT, as well as fears of a state

of "anything goes" turmoil where the integrity of the language itself is at stake. Apart from the eternal lamentations about "the decline of language" from the usual suspects, there are a number of actual problems at hand, namely what to teach, how to teach it, and how to assess the students' proficiency.

Routinely, TESL has addressed these issues by teaching standard English and, subsequently, testing the level of standard English attained by the students, leaving the choice of teaching method to the individual teacher.

TEIL is a slightly different breed of cat in these respects. Acknowledging that NSs and NNSs alike are heterogeneous groups, each with different social and cultural backgrounds within, it does not try to impose on students a standardized version of English different from that used by a majority of NSs themselves. Instead, focus is shifted to the learners, and helping them find a way of expressing themselves that is their own voice, using English as themselves, not as lesser versions of actual speakers of English.

The needs of ESL learners have often been perceived as being "... arguably well-catered for by a single monochrome standard form that looks as good on paper as it sounds in speech" (Quirk, 1985, quoted in Jenkins, 43). In addition to the obvious deprecation of the NNS, this point of view puts additional strain on the learner, who is expected to produce similarly grammatically correct speech, as well as writing, at all times. Jennifer Jenkins observes that this ignores the "variation [that] performs important linguistic and social functions regardless of whether the user is native or non-native" (43), as well as that "[i]t seems [. . .] unreasonable to expect NNSs to produce a more rigidly consistent kind of English than is typical or expected of NSs" (ibid.).

With regards to correctness, and on closely related issue of prescriptive versus descriptive grammar, ELF proponents tend to lean towards what is useful for the communicative situation. Informal speech and formal writing are treated as two different

beasts altogether. Free from "the conceptual straightjacket of ENL" (Seidlhofer 2001, 141), learners of ELF are encouraged to make themselves understood, even if by unorthodox means. Nevertheless, the baby is not thrown out with the bath water when it comes to language accuracy and precision. It should be noted that while certain linguistic constructions may be perfectly ok in a communicative aspect or in everyday speech, in text they might convey certain undesirable perceptions about the writer. Jenkins also points to the fact that teaching and examinations "also have to provide for those students whose preferred goal remains, despite EIL developments, a near-native variety of English" (48).

### 2.5.2 On intercultural communication

Farzad Sharifian states that "EIL emphasizes that English, with its many varieties, is a language of international, and therefore intercultural, communication" (2). With English becoming the *de facto* standard, NNSs are more likely to engage in interactions with other NNSs than with NSs, be it on holiday, business travel, or the Internet. In these cases, the communication taking place is completely detached from the inner circle, and it would appear preposterous to somehow argue that both parts should adhere to standard English for the mere sake of its sacrosanct status.

However, this is not uncommon, as ELT has traditionally included selling the whole "English culture" package with teachers serving as "ambassadors" for the customs, conventions, and ideology of the English-speaking community (Llurda 2004, 319) to students apparently willing to join the party, even if they're only allowed in through the back door. What is sold and bought into, apart from the elusive language of the NS, is often the view of English-speaking countries as basically homogenous, monocultural entities with a single fixed set of rituals, with textbooks often providing tourist brochure-like images of society. Alptekin notes that this "portrays an idealized image of the English-speaking world" (60) and

questions the importance of stereotypical conventions of the Anglo-Saxon society to NNS-NNS interactions (61).

Instead of this learning by heart the traditions and customs of the quintessential British or American household, itself already in an advanced state of influence from different cultures, EIL puts emphasis upon the students' own way of life, and being able to relate that to that of the rest of the world. As outlined by Larry E. Smith, and summarized by Sandra McKay:

- a) learners of an international language do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language,
- b) the ownership of an international language becomes de-nationalized, and
- c) the educational goal of learning it is to enable learners to communicate their ideas and culture to others. (140)

A greater recognition of EIL in the classroom situation, with its shift of focus from the culture of the inner circle to that of the learners, would provide the pupils with the opportunity and the tools required to reflect upon the culture in which they currently reside as well as how to communicate this. Ideally, this would make cultural learning less one-dimensional, as students are encouraged to juxtapose their own experiences to their perception of life in other parts of the world, with all its complexities, joys and everyday struggle.

### **3. A Swedish History of ELT**

ELT in Sweden has been around for a very long time, with pupils learning it from third grade. Traditionally prescriptive in nature, based upon British English, its goal has been mimicking

the syntax and pronunciation of, mainly, native speakers of The Queen's English.

Furthermore, the study of customs, traditions and culture in the English-speaking world will almost invariably have revolved around conditions in the United Kingdom, or even England, and, although less frequently, those of the United States.

This apparent monoculturalism with its narrow focus upon Western varieties of English, alongside the apotheosis of their native speakers, would seem to exclude all other varieties of Englishes, including that of the students. Supposedly attempting to widen this scope, changes have been made in the national curriculum from time to time, with more emphasis being put on intercultural communication skills, and less on learning the culture of English-speaking countries.

The national curriculum undergoes regular updates, either reflecting the zeitgeist or being adjusted towards the ideology of the governing political parties. Since the introduction of the current form of upper-secondary education, there have been three major revisions, in 1970, 1994, and 2011, respectively.

### 3.1 The 1970 curriculum (Lgy 70)

The syllabus for English in the 1970 curriculum (Läroplan för gymnasieskolan) is notable for its brevity, sharing all goals and principal activities with the other modern languages.

Essentially, and basically verbatim, it states that tuition should develop the pupils' ability to understand and use the target language, against a backdrop of the culture and social conditions of where it's spoken. To achieve this, texts are to be read and text-based exercises to be done, as well as additional work without the association to specific texts (176).

While this may seem well ahead of its time with its extensive lack of details and pontification, at the time of publication work was already underway on the "planning supplement" (*Planeringssupplement: Språkännen Engelska 3- och 4-åriga linjer*), published

in 1973 and offering chapter and verse on the way to teach English over the course of its 44 pages.

Oddly specific details on the layout of language laboratories (37) and an inordinate fondness for prepositions (15-16) aside, this publication places a lot of emphasis on learning set phrases and structures through "fixed" speech practice ("bundna talövningar") (6-8). This purports to build a grammatically and idiomatically correct linguistic foundation which the learner can then utilize to express themselves.

When discussing the virtues of correct pronunciation, teachers are cautioned about the American influence on students through exposure to media (10). This is known to cause "inconsistencies", presumably in the form of deviation from the strictly employed BrE RP, which students should be alerted about, but not necessarily having "corrected" (ibid.).

The planning supplement is surprisingly brief on the subject of cultural studies. It does state, however, that "the purpose is not to provide the pupils with an exhaustive description of cultural and societal life in the English-speaking world" (34, my translation). Instead, rather, current events may be commented upon, but "obviously emphasising countries where English is spoken as a native tongue" (ibid.)

### 3.2 The 1994 curriculum (Lpf 94)

In the 1994 curriculum, the syllabus for English takes note of its hegemonic quality, recognising it to be "the mother tongue or official language of a large number of countries, covering many different cultures" as well as "the dominant language of communication throughout the world". This apparent expansion of the inner circle, alongside the stated goal that pupils "deepen their understanding of English as spoken in different parts of the world" (ibid.) seems an obvious attempt at including World Englishes not traditionally dealt with, such as African, Asian, or Australian.

While that may hint at an understanding of the use of English as a *lingua franca*, other paragraphs suggest a belief in the notion that students learn English in order to communicate with native speakers, though not necessarily British or American. Emphasis is again on "ways of living, cultural traditions and social conditions in English-speaking countries", perpetuating the view of conventions and norms of the inner circle countries being inseparable from their language.

Nevertheless, the students' "ability to reflect over similarities and differences between their own cultural experiences and cultures in English-speaking countries" is considered an integral part of learning English, as it "eventually [leads] to an understanding of different cultures and inter-cultural competence." This is a departure from the old curriculum, which did not aspire to any deeper goals of language learning than learning a language. The 1994 syllabus also seemingly takes a swipe at the inflexibility of the olden ways as proposed by the 1973 version by proclaiming that "English should not be divided up into different parts to be learnt in a specific sequence."

There is, however, a somewhat odd discrepancy between the phrasing of the general description of the subject, and the outline for the more advanced course English B, during which students are required to gain "a knowledge of current conditions, history and cultures of *the countries where English is spoken*" (ibid, my emphasis). This would seem like a tall order, given the number of countries to feature at least the occasional Anglophone conversation. Either this distinction is made offhandedly to lend some variation to the text, or it really means shooting for the moon.

### 3.3 The 2011 curriculum (Gy 2011)

The syllabus in the present curriculum from 2011 now uses "parts of the world where English is used" (Skolverket 2011, 1) exclusively to denote English-speaking parts of the world,

which might be interpreted, as noted, most of the world. This would seem as a concession to criticism against TESL's preoccupation with the culture and language of inner-circle countries, with its connotations of colonialism.

Communication skills, not limited to English or even language, are now in the front seat, and teachers are expected to provide "functional and meaningful contexts, to develop all-round communicative skills" (1) as well as "different strategies to support communication and to solve problems when language skills are inadequate." (1)

This seems to indicate a further departure from previous, one-dimensional models of language learning, and the following paragraph provides a good summary of the current syllabus, as well as indicating a progression towards the basic ideas of EIL.

Teaching should encourage students' curiosity in language and culture, and give them the opportunity to develop plurilingualism where skills in different languages interact and support each other. (1)

The introduction of the concept of plurilingualism originates from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and adheres to its focus on intercultural communication. Plurilingualism takes a holistic approach to a person's knowledge of language, acknowledging that with increased experience in language used in various contexts comes an increased proficiency of communication. Not restricted to a single target language, this approach embraces all forms of communication, non-verbal included. The CEFR states that

[t]he aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve 'mastery' of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in

isolation, with the 'ideal native speaker' as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. (5)

Although this is played down in the supplementary material (*Kommentarsmaterial till kursplanen i engelska*), which states that "the basic view of language learning has not changed since the last curriculum" (6, my translation), this marks a paradigm shift.

## **4. Survey**

A survey was conducted in order to examine the current attitudes towards English teaching among student and teachers, and how these adhere to the current practices and the curriculum at hand. The main point of interest was to examine whether teaching focus is still upon correctness of language and the mimicking of native speakers, or if it has indeed shifted towards a more global communicative perspective. Furthermore, general attitudes towards learning English were probed.

### **4.1 Survey method**

The survey was carried out at a Swedish upper-secondary school in a Swedish town. The goal was the participation of all students taking English classes, as well as all of the teaching staff. Response was collected from 258 out of a total of 430 students taking English, or 60 %. All of the nine English teachers currently teaching, plus one recently retired, answered the questionnaire. It should be noted that none of the sample sizes is large enough to make this study statistically valid, but it might indicate some general tendencies.

In order to minimize misinterpretations, the students' questionnaire was in Swedish, while teachers were given their version in English.

In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to mark the extent to which they agreed with a statement, on a four-grade scale from "strongly disagree" to "agree strongly". The second part presented three alternatives which were to be graded "1" for best match, to "3" for worst. First-part answers with several boxes ticked were discarded, as were second-part ones with more than one alternative rated the same. For the latter, answers with just a box ticked, was counted as a "1", and in cases like 1/1/3, only the "3" was taken into account. Questionnaires used are attached in Appendix A of this essay.

The questions were grouped as to deal with certain aspects of language learning and attitudes towards one's experience as a student, whereas teachers, respectively, were asked how they believe their students perceive classes, as well as inquiring into the foundation of the didactics used. The results of the survey are presented in accordance with these groupings in the following sections.

## 4.2 Respondents

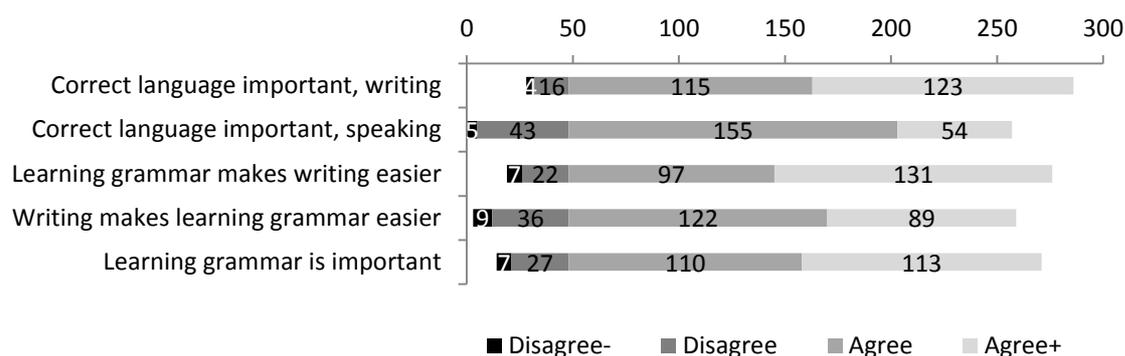
Student respondents were not selected from any special criteria, instead the ambition was to get a comprehensive result from a majority of all students of English at the school in question. This includes theoretical as well as vocational programmes, the basic course English 5, which is compulsory, and identical, for all students, the intermediate course English 6, taken by students of the theoretical programmes, and the optional advanced course English 7. Notable differences in attitudes between these are accounted for separately.

## 4.3 Results & discussion

### 4.3.1 Language correctness

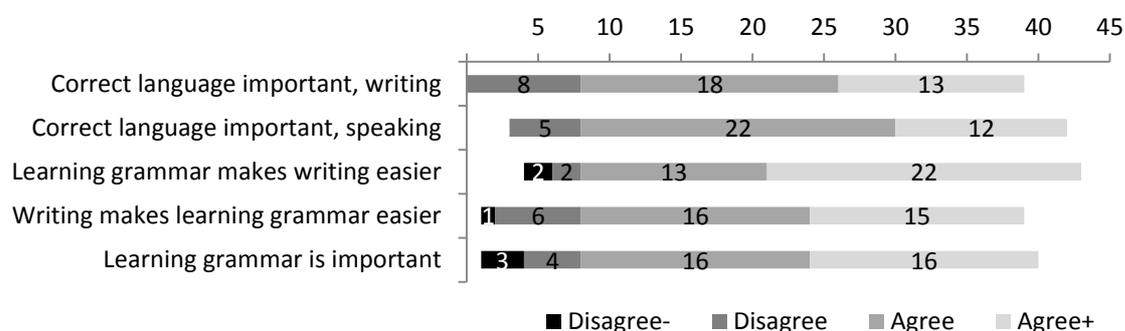
Survey questions related to language correctness focused on grammar, which is still an integral part of day-to-day language teaching in most places.

### Correctness - All students



The results show a somewhat surprising belief in the importance of correct language usage. With the advent of the Internet, as well as the current plethora of instant messaging services, a more lenient attitude towards preciseness might have been expected. A total of 87% of students find learning grammar important or very important. Breaking down these results, and extracting the vocational students at the basic level yields similar results:

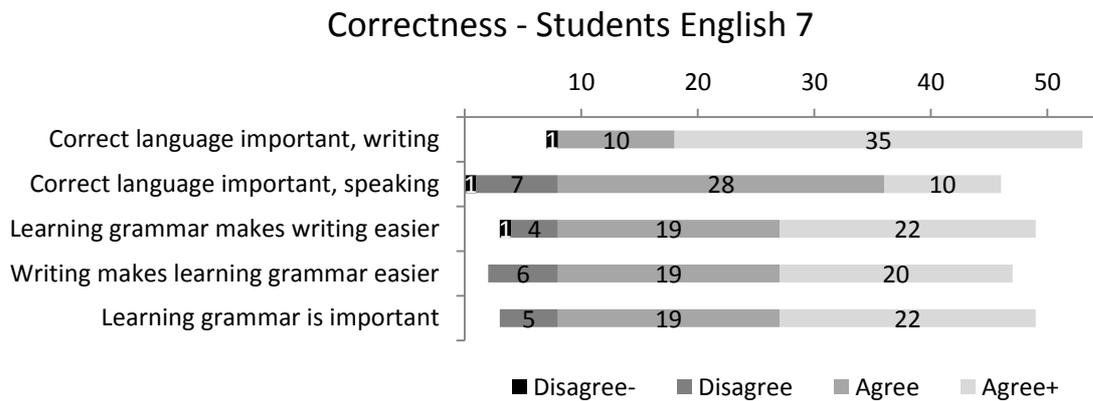
### Correctness - Vocational students English 5



Although it could be hypothesized that these students would have a more pragmatic take on language, where focus would be to get your message across, they still lean heavily upon the importance of learning grammar. It is difficult to say, however, whether this is due to the fact that they spend a great deal of their language learning doing grammar exercises, and thus have internalized the concept of it being of utmost importance, or if they simply strive for perfection.

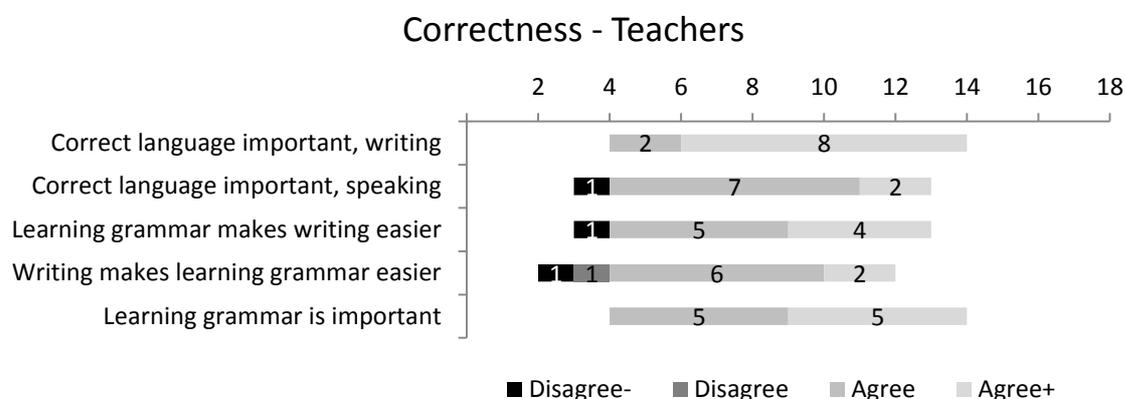
Compared to the total student body, these students, however, place less emphasis on using correct language in writing, which might be traced back to the aforementioned casual modern ways of written communication. This also seems to be in line with the otherwise remarkable result of correct language being more important in speaking, which traditionally has been the less formal way of interacting.

At the perceived other end of the student spectrum, we have the advanced learners:



These results correspond better with the traditional view of written language being more formal and, as such, more susceptible to scrutiny, thus necessitating a higher level of correctness. These students also are less concerned with the exactitude of spoken language. Again, this could be a consequence of the course in question being rather heavy on writing, and less on colloquial interactions. There is still a high opinion of grammar in general.

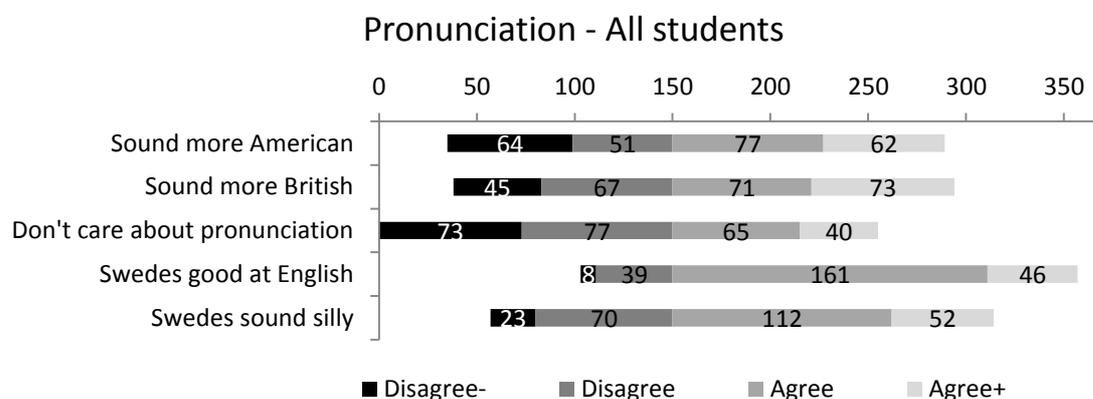
As one might assume, the views of the advanced students correspond well with those of the teachers:



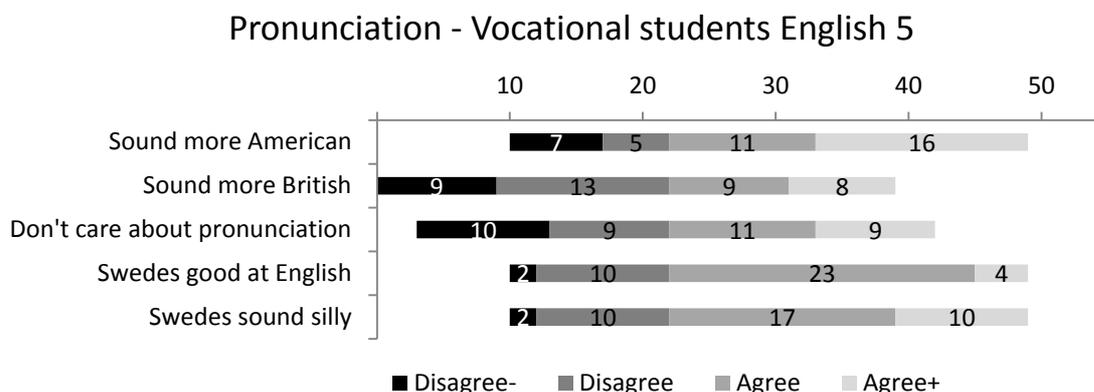
The support for the virtues of proper writing appears unanimous, and while there is a fragment of polarisation in the subsequent answers, teaching grammar also remains a worthwhile pursuit.

### 4.3.2 Pronunciation

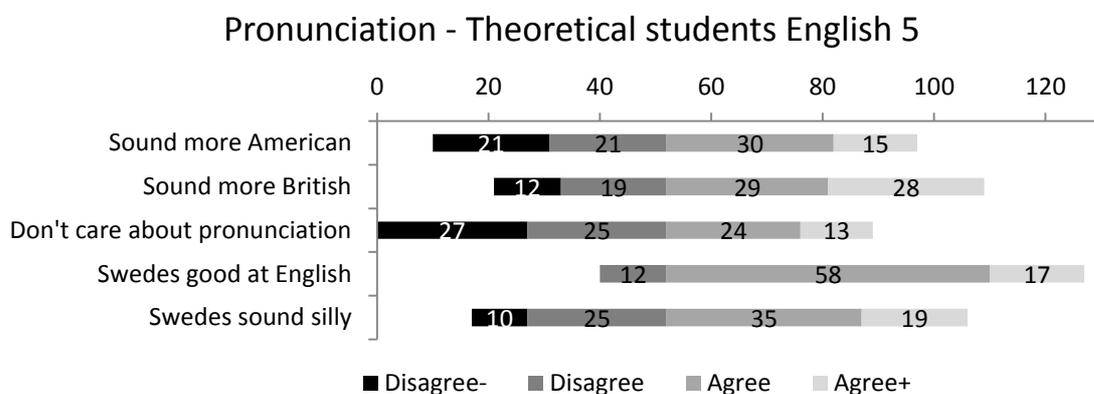
As noted in the discussion part of the essay, RP used to be the standard pronunciation taught at Swedish schools, something that has all but disappeared in the wake of the influence of other varieties of English. While the current goal of English learning should be to find your own voice and ways of expression, certain Englishes are still held in higher regard with some students.



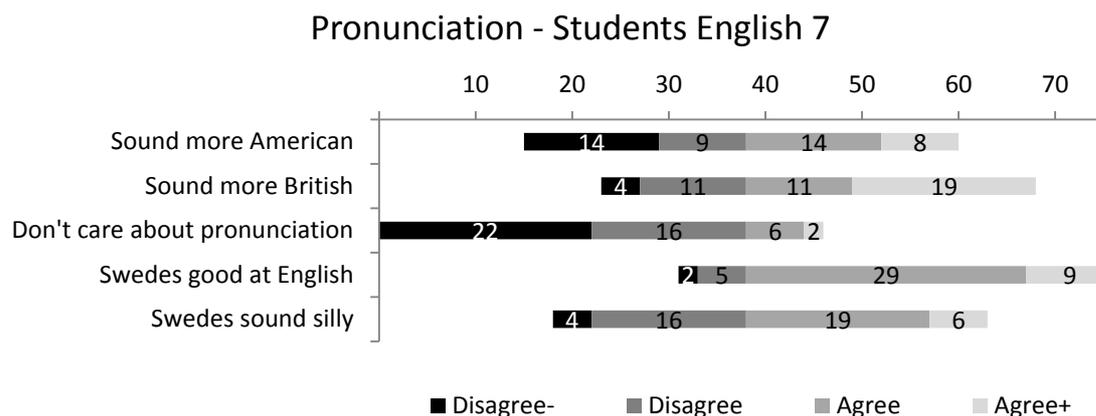
While the proficiency of Swedish speakers of English is widely acknowledged, there is also a perception that they come across as somewhat funny-sounding. Even given this, most students appear rather comfortable with their own pronunciation, although there is an even spread of wanting to sound more British/American.



Conspicuous among the vocational students is the relatively low opinion of a British accent, while sounding more American appears more appealing. The opposite, curiously, is the case with students of the same age in the theoretical programmes:

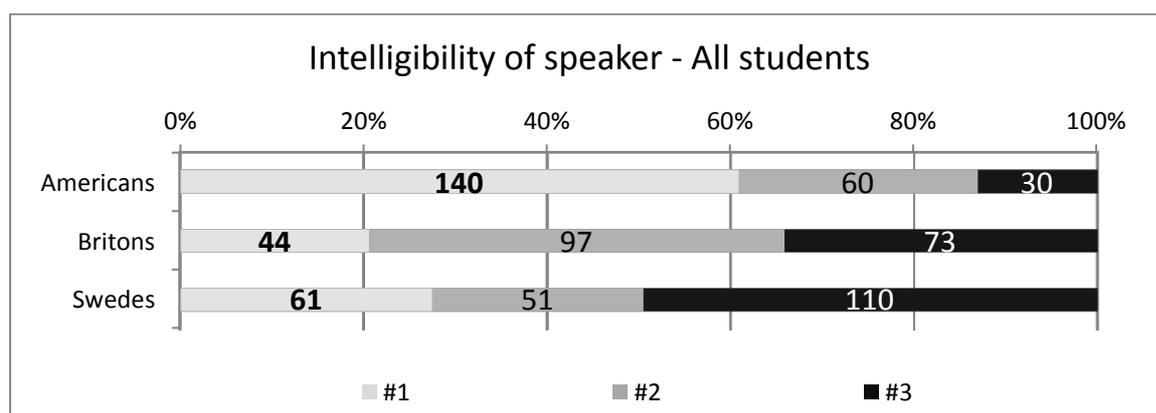


This preference for British pronunciation is even more obvious amongst English 7 students:

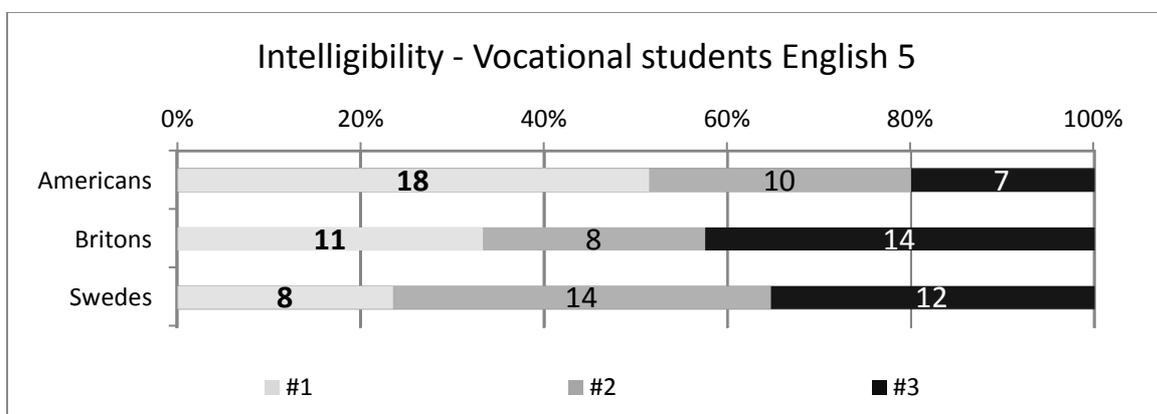
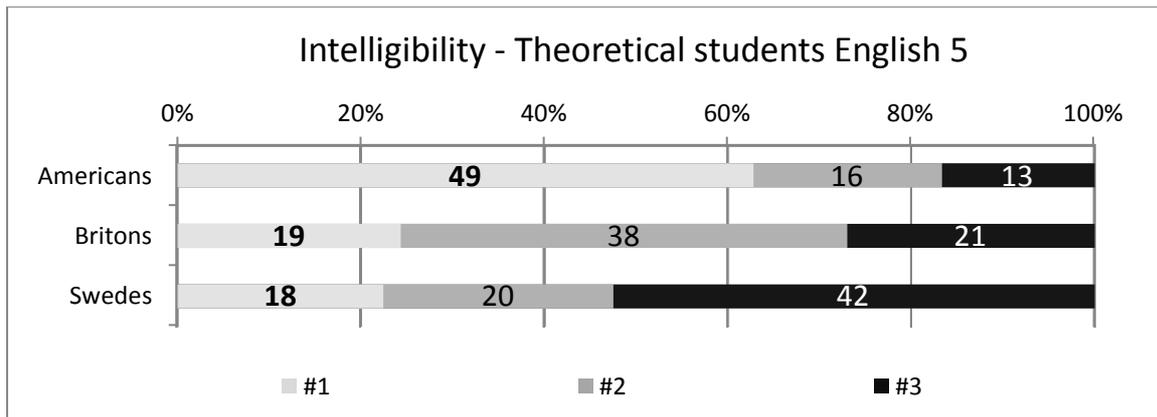


The sociolinguistic implications or explanations of these results warrant a study of its own, but remain outside the scope of this essay.

Furthermore, students were asked to rank a few different spoken Englishes with regards to intelligibility.



The vast number of subvarieties of each English notwithstanding, it is quite evident that American English is regarded as the easiest to understand, somewhat surprisingly, given that any errors made by a Swedish speaker would be easily recognisable by your average Swedish student, with little or no corruption of the intended message. Even the theoretical students who displayed an affection for British varieties still rate American English the highest:

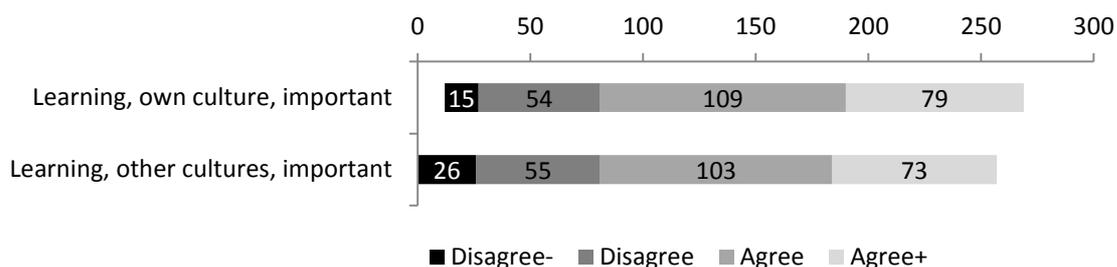


The above results would also seem to corroborate the findings of Li, previously referred to. Given the low status of your own accent, you are prone to deeming it more unintelligible, in spite of evidence points to the contrary.

### 4.3.3 Cultural studies

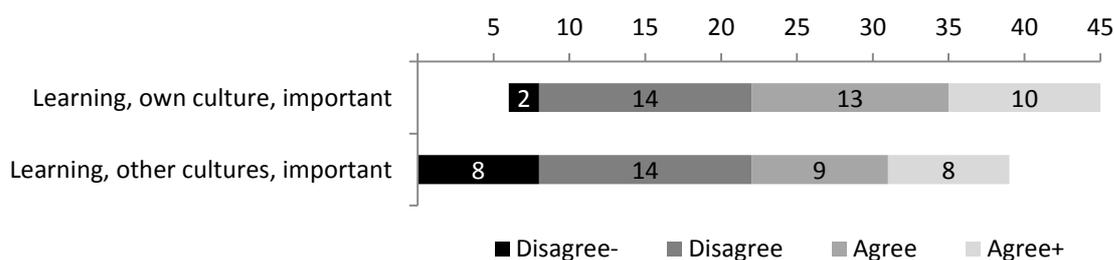
While the curriculum's shifted from an Anglocentric perspective towards one of multiculturalism, textbooks still focus to a large extent on culture in English-speaking countries. Although the intention is to make the students more aware of their own culture, and giving them the opportunity and tools to reflect on this and communicate their opinion to people from other parts of the world, a lot of the education still revolves around the ways of life of the inner circle.

### Cultural studies - All students

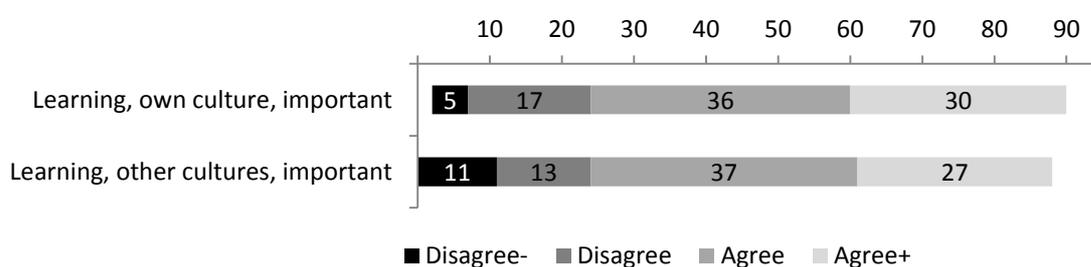


Students in general appear equally positive to learning more about the ways of life in Sweden and abroad, with a slight bias towards domestic conditions. Comparing the students taking the basic course in the vocational and the theoretical programmes, the distribution is roughly the same, with the vocational students appearing more skeptical about cultural studies as a whole.

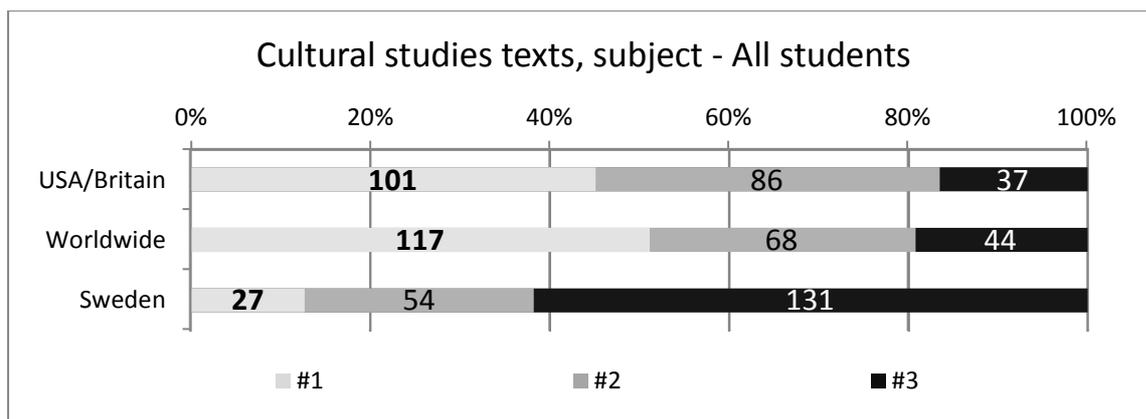
### Cultural studies - vocational students English 5



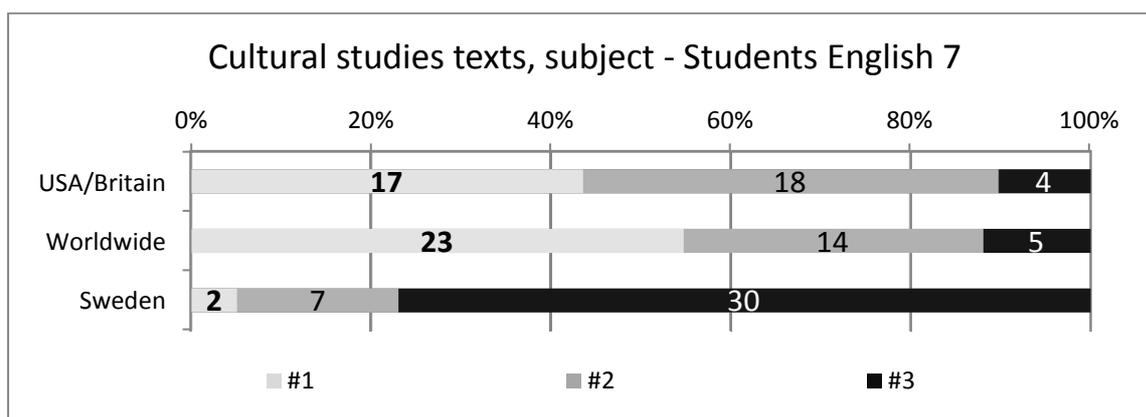
### Cultural studies - theoretical students English 5



Respondents were also asked to grade areas covered in the cultural studies segments of the textbooks used, to see whether they are content with studying the inner circle countries, the expanding circle, or more about their own culture.

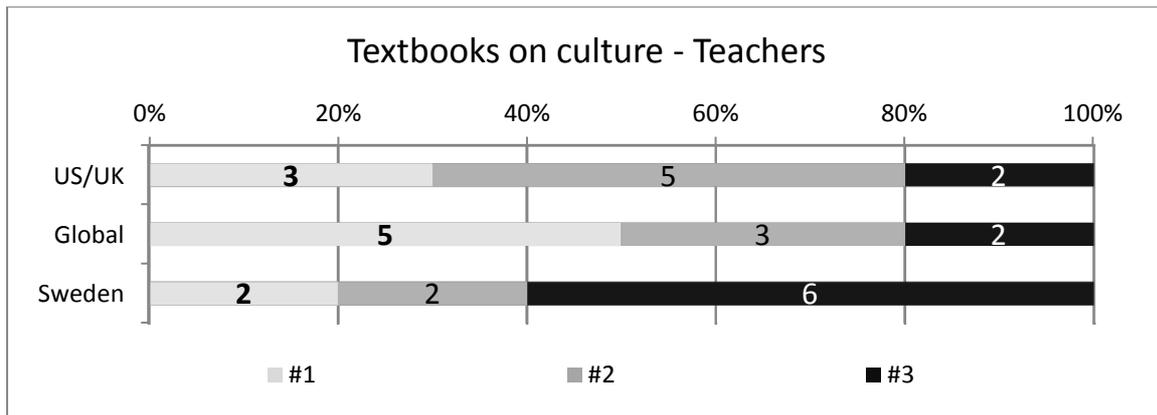


Quite remarkably, given their apparent interest in learning about Swedish culture, the students seem virtually uninterested in dealing with texts about their own country within the scope of English studies. This becomes even more apparent if the English 7 students are singled out:



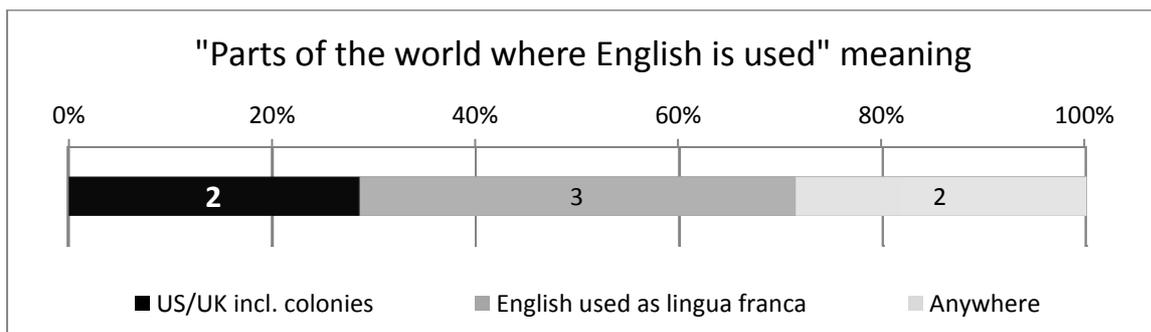
A likely explanation is that students on this advanced level of learning and, supposedly, proficiency are more eager to expand their knowledge of the English-speaking world, or the world as a whole, rather than dwell upon their own daily life. Given their penchant for British pronunciation, they might have been expected to prefer inner-circle countries, but their general preference is wider in scope.

The teachers' preferences seem to be in line with the English 7 students':



Again, with a few exceptions, the prevailing opinion of suitable texts for cultural studies is that these should teach the ways of life in other parts of the world, and although the area of interest has expanded beyond the inner circle, more teachers would still like to have students read about the UK or the USA than about their own culture. This is still in line with the 2011 syllabus' stating that students be "given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used". (1)

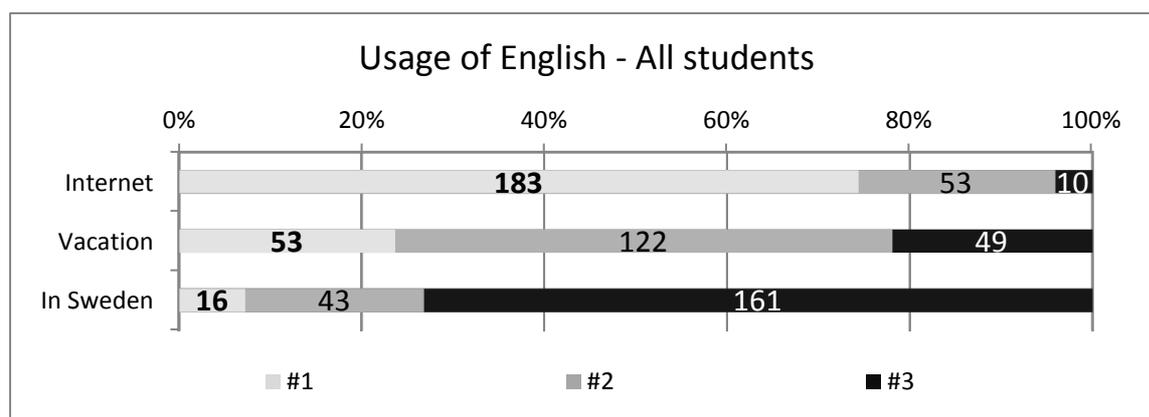
Teachers were asked about their definition of "parts of the world where English is used":



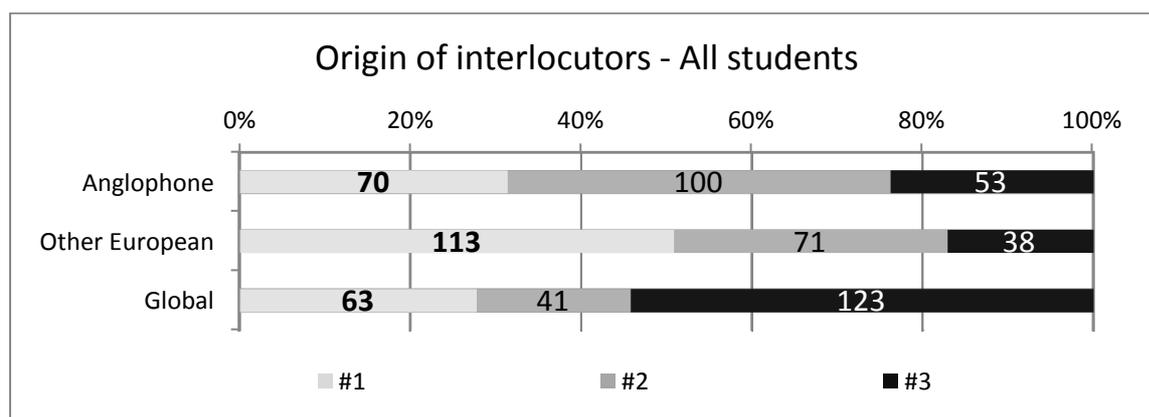
Evidently, there is some confusion surrounding this rather integral part of the syllabus, which probably explains the disparate answers to the previous question.

#### 4.3.4 Communication

Indisputably, at the heart of any modern language learning endeavour is the prospect of communicating with other people. With the World Wide Web literally at their fingertips, students are no longer limited to family holidays or foreign visitors in order to put their knowledge into practice. Additionally, the global rise of English as a *de facto* lingua franca further expands the possibilities of interacting with people from all over the globe.

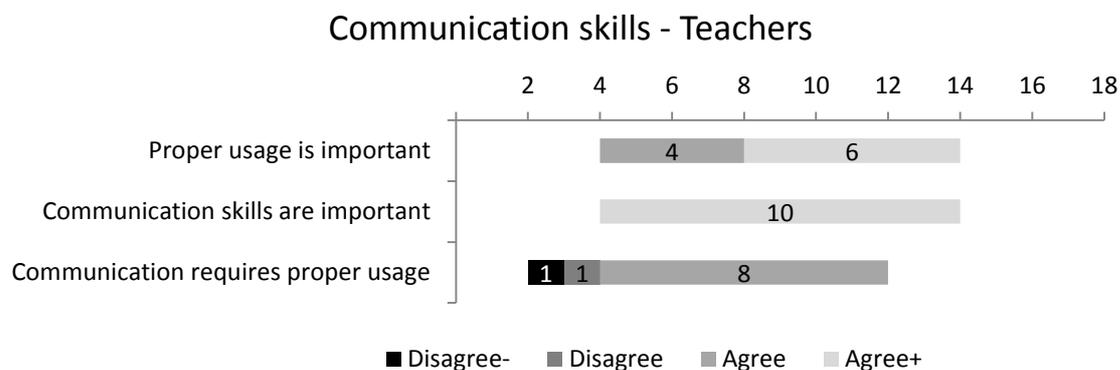


Hence, these results are as expected, with online usage being the predominant forum for interaction. On the Internet nation borders tend to blur, however students were still prompted to try and identify their communication partners by origin.



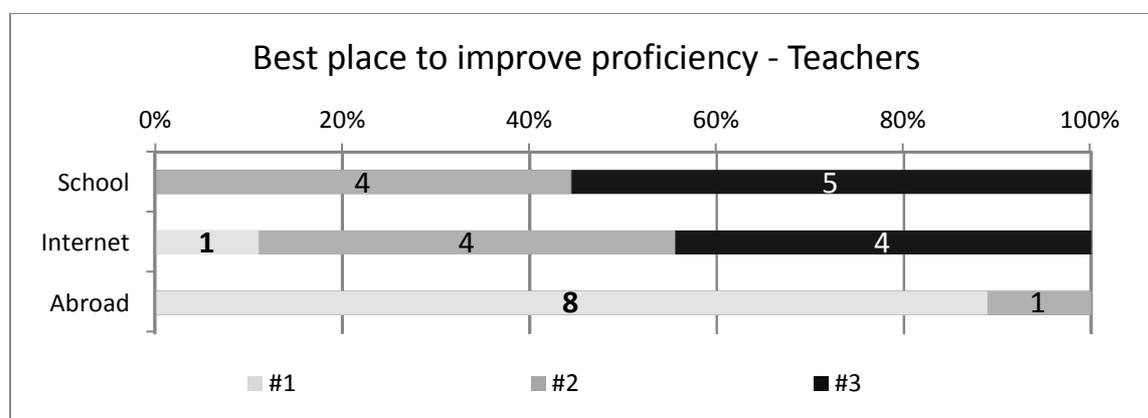
Disregarding the uncertainty arising from the difficulty of pinpointing the exact location of the person with whom you are communicating online, other European NNSs make up the largest group by far. If, to this, you add the students who primarily are in contact with NNSs from more remote continents, the notion of basing English teaching, for the sake

of communicative purposes, upon inner circle usage would seem counterproductive, taking into account the huge variety of native languages in circulation. For instance, an extensive knowledge of British idiomatic expressions might be rendered useless in correspondence, whereas a familiarity with Internet lingo would prove more fruitful.



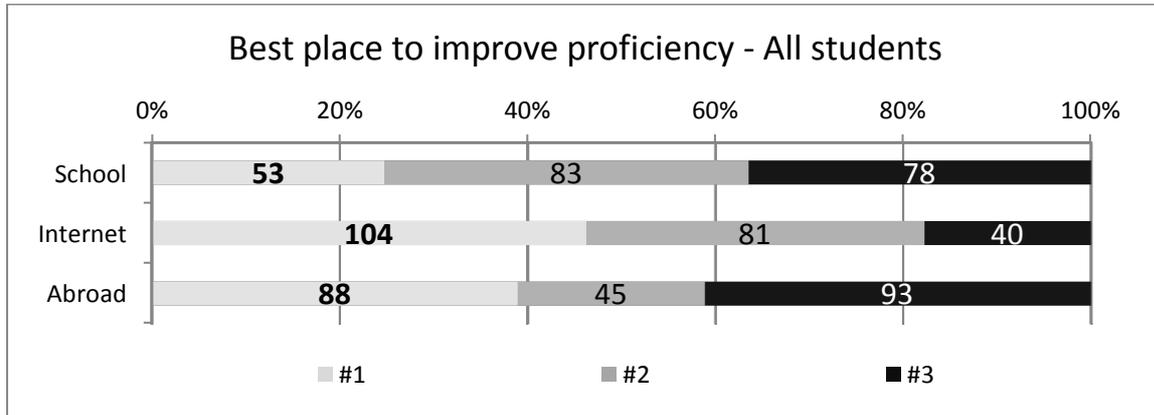
The virtues of good communication skills stand unchallenged, and while there are certainly situations where a command of proper English is paramount, views differ on the necessity of proper usage for communication purposes. Of course, "proper usage" could be interpreted as the best way of dealing with the situation at hand, but then ratings would supposedly be higher.

#### 4.3.5 In the classroom

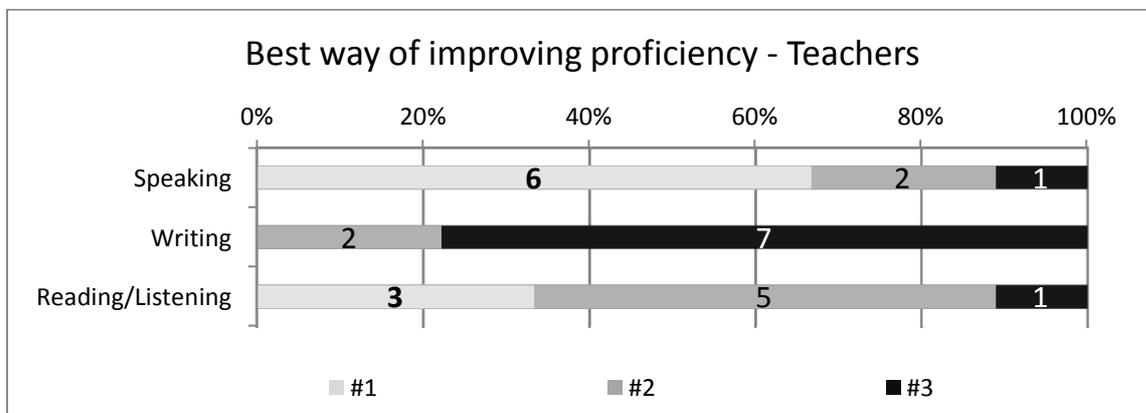


None of the teacher respondents believed school to be the best place to learn English. Contributing factors might be the artificial setting of it all, as well as the fact that resorting to

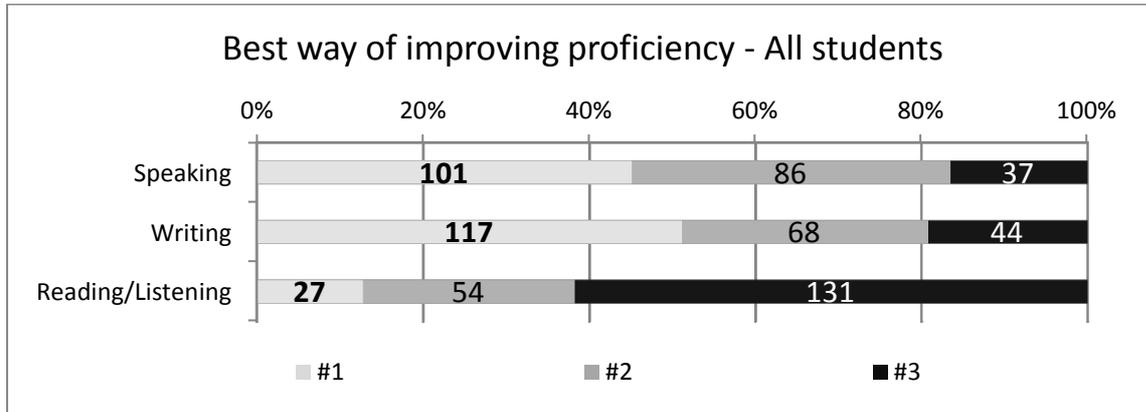
Swedish is always an option. In contrast, the perceived advantages of learning it abroad could be the immersion effect of being surrounded by the target language all the time, as well as the extrinsic motivation of having to use English in order to get around. To a certain extent this would also be the case if students aspire to use the Internet efficiently.



Perhaps equating "abroad" with "on vacation", students are less convinced than teachers of the merits of overseas learning. Furthermore, they hold school in higher regard than their tutors. However, the largest difference is to be found when it comes to the Internet. Whereas, for the teachers, the Internet is mostly a means of communication and a place for resources, it is an integral part of the students' lives, and as such equals being physically abroad in terms of language immersion. Apparently this is an aspect that seems to be underestimated by educators, belonging to another generation. Looking at the question of how to best improve your language skills, this again comes into play:

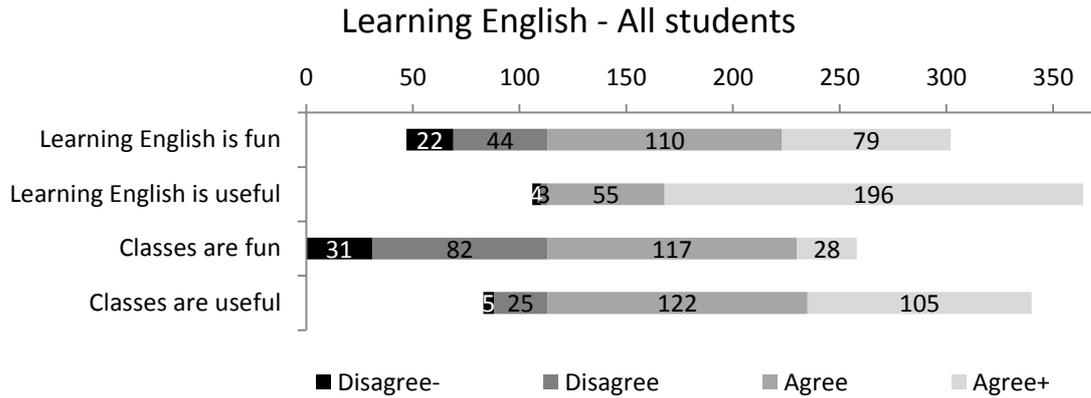


Teachers, presumably adhering to preconceptions of interaction being mainly spoken language, place speaking as the best way of learning, with receptive skills as second. Writing appears to be something you can engage in once you have mastered the other skills well enough. The students' results exhibit a different perspective on things altogether:

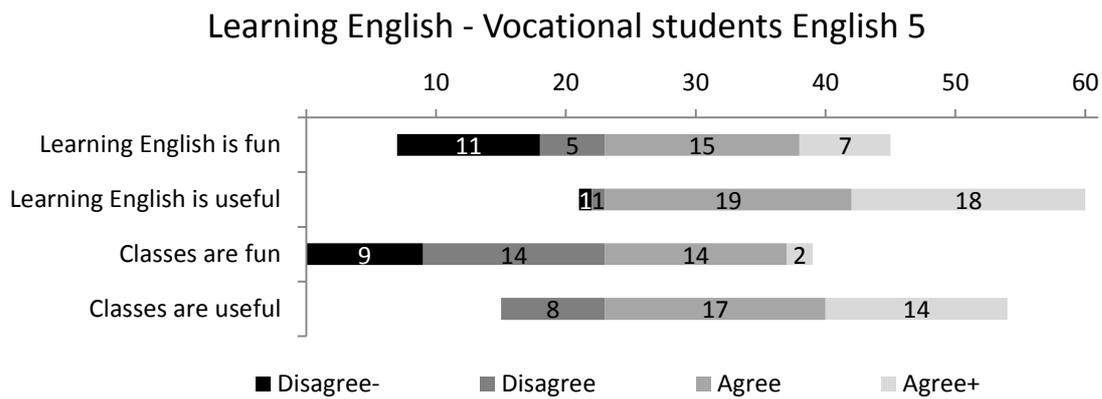


Here, writing is at the top of the scale, indicating, again, that the Internet could be a larger factor in the students' usage of language than expected. Arguably, most of the communication on the Web is text-based – hanging out on message boards, chatting with friends or other participants in online games. Speaking might be the best way of improving your oral skills, but in the ever-growing world of online communities, writing is the predominant mode of expression. Students no longer use spoken English a few times a year on vacation, communicating with foreigners, they use written language all the time.

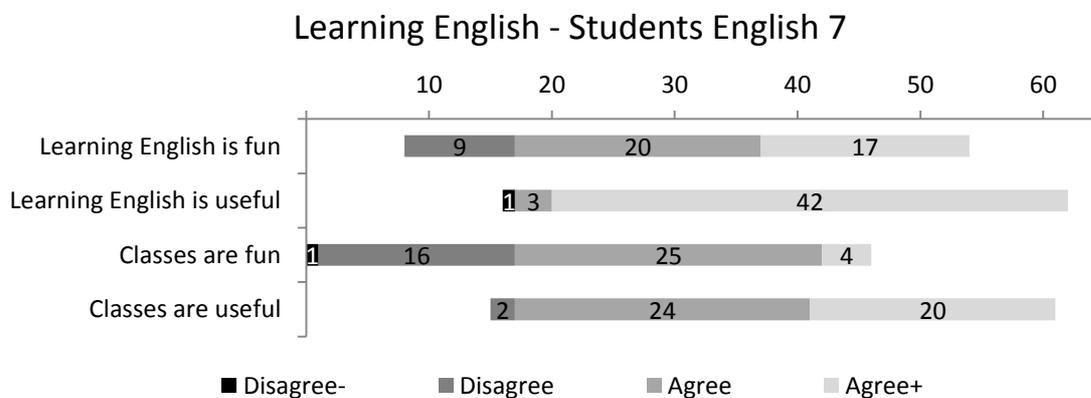
Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to look at the results of how students view their English classes.



While the usefulness of learning English have escaped few students, actual classes appear quite a drag to a lot of them, especially the vocational students, who express more negative traits than the student body as a whole:

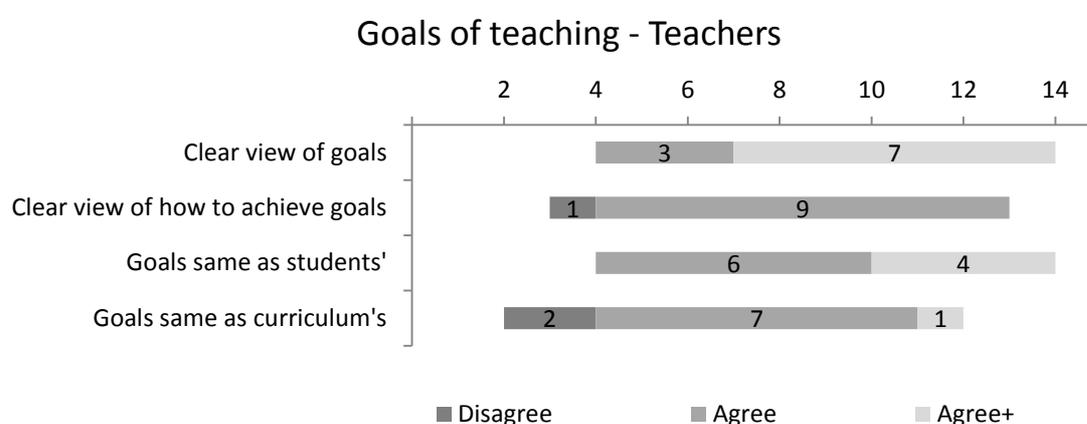


In comparison, the English 7 students are generally more positive, less surprisingly, having chosen this extra-curricular course out of free will and not out of necessity:



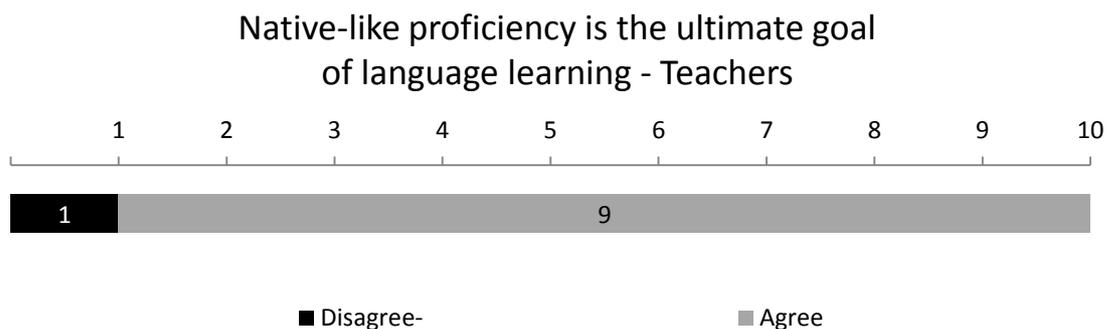
In spite of exhibiting a view of learning English as being fun, the students, however, seem slightly disappointed by their classes. One aspect of this might be the rift between the teachers' opinion of what learning activities are the most beneficial, and the students' own ideas on the same issue.

In essence, this is the heart of the matter of all teaching endeavours – having well-defined goals, as well as a conscious strategy for reaching these goals, while keeping the students engaged and striving towards a common objective. This is easier said than done, as expressed by the following results:



The individual teacher appears pretty sure about the goals they want to achieve, but less so when it comes to these goals being shared by the students. Even more uncertainty arises on the question of the goals being what the curriculum states, and no one is absolutely sure on how to reach the goals of their courses.

Finally, teachers were given a seemingly inconspicuous statement, albeit central to the question regarding a shift towards an international English:



Although none of the respondents would agree strongly with this, only one answer was at all critical. Again, the notion of the idealized NS rears its head, and the question remains whether you should set yourself an unattainable goal and remain a student of the language indefinitely, or, more in line with the EIL/ELF paradigms, become a user of English in your own right.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

Language teaching is a complex matter. On the upper-secondary level, not only do you get students whose abilities vary to a sometimes alarming degree, there is also the added pressure on the tutor of customising each class to meet the demands of each of the different programmes. Simultaneously, grading is expected to be in line with the results of the standardized national tests, which are the same, regardless of the students' choice of education. While the ambition of a national grading standard is commendable, in practice there is the very real risk of it becoming counterproductive, with the focus of courses being to get as good a result as possible on these tests, regardless of what would best benefit the students. The fragmentation of the subject into year-long courses which are graded individually further interrupts the learning process, adding forced intermediate goals instead of letting it evolve over time.

On the subject of examination and grading, comparing test responses against a measure of standardized, correct English yields easily quantifiable results, which are easily

converted into a grade. The problem inherent with this approach is that what tends to be tested are the abilities that are easy to test, but not necessarily central to the learning of language. Having been subjected to national tests since the age of eleven, students are used to this procedure, which in part might explain their apparent fondness for correctness and grammar, as these are what earns them good grades.

With each subsequent syllabus moving away from the concept of one correct variety of English, and with NNSs now outnumbering NSs, the hegemony of British and American Englishes has subsided. They are, however, still held in high regard with different groups of learners, respectively, prompting students' attempting to mimic their pronunciation. As argued in the theoretical section, instead of embracing their own quirks and characteristics, this pursuit of perfection leaves them in a perpetual state of discouragement. The low status of Swedish pronunciation was also shown by the results claiming Swedes being more unintelligible in general than Americans or Britons, even though students probably understand more of a Swedish speaker than of an average American, who were rated highest.

Regarding cultural studies, there appears to have been a shift from the focus on British and American conditions towards a global perspective. There is little to show, however, that either students or teachers are especially keen on texts dealing with subjects closer to home, even though this might provide students and teachers alike with the opportunity to reflect on their own ways of life, in order to establish a base point with which other cultures may be compared. In the interest of inter-cultural communication, this could also prove beneficial, telling people from different parts of the world about living in Sweden, instead of dealing with superficial, and at worst stereotypical, texts about other countries.

In the brave new world of the digital era, students spend more time on the Internet, effortlessly coming into contact with people from a plethora of cultures, thus finding this to be the most common way of using English on a day-to-day basis. For teachers, not having

grown up with these virtual worlds, applied English seems to remain primarily oral communication with foreigners abroad, with writing, apart from the occasional business letter, being more of a means to an end. With teacher respondents having been in the profession for an average of 22 years, it could also be a case of teaching old dogs new tricks.

To conclude, despite repeated attempts to modernize the syllabus, much of the English teaching seems to remain basically the same over the years, with both students and teachers conforming acceptingly to its inherently rigid form. Endeavours to encourage students to find their own voice among the ever-increasing global number of English speakers are somewhat stumped by the high status of the inner circle varieties, reducing the students to permanent learners, as opposed to users. Traditional attitudes of the teachers are less in line with the students' own reality of using English, perhaps even dismissing it as not being real usage, and ultimately, students are still being graded on the basis of NS standards.

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Please answer the following questions using the numbers 1, 2, and 3, where 1 is the best alternative, and 3 the least good.

<b>17. I use English mainly when ...</b>		
... on the Internet	... on vacation	... speaking to foreigners in Sweden
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>18. The people with whom I communicate with are mainly from ...</b>		
... English-speaking countries	... other parts of Europe	... the rest of the world
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>19. I would like the texts we work with to be about...</b>		
... life and culture in the United States / Britain	... life and culture around the world	... life and culture in Sweden
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>20. The best way to improve your English skills is by ...</b>		
... speaking	... writing	... reading / listening
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>21. The best place to improve your English is ...</b>		
... in school	... on the Internet	... abroad
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>22. The English the easiest to understand is that spoken by ...</b>		
... Americans	... Britons	... Swedes
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**English courses taught:****Number of years teaching:**

**To what extent do you agree with the following statements?  
Please tick the appropriate box.**

	Disagree strongly	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree strongly
1 Correct language is important when writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Correct language is important when speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Learning grammar makes writing easier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Writing makes learning grammar easier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Learning grammar is important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Proper usage of English is important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Communication skills are important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Good communication skills require proper usage of English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 Most students are happy with their pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Most students would like their pronunciation to be more native-like	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 Native-like proficiency is the ultimate goal of language learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 I have a clear view of the goals I want to achieve with my teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13 I have a clear view of how to achieve these goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 My goals are the same as those stated in the curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 My goals are the same as those of my students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please answer the following questions by using the numbers 1, 2, and 3, where 1 is the alternative that best corresponds to your view, and 3 the least.

<b>16. Students use English mainly when ...</b>		
... on the Internet	... on vacation	... speaking to foreigners in Sweden
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>17. The people with whom students communicate are mainly from ...</b>		
... English-speaking countries	... other parts of Europe	... the rest of the world
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>18. For cultural studies, I would like the textbooks to focus on ...</b>		
... life and culture in the United States / Britain	... life and culture around the world	... life and culture in Sweden
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>19. The best way for students to improve their English skills is by ...</b>		
... speaking	... writing	... reading / listening
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>20. The best place for students to improve their English skills is ...</b>		
... in school	... on the Internet	... abroad
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>21. In the curriculum, the phrase "parts of the world where English is used" refers to... (please tick one)</b>		
... countries where English is a native language, including former colonies	... countries where English is used as a lingua franca	... basically anywhere in the world
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>