

# American or British English Pronunciation?

A study on Swedish Upper Secondary school students' choices of and attitudes towards different varieties of English

Göteborg University Department of Languages and Literature Interdisciplinary C-essay, 15hp Carin Ledin 8505125024

Supervisor: Jennifer Herriman

**Abstract** 

Göteborg University

Department of Languages and Literature

Title: American or British English. A study on Swedish upper secondary school students'

choices of and attitudes towards different varieties of English

Author: Carin Ledin

This study investigates attitudes towards British and American English among students in an upper secondary school in Sweden. The study also aims at finding out to what extent factors such as TV, film and other media influence them regarding their English pronunciation. A survey was conducted on 76 students of which 64 surveys were used in the results. The results were then compared to two previous studies, one performed in Denmark in 1999 and one performed in Norway in 2010. The results showed that most of the students claimed to speak American English, closely followed by British English. Although most of them spoke American English, more students had chosen British English as their goal dialect. Most of the respondents were equally positive towards British and American English. TV and films was found to be the number one influence on the students' pronunciation and most students did not mind if their teacher had a different dialect of English than themselves. In the comparison with previous studies, similar results were found.

Keywords: American English, British English, pronunciation, upper secondary school, attitudes, influences.

## Table of content

1. Introduction	1
2. Aim	2
3. Background	3
3.1 English in Swedish Schools	3
3.2 English in Swedish Society	4
3.3 British English and American English	4
3.4 Language learning as a social phenomenon	5
4. Previous research	6
4.1 Hedge (2000)	6
4.2 Preisler (1999)	7
4.3 Rindal (2010)	8
5. Method and Materials	10
6. Results	12
6.1 Choice of variety, questions 4-8	12
6.2 English in School, questions 9-11	14
6.3 Attitudes towards AmE and BrE, questions 12-15	15
6.4 Influences, questions 16-18	17
6.5 Summary	18
7. Discussion	20
7.1 Results, comparison	20
7.2 Pedagogical consequences	23
7.2.1 Motivation – social vs. school influence	23
7.2.2 Motivation – teacher influence	24
8. Conclusion	25
References	26
Appendix	28
Questionnaire	28

#### 1. Introduction

In 2009 English was the native language of more than some 320 million speakers (www.ethnologue.com) and if you add the number of speakers with English as their second language to that list, English reaches close to half a billion speakers worldwide. Now, ten years on the number is even greater. English is undoubtedly a large and influential language and the importance of knowing and being able to master English is well known. The syllabus for the English subject for upper secondary school states that "Knowledge of English increases the individual's opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in global studies and working life" (Engelska05, Gy2011:Skolverket).

However, what position should a teacher take towards the different varieties of English that one would find in the world, such as American, British English for example. What consequence will that choice have on the students? And what do students think about all this? American and British English have a big influence on Swedish media today. Many of our daily TV shows are in American or British English. The music played on the radio is to a large extent in English even if the artists themselves are Swedish.

Many students in Sweden will have had an English teacher with a British accent but nowhere in the curriculum will you find that this is a pronunciation goal. How do students react to this when a lot of the English influences come from American English?

## 2. Aim

My aim is to try to investigate which variety out of British and American English (or any other variety) students speak and why by doing a survey on students in an upper secondary school. What influences them the most? My focus will be on these two varieties as they are by far the two most influential in this part of the world. I will try to find out what attitudes the students have towards the two varieties and if and how this affects their choice of pronunciation model. In the discussion I will reflect on how, if at all, the teachers' choice of pronunciation affects the students' motivation for learning English. Will the students be less motivated if their main accent is not in focus?

The main points examined in the essay are:

- What varieties of English do the students in the survey use?
- What influences these students more, the English that they hear in school or the English that they encounter outside of school?
- What are their attitudes towards British and American English respectively?

By comparing my results to previous studies of the same kind carried out in Denmark 1999 and Norway 2010 I will see if there has been an attitude change over the last ten years towards the different varieties of English. I will also see if the same tendencies found in Denmark and Norway also can be applied to Sweden. Furthermore, since the study in Norway was done in a school known for studious and ambitious students I will be able to see if there are any differences to students with more average ambitions.

My hypothesis is that most young people today are more influenced by American media and culture but are still learning British English in school. This might affect the motivation to learn English as the variety they are being taught is not relevant to them.

### 3. Background

In this chapter I will give a background to the situation in which this survey was carries out. I will begin by describing the situation in Swedish schools and society in general. I will also give a short introduction to the differences between American and British English regarding pronunciation and social status. I will end this chapter with an overview of different learning theories.

#### 3.1 English in Swedish Schools

Since 2011 English is a compulsory subject from year one to the first year of upper secondary school. In upper secondary school the subject is divided into three modules, 5, 6 and 7 of which 5 is compulsory for all upper secondary students, 6 is compulsory in some programmes and 7 is an optional course at some schools. In the syllabus for upper secondary school, the aim for the learning of English is described as follows. The student should be given "the opportunity to develop the following

- 1) Understanding of spoken and written English, and also the ability to interpret content.
- 2) The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech and writing.
- 3) The ability to use different language strategies in different contexts.
- 4) The ability to adapt language to different purposes, recipients and situations.
- 5) The ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. "(Gy2011:Skolverket)

Nowhere in the syllabus is there a mention of a specific pronunciation model. One of the goals for "reception" in the syllabus states that the student should understand "spoken language, also with different social and dialect features" (Gy2011). Hedge notes that choosing a pronunciation model is often left to the teacher's discretion (Hedge 2000:269). Preisler writes about how British English has long been the norm for pronunciation in most EFL countries (English as a foreign language) in Europe and although American English has emerged in recent years the British English and RP in particular remains the predominant norm for pronunciation in most countries in Europe (Preisler 1999:259).

#### 3.2 English in Swedish Society

The importance of knowing English is easy to understand. Sweden is a highly developed country when it comes to internet infrastructure and "smartphone" usage. Around 90 per cent of people in the ages 16 to 74 had access to internet in their home in 2012 (www.scb.se). 86 per cent of the population watch TV every day and as the media society evolves, 57 per cent of people in the ages 15 to 24 own a smart phone in which they can access the internet at any given time (nordicom:2011). The consequence of this is that the world is getting smaller each year and English is often the only common language between people who do not share a native language. In a matter of seconds you can contact someone on the other side of the world. Much of what is shown on Swedish television is in English, whether it be American, British or any other kind of English. With 85 per cent of the population of the ages nine to seventy-nine watching TV every day (nordicom:2011) there is a huge input from the English language. Many households today have access to cable TV with in turn gives them access to foreign TV channels which might not have any content in Swedish. Radio, music and internet pod-casts are other ways of encountering the English language in everyday life. Much of the popular music today is sung in English, even if the artist may be Swedish. Many popular culture phenomena come from America and they bring with them new terms which are quickly assimilated into young peoples' vocabulary.

#### 3.3 British English and American English

There are different ways in which American and British English vary (shortened AmE and BrE respectively). There are vocabulary differences such as *candy* (*AmE*) versus *sweets* (*BrE*), *cellular phone* (*AmE*) versus *mobile phone* (*BrE*). Moreover, one can find differences in spelling, for example *color* (*AmE*) and *colour* (*BrE*). The most obvious difference is pronunciation. Where British English would cut the phoneme /r/ in end position, the /r/ is always pronounced in American English. Although you do find this rhoticity in other British dialects the non-rhotic variety is the most common one. The diphthongated pronunciation of *no* for example is another BrE trait that you will not find in AmE.

The two most common standardisations of British and American English are Received Pronunciation and General American respectively. Received Pronunciation, RP, was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is regarded by many linguists and laymen alike as a Standard English. In Britain the RP accent is a clear marker of upper class, although still regarded as "standard". However, Milroy (1999:174-175) states in an article that the term itself, Standard English, is a little bit more complex than that.

In the United States the dialect of the North West is considered to be the Standard and often called "network American" (this is the variety of American English I will be referring to when talking about General American (GA)). Most inhabitants of the area clam to have no dialect at all. The classification of a Standard English is clearly different in the two nations. In Britain, RP is still; despite its class connotations, regarded as standard, but it is in no way the kind of "mainstream" dialect that classifies the American equivalent (Milroy 1999:174-175).

## 3.4 Language learning as a social phenomenon

The pedagogical theory of constructivism as well as the theory of sociocultural learning emphasises that learning is a social phenomenon. The theory of constructivism emphasises the importance of viewing education and learning from a contextual perspective, including the environmental situation in which the students find themselves (Schunk 2012:254). One of the core ideas in the constructivist theory is that of situated learning. It focuses on how cognitive processes take place within certain situations, such as both physical and social. The sociocultural pedagogical theory is very similar to the one of constructivism. Schunk explains Vygotskys, the founder of the socio-cultural theory, ideas: the "sociocultural theory emphasises the social environment as a facilitator of development and learning. The social environment influences cognition through its tools- cultural objects, language, symbols, and social institutions" (2012:274). Another perspective which is relevant in this situation is that of sociolinguistics and social identity. Mitchell and Myles (Mitchell & Myles 2004) write that language learning can be motivated by the wish to belong to and establish a certain social identity, and this identity can be acquired through language (2004:246). The amount of effort put into learning is closely linked to the motivation to reach the social identity connected to the end goal (2004:253). Also, Schunk claims that if the students feel that what they are learning is useful they are more likely to succeed in that area (2012:298). Mitchell and Myles write that research on French students show that although they learn English in a school environment they pick up on social variation. The extent to which the learner is in contact

with the target language has much impact on the level of acquisition of social patterns in language (2004:234)

#### 4. Previous research

In this chapter I will present previous research related to essay. I will also present the two studies I will use to compare my results to.

#### 4.1 Hedge (2000)

Much research has been done on the topic of learning English as a second or a foreign language and there is a discussion on whether a native pronunciation model is a realistic goal for English learners or if a "standard English" should be preferred. Hedge notes that "Part of speaking the English language competently is the ability to produce its sounds in ways that are intelligible to other speaker" (2000:268) and this is where the issue of which variety to teach arises. The choice often lands on either American English or British English as these two varieties are the two most historically, socially and politically significant varieties of English. However, she notes how this choice may have deeper implications. All of the factors mentioned above, may have consequences on which variety a teacher may choose. As noted previously, it is most often up to the teachers discretion to choose which variety to base their teaching and pronunciation model (Hedge 2000:269). Hedge writes about two important aspects that one needs to take into consideration when teaching. The teacher must think about the social context in which the students are living and learning. If the language is present in society and the students are exposed to it on an everyday basis, the motivation for learning might already be there and the supply of authentic teaching material would be virtually endless. This is what Hedge refers to as the "social factor". She notes that this is important as how "language teaching sets out to involve learners in purposeful tasks which are embedded in meaningful contexts and which reflect and rehearse language as it is used authentically in the world outside the classroom". Furthermore, an "educational factor" is also mentioned. This refers not only to the role of the teacher and the resources in the school but also the teachers' ability to influence curriculum, use of materials and ways of assessing and grading, all of which are important in language teaching. (2000:25).

### 4.2 Preisler (1999)

Bent Preisler conducted a survey on Danes and how they think, feel and are influenced by different kinds of English in their everyday life. He discusses the fact that a lot of news is Anglo-American influenced and therefore many topics and phenomenon are spoken about in English. His figures show that 45 per cent of his respondents watch English films or TVshows with subtitles at least once a day. If this number includes films or TV-shows without subtitles is not clear. He adds that another 30 per cent watches subtitled English films or TVshow at least once a week. (1999:242) He also notes that many news-readers are not aware that they are code-switching (Preisler 1999:243). Even twelve years ago, Denmark, much like Sweden had a wide-spread use of personal computers, a usage that has only increased in the following years. With the computers comes software and games, of which much comes from the US or other English speaking countries. The English language infiltrates Danish (and Swedish) society in more ways for every year that passes and it is not just concrete things that influence us, as Preisler notes, Denmark and Sweden alike import cultural phenomenon from abroad and the USA is one of the bigger exporters (1999:244). In his survey, he asks the respondents whether they prefer BrE or AmE and asks them to list reasons for why. For instance, on the topic of which variety is more natural 65 per cent answered that the felt AmE was more natural but on the topic of which accent is more cultivated 66 per cent preferred BrE. In his survey, Preisler finds that young people tend to lean towards American English as the preferred variety and older people lean towards British. Also he found that people with lower degrees of education tended to prefer American English. Most did so because it felt "more natural" and because British English is "stiff and informal". Most respondents were positive towards the British language but more in favour of Americans and American culture. Preisler deduces that this is due to the long standing position as teaching language that British English is preferred, but Americans and their culture are preferred as this is the bigger influence on Danes daily life (Preisler 1999:248-249). Furthermore, Preisler asks his respondents how they feel about American and British English in different situations. On the question whether they prefer BrE or AmE as the variety for teaching 39 per cent are in favour of AmE and 38 per cent in favour of BrE, 23 per cent answered either. He also asked if any of the respondents had had a teacher who spoke American English and had they had a teacher who did not accept American words or pronunciation. However, he did not see a correlation between this and the number of students who preferred American English (1999:250f)

Preisler discussed the terms "English from above" and "English from below". By the former he means English that you get from, for example school and other institutions that signal some form of superiority and preferred variety. By English from below he means language that comes from social communities and sub-cultures a variety of English that stands outside the norm (1999:259). The choice between BrE or AmE as standard English usually depends on the relationship the EFL country has with either of the two target varieties i.e historical, political or geographical relations. In the 80's most English acquisition came from learning the language in schools, representing "English from above" (1999:246), today, more than ten years later this is not the case in Denmark, nor in Sweden. Preisler notes that "this development has implications on motivation" (1999:246). He refers to a study from 1974 where it was stated that English acquisition is purely a case of practical need not because one would want to be a part of the culture or identify with a specific culture within the target language. Furthermore, he also notes as the internet is growing and giving everyone (particularly in Scandinavia with such a developed internet spread) access to the whole world, not just parts that are geographically close, students should be taught both BrE and AmE. Preisler also states that from a motivational point of view AmE should be focused on as well as BrE as young people often are more influenced by language "from below" (1999:264f).

## 4.3 Rindal (2010)

A survey with similar aims has also been conducted in Norway by Ulrikke Rindal. Rindal describes a situation which is similar to the one in both Denmark and Sweden with English being a compulsory subject in school. Like in Sweden, the school system has no set form for pronunciation. However, most teachers tend to have at British accent rather than American. She notes that at the teacher trainee program at the University of Oslo seven out of eight pronunciation groups are in BrE and only one in AmE. The situation outside of the schools is much like the situation previously described in Sweden and Denmark, many TV shows and films are in English as well as music. Rindal also notes that "American English is likely to be the most frequently heard variety through the media" (Rindal 2010:242). RP has traditionally been regarded as more prestigious than other varieties of English as it "has been associated with more competence and status" (2010:242). She goes on to write that, nor has it been very socially attractive although she notes that the same has been said for AmE. However, some might argue that a shift towards AmE being the dominant variety is taking place and that this

is due to the current "American global hegemony" (2010:242). Rindal describes how Swedish students might consider RP more prestigious regarding competence and status but lower on "solidarity and social attractiveness". She argues that the latter dimensions might be more important to students when it comes to motivation and that they might prefer AmE as pronunciation model, in this regard Rindal and Preisler have come to the same conclusion. Rindal's research is based on a production test where the students, in pairs, discussed different topics and were recorded, an attitude test where the students got to listen to spoken English and then filling out an evaluation form. Lastly, the students answered a survey and were interviewed. In the results, Rindal found that two thirds of the students used American pronunciation. On the question of what variety the students aimed at, eight were aiming for AmE and eleven aimed for BrE (2010:247). On the questions about the students' attitudes towards the two varieties, RP scored higher in the semantic fields of "status and competence" and also in "linguistic quality". However, in the field "social attractiveness" AmE scored higher (although the scores were close). In the discussion, Rindal writes that contrary to claims otherwise the Norwegian students still marked RP higher than AmE and the reason why being "status and competence". "British is more classy." And "American (...) is less formal" were some of the reasons given. (2010:249ff)

In conclusion, Rindal notes that BrE still has a higher status than AmE as academic language. She continues by stating that the "American cultural hegemony" still has an impact on the situation for the Norwegian English learner. The two varieties have higher status than the other in two different fields, BE for academic purposes and AmE for social situations. She writes that teachers need to be aware of such situations as most students, even though they aim for BrE, still use AmE pronunciation. And the attitudes toward the two varieties can have an impact on students' motivation for language learning (2010:255f).

#### 5. Method and Materials

The survey comprised eighteen questions with the aim of establishing what the respondents' attitudes towards different kinds of English pronunciation and experiences of their English education (see appendix).

The respondents were students from an upper secondary school in a suburb of a major city in the western parts of Sweden. The school is a municipal school with students from different social backgrounds. Out of the 64 answered and used surveys, 38 were answered by girls and 26 were answered by boys. The average age of the respondents was seventeen; this comprised 42.2% of the respondents. Other large categories were sixteen years of age which stood for 28.1% of the respondents. 21.8% were of the age of eighteen. Most of them started to learn English in school in the third grade (44.6%). The latest year in which English studies were started was year six. This gives all the students a minimum of four years of English studies with most of them having seven or more years of studies. The students are attending programmes such as social science, science, art and technical programmes. Furthermore, they are in different courses, English 5 to 7 as well as studying at different proficiency levels. The number of students who answered is 76.

The questions were in Swedish. The reason for this was the wish to get truthful answers. The respondents would not be confused by what was asked nor would they be constrained by their own ability to express themselves in English. The selection of questions was made to fit the aim of the essay. Some questions were taken from the survey that Preisler used in his research, so that a comparison between his and my results could be done.

As mentioned, the survey comprised eighteen questions, three background questions regarding gender, age and years of learning English in school (the results from these questions, 1-3, are shown in the section on method and material, 5.1). The survey was completely anonymous. There are six yes/no questions, of which one has a follow up question asking for a motivation. The survey also contains three descriptive questions, multiple choice questions and one asking the student to grade their perception of what influences their pronunciation most. Due to some surveys not being answered completely or answered in such a way that a comparison to the other surveys would not be possible, 12 surveys have been taken out of the end results. One of the questions concerns which variety of English the respondent uses and one is regarding if the respondent can tell the difference between British

and American English. I have chosen (partly due to time constraints) not to do an actual test to see whether this is true or not as my interest lies in the perception and attitudes the students, in the survey, themselves, have towards the two varieties.

My choice of method, I found to be the best way to gather the amount of information needed in the time given. Surveys can reach a bigger audience and takes less time than interviews for example. However, interviews would be a good complement to the study to further investigate how people think about their choice of pronunciation model. By using both multiple choice questions and open questions I was able to gather both quantitative and qualitative data which in my opinion gives the results a more stable ground. Concerning the validity of the survey, I believe a survey is a good way to investigate tendencies regarding specific areas and I believe that, my results gives the reader a good idea of how students in a upper secondary school in Sweden can think about different varieties of English.

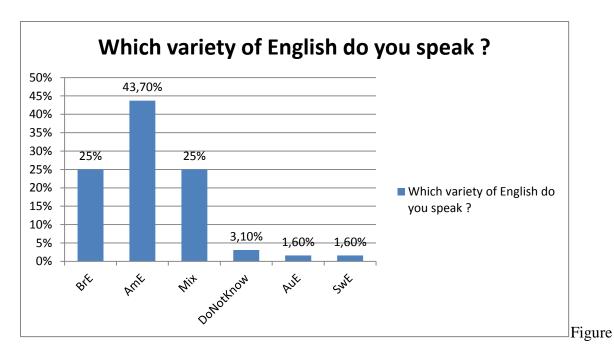
#### 6. Results

I will present the results grouped around four topics, choice of variety, English in school, attitudes towards British English and American English and different influences. Each question will be presented at the top and then further discussed in the following text. As the surveys were answered in Swedish, the quotes given are my translations.

## 6.1 Choice of variety, questions 4-8

- **4.** Can you tell the difference between American and British English?
- **5.** What variety of English do you speak? AmE, BrE or Other?
- **6.** Is it a conscious choice to speak that variety?
- **7.** Why do you think you speak that variety?
- **8.** What variety is your aim to speak?

On the question of "what variety of English do you speak?" 47.3 per cent answered American English. 25 per cent answered British English, 25 per cent also answered (in different ways) that they speak a mixture of both American and British English. In the figure below, a more detailed view is given. The following questions ask whether or not it was a conscious choice to speak this dialect. 67 per cent said it was not a conscious choice and 29.8 per cent said that it was.



#### 1. Which variety of English do you speak?

In question number seven, the respondents were asked to write why they think they speak that particular variety of English (or combination). Most students commented on the different channels of influences they meet. Of the students that answered that they speak American English (referred to as AmE) many of them listed films, TV-shows and online games as the reason why this is their chosen dialect. Other reasons were that it is easier to speak AmE rather than British English (referred to as BrE) and also that it is more common and "natural". Some students speak this variety simply because they think it is "nicer" and "prettier". For the students who stated that BrE is their spoken variety the most common explanation was that it is prettier than AmE. Compared to the answers of the AmE students, the influence of media was not as big a reason. Only two BrE students compared to fourteen AmE students gave this reason. Two students gave the reason of not liking the USA for choosing BrE.

In question number eight, the aim was to see whether the students have a pronunciation goal or not and if so what that is. Out of all the respondents 21.2 per cent of the students had AmE as their target dialect compared to 28.1 per cent who had put BrE as their target. 9.4 per cent wanted to speak a mix of both BrE and AmE. 12.5 % stated that it did not matter or that they had no such goal.

Table 1. Which variety of English is you aim to speak?

AmE	BrE	Both/mix	AusE	No goal/Don't	Do not	No	Other
				care	know	response	
21.2 %	28.1 %	9.4 %	1.6 %	12.5 %	9.4 %	3.1 %	14.7 %

### 6.2 English in School, questions 9-11

- **9.** Have you ever had a teacher who speaks American English?
- **10.** Have you ever had a teacher who did not accept your variety of English?
- **11.** Would you like your teacher to speak the same variety of English as you? Yes, No, doesn't matter. Why?

Questions nine to eleven the aim is to examine the respondents' experiences of English teaching and pronunciation in school. On the question if the respondents had ever had a teacher who spoke American English, 34.4% answered that they had, 48.4% said that they had not. 17.2% answered that they did not know if any of their teachers had spoken with an American dialect. In question number ten the respondents were asked to answer if they had ever had a teacher that had not accepted their dialect of English, only 7.8% of the students answered with a yes, 90.6 % said no and 1.6% did not know.

Question number eleven asks whether the students would like their teacher to speak the same variety of English as themselves and why they have answered the way they have. A fourth of the respondents would like the teacher to speak the same variety. The most common explanation was that it would be easier to learn that way as you hear your dialect more often. Some respondents also said that because the preferred one of the dialects they wanted their teacher to speak it, since they simply do not like the other variety. 70.3 per cent answered that it did not matter which variety the teachers speak. Some of the frequent reasons for this were that as long as the English was intelligible it did not matter. Other reasons given were that "English is English", "it is fun with variation", "it is fun with different dialects". The reasons for not wanting the teachers to speak the same variety of English as the students themselves were "I want to learn new things", "I hate my own English", "I want my teacher to speak American" (this particular student did not speak American English themselves).

#### 6.3 Attitudes towards AmE and BrE, questions 12-15

- **12.** How do you feel about British English? (Positive, Negative) Why?
- 13. How do you feel about American English? (Positive, Negative) Why?
- 14. Have you been to an English speaking country? Yes, which. No.
- **15.** If you had to live in an English speaking country, which would it be?

In questions twelve to fifteen the students are asked about their attitudes towards, and firsthand experience of English. Question number 12 asks if the respondent feel positive or negative about BrE. Out of all of the respondents 75% answered that they felt positive about BrE. 9.4 % of them felt negative and 14% circled both options signalling both or neither. Out of the 28 students who claimed to speak AmE 60.7% felt positive, 14.3 % answered negative and 25% of them answered both/neither. Out of the 16 students who spoke BrE, 15 felt positive about AmE. The numbers for those who spoke a combination of both AmE and BrE were 12 out of 16 that felt positive, 3 felt negative and one answered that they did not know. As well as asking the respondent to circle how they feel about the particular variety there is also a question asking them to comment on why. More than half of those who spoke AmE, who gave a comment, based their positive feelings on that the language is pretty, that they simply like it and one respondent thought it sounded "cool". The other main comment was that it did not really matter, "English is English" and "dialects do not matter to me". All BrE respondents (bar one who answered "do not know") felt positive about British English. The most common explanation was that they liked how it sounds, that it is "cosy" or "pleasant", that the vocabulary is better (than AmE). One student responded that he liked the UK better than the US. The comments from the respondents who speak a mix of the two dialects and felt positive were similar to the other positive comments, they like the way it sounds and how it feels to speak. One student believes that this is "the correct pronunciation". The comments from the respondents who felt negative about BrE felt that BrE was "ridiculous", "snobbish", "exaggerated" and "hard to speak". Of those respondents who had circled both options the most comments explained that they did not care or that they had neutral feelings towards the dialects.

Similarly to the previous question, question thirteen asks if the respondents feel positive or negative towards AmE. As with BrE, 75% had positive feelings towards this variety. However, 14% had negative feelings. 9.4% had circled both options and 1.6 % of the

respondents answered "do not know". Of the 28 AmE respondents all, except two, felt positive about AmE. Some of the explanations given were that it was easier to understand and easier to speak. Other reasons were it is "nicer", "more common", "more relaxed". Some of the students who had answered that they felt negative about BrE answered that AmE was "better", "easier to understand" and "more professional". The British English respondents, twelve out of sixteen felt positive about AmE with comments such as "it sounds modern", "it can be cool sometimes". Some respondents, although they circled the alternative for positive, commented that they "in all honesty did not really care that much". They were quite neutral in the matter. The students, who had negative feelings toward AmE, commented their answer with reasons such as "the pronunciation is sloppy", "it sounds lazy", "it is slang" and one student commented that he did not particularly like America or Americans. Of the sixteen respondents who spoke neither or both varieties, ten answered that they were positive towards AmE, four were neutral and two were negative against AmE. The positive comments were for instance "feels cooler" or "more common". One of the negative comments was that the respondent politically disliked the US.

Question number fourteen aimed to find out if the responding students had ever been to an English-speaking country. This was to find out if the students had had any "real" interaction with native speakers in English. The majority of the respondents had been to an English-speaking country with the UK having the most visits (39.1% of the respondents). 25% of the students had been to several different English-speaking countries. The second most frequently visited country was the US with 6.3% of the visits. Some of the students who had been to several countries had the UK and/or the US included. 28% had never been to an English-speaking country.

In question number fifteen, I wanted to find out which English-speaking country the students in the survey would choose to live in if they had to make such a choice. The highest scoring country was the United States with 37.5% of the answers. Second came the British Isles with 31.2%, in this category Scotland and Ireland was included (as specified by some respondents). The third most popular countries to live in were Australia and/or New Zeeland. This region accounted for 18.7% of the answers. The rest of the answers were some other combinations of countries such as US and/or Canada, UK and/or Australia.

#### 6.4 Influences, questions 16-18

- **16.** What do you think influences your pronunciation the most (grade from 1-6 where one is the biggest influence). Film/TV, Music, Friends, Celebrities, Adults, Teachers.
- **17.** How often do you watch British films or series? Every day, Every week, Every month More rarely.
- **18.** How often do you watch American films or series? Every day, Every week, Every month, More rarely.

In these last questions, the aim was to find out from where the surveyed students found their influence. Question sixteen asks the respondent to grade, from one to six, which of the following areas had the most influence on their English pronunciation. The different areas were film/tv, music, friends, celebrities, adults and teachers. Four surveys were not included in these results as the answers were not filled in completely and thus could not be compared with the others.

The number one influence listed by the respondents was *film/tv*. This category received 40 out of the sixty possible number ones. The rest of the grading was not as clear cut. However, *music* received 25 number two grades and thus is the second biggest influence for the students. Both *adults* and *celebrities* received bottom scores; they both got 19 number six grades on how much the responding students are influenced by them.

Table 2. Number of 1-6 grades received by each category.

	Film/TV	Music	Friends	Celebrities	Adults	Teachers
1	40	8	1	4	1	6
2	10	25	10	1	6	8
3	2	9	17	11	5	15
4	2	8	14	9	14	13
5	1	7	8	16	15	12
6	5	3	9	19	19	5

Question seventeen and eighteen ask the students how often they watch British and/or American TV-shows and films. The options for grading were *every day*, *every week*, *every month* or *more rarely*. On the question about the frequency of viewing British films or series, 4.7 % answered every day. The option with the highest number of respondents were more seldom than every month, 34.3 % chose this option. 32.8 % of the respondents watched British films or series every month. On the question of viewing frequency of American films or series, 31.2 % answered every day. The option of every week received more than half of the respondents' answers, 51.6%. None of the respondents watched American films or series more seldom than every month.

Table 3. How often do you watch British and American films or series?

	Every day	Every week	<b>Every month</b>	More rarely	Do not know
AmE	4.7	26.6	32.8	34.3	1.6
BrE	31.2	51.6	15.6	0	1.6

#### 6.5 Summary

To sum up the results, most of the students in the survey preferred and spoke American English, although equally large parts spoke either a mix of both American and British English and the other part just British English. The majority of the students had made no conscious

choice to speak the particular variety and most of them believed that outer influences such as films and TV had influenced them to speak that variety. On the question if they had any goal or aim variety of English, a slightly larger part answered that their goal was BrE than those who stated AmE as their goal. Almost half of the respondents had never had an English teacher with an American accent and about a third had. 90 per cent of the students had never had a teacher who did not accept their variety of English. Most of them did not mind if the teacher spoke a different variety than themselves. The by far biggest influence on the English was TV and films, closely followed by music. American TV series and films were more popular than British and the US was the most preferred country to live in, closely followed by the UK.

#### 7. Discussion

I will in this chapter compare my results to those of Preisler and Rindal, looking at similarities and differences. Furthermore, I will reflect on what pedagogical consequences these results might have for the students and their motivation.

## 7.1 Results, comparison

In 1999, Bent Preisler did a survey on a randomly selected group of Danish adults, regarding, among many things, their attitudes towards British and American English. He finds that 45 per cent of his respondent watch subtitled English films or TV-shows every week and another 30 per cent of the respondents watch unsubtitled films or TV-shows every week (1999:242). Surprisingly, the result from my survey shows a slightly lower number. Combining the percentage of respondents who watch American and British films or shows on a daily basis, only amounts to 18 per cent. On a weekly basis, however, this number is higher in my group of respondents with 39 per cent. The last eight years the daily internet usage in Swedish homes has increased significantly from 35 per cent using the internet every day in 2004 (mediebarometern 2004) to 74 per cent using it every day in 2011 (mediebarometern 2011). If this is a reason for my numbers being lower on the percentage of people watching English films or TV-shows daily is purely speculation; however, I do believe the different channels of media influence available today need to be taken into account. The channels of English influence today are somewhat different to 1999. Preisler too, discusses the changes in influences among English learners. In the 80's when it was claimed most English acquisition came from learning the language in school, more than ten years later he does not believe this to be the case. Referring to a 70's study where the conclusion was that English acquisition is purely a case of practical need not due a wish to belong to a culture or to identify with a specific culture within the target language. Preisler notes that "this development has implications on motivation" (1999:246). Although this might be true for the 'English from above' motivation of learning, it is certainly not true for most of the motivation representing 'English from below' (1999:246). Again this could also be said for Swedish society and English acquisition. School is no longer the sole influence for learning English and as a consequence of this the motives for learning are no longer the same.

Similarly to my survey, Preisler asks his respondents whether they can tell American and British English apart. His results show that 81 per cent of his respondents say they can, and 19 per cent says no (1999:248). My results show a similar trend, however with some differences. None of my respondents said they could not tell the varieties apart, although 4.7 per cent answered "sometimes". 95.3 per cent claimed to be able to tell the varieties apart. If this again is because of the wider range of media channels in which people today encounter different types of English is impossible to say, but I would like to suggest that it might.

Furthermore, Preisler asks about the respondents attitudes towards both Americans and Britons as well as towards American and British English. He sees a trend where the Danes are more inclined to like Americans and American society than Britons, but they seem to prefer British English rather than American. He believes that this is because of the long standing role of teaching variety, British English has in Denmark (1999:248). Of the respondents who claimed to be able to tell the difference between the two varieties, 50 per cent preferred American to British with 17 per cent undecided. The most common reasons for preferring British English were "it is more cultivated", "it represents traditional and spiritual values" and "because the other variety is ugly". The most common reasons for preferring American English were "this variety is more natural" and the other variety "is stiff and formal". Noted that the respondents in Preisler's survey did not write their own reasons, and the question itself is not identical to mine, the reasons for speaking American or British were quite similar. Particularly reasons for speaking American English were similar. Many students said American feels more natural.

Preisler tries to see if there is a correlation between if the respondents had had a teacher who spoke American or a teacher who did not accept American, and their reason for preferring that variety. He did not see any such connections (1999:251). Nor in my survey can one see such a correlation with 48.4 per cent not having had a teacher who spoke American and 43.7 per cent speaking American themselves. As 90.6 per cent of the respondents in my survey answered that they had not had a teacher who did not accept their dialect of English (in some cases American), I do not see a correlation there either. Another way of trying to establish reasons for the larger percentage preferring American English, Preisler asked the respondents about their travel activities to the US. As only three per cent had been to the USA he did not see a link there either. 15 (out of 64) respondents in my survey had been to the USA (among other English speaking countries for some of them) and 38 of them had been to the UK, so these

results would not explain the reason for why most of the students in my survey speak American.

In 2010, a survey was conducted in Norway by Ulrikke Rindal. She performed a survey on 23 students in the ages 17 to 18. She too wished to investigate speaker attitude, preference and choice of English pronunciation. In her oral test the students pronounced two thirds of the analysed words with American pronunciation rather than British. Regardless of their preference, American English was the predominating pronunciation model (2010:247). As I did not perform a test to see what variety of English the students in my survey actually spoke, it is impossible to make a comparison here, this is to be considered for further research. Rindal asked her participants what variety of English pronunciation model they were aiming at and eleven of them were aiming at speaking with a British pronunciation. Eight were aiming at American and four of the participants had no such pronunciation goal, or at least did not state one (2010:247). I came to the same conclusion with my results although there was a slightly bigger percentage of the respondents who were aiming for a British pronunciation. I also had many answers were the respondent said to have no pronunciation goal or had not given it any thought. Out of the 28 participants in my survey who claimed to speak American English only 12 had American as their pronunciation goal. And over all, more students stated British English as their pronunciation goal. In both Preisler's and Rindal's research British English score higher than American English in areas such as "status and competence" and "linguistic quality" (2010:250) whereas American scores higher in the area of "social attractiveness". In Rindal's survey, American scores higher in "popularity" and "likeability". British English is still regarded as the preferred teaching variety of English. It also scored higher in "aesthetic quality". (2010:249f) These results might explain the results of chosen pronunciation aim in both mine and Rindal's surveys. Even though American English is more popular and more "natural", since British English still is the more prestigious variety, it is the variety to aim for.

No result shows whether the pronunciation goal is aimed for school purposes or social. Rindal sees results that would indicate that students separate the two varieties for two different purposes and this might explain the reason for the 9.4 per cent (in my survey) who stated that they were aiming for both varieties. Rindal writes that it is hard to dismiss the influence English in media has on the pronunciation of the participants contrary to what many linguists have stated previously, American is the dominant variety in media in Norway. As the multimedia situation in Sweden is very much like the one in Norway; I agree with her. Since

most English teachers in both Sweden (only 34% of the students in my survey had had a teacher who spoke American English) and Norway seem to use an British accent the American influence is sure to come from some other part of the students' lives. The results for the question in my survey of what the respondents think influences them the most show clearly that TV and films have a larger influence than school teachers. However, some considerations must be made when comparing mine and Rindal's results and studies. The students in Rindal's study went to a prestigious school with a generally high level of ambition and many applicants. The students in my survey studied at different proficiency levels, in different programmes and they all had different levels of ambition. This school is by no means a prestigious school. This will have an affect on the results. Rindal sums up her article by writing about how it is important to acknowledge the attitudes towards different varieties of English in Norway, since there is no set pronunciation norm. The learner attitudes towards the English language could have implications on motivation. Although British English is the chosen goal for pronunciation, American English is far more common in actualised speech, this also needs to be considered by teachers and teacher educators. Media influence is a force to reckon with.

## 7.2 Pedagogical consequences

#### 7.2.1 Motivation - social vs. school influence

As previously mentioned, the Swedish syllabus for English in upper secondary school does not state which variety should be used as a pronunciation model. Nor does it state the need to explain similarities and differences between varieties. It simply states that the student needs to be aware of and understand different types of English and be able to use English in different situations (Skolverket: eng05, Gy2011). The absence of a pronunciation model makes it difficult for the teacher to know how to relate to the different varieties the students will encounter in their life. As noted by many researchers (Hedge, Preisler, and Rindal among others) there seems to be a connection between the students' social surroundings and their language acquisition. Although this might be hard to prove, it is impossible to consider the endless possibilities to encounter different types of spoken English in one's social life. The learning theory of constructivism states that all learning is situated within a social context for the learner (2012:274). With this view on learning, the outer influences of 'English from below' would inevitably have an effect on the student and their learning. Within the

sociocultural learning theories the environmental and social influences are also of great importance. The construction of identity is an important and big part of young people's lives, social status is what you are judged by. Rindal sees in her research that the students judge other students by what accent of English they are using, that the different accents have different types of status (2010:255).

Hedge writes about the importance of authentic learning materials (2000:25). If one views learning as a social phenomenon, one needs also to reflect on the relevance of the teaching materials. As previously mentioned, if the students are exposed to the target language (in any shape or form) in their private life, the relevance of learning would already be apparent and the motivation could already be present. By using authentic material that represents something real, and relevant to the student motivation could be increased. 'English from above' (represented by British English, as this is the more common variety the students teachers have had) might be hindrance for learning rather than an aid, by incorporating 'English from below' (represented by American English as this variety stands for a cultural influence present in the students' lives) one would meet the students where they are. It is clear that from the results in my survey, the students are very much influenced by other factors than just school and teachers. Although, they still pose a fairly big influence, TV, films and music is a much bigger one.

As a teacher one would need to be more open to different varieties of English regardless of which variety oneself speaks. By discussing differences, similarities and variations, the students would feel more engaged. As Preisler puts it, even if you might not be able to help practically, you should be able to give theoretical guidelines for learning (1999:256).

#### 7.2.2 Motivation – teacher influence

One of my hypotheses was that students might be less motivated if their teacher speaks a different dialect than their own or their goal dialect. However, there is nothing in my survey that confirms this theory. Most students did not care whether their teacher had the same dialect as themselves. The students showed an awareness of and openness to different varieties that was surprising. Many of the students wanted to learn both American and British English so a teacher who had a different variety than themselves would only be a positive

thing. Many of the students also stressed the importance of intelligibility. The teacher's chosen variety was of less importance compared to being able to understand.

#### 8. Conclusion

So what has come from this survey? Most of the students claim to speak American English but many students did not identify with either of the main varieties and claimed to speak a mixture of both American and British English. The large number of American speaking students was not a surprise but quite what was expected. What was unexpected was that although most of the students spoke American English, the main target pronunciation model was

British English. A possible explanation for this could be that British English still has a more prestigious status as 'English from above' than American English. Despite the influence of American culture on society. However, many students said they want to learn both varieties, if this is to be able to use them in different situations such as formal and informal will be left unsaid. Furthermore, more respondents feel negative about British English than American but the same percentage feel positive about both varieties. An expected result was that 90 per cent of the students in the survey had never had a teacher who spoke American English, however, contrary to my believes was that they did not mind even if their own dialect was American. It seems to me that British English still enjoys a strong place in the choice of English variety. This was surprising when the results of the question of how often you watch American and British TV and films, respectively, showed a clear favouritism towards American media. This might also be explained by the still strong influence from 'English from above'. I did not take into account other mediums in which one could encounter spoken English such as youtube, internet pod-casts. Had I done this the results might have been even more clearly as to where the majority of the English language influence comes from. It is also clear that, as a teacher one needs to be more open towards different varieties of English and also make it a bigger part of the teaching structure and not assume that all students are aware of differences and cultural phenomena that come with different kinds of English.

Areas that would need to be further researched to get more conclusive results are, what accent the students use in actualised speech, also a more thorough questioning regarding how they are influenced, and what they base their attitudes on.

#### References

Bex, Tony and Watts Richard J (editors). 1999. Standard English, the Widening Debate.

Londan: Routledge

Hedge, Tricia. 2000. *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford university press

Milroy, Lesley. 1999. Standard English and language ideology in Britain and the United States. In Standard English, the Widening Debate. Edited by Bex T, Watts R J. London: Routledge

Mitchell, Rosamond & Myles, Florence *Second Language Learning Theories* (second edition).. (1998) 2004. Oxford: Oxford university press.

Preisler, Bent. Function and forms of English in a European EFL country. In Standard English, the Widening Debate. Edited by Bex T, Watts R J. London: Routledge

Rindal, Ulrikke. 2010. Constructing identity with L2: Pronunciation and Attitudes among Norwegian learners of English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14/2 2010 240-261

Schunk, Dale H. 2012. *Learning Theories. An educational perspective* (Sixth ed). Boston: Pearson Education

SCB, internet access in the home 2012 http://www.scb.se/Pages/TableAndChart 281488.aspx

Nordicom. Mediebarometern 2004

http://www.nordicom.gu.se/?portal=mr&main=info\_publ2.php&ex=178

Nordicom. Internetbarometern 2011

http://www.nordicom.gu.se/?portal=publ&main=info\_publ2.php&ex=363&me=10

Skolverket. Upper Secondary School. Curriculum 2011 (GY2011)

http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publicerat/visa-enskild

Fwpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FRecord%3Fk%3D2801

Skolverket. Syllabus Englska05 (GY2011)

 $\underline{http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly\_fs/1.174543!/Menu/article/attachment/English\%20120912}.\underline{pdf}$ 

## Appendix

## Questionnaire

## Elevenkät

Mitt namn är Carin Ledin och jag skriver en C-uppsats om vad skolelever tycker och tänker om olika varianter av engelska i och utanför skolan.

Ringa in det svar som stämmer in bäst på dig.

1.	Är du,	Tjej	Kille?					
2.	Hur gammal är du?							
3.	I vilken årskurs började du läsa engelska?							
4.	Kan du höra skillnad mellan brittisk och amerikansk engelska?							
		Ja	Nej					
5.	. Vilken typ av engelska tycker du att du talar?							
	Brittisk EN	Amerikansk EN	Annan					
6.	Är det ett medvete	t val att tala den dialekten?						
		Ja	Nej					
7	Varför tror du att d	lu talar den dialekten?						

8.	8. Vilken dialekt är ditt mål att tala?				
9.	Har du haft en lärare som talat a	merikansk en	gelska?		
	Ja	Nej	,	Vet ej	
10.	Har du någon gång haft en lärare	e som inte acc	epterar din eng	elskdialekt?	
	Ja		Nej		
11.	Skulle du vilja att din lärare tala	ade samma tyj	p av engelska so	om du?	
	Ja	Nej	\$	Spelar ingen	roll
	Vorför tvokor du cå?				
	Varför tycker du så?				
12	Vad kännar du för brittisk angal	cka?	Positivt		Nagativt
12.	Vad känner du för brittisk engel Varför?	ska:	FOSITIVE		Negativt
	varior.				
13.	Vad känner du för amerikansk e	ngelska?	Positivt	Negativt	
	Varför?				

14. Har du varit i ett engelskspråkigt land?

Ja, vilket?Nej	
15. Om du var tvungen att bo i ett engelskspråkigt land, vilket skulle det vara	<b>a</b> ?
16. Vad tror du influerar ditt engelska uttal mest? (Gradera 1-6 där 1 är det som påverkar dig mest) Film/TV Musik Vänner Kändisar Vuxna Lärare	
<ul><li>17. Hur ofta ser du på brittiska tv serier eller filmer?</li><li>Varje dagvarje vecka varje månad mer sällan</li></ul>	
18. Hur ofta ser du på amerikanska tv serier eller filmer  Varje dag varje vecka varje månad mer sällan	

Tack för din medverkan!