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ENGLISH

How Swedish Teachers Work with Different Varieties of English in Their Classrooms

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Title: English as an EFL - *A Study About How Swedish Teachers Work with Different Varieties of English in Their Classrooms*

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Abstract: British English and American English are frequently used in Swedish schools. Today, however, English is a global language, and several other English dialects and accents are to be found worldwide. Therefore, questions that come to mind are why solely American English or British English are practiced in Swedish schools? In the Swedish curriculum, Gy11, it is stated that students should be given the opportunity to be exposed to different varieties of spoken English in order to develop all-round communicative skills. The aim of this study is to examine if, and how, EFL teachers work with different varieties of English, apart from British English and American English, at an upper secondary level in Sweden. Results from a questionnaire show that teachers did work with different varieties of English in their classrooms. There are several approaches to be found regarding how this was done. However, Internet was an appreciated resource among the teachers, in order to practice different varieties of English. This study gives a broader view of the actual working with English varieties from nine teachers' points of view.

Keywords: Varieties of English, English Dialects, English Accents, American English, British English, Global Language, Curriculum, Lpf94, Gy11, National Test, Syllabus for English, Swedish Upper Secondary School, Teachers of EFL.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

English is spoken all over the globe. There is one model (see Figure 1 below) made by Braj B. Kachru which demonstrates the different relationships to the English language (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:4-5). The model is made in order to understand the use of the English language in different countries. Kachru “[...] distinguishes three concentric circles in the spread of English” (Kamwangamalu 2006:161). The first circle, *the inner circle*, represents those nation-states where English is spoken as a native language (ENL). In other words, English is the mother-tongue in the nation. This includes nations such as Great Britain and Canada. Secondly, *the outer circle* represents countries which use English as a second language (ESL). A country such as India uses English as an ESL, but it is not spoken as a mother-tongue; rather, it has an official status and is used within the country (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:5). Finally, *the expanding circle* represents those countries, such as Sweden and Norway, where English is used as a foreign language (EFL). In other words, English is used by people with native languages other than English.

English is used “[...] in a global sense for international communication between countries” (McKay 2002:12). This is why it is vital for Swedish students to understand English since it is used by many people who are taught English as an EFL. Further, she says that “[...] English is an international language and that teaching it as such entails unique language teaching goals and approaches” (McKay 2002:5).

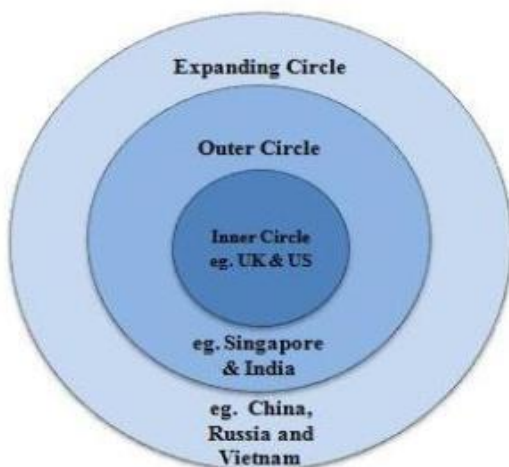


Figure 1: Kachru's circles of English (Crystal 1995:107)

The English language is the mother tongue of hundreds of millions of people, “[...] the main areas being the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa” (Johansson & Rönnerdal 2005b:12). A question that is brought to mind is why American English and British English are mainly used in Swedish schools, when there are other English varieties our students should be exposed to. It is not possible for teachers who teach English as a foreign language to teach Swedish students to speak all sorts of English varieties (e.g., Indian English). However, it should be acknowledged how necessary it is for Swedish students to be exposed to several varieties of English, apart from American English or British English, in order to be able to expand their understanding regarding the English language and its varieties. American English and British English have been the pronunciation models in school. One reason why these varieties are used is because they are easy to understand. These varieties are most often chosen by the media, etc., when featuring English, which makes these varieties familiar to us (Johansson & Rönnerdal 2005a:11). Teachers may be focusing on these common varieties, but they cannot neglect all other existing varieties of English since they are relevant in terms of exposing Swedish students to various varieties of the English language.

Trudgill & Hannah (2008:1) stress that Standard English “[...] is called ‘standard’ because it has undergone standardization, which means that it has been subjected to a process through which it has been selected, codified and stabilized, in a way that other varieties have not.” Since English has become an international language, teachers of English need to be aware of the English language and how the language is developing around the globe in order to adapt the English education for students who study English as an EFL. Trudgill & Hannah (2008:4) stress that “[t]here is no such thing as a Standard English accent. Standard English has nothing to do with accent, and in principle it can be spoken with any pronunciation.” However, “[a]s the world is in transition, so the English language is itself taking new forms” (Graddol 2000:2). The English language has changed noticeably over 1,500 years. English is developing in many parts of the world, “[...] which reflect local culture and languages, while diverging increasingly from the kind of English spoken in Britain or North America” (Graddol 2000:2).

According to the Swedish curriculum Gy11, applying to Swedish students at upper secondary school, several goals are set regarding different English dialects and varieties. The new curriculum says that the school is responsible for all individual students to “*acquire good*

knowledge in the courses they have studied, and can use this knowledge for further studies, and in societal life, working life and everyday life” (Skolverket4:8). Teachers do have a responsibility to support students in their communicative development.

The subject of English should enable students to develop their understanding of spoken English and the ability to interpret the content. Students should also be taught how to “[...] *adapt language to different purposes, recipients and situations*” (Skolverket6:2). The subject of English is to help “[...] *students to develop knowledge of language and the surrounding world so that they have the ability, desire and confidence to use English in different situations and for different purposes*” (Skolverket6:1). These goals demonstrate how vital it is to expose the students to different varieties of English in order to reach these goals.

1.2 Aim and scope

This study examines whether if, and how, teachers work with different English varieties and dialects in the classroom. The questions are:

- Do they work with more varieties than British English and American English?
- If they do, how is this done?

It is vital for Swedish students to understand different English dialects since the new syllabus states that every student should be capable of understanding spoken English (Skolverket6:1). The result might show that the teachers mainly work with British English and American English in their classrooms. I also believe that teachers mostly work with different varieties before the National Test in order to prepare their students for the listening comprehension. This is a small scale study due to the amount of time that was given in order to complete it.

1.3 Material and method

A questionnaire was formed in order to examine whether the teachers work with different English dialects and varieties in the classroom. The questionnaire was made to collect data needed to examine the aims of this study, and it was an appropriate method due to the limited time schedule. Information is gathered “[...] in a short time with little cost” (McKay

2006:35). The Questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1. A questionnaire can provide unreliable information for the research, and it may also result in poor and superficial responses (McKay 2006:36), which is not beneficial for research. However, in order to achieve maximum reliability, a pilot study was carried out with an English language teacher who teaches in a western Swedish city unrelated to the city of this study. The teacher had no connection to the school where the proper survey was done. After the pilot study was completed, the questionnaire was discussed to evaluate how the questions were interpreted by the teacher.

Several pilot studies could have been implemented, but unfortunately there was not enough time. Limitations when using a questionnaire may affect the quality of the survey. I am aware that the participants may have misinterpreted the questions, or I may have misread the responses. However, questionnaires were used since it was beneficial for this study in order to attain results in a short period of time. Open-ended questions were used where the teachers could explain and comment on how they work with different varieties of English and clear answers were received from the questionnaire. The result refers solely to the respondents who participated in the survey, and responses may differ if the survey is repeated with a different group of teachers.

The questions present different themes in the questionnaire. One question addresses the new syllabus, regarding English varieties and another question concerns if there is enough time for teachers to practice English dialects in the classroom. Two questions deal with which English variety the teachers speak, and another two questions if, and how, they work with English varieties. There are two questions regarding the listening comprehension for the Swedish National Test, and the final question is about whether the teachers use textbooks in their classrooms. The last question was posed in order to examine if textbooks practice English varieties. It also involves a subject ripe for further research. *Factual questions* are used to explore more about the teachers' background, such as age and gender. In addition, *behavioural questions* are used to investigate how the teachers work with English dialects and varieties. Finally, as mentioned, *open-ended questions* are used in order to let the teachers develop their answers.

Validity concerns how reliable the survey, as a method, is to collect the answers I intended to investigate. The questionnaire is used to elicit answers about teachers' working methods regarding English varieties where the target population is teachers who have English as one of

their subjects in upper secondary school. Respondents were chosen from my practice school, and they were selected through the snowball effect. The so-called snowball effect “[...] occurs when researchers begin with one person of interest and ask that person to refer others from the population or who share the characteristics to be studied to the researcher” (Abbott 2013:124).

Ten teachers who have English as one of their subjects in upper secondary school were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Nine teachers answered the questionnaire, which means that there was one teacher who did not complete the questionnaire. Five females and four males, between the ages of 25 and 65+, make up the group of respondents. The questionnaires were handed out personally and collected two days later at the school, which is located in the west of Sweden. The respondents were prepared for the fact that questionnaires would be handed out and what kind of topic it would concern. The respondents were anonymous. It took the teachers approximately 10 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. All questions were answered by the respondents. This study is primarily qualitative since the result is interpreted and discussed (McKay 2006:7).

The questionnaire to the teachers had reasonable distribution regarding the following categories: gender, age and how long the informants had been working as teachers. The distribution is relatively wide regarding the age range of the participants. In addition, the distribution regarding how long they have been working as teachers is also fairly wide with a span from 2 years to 33 years.

The diagram below presents the distribution of gender and age:

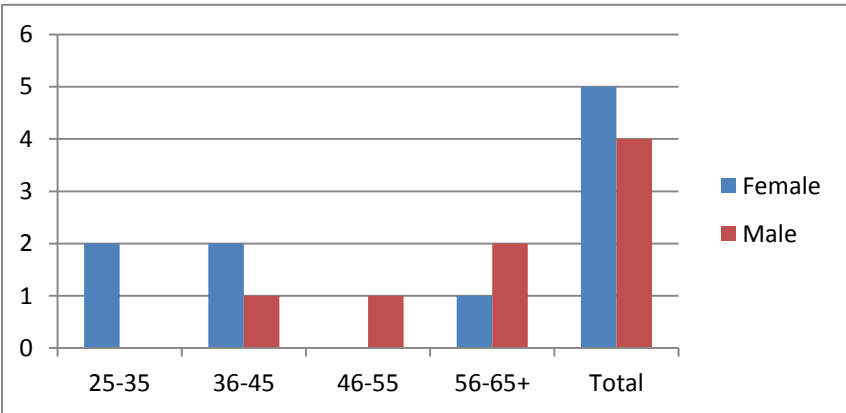


Figure 2: Distribution of gender and age.

1.4 Plan of study

The first chapter contains the background regarding the subject of the study. The aim and scope of the study are also included to give a brief explanation of what the study is about. The material and method are also described, in order to illustrate the procedure regarding the choice of material and the selection of participants in the study. In addition, the content of the questionnaire is presented. Previous research is presented in the second chapter where similar degree projects are introduced regarding English varieties in Swedish schools. The following chapter contains the main section of the study, where a short overview of various English varieties, dialects and accents are presented. Further, British English and American English are described as well as English as a global language. Short general descriptions of other varieties of English are also made in this chapter. The main section ends with a comparison of the National syllabuses for the subject of English and some information regarding the listening comprehension for the National Test. The fourth chapter presents the result from the questionnaires, which are clarified and discussed. Finally, the summary and the conclusion of this study are presented in the last chapter.

2. Previous Research

English, as an international language, is used by people of different nations in order to communicate (McKay 2002:11). “Most people who want to learn it do so because they need it to function in the world at large” (Svartvik & Leech 2006:2). Tricia Hedge (Hedge 2000:235) claims that in order to be able to respond to a speaker, we need to interpret and evaluate that speaker’s purpose. However, if the receiver does not understand or cannot interpret what the speaker wishes to express, how will the receiver manage to handle the situation? She (Hedge 2000:240) also presents a comparison between a recording of natural conversation among native speakers and a recording made for English language learners. Some differences were observed. A natural conversation was presented as a recording which had a variation in the speed of the spoken language and it delivered different varieties of accents. The majority of sentences were complex and had a natural intonation, whilst the recording for English language learners was presented at a slow pace with little variation, where explicit, articulated pronunciation and exaggerated intonation patterns were used.

Previous research shows that EFL students need to be given the opportunity to practice different varieties of English in order to manage the language outside the classroom (Hedge 2000:243). In other words, Swedish students need to be exposed to several varieties of English than British English and American English since it may be an issue for EFL students to understand other varieties of spoken English. Hedge presents relevant perspectives of teaching English as an EFL. However, Hedge's statements cannot be generalised for the Swedish school system. Her book is not exclusively based on the teaching of English in Sweden. Ulrika Tornberg (Tornberg 2009:53) argues that the concept of "communicative competence" has a major influence on language teaching not only in Sweden, but also internationally. The receptive skills are based on the different structures of sounds and interpretation of intonation, which is a process of encoding.

There are several studies about attitudes towards different varieties of English that are used in Swedish schools. Marie Söderlund and Marco Modiano (2002) write about whether American English, British English or Mid-Atlantic English was used in a Swedish Upper Secondary School. Another degree project was performed by Kaliopi Tioukalias (2010) focusing on English teachers and their "attitudes towards Standard English and General American". English teachers' acceptance regarding other varieties of English, apart from Standard English and General American, was also presented in the degree project. Another study focused on pupils in the 9th grade and their ability to understand different varieties of English (Enarsson 2011). There have been several articles and books written about English varieties. In contrast, studies regarding whether if, and how, Swedish teachers of English work with dialects are, to my knowledge, not to be found.

3. Varieties of English

3.1 A review of accents and dialects

Various English varieties are spoken worldwide. A *variety* can be used "[...] to mean a language, a dialect, an idiolect or an accent; it is a term which encompasses all of these" (Bolton 2006:290). A *variety of English* refers to the English language and its specific dialect, accent, style or register, in which the various varieties are seen as individual entities of the English language (Bolton 2006:290). The term 'dialect' refers to English varieties that are

distinguished from each other because of the differences in terms of grammar and vocabulary, whereas ‘accent’ refers to their pronunciation (Hughes & Trudgill 1996:3).

Learners of English might discover how limited they actually are in terms of understanding English when visiting the British Isles (Hughes & Trudgill 1996:1). One factor may be that native speakers of English speak differently from the English variety EFL learners have been taught in school (ibid.). There are many regional dialects in Britain and Standard English differs in various ways, regarding both grammatical and vocabulary distinctions.

Nevertheless, Swedish students, and other EFL learners, need an awareness of English varieties and the differences between them.

The recurring terms used in this study need to be clarified in order to understand the discussed varieties throughout the study.

- *Standard English* refers to a certain variety of English where it is accepted as a standard variety. Standard English concerns vocabulary, spelling and grammar. To clarify Standard English further, General American is mainly associated with Standard English since it is a major accent of the English variety used in the United States.
- *British English* refers to the English variety which is used in Great Britain.
- *American English* refers to the English variety which is used in the United States.
- *General American* refers to the standard accent used in the United States.
- *RP* (Received Pronunciation) is a standard accent connected to Great Britain. RP deals with the pronunciation only. RP will primarily be used as a reference accent when comparing other varieties.

3.2 British English and American English – the traditional varieties

British English and Standard American English are the most commonly taught varieties among EFL learners. British English is the variety used in Great Britain. A well-known accent in Great Britain is Received Pronunciation (RP). RP “[...] has been used as a model since [...] it has been socially accepted” (Johansson & Rönnerdal 2005b:12). It is mentioned that the accent is used in public schools and the BBC, “[h]ence BBC English is often used as a

popular label for RP” (ibid.). However, the English variety used in Great Britain varies immensely compared to other countries where the English language is spoken.

General American is used to describe all American accents “which do not have marked regional north-eastern or southern characteristics” (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:48). General American varies less regarding pronunciation, and “[...] there is no single American standard comparable with RP” (Johansson & Rönnerdal 2005a:122). In the world today, the United States has become a powerful country. In addition, American English influences are imported worldwide and frequently spread through films, radio and television (Johansson & Rönnerdal 2005a:11).

3.3 English as a Global language

A frequently heard statement is that “English is a global language”. You usually come into contact with the English language through television, advertisement and travelling. If you have travelled to a foreign country, there is a high probability that they will understand English (Crystal 2003:3). But what does “a global language” mean? What is the importance of a global language? How does a language come to achieve global status?

For a language to achieve global status, it must be recognised by other countries around the world, apart from those who have English as a mother-tongue (Crystal 2003:3). Moreover, there are two main paths through which a language becomes global. Those countries that have English as a second language, where English has become the official language, employ English “[...] as a medium of communication in such domains as government, the law courts, the media, and the educational system” (Crystal 2003:3.). The English language can also be “[...] made a priority in a country’s foreign-language teaching” (such as Russia), without the official status (Crystal 2003:4).

There are more than seventy countries which have English “[...] as an official or semi-official language”, which automatically makes the status of the language fairly high (Johansson & Rönnerdal 2005a:11). English speaking countries (both official and semi-official) are spread all over the world, which means encountering the language at some time is probable. Moreover, the status of the language in these countries is higher than any other language. Crystal (2003:6) stresses “that about a quarter of the world’s population is already fluent or

competent in English, and this figure is steadily growing”. The English language is by far the fastest spreading language, where no other languages can keep up with the growth. In addition, English is also the main foreign language taught in over 100 countries. This leads not only to an increased number of teachers of English, but also to teaching material being easily accessible (Crystal 2003:5).

When a language becomes global, that transformation has much to do with the speakers of the language. No language can grow as an international language if there is no solid base. In other words, “[l]anguage exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands and eyes of its users. When they succeed, on the international stage, their language succeeds. When they fail, their language fails” (Crystal 2003:7). So why do we need a global language? People from different countries will use the English language as an important tool to communicate with each other and to establish new contacts around the world. A common language must be used in order to be capable of understanding one another. This is one consideration for why there is a need for a global language. A person who learns English as an EFL may be motivated to learn English since “[...] it will put you in touch with more people than any other language” (Crystal 2003:3).

3.4 Short presentation of other varieties of English

English varieties have spread all around the world and continue to develop. There are new varieties of English which are distinctive from the native form originating from Britain (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:8). One significant factor in the development of the English language is that it has changed through time (ibid.). There are several English speaking countries all over the globe which use their own variety of English, where Swedish students might be exposed to these varieties someday. ”We travel more than we used to do, and English is understood and spoken almost everywhere” (Johansson & Rönnerdal 2005b:11). Some of the main areas where English is spoken will now be presented, including some varieties that may be unfamiliar to many EFL learners. EFL learners “[...] must be familiar with, and practise listening to, other English accents” (Johansson & Rönnerdal 2005a:12). Swedish teachers of English must meet the needs of students in terms of how the English language is spoken around the world.

3.4.1 Mid-Atlantic English

“Quite often, teachers advise students to keep the two major varieties of the English language separate, that is to say, to speak and write either American English or British English” (Modiano 1996:5). However, an increasing number of native speakers are using a mix of features from both American English and British English (ibid.). It is common for “[l]inguistic innovations, such as new pronunciations, [...] to jump from one urban area to another, across rural areas and across national borders” (Graddol 2000:16). There is also a trend among second language speakers in Europe to speak this variety which includes both features of Standard American English and British English. The actual understanding of the differences between Standard American English and British English will help students to communicate more effectively.

3.4.2 Scottish English

There is one variation called Scottish Standard English, which is “[...] described as standard English with a Scottish flavour” (Svartvik & Leech 2006:142). Svartvik & Leech (2006:141) address the fact that Swedish and Danish are related but still considered to be separate languages. Even though Scotland is a part of Great Britain, foreigners may have some difficulties understanding this type of variety since the vowel sounds, grammar and vocabulary are different from Standard English (Svartvik & Leech 2006:141). Trudgill & Hannah (2008:102) stress “[...] that the biggest linguistic division of all in English-speaking world is between Scots, on one hand, and all the other varieties on the other”.

3.4.3 Welsh English

English is spoken by the majority of the people of Wales. The variety differs from Standard English since there is a different usage of grammatical constructions (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:36). The English variety is rather distinctive since grammatical constructions (for example, word-order) and vocabulary may differ (Svartvik & Leech 2006:135-136). The Welsh Standard English has a ‘sing-song’ intonation, where Svartvik & Leech (2006:136)

point out that “[...] the voice often rises from a stressed syllable to an unstressed syllable”.

3.4.4 Irish English

The official languages in the Republic of Ireland are Irish and English, although Irish is spoken by a minority. The Irish English dialect is rather different from others (Svartvik & Leech 2006:145). Grammatical constructions differ. One example is the frequent use of cleft constructions, with initials *it* (for example; “*It is looking for new jobs a lot of them are* ‘A lot of them are looking for new jobs’” (Svartvik & Leech 2006:148). The pronunciation pattern is also different with specific features to separate the Irish English dialect from others. One characteristic feature is also the “[r]etention of vowel distinctions before /r/” (King 2006:38). In addition, another characteristic feature of the accent is a rise of intonation at the end of a sentence. This may lead to confusion, where statements might sound like questions (Svartvik & Leech 2006:149).

3.4.5 Australian English

English is spoken in Australia by about 20 million native speakers. The variety is phonologically close to RP. However, from a phonetic perspective, some differences can be detected. A ‘mild’ Australian accent slightly differs from RP, while a ‘broader’ Australian accent differs extensively from RP (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:22). The vowels are one main matter that separates the varieties, since Australian speech has its characteristic sound in its vowels (ibid.). The Australian vocabulary is said to be rather informal and colloquial, where a characteristic of Australian English is to shorten words. *Arvo* for *afternoon* is an example of this characteristic feature of Australian English (Svartvik & Leech 2006:105).

3.4.6 New Zealand English

The distance between Australia and New Zealand is comparatively short, which means that “[...] there has been significant travel and migration between the two since colonization” (Kiesling 2006:74). This may be one important factor regarding the similarities of the English

varieties spoken in both countries. The English languages are very similar to one another in most linguistic aspects (Kiesling 2006:74). Many of the recognised features of Australian English can also be found in New Zealand English. The phonetic sounds are similar to Australian English, and it may be difficult to know the differences between the varieties (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:29). One characteristic that is found in both Australian and New Zealand English is declarative utterances which have a rising instead of a falling tone. That may be difficult for outsiders since statements might be interpreted as questions (Svartvik & Leech 2006:109).

3.4.7 South African English

English is spoken by almost three million people in South Africa (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:33). According to Kachru's model, "[...] it can be stated unequivocally that South Africa belongs simultaneously to two of the proposed three circles of English: the Inner Circle on the one hand, and the Outer Circle on the other" (Kamwangamalu 2006:162). The English language is used as both a native language and as a second language. The pronunciation is rather close to the RP accent. However, if a 'broad' South African accent is spoken, the two will differ considerably. South African English is often difficult to tell apart from Australian and New Zealand English because there are a lot of similarities between these varieties (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:21).

3.4.8 Indian English

English is an official language in India, where the language is used for educational purposes and widespread communication. There are some distinguishing characteristics in terms of the pronunciation regarding, for example, the reduced vowel system. Indian English has fewer peculiarities in the vowel sounds compared to the consonants. For example, /r/ usually becomes a flap or retroflex flap (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:133). Moreover, the reduced vowel system depends on the speaker's particular native language. Indian English is considered different from other varieties of English where stress, rhythm and intonation are distinctive. Indian English "[...] tends to be syllable-timed rather than stress-timed" (Trudgill & Hannah 2008:134). Due to these differences, Indian English may be difficult to understand by speakers of other English varieties.

3.5 Comparison of the syllabuses

The former Swedish National School curriculum Lpf94 (Skolverket2) was revised in 2011 to the new curriculum Gy11 (Skolverket5). What does the new syllabus for English say about practicing different varieties of English in comparison to the old syllabus? Are there any adjustments regarding the practice of different English varieties in schools? Both syllabuses mention that the skill of understanding English is essential. A vital aspect is to expose Swedish students to different English varieties since English is an international language with several varieties. The new curriculum (Skolverket4:8) presents a goal where the students are expected to use the knowledge “[...] *for further studies, and in societal life, working life and everyday life*”. The presented goal, in particular, is vital for the subject of English since it will give teachers of English the opportunity to motivate the students to develop greater knowledge of the English language. In addition, “[...] *knowledge of English can also provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contacts, and greater understanding of different ways of living*” (Skolverket6:1).

The new syllabus state that “[...] *students should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in functional and meaningful contexts, to develop all-round communicative skills*” (e.g., receptive skills, where one part is to understand spoken language) (Skolverket6:1). The new syllabus for English states that the students should be given the opportunity to develop their understanding of spoken English, “[...] *also with different social and dialect features*” (Skolverket6:3). The former syllabus states that the students should “*understand clear speech from different regions*” (My translation) (Skolverket3:1). The knowledge requirements regarding receptive skills in the former syllabus and the new syllabus do not significantly differ. To a large extent, the syllabuses for English include the same content, where some goals have been developed and some parts remain the same.

The current Swedish grading system is from A-F (A is the highest grade whereas F is the lowest grade, which stands for no pass). The former grading system included the grades: Godkänd (pass), Väl Godkänd (pass with distinction) and Mycket Väl Godkänd (pass with special distinction). There are some differences between the courses of English 5 (former English A) and English 6 (former English B). English 5 is the first level course during the first year of upper secondary school, while English 6 is the second level during the second year of upper secondary school.

The table below presents the former and current grading systems:

	Former grading system	Current grading system
Courses:	English A	English 5
	English B	English 6
Grades:	Pass with special distinction	A
		B
	Pass with distinction	C
		D
	Pass	E
	No pass	F

Table 3: A comparison of the former and current grading systems.

To attain “Pass” in English A (English 5), the students need to understand regional varieties of the English language spoken at a slow pace in everyday situations.

To attain “Grade E” in English 5, the new syllabus (Skolverket6:4) states that the students need to understand “the main content and basic details of English spoken at a varying speed”.

To manage “Pass” in English B (English 6), the student needs to understand spoken English, also with different dialects. Finally, to reach “Grade E” in English 6, the students need to “*understand the main content and basic details of English spoken at a relatively rapid pace*” (Skolverket6:8). It is necessary to understand different varieties in order to get a high grade.

3.6 Listening comprehension for the National Test

The Swedish National Test is a general test for all students at upper secondary school, which includes the subjects of Mathematics, Swedish and English. The subject of English focuses on four skills regarding writing, speaking, reading and listening (Skolverket *NAFS*). The listening comprehension, part of the National Test, is based on the English syllabus and the elements regarding receptive skills. As mentioned in the new syllabus, the teacher should bring up spoken language where dialects should be presented (Skolverket6:3). The subject of English should contribute to the student’s development of language awareness and how it can

be used for different purposes. There are always features of different accents and dialects from different parts of the world in the National Test.

The National Test has two important goals. Firstly, to support an equal and fair judgement of the grading system through this particular test. Secondly, it is made to collect material to answer whether the aims are reached, throughout the whole of Sweden. The National Test may also contribute to concretising the curriculum and syllabus (Skolverket *NAFS*). The aim of listening comprehension, where the receptive skills are practiced, is to cover the core content, which is: “[s]*poken language, also with different social and dialect features and texts that instruct, relate, summarise, explain, discuss, report and argue, also via film and other media.*” and “[c]*oherent spoken language and conversations of different kinds, such as interviews*” (Skolverket6:3).

Teachers acquire some information and instructions along with the test which clarify how the National Test is connected to the syllabus and criteria. This is the only information the teachers receive before the test. The listening comprehension part of the test is divided into several parts, where the student’s ability to understand spoken language, even with an accent or dialect, and the ability to interpret the core content are tested (Skolverket *NAFS*).

4. Result and discussion

In this chapter, I intend to present the result from the questionnaire by discussing each question separately.

4.1 Familiarity with the current syllabus

The first question was: *Do you know what the new syllabus says about teaching dialects/English varieties?* When analysing the questionnaire, the answers indicated that all of the teachers were aware of what the new syllabus says about teaching dialects and English varieties. According to the teachers, they all seem to have found the new curriculum comprehensible and clear. In other words, the teachers seem to be aware of the importance of practicing different English varieties.

4.2 Time to practice English dialects

The second question included in the questionnaire was: *Do you experience that there is enough time to practice English dialects, and how do you integrate the practice of English dialects in the classroom?* The answers indicate that those who thought there was enough time to practice English dialects in the classroom did integrate the practice of English dialects in a variety of ways. One approach was using the textbook. Another approach was to use different speeches (presentation of various subjects found on www.ted.com) for integrating the practice of different dialects in the classroom. Speaking exercises are used where the students listen to speakers from different regions and get the opportunity to discuss the differences. Another way of working was by listening to old National Tests. Internet sources and other kinds of media were also used in class as listening practice as well as a basis for discussions. One teacher explains that “English varieties are included in the classroom through projects dealing with English in the world”. Another teacher noted that American English is the most easily provided variety of English since American series commonly appear on Swedish television. Furthermore, American English is more frequently encountered in the media nowadays, and so students of EFL tend to be influenced by American English.

Two teachers stress that there is not enough time for practicing different varieties of English. One of them mentions that most students need to focus on other aspects, such as pronunciation. Another teacher mentions that “it’s difficult to say, there’s hardly “enough” time for anything. It also varies immensely depending on what group of students you’re dealing with”. Another teacher claims that the content of the courses “makes it hard to justify spending months on each variety. Once you start with one variety, you feel obligated to give the other varieties equal attention. I find this very challenging!” It can be seen as an issue for teachers of English as a foreign language, to know how to manage working with different English varieties. Teachers of English as a foreign language are not expected to teach students every English variety there is. However, they do have a responsibility to increase awareness among the students regarding other English varieties.

4.3 Varieties spoken by teachers

The third question was: *What English variety/varieties do you speak, and why do you speak this/these variety/varieties?* An interesting discovery is that the teachers' usage of English varieties did not differ significantly. Four teachers state that they speak American English. In addition, it seems as if American English is used more frequently in this particular school. Two teachers speak Mid-Atlantic English. One of them speaks this variety since s/he has been taught British English in school but constantly hears American English through different sources of media. In addition, since s/he is Swedish, the intonation is influenced by that and does not represent a 'clear' dialect.

Having drawn this conclusion, it may be possible that it is more common these days that Swedish students speak a variety of Mid-Atlantic English. Moreover, I suppose this variety is more accepted nowadays. It is also important for the students to be familiar with more than one variety of English, and I do believe that students frequently use a blend of American English and British English. It is essential to present the relationship between American English and British English to Swedish students because the varieties do impact each other. An issue regarding teaching English as a foreign language is how to show students the most characteristic features between the two varieties in order to make the students aware of the differences.

Three teachers speak British English since they have studied or lived in Great Britain. I assumed that British English would be the most popular variety among the teachers since it has been the preferred variety in the Swedish schools before. The old Swedish curriculum Lgy 70, which was valid between 1971 until 1994, mentions that RP was the accent to be taught in Swedish schools (Skolverket1:274). According to Lgy 70, students should not practice American English but solely be given an orientation regarding its pronunciation and intonation. However, it is clear that there are several different reasons why the teachers do speak a certain variety.

The pie chart below presents which variety the teachers speak:

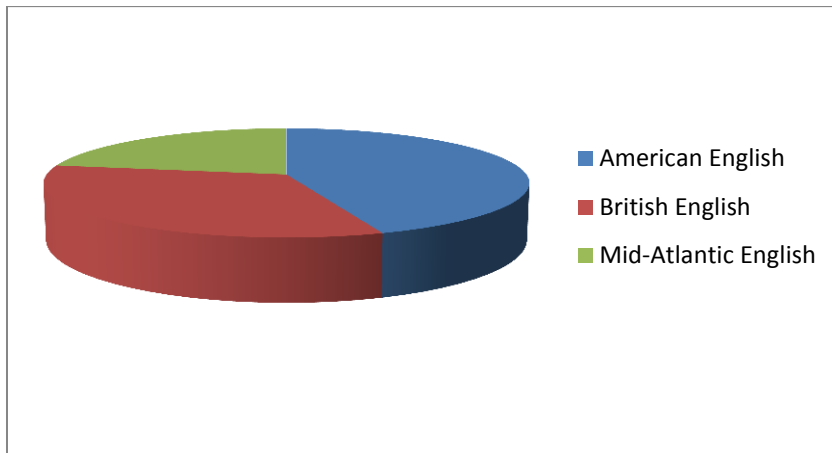


Figure 3: Distribution of which variety of English the teachers speak.

4.4 Working with English varieties

The fourth question was: *Do you work with different dialects/varieties, and how do you work with dialects/varieties in the classroom?* All teachers work with different dialects/English varieties in the classroom. Moreover, listening exercises are frequently used in order to practice different dialects. The students listen to speakers from different English speaking countries; however, they do not study the different varieties in detail. One teacher says that the students read texts with varying dialects through, for example, authors from different regions. Another teacher mentions that they work with dialects through projects dealing with English in the world. One teacher states “I ask students to pay attention to different characteristics of other people’s dialects. However, I usually stick to one dialect/accent myself and also encourage students to do the same. Still, it can be seen as a joke to imitate other varieties”. Even though the teacher claims that it can be seen as a joke to imitate other varieties, it is necessary for the teacher to practice different dialects whenever an opportunity is given. To clarify, teachers should not be expected to speak other varieties of English, or teach their students to speak other varieties, solely to make students aware of them. The answers indicated that some teachers practice dialects through speeches (speeches can be found on www.ted.com), old National Tests, TV programmes and films. All teachers work with different English varieties in the classroom; what differ mainly is the approach to dialects and what resources the teachers use.

4.5 Pronunciation tools used

The fifth question included was: *Do you use any pronunciation tools for the students? What kind of tools?* Eight teachers use some kind of pronunciation tool for the students. Two teachers indicate that general rules for listening and pronunciation are practiced. Also, dictionaries and www.ord.se are used if the students know phonetic transcriptions. The webpage gives the user access to several styles of English; old language, slang and also to read and listen to the pronunciation of any English word. However, one teacher mentions that the main pronunciations that are practiced are American English and British English and the differences between them. Another teacher has his/her own style, regarding pronunciation, where s/he breaks down words into syllables to demonstrate the different pronunciations of words in different dialects. Phonetic transcriptions are also used. A good resource that is used is www.esl-lab.com since there are examples to follow which deal with pronunciation. The webpage is especially helpful for students who struggle when speaking English. The webpage helps to improve accent and rhythm, and there are several samples of dialogues to be found in English as well.

In addition, students use online dictionaries for specific pronunciation of some words. However, pronunciation tools are not used on a regular basis, and one of the teachers notes that s/he does not use any pronunciation tools since “the students’ pronunciation is usually quite good”. Some of the teachers use www.ted.com in order to listen to speakers who have different dialects from numerous English speaking countries. The webpage includes a lot of conversations, speakers and talks. Webpages such as www.bbc.com and www.cnn.com are also used since there are many regional newscasts which present different dialects. Both web pages provide access to several sections regarding pronunciation, such as watching TV and listening to the radio. Moreover, www.sli.se has a significant amount of media that can be used for listening comprehension. For example, the media presents different dialects within Britain. Finally, www.youtube.com is a video sharing webpage that is used by several of the teachers where many different English varieties can be found. The webpage is very useful and there is a lot of material, regarding English dialects, to be found. These answers indicate the different approaches of how the teachers work with English varieties. As discovered, there are several ways to be found for how teachers can work with dialects in the classroom.

4.6 Instructions for the National Test

The sixth question was: *What kind of instructions are you given about the listening comprehension for the National Test? Do you practice dialects with your students before the National Test?* According to the majority of teachers, they are given general instructions regarding the listening comprehension for the National Test. A general guide for teachers is provided along with the test. The instructions mainly deal with how the test as a whole should be executed, including a script and comments regarding the listening comprehension and how the English syllabus is connected to the National Test.

Responses to the question of whether the teachers practice dialects with their students before the National Test differ. Seven teachers practice dialects by using samples from the internet, films, listening comprehensions exercises, textbooks and speeches from www.ted.com. One of the teachers says that s/he practices dialects before the test, “but briefly since it’s hard to do the different dialects/varieties justice in only a couple of classes”. One teacher says that s/he solely mentions the fact that there will be various dialects on the test. Two teachers do not practice dialects before the National Test. One of the teachers states that s/he does not practice dialects with a particular focus on the test since it is a recurring theme in the course as a whole. The other teacher mentions that “there’s so much else to practice and focus on. I have not experienced that the dialects/varieties are a problem for the students”. As discovered, there is a difference between whether teachers practice dialects with their students before the National Test, or if they do not focus much on the National Test since working with dialects is repeated throughout the course.

4.7 Textbooks in teaching

The final question was: *Do you use textbooks? How are dialects presented in the textbook?* The answers revealed a pattern of results where the majority of teachers do not use textbooks in their teaching. However, there are three teachers who do. The textbook ‘Short Cuts’, both 1 + 2, is used by two of the teachers, while ‘Ready for C.A.E’ is used by another teacher. However, ‘Ready for C.A.E’ does not present any dialects at all. ‘Short Cuts’ presents different dialects through listening comprehension exercises and through texts with different origins (e.g., one chapter is called “Big Cities” with texts from London, Mumbai, Sydney, etc.). Nevertheless, one teacher says that it varies greatly if s/he uses textbooks in class. It

depends on the group. Some groups want a textbook in class and some groups need a textbook while other groups do not.

5. Summary and Conclusion

Since English is an international language, numerous distinct varieties of English are to be found worldwide. For one thing, Swedish students may be exposed to some English varieties more than others. British English and American English were frequently used in the Swedish school where the study was conducted. However, the importance of being able to understand other English varieties, apart from British English and Standard American English, has increased since English is a global language. This is a reason why Swedish students should be introduced to further varieties of English since other dialects and accents are only briefly mentioned in the classrooms. It is worth recalling that the teaching of English should expose students to different varieties in order to not only make students aware of, but also more familiar with other varieties. It is necessary to practice different varieties of English since there are some distinctive characteristics to be found, such as: pronunciation, vocabulary and spelling. Since the characteristics of the English varieties differ, it may otherwise lead to confusion. Moreover, the current syllabus presents several goals for students at upper secondary school which mention that the skill of understanding is essential. The students should be given the opportunity to develop their understanding of spoken English, which includes dialects and different social features.

For this reason, this study is an attempt to examine if, or how, teachers work with different varieties in the classroom. In order to do this, a questionnaire, in which nine teachers participated, was used. The questionnaire included questions regarding the new syllabus, and what it says about teaching English varieties. There are questions as to whether the teachers experience that there is enough time to practice English varieties and also how the practice is integrated in the classroom. A question is also included regarding which English variety the teachers speak. Furthermore, one question deals with if the teachers practice dialects with their students before the National Test. The final questions deal with if the teachers use any pronunciations tools for the students and if textbooks are used in the classroom.

The results were analysed, and they showed that all the teachers practiced different varieties of English in the classroom. However, the results also demonstrate that there are different

ways to practice dialects. The approach that was used by most teachers and also the most significant way of working with English varieties was Internet sources and other kinds of media used for listening practice. In addition, it is mentioned that American English is the most easily provided variety since American English is frequently encountered in the media and on Swedish television. Also, Internet is constantly improving and is also a helpful tool since information regarding where teachers may find useful material when practicing different English varieties is frequently updated. Moreover, listening exercises, TV programmes and films are also used in order to practice English varieties. The results show that teachers find it challenging to include other varieties of English in the classroom since there is always a lack of time for working through all of the goals before the end of the school year. Moreover, there seems to be a difficulty to spend months on each variety and still give other varieties equal attention, apart from British English and Standard American English. All teachers are aware of what the new syllabus says regarding teaching English varieties. According to the results, the teachers seem to be aware of the importance of practicing different English varieties in the classroom.

The results demonstrate that the majority (four teachers) speak American English. The reason why is mostly because the teachers have lived or studied in the United States. However, it does not differ significantly since three teachers speak British English. The reason why the teachers speak British English is because they have lived or studied in Great Britain. In addition, two teachers speak Mid-Atlantic English. The results show that one teacher speaks Mid-Atlantic English since s/he has been taught British English in school but is exposed daily to American English. The results of my study also show that the majority practices dialects with their students before the National Test. It is also demonstrated that the majority uses pronunciation tools for their students. Most resources are to be found on the Internet and other sources of media. In general, teachers seem not to use textbooks; however, in some groups, it is necessary to use them since some groups need a textbook.

One significant conclusion is that using Internet sources as a tool when practicing English varieties seems to be a trend among teachers. Another conclusion is that American English seems to be the preferred variety among the teachers at this specific upper secondary school. I thought the result would show that British English was the most used variety since it has been the traditional variety in the old Swedish curriculum, Lgy 70. However, the results are not too

surprising since American English is a variety which is frequently encountered in different kinds of media nowadays.

When making this study, it became obvious that it is vital for teachers to expose their students to numerous varieties of English. It is not enough to expose them to British English and American English. English has become such an immense and important part of our world, and so many significant varieties of English exist in that world. This may lead to an extended awareness among the students regarding the English language and perhaps a way of developing their communicative skills. As presented, Internet has become an appreciated resource. What might be an interesting topic for further research is to analyse different Internet sources to see how English dialects are presented. To conclude this study, the results indicate that all of the teachers who were the subject of this study work with different English varieties. What differs primarily is what kinds of resources the teachers use.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Hello!

My name is Alexandra Nord. I am a teacher trainee, and I am studying at the University of Gothenburg. I am doing my degree project in English this semester and I am writing about how teachers work with English dialects and varieties in the classroom. I would appreciate it if you, as an English teacher, could answer these following questions. It would be very helpful for my essay. Your answers will be anonymous. Thank you very much!

Best Regards

Alexandra Nord

Please mark your choice:

1. Age: 25-35 36-45 46-55 56-65+

2. Gender: FEMALE MALE

3. How long have you been working as a teacher? _____

4. Do you know what the new syllabus says about teaching dialects/English varieties?

YES NO

5. Do you experience that there is enough time to practice English dialects in the classroom?

YES NO

5A: If yes, how do you integrate the practice of English dialects in the classroom?

5B. If no, why not?

6. What English variety/varieties do you speak? Please mark your choice/choices.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| American English | British English | Scottish English |
| Welsh English | Irish English | Mid-Atlantic English |
| South African English | New Zealand English | Australian English |

Other:

7. Why do you speak this/these variety/varieties of English?

8. Do you work with different dialects/varieties in the classroom?

YES NO

8A. If yes, how do you work with dialects/varieties in the classroom?

8B. If no, why not?

9. Do you use any pronunciation tools for the students?

YES NO

9A. If yes, what kind of tools?

9B. If no, why not?

10. Are you given any instructions about the listening comprehension for the National Test?

YES NO

10A. If yes, what kind of instructions?

11. Do you practice dialects with your students before the National Test?

YES NO

11A. If yes, how?

11B. If no, why not?

12. Do you use textbooks/books in your English lessons?

YES NO

12A. If yes, what textbooks/books do you use?

12B. If yes, how are dialects presented in the textbooks/books?

Thank you very much!

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