Awareness of Grammatical Differences between British and American English among Young Swedes

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ABSTRACT

Background and aim: According to the most recent curriculum for the Swedish upper secondary school\(^1\), the students should be able to differentiate between British and American English. Furthermore, they should be able to keep to one of the varieties, as this is a prerequisite of writing correct texts in English. In the present thesis, young Swedes’ awareness of grammatical differences between British and American standard English and which variety they use are investigated. The investigation is conducted by means of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed of three parts. The first part consisted of sentences written in English that the informants had to judge as written prevalingly in British or American English. In the second part, the informants had to translate sentences from Swedish to English, and then judge them as British or American. The third part of the questionnaire comprised questions concerned with language use and attitude, as well as questions on basic information such as the informants’ age, education and mother tongue.

Results and conclusions: Nine informants fulfilled the inclusion criteria. The informants’ judgments of the sentences in English suggest that they are not entirely able to differentiate between British and American English. Moreover, their translations of the Swedish sentences indicate that the informants mix British and American English. Furthermore, they are not aware of which variety they use and the majority does not know whether they prefer British or American English. In addition, the findings could support the emergence of Euro-English, a Mid-Atlantic variety.

\(^1\) Gymnasiet.
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1. Introduction

English is our time’s global language and the world’s most important *lingua franca* (Crystal 2003). To illustrate, 85 percent of international organisations and world institutions, such as the *United Nations* and the *World Health Organization*, use English as their working language. Moreover, the use of English is widespread in the financial sector as more and more countries are open to global flows of finance and are dependent on the US, economically and technologically. In addition, key financial institutions, such as the *World Bank*, have adopted English as an official language. Moreover, a great proportion of science is published in English. In fact, the majority of scientific journals, as well as books are published in English. Indeed, over 60 countries publish titles in English and many of the publications are exported all over the world (Graddol 1997:8-9).

In Sweden, it is mandatory for all pupils to study English at the compulsory school (Skolverket 1994a and b), many companies use English as their official language (Sveriges radio 2009). More and more courses at university are taught in English, and research is mainly published in English (Brock-Utne 2007:379).

Nevertheless, there are many varieties of English. The different varieties can be discussed with reference to three circles coined by Kachru in 1985 (cited in Svartvik 1998:16-17; Graddol 1997:10):

- **The Inner Circle** – This circle includes the countries where English is the first, and often only, language (L1). Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand belong to this circle.

- **The Outer Circle** – This circle comprises the territories where English is a second language (L2); for instance, many regions in Africa, Asia and the West Indies. In other words, regions that used to be members of the British Empire. Speakers in this circle might use a local variety of English, but can also be fluent in international varieties. In these regions, English is often required for further educations and government jobs.

- **The Expanding Circle** – This circle includes all regions where English is spoken as a foreign language (EFL); for example, Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden (Svartvik 1998:16-17; Graddol 1997:10).
This division of English is useful for understanding how English is used worldwide. However, it has its inherent disadvantages; for example, it puts the native speaking countries in the centre and thus makes these varieties the source of models of correctness. As a consequence, the classic division is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. In future, the L2 and EFL speakers will presumably outnumber the L1 speakers. Furthermore, there is an ongoing shift (figure 1) in the status of English in many parts of the world. That is, many L2 speakers are adopting English as the language of the home and the number of EFL speakers is expanding as the use of English in international communication is increasing (Graddol 1997:10-11). In fact, many second-language users are more fluent in some aspects of langue than quite a few of the L1 speakers and numerous EFL speakers know and use English better than L1 and L2 speakers. The shift towards second language competence is particularly true as regards EFL speakers in countries like Sweden (McArthur 2003:57-58).

Figure 1: Showing the three circles of English as overlapping makes it easier to see how the “centre of gravity” will shift towards L2 speakers (from White 1997).

1.1 Aim

The purpose of this bachelor’s thesis is to examine to what extent Swedes that have studied English in Swedish upper secondary school² are able to differentiate between grammatical features of the two prevailing standard varieties of English, that is British and American English. Moreover, it will be investigated whether the students are aware of the differences and are able to keep to one of the varieties, a prerequisite of writing correct texts in English.

² Gymnasiet.
2. Background

2.1 Early History of the English Language

The English language is one of the Germanic languages and belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. The original Indo-European tribe probably lived north of the Black Sea around 3000 BCE and eventually emigrated east to Persia and India, north to Russia and the Baltic countries, and west to Greece, Italy, Western Europe and the British Isles (King 2006:17-29). The Romans brought Latin to Britain in c. 55 BC. Prior to that, two branches of Celtic were spoken in the territory, that is Gaelic and Welsh (Graddol 1997:7).

2.1.1 Early Old English (c. 450-c.850)

The English language developed after the Germanic conquest of England (c. 449 AD), when the Romans left Britain (ibid:7). This marked the beginning of an Anglo-Saxon civilization in which Early Old English, a fusion of Germanic invader-languages, was spoken (Momma, 2008b:part V, section 1). Notwithstanding, Latin was still important because it was the language of the Church and many Latin words were introduced into Early Old English during this period. Furthermore, the first texts written in English appeared (Graddol 1997:7). However, Early Old English had little in common with the English of today grammatically, as it was very inflected and conjugated (Momma, 2008b:part V, section 1).

2.1.2 Later Old English (c.850-1100)

During this period, the language in Britain was subject to influences from other languages, particularly the Scandinavian languages that were brought to Britain by the Vikings (King 2006:17-29). Moreover, King Alfred had many Latin text translated into English during this period (Graddol 1997:7).

2.1.3 Middle English (c. 1100-1450)

The Norman Conquest (1066) brought French to Britain. As a result, French became the official language in the country and had a considerable impact on English spelling and vocabulary (ibid:7). The French dominance lasted approximately 400 years (Momma
Middle English was simpler and more equal to modern English in its grammatical features as many inflections were lost. (King 2006:17-29). In fact, grammatical functions were now expressed with word order (Graddol 1997:7).

2.1.4 Early Modern English (c. 1450-1750)

This period comprises the Renaissance, the Elizabethan and Shakespearean era. During this period, the European nation states took their modern form and the role of the Church and Latin started to decline. Moreover, scientists, like Isaac Newton, started to write about their discoveries in English rather than in Latin (ibid:7). In Early Modern English, all Indo-Germanic/Germanic complex morphology was gone. In addition, it was a diverse language and many regional varieties existed. There was not yet any defined standard language, so the usage varied greatly even among the upper class. Indeed, it was this diverse English that the British explorers brought to countries such as India, Australia, Hong Kong and America (Nevalainen 2008:part V, section 3). Furthermore, it was during this period that the teaching of English as a foreign language began, first in France and Holland (Graddol 1997:7).

2.2 British English

By 1750, English had become a “national” language in Britain. It was during this era that the first attempts to standardise the language were made. For instance, the first dictionaries and grammars were published (Johnson’s Dictionary 1755, the Oxford English Dictionary 1858-1928).

Britain had a considerable imperial power and therefore English was an important language. Furthermore, the industrial revolution, and the patent of the telegraph that made English the principal wire language, further augmented the importance of it. In addition, the colonialism made English the language of education in many countries globally. However, later the decolonisation diminished the importance of the British variety internationally (Paraphrased from Graddol 1997:7-8). British English is the basis for the Englishes spoken in England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Africa (Finegan 2004:366).

Today, about 56 million people speak English in Britain (Meredith 2000). British English has a standardized spelling, a standard grammar that is broadly accepted for writing, and a standard vocabulary that most people understand. The standard pronunciation
RP, or Received Pronunciation, is used primarily for comparative purposes in research and, to a certain extent, in teaching. In fact, only a small minority of the British population speaks RP in everyday life. On the other hand, there are a number of accents in Britain; the traditional English dialect areas are Lower North, Western Central, Eastern Central, Eastern, Western and South (ibid). In addition, there are varieties of Scottish and Welsh Englishes (Svartvik 1999:179-200).

2.3 American English

American English is a result of the expansion of the British Empire, just like other varieties such as the Englishes spoken in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. However, due to socio-political developments, American English is considered one of two reference varieties, together with British English (Schneider 2006:58-59).

The English language was brought to North America in the 17th century. The language used in the territory was a mixture of the different varieties used by the settlers from various regions in Britain (ibid:58-59). However, by the time of the end of the American Civil War in 1865, language norms independent of those in Great Britain had been established and American English was born (Wolfram 2008:part V, section 5). The American lexicographer, Noah Webster (1758-1843), contributed to the establishment of American English when he proposed a reform of the American spelling system to give written American English a distinguishable appearance (Nationalencyklopedin 2000). Graddol (1997) cites Webster (1789):

> The question now occurs; ought the American to retain these faults[,] which produce innumerable inconveniences in the acquisition of use of the language, or ought they at once to reform these abuses, and introduce order and regularity into the orthography of the American tongue? … a capital advantage of this reform … would be, that it would make a difference between the English orthography and the American … a national language is a band of national union … Let us seize the present moment, and establish a national language as well as a national government (Graddol 1997:63).

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3 A secondary reference is used as the original work is difficult to access.
Since the Second World War (or World War II as the Americans call it), the USA has been the most potent country internationally. Consequently, American English is the variety that has predominated globally over the last forty years (McArthur 2003:55-56; Anchimbe 2006:4). American English is the basis for the Englishes spoken in the USA and in Canada (Finegan 2004:366).

Today, American English is spoken by about 221 million people (Meredith 2000). Traditionally, the American dialects are divided into three main regions, namely North, Midland and South, with several sub-regions (Schneider 2006:60). In fact, there are fewer differences between the American dialects than the British ones. Moreover, there are fewer accents and dialects in the USA than in Britain and non-native speakers of English sometimes find them easier to understand (Modiano 1996b:210). In addition to the geographical dialects, there are a few distinct sociolects in the USA (Trudgill 2000:23); for instance, African-American English and Chicano English (Finegan 2004:385-389).

2.4 Euro-English

In recent years, many researchers have focused on the use of English as a *lingua franca* in mainland Europe and the variety *Euro-English* has been coined (Modiano 2006:223).

*Euro-English* is a Mid-Atlantic variety, that is, a variety that is not overtly American nor British (Modiano 1996b:209). In other words, it is a neutral form without any geographical association (ibid:211). Mid-Atlantic usage of English encompasses a pronunciation that has no strong traces of distinct regional varieties. In other words, it encompasses a pronunciation with traces of Standard American, unmarked Received Pronunciation and the speaker’s own mother tongue. Furthermore, it involves the usage of a vocabulary that most speakers of English in the world understand. Presently, this normally entails using American lexical items, as the USA’s global power (cf. 2.3) and the American film and music industries have introduced the American vocabulary to a wider global audience (ibid:213). However, all American vocabulary does not conform to the requirements of Mid-Atlantic English. For example, slang, technological jargon and off-colour language, vocabulary that is often used in the film and music industries, is not used in Euro-English as it can be misunderstood (Modiano 1996b:213).

The usage of a Mid-Atlantic variety makes it possible to avoid signalling the political or cultural label that might be associated with British and American English (ibid:210). Moreover, the non-native speakers do not have to try to join the native speaker
community. In other words, the inability to achieve a near-native proficiency does not have to be seen as a sign of inadequate training and education (Modiano 2003:36). In fact, most speakers of English on mainland Europe principally use English in contact with other non-native speakers of English, rather than with native speakers. In this scenario, to mimic a native variety of English has little purpose. Euro-English would make it possible for these speakers to express their own cultural and social identities when speaking English. (ibid:36).

Euro-English is an endonormative *lingua franca*, that is, it derives its norms from its own usage rather than from the native English of the UK or the USA (Jenkins et al. 2001:15). The norms derived from the speakers’ usage signify that expressions initially only understood by people who know the language of origin eventually become accepted among English speakers and undergo *nativization*. Finally, they are given communicative legitimacy and become part of the language used (Jenkins 2001:14). Swedish grammatical examples that could become part of Euro-English are literal translations of Swedish structures. For instance, Swedish uses the expression “we were” when referring to the number of people present at an event in cases when Standard English would utilise “there were”. Thus, a Swede would say: *We were* five people at the party”, instead of “*There were* five people at the party”. Even though a native speaker of English could perceive this usage as odd, it is nonetheless understandable for most of them (ibid:14). Another example is the answer to the question “Where are you from? “. Many Swedes would reply. “*I am coming from Sweden*”, that is use the progressive form where Standard English uses past simple. Again, even though this could sound strange to a native speaker, it seems to be perfectly understandable among non-native speakers and hence could become part of Euro-English (Modiano 2003:39).

However, there are many forms of English in mainland Europe (Modiano 2003:35) and, to establish a European second-language variety of English, an effort to study the language used would have to be made (Modiano 2006:238). Barbara Seidholfer from the University of Vienna explains:

If “Euro-English” is indeed an emerging variety as a European lingua franca, then it should be possible to describe it systematically, and eventually also to provide a codification which would allow it to be captured in dictionaries and grammars and to be taught, with appropriate teaching materials to support this teaching” (Jenkins et al 2001:14).
For this purpose, the *Vienna-Oxford ELF Corpus* has been established and studies are currently conducted. According to the initial observations, Euro-English has a tendency to eliminate some of the grammatical elements of Standard English:

- The “third person –s” is normally eliminated, that is the same present tense verb form is used for all verbs.
- The article is sometimes eliminated (“our countries have signed agreement about this”).
- The relative pronouns “who” and “which” are used interchangeably (“the picture who…”; “a person which…”).
- Gerund is sometimes eliminated and the verb stem used instead (“I look forward to see you tomorrow”).
- “Isn’t it” is sometimes used as a universal tag question (“You’re very busy today, isn’t it?”).

These features do not normally cause any misunderstandings among native speakers of English. However, lexical features and idiomatic expressions tend to be more problematic (Jenkins et al 2001:16).

### 2.5 English in Swedish Schools

In Sweden, English language is a mandatory subject at both the Swedish nine year compulsory school (Skolverket 1994a) as well as at the non-compulsory upper secondary school (*gymnastiet*) (Skolverket 1994b). In fact, English is the only foreign language that has ever been compulsory for all Swedish school children. It became obligatory around 1950, which means that most people that are now 60-65 years of age or younger have studied English at school (Mobärg 1998:249).

For many years, British English was the norm and the only variety taught at Swedish schools. Indeed, it was Received Pronunciation that was a requirement in official steering documents for the Swedish schools and all schoolbooks were based on British English (ibid:250). However, for the past 20-30 years, American English has challenged British English in EFL teaching (Modiano 2006:223-225). The first curriculum for Swedish compulsory comprehensive schools that mentions American Standard English as an acceptable alternative was introduced in 1994 (Skolverket 1994a and b) (Mobärg 1998:250).
Nonetheless, studies have suggested that Swedish teachers of English still prefer, and predominately use, British English in their teaching (Hurtig 2006:24, Modiano 1993:39). Furthermore, a small survey comprising five teachers could indicated that teachers of English in Sweden want the students to be consistent in their usage when writing formal text (Sjöstedt and Vranic 2007:14-22). The consistency desire is further supported by Modiano’s studies (1996:5; 1998:244). At the same time, some teachers themselves mix the two varieties in spoken language (Sjöstedt and Vranic 2007:14-22).

Moreover, according to Rhodenburg and Schlüter (2009:2), phonological, lexical and orthographic differences between the two varieties are often taught in second language teaching, whereas grammatical differences tend to be ignored. This is thought to be due to a lack of empirically based contrastive studies. However, the number of studies has increased in recent years (ibid:2, 4).

In addition, an evaluation of the Swedish undergraduate programmes at university has revealed that Swedish students who opt for studies in English language and literature have varying previous knowledge of English. Despite that, they should have received the same secondary schooling in the language. Still, the evaluation indicated that a proportion of the students at university level struggles to write coherent texts; although, the majority of them speak English fluently (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2005:30-31).

### 2.6 Differences between British and American English

According to the theory of *colonial lag*, the language of emigrants tends to be more conservative than the language in the country of origin as the language in the country of origin is prone to evolve quicker and that of the emigrants to remain static for longer periods of time. Thus, this theory suggests that American English is more *archaic* than British English (Hundt 2009:13-14). Furthermore, regional varieties and dialects are normally not as widely used by emigrants as they are by the speakers in the country of origin (Modiano 1996a:10). On the other hand, other researchers have suggested that the divergences between British and American English could be due to *colonial innovation* rather than *lag*. This would entail that American English is both conservative and innovative when compared with British English (Hundt:2009-13). However, according to Hundt (2009:13-37), this is an over-simplification as the development of American English, and the relation between British and American English, are much more complex. For example, features that seem to be due to colonial lag could be explained by *colonial revival*, that is, an imitation of the language the first settlers of
the colony used. Furthermore, the two varieties seem to have changed at a similar rate, but the changes have followed different patterns.

Recent studies have indicated that the differences between the two varieties are greater than previously thought and that they encompass differences in all fields of grammar (Tottie 2009:342). However, the divergences are of the gradual, and not the absolute, kind (Rhodenburg and Schlüter 2009:3) and seldom categorical (Tottie 2009:342). Moreover, there is of course a considerable intravarietal variation between different registers and between written and spoken language (ibid:341).

Nonetheless, some linguists state that British and American English only differ in vocabulary and pronunciation, but share the same grammar. For example, Mair has postulated the truism that “accent divides, and syntax unites” (Mair 2007:97). Furthermore, there is evidence that American English is influencing British English, whereas British English has little influence on American English. This is a result of the fact that Britons and Europeans are exposed to American English, whereas Americans are not exposed to British English (Modiano 1996a:9-10).

2.7 Grammatical Differences between the Two Varieties

Most of the examples in this section are taken from current articles in British and American newspapers. The structure exemplified has been italicised by the author of this essay.

2.7.1 Subject/Verb Agreement

In British English, a collective noun normally governs a verb that is plural, whereas a singular verb usually is used in American English (Algeo 2006:279-286; Chalker et al. 1998; Burchfield 2000:157-158; Svartvik and Sager 1996:§ 26, The British Council:2010). British English uses plural because a collective noun denotes a collection of individuals. Examples of collective nouns are sport organizations (“Thanks to their warrior-marksman, Chelsea are stalking their third triumph in four seasons in football’s oldest club competition” (Northcroft, The Sunday Times, April 11, 2010)), business organizations (“EasyJet say Mr Warrick did not break flying rules” (Cochlin et al, Daily Mail, October 27, 2007)), government and political organizations (“Labour are now the reactionaries, we the radicals” (Cameron, The Guardian, April 8, 2010)), military organisations (“The military say that all the dead were members of Gam” (Johnston, The Times, May 23 2003)), and public service organisations (Algeo
There is a difference in usage of the definite article between British and American English. For example, some nouns have a determiner in American English whereas they do not in British English. When the Americans say “I’m going to study at the university in the spring” and “I have to go to the hospital”, the British say “I’m going to study at university in the spring and “I have to go to hospital” (Algeo, 2006:54-55; Svartvik and Sager 1996:§176H).

Furthermore, Americans sometimes omit the articles where Britons use it. For instance, Americans say “in the future”, whereas Britons say “in future” (ibid).

### 2.7.3. Verbs

#### 2.7.3.1 The Present Perfect and the Preterit

English has two competing verbal forms to refer to past time: the present perfect and the synthetic preterit (past simple). In cases where the past time is not clearly defined, American English normally uses the preterit (“Did you eat yet?”), whereas British English uses the present perfect (“Have you eaten yet?”) (Elsness 2009:228). A general tendency in English, and in other languages, such as German and French, is that synthetic forms generally are replaced by periphrastic construction and, for many years, the usage of present perfect has increased at the expense of the usage of preterit (ibid:229). However, in recent years, the present perfect has begun to decline in both varieties of English. Hence, the American usage has accelerated a change towards the usage of preterit in British English as well (ibid:243-245).

#### 2.7.3.2 The Past Participle

Some verbs that are irregular in British English are regular in American English (Svartvik and Sager 1996:§63-87) (Table I). The re-establishment of regular verbs in American English could be explained by *colonial revival* (Levin 2009:81-82).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>British English</th>
<th>American English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lit</td>
<td>Lighted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learnt</td>
<td>Learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smelt</td>
<td>Smelled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelt</td>
<td>Spelled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Past participles (Hargrave 2003:46).

For example, the American *The New York Times* writes “Kiwi Captain *Learned* Premier League Defense in M.L.S” (Hall, March 19, 2010), whereas the British *The Times* writes “Swimming with dolphins: how a disabled boy *learnt* to fly” (Strain, March 23, 2010).

### 2.7.3.3 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

In some cases, verbs with the same meaning in the two varieties are treated differently syntactically. Specifically, American English sometimes uses intransitive verbs transitively (Hargave 2003:43-45). For instance, the Britons protest against something (“Demonstrators spilt their own blood at the gates of the Thai Prime Minister’s office yesterday as part of a mass *protest against* the Government” (Powell, *The Times*, March 17, 2010)) (with the exception of their innocence, which they protest), whereas the Americans protest something (Algeo 2006:244) (“6000 demonstrators *protest* Togo election results” (AP Online, *The Washington Post*, April 10, 2010)).

### 2.7.3.4 The Subjunctive

Subjunctive verb forms were common in *Old English*, but disappeared in *Middle English*. However, from 1920 onwards, subjunctive has reappeared in American English and has started to return in British English as well (Kjellmer 2009:246-247; Svartvik and Sager 1996:§ 90). The reason for the usage in America is thought to be a rise in prestige of subjunctive as many immigrants that use subjunctive in their mother tongue have started to use it in English as well. The rise seen in the UK is considered to be due to the impact that American English has on the British variety (ibid:256).

The re-appearance of the subjunctive can for example be seen in mandative clauses. In mandative clauses, American English normally uses the subjunctive form (“She suggested that he *visit* his parents on the way back”), while British English prefers the modal
construction ("She suggested that he should visit his parents on the way back") (Crawford 2009:257). However, the usage differs within the two varieties. Even though, it is notable that the stronger the verbal trigger is (ask, demand, propose, request, require, suggest), the lesser the variation within British or American English is (ibid:272-275).

Moreover, the revival of subjunctive can also be seen in conditional phrases, where Americans tend to use the subjunctive ("He left 67 million euro to the endowment, on the condition that the school change its name to honour his father") whereas Britons are inclined to use the indicative ("He left 67 million euro to the endowment, on the condition that the school changes its name to honour his father") (Schlüter 2009:277-280).

2.7.4 Prepositions

The main difference between the two varieties, as regards prepositions, is the choice of a particular preposition over another in a certain context (Algeo 2006:159; Hargraves 2003:50-51) (Table II).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>British English</th>
<th>American English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at the weekend</td>
<td>on the weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a team</td>
<td>on a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the street</td>
<td>on the street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at school</td>
<td>in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different from/to</td>
<td>different than</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Examples of variable usage of prepositions in British and American English (Adapted from Hargrave 2003:50-51).

For instance, the British paper The Daily Mail writes “Tories to make failing pupils spend an extra year at primary school” (Oliver, 02 September 2007), whereas the American paper The Gainsville Times writes “Gainesville students may spend five fewer days in school” (Crist, 12 May 2010).

Furthermore, the preposition can sometimes be omitted in one of the varieties. For instance, the British sometimes give clock time as “Half five” instead of “Half past five” (Hargrave 2003:261-262). Similarly, the Americans say “The bus arrives a quarter past three”, whereas the British say “The bus arrives at quarter past three”.
2.7.5 *Adverbs*

With regard to submodifiers, which are adverbs that are used to qualify adjectives, there is a considerable variance in usage between the two varieties. For example, the British usage and meaning of *rather*, *quite* and *very* are different to the American usage and meaning (Hargrave 2003:47-48). For instance, in American English, *quite* means “fairly”, whereas it can mean both “fairly” and “completely” in British English. An example of the latter British usage can be found in *The Times*: “It is *quite* true that we have found it necessary” (Editor, April 14, 2010). In addition, *rather* (Burchfield 1998:652) and *quite* (ibid:645) can be used emphatically in British English. *Rather* can be used as a response to a question and it then means “indeed” or assuredly”: “Did you enjoy your holiday? –*Rather!*”. In this usage, *quite* expresses agreement: “The minister should have resigned! –*Quite!*” (ibid:652, 645).

Furthermore, the usage of adverbs varies greatly according to social, cultural and regional contexts, rather than for linguistic reasons (Aijmer 2009:340).

2.7.6 *Adjectives*

There are few systematic adjectival differences between British and American English. Most of the variations concern lexical forms (Algeo 2006:119).

However, there are some differences in adjectival comparatives, as British English is prone to use more synthetic comparatives (“If there’s anything bigger and *prouder* than Ramsay, it’s India” (Rumbelow, *The Times*, January 19, 2010)) and American English more analytic comparatives (Mondorf 2009:105-107) (“From a public safety perspective, we couldn’t have been *more proud* of the way Richard handled the situation” (Wickett, *The Boston Globe*, April 9, 2010)).

Furthermore, the British are inclined to add –*ish* to existing adjectives to alter the meaning slightly (“James Allenby, a *tallish* all-rounder who is reckoned to be more of a batsman” (Hobson, *The Times*, May 2, 2006)); “He grew up a *saddish* moppet in Manhattan” (Grigoriadis, *The Times*, December 7, 2008)). This phenomenon does not exist in American English (Aijmer 2009:340).

2.8 *Vocabulary*

The British who settled in America in the 17th century had no, or very little, contact with the population in Britain and hence the differences in the two varieties started to emerge.
Furthermore, many settlers came from other regions in the world; for example, from Germany, France, Spain the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries. The settlers’ languages principally left their marks in the form of new words. Furthermore, the Industrial Revolution, and consequently a great need for new vocabulary, came after the emigration to America. By then, the USA was no longer conforming to the British standard and new words and new inventions thus received different names in the two countries. Even though, the communication between Britain and the USA has increased markedly in recent decades, different lexis for new concepts are still coined in the two countries (Davies 2007:2-7).

In practice, the border between grammar and vocabulary is arbitrary. The senior lecturer John Algeo explains (1988):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>British English</th>
<th>American English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>full stop</td>
<td>Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biscuit</td>
<td>Cookie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drink driving</td>
<td>drunk driving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first floor</td>
<td>second floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ground floor</td>
<td>first floor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of grammatical features that border with lexis and style are idioms such as “I don’t think he was ever on a cigarette-card, come to that” and “Perhaps we expect too much: over the past decade or so we have got accustomed to the idea, by Lloyd Webber among others, that musicals can sound good as well as make sense. But there you are” (Algeo 1988:12). Other examples are the usage of noun adjuncts (“Fire girl fights for life”; “England women v Romania Women”) (ibid:8), conjunctions (whilst, amidst, amongst, and nor, but nor) (ibid:14-15), emphatic adverbs (cf. 2.7.5), and prepositional complementation of verbs (“rained off/out”) (Algeo 2006:241-245).

There are a few examples of vocabulary differences that are tested in the present study (Table III).
Table III. Differences in vocabulary in British and American English (Modiano 1996a:46, 48; Davies 2007:149; Finegan 2004:368).

3. Design of the Present Study

3.1 Method and Material

A questionnaire was designed and distributed among Swedes that have studied English at the Swedish upper secondary school\(^4\). According to the curriculum of the Swedish upper secondary school, the pupils should be able to understand English from different regions. Furthermore, the pupils should be able to write texts in correct English (Skolverket 1994c).

The questionnaire was principally focused on awareness of grammatical divergences between British and American English, as the awareness of differences in pronunciation and vocabulary, among Swedish upper secondary pupils, has been examined previously (cf. for example, Alfberg 2009; Hurtig 2006; Modiano 2002; Norlin 2006; Pettersson 2008; Sjöstedt and Vranic 2007; Thörnstrand 2008; Östlund 2005). However, a few features with a vocabulary aspect were tested, as the border between grammar and vocabulary is arbitrary (cf. 2.8). Adverbial and adjectival differences were not tested as they vary greatly according to the context and which particular dialect somebody speaks (Hargrave 2003:47-48). Divergences in spelling and in orthography were left out as they are always difficult for EFL learners (Svartvik and Svartvik 2000:420), and hence might say little about knowledge and awareness of differences between the two varieties.

The grammatical features examined in the questionnaire were merely a small selection of the grammatical differences that exist between British and American English (cf. Algeo 2006). No attempt was made to cover the whole range of types of differences. To determine what correct British and American English are, and what the differences between the varieties are, grammar books and usage handbooks were used (cf. 2.7).

The questionnaire was composed of three parts: the first section comprised sentences to judge as written predominantly in British or American English, and the second part sentences to translate from Swedish into English and then judge as written in British or American English. The first part produced data that was subsequently analysed quantitatively, while the second part was more interpretative and produce data analysed qualitatively. The third part of the questionnaire contained questions concerned with language use and attitude

\(^4\) Gymnasiet.
as well as questions concerned with basic information such as the informants’ age, education and mother tongue. All questions were of the closed response format. The complete questionnaire is given in appendix I.

The sentences written in English only contained one element that differs between the two varieties and the students were instructed to judge the sentence according to where they think it most frequently occurs, that is, in Great Britain or the USA. The sentences to be translated by the informants contained one element that varies between the two varieties and hence indicated whether the students use British or American grammar, and whether they are aware of which variety they use. Once the sentences were translated, the students were asked to judge their sentences as to whether they were written in British or American English. The survey was distributed by means of the snowball method (Neuman 1997), that is, it was distributed to a few Swedes that have finished the Swedish upper secondary school and, when a response was received, the informants were asked to distribute the questionnaire to people they know that have finished the upper secondary school according to the curriculum introduced in 1994.

Answers received from people that had not completed the upper secondary school according to the curriculum introduced in 1994 were excluded. When an answer was received it was allocated a number, to which the informants are referred in tables and in appendices in this essay. All the questionnaires received have been archived in an anonymous format by the author of the essay. In the result section of the essay the percentages do not always amount to 100.0 percent as the figures have been rounded off. In the results section American English is abbreviated AM, British English BR and “Do not know” Dk.

4. Results

4.1 The Informants

Nine people answered the questionnaire. Six of them were women and three men. The mean age was 28.9 years (min 24 and max 33 years). Eight of them have completed the Swedish upper secondary school; one has completed the International Baccalaureate in Sweden. All of them have a university degree, of which eight have studied five years or more at university. The informants’ and their parents’ mother tongue is shown in table IV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Swedish</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

21
One of the informants had a Cambridge Proficiency Exam (marked ψ in table VI), whereas none of the others had studied English after the upper secondary school. Five of the informants had spent periods of 1 month to 6 months in one or several English speaking countries (marked * in table VI). The variety preferred by the informants and the variety used as stated by them, are given in table V.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>language</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV. Mother tongue

A summary of the percentage of correct and incorrect answers (sentence 1-24) and the variety used (sentence 25-33) is given in table VI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>1ψ</th>
<th>2*</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4*</th>
<th>5*</th>
<th>6*</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct answers</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong answers</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Do not know&quot;</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VI. The informants’ judgment of the sentences (1-24) and the variety used in sentence 25-33. The informant who has a Cambridge Proficiency Exam is marked ψ and the informants that have spent periods of 1-6 months in one or several English speaking countries are marked *

Sentence 14 was excluded from the survey as many of the informants judged it as “strange”. The informants’ answers are also given in appendices II and III.

4.2 Subject/Verb Agreement
The usage of subject/verb agreement was tested in sentence number 27, where the informants were asked to translate “Allmännheten har rätt att få veta”. If translated in typical British English would be translated “The public have the right to know” and in American English “The public has the right to know” (Algeo 2006:279-286; Chalker et al. 1998; Burchfield 2000:157-158; Svartvik and Sager 1996:§ 26, The British Council:2010).

One informant translated the sentence “the public have” (figure 2) and judged it as “do not know”, whereas 6 informants translated it “the public has” of which two judged it as “American English”, one as “British” and two wrote “do not know” (figure 3). One informant did not translate the sentence and one informant translated “allmännheten” with “people”.

![Figure 2. Variety used: Subject /Verb agreement](image1.png)

![Figure 3. Intended variety: Subject/Verb agreement](image2.png)

4.3 Articles

The matter of articles was dealt with in sentence number 18. The sentence constitutes an American example of omission of the definite article (“The child can tell time”). A Briton would say “tell the time”. The informants’ judgements of sentence 18 are given in table VII.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Correct answer</th>
<th>Wrong answer</th>
<th>&quot;Do not know&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>AM Dk Dk Dk Dk Dk Dk Dk Dk</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VII. Judgment of articles
The usage of articles was tested in sentence 32, where the informants were asked to translate “Jag ska läsa vid universitetet nästa år”. Normally, British English does not use the definite article with words such as university and hospital, whereas American English does (Algeo 2006:279-286; Chalker et al. 1998; Burchfield 2000:157-158; Svartvik and Sager 1996:§ 26; The British Council:2010). Five of the informants translated the sentence with “the university” (figure 4), of which one judged it as American English and four wrote “do not know” (figure 5). Three informants translated the sentence “university” (figure 4), of which one judged it as American English and two wrote “do not know” (figure 5). One informant did not translate the sentence.

4.4 Verbs

4.4.1 The Present Perfect and the Preterit

The matter of the present perfect and the preterit was dealt with in sentence number 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 24, 25 and 29. Sentence 1 (“Did you eat yet”), 3 (“Dolly just finished her homework”), 13 (“I didn’t receive a letter from him yet”) and 24 (“Did you ever ride a horse”) are written in American English. The British versions of the sentences would be “Have you eaten yet”, “Dolly has just finished her homework”, “I haven’t received a letter from him yet” and “Have you ever ridden a horse” respectively (Elsness 2009:228). The informants’ judgements of the American sentences are given in table VIII.
Table VIII. The informants’ judgement of sentence 1, 3, 13, and 24.

Sentence number 2 “Dolly has just finished her homework”, 11 “I’ve just arrived home”, and 12 “She had already left when I phoned” are written in British English. The American versions of the sentences would be “Dolly just finished her homework”, “I just arrived home” and “She already left when I phoned” respectively. The informants’ judgements of the British sentences are given in table IX.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Sentence 2</th>
<th>Sentence 11</th>
<th>Sentence 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>BR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct answer</th>
<th>Wrong answer</th>
<th>&quot;Do not know&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>67 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>44 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>56 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IX. The informants’ judgement of sentence 2, 11, and 12.

The usage of the present perfect and the preterit was tested in sentence 25 and 29, where the informants were asked to translate “Jag har redan ätit” and “Jag har tappat min nyckel. Har du sett den?” Eight of the informants translated sentence number 25 “I have already eaten”, that is the British present perfect (figure 6). One of the informants judged the sentence as British English, two as American English and five wrote “do not know” (figure 7). The American version of the sentence would be “I already ate”. One of the informants did not translate the sentence. Seven of the informants translated sentence 29 with the British version “I have lost my key. Have you seen it?” (figure 6). Three of the seven informants judged it as British English, one as American and four wrote “do not know” (figure 7). The American version of the sentence would be “I lost my key. Did you see it?”. One of the informants translated the sentence “I lost my key. Have you seen it?”, that is a mix of British and American grammar. The sentence was judged as “Do not know”. One informant did not translate the sentence.
4.4.2 The Past Participle

The matter of the past participles was dealt with in sentence 9. In the sentence the British form “learnt” is used. The American form of the parts participle in question would be “learned” (Svartvik and Sager 1996:§63-87). The informants’ judgements of sentence 12 are given in table X.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Correct answer</th>
<th>Wrong answer</th>
<th>&quot;Do not know&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table X. The informants’ judgment of the past participle

The usage of past participles was tested in sentence 30 where the informants were asked to translate “Jag tände en brasa”. Four informants translated “tände” with the British “lit” (figure 8), of which one of them judged it as British English, one as American, and two wrote “do not know” (figure 9). Two used the American “lighted” (figure 8), and both wrote “do not know” (figure 9). One informant translated “tände” with the incorrect form “light” and one used the unidiomatic sounding expression “turned on the fire”. One informant did non translate the sentence.
4.4.3 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

The usage of transitive and intransitive verbs was tested in sentence 31, where the informants are asked to translate “Arbetarna protestera mot beslutet”. The British version is “to protest against something” whereas the American version is “protest something” (Hargrave 2003:43-45). Six of the informants translated the verb as intransitive, that is, “protest against” (figure 10). Two judged it as British and four wrote “do not know” (figure 11). One informant did not translate the sentence and one informant translated the sentence to “The workers opposed the decision”.

4.4.4 The Subjunctive

The matter of the subjunctive was dealt with in sentence 16. The sentence (“She suggested that he visit his parents on the way back” is written in American English, that is with the verb “visit” written in the modus subjunctive. Normally, the British use indicative in a sentence with “suggest” (Kjellmer 2009:246-247; Svartvik and Sager 1996:§ 90). The British version of sentence 16 would be “She suggested that he should visit his parents on the way back”. The informants’ judgements of the subjunctive are given in table XI.
The usage of the subjunctive was tested in sentence 28, where the informants were asked to translate “De krävde att hon skulle godkänna erbjudandet”. One informant translated the sentence “should accept”, that is used the correct British form. The informant judged the sentence as “do not know”. Seven informants used incorrect translations (one wrote “they demanded that Sara accepted”, two wrote “they demanded her to accept” and four informants wrote “they demanded that Sara would accept”). One informant did not translate the sentence. As only one informant used a correct British or American translation a diagramme is not drawn.

4.5 Prepositions

The matter of prepositions was dealt with in sentence 6, 10, 17, 19, 20, and 23. Sentence 10 (“Breakfast is served at half five”) is a British sentence. An American would not omit the preposition and would therefore say “half past five” (Hargrave 2003:261-262). Four of the informants judged the sentence as British, one as American and five wrote “do not know”. Similarly, sentence 6 is an American example of the omission of a preposition. The Americans say “the bus arrives a quarter pas three”, whereas the British say “the bus arrives at quarter past three”. Furthermore, sentence 20 (“Where are you at?”) is an example of a case where the Americans sometimes use a preposition whereas the British never do (Burchfield 1998:76). Sentence 17 (“The new bakery will be opening starting Friday”) is written in American English. The British do not use a verb put a preposition to express the same thing. The British equivalent sentence would be “the new bakery will be open from Friday” (Algeo 2006:167). The correct answers to sentence 19 and 23 are given in table II. The informants’ judgments are given in table XII.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Correct answer</th>
<th>Wrong answer</th>
<th>&quot;Do not know&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table XI. The informants’ judgement of the subjunctive.
Table XII. The informants’ judgments of the prepositions.

The usage of preposition was tested in sentence 26, where the informants were asked to translate “Jag har inte sett henne på flera veckor”. The British translation of this expression is “in weeks” and the American “for weeks”. Four informants translated the sentence “in weeks” (figure 12). All of them marked their translations as “do not know” (figure 13). Four informants wrote “for weeks” (figure 12) and subsequently two judged is a British English, one as American, and one wrote “do not know” (figure 13). One informant did not translate the sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correct answer | Wrong answer | "Do not know"
---|---|---
44% | 22% | 33%
44% | 11% | 44%
33% | 22% | 44%
33% | 0%  | 67%
67% | 11% | 22%
33% | 11% | 55%

Figure 12. The variety used: prepositions

Figure 13. The intended variety: prepositions

4.6 Adjectives

The matter of adjectives was dealt with in one sentence 22 (“He did it Thursday last”), which is an example of where British and American English place the adjective differently. In this example it is possible to place the adverb after the noun in British, whereas it is not in American English (Algeo 2006:131). Two informants’ judgements of the sentences are given table XIII.
Table XIII. The informants’ judgements of adjectives

4.7 Vocabulary and Expressions

The awareness of lexical differences was tested in sentence 4, 5, 7, 8, 15, and 21. In sentence 4 the British expression “to queue up” is used. The equivalent American expression is “to stand in line”. In sentence 5 the British word “biscuit” is used, as opposed to the American word “cookie”. In sentence 7 the American word “period” is used. It translates into “full stop” in British English. The British expression “drink driving” is used in sentence 8, as opposed to the American equivalent “drunk driving”. In sentence 15 the American expression “to take a bath” is used. A Briton would say “to have a bath”. Finally, the expression “rained out” is used in sentence 21. This is American, whereas a Briton would use the expression “rained off”. The informants’ judgments of the different sentences are given in table XIV.

Table XIV. The informants’ judgement of the sentences concerning lexical differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Correct answer</th>
<th>Wrong answer</th>
<th>&quot;Do not know&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
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The usage of vocabulary was tested in sentence 33, where the informants were asked to translate the expression “Han bor på första våningen”. “Första våningen” translates “ground floor” in British English and “first floor” in American English. “First floor” in British English translates “andra våningen” in Swedish and “second floor” in American English (Petti1994:830) (cf. table III). Eight of the informants translated the sentence with “first floor” (figure 14); two judged is American English and six informants wrote “do not know” (figure 15). One informant did not translate the sentence.
5. Discussion

5.1 Methodology

A questionnaire on the grammatical differences between standard British and American English has its inherent weaknesses as the two varieties affect each other. In other words, the two varieties are not always clearly distinguishable and most grammatical features can occur in both of them. However, some features are not frequent in one of the varieties as compared to the other. In this essay the sentences have been marked as either British or American English. Consequently, in some cases, the informants’ judgment have been marked as “incorrect” even though the sentence in question might be perfectly acceptable in both varieties. This matter will be dealt with further later in the discussion, under “grammatical features”.

Another weakness of the questionnaire is that the number of informants is small. The questionnaire had one quantitative part where the informants had to judge the sentences and one qualitative part where the informants had to translate the sentences before they judged them. To translate sentences from Swedish to English is time-consuming and could be considered difficult. This might explain why it has been somewhat difficult to recruit informants. In other words, the quantitative could have suffered because of the qualitative aspect of the questionnaire. The number of answers in this survey is too small to make an adequate quantitative analysis and it is not possible to generalise the results of the inquiry.

In addition, to be able to generalise the results the same grammatical feature has to be tested in different sentences and several times. This method would make it possible to exclude that the informant are guessing and to determine that they are actually aware of the differences between the varieties. The only feature that is tested several times in the questionnaire is the differences in the usage of the present perfect and the preterit.
Moreover, the questions in the third part of the questionnaire were of the closed response format and hence the informants did not have the possibility to elaborate on why they prefer a certain variety and why they believe they use British or American English in written and spoken language respectively.

Furthermore, a weakness of the snowball method is that the questionnaire might reach a narrow group of people as the informants send on the questionnaire to their friends. This can clearly be seen in this material as all of the informants have a university degree and about the same age. Moreover, with this method, it is impossible to quantify how many people have received the questionnaire and hence the response frequency. The results are discussed with these reservations in mind.

On the other hand, a strong point of the methodology in this essay is that all of the questionnaires have been distributed in hard copy. Another strong point is that it evaluates the actual variety used, as opposed to a sociolinguistic questionnaire that does not investigate actual competence but is based on the informants’ auto evaluation.

5.2 Grammatical Features

5.2.1 Subject/Verb Agreement

Even though the usage of plural verbs with collective nouns is still considered correct British English, in, for example, Fowler’s Modern English Usage (Burchfield 1998:157) and by the British Council (2010), the singular form is now the most frequent form in both British and American English (Levin 2002:71). In fact, the frequency of singular verbs has increased markedly in recent years, which might indicate that British English is changing in the direction of American English (ibid:72). In spoken British English plural agreement is used with two thirds of the collective nouns (ibid:72). However, the usage of agreement varies greatly and is influenced by, for instance, the noun itself, the verb category used, as well as a number of functional factors (Levin 2001). Moreover, as the use of singular verbs with collective nouns today, in many cases, is considered acceptable in British English it is difficult to examine the informants’ awareness of the difference in usage between the two varieties with this grammatical aspect. Furthermore, in Swedish, a singular verb is always used with collective nouns (Jönsson and Kraft 1973:6). This could affect Swedes usage of English, and their choice between a singular and a plural verb could be due to their mother tongue rather than to their knowledge of English grammar. In addition, it is often
recommended that foreign speakers of English use the singular verb agreement with collective nouns if they feel uncertain (Levin 2002:71), which could imply that the informants’ have been taught to only accept the use of a singular verb as correct grammar. This could also affect their judgement of the sentences.

5.2.2 Articles

The examples hospital and university are complicated because when a specific hospital or university is referred to, or the university or hospital is viewed as an institution, the article is used in both varieties. For instance, “We drove past the university” (a specific university) and “She is a nurse at the hospital” (a specific hospital) (Svartvik and Sager 1996:§ 176H). This makes it difficult to test differences in usage between British and American English. Furthermore, this means that the informants are exposed to the usage of articles with the nouns hospital and university in both varieties and it might be difficult to apprehend the nuances. Moreover, articles, in general, constitute a linguistic element that is often problematic for foreign learners of English (Jenkins et al 2001:16). In addition, even though the articles do not exist in Swedish, but the definite form of a noun is created by means of a grammatical suffix, speakers of Swedish are used to using the definite form of university or hospital in the cases described in this essay. Again, this could affect the informants’ usage of English.

5.2.3 Verbs

5.2.3.1 The Present Perfect and the Preterit

According to corpus-based studies the British almost always use the present perfect, whereas the Americans have a tendency to use the simple preterit, even though the present perfect is also acceptable (Algeo 2006:26). This means that the sentences marked as “British” in this essay are considered correct in both British and American English, whereas the sentences marked as “American” are correct only in American English. Notwithstanding, the informants were not consistent in their judgment of the sentences concerning the present perfect and the preterit. However, they were all consistent in the fact that none of the informants judged sentences 2 (“Dolly has just finished her homework”) and 3 (“Dolly just finished her homework”) as belonging to the same variety. Nonetheless, it has to be taken into
consideration that these two sentences were placed consecutively in the questionnaire and therefore the informants probably noticed that the only thing that differed between the sentences was the verb tense.

In Swedish, it is possible to use both tenses to express past time (Jönsson and Kraft 1971:22) and therefore, the informants’ mother tongue should not affect their use of the present perfect and the preterit.

5.2.3.2 Past participle

A complicating factor, as regards this grammatical feature, is that the American versions of the past participles are used increasingly in the UK. In CIC (the Cambridge International Corpus) 34 percent of the past form of learn are learnt in British English, and less than 1 percent in American English (Algeo 2006:16). In the same corpus, 83 percent of the British past forms of light are lit and 77 percent of the American (ibid).

A further complicating factor is that in modern English the usage of regular and irregular past participles sometimes depends on whether it is used as a verb form or as an adjectival determiner. For instance, in British English lit is normally used as a verb form (“She drove into the sea, and then lit a cigarette” (de Bruxelles, The Times, November 15, 2005)), whereas lighted is used as an attribute (“The technique for removing them is to apply either a lighted cigarette or a dab of mosquito repellent” (Ashdown, The Times, April 12, 2009)) (Svartvik and Sager 1996:§ 87). This means that the informants probably have encountered both versions of the past participles in British English, which could complicate their judgement of the sentences. On the other hand, to light is a common verb that is included in the list of irregular verbs in the most commonly used English grammar books written for the Swedish upper secondary school (Svartvik and Sager 1971:104; Hargevik and Hargevik 1993:202; Ljung and Ohlander 1992:318). In all of these books the principle parts of the verb are stated as “light, lit (lighted), lit (lighted)”. The form in brackets is nominated “American English”. This could suggest that that most Swedes have learnt that the correct past participle of learn is lit. Nonetheless, the informants have been affected with more than what they have learnt in school. The informants’ media exposure to American English also has to be taken into consideration (Mobärg 1997: 261).

Moreover, when children learn their mother tongue grammatical morphemes eventually become discernable for the child. Initially, the grammatical morphemes are generalised and applied to new stems. Consequently, the child over generalises and treats all
verbs as regular verbs. For example, the child forms the preterits sov-de and, spring-de and
the past perfect participle läs-it and lek-it (Sofkova Hashemi 2008). Similarly, a foreign
learner of a language probably uses the regular form of the past participle, if the speaker does
not know if the verb is regular or irregular. This could affect the informants’ judgment of the
sentences and further complicated the interpretation of the results.

5.2.3.3 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

According to one count in British and American newspapers the British papers complement
protest by a preposition (against, at, about, over) 98 percent of the time, whereas the
American papers only complements with a preposition 3 percent of the time (Algeo
2006:244).

In Swedish, some verbs are sometimes transitive and sometimes intransitive; for
example, “Mannen körde (transitivt) bilen” and “Mannen körde (intransitivt) för fort”
(Jönsson and Kraft 1973:24-25). However, the verb protest is always complemented with a
preposition (mot), with the exception of the archaic expression “att protestera en växel”
(Svenska Akademien 1998:682). This might make speakers of Swedish prone to use “protest
against” rather than any of the other options.

5.2.3.4 The Subjunctive

Only one informant translated the sentence with a that-clause followed by “should”+infinitive
and four informants used verb “would”+infinitive . It is only possible to use the verb “would”
in these kind of subordinate clauses when the subject in the principal and the subordinate
clause refer to the same person (Ljung and Ohlander 1992:117), which is not the case in the
sentence in the present questionnaire. Similarly, the infinitive can be used after suggest if the
subject in both the principal and the subordinate clause refer to the same person (Svartvik and
Sager 1996:§ 90).

In Swedish, the present subjunctive virtually does not exist in modern language,
with the exception of a few fixed expressions such as “hon leve”, “varde ljus” and “ärad vare
Gud i höjden” (Åberg 1995:96). In fact, the subjunctive is seldom mentioned in Swedish
grammar books for the secondary school and if it is only imperfect subjunctive forms in
conditional clauses, such as vore and finge in clauses like “om jag vore i dina kläder”, are
considered (Andersson 2000:118). Today, the imperfect subjunctive forms only exist for 5-10
verbs in Swedish and they are principally used by the older generations (Andersson and Ringarp 2006: 254-255). The limited use of the subjunctive in Swedish could explain why the informants prefer the indicative when translating sentence 28 in English. This reasoning is in analogy with the theory that the usage of the subjunctive in America is in rise in prestige because many immigrants that use the subjunctive in their mother tongue have started to use it in English as well (Kjellmer 2009:246-247).

5.2.4 Prepositions

Native speakers are not always consistent in their usage of prepositions. In other words, they mix their choice of preposition, and hence could be said to use a form of Mid-Atlantic English (Estling Vannestål 2002:74). In fact, corpus-based studies have demonstrated that there is an inconsistency in usage of the prepositions included in this survey. An examination of the Cambridge International Corpus (CIC) revealed 244.9 iptmw (instances per ten million words) of at school in British texts and 83.9 in American texts. 56.9 iptmw of in school were found in British texts and 189.5 in American texts (Algeo 2006:163). Furthermore, corpus studies have demonstrated that at the weekend and on the weekend are equally common in British English, whereas at the weekend is very rare in American English (ibid:44). Moreover, in Britain in+team is three times more frequent than on+team, and in the USA on+team is four times more frequent than in+team (ibid:173).

The expression “where...at” is considered tautologous regional usage and does not belong in Standard English. The expression swept into American English in the 1960s and is widely used in the USA (Burchfield 1998:76).

Prepositions are one of the parts of speech that native Swedish speakers have most difficulty with when speaking and writing Swedish (Andersson and Ringarp 2006:264-268). Grammatical features that are difficult in the mother tongue are naturally difficult when learning foreign languages as well. Hence, the informants’ choice of preposition might be affected by other factors than their awareness of differences between British and American English.

5.2.5 Adjectives

“Thursday last” It is only possible to place last after the weekday in British English, but this usage is rare (Algeo 2006:131). As the usage of this word order is uncommon and the
informants therefore probably have not been exposed to it often, the interpretation of the result is difficult. Hence, it does not say much about Swedes’ awareness of differences between British and American English as regards adjectives. In retrospect, perhaps it would have been better to use a sentence with, for instance, a synthetic or analytic comparative to test the informants’ awareness of differences between the two varieties.

5.3 Vocabulary

Previous bachelor’s theses have indicated that Swedish upper secondary students are aware of the differences between British and American vocabulary (Alfberg 2009; Sjöstedt and Vranic 2007; Thörnstrand 2008). In this survey, four vocabulary items, that is, biscuit, period, queue up, drink driving and first floor were included. In addition, two expressions that have both a grammatical aspect and a lexical aspect were tested, that is, take a bath (choice of verb) and rained out (choice of preposition). The only vocabulary that was tested in the second part of the questionnaire, where the informants had to translate sentences, was “första våningen”. This is a difficult word as the semantically equivalent English expression “first floor” translates differently depending on whether it is American or British English. However, based on the informants’ judgment of the sentence they do not seem to be aware of the difference.

Söderlund and Modiano have suggested that even though Swedish speakers of English mix British and American English, and many American linguistic features are becoming increasingly common, some features of British English will always linger and resist Americanisation as they are “perceived by many as distinctive markers of European culture” (2002: 149). For instance, vocabulary like queue and cinema are mentioned. However, in the present investigation, the great majority of the informants were not able to identify “People had to queue up for hours to buy a ticket” as an example of British English. This result could indicate that queue up no longer is a distinctive marker of European culture.

5.4 Variety Used

A survey, regarding lexical choice and spelling, comprising 282 students conducted by Söderlund and Modiano (2002:167) has indicated that American English is used increasingly among young Swedes. Furthermore, their study showed that there seemed to be strong tendency to use Mid-Atlantic English, that is, to mix the two varieties (2002:167). In our study, all of the informants translated some of the Swedish into British English and some of
them into American English (cf Appendix III). This is in accordance with Söderlund’s and Modiano’s findings. Moreover, Söderlund’s and Modiano’s study indicated that there sometimes is a discrepancy between which variety the respondent think he or she is using and the variety actually used. Most commonly, the students think they use one variety, whereas they actually are using a mixture of British and American English (2002:162-166). This was also true among our informants when they translated the sentences from Swedish to English (cf. Appendix III). Hannah and Trudgill (1994:2) explains the mixing of different varieties in the following way:

> It is not reasonable to expect a Dutch student of English who has learnt EngEng at school and the studied for a year in the USA to return to the Netherlands with anything other than some mixture of NAmEng and EngEng.

In fact, five of the informants in this survey had spent time in one or more English speaking countries (table VI). Those informants did not mix the varieties more or less than the other informants (table VI). Moreover, young Swedes are exposed to different varieties of English every day, through, for example, media and music, and it would be surprising if the informants would apprehend the subtle grammatical differences between the varieties.

According to Söderlund and Modiano the variety used is strongly influenced by which variety the speaker prefers. Previous studies have suggested that majority of young Swedes prefer the American variety when it comes to lexis and vocabulary (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:162). However, this could not be seen in this study, as 33 percent stated that they prefer British English, 11 percent American and 55 percent “do not know”. Our finding is in accordance with Quiroz De Barros’ (2009: 40) conclusion regarding Portuguese learners of English:

> A significant part of respondents often elected not to choose between BrE and AmE. This conclusion questions the universality of attitudes on language which seems to be taken for granted in literature, also as far as foreign languages are concerned.

Furthermore, a study among upper secondary school student has revealed that younger students were more pro-American than older students. This could support this study’s finding, as the informants in this case are slightly older (mean age 28.9 years). In addition, Zhang’s (2008:342) research has suggested that L2 learners of English are positive to varieties that they have been exposed to; in other words, mainly British and American
English. This could explain why many of our informants do not know if they prefer British or American English. Moreover, a Danish study has shown that even though American culture is seen as exciting and the American media is significant in terms of transmitting attitudes, other sources, such as school, are important as well. In fact, the Danish survey indicated that exposure to American English and culture is massive, many Danes still consider Received Pronunciation the model for pronunciation, as it embodies the notion of correctness. The most feasible explanation for this is the “the imposed norm” hypothesis, which is, the judgment that one variety of a certain language is more pleasing is based solely on social and cultural norms, and not on linguistic grounds (Ladegaard 1998:266). Naturally, in analogy with this “the imposed norm” hypothesis might also explain why our informants do not know which variety they prefer.

5.5 Awareness of Variety Used

The majority of the informants in this study state that they do not know which variety the use in written (67 percent) and spoken (55 percent) language. This might suggest that Euro-English or Mid-Atlantic English is gaining ground, as the informants are not explicitly striving towards a certain variety. Our findings are in accordance with Queiroz de Barros’ findings (2009:38):

Portuguese users of English have no difficulty in distinguishing standard British and American accents, but are less able to identify lexical, grammatical and spelling peculiarities of those varieties of English. […] it […] suggests both the use of a Mid-Atlantic lexicon, grammar and spelling and a stronger salience of phonology as far as non-natives are concerned.

In fact, several studies have indicated that learners of English as a second language use their choice of variety to speak in their construction of identity. The findings are based on reported variety used not actual usage (Rindal 2010:255; Queiroz De Barros 2009:38-39). If this is true our findings support that Euro-English could be gaining ground. In addition, some researchers advocate the usage of a mix of different varieties. Canagarajah has written (2006:26):

a proficient speaker of English today need to shuttle between different communities, recognizing the systematic and legitimate status of different varieties of English. Rather than simply joining a speech
community, then we should teach students to shuttle between communities. To be really proficient in English in the postmodern world, one has to be multidialectal.

Furthermore, Trudgill and Hannah (1994:2-3) believes that a mixture of different varieties should be allowed in schools:

Given that the ideal, which foreign students are aiming at, is native-like competence of English, we feel that there’s nothing reprehensible about such a mixture and that tolerating is by no means necessarily a bad thing. Neither is it necessarily bad or confusing for school-children to be exposed to more than one model.

The acceptance of a mixture of different varieties and the emergence of Euro-English could be an indication that the usage of English in Swedish is shifting towards L2 competence (cf. paragraph 1).

5.6 Implications for Further Research

A questionnaire might be a bunt instrument when examining young Swedes choice of variety. The best way to examine young Swedes spontaneous usage of English grammar could be to create a corpus (Wray and Bloomer 2006:196) of the essays all Swedish upper secondary students have to write when sitting the national exam (Nationella prov) at the end of the courses (Skolverket 2010). As all students who take English in upper secondary school have to sit this exam, the corpus would be representative of the language to be studied.

6. Conclusion

No conclusions can be drawn from this limited study. However, the findings could suggest that:

- young Swedes are not able to differentiate between British and American English.
- young Swedes mix British and American English.
- young Swedes do not seem aware of which variety they use as regards grammar.
- many young Swedes do not know which variety they prefer.
- young Swedes’ usage of English might be in accordance with the development of Euro-English.
7. References


Cameron, David. (2010). “Labour are now the reactionaries, we the radicals”. *The Guardian*. April 8, 2010. Available on:


Appendix I: Questionnaire

ENKÄT – Finns det skillnader mellan amerikansk och brittisk standardengelska?

Denna enkät har som mål att undersöka i vilken utsträckning svenskar som slutfört gymnasiet kan skilja mellan brittisk och amerikansk engelska.

Instruktioner

➢ Ange i rutan om meningarna skrivna på engelska är skrivna på brittisk (BE) eller amerikansk (AM) engelska. Om du inte vet, skriv “vet ej” (VE). Vänligen gissa inte!

➢ Översätt meningarna på svenska till amerikansk eller brittisk standardengelska och ange i rutan vilken variant du använt (BR/AM /VE).

Kontakta mig gärna via e-post om du har frågor eller kommentarer angående enkäten.

Tack för hjälpens!

Emma Hansson

Student på kandidatkursen i engelska
Högskolan Halmstad
emmhan09@student.hh.se

Är följande meningar skrivna på brittisk eller amerikansk engelska? (AM/BR/VE)

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<tr>
<th>Bedömning</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Did you eat yet?</td>
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<td>2. Dolly has just finished her homework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Dolly just finished her homework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. People had to queue up for hours to buy a ticket.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. He usually has a chocolate biscuit in the afternoon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The bus arrives a quarter past three.</td>
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<td>7. Lying is wrong, period.</td>
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Vänligen översätt följande meningar till engelska och ange om du använt brittisk (BR) eller amerikansk (AE) standardengelska alternativt om du ej vet (VE).

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<th></th>
<th>Bedömning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Allmänheten har rätt att få veta.</td>
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<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Jag har tappat min nyckel. Har du sett den?</td>
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31. Arbetarna protesterade mot beslutet.

32. Jag ska läsa vid universitetet nästa år.

33. Han bor på första våningen

Slutligen skulle vi behöva veta lite mer om dig för att kunna sätta dina svar i ett sammanhang:

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<tr>
<th>Kö:</th>
<th>Man ☐</th>
<th>Kvinna ☐</th>
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<tr>
<th>Ålder:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Gymnasieutbildning:</th>
<th>Svenskt gymnasieprogram ☐</th>
<th>IB/Engelskspråkigt gymnasium i Sverige ☐</th>
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<tr>
<th>Högskoleutbildning:</th>
<th>Nej ☐</th>
<th>Ja ☐, vilken? ________________________________</th>
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<tr>
<th>Modersmål:</th>
<th>Svenska ☐</th>
<th>Brittisk engelska ☐</th>
<th>Amerikansk engelska ☐</th>
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<th>Annat språk ☐</th>
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<th>Mammas modersmål:</th>
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<th>Brittisk engelska ☐</th>
<th>Amerikansk engelska ☐</th>
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<th>Pappas modersmål:</th>
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<th>Brittisk engelska ☐</th>
<th>Amerikansk engelska ☐</th>
<th>Annan engelska ☐</th>
<th>Annat språk ☐</th>
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<tr>
<th>Utbildning i engelska språket utöver gymnasiet:</th>
<th>Nej ☐</th>
<th>Ja ☐, vilken typ? ________________</th>
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<tr>
<th>Vistelse i engelskspråkigt land:</th>
<th>Nej ☐</th>
<th>Ja ☐, vilket? ________________________________. I så fall hur länge? ________________________________</th>
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<tr>
<th>Brukar du använda brittisk eller amerikansk standardengelska i skrift?</th>
<th>Brittisk ☐</th>
<th>Amerikansk ☐</th>
<th>Annan engelska ☐</th>
<th>Vet ej ☐</th>
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<th>Annan engelska ☐</th>
<th>Vet ej ☐</th>
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| Föredrar du brittisk eller amerikansk engelska? | Brittisk ☐ | Amerikansk ☐ | Annan engelska ☐ | Vet ej ☐ |
APPENDIX II: The informants’ judgments of sentence 1-24

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Correct answers are yellow, incorrect answers are blue and “do not know” are marked in red.
APPENDIX III: The informants’ translation of and judgment of sentence 25-26

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British: 67% 56% 44% 33% 78% 44% 56% 56% 33% 33%
American: 22% 33% 44% 33% 11% 44% 33% 33% 56% 56%

BR: The informant translated the sentence into British English. AM: The informant translated the sentence into American English. Other: Other form than standard British or American English. Answers marked in grey were judged as “do not know”. Correct answers are pink and wrong answers are green.