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British or American English?
A survey of some upper secondary schools

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Abstract

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to find out what variety of English pupils in upper secondary schools are using, British English or American English, but also to see if there are any difference between boys and girls and if they are aware of their usage. British English used to be the only variety allowed in school, but now other varieties are taught as well and American English is gaining ground in Swedish schools. According to the curriculum, it is a part of the subject of English in upper secondary schools to study the different varieties and be aware of them. This study took place in Swedish upper secondary schools in the Stockholm area where 108 pupils in university preparing programs translated sentences with words that differ in British and American English, filled in a questionnaire which tested spelling and were also recorded when reading sentences. The survey showed that the tendency among these pupils is that they use American English more than British English in both vocabulary and pronunciation. The study also indicated that many pupils tend to mix their usage between the varieties, especially the girls. It was also seen that boys seem to be more aware of what variety they use.

Nyckelord: British English, American English, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, survey

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1. Introduction and aims

I got interested in this subject after being told by an English girl that as far as she could hear I used British pronunciation, except for a few words, while I was certain I spoke with an American accent. When I realized that my view of my own language was incorrect, I decided to conduct a survey to find out which variety pupils in school use and if they are aware of their own usage.

This survey was conducted in upper secondary schools in the Stockholm area in Sweden, to investigate whether pupils use British or American English. British English used to be the only variety allowed in school, but now other varieties are taught as well. Today, American English is gaining ground in Swedish schools. The influence from American movies, TV programs and other media may affect what variety of English pupils in Sweden are using; many pupils believe that they speak with an American accent, but in reality, some of them speak a blend of British English and American English.

To increase the awareness among pupils that there are varieties of English, it is a part of the subject of English to study them and their differences according to the curriculum in upper secondary school. Since it is easy to hear the differences between various types of English, many pupils are aware of the pronunciation differences, but they are not always as aware that there are also differences in vocabulary and spelling. For teachers it is not only important to talk about the differences between the varieties in pronunciation but also about the differences in vocabulary. It is especially important to explain words used in everyday speech, for example *holiday* and *vacation* which are words used for the same thing in British English and American English respectively.

The aim of the survey is to find out what variety of English pupils in upper secondary school use and if they are aware of their usage. I am also interested to see if they differ in their speech and vocabulary among themselves and if there are any differences between boys and girls.

2. Background

According to Melchers and Shaw (2003:180) English is the most studied foreign language in Swedish schools today. Moreover, according to the syllabus for the course 'English A' at upper secondary school, pupils are not only supposed to be able to speak English, but also to know about different varieties. But only a small part of the 'English A' course is devoted to learning about regions and countries where English is spoken, and usually the focus is more on the country and its history than on the differences in pronunciation and vocabulary

English today is a global language and there are many varieties of it. According to Kachru (1985), countries that use the English language can be classified into three different circles. The U.K. and the USA, for example, where English is the first language, belong to the *inner circle*. In the *outer circle*, there are countries that are ex-colonial, for example India and Nigeria, "where English co-exists with other languages" (Melchers and Shaw 2003:36). In the third circle, the *expanding circle*, which includes Sweden and other European countries, English is learned in school (Melchers and Shaw 2003:180). In Sweden and in Swedish schools today, the most common varieties of English known and taught are British English¹ and American English² although recently, according to teachers at upper secondary schools, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of other varieties, e.g. Australian English, and pupils are taking a growing interest in them. However, since British English and American English still are the two varieties mostly used, this essay will focus only on them.

Historically British English and American English can be seen as two rootstocks of English from which the other varieties of English derive (Svartvik and Leech 2006:150). Australian, African and Asian varieties are more closely related to British English whereas Canadian, Philippine and Puerto Rican varieties are connected to the American root.

However, through TV, internet and movies, American English has had an influence on world English. For example Australian English, which historically is an offshoot of British English, has over the past 30 years borrowed an increasing number of American English words. Today Australians use American words such as *elevator* and *truck*, but still stick to the British words

¹ In this essay English English/RP will be referred to as British English since that is the term that is most common and also used in the syllabus.

² In this essay the term American English is used to refer to Standard American English/General American.

petrol and *boot* (Svartvik and Leech 2006:152). Further it is also seen that Australians more often use the American word *gotten* instead of British *got* for the past participle of *get*.

2.1 Vocabulary differences

Due to the difficulties in communication because of the lack of technology, British English and American English began to differ in some vocabulary and expressions quite early on. It was not until the twentieth century, after the introduction of new technology such as radio and television the two varieties started to use the same word when new terms were introduced. However, some exceptions can be seen. Svartvik and Leech mention for example that when the British built their first large multilane highway, they created a new word of their own, *motorway*, instead of borrowing the existing American word *expressway*. Another exception is that the Americans use *cell phone* while the British use *mobile phone* for the same item. About 4000 words are different in American English and British English; some words are known in both countries, but many words are not (Svartvik and Leech, 2006:153).

Words that differ in British and American vocabulary can be classified according to the domains they refer to and each linguist has their own classification. Marckwardt & Quirk (1964) suggest that words can be divided into four different groups. In the first group, there are words that stand for real things, “the actual things we refer to in the two varieties of the language” (Marckwardt & Quirk 1964:26). These are words that for example have to do with flora and fauna like *aubergine* and *egg-plant*. His second group of words is terms that apply to skills and crafts. Marckwardt’s examples in this group are the words *grilled* and *broiled* that are different words used for the same thing. In his third group of words, he mentions words that relate to social and political institutions, for example *parliament*, which is used in Britain, and *congress* in America. His fourth group relates to the terminology of sports. Americans do not really know British *cricket* terms whereas *baseball* terms are unfamiliar in British.

Svartvik and Leech (2006) use another classification. Words that belong to particular areas are different in AmE and BrE. Words in the area of transport and terms related to the railroad are frequently different, such as *conductor/guard* and *one-way ticket/single ticket* in AmE/BrE respectively. But also words that refer to cars and road travel i.e. *licenceplate/numberplate* and *gas/petrol* are different. An interesting thing to notice is that some British words like, for

instance, *lorry* and *goods* today are struggling for their survival since the American counterparts *truck* and *freight* are on their way to replace them (Svartvik and Leech 2006:160).

The next group of words Svartvik and Leech (2006:161) consider are words that belong to education and the school system. Even here the American terminology is used more frequently. Earlier, British English and American English had different vocabulary in this area, but lately the British are more and more adopting the American terms, for instance the word *semester* is being replaced by *term* used in U.S.

The last group of words mentioned by Svartvik and Leech are those that relate to family or local life, or, “stay-at-home-words” (Svartvik and Leech, 2006:161) and are referring to words in the domestic area, such as American *faucet* and British *tap*.

2.2 Pronunciation differences

When comparing British and American pronunciation it is claimed that the *BATH* vowel is the “best known difference between RP and GA among Swedish learners” (Mobärg 2002:123). Using Wells’ standard lexical sets (Wells 1982:xviii), British English (RP) speakers pronounce words that belong to the *BATH* vowel, such as *bath*, *dance* and *after* with /ɑ:/, while General American (GA) English speakers use /æ/. There are also differences in LOT-words where British English (RP) has /ɒ/ and American English uses /ɑ/. In THOUGHT-words the difference is not phonemic, it is just the length of the vowel that differs. British English uses /ɔ:/ and American English has the shorter /ɒ/.

If we look more closely into the varieties we can see that there are also some regional differences. However, these will not be considered in this essay. In Britain, for example, Received Pronunciation (RP) is said to be the Standard English accent, but according to Marckwardt & Quirk (1964:57), within the British Isles even Scots and Irish English sometimes has the status of Standard English. Besides these, there are several regional varieties and dialects where *h dropping* is mentioned as one of the most distinctive features (Marckwardt & Quirk 1964:58). *H dropping* can be described as a feature where the initial /h/

is dropped, which means a word like *hammer* is pronounced /'æmə/. RP is rather regarded as a social, not a regional accent, used by upper-middle and upper classes and spoken only by 3-5 percent of the population of England (Trudgill & Hannah 1994:9). However, Standard English is the type of English that is taught in schools and it only involves grammar and vocabulary, not pronunciation. Another important difference between the varieties is that RP is not rhotic but American English is. However, this was not tested in the present study.

It is important to point out that it is very difficult to say whether pupils in Sweden use British or American English pronunciation since almost all of them will use EFL (English as a foreign language) which refers to learning English in a non-English-speaking country. A person probably does not develop a native-like accent until actually spending some time in an English speaking country and using the language every day. In this survey however, the pupils are too young to have been abroad. Many of them have probably been taught British English in the beginning and now they are realizing that there are other varieties and try to copy them in order to develop their own English language.

2.3 Spelling differences

Further, there are important differences in spelling between British English and American English and spelling can also be divided into different groups. Firstly, there are words, for example *color*, that are spelled with the ending *-our* in British English, but only *-or* in American English. There are also differences in words ending with *-re* and *-er* respectively, for example the word which is spelled *centre* in Britain but *center* in American English. The final sound in words like *defence* is spelled *-ce* in British English but *-se* in American English (*defense*) (Trudgill & Hannah 1994:84). These are just some examples of differences in spelling; there are many more.

There is a reason why this essay has its focus on pronunciation and vocabulary and not on spelling. When listening to a conversation without being aware that there are differences in vocabulary and pronunciation in the different varieties, the intention of the conversation might be lost since some words could be unknown if the listener only knows for example the British word and not the American counterpart, or vice versa. But reading a text with words with different spelling does not make a difference; the word is still understandable. The reason why

some pupils use American spelling and others use British spelling can probably be attributed to their previous English teachers, and what variety they used. For instance, if a teacher uses American spelling, this might influence his/her pupils to do the same. Textbooks and teaching aids used in upper secondary school often show both types of spelling in the wordlist, but not in the text. What vocabulary is used depends on the writer's origin, as does the pronunciation. But it still is important for the teacher to point out that both types of spelling are correct, as are both types of pronunciation and vocabulary.

2.4 Previous research

Investigating which variety pupils in Sweden use has been a very popular topic in recent years. Many surveys have been conducted. In 1999, Marie Söderlund and Marko Modiano made a study of pupils in upper secondary school in Hudiksvall to investigate whether they used American English or British English. They had the pupils translate a number of different words from Swedish into English to see if they used American vocabulary or British vocabulary. Their study showed that 12.4% of the pupils used American *fall* for the Swedish word *höst* and as many as 73.4% used the British *autumn*; 14.1% did not answer (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:158). In the same study, Söderlund and Modiano (2002:159) asked the pupils to translate *lastbil*, 55.3% of the pupils use American *truck* and 28% use British *lorry*. Given the choice between *candy* and *sweets*, 81.2% of their pupils used American *candy*, and only 7.8% used British *sweets*. According to Söderlund and Modiano (2002:160) the tendency shows that Swedish pupils are influenced by American media and that many think that *sweets* is a translation of the Swedish word *sötsaker*, which is the formal term, and not Swedish *godis* which was the word given.

Söderlund and Modiano also investigated some spelling differences. It is seen in their study (2002:160) that only 28.3% used the American spelling *color* while as many as 60.9% used the British spelling *colour*.

Another interesting survey was done by Margareta Westergren Axelsson in 2000. Swedish university students were asked what variety of English they believe they used. The students were given several options to choose between; 'BrE', 'AmE', 'Mixed', 'Other' and 'Don't know'. She then analysed men and women separately. Axelsson's survey (2002:142) showed

that there were some differences between genders. 34% of the women thought they spoke BrE which was the highest figure in the survey, 26% thought they used AmE; and 33% mixed; while among the men only 14% thought they used BrE; AmE and Mixed were spoken by 33% and 44% respectively. It is seen that the percentage of mixed users are high for both men and women.

In 1999, Mats Mobärg did a survey among pupils in grade 6-9, to analyse if they speak British or American English. In the survey he tested three differences between British and American pronunciation. The first was *T voicing*, which refers to the t-sound between two vowels that tends to be pronounced more like /d/ in American English. For example the words *latter* and *ladder* are pronounced the same. The second thing tested in Mobärg's survey was the *BATH vowel* which is pronounced /ɑ:/ in British English and /æ/ in American English in words such as *bath*, *dance* and *chance*. The last thing Mobärg tested was *Yod dropping* which is when American English speakers pronounce words such as *due*, *suit* and *resume* with an /u:/ and not the /ju:/ that is often found in British English. In Mobärg's survey it was shown that 53% of the pupils used the British pronunciation for the *BATH vowel* and 43% used the American pronunciation (Mobärg 2002:122). From his survey it can also be seen that he got an overall figure that shows that 64% used RP and 29% used GA (Mobärg 2002:121).

3. Methods

To investigate whether pupils in Sweden use British English or American English, I made up a questionnaire that contained vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling items that differ in American and British English. When deciding how to do this questionnaire there were two options. The first option was a questionnaire with English gap-sentences where the pupils were given the words both in British English and American English and they would only have to choose between them. The other option, which was finally chosen, was to have the pupils translate sentences from Swedish into English. This one was chosen so that the pupils would not know exactly what words would be used in the analysis and to ensure that they translated into words they usually use and that they not hesitate when given another option.

3.1 Participants

I wanted to interview about 80 pupils, but when I visited the different schools more teachers than the ones I had spoken to were interested in my study and they let me interview their students as well. So in the end I had as many as 108 pupils that took part in my study. They were in different upper secondary schools, but they all studied on a university preparing program.

In this study I decided to only look for differences between the genders, not age, since in upper secondary school the level of the pupils' knowledge of English is similar and there would probably be no noticeable difference between 16- and 19-year-olds. What would be interesting, though, would be to do this survey in grade 7-9 and then compare the results. Then the difference might be noticeable.

3.2 The test

The questionnaire (see Appendix 2) consisted of ten sentences that contained words that differ in British and American English. The pupils were supposed to, for example, translate Swedish *semester* as either *holiday* or *vacation*, Swedish *lastbil* and *taxi* as *truck/lorry* and *cab/taxi*. There were also some sentences where the pupils could choose which spelling they preferred for words such as *color/colour*, *rumor/rumour* and *neighbor/neighbour*. After the questionnaire, I had the participants read some sentences (see Appendix 3) that were recorded on tape. These sentences contained words where the pronunciation differs between American English and British English. For example words that, according to Wells' lexical sets, belong to *BATH* vowel /ɑ:/ or /æ/, and *LOT*-vowel /ɒ/ or /ɑ/, but also words like *tomato* where British and American English use /ɑ:/ and /eɪ/ respectively. In the survey, the pupils were also asked to pronounce the word *potato* to see if they confuse it with the pronunciation for *tomato* i.e. if some pupils pronounce *potato* with an /ɑ:/ even though this pronunciation is non-existing.

In the pronunciation part, this study examined only the pronunciation of vowels and in particular the *BATH* vowel, even though there are more pronunciation differences that could have been tested, such as *t-voicing* and *Yod-dropping* as mentioned earlier. In the vocabulary part, there are also more words that could have been a part of this survey. But the words were

chosen so that as many as possible would be known by teenagers, otherwise the non-valid result could have been high. Likewise there are more things that could have been tested in the spelling part of the study, not only three words with the same spelling difference between British and American English (-our/-or). However now I got to see if pupils were consistent in their spelling of this one typical spelling difference.

When choosing words for the questionnaire there were many aspects to think about. The main aspect was that it should be words that are used in everyday speech so that many pupils would know them. If the questionnaire consisted of too advanced words, many pupils might not know the words and the number of valid answers would be low and difficult to analyse. By choosing words that are used in daily speech, most pupils would know the words and there would be a higher number of valid answers to analyse.

I also tried to choose words that belong to the basic vocabulary pupils should have. Some of them, for instance *return ticket*, are useful to know when travelling in other countries. I decided that the survey would concentrate most on the vocabulary and the pronunciation parts, and that the spelling part would be smaller.

3.2 Teachers and syllabus

When doing this survey I asked the teachers what they teach in their classes. They said that previously they had to teach British English and the pupils had to speak British English, but today there are no requirements to teach British English, the teachers can choose which accent they want to use and the pupils are free to choose as well. The most important thing today is that they learn English and learn how to communicate in it; what variety pupils use does not matter. When reading the syllabus from Skolverket, the Swedish National Agency for Education, for the subject of English one goal to aim for is:

deepen their understanding of English as spoken in different parts of the world, and improve their ability to understand the contents communicated by different media

(Skolverket 2000)

In this survey, to speak American or British English, the participants should use one accent in at least 80% of all tested words. If they used less than that they were placed in the mixed group which means that they used American and British English variably.

4. Results

I visited several classes in different upper secondary schools in the Stockholm-area and got 108 pupils to fill in the questionnaire. However, later on when the pupils were asked to read some sentences, to record their pronunciation, four of them refused so only 104 pupils participated in the pronunciation part of the survey. In Appendix 1, the results for each word in the survey are shown.

4.1 Vocabulary

The questionnaire consisted of ten sentences for the pupils to translate from Swedish into English. In these sentences, there were 15 words that were particularly interesting. These were words that differ in British English and American English. 108 pupils filled in the questionnaire, and each pupil was to translate the 15 words which means a total of 1620 (15 words x 108 pupils) words to analyse. The results of the vocabulary test are shown in Table 1.

Vocabulary: 15 words x 108 pupils = 1620

TABLE 1
Vocabulary

	British	American	Non-valid	Total
Girls	212	449	239	900
Boys	158	465	97	720
Total girls and boys	370	914	336	1620
Percentage girls	23.6%	49.9%	26.6%	100.0%
Percentage boys	21.9%	64.6%	13.5%	100.0%
Percentage girl and boys	22.8 %	56.4 %	20.7 %	100.0 %

It is seen in Table 1 that the girls had quite many non-valid answers, 26.6% compared to 13.5% for the boys. A non-valid answer is either an incorrect or missing word. It is also seen

that both girls and boys tended to use American words more often than the British alternatives. The girls used American words in 49.9% and the boys as many as 64.6%.

4.2 Spelling

Table 2 shows the results of the spelling part of this questionnaire. It consisted of only three different words. The pupils were given both the British and American spelling and were asked to choose between them. Three words x 108 pupils means 324 words to analyse.

Spelling: 3 words x 108 pupils = 324

TABLE 2
Spelling

	British	American	Non-valid	Total
Girls	114	66	0	180
Boys	89	55	0	144
Total girls and boys	203	121	0	324
Percentage girls	63.3%	36.7%	0	100%
Percentage boys	61.8%	38.2%	0	100%
Percentage girl and boys	62.7 %	37.3 %	0	100%

This table shows that 63.3% of the girls and 61.8% of the boys tended to use the British spelling compared to the American spelling which was used in 36.7% and 38.2% of the cases, girls and boys respectively. It is also seen that there were no non-valid answers since the pupils only had to choose one type of spelling.

4.3 Pronunciation

The pupils were asked to read six sentences that were recorded. In these six sentences, eleven words were interesting for the survey. This makes a total of 11 words x 104 pupils = 1144 words to analyse and the results are shown in Table 3. (There were four pupils who refused to read the sentences.)

Pronunciation 11 words x 104 pupils = 1144

TABLE 3 Pronunciation

	British	American	Non-valid	Total
Girls	202	436	0	638
Boys	210	296	0	506
Total girls and boys	412	732	0	1144
Percentage girls	31.7%	68.3%	0	100%
Percentage boys	41.5%	58.5%	0	100%
Percentage girl and boys	36.0 %	64.0 %	0	100 %

Table 3 shows that both boys and girls used American pronunciation more than British pronunciation. 68.3% of the girls used American pronunciation versus 31.7% that used British pronunciation of the words. For the boys the figures were 58.5% and 41.5%, American and British pronunciation respectively. As it is seen in the table all words in the pronunciation part could be categorized as either British or American English.

I was not only interested in if the pupils used a British or American accent overall but also if they, in a set of two words or more, would use them variably, for example, if they have the same pronunciation of the stressed vowel in the words *either* and *neither* or if they, either said *either* /'aɪðə/ and *neither* /'ni:ðə/ or *either* /'i:ðə/ and *neither* /'naɪðə/. The result was that 24.1% of the girls and 14.6% of the boys did not have the same pronunciation of the stressed vowel in *either* and *neither* (Table 4 and Table 5 in the Appendix).

4.4 Self reported accent

The last question on the questionnaire was whether the pupils thought that they spoke British or American English. There were some pupils who could not tick only one box, but they thought they switched between British English and American English. These pupils are placed in the column that is named “both”. What the pupils believed are shown in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6

	British English	American English	Both	Total	British percentage	American percentage	Both percentage
Girls	6	48	6	60	10.0%	80.0%	10.0%
Boys	12	28	8	48	25.0%	58.3%	16.7%
Total	18	76	14	108	16.7%	70.3%	13.0%

Table 6 shows that most pupils believed themselves to use American English; 80% of the girls and 53.3% of the boys chose this alternative when doing the questionnaire. It is also seen that 13% of the participants thought they mixed the accents and could not choose just one.

5. Analysis

5.1 Vocabulary

The results of the survey indicate that pupils in upper secondary school have the tendency to use American English more often than British English in writing. An average of 49.9% of the girls use American English and only 23.6% use British English. However, it is important to note that among the girls 26.5% of the answers were not valid, i.e. the answers were missing or incorrect. Words that were considered as incorrect were when pupils translated a Swedish word into a word that does not exist or is the wrong translation, for example the Swedish word *motorhuv* was translated into *motortop* instead of *bonnet* or *hood*. Among the boys in upper secondary school the rate for using American English in their writing was higher than for girls. 64.6% used American English while only 21.9% used British English. The non-valid figure was 26.6%.

Vocabulary Girls

Word	Expected words British/American	British	American	Non-valid	Percentage British	Percentage American	Percentage Non-valid	Total
Höst	Autumn/Fall	38	16	6	63.3%	26.7%	10.0%	60
Godis	Sweets/Candy	2	56	2	3.3%	93.4%	3.3%	60
Kakor	Biscuit/Cookie	2	56	2	3.3%	93.4%	3.3%	60
Lastbil	Lorry/Truck	2	44	14	3.3%	73.4%	23.3%	60
Taxi	Taxi/Cab	36	24	0	60.0%	40.0%	0.0%	60
Lägenhet	Flat/Apartment	0	58	2	0.0%	96.7%	3.3%	60
Hiss	Lift/Elevator	4	50	6	6.7%	83.3%	10.0%	60
Semester	Holiday/Vacation	18	38	4	30.0%	63.3%	6.7%	60
Fotboll	Football/Soccer	46	12	2	76.7%	20.0%	3.3%	60
Motorväg	Motorway/Highway	10	34	16	16.7%	56.6%	26.7%	60
Bensin	Petrol/Gas	2	30	28	3.3%	50.0%	46.7%	60
Trottoar	Pavement/Sidewalk	4	16	40	6.7%	26.7%	66.6%	60
Järnväg	Railway/Railroad	24	5	31	40.0%	8.3%	51.7%	60
T & R biljett	Return ticket/ Roundtrip	24	0	36	40.0%	0.0%	60.0%	60
Motorhuv	Bonnet/Hood	0	10	50	0.0%	16.7%	83.3%	60

Vocabulary Boys

Word	Expected words British/American	British	American	Non-valid	Percentage British	Percentage American	Percentage Non-valid	Total
Höst	Autumn/Fall	26	18	4	54.2 %	37.5 %	8.3 %	48
Godis	Sweets/Candy	4	42	2	8.3 %	87.5 %	4.2 %	48
Kakor	Biscuit/Cookie	4	42	2	8.3 %	87.5 %	4.2 %	48
Lastbil	Lorry/Truck	4	38	6	8.3 %	79.2 %	12.5 %	48
Taxi	Taxi/Cab	24	20	4	50.0 %	41.7 %	8.3 %	48
Lägenhet	Flat/Apartment	6	38	4	12.5 %	79.2 %	8.3 %	48
Hiss	Lift/Elevator	4	38	6	8.3 %	79.2 %	12.5 %	48
Semester	Holiday/Vacation	6	38	4	12.5 %	79.2 %	8.3 %	48
Fotboll	Football/Soccer	22	24	2	45.8 %	50.0 %	4.2 %	48
Motorväg	Motorway/Highway	6	36	6	12.5 %	75.0 %	12.5 %	48
Bensin	Petrol/Gas	8	39	1	16.7 %	81.2 %	2.1 %	48
Trottoar	Pavement/Sidewalk	4	34	10	8.3 %	70.9 %	20.8 %	48
Järnväg	Railway/Railroad	18	20	10	37.5 %	41.7 %	20.8 %	48
T & Rbiljett	Return ticket/ Roundtrip	22	8	18	45.8%	16.7%	37.5%	48
Motorhuv	Bonnet/Hood	0	30	18	0.0%	62.5%	37.5%	48

When looking more closely into what words are used it can be seen that among girls no one used the British word *flat*, they all used the American *apartment* and, similarly, no one used American *roundtrip ticket*, instead they all used the British *return ticket*. Likewise, most of the boys preferred to use *apartment* and *return ticket*, although some of them used the other alternatives. Considering the words *bonnet* and *hood*, it is interesting to notice that *bonnet* is not used at all, neither among boys nor among girls. It should be noticed, however, that as many as 83.3% of the girls and 37.5% of the boys gave non-valid answers, which means that not many of the pupils knew the word at all. A non-valid answer is either an incorrect word or it means that the pupil did not write anything at all. There were also many sets of words where the American alternatives were used more frequently than the British, the numbers were almost the same for boys and girls. *Candy/cookie/truck/elevator/gas/sidewalk* were all used more frequently than their British alternatives: *sweets/biscuits/lorry/lift/petrol/pavement*.

When comparing these findings to Söderlund and Modiano's it can be seen that in some cases their findings are comparable to mine and that they are similar. In their study it was shown that 12.4% of the pupils used American *fall* for the Swedish word *höst* while as many as 73.4% used British *autumn*; 14.1% did not answer (Söderlund and Modiano 2002:158). In my survey it is seen that 31.5% of the pupils used *fall* and 59.3% used *autumn*; the non-valid figure was 9.2%. In both surveys, it can be seen that British *autumn* is used more often,

although in my survey the gap between the two varieties is smaller. When looking at the translation of the word *lastbil*, in Söderlund and Modiano's survey 55.3% of the pupils used American *truck* and 28% used British *lorry*. In my survey *truck* was used more frequently, by 75.9% of the pupils, while only 5.5% of them used *lorry*. 18.6% had a non-valid answer. Continuing with the words *candy* and *sweets*, there was also a similar difference between their results and mine. In Söderlund and Modiano's study, 81.2% of the pupils use the word *candy*, as compared with 90.7% in my survey; and only 7.8% and 5.5% respectively used *sweets*.

5.2 Spelling

In the survey, there were three words for the pupils to spell, and since the correct spelling was a prerequisite for the survey, the pupils were given the available options. In contrast with the results for vocabulary and pronunciation, the participants actually used British spelling for the words *neighbour/colour/rumour* more often than they used American spelling, even though American spelling is simpler than British spelling. The percentages for boys and girls were similar. I only focused on one type of difference in spelling, but there are of course more words where the spelling differs in British and American English.

However, what is interesting to notice is that even though British spelling is used more often overall, the word *color* was used with American spelling by 66.7% of the girls and 62.5% of the boys. In Söderlund and Modiano's study (2002:160) it was shown that only 28.3% used the American spelling *color* and as many as 60.9% used the British spelling *colour*. These figures are almost the reverse of what was shown in my survey where 64.8% of the pupils (boys and girls together) tended to use the American spelling of *color*. Very few pupils in the survey were consistent in their spelling, i.e. most of them used American and British spelling variably. This is strange since it would seem more natural for a student to learn only one type of spelling and use it for all words instead of changing the spelling for each word.

5.3 Pronunciation

This part of the survey turned out to be the more interesting than I realized before making the survey. I thought pupils spoke with either British English or American English, and that American English would be used more since it is often heard on television and in movies.

Beforehand I also thought some pupils would alternate between British and American English, but I did not realize how many of the pupils used British English and American English variably. I also thought that boys would speak more American English than girls, but it turned out to be reversed. The results show that 68.8% of the girls speak with an American accent, but only 58.7% of the boys.

What is interesting to notice in the pronunciation part of the survey is that 80% of the girls believed they spoke with an American accent, while only 10% thought they had a British accent; the remaining 10% thought they varied between them. Among the boys, the results were different, 58.3% believed that they had an American accent and 25% believed they had a British accent, which was higher than for the girls. 16.7% of the boys thought that they varied between American and British English. Thus the girls tended to use American English more than boys did, but the boys were more aware of what variety they used since the figures for American English and self-reported accent were almost the same.

The results from Axelsson's survey are not really comparable to mine. In that survey (2002:142) 34% of the women thought they spoke BrE, 26% thought that they used AmE and 33% thought that they mixed. Among the men, on the other hand, only 14% used BrE while AmE was spoken by 33%, and 44% actually mixed the accents. In Axelsson's survey, the percentage of mixed users is high for both men and women, while in my survey it is lower since the mixed option did not exist; some pupils just chose it anyway, i.e. they ticked both British and American English.

Some interesting findings emerged when comparing two or more words that belong to the same lexical sets as presented in Wells (1982). In most sets, the pupils used the same sound for all the words. But the percentage of those that used a "mix" between American English and British English was surprisingly high. By "mix", I mean that the pupils pronounced one word of the set with American pronunciation and the other word of the set with British pronunciation, for instance the words *either* and *neither*. An interesting test would be to have the pupils who "mix" the pronunciation in a set like *either/neither*, after reading the sentences, read the words from a list and then analyse if they pronounce the words differently or not. The disadvantage here, however, is that the pupils will concentrate more on what they are saying and the pronunciation will not be as "free" as it will when reading sentences.

When looking at the *either/neither*-stressed vowel sound we see that 69.0 % of the girls and 60.4 % of the boys used the American /i:/ while 6.9 % of the girls and 20.8 % of the boys preferred the British /ɑ:/ . The rest of the students varied in the pronunciation (24.1% of the girls and 18.8% of the boys; see below). It is noticeable that the use of British pronunciation is almost three times higher for the boys than for the girls. For the *BATH vowel* in the words *after/ask/dance/chance/bath* 25.9 % of the girls used the American /æ/ and only 10.4% of the boys. British /ɑ:/ was used by 6.9 % of the girls and 14.6% of the boys. The *BATH vowel* among boys was the only case in the entire survey where the British alternative was used more frequently than the American. As many as 67.2% of the girls and 75% of the boys varied their pronunciation in these words; see below.

However, the most interesting result concerning pronunciation was how the same phoneme was realized differently. I expected the pupils to use either the American or the British pronunciation for the pair *either/neither* and in the words that belong to the *BATH vowel*: *after/ask/dance/chance/bath*. Nevertheless, 24.1 % of the girls and 14.6 % of the boys varied their pronunciation in *either/neither* between American and British English, and as many as 67.2 % of the girls and 70.8 % of the boys did not use just one realisation in the *BATH vowel*; instead they used American /æ/ and British /ɑ:/ variably. However, there was a different number of words in the two groups which might have helped increase the figures. There were five words tested with the *BATH vowel* versus only two words when it comes to *either/neither*. In Möbärg's study it was shown that 53% of the pupils used the British pronunciation for the *BATH vowel* and 43% used the American pronunciation (Möbärg 2002:122). When comparing only the *BATH vowel*, the results are very different. His pupils tended to use British English while mine tended to mix British and American. Further interesting results are that he has an overall figure that shows that 64% used RP and 29% used GA (Möbärg 2002:121). By contrast, in my survey, the figures are reversed; in my survey, 64% used GA and 36% used RP. When comparing certain words though, for instance *dance*, the results are the same; 85% of the pupils in both surveys used the American pronunciation (Möbärg 2002:124). As can be seen some results in the surveys are different; this is probably due to both the age-differences of the participants but also the number of participants.

A very interesting discovery was that some pupils were confused by the word *potato*. According to the survey, most pupils used the American pronunciation for the word *tomato* with an /eɪ/ that is also used in *potato*. However, the interesting thing is that some pupils who used the British pronunciation for *tomato* with an /ɑː/ used it for *potato* as well, even though this pronunciation does not occur. Among the girls, 84.5% used the American /eɪ/ for *tomato*, and 15.5% the British /ɑː/, all the girls pronounced *potato* correctly. 86.9 % of the boys used American pronunciation of *tomato* and 13.1 % used the British pronunciation. Almost all of them, 8.7%, had /ɑː/ in their pronunciation of *potato* as well. Why some pupils use this non-existing pronunciation of *potato* cannot be definitively answered, but it is probably due to analogical formation. One possibility is that in the survey the words were close to each other, some pupils mixed them up.

In addition, the difference in pronunciation of the stressed vowel in *either/neither* is also very interesting, especially since the words were close to each other. When the participants read the sentences in the survey, *either* was the last word in one sentence and *neither* was the first word in the following sentence, and still some students pronounced them variably. The girls were in majority; 24.1% of them changed pronunciation of the stressed vowel sound but only 14.6% of the boys did so. However, in the *BATH* vowel the rates were more even; there the boys had an insignificantly higher rate than the girls did, 70.8% and 67.2% respectively.

Another interesting finding that was made when analysing the results of the survey was that there were 10 participants, 4 girls and 6 boys, who all used a clear British pronunciation but then in the vocabulary test they all used American words and not the British ones. But there were no pupils who did the opposite, i.e. used American pronunciation and then switched to British vocabulary.

6. Conclusion

This survey showed that the participants from upper secondary schools in the Stockholm area have the tendency to use American English more than British English in both vocabulary and pronunciation, probably because American English is more often heard than British English, due to all the TV programs and movies that are American. The survey also showed that

although many pupils think they use American English, in reality they often use American and British English variably, especially the girls. The boys seem to be more aware of what variety they use. An interesting finding was that the number of pupils who mixed the varieties appeared to be surprisingly high. I was also interested in seeing if pupils differed in pronunciation and vocabulary. The results showed that in pronunciation, the girls tended to use American English more than boys did. However, in vocabulary, it was the opposite since boys used American English more than girls did. There are more things to test that should have been a part of the study mainly in spelling and pronunciation. Since the data in this study is very limited the results just suggest that the tendency among these particular pupils is that they use American English more than British English, but this cannot be said to apply to all pupils.

This study did not consider differences between the different levels in upper secondary school, since the level of knowledge in English there is similar and there would probably be no noticeable differences. However, it would be interesting to conduct a similar survey in lower grades and compare these results with the results from this survey. Then the results might differ in many aspects. When comparing my results with a study done by Mobärg, in the grades 6-9, I discovered some differences. Most of the participants in his study used British English, which contradicted my results where the pupils tended to use American English. However, since these surveys were not similar in all aspects, it only gives an indication that there are differences between the groups; it would still be interesting to do a survey which is exactly alike in both groups and then see if the results still vary, however.

When looking at the material gathered, I made some observations that were admittedly not a part of my survey. Firstly, I noticed that there were many non-valid answers; these resulted when students used words that do not exist in the English language or just left a gap because they did not know the word. When making up the questionnaire, I tried to use words that belong to a basic vocabulary, but still there were unexpectedly many pupils who did not know the words. However, what was also interesting to notice was that some pupils when translating the sentences, even though they did not know the word, were able to explain them in other words. Secondly, I also noticed that there were many words that were misspelled. I believe that vocabulary and spelling are important areas in the subject of English which the school has the obligation to teach the pupils. It is important that the pupils acquire a

vocabulary they can use in daily life and that they can spell; otherwise, they will not manage in life.

After conducting this survey, which was very interesting, I realized that some things should have been done differently. Firstly, I should have chosen to use a questionnaire with gap-sentences and two optional words instead of sentences to translate. The reason is that I now realize that pupils have a smaller vocabulary than I imagined, and with sentences where they only had to choose between two words, the number of valid answers would be higher. On the other hand, doing it like that would not show what words the pupils are really using, especially if they do not know the word, since in that case they could simply pick a word at random. Secondly, I should have changed the last question from “what English do they think they speak?” to “what English do they think they use?” since in the questionnaire, this question can be interpreted as referring only to pronunciation. My intention was to find out what variety they used, both regarding vocabulary and pronunciation. I also should have had the option “both American and British English”, which was an option some pupils actually chose anyway.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Tables

Pronunciation

Word	Expected pronunciation Br/Am	British Girls	American Girls	British Boys	American Boys	Total Girls/boys
After	/ɑː/-/æ/	40	18	41	5	58/46
Ask	/ɑː/-/æ/	22	36	22	24	58/46
Dance	/ɑː/-/æ/	9	49	7	39	58/46
Lot	/ɒ/ - /ɑ/	35	23	35	11	58/46
Thought	/ɔː/-/ɔ/	35	23	42	4	58/46
Bath	/ɑː/-/æ/	25	33	18	28	58/46
Chance	/ɑː/-/æ/	9	49	8	38	58/46
Tomato	/ɑː/-/eɪ/	9	49	6	40	58/46
Potatoes	/eɪ/	0	58	4*	42	58/46
Either	/aɪ/-/iː/	9	49	17	29	58/46
Neither	/aɪ/-/iː/	9	49	10	36	58/46

* These pupils have used a non-existing pronunciation of *potato*/ɑː/

Spelling girls

Word	British	American	Non-valid	Percentage British	Percentage American	Percentage Non-valid	Total
Neighbor/ neighbour	58	2	0	96.7%	3.3%	0.0%	60
Color/ Colour	20	40	0	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	60
Rumor/ Rumour	36	24	0	60.0%	40.0%	0.0%	60

Spelling boys

Word	British	American	Non valid	Percentage Britain	Percentage American	Percentage Non-valid	Total
Neighbor/ neighbour	43	5	0	89.6%	10.4%	0.0%	48
Color/ colour	18	30	0	37.5%	62.5%	0.0%	48
Rumor/ rumour	28	20	0	58.3%	41.7%	0.0%	48

Girls

TABLE 4 Differences Girls

Word [Am] or [Br]	American	British	Mix	Percentage American	Percentage British	Percentage Mix	Total
Either/neither /i:/ or /ɑ:/	40	4	14	69.0%	6.9%	24.1%	58
After/ask/dance/chance/bath /æ/ or /ɑ:/	15	4	39	25.9 %	6.9 %	67.2 %	58

Boys

TABLE 5 Differences Boys

Word [Am] or [Br]	American	British	Mix	Percentage American	Percentage British	Percentage Mix	Total
Either/neither /i:/ or /ɑ:/	29	10	7	60.4%	20.8%	14.6%	48
After/ask/dance/chance/bath /æ/ or /ɑ:/	5	7	34	10.4 %	14.6 %	70.8 %	48

Overall

TABLE 6							
	British English	American English	Both	Total	British percentage	American percentage	Both percentage
Girls	6	48	6	60	10.0%	80.0%	10.0%
Boys	12	28	8	48	25.0%	58.3%	16.7%

Please translate:

Hösten är min favoritårstid.

.....

Jag tycker om både godis, kakor och choklad.

.....

Min pappa kör lastbil och min mamma kör taxi.

.....

Vi bor i en lägenhet på andra våningen utan hiss.

.....

I år ska vi åka till Hawaii på semester.

.....

Min lillebror spelar fotboll i England.

.....

Vår bil stannade på motorvägen för bensinen var slut.

.....

Utanför vårt hus har vi en trottoar på ena sidan och en järnväg på den andra.

.....

Jag beställde en tur och retur biljett till Stockholm

.....

Motorhuven på bilen är förstörd efter bilolyckan

.....

My _____(neighbor/neighbour) is from Korea.

My favourite _____(color/colour) is blue.

Have you heard the latest _____(rumour/rumor) about Tiger Woods?

I am a girl [] in grade _____
 boy []

I believe I speak with a British accent []
 an American accent []

Thank you for your help and have a nice day!!!

Åsa

Please read:

After this song I'm going to ask her to dance.

Have you ever eaten a banana with lot of chocolate on it?

I thought I would take a bath and read the paper.

Do you, by any chance, like to have a tomato?

I don't like potatoes either!

Neither do I!