



**British or American English?**  
**- An investigation of awareness of the differences in British and American  
vocabulary and spelling**

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## **Abstract**

English has, for some time, been one of the core subjects in the Swedish Educational Establishment and the English teaching has successfully enhanced Swedish students' knowledge and competence of the language. The differences between American and British English are rarely a subject for consideration though, and the aim in this essay is to investigate what abilities, if any, Swedish students possess in order to distinguish between American and British English spelling and vocabulary. This essay will contain a limited study, which includes a sample of 97 individuals who attend an upper secondary school in Halmstad. The results are gathered and analyzed with a quantitative method.

The conclusion suggests that Swedish students possess some abilities to distinguish between American and British English. However, none of the participants in the investigation were able to be consistent in their English use or stick to one specific variety of English. All participants mixed American and British English and they did so habitually.

Because of the limitation of the study, further research needs to be conducted in order to determine whether the findings in this investigation can be supported or not. Similar research could be conducted elsewhere in Sweden with a similar scope or with a broader perspective including pronunciation and grammar.

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## **1 Introduction**

In my experience, English instruction in school has always been emphasized, as English would benefit the individual in the future. Not only would a competent English speaker be able to travel and communicate with speakers from all over the world, but the language would also help the speaker to gain access to new cultures. The benefits of becoming a confident and erudite English speaker in a globalized world offer work-related opportunities to which a high level of proficiency in English would be a great asset. I will not argue the opposite; English has given me opportunities which I would not have experienced if I were only able to speak Swedish. However, as my own linguistic abilities have gradually increased, I have found that English competence is not always as unproblematic as I was taught to believe. Unsurprisingly, the semantics of Swedish and English differ, but to understand how they differ has taken an extensive amount of time. I have had to develop my own strategy by which I could re-visit, and even re-learn, many aspects of English. I found new and interesting linguistic features, which is one of the reasons I decided to conduct the research in this essay.

The varieties of English were rarely a concern during my English language schooling. Kim-Rivera (2008) acknowledges that English education in Sweden has been highly successful over the past years and that Swedish students are generally positive towards learning English. I am prepared to agree, but the variables that determine proficiency or even native-like use can differ, and competence can be viewed from different perspectives. I came to realize that I regularly and unknowingly mixed English varieties, especially AmE and BrE (and probably still do). Therefore, I am interested in investigating whether Swedish students are aware and consistent in their English use. In the field of language acquisition, I have decided to adopt a sociolinguistic approach to the research. The investigation will examine the level of awareness, and the abilities Swedish students possess, in order to distinguish between AmE and BrE.

### **1.1 Thesis Questions:**

1. What competence, if any, do Swedish students in upper secondary school possess to enable them to distinguish between BrE and AmE?
2. To what extent do the current theories and perspectives on SLA inform us as to students' abilities to distinguish between BrE and AmE?

### **1.2 Scope**

This investigation will include students who, at the time of writing, are attending upper secondary school in Sweden. Due to the limitation of the research, I have decided to investigate four classes in Halmstad. The participants are between 16 and 17 years old and they are attending their second year in both technical programs and in programs which are

preparing the students for further academic studies. The research in the investigation will examine the participants' abilities to distinguish between standard British English (BrE) and standard American English (AmE). The primary data will examine vocabulary and spelling only. Due to time constraints, the primary data will not include grammatical or phonetic aspects, although it will be considered in the discussion.

### **1.3 Structure**

The second chapter of the essay, the literature overview, includes a synopsis of the current theories of first and second language acquisition, a summary of the current perspectives of English, previous research in the field and the differences between AmE and BrE in terms of grammar, use, spelling and vocabulary. The literature overview will be followed by the methodology in which the population is delineated, the sampling process explained and justified, and the ways by which my results will be analyzed and interpreted will be outlined. Chapter four contains the results and the analysis of the primary data. The results and analysis is followed by the discussion. In the discussion, the primary data will be compared to previous research and discussed on the basis of the thesis questions. The discussion is followed by chapter six, which is the conclusion; this will summarize the preceding chapters, the findings of the investigation and the implication of those findings and recommendations for further research.

## **2 Literature Overview**

### **2.1 First Language Acquisition**

Lightbown and Spada (2013) describe the main theoretical positions of first language (L1) acquisition and the theories of their implications. The behaviorist perspective focuses on the encouragement by the speakers' environment. The 'positive reinforcement' of praise or accomplished communication is substantial for the behaviorists, as language acquisition is believed to be achieved through imitation and practice. In contrast to the behavioristic perspective, Chomsky, among others, challenged the behavioristic explanation by arguing that the theory failed to account for the logical problem of language acquisition. His theories are related to the innatist perspective, which proposes human languages to have a pre-equipped universal grammar (UG). Children have been shown to know more about their L1 than what the input has offered them, allowing researchers who study language acquisition from the innatist perspective to hypothesize whether the ability to construct complex grammatical sentences is instead conferred upon the speaker by the installed UG facility. In addition to the innatist and the behavioristic perspectives, cognitive psychologists argue that too much emphasis is put on the final state in which a speaker reaches the competence of an adult native speaker. This theory, namely the interactionist/developmental perspective, focuses on the interplay between the innate learning ability and the environment in which language is developed. In their view, all essential knowledge is held by the language itself and is required after continuous interaction with people and objects around the L1 learner. The importance of L1 acquisition is emphasized as a necessary component to understanding the process of second language (L2) acquisition, as L1 acquisition can affect the implementation of language acquisition theories in an instructional classroom environment.

### **2.2 Second Language Acquisition**

De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor (2005) call attention to the difficulties of defining what an L2 is and what a foreign language (FL) is, due to the sometimes dynamic relationship between different languages. L2 acquisition, according to the traditional definition, takes place in a setting in which the language to be learned is spoken in the local community. According to some definitions of L2 acquisition, the requirement needs to take place outside an instructional setting. FL acquisition, according to the traditional definition, takes place in a setting in which the language is not spoken or established in the local community. In most cases, FL acquisition takes place in a setting with formal language instruction. The dynamics of language is explored with 'nested systems'. The term refers to how a larger system of grammatical and lexical competence can contain smaller systems (sub-systems), involving changes in, for example, the vocabularies of speakers. Internal and external factors may, over time, influence speakers to modify their language use. Each individual has their own varieties of phonemics, lexical and grammar sub-systems, affected by prior experiences and

influential social environments. The changes in lexical competence can be affected by such factors as prestige and lack of usage.

Saville-Troike (2006) explains how language traditionally is divided into vocabulary, morphology, phonology, syntax and discourse. With vocabulary seen as the most important component when requiring an L2, the communicative competence is divided into academic and interpersonal competence. Saville-Troike's distinction of vocabulary is based on the intended use of the L2, influenced by the conditions of the learning environment. The linguistic competence is viewed from a broader perspective and includes appropriate use in particular communities. Every individual has their own experiences of language use and competence is believed to be connected to culture, context and what content is being communicated in every particular situation.

Jenkins (2006) approaches L2 teaching by explaining that the reasons someone chooses to acquire a L2 have changed. Jenkins argues that instructional language learning and the aim for achieving proficiency are questioned as English has developed into an international language. This means that the aim of the acquisition is very different, depending on the L2 learners' initial purpose of the L2. Some learners may need an L2 when visiting countries where their first language is not universally spoken and they need to interact with local people, while others need a more advanced L2 competence in their work. Such situation calls upon a broader perspective, while the concept of 'English as a foreign language' (EFL) is compared to the concept of 'English as a Lingua Franca' (ELF)<sup>1</sup>. The transfer of ELF learners' L1 might substantially affect the outcome regarding grammar, syntax or pronunciation, but the intended goal of the L2 could still be met, even though the L2 competence is far from advanced. The L2 could be spoken with, for example, grammatical errors, but it could still be seen as a successful communication as long as the ELF speaker makes himself or herself understood. When an ELF speaker reaches a level of competence where he or she feels that the L2 meets the intended communicative purpose, there is a risk that the learner might experience fossilization<sup>2</sup>. When this happens, the ELF learner might abandon any further attempts to develop their abilities in the new language beyond what they perceive to be the level required for daily conversation.

### **2.3 Defining the Current Perspectives on English**

Jenkins (2006) explains that the term *World Englishes* (WE) can be viewed from three different perspectives. Firstly, the term can serve as an 'umbrella label', also represented as *World English* (in the singular), *international English(es)*, and *Global English(es)*, which covers all varieties of English and the approaches used to analyze them. Secondly, it is used in a

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<sup>1</sup>*English as a Lingua Franca* refers to communicative situations in which no one shares the same mother tongue and has to communicate in a mutual language, in this case, English.

<sup>2</sup>Fossilization is a phenomenon which describes how incorrect language use, when learning a L2, can become a habit and cannot easily be corrected.



narrower sense which refers to the so-called “new Englishes” in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, also represented as *nativized*<sup>3</sup> or *institutionalized*. Thirdly, it represents the pluricentric approach to the study of English. Although the perspectives sometimes merge, the reference to the interpretations of the terms rarely causes confusion as the intended reference is a subject of mutual understanding. ELF is sometimes confused with *English as an international language* (EIL), as it is an alternative term for ELF. The term ELF does not determine any unitary variety of English, but is determined by the users; it would be non-native or native, depending on what researchers choose to ascribe ELF.

## 2.4 English in Swedish Schools

Kim-Rivera (2008) explains that English is a mandatory subject in compulsory school in Sweden and, when the new National Curriculum was introduced in 1995, during a process of decentralization, every school was given the authority to decide when English instruction would be introduced to the students. At the time, the main goal was to ensure every student was proficient in spoken English. The EFL teaching generally starts in first grade, by focusing on oral skills and English as a world language, which has been highly successful, as the use of English is widespread in Swedish society with a low number of students who have a negative attitude towards English as a subject in school.

Skolverket<sup>4</sup> (2011) introduces the subject English in the *Curriculum for Secondary School* by stating that “teaching of English should aim at helping the pupils to develop knowledge of the English language and of the areas and contexts where English is used [...]”, and supports the formulation by explaining that the teaching should aim at all-round communicative skills, confidence, and understanding cultural phenomena. All teaching should provide the students with knowledge in English and of the conditions and environments in which the language is spoken.

## 2.5 Previous Research

Skibdahl and Svensäter (2012) researched Swedish students’ attitudes and awareness of five different English accents and their ability to distinguish them from each other, by inviting participants from four different schools to participate in a questionnaire. AmE, BrE, IrE<sup>5</sup>, IndE<sup>6</sup> and AusE<sup>7</sup> were investigated and the result was analyzed using a quantitative method. The findings showed that the participants were most aware of AmE and BrE, although the other accents which were included in the research were quite familiar to them as well.

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<sup>3</sup> The term refers to a language which has gained native speakers. Such examples were common in former British colonies when inhabitants started to use accented English.

<sup>4</sup> The Swedish National Agency for Education

<sup>5</sup> Irish English

<sup>6</sup> Indian English

<sup>7</sup> Australian English

When the awareness of the different accents was compared with the accent the participants believed they spoke, a divergence was detected and that was attributed to identity. It was concluded that accent is connected with social identity and it is influenced by the situations in which it is used. Hence, a participant who believes him or herself to be a speaker of a BrE dialect (or accent) will identify himself or herself in situations where BrE normally is spoken.

Ledin (2013) investigated attitudes towards AmE and BrE in Swedish upper secondary school. The attitudes were compared with the participants' previous influences and, secondly, compared with two previous studies performed in the field. The findings showed that most participants claimed they spoke AmE, closely followed by BrE, but the result showed that most participants, even those who claimed they spoke BrE, actually used AmE. This was in spite of the fact that most participants stated that BrE was their target accent. Regardless of their intended accent, most participants believed they spoke a mixture of both AmE and BrE, as the influence of TV and other media were accounted for as the main contributor to the participants' mixture of AmE and BrE.

Alftberg (2009) investigated whether Swedish students in secondary school used AmE or BrE by researching attitudes, awareness and usage. The participants were given a questionnaire and they read a list of words out loud. The findings showed that all participants used an English with features of both AmE and BrE. Although most participants, particularly the male students, had a higher preference for AmE and in general, to a larger extent, were able to distinguish between AmE and BrE. A divergence in vocabulary was detected as 'school related' items were associated with BrE and 'non-school related' items were associated with AmE. Aftberg acknowledges that a possible change in attitudes towards AmE and BrE was apparent in the investigation, as BrE was no longer viewed as the higher prestige variety.

## **2.6 Differences Between AmE and BrE**

### **2.6.1 Grammar**

Tottie (2002) explains how grammar, as opposed to vocabulary, does not have to change in order to reflect a changing reality. When new vocabulary is coined and borrowed in response to new circumstances and new phenomena, the changes in grammar have been relatively few even though there are differences between AmE and BrE. The grammatical examples which are normally given are general and not exclusive for either BrE or AmE, thus variations in dialects and circumstantial use, for instance in conversation, fiction, academic writing etc., might differ in terms of their construction of grammatical features.

Modiano (1996) states that most observers of the English language recognize the differences between AmE and BrE to be found in pronunciation, vocabulary and spelling. However, while punctuation seems to be insignificant, grammatical and stylistic differences are more

extensive and important than most observers initially recognize. Some structures might be accepted in one variety of English while it is considered ungrammatical in the other, although such grammatical differences rarely impede communication. Seemingly minor differences do not cause disruptions, but these features are interlinked with the synthesis of lexical choices, pronunciation, spelling etc., which allows communication to proceed without misunderstandings.

### Articles

Tottie (2002) explains how indefinite articles are used depending on whether it is followed by a vowel sound or a consonant sound, as in *a dog, an apple*. However, in informal AmE, the indefinite article ‘an’ is replaced with the phoneme /ə/ as in *a orange, a area*, due to the influence of Black English where it is used frequently. Definite article usage differs between AmE and BrE. AmE uses the definite article to a greater extent than BrE, as in *university and hospital*.

AmE	My son is at the university
BrE	My son is at university

AmE	Fred is in the hospital
BrE	Fred is in hospital

(Tottie, 2002, p. 148)

Modiano (1996) gives examples of phrases which require a definite article in AmE, but are used without a determiner in BrE; *onto grounds* (BrE), *onto the grounds* (AmE), *members of staff* (BrE), *members of the staff* (AmE), *on average* (BrE), *on the average* (AmE). There are constructions in which BrE has a definite article, as in *in the light of these developments*, while AmE does not, as in *in light of these developments*, although both constructions are accepted in AmE (p. 126).

### Genitive

Tottie (2002) gives the general rule for how the s-genitive is used in both AmE and BrE. The rule of thumb is that animate nouns, particular in the singular, are constructed with the s-genitive, as in *the girl’s parents*, while other nouns are constructed with the *of*-construction, as in *the color of my car*. However, in recent years there has been a noticeable change in the use of s-genitive in AmE. The development has shown that abstract nouns, such as *swimming* and *jumping*, get the s-genitive as well as in the following examples of an English newspaper (Hundt 1997:40):

AmE	Anita Nall and Summer Sanders – <i>swimming’s</i> “New Kids on the Block”
AmE	[S]how <i>jumping’s</i> prize money doesn’t yet approach golf or tennis . . .

### Number

Tottie (2002) explains how number sometimes varies between AmE and BrE. For instance, AmE speakers tend to prefer the plural form *accommodations* while BrE speakers use the singular form *accommodation*; conversely, AmE speakers say *math* while BrE speakers say *maths*. Noun-noun compounds represent the largest of all categories of new words and a difference in number can be distinguished there as well. In AmE the first noun is generally in singular, as in *drug problem*, *trade union*, *road policy*, *chemical plant*. In BrE the first noun is sometimes in plural, as in *drugs problem*, *trades union*, *roads policy*, *chemicals plant*.

### Verbs

Tottie (2002) explains the differences in verb morphology between AmE and BrE. With regular verbs the dental suffix is normally realized as [t] after a voiceless consonant, as in *stopped*, as [d] after a voiced consonant, as in *mailed*, and as [ɪ d] after a dental consonant, as in *ended* and *wanted*. There are features of both endings in both AmE and BrE.

Modiano (1996) acknowledges the differences in verb forms as perhaps the most significant dissimilarity between AmE and BrE. A number of BrE verbs have a *t*-inflection while AmE verbs tend to conform to the standardized *-ed* structure. These differences constitute a subtle distinction in pronunciation which often goes unnoticed in pronunciation, but indicates in which English a text is written. It is worth mentioning that many AmE conjugations are considered Standard English in BrE, thus both versions are accepted as correct.

AmE	BrE
burn, burned	burn, burnt
dwell, dwelled	dwell, dwelt
get, gotten	get, got
learn, learned	learn, learnt
smell, smelled	smell, smelt
spell, spelled	spell, spelt
spill, spilled	spill, spilt
<u>spoil, spoiled</u>	<u>spoil, spoilt</u>

(Modiano, 1996, p. 125)

Tottie (2002) shows another class of verbs that are being used with the same pronunciation and spelling patterns. Verbs such as *dream*, *lean*, *kneel* and *leap* all have a long stem vowel which affects the pronunciation pattern in the past tense ending, especially in AmE where *dreamed* usually is pronounced [drɪmd]. Thus verbs as such, with a stem vowel, in past tense in AmE are pronounced with an [i] followed by a [d], while in BrE it is pronounced with an [e] followed by a [t].

<u>AmE with [i] and [d]</u>	<u>BrE with [e] and [t]</u>
<i>Dream dreamed dreamed</i>	<i>Dream dreamt dreamt</i>
<i>Kneel kneeled kneeled</i>	<i>Kneel knelt knelt</i>
<i>Lean leaned leaned</i>	<i>Lean leant leant</i>
<u><i>Leap leaped leaped</i></u>	<u><i>Leap leapt leapt</i></u>

Tottie, 2002, p. 151

### *Prepositions*

Modiano (1996) calls attention to the divergences of prepositions, for example, in BrE 'the restaurant is *in* the High Road' and 'he was in Paris *at* the weekend' while in AmE 'the restaurant is *on* the Main Street' and 'he was in Paris *on* the weekend'. Both BrE constructions are considered peculiar in AmE. Sometimes the contrast can be even more striking, as in BrE 'fill *in* a form' and in AmE 'fill *out* a form'.

Tottie (2002) explains how the same prepositions sometimes take different forms in AmE and BrE. *Toward* is commonly, in BrE, spelled with an -s and *among* (accepted in AmE and BrE) is spelled with -st, although the form *amongst*, in BrE, is considered old-fashioned:

AmE	He walked <i>toward</i> the entrance
BrE	He walked <i>towards</i> the entrance

AmE, BrE	He found it <i>among</i> the flowers
BrE	He found it <i>amongst</i> the flowers

(Tottie, 2002, p. 172)

Another example of divergence between AmE and BrE is the two forms of the preposition *around*, as in:

AmE, BrE	She walked <i>around</i> the block
BrE	She walked <i>round</i> the block

(Tottie, 2002, p. 172)

### *Subject/Verb agreement*

Modiano (1996) explains the many differences in subject concord between AmE and BrE. For example, plural nouns as organizations, businesses, official agencies, etc., are often treated as plural entities in BrE, which means they are given the verb *are*, whereas in AmE, the same nouns are considered singular and they get the verb *is*. Implied plurals are similarly constructed, for example, in BrE it is acceptable to say 'the committee are going to issue a statement' and 'the government are considering the proposal', whereas in AmE one would say 'the committee is going to issue a statement' and 'the government is considering the proposal'. In the cases where the plural form is used, it indicates a reference to the individuals or the sub-groupings in an organization and not the organization itself.

### 2.6.2 Punctuation

Modiano (1996) explains some general features in the differences between AmE and BrE regarding punctuation. For example, the hyphens are more frequently used in BrE when writing compound nouns whereas, in AmE, they are written with two words; for instance, in BrE *co-operation* and in AmE *cooperation*. One of the main diverging features, when writers are dividing a word at the end of a line, is that in BrE the system for dividing a word is based on the morphological breaks in a word, for example, *struct-ure*. AmE, on the other hand, is syllabic, for example, *struc-ture*. However, the matters of word dividing have more or less disappeared as word-processing programs and new technology automatically adjust the margins.

The comma is used differently in AmE and BrE. For example, when listings occur in writing, in BrE, there is no comma between the second and the last item, while in AmE there is a comma following the second to the last item (p. 130):

AmE	The cover has red, white, and blue flowers
BrE	The cover has red, white and blue flowers

### 2.6.3 Spelling

Gelderen (2006) explains how differences in spelling between AmE and BrE occur for external reasons – the conscious decisions of editors, educators and politicians. The slight spelling differences can be understood by both AmE and BrE speakers; hence, the relatively standard English may be responsible for keeping the varieties mutually understandable.

Tottie (2002) acknowledges how most spelling differences are systematic, although some have to be learned individually. The spelling differences are divided and organized by simplified rules and they are seen as systematized. Among the systematic differences, some of the most important spelling differences are AmE *-or* compared to BrE *-our* as in *color/colour*, AmE *-re* compared to BrE *-er* as in *centre/center*, AmE *-log* compared to BrE *-logue* as in *catalog/catalogue*, AmE *-ense* compared to BrE *-ence* as in *license (noun)/licence (noun)*. However, sometimes the pattern is reversed, as in BrE *practise* (verb), while in AmE it is spelled *practice* (verb)<sup>8</sup>, and the use of double 'l' in AmE while BrE spelling use one 'l', as in *travelled/traveled*. AmE spellings are in general shorter although there are some exceptions, as in AmE *fulfill* compared to BrE *fulfil*.

The verb ending *-ize* is the prevalent spelling in AmE, as in *fraternize*, *jeopardize*, *militarize* etc., as BrE rather use the *-ise* ending, although there are variations in BrE while both variations sometimes are accepted, as in *organize/organise*, *naturalize/naturalise*, etc.

Some spellings, nevertheless, have to be learned since they do not follow any pattern and cannot account for a systematic nature. The differences, just to give a few

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<sup>8</sup>The reversed pattern is also, for example, applied to BrE *license* (verb), compare to *licence* (noun).

examples, are, AmE *check* while BrE *cheque*, AmE *plow* while BrE *plough*, and AmE *tire* while BrE *tyre*.

#### 2.6.4 Pronunciation

Modiano (1996) examines the differences in pronunciation between AmE and BrE by explaining how difficult it is to determine and investigate any standard models, as accents and dialects vary, most conspicuously in the UK. Some dialects of BrE have developed through institutional establishments, such as public schools and aristocratic domains, and are therefore associated, to some extent, with social class. The English spoken in the UK became the educational standard in Europe. However, in recent years, the input of AmE has reconstructed the language use and today both AmE and BrE are accepted.

Tottie (2002) compares Received Pronunciation (RP) for BrE and Network English for AmE, the latter is the pronunciation of English used during broadcasts in the US. The choice of standard models is argued as being those which most native and non-native speakers understand, although they are used by few native speakers.

##### *Individual sounds*

The differences in individual sounds between AmE and BrE can be divided into systematic (predictable) ones, and non-systematic (unpredictable) ones. One significant difference between some dialects in AmE and BrE is the post-vocalic /r/, thus some AmE speakers speak with a *rhotic* dialect. Hence, for example, *father*, *mother*, *pleasure*, and *tar* are pronounced with an audible [r]; a strong retroflex r-coloring of the vowel, which means that the tip of the tongue is turned back against the alveolar. In both AmE and BrE the /r/ is not trilled and the airstream is less narrowed than for a fricative.

Another noticeable characteristic of AmE is the pronunciation of the intervocalic<sup>9</sup> /t/. In BrE, /t/ is articulated as a voiceless stop while in AmE it is a voiced tap - a rapid articulation of a stop with a single tongue tip movement. Intervocalic /t/, in AmE, tends to sound as a /d/, as in *butter*, *batter*, *better*, and *fatter*. This feature, in AmE, turns some words into homophones<sup>10</sup> as /d/ also is pronounced in the same way between vowels spelled with *d*, for example, *bidder* and *bitter*, *udder* and *utter*, and *medal* and *metal* (p. 17).

The vowel systems differ in many ways between AmE and BrE. For instance, the vowels in the words *dance*, *example*, *half*, *fast*, *bath* have, in general, an [a:] in dialects spoken in southern England, while in AmE (and in some northern BrE dialects) the vowel is pronounced [æ]. Hence *ant* and *aunt* are homophones in AmE. However, before /r/ and in words spelled with *-Im* AmE use [a:], as in *far*, *car*, *calm*, and *palm*. Similarly, in AmE *father* and *sergeant* have [a:].

<sup>9</sup>Intervocalic consonants are placed in between two vowels and occur in the middle of a word.

<sup>10</sup>Homophones occur when words sound the same, but are spelled differently and have different meanings.

AmE and BrE also differ in rounded back vowels. BrE distinguishes between three different back vowels, as in the words *caught*, *cot*, and *calm*, [ɔ], [ɒ], and [ɑ:], respectively. In AmE, there are normally two distinctions, [ɔ] and [ɑ:], thus *caught* is pronounced with [ɔ] and *cot* and *calm* with [ɑ:]. However, in some dialects in America, especially in the Midwest and the West, these vowels merge and are pronounced with the same articulation. Hence *caught* and *cot*, *stalk* and *stock*, and *naughty* and *knotty* may become homophones.

### 2.6.5 Stress

Tottie (2002) acknowledges how stress differs between AmE and BrE, although the patterns are, to some extent, systematic and can be sorted by syllables, suffixes, and whether a word is a loan word or not. Verbs ending with *-ate* are usually stressed on the first syllable in AmE, but on the ending in BrE. Some longer words, usually with four syllables, ending with *-ary*, *-ery*, or *-ory*, also have different stress assignments, thus some words are stressed on the first syllable in AmE and on the second syllable in BrE:

	AmE	BrE
<i>ancillary</i>	[ˈænsɪˌlæəri]	[ænˈsɪləəri]
<i>capillary</i>	[ˈkæpɪˌlæəri]	[kæˈpɪləəri]
<i>corollary</i>	[ˈkɒrəˌlæəri]	[kəˈrɒləəri]
<i>laboratory</i>	[ˈlæb(ə)rəˌtɔəri]	[ləˈbɒrət(ə)rɪ]

(Tottie, 2002, p. 21)

Although the majority of words with these endings are stressed on the first syllable, there is still a difference in pronunciation. In the second syllable from the end, AmE has a full vowel, whereas in BrE the same vowel is either reduced or not pronounced at all, as in:

	AmE	BrE
<i>commentary</i>	[ˈkɒmənˌtɛəri]	[ˈkɒmənt(ə)rɪ]
<i>category</i>	[ˈkædʒəˌɡɔəri]	[ˈkætəɡ(ə)rɪ]
<i>cemetery</i>	[ˈseməˌtɛəri]	[ˈsemət(ə)rɪ]

(Tottie, 2002, p. 21)

On the other hand, words ending with *-ile* have reduced vowel in AmE but not in BrE, as in:

	AmE	BrE
<i>fertile</i>	[ˈfɜːDəl]	[ˈfɜːtaɪl]
<i>hostile</i>	[ˈhastəl]	[ˈhɒstaɪl]
<i>virile</i>	[ˈvɪrəl]	[ˈvɪraɪl]

(Tottie, 2002, p. 22)



### 2.6.6 Vocabulary

Modiano (1996) recognizes the differences in vocabulary to be increasingly important as the influence of AmE, in recent years, has had a great impact on the English use in Europe. The attitudes towards AmE have changed, and L2 learners have, to some extent, to be aware of, and have some knowledge regarding, the differences between AmE and BrE. As for today, BrE is strongly affected by AmE and many educational establishments throughout Europe have adopted a teaching approach which is encouraging the multiplicity of the English language variants. The mixture of AmE and BrE in use in Europe, which is referred to as “mid-Atlantic English”<sup>11</sup>, calls attention to how confusion in communication might occur for L2 learners, and even native speakers of AmE and BrE sometimes find the differences odd.

The differences in vocabulary are divided into three categories, depending on how they differ and in what sense they might cause confusion. The first category indicates that the terms not only share the same meaning, but are readily understood and, to varying degrees, are used in both the UK and the US. The second category indicates that there are two different terms for the same referent, but in this case the terms are not interchangeable. Despite the differences in preference, they rarely cause breakdowns in communication. The third category indicates more complicated terms which cause misunderstandings and failure in communication, as the terms have completely different meanings. In the third category, the potential of breakdowns in communication are much greater than in categories one and two. Below there is a conceptual chart with examples from all three categories and it illustrates how the terms might be interpreted by AmE and BrE speakers (p. 23-70):

#### Category 1 Words that differ but are understood by both AmE and BrE speakers

AmE

**Gas pedal**

BrE

**Accelerator**

Automotive term.

**Room and board**

**Accommodation**

When the term *accommodation* is used in AmE, it is sometimes written and spoken with an -s.

**Elastic band**

**Rubber band**

The BrE term is not used in the US, but may be understood in context.

**Airplane**

**Aeroplane**

This BrE term is considered old-fashioned in America, whereas *airplane* is listed as AmE in British dictionaries.

<sup>11</sup> The term *mid-Atlantic English* refers to the usage of English noticed mostly in Europe where the EFL speaker uses a mixture of both AmE and BrE.

**Stick shift/Gear shift**      **Gear lever**

**Fall (noun)**      **Autumn**

**Gauze**      **Bandage**

In BrE, *bandage* is a specific term which describes the actual roll of cloth which is used to wrap the injury. In AmE, *bandage* is a general term used to describe many different types of dressing, but *gauze* is the specific term for a thin strip of cloth used to wrap injuries.

**Category 2 Non-interchangeable terms which indicate the same thing**

AmE      BrE  
**Apartment**      **Flat (noun)**

Many Americans understand the BrE term, but do not use it. The term *flat* is also used in *flat tyre* (in AmE *flat tire*), and to express a battery without electricity, as in BrE *flat battery* (in AmE *dead/empty battery*).

**Room mate**      **Flat mate**

The BrE term is not used in the US.

**Switchblade**      **Flick knife**

**Two weeks**      **Fortnight**

Many native AmE speakers understand the BrE term but rarely use it.

**Period (punctuation)**      **Full stop**

The BrE term is not commonly used in the US and might cause disruption for native speakers of AmE.

**Amusement park**      **Funfair**

The term *funfair* is most likely understood in context in the US, but Americans do not use the word.

**First name**      **Given name**

The BrE term, while seemingly understandable, is not always comprehensible to native speakers of AmE.

**Category 3 Terms which likely cause disruption or confusion**

AmE

BrE

**Sidewalk**

**Pavement**

The term *pavement* in AmE means the area of the street on which vehicles pass. The area alongside the street which is designated for pedestrians is called *sidewalk*. Many Americans will be confused if someone uses the term *pavement* when referring to the pedestrian walkway.

**Cigarette**

**Fag**

*Fag* is slang in BrE and, furthermore, it is slang for homosexual in the US which can cause offensive misunderstandings.

**Second floor**

**First floor**

These terms often cause confusion, because in BrE there is a *ground floor* followed by a *first floor*, whereas in AmE *ground floor* is referred to as *first floor*. Thus BrE *first floor* is *second floor* in AmE.

**Soccer**

**Football**

The BrE term is associated with a completely different sport in the US, as *football*, to native AmE speakers, is what Europeans call *American football*, although native BrE speakers usually understand the AmE term.

**Band aid**

**Plaster**

The BrE term *plaster* is not understood in the US when used to designate a small, adhesive bandage. *Plaster*, in AmE and BrE, is a white chalky material used in the construction industry and to make a cast for broken bones. The AmE term *Band aid* is a coinage and these were not originally marketed in the UK. Therefore, this coinage never caught on.

**Private school**

**Public school**

Public schools, in BrE, are privately owned institutions which are associated with the upper class and prestige. The term *public school*, in AmE, refers to schools which are operated with public funds. The term *private school*, however, is understood internationally.

**Principal****Head master/mistress**

Native AmE speakers would probably understand the term *head master/mistress* in context, but as the term *mistress* refers to a man's secret lover in AmE, the term can appear strange to a native AmE speaker.

## 2.7 Implications of L2 Teaching with Multiple Englishes

Cogo (2011) argues that ELF<sup>12</sup>, which should not be confused with WE<sup>13</sup>, is valid and important in its creativity and as a communicative tool among non-native English speakers. While WE is nativized, ELF is a phenomenon described as virtual and transient in nature, strongly connected to context. Since ELF communication normally occurs in highly variable socio/lingua cultural groups or networks, the use is not monolithic and does not appear in a single variety, but is locally transformed and realized in transnational, or international, networks, and movements. As a result, speakers of ELF have developed an innovative ability to co-construct and blend English in order to ensure understanding. The opinions of teachers and learners is seen as an obstacle in the approach to ELF, although changes in attitudes towards the concept have already taken place, as learners, teachers, and English language teaching (ELT) practitioners in general are encouraged to engage in the debate of what a language is and in the issues of the English ownership. The preference regarding native-like English is criticized, as the assumption is considered dated. Instead, the approach to language teaching is accounted for by, for example, pragmatic competence. Hence, the dynamics of EFL<sup>14</sup> communication, such as awareness and variability, are credited as equally important features of language competence.

Rajagopalan (2004) reviews the concept of native speakers of English by hypothesizing whether L2 speakers should or should not be assigned proficiency, as native speakers i.e. of the Queen's English or General American, might experience difficulties in communication due to the interlocutor's distinct (supposedly) foreign accent or inference of the L1. The implication of increasing numbers of EFL learners have put native speakers of English in a new situation, as the English spoken in airports, restaurants, international trade fairs, and academic conferences is closer to WE than any native English. The theoretical standpoint as to whether native speakers of English will keep their privileged status as EFL teachers is neglected because they are not model speakers of WE. This leaves standardized English (-es), such as AmE and BrE, in a less influential position.

Armah (2009) questions whether West African students and teachers can distinguish and be consistent in their English use regarding AmE and BrE, without any interference of the other

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<sup>12</sup> English as a Lingua Franca.

<sup>13</sup> World English(-es).

<sup>14</sup> English as a foreign language.

variety. Vocabulary, tense, spelling, and prepositions were investigated and recorded in four phases, which included conversation, whether teachers could identify and distinguish AmE and BrE, spelling exercises for candidates, and discussions concerning omission of preposition in today's English newspapers. The conclusion of the paper suggests that the differences between AmE and BrE were not recognized. Neither teachers nor students were able to distinguish or correctly sort the examples of AmE and BrE, and the teacher's attitudes towards being tested made some of the research unsuccessful. The result of the study implies that much work needs to be done in order to change the current trend of the indifference towards the differences between AmE and BrE, in order to achieve adequate results in writing and speech.

### 3 Methodology

The initial ideas were to interview students about their attitudes towards BrE and AmE and investigate how their attitudes might affect their language-use. I soon realized that the workload would be overwhelming. The process of establishing contact with students and arranging opportunities for interviews would challenge the given timeframe for the essay. Therefore, I changed the approach and decided to test the competence and awareness of BrE and AmE. The investigation will focus on the participants' abilities to distinguish between AmE and BrE vocabulary and spelling, and it will not include grammar or pronunciation.

In order to support the research question, a face-to-face survey will be handed out directly to the students, mainly to make sure it is completed without any help from textbooks or electronic aids such as computer programs or online dictionaries. I want to avoid an online-based survey since the participation tends to be lower than with a face-to-face survey (Gorard, 2001). It is also an opportunity to prevent the participants from conferring with each other or using reference materials. The results will be analyzed using the quantitative research method.

#### 3.1 Material

The survey (see appendix 1) comprises three phases. The first phase tests the participants' abilities to distinguish between BrE and AmE lexical words. The participants will be given 40 sentences, each one with one or two words printed in bold. Each sentence is followed by four alternatives. The alternatives ask the participants to decide whether they believe the requested words to be British (A), American (B) or used by both languages (C). The student will be asked to choose alternative (D) if they, by any reason, are not sure about the word. For example, the students will encounter the word *petrol* and the task will read: "to get a car running you need to fuel it up with **petrol**. Which of the following statements is true?" As shown, the requested word is printed in bold and followed by the question 'which of the following statements is true'. The same format will be implemented on all words included in the first phase of the survey. Two words of the 40 are used by both languages, which thereby makes the correct answer 'C'. These words, so-called red herrings, are used as a reference point in the examination of the students' lexical awareness. The words are put into context in order to enhance the pragmatic implication as some words are used in both languages, but with diverse denotative definitions.

The selection of words is meant to represent and cover different areas in everyday-life which the students possibly might encounter, for example, work-related situations. All words have been evaluated and discussed with my supervisor and a fellow student. There will still be some concerns regarding manipulation and subjectivity since I have made the selection of words based on an anticipated use. My supervisor has informed me about how some words which have been hitherto regarded as exclusively AmE are being absorbed into BrE. I have identified these and replaced them with other words.

The second phase of the survey consists of twelve sentences, each with a word missing. The respondent is given the Swedish equivalent and will be asked to fill in the gap with the appropriate translated word in English. Depending upon the chosen spelling, their answers will be divided into BrE and AmE. Any misspelled word will be categorized as either 'misspelled BrE' or 'misspelled AmE'. The answers will be determined to be BrE or AmE by the attempted spelling, based on what word I am investigating. For instance, this means that an answer spelled 'coulor' instead of 'colour' or 'color' will be considered a misspelled BrE word, supported by the fact that the student uses 'ou', evidently, the spelling belong to BrE. The chart will have an additional bar named 'wrong word'. Any inaccurate translation will be shown in the chart and examined separately.

The last phase of the survey covers the respondents' previous influences. The first two questions inquire of their native language and determine whether they should be taken into account or not. Students who answer that they have another first language than Swedish will not be included in the result. Their answers are of equal importance but are not going to be taken into account in the final result. This phase is put into the survey to investigate whether the students are aware of what they are learning and whether previous teachers have been clear as to which variety of English they have been using and teaching. The student has to choose whether their previous teachers used BrE, AmE or Swedish English. The term "Swedish English" refers to a non-specific use of English with classes mainly conducted in Swedish. The fourth alternative is chosen if the student is not sure and a last alternative leaves the student to write freely regarding any other English used by previous teachers. The two final questions examine influences upon the students outside the classroom and involve investigating their consumption of music and television programs. I am aware of my inability to verify whether the participants' answers regarding music and movies are correct. In that regard, I have to trust their given answers. Information about which English the students are exposed to outside school might have an impact on their awareness and competence of BrE and AmE and are therefore relevant for the research.

### **3.2 Instructions**

The introduction to the survey will be given in Swedish to avoid any unintended input from my own accent and language use. I have chosen to exclude the option of providing an explanatory introduction to the survey because it might affect the students in their choices. Instead, an overhead transparency will be shown with two examples of how the statements are designed and how the spelling part should be performed. They will be told to put away their phones and any other technical equipment. I will be present at the time they are completing the survey, making myself available for possible questions.

The instructions are important to ensure the validity of the survey. The answers are meant to be intuitive and spontaneous and, in order for the data to be as authentic as possible, the students will be instructed that they will be anonymous and that the survey is designed to ensure their anonymity. No answer will be attributed to anyone as an individual.

Since the research does not take gender or ethnic background into account, the anonymity might avert unintended contamination when I am processing the result. In order to avoid pressure on the students, and thus rush them into guessing, no time limit will be set for their completion of the survey.

### 3.3 Research Groups

The students who are invited to participate in the investigation attend Kattegattgymnasiet in Halmstad. Approximately 1300 students, between the ages of 16 to 19, attend the school which is situated close to Halmstad city center. The school offers students to the choice between technical programs and academic programs. The students who attend the technical programs aim to be electricians and construction worker. The students who attend academic programs aim towards further studies at university level. Four classes have been invited to participate in the research.

*Table 3.3.1. The number of students in each class*

Technical classes		Academic studies classes	
<b>TS 1</b>	27	<b>AS 1</b>	19
<b>TS 2</b>	26	<b>AS 2</b>	25

The first class consists of 27 students and they attend a manual labor program (*TS 1*). The students are between the ages of 17-18. They are studying their second year at upper secondary school with English as a compulsory subject.

The second class consists of 26 students and they attend a manual labor program (*TS 2*). The students are studying their second year with English as a compulsory subject. They are between the ages of 17-18.

The third class consists of 19 students and they attend a program that prepares them for further academic studies (*AS 1*). They study their second year at upper secondary school with English as a compulsory subject. They are between the ages of 17-18.

The fourth class consists of 25 students and they attend a further academic studies program (*AS 2*). The students are studying their second year at upper secondary school. They are between the ages of 17-18.



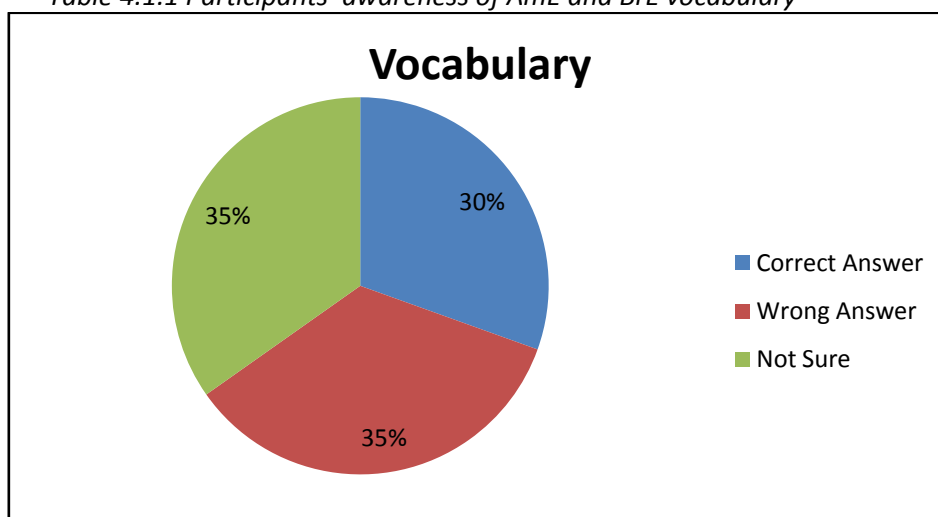
## 4 Results and Analysis

The following results were gathered, as previously mentioned, in an upper secondary school in Halmstad. A total of 97 students completed the questionnaire and the results of each phase is divided into vocabulary, spelling and previous influences.

### 4.1 Vocabulary

Table 4.1.1 shows the participants' ability to distinguish between AmE and BrE vocabulary. The label 'wrong answer' refers to the participants who either chose the wrong variety of English or falsely believed that the words were used by both AmE and BrE when the words were not. The percentages in the diagrams are an average of 87 participants' answers and each color in the circle diagram represent one label each. The vocabulary phase included 40 sentences with 41 given words which the participants were asked to decide whether they belong to AmE or BrE.

*Table 4.1.1 Participants' awareness of AmE and BrE vocabulary*



The results show that 30 % of the participants answered correctly, while 35 % of the participants failed to distinguish between AmE and BrE vocabulary and 35 % of the participants were 'not sure'. A few participants left some words without an answer. Those answers are labeled as 'not sure' in the diagram, as those answers are interpreted as an insecurity of the participant's awareness regarding whether the words belonged to AmE or BrE. Four participants offered answers for only a few of the words, the rest were marked as 'not sure' or left blank.

Some words stood out as being seemingly harder to distinguish as to whether they were AmE or BrE. Table 4.1.2 shows the vocabulary which had the lowest average of correct answers. The vocabulary is displayed to the left in the chart and the percentages of the participants' awareness to the right, with the lowest average shown on top of the chart.

Table 4.1.2 The lowest average of correct answers

Vocabulary	Average percentage of correct answers
<i>Diaper (AmE)</i>	9 %
<i>Mail box (AmE)</i>	13,4 %
<i>Curse word (AmE)</i>	13,4 %
<i>Jam (BrE)</i>	13,7 %
<i>Full stop (BrE)</i>	16,4 %

“Diaper” was the hardest word to identify. About 59 % of the participants answered that they were not sure about which variety of English “diaper” belongs to, while 30 % answered that they were not sure. “Mail box”, “curse word” and “jam” had a similar average, with a percentage just over 13 %. At the bottom of the chart, “full stop” was recognized by just over 16 %. More than 65 % answered that they were not sure about which variety of English “full stop” belongs to.

Table 4.1.3 shows the vocabulary which the participants were most successful in identifying as to whether the words belong to AmE or BrE. The vocabulary is displayed to the left in the chart and the percentages of the participants’ awareness to the right, with the highest average shown on top of the chart.

Table 4.1.3 The highest average of correct answers

Vocabulary	Average percentage of correct answers
<i>Soccer (AmE)</i>	73 %
<i>Sweets (BrE)</i>	67 %
<i>Vehicle</i>	64 %
<i>Socks</i>	58 %
<i>Petrol (BrE)</i>	55 %

The word “soccer” stands out with an average of 73 % correct answers. “Soccer” had the highest number of correct answers followed by “sweets” with an average of 67 % correct answers. The words “vehicle” and “socks”, the two so-called red herrings, follow with 64 % and 58 %, respectively. The word “petrol” had an average of 55 % correct answers.

## 4.2 Spelling

The participants were asked to translate twelve Swedish words into English and depending on their chosen variety, or their attempt at a certain variety, their answers are shown below in circle diagrams, one diagram for each word. The two possible correct answers are shown on top of each table. Correct answers are displayed as either “AmE” or “BrE”. The shortening ‘MS’ stands for ‘misspelled’ and it is divided into either ‘MS AmE’ or ‘MS BrE’. As mentioned before, for example, if a participant wrote ‘coulor’ instead of ‘colour’, the attempted spelling variety is interpreted as BrE as the conclusive spelling feature, in this case -‘ou’, is used. Some participants chose not to translate some of the requested words and these answers have been categorized as ‘Blank’. The category ‘incorrect’ in the circle diagrams stands for

incorrect translations, such as wrong word choice or words that do not exist in the English language. The figures in the circle diagrams show the number of answers of each category.

Table 4.2.1 Tire/Tyre

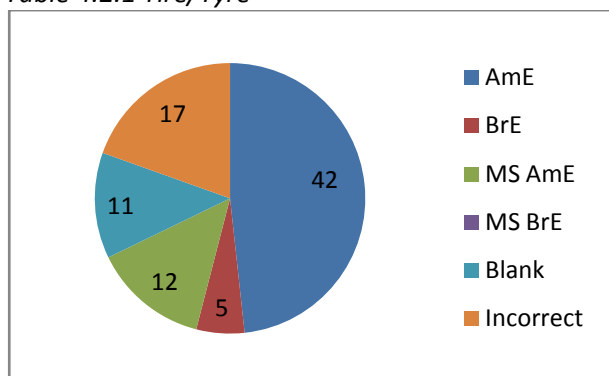


Table 4.2.2 Color/Colour

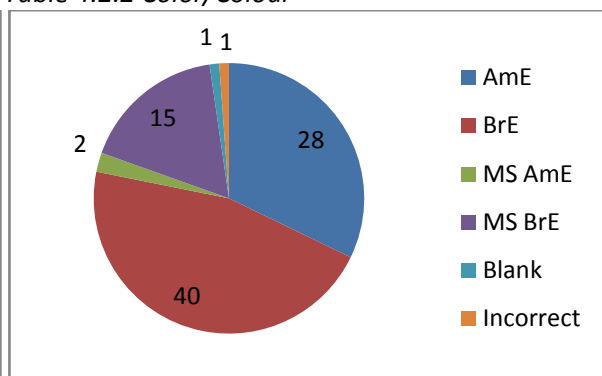


Table 4.2.3 Traveled/Travelled

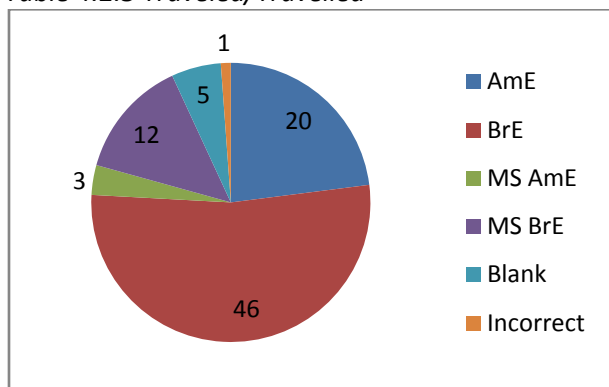


Table 4.2.4 Meter/Metre

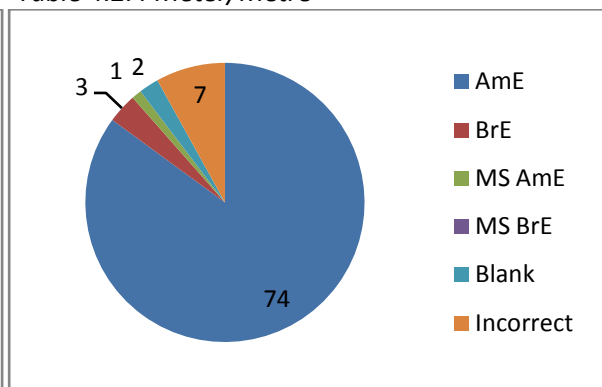


Table 4.2.5 Practice/Practise

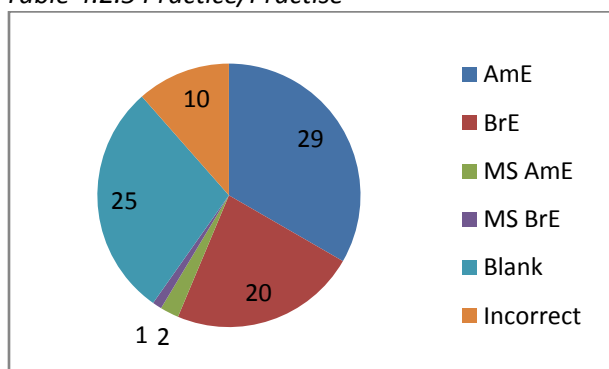


Table 4.2.6 Licorice/Liquorice

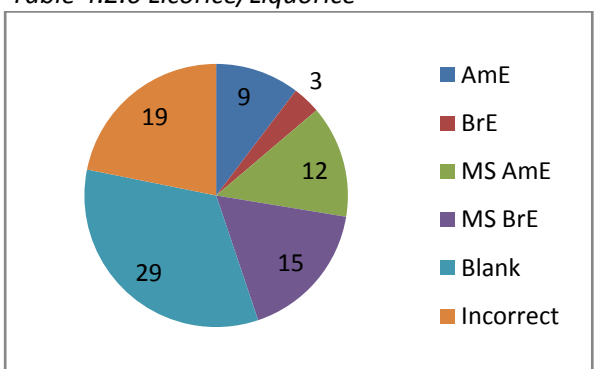


Table 4.2.7 Grey/Gray

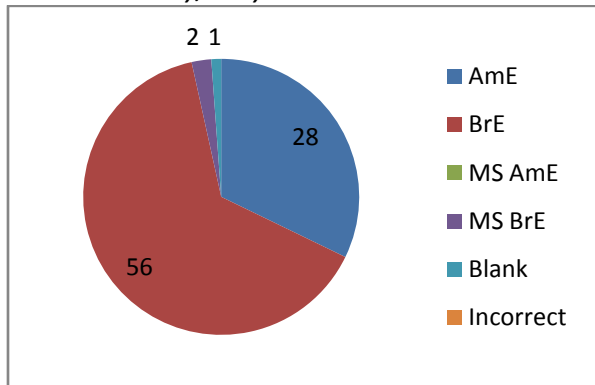


Table 4.2.8 Donuts/Doughnuts

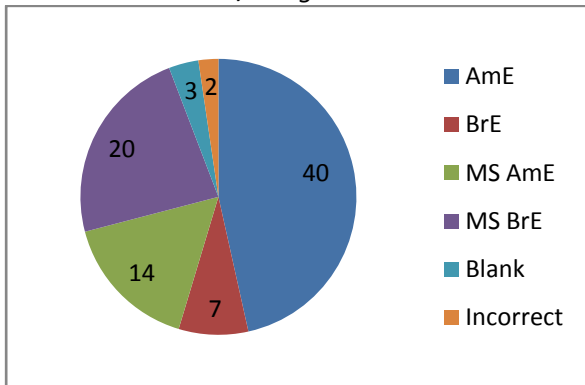


Table 4.2.9 Pyjamas/Pajamas

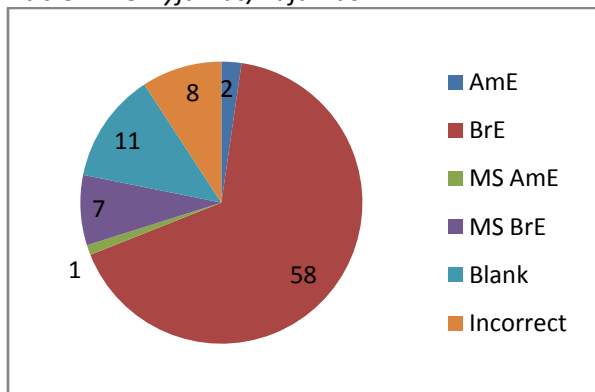


Table 4.2.10 Catalog/Catalogue

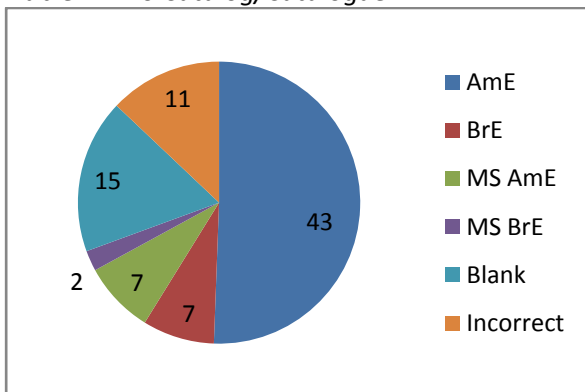


Table 4.2.11 Neighbor/Neighbour

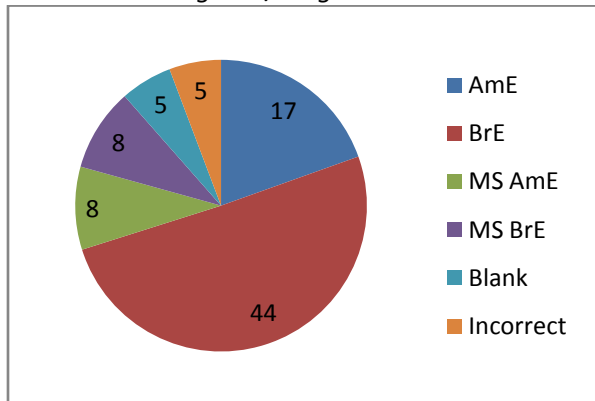
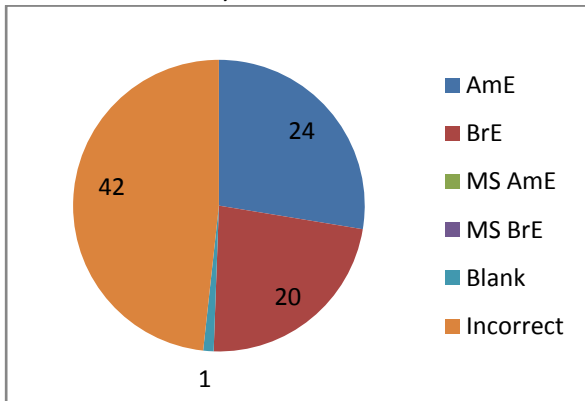


Table 4.2.12 Mom/Mum



The results show that, in general, neither AmE nor BrE were confirmed as being more frequently used than the other. The figures vary, seemingly depending on the requested word and only a few translated words were governed by one certain variety. However, the AmE term “meter” was used by 74 participants, which makes it the most frequently used term. This can be compared to the three participants who chose the BrE translation. The second most frequently used term was the BrE “pyjamas” which was the chosen translation of 58 participants, closely followed by the BrE term “grey” with 56 translations. “Licorice” (AmE) or “liquorice” (BrE) had the lowest number of correct translations with a total of 12 correct translations (in both AmE and BrE). Almost a third of the participants left the

requested translation blank and 19 participants translated the term incorrectly. The term with the highest number of incorrect answers was the term “mom” (AmE)/”mum” (BrE). There were 42 participants who translated the desired term into “mother” which does not correspond to the requested Swedish word. In terms of misspelled words, “donuts” (AmE)/”doughnuts” (BrE) stood out with 14 AmE misspelled terms and 20 BrE misspelled terms. The participants were successful in translating the terms “gray” (AmE) and “grey” (BrE). Only two participants misspelled any of the two varieties and one participant provided no response.

During the collection of the data, some participants stated that they had dyslexia and that they struggled with spelling on an everyday basis. They were informed that they had the option to avoid the spelling phase because, at that moment, they did not have the support they needed in order to perform to their best. However, only one participant left the spelling phase blank and those answers are included in the circle diagrams under the category ‘blank’.

### 4.3 Previous Influences

The last phase of the questionnaire probed the participants’ previous influences and their individual tastes in music and television. As mentioned before, the first two questions of this phase investigated whether the participants had a first language other than Swedish.

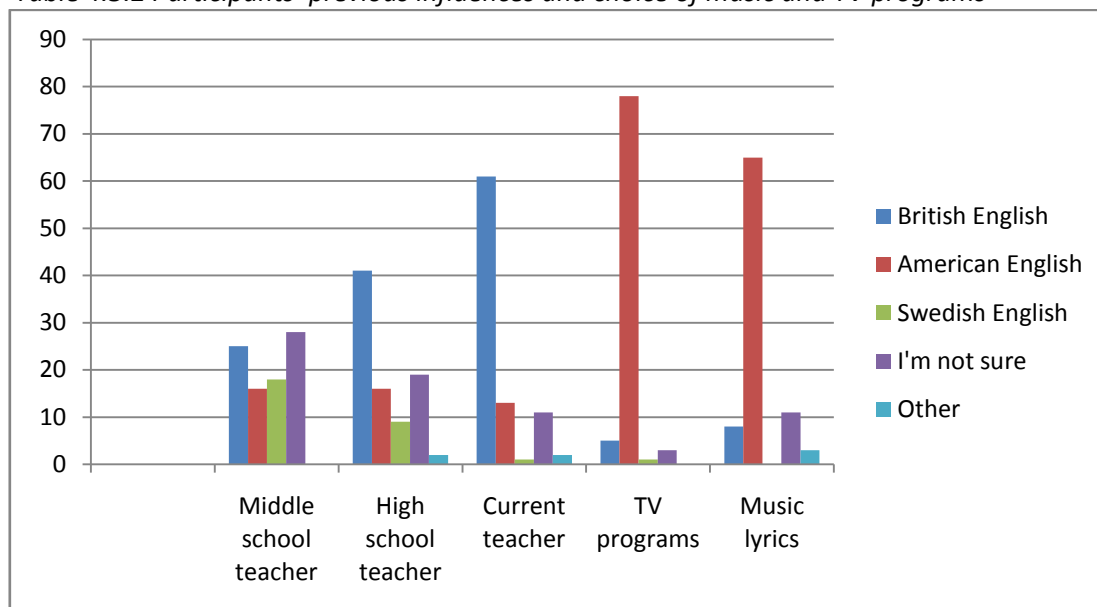
Table 4.3.1 shows the total number of participants and the number of participants who stated that they had a first language other than Swedish.

*Table 4.3.1 The participants’ native language/s*

<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>First language other than Swedish</b>
97	10

Ten participants stated that they had a mother tongue other than Swedish or that they found their second language spoken at home to be equally used. These participants’ answers are excluded in the research in order to prevent eventual input from the other languages. Questions numbers three and four inquired which variety of English their previous English teachers used and question five attempted to establish which variety of English their current English teacher uses. Questions six and seven investigated the participants’ tastes in music and whether the TV programs they preferred were spoken in AmE or BrE.

Table 4.3.2 Participants' previous influences and choice of music and TV programs



The results show that 28 participants are 'not sure' about whether their middle school teachers used AmE or BrE, while 25 participants believed that their teachers used BrE. A total of 18 participants stated that their previous teachers used Swedish English, closely followed by 16 participants who believed their previous teachers used AmE.

Question four investigated the participants' middle school teachers' English use. The participants stated that BrE was the most frequently used variety, having been chosen by 41 participants. The use of AmE remained the same with 16 answers and both 'Swedish English' and the participants who were 'not sure' decreased to 9 and 19, respectively. Two participants stated that their high school teacher used another variety of English than AmE, BrE or Swedish English.

In question five, which investigated the participants' current English teachers' use, BrE was chosen by 61 participants compared to 16 participants who believed their current teacher used AmE. A total of 11 participants were 'not sure' about their current teachers' English use, while one participant believed Swedish English was used. Two participants stated that another English variety was used.

Table 4.3.3 shows the participants' awareness of their current teachers' English use, class by class. The percentage to the right in the chart indicates the number of participants who were correct regarding their current teachers' English use.

Table 4.3.3

Class	Teachers' English	Correct answers
Technical students 1	BrE	96 %
Technical students 2	BrE	91 %
Further academic studies 1	BrE	55 %
Further academic studies 2	AmE	50 %

Question six investigated the participants' choice of TV programs. In all, 78 participants stated that they mainly watch AmE TV programs, while 6 participants stated that they mainly watch BrE TV programs. Only 3 participants were 'not sure'.

Question seven investigated the participants' choice of music and 65 participants answered that the music lyrics were mainly in AmE, while 8 participants answered that the music lyrics mainly were in BrE. There were 11 participants who answered that they were 'not sure' and 3 participants answered that they either did not listen to music, or they listened to music other than music with AmE or BrE lyrics.

## 5 Discussion

In the beginning of this investigation, I asked what competence Swedish students possess to enable them to distinguish between AmE and BrE and to what extent current theories on SLA can inform us about these abilities. The results indicate that Swedish students mix AmE and BrE and that they are not aware of the differences in vocabulary. For example, a few students were able to distinguish between them and even give the alternative term when they answered the first phase of the survey. Although they were not asked to do so, some students wanted to show that their awareness of the differences were sufficient. However, some students stated that they 'were not sure' about a majority of the lexical words, and the same students experienced problems with the spelling phase. Most answers were misspelled or left blank.

Although none of the participants in the survey were able to be consistent in their English use, we can see a divergence in knowledge. Some students were well aware of the differences while others were not. The participants' teachers stated that they worked consistently with the differences between AmE and BrE when there was an opportunity to do so. Still only an average of 30 percent were able to successfully attribute the words to the correct variety.

De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor (2005) examine how all language learners have their own set of e.g. vocabulary, grammar and phonemics and that these abilities are divided into 'sub-systems'. These abilities can be affected by such factors as, for example, the degree to which the language use is consistent. The setting for the L2 acquisition, which the participants in this investigation experience, correlates with the traditional definition of FL acquisition also referred to by De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor (2005). The participants are exposed to an educational environment which they all share on a regular basis. English is not spoken in the local community and each lesson sets a reference point of when to start and stop speaking English.

The features of the participants' abilities cannot only be explained by investigating the classroom environments or the respective teachers' awareness of the differences. The divergence between the participants' abilities to distinguish between AmE and BrE could possibly be a result of individual efforts and interest taken in the classroom. However, as the input of English has increased in, for example, the media, SLA is not only related to the classroom.

BrE has been the preferred variety in Europe for a long time and the educational establishments have had a great influence when it comes to SL teaching. I can only speculate as to whether Swedish students were more likely to use British English in the past, but what we see now is confusion in terms of separating AmE and BrE. The general view of a 'high and a low' variety of English, with AmE in the bottom, has been reevaluated as AmE has gained more prestige in recent years (Modiano 1996). What we see today is that BrE is no longer the obvious choice for L2 learners and the wider input from TV, for example, has introduced AmE as an acceptable variety, even within the realms of academia. The newly gained status of AmE might be one of the factors which explain the confusion and there is a



possibility that teacher-led English education faces a new challenge. The participants stated that their previous and current FL teaching was mostly British English. The exposure of English outside school, on the other hand, was governed by AmE. The results show a 'conflict' between the two varieties which informs us about a lack of awareness regarding the participants' ability to distinguish between AmE and BrE. The results imply that Swedish students do not have enough knowledge to make the distinction between the two varieties. The inconsistent use of any English variety in particular can negatively affect future teaching, and learners' ability to distinguish between AmE and BrE. However, the teachers in this investigation stated that they preferred that their students were consistent, although the results show that they were not.

The teachers' ambitions to educate their students in consistent English use and the participants' actual abilities differ. The future challenge might consider whether this divergence should be accepted in English education in Sweden.

The curriculum for upper secondary school (Lgy11) does not identify the mixture of AmE and BrE as an issue. Actually, the document does not acknowledge any of the varieties of English that are widely spoken around the world. Jenkins (2006) explains that the term ELF<sup>15</sup>, in recent years, has become increasingly prominent when English teaching is discussed. The transfer from L2 learners' L1 in communicative situations where the speakers do not share a common mother tongue has, to some degree, generated variants of English which cannot be identified as being any known native variety<sup>16</sup>. The aims and guidelines in Lgy11 correspond, to some degree, to Jenkins's theories of ELF. The focus seems to be put on communication and cultural knowledge more than the ability to distinguish and properly use one specific variety. The challenge is, therefore, to see this not only as a teacher-related issue, but one that should be addressed within the entire educational establishment in Sweden. English teachers possess the ability to educate Swedish students in different varieties, but the support from the curriculum is insufficient. Whether L2 speakers should or should not mix different native English varieties is not part of this essay, but the results of this investigation confirm that Swedish students do indeed mix AmE and BrE, and do so habitually and with little awareness.

The participants' English use, according to the results of this investigation, also shows a tendency related to Modiano's (1996) term "mid-Atlantic English". The mixture of AmE and BrE is not only something that is happening in Sweden but, as Modiano points out, is a tendency seen across Europe. Even advanced L2 speakers might speak with a native-like accent, but they are also seen to have a tendency to mix AmE and BrE vocabulary. However, the results in the survey regarding the participants' previous influences show that the participants, mostly, were well aware of their current teacher's accent and which variety he or she used. The participants' ability to distinguish their own teacher's English was far better than the results of their own ability to distinguish between AmE and BrE. This corresponds to Ledin's (2012) investigation which showed that the students who participated in the

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<sup>15</sup>English as a Lingua Franca

<sup>16</sup>Such as AmE, BrE, Canadian English, AusE. The concept of native varieties, though, sometimes includes nativized varieties, such as e.g. Indian English (Jenkins 2006).

research claimed they spoke, for example, BrE but when the results were analyzed, the findings showed that they actually spoke with an accent more closely associated with AmE, and so there was a divergence between the target accent and the actual spoken accent.

In the spelling phase of the survey, the participants were asked to translate twelve Swedish words into English and the results showed that none of the participants were able to consistently stick to one specific variant. The results reveal that the participants are not only confused in terms of vocabulary, but in spelling as well. This confusion has been found in all of the participants' answers apart from a few exceptions where the participants were able to give both correct answers (but not in all twelve words), whereas some participants struggled in their attempts to even find any correct English word.

One participant acknowledged the difficulties in the phase which considered the participants' previous influences. When the participant was asked about the English use of the previous English teachers, he answered "a little bit of both". The seemingly short answer accords with what has been found throughout this investigation, although the answer itself is not very informative. The participants have been well aware of the existing differences between AmE and BrE, but they have not been able to attribute the differences to the correct variety and use them accordingly. The answer "a little bit of both" is not only proposing that Swedish teachers mix AmE and BrE, but is also acknowledging an awareness of the fact that there are some differences that exist between AmE and BrE. Again, there is a divergence between the knowledge of the existing differences and the ability to distinguish and attribute them to the correct varieties.

As Kim-Rivera's (2008) findings demonstrate, English education in Sweden has been highly successful and Swedish students are competent and confident in their English use. However, the results in this investigation show that the differences between native varieties, such as AmE and BrE, have been, to some degree, neglected in current English education. An introduction of such competence would benefit the individual English learner, but it is not without concern that such introduction could be established in the Swedish educational establishment. Sufficient knowledge in the differences between AmE and BrE would create a more confident and competent English speaker. Swedish students who are attending programs which are preparing them for further academic studies would benefit from such competence as some, or all, of their future studies will be carried out in English. However, in order to implement a change of the current unawareness of the differences between AmE and BrE, a large scale reform has to take place. All teachers who are teaching in English, and not only English teachers, would have to agree on a common appreciation of the problem and such implementation cannot be achieved by the teachers alone, but has to be reconsidered and agreed upon by school boards or principals, etc.

The teacher is, in many ways, the expert in the classroom and the instructor of the foreign language. If the teacher does not explore the differences between AmE and BrE continuously throughout the English teaching process, the students will be disadvantaged as they might miss the opportunity to acquire two English varieties instead of one. The consequences of the current English teaching process which has been observed in this investigation, however, show that Swedish students do not even stick to one variant and

such confusion might affect the students in future English communication as they do not recognize and are not able to identify the differences.

The implementation of a change in the Swedish English education would come with both advantages and disadvantages. The differences between AmE and BrE are a seemingly small issue compared to other subjects of English in Swedish schools, such as reading and writing skills. There are other subjects which are more important for the students to acquire before the differences between AmE and BrE become relevant. The differences between AmE and BrE could be seen as an issue for advanced learners. However, if the English teachers do not exercise the ability in an early stage, the competence might be harder to achieve later on.

The schools would need to have staff capable of teaching and distinguishing the two varieties and this teaching would burden the students, to various degrees, with two varieties of English. The majority of the teachers in this investigation, as previously mentioned, used BrE and the input from, for example, TV was governed by AmE. This might be one factor to account for the current confusion, as the participants in the investigation mixed AmE and BrE. In my sample, Swedish students showed themselves able to recognize the existence of some of the differences, but not necessarily to be able to attribute them appropriately – i.e. to the correct variety of English. If the teachers trained students in developing the abilities to distinguish between AmE and BrE, such competence would benefit the students as they would be able to use AmE and BrE without any misunderstandings or confusion.

## 6 Conclusion

In my investigation, it has been shown that the participants mix AmE and BrE and they do so habitually. The thesis questions asked what abilities Swedish students possess which enable them to distinguish between AmE and BrE and what current SLA theories inform us about these abilities. The participants showed some awareness in the differences between the two varieties but they were not, in most cases, able to attribute them to the correct variety. The teachers of the investigated classes stated that they worked continuously with the differences, although none of the participants were able to be consistent throughout the investigation. A divergence was detected between the participants' abilities to identify the differences of each variety and to attribute them correctly.

Throughout the process, it became clear that the knowledge of the participants differed extensively on an individual basis. Some participants were able to give the alternative term of the requested words, even though they were not asked to do so, while others stated that they were not sure about most of the content in the survey. The differences in knowledge were continuously evident throughout the research. The answers of the examined words, even when they were investigated on a class-by-class basis, did not show any consistency. With a few exceptions, the results seemed, at first, randomly spread out. The participants who attended programs which prepared them for further academic studies were not more accurate in their answers than the participants who attended programs which prepared them for manual labor work. Although the quantity and level of the English teaching varied, depending on which program the participants attended, the differences in the English instruction did not seem to affect the knowledge of the differences between AmE and BrE. Neither the current Swedish curriculum (Lgy11) nor previous research (i.e. Kim Rivera 2008) supports the notion of formally teaching the differences between AmE and BrE. The findings, in this investigation, suggests that the problem is not only teacher-related, but can be seen as one that should be addressed to the whole educational establishment in Sweden. Swedish teachers of English might possess the abilities to educate their students in the differences between AmE and BrE, but the insufficient support from the curriculum undermines efforts to develop such competence. When compared to other subjects on the curriculum, this matter might not be considered as important as, for example, reading and writing skills.

An average of 30 percent of the participants were able to attribute the words to the correct variety and the spelling phase showed that none of the varieties could be interpreted as more prestigious than the other. The answers were widely diverse and showed no discernible trend. The findings in my sample show that the choice of variety, or attempted variety, was connected to which word the participants were asked to translate. I can only speculate as to why some words were translated into a certain variety, but the general inconsistency lends further weight to what has been seen throughout the investigation – that is, the abilities to distinguish between AmE and BrE are insufficient in terms of vocabulary and spelling.

The phase which examined the participants' previous influences showed that mainly BrE was used by the teachers in school. However, AmE seemed to be the variety which the participants acquired on their free time, including TV and music lyrics. Most participants were aware of which variety their current English teachers used, although AmE was shown to be the most difficult variety to identify. The findings demonstrate confusion between the two varieties and an inability to use them properly. The input of BrE in school and the increasing input from AmE in media might be two of the factors to account for the confusion.

### **6.1 Future Research**

In future research, it might be of interest to investigate the issue even further. The abilities in terms of distinguishing between AmE and BrE have so far not been an issue in the Swedish educational establishment. Since the sample of this investigation is limited to the demographic areas of Halmstad, similar research should be conducted elsewhere in Sweden. New findings will either validate or contradict the results of my research and therefore give a more conclusive understanding to the problem. The results in this investigation show that Swedish students mix AmE and BrE, but are less informative in explaining why they do so. It would be of interest to conduct a more in-depth study which considers the reasons for the confusion and can suggest a viable way forward.

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## 8 Appendix 1 - Survey

### Vocabulary

1. To get a car running you need to fuel it up with **petrol**. Which of the following statements is true?
  - a) British English speakers call it petrol.
  - b) American English speakers call it petrol.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it petrol.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
  
2. If your car doesn't start it might have to do with a **dead battery**. Which of the following statements is true?
  - a) British English speakers call it dead battery.
  - b) American English speakers call it dead battery.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it dead battery.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
  
3. **Biscuits** are something you often find in a bakery or a café. Which of the following statements is true?
  - a) British English speakers call it biscuit.
  - b) American English speakers call it biscuit.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it biscuit.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
  
4. Food such as beans is often **canned**. Which of the following statements is true?
  - a) British English speakers call it canned.
  - b) American English speakers call it canned.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it canned.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
  
5. Some people put strawberry **jam** on their pancakes. Which of the following statements is true?
  - a) British English speakers call it jam.
  - b) American English speakers call it jam.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it jam.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.



6. The months September, October and November are all a part of **fall**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it fall.
  - b) American English speakers call it fall.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it fall.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
7. When you're about to stay in a hotel you usually make a **booking**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it booking.
  - b) American English speakers call it booking.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it booking.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
8. When you are walking next to a road you should use the **pavement**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it pavement.
  - b) American English speakers call it pavement.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it pavement.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
9. When people get sick they visit the **chemist**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it chemist.
  - b) American English speakers call it chemist.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it chemist.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
10. A **dustbin** is meant for you to put your **rubbish** in. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it dustbin and rubbish.
  - b) American English speakers call it dustbin and rubbish.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it dustbin and rubbish.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.

11. Private schools might ask you to pay **tuition**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it tuition.
  - b) American English speakers call it tuition.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it tuition.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
12. Zlatan is a well-known **soccer** player. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it soccer.
  - b) American English speakers call it soccer.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it soccer.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
13. A lot of people like to travel during their **holiday**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it holiday.
  - b) American English speakers call it holiday.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it holiday.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
14. If you don't have the energy to take the stairs you can use the **lift**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it lift.
  - b) American English speakers call it lift.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it lift.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
15. If you are not satisfied with your writing you can use a **rubber**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it rubber.
  - b) American English speakers call it rubber.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it rubber.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
16. To keep track on your lessons you can look at your **timetable**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it timetable.
  - b) American English speakers call it timetable.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it timetable.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.

17. When you're a baby you need **diapers**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it diapers.
  - b) American English speakers call it diapers.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it diapers.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
18. A **cell phone** is a portable phone. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it cell phone.
  - b) American English speakers call it cell phone.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it cell phone.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
19. This sentence ends with a **full stop**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it full stop.
  - b) American English speakers call it full stop.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it full stop.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
20. The **boot** is the space in the back of a car. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it boot.
  - b) American English speakers call it boot.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it boot.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
21. If you want to watch a movie, you can go to a **cinema**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it cinema.
  - b) American English speakers call it cinema.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it cinema.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
22. If you live in the city you might have an **apartment**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it apartment.
  - b) American English speakers call it apartment.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it apartment.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.

23. A **principal** is in charge of the school. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it principal.
  - b) American English speakers call it principal.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it principal.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
24. Sometimes you miss school because you **sleep in**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it sleep in.
  - b) American English speakers call it sleep in.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it sleep in.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
25. Both cars and motor cycles are **vehicles**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it vehicle.
  - b) American English speakers call it vehicle.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it vehicle.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
26. If you are cold you can wear a **polo neck**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it polo neck.
  - b) American English speakers call it polo neck.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it polo neck.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
27. To keep your feet warm you can wear **socks**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it socks.
  - b) American English speakers call it socks.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it socks.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
28. You can keep all your books in your **backpack**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it backpack.
  - b) American English speakers call it backpack.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it backpack.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.

29. If you write a letter you can put it in the **mail box**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it mail box.
  - b) American English speakers call it mail box.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it mail box.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
30. When you want to eat something before your main course you can have **starters**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it starters.
  - b) American English speakers call it starters.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it starters.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
31. When you wash your hands you hold them under a **faucet**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it faucet.
  - b) American English speakers call it faucet.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it faucet.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
32. When you are waiting behind some people you stand in a **queue**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it queue.
  - b) American English speakers call it queue.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it queue.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
33. The F-word is a well-used and well known **curse word**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it curse word.
  - b) American English speakers call it curse word.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it curse word.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
34. Roads are usually paved with **tarmac**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it tarmac.
  - b) American English speakers call it tarmac.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it tarmac.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.

35. If you open the **hood** on a car you can look at the engine. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it hood.
  - b) American English speakers call it hood.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it hood.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
36. When you want something sweet you can go and buy a bag of **sweets**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it sweets.
  - b) American English speakers call it sweets.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it sweets.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
37. If a young kid asks you to buy him a pack of **fags** you should say no. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it fags.
  - b) American English speakers call it fags.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it fags.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
38. If you are moving somewhere you put your furniture on a **lorry**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it lorry.
  - b) American English speakers call it lorry.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it lorry.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
39. When driving and you want to go left, you have to use your **turn signals**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it turn signals.
  - b) American English speakers call it turn signals.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it turn signals.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.
40. When you learn how to drive you need to know how to use the **gear box**. Which of the following statements is true?
- a) British English speakers call it gear box.
  - b) American English speakers call it gear box.
  - c) Both American and British English speakers call it gear box.
  - d) I am not entirely sure.

## Spelling

1. A car has four \_\_\_\_\_.  
Däck
2. Do you think blue is a nice \_\_\_\_\_?  
Färg
3. He has \_\_\_\_\_ across the world.  
Rest
4. The hotel is just hundred \_\_\_\_\_ from the beach.  
Meter
5. Have you \_\_\_\_\_ what you've learned?  
Praktiserat
6. Do you like \_\_\_\_\_?  
Lakrits
7. It's quite rainy outside, the clouds are really \_\_\_\_\_.  
Grå
8. Police officers and Homer Simpson eat \_\_\_\_\_.  
Munkar (med hål i)
9. I usually wear \_\_\_\_\_ when I go to bed.  
Pyjamas
10. In August we get the IKEA \_\_\_\_\_ in the mailbox.  
Katalog
11. My \_\_\_\_\_ is a nice old man.  
Granne
12. Is that your \_\_\_\_\_ over there?  
Mamma

## Previous influences

1. What is your first language?

Swedish

English

Other

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What language is mainly spoken in your home?

Swedish

English

Other

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which accent did your middle school (ages 9-13) English teacher have?

British English

American English

Swedish English

I'm not sure

Other

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Which accent did your high school (ages 13-16) English teacher have?

British English

American English

Swedish English

I'm not sure

Other

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Which accent does your current English teacher have?

British English

American English

Swedish English

I'm not sure

Other

\_\_\_\_\_

6. The movies you watch on TV and elsewhere are mostly in:

British English

American English

Swedish

I'm not sure

Other

\_\_\_\_\_

7. When you listen to music the music lyrics you listen to is mostly in:

British English

American English

Swedish

I'm not sure

Other

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