

Characterising International English

A Description of English among International Students at DalaUniversity

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CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 Organisation of this paper	5
2. AIMS	7
3. METHODOLOGY	8
3.1 Hypotheses	8
3.2 Tools	9
4. BACKGROUND LITERATURE	11
4.1 Definitions of main concepts used in this paper	11
4.2 Origins of English as an International Language	15
4.2.1 <i>Historical context</i>	16
4.2.2 <i>Cultural Foundation</i>	17
4.2.3 <i>Cultural Legacy</i>	18
4.3 Levelling in present International English	18
5. RESULTS	21
5.1 EFL background and informants' conception of English variety	21
5.2. Levelling features	23
5.2.1. <i>Spelling</i>	23
5.2.2 <i>Phonology</i>	23
5.2.3 <i>Lexis</i>	25
5.2.4 <i>Syntax</i>	25
5.2.5 <i>Pragmatics</i>	26

6. DISCUSSION	27
7. CONCLUSIONS	31
8. REFERENCES	35
9. APPENDIX I	37
10. APPENDIX II	38
11. APPENDIX III.....	40

1. INTRODUCTION

Salman Rushdie's words "The English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago" (Crystal, 1997a:130) could not be any more true in the academic, political and economic international scenarios in which English native speakers are not the majority anymore.

In the European Union (EU) neither French (still regarded as diplomatically prestigious) nor German (the language of the strongest economic partner in the New European Order and with the most native speakers of a language in the EU) is the official language. It is English that has been chosen for the leading linguistic role in the new European scenario.

Using a *lingua franca* —that is, a common tongue used by speakers of other languages— might be a sensitive or irritating issue for many regardless of the advantages it implies. Factors other than linguistic or learning features highly affect the acceptance or rejection of a lingua franca. Even in science-fiction (sci-fi) literature, a field dealing with inexistent places and characters, the mere idea of having a preferred language other than the mother tongue sometimes happens to provoke some discomfort. For instance, the frequent term in sci-fi "planetary language"¹ was coined by Isaac Asimov during the 1950's referring to the world language (implying that it was based on English), but writers in the same field —especially from Eastern Europe— have strongly opposed to the use of that term.

¹ In his story "Living Space" (1957), Asimov has one of the characters explain why English is the base of "planetary". The main character, a frustrated dropout of archaeology and ancient languages working as a real estate agent, happens to meet "German-based" planetary speakers in another planet (rather an "alternate earth"). To his surprise, he finds out that the Germans had succeeded in winning WWII in this newly discovered Earth. The character, who has a Slavic family name himself, infers that there might even be an alternate earth in which Planetary is based on Russian or even an earth in which Rome never fell.

Regardless of individual acceptance or rejection, the fact is that there is a language used by many non native speakers to communicate among themselves; and lacking the skill—or the will to use— such language drastically reduces the chances of getting non-linguistic rewards associated to the use of a lingua franca (for instance, access to more academic, job, business or even *love* opportunities). At this point of human time English is the most widely used language in international contexts and it seems unlikely that the situation will change for several generations.

Speakers from many different backgrounds may need to negotiate a common ground for communication; that is to say, a set of elements accepted by both parties which attempts to work as a facilitator. This phenomenon is usually described in linguistics as *levelling*, which can be roughly defined as a language negotiation that speakers from different dialects of the same language or different mother tongues perform so as to establish a common—and up to a great extent— a more comfortable way of communication.

Hancock (2000:1) defines levelling as the characterization “... of extensive lexical adoption, i.e. their mixed-source vocabularies, either drawn from other languages, or reflecting different dialects of the same language”.

Such negotiation usually takes place without the speakers actually being aware of this fact. In fact, all users of a language eventually level their speech up to a different degree. Factors such as personal rapport or previous biases in regard to the interaction group tend to influence levelling (Arcos, 2004). This phenomenon is particularly true in regard to a *lingua franca*. International student exchange university programmes serve pretty well for a description of levelling by offering excellent primary source material to characterise such a phenomenon.

This paper narrows the scope of use of English only to the context of international studies in a Swedish university. Nevertheless, a brief review of various topics regarded as necessary to lead the reader to a more direct understanding of this paper are included in this paper.

1.1 Organisation of this paper

This paper is divided in various sections. To start, the section *Aims* introduces the main objectives of this paper and describes them briefly. It is worth mentioning that the objectives of this paper are based on both socio-linguistic and Foreign Language (FL) teaching points of view.

The section *Methodology* consists of two parts. The first one, *Hypotheses*, states the assumptions for this paper. This section works as a starting point for the development of this paper. The first two of these assumptions refer to biases held by informants in regard to their conception of their English variety, whereas the remaining assumption deals with levelling at a Swedish University. The three hypotheses are treated in both qualitative and quantitative ways. The section *Tools* explains the way in which the data collection in this paper was performed. The empirical tools for this paper are mainly based on previous studies and data collection by the author. Whereas the theoretical tools described in *Background literature* are based on works of linguists and FL authors. Furthermore, this part briefly discusses the rationales for choosing one or the other tool.

The fourth section, *Background literature* consists of three parts. The first one of these provides the reader with the definitions *lingua franca*, *levelling*, *first language*, *second language*, *foreign language*, *General American*, etc. These concepts are supported by the work of other authors in the field, mainly David Crystal. The objective of this first

part is to give the reader a frame which avoids ambiguity when using such terms. The second part of this section introduces the reader to the origins of English as a World Language. The third part of this section will deal with features of levelling in International English.

In *Results* the reader will be able to see the actual outcome of the data collection in a strictly informative way. That is to say, *Results* comments more with words than with numbers. The format used for the questionnaires is shown in the appendixes.

Discussion is the interpretation of *Results*. This section includes various examples comparing the findings of this paper with Spanish language. There are two main reasons for this: a) the author is a FL teacher of English and Spanish; therefore, he is familiar with frequent characterisation of these languages; b) the author wants to remind the reader that levelling and all the characterisation described in this paper can be applied to any other language used as an international language.

In *Conclusions* the reader will have access to an overall review of this paper as well as the opinion and suggestions of the author in his role of a FL teacher from a liberal ideological framework (“liberal” as defined by Melchers & Shaw, 2003). The main point of the suggestions made in this section is to give both EFL professionals and/or users of International English² some useful tools to facilitate communication in this language.

Finally, a list of references used to support the theoretical section of this work as well as two appendixes showing the surveys and the empirical data are provided in case the reader becomes interested in further reading about this topic.

² as further defined in *Background literature*

2. AIMS

The main objective of this paper is to characterise levelling in “International English” in the context of an international programme at a Swedish University by means of discussion of background literature in this regard, collection of data and further discussion.

The second objective is to offer English as a FL (EFL) professionals –especially teachers– tools with which to work on students’ weak points, especially with those students using the language in real-life lingua franca settings.

The first objective is completely descriptive, mainly from a sociolinguistic point of view, whereas the second aim is more prescription-oriented. It should be clear, though; that the term *prescriptive* does not involve a moral judgment as this term usually implies, especially in the linguistic field. The intention is rather to help the user of the lingua franca *to mean what (s)he says and to say what (s)he means*; especially, since in this very case –an international studies programme– the user may become a researcher and should be able to express his/her ideas to others in clear terms and avoid ambiguity.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested in this paper:

- 1) The informants do not have a clear idea of the difference between “American English” and “British English”.
- 2) The informants tend to regard native-speaker accents as more prestigious and as something desirable to achieve.
- 3) The English used by the informants is influenced mainly by the English spoken by Swedish speakers, both in structure and phonological elements after their stay in the programme.

The first two hypotheses refer to biases held by informants in regard to the variety of English they have learnt, they use and they intend to achieve. These hypotheses are regarded as central to this paper since the author notices that a typical complaint of the International English (IE) users—in this case university students—is that they want to speak “correct English” and they regard native speakers from Britain and North American English speakers as holders of this “correct variety”. Nevertheless, the IE users do not seem to make a great effort to actually obtain the “correct” variety desired. Therefore, the levelling (hypothesis 3) resulting in IE is, in my experience, different from levelling among native speakers.

3.2 Tools

In order to characterise levelling of the informants in this paper, two main tools were used in this study: i) data collection by means of two surveys; and ii) direct oral and written registers of informants (31 non-native speakers of English studying in exchange programmes at a Swedish University College 2003-2004). Both tools are related with qualitative and quantitative methods, helping the author to discover levelling strategies in IE. The only requirement to be included in this study was to be an international exchange student at the college starting in the autumn term 2003.

The first survey included various questions regarding the EFL background of the informant. Refer to appendix I to see the questionnaire and results. The aim of this survey was to collect information which could be used for further analysis in this paper. Such information was considered the linguistic *base line* before levelling (pre-levelling). The questionnaire was designed taking advantage of previous interviews carried out by the author with learners of both Spanish and English as foreign languages.

The second survey collected information about what the students regarded as *native English speakers'* accents. The rationale for choosing accent (oral feature) rather than dialect (lexical, morphology features) lies in the fact that EFL students base their conception of AmE and BrE on the accents (Arcos, 1998). See Appendix II. In order to perform this, the informants listened to different people speaking (from different segments from TV shows without images), and had to answer various questions. In order to prevent "guessing" by the students, no segment had reference to the place of the speaker's origin. For instance, the Australian TV show host talked about snakes, the Mexican actress referred to an incident she had had while shooting a film, the British politician talked about the future members of the EU, and so on. Refer to appendix II to see format and figures.

The convenience of using questionnaires lies in the fact that the information can be systematised, ordered and presented explicitly in tables.

For this paper, the author assumed that the international students accepted in the different programs at DU have learnt EFL with books, material and teachers in one of the following varieties: a) *American English*; and b) *Standard English English* (mostly regarded in this paper as *British English*). Both concepts will be discussed in the section of Background Literature. Such a division is arbitrary and even unrealistic in the linguistic spectrum of English —and of any other language. In the section of Background literature the reader will have access to some information in this regard.

The oral and written data was collected in two stages: 1) from late August to October 2003 and 2) from early March to May 2004. The objective of this observation was to compare the changes in the informants' use of English. Both periods of comparison (pre-levelling and levelling) were described based on the prescriptive exercises of a *Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL) exercise book by Phillips (1995). That is to say, the informants' registers were not reported unless they diverged from the prescriptive grammar of this book. The expected new characterisations were regarded as the levelling achieved.

4. BACKGROUND LITERATURE

4.1. Definitions of main concepts used in this paper

The territory of what was the European Union before May 2004 has had various spread *linguas francas* over the last two thousand years. The language preferred has frequently had a lot to do with either economic or military power. Nevertheless, such a language frequently survives its original advantageous circumstances and becomes prestigious in other less practical areas such as art or scholarship. It is then that its influence on other languages becomes stronger but more distant from the original language source, especially if the “original” native speakers have lost economic or military supremacy.

This paper deals with levelling of an international language mainly used by non native speakers (international students in a Swedish university). In order to avoid problems of interpretation by the different background of the readers, the following concepts are defined: *First Language (L1)*, *Second Language (L2)*, *American English (AmE)*, *General American (GA)*, *Standard English English (Standard EngE)*, *Received Pronunciation*, *Foreign Language (FL)*, *International English*, *Circles of English*, and *levelling*. It is important to take into account that these definitions are adapted for this paper and might be defined slightly differently in other articles by the author.

First Language (L1). For the purpose of this paper, L1 will be simply the first tongue acquired and will be equalled to the concept of *native language*. It should be noticed that an individual can have two L1s. In that case, the individual will be called *bilingual*.

Second Language (L2). It will refer to the language either acquired or learnt after the first language and it is highly related to “non-native settings, where the language has become part of a country’s chief institutions,...” (Crystal; 1997b:54). Many times, the learning of a L2 is encouraged and enforced by the government in order to have a common

ground for certain public fields. According to Crystal a L2 is “a non-native language that is widely used for purposes of communication, usually as a medium of education, government, or business.” (1997b:372).

Foreign language (FL). This concept will refer to the language learnt in lessons (either private or public) taken in non-native speaking countries, and which “has no status as a routine medium of communication in that country.” (Crystal; 1997b:372)

American English (AmE) refers to the characterisation of vocabulary, syntax and phonology used by the TOEFL organisation in its registered material. It is important to notice that it is not only way or the most widely spread variety of American English. It is rather the American variety most used in EFL.

Standard English English (Standard EngE). This concept will refer to the most popular characterisation which “is maintained and updated in major publications such as the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* as well as a number of dictionaries and grammar books written for native and non-native users of English” (Melchers & Shaw, 2003:47)

Received Pronunciation (RP). Originally, the term referred to the “correct” pronunciation based on Daniel Jones’s own speech. Jones was a linguist who published his work *Phonetic Transcriptions of English Prose* in 1907. Eventually, it referred to pronunciation used by the “educated” in southern England. Nowadays RP might be treated simply as “the basis of linguist’s **phonemic descriptions** of English, and this has led to other accents being described in terms of their distance from an RP standard.” (Graddol, Leith and Swan, 1996). For this paper, RP will be the intended target of both students and teachers in EFL when not dealing with GA.

General American (GA) This is the most commonly accent used in TOEFL exams and represents American accent “without a great deal or regional colouring” (Melchers &

Shaw.; 2003: 85). Unlike RP, General American is seldom linked to a specific social stratification.

The term *International English* will be “a complex of linguistic features and communicative practices which make the variety widely comprehensible” (Melchers & Shaw; 2003: 179). It includes no particular accent and unlike GA and Standard EngE Received Pronunciation, it is syllable-timed — that is, sounding like a burst of equally short syllables rather than stressed-timed, which stress syllables at regular intervals regardless of the atonic syllables (Arcos; 2004: 12).

The three circles of English. This concentric-circle model was developed by Kachru (Melchers & Shaw; 2003:36) and it classified the English language into the *inner circle*, *the outer circle*, and *the expanding circle*.

The first case, *the inner circle*, consists of the speech communities whose first language is English. Typical examples of this region are the US, Australia, Canada and the UK. It is worth noting that legally speaking, English is not the official language of the UK and the United States. Thus it should be borne in mind that the concept of *inner circle* is far from being technically legal.

The second linguistic region, the *outer circle*, refers to those countries which use English as a domestic lingua franca for official purposes. The reason for adopting an official language lies in the fact that there might be speakers from other languages and English. Examples of this circle are India, some countries in Western Africa such as Ghana, among others. For this paper, the outer circle speakers will be regarded as “honorary” members of the inner circle mainly because of the much higher exposure to English in everyday life when compared to speakers of the expanding circle.

Expanding circle refers to all those countries which do not use English in their domestic legal or academic issues as the main language. Nevertheless, they recognise the importance of this language for further academic or economic development. English is widely promoted as a FL in their public education syllabi. Technically speaking Sweden should be included in the *expanding circle* although English is recognised as a common for business and education. For the purpose of this paper, this country will be regarded as *outer circle*.

A final point in this part is the ideological framework of discussion, by political stance. For this paper, the author uses the division proposed by Melchers and Shaw (2003). See table below.

Table 1 Ideological frameworks of discussion, by political stance

Conservative	People in this group (Quirk 1990, Honey 1997) emphasize that it is valuable for members of less powerful groups to gain respect and credibility by assimilating to more powerful groups' language practices
Liberal	People in this group (Crystal 1997a, Kachru 1983, Mac Arthur 1998) emphasize that all varieties are linguistically equal and deserve equal recognition.
Radical	People in this group (Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1994, Tollefson 1992) emphasize the inequalities among groups who use different languages and the tendency of English to exacerbate some of these inequalities.

Source: *World Englishes* (Melchers and Shaw, 2003:30).

The author agrees with Melchers and Shaw' view that the table actually shows three different interpretations of the very same facts. In this paper, the discussion, and the conclusions come from a liberal perspective.

4.2 Origins of English as an International Language

Many languages have been used for speakers of other languages to achieve mutual understanding. In most cases the original reason for preferring one language over the other is based on the economic or military powers of such a language. Nevertheless, the language might be associated with other “rewards” after initial contact with native speakers has decreased or simply stopped. French is still a widely used language in international diplomacy and the Vatican still holds a yearly contest in written Latin.

The English proverb “Every dog has its day” can be clearly illustrated by the “internationality” period of a language. Under the territory ruled by Alexander the Great Greek was the language most commonly spoken, and during the Renaissance Italian and French were. As previously mentioned, a language might continue to live on as an international language even after its native speakers have lost economic and/or military power. However, a language can stop being an international language for lack of association with prestige. For instance, Spanish, the third most widely spoken language nowadays, is a clear example of a language which “lost its momentum” to become a European Lingua Franca for a longer time than it actually was. Alatorre (2000) suggests that a scholar as Spinoza or Erasmus might not have fully developed in the Spain of the 16th of 17th centuries. The Castilian repression of the humanistic movement can be regarded as one of the main reasons that made Spanish a widely spread first language rather than an international language.

The following three sub-sections are a review of Crystal’s work “English as a Global Language” (Crystal, 1997a), which offers a general view of the reasons why English has become the main international language used nowadays. He mentions three elements: i) the historical context, ii) the cultural foundation, and iii) the cultural legacy. The author of

this paper regards the first element as the reason of existence for the present inner and outer circles. Therefore, it will be briefly mentioned and actually the historic reference will start from the 19th century. The other two elements will be discussed in more detail.

4.2.1 Historical Context

According to Crystal, the expansion of British colonial power and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic power are the two main factors which make English the most widely spread global language nowadays.

Although the British had started colonies overseas at around the same point of time as the other colonial powers (France, Portugal and Spain, mainly), they never actually had many new native speakers in the new lands. Unlike the Spaniards who openly mixed with and married native people from their colonies, the British had mainly settlements of inhabitants from the British Isles (the thirteen colonies, Canada, Australia, for example), and English became the lingua franca and would eventually become a second language in most places of the outer circle (India, Ghana, Singapore, etc.)

WWI and WWII meant the loss of World supremacy for the British Empire but not for its language since one of the new powers emerging happened to be an inner circle country, the USA. Unlike the USSR, the United States had relatively few human casualties and material losses in WWII, thus having more chances for investing and influencing in the fields which had been mainly European, Asiatic and African. Furthermore, Russian was never a lingua franca in Western and Central Europe except for the small communities of immigrants. This historical context has been supported (by cultural foundation) and confirmed by cultural legacy.

4.2.2 Cultural Foundation

In regard to cultural foundation, Crystal (1997a) mentions the pride of some writers such as David Hume when writing and promoting English at a time that French had more prestigious among the literature. Nevertheless, the author of this paper regards *Access to knowledge* by Crystal (1997b) as more relevant for the aim of this paper.

One of the many watersheds in the role of English as an International Language was the Industrial Revolution. The need to avoid competitors who would simply copy—and possibly improve—devices led many inventors to stop using Latin, the language of science thus. Technology rather than science was the main use of English. Curiously, English had started to become the Latin of the modern times. It would take almost two centuries to substitute French as the international language in other fields. It is at this point of time that English became even closer in lexis to the Romanic languages (French, Spanish, etc.) because of the terms or *neologisms* coming from Greek or Latin.

In the late 1800s the United States would become an attractive place for economic development because of the use of technology. It is curious to notice that English started to take the place of French as a lingua franca for other reasons than linguistic; it was the language of economic opportunity.

Yet it should be mentioned that English would have a long way to go in order to achieve the international status it has nowadays. For instance, much of the research about AIDS in the late early 80's was not in a common language. The two main researchers published their original information in French and English, and the reader might remember that Gallo (US) and Montaigner (France) had a long legal battle for the recognition of the discovery of the virus (Garfield; 1995). Such dispute might have been avoided in 2004,

mainly because of easier access to e-information, but also because it has become obligatory in most prestigious science journals to include an abstract in English.

4.2.3. Cultural Legacy

The role of English nowadays is reinforced by the cultural load in this language coming from cultural aspects which obviously mean economic profit but also mean personal satisfaction. Among these elements are the media, advertising and art (mainly cinematography and popular music), tourism and international safety. It is noticeable that the song for the 1998 Football World Cup in France was sung by a native-Spanish speaker (“Ricky” Martin) with lyrics in English, French and Spanish.

What is more, the role of English in international relations has stopped being highly associated with the economic or military power of the British Empire or the US. It is true that the NATO alliance had the US as its most influential member, and the UN included two English-speaking victors from the WWII; however, the use of English in international exchange programmes and international meetings —especially in the EU— has slowly moved away from the association with the US and England.

4.3. Levelling in present international English

Levelling is a phenomenon which does not take place drastically nor is it imposed by any institution, especially, if such a body depicts the language of the majority as “ugly”. For instance, the *Appendix Probi*³ ended up serving more as a description of the evolution of the Spanish language, rather than a code faithfully obeyed.

³ In the 3rd century A.D., the Iberic monk Probo wrote an appendix of correct Latin use. It is worth mentioning that Latin had started along its way to Spanish generations before Probo was born. His effort was

The Standard English in EFL teaching is usually described —and up to a great extent prescribed— by prestigious publishers, mainly *Longman* or *Oxford* and *Cambridge University Presses*. Nevertheless, as in the case of the Appendix Probi, the prescribed (or rather suggested in EFL material) English sometimes changes drastically in actual use in real situations. Levelling takes place in the interaction between people with different linguistic backgrounds. The actors participating in the levelling have grown up in a specific linguistic frame, and usually find themselves with no one-to-one semantic, phonological or syntactic equivalent.

Jenkins (2002) has described English as a lingua franca especially in phonological aspects, whereas Melchers and Shaw (2003) comment on a wider range of issues (spelling, phonology, grammar, pragmatics and lexis). According to Melchers and Shaw International English is basically a mix of AmE and BrE plus the first language. It should be understood that the type of English mentioned above does not usually come from a regular native speaker, but rather from an EFL teacher and/or material in which a standardised English is promoted, in this case, GA and RP.

Melcher and Shaw comment on an example given by Crystal about a Spanish student in Sweden:

‘...though here in Sweden he practices English every day, he practices it mainly with Erasmus students. People who are in his same linguistic situation. These students could speak better or worse, but they are not the better sample to follow. But *since they speak different languages from him, they are not making gross Spanish mistakes. He will develop a kind of Euro English*’ (Melcher G; Shawn, P, 2003:186)

fruitless as a device to stop the “deformation” of Latin. His work, though, has been widely used by historical linguistics to follow the track of Latin in the Iberian Peninsula.

Alatorre (2000) comments that the most prestigious speech is associated to the vertical (social class) rather to the horizontal (geographical distribution) strata of a language. It should be noticed that the standard language when considered as a whole is more an ideal target rather than an actual language. Demonte (2003) makes a point that the notion of a standard language is subjective and social. Whereas Pascual and Prieto (1998) state that the standard language is rather the intersection of various dialects, thus it is a variety which has been superposed conventionally.

What is more, the division between American English and British English has long been left behind in most EFL circles (expressions such as “other Englishes” or “Euro-English” are not uncommon in EFL teaching circles). The author assumed, though, that the informants in this study were influenced by the deeply rooted idea that they had learnt Standard English Eng (with RP) or AmE (with GA) and/or that they regarded one or the other accent as a desirable target (see *Discussion* and *Appendix I*)

5. RESULTS

5.1 EFL background and informants' conception of English variety

The results of the surveys regarding EFL studies background of individuals as well as their conception of *AmE* and *Standard English Eng* are shown in tables 5.1 and 5.2 respectively.

Table 2. EFL background studies of the informants

Nationality	17 Poles, 4 former Soviets, 4 Czechs, 3 Italians, 3 Spaniards (total of informants: 31)
Age	22-29
Gender	23 women, 8 men
Age at which you start learning EFL?	At 8 years old (3), at 12-15 (28)
How long did you study EFL in the compulsory curriculum in your country?	Less than one year (none), 1-2 years (none), at least 3-5 (4), more than 5 (27)
Did you take more than fifty hours of EFL private lessons?	Yes (3), no (28)
Have you taken any international programmes in English language before?	Yes (none), no (all)
What is the main orientation that you got in your EFL studies (AmE, BrE or other?)	AmE (none), BrE (all), other (none)
Is there a special variety of English that you intend to eventually achieve?	AmE (1), BrE (30), other, (none)
Have you lived in an English speaking country for more than three months?	Yes (3), No (28)
Why did you choose Sweden as an option?	—First option to practise English (7) —Second option to practise English (20) —the programme is important for my future career (4)
Have you taken any TOEFL, PTE, FCE, or any other EFL test?	Yes (1, TOEFL) No (30)
Were you asked for any special test to be admitted at Dalarna University?	Yes (none), No (all)

The compulsory time to study EFL in the national systems and the age at which the informant started EFL was quite similar. There were only three subjects who started studying EFL as young children.

Most informants regard Sweden as a good option to practise English. It is noticeable the prestige that Sweden has in regard of EFL, especially since the question was open and

no answers typically associated with Sweden (such as landscape, level of studies, field of academic interest) were common.

BrE turns out to be the most desirable target in use. Nevertheless, Survey II shows that despite the fact that BrE is regarded as a prestigious and desirable speech, few informants were able to draw a clear line between the different varieties. Table 3 below shows the results in this regard. (See Appendix for details about the speakers)

Table 3. Survey II Informant's conception of what AmE and BrE is (through accents)

Speaker	Informants believing the speaker was a native speaker of English	Informants believing the speaker had an AmE accent	Informants believing the speaker had a BrE accent	Informants believing the speaker other accent but AmE or BrE (even other native English accents are included)
US Actor	100%	20%	80%	-
Australian TV show host	100%	90%	-	10% (Australian)
Swedish presenter	95%	-	95%	5% (German/Dutch/Danish/Swede)
Hindu character from TV show	20%	-	-	80% (Indian)
British Politician	100%	-	100%	-
Irish DU student	100%	-	100%	-
Mexican actress	0%	-	-	100% (Hispanic, Italian)
Russian journalist	0%	-	-	100% (Mainly Russian, always "Slavonic")
British singer	100%	95%	0%	5% (Australian)
Canadian actor	100%	100%	-	-
Nigerian speaker	100%	10%	-	90% (Africa, West Indies)

Only one of the informants is familiar with the tests of EFL which are usually required for non-European students. Many students (25) commented that they were not required to take that kind of tests because their universities approved their level of proficiency.

5.2 Levelling Features

It should be clarified that only for linguistic reasons, Russian, Czechs and Poles will be referred to as *Slavonics* or *Slavonic speakers*, whereas Italian and Spanish speakers will be referred to as *Romance speakers* in the rest of this paper. This section will contain some registers exemplifying the features. Refer to Appendix III for more examples.

5.2.1 Spelling

Although there was some hesitation in the spelling in words ending in “-our” or “-ise” (BrE) and “or” and “-ize” (AmE) during the first stage of observation, at the end of the second period there was an overcoming trend to favour AmE. This phenomenon occurred in all the students, even those claiming that they favoured British-oriented English. Among the examples of this trend are “favor”, “color”, “organize” and “characterize”.

5.2.2 Phonology

Intonation and pronunciation remained basically the same throughout the study. That is to say, the students kept their strong native intonation and pronunciation, this latter characterised by the simplification of vocalic sounds when compared to GA or RP. This might be partially explained by the fact that all the speakers in this paper had a syllable-timed or partially syllable-timed mother tongue.

The most noticeable features in this area were:

- i) Transformation of final voiced consonant sounds into corresponding voiceless sounds, thus usually leading to /s/ in most plurals (“dogs” pronounced as /δακσ/, /δοκσ/ or /δΑκσ/, for instance). Although this phonetic event also took place during the pre-levelling period, it was in the second period that such feature became the norm rather than the exception.
- ii) Much more use of *juncture* and *assimilation* . Both concepts refer to phonetic linkage of two morphologically different words. The first one refers to what happens at morpheme boundaries (for instance, “she’sat school” sounding as /Σι:σατ̄ σκυλ/), whereas the latter one refers to consonant or vowel sounds similar to surrounding sounds (for instance, whatdo...?” sounding as /’ωαδυ/). More use of *juncture* which resulted in more fluent utterances, especially when one-syllable non content words (prepositions and conjunctions mainly), Although such a phenomenon did not take place as it does in native speakers who tend to stress differently and produce two different entities as in *blackbird* and *black bird* (see table below)
- iii) Noticeable hesitation when using questions of offer/request. That is to say, continuous pausing without completing the utterance. For instance,

Would it be ok...if you move...a little bit? or

I...think that..uh...maybe...

Table 4. Examples of juncture and assimilation in period 1 and period 2

Period	Juncture	Assimilation
Pre-levelling	It is /ið ɪs/ liked it /λαφκτ ιτ/ ωορκ ιν... /ωορκ ιν/	As soon as /as-sun- as/ A student /αν εσ'τφυ δεντ/ (especially Spanish speakers) What do /ωατ δυ/ or /ωαδ δυ/
Levelling	It is /'it is/ liked it /lajkit/, /lajkit/ or /lajtit/ work in /'ωορκιν/ or /'ωερκιν/	As soon as /≡συνασ/ A student /αν εσ'τφυ δεντ/ or /astjudent/ What do /ωαδυ/ or /ωαρυ/

5.2.3. Lexis

The four features registered were:

i) *nonce-words* (the unknown words in the target language but created with known elements and which usually become “jargon”). An example of this is “to be Swede”, that is, not to be direct, usually with a negative connotation. Curiously, a similar expression with a different meaning does exist in Spanish, but the example here came from Slavonic speakers.

ii) A noticeable increase of lecture/reading-related vocabulary, mainly conjunctions, prepositions and adverbs (*according to, furthermore, what is more, yet, etc.*) It should be noticed, though, that some of these words were used incorrectly, for instance, “According to the yesterday” meaning “the weather yesterday” or “That’s expensive. Furthermore, I need it!”

iii) *Calques* (that is, semantic copy of the native language into the lingua franca). For instance, *send me an ‘arrow’* by Polish speakers suggesting to call somebody’s

attention at an appointed time by ringing up but expecting that the receiver should not answer the phone.

iv) *False cognates* (words morphologically similar in two languages but with different semantic use). For instance, Spanish speakers tended to use “realise” instead of “perform”.

5.2.4. Syntax

The most notorious feature was the use of passive voice. Even when in informal conversation, utterances such as “They told me to pick it up later” and “A friend is checking my paper” became “I was told to pick it up later” and “My paper is checked (instead of “being checked”) by a friend”. Other prescriptive errors such as subject omission (*is important*), subject-verb order (*he doesn't know when is he going to come*), etc. did not show a relevant increase during the period studied.

5.2.5 Pragmatics

The most relevant aspect is related to questions regarding offers and requests. As mentioned above, there is a trend to phonetic hesitation, but this phenomenon is reinforced by “beating around the bush” when offering, requesting or even apologising.

For instance,

Maybe we should go or maybe we should stay? (Rising tone although it is a statement)

Do you think that it would be ok if we start...?

Oh, I am sorry (not “I'm sorry), maybe I should ...

6. DISCUSSION

In general terms, the results of the levelling observed in this paper corresponds to the features commented by Jenkins (2002), Melchers and Shaw (2003) and Seidlhofer (2001). This is especially true in regard to syntax and spelling. Lexis, phonology and pragmatics were much less characterised by the work of these authors. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the levelling found was not as prevalent as expected by the author. The features of the individuals' English were *reinforced* rather than *changed*.

Syntax and lexis seems to have been highly influenced by the printed material for the lectures. In the second observation period, the informants used words such as “furthermore”, “according to” and “however” instead of the frequently informal “besides”, “X says/thinks” and “but” in settings which might be regarded as unnecessarily formal or even artificial by English native speakers. Latin words which have acquired a formal and/or abstract use rather than daily talk in English were preferred by both Romance and Slavonic speakers, thus resulting in utterances such as “The teacher is a little timid” (“tímido” = *shy* in Spanish) or “My mother has many norms at home” (“norms” instead of rules, by a Slavonic). The same comment about “artificial” or “too-formal” native English can be said about the use of structures such as passive voice instead of “they” sentences (*The copies were given to us yesterday*) or preposition-relative-pronoun clauses (*That is the boy with whom I talked yesterday*).

Alatorre (2000) comments that such phenomenon is frequent among non-native speakers in academic circles and illustrates such an event with the appearance of the Low Latin spoken in the Middle Ages which Cicero, the Roman statesman and orator, might have found it hard to recognise as his own language. Unlike Latin, English has the advantage of being more widespread, which can prevent the kind of fragmentation that

affected Latin —giving birth to the group of Romance languages. Furthermore, such spreading has been achieved with the printed word and electric media. It is true that icons of the English-speaking world culture such as Elvis Presley, the Beatles or more recently, the *Simpsons* are still relatively little known or even unknown in many parts of the globe, English has proved, though, to be more standardized than the language of the Roman Empire.

In regard to phonology, it is noticeable the higher degree of both listening comprehension and oral fluency demonstrated by the fact that the interaction among speakers in the second observation period showed more coherency in interaction. That is to say, the individuals acted more promptly to the others' utterances and linguistic confusions became more infrequent. For instance, during the first observation period there were three frequent features implying lack of understanding: i) the utterance "excuse me?"; ii) giggling and/or smiling but without giving an answer to the speaker's question; and iii) interaction with unexpected incoherent answers (speaker 1: "How are you doing? speaker 2: with bicycle here."). Although lexical and pragmatic familiarity could have actually improved, it seems that the fluency achieved by means of *juncture* and *assimilation* highly contributed to the higher degree of coherent interaction as suggested by Arcos (2004).

Spelling among individuals showed a preferred trend for Am spelling in the second observation period. It seems to be an interesting fact taking into account that most of the printed material used by the individuals (especially in the M.A. in Sociology) has been written by European authors who are most likely to have access to the BrE variety at least during L2 or FL lessons. The reason, then, seems to do little with the individuals' preference of one or the other variety rather with the fact that the software Microsoft Word used by all students had American English set by default in most computers.

In regard to the concept of AmE and BrE, it seems that such a difference is reinforced by the individuals' EFL studies backgrounds rather than by the actual contact with native speakers using these varieties of English. The main reason is that the individuals did not have frequent actual contact with native speakers except for two classmates originally from Ireland and Australia).

Likewise, most students are not aware of other "New Englishes". In fact, most of the informants commented that sub-saharian Africans and Indian-oriented English users were the hardest to understand because they "did not speak English correctly". Although it can be argued that English is an official language rather than a mother tongue for these "incorrect" users, English is much closer in context and familiarity in their native countries than for the informants. For instance, most of the students were not aware that many Indians and Western Africans regarded English not as their L2 but as their native tongue and that they even use a "pidgin" English when talking in their own groups.

Finally, the apparent influence of Swedish speakers in the way international students use their variety was that of hesitation both phonetically and pragmatically. The main reason for this phenomenon might be the result of the interaction with people from a different cultural background in "favourable" circumstances (excitement to be in another country and meeting international people, and in many cases, the economic comfort of a scholarship, etc.) Good rapport might have made the international students more tolerant toward others, thus, more willing to "negotiate" and use English in a friendlier and at the same time more respectful way, which would explain the hesitation. Seidlhofer and Jenkins (2001) have proposed some norms for an international English core for Europe and have broadly described the main features of this variety of English, which is usually referred to as *English as a Lingua Franca in Europe* (ELFE). Among the syntax norms proposed by

Seidlhofer and Jenkins —norms derived mainly from their registered *use* rather than from classroom prescription— are the elimination of the *-s* present tense form for the third person singular (*I look, he looks*) or the elimination of article before nouns (*such mistake*). Phonological and lexical norms also tend to reduce the options used in the actual EFL classroom setting.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Two out of the three hypotheses of this paper were confirmed. These are: a) the student has no clear idea about AmE. and BrE; and b) the student regards native accents as more prestigious and desirable. Their level of English, though, did not eventually get closer to one of the desired varieties. What is more, despite claiming that BrE is the intended goal, most students showed a marked preference of use for AmE spelling. The reason for this seems to be closely related to the fact that the software (Microsoft Office) is usually set by default at the school.

The third hypothesis (levelling influenced by the way Swedes speak English) was rejected after the analysis. The main reason might lie on the fact that during and after levelling, interactions among English users in this paper shows that their contact with Swedes speaking English is much less than with non-Swedes speaking English. The most notorious levelled features were those of lexis and grammar. Both features show an improvement according to the TOEFL reference book used in this paper.

Native-like accent in the target language is another frequent reference for the students to feel that somebody is speaking “correctly”. Part of our personality is reflected in using our mother tongue and using a new phonetic frame in FL might be uncomfortable for the individual. The author registered the following comment by a Swedish lecturer on his reasons to avoid teaching in international programmes:

“I do not *feel myself* (*sic*) using English, and...I feel obliged to use fancy words and sentences that we do not use in Swedish...”

Furthermore, as Taylor (1991) comments, only spies need an actual native accent. Nevertheless, an excess of phonetic and semantic adaptations to a FL to might result in an obstacle for more fluent or even a more reliable communication at least for the setting in which this study took place, that is, EFL used as an academic lingua franca. It is true that familiarity with the sounds, structure and vocabulary (especially, “local jokes”) helps to achieve a comfortable use; nevertheless, there seems to be a problem in semantic and phonetic fluency when interacting with a new group. Self-awareness in this regard by the user might be useful.

The objective of this paper is not to make judgements about the obligation to use “a correct native English” even in the case of an EFL user. Nevertheless, what seems relevant in this case is that levelling could be a more controlled phenomenon which could prevent misunderstanding or simply lack of understanding. A clever idea might not be understood or could be misunderstood if no common code is used.

EFL use is highly influenced by linguistic mother tongue values of the speakers, and not only are words or structures translated but also semantic values (*calques* as mentioned before). Such phenomena are normal and at one point of the spectrum, it might lead to interesting anecdotes worth commenting in parties or in translation lectures. At the other extreme of the continuum, in a more “formal” situation such as seminars, term papers and even theses, very regional levelling (in this case an international program in English language), or “local EFL speech” might lead to future lecturers having difficulty expressing themselves clearly.

Graddol et al. cite Aitchinson’s 1996 work *Why do Purists Grumble so Much?* commenting that language undergoes continuous changes and suggests that a language does not decay but simply changes. Nevertheless, she points out the serious consequences of

manipulating the language – regardless of whether the individual is aware or not; after all, the result is the same: the speaker says something and the listener understands something else.

The author of this paper is also in favour of a common linguistic ground for EFL use. It does not imply, however, that other varieties of English should be neglected. On the contrary, a general vision, contact and sensitivity about “New Englishes” might prompt the EFL user (in this case an international student) to feel the need to have a common core of standardised set of rules at least for academic purposes.

This paper was based on the data collected from two streams of EFL speakers: Slavonics and Romance speakers in social science studies. Further studies might include speakers from other linguistic and academic backgrounds in order to complement the information gathered as well as to include new proposals for the use of such information. For example, data collected among speakers from the three circles of English, international students from different fields (engineering, science or medicine) as well as practising EFL teachers could be useful for this regard.

Melchers and Shaw (2003) raise the question of which English should be taught in FL settings. Their answer makes references to three elements: a) *model* (mainly by the teacher and EFL material), b) *exposure* (mainly authentic printed or e- material) to almost anyone in the global community; and c) *target* (that is, what the would-be user intends to do with this learning).

In the context of an International Language, a “common core” seems sensible. Uniformity is practically impossible to get but a negotiation in EFL (a certain EFL teaching levelling) might be practical for the sake of international users.

Moreover, future work might be directed in this line not only to continue the standardisation of International English, but also to start implementing such knowledge in actual EFL lessons. The first step could be the promotion of the “existence” and the acceptance of International English varieties among EFL teachers who are the first contact between the student and the actual use of the language. Thus the potential user of English might take advantage of the shortcut that Jenkins and Seidlhofer or others suggest.

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9. APPENDIX I

Questionnaire used to collect information about the informants' EFL learning background

- 1) Nationality?
- 2) Age?
- 3) Gender?
- 4) Why did you choose Sweden as an option?
- 5) Were you asked for any special test to be admitted at Dalarna University?
- 6) Age at which you start learning EFL?
- 7) For how long did you study English in the compulsory curriculum in your country?
- 8) Did you take more than fifty hours of private lessons in EFL?
- 9) Have you taken any international programmes in English language before?
- 10) What is the main orientation that you got in your EFL studies (AmE, BrE or other?)
- 11) Is there a special variety of English that you intend to eventually achieve?
- 12) Have you lived in an English speaking country for more than three months?
- 13) Have you taken any TOEFL, PTE, FCE, or any other EFL test?

NOTE: Questions 4, 10, 11 are open questions to allow free expression.

10. APPENDIX II

Second survey used in this paper.

The format above is the same that each informant got except for the information in parentheses, which is provided here to let the reader follow the line of research. The informants were told that native speakers from other places besides US and England were among the speakers.

Speaker	Native speaker	American English	British English	Other
1 (US Actor)	(yes)	(New England accent)		
2 (Australian TV show host)	(yes)			(Australian accent)
3 (Swedish presenter)	(no)			(soft Swedish accent but BBC English oriented)
4 (Hindu character from TV show)	(yes)			(Indian accent)
5 (British Politician)	(yes)		("BBC English")	
6 (Irish DU student)	(yes)			(Neutral Irish accent)
7 (Mexican actress)	(no)			(Strong Hispanic accent)
8 (Russian journalist)	(no)			(Strong Russian accent)
9 (British singer)	(yes)		(Liverpool working class accent)	
10 (Canadian actor)	(yes)			(British Columbia accent)
11 (Nigerian speaker)	(yes)			(West African accent)

Notes about speakers and their accents

- i) The notion of accent and dialect are based on the classification is based by Melchers and Shaw (2000; 11-13)
- ii) *Outer circle* speakers were regarded as native speakers for practical purposes in this paper.

Speaker 1 is a TV actor who plays a character from a high-class conservative Catholic family in Boston.

Speaker 2 is a TV show host depicted as an “explorer” for a program in *Animal Planet*.

Speaker 3 is a Swedish TV contest host.

Speaker 4 is “Appu”, the Indian character at “the Simpsons”. (Since all the informants were familiar with this show, the high percent (80%) regarding such character as “non-native speaker” might be explained by the fact that the informants did not have unified criteria about regarding Indian English speakers as native or non-native. The author regarded the character as a native speaker —bilingual though. Since no previous information was given in this regard to the informants, the answers given depend more on the concept of nationality than that of “native speaker”).

Speaker 5 is a member of the EU Parliament.

Speaker 6 is an Irish international exchange student at DU.

Speaker 7 is an international actress (from Mexico).

Speaker 8 is a Russian correspondent in Turkey.

Speaker 9 is one of the Beatles.

Speaker 10 is an actor in a Canadian TV show.

Speaker 11 is a native speakers of Nigerian English interviewed for a BBC documentary.

11. APPENDIX III

Notes:

- 1) The reference for the selection of prescriptive errors come the *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL: skilled book, volume A* by Phillips, D. (1995)
- 2) The non-native features (according to the Longman book) are registered only if they have been said for more than 5 EFL users in more than three different times.

Prelevelling features:

Spelling

Similar distribution between *-our* in *colour, favour*, etc. and *-ise* in *practise, realise*, etc.

Phonology

i) All cases showed strong native homeland accent in intonation and pronunciation. The intonation was in all cases syllable-timed. In Romance speakers, most of the “incorrectly” pronounced words were stressed on the second last syllable (*understand, secretary*, etc.) In Slavonic speakers, this non-native stress pattern was on the pre-penultimate syllable (*computer, understand, gymnastics, aerobics*, etc.)

ii) Strong /t/ in most verbs ending in *-ed*, or in words ending in *d*. This phenomenon occurred even in plural (*learned, studied, hand, hands*, etc.)

iii) Practically no /z/ in Romance speakers (although it is existent in and widely used in Italian and Spanish has an allophone [z] of /s/). Especially, in regular plural forms and *-s* form of the present tense. (*rose, ends, hands*, etc.)

iv) Reduction in the number of vowels:

/i:/ and /I/ → /i:/ (*leave, live, peace, peas*)

/ɜ:/ → /ɑ/ in Romanic speakers, → /ɛ/ in Slavonics (*rats, cats*, etc.)

/ɛ:/, /θ/, /O/ αvδ /OY/ αvδ /ɛY/ frequently → /o/ (*go, bought, those, boss, war, furthermore, pencil* for everybody, and *cut, but* in Romanics)

/ɜ:/ → /ɑ/, *pass* (for all), *cut, but* (Slavonics)

/ɛ:/ or /ɛ:/p/ ιν τηε spelling ”-ur” βεχομεσ /εp/ (*ηυρτ, φυρτηερ, ετχ.*)

v) Voiceless sound of “th”, /T/. Both Polish and Spanish students tend to give another fricative equivalent, either /f/ or /s/. All of these are voiceless fricative sounds. (*think, through, thought*, etc.)

vi) Letter “t” was usually pronounced as /t/ even words ending in *-ture*. (*literature, nature, nature, mature, future*, etc.)

vii) Preference for rhotic pronunciation in words which would not have and /r/ in EFL material which is BrE oriented. (*hurt, word, world, war, car, etc.*)

viii) /v/ instead of /w/ in Slavonic speakers before an “e” or “i”

We /wɛI:/, wind /wɪ:vɪd/, but want /wɔ:vɪt/ or /wɔ:vɪt/

Lexis

No registers.

Syntax

Common mistakes prescribed by the TOEFL (Phillips) were present. Mainly:

1) Present perfect vs. past (already/yet) or present simple (for/since)

Ex. *Did you see this movie yet?*

I practise aerobics since two years ago.

2) Present simple substituted by present continuous (only in Slavonics)

Ex. *The party is depending on...*

The author is saying (in essays, meaning “the author says”)

3) Present simple vs. present continuous

Ex. *I make my breakfast (now)*

4) Subject (it, there) missing.

Ex. *Is important to say that...*

Are many people that...

5) Passive and active adjectives derived from verbs

Ex. *I am very boring now because... (bored)*

I am very interesting in... (interested)

6) Change of subject to second place (verbal place) when the subject is “long”; especially in Romanics.

Ex. *If return the books the student before ...*

7) Passive voice substituted by an implicit *they* active structure (Romanics), or using an impersonal “it” passive form with the actual subject at the end (Slavonics).

Ex. *[They] tell you to wait in line.*

In the office tell you what you do

It was cancelled the lecture

8) Inverted word order in indirect speech

Ex. *We don't know what did the teacher say.*

They asked me when is the exam.

9) Incorrect use of prepositions, especially before an object of a verb (Romance speaker) and adjective plus preposition (Slavonic speaker)

Ex. *They admire to the teacher. (Romanic)*

We are interested at the topic. (mainly Slavonic)

10) The use of modals *would* and *will* in if-clauses which mark condition rather than reported speech.

Ex. *If you would come before, you would know...*
 If you will read this, I will...

Pragmatics

No registers

Levelled features

Spelling

Overwhelming preference for the AmE spelling in words ending in *-our* and *-ise*

colour, favour → *color, favour* *practise, realise* → *practice, realize*

Phonology

i) A more marked hesitation when asking questions implying *offer/request/suggestion*.

Examples.

Would you prefer...X...or...would you Y?

Why don't we... ask Frank?

Let's go to X...or ...maybe...we can Y.

ii) The pre-levelling features of single word pronunciation remained except for two:

ii.a) The ending –“ture”, which happened to sound more like / τΣO:p/

ii.b) *Spelled “t” sounding as /d/ in “medal” in GA better, butter,*

iii) *Juncture*

Afterall sure about getaway What is it about? ...think of it?

Not at all Can't help it

iv) *Assimilation*

It depends what do you... Carlos says

v) Transformation of final voiced consonant sounds into corresponding voiceless sounds, thus usually leading to /s/ in most plurals.

dogs /δOγζ/ → /δoκσ/ or /δAκσ/ lives /λι:φσ/ (verb) lives /λαφφσ/, /λαιπσ/ or /λαφβτσ/

vi) /φ≡ \ης/ (“Jaho” is a Swedish utterance indicating that the listener is following a conversation)

Lexis

Most of the examples are technically correct but sound artificial for native speakers in informal chatting.

- i) *however* instead *but*
- ii) *furthermore, what is more* instead of *besides*
- iii) *in regard to, regarding* instead of *about, as for*
- iv) *according to* instead of X says/thinks/told me...
- v) Latin-derived words which tend to sound formal or less frequent for most native speakers but sound more transparent for Romanics (although Slavonics also use them)
Fury, timid (instead of *shy*), *cancel, panacea, proof* (instead of, *exam*), *implement, norms*, etc.

Syntax

There was a slight improvement in grammar use (although artificial for most everyday purposes) but the features are basically the same as in *prelevelling*.

- i) the use of passive voice even in informal conversation
- ii) conjunctions or adverbs in either a wrong way or “artificial” for everyday native speaking. (see *Lexis* above)

Pragmatics

- i) “Beating around the bush” when apologising, offering, requesting, or suggesting.
Examples,
Maybe we should go now, or maybe we should wait
What did you say? (Excuse me?)
I am sorry, maybe I should say ...or maybe I should...
- ii) Less interruption or overlapping in the conversation. That is to say, the speaker in turn reduces talking time, whereas the next speaker waits turn. This was especially true in regard to Romance Language speakers.
- iii) Expressing that they are following the conversation by uttering “uh-huh”, “uh” “jaho” or nodding the head.