

Degree Project

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American or British English?

Attitudes towards English dialects among Swedish pupils

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Abstract

The two major varieties of English are American and British English. In Swedish compulsory school both varieties are taught. This essay examines the preferences and attitudes of pupils in 9th grades towards the two varieties, and if there are any gender differences. Previous research has shown that pupils are becoming more and more positive towards American English than they have been in earlier studies. This essay is based on a quantitative study carried out through questionnaires handed-out to 84 9th graders. The results show that the pupils prefer American English in speaking and for educational purposes. However, British English is viewed as more intelligent, professional, beautiful and correct. These findings mostly correspond to previous research but also show some contrasting features such as pupils wanting to speak British English rather than American English.

Keywords: Attitudes, American English, British English, L2 learners, Preferences

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1 Introduction

English is a very important language in the world today and has been for a long time (Melcher & Shaw, 2003: 6). Since the Second World War the American English has had an even easier way of spreading across the world (Bolton, 2010: 140). The English language is used in commercials, businesses, media and in science and is therefore used worldwide (Bolton, 2010: 125, 141f). This has resulted in English having grown larger and more people around the globe speak English than French which was the former language in the mentioned contexts (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997: 115).

Through the spread of American movies, brands and computer games, many are exposed to American English every day (Bolton, 2010: 125, 142, 145; Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 211, 213). Children in Sweden speak English as a second language and are exposed to it early in life. English is also taught at an early age in schools as a compulsory subject (The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 1; Bolton, 2010: 142).

The great exposure to American English in the media but the geographical closeness to Great Britain makes the dialect preferences and attitudes among Swedish pupils interesting and worth studying. In addition, positive attitudes also help with proficiency (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997:116ff, 125ff). During my time at different schools I have often been in discussions with both pupils and teachers about dialect preferences. According to Westergren Axelsson (2002: 132) the attitude of The Swedish National Agency for Education has changed from previously only promoting British English to now promoting both dialects in teaching.

1.1 Aim

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes towards American and British English among Swedish pupils in compulsory school year 9. The research will also examine if there is any gender bias towards the varieties. I will study the pupils' own attitudes towards the varieties and their preferences and will also briefly examine which dialect they would prefer to be taught in.

Research questions:

What dialect do Swedish pupils in 9th grade prefer to use?

What dialect would Swedish pupils in 9th grade prefer to be taught in?

What attitudes do Swedish pupils in 9th grade have towards the American and British dialects of English?

Are there any differences in attitude between the genders?

2 Theoretical Background

This section presents previous research that is relevant to this study. The first section is about English varieties and focuses on American and British English which are the varieties the pupils have been asked to respond to. The second part deals with English in Sweden and presents how great of an influence it is. The second part also describes English education in Sweden, primarily how teachers deal with English varieties. In this part, the English curriculum is also presented to show the level of understanding the participants of the investigation should have.

Linguistic variation and change occurs when different linguistic features come into contact with new speakers (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 2). Languages can be categorized into dialects and accents. Dialects are of same language but have some differences in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. The line between languages and dialects is widely discussed because the difference between the two is how big the differences are in the mentioned criteria. Because of the definition problems with dialect the expression *variety* is more widely used (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 12). Variety will be used in this essay to define the different English varieties instead of dialect or accent.

2.1 English varieties used in teaching

There is no International Standard English agreed upon today. Written and spoken texts need local ties but can be understood internationally. English comes in many shapes but the two major varieties are British and American. However; Indian, Australian and other local varieties are also recognized as standard varieties (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 31).

2.1.1 American and British English

British and American English differ largely in pronunciation, closely correlation in grammar and clearly differ in vocabulary. The differences and similarities are due to historical and outside influences (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 23, 31).

However; American English and British English contain many different accents and linguistic styles. This essay focuses on the pronunciation of General American and Received Pronunciation. The differences described do not reflect every speaker but show general linguistic features used within these varieties. General American is a general variety widely spoken in the United States of America. However, Received Pronunciation is only spoken actively by 12% of British English speakers (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 47).

The most well-known difference between American and British English is the pronunciation of /ɑ:/ as in the vowel of *bath* (Mobärg 2002: 123). There are general differences in vowel pronunciation between the two varieties where American English uses fewer diphthongs, in general (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 16, 17).

Voicing of intervocalic /r/ and /t/ voicing is also common in American English but not in British English (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 17; Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 134; Mobärg 2002: 120). The intervocalic /r/ pronunciation before consonants was a favorable accent used by American radio speakers and then spread to become a standard in American English (Bolton, 2010: 132f).

The grammar of the different English varieties does not differ very much which helps its understandability internationally. However, some differences can be noticeable. The usage of plural verbs after collective nouns in American English, is notable. In contrast to British English where collective nouns are followed by singular verbs. Some verb forms differ between American and British English such as *dove* instead of *dived* where *dived* is the preferred one in British varieties (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 22).

The spelling of words in American English follows pronunciation and simplicity. In general, American English favors *or* instead of *our* as in *color*, *er* instead of *re* as in *theater* and *ize* instead of *ise* as in *Americanize* (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 94). In comparison, in British

English many words have kept the spelling from foreign roots, for example *re* in *theatre*, a borrowed word from French. There is an Americanization of words going on in British English where some American words are being used instead of traditional British English words (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 47).

2.2 English as a Second Language in Sweden

English is an international language used in several different arenas such as politics, business, science and media (Bolton, 2010: 143; The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 1). In Sweden, pupils are surrounded by the English language everywhere and it is therefore a big influence in people's lives. The Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket] voice that languages are important for understanding the world and that pupils should understand the need for learning other languages as a way of experiencing the world (The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 1).

2.2.1 English in everyday life

English is a worldwide language and it has spread and increased its power since the First World War (Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 21; Bolton, 2010: 125). Swedish children are influenced by American English in their everyday lives through TV, the internet, computer games and many other sources. English is also a multifunctional language which made Europe copy the American way in cases such as business, branding and marketing (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 8; Bolton, 2010: 141f). This is a part of the Americanization that has been going on for several years. It also manifests itself in everyday life. Over 80% of the shops on the main shopping street in Stockholm had English names in the year 2000 (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 6). Germany has tried to lessen the impact of the English language through dubbing American TV-series and movies, rather than using subtitles as in Sweden. But languages find a way to make an impact anyway (Bolton, 2010: 142).

Languages change, acceptance of changes and new styles can take time for some users. Hip hop slang had its own kind of language, but after some time slang expressions found their way into everyday language and today they are considered mainstream. Movies have also been shown to alter language usage among young adults and over time in adults and elderly people (Bolton, 2010:137). English is linking the world together and changes originating from movies and music can be found worldwide (Bolton, 2010: 142, 145).

2.2.2 English varieties in the Swedish school system

The Swedish National Agency for Education used to promote only British English to be used by teachers in the classroom. However, today, both the major dialects are accepted in teaching (Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 132; Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 79). The curriculum states that pupils graduating year 9 are obligated to know about different accents of English and also about living conditions in English-speaking countries. The teacher therefore has to introduce and compare dialects as a part of English language education (The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 4f).

In compulsory and upper secondary school, the pupils are allowed to mix accents and dialects (Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 223). Studies have shown that all pupils and students alike mix accents to some extent (Mobärg, 2002: 124; Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 223 ; Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 132f). The reason for this might be because both the American and British accents are taught in school (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002: 149).

Studies have shown that students aiming for a British accent use fewer American features than those aiming for an American accent (Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 223). This supports Rindal's (2010: 247) findings that students try to follow their aimed pronunciation. The mixing of the dialects is discussed by Mobärg (2002: 124) to be a result of L1 interference. However, Söderlund and Modiano (2002: 149) believe the reason for mixing to be due to confusion among the pupils since both dialects are taught in school. Other reasons for mixing could be because of media exposure, 80% of movies shown in Europe are from California which exposes pupils to the American English variety (Bolton, 2010: 144).

However, the variety the students and pupils believe themselves to speak is not always what they actually speak due to the mixing. Westergren Axelsson (2002: 139) also describes the choice as a show of wishful thinking. The participants often chose to fill in the accent they would like to speak rather than their true accent in Westergren Axelsson's survey. However, according to Rindal, pupils try to follow their aimed for pronunciation since pupils aiming for British English used less American markers than those aiming for an American variety (2010: 247). This shows that the differences between American English and British English are well known to students, which is supported by studies done by Melchers & Shaw (2003: 16).

The students in Westergren Axelsson's (2002: 132- 133, 139) study were conscious of their mixing of the dialects; it was also something they were ashamed of. The failure to keep a clean dialect was discussed among the students to be a source of sadness for many of them. The emotion of failure was strong since consistency is very important at university level.

The students and pupils in previous studies have shown their dialects through linguistic markers. Mobärg (2002: 126,127) found that common and highly frequent words used by pupils are to some extent in British English and others in American English. The reason for this is explained to be the arena where the word is mostly used. Words such as *half* and *after* were spoken using British features while *better* and *little* had more American features. The words with British features are words taught and often repeated in school, and the words with American features are words often used in media (Mobärg, 2002: 124, 127). Since the United States of America has close to a monopoly on entertainment (Bolton, 2010:148), the greatest influences on the pupils will be from American English. Other great influences are friends and family, visiting other countries and school (Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 141).

The choice of vocabulary has been investigated by Söderlund and Modiano (2002; 158f). They came to the conclusion that Swedish pupils more often translated words into American English rather than British English. Examples of this are *airplane*, *Santa Claus*, *drugstore*, *chips*, *candy*. These words are commonly used in media which might be the reason for their choice (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002: 158ff). Media can help build a passive vocabulary and since media is dominated by American English, it is the variety that spreads (Bolton, 2010: 136, 125; Mobärg, 2002: 127). Media exposes the pupils to the American language which can have an impact on their language usage. 80% of the movies shown in Europe are from California (Bolton, 2010: 125, 144).

The pupils chose British English in words that are taught in school and more frequently used in that context. British vocabulary to be favored was *bathing suit*, *biscuit*, *football* and *cinema* (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002: 158ff). In the case of spelling it followed a similar pattern, British English in formally taught words and American English in highly frequent words used on the internet and with similarities to Swedish spelling (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002: 160ff).

2.2.3 The Swedish curriculum

The Swedish curriculum, goals and national guidelines are formed by The Swedish National Agency for Education on behalf of the Swedish government (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). English language education in Sweden starts early, in third grade there are goals to be met and when finishing year 9 pupils are to have learnt to understand English accents and some common slang, be able to adjust their language based on purpose and audience and to have knowledge about traditions and English countries' living conditions (The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 4f).

2.3 Attitudes Among Learners

Attitudes can differ and change but they cannot be neutral. One always leans in one direction or the other (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997:118). The reason for favoring one dialect over another could be due to geographical reasons, media exposure, TV, visiting other places, school, friends and family (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997: 120; Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 212; Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 141). A strong factor for a positive attitude towards a dialect is based on how familiar the learner is with the dialect in question. The more a learner is exposed to a dialect, the more positive their attitude becomes. This is affected even greater if the learner has a positive personal contact with a variety. American English has had and continues to have a large impact on other varieties and other languages (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 80). This is speculated to be because of media exposure and the spread of the American variety through mass media and the impact becomes more prominent if TV programs are subtitled instead of dubbed (Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 212 - 213, 223).

The American English variety is viewed by Austrian learners of English as more friendly and approachable (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997:125). Rindal (2010: 250) describes American English as a socially attractive variety based on reviewed surveys. This description recurs in other studies as well. American English is viewed by English language learners as informal, relaxed, popular and thereby socially attractive (Rindal & Piercy, 2013; Mobärg, 2002; Westergren Axelsson, 2002).

Studies have shown that British English is viewed as more *proper, professional, formal, polite* and *correct* by second language learners (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997:125; Mobärg, 2002:127; Westergren Axelsson, 2002:142f). Using Received Pronunciation shows

prestige, competence and *status* according to the participants in the study by Rindal (2010:242). In the same study, the British variety had low scores when it came to solidarity and attractiveness. Some students even described it as *snobby* (Rindal, 2010:242).

The attitudes towards American and British English have changed over the last decades. The oldest study referenced in this essay is Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit published 1997 showed that the students favored Received Pronunciation (British English) over General American (American English). The result of the study showed that 67% of the students favored British English. This is supported by Söderlund and Modiano (2002: 149) who cite a study made in Sweden in 1993 where well over half the students asked also preferred British English. Westergren Axelsson (2002: 140) asked university students in the year 2000 what dialect they preferred. 54% answered British English and 25% American English. Mobärg (2002: 121) researched university students' actual usage and discovered that 64% of the participants used British English. However, some American English speakers prefer British English but blame the media for their usage (Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 140).

Söderlund and Modiano (2002: 153) studied a younger generation and asked upper secondary students in the year 2001 about their preferences. The study shows that the attitudes have changed, only 33% of the pupils preferred British English while 61% preferred American English.

In 2013, a similar study was carried out in Norway (Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 221) and the results showed that 29 pupils favored American English compared to 23 pupils who preferred British English. The study also showed that some students preferred a 'neutral' accent, which they described as a mix of the two major varieties (Rindal & Piercy, 2013:221).

To summarize, attitudes and preferences have changed from British English being the most popular to American English. Students and pupils are more positive towards American English while teachers still mostly prefer British English (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002:162). Teachers are now more accepting of American English than they have been earlier (Westergren Axelsson, 2002:132). Standard vocabulary taught in school follows teachers' pronunciation (Mobärg, 2002:127). However, teachers' dialects have small influence on the attitudes of the pupils towards English varieties (Rindal & Piercy, 2013:223).

3 Material And Method

3.1 Material

3.1.1 The respondents

The respondents of this research are pupils in year 9 in Swedish compulsory school. The school in which the research has been carried out by had three classes of year 9 pupils who participated. The school is located in the south of Sweden in a small city with a population of 7,595 citizens (SCB 2010). The community has two compulsory schools for grades 7 to 9. The school also has pupils from around the neighboring communities that do not have their own schools for this level. The school pupil base is very homogenous in terms of social class and origin.

The three classes have many pupils, over 30 in each class, which has led the school to divide the classes into two groups during some subjects, where English is one of them. The classes therefore have two English teachers per class, giving a total of six English teachers teaching year 9.

3.1.2 The questionnaire

The inspiration for my questionnaire came from previous studies in the field by Westergren Axelsson (2002:146), Söderlund & Modiano (2002:169) and Rindal (2010:246). Questions 1 and 2 are to establish the gender and group identity. Questions 3 to 7 establishes the pupils' preference of variety. Question 8 is based on Rindal (2010:246) to establish the pupils' attitude to the different varieties. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1. The term *dialect* is used in the questionnaire because it is a more familiar term for the pupils to understand. The term *variation* is not used since it could alienate or intimidate the pupils. By using questionnaires this study is of a quantitative style since it focuses on primarily on instances and does not investigate further reasons among the pupils which would become more evident in the use of interviews.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Collecting the material

The contact with the school and teachers was made early on and a date set for a visit was made. Before the visits the parents of the pupils were contacted through the school website and flyers the pupils took home with information about the purpose of the study and its ethics. Three classes in year 9 were visited and a total of 82 pupils participated, 38 female pupils and 44 male pupils. During the visits, the purpose of the research was presented and the knowledge among the pupils about English dialects was discussed briefly. Extra emphasis was given to the fact that participation was voluntary and the answers fully anonymous. The questionnaire was shown and explained to avoid any misunderstandings. The questions were also translated into Swedish to be certain the pupils understood it perfectly. The purpose of the study was stressed to the pupils to avoid any misunderstandings. After the presentation, the questionnaire was handed out and the pupils had some time to answer the questions. The questionnaires were then collected and put into folders for each class.

Two female pupils in class A chose not to answer the attitude questions but did participate in the preference study. In the first questions asking about preference, filled out answers are counted among the category “Other” since the pupils marked both boxes indicating they meant both dialects met the criteria. In the last question referring to attitude, the unmarked or double marked answers are included as “Unknown” in the data presentation.

3.2.2 Reviewing the answers

The answers were studied one class at the time, female and male answers studied separately. The number of instances were counted and compiled into tables showing both percentage and instances. The percentage was then used to make figures for an easier overview. The ambition was to analyse the results both on a general level and detailed on the different classes, due to time and other factors only a general view of the results has been conducted. Further and more extended research needs to be conducted for more significant differences to be found.

4 Result And Discussion

In this section the results of the study are presented and discussed with the theoretical background in mind. The section is divided into three parts that follow the layout of the

questionnaire. In the first part, the pupils' preferences are presented and analyzed. The second part deals with the pupils' preferences for dialect of English in a school environment. The third and final part analyzes the pupils' attitudes towards the two major varieties.

4.1 Preferences

To understand the pupils' preferences, a series of questions were asked. The figures below show the pupils' answers to the seven questions in percentages.

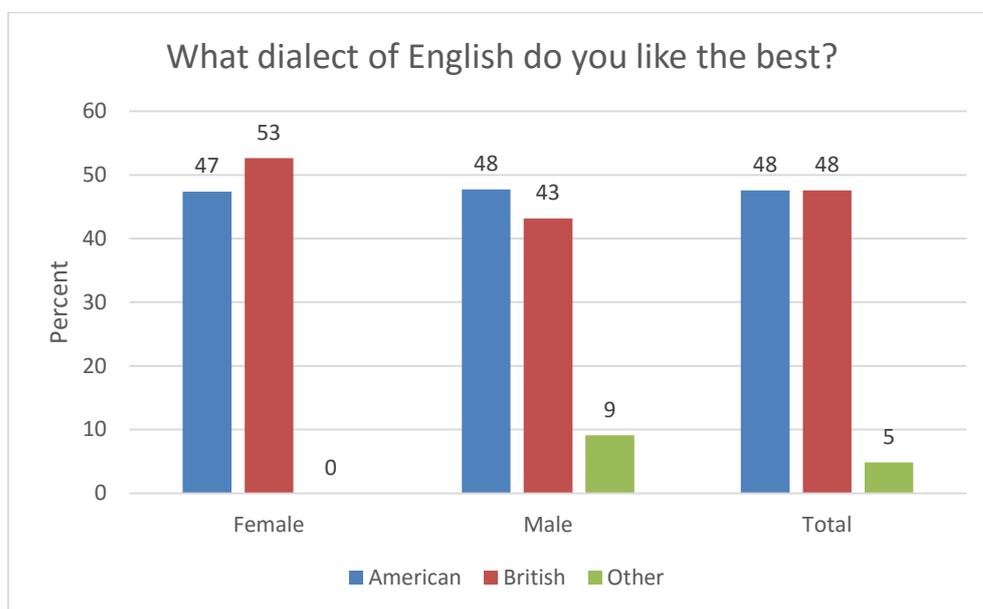


Figure 1. Responses to *Which dialect of English do you like the best?*

The result of this investigation shows that the pupils prefer both American English and British English. 39 pupils (48%) answered that they liked American English the best and 39 pupils (48%) answered British English. This does not support the latest research that pupils prefer American English over British English (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002: 152).

Females had a higher preference for British English (53%) than American English (47%). This is to some extent supported by Söderlund and Modiano's research which also showed the females tend to have a higher preference for British English (2002: 152f). However, in their research the females still preferred American English (54%) over British English (39.5%). Söderlund and Modiano elaborate that the preference for British English could be due to interests in romantic and historical programs (2002: 153). According to Westergren Axelsson

(2002: 132, 141) school has a large influence on pronunciation and since teachers historically have preferred teaching British English and Skolverket recommended it, this have an effect on the female choice of variety to be more proper and have a wish to follow the taught pronunciation.

The male participants preferred American English the most, 48% American English to 43% British English. The high preference for American English is supported by Söderlund and Modiano (2002: 152f) who also noted this gender difference in their research. The reason for males being more positive towards the American variety could be because of their interests in computers and being more exposed through the internet (Bolton, 2010: 142; Söderlund & Modiano, 2002: 152f). Through the use of computer games and online chats, the males make friends which might have an influence on their preferences (Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 141).

Four male pupils did not choose American or British English as their favorite variety. Two of them had written Australian to specify that they liked the Australian variety the best. By specifying another dialect, the pupils show that they are aware of other varieties besides the two major ones. This also shows that the pupils have had an appropriate education based on the curriculum and have been introduced to other varieties than their teachers' variety (The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 4f). The other two had written *both* and *it depends (situation)*. This indicates that they had trouble deciding and that preferred variety to some extent is situation based. Speaking to an American friend makes the American dialect preferable but for schoolwork British might be more favorable (Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 141; Mobärg, 2002: 124). The study by Rindal & Piercy (2013: 221) indicated that pupils preferred a so-called "neutral" variety which was described as a mix of American and British English. It is interesting to note that given the choice these two pupils still took the time to specify that they did not like one variety over the other.

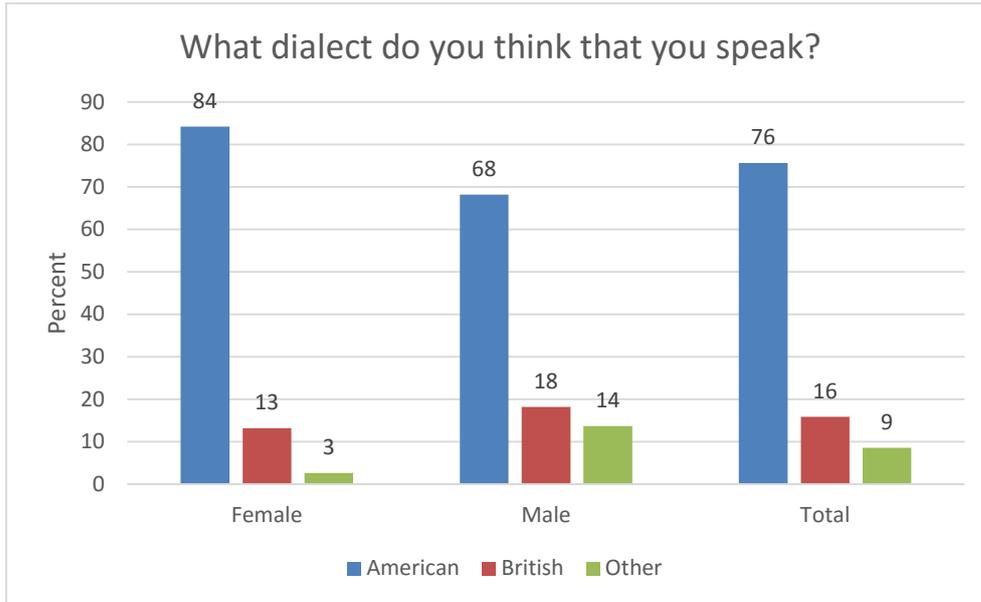


Figure 2. Responses to *What dialect do you think that you speak?*

Figure 2 shows the variety the pupils believe themselves to speak. Both female and male pupils believe themselves to speak American English. This is probably due to the high exposure from the mass media (Bolton 2010: 142). Westergren Axelsson's (2002: 140) research indicated that students spoke with an American variety but still preferred British English. This study seems to have the same conundrum. 84% females and 68% males claim to speak American English but only 47% and 48% answered that they liked American English the best, see Figure 1.

Figure 2 shows one female and six male participants answered the option "Other", the female and three males answered that they mixed, one male did not know, one said *it depends* and the last one answered *Swedish*. The pupils might not feel fully aware of the differences between the varieties and are therefore hesitant to answer in any direction. The answers also indicate a difference in knowledge and certainty. The male pupil who answered *Swedish* is probably not as comfortable with the language as the pupil who answered *it depends*.

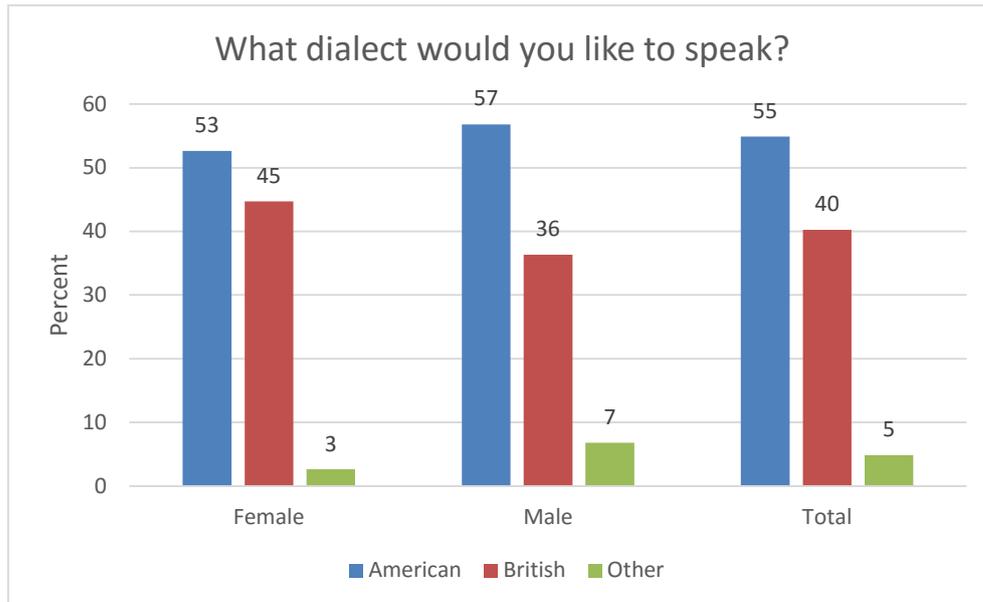


Figure 3. Responses to *What dialect would you like to speak?*

Figure 3 shows that even though half of the pupils liked British English the most, not all of them want to speak British English and instead some of those who liked British English the best, still prefer to speak American English.

Four pupils choose the alternative “Other”. The female and two of the male participants answered *both* and another male subject wrote *it depends*. Again it is noteworthy to voice that the pupils took the time to specify that both varieties are spoken and aimed at. Rindal and Piercy (2013: 221) voiced that learners liked a neutral mix of the two varieties, which could be what these pupils mean as well.

One can speculate that if there had been an option indicating a mix in the questionnaire, there could have been a difference in the results. However, by making the pupils choose they also needed to think about their choice rather than going for an easy alternative.

The male who answered all the questions about preference with *it depends* showed that he has an understanding of English accents. By adding (*situation*) to the answer to the first question further displays his ability to adjust his language based on purpose and audience which are a compulsory criterion for passing English in year 9 (The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 4f). It could also be that the pupil over-estimates his abilities, believing he can adjust his English variety solely according to purpose.

Researchers have come to the conclusion that learners mix the varieties to some extent (Mobärg, 2002; Westergren Axelsson, 2002; Söderlund & Modiano, 2002; Rindal & Piercy, 2002; Rindal, 2013). This could be the reason for the pupils indicating *both* varieties in the questionnaire. However, the pupils that aim for British English do use less American markers, and vice versa (Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 223). This is supported by Melchers & Shaw (2003: 16) who indicate that learners are to some extent familiar with the differences between the varieties. Mobärg (2002: 123) voiced that the BATH-vowel is the most well-known indicator but also /t/ voicing and intervocalic /r/ are known among the pupils (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 17; Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 134; Mobärg 2002: 120). The curriculum also states that the pupils need to be aware of different varieties of English and be able to adjust to them (The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 4f).

This study does not investigate actual usage but these results are still interesting and further studies are recommended to be able to draw any conclusions as to the pupils' actual usage. For now, it is implied that pupils do not always speak the variety they like the best. This is something other researchers has been confronted with as well. Westergren Axelsson (2002: 133, 139, 132) had students who felt ashamed of their mixing and inability to speak the variety they would like to. The pupils of this study might not feel as strongly about this as the students of the other research, but without any interviews this cannot be established.

When comparing Figures 1-3, they present that 20 females liked British English the best but only 5 claimed to speak it and 17 would like to speak it. The same pattern can be seen among the males, 19 liked British English the best, 8 claimed to speak it and 16 would like to. This could be because the pupils are so exposed to American English through the media that British English seems more exotic which gives it a higher value. This would also explain their reason for speaking another variety than they would like to, because of media exposure. Bolton (2010: 136, 125, 141f) presents that media can help build a passive vocabulary and exposes the pupils to the language at a high rate. Another reason is voiced by Melchers & Shaw (2003: 94), American English is easier to learn due to its heritage and logical spelling and grammar. Mobärg (2002: 124) also brings up the reason that American English is closer to the pupils' first language (Swedish) which makes it easier for them to learn.

Previous research has shown that pupils are more inclined to like the variety they are most familiar with. These results could therefore be due to geographical closeness to the United Kingdom and the exposure to American English through media (Dalton-Puffer & Kaltenboeck and Smit, 1997: 120; Rindal & Piercy, 2013: 212; Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 141; Bolton 2010: 137, 142). Another reason for there not being a difference in favorite could be because both varieties are taught in school (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002: 149; Skolverket, 2016: 5).

To conclude, the pupils like both varieties equally. This result is not supported by other modern research which has shown that pupils are more and more favorable towards the American English (Dalton-Puffer & Kaltenboeck and Smit, 1997; Westergren Axelsson, 2002; Söderlund & Modiano, 2002; Rindal, 2013). However, when examining the other two diagrams, the pupils both believe themselves to speak and would like to speak American English, which is supported by said research.

4.2 Teachers and School

In this section, the results of the questions correlating to English in schools are presented and analyzed with a base in the previous research. Previous research has shown a difference in the teacher's role in language learning. According to Rindal and Piercy (2013:223) the teacher's variety is important for the pupils when it comes to pronunciation, since the pupils imitate the teacher's pronunciation. However, the researchers also came to the conclusion that the teacher's pronunciation did not matter for the pupils' choice of variety or had an effect on their attitudes. As seen in figure 4 below, the pupils are uncertain what dialect their teacher speaks. The three classes had three different English teachers, which supports the hypothesis that pupils are not affected by their teacher's variety when it comes to their own preferences.

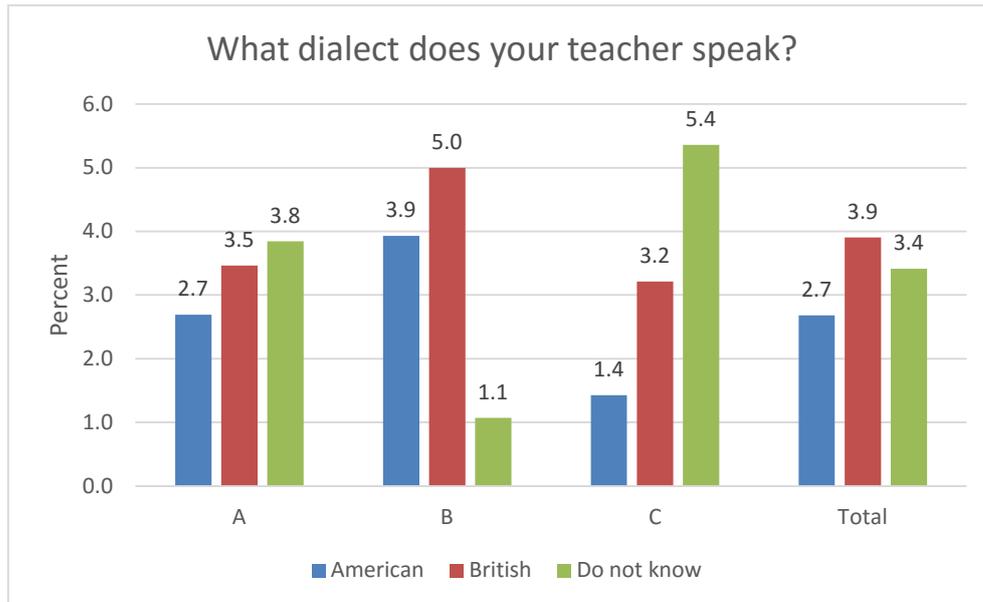


Figure 4. Responses to *What dialect does your teacher speak?*

To begin with looking at the total, the pupils are uncertain what variety their teachers speak but the majority believe it to be British English. When examining the results on a class level, it is even more evident that the pupils are divided on the question. Class A and C are both uncertain but some have a guess. Class B has the fewest uncertain pupils but the class is divided whether the teacher uses American or British English. The different answers could be due to the fact that the pupils have different English teachers using different varieties. The results still show that many of the pupils are unsure of their teacher's variety.

It is noteworthy that in all the classes the pupil's report that British English is more frequently used than American English by their teachers. This could be due to the teachers speaking British English or it could be because the primary course materials they use are in British English or it could be because that traditionally the teachers have taught British English during lessons (Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 132). Today, both varieties and others are introduced in the classroom but traditions are hard to let go of (Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 132; Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 79; The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 4f).

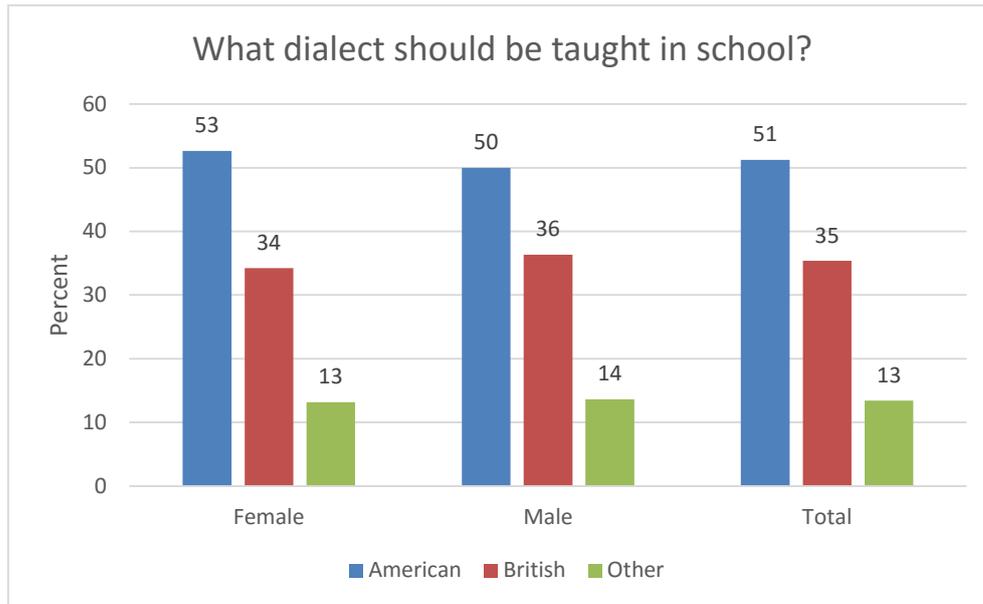


Figure 5. Responses to *What dialect should be taught in school?*

The figure above shows which variety the pupils would like to be taught in school. The American variety is the most preferred one, in contrast to what they believe their teachers teach. The ones that choose other or had crossed both boxes indicated that they thought both varieties should be taught.

The majority of the participants might have chosen American English since it is closer to their first language (Mobärg, 2002: 124) and therefore easier. It could also be due to that the grammar and spelling is easier and more logical than the British variety which has kept its historical roots in the spelling (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 94).

Additionally, American English is something the pupils are used to from TV, the internet, computer games and in marketing (Bolton, 2010: 141f). The pupils are exposed to this daily and school is not the only place where they see and hear the language (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 6). By experiencing English at this intensity helps the pupils build a passive vocabulary of words they understand but do not use actively while conversing (Bolton, 2010: 136).

Further, English is an international language to be used in different arenas. By knowing English, the pupils are better equipped to participate in the global world we live in (The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 1). To make this transition and be as prepared as they can be for

the global world, they need a variety of English that most people understand and are exposed to, American English.

The need for an international standard or at least a generally taught variety is noticeable in the previous research. Pupils do mix the varieties for different reasons; Söderlund and Modiano (2002: 149) believe it to be due to confusion; Mobärg (2002: 124) believes it to be because of L1 interference; and Bolton (2010: 144) blames mass media. Research by Söderlund and Modiano shows that the pupils use British English in formally taught words but use informal American words which are used frequently in media and online. The pupils also translated L1 words more often into American English both in vocabulary and spelling (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002: 158f, 160ff). Although the reasons are purely speculative, the pupils of this study show that they would prefer to be taught primarily in American English. The curriculum however does state that they are to know different varieties and have knowledge of English-speaking countries (The Swedish Curriculum, 2011: 4f), even though it might make the pupils mix the varieties.

To conclude, the pupils are unsure what dialect their teacher speaks but most believe it to be British English. This could be because British English has traditionally been taught in school and the teachers were most likely schooled in British English themselves. The pupils would prefer to be taught in American English, perhaps because of the closeness to their L1, their familiarity with it through media or that it is more logical in spelling and grammar.

4.3 Attitudes on qualities associated with the varieties

The pupils were given adjectives which they were to answer which variety best matched the adjective, in their opinion. The adjectives can be read below the columns, see figures 6 and 7.

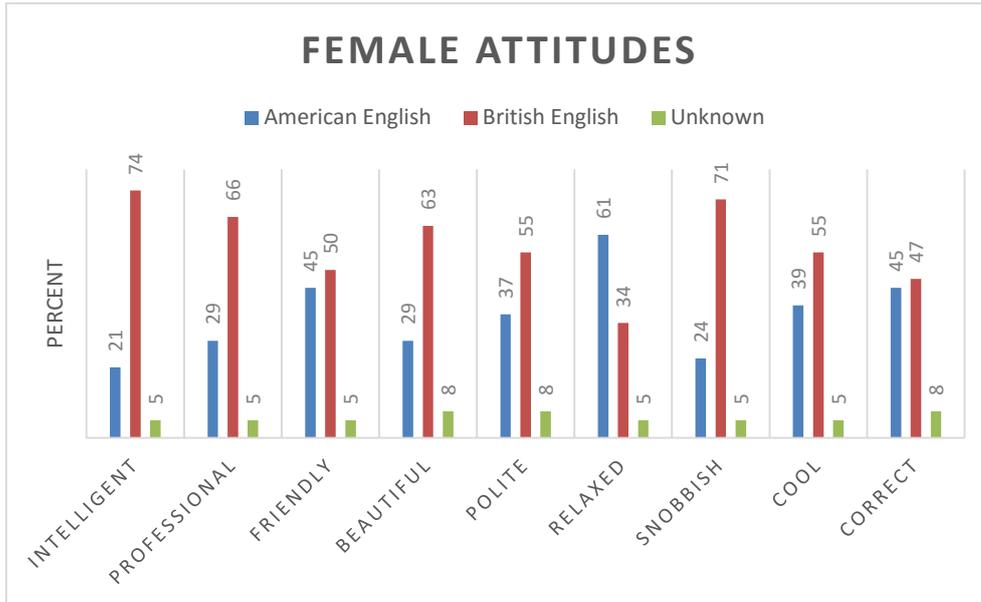


Figure 6. The female participants' attitudes towards American and British English

The female pupils answered that American English sounds the most relaxed, the other attributes were considered British. For the categories friendly and correct, British and American were very similar, while for intelligent, professional, beautiful and snobbish, British English rated much higher. For the adjectives, cool and polite there is also a clear trend to favor British English but the American variety also is associated with these qualities but to a lesser extent.

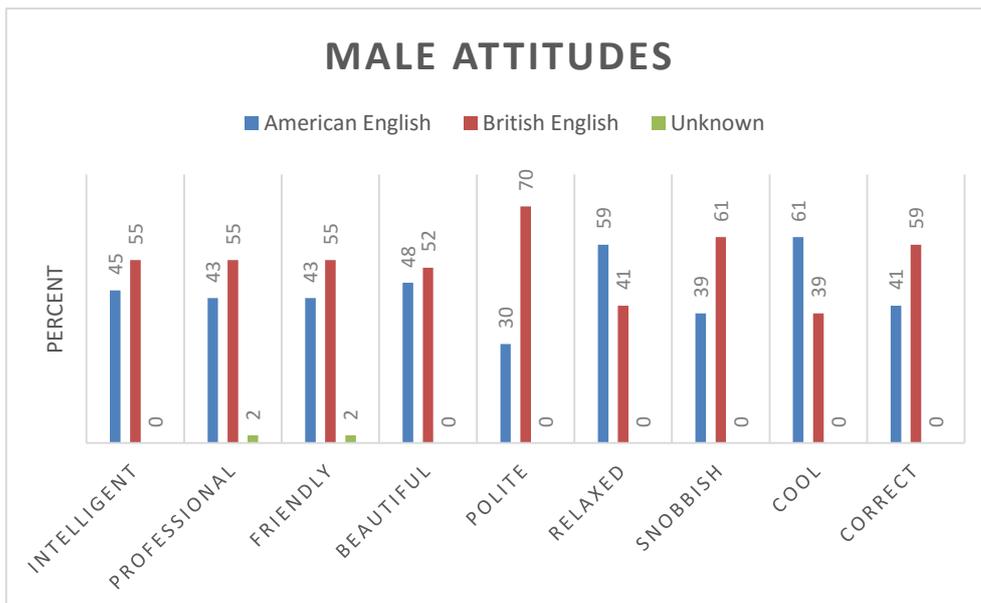


Figure 7. The male participants' attitudes towards American and British English

The male pupils' attitudes as seen in the figure above, figure 7, shows that the male pupils find British English the politest sounding variety and even more so than the female pupils did. Politeness is the only attribute where the bars differ this much, 30% American English to 70% British English. Other attributes with a clear difference are snobbish, cool and relaxed. American English is considered cool and relaxed while snobbish is associated with British English. The other attributes have a slight difference but British English is still associated with the positive adjective more than American English.

It should be mentioned that on two occasions male pupils have crossed both boxes. These instances were on professional and friendly. The same thing was done with beautiful, polite and correct by female pupils. These instances have therefore not been counted and a total of 44 male and 35 female answers were used in the charts. The reason for the pupils being unable to choose could be because they feel that both varieties have these attributes or both lacking them (Rindal & Piercy, 2013:221). However, attitudes can differ and change but they cannot be neutral. One always leans in one direction or the other, so the pupils should have been able to choose between the two alternatives (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997:118).

The pupils favored British English when it came to these attributes. The clearest similarity is that both the male and female pupils believe that British English sounds more snobbish than the American variety. Rindal (2010: 242) encountered pupils also describing British English as snobbish, these results support the notion that the variety sounds more snobbish than American English. However, the female pupils did to a greater degree describe British English as snobbish, 71% compared to the males 61%.

British English also scored high on the attributes: intelligent, professional, beautiful and polite. This is supported by other researchers who also reporting British English was viewed as more proper, professional, formal and polite (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997:125; Mobärg, 2002:127; Westergren Axelsson, 2002:142f). To be noted, the females scored British English higher on all these attributes but polite. The attribute intelligent had almost 20% more females answering British English than the males (74% to 55%). The attributes professional and beautiful have about 10% difference between the males and females, females favoring British English the most. However, for polite the males answered British English to a greater extent than the females, 70% to 55%.

On the other hand, American English is described as cool and relaxed. This is supported by previous research by Rindal & Piercy (2013), Mobärg (2002) and Westergren Axelsson (2002) where American English also has been described as informal, relaxed and popular. This could be due to mass media being a large informal influence on the pupils (Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 8; Bolton, 2010: 141f).

The results of this essay are not supported by previous researchers when it comes to correctness and friendliness. Previous research found that British English was perceived as correct while these results show that females describe both varieties as correct (49% American and 51% British English). However, the male pupils were more in line with the previous research, with 59% answering that British English sounds more correct than American English (41%). Interestingly, the males answered American English to be their favorite variety and the one they would like to speak but they still believe British English to be more correct. The reason for the males liking and preferring American could be that they are used to it and when confronted with attributes to assign the different varieties they still feel that British English is more correct since it is traditionally the taught variety (Westergren Axelsson, 2002: 132).

In the question about friendliness, both male (56%) and female (53%) pupils favored British English while previous research has found that American English is usually described as friendly (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997: 125).

A strong factor for how positive an attitude the pupils have towards a variety is based on how familiar they are with it (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997:116ff, 125ff). However, in the light of these results it might be that British English is viewed as exotic when the pupils are exposed to American English on a daily basis (Bolton, 2010: 141f ; Melchers & Shaw, 2003: 6). Moreover, since British English is also the traditionally taught variety could have an impact on it being viewed as more correct and proper (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck & Smit, 1997:125; Mobärg, 2002:127; Westergren Axelsson, 2002:142f).

5 Conclusion

In this section are the conclusions from 4. Result and discussions presented. The research questions this essay is based on are: What dialect do Swedish pupils in 9th grade prefer to use,

what dialect would Swedish pupils in 9th grade prefer to be taught in, what attitudes do Swedish pupils in 9th grade have towards American English and British English and are there any differences in attitude between the genders?

The first question deals with preferences. The pupils' favorite variety was impossible to draw any conclusions from because of the nonexistence difference in opinion, 48% British English and 48% American English. The pupils answered that they believed themselves to speak American English in a greater extent than they would like to. These results might be due to that the pupils are exposed to American English through the media and British English in school (Bolton, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck and Smit, 1997; Mobärg, 2002; Rindal, 2010; Rindal & Piercy, 2013; Söderlund & Modiano, 2002, Westergren Axelsson, 2002). However, the majority of pupils would like to speak American English.

The second question is about school and teaching. The pupils answered that they would prefer being taught American English. This result might be because American English is closer to their L1, has an easier grammar and they are used to the variety from the mass media (Bolton, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck and Smit, 1997; Melcher & Smith, 2003; Mobärg, 2002; Rindal, 2010; Rindal & Piercy, 2013; Söderlund & Modiano, 2002, Westergren Axelsson, 2002).

The last research questions was to study the pupils' attitudes and note any gender differences. The differences between the genders were significant. The male pupils had only one large difference in attitude, British English sounds politer than the American variety. The female pupils thought British English to a higher degree sounded more intelligent, professional and snobbish than American English. The results of the study follow known research as to British English being more formal to pupils. However, the results do not fully follow researchers' findings that American English is more relaxed and cool. Speculation to the reason for this could be that schools teach British English which makes pupils view it as more formal and proper. American English might not follow the pattern because the pupils are so exposed to the variety that it has lost its originality (Bolton, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck and Smit, 1997; Melcher & Smith, 2003; Mobärg, 2002; Rindal, 2010; Rindal & Piercy, 2013; Söderlund & Modiano, 2002, Westergren Axelsson, 2002).

Further research is needed to be able to answer to why the pupils prefer the different dialects and to be able to understand their attitudes. By interviewing the pupils, it might be possible to determine some of the reasons as to why they like and speak American English but would like to speak British English could get an explanation and also what the reasons are for associating certain adjectives with the different varieties and how these attitudes might affect learning.

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Appendix

American or British English?

Gender: Female Male
Class: A B C

What dialect of English do you like the best?

American British Other: _____

What dialect do you think that you speak?

American British Other: _____

What dialect would you like to speak?

American British Other: _____

What dialect does your teacher use?

American British Don't know

What dialect should be taught in school?

American British Other: _____

Which dialect sounds more:

	American	British
Intelligent		
Professional		
Friendly		
Beautiful		
Polite		
Relaxed		
Snobbish		
Cool		
Correct		