

# Teaching Standards or Standard Teaching?

An analysis of the Swedish national curriculum for  
English at upper-secondary school level

by

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*An Englishman's way of speaking absolutely classifies him  
The moment he opens his mouth some other Englishman despises him.*

*One common language I'm afraid we'll never get.  
Oh, why can't the English learn to see  
A good example to people whose English is painful to your ears?*

*The Scotch and Irish leave you close to tears.  
There even are places where English completely disappears.  
In America, they haven't used it for years!*

**George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright, Nobel Prize laureate and Academy Award winner**

## Abstract

English is the most expansionist language in the world today. Currently, native speakers are outnumbered by non-native speakers by a ratio of 3:1, a ratio that is set to grow to 10:1 within the next ten years. One of the consequences of a language growing so rapidly is that its new users tend to ignore already accepted standards. In what linguists refer to as the outer and expanding circles of English-speakers (mainly in Africa and Asia) new varieties and standards of English are now being invented.

In this study, the effects of the current expansion of English on the teaching of English in Swedish upper-secondary schools are explored. Questions raised include: Should teachers of English in Sweden reflect the changing nature of English in their teaching? Should they readily adopt the New Englishes that are emerging or should they teach with the standard they have always used? The national curriculum for the teaching of English in Sweden is discussed in some detail. The guidelines therein are evaluated in terms of their ability to capture the changing face of English as well as their ability to give solid guidance to teachers in a classroom situation.

Findings derive from linguistic literature and from interviews conducted with English teachers at upper-secondary level. One of the main conclusions of the study is that whilst the national curriculum recognises the global diversity of English, its goals are overambitious in what it tries to achieve and thus it fails to provide teachers with practical guidance in their day-to-day teaching. A recommendation, therefore, is that the curriculum should be clearer in spelling out the importance of adhering to native standard varieties of English. However this does not mean that teachers should ignore the cultural diversity of the English-speaking world.

**Keywords:** **lingua franca, Standard English, global English, inner circle countries, outer circle countries, expanding circle countries.**

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## **Aim**

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the teaching of English at Swedish upper-secondary level against the background of the changing face of English in a globalised world. The current national curriculum for English forms a key part of the study.

## **Rationale**

My choice of dissertation topic stems from an interest, as a student teacher, native English speaker, and soon to be English teacher, in developing good teaching practice. For me, this entails following the national curriculum for English and also being able to share my knowledge of the language with my pupils.

## **Methodology**

### *Outline of methodology*

Primary as well as secondary sources were used for this study. The national curriculum for the teaching of English in Sweden (Skolverket 1994) formed an important part of the theoretical stance. Other secondary sources included literature/theories on the expansion and changing nature of the English language, particularly relating to the effects of globalisation.

### *Scope*

The range of this study is limited. At upper-secondary school level, the teaching of English is divided into 3 different courses: A, B and C, where A is compulsory for all programmes of study, B is compulsory for some and C is optional. For the purpose of this essay I focused on the A and B courses.

### *Primary research methodology*

For my primary sources I interviewed a sample of English teachers: one group consisting of native English speakers and another group consisting of native Swedish speakers. It should be stressed that this dissertation does not attempt to evaluate the quality of teaching or to make judgements as to which group utilises the best teaching methods. This has already been the subject of many studies both in Sweden and internationally.

I asked the interviewees questions regarding their approach to teaching English in Sweden, both in terms of their attitudes, e.g.:

- Their level of awareness of the changing face of English
- Their views and perceptions of “correct English”
- Their views on the national curriculum

and in terms of practical classroom application, e.g.:

- The standard they use (i.e. British, American or otherwise)
- The type of material (including topics/examples) they use
- Their willingness and opportunities to experiment with material and introduce new material

The number of interviews was restricted to eight in all. While this limited the possibility for generalised conclusions, it presented an opportunity to obtain detailed information from each interviewee. Rather than relying solely on findings from the interviews, I regarded them as complements to the secondary research. They gave some invaluable insight into the situation on the ground in terms of how the educational curriculum is interpreted and applied.

Teachers from two different schools were chosen. They were selected on the basis of their willingness to cooperate in the study. My rationale for this was that the most important thing in an interview situation was to create an atmosphere where the teacher wilfully wants to give answers to my questions and promote productive discussion.

I decided to opt for a mix between native English and native Swedish speaking teachers as I felt that both Swedish and “non-Swedish” perspectives could lead to more diverse and interesting findings.

I chose to interview teachers with at least four years experience. This was because I felt that less experienced teachers might not yet have developed definite teaching patterns by which they could characterise themselves and definite views on the current national curriculum in relation to their teaching. This criterion led to a concentration of people in the 40-60-age category. All respondents were fully qualified English teachers, as unqualified teachers were thought to be less likely to be fully aware of the curriculum. All of the teachers had experience from teaching at upper-secondary A- and B-level.

The respondents are presented in Appendix 1. For ethical reasons and in order to protect anonymity, they have been given fictitious names.

The interviews followed what Lantz (Ekström & Larsson 2000:55) refers to as an “open but directed format”, which is a cross between an open dialogue and a semi-structured interview. One reason for choosing this methodology was to allow for a flow in which the interviews could give rise to new ideas. The kinds of questions I used were what Larsson refers to as specific questions.<sup>1</sup> Thus the questions were precise and clearly worded, lending themselves to a range of responses within the bounds of the study, yet not of a multiple-choice character (Ekström & Larsson 2000:55). In some cases it was not necessary to ask interviewees all questions in strict order as they had already given very detailed responses. In cases where I found the responses unclear, follow-up questions were asked or the question rephrased.

The interviews were conducted individually. I decided against group interviews, as I wanted to get the full opinions of everyone and thought that group interviews might result in cross talk and/or one person dominating the process.

All interviewees were sent a copy of the aims and objectives of the study at least one week in advance and they were also given an outline of what would be discussed at interview. They were also invited, if they wished, to bring to the interview a sample of material that they used in class.

I decided against using recording equipment, as I felt that doing so might give the impression that I was attempting to pass judgment. I felt that such a situation might make the Swedish-speaking teachers feel uncomfortable. To the Swedish nationals I also stressed that the study was not a comparative evaluative one. This approach created a friendly peer-to-peer atmosphere and allowed for relaxed discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> My questions are attached at Appendix 2.

## **Background**

### **The teaching of English in Sweden**

#### *Historical background*

In 1946, English replaced German as the primary foreign language in the Swedish school system. Following a change in the national curriculum in 1962, English became a core subject. Much of the reason behind this was that English in Sweden had already become important due to the influences of film and radio and was thus seen as the most useful second language.

#### *The current national curriculum*

The way in which English is taught in Swedish schools has changed significantly since it was first introduced. Previous curricula, such as those of 1962 and 1969, were rigid in format, placing a high level of importance on the teaching of grammar patterns, expressions and phrases. The current curriculum, which dates from 1994, gives greater autonomy to the individual teacher and unlike previous curricula it focuses on pupils developing the communicative and cultural aspects associated with the language. Corbett describes this kind of change as “redefining the aims of language education to acknowledge ‘intercultural communicative competence’ rather than ‘native-speaker proficiency’ as the ultimate goal” (Corbett 2003:30).

The goals of the curriculum for English at upper-secondary are for pupils “to build on and develop knowledge of the expanding English speaking world and its culture” and “to be able to communicate within an international context”. Furthermore, “broadening perspectives on an expanding English-speaking world with its multiplicity of varying cultures” is a key aim of the subject.

The curriculum also sets out the desirable type of skills for pupils to acquire. These are “the ability to use the different forms of vocabulary, grammar, spelling, phraseology and pronunciation”.

Some of the main goals included in the curriculum are for pupils to:

- “Develop their ability to communicate and interact in English in a variety of contexts concerning different issues and in different situations.

- Be able to express himself/herself as correctly as possible in spoken and written English.
- Deepen their understanding of English as spoken in different parts of the world, and improve their ability to understand the contents communicated by different media.
- Reflect over ways of living, cultural traditions and social conditions in English-speaking countries, as well as develop greater understanding and tolerance of other people and cultures.
- Develop their ability to speak in a well-structured way, adapted to the subject and situation.”

(<http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0506&infotyp=8&skolform=21&iid=EN&extraId>)

## **English as a global language**

### *An expanding lingua franca*

In total, approximately between 700 million and 1 billion people in the world speak English (Pennycook 2000:78). They are frequently divided into three groups known as the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle (Kachru & Nelson 2000: 13). The inner circle is made up of approximately 370 million people in countries where English is spoken as a first language. The United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Ireland belong to this group. The outer circle consists of people, mainly in former colonies in Africa and Asia, who use English as a second language and official language. The expanding circle, finally, consists of people who use English frequently e.g. those who use it as a business language. Sweden belongs to this group, as do countries such as China and Japan. The number of people who belong to the outer and expanding circles is roughly evenly divided.

Currently, a rapid expansion is occurring in the number of speakers of English as a foreign language, hence the term “expanding circle”. Such is the growth that it is estimated that in ten years time, some 3 billion people will speak English (Newsweek International 2005:41). Most of them will belong to what is now called the expanding circle.

Internationally, English is already the dominant language of commerce, media and communication and it is also making headway into the private domain. English is also used by various

international organisations such as the United Nations, which lists English its first official language (UN online 2006).

Thus, it could be argued that English has assumed the role of *lingua franca* on a global scale. A *lingua franca* is a “common language” (Crystal 1997:9), an important function of which is to allow communication between people who do not have the same mother tongue. An example of such a *lingua franca* was Latin, which was used in the past to advance religious and cultural purposes. In some cases, such as the creation of Esperanto, the idea of a common language has been linked to peace and the unification of humanity (Al-Dabbagh 2005:9). Historically, most *lingua francas* have functioned as links between people in the same region. However, the modern day world, with its rapid advances in IT and telecommunications, has meant that geographical distance and national boundaries have been all but wiped out. Such developments have given rise to the need for a new, global type of common language. According to Crystal, English is fulfilling this need. The fact that people in China, India, Brazil and other heavily populated, fast-growing economies are adopting English as their business language is testimony to this (Crystal 1997:9).

#### *The emergence of new Englishes*

Linguistically, many argue that English is far from an ideal *lingua franca*. Speakers of nearly all other languages (including Swedish) find English extremely difficult to pronounce, especially in relation to its large number of vowels and diphthongs. The linguist Ross Smith categorises English as an irregular language, pointing out that most common verbs are irregular and that the spelling often does not correspond with the pronunciation. Smith furthermore maintains that English grammar is complex, citing “extravagant prepositions, the curious neutral *it*, totally inflexible syntax, and the diabolical phrasal verbs” (Smith 2005:58). Finally, he maintains that non-native speakers tend to find some media and business English, e.g. newspaper headlines, difficult to understand because it carries a lot of hidden meaning.

On the other hand, English also has linguistic characteristics that make it easy to learn at an elementary level. To former pupils of Latin and Germanic languages, it may be a relief to learn that English nouns do not have gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) forms. In the same way, the rules of subject-verb agreement (though problematic for many Swedes) are not as complicated as those of for example French or German.

The combination of its widespread adoption and the fact that, for many people, English is easy to learn at an elementary level but difficult to learn at an advanced level, has meant that the English language itself is undergoing change. The new English-speakers in the expanding circle “aren’t just passively absorbing the language – they’re shaping it” (Newsweek International 2005:42). Rather than simply making mistakes, they are devising new terminology and grammatical structures to fit their own needs. Crystal presents a scenario where a number of “New Englishes” are surfacing. In his view, rather than a coherent whole language, international English now consists of a number of regional dialects. Linguistic background, level of education, age, gender and class are all factors that determine what type of English an individual uses. For example, the English spoken by a ten-year-old Japanese beginner student is different from that spoken by a farmer in the US Mid-West (Crystal 1997:130).

To some commentators, such linguistic adjustment and diversity are undesirable and represent “language corruption”. They foresee the end of “proper” English. However, other linguists (Jenkins in Newsweek International 2005:42) want to promote the local variation and see no grounds why people should be limited to an idealised core version of the English language. The very notion of “proper English” is also under debate. Butcher (2005:13) claims that the term “native speaker”, in implying that there is one (and only one) proper and therefore superior type of English, is obsolete as well as imperialist and as such should be avoided.

Crystal predicts that a new form of global English such as World Standard Spoken English (WSSE) will emerge, made up of the lowest common denominators that can be understood by all English speakers irrespective of nationality (Crystal 1997:136). This, however, gives rise to a number of questions. For example, who or what should be in charge of setting the standard?

The situation that English now finds itself in is best summarised by Graddol who maintains that “contradictory tensions arise because English has two functions in the world: it provides a

vehicular basis for international communications and it forms the basis for constructing cultural identities. The former function requires mutual intelligibility and common standards. The latter encourages the development of local forms and hybrid varieties” (Graddol 2000:27).

### *One language but different standards*

Unlike the Swedish language for example, English does not have a governing body that establishes the rules of the language. The term *Standard English* refers to the form of written and spoken English that people in a native English speaking country consider to be a model in their respective country. Because of this, the standards vary, particularly in spoken register.

Standard English refers to grammar and vocabulary. It does *not* refer to a particular type of pronunciation such as the British Received Pronunciation (RP)<sup>2</sup>.

To Swedes, the most familiar varieties of English are Standard British English and Standard American English. The main difference between them is in the vocabulary and to a lesser extent in the grammar. For example while Americans consider the phrase “bacon tastes good, pork chops taste good” to be correct, British people would favour the phrase “bacon tastes nice, pork chops taste nice”.

Apart from the British and American ones, a multitude of standards exist within the inner as well as in the outer circle of the English-speaking world. Many of them have been influenced by loanwords and grammar from other languages. On the fact that Standard Indian English differs from Standard British English, the Indian born author Salman Rushdie comments that “we can’t simply use the language in the way the British did. It needs remaking for our own purposes” (Rushdie 1992:1).

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<sup>2</sup> “Received Pronunciation was also sometimes referred to as BBC English as it was traditionally used by the BBC. Received Pronunciation (RP) is a form of pronunciation of the English which has traditionally been the prestige British accent” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Received\\_Pronunciation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Received_Pronunciation)

## Analysis

### **The national curriculum in Swedish classrooms**

*Does the national curriculum recognise the changing face of English?*

In the national curriculum, there are several references made which could be seen to reflect an awareness of the changing nature of the English language. Aims such as “to build on and develop knowledge of the expanding English speaking world and its culture” (Skolverket 1994) recognise the spread of the English language worldwide.

While no explicit mention is made of concepts such as “New Englishes”, outer circle and expanding circle etc., the curriculum clearly emphasises cultural as well as linguistic diversity. The curriculum is particularly ambitious in terms of cultural understanding. Pupils are not only to be taught about life, culture and society in the English-speaking world, they are also (presumably as a positive side effect of the aforementioned) to “develop greater understanding and tolerance of other people and cultures” (Skolverket 1994). Linguistically, the curriculum states intercultural and international communication capabilities as prime goals. Again, diversity is emphasised. Pupils are to be able to understand and use English in a range of different circumstances across the world.

Thus, to the question of whether the curriculum recognises the changing face of English the answer is undoubtedly yes. However, there is little in the way of specific guidance to teachers. Rather, the purpose of the curriculum is to encourage the attainment of broad goals. Because of this, teachers are allowed a high level of freedom and various modes of teaching are accepted as long as they do not contradict the national goals.

*Is the national curriculum useful to teachers?*

My interviews presented a picture of the teaching of English in Swedish schools as far from clear-cut. The complex situation, the teachers argued, is not due to increased teacher autonomy *per se* but rather due to the pace with which English is currently changing and the scale of change. Even the most up-to-date and dedicated teachers, such as those interviewed, have a hard time keeping up with new vocabulary, phrasal verbs, and grammar being introduced to the language.

The teachers whom I interviewed all had similar views on the national curriculum. While they sympathised with the aims and tried to fit their teaching methods into the framework, they regarded the national curriculum as a political statement rather than an education tool. Since its introduction, the curriculum has not made their teaching easier. The goals were perceived as too broad and too ambitious, and not practical. One of the teachers compared the curriculum to the US constitution and felt that the curriculum looked good on paper but that it was mainly for the benefit of outside observers who would get a positive impression of English teaching in Sweden.

Because of the pressures of their day-to-day working life, teachers expressed a frustration about trying to fulfil the goals of the national curriculum. For a very ambitious teacher who takes the goals seriously and strives to deepen pupils' knowledge of the English-speaking world, the goals were seen to be unrealistic. The teachers felt that given the limited number of hours devoted to the teaching of English A and B (80 hours for both courses), if they were to cover all that was identified in the curriculum they would only be able to offer pupils superficial knowledge. Instead, the teachers preferred to provide pupils with a general overview and then to concentrate on a couple of English speaking countries. All of the teachers maintained that the most important aspect was for pupils to develop good written and spoken ability. With that, they believed that the rest in relation to understanding and conceptualising the English-speaking world would follow.

### **To standardise or to neutralise?**

In the national curriculum, there is no recommendation as to which standard of English is to be followed. While it states that pupils are to be taught to express themselves as correctly as possible, there is no explanation as regards "correctly in relation to whom". All teachers of English in Swedish schools are therefore free to teach the subject as they see best fits the curriculum. In my interviews, standardisation versus neutralisation arose as a major issue and I have therefore decided to expand on it.

### *The case for de-culturalisation and for abandoning inner circle standards*

In trying to teach pupils "correct English", one option is for teachers to use a standard from a so-called inner circle country. To many this is the obvious choice. Because the English speaking world has never had a common linguistic authority like the Swedish Academy, outer and expanding circle countries such as Sweden have always tended to regard the inner circle as

the model (Burns and Coffin 2000:16). However, many linguists have begun to question the validity of teaching inner circle standards of English. Critics highlight the fact that English can now be regarded as the world lingua franca and hence call for the de-ethnicisation and deculturalisation of English language teaching. Given the spread of the language worldwide one can reasonably ask if the teaching of the standards and the culture of “traditional” English speaking countries such as Britain, Ireland and the USA has any place in the teaching of English as the language is no longer exclusively theirs?

There is also a growing tolerance for multiple non-native standards of English. Many claim that if global English is used as a lingua franca between speakers of different mother tongues it is not necessary that the traditional native-speaking standards be followed. Instead speakers can happily carry over linguistic features from their native language thus avoiding difficult expressions from standard varieties. Graddol maintains that people do not have to sound like native speakers to be understood and that speakers of global English can still keep their identities (Graddol 2004). He adds that the use of English and the language itself will continue to change in many ways (Graddol 2004). Pakir claims that English is “going ‘glocal’, that is, going global while maintaining local roots” (Goswami 2003).

Mac Arthur in Butcher notes that “English is the lingua franca that Asians now share with one another and the rest of the world” and as such maintains that “it is now also manifestly an Asian language in its own right” (Butcher 2005:21). It could therefore be argued that the increased importance of the outer circle and expanding circle of English speakers should be more visible in Swedish schools. That is, if one of the primary reasons for learning English in Sweden is to facilitate international communication, as the current curriculum states, the curriculum and the teaching of the language should recognise that the bulk of that communication in the future will happen with people from outer circle and expanding circle countries. By the same rationale, learning about “traditional” English speaking countries, which are largely Anglo-Saxon, would not have a future in Swedish classrooms as their relevance to the language becomes less and less. Instead it would be more logical for teachers in Sweden to use texts from Swedish and world culture situations.

Modiano puts forward another reason why it is undesirable for pupils of English to follow the study of so-called “traditional practices”, which he defines as “the learning of British Standard English with RP pronunciation, where the instructor speaks this variety and where the

students are expected to study the prescriptive standard with integrative motivation, thus achieving near native proficiency” (Modiano 2001:162). He regards such practices inappropriate because when one studies the speech of one particular community, it is difficult to acquire the pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary of the language used by other communities. According to Modiano, given the fact that there is now a multiplicity of communities that use English, restricting pupils to the imitation of one inner circle standard cannot be considered best practice. This thinking is in line with the current Swedish curriculum in its ambition towards “broadening perspectives on an expanding English-speaking world with its multiplicity of varying cultures” (Skolverket 1994).

That the language of a non-native speaker is less complex compared to that of a native English speaker is another reason for abandoning the inner circle standards. Graddol cites a study carried out by Smith where the language of English-speakers from China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Taiwan, the United Kingdom and the United States was compared in order to discover whether “the spread of English is creating greater problems of understanding across cultures” (Graddol 2000:28). Smith found that they understood each other well (in other words, English does function as a lingua franca) but that “native speakers (i.e. those from the UK and the US) were not found to be the most easily understood, nor were they, as subjects, found to be the best able to understand the different varieties of English” (Graddol 2000:28). This is probably because the language of inner circle English speakers is more complex in terms of grammar and vocabulary.

#### *The case for standardisation and culturalisation*

Though the arguments for the de-standardisation appear strong there are many who disagree with them. One pro-standardisation argument is put forward by Quirk who feels that it would be unwise to separate a language from its roots and its heritage when teaching it as a foreign language. On the question standards Quirk that their existence “is an endemic feature of our mortal condition and that people feel alienated and disoriented if a standard seems to be missing” (Quirk 1985:5). Even if English were to be learned purely as a communicative tool, the student has to feel motivated and inspired to devote time and effort to studying it. Studying a language without a real context may have a demotivating effect on this process. In other words, a neutralised version of English may appear pointless to learn, simply because it has no context.

Corbett also maintains that a teaching approach that pays particular attention to cultural aspects “broadens its scope from a focus on improving the ‘four skills’ of reading, writing, listening and speaking, in order to help learners acquire cultural skills, such as strategies for systematic observation of behavioural patterns” (Corbett 2003:2). Furthermore, he argues that taking an intercultural approach to language learning does not necessarily mean striving to imitate the native English-speaker. Instead it has to do with acquiring intercultural communicative competence, which includes the ability to understand the language and behaviour of the target. In other words, intercultural competence teaches pupils to be “diplomats able to view different cultures from a perspective of informed understanding” (Corbett 2003:2). This is also very similar to that which the current Swedish national curriculum aims to achieve.

#### *The approach taken by teachers in Sweden*

Though the arguments for the de-standardisation appear strong there are many who disagree with them, not the least the teachers I interviewed. All Swedish-born teachers stressed the need to use a standard from the inner circle, favouring the British Standard English in particular. Their version of British English is a modern one that does not involve a strict pronunciation regime. So while in the past Swedish pupils were taught to drive their ‘cahs’, and wish each other a ‘good mooohning’ according to the RP model, teachers nowadays have a more flexible view on spoken language. Nevertheless, following a standard (especially in relation to writing) is still important to them.

Interestingly, Swedish born teachers seemed to be more fond of correctness and adherence to a particular standard than native speakers. The native English-speaking teachers relied more on an instinctive sense of correct versus incorrect English and therefore did not insist that pupils use one particular standard, but they too claimed to stick to inner circle varieties of English in their teaching. All native-English speaking teachers taught using their own standard variety (American, Canadian, Irish and Australian). American born Susan told me about how some of her pupils once wanted her to imitate RP pronunciation, as it appeared in a textbook the class was using. She refused to entertain the request (despite much protestation from her pupils) because she would be unable and embarrassed to imitate an accent with which she is unfamiliar.

The Swedish born teachers stated three main reasons why they use the British standard: firstly, because it is the standard that they learned during their formal education and the one

with which they are most familiar. Secondly, there is the element of confidence. Because it is the one to which they have been most exposed it is the one they feel most comfortable using. Thirdly, they held the view that British Standard English (at least in terms of writing) is the best for pupils to learn, as all other standards are variations of this. The latter is in line with Trudgill's statement: "The different types of English are based on British English but have developed grammatical differences and changes because of influence and loanwords from other languages" (Trudgill 2000:6-7). One of the teachers in particular felt that it was important to adhere to the British variety, as outer and expanding circle varieties are often too localised and written in a way that is difficult for outsiders to understand. She mentioned Egyptian English as an example of this.

As for teaching the cultural aspect, all Swedish teachers have a lot of knowledge about the culture in inner circle countries, as they have been exposed to what is going on in those countries having visited them for both cultural, educational and leisure purposes. The same is even more true for native English speakers.

None of the teachers claimed to have the same level of knowledge of outer and expanding circle countries as they had of inner circle countries. June, for example, grew up in a household where she was exposed to inner circle varieties of English from an early age. In school, she learned English according to the British Standard and RP pronunciation. The British Standard was also the standard used at the university she attended. For much of her life, British English was the only standard June knew. It was only about 15 years ago (15 years after her qualifying as a teacher) that the notion that there were other Englishes occurred to her. This does not mean that she considers other standards to be incorrect. However, the idea of teaching for example American Standard English is not an option for her simply because she is not au-fait with that particular standard.

The above examples demonstrate an important point namely that even if a more "democratic" simplified standard of English were introduced in Swedish schools it is unlikely that it would get any support from the English teaching community as it would require the unlearning of habits learned over a lifetime. On top of this, there would be time and cost factors involved in the training of teachers.

All the teachers interviewed subscribed to the argument raised by Quirk, i.e. that a neutralised version of English would be difficult to teach because it lacks context. In fact being able to talk about life in English speaking countries and their cultures is almost as important to the teachers I interviewed as the importance of correct grammar and good vocabulary. The type of materials used in the teaching of culture ranges from literature, music (both traditional and current), newspapers, debates, articles and video. All teachers also made the study of a novel a compulsory part of their classes. Most literature that the teachers recommended originated from Britain, Ireland and the US. However, all teachers confirmed that pupils were free to choose literature from other parts of the English speaking such as Africa and Asia. That most of the literature they recommended had a British/Irish origin had to do with availability of books and the familiarity of those cultures to Swedish pupils. All teachers felt that giving English a cultural context to be very important as it gave pupils a feel for colloquial expressions and vocabulary. Another reason was to get them to read something to which they could relate and thus create interest in the language. In fact, engaging pupils' interest in the language was seen as more important than actual cultural appreciation. All of the teachers would have liked to have more access to culturally diverse material. However, the availability in Sweden of suitable textbooks, novels, and video from countries from the outer and expanding circles is extremely limited.

The teachers whom I interviewed were aware of the changing and expansionist nature of English. In fact, one of the native English-speaking teachers predicted that within 10-15 years the world would have a Russian variant of English. Another one of the teachers presented a parallel to the study conducted by Smith. She told me that during her listening exercises she regularly played accents from the English-speaking world. Her pupils were able to understand all accents but seemed to find the outer circle accents, such as the Indian one, easier to understand than the inner circle ones.

This awareness however, does not mean that the teachers were in favour of introducing a more neutral, global standard of English into Swedish schools. On the contrary, teachers argued that being familiar with the culture of inner circle countries, i.e. knowing the cultural and societal registers of these influential nations, gives Swedes an advantage. Canadian born Brad, for example, commented on how a move away from inner circle standards would impact on the relatively powerful position that Swedish pupils currently hold when it comes to their command of English. In Sweden, English is taught from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and even at this

early stage it has an inherently inner circle perspective. The fact that Swedish pupils learn an inner circle standard well, not only gives them respect from the English speaking world but also the upper hand compared to others that use English as a lingua franca. In contrast to most second language users, Swedes have a better ability to express themselves. In fact, he added that Swedes when they go abroad are often mistaken for native English speakers because the standard of English they speak is so good. To illustrate his opinion Brad spoke about an exchange between his school and a school in Poland. The language of communication between the Swedish and Polish pupils was English. All the Swedish pupils were surprised by how poor a level of English the Polish pupils had, in terms of grammar, vocabulary and general communicative ability. Even though both sets of pupils were able to communicate (further proof that basic English functions as a lingua franca), the Swedish pupils experienced and appreciated at first hand the benefit of having teachers from a school where the inner circle standard was de-rigueur. Given this experience, it is unlikely that Swedish pupils would want to stop at a basic level such as the Polish standard. In other words, having more knowledge than is actually required is an advantage in an international context.

Further, teachers raised doubts as to whether pupils would understand and/or take an interest in a more neutral global type of English. All of the teachers said that television, popular music, magazines, the Internet and computer games shaped their pupils' English. The English that pupils are exposed to via these media originates from native English speaking countries with the US being particularly dominant. It is unlikely that such media would ever use a simplified variety of English. Because of this, pupils' ways of comprehending the concept of English do not stem from either their teachers or what is taught in class. Therefore, introducing a more 'neutral' variety which deviates from the standards that pupils are exposed to in their everyday life would cause confusion and possibly demotivate them from learning such a language and may well lead to behavioural problems in class. In fact, Swedish born Sven talked about how in one of his Vocational classes, pupils despised listening to British English referring to it as 'gay English'. For them the only variety of English they wanted to listen to was American English, as they perceived the American dialect and pronunciation to be 'normal' English.

## **Conclusion**

The current national curriculum for English is a commendable document in some respects. It is insightful enough to recognise the enormous linguistic and cultural diversity of the English-speaking world. It does not seek to specify details of the teaching of English and therefore avoids a ‘one size fits all’ attitude to English language learning.

However, the same characteristics could also be seen as shortcomings. The fact that the curriculum is subjective leaves it open to interpretation. This absence of specificity has led to ambiguities. Notably, the lack of recognition of the different standards of English has meant that teachers receive no guidance in answering questions like: What exactly is the “English-speaking world” and how can English teaching realistically reflect this world? What is the goal for Swedish pupils at upper-secondary level: mutual intelligibility or near-like native proficiency?

None of the teachers I spoke to took the curriculum too seriously. While a worthy document, they felt that it lacked much practical application. Given this, one has to ask what the point of writing such a curriculum was and how much influence, if any, ordinary teachers had on its wording? In other words, political statements are all very well, but the fact that the educational perspective has been overlooked is a serious weakness of the curriculum. Not the least in light of the fast-changing nature of English, teachers are in need of a document that provides them with real direction that reflects the reality of day-to-day teaching and takes into account how much a teacher can cover with a class in an 80-hour period.

From analysing the current debate and conducting interviews, I am aware that linguists and educationalists take different views on the future of English teaching (see Table 1). Some linguists speak of the emergence of a new global English, which may act as a standard in itself. Other linguists want to encourage a multitude of local varieties and let the English language be common property, i.e. “everyone who has learned it now owns it” and “has a right to use it the way they want” (Crystal 2003:2-3). However from an educator’s point of view, this is hard to put into practice. Teaching a global standard which is, at best, in its infancy does not seem to be a viable option and encouraging a Swedish variety of English is not on the agenda. This is because teachers prefer to use recognised and well-documented forms of English.

Table 1. Approaches to the teaching of English

	<u>Standardised</u>	<u>Non-standardised</u>
<u>Inner circle focus</u>	Native Swedish-speaking teachers' approach: emphasis on British Standard English, particularly in writing	Native English-speaking teachers' approach: reliance on own instinctive knowledge, acceptance of different standards
<u>Inclusive approach</u>	"Global English": a lingua franca based on simplified grammar and vocabulary	Multiplicity of local varieties (outer and expanding circle countries)

Personally, I have been convinced that with an ever-changing English language, the curriculum needs to emphasise the teaching of a standard. Ideally, this should be an inner circle standard rather than an international one. Admittedly, the argument for the teaching of a non-standardised "neutral" English can be justified, given the prediction that in ten years' time, non-native speakers of English will outnumber native speakers by a ratio of almost 10:1. Nevertheless, a neutral English is unlikely to be regarded highly by native English speaking countries. In countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, people are judged by the quality of their language. Outer and expanding circle varieties are seen to have lower status. For Sweden, any sharp deviation from the inner circle norms would be futile as Sweden is heavily dependent on the aforementioned inner circle countries for trade and investment, and culturally more similar to them than countries in the expanding circle.

As it is, Swedish pupils have an excellent international reputation for having a high standard of English (<http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/205/a/825>). It therefore is unlikely that the Swedish educational authorities would want to dilute this hard won and enviable status. In fact adopting a non-standardised "neutral" version of English could justifiably be seen as a step backwards. This is because there is a risk that any future Global English will be a mixture of many varieties and dialects, which may ultimately threaten communication. In my opinion, the best

way to maintain the excellent work carried out thus far by teachers in Sweden is to continue teaching using an inner circle standard. Hopefully, any future curriculum will recognise this.

However, that the curriculum should favour native standard varieties does not mean that English teachers should ignore the cultural and ethnic diversity of the English-speaking world. In fact, I can think of no good reason why such diversity cannot continue to be an integral part of English teaching in Sweden. I also believe that if pupils are equipped with a standard variety this will allow their language to be transferable to any cultural setting.

### **Personal reflections and recommendations**

There were a number of issues that struck me during the course of my dissertation work, which could form the basis for future research and other initiatives.

Firstly, there is the issue of teacher training. All the teachers I interviewed who had been trained in Sweden commented on shortcomings in their pedagogical training. They felt that the programmes at the third level institutions they attended had been too abstract and had made no effort to prepare future teachers for the classroom situation. In their view, apart from knowledge of the language itself, teachers also need knowledge related to pedagogical techniques, e.g. how to use different teaching materials, how to prepare a class and how to motivate pupils to develop their language ability. Making students aware of the curriculum requirements and how best to fulfil these requirements is also essential. None of these things were part of the teaching training programmes.

As a consequence, newly qualified teachers have never had a chance to develop the skills that they need in their everyday teaching. This may be a reason for the widespread perception that a teaching degree is superfluous and that anyone with an education in English can successfully teach the language.<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, this is a gross misunderstanding of the requirements that are placed on today's upper-secondary school English teachers. I believe that knowledge of the language is only one element in the successful teaching of English. Teaching is a skill and like any skill, it requires proper instruction, e.g. through demonstrating techniques, giving examples and exercises and encouraging students to reflect and work towards the outlined

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<sup>3</sup> This is obviously a view held by many Swedish employers who seem to have no problem ignoring national educational guidelines by employing unqualified teachers on a full-time basis. Statistics are available at <http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/205/a/981>

goals. Training teachers to be more aware and reflect over the changing nature of English and the different standards in use is also of high importance.

This view is shared by Martin who argues that “language teaching is strengthened in its pedagogical effectiveness when its practitioners have a heightened awareness of the functionality of grammatical resources” (Martin in Burns and Coffin 2000:4). They also believe that in order to achieve positive outcomes in teacher training, it is important to create awareness of the status and functions of Englishes in the world today and in the future. Kachru and Nelson point to the fact that English language research and literature have already begun to take more pluralist forms. Similarly, English teacher training should acknowledge this (Kachru and Nelson 2000:12).

In follow-up to my interviews, it would be interesting to conduct a more extensive study amongst teacher training students, seeking their views on the training that they are receiving and its perceived relevance to a classroom situation. This in turn could be followed by a study of the same individuals when they have spent time in the field (say 2-3 years). Such longitudinal research would verify or falsify my own findings and it could also lead to useful suggestions as to how English teacher training could be improved.

Secondly, there is the issue of helping student teachers to master the English language and develop an understanding of English speaking cultures. From my own personal experience the best way to learn a foreign language is to live in a country where it is spoken. I therefore feel that a compulsory period of study abroad (a least one academic term) in a native English speaking country should be part of the training of all English language teachers. Not only would this have the obvious benefit of perfecting the student teacher’s English but it would also heighten teacher awareness of the target country’s culture. The fact is that in today’s teacher training programme it is possible for an individual to qualify as an English teacher without ever having been to an English speaking country. Given the emphasis placed on the culture and knowledge of English speaking countries in the curriculum I find this scenario unacceptable.

Finally, there is the issue to professional development. For a language undergoing such rapid change I believe life-long learning opportunities for teachers of English to be essential. Unfortunately, according to the teachers I interviewed, professional development for teachers

does not seem to be important to school management. This was in stark contrast to the ambitions of all of the Swedish born teachers I interviewed who were very enthusiastic about the idea of further professional development. In some cases, teachers had gone abroad to undertake courses in English speaking countries through their own initiative. In other cases schools had paid for language trips but only after prolonged lobbying from the individual teacher. One of my interviewees cited that one reason for the lack of support from school management is that such initiatives are perceived to be holidays. In my view, this is most unfortunate. Opportunities for language development should be regarded as an integral part of the professional life of an English teacher.

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## **Appendix 1: Presentation of interviewees**

Tony: Australian national. Graduated from teacher training college in Australia in the 1980's. Has taught English at upper-secondary level in Sweden for 10 years.

Sara: Swedish national. Did her primary degree in English and Swedish at Linköping University and subsequently went on to complete her teacher training at Lärarhögskolan, Linköping. She has 30 years teaching experience, 15 of them at upper-secondary level. Though Sara has never lived in an English-speaking country for an extended period she very is interested in developing her language ability and her cultural knowledge of native English speaking countries. This interest has led her to undertake courses and study visits to both Britain and Ireland. Her trip to Britain she financed herself whilst her trip to Ireland was part funded (after much drawn-out negotiation) by the school where she works.

Petra: Swedish national. Holds a teaching qualification from Lärarhögskolan, Stockholm. Completed her primary degree in English and Swedish at the University of Stockholm. Petra has more than 30 years experience of teaching English. She is extremely interested in English culture, particularly English folk dancing. This has resulted in numerous visits to England and her having many English friends. She is also extremely interested in British and Irish literature (James Joyce being her favourite). She has attended formal courses in England to help develop her language and cultural knowledge. The school where she previously worked financed these trips.

June: Swedish national. Took her English degree at the University of Stockholm and her teacher training qualification from Linköping, Lärarhögskolan. Has 30 years experience teaching English and has taught at upper-secondary level for 11 years. Was headhunted by the upper-secondary school where she now teaches. June grew up in an international environment and from an early age was exposed to the British and South African varieties of English.

Brad: Canadian national. Holds a bachelors degree in English from the University of Montreal, Canada. He gained his teaching qualifications from Lärarhögskolan, Stockholm in the mid-1980s. Has taught English at upper-secondary school since the early 1990s.

Sven: Swedish national. Holds his primary degree in English and Swedish from the University of Gothenburg. Gained his teaching qualification one year later from the same university. Has over 30 years teaching experience. Sven has taught at upper-secondary school level since 1991 and is the Head English Teacher at the school where he works. Has visited the US and UK a couple of times but these visits were for leisure purposes.

Susan: American national. English graduate from the University of Stockholm and holder of a teaching qualification from Södertörns högskola, Stockholm. Has taught English at upper-secondary level for four years. Currently, she is studying for her Master degree in English at the University of Stockholm. Susan is extremely interested in world Englishes, which she believes is the result of many visits and extended stays in Asia.

Sean: Irish national. Holds a degree in English and Latin from the University of Stockholm and a teaching qualification from Lärarhögskolan, Stockholm. Has taught English at upper-secondary school for 25 years.

## **Appendix 2: Interview questions**

1. What is your educational background? What did you think of your studies at university? Did you feel that your teacher training studies adequately prepared you for your professional life as a teacher?

2. Would you describe yourself as someone who teaches a particular standard/variety of English? If so, which one? Did you make a conscious choice to teach a particular standard/variety? If so, why? Do you think it is important that pupils are taught a particular standard?

3. In your view, is there such a thing as “correct English”? If so, how would you define this? Is it important that your pupils acquire a “correct” standard of English? If so, does this influence your grading of national tests/portfolios/projects etc?

4. What type of books and material do you use? What type of material do you use to illustrate cultural aspects of English-speaking countries? From which countries do these materials originate? Has your choice of culturally related material changed over the years? How and why?

5. The two dominant standards in the current teaching of English in Sweden are the British and the American standards. Do you make pupils aware of the existence other standards of English? If so, which ones? Do you think it is important that pupils are made aware of other standards? Do you devote much time to this?

6. The English language is undergoing a lot of change, becoming an increasingly global language and it is now widely used outside the traditional native English speaking countries such as the US, Britain and Australia. How do you keep up with the changing nature of English? Is it reflected in your teaching? Does your school actively support the professional development of English teachers? If so what kind of support is provided?

7. The national guidelines for the teaching of English in Sweden aim for pupils “to build on and develop knowledge of the expanding English speaking world and its culture” and “to be able to communicate within an international context”. “Broadening perspectives on an ex-

panding English-speaking world with its multiplicity of varying cultures” is another key aim of the subject. Do you find the national guidelines for English helpful in your teaching? Do you think they can be improved upon? If so, how?