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Exposure to English outside the Classroom

Exponering mot Engelska utanför klassrummet

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The following is a collaboration of work by both Fraser MacLeod and Pia Larsson. Broadly speaking, it can be said that Pia concentrated on sections such as “previous research” and the “method” section, and Fraser took responsibility for talking about “the natural approach” and the “results” section. However, we both take full responsibility for the validity of all the contents within.

Abstract

This study attempts to outline the exposure to English language students between the ages of 14 and 16 experience in Swedish schools. Due to the relatively small scope of our study we have limited our parameters and concentrated on two schools with predominantly Swedish pupils. The aim was to establish the nature of English influence on teenagers in Swedish schools and then to examine whether this naturally occurring acquisition of knowledge is utilized in the more formal language learning environment of the classroom.

We used a survey to get an overview of our topic and to help us establish patterns and trends of English language exposure amongst our target students. In order to further analyze our topic we conducted two group interviews.

Our research shows that English has a great influence on Swedish children though perhaps not as much as we had first anticipated. While receptive acquisition is high, chances to actively produce the language remain low. It is also noted that while different types of English media is in fact utilized in the classroom, it may not be relevant or interesting to the students.

Keywords – media, culture, English, language, acquisition, learning, input, L1, L2, outside classroom

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

English has long been the international language and globalization has made it more important than ever. Due to globalization, media from around the world is more readily available through a variety of sources such as the internet, television and radio. The media output from English speaking countries, particularly the US, is phenomenal and has become a part of society here in Sweden. The policy of not dubbing films and television and only translating through subtitles has given Sweden and the Swedish an edge when acquiring English as their second or third language.

We are two students in our final term of a four and a half year teacher program at Malmö Högskola. Fraser is a native English speaker from the United Kingdom and Pia has lived and worked in Ireland which gives them both an insight, through exposure, into English language popular culture as well as an interest in the language itself and its increasing importance in an increasingly communicative world.

Language use inside the classroom works as a stimulus for many students when it comes to the informal learning of English outside the school, whilst to other students it can have the opposite effect, that of informal English working as a stimulant for classroom English. (*Skolverket (2006) Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre (Lpo94) <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=1070>*)

As future teachers of English we are intrigued by the potential influence of this widely used international language on students. Through many types of media, such as film, music and the internet, teenagers are exposed to the English language on a daily basis. We feel that this language overlap with popular culture puts English language teachers in a unique position to create interest, motivation and enthusiasm within their subject. A look at the syllabus for compulsory school reveals quite clearly a link between the 'real' world and that which is supposed to be taught in the classroom. Examples are that students are asked to both, "develop their ability to read different types of texts for pleasure and to obtain information and knowledge", and also "deepen their understanding of spoken English in different situations and contexts" (*Skolverket (2006) Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system (Lpo94) <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=1072>*) A failure, therefore, to interconnect the spheres of classroom study and the student world beyond would seem to be a waste of useful and renewable resources.

We also feel that it is in our best interest as future teachers to gain awareness of materials that are more relevant to today's youth.

1.2 Purpose statement

Our aims are to ascertain English influence outside a typical classroom setting. In order to achieve this aim we will be targeting two groups of students between the ages of 14 and 16 using a survey. From the results of this survey we will formulate student interviews to concretize our findings. Our purpose is to gain a more detailed understanding of the various types of exposure to English and which kinds of media and material they prefer to work with. It is worth mentioning that while this study concentrates on the subject of English, it is only material and media in our modern day culture that is being researched and not the acquisition of specific language forms.

1.3 Research question

- What forms of English do some students come into contact with outside the classroom, and what are their opinions on this English language exposure?

2. Literature Review

In this section we will define various concepts that are key to our study, as well as providing pedagogical theory as to why the study is significant. These ideas include principles on the acquisition of language outside of a learning environment, and how this innate ability to acquire could be utilized within the classroom from a motivational perspective. It also outlines theories on media exposure in youth cultures.

2.1 Definitions

Inside vs. outside the classroom: When we talk about learning English inside of the classroom we refer to the English that is being taught by the teacher in a classroom situation. Watching a movie or reading a book during English-class are examples of English taught inside of the classroom. When we talk about English outside of the classroom we refer to all aspects of the English language that the students are exposed to outside of school. Watching TV or reading an English book before bedtime are examples of English picked up outside of the classroom.

The ESL classroom: ESL is the abbreviation for *English as a Second Language*. When we use the term ESL or the ESL classroom we mean a classroom in which the students in most (if not all) cases have mother tongue other than English.

L1: L1 is the term for first language. If a student speaks Swedish as their L1 it means their mother tongue is Swedish.

L2: L2 is the term for second language. If a student speaks English as their L2 it means their mother tongue is not English.

Media: With the term *media*, we mean various forms of communication and forums such as television, Digital Video Discs, music, the internet, magazines and newspapers.

Culture: When we discuss the term *culture* we refer to the gathered ideas, attitudes, values, perspectives and images that through mass media in different ways influence a society. It is important to keep in mind that *culture* is a fluid concept, changing constantly and occurring uniquely in a specific place and time. We would like to point out that we are aware of

different forms of culture, but would prefer to use just *culture* as an umbrella term to cover all influences.

Receptive and Productive skills: With the term receptive skills we mean the students competence in listening and reading. Their productive skills include the competences speaking and writing.

2.2 The Natural Approach

The Natural Approach, developed by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell is based on five pedagogical hypotheses. The following three are closely linked with our area of interest;

- The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis (defining acquisition and learning+)
- The Monitor Hypothesis (the advantages of acquisition)
- The Input Hypothesis (how we acquire knowledge)

As we are dealing with sources and materials beyond our control, i.e. outside the classroom, we should be aware of how useful these materials can be. These hypotheses give weight to our inference that materials from the outside world, within popular culture, can be of benefit to the development of student L2 language skills.

The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Of significant importance to the Natural Approach are the defining and differentiating of “acquisition” and “learning”. “Learning refers to “explicit” knowledge of rules, being aware of them and being able to talk about them” (Krashen & Terrell, p.26). Here we could talk about the introduction of grammar as the building blocks to a language, often to be found in a more structured learning environment such as the classroom. When studying grammar, there has been a conscious choice to learn and develop. One does not understand rules, merely by chance. They have to be thought about and analyzed to some degree. Acquisition, on the other hand refers very much to “accidental” knowledge development, “Language acquisition is the “natural” way to develop linguistic ability, and is a subconscious process; children for example are not necessarily aware that they are acquiring language, they are only aware that they are communicating” (Ibid, p.26). To acquire knowledge, it has to be available in some form, and this is where the day to day exposure to English through various media becomes interesting. “To summarize, the term “second language acquisition” (SLA) refers to the sub-

conscious or conscious processes by which a language other than the mother tongue is learned in a natural or a tutored setting” (Ellis, p.6).

The Monitor Hypothesis

Could it be said that language acquisition is of serious significance when compared with a structured learning environment? “The (Monitor) hypothesis says that when we produce utterances in a second language, the utterance is “initiated” by the acquired system” (Krashen & Terrell, p.30). The idea is that with learned knowledge, based around rules and structure, the learner is constantly “monitoring” his or her language output, providing less spontaneous and fluent conversation. Therefore, acquired knowledge is essential for students’ communicative skills.

The Input Hypothesis

So, how do we acquire language?

“This (input) hypothesis states simply that we acquire (not learn) language by understanding input that is a little beyond our current level of (acquired) competence” (Krashen & Terrell, p.32). Thereby, if input is ‘i’, acquisition can be described as ‘i+1’. Krashen and Terrell are keen to point out that the knowledge not yet acquired in a second language does not necessarily follow a natural order and that acquisition is not limited to a “level” immediately above the current level of competence. Thus, knowledge of certain areas of language can theoretically be acquired through any exposure to any L2 source.

The aim of the Natural Approach is to bring acquisition into the classroom with the principle of “... foster(ing) a lowering of the affective filter of the students. Activities in the classroom focus at all times on topics which are interesting and relevant to the students and encourage them to express their ideas, opinions, desires, emotions and feelings” (Ibid, p.20). With this in mind, a list of personal communication skills to be presented in the classroom was drawn up in order to promote natural acquisition:

- Participate in a conversation with one or more speakers of L2
- Listen to a conversation between other speakers
- Listen to announcements in public places
- Request information in public places
- Listen to radio, television, movies, music

- Read and write notes to friends or workers
- Read signs, including instructions
- Read and fill out forms (applications and other documents)
- Read advertisements (windows, newspapers, magazines)
- Read and write personal letters
- Pleasure reading

These skills align themselves very closely with the survey we have used in ascertaining students' use of English outside of school. "It is self-evident that SLA can take place only when the learner has access to L2 input" (Ellis, p.12). This is the crux of our study. Since 1984, there has also been the significant development of computers and the internet on which most of these skills can be developed. Maria Estling Vannestål recognizes this when she says, "Never before has it been so easy to bring the world into the classroom" (Vannestål, p.17).

Of course, while the principles of acquisition are sound, students' motivation to test themselves and to develop, especially in a non-structured learning environment, must be taken into consideration. To quote research done by *skolverket* on this subject, "In order to focus the students' informal L2 learning and linguistic experiences outside of the classroom, it is important to increase their interest and motivation to learn more", (*Skolverket (2000) Syllabus for English in the compulsory school* <http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=SV&ar=1011&infotyp=23&skolform=11&id=3870&extraId=2087>)

2.3 Motivation within the classroom

What we have experienced both as students and teachers is that aligning oneself to a student's area of interest makes learning more enjoyable, making it important to ascertain exactly what these areas are. Of course, the humanists point out the pitfalls in providing too safe an environment from a learning perspective, however, an awareness of students' culture is of an obvious benefit for the motivational reasons given above.

When it comes to motivation the humanists, such as Abraham Maslow, believed that healthy people were "... motivated by seeking fulfilling experiences". The implications are that teachers need to fulfill all student needs at any given level to motivate them to progress to the

next level. The idea is that a human will naturally gravitate to that environment which is safe and therefore fail to test themselves due to the inherent dangers of failure. “If... you make learning appear appealing, minimize pressure, and reduce possibilities for failure or embarrassment, your students are likely to be willing, if not eager, to do an assigned task” (Snowman, Biehler, pp.409-11).

2.4 Previous research

In our study we have chosen to focus on exploring how students themselves perceive their media use inside versus outside the ESL classroom, but we feel that in this section it is necessary to give a brief summary of previous studies within the field of L2 media exposure since these have contributed several important aspects and thoughts to our main discussions within this study.

As we suggested in our introduction, we feel that an overlap between popular culture and the learning of English as a second language puts English language teachers in a unique position to create interest, motivation and enthusiasm within their subject. It is important to keep in mind that technology has in recent years increased the prospect of media exposure not only in our daily lives at home but also inside of the language classroom. As a result of this technological evolution, the usage of various forms of media; such as i.e. the internet, computer games and music platforms, has become as common as the usage of traditional text and work books. According to a study carried out by Sonia Livingstone (2001), professor of social psychology, “the media today operate as pervasive, yet often imperceptible, elements in the everyday cultures of children and young people” (p. 286). In the same study she suggests that media can and does have a positive effect on students who study English as a second language, due to the fact that several media genres are primarily in English (p.192).

2.4.1 Television and the internet

According to a study measuring teenagers’ media use, carried out by Professor Ulla Johnsson-Smaragdi in 1998, results show that Swedish teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19, spend approximately two point five hours each day in front of the television, (TV Use and Social Interaction in Adolescence, 1998) and therefore this plays an important part in their lives.

Even though this study by some might be looked upon as outdated it does provide us with an insight of teenagers' use of media. The results are in no way surprising to us since most families in Sweden today own a television and it is therefore natural that teenagers spend a large amount of their free time watching various programs. Furthermore, in her study, Johnsson- Smaragdi presents us with results showing that teenagers spend approximately forty minutes per day playing different computer games, (Johnsson- Smaragdi et. Al 1998). A more recent study carried out in 2006 by The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs shows that almost 21% of Swedish 16 year-olds use game-rooms and/or chat-forums on the internet every single day, (<http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/art/0,2072,7326,00.html>).

As previously mentioned, several youth-orientated media genres are predominantly in English, and alongside the results measuring teenagers' use of the internet and computers in general, carried out by The Swedish National Board of Youth Affairs', one might suggest that exposure to informal English has increased inside as well as outside the ESL classroom. With activities such as chatting via various forums on the internet, one engages in mostly informal conversations. These conversations are a part of the informal learning that teenagers are exposed to when using a media form such as the computer connected to the World Wide Web.

Further on, Livingstone (2001) states that Swedish ESL students at an early age are educated in how to turn to the World Wide Web when searching for specific and non specific information within various fields of knowledge (p.132).

In their book; *How languages are learned*; Lightbown and Spada propose that, "children do imitate and practice, and practice can explain some aspects of the language such as word meanings and some routines are learned" (p.26) and one might suggest that the use of the World Wide Web and the exposure to informal language, inside as well as outside of the ESL classroom will function as a tool for practicing the skill of interacting and understanding instructions in the English language. Lightbown and Spada (2003) delineate the informal language setting as;

A setting in which the second language is not taught, but rather, is learned naturally, i.e. 'on the job' or 'in the streets', through informal conversations and interactions with native speakers of the language being learned. (p.178)

Here we have a direct correlation with The Natural Approach.

2.4.2 Music

Given our own experience and that of those around us we would infer that music is an important part of our society and identity. It could then be assumed that music could and should play a larger part of the English language curriculum.

In her book, Livingstone (2001) suggests that “music is a mood creator” to people in general and she proposes that music does play a huge part in everyday life. She mentions that waking up to a sad song on the radio most often effect the way you will feel the rest of that day (p. 283). In his book; *Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy*, writer and composer Robert Jourdain (1998) observes highly remarkable relations between music and language learning. Based on his research we can see that communicative systems are lateralized in the two temporal lobes of the brain, thus, communicating through the two separate systems of music and language further increases the ability to learn. Even though they are “separate”, they are “complimentary systems of structured communication” where “language is primarily responsible for content and music for evoking emotion” (p. 292). Jourdain suggests that the two different systems representing music and language-learning when operating together can be highly valuable to the language learner especially when picking up new vocabulary. This certainly rings true from our personal experience as both young and old learners of our L2s. This suggestion is backed up by the article; “Singing in ESL with songs for the grammar class”, written by Fawn Whittaker (2004). She implies that singing in the classroom should be seen as a tool for learning how to listen, speak and read a language.

2.4.3 In summary...

To sum up this section, we see that language acquisition is essential to fluency in a second language and that this acquisition can be aided by a helpful and motivational learning environment. We see that studies have demonstrated that various forms of media can be helpful for the ESL students’ language development. Several researchers have discovered how media can function as a source and motivational tool for informal L2 acquisition learning. Television, music, chatting and seeking information on the internet all contribute to exposing adolescents to the English language since a vast amount is communicated in English.

3. Method

In order to conduct this study we will have both the breadth of a quantitative survey and the depth of qualitative interviews. This facilitates validation through cross-examining the different sources, providing us with more confident results. Conducting interviews, using survey results as a foundation, entitles the researcher to rest findings upon different sources.

Interviews are valuable to teachers because, properly conducted, they can provide insights into people's experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and motivations at a depth that is not possible with questionnaires. They do not yield the breadth of information that questionnaires answered by numerous respondents can offer, (...) but they do hold out the possibility of *understanding* the lived world from the perspective of the participants involved. (Heigham & Croker 2009, p.187)

3.1 Sampling

3.1.1 Schools

The two schools selected for our studies are rather small independent schools located in two separate towns in the south of Sweden. We decided to conduct our studies at one compulsory school and one upper secondary school due to our familiarity with the respective schools. We felt that the age gap and the level of English skills between a student in year nine of compulsory school and a student in the first year of upper-secondary school would be sufficiently small and would therefore not affect our findings or results in any significant way.

3.1.2 Students

For this case study we chose to interview a total number of eight students, two girls and two boys in year nine, and two girls and two boys in their first year of upper secondary school.

Our selection has been largely volunteer-oriented. Our final selections were originally influenced by our knowledge of the students and whether we thought they would respond well to an interview conducted in English, as well as our desire to gain a cross-section of society in the interview chair. However, as our criteria changed and our interviews were to be conducted in Swedish, we became less controlling. Taking into account which students had expressed a positive desire to participate in our interviews gave us not only more confidence that the interview process would be successful but also, as they are willing participants, we were more

comfortable on ethical grounds. It should be noted that we did clearly inform the students of their right to withdraw their participation at any stage before, during or immediately after the interview.

After selecting students to interview, we handed out a pre-made consent form for the parents of our chosen students to sign. In the consent form, the students and their parents were given a brief introduction to our area of focus. These were written in Swedish to avoid confusion and misunderstanding and can be found in Appendix E.

3.2 Surveys

In order to ascertain information relating to our study from as many students as possible, it was decided that a quantitative study would be the most effective. The goal in the early stages of research was to get an overview of English usage outside of the classroom. A questionnaire providing statistical evidence seemed, therefore, to be a way of both reaching that goal and providing a foundation for further research, whilst having the added benefit of eliciting important information with as little fuss, stress and duress on the students themselves. It was decided to question one class in each of the schools from which we would select our interviewees. We felt that this number would be manageable. Further justification for this selection was our knowledge of the students. These two classes were the only groups within our target age bracket with which we were familiar.

3.2.1 Formatting and creating

Through previous exploration of the Skolverket website, we had stumbled across a checklist on English language usage produced by the Department of Education at Göteborgs universitet for English A level students. The checklist was divided into the four primary language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking and each section contained a great many ways in which students can expose themselves to language within these skill areas. This checklist provided the base for our own survey. The modifications made were to a) move the focus of the questionnaire to the materials, texts and media of English and away from any linguistic angle and b) to provide a scale with which we could draw statistical results. The original checklist had been designed for students own use and therefore the existing answer

scale would not have suited our statistic-driven purpose. The scale was therefore expanded from three alternatives to six to provide a more nuanced study. The choice of an even number of options was to eliminate the indecisive middle alternative. Consideration to language and format concentrated on simplicity and clarity. A brief summation of the subject of the survey was provided with some explanatory instructions as to how it was to be completed.

3.2.2 Delivery procedure

The survey was delivered to each class, accompanied with a verbal explanation of the reason for the questionnaire, a mention of the instructions and a plea for accurate response. While the importance of the survey was made clear, we took time to stress the anonymity of the students and that it was nothing to get worried about. This was done at the beginning of each lesson and the students handed them in to the front of the class on completion. Despite our best efforts at double checking the completion of each survey, there were a number of questions left unanswered.

3.2.3 Data correlation

The statistics collected are average ratings based on the formula (within an Excel document) $A1 \cdot A2 + B1 \cdot B2 / C$. In this example A1 and B1 are the original values (1-6) and A2 and B2 are the number of students to choose each particular value. C is the total number of students. This gives each answer a rating between 1 and 6. The extreme values are therefore any number between 1 and 2 (which, given our scale, would be “All the time” or “A lot”) and any number between 5 and 6 (which, given our scale, would be “Never” or “Not much”). These extreme values are highlighted in our results tables. In case there is significant discrepancy between our targeted schools or between gender groups the results tables have been divided both by school and by gender before being merged into one overall results table.

3.3 Interviews

To enable us to investigate our research questions, we were to conduct a qualitative study in which we investigate a set number of students. Because we have agreed to look in depth at a

confined number of students, we decided that interviews would be the most applicable method. It should be noted that our findings and results will in no way be large enough to be used as any form of substratum and should therefore not be seen as a generalisation of students in this particular age group. The purpose of these interviews is rather an interest in gaining a deeper understanding of what students' use of the English language outside a classroom situation might look like and their own awareness of any possible effects of this "out of classroom context" exposure.

As we are trying to ascertain information from outside our geographical field of study, i.e. the school, the use of formal qualitative interviews has been chosen in order to gain a deeper insight of students' use of English. The formal qualitative interview will be semi-structured in the sense that it entitles the researcher to, while the interview is in progress, change their prepared questions in order to change directions of the interview (Hatch- 2002, Kvale- 1997). We feel that a formal semi-structured interview would give us a wider flexibility to lead the interviewee into areas of our interest.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that we are aware of the limitations of interview. We will be conducting our interviews in schools where we have spent some time during our teachers' education, so we are familiar with the interview subjects themselves. In order to avoid pitfalls concerning the interview effect (whereby an interviewee's answers can be influenced by the personal connection with the interviewer (Svenning, p.14) it has been decided to always do our interviews as a pair. During each interview one of us will carry out the actual interview whilst the other one will take on a more observational role. Originally, the observing researcher was to be the one that had no personal connection to the informants. This was to ensure, that the informant does not give answers only to satisfy. Conducting the interviews in pairs has the added advantage of support and complimentary questions coming from the observational researcher. This approach was changed, as will be discussed later in the results section.

To ensure that our students feel confident, interviews will be carried out at the student's schools in rooms designed for privacy. "Interview spaces need to be private so that you are comfortable asking for sensitive information and your informants are comfortable giving it" (Hatch, p.100). A digital tape recorder will be used for our interviews.

3.3.1 Procedure

The interviews were conducted in two parts. Firstly, task-based oral exercises were conducted to compliment the building of student profiles and then a recorded interview took place.

3.3.1.1 The task

In order to gain background information on our subjects it was felt that an exercise (see Appendix G) would bear more fruit than a basic question and answer session. Inspirational visual aids, in the form of 16 images, are used to inspire a personal description from the students on their interests and personality. Using this, we give the students a chance to warm up before the serious business of the interview proper. This approach is also in keeping with our classroom methodologies of variation, inspiration and maximizing productivity.

3.3.1.2 The interview

The questions were designed to focus on the areas highlighted by our questionnaire. We wanted the semi-structured interviews to complement our quantitative results by adding depth and either confirming or disproving anomalies in the statistical results. Questions relevant to our study, of course, focused on the students' use of English outside the classroom. The questions could then be reinforced or ignored during the interview process.

3.4 Method discussion

3.4.1 Data Analysis

When we come to analyze our data, as our research was to begin at a quantitative level and naturally progress to the qualitative through our narrative enquiry, our analysis will follow a similar pattern.

A total of forty-three questionnaires will be compiled into several results tables. These results tables will aim to provide statistical evidence for the use of English outside of the classroom as well as an overall perception of the similarities between English inside and outside the classroom regarding materials.

Two group interviews with students will have aimed at creating eight brief student profiles in order to correlate opinions from a qualitative perspective.

3.4.2 Ethical considerations

Our principal ethical consideration is to maintain anonymity for our participants. The 2004 *EU Code of Ethics for Socio-Economic* (<http://www.respectproject.org/ethics/412ethics.pdf>) also advocates voluntary participation, participation from an informed position and the protection of participants from undue harm or distress.

As we are dealing with personal social patterns, students are more likely to give more truthful responses if their identities are not exposed. A student revealing their identity could possibly seek to fit in with the social norms of their peers and this could affect their answers. It would also be unfair to single out any particular behavior as either complying with a norm or being out of the ordinary.

The questionnaires were therefore be conducted anonymously. Technically, it could be argued that the identity of the students could be revealed through handwriting styles; however, it is of no interest to us as researchers to ascertain these identities. Issues of privacy, trust and confidentiality become more important when we handle the interview situation. In order to protect the identity of our interviewees, names will not be mentioned in the interview and when referred to in our text and transcriptions pseudonyms will be used. Background information will be kept to a minimum and only mentioned if truly relevant. The original audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription.

Our participants were informed about the nature of our research, told what was expected of them and were assured of their anonymity before their participation. They were, at no point, coerced into taking part. Though we do not believe the nature of our research to be overly intrusive, we took care not to force response from our volunteers.

3.4.3 Validity and reliability

During the interview process we saw that the intention of providing a safe environment has possibly had detrimental side-effects on the validity of the study. Not pressing the subject into

more open answers, so as not to frighten them, has given weak results. It was also noted that some of the questions were very similar and therefore had little extra meaning when asked in a different way. Whilst this may have been noticed early on, we were reluctant to change for future interviews as such a change might compromise results from the earlier interviews due to inconsistency.

Could the study have been bigger? If the number of participating students had been larger, it would stand to reason that the validity (to more than just a select group of teachers/pedagogues) and reliability (through a wider range of results) would be increased. Whilst such factors as gender and age have been factored into the research that of ethnicity and class has not and therefore raises questions about the validity of such a study. It could be argued, however, that these variables could be introduced in a later and broader study.

4. Results

The following section will first outline the quantitative information gleaned from the questionnaire. It will then outline the results of the interviews with brief profiles of our participants and an overview of the interview process.

4.1 What can we draw from the survey results?

The results tables from which this section is based are to be found in the appendices A, B, C and D:

- Appendix A – *Original questionnaire*
- Appendix B – *Results table for Vellinge Sundsgymnasiet*
- Appendix C – *Results table for Ystad Västervångskolan*
- Appendix D – *Overall results table*

It is worth remembering that the ratings are between 1 and 6 and that any ratings close to 1 represents “a lot” or “all the time” while any rating close to 6 represents a vote of “not much” or “never”. It should also be noted that the “other” options were not filled in correctly and so we have deemed them irrelevant for future discussion.

4.1.1 Listening

The questions on listening produced the most extreme results overall with many ratings between one and two. Conclusions suggest that television and film in English play significant roles in students’ lives, however, music, with a rating of 1.56, is easily the most influential source of English exposure outside of the classroom. It is significant that music attracted the highest number of extreme results in the entire survey, i.e. 25 ratings of 1. Of all the participants, only 3 say that they do not listen to a lot of music in English with only 2 giving a rating above 4.

Across the survey, we can see that Students are exposed to a lot of English in an aural sense with the only stand out exception being audio books. Radio is not a large influence but still hovers around an average rating. Boys, in particular, are not exposed, or do not expose

themselves to audio books and radio, though we can see a slight trend that suggests the older the students get, the more they are exposed to these media. This trend is also true of English television and film exposure.

Listening influence from the computer is common across all ages and genders, though we see significantly more influence here on the younger boys. There is of course a potential problem with these statistics in that computer use was not specified in questionnaire and the conjecture could be that students made the connection with computer games. This could, in turn, explain the reason behind boys feeling that less of their home media exposure is relevant in the classroom. Though, it should be pointed out that this question gained an overall rating of 2.95.

4.1.2 Speaking

We can see that the ratings given for speaking outside of the classroom are middling with only a few exceptions. The trends are that while there is some, there is not a lot of English speaking with friends and relatives, or people from abroad unless it is in a travelling context. When the students are abroad we see more willingness to speak.

The significant results surround singing in English. The only negative rating on singing is from the younger boys, while the older girls seem to sing in English all the time with a high rating of 1.75. From the overall ratings, we can also discern that students either sing or they don't sing, with very few middle ratings of 3 and 4 given on the survey.

The other interesting point to note is that the younger students, particularly the girls with a rating of 5.25, do not believe that there is much of these kinds of speaking in the classroom. The older students veer towards a more average rating.

4.1.3 Reading

There are several notable findings from the reading section. The least popular reading medium seems to be that of reading newspapers, particularly with the older boys. This trend is also consistent with comic books, although here it is the older of *both* genders that show less interest in reading English comic books. The main areas of reading interest in English for both boys and girls are based on the internet. Here, it should be mentioned that there was perhaps

too much of a leading distinction between reading newspapers and reading on the internet. Of course, these two things are not mutually exclusive.

We see the genders differ when we see that girls seem to study a lot of song lyrics in English whilst boys' exposure is through computer games which in turn involves more reading of instruction manuals. Though we see lower than average ratings for the reading of books and magazines, we do see that girls read more than boys in this area.

In response to the question about how much of these types of reading the students are exposed to in the classroom we receive an average rating, however, with a damning statistic of 5.85 we can see that younger girls clearly feel they do not receive any familiar reading material in class.

4.1.4 Writing

A glance at the results of the questionnaire show that writing is the least used skill outside of the classroom. In every field, bar one, we see a rating of 4 and over. The most significant statistics tell us that younger girls very rarely write poetry or songs in English and that younger boys almost never try their hand at writing short stories in English. It is also plain that older boys rarely write letters and postcards.

The glaring anomaly to in the writing statistics is the use of English in internet chat rooms. Here we see a complete swing in the other direction with the younger students particularly taking a lot of initiative when it comes to *chatting* in English. Students generally feel as though they do a reasonable amount relevant writing inside the classroom with the exception of the younger girls, who, coincidentally, also had the highest rating of 2.13 when it came to internet chatting.

4.1.5 Overall

The significant results can be summarized as follows;

- Students are heavily exposed to aural English, the most significant medium being music along with television and film.
- Singing is the most popular form of oral English outside of the classroom.

- Students do not tend to write an awful lot in English outside of the classroom.
- Computers and the internet play a massive role in exposure to English outside the classroom.
- Students feel that an average amount of relevant English can be found in the classroom environment.

4.2 Interviews

This section will deal with each group interview one at a time, first outlining the interview situation, secondly providing background profiles on the individual students and thirdly enhancing our profiles using information gleaned from each interview. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the reality of the interview circumstances, an overview is then provided.

4.2.1 Interview 1, Vellinge

For the interviews at Vellinge we had four students, two boys and two girls, who had volunteered to be interviewed. From previous experience teaching these students and from their responses in the interviews, it is possible to outline various generalizations about these participants. On the whole, the class to which our participants belong has a reputation for being quiet and unresponsive. This opinion has been backed up by Fraser's own personal experience.

4.2.1.1 The students

Of the selected students, *Ingrid* is the most quiet, rarely offering answers without being called upon to do so. However, when called upon, she is often able to offer measured responses with a reasonable competence in English construction and fluency. She is 16 and describes herself as tired in the mornings, kind and friendly as well as interested in football.

Karro is one of the most competent students in the class from an English language perspective. Her construction is plainly evident in her written work and her fluency, when given a chance to speak. She does not readily volunteer answers, though when the class

remains silent, it only takes a little cajoling from the teacher for Karro to attempt to save the awkwardness by offering a response. Her initial reluctance could be due to peer pressure. She is also 16 and describes herself as tired in the mornings and she likes to go shopping.

One of the more playful students in the class is *Christian*. He can be quite vocal in an otherwise quiet classroom. Unfortunately, he doesn't like to speak much English in class. When called upon to respond in English, he often glances around at his friends for confirmation before proceeding. While not at the same level as the other interview participants in terms of English language usage, he can communicate with reasonable competence. He is 16 and describes himself as just tired in the mornings.

Peter is his own man in the class. He often resists pressure from the other students to shirk his work, and actively seeks to participate. This does not, however, compromise his popularity in the class. He is quiet and unassuming and seems keen to learn. His competence is not very high but during the first half of English A he has shown great potential to improve. He is also 16 and describes himself as interested in sport and likes to have free time. He also gets tired in the mornings.

4.2.1.2 Overview

The interview started off quietly with minimal introductions as students used prompting from the interviewer to form their responses. Pia's example when introducing herself of being tired in the mornings was heartily welcomed by the group when in turn describing themselves. However, as the interview progressed, each found their confidence as they realized that the subject of the interview was about things they enjoy in their everyday lives.

Ingrid

Ingrid, in particular, though quiet, became very responsive. She gave us an early insight into just how much English popular culture is out there when she stated that, "*If you watch television, it's rare to see Swedish programmes.*" She was particularly vocal about the importance of lyrics in English music; "*The lyrics to songs are incredibly important!*" She showed just how much she understands the significance of English in her day to day life when stating, "*You actually learn a lot by just listening*" when referring to the use of subtitles. Here

we have a student that is aware of the impact of English exposure and is willing to embrace English popular culture, for both enjoyment and learning purposes.

Peter

Peter remained true to type and was enthusiastic, if lacking in depth, in his answers. He also showed a willingness to adopt English receptive possibilities outside of the classroom when he states, *“I normally use subtitles, preferably in English”* as he realizes that translation is not always reliable. We see from Peter a preference for English music, *“I like old music like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones”* though denser text types, such as novels and short stories, seem to be off putting; *“I like to read, but there’s not enough time. I spend a lot of my time in front of the computer, if I read, I read in Swedish”*. Peter is receptive to English outside of the classroom; however, he does not seem to actively seek to use it.

Karro

Karro, was competent, but perhaps lacked some of the confidence in an L1 group situation that she would normally have had in an L2 environment where she is strong. However, we see a student that is very aware of the L2 possibilities in life outside of school, almost to the point of rejecting Swedish alternatives; *“Almost everything that’s shown is in English. I don’t think I watch any programmes in Swedish”*. The one area that Karro does not seem keen on developing in English is her writing as she states, *“I blog, but only in Swedish”*. Karro shows us a student type that is very enthusiastic about English as a language, but perhaps does not have the confidence to use it.

Christian

Christian was succinct in his responses but was unwilling to develop them. Though, overall, he did not seem to actively look to employ any of his English skills (he was quite definitive in his answers, such as when asked about singing he said he *“Never!”* sings) he did open up when the subject of computer games came up. When asked about instructions and commands in computer games he said, *“It’s annoying that you sometimes don’t understand, but you can always look it (words) up or ask someone else”*. When something is of specific interest to Christian English ceases to become a barrier.

4.2.2 Interview 2, Ystad

For the interviews in Ystad we had four students participating, two boys and two girls. All students had volunteered to do the interviews. The class to which our participants belong has a reputation for being quite noisy although the average level of English is quite high. This opinion is noted during the interviews where a couple of the students seem to find it hard to focus on our questions.

4.2.2.1 The students

Out of the four students, *Cornelia* is the most interested and, in general, motivated student from an English language perspective. She is fluent within the language which gives her the confidence to always offer a response to questions asked by the teacher. Cornelia is 15 and describes herself as calm, funny and a definite night owl.

The other girl to take part in our Ystad interview is *Anna*. From an English language perspective, Anna is not very interested and she does not seem to like being called upon to answer questions during class. However, Anna's level of English is rather high and this shows when asked to perform written assignments. Anna is 15 and describes herself as cool, grumpy in the mornings and a good friend.

Richard is one of the "popular" students, and he can be rather vocal during class. He does not seem to have a problem speaking English in class even though he, from an English language perspective is not one of the strongest. He is normally the first one to shout out an answer to questions asked by the teacher and he never seems to be ashamed when giving an incorrect answer. He seems motivated to learn. Richard is 16 and describes himself as happy, loud and dominant.

Our last participant is *Tim*, who is a rather quiet student. He does not like to speak English in class even though his level of English is very high. During the interview he gives the impression of being shy. Tim is 15 years old and he describes himself as a happy but sleepy "computer-nerd".

4.2.2.2 Overview

The interview started with brief introductions of the students where they were asked to describe themselves in three words. At the beginning, the atmosphere was somewhat wary but this wore off and soon became more relaxed. All of the participants were competent and they all shared interesting thoughts during the interview.

Cornelia

Cornelia, in particular, became very approachable. She was one of the few students interviewed that actively writes in English; *“Sometimes I blog. I kind of like it because no one corrects my mistakes.”* This shows a positive attitude towards the language and the benefits of using English outside of school. However, she seems to need the structure and discipline of a classroom environment to deal with established texts when she states, *“I read sometimes, but I never read in English except when I’m in school”*. Cornelia shows a student type who wants to use her knowledge of English in a productive and active way. Taking control of the language makes her comfortable, even if her receptive skills do not.

Richard and Tim

In summary, Richard and Tim both had the confidence to respond to our questions but perhaps did not give the answers as seriously as we would have wished for.

When asked about his views on subtitles, Richard showed awareness of the benefits of English at home when he said, *“I use subtitles in Swedish! Although I know you want me to say (I use them) in English, because you learn more”*. Here we have a passive view to knowledge accumulation, backed up by comments, such as, *“I never read, I’d rather watch TV”*. Tim showed a similar attitude, though it could be interpreted as Tim following Richard’s example instead of proffering his own opinions. He mentioned, quite openly, that, *“I normally use subtitles as I can’t be bothered to listen”*. The one time when he appeared from under Richard’s shadow was when asked if he watches TV in English. Tim was the only student to refer to documentaries on *The History Channel* and *The Discovery Channel*.

Anna

Anna, though rather quiet throughout the interview, provided better thought out answers to our questions. When referring to music, for example, she said, *“I think the lyrics are the most important. The song can be incredibly boring to listen to, but provide a nice message, or the*

other way around. Although, sometimes it's difficult to hear what they sing" This displays motivation within the student to actively use English. Interestingly, Anna shows us that sometimes students show a preference for different languages in different formats when she states, *"I always blog in Swedish, but sometimes when I write my poems, I write in English"*. Anna shows a willingness to embrace her L2 and sees the importance of it in terms of expression and knowledge development.

4.2.3 Interview comparisons

Originally it was decided to conduct our interviews in English for continuity reasons. The thinking behind this decision was that we would have been able to use direct quotations without the need for translation, and it would concentrate the students solely on the use of English. It was also decided that individual interviews would yield more comprehensive results. We conducted these interviews with poor results. The interview conditions varied and the required level of English was not high enough. The presence of two competent speakers of English in the same room, outnumbering our participant, also seemed to have an overwhelming effect which was not conducive to extracting good research material. It was therefore decided to repeat the interview process under different conditions.

A group interview in Swedish yielded far better results as our participants could derive confidence from one another and feel more comfortable in their L1 environment. Overall, the conditions of the interviews were designed to be the same: similar time of day; private study rooms; similar length of time; same questions; similar introductions and conducted during English lesson hours. Our final concession, however, was to have Pia conduct both interviews as her L1 is Swedish, while Fraser was relegated to technician. Thus, the relationship between the interviewees and the interviewer in each interview was different. While this could have had an adverse effect on one or other of the groups, we found little or no noticeable effect. Fraser's presence in the Vellinge interview was enough to elicit a favourable response, while at the same time it did not intimidate in the Ystad interview. Pia's friendly, encouraging interview style put both groups at their ease from the beginning.

5. Analysis

Aural exposure is by far the highest in our study. Music, television and film are extremely common sources of English exposure and often elicit positive responses from our participants. It would perhaps be fair to admit that we started this study under the assumption that there would be a lot more exposure to English outside of the classroom than perhaps was the case. Indeed, in a previous study done by *skolverket*, when students were asked where they learn most English, only 19% of them answered “outside of the classroom” (<http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=SV&ar=1011&infotyp=5&skolform=21&id=3199&extraId>).

The following analysis is divided into media genres.

5.1 Television and Radio

If we return to the results of our survey, we see that radio plays quite an insignificant role in the life of our chosen teenagers which veers heavily away from our own experiences at a similar age. A similar trend is noticed when asked about the reading of newspapers.

The type of television show attracting attention is also in constant flux, with the most common examples of programmes in English watched being those of *Family Guy* and *How I Met Your Mother* which are available to watch on Swedish television currently six days in a week. Ten years ago this would have been *The Simpsons* and *Friends*, though *The Simpsons* shows its durability by also being mentioned. Of course, it is also available six days a week at multiple times. This saturation even prompted Richard from Ystad to remark that “Almost all programmes on TV are English”, a point that is backed by peers in both interviews. The same student inferred earlier that he preferred Swedish shows, so is it in fact an involuntary exposure that we are talking about? It would seem not, as several of the interview candidates mention that they watch most shows on the computer. This gives them both more privacy if they don't have television in their rooms and more flexibility with regards choice through downloading and streaming. If they are then watching English programmes on the computer, they must be making a choice.

The same can be said of downloading films over the internet as well as renting DVDs. It is perhaps a little unfair to point at teenagers choosing English language films over their

Swedish counterparts given the paucity of Swedish films in comparison to the Hollywood machine. However, what is interesting to note is that while the younger interviewees prefer Swedish subtitles, when they can be bothered to download them, the older students prefer to concentrate on the English as they realize that they "... miss a lot of jokes..." (Peter) in the translation. This lack of L1 is to the detriment of their understanding, though it is clearly something that they have grown accustomed to and are willing to put themselves through. Here we see a clear example of input+1, as the students are putting themselves in a position whereby the media material is above their current level of competence.

5.2 Computers and the Internet

While the internet plays a significant role in these teenagers' lives, and the results of the survey suggested a wide exposure to English through the internet (particularly with the aforementioned downloading and streaming of television series and film), our interview subjects were a little less committed to the idea of using English through the computer. Swedish alternatives are now readily available and even when downloading English speaking films, films with Swedish subtitles are still preferred and sought after. It had been thought that a particularly pertinent source of English exposure would be the internet and that the students would leap on this during the interview process. What then was disappointing was the realization that popular websites of today are now all available in Swedish. From our experience, Wikipedia is often the first research tool to which a student turns. However, while initially a tool in English, which still has the majority of its information in English, ever increasing quantities of information are being translated into L1 languages. It is interesting to note that none of the interviewees actually mentioned Wikipedia as a website they use in English.

While during the early days of internet forums and social networking sights gave us the exciting possibility to chat with different people from around the planet, the youth of today seem content to keep their social circles to the friends they already know. In answer to the question about who they communicate with on *Facebook*, we hear that it is friends and that it is used instead of calling. *Skype* is often used to call home from abroad with an obvious lean towards Swedish, and *Spotify* is mainly just to listen to music and not so much about the biographies or any other written English text on the site. Of course, where this differs is in the playing of global community computer games, particularly amongst the boys.

These games involve both verbal and written communication. Christian mentions that all the best games use English and from Tim we hear that people are so used to World of Warcraft being in English that it is actually "... no big deal". The use of computer games also finds its way into the girl's day-to-day life with the increasingly popular karaoke style games such as *SingStar* and *UltraStar*. These predominantly English based singing games lead us nicely on to arguably the most significant statistic.

5.3 Music

Robert Jourdain would be pleased to note that the largest source of L2 exposure outside of the classroom seems to be through music, though understanding lyrics does not seem to be of great importance. Music in English seems to have a higher status than its Swedish equivalent (of course, this is a generalization) in youth culture and is therefore one of the few mediums that is actively sought after by our students. While many of the forms of English are accidentally acquired or seemingly forced upon our subjects through necessity, music and film stand out as being different. However, while films and television offer language alternatives, people don't actively seek translations to music. Songs in their original form are warmly accepted and therefore must remain or become the greatest asset to a teacher of English. Of course, this would depend very much on the type of student. A disagreement between Cornelia and Anna from Ystad saw Cornelia saying they listened to music, but did not listen out for the lyrics, while Anna couldn't understand this, saying that, "... the lyrics are the most important!" We also have the problem that it is sometimes difficult for the students to make out the words, which will be discussed in the following section.

It is one thing to happily passively listen to lyrics in English, but it seems to be a completely different playing field when it comes to the written word. When it comes to receptive skills, reading comes in second best as only one of our interviewees confessed to genuine attempts at reading novels in English. It was no surprise that this student was Karro and our most competent English speaker. Though, even she can't help but mention that it is a slower process. While our Ystad students just dismiss the thought of reading in English, our older Vellinge participants try to justify their choice by suggesting that they have little time to read at all, regardless of language, and that the computer takes up most of their time. Given these excuses, would it be valid to suggest that the reading of novels has little place in the language classroom anymore, due to its lack of relevance with the world which modern day teenagers

inhabit? After all, our survey shows that the vast majority of girls do not see any familiar reading at school.

5.4 The World Outside

It is clear that there are not as many opportunities for students to actively produce English in spoken and written forms away from the classroom. However, it could also be stated that when these opportunities do occur, they are often not taken, as L1 remains the preference. This seems largely due to a lack of confidence and could well be a result of a lack of practical practice inside the classroom. The classroom should be the safest environment for students to attempt new use of language and should prepare them for experimental use in real life situations. Particularly the younger students felt they were being short changed on relevant oral practice.

At this stage, it is pertinent to note that we had originally conducted some interviews in English with some of our participants and found them shy and unresponsive. It was then that we decided, in order to gain a wider picture of our study, that we should ask the same questions in the participants L1. The majority of the students had travelled abroad and, when asked if they had used English themselves to communicate, it turned out they had relied on their parents. This is despite one of our participants mentioning a language trip to the UK amongst her experiences.

6. Concluding Remarks

- It came as a surprise that in the survey results there were middling averages when it came to the question about familiar language use inside the classroom. It had been expected that there would be less of a relationship between popular culture and the school syllabus. However, a lot of energy is expended on making certain material important and entertaining to the students, while there is, in fact, material that will excite and engage readily available for a teacher in touch with what happens to be in vogue at any given time.
- It is the teacher who has a command of the language principles to be taught, so the balance between fluency and accuracy is steadied by a teacher's grasp on each philosophy. However, a student that sees little or no relevance in a subject is unlikely to apply themselves, with only the acquisition of grades as a motivation. The answer is surely to understand both perspectives and create a reciprocal atmosphere.
- We do see from our participants that there are specific genres that are of interest to them, such as crime or romance, and that there are still book series out there that can rival the juggernaut of film, such as *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*. But these are not to be found, it seems, in the classroom. It may be that the common text books at a teacher's disposal are not filled with the right material, or that relevant material quickly becomes irrelevant and needs constant updating. Of course, more practical considerations need to be addressed by the teacher when choosing material for the classroom. The time it would take to read even one *Harry Potter* book would be significant, for example. However, relevant extracts could be utilized and developed upon, as they would be under normal circumstances with film, in order to be more time effective.
- It is spoken English that seems to suffer most in the classroom and it is disappointing that these students do not have the confidence to communicate in English in real life situations and it seems little wonder as they do not get (according to the survey) much in the way of real speaking practice in English lessons. As we saw from the survey in Ystad, the girls felt as though there was little or no relevant spoken English in the classroom, which is a damning indictment in a communicative subject. If there is no relevance outside the classroom, at what stage would they be able practice their acquired knowledge? Interaction between the students of an English class is most often in L1. If an opportunity presents itself in a real life situation to communicate in

English and to talk about oneself, the required vocabulary and phraseology could be missing for significant interaction. It is one thing to be competent at a doctors office or be able to order food, but it is quite another to establish friendship with others in an L2.

Of course, this last point brings into focus the obvious disadvantage of a classroom environment. The language use is staged and therefore unlike its real life cousin. So, when faced with this different environment it is natural to feel apprehension. If English textbooks are anything to go by, English in the classroom is more formulaic, adhering to certain structures and patterns. This leads to a lack of fluency as mentioned by Krashen and Terrell in the monitor hypothesis.

Relevance is key, and a significant conclusion from this study is that, as teachers, we need to be constantly aware of the shifting social trends amongst students in order to make materials and any media work relevant. If we do not do this then we risk alienating the students and the significant advantage of English language globalization will be lost on a generation. "Different learners in different situations learn L2 in different ways" (Ellis, 1984, p.5), therefore as many natural resources as possible should be utilized.

What is plain, is the enormity of the subject we have tackled. While the study was extremely relevant to us as teachers of these particular students, it loses much of its potency when used to generalize. A more thorough investigation, with a wider range of parameters and a larger research base, would have yielded more interesting and pertinent results. This is merely the tip of the iceberg.

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