Six Students’ Thoughts about English Media

Sex studenters tankar om engelsk media

Andrea Cucarano
Sally Siomos
ABSTRACT

Our aim with this dissertation is to explore adolescents’ view of media and the importance they attribute to their media exposure in their informal learning. In order to find an answer to our questions we interviewed six students in an upper secondary school in the south western part of Skåne. Apart from being a source of entertainment, students consider media to be an educational resource with regard to vocabulary and general communication skills.

Keywords: English media, informal learning, upper-secondary school, media exposure
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 7

Purpose 7
Questions 7

LITERATURE REVIEW 9

Children and Adolescents’ Media Use 9
Television, Video Recorder and DVD 10
Internet, Computer Games and Chat 10
Music 11

METHODOLOGY 13

Collecting Data 13
Selecting Participants 13
Procedure 14
Analyzing Process 15

RESULTS 17

Interviewees Own Definition of Media 17
Television 17
Internet 19
Chat and Computer Games 20
Music 21
Books and Magazines 21
Adolescents’ Thoughts About English In- and Outside School 23

ANALYSIS 25
INTRODUCTION

The opportunities we have had as substitute teachers have revealed to us that our pupils have lively discussions about television-programs, about what has happened in various TV-series or about the latest video game. At these occasions the pupils often use English terms and expressions that most likely have not been taught in class. It is apparent that pupils acquire vocabulary and other features of the English language outside the school environment, as for example from the English speaking media. As an example we would like to mention an extremely popular online computer game where the setting is in a fantasy world amongst dragons, knights and sorcerers. The spoken language is English which is logical as this game is played by users world wide. It is common amongst players involved in this type of game to use terms suitable for everyday conversations.

The technology has in recent years increased the possibility of media exposure in our daily lives. As a result, many adolescents use media in various forms such as cable television, video and DVD, electronic games, the Internet, the personal computer, etc. According to a study made by Sonia Livingstone (2001), “the media today operate as pervasive, yet often imperceptible, elements in the everyday cultures of children and young people” (p. 283). Moreover, many of the youth-oriented media genres are predominantly in English and previous studies show that media can have a positive effect on students who study English as a second language. But what perceptions do students have about the usefulness of media exposure for their English language learning? In this study we are interested in exploring how students themselves perceive their media use.

Purpose
Our aim with this dissertation is to explore adolescents’ view on media and the importance they attribute to their media exposure in their informal learning.

Questions
The questions we intend to answer are:

1. How do students define their own English media exposure?
2 What perceptions do they have about the usefulness of the exposure in their informal learning?
LITERATURE REVIEW

Children and Adolescents’ Media Use

In a study made by Ulla Johnsson-Smaragdi et. al. (1998), where Swedish, Flemish, and German children and adolescents’ media use was measured, results showed that television plays an important part in their lives. According to the study, Swedish teenagers spend approximately two hours each day in front of the television. Even though this study was made several years ago it can still provide us with a perception on adolescents’ use of media. On one hand the accessibility of a medium is an important factor for using it but on the other hand the social, cultural, and psychological accessibility is also very important (Livingstone, 2002). Livingstone writes that:

[t]hese factors may be related to the degree of social acceptance of a medium in a specific culture, to the social context in which it is used, and to individual requirements, habits, and attitudes. (p. 115)

As most families own a television it is natural that adolescents spend a large amount of their spare time watching programs. A similar claim would be made regarding computers as they have become something that many families can afford these days. The time children and adolescents spend playing computer games on a PC in Sweden is about 40 minutes per day (Johnsson-Smaragdi et. al., 1998). With a computer one can perform many different activities but one that is growing is chatting, in other words communicating via the internet with people from next door or someone on the other side of the world. When chatting one uses mostly informal conversations and these conversations are a part of the informal language learning that adolescents are exposed to when using a media like a computer connected to the world wide web. Lightbown and Spada (2003) define the informal language learning 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. 176)

Further, Lightbown and Spada (2003) state that “children do imitate and practice, and
practice can explain some aspects of the language such as word meanings and some language routines are learned” (p. 25, 26). The internet is something that definitely makes the adolescents interact and practice their English, especially when interacting with people from English speaking countries.

Spending time with printed media is not as popular as using the PC, and as children grow older they spend less time reading books. Johnsson-Smaragdi et. al. (1998) write that the youngest teenager, in their survey, read about 31 minutes per day but the older teenager read about 18 minutes each day. We have now provided the reader with an overview of the use of English media in Europe. The text that follows will explain more in depth different aspects of media. As we shall see in the following text all the various forms of media use are more or less helpful in learning English.

**Television, Video Recorder, DVD**

According to a comparative study of three European countries that focuses “on cross-cultural similarities and differences in how media use is related to children’s and teenagers’ relationships with their peers”, the media plays an essential part in children’s everyday life (Suess et. al., 1998, p. 521). The study also mentions that children in all three countries view television as the most important medium (p. 526).

Olle Findahl (1989) writes in his study that the majority of students come in contact with the English language through television. Findahl also writes that in no other country do young people watch as much television containing the English language as in Sweden (1989). Further, Findahl states that massive exposure of authentic and comprehensible language input can lead to some learning of that particular language.

**Internet, Computer Games and Chat**

Livingstone (2001) writes that a teenager in Sweden spends an average of 13 minutes every day surfing the web, 26 minutes on the PC use (not for games) and 37 minutes are spent playing electronic games. Livingstone also writes that children and adolescents look to Internet and PCs when they want to learn about things. The question is, however, how many English websites adolescents turn to in order to find information? Is it so that adolescents seek an easy way out by searching information in their native tongue?
Furthermore, one can ask if coming into contact with the language in question through the net is an aid to language learning. Coniam and Wong (2004) conclude that students perceive their communication as stimulating and beneficial when chatting on the net (in this case through Internet Relay Chat facilities such as ICQ and MSM) and that “[m]embers of the experimental group expressed positive attitudes towards the use of IRC as a means of practising their English” (System, 2004, vol. 32, p.321-325). The results also showed that the students had a very positive attitude towards chatting in English, that they felt that their English had improved and that they also spent more time than required chatting. However, the study did not show that the students made any considerable improvements in their language proficiency.

Music
Livingstone (2001) writes that “music is a mood creator” amongst children and adolescents and that it plays a very important role in their lives (p. 283). Music is something that teenagers listen to most of the time and even if they do other things at home or outside home they constantly have a “background noise” (p. 216).

Robert Jourdain (1998) makes interesting links between language learning and music in his book Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy. He writes that the ability of communicating through music and language are separate systems, functioning in different ways in the brain and lateralized in the two temporal lobes. 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. 293). These two systems, when operating together, can be beneficial to the language learner in learning phrases and vocabulary. Vocabulary and phrases can be easier to remember in the context of a song.

Jon Weatherford Stansell (2005) mentions Fawn Whittaker’s article “Singing in ESL with songs for the grammar class” where she writes that songs can be a great aid in writing, listening, reading and speaking in a new language.

To sum up this section, many studies have demonstrated that the various forms of media can be helpful for the ESL students’ language development. Several researchers have
discovered how media can function as a source for informal 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. It is interesting to note that many researchers see how different types of media can be helpful when learning for example vocabulary. Music and lyrics are one example of this and chatting is another.
METHODOLOGY

Collecting Data
In order to find information that quantitative measuring tools such as questionnaires do not give, researchers have used qualitative methods and among them are the qualitative interviews (Jacobsen, 1993). When using qualitative interviews as a research tool one can get further insight in people’s ideas, attitudes, experiences, opinions and examine motives and feelings in a way that a questionnaire cannot do (Bell, 1999; May, 2001).

There are various types of interviews. On the one hand you can have a very standardized and formal interview where all the questions are already created and little variation is allowed, the so called structured interviews. On the other hand you have the unstructured interviews which are very informal in their sense that the questions depend much on what the interviewees have already said (Bell, 1999). Since we are primarily interested in exploring students’ thoughts on learning English in an informal context, we came to the conclusion that semi structured interviews would be the ideal tool. The semi structured interview gives the interviewees the chance to develop their answers and it gives the chance to the interviewer to examine interesting answers further (May, 2001). In order to avoid the risk that the interviewee takes control over the conversation we created various key questions for which we had prepared sub-questions in order maintain the focus during the discussion. By using open-ended questions as a starting point we were convinced that we could create flexibility for our interviews and avoid the pitfall of asking guiding questions. Also, we avoided to use questions containing expressions such as “do you not think…” or “is it not so…?” These questions could steer the participant to answer in a way that he or she perceived as our belief. Worth mentioning is that our interviewees might want to project a certain image of themselves and trying to provide us with answers they might think we want.

Selecting Participants
We chose to conduct our interviews in an upper-secondary school situated in the southwest of Skåne. Our reason for doing so was because one of us was placed at that school during our period of teaching practice, and we had already established a relation between the students and us. Therefore we did not encounter any difficulties when
searching for suitable interviewees. People living near the area in which the school is located are of the upper middle class. Our participants’ age is sixteen and all our interviews were conducted individually with each student.

The students showed strong enthusiasm for participating in our study, something that provided us with the challenge of selecting which students to interview. We decided to interview three boys and three girls. The criteria that we based our selection on was accessibility (May, 2001). May points to an important factor, namely, whether or not the participant has knowledge, or access, to the information vital for our research project.

**Procedure**

When we had decided on which school and who to include in our interviews, we set up a date for when the interviews would take place. Naturally, we did not have time to finish them all in one day so we divided them up on different occasions. We composed a document, or information sheet, where we included our appreciation for their help; background and purpose of our research and some ethical principles guiding us in our research and stating that could be interesting for them to take part of. These principles included aspects such as confidentiality, anonymity, i.e. that their identities would be kept concealed from others except us. Also, we informed the interviewees about the estimated length of the interview. We had calculated that a total of 45 minutes would be sufficient, and we informed our participants on the time limit we had set (Bell, 2000). May points out an interesting aspect when working with interviews when he claims that “the interviewer needs to get the respondent to feel that their participation and their answers are meaningful, because cooperation is a fundamental prerequisite for the research to be able to be carried out” (translation made by us) (May, 2001, p. 157). Our belief was that, by handing out this document, we would increase the person’s awareness of the importance of our project and that the outcome depended on his or her active participation.

We used a video-recorder with the lens-cover on since we lacked a tape-recorder. In line with May, we chose to use the video-recorder because it would provide us with an effective method to store the accumulated data. Also, instead of our focus being on taking notes, we could turn our attention to the interviewees behaviour (May, 2001). By not placing the video-recorder between us and the interviewee but behind a handbag, we
could demonstrate that the video-recorder was only there as a tool to help us improve our research.

We arranged so the meeting took place in a secluded room at our teaching practice-school were the interview could be conducted without any interruption or be overheard. Also, the room we chose was quite secluded, so even though the room had windows, we were undisturbed.

The interviewee sat down in front of us and before we started the interview we handed the interviewee a sheet of paper were we asked the person to fill in basic information such as name and age. This, and some additional information, such as the participant’s telephone number, would be helpful in the step that followed the interview: the analysis. Perhaps, we needed to ask some clarifying questions during the analysis.

The interview was conducted in Swedish in order to ensure intelligibility. It was important that the person understood our questions as the answers we received depended on it. Also, we felt that the person could elaborate his or hers thought more in Swedish, than in a second language. We did not want the interviewee to be hindered for instance by lack of vocabulary.

After we had concluded the interview we stopped the video-recorder. We expressed our gratitude and stressed the crucial role they had played for the success of our research. We informed them about the internet address where they would be able to read the electronically publicized copy of the dissertation. When the person had left the room we immediately took notes on our own reflection about the interview. We had the person’s words on tape, but aspects like body language would have been missed otherwise. By taking these concluding notes we would remember these aspects even if we wrote down our analysis a few days later.

**Analyzing Process**

The first step we took in the analyzing process was to transcribe the taped interview. We typed the interview on paper after one or two interviews which enabled us to reflect on the interview itself to see what worked and what did not regarding our questions (Hatch, 2002). After having transcribed the interview, we added the notes we took
directly after the interview in order to decide whether or not these notes could contribute with some new information to our analysis. The next step was to determine how the participants’ answers would provide us with answers to the questions that we had set out to explore.
RESULTS

Interviewees’ Own Definition of Media

Even though many of our interviewees come into contact with various forms of media everyday, many of them found it a bit difficult to explain what media is for them. Below are some extracts from our interviewees views on what the concept media means to them:

Erik: Asså vad jag skulle,, jag tycker är engelskspråkig,, ja, tv, när man tittar på tv, när man sitter och spelar datorspel kanske med andra asså sånna multitvspel som man kan spela med folk från hela världen. Aaa, vad finns det mer? […] musik […] internet..
---
Peter: TV, ljud, musik och radio.
---
Jenny: Jag vet inte riktigt. […] Det är mer tidningar, nyheter och sånt. […] hemsidor och sånt som man kan gå in på asså andra hemsidor från andra länder och sånt men det är media mer för mig typ nyheter och sånt. […] Vad som sker typ i omvärlden.
---
Anna: Ja, TV…Det är nog det. Sen kanske någon tidning, eller så…
---
Malin: Jag tänker på tidningar och tv och nyheter och sånt skvaller,, ja,, haha..

It seems that television is the primary thought that comes to our interviewees’ mind when thinking about media. Since television plays an important role in children and adolescents’ lives and they spend approximately two hours with it, it is quite natural that our interviewees would mention television in their definitions (Ulla Johnsson-Smaragdi et. al. 1998).

Television

It is evident, based on our interviews, that viewing television is something that our interviewees do to a large extent in their spare time. In fact, it appears that television is ranked as the primary media source among our interviewees:

Malin: Ja, men det är mer.. alltså man ser på tv program och så man kollar ju mest på engelska program. […] Ja, så det är mest tv […].
Many of the interviewees found that watching television was useful for learning English. Some of them consider television to be an educative source to extend their vocabulary as well as their communicative skills:

Peter: Inte på MTV. För där är inte så mycket ord man använder, men när man kollar på serier så är det rätt mycket ord man har användning för.

---

Erik: På tv brukar jag faktiskt sitta och titta på texten, vad vissa ord betyder för det kan man använda i den meningen liksom så.

---


---

Malin: Asså, det blir mer så, när man tittar på tv och sånt och lär sig där är det mer,, asså, hur dom pratar och sånt där är det ju inte exakt grammatik och det är liksom lättare och prata när man tittar på teve och sånt.

What the interviewees have in common is an active participation while watching television. Their active participation involves being alert for new vocabulary and listening to how the language is used in “real life”. Active participation in combination with a large exposure to authentic language which is often used in television, enforce the theory presented by Findahl (1989) that a massive exposure of authentic language can lead to language learning.

In Anna’s case, television also works as confirmation that she is able to understand native speakers. She also says that she watches television in order to keep the language alive. This is very important since language is dynamic and therefore constantly changes and develops. Television is therefore an excellent provider of updates regarding the English language, something that Anna has discovered.

The types of programs that the interviewees see vary a lot:

Peter: Asså..det är typ vissa musikprogram jag kollar på…och sen är det vissa program som är på kvällarna som t.e.x Pimp my Ride, Cribs…ja, såna program. […] På TV3 är det mer då program som Prison Break, Simpson. Och ibland på TV4 är det en del filmer, kanske på
söndagskvällarna.

The different genres use different types of spoken language. It can help them to adopt their language to different situations.

One of our interviewees, however, did not watch television on a regular basis. This was due to the fact that he did not find it particularly interesting. His attitude towards television can be linked to the accessibility that Livingstone (2001) writes about. Individual habits and attitudes may be the reason why a person avoids a certain medium.

Kalle: [...] Och film är jag inte sådär kollar inte så jäkla mycket på film egentligen men det händer det också. Lite nyhetsgrejer, det är inte mycket, jag är inte så särskilt intresserad av det, tycker det är rätt så,, det skrapar mest på ytan, det är inte så särskilt intressant.

Internet

Internet contributes to a very large media exposure among our interviewees. They use it to search for information for school-tasks, just as Livingstone (2001) writes, or personal interests. However, we found, during our discussions with our participants, a tendency to use websites that are in Swedish rather than in English. Websites in English are only used as a second choice, when the information in the Swedish websites are poor.

Interviewer 1: Engelska hemsidor och liknande. Det finns ju mycket av det. Kommer du i kontakt med det?
Peter: Ja, men det är när man till exempel gör arbeten och sånt. Då går man in på de engelska om man inte hittar nåt på de svenska.

Peter gave us a reason for this choice:

Interviewer 2: Tycker du att det är lätt att förstå det som står på sidorna?
Peter: Man får läsa igenom det en gång, sen en gång till. Andra gången förstår man det mycket bättre.

The reason for choosing the Swedish webpage could be a strictly practical one since it is less time consuming to read in ones own mother tongue as the following quote proves:

Kalle: Ehh, för att, det är helt enkelt, man har det ändå närmre, även om man är bra på engelska
Chat and Computer Games

Something that we noticed during our research was the common use of chatting on the Internet as a means of communicating with friends from different countries and nationalities. They have found chatting to be a useful tool to practice their English, not only when communicating with people from English-speaking countries, but also with people who use English as a second language. The following quote describes this situation:

Malin: [...] på datorn kanske det e en gång i veckan som jag pratar med (min vän) (...) ja den personen är spansk men vi pratar engelska med varandra.

Some of our interviewees mentioned that they play computer games in their spare time, in fact one of them said that playing online computer games was that participant’s main use of media. The participant plays regularly a very popular computer game that requires the player to speak in English, via a headset, with an average of forty co-players from different countries in the world. As the participant states, this can be rather challenging:

Erik: Ja, det är från Israel till England till Italien, överallt.
Interviewer 2: Det måste vara ganska svårt ändå med olika sätt att tala engelska?
Erik: Ja, dom där araberna har svårt med uttalet men dom är bra på engelska, så det är lite så,, men det är jättekul att lyssna på.

It appears, from the answers we received, that our participants felt encouraged by being “forced” to speak English. After they managed to have an authentic discussion by chatting on the net with people around the world, their self-esteem increased. This helped them in their language development. It is interesting to note that they came to this conclusion themselves. Their perception on the usefulness in informal learning could therefore be described as quite high. Malin and Kalle point this out for us:
Malin: Det känns liksom,, som den här jag pratade om innan,, ee den här spanska killen som jag pratar med,, han är jätte duktig på engelska så man lär sig jätte mycket av att skriva om honom eller med honom och så det är bra asså man känner så att man varit lite duktig och så när man chattar med honom och så.

Kalle: […] kan jag tycka att man kan lära sig jäkligt mycket på genom att samtala med människor på ett mer vardagligt sätt liksom över Internet.

Music
Most of the interviewees listen to music but only a few of them pay attention to the language used in lyrics. Those who do pay attention though, look up words they do not know, they download karaoke programs and they analyze the songs as Anna’s comment demonstrates:

Anna: Ähh,, faktiskt jag och […] vi är båda intresserade av musik. Man kan ladda ner karaokeversioner som sen väljer “lyrics” så får man texten också. På Internet då..sen kan man sjunga lite.
Interviewer 2: Kollar ni ibland vad orden betyder och slår upp ordet och så?

Since Anna and her friend look up words in dictionaries and search for meaning, they have an opportunity to extend their vocabulary in English. She is motivated by her interest in music and her primary reason for learning these words is not to extend her vocabulary but to get access to the information in the lyrics she is working with. Livingstone (2001) points to this when she states that children and adolescents look to Internet and PCs when they want to learn about things. In this case, Anna is eager to learn more about a specific artist, so she turns to the internet. On the internet she encounters mostly English written information which could lead to informal learning.

It could also be easier for Anna and her friend to remember the vocabulary and the phrases that they encounter in the songs since music can assist in language learning as mentioned by Jourdain (1998).

Books and Magazines
Most of our interviewees said that they only read English texts printed on paper,
especially books, in combination with school either in class or as homework. Many of them read Swedish literature but only a few of them read books or magazines in English. In fact they seem to read English literature printed on paper when told to do so.

Interviewer 1: Läsning, brukar du läsa engelska böcker?
Anna: Ja, jag tro såhär: Böcker började man med lite av tvång när man, liksom nu måste man läsa den, nu läser man mer. Jag har tvingat mig att tycka om det. Men det har varit rent tvång så jag läser det inte självmant.
Interviewer 1: Menar du böcker överhuvudtaget eller?
Anna: Ja, böcker överhuvudtaget, ja.

One of our interviewees is a frequent reader of English books either translated from other languages into English or classic English literature. The interviewee in question also finds reading very educational in his language learning. When asked about suitable learning situations, he considered reading books to be an optimal tool for language learning:

Kalle: Ja, det var väl i princip när man läste en riktigt bra bok och liksom på något sett efter när man hade läst den så fick man liksom den typen utav meningsbyggnad i tankarna. Och sen när man väl skulle skriva i språket i fråga, asså man kopierar nästan omedvetet. Och därefter det så liksom man hade mer olika uttryck som man inte riktigt hade plockat fram innan men om man bara försökte och ansträngde sig lite mer så var det väl när jag läste någon speciell bok jag tyckte var bra., jag kan inte riktigt komma ihåg vilken det var men så var det mer det när man själv började ta tag i det, egentligen, när man fick ett eget engagemang för det. Så har det blivit som det är.

Kalle is aware of how important it is to be a active even when learning outside of school. He talks about commitment, which is something that surely can have impact on a adolescents’ motivation. But printed texts are much more than just books. A very popular form of printed text are magazines.

Interviewer 1: Tycker du det är svårt att hänga med i dom texterna?
Anna: Nej, du förstår ju helheten.
Interviewer 1: Det är ju mycket facktermor om mode.
Anna: Ja precis, fast det är ju mycket samma på svenska som på engelska..men lite svårt kan det vara men man förstår ju helheten.
Anna is not very keen on reading books. However, she does come in contact with literature in magazines, which are written in English.

Adolescents’ Thoughts About English In- and Outside School
A common view of our interviewees is that school is important when it comes to language learning. At school they are provided with the basic knowledge of English. What students do with English outside the classroom situation works as a complement to what they have learned at school. In their opinion both ways of learning are very important and should not be separated.

Erik: Asså, jag tycker, att prata blir man bäst på när man lyssnar på teve, snackar med kompisar eller så på sånna här program men liksom, själva grammatik och sånt det... så dom kompletterar ju varandra så jag tycker att det är ganska bra så.. Men man lär ju sig alltid bäst på engelskleetionen tror jag, där är man man,, i alla fall i grammatik och man lär sig ganska många nya ord och.

Peter: Det är i skolan [...] För att man lär sig sånt som glosor och jag lär mig mycket ord och sånt och det är bra för självförtroendet och sånt.

Other students said the same about learning grammar and vocabulary at school and gaining communication skills from media, especially from the television.

Malin: Asså, det blir mer så, när man tittar på teve och sånt och lär sig där är det mer, asså, hur dom pratar och sånt där är det ju inte exakt grammatik och det är liksom lättare och prata när man tittar på teve och sånt [...] Interviewer 2: så vad skulle du säga, vilket är det viktigaste skolan eller utanför?
Malin: jag vet inte, skolan måste jag säga för där lär man sig ju asså man hade ju inte vetat någotning om det andra om man inte hade lärt sig i skolan.

One of the students point out that the pace in school is quite slow and that he needs to actively search for own ways of developing his language.

Kalle: Dom komplementerar varandra, tycker jag. Om man lär sig, övervägende tycker jag att man lär sig själv genom eget engagemang men man får inte grunden direkt själv. Grunden får
ANALYSIS

Before conducting our research, we already had some ideas on what our findings would be. These preconceived notions proved to correspond quite well to the real picture as our participants confirmed most of our theories by the answers they provided. Nevertheless, it has been very educative to hear pupils’ own thoughts and opinions regarding the topic we investigated.

Even though the majority of our participants mentioned television as the primary media source, it is evident, based on our interviews, that watching television is something that our interviewees do to a large extent in their spare time. Some of the interviewees also mentioned that reading books and magazines and listen to English music was a part of their media consumption. An interesting aspect regarding television that was brought to our attention was that pupils do not only consider watching television as a way of killing time. They also consider it to be an educative source to extend their vocabulary as well as their communicative skills.

Our participants seemed to agree on the fact that they, to maximize their intake, needed to be active and alert to new vocabulary and new ways of implementing the language into “real” life, just as Findahl (1989) pointed out in his research. Television is therefore an excellent provider of updates regarding the English language and a way of staying in touch with current changes that English as a language might go through. Depending on the genre of the program that our participants watch they are exposed to different ways of speaking. One example is our interviewee Peter. He said that he watched programs such as Pimp my Ride, Cribs, Prison Break and The Simpson’s. These are programs that use different terminology and therefore some of our participants can gain from being aware of this fact.

Television was, as mentioned, the primary media source for most of our interviewees but there was one of them that demonstrated that there are exceptions. Kalle felt that television did not interest him. If we take news programs for example, he found them shallow and he wanted to find his information in alternative ways. Individual habits and attitudes may be the reason why a person avoids a certain medium.
The second largest media source, according to our interviewees, is the internet. It contributes a great deal by providing information in different languages, among them English. But it is not only used for seeking information but also for other activities such as chatting. Especially chatting is something that our interviewees felt developed their skills in the English language, which follows the results presented by Coniam and Wong (2004). Some of our participants used chatting to communicate with peers from other countries who were not native speakers of English.

Nowadays, chatting and playing online computer games goes hand in hand with each other. They do not necessarily write in English, instead they use a head-set which enables players from all over the world to speak to each other. This was seen as a challenge sometimes by one of our interviewees but he also mentioned how encouraged he felt after being “forced” to speak in English. His self-esteem increased with the notion that he had the ability to understand and be understood by people from different mother tongues. An interesting detail is that the interviewee came to this conclusion himself so this shows that adolescents can have a quite high perception about their own informal learning.

The internet itself is, as we mentioned earlier, used for example to gather information. Here we could notice a tendency to choose Swedish websites rather than English. English websites are only used as a second choice when the material on the Swedish websites was too poor. The reason appeared to be purely practical as Peter mentioned. It is simply more time-consuming for our interviewees to read information provided on the internet in English than to read the same information in Swedish.

It is safe to say that the majority of our interviewees listen to music. But when it comes to working actively with music, and especially English lyrics, the habits of our participants differ a bit. Some use music for recreational purposes in order to, for example, relax or to pass the time. But one of our interviewees in particular sees lyrics as a way of developing in the English language.

Most of the interviewees listen to music but only a few of them really pay attention to the language used in lyrics. Those who do pay attention though, look up words they do
not know, download karaoke programs and analyze the songs. Hopefully, during this process they extend their vocabulary in English. Their motivation is their desire to learn new things. This is pointed out in Livingstone’s study (2001) where she found that adolescents primary use internet to access information. Their primary goal is not to extend their language skills, but in their search for other type of information they come in contact with the English language on the internet and this leads to informal learning.

A result of working with music and lyrics is that it enhances the chance of learning new vocabulary and phrases. This viewpoint has been reinforced by several researches such as Jourdain’s (1998). In other words; music will help a learner to acquire vocabulary and phrases in a more permanent form. Lightbown and Spada write that children can learn through imitation and we found this to be quite accurate as several interviewees claimed that they sang along with songs they listened to and also that they picked up words and expressions that they heard from the songs.

The general opinion on reading books and other printed texts, is that it is something they do when someone else is telling them to do so. This “someone” is, in most occasions, their English teacher. Anna, one of our participants, said that she started reading books after being forced to do so at school. This has lead to a situation where she does not enjoy book reading in her spare time.

Kalle, on the other hand, is a frequent reader. He considered books to be an optimal tool for language learning. He talks about commitment, to be active in their informal learning when reading for example a book. The same interviewee pointed out that the pace in school is quite slow and that he needs to actively search for own ways of developing his language and a way that he had found to be rewarding was to read books, books which presented some sort of challenge regarding language that was used in the texts.

Our interview group had different opinions on the sections presented above but one thing that there seem to be a consensus about is that school is important when it comes to language learning, according to our interviewees. There they are provided with the basic knowledge of English whereas outside the classroom situation when they involve with media they can practice what they have learnt at school and also develop their
language skills further. According to the interviewees, they learn grammar and vocabulary at school but practice their communicative skills when using various forms of media. In their opinion both ways of learning are very important and should not be separated since they complement each other.
CONCLUSION

Our aim with this dissertation was to explore adolescents’ view on media and the importance they attribute to their media exposure in their informal learning. The answers we received from the interviewees pointed out that they are exposed to various forms of media every day as for example computer games, music, internet, books and more. Almost all of them, however, spent time watching television. The interviewees regard school as something important for making progress in English but they found the various forms of media to be good for their communicative skills and as a good complement for the English they learn at school.
LITERATURE


Livingstone, S. (2002) *Young People and New Media : Childhood and the Changing*


Oral sources:
Jenny 1 December 2006
Kalle 1 December 2006
Erik 29 November 2006
Malin 22 November 2006
Anna 16 November 2006
Peter 15 November 2006
APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I vilka former kommer du kontakt med engelskan utanför skolan?
- Beskriv

Vad definierar du som engelskspråkig media?

Hur mycket tid använder du för varje media gren?

Tycker du att ............ är särskilt effektiv för språkinlämnning eller finns det andra former som du skulle anse dig ha användning av?

Var anser du att du lär dig den mest användbara engelskan, utanför eller i skolan?
- Nytta

Hur mycket tid uppskattar du att du använder till läxläsning i engelska respektive generell användning av media?

Berätta om ett (eller flera) tillfällen då du kände att du utvecklade dina kunskaper i engelska utanför skolan.