Speaking English Just for Fun!
About why some students at a school in the south of Sweden choose to speak English instead of Swedish

Prata engelska bara för att det är roligt!
Varför vissa elever på en skola i södra Sverige väljer att prata engelska istället för svenska

Jessica Eilers
Susanne Johansson
Abstract

The purpose of this degree paper is to look at some adolescents’ use of English in conversations outside of school. Adolescents in today’s society come into contact with the English language in various different ways and one of these can be through oral interaction with others.

By using a mixed-method approach consisting of a questionnaire and interviews this qualitative study provides an insight into some adolescents’ extramural English interactions. The goal is to find out why some students at a school in the south of Sweden choose to speak English in settings where there is no apparent reason for them to do so. The aim is also to see what the conversations look like and what attitudes the students have towards English. It was found that the main reason is because the students think it is more fun to speak English than Swedish. They claimed that they can express themselves better in English and that it sounds better to speak English. The conversations occur spontaneously and errors are corrected. Two groups of students were interviewed and their answers differed, because their attitudes towards English differed. The students, who engaged the most in extramural English conversations, were well aware of the usefulness of English.

Key words: code-switching, ESL, extramural English, informal learning, second language learners, speech event
Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................... 6
Purpose and Research Questions ................................................................. 7
Literature Review.......................................................................................... 8
  Spoken English .......................................................................................... 9
  English and Swedish Adolescents ............................................................. 9
  Culture and Identity .................................................................................. 13
  Language and Identity ............................................................................. 15
  Language and Power ............................................................................... 17
Methodology ............................................................................................... 19
  Selection .................................................................................................... 19
Methods of Data Collection ......................................................................... 20
  Questionnaire .......................................................................................... 20
  Qualitative Interviewing .......................................................................... 22
  Selection .................................................................................................... 22
  Prior to the Interviews ............................................................................. 23
  Conducting the Interviews ...................................................................... 23
Ethics ........................................................................................................... 26
Results ......................................................................................................... 27
  Questionnaire .......................................................................................... 27
  First Interview ........................................................................................ 29
    Attitudes and Feelings .......................................................................... 28
    Reasons .................................................................................................. 30
    Speech Events ....................................................................................... 32
Introduction

English is a language that was at the right place at the right time and is now a global language spoken in 70 countries by 20% of the world’s population. The amount of English speakers is constantly increasing (Svartvik, 2000). Even though English is not the official language in Sweden, it is used in several discourses in society. English is acquired for many educations and jobs and it is more common today to study and work abroad where English is a necessity in order to communicate. Adolescents today are brought up under these conditions and they have to be aware of the importance of knowing English in order to be attractive on the labor market. Luckily it is easier for adolescents today to learn English, since they are surrounded by English every day. They encounter a lot of English through films, TV-shows, computer games, the Internet and various other sources. With this in mind it is not surprising that the syllabus for English propagates that the students should develop “an all-round communicative ability” (Skolverket, 2000) and that speaking is an important part of learning English.

During our teacher practice we occasionally heard English being spoken during breaks amongst our students. In most of the cases one or a few words were switched from Swedish into English, but in some cases the students conversed for a longer time in English, even though there was no apparent need to use English. Our curiosity was raised around what lies behind the students’ choice of speaking English with their friends like this. We felt that we wanted to know more about who these students are, who they speak English with, what their conversations look like, when they choose to speak English and if they feel that they learn anything from these conversations. It is also interesting to explore how they feel about English, which surrounds them every day, to explore how well aware they are of what the English language represents.
Purpose and Research Questions

The syllabus for English highlights the importance of the English the students meet and use outside the classroom. Teachers must be able to make use of the students’ experiences and to do so; teachers must know what experiences their students have (Skolverket, 2000). This study is focused around the students’ experiences of spoken English outside of school.

This study’s primary aim is to find young learners of English who speak English outside of school. We are interested in the situations where students choose to speak English, even though there is no clear need for it. Consequently we are not interested in situations where English is used because there is no other language in common. We want to examine why the students choose to speak English and in what contexts they choose to do so. By contexts we mean for example: With whom the students speak, what they talk about and what the conversations look like, what happens if someone makes a mistake or if someone does not know a word in English. In order to do this we aim to answer the following questions:

- How do some students at a school in the south of Sweden describe their attitudes and feelings towards the English language?

- What reasons do these students express for choosing to speak English outside the classroom?

- How do the students describe their extramural English conversations?
Literature Review

We have not been able to find a study that explores Swedish students’ extramural English conversations, but we have found plenty of sources studying Swedish students’ extramural English in general. Apart from that this literature section will also discuss how language use is connected to culture and identity.

Spoken English

This study focused on some students’ oral extramural conversations. Extramural English is a term used by Sundqvist in her dissertation Extramural English Matters and is defined as “English outside the walls”, in other words “the English that learners come in contact with or are involved in outside the walls of the classroom” (2009, p.24). When studying spoken language there are some concepts that are important to be aware of. Some definitions will be explained in the following section in order to make it easier to understand the study.

Spoken language is different from written, because spoken language occurs in real time and is a quick and short-lived process that offers no time to think. Speaking is therefore more demanding than writing (Svartvik, 2000). Oral proficiency contains many categories of language for example vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation (Sundqvist, 2009). Lundahl (2009) points out that spoken language and written language are different and they are not used in the same contexts. Speaking and listening belong to the oral/aural mode of language and are therefore related to each other. Speaking is a productive skill and listening is a receptive skill and both are needed in oral communication. However, listening contains
features of productivity. There are demands on both productive and receptive skills when paying attention to what somebody says.

This study’s main focus is on students who engage in monolingual *speech events* in English. A speech event is defined as a conversation. (Breitborde, 1998). All communication occurs in a social context, also called a social situation, which “consists of persons who are interacting on the basis of an ordered configuration of particular statues or identities” (ibid, p.121). There is also a need to define the term *code-switching*, since this is connected to choice of language use in conversations. *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* defines code-switching as follows:

A change by a speaker (or writer) from one language or language variety to another one. Code switching can take place in a conversation when one speaker uses one language and the other speaker answers in a different language. A person may start speaking one language and then change to another one in the middle of their speech, or sometimes even in the middle of a sentence. (Richards et. Al, 1985, p.45)

Code-switching can function as an unmarked or marked choice. In the first, “no meaning need to be attached to any particular switch” (Mesthrie et. Al, 2007, p.168). In contrast, in a marked choice the switch has a meaning which may be to increase social distance or to demonstrate authority or anger. Code-switching may also have an exploratory function for example if the speaker does not know the listeners’ social identity (2007).

**English and Swedish Adolescents**

This study aimed to investigate some students’ descriptions of their attitudes and feelings towards the English language and also how they describe their extramural English, especially their oral conversations. The following section is a brief summary of what recent research say about general attitudes towards English in Sweden and Swedish adolescents’ extramural English. This will hopefully increase the awareness of what the students’ world
look like regarding the English language. We are interested in the connection to English as a school subject, since we are future teachers. We have therefore referred to the national steering documents of the Swedish school system.

English is a global language and the amount of English speakers is rising steadily all the time. As a consequence, many speakers of minor native languages feel that their languages are threatened. A negative reaction can be noted when the English language is diverging at the expense of native languages, but there is a positive attitude towards English in Scandinavia (Svartvik, 2000): “We borrow willingly and easily English words, which indicates a positive attitude towards the Anglo-American sphere” (2000, p.223 our translation).

The positive attitude towards English might stem from the usefulness of the language as described in the national syllabus for English:

> English is the mother tongue or official language of a large number of countries, covering many different cultures, and is the dominant language of communication throughout the world. The ability to use English is necessary for studies, travel in other countries and for social and professional international contacts of different kinds. (Skolverket, 2000)

Swedish students feel that they “have good confidence and judge that they can manage most communicative situations” (Skolverket, 2005, p.51 our translation). This includes both speaking and listening and reading and writing (2005). Svartvik argues that it is not surprising that Swedish adolescents know English well, because the two languages, English and Swedish, are closely related and adolescents encounter English in various forms during their spare time (Svartvik, 2000). Svartvik’s view is confirmed by Skolverket’s investigation Engelska i åtta europeiska länder, where it is declared that only a small percentage of Swedish adolescents have encountered and used English abroad, but that they have had and have rich opportunities to come into contact with the English language in other ways, within the country and outside school: they watch a lot of English speaking TV, video or cinema, with or without Swedish subtitles, they listen very much to music, in
most cases with English lyrics, they play computer games and surf on the Internet several hours every week. (Skolverket, 2004, p.47 our translation)

Further on, Sundqvist found that the most common after-school activity among the participating ninth graders was listening to music, followed by playing computer games, watching TV, watching films, using the Internet, other activities, reading books and last, reading newspapers and magazines (2009).

Swedish adolescents engage in and are exposed to extramural English to such an extent that English can be said to be all around them, or as expressed in the syllabus for English: “The English language and other forms of culture from English-speaking countries are widely accessible in Swedish society. Pupils encounter today many variants of English outside school” (Skolverket, 2000). Sources like TV, films, music, the Internet and computer games are again listed as sources where Swedish adolescents encounter English during their spare time. Contacts with English speaking people are also acknowledged. The syllabus for English emphasizes the importance of both making the students aware of and making use of the English around them (2000).

The intense presence of English and its relevance in adolescents’ present and future lives make them motivated to learn the language. “We can see that the students are motivated and that they value the knowledge of English as important both in and outside school, both for future studies and for working life” (Skolverket, 2005, p.43 our translation). English is not perceived by Swedish adolescents as the most fun subject, but as the most useful. Most of the adolescents who participated in the study think that they learn the most in English compared to other subjects and that they are the most motivated to learn in English compared to other subjects (2005).

Apart from being all around the students, extramural English also offers the students “great opportunities to informal learning” (Skolverket, 2004, p. 48 our translation). What characterizes informal learning is that it is an unconscious, implicit process. It occurs freely during the spare time and without teaching. What is learned, how and when it is learned is
decided by the individual. Formal learning, on the other hand, is explicit with goals to achieve, tasks, homework and assessment, although formal learning also contains implicit aspects (Lundahl, 2009). Most adolescents feel that school is the most important source of learning English, even though they are surrounded by English during their spare time (Skolverket, 2004). One reason behind this might be that being surrounded by English alone, does not ensure learning. Lundahl claims that what matters the most when learning English is the kind of English you encounter and that you have an active attitude. These two factors are more important than the amount of English you are surrounded by (2009). Another reason might be that the English that students encounter in and outside of school is not the same. Learning in school and during your spare time, in other words formal and informal learning, creates different kinds of knowledge. Lundahl distinguishes between everyday knowledge and curriculum knowledge. Everyday knowledge is informal learning during the spare time and is more focused on the spoken language. Everyday knowledge is more concrete and occurs in the present. It can take many different forms and it is based on social interaction. Curriculum knowledge, on the other hand, is focused on the written language and is usually more technical and abstract. Curriculum knowledge is divided into subjects and is based upon national steering documents. Since the two are so different in nature, the language is not the same (2009). “School activities must therefore be connected to life outside school…” and school must “function as an alternative to the students’ life worlds outside school” (2009, p.47 our translation).

Although most adolescents claim that they learn more English in school than outside school, extramural English is not to be neglected regarding language learning. In Sundqvist’s previously mentioned study, she draws the conclusion “that almost 10% […] of the variance in OP [oral proficiency] grades is explained by the relationship between EE [extramural English] and oral proficiency rather than by chance or some other factor(s)” (2009, p.141). This means that the English the students in the study met and used during their spare time did improve their oral proficiency (2009).
Culture and Identity

The participants in this study were young students in the middle of adolescence, which is a time in life of intense identity formation. This section aims to explain the concepts of culture and identity in order to further understand the participants. It is well beyond the scope of this study to conclude anything about the participants’ identity. Such a study must rely on other research methods than mere questionnaires and interviews, but identity is a fundamental concept when it comes to language use. Lundahl mentions that identity is especially important in everyday English, in other words extramural English (2009).

Swedish adolescents live in a world where English is close to them and English works more as a second language than a foreign language for them (Sundqvist, 2009, p.28-29, quoted in Viberg, 2000, p.28-30). Svartvik even claims that English is part of youth culture:

The English language and English speaking countries has become a part of youth culture: Thousands of Swedish adolescents participate every year in language courses in England, watch children as au pairs in the USA or travel about with backpackers in Australia. (2000, p. 216 our translation)

The word culture is in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defined as “the beliefs, way of life, art, and customs that are shared and accepted by people in a particular society” (2007, p. 382). The dictionary acknowledges culture within a society and defines it as “the attitudes and beliefs about something that are shared by a particular group of people or in a particular organization” (2007 p.382). Philip Riley, who is Emeritus Professor in Ethnolinguistics, defines culture as “a product of human activity and effort, the sum of knowledge which humanity has produced, accumulated, stored and transmitted throughout history” (2008, p. 22).

The social knowledge system involves how knowledge functions and how it is structured in a society. The creation of knowledge is a constantly ongoing process and may contain facts, ideas and theories. “Existing knowledge […] is organized into disciplines and domains with
their own principles of relevance and objects” (ibid, p.31). This can for example be scientific or practical knowledge, but also common sense, religious knowledge and magic. “Knowledge is stored in social institutions, such as language, codes of law, oral history, literature and mythology” (ibid, p.31). Social groupings that share the same knowledge are created when knowledge is distributed. An example of this is professions, where certain knowledge is required when entering a profession. These social groupings are called epistemic communities and the belonging to a community is a major determinant of an individual’s identity. Some communities are more dominant than others in a society (ibid). According to Riley, this domination is “established through discussion, power, interest and ideology. [It] is justified by authority, rationality, consensus, revelation, magic or pragmatic procedures” (ibid, p.32). Language is a primary mechanism when knowledge is transmitted to others in social learning processes. Examples of situations where knowledge is transmitted are when children are brought up and when teachers teach their students. Knowledge is always distributed and learned in social contexts, in interaction with others and this interaction is essential when forming an identity. A child acquires knowledge through experience, interaction, discourse, participation and observation. This knowledge is stored in the child’s memory in different cognitive categories, which facilitates the child’s understanding of the world (ibid). An individual’s social identity is determined by other people’s views of them and is for example based upon how the individual behaves and communicates. People’s world views, which contain their ideas, beliefs, representations, values and attitudes, help them to understand the world when they interact with other people. The judgments people make about other people are based upon these world views (ibid). Riley therefore concludes that: “‘Identity’ is a quality which is ascribed or attributed to an individual human being by other human beings” (ibid, p.86). Widdicombe and Wooffitt also describe how identity is formed and changed within a social context:

Society, culture, and the formal and informal groups to which we belong, all influence thinking, behavior and feelings. In addition, numerous experiments have demonstrated that people make different kinds of decisions and judgments, and they behave differently when they are in the company of others. (1995, p.32)
Adolescence is a period in a human’s life where identity is negotiated and attitudes, values and ideas are questioned and reconstructed and friends play an important role in this process. Widdicombe and Wooffitt state that “peer groups are very important in the lives of young people” (1995, p. 137). Peer groups are important in several aspects, for example in forming and changing identity: “[T]he peer group plays a role in identity formation and change; this is presumed necessary because adolescents need to differentiate themselves from adults, locate themselves in social terms, and overcome feelings of insecurity and fears of loneliness” (1995, p. 137). Peer groups also have a supportive and influential role. (1995). Moreover, Norton defines identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (2000, p.5).

**Language and Identity**

When interacting with others, it is necessary to use language. Language is therefore an essential element in an individual’s identity, which is confirmed by Norton who “foreground[s] the role of language as constitutive of and constructed by a language learner’s identity” (2000, p.5). Language facilitates an individual’s forming and expression of who she is, herself, which changes with time and space, but also within the same situation (2000).

Language is interrelated to identity and culture, since it is a universal tool for social communication. “Language is the most developed form of symbolic interchange; it is through language that individuals can converse and orient their activities in a more complex fashion; and through language that the attitudes of the whole group can be communicated” (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995, p.46). Widdicombe and Wooffitt view “identity as something which is produced through, and embedded in, everyday forms of language use” (1995, p.66). Identity and language can therefore be seen as inseparable. Identity is also inseparable from culture because “identity is an active, practical and situated accomplishment” (1995, p.218). This accomplishment is a joint, and not individual, achievement that occurs through social interaction (1995).
Language and Power

We have now seen how culture and identity are interrelated to language. Language plays an important part in identity formation and identity can be expressed through language. Language is also a tool for gaining or being denied access to power through social networks. Language is necessary when becoming a member of a social network that can give you the opportunity to speak (Norton, 2000). Norton claims that “identity construction must be understood with reference to relations of power between language learners and target language speakers” (2000, p.6) and she suggests that language learners may be marginalized because of features of their identity, such as their gender, race, class and ethnicity. Norton uses Pierre Bourdieu’s theories when she defines power as “the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and community through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated” (2000, p.7). Symbolic resources are features such as language, education and friendship and material resources are features such as capital goods, real estate and money. Power operates both at the macro level, through laws, education and social welfare, “but also at the micro level of everyday social encounters between people with different access to symbolic and material resources – encounters that are inevitable produces within language” (2000, p.7). Power is unequally distributed in the world and a resource that an individual possesses can be valuable in one society, but useless in another. What is considered to be a valuable resource in a society also changes with time. Power is connected to language learning:

If language learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase their cultural capital. Learners expect or hope to have a good return on that investment - a return that will give them access to hitherto unattainable resources. (2000, p.10)

Norton showed this in her diary studies of five female immigrants in Canada. The women had symbolic resources, like long educations, friends and language, but these were not valuable in their new country, Canada. They were not allowed to work with their previous occupations and had to work with low paid jobs. This was mainly because their languages
were not valuable in Canada, where the common language of communication is English. When learning English they therefore hoped to gain access to power in the Canadian society, for example better paid jobs and friends. The women’s poor knowledge of English made them feel marginalized. Some of the women became quiet when they felt marginalized. One of the women used her ethnic background as a resource to create a different identity than the one of an immigrant. By letting everyone believe that she was a foreign visitor and not an immigrant, it was therefore easier for her not to feel marginalized, hence not to be silenced (2000).

This study focused on language choice, in other words why some students chose to speak English instead of Swedish. Power is connected to language choice, which was shown in Breitborde’s study where the English language carried powerful values that gave the speaker higher status. Breitborde’s study of spoken English was conducted in urban Liberia. The participants spoke a local African language, Kru, and English and Breitborde concluded that the participants “choose to use English in order to evoke certain elements of their social identities” (1998, p.3). An example of this is an argument on a bus, where an old man criticized education by starting an argument with a student. Both Kru and English were used in the discussion and the presence of English might have to do with the topic, education, since in Liberia “education is associated with proficiency in, and the use of, English” (1998, p.90). However, there was another more important factor explaining why English was used in the argument, namely power. “As the argument developed, their choice of English augmented power of what was said, to indirectly highlight the uneducated, political conservative orientation of Tweh [the old man]” (1998, p.95). In Liberia English is connected to young, educated and civilized people. “[T]he use of English expresses an individual’s commitment to civilization, it also conveys cultural values grounded in the structure of the Liberian social systems” (1998, p.131). The old man used English in his first line, probably because he did not know the man’s ethnic identity and because he identified the man as a young student. During the rest of the conversation, the old man spoke Kru, because that was expected of him as an old and uneducated man (1998). The observations and interviews in Breitborde’s study constantly show that “social identities of speakers underlie their use of English” (1998, p.175). “In many cases, speakers could, in
principle, use any of their languages in interaction with others, but in practice certain languages tend to be associated with certain contexts (with certain settings, topics, groups of interlocutors, and so on)” (Mesthrie et. Al, 2007, p.153). The choice of language is meaningful because it reveals bits of the speaker’s origin and social identity and it also transmits social values to the speaker. A language can therefore be used as a resource in communication with others (ibid).

Norton’s study was conducted over several years and she was therefore able to capture parts of her participants’ identity. This study will not even come close to that, but Norton’s study demonstrates how powerful knowledge of English can be and how this can be a motivating factor. Breitborde’s study concerns what this study focuses on, namely spoken English in conversations. The settings of Breitborde’s study are different from our participants, since his study is set in a different country and the participants are bilingual. Breitborde’s study is yet important since it gives possible motives behind why English is used in conversations, which is one of the aims of this study.
Methodology

Selection

Due to the accessibility factor we decided to use the students at our VFT schools in our study, since we came into contact with them on a daily basis. The selection was therefore based on convenience; using what we had access to (Trost, 2007). One other reason for this decision was that it could also be of interest to compare results from the two different schools to see whether it was common among the students to use English in conversations outside of school. It was decided to focus on students in the 9th grade since we believed that these students were likely to engage in such conversations.

Due to poor interest from students and parents at one of the schools, we eventually had to rethink our initial idea and focused solely on one school. The school where all of the materials were gathered is situated in the south of Sweden and it is a secondary school. Furthermore, since one of us had already witnessed and heard some students from the 8th grade using English in conversations, when having recess, it became clear that the focus could not solely be on 9th graders’ use of English in conversations but on 8th graders as well. We used a qualitative approach and implemented a mixed-method strategy that focused on questionnaires and interviews to find the students that were going to be of interest to us.
Methods of Data Collection

Questionnaire

Out of 61 students that participated in answering the questionnaire there were 49 who handed in the consent form with their parents’ signature, hence these are the 49 questionnaires that we were allowed to use.

The questionnaire functioned as a safety test to first and foremost see if there were any students who conversed with their peers in English outside the classroom and if there were any students of interest to us that we could interview. It was also designed to explore the students’ use of English outside the classroom in general. If the analysis of the questionnaires did not reveal any students who spoke English during their spare time, we still had information about the students’ extramural English to fall back on (See Appendix A). We were aware of the difficulty in trying to capture the students’ attitudes towards English through a questionnaire, but we believed that we at least could discover something about their feelings and thoughts towards the language. As aforementioned, the questionnaire was designed to point us in the direction of which students we could interview and we had the opinion that through the interviews we could go deeper into finding out the students’ thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards English.

The language used in the questionnaire was Swedish and the students were asked to answer in Swedish. The questionnaire contained both open and closed response items. These two items complemented each other and gave us a more complete perspective on the subject. We aimed to follow recommendations by Trost, that the questions should be short and written in simple, ordinary language and to only deal with one issue in each question. We also avoided the use of negations and emotionally charged words (2007).
By using open-response items we gave the students an opportunity to express themselves in their own words and this helped us to gain a deeper understanding and more importantly ideas for interview questions. An open-response item is easier to write because it “leaves all the thinking to the respondents” and “respondents [can] probably think of responses that the researcher might miss” (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p.204). Trost (2007) does not recommend the use of too many open response items in questionnaires, since it is time consuming and difficult to manage technically. Trost claims that there is a higher risk of respondents not answering open response items. Some respondents might decide not to write anything because they are not used to writing, do not have an opinion on the issue or are not interested in the issue (ibid.). In the case of this study, however, the risk of students not answering the open response items due to the reasons that Trost mentions were small. Our target students were interested in answering the questions, since they have a genuine interest in the topic.

The questionnaires were administered during lessons since there was the possibility of not getting any answered questionnaires back if the students did them outside of school. Before the questionnaire was answered, the students had to sign a consent form which gave them information about what the survey was about and approximately how long it was going to take them to complete. The students were also informed that depending on their answers there was a possibility that we wanted to come into contact with them again and that was the only reason why they were asked to write their names on the questionnaires. Through the consent form, handed out to the students, it was explained that participation in the questionnaire was on a voluntarily basis. Trost recommends giving the respondent information about who is conducting the survey and information about the purpose and the content of the survey (2007). The only information the students were given regarding the content of the questionnaire was that the questions had to do with language development in and outside of school. We did not want to give them too much information because then there was a risk of it affecting the survey in a negative way, “respondents will sometimes try to provide the answer they think will please you (courtesy bias)” (Wray & Bloomer, 2006, p.155). If we had told them that we were looking for students who use English during their spare-time when talking to friends then this might have affected their answers.
Qualitative Interviewing

It was a natural decision to use qualitative interviews as one of the research methods since “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view” (Kvale, 1996, p.1). When the students filled in the questionnaires we got insight regarding their use of English in conversations during their spare-time. In order for us to get an in-depth understanding we conducted qualitative interviews since they “can be used to gather information that cannot be obtained using other methods. Surveys might offer mass data about a particular issue, but they lack the depth of understanding that a qualitative interview provides” (Tierney & Dilley, 2001, p.454). It would have been interesting to use observation as a research method. That way we could have documented an actual conversation and compared it to how the students described their conversations through the interviews and questionnaires. A difficulty with this was that we did not know when the conversations occurred and it would not be ethical to follow students during their spare time. One other issue was that their behavior could be affected by us observing them.

Selection

The selection of interviewees was based on the students’ answers in the questionnaire; hence the questionnaires played an important role at this stage. In order for a student to be chosen as a participant for the interviews there had to be an indication through the questionnaire answers that this student was familiar with code-switching from Swedish to English in conversations outside of school. So, out of 61 students that participated in the questionnaire, 13 students were selected for the interviews. It so happened that when our final selection of participants for the interviews was done we had a focus group of 13 students who all were 8th graders. They came from two different classes; six students from one class, three girls and three boys, and seven from the other class, six girls and one boy. The first focus group consisted of six students with approximately the same level of English. They come from a class that is outspoken and everyone gets along with each other. Out of the six students in this focus group one was absent on the day dedicated for the
interview. Furthermore in this group constellation two of the students are best friends. All of the students in this focus group are born in Sweden but one of the participants’ parents are from Serbia.

The second focus group consisted of seven students with a varying level of English. The group dynamics differed somewhat between this focus group and the first focus group. They were not especially outspoken and it felt as though everyone was not comfortable in the situation of being interviewed although all of them wanted to participate. Out of these seven students two groups of two are best friends. Furthermore they were all born in Sweden.

Prior to the Interviews

Before we started conducting the interviews we had to be certain that all of the students chosen to participate still were interested. This was done through a brief meeting one week prior to the interviews with the students concerned. During this brief meeting the students were also given some information regarding what area the interview was to deal with, “The interviewees should be provided with a context for the interview by a briefing” (Kvale 1996, p.127). All of the chosen students were interested in taking part in the interviews and a time, date and place was suggested. After having verified with the concerned teacher as well as the school headmaster, the decision was made that the interviews were to take place during school hours. During the brief meeting the students were asked to think about their use of English outside of school, and particularly their use of English in conversations.

Conducting the Interviews

Regarding the practical issues of the interviews we did group interviews with the students and both of us were participating as interviewers. We believe there are many advantages in conducting group interviews such as “children are more relaxed in the company of their
peers” and “in group interviews, participants build on each other’s talk [so called collaborative talk sequence] and discuss a wider range of experiences and opinions than may develop in individual interviews” (Eder & Fingerson, 2001, p.183). By using the method of qualitative group interviewing the interviewees gave us more information regarding their use of English in conversations since they built on each other’s answers and further developed their answers with help from their peers due to the notion that “[t]he interaction among the interview subjects often leads to spontaneous and emotional statements about the topic being discussed” (Kvale, 1996, p.101). Furthermore, one other positive factor when using group interviewing was that it “enables you to collect data from a lot of people very quickly” (Wray & Bloomer 2006, p.163). We also considered if both of us were going to participate in the interviews as interviewers since we did not want the students to feel uncomfortable. This could happen if we did individual interviews, then there was the possibility of the interviewee feeling outnumbered by us; the interviewers. By conducting group interviews “the adult researcher’s power can be reduced while making the interviewing context more natural if children are interviewed as a group rather than as individuals” and furthermore “there is less chance for a researcher to impose adult interpretations and language on the young people if they are interviewed collectively” (Eder & Fingerson, 2001, p.182-183). Since the students chosen to participate in the interviews came from two different classes, we decided to divide them according to class thus one interviewing session was with a group of six students and the other session with seven students. This decision was to some degree based on information from the questionnaires where some of the students expressed that they often used English in conversations with friends, and therefore it was important that we were able to interview them at the same time. Swedish was the language used in the interviews in order for us to improve the students understanding and get deeper answers. Furthermore, the decision was made to audio-record the interviews with the use of a Dictaphone and this allowed us to “concentrate all of [our] attention on the interviewee(s) (Wray & Bloomer 2006, p.163) instead of spending time taking notes and it also provided us with the opportunity to go back and listen to what was said during the interview.
The interviews were conducted on Tuesday the 16th of November 2010. Two classrooms were the setting for the interviews and in these classrooms we rearranged the furniture so that we could sit in a circle placing the Dictaphone in the centre of the table. Since we sat in a circle everyone was able to have eye-contact with one another, and we felt that this was pertinent in creating an environment where the students could feel safe and relaxed.

The interviews were semi-structured. We were aware of what questions needed to be answered but we also wanted to be flexible enough to let the students talk freely so that the interviews could reveal unexpected issues (See Appendix B). We had the goal to make the interviews “conversation[s] with a purpose” (Heigham & Croker 2009 p.186). By having the interviews semi-structured we offered the students the opportunity to tell us about things they had thought about regarding their use of English in conversations during their spare-time. The goal was to keep the interviews as open as possible so that the interviewees felt that there was space for them to introduce themes that maybe not were included in our interview guide and this is also something that Steinar Kvale frequently mentions that “the very virtue of qualitative interviews is their openness” (1996, p.84). So, even though we had an interview guide that contained questions regarding specific themes to be covered we were flexible enough during the interviews so that we could keep “an openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by the subjects” (ibid. p.124). We recognized that if we were going to get thick descriptions from the interviewees, it was pertinent to be sensitive to what was said and also to help the interviewees’ further build up their answers by asking additional questions. To sum up our intention with the way the interviews were conducted the words of Steinar Kvale seem appropriate to use here, since he writes that dynamically in a qualitative interview “the questions should promote a positive interaction; keep the flow of the conversation going and motivate the subjects to talk about their experiences and feelings. The questions should be easy to understand, short, and devoid of academic language” and furthermore “the more spontaneous the interview procedure, the more likely one is to obtain spontaneous, lively, and unexpected answers” (ibid. pp.129-130).
Research can be a powerful tool, since research reports can work as support for new laws and decisions (Gullveig Alver & Øyen, 1998, p.35). With great power comes great responsibility, which means that a researcher has both laws and ethical issues to regard. The students’ parents gave us permission to let their children participate in a questionnaire and interview by signing a consent form. We also asked the principals of the schools for permission to conduct the study.

Good research moral requires that all participants are aware of what the research is about and what the conditions for the study are. A researcher has to respect the integrity of the individual, her right to decide of her own life (ibid. p.93). Both the questionnaire and the interview were voluntary and the students were free to withdraw from the study at any time. The students were assured that the collected material was only to be used for the purpose of this study and was thereafter going to be destroyed. The students were not promised anonymity but rather confidentiality since they were assured never to be named or in any other way indentified in the final research report.
Results

Throughout this section the results from the two semi-structured interviews conducted with two different focus groups are accounted for as well as the information that was given to us through the questionnaires. As previously mentioned, the questions in the questionnaire and the interviews were in Swedish and the students were expected to answer them accordingly. Throughout this section the questions from the questionnaire as well as the students’ written answers and the quotes from the interviews will be translated into English.

Questionnaire

Regarding the more pertinent questions for our research, and that is the questions on the students’ use of English in conversations with peers, some open-response items were used to give the students the opportunity to describe their language use in their own words. We asked if the students could describe why they started to talk English with their peers instead of Swedish. All of the students wrote several reasons to why they chose English instead of Swedish in conversations with peers but the reason mentioned the most was that they feel that it is more fun speaking English than Swedish. Other reasons that were mentioned were the fact that English sounds better and cooler than Swedish and three of the students had the opinion that it is a nicer language. Six of the students even mentioned that it can be hard sometimes to find the Swedish words you are looking for and when this happens you often know the specific word in English and use that instead. This goes hand in hand with the answer that at times English words are more suitable than Swedish words and that there are better expressions in English that enables you to explain yourself in a better way. Three of the students were even of the opinion that they are better at English than Swedish and they give the impression that it is the most natural thing in the world to use English since this is
the language they know. Only one student mentioned that the reason why she speaks English is basically to practice the language.

Another follow-up question was designed to find out what the students talk about when using English, what topics (if any specific) they talk about. One student answered that she does not talk about anything in particular and feels that you can talk about everything in English that you might as well be able to use Swedish for. Seven of the students were more specific and mentioned that they use English when talking about sports, music, computer games and lines from funny movies.

Furthermore, when asked at what occasions they would say they use English, and then specifically focusing on the spoken English in conversation, three of the students answered that it was of a strategically nature because they did not want siblings or younger cousins to understand what they were talking about. Two students answered that they sometimes speak English with their parents even though there is no actual reason for doing so. Overall when looking at the occasions mentioned for the use of spoken English the one thing that stood out among the answers was to speak English with peers. The other occasions when spoken English was used mostly had to do with the fact that there was a need to use English so that everyone understood.

First Interview

The names throughout this section are not the students’ real names. We have chosen to call them: Pernilla, Marie, Alice, Andreas and Linus.

Attitudes and Feelings

The students thought about that English is all around them. All the students agreed that English is an important subject in school. Marie said that: “It is a language that is spoken all around the world, so it is important if you are going abroad, just on vacation or future work,
so it is important”. Pernilla said that: “It is almost the most important subject, I think” and Andreas and Alice agreed. Linus said that: “Almost everyone in the world understands it”. All of the students in this interview explained that they will need English in the future and that these future plans probably affect their interest in the English language. Alice wants to go to Melbourne to study theatre and she will of course need English there. Andreas and Linus want to work with music and they already write song lyrics in English. Marie said that: “I have not quite made up my mind yet, but I want to conduct research and I will probably do that abroad”. Marie also said: “It is important even if you stay here… if you work in a store and people who cannot express themselves in Swedish and such comes in”. Andreas agreed “It is common knowledge”.

The students claimed that they do not prefer a particular dialect but Marie said that “it is fun and you hear the difference between American English and British English”. Andreas agreed and Linus added that “[t]here is a big difference”. Andreas agreed and said: “Very big”. He also admitted that he preferred American English: “I like more this rough pronunciation if you say so, not this posh English”. Linus explained that “they have different expressions too, if it comes from the USA or England, there are “A lot more kind of weird expressions in England”. Pernilla said that “I think English is nice because they speak in such an old fashioned way”. Marie added: “and they always sound so friendly”. Pernilla said: “It sounds so cool or something”.

All of the students claimed that speaking English outside of school help them in their English learning in school. Marie said that “it makes it easier” and Andreas said that you become “more fluent, you get good at speaking”. Pernilla explained it in the following way: “Well, you learn more words the more you speak and then maybe you remember that oh, I have heard that [word] on some TV program some time and then you know what it means, even though you don’t use to talk about it so you can say it a couple of times and you have learnt it”.

When talking about how the students feel when they speak English Andreas mentioned that it sometimes feels like he plays a role when he speaks English compared to Swedish.
Pernilla said that “I think it is only like using another language”. Marie commented: “Yes, most of the time, but you can add funny accents sometimes and sort of joke around … sometimes you go into such an exaggerated British accent or something like that but most of the time you speak normally”. Andreas and Linus also claimed that they play around with the English language and Andreas demonstrated it by saying “Ai mate” with an Australian accent and previously when talking about Alice’s theater plans he quoted Hamlet when saying “to be or not to be”. Andreas concluded that he does it because it is fun, not because he dares more when he speaks English and Alice agreed on this. Furthermore, all of the students agreed that if they were going to talk about emotional issues, like a break up, they choose to speak Swedish.

All the students thought they were a unique category of students, because they did not experience that a lot of other people in their age group speak English in the same way as they do. When asked if they thought it was common among young people to use English in conversations Andreas, Alice and Linus answered “no”. Pernilla thought: “No, not very much” and Andreas said: “Not especially”. Marie said: “Well, as mentioned, some words is probably quite common, but I don’t think that there are people who walk around and talk English during a longer time with each other… one sentence or so, but not that you have conversations in it”. The students described other people around them in their age group and their use of English. Andreas said: “I think that they think it’s fun, but they don’t dare to express themselves, in some situations maybe”. Marie said: “It is often different, because some like some school subjects more than others, so it can depend on that as well”.

Finally, all of the students in this interview were of the opinion that English is connected to a higher status than Swedish is, and when the conversation moved along to the subject of TV ads that are in English Pernilla said that they are “more appealing”.

**Reasons**
The students were asked why they sometimes choose to speak English instead of Swedish and the first thing they thought about was the way English sounds. Pernilla said that “It
sounds nicer, it sounds better” and many of the other students agreed. The next reason they brought up was that they know English so well, so as Marie said: “you can just as well make use of it” and Pernilla agreed: “like practice it”. Three of them answered that they are so good at English, so speaking English is never experienced as an obstacle for them. None of them disagreed when this issue was raised. English seems to give them more opportunities, because as Marie said “many of the expressions sound a lot better and it is easier to express yourself in English than in Swedish”. All of the students agreed and Linus added that “there are more expressions”, which was something that they all agreed on.

When the students were asked how it feels when they speak English compared to when they speak Swedish, they once again referred to the way the English language sounds. Pernilla answered that there actually is no difference in how you feel the only thing is that “it sounds cooler” when speaking in English. Marie continued and said that “it sounds a whole lot nicer as well… it just does”. The students are attracted to the language’s melody and how it sounds and as Marie said: “and how they express themselves and so”.

The students declared that they choose to speak English instead of Swedish on a daily basis. They answered that it happens “every day”. Marie said that “some time every day, you say something in English” and Andreas said that it happens “all the time”.

The students’ tendency to start speaking in English occurs spontaneously. It is not something that is planned or something that the students think about. Linus said that “it just happens” and Pernilla added “especially after English class, then you continue to speak English”. Alice and Linus agreed and Marie continued: “so if you have like Swedish after that, then it gets confusing”. The students do not have the same tendency to spontaneously continue to speak the target language after “B-språks” class, where optional languages as French, German or Spanish are studied, as they do after English class. Marie said that it is “not in the same way because you hear English all the time so it is easier to know English than the B-språk”. Andreas and Linus said that it is “easier to express yourself”.
The students speak English after class, during recess in school and during their spare time. Marie has an English speaking trainer, so she sometimes has to speak English at volleyball practice. Pernilla has an English speaking neighbor, so she also has to speak English sometimes. Andreas said that he needs to speak English when he is playing a computer game called Call of Duty. He talks via a headset with people from other countries. Andreas said that he speaks with his friends and Linus and Marie agreed. Marie also mentioned that she speaks English with people who live abroad. Pernilla and Marie are best friends and they often speak English with each other. Alice said that the friends she usually hangs out with do not usually speak English, so she said that “I use to do it by myself” and when she says something in English to her friends they answer her in Swedish.

The students did not speak English so that others were not going to understand what they talked about, because “most people understand English”. Although Marie said that it can be useful sometimes for example when talking about Christmas gifts to young cousins because “they do not understand English since they have not started school yet”.

The students said they started using English more outside the classroom during secondary school than previously. Marie said: “It started when you became older and watched English films and also read texts and with music and stuff like that”. Andreas agreed: “It is more now in secondary school”.

**Speech Events**

Alice claimed that she engages in both code-switching and the choice of English in longer speech events and Marie agreed. Andreas said that when he speaks English he sticks to that language “all the time”. If the students face difficulties when they speak, like not finding a word, they said that they try to find another word in English or let the one they are talking to help them. Alice said that “I try to find another word that fits” and Pernilla said that she “explains around the word” and Marie added: “or you help each other and say the word in Swedish and then you come up with the word you meant”. After that, Marie claimed that the conversation continues in English. If someone makes a mistake during a speech event,
the students said that they correct it. Pernilla described the correction as: “You just say…” Marie filled in: “the right word” and Pernilla added: “it is pronounced like this or you say it like this”. The corrections are done in English and apart from pronunciation mistakes; errors of word choice are also corrected. Marie also said that grammatical errors are also corrected because “It needs to be correct grammatically, if you say so, too”.

Four of the students said that they do not feel hindered when speaking English. Andreas said: “No, only sometimes”. Pernilla said: “No, because you always manage to explain around it because if you sort of don’t know the word you know a lot of other words that are almost like synonyms so you can explain anyway”. Marie added: “So you can still make yourself… heard and so on”.

On the question regarding what the students talk about, they found it difficult to mention anything in particular. The topics seemed to be the same topics as when they are speaking Swedish. Pernilla said that “it is everything” and Marie said that they talk about “[a]ll sorts of things, like well anything”. There were no particular subjects that the students thought sounded better to talk about in English rather than Swedish. What they talk about are things that could just as well be talked about in Swedish. Marie said: “Yes, we can express ourselves in Swedish also, but it is more fun in English”.

Four of the students thought there was no difference in talking to a friend or an English speaking person or someone they do not know well. Marie and Linus answered “no” and Pernilla said: “No, not so much, but you are less afraid of saying something wrong when you talk to those you sort of use to talk to”. Pernilla felt more secure when talking to people she knows.

**Second Interview**

When presenting the results from this interview with seven students there are no names mentioned at all. The reason for this is because when transcribing this interview these students’ voices were very hard to connect to the names of those participating. What was
done instead was that the students were differentiated by the use of numbers and their voices so with this we were still able to know which comments were made from the different interviewees.

**Attitudes and Feelings**

The students thought that it is not very common for adolescents to speak English outside the classroom. “I don’t use to hear it”, “No, no one who…”, “No not often”. They mentioned that they sometimes hear “words or such” but never anyone who has a conversation in English. They think English is important when going abroad, studying or working in another country and making friends with people from other countries. The students presented their thoughts about Swedish and English. They feel that Swedish is more important than English. “Both of them are fun, but Swedish, we still live in Sweden and so”. Another student said: “You sort of know it; well you know it more I think”. Another student claimed: “It can still be fun, like for fun to speak English; you speak Swedish all the time”. Yet another student thought: “So many people on Earth know English so therefore it is easy to use it when going abroad and so. We can only use Swedish here”. The students also mentioned that they feel they can express themselves well in English and that it is not an obstacle for them; they feel comfortable with the English language. One student said that “you become more comfortable the more you talk”. Although, one thing all of the students agreed on was that when talking about emotional issues they chose Swedish, because “it is easier to express yourself” and “you are a little less serious […] when you speak English”.

One section of the interview was about the students’ feelings regarding the English language and in what way they felt English is an important subject in school and all of the students were of the opinion that English is a very important subject. One student shared her thoughts as to why she feels that English is important: “when you’re older and you maybe want to study in another country, yeah maybe even find friends or love in another country when you get older or maybe become a football pro or something”. Although this student explained that she was hesitant to this being her dream and future plan.
When the conversation moved along to the issue about ads that are in English, even though they are broadcasted in Sweden, one student thought about this and said: “Maybe it feels more professional or I don’t know”, but she quickly added: “it comes from that there are so many that speak English, that it is not only little Sweden that has…” She referred to that the ad is reaching more people if it is in English. Another student added: “But it can be a thing that is advertised that is, which you can find in other countries and so”. She meant that it is easier for the companies to make only one add for a product that is sold in several countries, without having to translate it into different languages. One student’s thoughts about English ads were in the line of that “it is maybe only for fun… maybe they want to vary themselves”. Another student said: “There are many unreliable ads that are in English, like Tele 2 ads”.

**Reasons**

The students in the second interview claimed that they chose to speak English instead of Swedish approximately once a week. They said that they did not talk to anyone in particular. One girl said: “It is just, yes sometimes I do it with friends”. One of the students also talks to her parents and siblings sometimes: “I talk with my parents sometimes and siblings”. They do it because: “But it is like, well like if you joke more”. Another student said: “It is more fun”. One student mentioned: “Yes, and sometimes to practice English”. They also said that they sometimes chose to speak in English so that younger siblings or younger children could not understand what they are talking about. One student gave an example of this happening at her work practice experience (PRAO) at a daycare center where “you talked English with the teachers so that they [the children] wouldn’t understand”. The students said that sometimes they started talking English “when you watch films and listen to music”, because you get into it then. The students claimed that “it just happens” and it happens in no particular situation. When asked what topics they talk about in English one student said “It can be anything”. The students said that it could be the same topics as if they were speaking Swedish.
When asked if one reason for choosing English could be that you dare more when speaking in another language because maybe it feels like playing a role one student said that “It depends, I think, because sometimes you are afraid to say something wrong, it depends who you’re talking to” and another student agreed.

**Speech Events**

The students claimed that they do not feel hindered when speaking English, because they can express themselves very well in English. One student said: “Sometimes if you like don’t know a word it gets sort of like this Swenglish sometimes”. The rest of the students agreed that if they come across words that they do not know they use Swedish instead. One student said that she “ask[s] the friend first if they know it… [in] Swedish”. Another student said that “sometimes you explain it otherwise in English sort of, well if the other one maybe knows it then you say that”. Another student added: “But it is quicker to ask in Swedish”. (This was the same student that said that she asks her friend in Swedish if the friend knows the word. She also mentioned earlier that she speaks English to practice speaking English.) What characterizes the conversations outside school is that they are more for fun and less serious than in the classroom. Words the students do not know are said in Swedish “if you are too tired of thinking” and the conversations are characterized by “a lot of Swenglish”.

Five of the students said that they corrected their friends when they were making mistakes when speaking. One student said: “I try not to do it because I know that I myself think it is uncomfortable”. When they correct their friend they “just say it, how it is supposed to be… well you just say it in English, the right word”. They said they correct all types of mistakes such as word choice, pronunciation and grammar.

To sum up the results from the two interviews and the questionnaire we found that there were many similarities in the students’ answers. The similarities can especially be found in the answers regarding the students’ feelings toward English and the reasons as to why they chose English instead of Swedish in conversations. The majority of the students that
participated in this study expressed that it is more fun speaking English than Swedish, there are better expressions and words in English and the English language sounds better and cooler. There was an obvious difference between the two interviewing groups regarding how often they used English in conversations outside of school where the first group claimed they did it on a daily basis as oppose to the second group who estimated it to be once a week. We can speculate if this is connected to the students’ attitudes and feelings towards English, since the two interviewing groups were of different opinions regarding the importance of English. Both of the groups claimed that English is an important subject but the second group stated that Swedish is more important since we live in Sweden and this is further discussed in the following “Discussion and Analysis” section of this degree paper.
Discussion and Analysis

Attitudes and Feelings

“Through conversations we get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes and the world they live in” (Kvale, 1996, p.5). One thing that became strikingly obvious when reviewing the results from both the interviews and the questionnaires was that the students felt as though “it is more fun” to use and express themselves in English rather than Swedish. Maybe this general feeling is connected with some of the students’ claim that “it is easier to express yourself in English than in Swedish” because “there are more expressions” in English and “many of the [English] expressions sounds a lot better”. Not only expressions were talked about in the interviews and written about in the questionnaire but also the English language in general where the students agreed that English sounds “cooler” and “better” and even “nicer”. Furthermore, when talking about how English sounds, the students in one of the interviews came to talk about different English dialects, different types of variations in the English language. When asked if they preferred one dialect in particular over another all of the five students said they did not but later it became clear that they actually had some preferences. Some of the students in this interview felt that British English has a more polite and friendlier tone than American English and that it sounds cool because “they speak in such an old fashioned way”. Then there were three students who felt that they did not care much for the “posh” sounding British English, instead “the rough pronunciation” of American English was more appealing to them. Those who preferred American English also had made an observation that according to them there are “a lot more kind of weird expressions in England”.

When talking about the English language in both of the interviews there was a noticeable
difference in the students’ attitudes towards the language. In both of the interviews the students agreed that English is an important language since “it is a language that is spoken all around the world” and that it is important to know when going abroad on vacation, working in another country or when making friends from other countries because “Almost everyone in the world understands it”. These statements are in line with the results from Nationella utvärderingen av grundskolan 2003 Engelska where it is stated that “We can see that the students are motivated and that they value the knowledge of English as valuable both in and outside school, both for future studies and for working life” (Skolverket, 2005, p.43). It is also in line with Norton’s opinion that language learning can be seen as an investment. If an individual is making an effort in learning a language, that is done because that person will gain something from knowing the language (2000). In this case the students believed that they will find their knowledge of English useful in their future lives. There was a difference in the opinions from the two interviewing groups regarding their attitude towards English. Even though it was agreed that English is an important language the second interviewing group also said that Swedish is important, in fact they even said that Swedish is more important than English because we live in Sweden. This differed widely from the first interview group where the students made comments about English being “the most important subject” and that English “is a common knowledge” (or it should be).

Why then do the answers from the two interviewing groups differ even though they were asked the same questions? We think an answer to this is connected with the students’ motivation and future plans. The students in the first interviewing group were more outspoken when talking about their future plans. Four out of the five students had already made up plans for their future and thought about higher education as well as in what field they want to work. English plays an important role in these plans and they all feel that English is a language they will need in the future. Both of the boys in the interview want to work with music and this is something they have already started doing since they write song lyrics, and these lyrics are written in English. One of the girls has her eye on a career in the world of theater and there did not seem to be a doubt in her mind that she was going to perform plays in English since her plan is to study in Melbourne. Another girl has set her mind on conducting research and she said that “I will probably do that abroad”, she did not
mention what kind of research she wants to conduct but it seemed the most natural thing in
the world for her that research should be conducted abroad. All of these students have
English as their favorite subject in school and they said that they definitely use the spoken
language on a daily basis. Their future plans keep them motivated to use the English
language as much as possible and to take every opportunity there is to do so, and according
to Lundahl things that matter when learning English is the kind of English you encounter
and that you have “an active attitude” (2009, p.37 our translation).

Since adolescence is a time of identity creation, not all adolescents have future plans
“adolescence and early adulthood are regarded as a period for reshaping values and ideas
and exploring one’s relationship to the world” (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995, p.25).
Maybe this was a reason why the students in the second interview group did not express
any future plans. When reviewing the students’ answers there was a difference in attitude in
comparison to the other group. Their attitude toward the English language was in the line of
English being a fun language that can be used when joking, when it is not so serious, and it
is a good language to create variation since Swedish is used all the time it is “like for fun to
speak English, you speak Swedish all the time”. One student mentioned English as being an
important language if you have plans of becoming a football pro or finding love in another
country. When asked if these were her future plans she answered no.

It was difficult gaining information from the second interview regarding the students’
attitudes and feelings towards English. Maybe this was because they had not given it that
much consideration as the other group had. They did not seem as motivated as the other
group to use English since they did not express any future plans where English was needed.
One other reason could be that they did not feel comfortable in the situation of being
interviewed or they felt uncomfortable in the group they were interviewed in. One thing
that can be said is that they ranked Swedish as a more important language based on the fact
that “we live in Sweden”. Furthermore, they did not use English to the same extent as the
other group and did the estimation that they chose to “speak English instead of Swedish
approximately once a week” which was an enormous difference compared to the other
group where spoken English occurs on a daily basis.
Reasons

“Whatever specific functions are served by code-switching within and across communities, it adds to the verbal strategies that speakers have at their command, and is to be recognized as a dimension of communicative competence” (Saville-Troike, 2003, p.59). This quote mentions that there can be functions attained by code-switching and there can also be specific reasons and motives as to why people choose to engage in code-switching. The students in the first interview group believed that English is used in ads to make them more reliable. Riley states that some communities in society are more dominant than others (2008). English is a more dominant language than other languages in the world and the students expressed awareness that English can work as a status increasing tool. However they did not connect this to identity and they did not acknowledge this as a reason to why they choose to speak English instead of Swedish. The students might not be aware of aspects in their own identity since adolescence is, as previously mentioned, a time where identity is formed and changed.

Almost all of the students in our interviews were of the same opinion regarding one reason for choosing to speak English instead of Swedish, and that reason was simply because “it is more fun”. This was also a common reason given in the questionnaires. As someone said “you speak Swedish all the time”, and therefore the students seek some variation in their communication, and speaking English is one strategy of doing so. The reasons and motives for the students to speak English were very much connected to their attitudes and feelings towards the language. As previously mentioned the students felt that there are “better expressions in English”. At times English words seem more suitable to use than the Swedish ones and English “sounds nicer, it sounds better, it sounds cooler”.

Five of the interviewed students believed they were good at English and since it was not an obstacle for them to speak English they “can just as well make use of it”. The questionnaire made us aware of the fact that there were students that actually felt that it was more natural for them to use English when speaking instead of Swedish, since they thought they were better at English than Swedish. There was a common denominator amongst these students
that was revealed when going through the questionnaires, and that denominator was that
these students do not have Swedish as their mother tongue. This was by any means not a
common feeling among the students in our study and it led us to question if the students
that thought they were better at English actually were better. This can be tied together with
Widdicombe and Wooffitt’s study (1995) where they state that “social identities are
emergent features of verbal interaction” (p.90) and that “identity is […] something we do.
[Identity] is a practical accomplishment, achieved and maintained through the detail of
language use” (ibid. p.133). So, in this case, the students that felt they were better at
English than Swedish might not think of themselves as being Swedish. Rather their identity
is grounded in another country and they use the English language to distance themselves, in
a way, from Sweden but these are only speculations from our side. Identity and language
are closely knit together and can work as a key factor for adolescents’ linguistic identity
when belonging to a group of peers. Language can be used to identify oneself with others,
and by doing this you in a way also distance yourself from others. The use of English
among the interviewed students did in a way display this. These students seemed to look
upon themselves as being unique in their use of English in speech events. When the
question was asked if they ever heard anyone else around them at school who spoke
English they unanimously answered “no”. When asked if they thought it was common for
adolescents to use English in speech events they were of the opinion that other students
probably “say a few words” in English now and then but they did not “think there are
people who go around talking English for a longer time with each other”. This showed an
“us and them” mentality where these students in a way separated themselves from the other
students at this school. They talked about themselves as the ones who use English instead
of Swedish during speech events on a regular basis, and the others at school only said
occasional words now and then. But one can also say that even though these students saw
themselves as a unique group of adolescents it does not necessarily have to mean that they
consciously separate themselves from the others, it can also be a sign of them having “a
wish or need to function as members of more than one group and be ‘bicultural’ as well as
bilingual” (Saville-Troike, 2003, p.198). Although they did not say that it was the culture of
English-speaking countries they were attracted to but rather the language, “the way it
sounds”.

42
The interviewees in the first group stated that they rarely thought about why they start speaking English, it was something that “just happens” and occurred spontaneously. One reason that was mentioned was that “because you hear English all the time” you start speaking English without any apparent reason. The closeness to English and the fact that it is almost like a second language to young people is also mentioned by Sundqvist (2009). An example of this is after the English lessons where the students “continue to speak English” since the language is vivid in their minds.

Language can be used as a social function strategy to exclude people from understanding what is said but the students that participated in this study felt that since so many people understand English it is hard to use the language as a strategy for this. The only scenario they thought of where code-switching could work as a strategy to exclude others was when young children were involved. The students thought young children were the only ones who would not understand English and therefore if they had to discuss Christmas presents English would be a good language to use when “a comment is intended for only a limited audience” (Saville-Troike, 2003, p.57).

The students in the interviews thought about potential learning outcomes from engaging in extramural speech events with peers. They felt that speaking English outside of school helped them with their formal English learning in school. These informal speech events aided the students in becoming “more fluent, you get good at speaking” and “it makes it easier”. One student also said that “you learn more words the more you speak”. This is in line with Sundqvist’s study on extramural English, where she found that students do learn from extramural English (2009).

**Speech Events**

According to the students the speech events occurred spontaneously. They often talked to friends and there were no particular topics talked about, it could be anything. When asked how the students would characterize the conversations, especially regarding occurring
errors, the students in the first interview answered that if they heard someone making a mistake they would correct it. This was not the case for all of the interviewed students; there was one girl who stated that “I try not to do it because I know that I myself think it is uncomfortable”. Those students who claimed that they correct each other’s mistakes said that they corrected all kinds of mistakes such as pronunciation, word choice and one student said that “It needs to be correct grammatically” so therefore she tried to correct grammar mistakes too. These statements showed receptive skills from the students and, as Sundqvist claims in *Extramural English Matters* (2009), there are demands on both productive and receptive skills when paying attention to what somebody says. Sundqvist explains how oral proficiency contains many categories, such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (ibid.). Through the answers the students gave and according to Sundqvist’s findings, an assumption can be made that these students have a rather developed oral proficiency. One other thing the students claimed regarding their language corrections was that they as far as possible tried to correct each other in English.

Regarding the students’ descriptions of their speech events there was an obvious difference between the two interviewing groups. In the first interview, when talking about what the students did when they could not come up with the right English word to use, they said that they tried to explain the word or “try to find another word that fits” and as a last resort “you help each other and say the word in Swedish”. The students in the first interview group used strategies that are connected to a high oral proficiency, since they tried to only use English when correcting mistakes. This might not be common at their school, because the students in the second group stated that if they had trouble finding a word in English the speech event usually became “swenglish”, they mixed English and Swedish into one word. This group also said that they “ask the friends first if they know it [the word]”, and this was done in Swedish. The reason for using Swedish given by the students was that “it is quicker to ask in Swedish” or to simply say words you do not know in Swedish “if you are too tired of thinking”.

44
Conclusion

Even though this study is a qualitative study on some adolescents’ extramural English use during speech events there were still some quantitative data gained, in the form of information on how common it is for students at this particular school to engage in English extramural speech events. This study has shown that it is quite common for students at this school in the south of Sweden to engage in extramural English speech events with peers. Although, through the answers that we gathered from interviews and questionnaires it can be said that there is a difference among the students in regarding how often this happens. The students in the first group reported that they speak English with their friends on a daily basis, while the students in the second group did it once a week. One of our research questions concerned the students’ reasons behind engaging in extramural English conversations. The study also aimed at examining the students’ feelings and attitudes towards English. The two interview groups differed when trying to answer these two questions and the questions seemed to be interrelated. The students’ reasons coincided with their feelings and attitudes towards the English language. The students in the first group seemed to be very motivated to learn English and they showed a developed awareness of the usefulness of the language in their present and future lives, which can explain why they spoke English as often as every day. The students in the second group did not express any future plans involving the use of English and that is possibly a reason to why they choose to speak English outside school less often than the first group.

The students claimed that they choose to speak English outside school because English is fun, there are more suitable expressions and words in English and it sounds better than Swedish does. In the first interview group there was an awareness that English can serve as a status tool in ads and it was also mentioned that speaking English sounds cool. This was however, according to the students themselves, not connected to why they chose to speak
English instead of Swedish. The students even said that they were attracted to how the English language sounds and not to English speaking cultures.

The study also aimed to find out how the students described their extramural English conversations. The students claimed that the conversations happened spontaneously. Errors were corrected and only one student said that she tried not to correct errors because she thought it felt uncomfortable to be corrected. All sorts of language errors were corrected, such as grammar, pronunciation and word choice but how the errors were corrected, differed in the two groups. The first group corrected errors in English, the second in Swedish, and the students in that group used a lot of Swenglish. This also shows that the students in the first interview group have a good oral proficiency.

The students claimed that they learn from their extramural conversations, which is in line with Sundqvist’s findings in her study 2009. The students claimed that the conversations help them become more fluent when speaking and they learn more words.

We have now seen that there are students who engage in extramural English conversations and that they do it spontaneously with friends for fun. As teachers we feel that it is pertinent to be aware of the students’ extramural use of English in order for us to create valuable learning situations. We were not able to find much previous research about students’ use of English in extramural conversations. Therefore we feel that there is a need to conduct more similar, but larger studies with more participants in order to be able to examine students’ extramural English conversations further. Maybe this degree paper will inspire others to do so.
References

Primary Sources

Interview with two groups of eight graders from a school in the south of Sweden. (23 Nov. 2010)

Questionnaires with students at a school in the south of Sweden.

Secondary Sources


Appendix A

Enkätundersökning
”Språkutveckling i skolan och på fritiden”

Kryssa i det svarsalternativ som passar bäst in på dig!

1. Vi vet att du använder dig av det engelska språket i skolan men brukar du även använda dig av det engelska språket på fritiden, förutom när du gör dina läxor i engelska?
   □ Ja, ofta □ Ibland □ sällan

2. Vid vilka tillfällen skulle du säga att du använder dig av det engelska språket på fritiden? Skriv några rader där du beskriver när du använder dig av engelskan på fritiden, varför du använder dig av engelskan och inom vilka områden du använder engelskan t ex dataspel, musik, facebook, filmer eller brukar du kanske skriva dikter, låttexter mm på engelska
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. Skulle du säga att du använder dig av engelskan på fritiden varje dag?
   □ Ja, helt klart □ Inte varje dag men ofta □ Absolut inte

4. Händer det att du tillsammans med dina kompisar brukar prata engelska med varandra även om alla kan svenska?
   □ Ja det brukar vi. □ Det händer ibland □ Har aldrig hänt

Om du svarade ”ja det brukar vi” eller ”det händer ibland” på fråga 4 ska du svara på nästa fråga. Om du svarade ”det har aldrig hänt” kan du hoppa över nästa fråga.

5. Beskriv kortfattat om du kommer ihåg varför ni började prata engelska med varandra och vad det är ni brukar prata om när ni väljer det engelska språket istället för svenska.
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
6. Tycker du att den engelska du lär dig i skolan hjälper dig att förstå den engelska du kommer i kontakt med på din fritid?

☐ Ja, helt klart ☐ Nej, det är stor skillnad
☐ Ibland mellan skolengelskan och fritidsengelskan.

7. Använder sig lärarna av sådan engelska som du kommer i kontakt med under din fritid på lektionerna?

☐ Ja ☐ Sällan ☐ Nej

8. Tycker du att det är viktigt att lärarna använder sig av den engelskan du kommer i kontakt med under din fritid på lektionerna. Skriv några rader om varför/ varför inte du tycker att det är viktigt att ta in fritidsengelska på lektionerna.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________


1----------------------2---------------------3--------------------4--------------------5------------------6

Inte bra!                                                                                                                            Bra!


________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Tack för din medverkan!
Jessica och Susanne
Appendix B

Intervjufrågor

1. Varför väljer ni att använda er av engelska istället för svenska ibland när ni pratar?

2. Vem är det ni pratar med när ni pratar på engelska?

3. Finns det någon tanke bakom varför ni väljer engelska, är det för att någon annan inte ska förstå?

4. Planerar ni att börja prata på engelska eller det bara händer?

5. Hur får det er att känna er när ni pratar på engelska?

6. Vad tycker ni om det engelska språket?

7. På vilket sätt tycker ni att era engelska konversationer på fritiden hjälper er i skolan?

8. Vad gör ni om ni inte kommer på ett ord på engelska?

9. Händer det att ni rättar varandra om någon säger fel och i så fall hur ser denna rättning ut?

10. Vad har ni för attityd till det engelska språket?

11. Anser ni att engelskan kommer vara viktig för er i framtiden?

12. Var stöter ni mest på engelskan på fritiden?