Secondary School Students’ Use of English Outside School

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Birthe Stövring-Nielsen

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Examinator: Bo Lundahl
Handledare: Sara Bjärstorp
Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to get secondary school students’ perspectives on how they encounter and use English outside school. Eleven students, six boys and five girls, at two secondary schools in the southern parts of Sweden have been interviewed for the study.

The findings of the study show that the secondary school students interviewed in this study have many opportunities to use English outside of school. They play online computer games, watch American TV shows and movies, read books in English, listen to music and travel. The students are fond of English and realise the importance of English in society and for their future. They find English, as they encounter it outside of school, of great importance for their development of English.

Key words: English, learners, secondary school, media forms.
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1. Introduction

Secondary school students use and encounter English in a variety of situations outside school, in society and in their daily lives. They watch TV and movies, use the Internet, play computer games, listen to music and read books. Compared to other languages such as German, French and Spanish, which they also study in school, they have more opportunities to use and listen to English outside school. The offer of English TV shows and movies today is huge, satellite TV makes it possible to watch English TV channels and the Internet makes it possible to download whatever show, movie or music preferred. It is possible to access computer games such as online games and role-playing games on the Internet. The Internet also makes it possible to listen to radio shows from any country in any language.

From a pedagogical point of view it is important for me to know how the subject I will be teaching is used and appreciated by my students. Imsen (1988) writes that a meaningful connection between the way you work in school and the way students use the knowledge outside school needs to be established and that learning must take place in a context that is meaningful and realistic to the student. Throughout my training to become a teacher it has been important to me to find ways to teach that correspond well with students lives outside of school. My idea of learning, following Imsen, is that you learn more if what you do and study is something that you can relate to and is something that feels useful to you. Experience from my teaching practice tells me that students appreciate topics they can relate to which makes it fun for me as a teacher to teach.

1.1 Background

The syllabus for English in compulsory school confirms the view that students face English to a great extent outside of school:

The English language and other forms of culture from English-speaking countries are widely accessible in Swedish society. Pupils today encounter many variants of English outside school. They meet English in a variety of contexts: on TV, in films, in the world of music, via the Internet and computer games, in texts and via contacts with English-speaking people. The subject of English provides both a background to and a
wider perspective on the cultural and social expressions surrounding pupils in today's international society. The subject covers both examining the meaning conveyed by language and making use of the richness and variety of English, which children and young people meet outside the school. (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2000)

This view of the subject of English emphasises the need for an awareness of how the subject is used outside of school.

Over the years, the exposure to information via new information technologies has increased to a great extent. Young people today have access to information just as much as adults. Because of the access many young people have to TV, radio, the Internet, music, and other media they are good at finding their way around in these areas. The knowledge teenagers have about the world today and the access they have to finding this knowledge is incomparable to how it was just a few years ago (Parmar, Richar & Steinberg, 2006). For Swedish secondary school students this means having access to information in English, which will not only make them more aware of different societal forms but also enable them to practice English.

An important part of the Swedish Media Council’s assignment is to keep track of what kinds of media forms young people in Sweden use in general, and to what extent. The purpose is to lower the risks of negative effects. A report from 2006 states that the most common media forms used among children and youths who use a form of media at least three hours each day are; watching TV followed by the Internet, computer-games, TV-games, video and DVD, in that order. When it comes to having a TV or a computer in their bedroom, boys are more likely than girls to have this kind of equipment in their bedrooms. 2000 children took part in the study, as many girls as boys. The study shows that 46% of the boys have technical equipment in their bedrooms whereas only 31% of the girls have technical equipment in their bedrooms (The Swedish Media Council, 2006).

Using different sorts of media outside school is something that the students choose on their own. Lundahl (1998) claims that there is a difference in what and how students learn outside school and in school. The big difference is that in their spare time students are engaged in things they are interested in and things they choose on their own, which might not be the case in school. Imsen (1988) also states that learning in school is systematic and organised but outside of school students learn in different ways and for different reasons. Outside of school students’ interests control and direct the way they learn, through their own curiosity and
intentions. One can also talk about *intrinsic* as opposed to *extrinsic motivation*. Imsen (1988) says that a student engaged in something outside school, whether it be collecting stamps, rocks or stickers does this because of an interest in doing so. The motivation comes from inside, *intrinsic motivation*. The activity, the learning and the process are kept alive by the hobby. *Extrinsic motivation* means that the activity or the learning is kept alive because of the desire of a reward or to reach a goal. This can be connected to teenagers interested in playing online computer games, where they have to interact by using English. They will keep their learning of English active by being motivated to play the game and thereby using the English language.

Lightbown and Spada (1999) describe how motivation, aptitude, personality, intelligence and learner preferences affect students in how they acquire a second language. They write that, according to second language learning literature, some studies show that students with higher levels of motivation are better language learners than students with low levels of motivation and other studies say that high motivation is not decisive for learning a second language better. These results can depend on differences in proficiency tests used in different studies however. Some tests may test oral communication skills while other tests test metalinguistic knowledge.

When it comes to being motivated to learn a second language studies show that if the learner has certain ambitions or need to use the target language in social situations he or she will be driven and motivated by this to learn and improve their second language (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

The Swedish National Agency for Education has done studies on how students use English outside school. For example the *Assessment of Pupils’ Skills in English in Eight European Countries* study, that explores student’s attitudes and exposure to English in eight European countries. What is notable in this study is that countries that have the highest exposure to the English language are the same countries that have the best results among students. Accordingly, Swedish students are among the top students in Europe when it comes to English (The Swedish National Agency for Education 2002). This would indicate that being exposed to English outside of school to a great extent could help to improve students’ knowledge of English. Through results from student questionnaires in the study it was concluded that Swedish students encounter English in many places in society. According to
the study they first and foremost listen to music in English, they watch a great amount of TV and movies, they play computer games and they spend many hours each week surfing the Internet. The study concluded that the English language to a great extent surrounds Swedish students and that there are many opportunities for informal learning (The notion of informal learning will be further discussed in the next chapter). In contrast, students from Spain and France, who had worse test results, are not surrounded by English in the same way. One explanation for this might be that these countries dub TV and movies (The Swedish National Agency for Education 2002). All the studies done by The Swedish National Agency of Education conclude that students and teachers find English an interesting, fun and useful subject.

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of my research is to get secondary school student’s perspectives on how they encounter and use English outside school. As a future teacher of English this is of importance when planning and conducting lessons that shall engage students and make them feel that what is taught in school is useful to them. It is important to emphasize that the study does not set out to make generalisations about students in secondary school. It mainly looks at a small selection of students and their use of English in their spare-time.

This study sets out to answer the following research question: How does a group of secondary school students use English in their spare-time?

2. Literature review

Young people today have many opportunities to use English. As stated above the Swedish Media Council lists the media forms most common among young people, watching TV using the Internet, computer-games, TV games, video and DVD (The Swedish Media Council,
All these media forms work as entrances for the English language. Parmar, Richard and Steinberg 2006 state:

Through the exportation of cultural products from native English-speaking nations to non-native English nations, the social and cultural knowledge and values of the former are transmitted to the latter. Among all the cultural forms, television and movies have become a major channel for cultural exportation and the widespread use of English. (p. 597)

With this in mind it is important to be aware of how young people in Sweden handle English sources and how they use them. In Denmark, research on children’s use of interactive media forms was carried out between the years 1997 and 2001. The purpose of this research was to look at how children between the age of seven and fifteen use interactive media in their social life, at home, in school and other educational environments and what effect this has on their education, socialisation and culture (Sorensen Holm & Olesen, 2000).

According to the study, the language children use on the Internet is often a mixture between Danish and English. The authors also say that computers support and activate children’s second language. Children are often capable of handling English computer games and computer programmes before they have their first English class in school (Sorensen Holm & Olesen 2000).

The Swedish National Agency for Education presented a number of reports about how students find the subject of English. One of the studies mentioned above, The Assessment of Pupils’ skills in English in Eight European Countries (Henceforth referred to as The Assessment of English Study), looked at both students’ abilities and their attitudes towards the subject and the language. Students were asked to do a test and to judge how hard the exercises were, and to express their own level of English knowledge. In the study Swedish students performed well and the results indicate that Swedish students are good at English and find English a fun subject. In self-assessment, students also found themselves good at understanding spoken English via media (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2002).

According to the study, Swedish students’ attitudes towards English, both as a language and as a subject in school, are over all positive. Swedish students also state that they find English
expressions more accessible than Swedish ones when speaking Swedish. Although English circulates to a great extent in Swedish society, students, according to the study, still think that school is where they learn most English. Influences from media came second (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2002).

Another study carried out by the Swedish National Agency for Education is *The National Evaluation of Compulsory School, English* report (2003). Similar results were found as in the *Assessment of English Study*. According to the study, secondary school students are fond of English. The study reports that English is one of the subjects they find most useful. Students today feel secure in using English and are not afraid to use English both in and outside of school. Results in the study also indicate that students actively use English in their spare time, to mention a few areas brought up in the study, they chat on the computer, write letters, surf the Internet and play interactive games in English. Moreover, students find themselves very capable of communicating with English speaking people in different situations as well as being able to read both books, technical texts and listening to and understanding English song lyrics, television programs and videos in English. Students value English knowledge as important as well as in and outside of school as for future studies and professional life (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2003).

A difference between this and the *Assessment of English study* is that more than half of the students participating in the study say they learn more English outside of school than they do in school. What was also noticeable was that students with good test results are more likely to think that they learn more English outside of school than students with poorer test results (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2003).

When it comes to learning outside of school, Lightbown and Spada (1999) write about informal language learning settings as situations where you are not actively taught the target language. In these situations, language is rather learned naturally for example through work or in social interaction with other people. Outside school the focus is on using the target language for communicative interaction. In school teaching is focuses on the target language, rather than focusing on information mediated by the language. One part of the focus in school is often on vocabulary and grammatical rules and the learners’ goal is to pass exams and to get grades.
Säljö (1989) claims that, from a psychological standpoint, there is an important difference between learning as it is organised in school and learning that happens in social settings outside school. In school, learning is a conscious goal. But learning outside school is often a part of a bigger course of events with other purposes.

Säljö (1989) also writes that school to a certain extent decontextualises learning and knowledge. That is, learning in school is separate from how you use knowledge in real life. School does not supply the concrete situations where specific skills and knowledge are needed. There are many reasons for this according to Säljö.

3. Methodology

By interviewing secondary school students, this study aims at finding out more about where they encounter English outside school and to what extent they use English in their spare time. Students have also been asked about what kind of effects they think their use of English has on their English knowledge in general and whether they think they learn more English in school or in their spare time. This study does not make generalisations about secondary school students’ use of English outside school. The purpose is rather to interview a few students about their use of English and to get an increased understanding of what it may look like.

To get students’ opinions on how they use and learn English, conducting research with a qualitative approach is appropriate. “Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it” (Hatch 2002, p. 7). According to Hatch, people have underlying meaning structures to help them organize experiences and make sense of the world. Meaning structures are hidden and taken for granted by us. By using qualitative methods these meaning structures can be brought to the surface (Hatch 2002).

Formal qualitative interviews have been used in this study. A formal interview can be semistructured in the way that the interviewer prepares questions that are open to change.
along the interview. That is, the interview is flexible in the sense that the researcher has prepared questions for the interview but as the interview goes on and takes different directions the questions are open to change. Depending on responses from the interviewee the interview can take new turns (Hatch- 2002, Kvale- 1997).

3.1 Sampling

I interviewed eleven students in order to get a variety of opinions and to be able to have an as equal number as possible of boys and girls. I finally ended up with six boys and five girls. They are all students at two secondary schools in the south of Sweden. Four are students at a secondary school that I refer to as school A and seven are students at a secondary school that I refer to as school B. School A is located in a small town and has approximately 300 students in grade seven to nine. School B is located in a suburban village and also has about 300 students in grades seven to nine. Both schools are located in middle class areas.

Based on my preferences for students to interview, the two English teachers that I contacted looked for appropriate students and asked them about their use of English. They then suggested a few students from their classes that they thought appropriate for the study. They chose students based on students’ desire to participate in interviews and on my preferences for half boys and half girls. I then decided on which students to interview, mainly based on gender. The students are 8th graders.

3.2 Research ethics

“The dissertation must build on respect for the people participating” (Johansson & Svedner, 2001 p.23). There are certain ethical guidelines to keep in mind when doing research. When interviewing students that are under age it is necessary to get parents’ consent (Hatch 2002). After I had decided which students to use for my interviews I handed out written consent forms for the students’ parents to sign. In the consent form I presented myself, stated the purpose of my research and guaranteed the anonymity of the students. I included my email so that they could get in touch with me if they had any questions. The students’ teachers handed
out the consent forms in advance and all students brought them back, signed by a parent, to school before the interviews took place.

I followed Johansson & Svedner’s guidelines on interview ethics. I started the interviews by informing the participants about the subject of my dissertation, about the methods I was using and the purpose of my research. I told them that if they had questions to ask at any time. I also informed them of their rights to withdraw their participation consent at any time during or after the interview, without there being negative consequences. I guaranteed their anonymity when publishing my dissertation so that neither them nor their school would be possible to identify (Johansson & Svedner 2001).

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

In order to reach students’ perspectives and thoughts about their use of English outside school I chose to conduct interviews. I conducted eleven qualitative interviews with secondary school students. The syllabus for English in compulsory school states that students encounter English in many places in society such as TV, films, music, Internet, computer games, texts and through contact with English speaking people (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2000). With these different activities in mind I did background research through literature.

Qualitative interviews that are semi-structured in the sense that they contain questions that are open to change and rearrangements during the interview (Kvale 1997) were appropriate. I wanted to have a relaxed conversation with the students. I had prepared questions on the subject, but depending on what spare time activity the students were engaged in the questions took different directions.

The general question area was about students encountering English in their spare time. The same questions were posed to all the students. Depending on if the students used computers, watched TV, listened to music or read books they were all asked to describe how they used English in their special area of interest. The question areas also centred on where the students estimate that they learn English the most, in school or outside school, how they prefer to
express themselves in English, what their thoughts in general are about using English and what their thoughts are about how they will use English in the future. The interview guide is found in appendix 1.

3.4 Procedure

After deciding on which students to interview, I handed out the consent forms for the students’ parents to sign.

I decided a time and place for the interviews to take place with each teacher. The interviews were conducted in Swedish and took place at each student’s school, in small rooms where we were not disturbed, during English lessons. The interviews were taped on a digital tape recorder, they took about 20 minutes and were conducted individually except for two interviews with girls and one interview with boys that were conducted in pairs. The reason for conducting some interviews in pairs was that I thought it would be interesting to see if they would generate ideas and complement each other more than if the interviews were done separately.

Before the interviews started I informed the students about my dissertation and about their rights during and after the interview (see Research Ethics 3.2). When the interviews were done I thanked the students for their participation.

3.5 Data Analysis

After the first data had been collected my analysis begun. Starting analysis directly is beneficial because impressions and remembrance of interviews is still up to date and starting early allows change in future data collection based on what is actually found and not found, that is, questions in future interviews can be changed if necessary (Hatch, 2002). For me this meant changing the order of some questions and leaving some questions out because I felt that they were of no relevance to the study. When analysing the data I used what Hatch calls the Typological Analysis method. This means that you start by identifying typologies and you
divide your material into these typologies. Within the typologies you look for patterns, relationships and themes (Hatch, 2002). According to Jonas Aspelin you need at least five typologies (Lecture notes, 2006-11-15). I found five typologies within my interviews,

- Situations where secondary school students use English outside school.
- Thoughts on learning in and outside school.
- Using English when speaking Swedish.
- Appreciation of English.
- Future use of English.

When arranging the results from my interviews I have mixed answers from different questions (Johansson & Svedner, 2001). I did this because many answers were long and the students were reasoning when answering. Also since similar questions followed each other it made more sense to compile the answers and mix and arrange the answers to a narrative text.

4. Results and analysis

4.1 Results

In order to ensure the students’ anonymity, I have changed their names. In the discussion they are called Anna, Maria, Lisa, Sophie, Eve, Stefan, Magnus, Peter, James, Carl and Daniel. When reviewing the interviews the typologies stated above are followed.

4.1.1. Situations where students use English outside school.

When interviewing the students I asked them to think of all the places in society where they encounter English. This is what they thought of: TV shows, books, when travelling, computer games, radio, acquaintances from other countries, music, movies, in manuals for using technical equipment.
Next I asked the students to tell me about when they use English outside school, and to elaborate on that. All the boys I interviewed played computer games. One game they all played was *World of War Craft*, which is an online game where you play with other players from anywhere in the world. I was told that each player is a character that you control and that you work with to get to different levels. When interacting with the other players you either use the keyboard to chat, or you use a system called teamspeak to talk live to the other players. All communication is in English except for when you are only Swedes in a so-called guild, a sort of tournament, then you communicate in Swedish. Stefan said, “When I play computer games I use English in the way that I have a program called teamspeak where you have a microphone and talk live, you actually speak to each other. Or I use the keyboard and chat with the others”. Daniel mentioned that he is in regular contact with two guys from Scotland that he plays with “I’ve met two guys from Scotland that live together, that I play with all the time.” All the boys agreed that they develop their English through the computer games, Magnus said, “You know, my English develops automatically when I play my computer games”.

Chatting on msn with friends is also a common way to use the computers. Lisa, Carl and Eve mention that they keep in touch with English speaking friends that they have met either through travelling with different sport teams or that are acquaintances of the family. When chatting to Swedish friends it is common to use short words such as LOL, which means Laughing Out Loud, for something that is funny, and BRB for Be Right Back.

Listening to music, both in Swedish and English, is common among the students. When it comes to understanding lyrics in English both Carl and Stefan mentioned that it was important to them. Carl mentioned that whenever he does not understand the lyrics he looks them up on the Internet. Lisa and Eve said that they listen to a lot of English music but nowadays the offer of Swedish music has increased. They also mentioned that they have friends who make their own music. Rapping in Swedish has become popular and if you know someone who raps in Swedish he or she usually has friends who also rap and then you listen to their music. They also mentioned that downloading from the Internet has made it easier to access whatever music you want to listen to. “Nowadays you can download music but when I was younger I listened to whatever I heard on the radio”, Lisa said. Carl mentioned that he thinks there is more good music in English than there is in Swedish.
Watching TV is something that all the students interviewed do on a daily basis. James mentioned that he watches movies without Swedish subtitles whenever he can since he often finds the subtitles badly translated. He also said that he is too lazy to read the subtitles so he watches movies without them because they are only in the way. All students follow an American TV show on TV. A few students mention the shows *Lost* and *Prison Break*. Stefan told me that he watches a cartoon called *Futurama* over and over again in English, with English subtitles, mainly because he thinks it is funny and witty. James said that he watches comedy shows that are aired on a daily basis. Eve said that she often watches British detective shows with her mother.

Travelling is fairly common among the students that I interviewed. Carl mentioned that he had been away at a European Summer Camp this summer where campers from all of Europe gathered and the language they communicated in was English. Otherwise travelling with parents during summer holidays and making trips with either the basketball team, handball team or soccer team is common. When travelling with parents the students say that they use English in restaurants and when they go shopping. When travelling with their sport teams communication with other nationalities does not seem as common, “You don’t really speak to each other”, Stefan said. Carl, who spent time at camp this summer, said that it was a bit hard to communicate with the rest of the Europeans at first. He felt that the Swedes and the Finish people at camp spoke better English.

When it comes to reading books, only one boy, Peter, mentioned that he has read a book in English, whereas four girls, Sophie, Lisa, Eve and Maria say that they have read more than one book in English. *Harry Potter* is the most frequently read book among the girls interviewed. Sophie is currently reading the second *Harry Potter* book but she has already read them in Swedish. Lisa said, “You usually read American books that are translated into Swedish, but it is a bit more fun to read books in English”.

Anna mentions that when she plays basketball she sometimes has English-speaking coaches. She says that they usually understand Swedish but sometimes they have to speak English to each other. She also talks about the terms they use when playing basketball that are usually in English, such as *foul, shadow, hedging* etcetera.
Conclusion

The computer is a big part of the students’ lives. Online games are common among the boys while the girls use the computer for chatting with friends and to search for information. Online games supply the students with many opportunities to communicate in different ways in English. Using the Internet to download music is advantageous but it seems just as common to listen to Swedish music as English music. The students follow American TV shows and watch movies in English. TV and movies give the students good opportunities to listen to spoken English. Travelling with sport teams and parents is fairly common. When travelling, the students use English at a basic level, when shopping and ordering in restaurants.

4.1.2 Thoughts on learning in and outside school

All students except two, Magnus and Peter, say that they learn more English outside school than in school. Many of them stress that they think they learn grammar in school and how to speak, different dialects, new words etcetera through TV shows, movies and the computer. James, Stefan and Daniel expressed that the words presented in school are not really new to them. Usually what they do and learn in class, they are already acquainted with through the media, they said. However, they think English in school is good because although you have heard most of the words, they might not know how to spell them, and that they learn in school. When it comes to grammar, it is not something the students think about when interacting in English outside school, especially not when speaking to people via the computer or when travelling. But the students think that grammar is something you learn and focus on in school, where it is important. And as Daniel said “English in school can work on its own but English outside school would not work on its own”.

All students say that their teachers speak British English but that they usually hear American English on TV and in films. Lisa and Eve said, “The English language is something you hear on TV and in movies, you hear slang and how to speak for real, in school it’s more grammar and stuff”. The same girls say that although you hear a lot of slang in movies and on TV you learn how to separate it from how you speak and write in school. James said, “I think I learn more English outside school, but I also learn English in school, but school is where I am able to show what I know. In school you get your grade based on how good you are, in school you are tested”. James also said that he feels he has a great advantage since he plays a lot of computer games. And he feels that if he has been playing computer games for an entire
summer break, his English is much better than the rest of the students in the class. Daniel said, “School has taught me the basics. After that I have not developed my English further based on lessons in school. Mainly because I play more computer games than I have English lessons in school”.

When encountering things they do not understand while playing online computer games all boys say that they either ask someone in the same “guild” or the person saying the words or sentences they don’t understand. They ask in English what they don’t understand in English. Using online dictionaries is fairly common. Asking parents for help is also common.

When I asked the students if they thought it was hard to separate English as they used it when chatting or playing online games from English required in school they all thought that they were able to separate the two ways. Daniel said “I remember one time when I used u instead of writing you, but I don’t feel that it is affecting me in general, what I think is good is that you learn all the short words and you learn what they really stand for, so you know other ways to use them”.

**Conclusion**

A majority of the students say they learn more English outside school. They associate grammar with school and say that school is the place where they are able to show their progress. A few of the students think that they are presented with more challenges and new situations outside school than in school.

**4.1.3 Using English when speaking Swedish**

When it comes to expressing themselves with English words when speaking Swedish all students say that this happens quite a lot.

Stefan who spends time playing computer games in his spare time said “When I speak about the games with my friends it happens that we speak in English, you ad English words and stuff, I think because you play the game in English it is also easier to talk about it in English”. Stefan also said “When speaking Swedish it happens that I use the word LOL, in speech that is”. This I later found was common among the rest of the students as well. Maria said, “Sometimes you can’t think of the word in Swedish but you know it in English so you say it in English”. All students agree that using English when speaking Swedish is fairly common,
the reason for doing this they say is that sometimes they think they find better expressions in English than they know of in Swedish. Stefan and Magnus both said, “As there are more words in the English language, this is only natural”.

Stefan said that he usually swears in English. And Carl said, “Of course I use words in English, “oh shit” for example”. James said, “Sometimes English words pop up in my head, words I cannot find in Swedish or expressions that fit better if you say them in English”. Daniel said, “Sometimes I say words in English that I can’t think of in Swedish. It is almost a bit scary when I can’t think of the words in Swedish”.

Conclusion
Using English words when speaking Swedish is common. A reason for this students say is because they sometimes find it easier to access suitable expressions and words in English.

4.1.4 Appreciating English
English is fairly appreciated among the students I interviewed. If not their favourite subject they all agree on it being one of the best subjects and that it is important to know English. Every student except one girl, Eve, said that they thought speaking in English was what they enjoyed doing the most, compared to writing, reading and listening to English. Eve said she liked writing more. When comparing English to Swedish, James said, “I think it's more fun with English because with Swedish you are able to read through something so fast without thinking about it. In English you need to think more about what you are reading”. Anna said, “If compared to other languages such as Spanish, it is easy to learn English since it is in all the movies and on TV, you learn a lot that way and that makes it more fun”. Carl said, “I think I would be better at French if I watched more movies in French, if it was with French as it is With English, that it is all around us”.

They all feel secure when it comes to speaking English in English speaking countries. Anna, Maria and Carl said that they worry about grammar when they are speaking, but the rest said that they don’t care much and think it is more important to just speak. Lisa said, “If you don’t know a word it’s okay. If they were to come to Sweden they would not know any Swedish anyway”. Eve said, “It’s embarrassing if you get words wrong, like when you meet foreigners in Sweden it sounds really funny if they make mistakes”.

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All students agree that knowing English gives you many advantages. James said, “You feel left out from the world if you don’t know English. You are able to understand so much by knowing English, me for example, I can talk to almost anyone in the world, it is usually the other people that don’t understand English then. I feel sorry for them, especially for people living in third world countries where they miss this big opportunity”.

Conclusion
The students appreciate English and find it one of the best subjects in school. They also realise the importance of English as an international language.

4.1.5 Future use of English
The students all agree that English will be a big part of their future. Sophie, Anna and James said that they have plans to go on a so-called language trip to an English speaking country within the near future.

Sophie, Lisa, Eve, Maria, James and Peter said that they want to travel in the future, either to spend a school year abroad, or to go abroad after finishing upper secondary school. All the students think they will study at a university in the future but it is not something they have given any active thoughts to at this point. About work in the future James said, “I think that the job market will be centered abroad, you will work over borders, so I think that countries will need to cooperate more when it comes to work and stuff like that, then I think we will use English much more”.

Conclusion
Most of the students express the desire to go abroad, either to work or travel, after they have finished school. Some also think about going on a language trip within a year or two.
5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Without making generalisations based on the results from the interviews it is possible to get a good view of how the situation of using and encountering English outside school looks like for students in secondary school. It is possible to distinguish patterns both among the boys and the girls separately and across the two groups. With regard to the research question of how a group of secondary school students use English in their spare-time, it is also possible to discover similarities with results found in studies done by the Swedish National Agency for Education as well as with results found in studies done by the Swedish Media Council. One important reason why it is not possible to make any generalisations, apart from the limited sample and apart from it not being possible to make generalizations in qualitative studies, is due to the socio-economic areas where the schools, where the interviews were conducted, are situated. As mentioned above the schools are situated in middle class areas where for example computer access at home is common as well as travelling with parents.

As stated above, the syllabus for English in compulsory school states that “The English language and other forms of culture from English-speaking countries are widely accessible in Swedish society” (The National Agency for Education, 2000). It also says in the syllabus that students encounter English on TV, in films, in music, via the Internet, when playing computer games, in different sorts of texts and via contact with English-speaking people. All these areas of interest are brought up in the interviews presented above. The students interviewed are to a great extent interested in using different media forms, which answers the question of how some students use English outside school. According to the Swedish media council the most common media form to use among young people is the Internet followed by computer-games, TV-games, video and DVD (The Swedish Media Council, 2006). I would say that this corresponds with the results from the interviews in this study to some extent. When it comes to using the Internet and playing computer-games the boys emphasized that these are important areas of interest. The girls use the Internet as well but do not put as much effort into expressing the importance of computers in their lives as the boys do. The importance of
computers in boys’ lives can also be seen in the 2006 report from the Swedish Media Council (The Swedish Media Council, 2006).

When it comes to playing online computer-games the boys who play are given many opportunities to use English in different ways, speaking, reading, writing and listening. The boys agree that they develop their English when interacting in the games. It seems like the boys playing online computer games have a great advantage when it comes to developing and using their English language. Both Imsen (1988) and Lundahl (1998) discuss learning outside school. They claim that if you are engaged in a spare time activity you learn for different reasons than reaching a set goal or getting a grade based on knowledge, as you do in school. The boys in the study seem to have genuine interests in playing computer games. The game in itself activates them and the only way to interact with other players is to use English, so by fulfilling their interest in playing the game, at the same time they develop their English in different ways. Following Imsen and Lundahl I agree with students learning for different reasons in and outside of school. I also think that engaging in something on your spare-time, something that comes from within, meaning something you developed on your own out of your own interest, will motivate you in related areas. That is, students being engaged in spare-time activities, that require them to use English, will be more motivated in English lessons in school.

One problem of learning English while playing computer games is that when interacting during game time students are not corrected and the language spoken by other players might not be grammatically correct. However, according to me, you can argue what is more important, to speak correctly or to make oneself understood despite making some mistakes. The Internet provides students with free online dictionaries, which some students say they use. It is also possible to use a search engine on the Internet to look for answers to words or meanings you don’t understand. But at the same time as it is fairly easy to look up things on the Internet, it is just as easy not to bother and move on.

Watching TV and movies is very common. American TV shows are aired daily and all the students say they follow a show. When watching TV and movies not much effort is required, but considering the amount of time students spend watching TV and thereby listening to English it is bound to have some effect. As was shown in the The Assessment of English study as well as in this study many students said that they often use English expressions when
speaking Swedish. This they say depends on it being easier to access English words and expressions than Swedish ones. This might depend on the constant input of American TV shows and movies where we are exposed to nuanced English language regularly. The use of English words when speaking Swedish also became clear to me when conducting the interviews. One boy said that he used English when discussing the game with his friends. The students I interviewed also actively used English words when talking about the online games during the interviews.

Learning outside school for other reasons than reaching a goal or getting a grade, as Säljö (1989), Lundahl (1998), Imsen (1988) and Lightbown & Spada (1999) discuss in terms of spare-time English, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and informal learning situations seems very reasonable to me. It is also clear that students in this study feel that they learn more English outside school, compared to the Assessment of English study where students say they learn more in school. The National Evaluation of Compulsory School, English reported that students with good test results attach more importance to situations outside school when it comes to learning English. This might apply to the students I interviewed.

The students in this study see school as a place for grammar and getting a grade, while interacting in English outside school is informal and supplies many opportunities for learning. Some of the students say that in school they are not introduced to “new stuff”, rather to things they have already heard on TV or on the Internet. But at the same time they agree that school and spare-time use of English complements each other in a good way. As Daniel said “English in school can work on its own but English outside of school would not work on its own”.

The students I interviewed realise that they encounter English via media to a great extent. To learn other languages better some of them express the wish for more media sources in for example French and Spanish. They also understand the importance of English for their future. They recognise English as a world language, a lingua franca, and they are positive and enthusiastic about using and learning more English in the future.
5.2 Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to get a group of secondary school students’ perspectives on how they encounter and use English outside school. I base my conclusions on the results from the eleven interviews that were conducted for the study.

As stated in the syllabus for English in compulsory school English surrounds us to a great extent. Students today have access to many different media forms. Students in this study encounter English outside school by watching TV, reading books, playing computer games, listening to the radio and to music, interacting with friends from other countries, travelling with parents and sport teams and using directions for technical equipment.

Playing online computer games is the most popular activity among the boys. When playing they interact with players from all over the world and the language they communicate in is English. Playing provides the boys with many opportunities to use English and they feel that they develop their English by playing the games. Watching TV shows and movies is also popular and all the students in the study follow at least one American TV show each week. The girls read more books than the boys do and listening to music is fairly common among both the boys and the girls.

The study shows that one way English affects students is that they use English words and sentences when speaking Swedish. The students feel that sometimes it is easier to access expressions in English than it is in Swedish.

The students in the study feel they learn more English outside school than they do in school, mainly because they are surrounded by English media sources to a great extent. Some of them feel that school is a place for grammar, a place where they are tested and get a grade. They still realise the importance of school although they feel that “new stuff” is introduced to them to a greater extent outside school.
References

Written sources


Oral sources


Eleven interviews conducted at two secondary schools in the southern part of Sweden, 2006-11-20, 2006-11-21.
Appendix 1
Interview guide

Intervjufrågor – Hur används engelska utanför skolan?

1. När är du född? Vilken klass går du i och på vilken skola?

2. Försök komma på så många ställen/situationer i samhället där man utsätts för engelska, utanför skolan, överhuvudtaget.
   *Brainstorm tillsammans med mig för att få det lite avslappnat och bygga förtroende.*

   *Är det kul? Roligt att prata, skriva, läsa, sjunga?*

4. Berätta om hur du kommer i kontakt med och använder engelska utanför skolan, i din fritid.
   *Lyssnar du på mycket engelska, pratar du mycket engelska, skriver mycket engelska?*

5. Använder du engelska på fritiden i den mån att du producerar egna texter, sjunger, skriver brev, mail, chattar i forum på Internet etc. på engelska?

6. Tycker du att du lära dig något av detta? Förbättrar det din Engelska?

7. Hur känner du att ditt fritidsintresse (där du använder engelskan) påverkar dina engelska kunskaper i skolan? Fördelar?
   *Blir du bättre på att stava, prata, läsa? Känner du dig säkrare?*

8. Känner du dig säker på att prata engelska?

9. Är det viktigt för dig att kunna prata och skriva bra på engelska?
   *Tycker du att det är viktigt att allt blir rätt t.ex. grammatik eller tycker du att det är viktigare att man bara pratar på och gör sig förstådd?*

10. Hur gör du när du stöter på okända och svåra ord på engelska?
    *Gissar du dig fram? Slår du upp i en ordbok? Försöker du se vilket sammanhang ordet står i?*

11. Ser du några faror med att man stöter på så mycket engelska genom TV, musik, datorer etc?

12. Vilka är fördelarna med att kunna engelska tycker du?
    *När man ska resa, se på film, läsa?*

13. Var känner du att du lär dig mest engelska?
    *Genom ditt fritidsintresse? I skolan? Både och? Kombination av båda?*
Varför gör man det tror du?

15. Vad vill du göra i framtiden, när du slutat skolan?
Plugga på universitetet, resa, jobba med musik, film etc.

16. Hur tror du att du kommer använda **engelskan** i den närmsta framtiden?
Språkresa, plugga utomlands, au-pair, resa etc?