



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

British or American English?

A Survey on Speech

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

The aim of this survey is to determine whether Icelanders use more British English or American English in their speech. British English is taught in most compulsory and secondary schools in Iceland but most English input comes from the United States. The research shows that males are more likely to use British English in their speech than females. They are also better at determining whether a sentence is written in British English or American English. The research indicates that older participants are better at determining whether a sentence is written in British or American English than younger participants. Older participants also use more British English in their speech than younger participants. Participants with a university education are more likely to use British English in their speech, and are better at determining whether a sentence is written in British English or American English, than participants who only had a secondary education or compulsory education. Unfortunately the participants do not represent the entire country as the majority are females and university-educated, so further studies in this area are needed.

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1. Introduction

There is no denying the strong presence of the English language in Iceland. It is dominant on television, the Internet, in computer games and music lyrics. It is the preferred language used by tourists and the travel industry here. All those things are an immense part of our daily lives. As a result, English language education in schools is becoming and more important.

Iceland's connection to Great Britain improved after the arrival of steamships in 1858 and with them many Britons came to the country for business. This helped draw attention to the English language here in Iceland. English was probably first taught in *Lærði Skólinn* or the Learned School in Reykjavik in the 19th century (Auður Hauksdóttir, 2007, p. 20)

English awareness grew substantially in the Second World War and its wake. British military occupation, and later American occupation, in Iceland had a great effect on the relation Icelanders had with English-speaking people. In many places in the capital region you could hear American radio or watch American television (Auður Hauksdóttir, 2007). American and British television and movies has only increased in popularity since then (Statistics Iceland, 2003a). With this exposure to the English language you can also add music with English lyrics, coming from all over the world.

English is, in addition, a giant presence in the world's media. Most of the television material in Iceland comes from English-speaking countries (Statistics Iceland, 2003b, c), especially the United States (Magnús Fjalldal, 1987). With information travelling through satellites and the internet, English has an easy access into people's home.

Dubbing of visual material for children began in the Nineties in Iceland. This did not decrease the English input in Iceland by much as at that time computer games aimed at children started to emerge (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 55).

From the year 1946, English was only taught at academic level, as opposed to vocational level, in the second grade for older students in compulsory school. In 1972, English was also taught in the first grade for older students in compulsory school. In 1973, English was taught to students in, what was then the sixth grade. This would now be the seventh grade due to longer compulsory education (Auður Haraldsdóttir, 2007, p. 45). In 1999 English education began in the fifth grade and in 2004 compulsory English education began in the fourth grade (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2004b).

Since British English is emphasised in school, people should use that in their speech. However, most of the input comes from American English, and it is this variety that dominates in the English spoken in Iceland. The schools also emphasize that students should recognize different varieties of English. They should be able to clearly distinguish between for example; British and American English (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1999). This survey will examine if Icelanders use American English more than British in their speech and if they can distinguish between the two varieties.

Most textbooks used by secondary schools in Iceland are designed to prepare students for international exams, and especially The Cambridge Examinations (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1999). The Cambridge Examinations are a provider of qualifications for learners and teachers of English (UCLES, 2013), and these examinations use British English as their standard. I have also spoken to several teachers who confirm that the British English variety is emphasised in their schools and other schools where they have taught.

2. The difference between British and American English

In one of his short stories; *The Canterville Ghost*, the Irish writer Oscar Wilde says “we have really everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language” (1937, p. 144). This might be in part true, the United Kingdom and the United States have a lot in common but their language might not be as different as Wilde suggests.

When a speaker of American English uses an article in front of administration building terms, such as hospital or university, a speaker of British English will undoubtedly understand him. And so the differences in grammar might be trivial in nature and might not lead to any confusion. The lexical items that differ would, at best, lead to a slight misunderstanding: an American English speaker who talks about his pants would not be talking about his underwear which is the British English definition of the word.

The variety of English you use when speaking to a native English speaker will not affect how he understands you. Most Icelanders are taught the British English variety in school, but the input they get from media is mostly from the United States so their English might be a mix of both varieties. This does not affect native speaker’s understanding of an Icelandic’s English, but he will notice that you are using more than one variety.

The differences in British English and American English might be trivial, but they are numerous. I will not list each item here, only the elements that are relevant in regards to the survey.

2.1. Standard English

A language has many dialects, and the English language is no exception. British English has various dialects; both within English spoken in England and also English spoken in Ireland, Scotland, Channel Islands and other places within the British Isles. American English also has many dialects spoken all over North America. Varieties of English are also spoken all over the world in places like Singapore, India, Australia and South Africa. Dialects are not only regional but also social; where a group of people speak the same form of a language. So to list the differences between each dialect would perhaps be an insurmountable task.

British English and American English are the two varieties spoken by most native speakers of English and the varieties that are studied by most foreign learners (Algeo, 2006, p. 1) however, not all speakers of British English or American English speak the same dialect. A defined set of grammatical and lexical features of a language, which most speakers agree to be correct, is called a standard language. In the case of English, Peter Strevens puts it:

Standard English is the embodiment of what all educated speakers of English agree to be internationally accepted usage, it is the dialect agreed by native speakers of English to be the most suitable one for teaching their young, and it is the obvious and automatic choice of a model and a target for foreign learners of English” (1972, p. 45).

The two dialects I am working with in my survey are both standard varieties. In Great Britain, the standard is Standard British English and in the United States the standard is General American or Standard American English.

Other dialects, or non-standard English, may differ from the standard in grammar, vocabulary and spelling. Pronunciation, on the other hand, has nothing to do with Standard English, in theory. A Standard English can be spoken with different pronunciation. However, a certain pronunciation is often linked to Standard British English, and that is Received Pronunciation; an accent that has not so much to do with a particular region, unlike other accents in Great Britain, but more with a particular social group; formal and educated speakers. It has, however, some connections with the accent of Southern England (BBC,

2014) General American is the pronunciation most associated with Standard American English and like Received Pronunciation; it is not associated with a particular region.

A standard is not set in stone; it can change over time. Standard British English and Standard American English are two separate varieties of English however, they have often borrowed terms from each other that later became embedded in their standard (Allen, 2003).

All the varieties I mentioned before are just as worthy of study as British English and American English, but it is unlikely that the English an average Icelander speaks is coloured by the dialect spoken in Cardiff or by African-American Vernacular English. Their English teaching has been based on British English (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1999) and a great deal of material on Icelandic television comes from America. It is for these reasons I chose British English and American English for this survey and not Australian English or New York Latino English for example.

2.2. Vocabulary

I only tested the participants' use of British English or American English vocabulary in this survey. British English and American English also differ in grammar, spelling and pronunciation. Apart from perhaps pronunciation, it is the difference in vocabulary that separates these two varieties the most.

In the first part of the survey, the participants were asked to translate sentences from Icelandic to English. This was to see whether they would use British English words or American English. There were eleven questions of twelve relating to vocabulary. These were questions two through twelve.

Part two consists of a choice between British English and American English. Here, there were four questions of seven relating to vocabulary, these were questions fifteen, sixteen, eighteen and nineteen.

Part three is also a choice between British English and American English. In part three there were six questions relating to vocabulary; these were questions twenty through twenty-five.

2.3. Grammar

Grammatical differences between British English and American English are numerous. I only tested a few of those differences in this survey.

2.3.1. Determiner

In part one, there were only two questions related to grammatical elements. The first question of the survey deals with the presence or absence of a determiner before nouns. There are a few nouns which do not take an article in British English; these are usually word relating to institutions, like *hospital* or *university*. British English uses the term *hospital* without a determiner after certain prepositions of location like *in* (Algeo, 2006, p. 54). I tested both of these words in questions one in part one, and question fourteen in part two.

2.3.2. Notional agreement

Sports teams are usually plural in British English. They can be identified by the proper names of cities or countries and still be plural, for example: *Spain are the champions*. Sports team are commonly singular in American English (Peters, 2004, p. 24). I tested this in question twenty-seven of the survey.

In question nine, I asked the participants to translate the Icelandic word *stærðfræði* into English. I wanted to see if they would use the British term *maths* or the American term *math*. This would at first seem to be a question about plural or singular form; however, *maths*, or *math*, is an abbreviation of the term *mathematics*. The *-s* ending is a noun-forming suffix, as can be seen in words such as *physics* (Strevens, 1972, p. 92)

2.3.3. Come + see

In American English *and* is often dropped in sentences involving the verb *go*, creating sentences such as *go do something*. Similarly, *and* is also often dropped in American English in sentences involving *come*, creating sentences such as *come see this*. I tested *come + and* in question thirteen (Hornby, 2000)

2.3.4. Tense

British English has a tendency to make more use of the present perfect than American English when talking about an event in the recent past, American English would use the simple past (Peters, 2004, p. 51). The difference would lie in the verb in sentences such as *I have already eaten* and *I already ate*. I tested this in question twenty-six.

Question eighteen revolves around the British term *drink driving* and the American term *drunk driving*. At first this seems to be a matter of tense however, the British term *drink* refers “to [the] euphemistic use of *drink* as a noun meaning ‘alcoholic liquor,’ found in idioms such as *took to drink*” (Peters, 2004, p. 166). The American term uses the verb *drink* like a verb in its past participle form. Therefore, this is more a matter of lexical items than tense.

2.3.5. Inflection

In question twenty-eight, participants were asked to determine whether the sentence *Pop Star Michael Jackson has died, aged 50* was written in British English or American English. In British English, *age* has a –d inflectional suffix as it is inflected as an adjective. American English has no suffix and the form stands as a numerical compound (Peters, 2004, p. 279)

2.4. Spelling

Numerous words have different spelling in British English and American English. Several British English words are spelt with a *u* where it has been lost in American English, words such as *colour* in British English and *color* in American English. Some words are spelt with a *c* in British English, and an *s* in American English; these are words such as *defence* in British English and *defense* in American English. Another difference is that British English spells words such as *advertise* with an –*ise* where American English would have –*ize* and British English has double consonants in words such as *travelling* where American English has one consonant (Strevens, 1972, p. 65). What I tested in this survey was the difference between –*re* and –*er*, British English often has an –*re* ending in words such as *theatre*, where American English has an –*er* ending. Questions seventeen and twenty-nine tested the participant’s preference and knowledge of this.

3. The survey

The electronic survey was conducted on *Google Spreadsheet*, and posted on several Facebook pages on March 7th, 2014 and stayed open until March 13th, 2014. It was advertised to over 650 people and out of those 257 had answered the question. The main aim of the survey was to see whether the participants favoured British English or American English when using the English language. The questions used in this survey were personally created and not provided by Google.

The survey was in three parts. The first part consisted of simple sentences that I asked the participants to translate from Icelandic to English. The purpose of this part was to test their word usage and grammar; to see which variety of English they favour. I constructed the sentences so that they will be fairly easy to translate so not to scare off participants. The sentences in the first part focused mostly on participants' vocabulary, whether it was British or American, but it also tested a few grammatical elements that distinguish these varieties.

In the second part of the survey, the participants were given a choice between two sentences; one written in British English and the other in American English. They were asked which sentence they were more likely to use. The sentences in this part were very similar, they only varied slightly in the presence or absence of the definite article or other syntactic elements, such as the conjunction *and*. Terms that show the differences in vocabulary between British and American English but have similar form were also used. This, as well as the first part, showed which variety of English the participants preferred. In most textbooks used in Icelandic schools, the British variety is taught and based on their schooling the participants should choose this variety.

The third part was based on The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture's criteria for foreign language learning. The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools' General Section 2011 states that by end of their studies at compulsory school, students should be able to differentiate between the main varieties of the language they have been studying. For example, differentiate between Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Faroese, and between American English and British English (p. 130). The Icelandic National Guide for Upper Secondary Schools' main curriculum for foreign languages from 1999 states that after finishing nine credits students should "know the difference between American and British English, especially concerning spelling and the most common words, and be able to distinguish between usages" (author's translation, p. 14). In the third part participants were

given a sentence that was either written in British English or American English, and they had to determine in which variety the sentence is written. This was a multiple choice question and the answers provided were *British English*, *American English* and *I am not sure*.

3.1. Questions

The questions were all formed by using material that is taught in English Compulsory and Secondary Schools. Not all schools use the same books, and they frequently update their textbooks to move with the times so basing this material on one book might be biased. As a result I used two, random textbooks used in several secondary schools today and one textbook that has recently been discontinued. These books were *Total English Intermediate Student's book* by Antonia Clara and J.J. Wilson (2006), *Ný ensk málfræði* by Raymond Murphy (2000) and *New First Certificate Masterclass Student's Book* by Simon Haines and Barbara Stewart (1996). This last book is the one that has recently been discontinued. I also used Peter Streven's *British or American English* (1972) and Randolph Quirk's *Grammar of Contemporary English* (1980).

3.1.1. Background information

I asked the participants to provide some background information. They were asked to tell me their gender, their age, what their education they have had, if they had lived abroad and if so, then where.

The participants were also asked how much time they spend watching television and how much time they spend on foreign, English language, websites to see if the amount of input they receive every day would have an effect on their answers.

3.1.2 Survey Questions

In the first part of the survey the participants were asked to translate these sentences into English:

1. *Pétur er á spítala með brotinn handlegg*
2. *Taktu lyftuna upp á þriðju hæð*
3. *Verð á bensíni hefur hækkað mikið síðan 2008*

4. *Í New York ól (fæddi) kona barn á gangstétt*
5. *Ekki henda steinum*
6. *Með þessari nýju tækni munt þú aldrei þurfa að bíða í biðröð aftur*
7. *Þessar buxur eru of þröngar*
8. *Farsíminn minn er bilaður*
9. *Nýja íbúðin er mjög lítil*
10. *Pétur spilar fótbolta á mánudögum*
11. *Í boxinu er nammi*

In the second part of the survey the participants were asked which sentence they were more likely to use

1. *Come and see what I bought or Come see what I bought*
2. *John studies at the University or John studies at University*
3. *I own a rowboat or I own a rowing boat*
4. *Public transport is better for the environment or Public transportation is better for the environment*
5. *The city centre is that way or The city center is that way*
6. *Drink driving is the cause of many fatalities or Drunk driving is the cause of many fatalities*
7. *Put the luggage in the boot of the car or Put the luggage in the trunk of the car*

In the third part of the survey the participants were asked if they thought the sentence given was written in British English or American English

1. *I like your new trainers*
2. *The car is in the parking lot*
3. *We went to Barcelona on holiday*
4. *They are building the new railway over there*
5. *The licence plate fell off my car*
6. *What is the postcode in Garðabær?*
7. *I have already eaten*
8. *Spain are the champions*
9. *Pop star Michael Jackson has died, aged 50*
10. *There must be silence in the movie theater*

3.2. The participants

As this was an online survey only posted on *Facebook*-pages, the participants were quite limited in their age range. According to a media analytic website, *Socialbakers*, the largest age group in Iceland on this social network is 25-34 years, or 20, 9%. Following is 18-24 years, or 19, 1%. The male to female ratio using Facebook in Iceland is rather equal 51, 3% females and 48, 7% males (March 12th 2014) but those equal numbers did not appear in my survey; far more females took part in it than males.

257 people took part in the survey; however, only 236 people finished the survey. 21 answers had to be counted as null due to the fact that the participants had only filled out the background information and nothing else, or answered only one or two questions. The participant's age did vary between thirteen and sixty-five, however, most participants were between the ages twenty-one and thirty, which correlates to the Facebook-users statistics mentioned before.

More females took part in this survey than males; 172 females or 73% and 64 males or 26%. As stated before, the largest age group that took part in this survey was between twenty-one and thirty; 149 participants or 63%. The second largest was between thirty-one and forty; 62 participants or 26%. Ages forty and over had 18 participants or 8% and ages twenty and younger had eleven participants or 5%.

118 participants or 50% had had a university education and 67 or 28% had had a secondary school. Eighteen participants or 18% had other type of education, such as vocational education, and 32 or 14% had only finished compulsory education.

107 participants or 45% had lived in Iceland their whole life, 20 participants or 8%, had lived in the United Kingdom, 28 or 12% had lived in the United States, 8 participants or 3% had lived in Canada, Australia or New Zealand, 6 participants or 2,5 % had lived in two or more English speaking countries. 67 participants or 28% had lived in a country where English was not the native tongue.

24% of the participants said that they watched television for less than one hour each day, 70% said they watched television for 1-5 hours, 5% said they watched it for 6-8 hours and 1% said that they watched television for over eight hours every day.

21% of the participants said they spent less than one hour every day on the Internet, 69% said that they spent 1-5 hours on the Internet, 8% said they spent 6-8 hours every day and 2% said they spent more than 8 hours every day on the Internet.

3.3. Reasons

As stated at the outset, the aim of this survey is to see whether Icelanders use more British or American terms in their speech. I also want to know if people who spend a great deal of time watching television or on the Internet will have more American-based answers. And if younger people would use more American terms and vocabulary than older people as they have had more American input from media while growing up.

In part 3 of the survey, the participants had to determine whether a sentence was written in British English or American English. As stated before; according to the Compulsory School's curriculum and the Secondary School's curriculum; students should be able to differentiate between English varieties once they leave school. I would like to see if participants will be able to do that.

4. Results

4.1. Part One

Part one is translations. I asked the participants to translate these sentences from Icelandic into English. A few participants wrote in their answers using both varieties of English. They would answer using one variety and then put the other in parenthesis, stating that they would use the British variety when in the United Kingdom and the other one when in the United States. I counted those answers separately. The statistics for all questions in part one, two and three are shown in pie graphs or bar graphs below each question.

4.1.1. Question 1: *Pétur er á spítala með brotinn handlegg*

In this question the participants had a choice to use a determiner before the word *hospital*. A determiner is not used in Standard British English but is used in American English (Strevens, 1974).

Out of the 236 participants, 213 used the American variety, 22 used the British variety and one participant did not answer the question. And so 90% answered using American English, and only 9% used the British English variety.

Figure 1



4.1.2 Question 2: *Taktu lyftuna upp á þriðju hæð*

Here I looked at whether participants used the British English term *lift* or the American English term *elevator*.

199 participants answered using the American variety, or 84%. 35 answered using the British variety or 15%. One participant answered using both varieties and one did not answer the question.

Figure 2



4.1.3. Question 3: *Verð á bensíni hefur hækkað mikið síðan 2008*

In this sentence I wanted to know if the participants used the British term *petrol* or the American term *gas* or *gasoline*.

182 participants used the American term or 77%. 19% or 44 participants used the British term, one participant answered using both varieties and eight or 3% answered using other terms such as *fuel* or *oil*.

Figure 3



4.1.4. Question 4: *Í New York ól (fæddi) kona barn á gangstétt*

Here I wanted to see if the participants would use the British English term *pavement* or the American term *sidewalk*.

48 participants answered using the British term or 20%, 158 participants answered using the American term or 67%, one participant answered using both varieties, 12% of the answers were counted as null as four did not answer the question and 25 used other words with a slightly different meaning than *gangstétt* such as *street* and *curb*.

Figure 4



4.1.5. Question 5: *Ekki henda steinum*

In this sentence I wanted to see whether participants used the term *stone* or *rock*. According to the BBC News Styleguide the Standard English is *stone* because *a rock* is too large to pick up.

In American English *a rock* is something you can throw and the term is considered Americanism by the BBC News Styleguide (2003, p. 21).

71 participants or 30% used the British English term *stone*, 162 or 69% used the American English term *rock* and one participant answered using both varieties.

Figure 5



4.1.6. Question 6: *Með þessari nýju tækni munt þú aldrei þurfa að bíða í bíðröð aftur*

Here I wanted to see whether the participants used the word *line* or *queue*. The word *queue* is British English and *line* is American English.

198 answered using the American English term *line* or 84%, 35 answered using the British English term *queue* or 15%, two participants did not answer this question and one used both varieties.

Figure 6



4.1.7. Question 7: *Pessar buxur eru of þröngar*

In this sentence I wanted to see if the participants would use the British word *trousers* or the American word *pants*. *Pants* is also a word used in British English but they usually only refer to undergarments. The Icelandic term *buxur*, used in this question, would never refer to undergarments.

161 participants answered using the American English variety or 69%, 61 participants answered using the British English variety or 26%. 4% of the answers were counted as null answer as one participant did not answer the question and nine participants answered using terms that mean slightly different than *buxur* such as *shorts* and *jeans*. Four participants answered using both varieties.

Figure 7

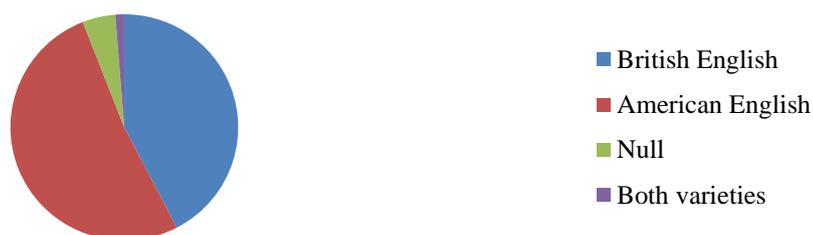


4.1.8. Question 8: *Farsíminn minn er bilaður*

Here I was testing the participants to see whether they used the British English term *mobile phone* or the American English term *cell phone*.

100 participants used the British English term *mobile phone* or 42%. 122 participants used the American English term *cell phone* or 52%. Null answers were 5% as one participant did not answer the question and ten participants used the terms *phone*, *telephone* or the German word *Handy*. Three participants answered using both varieties.

Figure 8



4.1.9. Question 9: *Stærðfræði er skemmtileg*

This sentence showed if the participants used the British English term *maths* with a *-s* or the American term *math*. *Mathematics* is also a possible answer and a neutral one so any answers with the term *mathematics* were counted separately.

186 participants answered using the American English variety or 79%. 12 participants or 5% answered using the British English variety. 37 participants or 16% answered using the neutral term *mathematics* and one participant did not answer.

Figure 9



4.1.10. Question 10: *Nýja íbúðin er mjög lítil*

Here I wanted to see if the participants used the British English word *flat* or the American English word *apartment*.

83% or 196 participants answered using the American English term *apartment*, 15% or 36 participants answered using the British English term *flat*, and one participant answered using both varieties. Three answered were counted as null answers, one participant answered

using the term *place* and two participants seem to have misread the Icelandic word as they answered with the words *ice-cream store*.

Figure 10



4.1.11. Question 11: *Pétur spilar fótbolta á mánudögum*

Here I wanted to see whether participants would use the British English term *football* or the American English term *soccer*.

This was the first question where more participants answered using the British English term; 136 participants answered using the British English term *football* or 58% and 90 answered using the American English term *soccer* or 38%. Nine participants answered using both terms and one did not answer.

Figure 11



4.1.12. Question 12: *Í boxinu er nammi*

This last translation question was to see whether participants would use the American English term *candy* or the British English word *sweets*.

210 participants answered with the American English variety or 89%, 23 participants or 12% answered using the British English variety. One participant did not answer this question and two participants answered using the Australian English term *lollies*. The term *lollies* is used in Australian English the same way as *candy* and *sweets* is used in American English and British English respectively, *lollies* in British English refers to *lollipops* (“Oxford Dictionaries”, 2014). The two participants who answered *lollies* had both lived in Australia or New Zealand and so I believe they are using the Australian English term and not the British English term for *lollipops*.

Figure 12



4.2. Part two

Part two consisted of a choice between British English and American English. I asked the participants to choose which sentence they were more likely to use.

4.2.1. Question 1: Come and see what I have bought or Come see what I have bought

Here I wanted to see whether the participants thought that it was necessary to have the word *and* in the sentence next to the verb *come*. The sentence with the word *and* is Standard British English and the sentence where *and* is omitted is allowed in American English. It is acceptable to use the sentence with the word *and* in American English and here I wanted to see how many would rather leave out the word than use it.

146 participants or 62% answered that they preferred the sentence with the word *and*, 89 participants or 37% answered that they preferred the sentence with *come* and the bare infinitive. One participant did not answer this question.

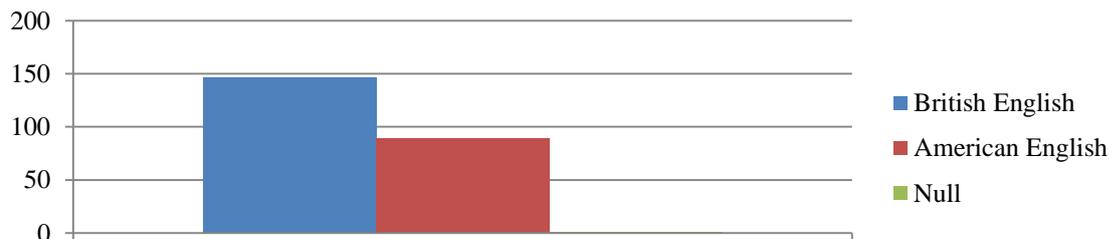


Figure 13

4.2.2. Question 2: John studies at the university or John studies at university

In this question I wanted to see if the participants thought it was necessary to have the definite article *the* in front of the word *university*. The definite article is used in the American English variety where in the British English variety it is not used.

55 participants or 23%, answered that they would prefer the British English variety; without the definite article. 179 participants or 76% answered that they would prefer the American English variety. Two participants did not answer this question.

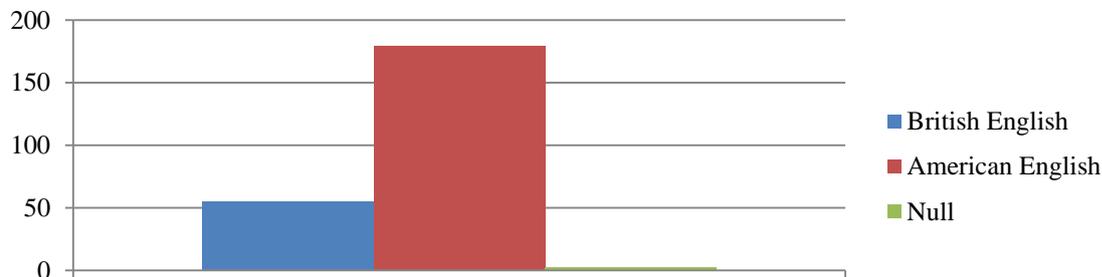


Figure 14

4.2.3. Question 3: I own a rowboat or I own a rowing boat

Here I examined which term participants used; the American English term *rowboat* or the British English term *rowing boat*.

108 participants answered that they would prefer to use the British English term *rowing boat* that is 46%. 127 participants answered that they would prefer to use the American English term *rowboat* or 54%. One participant did not answer this question.

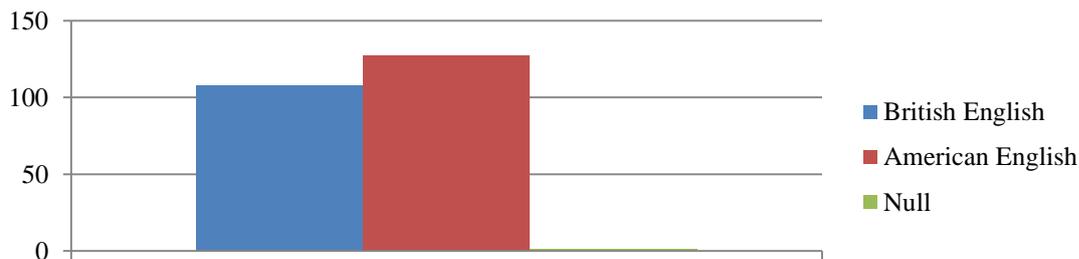


Figure 15

4.2.4. Question 3: Public transport is better for the environment or Public transportation is better for the environment

This question showed which word the participants preferred. *Transport* is the British English variety and *transportation* the American English variety.

92 participants or 39% preferred the British English term *transport*, 135 participants or 58% preferred the American English variety. 9 participants or 3% did not answer this question.

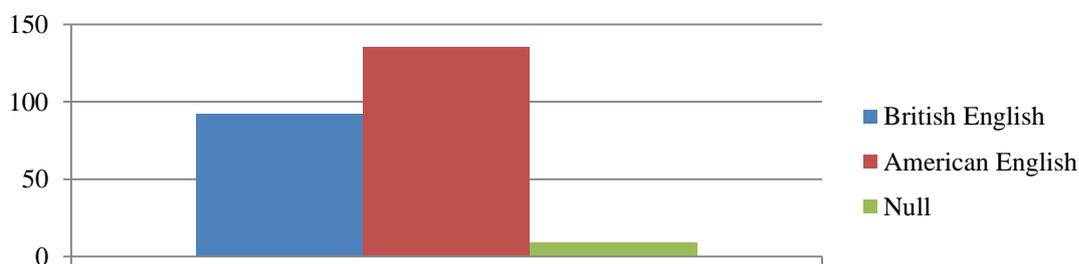


Figure 16

4.2.5. Question 5: The city centre is that way or The city center is that way

Here I looked at spelling. *Centre*, with a *-re* ending is the British English variety and *center* with a *-er* ending is the American English variety.

65 participants or 28% preferred the British English spelling with *-re* ending, 170 participants or 72% preferred the American English spelling with *-er* ending. One participant did not answer this question.

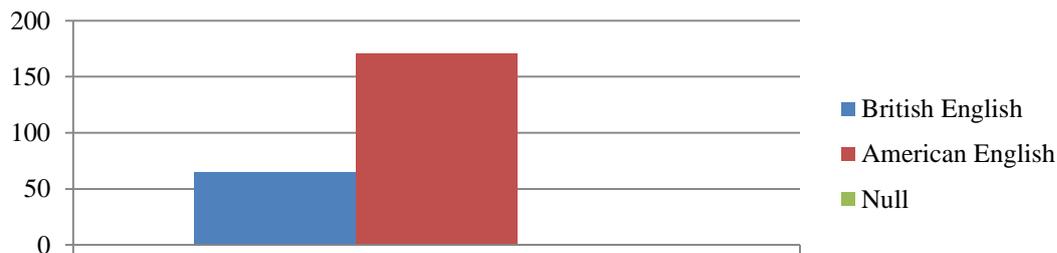


Figure 17

4.2.6. Question 6: Drink driving is the cause of many fatalities or Drunk driving is the cause of many fatalities

In this question I looked at which form the participants used. *Drink driving* is the British English form and *drunk driving* the American English form.

221 preferred the American English form *drunk driving* or 94%. 14 participants preferred the British English form *drink driving* or 6%. One participant did not answer this question.

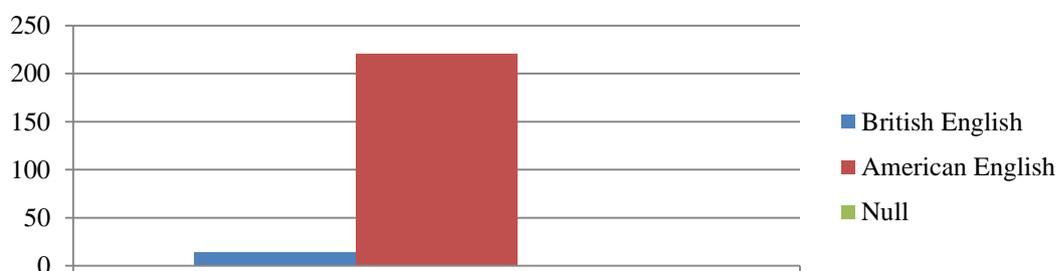


Figure 18

4.2.7. Question 7: Put the luggage in the boot of the car or Put the luggage in the trunk of the car

This last question in part 2 of the survey showed whether the participants were more likely to use the British English word *boot* or the American English word *trunk*.

209 participants or 89% preferred the American English word *trunk*, 25 participants or 11% preferred the British English term *boot*. One participant did not answer this question.

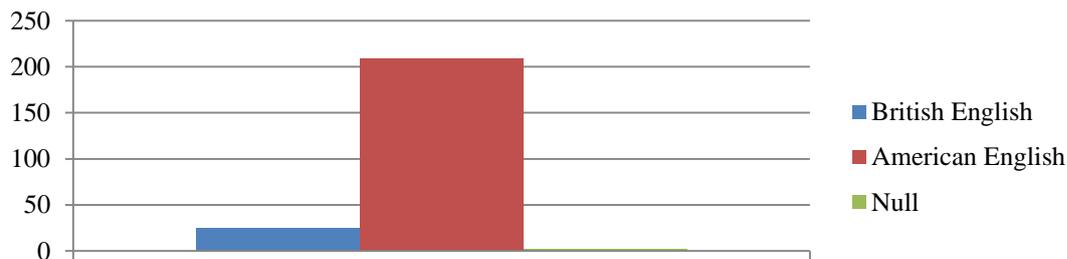


Figure 19

4.3. Part three

Part three was also a choice between British English and American English. This time the participants had to determine whether a sentence is of a British English variety or American English. The choices given were *British English*, *American English* and *I am not sure*.

4.3.1. Question 1: I like your new trainers

Here the word *trainer* is the word that indicates that the sentence is written in the British English variety. The American word would be *sneakers*.

135 participants or 57% answered that this question is written in British English which was the correct answer. 76 participants or 32% answered that this sentence was written in American English and 25 participants or 11%.

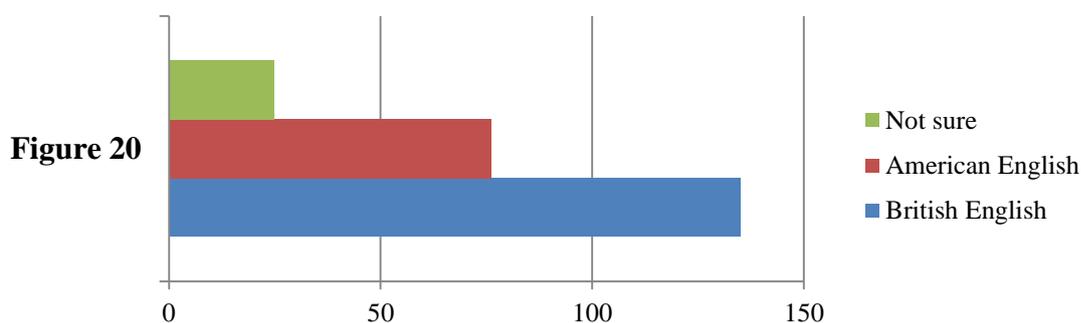
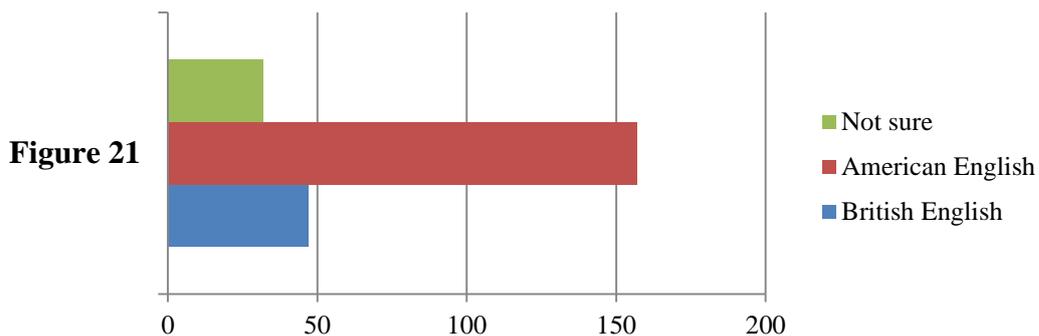


Figure 20

4.3.2. Question 2: The car is in the parking lot

In this sentence it is the term *parking lot* that indicates that the sentence was written in the American English variety. The British English term is *car park*.

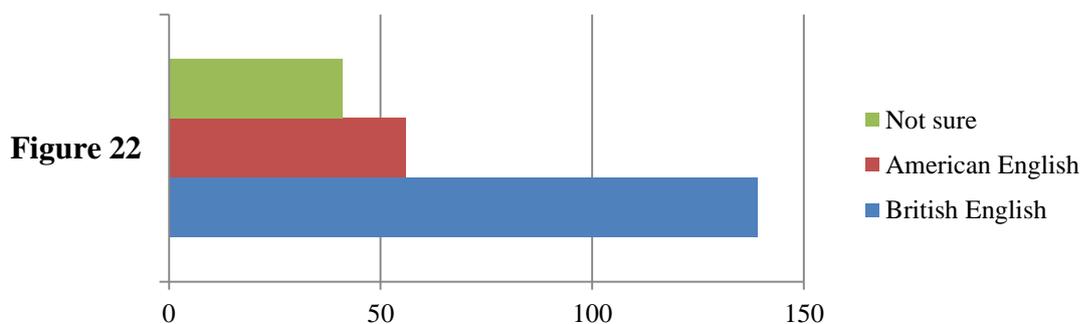
157 participants or 67% answered correctly, that the sentence is written in American English. 47 participants or 20% answered that the sentence is written in British English and 32 participants or 13% were not sure.



4.3.3. Question 3: We went to Barcelona on holiday

Here, the word that shows this is a sentence written in British English is *holiday*. *Vacation* is used in American English.

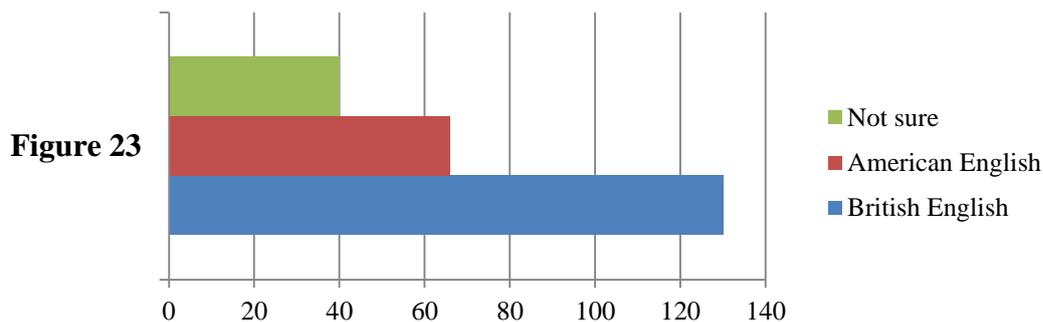
139 participants or 59% answered with the correct answer of British English. 56 participants or 24% answered that this was written in American English. 41 participants or 17% were not sure.



4.3.4. Question 4: They are building a new railway over there

Here, the word *railway* showed that this sentence was written in British English. The American English word is *railroad*.

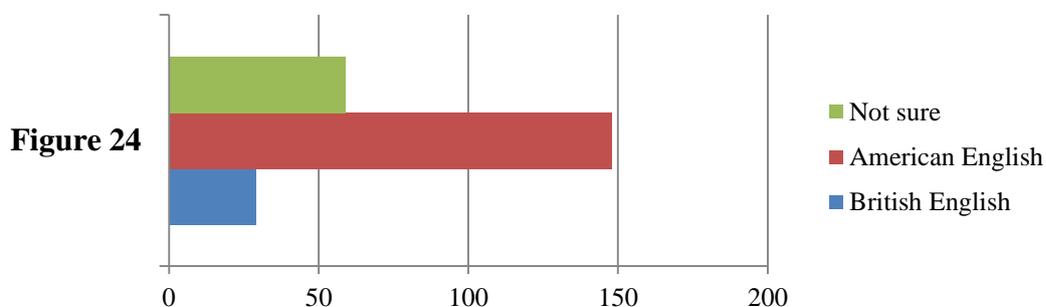
130 participants or 55% answered correctly; that this sentence is written in British English. 66 participants or 28% answered that this sentence was written in American English and 40 participants or 17% were not sure.



4.3.5. Question 5: The licence plate fell off my car

In this sentence the term *licence plate* is the word that indicates that the sentence was written in the American English variety. The British English term is *number plate*.

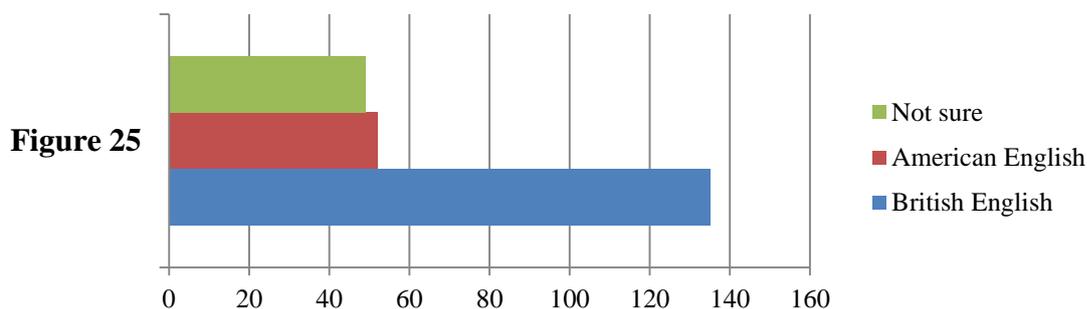
148 participants or 63% answered correctly that the sentence was written in American English. 29 participants or 12% answered that the sentence was written in British English and 59 or 25% were not sure.



4.3.6. Question 6: What is the postcode in Garðabær?

Here it is the word *postcode* that indicates that this was a sentence written in the British English variety. The American term would be *zip code*.

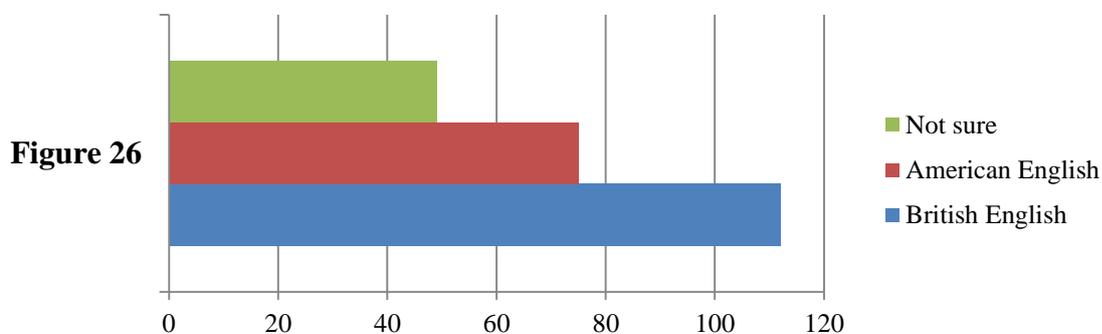
57% or 135 participants answered with the correct answer of British English, 22% or 52 participants answered that the sentence was written in American English and 21% or 49 participants were not sure.



4.3.7. Question 7: I have already eaten

In this sentence the verb was in the present perfect, *eaten*. This shows that the sentence is written in British English. The American English sentence would most likely have been written with a simple past; *I already ate*.

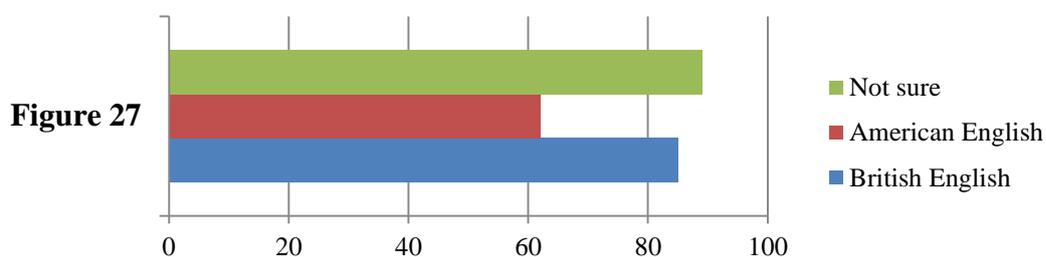
112 participants or 47% answered correctly. 75 participants or 32% answered that the sentence was written in American English. 49 participants or 21% were not sure.



4.3.8. Question 8: Spain are the champions

In this sentence it is the plural of the verb *be*: *are*, that indicates that this sentence was written in the British English variety. In British English sport teams, even when they are a whole country, are in plural. *Spain is the champions* would be the American variety.

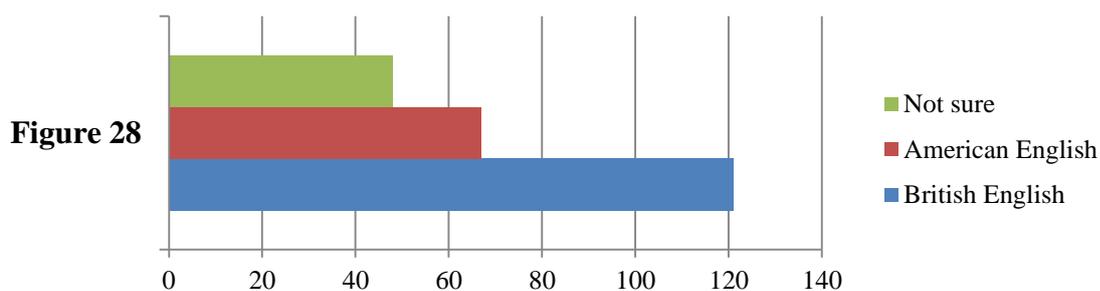
Most participants were not sure whether this sentence was written in British English or American English, 89 answered so or 38%. However, 85 participants or 36% did answer correctly that the sentence is written in British English. 62 participants or 26% answered that the sentence was written in American English.



4.3.9. Question 9: Pop star Michael Jackson has died, aged 50

American English usually drops the inflectional suffix; it tends to favour clipped forms so here the American English form would be *Pop star Michael Jackson has died, age 50*. Where the *-d* at the end of *aged* is dropped.

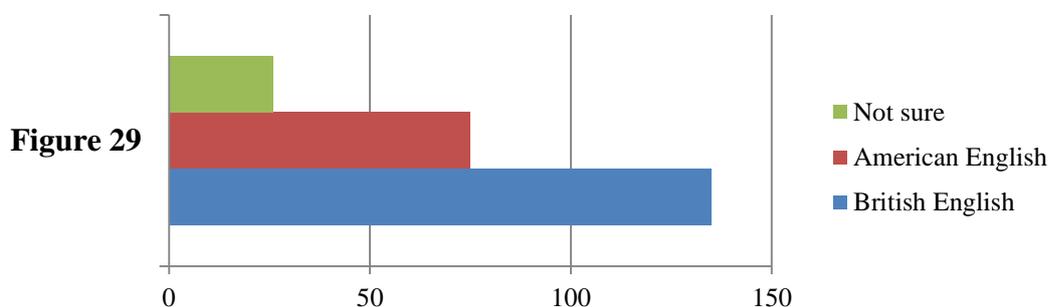
121 participants or 51% answered this question correctly and said that the sentence was written in British English. 67 participants or 28% said that it was written in American English and 48 participants or 20% were not sure.



4.3.10. Question 10: There must be silence in the movie theater

Here I was testing spelling. This was the American English spelling with the *-er* ending. The British English words end on *-re*.

Here, most participants, or 135 which is 57%, answered that the sentence was written in British English, which is incorrect. 75 participants or 32% answered that the sentence is written in American English, which is the correct answer. 26 or 11% were not sure.



5. Analysis

5.1. Introduction

The results were collected through *Google Spreadsheet* and transferred from there to *Microsoft Excel* for counting and further analysis. Out of the 257 participants that took part in the survey, 21 was counted as null as they only filled out the background information, and few had answer the first one or two questions. The 236 participants that were left answered most of the question, a few participants did leave out one or two question, I counted those answers separately.

Prior to analysing the answers, I grouped together the answers according to the participants' background information. I put all males in one category and all females in another. I also grouped together the answers according to the participants' age, education and how much time they spend watching television and on the Internet. The final group contained participants who had lived abroad; they were divided by the place, in which they had lived;

Iceland, the United Kingdom, the United States, other English speaking countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, two or more English speaking countries, and countries that have another language than English as native tongue.

5.2. Groups and questions

As stated, the participants were divided into groups based on their background information. The difference between the groups was very little. Generally, most participants preferred to use the American English variety in their answers. All participants, except one, used both varieties in their answers. This one participant answered each question in part one with the American variety and this participant also preferred the American variety in all questions in part two. This participant; a 22 year old female had only lived in Iceland and only had a compulsory education.

In part one, the only questions that gave more British English answers than American was question ten: *Pétur spilar fótbolta á mánudögum*. Question eight in part one: *Farsíminn minn er bilaður* did get many British English answers, or 42% compared to 51% of the American English. This might be explained by the fact that both of the British English terms are widely used in Europe. Some variations of the word *mobile* are used in languages such as French, Danish and Spanish, where it has been adjusted to each language's phonological system. Many European languages, including Icelandic, use a direct translation of the term *football* that is quite similar to the English term, for example; *fótbolti* in Icelandic, *fodbold* in Danish, *Fußball* in German and *fútbol* in Spanish.

In part two, the only question that gave more British English answers was the first question: *Come and see what I bought* or *Come see what I bought*. The phrase in Icelandic would have the Icelandic word for *and* to connect these verb phrases which might explain the participants' preference for the Standard British English variety. *Come and see what I bought* is also a phrase that is acceptable in American English and so most participants might feel more comfortable using the phrase with the word *and*. In this question I focused more on the answers that showed the version that is allowed only in American English; the bare infinitive after the word *come*.

Most groups answered Part Three correctly except for the last question: *There must be silence in the movie theater*. Most answered that this was a sentence written in British

English. The *-er* ending of the word *theater* was the clue that this was written in American English, however, I suspect that this clue was a little too subtle for most participants and that their guess was based on the use of the modal *must*, which is somewhat more frequent in British English but the use of which is not considered to be altogether British English (Algeo, 2006).

5.3. Part one and two

5.3.1. Gender

There was not much gender difference in the answers. Most participants preferred to use the American English variety, except in those questions I mentioned before. The males were between 1% and 11% more likely to answer using the British English variety than females in all questions except four. Those were: question five in part one, where 19% of males and 34% of females answered using the word *stone*, questions eight in part one and questions three and six in part two. In these last questions the females were between 1-7% more likely to answer with the British variety than males.

Three questions showed a substantial difference between the genders. Question three in part one had 31% of males answering with the British variety but only 14% of females. In question two in part two; *John studies at the University* or *John studies at University*, 67% of the males answered that they preferred the British English variety but only 20% of the females preferred this variety. And question four in part two had 56% of the males and 38% of the females answering with the British English.

This study indicates that males are more likely to use British English terms than females but the difference is not great.

5.3.2. Age

The majority of the participants in these groups preferred to use the American English variety for most questions. I focused on the group where participants were between 21-30 years old and the group where the participants were between 31-40 years old, as there were only eleven participants under the age of twenty and eighteen over the age of forty. The usage of British English seemed to increase with age. For each question a slightly more percentage of

participants aged 31-40 answered using British English than participants aged 21-30, this percentage difference was between 1% to 10%. One question showed more difference: question five in part two, 23% of participants aged 21-30 preferred to use the British English variety whereas 40% of participants aged 31-40 preferred it.

Three questions showed more participants ages 21-30 favouring British English than participants aged 31-40. These were questions one in part one and four in part two. These questions only showed a 1% difference between those age groups. Question five in part one showed more difference: 30% of participants aged 21-30 used the British term *stones*, whereas 21% of participants aged 31-40 used this term.

Only seven participants were under the age of twenty and so their results are not significant for this survey. Their answers did show substantial preference towards American English. Only eighteen participants were over the age of forty and their English usage showed preference towards British English. This suggests that younger people are more likely to use American English although further studies are needed in this area.

5.3.3. Education

The American variety is the preferred one in almost all questions but the use of British English is more frequent with participants who have had higher education. Participants who had a university education were more likely to answer using British English than those who had a secondary education. Those who had secondary education were more likely to use British English than those who only had compulsory education. The participants who had other type of education, such as vocational education were too few to get a significant result. 81% of university-educated participants and 85% of participants with a secondary education answered using the American English term *elevator*. 91% of participants who only had a compulsory education used the term *elevator*. This was the development throughout the survey.

Questions that had a high percentage of British answers with the overall participants followed this pattern as well. In question ten in part one the participants were asked to translate the sentence *Pétur spilar fótbolta á mánudögum*. 31% of university educated participants answered using the American term *soccer*, 48% of the participants with a

secondary education answered using *soccer* and 53% of participants with a compulsory education.

There were three questions that did not fit this pattern: question eleven in part one had more participants who only had a compulsory education answering using the British term *sweets*, or 9%, than participants with a secondary education, or 4%. However, participants with a university education who answered using the British term *sweets* were 13%. In question two in part two, there were more participants with a secondary education that answered that they preferred the British term over the American term than participants with a university education. And only 50% of participants with a university education preferred to use the British term *rowing boat*, while 57% of participants with a secondary school education and 53% of participants with a compulsory education answered that they preferred *rowing boat*.

The survey indicates that participants with a higher education are more likely to use British English in their speech.

5.3.4. Living abroad

75% of Icelanders use English in their travels to foreign countries, both to countries where English is the native tongue and others. And 47% use English when travelling to Scandinavian countries (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2001, p. 45-46). I compared groups where participants had lived in Iceland their whole life to the group that had lived in a non-English speaking country. I also grouped together and compared those who had lived in the United Kingdom, those who had lived in the United States and those who had lived in other English speaking countries.

The results were almost identical between the group that had lived in foreign non-English speaking countries and the group that had only lived in Iceland. Both groups were partial to American English in most questions and only a few percentage points set them apart for each question.

Two questions gave almost equal answers: in question eight in part one 46% of participants who lived in a foreign non-English speaking country would use *mobile phone* and 46% would use *cell phone*. 43% of participants who had only lived in Iceland would use *mobile phone* and 50% would use *cell phone*. Question three in part two gave similar answers;

the division in the Icelandic group was 50% for *rowing boat* and 50% for *rowboat*. For the non-English speaking country group it was 51% *rowing boat*, 49% *rowboat*.

Two questions gave more British English answers: question ten in part one, 57% of participants who had only lived in Iceland used the term *football*, 39% used *soccer* while 64% of participants who had lived in a foreign country used *football* and 33% used *soccer*. In question one in part two 61% of participants who had only lived in Iceland preferred to use the British English variety and 70% of participants who had lived in a foreign country preferred this variety.

The answers coming from participants who had lived in the United States were, as expected, more partial to American English. Not one participant did however, answer all questions with American English. In all other groups there was never a question where 100% answered using American English. All of the participants in this group answered question six in part two with the American English variety of *drunk driving*. *Soccer* was also the preferred choice for 68% in question ten in part one, and *cell phone* was the choice for 71% in question eight in part one. In questions three and four in part two, 75% preferred to use the American term *rowboat* and 54% preferred to use the American term *transportation*.

40% of participants who had lived in the United Kingdom answered question one in part two with the American English answer of *come* + bare infinitive. This was the highest percentage rate of all groups in “living abroad” category for this question. The other groups did follow closely with 39% of those who had lived in the United States, 38% of those who had only lived in Iceland and 30% of those who had lived in a non-English speaking country.

The participants who had lived in the United Kingdom did show some preference toward Standard British English in questions such as question seven in part one where 55% would use the word *trousers*, question ten in part one where 80% would use the word *football* and question four in part two where 55% would prefer the word *transport*. In this last question 40% would rather use the American English term *transportation*, and in question eight in part one 50% would use the term *mobile phone* and 50% *cell phone*.

The group that contained participants who had lived in other English speaking countries, such as Canada and Australia, and those who had lived in more than one English speaking country could not be analysed as there were too few participants in this group to get a significant result.

The evidence suggests that living abroad does not affect the amount of American English in a participant's speech, unless the country in which he lived is the United States. Participants who had lived in the United Kingdom had slightly more British English answers than others but the majority usually had American English answers.

5.3.5. Television watching and Internet usage

Most participants watched television for 1-5 hours every day or 70% and 24% said that they watched it for less than an hour, 6% watched television for more than 6 hours. There was no indication that the amount of television-watching affected the participants' answers. Participants who watched television longer did not have more American English answer than those who watched it less.

The same goes for Internet-usage. The amount of time the participants spent on the Internet did not affect their answers. The only difference between those groups was that those who spent less than one hour on the Internet were less likely to answer question one in part two with *come* + bare infinitive or 24% compared to 42% of those who spent 1-5 hours on the Internet. Those who spent more than 6 hours on the Internet were too few to get significant results.

The answers for participants who watched television for 1-5 hours and who spent 1-5 hours on the Internet, and the answers for participants who watched television for less than one hour and who spent less than one hour on the Internet was almost identical, indicating that the same participants spent the same amount on television-watching as they do on the Internet.

The study indicates that it is not the amount of input from such visual material as television and the Internet, which affects a participant's speech. Looking at these results and the results from the age-groups, it seems that it is not the amount of input but the age when a participant is exposed to the input that makes a difference.

5.4. Part three

As stated; according to The Icelandic National Guide for Upper Secondary Schools' main curriculum for foreign languages from 1999, students having finished nine credits should

“know the difference between American and British English, especially concerning spelling and the most common words, and be able to distinguish between usages.” (author’s translation Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, p. 14). In this part I wanted to see if this statement applies to the participants in this survey. I looked at the percentage of the answers to determine whether a group had answered correctly or not. If 50% or more participants in a group answered the question correctly, I determined that this statement applied to the group.

5.4.1. Gender

Less than 50% of both males and females answered question ten incorrectly. Less than 50% also answered question eight correctly but the percentage for the correct answer was still higher than the incorrect answer and participants who were not sure. The same goes for question seven for the females. Higher percentage of males answered each question correctly than females except question three where 60% of females answered it correctly and 56% males.

5.4.2. Age

Participants aged 31-40 had more participants answering correctly than participants aged 21-30 in most questions. 35% of participants aged 31-40 answered question eight incorrectly, 34% answered correctly and 31% were not sure. Less than 50% answered question seven correctly but those who did were still more than those who answered incorrectly or were not sure. The same goes for question four for ages 21-30.

5.4.3. Education

Less than 50% of all groups answered question ten correctly. 37% of university educated participants answered it correctly; 34% of compulsory educated participants and only 24% of secondary educated participants. Higher percentage of university educated participants answered the questions correctly than the participants with a secondary or compulsory education, except question five where 72% of participants with a compulsory education answered correctly, 64% of university educated participants and 57% of participants with a secondary education.

More participants with a university education answered that they were not sure of the answer to question eight than those who answered it correctly, or 42% who said they were not sure and 31% who answered correctly. 37% of participants with a secondary education answered question eight correctly and 37% were not sure.

53% of participants with a compulsory education answered question seven incorrectly, 41% answered correctly. Only 47% of participants with a university education answered this question correctly, 28% answered incorrectly and 25% were not sure.

As stated, more participants with a university education answered the questions correctly than those who had secondary education or compulsory education. Those participants who had a compulsory education and those who had a secondary education had very similar answers.

5.4.4. Living abroad

Those participants who had lived in the United States had over 50% of participants answering each question correctly, except question 10 where only 46% answered correctly.

50% of those participants who had lived in the United Kingdom answered question one incorrectly. 49% of those who had lived in a non-English speaking country answered this question correctly and 48% answered question three correctly. The other groups had over 50% answering these questions correctly.

Those participants who had only lived in Iceland had less than 50% of participants answering question four, seven and eight and nine correctly, but the percentage for the correct answer was still higher than the incorrect answer and the “not sure” answer. This was also the case for question seven and eight for participants who had lived in the United Kingdom and for question eight for participants who had lived in non-English speaking countries.

57% of participants who had lived in non-English speaking countries answered question ten correctly. Only 28% of those who had lived in Iceland answered it correctly and 25% of those who had lived in the United Kingdom.

5.4.5. Television watching and Internet usage

Those who watched television for less than one hour every day and those who watch it for 1-5 hours every day had very similar answers. Less than 50% of participants who watched television for 1-5 hours answered question seven correctly but the percentage for the correct answer was still higher than the incorrect answer and the “not sure” answer. This was also the case for participants who spent less than one hour every day on the Internet and those who spent 1-5 hours on the Internet.

All groups had more participants answering “not sure” to question eight than the correct answer or the incorrect answer or between 38% and 40%. Between 30 and 36% did answer question eight correct.

Those who spent less than one hour on the Internet had less than 50% answering questions one, three, five, six, seven and nine correctly. More participants answered these questions correctly than incorrectly or “not sure”.

6. Conclusions

As Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir says in *English in Iceland: Second Language, Foreign Language, or Neither?* (2007): “It has been a generally accepted fact for some time that the average Icelander is exposed to English almost every day through TV, music lyrics, computer games, the Internet, tourists, and travel.” She suggests in this article that the exposure to English is so much that calling it a foreign language in Iceland might not be accurate. She suggests that

the exposure which languages learner have to a language is that is not their native tongue would perhaps be better described on a continuum, extending from a second language situation with ample input to a foreign language situation where the exposure is limited to the classroom (p. 52).

In this regard, English is more like a second language to Icelanders than a foreign language.

The survey reported in this thesis shows that it is not just “English” that Icelanders use as a second language or foreign language; it is “American English”. Most participants prefer to use an American English vocabulary in their answers. The amount of American English in

answers decreased with higher age and higher education. Males were also slightly more likely to use British English.

Icelanders still use a mixture of both but according to this survey, American English is dominant. The only British English term that was used more than the American English term was *football*. This might be explained by the similarity of the Icelandic translation *fótbolti* and by the fact that this sport is more popular, both here in Iceland and in Europe, than it is in the United States. The English Premiership League is highly popular here in Iceland and so the term can be heard almost every weekend in many households.

Icelanders seem to be able to differentiate between British English and American English, as part three of the survey shows. Question eight in part three was the one that most participants answered “not sure” The grammatical difference between British English and American English is very small in this regard and so having most participants answering “not sure” might be due to the fact that they might not notice the difference.

The research indicates that males, those who had a university education and participants aged 31-40 were slightly better at determining whether a sentence is written in British or American English than the other groups. However further studies in this area are needed to get more accurate results, as the participants did not represent all groups of Icelandic people.

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