It Don't Matter…Or Does It?

The Significance of Non-Standard Grammar Features in Relation to Reading Comprehension

Authors: Frida Nilsson & Julia Lu

Supervisor: Dr. Francis M. Hult

Term: Spring 2018

Course: ÄENM92 (30 hp)

Master's Thesis (*Examensarbete*)

English for Subject Teachers

(Upper Secondary)

Abstract

The development of English into a dynamic and diverse compound of language varieties has led to a spread of non-standard grammar features. Such linguistic development affects language education, and thus the significance of common non-standard grammar features needs to be explored. The purpose of this study was thus to investigate the significance of traditional "correctness" of grammar in relation to reading comprehension. The grammar features we examined were attested and pervasive non-standard conjugations of *be* and *do*, frequent in World English varieties, namely: Invariant *don't* for all persons in the present tense, *was* for conditional *were*, *was/were* generalization, deletion of auxiliary *be*: before progressive, deletion of auxiliary *be*: before *gonna*, and existential/presentational *there's/there is/there was* with plural subject. The study was carried out through a reading comprehension test taken by 108 Swedish upper secondary school students, where the success-rate of non-standard grammar features was compared to the success-rate of their standard counterparts. The results showed that although the standard test generated slightly higher results, the difference was small and most non-standard grammar features proved successful for comprehension. One test item regarding *was/were* generalization stood out, since this received a higher score of correct answers on the non-standard reading comprehension test. Two other items, regarding deletion of auxiliary *be* before *gonna* and *was* for conditional *were*, generated the same percentage of correct scores on the non-standard and standard tests. Deviant from the trend, however in the reverse direction, was invariant *don't* for all persons in the present tense, where the standard-test generated significantly higher results. We conclude that most of our examined non-standard grammar features do not appear to drastically affect reading comprehension negatively, and that due to the high success-

rate of some non-standard grammar features, teachers ought not to dismiss them as erroneous without consideration.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

1. Introduction

Historical and recent developments in English have led to dynamic linguistic variety within the English-speaking world. Thus, the English language has not been subject to a uniform linguistic evolution, but globalisation has rather led to great linguistic diversity, with different varieties of English developing individual characteristics. Such characteristics spread through various means of communication, most commonly through modern media, providing unlimited and global access to non-standard features (Mair, 2016; Schneider, 2016; Seoane, 2016). As a result, traditional standards of correct grammar, according to standard British and American English, are being challenged by pervasive non-standard grammar features. However, research shows that many pervasive and documented non-standard grammar features are viewed as erroneous rather than legitimate (Hundt, 2016; Lee, 2006). This aligns with our personal field experiences, where we have observed instances of students being exposed to and using such non-standard grammar features, yet teachers promote standard grammar limited to British- and American English. Regarding English education for upper secondary school in Sweden, Skolverket (2011) states: "Through teaching students should also be given the opportunity to develop correctness in their use of language" (English: Aim of the subject). Hence, the debate regarding which features can be labelled as "correct" ought to be of interest for Swedish teachers of English.

Our field experiences made us wonder if students comprehend the non-standard grammar features equally well as the standard ones. Due to a lack of research on non-standard grammar features of English in relation to Swedish upper secondary school students' comprehension, we have aimed at contributing to the accumulation of research on the matter. Our study thus examines the significance of standard vs non-standard grammar features in relation to reading comprehension among Swedish upper secondary school students. We do this by in further detail

presenting background information and research on the subject of World English varieties and the development of non-standard grammar features. We then move on to presenting the methodology for our study, which describes how we conducted a reading comprehension test of an experimental nature, followed by the theoretical perspective, namely schema theory, applied to our results. Finally, our results, that is the success-rate of the non-standard features compared to the success-rate of the standard features in relation to reading comprehension, are presented and discussed.

1.2 Aim

The aim of this project is to test if non-standard conjugations of *be* and *do*, frequently used in different varieties of English, affect Swedish upper secondary school students' reading comprehension in comparison to standard conjugations of *be* and *do*. Collected from the Electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English, we focus on the six most frequent non-standard uses of *be* and *do*. These are:

- **Deletion of auxiliary *be*: before *gonna*** i.e. "I gonna leave now"
- ***Was/were* generalization** i.e "you was there"
- **Deletion of auxiliary *be*: before progressive** i.e "the nurse comin soon"
- **Existential/presentational *there's/there is/there was* with plural subject** i.e. "there's two men waiting in the hall"
- **Invariant *don't* for all persons in the present tense** i.e "he don't like me"
- ***Was* for conditional *were*** i.e "if i was a boy"

2

With this as our starting point, our research question is: What is the importance of traditional "correctness" of the six chosen verb conjugations in relation to reading comprehension? Our hypothesis reads as follows: Common non-standard conjugations of *be* and *do*, frequent in various World English varieties, do not negatively affect students' reading comprehension.

2. Background

The aforementioned development of World English varieties will now be further explored for a deeper understanding of todays' diversity within the English language, with focus on the historical background and recent development, spread and influence of non-standard varieties.

2.1. World Englishes

The spread of the English language is unprecedented in relation to any other language in modern times. However, rather than resulting in a uniform global English, "English is indigenizing into new vernaculars and specializing into national and international varieties of the lingua franca" (Seoane, 2016, p. 1). The development of English is thus a "differential evolution", rather than an evolution towards monolingualism (Seoane, 2016, p. 1). This differential evolution is in part an emergence of hybrid varieties of English and local languages - language mixtures which in today's world, where the term multiculturalism frequent in educational policies and the corporate world, do not only serve multiple communicative purposes, but also function as identity markers and representations of modern society (Seoane, 2016, p. 1). These new varieties of English are often called World Englishes, New Englishes or Postcolonial Englishes. Such a development accordingly bears consequences for language pedagogy and language policy, especially since

young learners of English around the world are exposed to usage of the English language which might deviate from the standard rules of American- or British English (Seoane, 2016, p. 1).

The development of World Englishes has opened a major field of research (Seoane, 2016, p. 4). The development of World Englishes has historically been the result of colonial-contact settings, but focus in research has now shifted to the dynamics of the development of 21st century English varieties, described as "the appropriation of (components of) English(es) for whatever communicative purposes at hand, unbounded by distinction of norms, nations or varieties [...] driven predominantly by utilitarian considerations" (Seoane, 2016, p. 4). The conceptualization of World Englishes is thus complex, and deals both with historical aspects of linguistic development, as well as current evolution of English due to modern global mobility of people, language, and culture (Seoane, 2016, pp. 4-5). One attempt at conceptualizing and understanding this latter description of the development of English is Mair's "World System of Englishes", in which digital media is accounted for a significant part of the development of English (Seoane, 2016, pp. 4-5). The World System of Englishes divides different varieties of English into four categories. These categories are defined based on of number of speakers, international function as well as geographical diffusion. In Mair's World System of Englishes, American English is defined as the hypercentral variety. Though it might be contested by British English speakers, the fact that American English is categorized as the only hypercentral variety is based on evidence of uncontested American English influence: "For several decades there have been strong unidirectional currents of lexical borrowings from (standard and non-standard) AmE to practically all other varieties, including BrE, but only trickles in the reverse direction" (Mair, 2016, p. 24), and when it comes to spelling, borrowings into other languages use American spelling more often than British (Mair, 2016, p. 24). After the hypercentral variety of

American English comes the super-central ones such as British English, Australian English and Indian English. In the super-central category, both standard English varieties, such as the mentioned varieties, as well as non-standard ones, such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Jamaican Creole English, can be found. Following the super-central varieties are the central ones, such as Irish English, Scottish English and Jamaican English. This category, just as the super-central category, includes both standard English varieties and non-standard ones, the latter including for instance United States "Southern" English" (Mair, 2016, p. 24). The fourth category consists of the peripheral varieties, many of them rural non-standard dialects and ex-colonial varieties such as pidgins and creoles, for example Maltese English and Cameroonian English (Mair, 2016, p. 24; Seoane, 2016, p. 5). This model suggests that linguistic influence follows a downwards direction in the described linguistic hierarchy. The World System of Englishes also makes it possible to follow the influence of non-standard World English varieties on other English varieties (Seoane, 2016, p. 5). One example of this is Jamaican Creole versus Jamaican Standard English - Jamaican Creole belongs to the super-central category, whereas Jamaican Standard English belongs to the central category:

> This is a clear inversion of the prestige of the two languages/dialects in their own national base, but reflects the fact that most Jamaican influence on other varieties of English or other languages in the world proceeds through Jamaican Creole rather than Jamaican English (Mair, 2016, p. 25).

The influence of non-standard varieties of English is thus one dynamic topic of research. Among other things, research in the field of World Englishes deals with examining whether non-standard features, instead of being dismissed as erroneous or interfering, represent an ongoing linguistic development in native or contact varieties of English (Seoane, 2016, p. 5).

2.2 Globalization and the Spread of Non-Standard Varieties of English

When it comes to language development, contact varieties are often rooted in local or socially bound vernacular communities. However, when it comes to varieties of English, some non-standard varieties are spreading globally through mainly modern media (Mair, 2016, p. 19). One such variety, which influences standard-English varieties, is African American Vernacular English, which can be connected to hip hop music: "Elements of AAVE have become part of the linguistic substrate of a linguistically very diverse global hip hop sub-culture" (Mair, 2016, p. 20). Usage of certain non-standard linguistic features, connected to urban versions of AAVE, represent language norms where differential use of linguistic features is a way of signalling membership, role, and status in society. Linguistic symbols, such as words, expressions, and phrases, thus function as commodities for these usages (Mair, 2016, p. 20).

The creolisation of European colonial languages came about as a result of forced cultural and linguistic contacts between Europe and West Africa during and after the transatlantic slave trade. While this process took place during the 17th- and 18th centuries, today's currents of migration, voluntary in a larger extent, result in World English varieties such as African American Vernacular English, Caribbean creoles and West African pidgins spreading and coming into contact with each other, especially in modern urban areas. With the aid of modern media as a channel for further linguistic and cultural exchange, this has brought about "a forum for linguistic experimentation and lively language-ideological and cultural debate" (Mair, 2016, p. 31). This kind of development has led to a change in language hierarchy - non-standard language uses which have historically entailed a stigmatizing factor have in some social contexts now earned prestige and appreciation in symbolic value (Mair, 2016, p. 33).

The above mentioned linguistic development suggests that a more detailed look into widely used non-standard features ought to be of interest for language teachers, since dismissing them might not only limit communicative alternatives, but also restrict existential means of expression.

3. Research on Development, Usage and Perceptions of Non-Standard Grammar

Having demonstrated an overview of the development of World English varieties, we now proceed to present examples of said development with focus on some specific non-standard grammar features, to provide additional dimensions to the understanding of the complexities of grammar standards.

3.1 When Errors Become Features

When coming across unusual language use, the understanding of such occurrences might often, at first, be that the non-standard feature observed is some sort of error. However, as Hundt described it, "[t]hese apparent 'errors' are of potential interest because they may, in fact, be on their way of becoming a 'feature' of a contact variety or be instances of ongoing change" (2016, p. 37). Such non-standard language features are often bound to World English varieties or dialects which deviate from standard BrE or AmE. It is often in communities where other languages come in contact with English that such non-standard language use develop. However, standard varieties such as BrE end AmE play a special role in the spread of language development - due to its magnitude in range, the hypervariety American English has the ability

to influence language use globally, since it has a wider reach than more locally bound varieties. Laitinen and Levin accordingly found that American English "is often at the forefront of change" (2016, p. 229). Thus, even though World Englishes can develop in smaller regions, change in language (and linguistic influence) spreads most rapidly through the most dominant variety. For our research, this might be of significance, since American English comes into contact with various World English varieties (for example African American Vernacular English), and Swedish students in turn are exposed to a significant amount of American influence (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002).

In this day and age of development of the English language, or perhaps rather the many languages of English, keeping standards of what is correct or not is no small feat:

> (...) a conventional classification into "varieties" of English, old and new, is no longer sufficient to capture its "poststructural diffusion" into many new settings, outside of established contexts of language teaching. A grassroots' spread of English as a (partial) set of resources has been going on, not really producing coherent "varieties" but just serving their speaker's needs in bits and pieces of language production, grammatical or not (Schneider, 2016, p. 254).

Diverse and developing varieties of World Englishes are thus a reality which most speakers of English - native and non-native alike - are exposed to and influenced by, voluntarily or not. Passive exposure to various World English varieties thus occurs at times without intention of the recipient (Schneider, 2016, p. 254). Schneider explained that this exposure to World Englishes is often the result of travel and other similar physical connections between people of different cultures, but is also in a large extent due to modern media (2016, p. 255). Modern media offers

both unintended and intended exposure to World English varieties (Schneider, 2016, p. 255). For instance, non-standard language variation can be used through media to generate attention from or connection to a certain audience more effectively. According to Schneider, examples of such audiences could be rural-or dialect speakers, "who may not be thoroughly familiar with standard speech forms" (2016, p. 263). Non-standard uses of English might thus work as a consciously used tool for different purposes, possibly even making communication more effective. Learners of English are through such language exposure additionally often in contact with language use where non-standard features are used explicitly as social markers, providing people with the tools to demonstrate belonging/distance to certain social contexts. Using "errors", or non-standard speech, might thus also be a way for people to demonstrate identity (Mair, 2016, p. 33). If a non-standard use makes communication and understanding effective, but does not conform to standard American or British English, the question of whether this is to be dismissed as incorrect in an educational setting arises. Additionally, dismissing non-standard features of English might fail to take into account languages' existential functions. Below, examples of non-standard grammar features of English, where the status of error versus change might not be fully clear, are provided.

3.1.1 Be + been.

One example of a possible emergent feature in disguise of an error is the combination of *be + been*, for example:

> … the institutionalization of labour relations are been seen as progressive. (Hundt, 2016, p. 37)

This example is taken from the Canadian component of ICE[1], and thus represents a variety of English as a national language, where the student from whose text this extract has been taken has English as a first language. However, Hundt (2016) also found similar usages of *be + been* in contact varieties of English. The emergence of this feature not only in contact varieties but also in standard ones might be an indication of an error that is on its way of becoming a legitimate language feature of English (Hundt, 2016, p. 38). Hundt examined this issue through various methods, one being providing examples of this feature to native speaker language teachers and linguists. Regarding the issue of errors being seen as developing features, one teacher said she "often initially mistook instances of ongoing change or regional variation in her students' writing as typos" (Hundt, 2016, p. 41). Hundt's native speaker survey, in addition to an analysis of meta-linguistic comments on this topic found on the internet, showed that this unusual feature was mostly viewed as a performance error, much more often than being regarded as an instance of incipient change (2016, p. 41). Even though this feature is regarded mostly as a performance error by native speakers of English, its occurrence in other World English varieties might state otherwise: "In Ghana and Sri Lanka, *be + been* is regularly attested in written texts, both published and unpublished" (Hundt, 2016, p. 43).

When it comes to instances of *be + been* found in corpora of British English, the phenomenon is present, but seems to occur in mostly spoken language (Hundt, 2016, p. 45). In corpora of American English, examples of this feature from spoken sources are present, and so are examples from edited written sources, some of which come from academic writing, and Hundt has accordingly stated that dismissing *be + been* as a performance error thus is more complicated for American English (2016, p. 45). Hundt (2016) also provides examples of early

---

[1] The International Corpus of English

usage of this feature from various historical corpora[2]. Historically, usage of *be + been* has been mostly connected to certain ethnic and/or social groups, and can be found in corpora from the early 18th century, becoming more regular (even though still relatively low frequency) in the 19th century (Hundt, 2016, p. 50). Similarly, other examples of non-standard uses of the verb *be* are also historically connected to certain ethnic groups, such as the use of invariant *be* in AAVE (Myhill, 1988, p. 304).

One hypothesis of trying to explain the perception of this feature as erroneous, despite its long history of usage, could according to Hundt be that this feature is in some instances of such an unobtrusive nature (for example *been* being confused with *being*, due to audible homophony) that its existence has not made itself noticeable enough to trigger awareness of its use, and thus might not be thought of as an emergent feature of change (2016, pp. 38,41). Its unobtrusive nature can arguably be found in the native speaker survey, where 22 out of 64 participants did not notice *be + been* on first reading of an authentic example of its usage (Hundt, 2016, p. 40). The question of obtrusiveness in relation to frequency could be worth noting in comparison to the previously mentioned invariant *be*. This non-standard usage of *be*, more obtrusive to the standard conjugated *be*, is increasing at a rapid rate in modern urban speech, and can arguably be considered a feature in the process of grammaticalizing (Myhill, 1988, pp. 303-306).

In summary, the analysis of *be + been* is complex. This feature has been a part of varieties of English for at least 300 years, but due to low frequency and unobtrusive nature it is still viewed by language experts mainly as a performance error. Hundt concluded that even though *be + been* is relatively infrequently used, "it is too consistently attested to be written off

---

[2] The Corpus of Historical American English; the Corpus of Late Modern English; OBC: a historical corpus of British English speech-based language (Hundt, 2016, p.47)

as a mere performance error" (2016, p. 57). In relation to our study, the discussion on the perception of frequent non-standard grammar features as incorrect will be further added to.

3.1.2 Was/were.

Another non-standard usage of the verb *be* is *was* and *were* in conditional clauses. The past tense forms of the verb *be* have been variable throughout history, even in standardized forms of English where *was* and *were* have mostly stabilized (Cheshire & Fox, 2009, p.1). With regards to the past forms of *be*, Lee's (2006) study found that Hong Kong grammar textbooks and practice books tended to regard the non-standard English use of indicative *was* as incorrect in conditional clauses, whilst electronic databases of published written language showed that indicative *was* was used more frequently than the standard use of subjunctive *were*. The aim was to examine whether grammar books used in Hong Kong to teach English as a second language reflected actual grammar usage, focusing on *was* and *were* in hypothetical *if*-clauses and in nominal clauses (Lee, 2006, p.81). Authors of 13 of the 20 examined textbooks considered subjunctive *were* as the only correct way of indicating a hypothetical sense, suggesting an extensive prescriptive view. For prescriptive grammar, there is only what is considered grammatical, i.e. the correct way of using a language, and ungrammatical, i.e. incorrect use of language (Hashemi & Daneshfar, 2018, p.341). Hence, prescriptivist grammar advocate the view that "one variety of a language has an inherently higher value than others" (Lee, 2006, p.81). This is problematic according to Lee, since research has shown that many teachers view grammar books as an authority and consequently ask students to change what might be actual use of language to standard English only (2006, p. 80). During the analysis of the Australian Corpus of English, Ozcorp, and the Hong Kong Corpus from the Macquarie Asian English Corpus, Lee found discrepancy between current language use and the grammar books. Although subjunctive *were*

12

occurred, indicative *was* "reflects the actual usage, and therefore does not reflect the speaker's 'lack of education" (2006, p. 90). The widespread use of indicative *was* is rather a way to make English more simplified. Thus, Lee argued that textbooks describing subjunctive *were* as the only correct way to form hypothetical conditions is unjustified, and although Lee did make a point of the impracticality of describing all varieties in a textbook, Lee still stressed the importance of linguistic variation awareness (2006, pp. 90-91). In contrast to prescriptive grammar, descriptive grammar focuses on the actual use of a language across all varieties (Hashemi & Daneshfar, 2018, p. 341), which Lee urged teaching materials to consider. This research showed that *was* for conditional *were* is a common and current feature but did not, however, touch upon the relevance it has in relation to learners' reading comprehension.

3.1.3 Third person singular don't.

When it comes to *do*, our other verb of interest, third person singular *don't* can according to Martinez (2016, p. 62) "be considered as one of the most prominent features of non-standard negation", yet has received limited attention in relation to its use (Martinez, 2016, p. 62). This non-standard grammar feature has even reached mainstream presence in popular culture, for instance in Zayn Malik's song "She don't love me" (2016) and in August Alsina's "Don't matter" (2017) where the phrase "it don't matter" is frequently sung.

Regarding non-standard uses of grammatical features, Martinez found that it is often members of ethnic communities who introduce new features, and thus development and change, to languages, usually due to mother tongue influence (2016, p. 64). According to Martinez (2016, p. 65) and Squires (2013, p. 207), third person singular *don't* is frequent especially in

13

African American English, but also other varieties such as Welsh and Irish English, Tristan da Cunha English, East African Vernacular English, Hong Kong English, and Malaysian English.

One theory for explaining the emergence of this non-standard feature is it being the result of a regularisation from all other persons to the third person singular (Martinez, 2016, p. 65). On this issue, Martinez reflected:

> It would also be interesting to assess the extent to which language change could be taking place here, with a tendency to oversimplify the third person singular auxiliary negative system in favor of the use of *don't* for all forms of the present verbal paradigm (2016, p. 81).

Usage of third person singular *don't* is also common in clauses with negative concord[3], and Martinez concluded that there seems to be a correlation between negative concord and third person singular *don't,* possibly because these are two untraditional ways of expressing negation (2016, p.74). On this issue, Martinez found that the accumulation of negatives accentuates the negative meaning of the clause (negative concord):

> With *don't* this also seems to be the case, that is, negative concord sentences with *don't* on many occasions serve the same communicative purpose as a single clause negation, although at times they may accentuate their negative meaning (2016, p.76).

Martinez labelled this a linguistic strategy, where non-standard features actually make the meaning even clearer. If such is the case, and communication is aided by non-standard features of English, the usage of such non-standard features might not be simply incorrect, especially

---

[3] Negative concord is a double negative such as: *They don't know nothing*

since Martinez also found that usage of third person singular *don't* also is common amongst young native speakers of British English (2016, pp. 80-82), and has thus also claimed its place in Mair's super-central standard variety of English (Mair, 2016, p.24). Martinez found that in his analysis of corpora[4], non-Anglo speakers of English in London use third person singular *don't* less than native Anglo speakers in London, providing a surprising result in relation to non-standard features often developing in linguistically diverse communities (2016, p.80). Martinez observed that "some of the combinations with third person singular *don't* may well be taken as formulaic, prefabricated expressions or lexical associations that may figure in linguistic memory even if their general meaning is easily predictable from the general construction" (2016, p.76).

Martinez' analysis concludes that usage of third person singular *don't* is frequent among British teenagers, but the traditional *doesn't* is even more common. Third person singular *don't* is more common among teenagers than adults. Examining non-standard language features might thus be of extra interest in relation to youths, such as Swedish upper secondary school students.

3.2 Linguistic Form in Relation to Comprehension: Implicit Causality

The question of the importance of focus on linguistic form in relation to reading comprehension is relevant for the issue of how much one ought to focus on grammatical correctness in education. Analysis of another linguistic dilemma, called implicit causality, might shed light on to which extent detailed focus on form might affect comprehension of English. In cases of implicit causality, deciding the preferred referent of a pronoun in dependent clauses (the understanding of who caused the event) is dependent on the reader's own previous knowledge, rather than the linguistic form, for example:

---

[4] The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language; Linguistic Innovators Corpus

John admires Eric because he… (he = Eric), compared to John angers Eric because he …

(he= John)

According to Hartshorne, in the debate on importance of linguistic form versus non-linguistic cognition, some researchers have claimed that "implicit causality is related to a broad social judgement task, and it is affected by general knowledge about the participants in the event" (2014, p.1). However, Hartshorne demonstrated findings which supported the notion that implicit causality "is driven primarily by linguistic structure and only minimally by general knowledge and non-linguistic cognition" (2014, p. 1). We suggest that our study could be of relevance in a similar debate, more specifically on the importance of the linguistic form in cases of traditional vs non-traditional conjugations of *be* and *do*, possibly aiding in informing teachers on what kind of grammatical features actually affect language comprehension. This issue also ties in with theoretical perspectives on reading comprehension such as the traditional versus cognitive view (Vaezi, 2006; Urquhart & Weir, 1998) - are details such as traditionally correct conjugations of *be* and *do* necessary for mastering English, as in accordance with the traditional view with focus on the ability to decode symbols such as words or grammatical features, or do learners and users of English get by equally well without this knowledge, with the understanding of reading comprehension as an interpretive process where the learner's own knowledge is what creates hypotheses on the meaning of the text?

3.3 Linguistic Features and Their Effect on Communicative Success

Seidlhofer (as cited in McKay, 2010, p. 93) listed a few linguistic features which do not seem to affect communicative success (this focusing on oral language communication). These were:

- Dropping the third person present tense -*s*.

- Confusing the relative pronouns *who* and *which.*

- Omitting the definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in ENL [English as a native language], and inserting them where they do not occur in ENL.

- Failing to use correct tag questions (e.g. *isn't it*? or *no*? instead of *shouldn't they*?).

- Inserting redundant prepositions, as in *We have to study about…*

- Overusing certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as *do, have, make, put, take.*

- Replacing infinitive-constructions with *that*-clauses, as in *I want that.*

- Overdoing explicitness (e.g. *black color* rather than just *black*).

However, these do not include our chosen *be* and *do*-conjugations, and thus our research could contribute to the understanding of what generates communicative success. Hence, a body of research demonstrates both the importance as well as common use of non-standard grammar features, but could benefit from a deeper understanding on the most frequent *be*-and *do* conjugations in relation to reading comprehension.

4. Methodology

To test our hypothesis that students' reading comprehension is not affected negatively by non-standard conjugations of the verbs *be* and *do*, students were recruited to participate in an experimental study where they either completed a standard or non-standard conjugation reading comprehension test. The tests were made up of excerpts from authentic literature from a variety of Englishes, created in light of reading comprehension assessment theories. The following section moves on to describe in greater detail the ways this research was conducted.

4.1. The Electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English

To select the non-standard grammar features for this research, a tool was needed to guide us towards the most common ones. The electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English[5], or eWAVE, is an online database covering 50 varieties of English as well as 26 pidgins and creoles based on the English language, mapping 235 features of non-standard English grammar (Kortmann & Lunkenheimer, 2013). The data was collected from descriptive materials, corpora, and contributions from 83 experts in linguistics and English from around the world. With eWAVE it was possible to access a list of grammar features that frequent in English varieties and from that list determine the six most attested[6] conjugations of the verbs *be* and *do*. The results were:

Table 1 Most Attested Conjugations of *Be* and *Do*

Grammar feature	Attestation (%)
Was for conditional were	76
Existential/presentational there's/there is/there was with plural subject	71
Invariant don't for all persons in the present tense	68
Deletion of auxiliary be: before progressive	58
Was/were generalization	58
Deletion of auxiliary be: before gonna	53

With this, eWAVE further informed on all varieties of English within their database that shared each of the grammar features. From that, we opted for all those varieties that eWAVE had deemed a value of A, which stands for "feature is pervasive or obligatory" (Kortmann &

---

[5] eWave was created by the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies,the English Department of the University of Freiburg, Germany and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig.

[6] Terminology used by eWAVE

Lunkenheimer, 2013). The gathered list of all the varieties which shared the chosen features can be found in appendix A. Therefrom, appropriate literature written in the chosen varieties of English were found through library- and online databases to form the basis of our experiment. But before proceeding to present the literature, it is necessary to present the methodology for this study.

4.2 Experimental Research Method

The applied method for this research was experimental in nature, as it was a method which allowed us to quantitatively measure the differences non-standard and standard grammar conjugations have on students' reading comprehension. Experimental methods in language learning research are traditionally applied when exploring causation by manipulating variables to achieve a change. In other words, factors can be tweaked and changed by researchers who then examine whether the changes elicit altered behaviour by participants (Phakiti, 2014, p. 24). In our case, non-standard grammar features were these factors. Moreover, applying an experimental research design allows researchers to regulate research situations to hinder other variables interfering with the results. Nunan further defines experimental research methods as exploration of "the strength of relationships between variables" (1992, p. 25). Within experimental methods, variables are then whatever can be changed, in other words not constant. Variables can be divided into three main groups: independent, dependent, and confounding variables. Firstly, independent variables are the variables that researchers expect to have an effect or influence on the result. Secondly, dependent variables are then the result of the independent variable as they depend on the independent variables, and are therefore what researchers attempt to measure (Nunan, 1992, p. 25; Phakiti, 2014, pp. 27-28). For this research, the independent variable

19

consists of the non-standard grammar features, whilst the dependent variable consists of the test score from the reading comprehension tests. Thirdly, experiments should be carefully controlled to assure that variables sought out to be measured are in fact what is being measured to make research credible and trustworthy - in other words to enhance the validity. Hence, confounding variables must be identified. Confounding variables are variables that "are not of interest, but which can influence research outcomes" (Phakiti, 2014, p. 23). Phakiti exemplifies these as being: "the materials used, pre-existing differences in language proficiency and measures of linguistics accuracy" (2014, p. 23). These will be further discussed in each part of the experiment.

4.2.1 The experiment.

A true experiment is characterized by incorporating both a pre- and post-test, using experimental and control groups, and finally random assignment of subjects (Nunan, 1992, p. 41). The different components of an experiment will be discussed further below, but due to the circumstances of this research, it was not possible to fully carry out a true experiment, but rather a study of experimental nature. It was deemed impractical to have a random assignment of subjects as it would have meant that all the participating students were randomized into groups across different classes and schools. Time and means were factors that hindered the prospects of this. Instead, convenience sampling was adapted based on the groups of English students who were available to us. Phakiti (2014) points out that the lack of randomization does however affect the generalizability of the study, which we took into consideration when we analyzed the results. The design of this research method consisted of an inclusion/exclusion criteria test, followed up by non-randomized experimental and control-group tests. With this, there were two different groups of participants, with one group exposed to items containing non-standard grammar

features, and the other exposed to items consisting of the same extracts with standard grammar features instead. The results were then compared to each other.

As aforementioned, experimental methods give researchers an opportunity to control the situation participants are in. In order to test the hypothesis that English non-standard *be* and *do* grammar features do not negatively affect students' reading comprehension, the independent variable had to be controlled, or in other words manipulated. Manipulation of a variable occurs when the factor of interest is varied to test its effect and at the same time control confounding variables (Phakiti, 2014, p. 33). To manipulate the variables, we used the "presence or absence technique" (Phakiti, 2014, p. 62), which was applied for the non-standard/standard tests. It meant that non-standard grammar features were present for the experimental group and absent for the control group. Since the participating classes were of different sizes, the distribution between the non-standard English test and the standard English test was conducted through dividing each class into halves, with one experimental group and one control group. This ensured that both groups were made up of participants who had received the same education as well as having a similar level of reading comprehension skills, making it a valid comparison (Phakiti, 2014, pp. 64-65).

To ensure that the experimental and control groups were comparable, all the students had to be studying English at a Swedish upper secondary school during the time of the tests along with passing a certain level of reading comprehension. As a result, inclusion/exclusion criteria were introduced to regulate the groups.

4.2.2 Inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria in the form of a reading comprehension test was carried out to implement the group criteria. Although the groups could not be fully equal in terms of proficiency level distribution within the groups, due to the convenience sampling and inability to rearrange students, measures were taken to create inclusion and exclusion criteria for a more homogeneous group. The inclusion criterion meant that students had to possess a certain level of reading proficiency to ascertain that their reading abilities were not confounding variables threatening the validity of the non-standard English grammar test. The inclusion/exclusion test was made up of the first part of a national test example for reading comprehension in English 5 available to the public, called *The Summer of '63*. The test consisted of nine items where a text passage was followed by multiple choice questions and short answer questions based on the content of the texts. A maximum of nine points could be given, whereas a majority of correct answers, i.e. five points, was set as an eligible score to further participate in the study.

4.2.3 Non-standard/standard tests.

The following procedure was applied for constructing our instrument testing the chosen non-standard grammar features. The final product is referred to as the non-standard/standard tests and can be found in appendix B and C.

4.2.3.1 *Literature.*

Our choice of using literature as a medium for testing non-standard grammar comprehension is based on several factors. Typically, written and published texts have a higher level of formality than oral production since they require conscious linguistic choices and revision. For example, Hundt (2016, p. 45) draws the conclusion that the non-standard combination of *be + been* is

much more difficult to dismiss as a performance error in American English than British English, since American English provides examples of this feature in edited written sources more frequently than in British English. Additionally, the writer has made a conscious decision to use the non-standard variety over standard English, suggesting that any non-standard features are not mistakes (Dawson Varughese, 2012, p. 17).

For the reason that previous reading comprehension tests of a similar nature testing specific non-standard English grammar features could not be found, it was most suitable to construct our own tests. The advantage of constructing a unique instrument made it possible to elicit the target ability that was sought after and "[a]s such, it will produce data that can be used to answer a specific research question" (Phakiti, 2014, p. 120). Before creating the non-standard/standard tests, it was necessary to be able to produce tests that were similar to the inclusion/exclusion criteria test concerning difficulty level. As the inclusion/exclusion criteria test consisted of an English 5 national test for upper secondary schools in Sweden, the non-standard/standard tests had to be equivalent to the difficulty of English 5 as well. This was possible to determine and achieve with the help of the Flesch Reading Ease[7]. When adding the passage from the national test to Microsoft Word 2016, the Flesch Reading Ease came to a score of 82, which in turn then set the approximate readability level for the excerpts in the non-standard/standard tests to be found soon after. The scale of which excerpts were allowed to differentiate from the inclusion/exclusion criteria was set to a Flesch Reading Ease score of 82 +/- 10. The 14 excerpts selected for the non-standard/standard reading comprehension tests ended up with Flesch Reading Ease scores that span from 75,1 to 88,5.

---

[7] Flesch Reading Ease is a readability formula aimed at measuring text difficulty based on word and sentence lengths in texts, and is commonly used in the creation of L2 reading material (Hartley, 2016).

The basis of the reading comprehension tests were excerpts from literature in different authentic variations of English. These included Australian English, Bahamian English, Barbadian Creole, Gullah, Hong Kong English, Jamaican Creole, Indian English, Newfoundland English, and Trinidadian Creole. The excerpts for the tests were selected, aside from a Flesch Reading Ease score around 80, based on authenticity from literature in different varieties of World Englishes, as well as their availability. In the process of selecting literature, randomization was the first choice, but was later disregarded due to lack of literary tradition or availability for some varieties of English. Another option was to find literary works from English varieties that frequented in two or more of the selected grammar features, which all of the above varieties except for Indian English did. Finally, it was a matter of availability. For each grammatical feature, it was then decided to have two different items in order to increase the reliability of the tests but also limit the amount of time spent taking the tests (Hughes, 2003, p.44). Moreover, a handful of the excerpts contained additional non-standard grammar features that were not any of the six target features, and were therefore manipulated so each excerpt only contained the one non-standard grammar feature that was of interest, and the remainder of the text turned into its standard English equivalent. This diminished prospects of measuring other non-standard grammar features as confounding variables to ensure that the independent variable was the main factor which could lead to students' ability to comprehend the text (Phakiti, 2014, p. 33). The chosen literature comprising the non-standard/standard tests are as follows:

- *2 States: The story of my marriage* by Chetan Baghat, 2009
- *An evening in Guanima: A treasury of folktales from the Bahamas* by Patricia Glinton-Meicholas, 1993
- *Cloudstreet* by Tim Winton, 1991

- *Folktales of Newfoundland (RLE Folklore): The resilience of the oral tradition* by Herbert Halpert and J.D.A. Widdowson, 2015

- *Ghetto slam* by Chrystal A. Evans, 2014

- *I been in sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots: A novel* by Susan Straight, 2013

- *In the castle of my skin* by George Lamming, 1953

- *Light falling on bamboo* by Lawrence Scott, 2012

- *Paradise overload* by Brian Antoni and Robert Antoni, 1997

- *Psynode* by Marlee Jane Ward, 2017

- *The Shanghai union of industrial mystics* by Nury Vittachi, 2006

Additionally, there are two item distractors featured in the non-standard English reading comprehension tests. These distractors are meant to distract the test takers from recognizing that the tests only consist of non-standard English grammar, thus avoiding that the participants respond in a way they think is what is sought after. The distractors are made up of excerpts that use standard English grammar taken from two different novels: *Outlander* by Diana Gabaldon and *Falling Angels* by Tracy Chevalier. All the excerpts were then made into multiple choice items.

4.2.3.2 *Multiple choice items.*

For the non-standard grammar feature test, a multiple choice item test technique was utilized. Multiple choice items were also used in the national test for the inclusion/exclusion criteria of this research, therefore accustoming the students to a similar type of test since Urquhart and Weir (1998, p. 154) highlight the importance of the participants' familiarity with the task type, so that their performance is not affected by the lack of knowledge of how to carry out the test.

Furthermore, multiple choice items prevent possible interpretations or judgements of responses needed from researchers so scoring is consistent and increases reliability, since participants are not required to produce any language themselves (Hughes, 2003; Phakiti, 2014; Urquhart & Weir, 1998). For our tests, both written alternatives and illustrations were used. Each item contained two, three or four options, where there was only one correct alternative and the rest being distractors. However, applying multiple choice items also brings about guessing from the participants which can lead to inaccurate results, since there is no way to determine what scores came about through guesswork. Therefore, Hughes advices that items should have four alternatives, but also mentions that there are restrictions to how many suitable distractors grammar test items might possibly include (2006, p. 77). Accordingly, few of the test items comprise of one correct answer and only one distractor as they are of the true/false item nature. However, item 4 has an additional distractor to reduce the likelihood of guessing, as suggested by Hughes (2003, p. 144). Nonetheless, Urquhart and Weir (1993, p. 159) explain that multiple choice items are suitable when it comes to testing isolated details, which arguably is what the non-standard grammar features are, and for that reason we have found multiple choice items to be beneficial for the non-standard/standard tests.

Another challenge when facing multiple choice items was to write successful items. Giving clues to the correct answer, having more than one or none correct answers, and avoiding ineffective distractors, are all faults that are crucial to prevent in order to write successful items (Hughes, 2003, p.77). When designing the questions that followed the excerpts, a set of guidelines created by Fillmore and Kay (as cited in Urquhart & Weir, 1998, p. 152) were followed. They express that:

- Questions should not contain harder vocabulary than the text.

- Questions should have only one unequivocal answer.

- If the candidate understands the text they should be able to answer the question.

- Skills not related to reading should not be tested.

- Incidental insignificant information should not be tested.

- Questions that require stylistic or other ambiguous judgements should be avoided.

Test items were therefore moderated several times to generate their current state. Then it was further critical to trial the test items before conducting the non-standard/standard tests on students, as suggested by Hughes (2013) and Urquhart and Weir (1993).

4.3 Trialling/Pilot Study

Two English 6 students at the upper secondary school piloted both tests in order to determine the time necessary for completion. This was required when contacting teachers to give them an estimated time frame.

4.4 The Participants

The participants in this study were students studying English at upper secondary schools around Scania. Four classes studying English 5, two English 6 classes and one English 7 class were subjected to the tests. In total, there were 148 students who conducted the inclusion/exclusion criteria test. Each student used a test number made up of the last three numbers of their telephone number and the last two numbers of their social security number to ensure their anonymity and that no numbers would appear twice. Before conducting any of the tests, the students were informed that the tests were voluntary and that they were anonymous. The only information

provided regarding the contents of the tests was that it concerned reading comprehension, for the purpose of not drawing attention to the non-standard features and possibly influencing the results.

Out of the 148 participants, 112 students passed the inclusion/exclusion criteria and were available on both occasions. The distribution was 58 non-standard tests and 54 standard tests. For an equal comparison, we thus had to remove 4 non-standard tests through randomization. The statistics generated from the tests were then analyzed.

4.5 Reading Comprehension - Traditional vs Cognitive View

To make sense of the statistics, we analyzed the results through applying schema theory. Our statistics can only indicate whether participants do or do not understand non-standard conjugations of *be* and *do*. However, it cannot answer the question of why. By analyzing our results with schema theory, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of students reading comprehension in relation to the chosen features.

Vaezi (2006) explains that two opposing theoretical views of reading comprehension have dominated understanding of reading comprehension during the 20th and 21st centuries. The first of these is the traditional view, in which reading comprehension is understood as a bottom-up process with emphasis on form and the actual text. According to the traditional view, the reader begins by learning a set of skills in order to understand the text, which together function as building blocks for an overall ability to comprehend written text. This paradigm understands reading comprehension as the ability to decode symbols, letter to letter and word for word, in order to reach the full meaning of a text (Urquhart & Weir, 1998, pp. 40-41). The meaning is within the text, and the reader is to take in the information provided, which gives the reader a

role as a passive receiver of information. This theory for understanding the process of reading comprehension has received critique on being too focused on form, with emphasis on features such as words and structure.

In opposition to this view is the cognitive view, in which a top-down perspective is dominant and where the reader is in focus. According to Vaezi (2006), "cognitively based views of reading comprehension emphasize the interactive nature of reading and the constructive nature of comprehension". The cognitive view understands reading as a process where the reader continuously constructs hypotheses on the meaning of text, based on the input of information from the text and the reader's own understanding of it, in other words: "a process in which readers sample the text, make hypotheses, confirm or reject them, make new hypotheses, and so forth" (Vaezi, 2006). Vaezi (2006) does however make a point that despite those who reject the traditional theory, they cannot wholly dismiss the fact that reading comprehension requires knowledge about words and structure. Because unlike the traditional view, the reader discards letters and words in texts that they find irrelevant for their comprehension by "using their language knowledge (syntax and semantics) to guide their guesses" (Urquhart & Weir, 1998, p. 43). The information retrieved from the text interacts with the reader's own memory and knowledge as building blocks. This way, comprehending text could be understood as schematic.

4.5.1 Schema theory.

As previously mentioned, schema theory assumes that texts do not carry any meaning, in contrast to the traditional viewpoint. Instead, the text provides directions for readers "as to how they retrieve or construct meaning from their own, previously acquired knowledge" (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 556), also known as their background knowledge. The notion of schema can

be traced back to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant who first argued that the way the world can be interpreted is through schema, implying that an understanding of new things and ideas only comes when they are in relation to one's previous knowledge (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 553; Cook, 1997, p. 86). According to schema theory, background knowledge is organized into a network of knowledge units with a hierarchical structure. These knowledge units, or schemata, store information about different concepts of the world such as people, objects, events, and situations (An, 2013; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Grabe, 2009). In these concepts, there is also linguistic schemata that contain knowledge about the different vocabulary and grammar involved (An, 2013, p. 131).

Advocates for schema theory explain that knowledge stored in the schema is always present and interacts with the text when triggered through reading, and schemas help to organise, interpret and sort information and experiences into the existing concepts. This implies that readers' schemas expand and build a bigger base for reading comprehension while they are reading (Urquhart & Weir, 1998, pp. 63, 69-70). According to An, there are two ways reading can affect schema. Firstly, a word or textual signal that is "highly suggestive of a certain schema" can activate a whole schema such as "fire brigade" activating the "fire accident" schema (2013, p. 131). Although a single textual signal might not instantly activate the correct schema that the writer has intended, when more such signals are presented the reader can focus on the correct schema. The second variety is when there is no distinct correlation between two or more textual signals but "an activated schema will give schema-specific significance", making sense of the signals such as "apron" and "chair" activating a "kitchen" schema (An, 2013, p. 131). This schematic process "allows people to interpret new experiences quickly and economically, making intelligent guesses as to what is likely, even before they have explicit

evidence" (Cook, 1997, p. 86). In other words, an efficient reading comprehension presumes that the reader is able to activate an appropriate schema when reading a text (An, 2013; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

Grabe (2009, p. 78) on the other hand, points out that schema theory has been criticized for being too vague in that it is has not yet been empirically possible to map out the mechanics of schemas and how it is stored, changed, retrieved, and used. Additionally, others have argued that the theory has proved to be problematic when attempts have been made to improve students' reading comprehension through targeting specific schemata (Grabe, 2009). However, the way schema theory is applied to our research is not a way of understanding how the cognitive mechanisms function or how reading comprehension can be improved with the help of schemata, but schema theory will inform this study to determine whether students at Swedish upper secondary schools have sufficient schemata of the grammar features of *be* and *do* to comprehend the excerpts.

5. Results

Following, the results of the non-standard and standard reading comprehension tests will be presented and analyzed with the help of schema theory and previous research.

Table 2 Overall Score

Maximum number of correct scores = 12

	Participants	*Mean*	*Median*	*SD*
Non-standard test	54	9,35	9,5	1,76
Standard test	54	10,19	11	1,96

Table 2 describes the results from the non-standard/standard tests of 108 participants. We included the median in order to demonstrate a representative depiction of the results, since the mean can be affected by single participants with scores that deviate significantly from the average. The lowest score for the non-standard test was 5/12, and 4/12 for the standard test. The standard deviation shows that the variance was low for both tests, thus signalling that the participants' scores were relatively close to the mean. This, in combination with the high level of correct scores regarding both the mean and the median, indicates that the participants were fairly successful at comprehending texts with non-standard grammar features, and that the comprehension of such texts did not differ much from texts with standard grammar features. The consistency demonstrated by the standard deviation, median and mean makes the results more dependable, since we do identify a clear pattern in the regularity of the results.

Deletion of auxiliary *be*, before *gonna* (item 1 & 8)

Table 3.1 Item 1

	Non-standard	*Standard*
Kitty has left	1	2
Kitty will leave*	48	48
Kitty won't leave	2	1
Kitty will not leave	3	3
Correct answers (%)	89%	89%
Bold alternative=correct answer		

For item 1, the non-standard and standard tests received same percentage of correct scores, suggesting that the feature is not crucial for reading comprehension. We understand this as either the context provided enough information for the reader to make a logical guess (Cook, 1997, p. 86), or that students already possessed sufficient schema in relation to the non-standard feature (An, 2013). Students may have come across this non-standard feature due to

prefabricated expressions in platforms such as modern media where non-standard varieties are frequently present (Mair, 2016, p. 19). The test results resemble those of implicit causality in that there is sufficient previous knowledge of the context, so that the linguistic form is not crucial for comprehension (Hartshorne, 2014, p.1).

Table 3.2

	Non-standard	Standard
What will happen?	42	46
What has happened?	7	4
What didn't happen?	2	1
What won't happen?	3	3
Correct answers (%)	78%	85%

The non-standard test showed fewer correct answers, indicating that the feature in this context mattered more to comprehension. Here, the context was possibly more difficult, making it harder for the participants to activate the correct schemata, since both non-standard and standard scores were lower than the previous item. Since item 8 was indeed of more difficult readability according to Flesch Reading Ease, our results could in this case suggest that with a more difficult context, a non-standard grammar feature might result in more confusion. Still, the standard test got only 4 more correct answers, and so the difference does not imply a major disadvantage caused by the non-standard feature. However, for this non-standard feature, the validity of the items can be questioned on the topic of whether testing has been conducted for reading comprehension of the non-standard grammar feature or the vocabulary knowledge of the word *gonna*, since *gonna* in itself is a non-standard form of *going to*. Nonetheless, we could not change *gonna* into *going to* since this specific formulation is part of one of the most common non-standard features according to eWAVE.

***Was/were* generalization** (item 2&4)

Table 4.1 Item 2

	Non-standard	*Standard*
The first speaker is tidy	38	42
The first speaker used to be tidier	1	0
The first speaker is not tidy	9	9
The first speaker will tidy the studio	6	3
Correct answers (%)	70%	78%

Table 4.2 Item 4

	Non-standard	*Standard*
One person.	9	11
Two or more people.	41	38
No one.	4	5
Correct answers (%)	76%	70%

When analyzing item 2, the difference between correct scores on the non-standard and standard tests was again not major, thus resulting in the detection of a pattern forming. However, in the case of item 4, the non-standard text actually generated more correct answers than the standard one. Even though the difference might appear of little significance, it deviates from the trend of the standard features generating a higher test-score. It is the only item that presents such results. However, the distribution between the different alternatives was rather similar on both item 2 and 4, with the percentage of correct scores ending up below average in comparison to most other features, which indicates that though the students struggled with past tense subject verb agreement for *be,* the non-standard version did not seem to be a determining factor.

Deletion of auxiliary *be,* before progressive (items 3 & 6)

Table 5.1 Item 3

	Non-standard	Standard
When the witch's feet start to bleed, she will stop dancing.	2	0
When the witch's feet start to bleed, she starts to dance.	3	2
When the witch's feet start to bleed, she will continue dancing.	49	50
When the witch's feet start to bleed, she has already stopped dancing.	0	2
Correct answers (%)	91%	93%

For item 3, both the standard test and the non-standard test resulted in a high percentage of correct answers. The sentence from item 3 in the non-standard test: "When you see my feet bleed," she continued, "and I drop down on my knee, I still dancing" seems to have been comprehensible without the standard grammar feature, and therefore suggests that it activated the necessary schemata (An, 2013; Cook, 1997, p. 86). The participants thus already had the required background knowledge, but noteworthy is that the non-standard feature did not significantly negatively affect reading comprehension.

Table 5.2 Item 6

	Non-standard	Standard
The children were not worth bothering with.	16	8
The children are not worth bothering with.	30	42
The children will not be worth bothering with.	4	0
The children had not been worth bothering with.	4	4
Correct answers (%)	56%	78%

This item showed a significant difference between the non-standard test and the standard test results. However, this might be due to a fault in our own item construction, since the standard test contained the almost identical sentence as the correct alternative. Therefore, we

hold the position that the difference is due to our error, rather than being dependent on the feature itself. We affected the internal validity of this item, making its results untrustworthy. We thus advocate that item 3 (see Table 5.1) is more representative of the importance of this feature. The validity of this item will be further discussed in the concluding discussion.

Existential/presentational *there is* with plural subject (items 7 & 14)

Table 6.1 Item 7

	Non-standard	*Standard*
One animal block, two offices and two stereo rooms.	41	47
One of each.	12	5
Two animal blocks, one office and one stereo room.	1	1
Two offices, one animal block and one stereo room	0	1
Correct answers (%)	76%	87%

Table 6.2 Item 14

	Non-standard	*Standard*
Multiple pasties, figs, and oranges.	45	46
Single pasty and fig, multiple oranges.	5	0
Multiple pasties and oranges, single fig.	3	2
One of each.	1	6
Correct answers (%)	83%	85%

The results for this feature are slightly more inconsistent, both between the two items, and also within the individual items. Item 7 shows a significant difference in comprehension, since the standard test generated 6 more correct answers. On the non-standard test, 12 people chose alternative 2, which consisted of singular subjects only, despite the plural s-ending. This suggests that the singular *there's* with plural subject interferes with comprehension. Item 14 generated more similar results when it came to correct answers, but the spread of incorrect answers differed more than for most other features. This inconsistency makes it difficult to draw

a confident conclusion on the importance of standard/non-standard usage. However, in both cases the standard test generated more correct answers, which conforms with the overall trend. Even for this feature, which we have deemed more inconsistent, the non-standard test is not far behind the standard test.

Invariant *don't* for all persons in the present tense (items 9 & 13)

Table 7.1 Item 9

	Non-standard	Standard
Carolanne.	28	39
Carolanne and Marietta.	12	5
Carolanne and the niece.	9	8
The baby.	5	2
Correct answers (%)	52%	72%

Table 7.2 Item 13

	Non-standard	Standard
Calvin.	0	0
Calvin and Nate.	4	3
Jesse and Miss Alberta.	5	1
Miss Alberta.	45	50
Correct answers (%)	83%	93%

The results for invariant *don't* for all persons in the present tense are inconsistent between the two items. Even though item 13 is in accordance with the overall trend of the standard test generating higher results by a limited margin, we hesitate to claim any strong conclusions on this feature, other than the fact that it does continue the trend of the standard test generating a higher score. This supports Martinez' find that *doesn't* is more frequently used, but contrasts to Martinez' suggestions that non-standard features might make the meaning clearer (2016, p. 76).

However, in accordance with Martinez (2016, p. 62), our inconsistent results suggest that further research is needed around this feature.

Was* for conditional *were (items 10 & 11)

Table 8.1 Item 10

	Non-standard	*Standard*
Yes.	47	52
No.	7	2
Correct answers (%)	87%	96%

Item 10 demonstrates the common trend in that the standard test generated more correct answers, however it is worth noting that the percentage of correct answers was high for both tests. The fact that 87% of the responses were correct on the non-standard test could thus also indicate that the feature at least does not dramatically interfere with comprehension.

Table 8.2 Item 11

	Non-standard	*Standard*
Yes.	4	4
No.	50	50
Correct answers (%)	93%	93%

In view that the non-standard test scores were exactly the same as those from the standard test, the conclusion for this item is that the non-standard feature does not negatively affect comprehension. This is in accordance with Lee's (2006) study, which demonstrates that even though conditional *were* is taught as the "correct" alternative in grammar books, *was* for conditional *were* is more commonly used in published written language. The use of *was* instead of *were* is a simplified way of expressing the same meaning according to Lee, and might be an

explanation as to why students have received a high score for both item 10 and 11 (Lee, 2006, p. 90). Similar trends of conjugated verbs being simplified into invariant forms have been identified by Martinez concerning invariant *don't*, and also by Myhill as early as in the 1980s, her example concerning invariant *be*, and could potentially signal an ongoing development where such simplifications are grammaticalizing and becoming legitimized (Martinez, 2016, p. 81; Myhill, 1988, pp. 303-306). Parallels to *was* for conditional *were* might also be drawn to Hundt's study, suggesting that if non-standard features are unobtrusive in nature, they might even go unnoticed (Hundt, 2016, p. 38). If this is the case, then such a non-standard feature should not be detrimental to comprehension since it is not noticed as disturbing. This, in combination to its regular usage, might be the pattern of an error on its way of becoming a legitimate language feature of English (Hundt, 2016; Lee, 2006).

When it comes to reliability, it should be noted that both items contain only one distractor, allowing guesswork with a 50% chance of choosing the correct alternative and thus affecting the reliability. However, the high consistency of correct answers for both items indicate that the responses are likely based on existing schema or the unobtrusive nature of the feature, and therefore we argue that the reliability has not been compromised when it comes to item 10 and 11.

We also identify another trend which is supported by previous research e.g. Hundt (2016) and Lee (2006). Studies such as Hundt's show that even though non-standard grammar features might be regularly used, as well as unobtrusive to language comprehension, they are still often viewed as incorrect, more often than being regarded as an instance of linguistic development (Hundt, 2016, p. 41). In some instances, participants who conducted the non-standard test

understood the meaning of the extracts containing a non-standard feature, but actively

commentated that they were incorrect.

1.

> She looked up and saw him standing at the door with the remote in his hand staring down at her with mischief written all over his face.
> Kitty was hurting and he took this entire thing for a damn joke. "Why do you behave so childish?" He asked with contempt.
> "No I just gonna leave you so you can have your conversations on your phone" She said coldly.

m

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ Kitty has left.
- ☒ Kitty will leave.
- ☐ Kitty can't leave.
- ☐ Kitty will not leave.

R

The student has added "m" upon noticing the missing *be* before *gonna*, but answered correctly.

3.

> While this pair awaited their orders, Vashti danced like a young girl over the quaking boy.
> In a voice that was sometimes a man's, sometimes a woman's, the witch said, "My son, if you can play more than I can dance, you can kill me. If I can dance more than you can play, I will kill you."
> "When you see my feet bleed," she continued, "and I drop down on my knee, I still dancing. When my knee blisters and I drop to my elbow, I still dancing. If these get sore and I turn on my head, I still dancing."

+m

Im

Im

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she will stop dancing.
- ☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she starts to dance.
- ☒ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she will continue dancing.
- ☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she has already stopped dancing.

R

The student has commented on the deleted *be* before progressive, but answered correctly.

4.

> They went into the room, got into bed and he left his room door open. He took his marriage certificate and he pinned it up over the door.
> They waited so long and she never came. Well, she went back home. The mayor asked the servant girl where she was at.
> "Over there in bed with another man" she said. Oh, they was going to behead her right away now because she was in bed with another man.   ~~were~~

Question: Who will behead the woman?

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ One person.
- ☒ Two or more people.
- ☐ No one.

The student added "were" in the case of was/were generalization, but answered correctly.

10.

> "I don't see them again. In ten or fifteen years you might make it to management, get out of the dorms, and into a subsidised single. Live the high life. If I was forty years younger, that's what I'd do." She nods to herself, chins doubling and disappearing. "And don't cry," she says, "they hate that…".

Question: Is the speaker more than 40 years old?

Choose the best answer:

- ☒ Yes.
- ☐ No.

11.

> "What's going on?" I said and sneezed twice. The pungent smell of burnt chillies flared my nostrils.
> "Special cooking for special guests," Manju said, while continuing to solve his physics numerical.
> "Who?"
> "Harish, from the bay area," Manju said.
> "Harish, who?"
> Another fryer went on the stove. This time smells of mustard, curry leaves, and onions reached us. If this was one of those prize-winning Indian novels, I'd spend two pages on how wonderful those smells were.

Question: Is this a prize-winning Indian novel?

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ Yes.
- ☒ No.

The same student that commented and corrected the non-standard features on deletion of *be* before *gonna*, deletion of *be* before progressive, and *was*/*were* generalization[8] did not notice or comment on *was* for conditional *were*, supporting the previously mentioned theory that the pervasiveness of this feature might be due to its unobtrusive nature.

For a deeper analysis of the test results, schema theory will now aid in the understanding of our experiment. Regarding schema theory, we identify three trends from analyzing all 12 items:

1) Students have enough schemata on the specific verb (*be* or *do*) in order to be able to activate information on other usages of the verb as well as draw conclusions on the meaning despite an incorrect form (An, 2013; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

2) The importance of the verb is insignificant in relation to the context, which activates enough schemata for comprehension on its own (Cook, 1997, p. 86).

3) Students have met the non-standard form previously and thus have schemata attached to this usage as well, and are therefore able to depict meaning. The existence of sufficient schemata can be explained by young learners of English around the world being exposed to usage of the English language which might deviate from the standard rules of American or British English (Seoane, 2016, p. 1). Even if students do not actively use these non-standard features themselves, non-standard grammar features which frequent in modern media might be registered in the lexical memory of the recipients as formulaic expressions, thus activating schemata when coming across the feature again (Mair, 2016, p. 19; Martinez, 2016, p. 76).

---

[8] The student also commented on other features, but we have chosen not to include pictures of every occurrence of this.

The modern development of English has led to a linguistic evolution in which language is used in a more unbounded manner, where standards, norms and varieties come second hand to whatever communicative purposes are needed, allowing the use of non-standard features in a larger extent (Seoane, 2016, p. 4). This study suggests that non-standard features are functioning for comprehension, however to our specific demographic, inferior to standardised features. Schneider explains that today, the English language can be viewed as a set of resources, where its usage does not always focus on production of coherent varieties, but is rather "serving their speaker's needs in bits and pieces of language production, grammatical or not" (Schneider, 2016, p. 254). Lack of coherency might however affect comprehension, and for our study, inclusion of non-standard features does somewhat go against Mair's and Martinez' findings that non-standard features can make communication more effective (Mair, 2016, p. 33; Martinez, 2016, pp. 74-76): for instance, Vaezi (2006) highlights the importance of not dismissing the significance of word- and structure knowledge for reading comprehension. While Mair (2016, p. 31) describes current development in the English language as a forum for linguistic experimentation, our study shows that some non-standard features, for example existential/presentational *there's* with plural subject (table 6.1 and 6.2), does seem to cause slight confusion. A deeper understanding of which non-standard features cause confusion, and which do not - as well as which can possibly be more effective than standard ones - can thus be of use for language teachers. With regards to this, our study can contribute to such an awareness, since it demonstrates the results of language comprehension amongst six common non-standard features.

This study, however small, suggests that teachers ought to be informed of which features are or are not significant for comprehension, in order to keep up with linguistic development. Teachers can benefit from Seidlhofer (as cited in McKay, 2010, p. 93), who has conducted

similar research on non-standard grammar features in relation to communication, but our study can function as an informative aid specifically when it comes to reading comprehension. Since our results show that some non-standard grammar features are equally comprehensible as standard ones, Lee's (2006) findings are supported, arguing for descriptive grammar, which instead focuses on the actual language use as described by Hashemi & Daneshfar (2018), to earn a more substantial place in language education. Referring back to the starting point of this study, which was several observations of prescriptive grammar dominating our field experiences, we concur with Lee (2006): some non-standard grammar features are pervasive enough to be taken into consideration in a larger extent in English education.

6. Conclusion

The results have proved to both align with and deviate from our initial hypothesis, generating findings which may be of interest for the accumulation of research on the matter of grammar standards. Below, the implications of the results will be discussed, as well as limitations and suggestions for further research.

6.1 Discussion

The analysis of results shows that most non-standard grammar features do showcase a lower reading comprehension in comparison to comprehension of standard grammar features, however the divergence is not significant. In summary, a few items stood out from the general trend of the standard test generating a slightly higher result than the non-standard test: One of two items concerning deletion of auxiliary *be* before *gonna* (table 3.1) and *was* for conditional *were* (table 8.2) gained the exact same number of correct scores on both the non-standard test and the

standard test. Concerning the feature of *was* for conditional *were*, the combined results for both items were consistent in presenting a high success-rate on the non-standard test, generating a percentage of correct answers of 87% and 93%. This is the highest percentage of correct answers generated from both items constructing one non-standard feature. Another item worth highlighting is item 4, where one of two items concerning *was/were* generalization (table 4.2) even received higher scores on the non-standard test than on the standard test, with the non-standard test generating 76% correct answers, and the standard test 70%. Deviant from the trend, however in the reverse direction, was invariant *don't* for all persons in the present tense (table 7.1) with the non-standard test on one of the items only generating 52% correct responses, whereas the standard test got 72%. However, the other item testing invariant *don't* resulted in only one score difference between the standard and non-standard tests. Overall, the trend was as previously mentioned a slightly higher result on the standard test, with a few noteworthy exceptions. Worth adding is that even though the mean and median were slightly higher for the standard test, the standard deviation was also somewhat higher, indicating a more varied spread of scores than for the non-standard test. The overall success rate of the participants was thus not much different on the non-standard test.

With reference to previously mentioned research about the spread of non-standard World English varieties, the success rate of the non-standard test in comparison to the standard test, amongst a total of 108 Swedish upper secondary school students, adds further to the discussion of grammar traditionally viewed as erroneous developing into legitimate features (Lee, 2006; Mair, 2016; Seoane; 2016). One example from our study that highlights this is as previously mentioned item 4 testing *was/were* generalization (see table 4.2), where the non-standard test actually received more correct answers than the standard test.

The study thus presents results which both deviate, but also align with our initial hypothesis. Our hypothesis was that common non-standard conjugations of *be* and *do*, frequent in various World English varieties, would not negatively affect students' reading comprehension. We did find that the standard test generated slightly higher results, however, the difference was limited enough for us to draw the conclusion that the chosen non-standard grammar features were not detrimental to reading comprehension, and some features even presented equal success in both the non-standard and standard version. These results indicate reading comprehension as schematic, since the students were able to depict meaning even without the standard form, suggesting that context and background knowledge provided enough information for comprehension and/or successful guesswork. We thus draw the conclusion that form was not essential to most of our chosen features, which aligns with the cognitive view rather than the traditional view on reading comprehension (Vaezi, 2006).

Despite the success in comprehension of the non-standard features, our study provides examples of them still being considered as incorrect, since some students actively corrected the non-standard excerpts even though they answered them correctly and thus understood the features. Deeming non-standard features as errors is a pattern recognized by Hundt (2016) and Lee (2006) as well.

Our research question, which reads as follows: "What is the importance of traditional "correctness" of the six chosen verb conjugations in relation to reading comprehension?", we answer by claiming that traditional correctness proves successful, but not crucial, in relation to reading comprehension of the chosen grammar features, and that consideration to the non-standard versions could provide additional dimensions to teachers' understanding of reading comprehension. For the Swedish context, the relevancy might be more prominent due to the

strong presence of American culture (Söderlund & Modiano, 2002), and thus language exposure, in Swedish society. Since Laitinen and Levin find that American English is at the forefront of linguistic development and change in the English language, which is supported by Mair deeming American English the only hypercentral variety, it is likely that Swedish youths are exposed to such linguistic change as well, and the needs caused by this development accordingly ought to be met in the classroom (Laitinen & Levin, 2016, p. 229; Mair, 2016, p. 24).

Another dimension to the importance of awareness of non-standard language use is the fact that research has found that it might bear meaningful existential functions. Ways of expressing oneself through language might therefore be restricted if grammar standards limit possibilities of language experimentation (Mair, 2016). Through a more open-minded approach towards non-standard grammar, teachers could aim to avoid undermining students' identities. Consequently, we aim to contribute to the research on the many aspects of grammatical correctness. Similar to Seoane (2016, p. 4) we argue that in 21st century English, form comes secondary to the needs of communication and comprehension, in accordance with the cognitive view (Vaezi, 2006), and thus language standards of traditional "correctness" could benefit from being challenged. With regard to Skolverket's (2011) aim of English education allowing students to develop "correctness", we advise teachers to consider the function of standard grammar, since some non-standard grammar features might be comprehensible enough to not to be dismissed without consideration.

In summary, since the chosen features are the six most common non-standard *be* and *do* conjugations according to eWAVE, in addition to the results indicating that some of these perform equally well as their standard counterparts, our study suggests that Swedish English teachers of upper secondary school could benefit from awareness regarding their pervasiveness

and usage in modern English, in order to meet the needs of current linguistic development and accordingly the needs of language education.

6.2 Limitations

Even though we do find that our results are fairly conclusive, awareness also needs to be pointed towards the limitations of this project. In terms of validity, the fact that our choice of literature was steered by availability affects the internal validity of the items, since they differ in character and literary style as well as readability level. In some items the context might provide more information than in others, and the question of whether it is in fact the chosen grammar feature that has been tested cannot be answered with complete certainty. Yet another affecting factor is how we have chosen to formulate the questions to each item, and the character of the alternatives. This is especially noticeable for item 6 (see appendix B), where the difficulties of formulating alternatives which depended on the specific grammar feature, yet did not give the answer away, proved challenging, especially for the standard test where the correct alternative is formulated very similarly to a sentence in the extract. However, since the readability-variation has been limited to a Flesch Reading Ease score between 75,1-88,5, we have aimed to choose comparable extracts, and we have also aimed at eliminating confusion by converting other non-standard features into standard ones to isolate our chosen features, and not cause interference due to distractors, in accordance with previous research pointing at this possibly being an influencing factor (Hundt, 2016).

Our results cannot be said to be representative of a certain population, since we did not adopt random sampling. We also do not claim any test-retest reliability, since the experiment was not conducted repeatedly to secure reliability between one time and another. We do however

claim a certain level of dependable results, since each feature was tested twice, by 54 participants on the standard and non-standard test each, in addition to the students having conducted an inclusion/exclusion criteria test to secure a similar reading comprehension level. This, in combination to the low standard deviation, as well as the close proximity between the mean and the median, suggests consistent, and thus somewhat reliable, results (Hughes, 2003; Phakiti, 2014).

Despite the limitations of this project, we thus do believe that our research can add to the awareness about non-standard grammar features in relation to English reading comprehension, and also to a broader discussion on the topic of the spread and function of non-standard English.

6.3 Further Research

Even though our study can point to a pattern regarding the significance of our chosen features for reading comprehension, the project was as previously mentioned of a rather limited nature. Our study could benefit from the features being further tested, since we only tested each feature twice, as well as with a larger population of participants. In order to contribute to a broader discussion on the status of non-standard grammar features of English in the Swedish school context, other common non-standard grammar features could benefit from further testing as well. Additionally, it might be of interest for other researchers to further examine the teachers' perspective on the matter, since the starting point for this study was field experiences where prescriptive grammar was dominant. However, our experiences were limited, and cannot be said to be at all representative of how English grammar education is conducted in Swedish upper secondary schools.

Yet another idea for further research is to use other media for the construction of items testing the non-standard features, since we only used published literature. Other kinds of modern media might provide more dynamic forums for language development, where non-standard grammar features might undertake development at a different pace and extent. Such forums could be for instance movies, TV series, online newspapers, Facebook and YouTube (Schneider, 2016, p.255). One could also test non-standard grammar not only in relation to reading comprehension, but also for other forms of comprehension and communication. This would further add to and develop the knowledge and research on the function and significance of common non-standard grammar features.

References

An, S. (2013). Schema theory in reading. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 3*(1), 130-134. Retrieved from

https://search-proquest-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/docview/1346774359?accountid=12187

Carrell, P. L. & Eisterhold, J. C. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17: 553–573.

Cheshire, J., & Fox, S. (2009). Was/were variation: A perspective from london. *Language Variation and Change, 21*(1), 1-38.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1017/S0954394509000015

Cook, G. (1997). Key Concepts in ELT, *ELT Journal*, 51(1), 86.

Dawson Varughese, E. (2012). New departures, new worlds: World englishes literature. *English Today, 28*(1), 15-19. Retrieved from

https://search.proquest.com/docview/926421713?accountid=12187

Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hartley, J. (2016). Is time up for the Flesch measure of reading ease? *Scientometrics,* 107(3), 1523-1526.

Hartshorne, J. K. (2014). What is implicit causality? *Language, Cognition, and Neuroscience*, *29*(7), 804–824.

Hashemi, A., & Daneshfar, S. (2018). The impact of different teaching strategies on teaching
grammar to college students. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 8*(3), 340-348.
doi:http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.17507/tpls.0803.10

Hughes, A. (2003). *Testing for language teachers*. (2.ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press.

Hundt, M. (2016). Error, feature, (incipient) change - or something else altogether? In Seoane,
E., & Suàrez-Gómez, C. (Eds.), *World Englishes: New theoretical and methodological
considerations* (pp.36-60). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Kortmann, Bernd & Lunkenheimer, Kerstin (eds.) 2013. The Electronic World Atlas of Varieties
of English. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.
(Available online at http://ewave-atlas.org, Accessed on 2018-03-14.)

Laitinen, M., & Levin, M. (2016) On the globalization of English: Observations of subjective
progressives in present-day Englishes. In Seoane, E., & Suàrez-Gómez, C. (Eds.), *World
Englishes: New theoretical and methodological considerations* (pp.229-252). Amsterdam:
John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Lee, J. (2006). Subjunctive were and indicative was: A corpus analysis for English language
teachers and textbook writers. *Language Teaching Research, 10*(1), 80-93.
Retrieved from
https://search-proquest-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/docview/221811331?accountid=12187

Mair, C. (2016). Beyond and between the "Three Circles": World Englishes in the age of
globalisation. In Seoane, E., & Suàrez-Gómez, C. (Eds.), *World Englishes: New theoretical*

and methodological considerations (pp.17-35). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Martinez, I. P. (2016) "He don't like football, does he?": A corpus-based study of third person singular don't in the language of British teenagers. In Seoane, E., & Suàrez-Gómez, C. (Eds.), *World Englishes: New theoretical and methodological considerations* (pp.61-84). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

McKay, S. (2010) English as an international language. In Hornberger N. H., & McKay, S.(Eds.) *Sociolinguistics and language education* (pp.89-115). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Myhill, J. (1988). The Rise of Be as an Aspect Marker in Black English Vernacular. *American Speech, 63*(4), 304-325. doi:10.2307/455263

Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Phakiti, A. (2014). *Experimental research methods in language learning*. London, UK: Bloomsbury.

Schneider, E. W. (2016). World Englishes on Youtube: Treasure trove or nightmare? In Seoane, E., & Suàrez-Gómez, C. (Eds.), *World Englishes: New theoretical and methodological considerations* (pp.253-281). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Seoane, E. (2016). World Englishes today. In Seoane, E., & Suàrez-Gómez, C. (Eds.), *World Englishes: New theoretical and methodological considerations* (pp.1-15). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Skolverket. (2011). Aim of the subject. In *Ämnesplan - engelska*. Retrieved from

    https://www.skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.174542!/English%20120912.pdf

Squires, L. (2013). It don't go both ways: Limited bidirectionality in sociolinguistic perception.

    Journal of Sociolinguistics, 17(2), 200-237. Retrieved from

    https://search-proquest-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/docview/1438636900?accountid=12187

Söderlund, M., & Modiano, M. (2002). Swedish upper secondary school students and their

    attitudes towards AmE, BrE and mid-Atlantic English. In Modiano, M. (ed.) *Studies in Mid-*

    Atlantic English (pp. 147-171). Gävle: Högskolan i Gävle.

The Summer of '63, In *Projektet nationella prov i främmande språk* (Prov i Engelska: Exempel

    på uppgiftstyper: Engelska 5). Retrieved from

    https://nafs.gu.se/digitalAssets/1516/1516417_the-summer-of-63.pdf

Urquhart, A.H. & Weir, C. (1998). *Reading in a second language: process, product and*

    practice. London, UK: Longman.

Vaezi, S. (2006). Theories of reading. In *British Council* (Teaching English). Retrieved from

    https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/theories-reading

Literature used for the non-standard/standard test:

Antoni, B., & Antoni, R. (1997) *Paradise overdose*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

Baghat, C. (2009). *2 states*: *The story of my marriage*. India: Rupa & Co.

Chevalier, T. (2001). *Falling angels*. London: HarperCollins.

Evans, A. C. (2014). *Ghetto Slam*. Jamaica: Chrystal Evans Book Club.

Gabaldon, D. (2014). *Outlander*. New York, NY: Dell Publishing Company.

Glinton-Meicholas, P. (1993). *An evening in Guanima: A treasury of folktales from the Bahamas*. Nassau, Bahamas: Guanima Press.

Halpert, H., & Widdowson, J. D. A. (2015). *Folktales of Newfoundland (RLE folklore): The resilience of the oral tradition*. London, UK: Routledge.

Lamming, G. (1953). *In the castle of my skin*. London, UK: Michael Joseph.

Scott, L. (2012). *Light falling on bamboo*. Birmingham, UK: Tindal Street Press.

Straight, S. (2013). *I been in sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots: A novel [Electronic resource]*. Open Road Media.

Vittachi, N. (2006). *The Shanghai union of industrial mystics*. New South Wales, AU: Allen & Unwin.

Ward, M. J. (2017) *Psynode*. New South Wales, AU: Brio Books.

Winton, T. (1991). *Cloudstreet*. London, UK: Picador.

Appendix A

1. Invariant *don't* for all persons in the present tense:

Aboriginal English	Australia	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Barbadian Creole (Bajan)	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Earlier African American Vernacular English	America	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
East Anglian English	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Gullah	America	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Guyanese Creole (Creolese)	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Hong Kong English	South and Southeast Asia	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Malaysian English	South and Southeast Asia	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Newfoundland English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Ozark English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Rural African American Vernacular English	America	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

Southeast American enclave dialects	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Trinidadian Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Tristan da Cunha English	South Atlantic	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Urban African American Vernacular English	America	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

2. *Was* for conditional *were*:

Appalachian English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Australian English	Australia	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Australian Vernacular English	Australia	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Bahamian English	Caribbean	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Barbadian Creole (Bajan)	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Cameroon English	Africa	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
East Anglian English	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
English dialects in the North of England	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

English dialects in the Southeast of England	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
English dialects in the Southwest of England	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Guyanese Creole (Creolese)	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Hawai'i Creole	Pacific	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Indian English	South and Southeast Asia	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Irish English	British Isles	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Kenyan English	Africa	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Malaysian English	South and Southeast Asia	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Newfoundland English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
New Zealand English	Pacific	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Ozark English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Palmerston English	Pacific	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Pure Fiji English (basilectal FijiE)	Pacific	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Rural African American Vernacular English	America	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

Southeast American enclave dialects	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Urban African American Vernacular English	America	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Welsh English	British Isles	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

3. *Was/were* generalization:

Appalachian English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Australian Vernacular English	Australia	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Bahamian Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Bahamian English	Caribbean	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
East Anglian English	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Hawai'i Creole	Pacific	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Hong Kong English	South and Southeast Asia	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Jamaican Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Newfoundland English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

Trinidadian Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Tristan da Cunha English	South Atlantic	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Vincentian Creole	Caribbean			

4. Deletion of auxiliary *be*: before progressive

Aboriginal English	Australia	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Bahamian Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Bahamian English	Caribbean	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Barbadian Creole (Bajan)	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Belizean Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Butler English	South and Southeast Asia	English-based Pidgins	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Colloquial Singapore English (Singlish)	South and Southeast Asia	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Gullah	America	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Guyanese Creole (Creolese)	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Hawai'i Creole	Pacific	English-based	A - feature is pervasive or	

		Creoles	obligatory	
Hong Kong English	South and Southeast Asia	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Liberian Settler English	Africa	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Nigerian English	Africa	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Nigerian Pidgin	Africa	English-based Pidgins	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Norfolk Island/ Pitcairn English	Pacific	English-based Pidgins	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Pure Fiji English (basilectal FijiE)	Pacific	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Roper River Creole (Kriol)	Australia	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Torres Strait Creole	Australia	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Trinidadian Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Urban African American Vernacular English	America	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Vernacular Liberian English	Africa	English-based Pidgins	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Vincentian Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

5. Deletion of auxiliary *be*: before *gonna*

Aboriginal English	Australia	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Bahamian Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Bahamian English	Caribbean	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Barbadian Creole (Bajan)	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Belizean Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Guyanese Creole (Creolese)	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Hawai'i Creole	Pacific	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Hong Kong English	South and Southeast Asia	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Jamaican Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Liberian Settler English	Africa	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Norfolk Island/ Pitcairn English	Pacific	English-based Pidgins	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Pure Fiji English (basilectal FijiE)	Pacific	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory
Roper River Creole (Kriol)	Australia	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory

St. Helena English	South Atlantic	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Torres Strait Creole	Australia	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Trinidadian Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Tristan da Cunha English	South Atlantic	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Vernacular Liberian English	Africa	English-based Pidgins	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

6. Existential-presentational *there's/there is/there was* with plural subjects

Appalachian English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Australian English	Australia	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Australian Vernacular English	Australia	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Bahamian Creole	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Barbadian Creole (Bajan)	Caribbean	English-based Creoles	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Black South African English	Africa	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Cape Flats English	Africa	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

Channel Islands English	British Isles	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Earlier African American Vernacular English	America	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
East Anglian English	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
English dialects in the Southeast of England	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
English dialects in the Southwest of England	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Hong Kong English	South and Southeast Asia	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Indian South African English	Africa	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Irish English	British Isles	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Malaysian English	South and Southeast Asia	Indigenized L2 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Newfoundland English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
New Zealand English	Pacific	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Orkney and Shetland English	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Ozark English	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Rural African American Vernacular English	America	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

Scottish English	British Isles	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Southeast American enclave dialects	America	Traditional L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Tristan da Cunha English	South Atlantic	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
Urban African American Vernacular English	America	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	
White Zimbabwean English	Africa	High-contact L1 varieties	A - feature is pervasive or obligatory	

Appendix B

Interpreting Texts in English

Your test number: _____

Directions: Read each of the text excerpts. For each excerpt, choose the best answer.

1.

> She looked up and saw him standing at the door with the remote in his hand staring down at her with mischief written all over his face.
> Kitty was hurting and he took this entire thing for a damn joke. "Why do you behave so childish?" He asked with contempt.
> "No I just gonna leave you so you can have your conversations on your phone" She said coldly.

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ Kitty has left.
- ☐ Kitty will leave.
- ☐ Kitty can't leave.
- ☐ Kitty will not leave.

2.

> "Well, this is my studio, as you can see."
> "I didn't think you was so tidy. I imagine you need somebody to keep house for you."

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ The first speaker is tidy.
- ☐ The first speaker used to be tidier.
- ☐ The first speaker is not tidy.
- ☐ The first speaker will tidy the studio.

3.

> While this pair awaited their orders, Vashti danced like a young girl over the quaking boy.
> In a voice that was sometimes a man's, sometimes a woman's, the witch said, "My son, if you can play more than I can dance, you can kill me. If I can dance more than you can play, I will kill you."
> "When you see my feet bleed," she continued, "and I drop down on my knee, I still dancing. When my knee blisters and I drop to my elbow, I still dancing. If these get sore and I turn on my head, I still dancing."

Choose the best answer:

☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she will stop dancing.

☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she starts to dance.

☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she will continue dancing.

☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she has already stopped dancing.

4.

> They went into the room, got into bed and he left his room door open. He took his marriage certificate and he pinned it up over the door.
>
> They waited so long and she never came. Well, she went back home. The mayor asked the servant girl where she was at.
>
> "Over there in bed with another man" she said. Oh, they was going to behead her right away now because she was in bed with another man.

Question: Who will behead the woman?

Choose the best answer:

☐ One person.

☐ Two or more people.

☐ No one.

5.

Tucking my handbag firmly under my arm, I marched into the shop and bought the vases. I met Frank at the crossing of the High Street and the Gereside Road and we turned up it together.
He raised his eyebrows at my purchases.
"Vases?" He smiled. "Wonderful. Perhaps now you'll stop putting flowers in my books."
"They aren't flowers, they're specimens. And it was you who suggested I take up botany. To occupy my mind, now that I've not got nursing to do," I reminded him.
"True." He nodded good-humoredly. "But I didn't realize I'd have bits of greenery dropping out into my lap every time I opened a reference."

Choose the best answer:

☐   The speaker bought the vases.

☐   The speaker will buy the vases.

☐   The speaker did not buy the vases.

☐   The speaker will not buy the vases.

6.

My mother was silent, and I wondered whose side she was taking now, Bob's or his mother's. She looked up a little dazed, but her attention was soon arrested by another woman coming across the fallen tree.
"It's true," the woman said, "the children not worth bothering with. Did you all hear what happened this morning to that other one down the road?" The newcomer had brought bad tidings. Someone said from the fence, "Poor miss Foster, she must have a story to tell."
"Who are you talking about?" my mother asked.
"Gordon," miss Foster said.
"Who Gordon?" my mother asked.
"Gordon, Bess' grandchild," Miss Foster said.

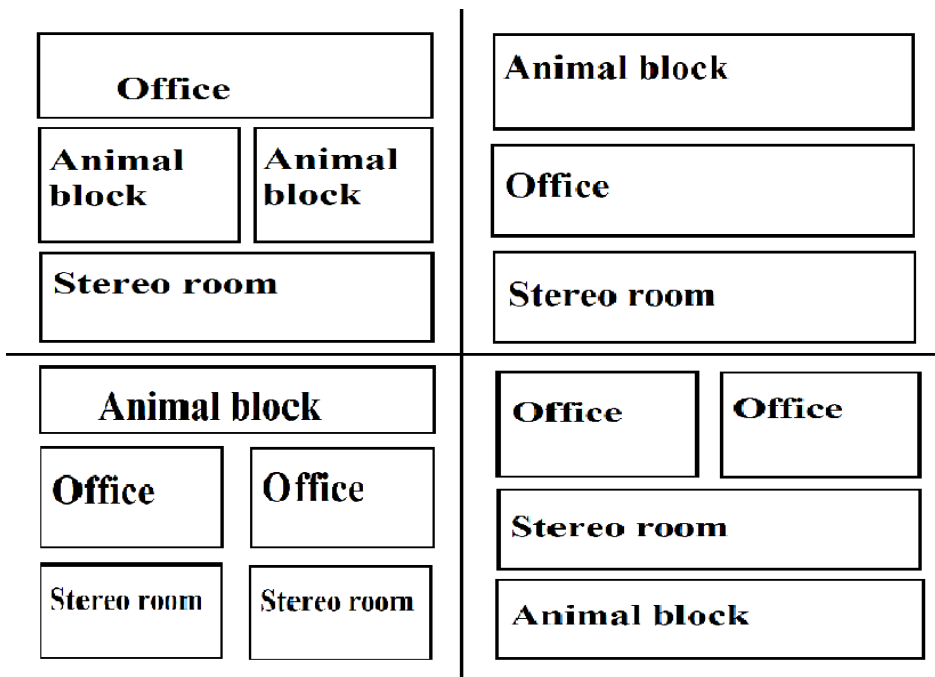Question: What does the woman think?

Choose the best answer:

☐   The children were not worth bothering with.
☐   The children are not worth bothering with.
☐   The children will not be worth bothering with.
☐   The children had not been worth bothering with.

7.

Lin Yao buried her face in her hands for a minute. She took deep, slow breaths. Then she looked up, sniffed once and spoke calmly: "It gets me into the place where they keep the animals for government use – the horses for parades, the performing animals for shows, and so on. I'm a veterinarian. My job is to look after these animals if they get sick"
"I see. Is there any money associated with the place?"
"No, nothing. There's the animal block, and there's the offices, and there's the stereo rooms where we keep the fodder, medicines, bales of hay, that sort of thing. There's no money there."

Circle the picture that best depicts Lin Yao's description.

8.

> Maple said "If peas can cause all that, what gonna happen when she does glimpse all them ugly rotting shells, far less when her nose holes get scratched by the conch pile stank?"
> "You do the accent so well, I love it."
> "That's because I used to talk like that. Before I went away to this messed-up boarding school in Florida, before I made myself talk like a Yankee so the kids wouldn't make fun of me."

Question: What does Maple want to know?

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ What will happen?
- ☐ What has happened?
- ☐ What didn't happen?
- ☐ What won't happen?

9.

> "She said at least I don't bring my kid for her to babysit, and she gave all the baby clothes to her niece, so don't ask for any. I don't know what she's thinking." Carolanne rubbed her eyes.
> "She said, 'Carolanne don't ever come by here – the baby will be grown next time we see her.' She was mad because I spent more time talking to the lady who made your shirts than I did listening to her."
> Marietta didn't say anything, and Carolanne snapped, "I know it isn't that far, okay?".

Question: Who never comes by?

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ Carolanne.
- ☐ Carolanne and Marietta.
- ☐ Carolanne and the niece.
- ☐ The baby.

10.

> "I don't see them again. In ten or fifteen years you might make it to management, get out of the dorms, and into a subsidised single. Live the high life. If I was forty years younger, that's what I'd do." She nods to herself, chins doubling and disappearing. "And don't cry," she says, "they hate that…".

Question: Is the speaker more than 40 years old?

Choose the best answer:

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

11.

> "What's going on?" I said and sneezed twice. The pungent smell of burnt chillies flared my nostrils.
> "Special cooking for special guests," Manju said, while continuing to solve his physics numerical.
> "Who?"
> "Harish, from the bay area," Manju said.
> "Harish, who?"
> Another fryer went on the stove. This time smells of mustard, curry leaves, and onions reached us. If this was one of those prize-winning Indian novels, I'd spend two pages on how wonderful those smells were.

Question: Is this a prize-winning Indian novel?

Choose the best answer:

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

12.

> "Lavinia," the older girl said, shrugging her shoulders and tossing her head so that her curls bounced. "Mama, I want you and Papa to call me Lavinia, not Livy."
> I decided then and there that I would never call her Livy.
> "Don't be rude to your mother, Livy," the man said. "You're Livy to us and that's that. Livy is a fine name. When you're older we'll call you Lavinia."
> Lavinia frowned at the ground.
> "Now stop all this crying," he continued. "She was a good queen and she lived a long life, but there's no need for a girl of five to weep quite so much. Besides, you'll frighten Ivy May." He nodded at the sister.

Choose the best answer:

☐ The queen is dead.

☐ The queen is alive.

☐ The queen is dying.

☐ The queen will die.

13.

> "And how's that going to work?" Miss Alberta said.
> "Calvin's an offensive lineman, Miss Alberta," one of the boys said. "He has got to block the dudes trying to get to the quarterback. Or the running back."
> "Huh."
> "And Nate, he is like Lawrence Taylor playing for the Giants. Hunting dudes down, man. He sacks any quarterback, I don't care who it is."
> "Is Nate playing against his own brother?" Her voice rose.
> "No, miss Alberta, he doesn't…Oh I'm going to show you when the season starts. I'm going to show you on TV."
> "She don't know anything about football. Baby Poppa could have explained it to her," Jesse said.
> They were all respectfully silent for a moment, and Tiny Momma hummed when she pinched the heads off the shrimp.

Question: Who knows nothing about football?

Choose the best answer:

☐ Calvin.
☐ Calvin and Nate.
☐ Jesse and Miss Alberta.
☐ Miss Alberta.

14.

Twenty years, they all say, sprawling and drinking. There's ginger beer, stagger-juice and hot flasks of tea.

There's pasties, a ham, chicken legs and a basket of oranges, potato salad and dried figs. There are things spilling from jars and bags.

Circle the picture that best depicts the right amount of food.
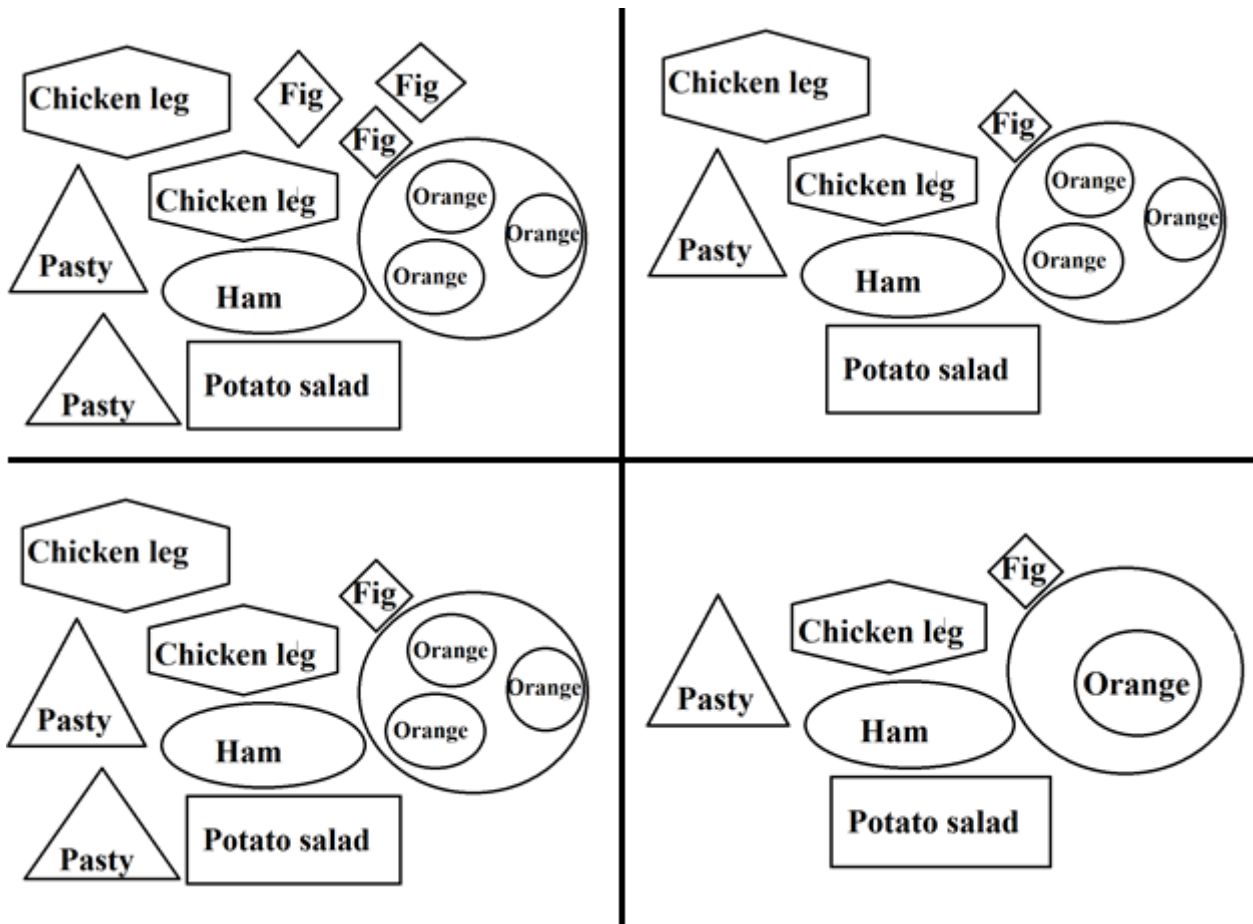
Appendix C

Interpreting Texts in English

Your test number: _____

<u>Directions</u>: Read each of the text excerpts. For each excerpt, choose the best answer.

1.

> She looked up and saw him standing at the door with the remote in his hand staring down at her with mischief written all over his face.
> Kitty was hurting and he took this entire thing for a damn joke. "Why do you behave so childish?" He asked with contempt.
> "No I am just gonna leave you so you can have your conversations on your phone" She said coldly.

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ Kitty has left.
- ☐ Kitty will leave.
- ☐ Kitty can't leave.
- ☐ Kitty will not leave.

2.

> "Well, this is my studio, as you can see."
> "I didn't think you were so tidy. I imagine you need somebody to keep house for you."

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ The first speaker is tidy.
- ☐ The first speaker used to be tidier.
- ☐ The first speaker is not tidy.
- ☐ The first speaker will tidy the studio.

3.

> While this pair awaited their orders, Vashti danced like a young girl over the quaking boy.
> In a voice that was sometimes a man's, sometimes a woman's, the witch said, "My son, if you can play more than I can dance, you can kill me. If I can dance more than you can play, I will kill you."
> "When you see my feet bleed," she continued, "and I drop down on my knee, I am still dancing. When my knee blisters and I drop to my elbow, I am still dancing. If these get sore and I turn on my head, I am still dancing."

Choose the best answer:

☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she will stop dancing.

☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she starts to dance.

☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she will continue dancing.

☐ When the witch's feet start to bleed, she has already stopped dancing.

4.

> They went into the room, got into bed and he left his room door open. He took his marriage certificate and he pinned it up over the door.
> They waited so long and she never came. Well, she went back home. The mayor asked the servant girl where she was at.
> "Over there in bed with another man" she said. Oh, they were going to behead her right away now because she was in bed with another man.

Question: Who will behead the woman**?**

Choose the best answer:

☐ One person.

☐ Two or more people.

☐ No one.

5.

Tucking my handbag firmly under my arm, I marched into the shop and bought the vases. I met Frank at the crossing of the High Street and the Gereside Road and we turned up it together. He raised his eyebrows at my purchases.
"Vases?" He smiled. "Wonderful. Perhaps now you'll stop putting flowers in my books."
"They aren't flowers, they're specimens. And it was you who suggested I take up botany. To occupy my mind, now that I've not got nursing to do," I reminded him.
"True." He nodded good-humoredly. "But I didn't realize I'd have bits of greenery dropping out into my lap every time I opened a reference."

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ The speaker bought the vases.

- ☐ The speaker will buy the vases.

- ☐ The speaker did not buy the vases.

- ☐ The speaker will not buy the vases.

6.

My mother was silent, and I wondered whose side she was taking now, Bob's or his mother's. She looked up a little dazed, but her attention was soon arrested by another woman coming across the fallen tree.
"It's true," the woman said, "the children are not worth bothering with. Did you all hear what happened this morning to that other one down the road?" The newcomer had brought bad tidings. Someone said from the fence, "Poor miss Foster, she must have a story to tell."
"Who are you talking about?" my mother asked.
"Gordon," miss Foster said.
"Who Gordon?" my mother asked.
"Gordon, Bess' grandchild," Miss Foster said.
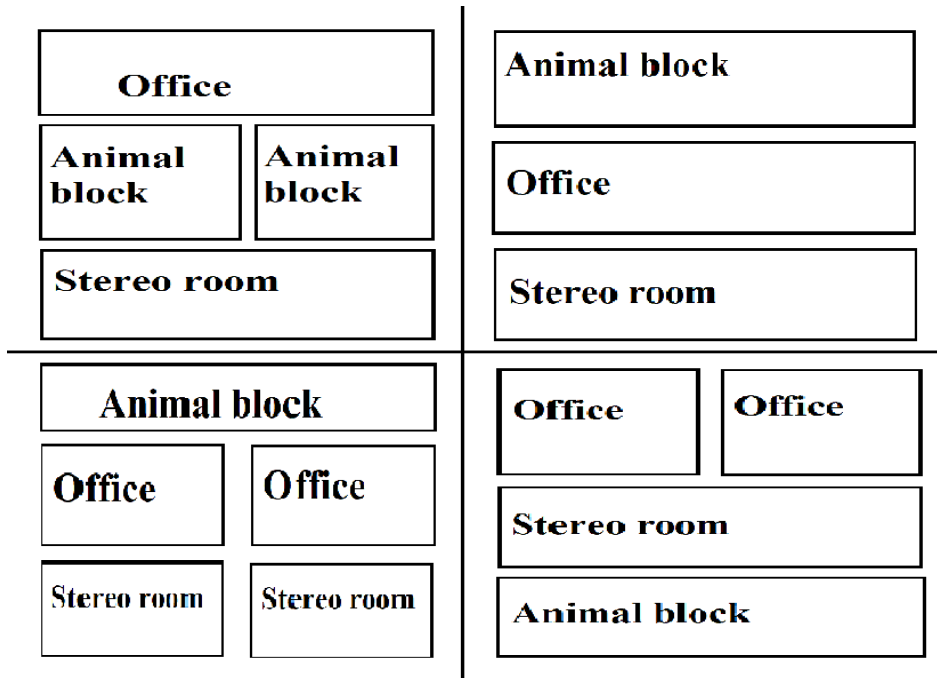
Question: What does the woman think about the children?

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ They were not worth bothering with.

- ☐ They are not worth bothering with.

- ☐ They will not be worth bothering with.

- ☐ They had not been worth bothering with.

7.

Lin Yao buried her face in her hands for a minute. She took deep, slow breaths. Then she looked up, sniffed once and spoke calmly: "It gets me into the place where they keep the animals for government use – the horses for parades, the performing animals for shows, and so on. I'm a veterinarian. My job is to look after these animals if they get sick"
"I see. Is there any money associated with the place?"
"No, nothing. There's the animal block, and there's the offices, and there's the stereo rooms where we keep the fodder, medicines, bales of hay, that sort of thing. There's no money there."

Circle the picture that best depicts Lin Yao's description.

8.

> Maple said "If peas can cause all that, what's gonna happen when she does glimpse all them ugly rotting shells, far less when her nose holes get scratched by the conch pile stank?"
> "You do the accent so well, I love it."
> "That's because I used to talk like that. Before I went away to this messed-up boarding school in Florida, before I made myself talk like a Yankee so the kids wouldn't make fun of me."

Question: What does Maple want to know?

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ What will happen?
- ☐ What has happened?
- ☐ What didn't happen?
- ☐ What won't happen?

9.

> "She said at least I don't bring my kid for her to babysit, and she gave all the baby clothes to her niece, so don't ask for any. I don't know what she's thinking." Carolanne rubbed her eyes.
> "She said, 'Carolanne doesn't ever come by here – the baby will be grown next time we see her.' She was mad because I spent more time talking to the lady who made your shirts than I did listening to her."
> Marietta didn't say anything, and Carolanne snapped, "I know it isn't that far, okay?".

Question: Who never comes by?

Choose the best answer:

- ☐ Carolanne.
- ☐ Carolanne and Marietta.
- ☐ Carolanne and the niece.
- ☐ The baby.

10.

> "I don't see them again. In ten or fifteen years you might make it to management, get out of the dorms, and into a subsidised single. Live the high life. If I were forty years younger, that's what I'd do." She nods to herself, chins doubling and disappearing. "And don't cry," she says, "they hate that…".

Question: Is the speaker more than 40 years old?

Choose the best answer:

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

11.

> "What's going on?" I said and sneezed twice. The pungent smell of burnt chillies flared my nostrils.
> "Special cooking for special guests," Manju said, while continuing to solve his physics numerical.
> "Who?"
> "Harish, from the bay area," Manju said.
> "Harish, who?"
> Another fryer went on the stove. This time smells of mustard, curry leaves, and onions reached us. If this were one of those prize-winning Indian novels, I'd spend two pages on how wonderful those smells were.

Question: Is this a prize-winning Indian novel?

Choose the best answer:

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

12.

> "Lavinia," the older girl said, shrugging her shoulders and tossing her head so that her curls bounced. "Mama, I want you and Papa to call me Lavinia, not Livy."
> I decided then and there that I would never call her Livy.
> "Don't be rude to your mother, Livy," the man said. "You're Livy to us and that's that. Livy is a fine name. When you're older we'll call you Lavinia."
> Lavinia frowned at the ground.
> "Now stop all this crying," he continued. "She was a good queen and she lived a long life, but there's no need for a girl of five to weep quite so much. Besides, you'll frighten Ivy May." He nodded at the sister.

Choose the best answer:

☐ The queen is dead.

☐ The queen is alive.

☐ The queen is dying.

☐ The queen will die.

13.

> "And how's that going to work?" Miss Alberta said.
> "Calvin's an offensive lineman, Miss Alberta," one of the boys said. "He has got to block the dudes trying to get to the quarterback. Or the running back."
> "Huh."
> "And Nate, he is like Lawrence Taylor playing for the Giants. Hunting dudes down, man. He sacks any quarterback, I don't care who it is."
> "Is Nate playing against his own brother?" Her voice rose.
> "No, miss Alberta, he doesn't…Oh I'm going to show you when the season starts. I'm going to show you on TV."
> "She doesn't know anything about football. Baby Poppa could have explained it to her," Jesse said. They were all respectfully silent for a moment, and Tiny Momma hummed when she pinched the heads off the shrimp.

Question: Who knows nothing about football?

Choose the best answer:

☐ Calvin.

☐ Calvin and Nate.

☐ Jesse and Miss Alberta.

☐ Miss Alberta.

14.

Twenty years, they all say, sprawling and drinking. There's ginger beer, stagger-juice and hot flasks of tea.

There are pasties, a ham, chicken legs and a basket of oranges, potato salad and dried figs. There are things spilling from jars and bags.

Circle the picture that best depicts the right amount of food.