

# Is it enough to be understood?

A study of teacher attitudes towards accent in the EFL classroom



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## **Abstract**

This study investigates teacher attitudes towards accent in the EFL classroom. The central theoretical base for this study is English as a lingua franca (ELF), which proposes that intelligibility is the key to communication in English between people from different backgrounds. EFL, together with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) document from 2018 that removed a nativelike pronunciation altogether as a requirement for a higher language proficiency, seem to be the biggest proponent for intelligibility as the goal. On the other hand, much of the previous research claims that both teachers and students regard a nativelike accent as an important trait, and that a distinct L1 accent is viewed as something negative (Jenkins, 2005; Chan, 2016; Candan & Inal, 2020; Tabataba et al., 2018). Data for this study was collected from interviews with four Swedish EFL teachers about their attitudes towards accents, and if/how they do teach accents in their classes. The data shows that while the teachers initially described intelligibility as the main goal for their students to achieve, they also pointed out that there are still many advantages of speaking with a nativelike accent, in terms of gaining status and respect. The results also showed that the teachers themselves believe that the students have less respect for a teacher who speaks with an accent. Although the study is quite limited in scope, the results indicate that a larger study of a similar kind with similar results, in Sweden, could create a need for questioning how to raise the status of L1 accented English and whether Skolverket should include more explicit aims regarding accents in their syllabi.

Key words: accents, teacher attitudes, pronunciation, English as a lingua franca, World Englishes, nativelikeness.

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# 1 Introduction

English is a great part of many people's lives today, whether they are born in an English-speaking country or not. People all around the world use English, which, according to the theory of *World Englishes* (WE), has led to the creation of new national varieties of the language (Leyi, 2020). While WE treats different varieties of English within a certain context, the rapid expansion of English has also resulted in an increase in interactions between native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS), which has led to the theory of *English as a lingua franca* (ELF), i.e., the use of English as a means of communication between people with different L1s, to develop [see sub-section 2.2 for further description]. This expansion has led to the regional variations and accents changing more and more (Hornberger & McKay, 2010). However, several studies show that English accents that are non-nativelike are met with more negativity than nativelike ones, amongst other English speakers, both native and non-native speakers (Chan, 2016; Jenkins, 2005; Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010; Tsang, 2020). Skolverket, the Swedish National Agency for Education, states in the syllabus that one of the central aspects of English teaching in Sweden, from lower secondary school (*högstadiet*) through upper secondary school (*gymnasieskolan*), is “linguistic phenomena, including pronunciation” (2021b; 2021c). This begs the question whether EFL students in Sweden should be taught to sound as much like NSs as possible, in order to maximize their potential of success in the ELF-community, or if intelligibility is enough?

Since Skolverket does not specify which type of pronunciation is to be taught, teachers themselves have a great agency to decide whether they find a nativelike accent significant or not. The conflict, on the one hand, has the views on WE that supports the development of a national Swedish variety of English, and on the other hand research (as mentioned previously) that claims that a nativelike accent is important to gain respect, makes studies about this topic crucial in order to broaden the knowledge about it.

## 1.1 Aim and purpose

The aim of this study is to investigate Swedish EFL teachers' attitudes towards L1 accents, the teaching of accents and pronunciation, and whether they believe that nativelikeness is something to strive for. More specifically, the study looks at whether teachers try to teach their students to speak with a more nativelike accent, or if they think that it is enough to speak with an L1 accent, as long as the oral production is comprehensible. It is also of interest to look at why teachers make these choices on these subjects, and if their opinions are supported by the current research on the subject or not. The study will focus more specifically on these research questions:

RQ1: What are Swedish EFL teachers' attitudes towards nativelikeness in their students' oral production?

RQ2: Do Swedish EFL teachers actively try to work on their students' pronunciation in order to make them sound more nativelike?

RQ3: What do Swedish EFL teachers believe to be the advantages and disadvantages of practicing a nativelike pronunciation with their students?

The essay contains a theoretical framework section, where some theories and some important terminology is explained. After the theory section, a literature review follows, where some previous research that is relevant to this study is presented. Thereafter follows a section where the method of the study is presented, before presenting the results of the study. A discussion of the results follows, including some pedagogical implications and/or suggestions for teachers. Finally, in the conclusion of the essay, the research questions are answered and suggestions for further research proposed.

## 2 Theoretical framework and literature review

This section contains information about some of the theoretical framework on which the current study is based. The key theories to describe are those of World Englishes and English as a lingua franca. The section also contains a review of some previous research that is presented to make it clear why this study is relevant and how it fits into the current research field. As presented below, the views of the researchers of WE and, more importantly, ELF, that intelligibility is the most significant part of English language learning, do not seem to conform with the actual views of the teachers and learners on this topic.

### 2.1 World Englishes

The term World Englishes derives from Braj Kachru's description of the different varieties of English from the 1980s (Hornberger & McKay, 2010). In theory, the model divides the English-speaking world into three different categories. The first one, the *inner circle*, contains people who are NSs, who uses the language as their primary means of communication. The second category contains the *outer circle*, which includes people who speak an "institutionalized second-language variety of English" (p.89). Finally, the third one is called the *expanding circle*, and is inhabited by people who use English in more restricted settings as a foreign language. Studies about these different varieties of English, both pertaining to geographical and sociolinguistic aspects, has led to the term WE to emerge when discussing the expansion of standardized varieties of English. The expansion of both the outer circle and the expanding circle has led to a nativization and new standard varieties of English being created outside of the traditional sphere of the language.

The great importance that WE has is that it changes the way the language is perceived and legitimized. The focus is shifted from General American (GA) and Received pronunciation (RP) as the only and necessary ideal(s) for English learners and speakers to aspire to.

Hornberger & McKay argue that English has become too embedded in the local social and cultural contexts to which it pertains, all around the world, for us to be able to still measure it against only the inner circle varieties of the language. They claim that WE tries to avoid having one supreme variety, to which all others are compared. Instead, the goal is to place all varieties on an equal plane, where all are seen as acceptable. However, they note that, even though WE is an important part of the field of study, it fails to acknowledge how other languages affect bilingual and multilingual English speakers, and thus how their own language identity affects the evolution of their regional English, and vice versa (2010).

## **2.2 English as a lingua franca**

The theory of English as a lingua franca is difficult to define (Jenkins 2014). Jenkins herself does so by describing it as “English when it is used as a contact language between people from different first languages (including native English speakers)” (p. 2), but also acknowledges that even her own definition is problematic. She means that the research community is divided in whether to include NSs or not into this definition. She gives examples of other definitions of ELF which include the use of a second language to overcome linguistic barriers on both sides, which differs from the aforementioned by not including NSs. Jenkins argue that ELF should include NSs, but that the NNSs have, and will continue to have, way more influence over how ELF evolves.

One way of defining ELF is to look at differences between the use of ELF and traditional use of EFL. First, there is a major difference in that EFL-users do not learn the language to communicate solely with NSs, but also to communicate with people from all around the world. Second, another difference is that there is much more room in ELF for negotiation rather than absolutes in terms of linguistic errors. Something that is seen as plainly wrong in traditional language learning can be a way of using English differently by ELF speakers (Jenkins, 2014).

Another significant aspect to focus on is the difference between ELF and WE. Even though these two theories share a common theme of communication in English between people from all around the world, there are some key differences. While WE research focuses on how people from a certain area create their own variety of English, which becomes an identity marker in communication with people from other English-speaking areas, ELF research makes no importance of the geographical borders, instead it focuses on communication in English across borders, where it, instead of Englishes, is seen as one language (Jenkins, 2014; Leyi, 2020).

### **2.3 WE and ELF implications on teaching**

As pointed out previously, this study is carried out because of the notion that the landscape of English learning has changed drastically over the last decades, which has been explained using WE and ELF. After explaining these theories in the previous sub-sections, this sub-section includes some of the implications that these theories have had on teaching the language. Leyi (2020) proposes that there are three major areas that have been affected. These areas, that concern a shift in the main goal of learning English, a different view on what is seen as correct language, and an altered view on who should be teaching the language, are discussed below.

First, these theories have caused a paradigm shift in the views of what the main goal of studying English actually is. Where the perceived goal of English language learning formerly was to acquire nativelike qualities, or more accurately, oral production that resembled that of English-speaking people mainly from north America or Great Britain, the aim of English studies seems to shift more and more towards intelligibility, more than anything else. The main goal of learning English is to be able to use it in communication with people in the specific communities to which they pertain (Leyi, 2020). Second, but connected to the last point, the expansion of English and its new varieties has led to a shift in what is seen as correct language



practice. Both Jenkins (2014) and Leyi point out that several studies have shown that many grammatical and phonological features are changing in the ELF community in comparison to the inner circle-varieties of the language, without them necessarily being seen as doing something wrong. As an example of this, Jenkins mentions that ELF speakers have a tendency to drop the third person present tense *-s* and confuse the relative pronouns *who* and *which*, among other features. Third, the question of who should be teaching the language is changing. Leyi means that this new climate has made bilingual teachers, not only equally as qualified, but actually better qualified than NSs at teaching English. The advantage of having a NS as a teacher is that he/she has a good understanding of the English-speaking culture and that he/she can mediate the NS competence to his/her students. However, if the goal is not for the students to gain this competence, Leyi means that a local teacher has a better understanding of the culture and context in which the students will use the language in the future.

#### **2.4 Teacher attitudes towards L1 accents**

The research field that concerns attitudes towards L1 accents, when speaking English, is not unified. EFL teachers seem to believe that there are both positives and negatives in the usage of an accent by their students. While some studies point out the importance of intelligibility, others find that there are still many negative views toward accented language (Jenkins, 2005; Noviana, 2020; Tabataba et al., 2018).

First, teachers' positive feelings and opinions toward accents mostly pertain to ELF and WE. In a study from 2020, most of the teachers from all around the world that participated stated in a survey and later interviews that accents were unimportant in their teaching, as long as the spoken language was clear and understandable (Noviana, 2020). Overall, the study is very positive towards ELF and totally disregards the importance of learners' accents as long as the correct message is conveyed. This study is supported by the Common European Framework

of Reference (Council of Europe, 2020), which works as a reference point for language testing all around the world, but it also serves as support for EFL syllabi in Sweden (Skolverket, 2021a). In a revised CEFR document from 2018, its scales regarding pronunciation were entirely remade, and it is noted in the document that the previous version, from 2001, mentioned a clear and nativelike accent as a different between B1 and B2 levels of English. In the new document, it is stated that the need for likeness to idealized versions of English has been removed, and instead a focus on intelligibility has been emphasized (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 133).

Although there are studies showing positive teacher attitudes towards L1 accent use, there is also research that shows that many teachers doubt the positive effects they could have. As pointed out in a study from 2005, where five EFL teachers were interviewed, all NNSs, teachers feel reluctant to teach their own accented variety of English because of a notion that it could harm the students' success in the English-speaking community (Jenkins, 2005). This makes the teachers themselves strive towards a nativelike accent, which is described by all the teachers participating in the study in a more positive way. Jenkins herself points out that this is problematic, since she claims that the only way that an ELF accent will be accepted and effective is when the teachers themselves believe that it will not harm their students' chance of success. The same doubt is expressed by Tabataba et al. (2018), who claims that teachers feel embarrassed to use their own accented variety of English when teaching, both in EFL and in ESL.

## **2.5 Learner attitudes toward accents**

In the same way as in teacher attitudes, learner attitudes towards accents are divided. However, they are a bit more skewed toward negative views on accents than the teachers' ones. Although this study is focused on teacher attitudes, it is relevant to also examine learner attitudes, since

much of the teacher attitudes actually concentrate on how they believe accents in the classroom affect the learners.

A pattern that can be found in studies in this area is that people tend to be biased towards familiar accents, rather than to the more nativelike accents. In a study that investigated if learners tried to speak with a nativelike accent when speaking English, as well as which accents they preferred and did not prefer, the majority of the 37 participants had problems identifying which accents were the native ones, even though they expressed a desire to speak with a similar one themselves. The study also concluded that the learners preferred the accents which they found easiest to understand and that were familiar to them (Scales et al., 2006). Along those same lines, a study from 2019 aimed to challenge the traditional types of listening comprehension tests, that almost exclusively include “inner circle” accents. The results showed that each of the listeners had an easier time understanding the varieties that were closer to their own in terms of accent. The study concludes that this is a big problem when trying to create a standardized test with different, non-native, English accents, that there seems to be an inherent bias towards people that are familiar with a certain accent (Kang et al., 2019). Similar results can also be observed in a Swedish context. In a study by Jeong et al. (2021), Swedish youths were found to prefer accents that were familiar to them, mainly American and British English. The study proposed that important phonological features that affect Swedish speakers’ understanding of English should be included in the curriculum in order to improve Swedish peoples’ understanding of different varieties of English. These results are comparable to those shown in a study from 2021, that examined how listeners’ backgrounds affect their social judgement on accented speech. The results show that people who had been exposed to more NNSs tended to disregard accents when assessing speakers’ overall proficiency level (Kang and Yaw, 2021).

While the studies presented above describe a bias toward familiar accents, there are instances where studies show that people openly prefer an L1 accent over an L2 one. One example of this can be seen in a study where 1300 students were questioned about their attitudes towards the use of accents in the classroom. Interestingly enough, and contrary to the claim by Leyi (as described in sub-section 2.3) that bilingual, local, teachers would actually be preferred over NSs, the study concluded that the majority of the participants were either negative or neutral about incorporating non-standard English accents into the classroom. However, it should also be pointed out that, as noted above, the people that had been exposed to more accented English tended to be more positive toward it (Tsang, 2020). Also discovering a slightly negative attitude toward L1 accents was a study in Hong Kong from 2016 that examined English learners' use of accents, their ability to recognize them, as well as their perception and attitudes towards them. The participants were found to recognize GA, RP and Hong Kong varieties of English better than others. More importantly, they also rated the English and American accents as more intelligible than the rest. The researchers conclude that the higher the proficiency the students have, the more likely they are to prefer L1 varieties of English over the local ones. They also pointed out that pronunciation teaching is of high importance if a difference in status between people with different accents is to be overcome (Chan, 2016). The same can be said for a study by Candan and Inal (2020), where they concluded that learners felt positive about both NS and NNS teachers, but they also expressed a desire to receive more pronunciation-focused teaching. This last point is noteworthy since it does not at all comply with the thoughts of ELF, that intelligibility is the main part of language learning.

### 3 Method

In this section of the essay, the method of the study is outlined. First, the participants are presented, before describing the data collection method that was used. Lastly, a discussion of the reliability and validity of the study takes place.

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants in the study were four EFL teachers, all currently teaching in Sweden. As shown in Table 1, three of the participants were female and one of them was male. Their experience ranged from 12 to 36 years of experience from working as EFL teachers. While all the participants spoke Swedish as their L1, one of them also spoke English as an L1.

All interviewees worked at either lower or upper secondary school, and even though this study is primarily focused on teaching in upper secondary school, the criteria from Skolverket is the exact same for both levels regarding pronunciation, which makes it relevant to include teachers from the lower level as well. Both the syllabus for lower secondary school, as well as English 5, 6 and 7 in upper secondary school, contains the exact wording “linguistic phenomena, including pronunciation” in its central aspects of what students should be exposed to in terms of production and interaction (Skolverket, 2021b; 2021c).

Table 1

#### *Participant data*

<b>Number</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Experience of EFL teaching</b>	<b>L1</b>
Participant 1	Cate	Female	17 years	Swedish
Participant 2	Mary	Female	12 years	Swedish and English
Participant 3	Jane	Female	22 years	Swedish
Participant 4	Andy	Male	36 years	Swedish

The results are gathered from the interviews described in sub-section 3.2, which can be found in their entirety in the Appendix. While discussing the results, the participants are referred to by pseudonyms, as listed in Table 1. While two of the participants answered the questions in English, two of them elected to answer in Swedish. Because of this, their answers are translated to English by the author when referring to them in section 4.

### 3.2 Data collection

The data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with Swedish EFL-teachers. The choice of semi-structured interviews was made in order to have some type of flexibility during the interviews, which is one of the main reasons why it has been favored by researchers when choosing what type of interview to conduct. Even though all types of interviews display an uneven relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, in terms of power, the semi-structured interview allows for more of a conversation than a structured one, which the interviewer can use to his advantage if he/she wants to steer the interview in (or away from) a certain direction (Nunan, 2012).

The interviews consisted of seven set questions, where the first one was asked to gain more general knowledge of the participants teaching experience, while the rest of the questions were aimed at the specific topic of this study. The interviewer asked the questions both in English and in Swedish, and the interviewees got to decide themselves whether to answer in English or Swedish, in order to make them feel as comfortable as possible with the situation. The interviews were conducted between the October 26 and October 28. They were recorded with the participants consent using the recording function on iPhone, and later transcribed by the conductor of the study (Appendix). The data was then analyzed using, what Nunan describes as, conversation analysis, where the data is analyzed by interpreting transcribed speech from recorded spoken language without any pre-determined categories or assumptions (2012).

Quotes from the interviews were arranged into themes that fit in with the aim and RQs of the study, but also with the previous research.

### 3.3 Reliability and validity

It is essential to discuss the limitations of this study in terms of reliability and validity. Since reliability concerns the replicability of the study, that someone would achieve similar results if they conducted the same study again on another occasion, the possible problems with reliability are important to highlight (Nunan, 2012). Since only four people participated, an obvious problem is representation. Four people can never be said to represent an entire group of teachers. However, since much previous research has been presented on similar topics, it is relevant to investigate if these four teachers in Sweden agree with the previous research, since only one of the previous studies (Jeong et al., 2021), that the author of this essay could find, took place in Sweden, or even northern Europe. There is also a problem with geographical representation, since all four teachers resided in the same part of Sweden. However, both the problem with the small sample and the geographical distribution are explained by the limited time and extent of this study. To secure the reliability of this study, further research will be needed, containing a broader sample with a wider range. As for the external validity of this study, that is the possibility of generalizing the results of this study to a wider context (Nunan, 2012), many of the same problems as with the reliability should be considered. The results cannot be said to be representative of teachers in Sweden because of the small sample and geographical distribution but could be useful when compared to other studies of a similar kind.

## **4 Results and discussion**

In this section, the results of the study are outlined. Connected to the previous research, certain noteworthy themes that arose during the interviews are presented. Following this, a discussion takes place, where the results are contextualized and compared to the previous research.

### **4.1 Results**

The results are presented below with the following themes: intelligibility, teaching pronunciation, common Swedish mistakes when speaking English, speaking without an accent is a way to get a better grade, the advantages and disadvantages of teaching accents, difference in status between accents and teachers' thoughts on student views on teacher accents.

#### **4.1.1 Intelligibility**

One of the main themes throughout the interviews is that all the participants consistently refer to intelligibility as the key factor in language teaching. Throughout the interviews, the participants all claim, in one way or another, that their students' accents are not significant as long as it is possible to understand what they are saying. However, these thoughts were in the majority of the interviews, at least initially, expressed as direct answers to the question: "Do you think it is important if the students speak with an accent or if they sound more nativelike?".

Mary, Jane and Andy phrased it almost identically:

1. As long as they can make themselves understood (Mary).
2. [T]o be understood is most important. It does not matter how many words you know if you cannot get them out (Jane).
3. [B]eing able to express what you feel and what you think, of course, basically [...] The most important thing is that they can communicate. (Andy)



Even though she did not express it in the exact same way, Cate shared this feeling but phrased it slightly different, where she stated that she believes that the main aspect for her students is to know the language, and that there are students that speak very good English and can be understood perfectly despite having a clear accent or problems with pronunciation.

#### **4.1.2 Teaching pronunciation**

The question that most divided the teachers in the interviews was the one that asked whether they explicitly teach pronunciation. This question led to a wide spread of answers that went in very different directions, with one teacher stating that she does teach pronunciation, one saying that she does not, and two saying that they let their students choose themselves. First, Cate expressed that she does not actively feel like she teaches her students pronunciation, but that she tries to show her students language spoken by people with a variety of accents. Despite that, she believes the way she talks herself, with a clear British accent, has a big influence on her students' own way of speaking. Second, Mary wanted to make it clear that she tries not to force her own American accent on to her students, and instead provides them with different material, in order for them to encounter as many varieties of English as possible, and that they are free to choose to talk in whichever way they want. However, she also notes that even though she does not aim for it to happen, her students often end up speaking American English. Third, Jane, on the other hand, expressed clearly that she actively teaches her students pronunciation. She mentioned that she continuously teaches her students about the rules of pronunciation and works regularly with some of the problems Swedes usually have when learning English, which are presented further in sub-section 4.1.3. Lastly, Andy, somewhat like Mary, expressed that he lets the students choose whichever pronunciation they want, but that he wants them to choose either a British or American pronunciation. He, who speaks with a British accent, feels, like

Mary, that the students prefer the American accent over his own British one. To summarize, three of the teachers claim in one way or another that they do not actively teach pronunciation, but one of them wants his students to choose either a British or an American pronunciation. Meanwhile, one of the teachers claimed that she actively works with pronunciation.

#### **4.1.3 Common Swedish mistakes when speaking English**

As shown previously, the participants claimed, unanimously, that intelligibility is most important for their students and that they do not actively make them speak in a specific way. One interesting aspect that arose several times during the interviews, was that the majority of the teachers, even though they claimed that the main object for the students is to be understood, commented on certain aspects of the language that are specific for their Swedish students' pronunciation of English. Cate expressed it like this:

4. [S]ome pronunciation mistakes that Swedes make, where the differences in pronunciation can carry more meaning, in those cases accents or pronunciation can be quite important, but then I am maybe a bit of a nerd that can say that, "o-f", that is always /ʌv/, there are always small things like that. (Cate)

In other words, she recognized the importance of certain features that are vital for the intelligibility of her students but added that she also has a tendency to point out that her students pronounce certain sounds incorrectly, even though they cannot be said to carry a great amount of meaning. Mary expressed it in a similar way:

5. As long as they can make themselves understood, “and if they speak like this” [imitating a Swenglish accent] maybe it’s not that great, because that could make it so they are not as easily understood. (Mary)

She too pointed out that it is enough if the students can make themselves understood, but followed that up with a similar remark to the previous participant, where she imitated how a student with an apparent accent could sound, pointing out that it could be a problem, even though what she said was fully comprehensible. Jane used a similar example to the one used by Cate:

6. [T]here is a difference between /ʌv/, and /ʌf/, for example. And we talk about the Swedes’ big problem with saying [θ], those are two of my hobbyhorses. So, it is like, those are the kind of things that really expose that you are Swedish, if you make those mistakes. (Jane)

In accordance with the previous two, she demonstrated common mistakes that she believes to be important, but the examples show cases where people display a distinct Swenglish accent, rather than failing to make themselves understood.

#### **4.1.4 Speaking without an accent is a way to get a better grade**

One aspect that arose spontaneously during two of the interviews, and as an answer to a question in one, was a thought that accents and pronunciation can be connected to the grade the students get, or at least that the higher-level students, if any, are the ones that could possibly be asked to work on their accent and pronunciation. Jane expressed these thoughts on three separate occasions during the interview:

7. To get an E it does not matter [...] to get an E in English it does not matter how you sound as long as you can make yourself understood [...] if there is someone who has the vocabulary and grammar and, god knows all, on an A-level, but that speaks really Swenglish [...] then you are there and poke and say that “you need to work on your pronunciation”. (Jane)

As is shown with the previous quote, this teacher believes that the higher the overall proficiency of the student, the likelier it is that she will make them work on their accent in order to get a higher grade. Andy proposed a similar belief:

8. If it’s a student on the C- or A-level then absolutely, “work a little more on your intonation”, so, yeah. Then it’ll become a better grade, perhaps (Andy).

Both these teachers expressed a belief that the students could receive a higher grade based on their pronunciation. Although Mary did not say it as clearly, she expressed thoughts along the same lines. When asked the question “If there are stronger students, maybe you would want them to work on that [their pronunciation] to be even more proficient?”, she answered that she definitely would want them to.

It should be noted that two of the participants presented an idea to what could be the explanation of this. These two examples read as follows:

9. [B]ut where the pronunciation is very difficult, the language in itself may be hard and heavy. So then it is kind of connected (Cate).

10. But generally it is those who are good at English who want to sound like that [nativelike], and that can then just choose whichever accent they want. (Jane)

The two quotes show a belief that the overall language proficiency is connected to the students accents and pronunciation, something that possibly could explain why a good accent is connected to a higher grade. Weaker students generally struggle with many aspects of the language, which make the teachers focus on the basics of the language rather than pronunciation.

#### **4.1.5 Advantages of teaching accents**

During the interviews, the participants were asked about what they feel would be the advantages and disadvantages of teaching their students to speak with more of a nativelike accent. First, the advantages suggested by the teachers will be presented, before presenting the disadvantages in sub-section 4.1.6. The participants expressed similar opinions when they were asked this question. As is shown below, the most common response was to mention the students' confidence as a positive effect of them having a more nativelike pronunciation:

11. I think it would have to do with their own security and their self-confidence (Cate).

12. But also, it can make you feel more confident if you, well if you got a good pronunciation (Mary).

13. The advantage is that it is easier for other people to understand if you have a better pronunciation (Jane).

14. [Y]ou could get a good self... what do you say... self-confidence, yeah, you can get more confident in using the English language, and it's always a good feeling if someone takes you for an American or an English person. (Andy)

As the quotes show, three of the teachers used similar wording when describing the possible advantages of teaching students accents more explicitly. According to the participants, speaking with a more nativelike accent can lead to people having more confidence in themselves when speaking a foreign language. Jane did not mention confidence, but instead talked about the importance of intelligibility, which she meant increases with a better pronunciation.

#### **4.1.6 Disadvantages of teaching pronunciation**

Unlike the advantages, the participants did not all answer the question about the disadvantages of teaching their students a nativelike accent in a similar way, however, two of them mentioned it as a possible hinderance, if the students are expected to sound in a certain way. Cate did not answer this question specifically, so the answers presented here are from the other three only:

15. I think it can become like a hinderance. You focus more on how you sound than what you are actually saying (Mary).

16. [O]ne con can be that you actually inhibit them. As I said, if they become too self-conscious of their pronunciation it can stop them from saying anything, if they feel like they have to say it in the right way instead of just talking (Jane).

17. I wouldn't say there are any cons, no. As long as they try to. (Andy)

Both Mary and Jane mentioned that a negative of teaching their students to talk with a nativelike accent could be that it inhibits them, and it could lead to them avoiding talking at all if they feel pressured to speak in a specific way. Andy however, expressed that he does not believe there to be any disadvantages of teaching accents to his students.

#### 4.1.7 Difference in status between accents

One topic that arose during the first interview was that Cate mentioned that she perceived the use of a more nativelike, or non-nativelike, accent, to be somewhat of a status marker between the students. Since this was a very notable comment, the three following interviewees were questioned about whether they agree with this or not. The result was that three out of the four teachers somewhat agreed, and the fourth stated that he did not want to answer since he did not observe the students enough outside of the classroom. First, the comment by Cate during her interview reads as follows:

18. There is some status in either having a very good British pronunciation or accent, or maybe American, and then you if you have a slightly worse pronunciation even though you have a satisfactory vocabulary and use advanced words [...] there is a feeling that it can be that you have a slightly lower status. (Cate)

After the interview with Cate, the remaining interviewees were told that this difference in status had been mentioned in a previous interview and were asked whether they think that this could affect the students or not. As shows in the following, both Mary and Jane, at least partially, agreed:

19. Yeah, maybe. Maybe so. And also, maybe the reverse, like, if you have a really good accent people might think that you know more than you do. So, it can be the opposite as well. But I think that, unfortunately, a common thing, it doesn't matter if it's English or whichever language, if you don't speak it well, you won't be taken as seriously. I think. (Mary).

20. Yes, it is, absolutely [when asked whether it is a fair assumption that a good or bad accent can affect the students' status]. [...] most of the students speak with an American accent, but now suddenly it is starting to be cool to talk with a British accent. [...] [b]ut often it is the students that are already good English speakers that want to sound like that, and who are able to, and just choose which accent they want. (Jane)

As shown in the comments by the teachers, all three of them have strong opinions on this subject. It also shines a light on the difference between the teachers' views on the importance of intelligibility and their views on how they think the students' attitudes towards these same problems differ from their own views.

#### **4.1.8 Teacher thoughts on the students' views on teacher accents**

Even though the interviews primarily focused on teacher attitudes towards student accents, they were also asked about their thoughts on teacher accents, and whether they think an apparent L1 accent would affect the way in which the students perceive their EFL teacher. Three out of the four teachers did fully agree that too much of an accent would be a hinderance for an EFL teacher. It is important to note that the fourth teacher did not disagree, but interpreted the question in a slightly different way, talking about the students' views on American vs British accents. The three teachers that agreed stated this in quite similar ways:

21. I think it is a status symbol, it is not entirely easy teaching English at a high level with an apparent Swedish accent (Cate).

22. I do think that they [the students] assume, at least, that the teacher knows more if they speak the language, not as a native speaker maybe, but fluently and without too much of an accent. Not that that is necessarily true [...] [b]ut I do think students see it that way (Mary).



23. [Do you think that it affects how the students view their teacher if he or she speaks with an apparent L1 accent?] I think it does, actually. They expect the teacher to have a good pronunciation. (Jane)

As all these comments show, the teachers believe that the students have certain expectations in their EFL teachers, and that their credibility as teachers, at least partially, relies on having a, more or less, nativelylike accent. All these comments center around the students' expectations and beliefs, and it seems all three of them allude to a basic need to gain the respect of the students by speaking in a way that signals that they control the language. Interestingly enough, Cate and Jane added comments about their own opinions on this topic in connection to these previous answers, where both of them expressed that they too believe teacher accents to be significant:

24. I am not very proud of it, but I remember clearly in upper secondary school, in first grade, I was an English fan, it was my best subject, and I had a teacher that had this incredible pronunciation, British, as I like it, and I was really impressed and thought it was great. I had to change teachers [...] to a teacher that was really Swenglish [...] and I lost a lot of respect because of this (Cate).

25. I think it is important that a teacher has a good pronunciation. (Jane)

Even though the former spells this out with a longer comment, involving her own experience, both Cate and Jane express a belief that they think it is important for teachers to have a “good” accent in order for them to be respected.

## 4.2 Discussion

In this section of the essay, the results of the study are discussed. All the themes from the results section are discussed and contextualized, both in relation to the research questions and to the previous research.

The fact that all the participants initially pointed out intelligibility as the main goal for their students was expected and aligns well with ELF on the importance of the use of English as a tool for communication between people with different L1s, and that intelligibility is more important than a likeness to some idealized version of English. This view also fits with the CEFR scales that does not state nativelike pronunciation as a necessity for a higher level of language, as well as the study by Noviana (2020).

Interestingly, even though the teachers' answers varied in terms of teaching pronunciation, they all made similar remarks afterwards in terms of providing their students with material from and by people with different accents, in order for them to choose one of their own and improve it. It could certainly be argued that this is pronunciation teaching, even if it is not the teacher him/herself explicitly telling their students how to pronounce certain words. The fact that most of the teachers were quick to mention that they do not teach pronunciation, but then proceeded to give these examples is interesting, as if they felt that it is something that you should not do. This could be explained as the *Hawthorne effect*, which is an effect during research that makes the participants act differently when they know that they are being observed (Dörnyei, 2007). It is even more interesting when compared to the study by Candan & Inal (2020), where the learners expressed a wish to receive even more pronunciation focused teaching.

One of the more noteworthy aspects of the study is that three of the teachers mentioned specific mistakes Swedes tend to make, in terms of pronunciation, as problems they work with, even though they, as mentioned in sub-section 4.1.3, do not seem to result in a far lesser ability

to communicate. This indicates that the participants of this study agree, although not explicitly, with the study by Jenkins (2005), that teachers believe an L1 accent to have a negative effect on their students' chance of success in the English speaking community in the future.

The most essential area to discuss and contextualize could very well be the comments made about accents affecting the students' grades (excerpts 7 & 8). While these comments are remarkable when taken literally, especially in relation to the syllabus, they could be explained with the latter quotes in the same sub-section (4.1.2). What the teachers seem to mean is that the E-level students are usually weaker in all parts of the language and cannot be expected to focus too much on their pronunciation. Meanwhile, the one instance where they would actually make their students focus on their accent or pronunciation, is when they are already proficient in all other areas of the language but lack a good pronunciation. In whichever case, these comments are interesting and are not similar to any previous studies encountered by the author of this study.

While discussing the advantages and disadvantages of teaching accents, the participants could be said to give "confidence" as an argument for both sides. As an advantage of teaching accents, the teachers mentioned that it would give their students confidence to speak with a good accent, while a disadvantage could be that it harms their students' confidence to be expected to speak in a certain way. The notion that the students would become more confident while speaking with a "better" accent is an indication that the teachers believe that the students see accents as a key trait, and is supported by the studies by Jenkins (2005), Chan (2016) and Tsang (2020), which all came to the conclusion that both teachers and students still prefer NSs over NNSs. This theme of confidence could be linked to what is presented in sub-section 4.1.7, namely a difference in status between accents. The belief that a better or worse accent affects the students' status is highly significant. As Jenkins pointed out in her study from 2005, ELF accents cannot be effective if the teachers believe that they will harm their students' chances of

success. Clearly, there is still a belief that this is the case, and that a “better” accent is a key to success in the English-speaking community.

Lastly, the belief expressed by the teachers regarding the students’ feelings toward teachers with accents, fits in with much of the previous research (Chan, 2016; Jenkins, 2005; Tsang, 2020). Teachers seem to believe that their students think of a nativelike accent, or at least close to one, as an important trait for a teacher to have, at least in terms of gaining their students’ respect. As the comment from Cate shows in excerpt 24, teachers are, naturally, defined by their own experiences from when they were students. When discussing this topic, Jane did note that “you just have to realize that, when it comes to English, they [the students] learn in a thousand different ways than just the classes”. This may as well be the reason that the students, allegedly, believe that their teachers should sound as nativelike as possible. If they are exposed to so much English, by NSs, every day, why should they settle for anything else from the one person that it set to teach them? What Jane is talking about in this quote could be explained as *extramural English* (EE), which according to Sundqvist (2009) is the English that the students are exposed to outside of the classroom. Sundqvist agrees with Jane in that EE is very relevant in the Swedish EFL context, and that it is also valued highly by the students themselves.

## **5 Conclusion**

This study aimed to examine Swedish EFL teachers’ attitudes towards L1 accents. The results can be described as mixed. Even though the teachers largely expressed views that coincide with those of ELF, that English as a world language mainly should be viewed as a means of communication, and not be measured against some idealized version of it, in terms of oral proficiency, the interviews also showed that the teachers, in reality, believe that a more

nativelike pronunciation is something that presents advantages in the English-speaking community.

The teachers stated that they either worked actively with their students' pronunciation or provided them with different materials in order for them to be exposed to different English accents. Even though they expressed that they let their students choose whichever accent they want, two of the interviewees believe that the students often end up speaking with a similar accent to their own.

The participants thought that a positive result of teaching their students to talk with a more nativelike accent could be that it would improve the students' confidence to sound more like a NS, and that it is easier to gain respect when talking more nativelike. However, they believed that this type of teaching could become a hinderance for their students and could prevent them from talking if they felt like they needed to perform with a perfect accent.

Overall, this study has in many ways reflected the results gathered from the previous research. Even though official documents, such as the CEFR-scales, states that focus should be on intelligibility, the reality is that people tend to focus on *how* someone sounds, even if they are perfectly proficient in every other aspect of a language. Already in 2005, Jenkins proposed that teachers' attitudes would need to change, in order for ELF accents to gain respect. According to this, quite limited, study, this still holds true. As long as teachers believe that students view accents as something important, it seems quite difficult to change their status in the classroom. Further research in a Swedish context would be needed to explore whether this is the case, and, perhaps more essentially, how to increase the status of L1 accented English in the classroom and in the ELF community.

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## Appendix

(I= interviewer, P= participant)

### Participant 1 (Cate)

**[I] How long have you been working as an English teacher, hur lång tid har du jobbat som engelskalärare?**

[P] Menar du på en nivå eller totalt sett? För jag har jobbat länge fast..

[I] Totalt sett skulle jag säga.

[P] Då är det ju längre, jag började ju med 4-5-åringar, när det nu var.. Nu ska vi se, 2005, så sen 2005 då med lite avbrott för föräldraledighet, räcker det som svar?

[I] Det räcker absolut som svar, gud ja! Och då som lite följdfråga, **Can you tell me briefly about your experience of working as an English teacher, kan du berätta lite om din allmänna erfarenhet av att jobba som engelskalärare?**

[P] Jaa, i och med att det är så lång tid, man kan väl sammanfatta det, det är ju så olika. Det beror på olika arbetsplatser och olika åldrar förstås. Om jag tar det som jag jobbar nu så är det ju mot äldre åldrar och då är det ju mer fokus på ämnet och kanske mer fokus också på var i världen man pratar engelska, så kultur och folk och bakgrund och historia. Det är det kanske inte jättemycket när man har syftet att lära 5 eller 10-åringar engelska, där det blir mer fokus på att kunna ta sig fram språkligt, eller förbereda sig för det. Men jag personligen trivs ju jättebra eftersom att jag har ett jättestort intresse för engelska, eller har haft det sen jag var liten. Ehm, vill du ha något mer..

[I] Nej det blir jättebra! Okej men lite mer nu då, inriktat på det lite mer nischade området. **Do you explicitly teach pronunciation, if so, do you teach your student a specific kind of accent? Alltså, lär du ut uttal specifikt, och om du då gör det, lär du ut en speciell engelsk dialekt då, till dina elever?**

[P] Ja alltså, den frågan har ju lite olika svar för mig. För det första så brukar jag ha, när man då t.ex. jobbar med var engelska talas i världen, då möter ju eleverna talat språk med olika dialekter. Jaa, i, när man lyssnar på ljudfiler och sådär, när man jobbar man med.. Men det är ju inte sånt man tänker att man lär ut, men de möter ju det. Sen märker jag ju att mitt uttal smittar av sig på vissa elever, och det har jag både märkt själv och elever har sagt det till mig själv, att du pratar ju brittisk engelska och jag tycker det är så fint och det vill jag också försöka göra, sådär. Så att det är ju intressant, och vissa tycker ju inte alls om det har ju också sagt, att

jag tycker inte alls om din dialekt, jag gillar inte den. Så det är ju, each his own, men det är, uttal som man t.ex. då tog upp på min lärarutbildning, i, vad hette den... Salisbury, där vi var, det var ju ganska bra, det var ju liksom lite så uttalsmissar som svenskar gör, där det är mer betydelsebärande uttalsskillnader, där kan ju dialekter eller uttal liksom vara ganska viktigt, och jag är ju kanske lite sådär nörd som kan säga att "o-f" det är alltid /ʌv/, såna där smågrejer. Där är jag liksom. Så för mig är ju uttalet viktigt, men jag skulle heller inte vilja att någon elev begränsas av det och känner att... för det kan de ju säga i t.ex. årskurs 7, när man börjar bli väldigt självmedveten att, du pratar så himla bra och jag kan inte prata, då kan de bli stressade, och då får man ju försöka å liksom såhär, men det viktigaste är ju att man kan språket och det finns ju de som pratar jättebra engelska men inte alls har... å kanske har vad vi då säger brytning eller dialekt eller uttalssvårigheter som gör att det kanske ändå blir väldigt bra förståelse.

[I] Intressant. Nu svarade du lite på det här redan, men, **do you think it is important if your students speak with an accent or if they sound more nativelike? Alltså, tycker du det är viktigt om dina elever pratar med en svensk dialekt eller brytning eller om de låter mer naturligt engelskspråkiga?**

[P] Nej det tycker jag inte är viktigt, fokus är ju på språket i sig men, som sagt, för det kan utesluta väldigt många som kanske har en långsam process. Men samtidigt idag så tycker jag att det är väldigt få som har det svårt med uttal, iom att det har ju skett ett stort skifte framförallt iom att de har ju väldigt mycket tiktoks och andra medier som gör att de hör engelska varje dag så att de får ett annat flyt i sitt uttal. Och det märker jag ju bara på mina egna barn men, varav en är 10 år liksom, och bara hux flux har ett liksom superfint uttal så att. Det kommer ganska mycket av sig själv, och där det inte gör det, där tror jag, dock litegrann, och det vet jag ju, har ju inget befast så, men där uttalet är jättesvårt där är ju även språket i sig kanske tungt och svårt. Så då hänger de liksom litegrann ihop, och då tränar man generellt på allting, men inte först och främst fokus på uttal, så det lär jag liksom inte ut.

[I] Mm, tror du det kan göra då att om eleverna i allmänhet har väldigt bra uttal, att det kan göra att de som inte har det känner sig ännu mer, liksom, utestängda eller vad man ska säga?

[P] Ja, jag tror att du är inne litegrann på det, att det ligger lite status i att ha antingen då väldigt bra brittiskt uttal eller dialekt eller kanske amerikanskt, och har man då liksom ett lite lite sämre uttal men kanske har ett fullgott ordförråd och avancerade ord så kommer eleverna, kanske, det vet jag inte, jag har inte frågat eller sett studier på det, men det finns en sådan känsla att då kan det vara så att man är, har väl lite lite lägre status.

[I] Väldigt intressant. Som sagt, det blir lite upprepningar av det du redan har sagt, men, **If you have a student that speaks with an apparent L1 accent, like swenglish for example, do you make him or her work on it to sound more nativelike, alltså om du har en elev som talar med en tydlig brytning, t.ex. svengelsk, försöker du då få den eleven att jobba för att förändra den?**

[P] Ja, alltså om man tänker brytning och svengelska då får man definiera vad det är. För är det en brytning men det är rätt... ordföljd osv, då skulle jag nog bara kommentera om eleven kommer till mig och säger så här, jag känner mig liksom osäker, men skulle språket vara liksom korrekt och den skriver korrekta texter och pratar i klassrummet, då skulle jag inte gå in och bara, du, vi ska nog träna lite på ditt uttal. Men är det liksom svengelskt, att man t.ex. ändrar ordföljden för, som den svenska, att det blir så, då blir det ju helt plötsligt inte korrekt liksom. Och då skulle jag nog gå in, eller då får man försöka korrigera det. Och där skriver jag ju även i om man säger, det har ju inte med uttal att göra men i texter där man ser att det är svengelska liksom, då kan jag skriva att det här är svengelska, så säger vi på svenska, så här säger man på engelska, eller skriver. Tal och skrift hänger ju ihop förstås.

[I] Mycket bra. Nästa fråga då, **what do you think would be the pros and cons of trying to teach your students to speak more nativelike, alltså vad tror du det kan finnas för fördelar och nackdelar med att jobba med att elever ska låta mer naturligt engelskspråkiga?**

[P] Jo men då tror jag att det skulle ha att göra med deras egen trygghet och deras självförtroende i såna fall, för att som sagt det är, det är tufft att våga prata ett annat språk och iom, jag tänker moderna språk som spanska och franska, där tror och gissar jag inte att det kan ha lika mycket betydelse hur pass tyskt du låter, för det är så tidigt om vi tänker då högstadiet, gymnasiet kanske det blir på en annan nivå. Men engelska, alla ska kunna det, och det som sagt, blir en liten hierarki eller en liten statuskillnad mellan den som då pratar. Det man rekommenderar, eller det jag rekommenderar är ju, och det är ju generellt också för att förstå bättre, men det är ju som sagt att lyssna på tex poddar eller vloggar där de pratar, där det inte är väldigt avstannande i tempo, långsamt, alltså där de pratar liksom på riktigt så att man ska förstå.. Och då kommer ju liksom flytet och uttalet med det, liksom, om eleven är mottaglig och vill.

[I] Okej, sista då, **do you think that it affects how the students view their teacher if he/she speaks with an apparent L1 accent or not, alltså, tror du det påverkar elevernas syn på läraren om hen skulle prata med en tydlig brytning, eller om man pratar mer naturligt engelskspråkigt?**

[P] Ja, alltså om jag får ta det på en personlig nivå, för jag har också varit elev, och jag är inte jättestolt över det, men jag minns väldigt tydligt på högstadiet [gymnasiet, författarens anteckning], i ettan, och jag var ju då engelskafantast, det var ju mitt roligaste, och jag hade en lärare som hade SUPER-uttal, brittiskt då, som jag gillar, och jag var väldigt imponerad och tyckte det var superbra. Fick byta lärare, nu vet jag inte varför, av någon anledning, var väl kanske en annan kurs eller någonting i tvåan, till en lärare som hade väldigt tydligt svengelsk, eller ja, svenskt engelskt uttal. Och jag personligen, tappade mycket respekt iom det, bara det, och det kan jag liksom ärligt säga att det var jättesvårt för mig, för att jag såg då att det hängde ihop. Det är inte alls säkert att det gjorde det, men där är, tror jag det är en statussymbol, det är inte helt lätt att undervisa engelska på hög nivå med en tydlig svensk.. och sen är frågan om det är rätt eller fel, men, samma sak på lärarutbildningen när vi kommer in på engelskundervisningen. Jag minns att läraren pratar som en ”native speaker”, hela hela tiden, veckor in i utbildningen så byter hon, eller om vi skulle iväg på den här resan att hon byter till svenska, ingen trodde att hon var ens svensk, vilket blir så här, åå. Och då är man imponerad av det, på något sätt, det finns liksom en.. tror jag. Och nu förstås utifrån mig själv och min egen syn på det här, men jag skulle gissa på att det finns en sån allmän syn i samhället, ”nej jag vågar inte” min mamma liksom, som har läst engelska i knappt ett år liksom på den tiden liksom. Man kan bli väldigt begränsad så att det är ju en väldigt intressant fråga, ska man, ska man inte? Och liksom, blir det klyftor av det, och som lärare, vad har du för utmaningar där? Jätteintressant faktiskt. Och det har man ju fått höra själv att ”du pratar ju såå bra” liksom, och då, man behöver ju inte vara en bättre lärare för det men, eller hänger det ihop, inte vet jag, vi säger det, haha.

## **Participant 2 (Mary)**

[I] **For how long have you been working as an English teacher, alltså, hur lång tid har du jobbat som engelskalärare?**

[P] Well, since, I worked for a year and a half when I was 21, when I came back from the states. But then I didn't have my license of course. And then I've been working for 12, maybe.. isch.

[I] Good enough! **Can you tell me briefly about your general experience of working as an English teacher in Sweden?**

[P] My general experience? In regards to...?

[I] Overall, how is it to work as an English teacher in Sweden?

[P] Varied, their knowledge of English is vary varied. And some think they know a lot because they are gamers, and they know a specific type of English. Most have some knowledge, but there are those who have basically no knowledge at all, so it's very, sort of, high and low. But I do think it's, for the most part, an easy subject in the sense that they understand why it's important.

[I] Yeah, I get that.. The next question, moving into the subject a bit, what it's really about. **Do you explicitly teach pronunciation, and if so, do you teach your students any specific kind of accent?**

[P] I speak American English, so I'm very clear about that when I teach them, that this is my English, and yours can be whichever you feel the most comfortable with. And I try to not force them to speak American English, and refer them to different sites where they can listen. There are online dictionaries for example that they can use, but of course they get my English for the most part, because that is what they hear.

[I] So they generally want to talk, more or less like you?

[P] Yes, and I think that's also the most common type of English in Sweden.

[I] Yeah I'd say so too. Interesting. **Do you think it is important if the students speak with an accent or if they sound more nativelylike?**

[P] No.

[I] Not at all? Why?

[P] As long as they can make themselves understood, "and if they speak like this" [imitating a Swenglish accent] maybe it's not that great, because that could make it so they are not as easily understood, but I have an accent to, so that's unavoidable and I don't think... it's better to... strive maybe for, you know, expanding your vocabulary than trying to sound as a native speaker.

[I] So comprehensibility is the key?

[P] Yes I think so, I think that's what language is all about

[I] So where do you draw the line then? For where it becomes a problem for the students? There is some borderline, right?

[P] Yeah, when they say a word completely wrong. You know... silly example, bear and beer, you know. Yeah. People have different opinions I'm sure, but that's where I stand.

[I] Sure. So, **if you have a student that speaks with an apparent first language accent, like really Swenglish for example, do you make him or her work on it order to sound more nativelike?**

[P] That depends. If the student is very insecure, about speaking at all, I don't, 'cause then I just want them to speak. And then, commenting on how they speak, I don't think that really leads anywhere, 'cause you really need to get them to just do it. If they are... conscious of how they sound, and if that's something they want to change, then definitely. If that is what's making them insecure, do you see the difference?

[I] Yeah, of course. So, it's more like.. If there are stronger students, maybe you would want them to work on that to be even more proficient?

[P] Yeah definitely! It depends where they're at.

[I] **So what do you think would be the pros and cons then, of really trying to teach your students to speak more nativelike? Or are there pros and cons?**

[P] Well, like I said, I think it can become like a hinderance. You focus more on how you sound than what you are actually saying. But also, it can make you feel more confident if you, well if you got a good pronunciation. But then again, my mother in law, she lived in the states for about 30 years, and she still sounds Swedish.. And she is, you know, she's got a PhD, so. But I mean, for some people it's also easier, and for some it's harder, so.

[I] So, that teacher I talked to earlier, she said that she feels like it becomes kind of a status thing, that you should almost speak kind of cleanly, not cleanly, but since the students are exposed to so much English nowadays, here in Sweden as well, that it becomes kind of expected that they should talk better. Do you think that's fair?

[P] I can see where that's coming from, but... Do I think that's fair... It depends on what kind of English they have been exposed to, I mean if you only play computer games that's one type of English, if you listen to one type of music or watch one type of movies or... I think perhaps they are more well versed in like, the informal types of English. But we can't expect them to know their way around more formal English.

[I] Do you think it affects how natively, well native, not natively. Do you think it affects how native speakers of English, see people from Sweden, for example, if they speak with an apparent Swedish accent? Negatively, I should say

[P] Yeah, maybe. Maybe so. And also maybe the reverse, like, if you have a really good accent people might think that you know more than you do. So it can be the opposite as well. But I think that, unfortunately, a common thing, it doesn't matter if it's English or whichever language, if you don't speak it well, you won't be taken as seriously. I think.

[I] Yeah. **So, actually the last question I've written is this, do you think it affects how the students view their teacher if he or she speaks with an apparent first language accent?**

[P] Yes.

[I] You think? How?

[P] I think, since they're there to learn the language, I do think that, they assume at least that the teacher knows more if they speak the language, not as a native speaker maybe, but fluently and without too much of an accent. Not that that is necessarily true, I've had teachers at the university that spoke with a, you know, pronounced Swedish accent, and they were, you know, brilliant, they were very good at English, so. But I do think students see it that way.

[I] And do you think, on the other hand, like it can affect them in a real positive way if the teacher speaks well, automatically, or is it like, it's more that it could have a negative effect if they don't speak with a good accent?

[P] Interesting. Well, I do think that they get... like their... understanding of how English is phrased, spoken, how it sounds, understanding of... what they understand from spoken English, and how maybe they can incorporate that to their own English, I think that it's a bit easier, actually. But then you... Like, again, it's not just how you say it, it's what you say. You know, I can stand here speaking English like an American, you know, for hours, without saying anything.

### **Participant 3 (Jane)**

[I] **For how long have you been working as an English teacher, alltså, hur lång tid har du jobbat som Engelskalärare?**

[P] 22 år.

[I] **And then, can you tell me, briefly, about your general experience of working as an English teacher? Alltså mer generellt, hur är jobbet som engelskalärare?**

[P] Alltså, om man får jämföra det med att undervisa i andra ämnen, jag jämför bara med svenska och med matte, så är engelska ett ganska fritt ämne att undervisa i. Alltså, så länge du använder dig av engelska, så kan man göra ganska mycket saker, och det är väldigt trevligt, det är väldigt kreativt på det sättet. Man kan vara väldigt kreativ som lärare.

[I] Så det känns mer fritt, du är fri att göra...

[P] Ja, man är inte så bunden. Svenskan där har du, man måste lära sig vissa former på saker och ting, i maten ska man lära sig att räkna vissa saker, men engelska då ska man lära sig ett språk.

[I] Man kan välja lite själv hur man lägger fokus?

[P] Utan tvekan ja, alltså innehållet. Så länge formen är... gud hur ska jag förklara det här... Alltså så länge du lär dig att läsa och prata och förstå, lyssna på engelska, förstå och läsa och förstå och allt det här, så spelar det ingen roll hur du lär dig det. Det är fördelen.

[I] Men då, lite mer, för att komma in på det som jag egentligen ska fråga om, **what is your focus when working with oral proficiency in English with your students, alltså vad har du för fokus när du undervisar i muntlig språkfärdighet i Engelska?**

[P] Att de pratar.

[I] Det är huvudmålet? Det är det enda viktiga?

[P] Ja men det är ju det som är mål nummer ett, det är ju att de pratar. Sen, huruvida det som kommer ut är korrekt eller inte, det spelar mindre roll. Alltså om man ser i grund och botten, så är det viktigaste att de pratar, att de använder sig av engelska. Sen är det ju självklart, ju högre upp på betygsskalan man kommer, desto mer korrekt måste det vara.

[I] Så då, för att fortsätta lite på det, **do you explicitly teach pronunciation, and if so, do you teach your students any specific kind of accent, alltså, lär du ut uttal till dina elever specifikt, och då, om ja, lär du någon speciell typ av engelsk dialekt, eller så?**

[P] Jo och nej, är det ett bra svar?

[I] Om du utvecklar..

[P] Jaha, säger du det, haha. Nej men alltså, uttal, ja, det är ju klart man pratar om uttal, det gör man ju kontinuerligt, och ibland pratar man uttalsregler, man har ju sina små käpphästar, att det är skillnad på /ʌv/, och /ʌf/, t.ex. Och vi pratar om svenskarnas stora problem med att säga [θ],



det är väl två såna här käpphästar. Ja men alltså, det är ju såna saker som verkligen avslöjar att man är svensk, om man gör dem misstagen, så det påtalar man.

[I] Känner du att det är viktigt att den grejen, att just avslöja att man är svensk, att inte göra det?

[P] Det beror sig på. För ett E så spelar det här ingen roll. Återigen, alltså, det viktiga är att man kan prata på Engelska. Men om man ska gå in och börja diskutera såna här saker, så petar man på uttal av vissa ord och vissa bokstäver, men däremot så petar man inte på deras accent. Det får de ha vad de vill.

[I] Så, nu ställde jag nästan en av mina framtida frågor här, och nu blir det ju lite upprepning av vissa saker, eftersom du förmodligen kommer svara på frågorna redan innan jag ställer dem, vissa av dem. **Do you think it is important if the students speak with an accent or if they sound more nativelike, alltså tycker du det är viktigt om dina elever pratar med en svensk brytning eller dialekt eller om de låter mer naturligt engelskspråkiga?**

[P] Viktigt vet jag inte om det är. Återigen, vi landar på att för att få ett E i engelska så spelar det ingen roll hur du låter så länge du kan göra dig förstådd. Prio nummer ett, att använda språket och att göra sig förstådd på språket, prio nummer ett.

[I] Så att generellt i klassen så, det är inget du lägger fokus på, när du undervisar klassen som helhet liksom?

[P] Då uppmuntrar man dem att prata.

[I] Men det finns lägen där det kan komma in?

[P] jaa, fast det händer så sällan, det är det. Alltså om man skulle prata ett extremfall, om det är någon som liksom har ordförråd och grammatik och gud vet allt på A-nivå men som pratar världens svengelska alltså med den accenten, så, då är man där och petar och säger att du behöver liksom träna på ditt uttal. Men då är liksom eleverna med på det själva, då vill de ha bättre uttal, så aa, men hur ofta händer det då?

[I] Nej, okej, så, **if you have a student that speaks with an apparent first language accent, e.g. Swenglish, do you make him or her work on in to sound more nativelike, alltså om du har en elev som pratar engelska med en väldigt tydlig brytning, t.ex. svengelska, försöker du då få den eleven att jobba för att förändra den?**

[P] Ja men det är ju precis som man utvecklar alla andra förmågor, så det är ju klart att man pratar med eleverna om att de behöver utveckla hur de pratar, även om man inte lägger jättevikt vid det, så är det ju klart att det är ett utvecklingsområde, ja. Och då uppmuntrar man, vet du vad man uppmuntrar dem att göra då, då uppmuntrar man dem att se på tv-serier och film.

[I] Det är du inte den första som har föreslagit. Så, **what do you think would be the pros and cons of trying to teach your students to speak more nativelike, alltså vad tror du det kan finnas för fördelar och nackdelar med att faktiskt jobba med att elever ska låta mer naturligt engelskspråkiga, om du tror att det finns några?**

[P] Jo men, en nackdel kan ju vara att man faktiskt hämmar dem. Som sagt var, om de blir allt för medvetna om sitt uttal så kan det stoppa dem från att säga någonting om de känner att de måste säga det på rätt sätt istället för att bara prata, och fördelen är ju det att, det är lättare för andra människor över huvud taget att förstå om du har ett bättre uttal.

[I] En tidigare person som jag intervjuade nämnde det som att det kunde finnas, eftersom elever pratar så pass bra engelska i allmänhet nu, att det kan finnas lite statusgrej i att faktiskt prata bra engelska, eller kanske snarare att man tappar status om man inte gör det. Tror du det är ett rimligt antagande?

[P] Ja det är det, absolut. Och det är lite häftigt, och nu vet jag att vi säkert kommer komma dit så småningom, men det som är häftigt det är ju att, majoriteten av eleverna pratar ju med amerikansk brytning... men nu börjar det bli lite häftigt att prata brittisk engelska helt plötsligt. Och då pratar vi inte RP, utan då pratar man att man ska låta lite som att man kommer från norra London eller norra England någonstans, för det tycker de är skithäftigt liksom, haha.

[I] Så det har liksom gått ett varv nästan?

[P] Ja men det känns som det, av någon anledning. Fast ofta så är det ju de som är duktiga på engelska som vill låta så, och som kan göra så, och bara välja vilken accent de vill ha. Det är ju inte alla som gör det nej.

[I] Nu blir det kanske en lite ledande fråga här, men alla säger till att börja med att det inte spelar någon roll hur man pratar, men kommer ändå fram till, till slut, att det faktiskt spelar roll. Så var går gränsen, eller vad man ska säga? När börjar man bry sig om att det faktiskt spelar roll?

[P] Oj gud, nu ställer du svåra frågor. Men återigen, för ett E i engelska, för att kunna göra sig förstådd, så handlar det om att man måste kunna förstå vad de säger, där går gränsen. Alltså, har du så pass svensk brytning så att det inte går att förstå, då blir det ett problem. Men annars, så länge man kan göra sig förstådd så, där går gränsen, återigen, där har vi minimigränsen för att göra sig förstådd, sen allting därutöver är ju någonting helt annat.

[I] För då snackar vi också betyg i skolan och uppfylla kunskapskrav och sånt, men om man tänker sen liksom, i verkliga livet så blir det kanske en annan sak också?

[P] Men återigen, där är ju att bli förstådd det absolut viktigaste. Det spelar ingen roll hur mycket ord du kan om du inte kan få ut dig dem, haha. Och dessutom, begripligt... Det måste ju vara begripligt. Alltså, nej gud i himlen, utvandrarerna, där är det ju det här när de först kliver i land i USA, så har han ju lärt sig ordboken hemma, precis hur man ska uttala allting och ingen förstår ju vad han säger, fastän han säger precis rätt saker, det är ju ett sånt typexempel, det spelar ju ingen roll att han har lärt sig det här, för han uttalar ju det så konstigt så ingen fattar ju vad han säger. Ja, man måste kunna göra sig förstådd.

[I] Så då är man under gränsen att kunna göra sig förstådd..(?)

[P] Haha, ja. Man kan liksom inte uttala det bokstav för bokstav, man måste ju ha någon form av uppfattning om hur man uttalar engelska ord. Man kan inte bara sitta i ett isolerat rum och läsa en text och uppfinna uttalet själv, man måste lyssna på engelska.

[I] Då har jag väl egentligen en fråga här, den enda frågan som handlar om liksom motsatta förhållandet här, och det är: **do you think that it affects how the students view their teacher if he or she speaks with an apparent L1 accent, alltså tror att det påverkar elevernas syn på läraren om hen pratar med en tydlig brytning, eller om då läraren pratar mer naturligt engelskspråkigt?**

[P] Det tror jag att det gör. Faktiskt. De förväntar sig att läraren ska ha ett bra uttal.

[I] Tror du det påverkar elevernas lärande också?

[P] Ja de lär ju sig inte rätt uttal. Eller... Gud nu ska vi inte höja upp vår roll som lärare till det mest viktiga här i världen, för det är bara att inse att elever, just när det gäller engelska, så lär de sig engelska på tusen andra sätt än på lektionerna. Det är inte vi som är det viktigaste i livet, så nää, vi kanske inte är så viktiga som vi vill tro att vi är, haha.

[I] Men man kommer tillbaka till det då att, så länge man har en lärare som kan göra sig förstådd och är duktig rent tekniskt kanske....

[P] ... på att lära ut och ändå kan det, men har dåligt uttal?

[I] Mm..

[P] Så skulle det säkert funka, även om det inte är det bästa. Jag tycker det är viktigt att en lärare har ett bra uttal, ja. Sen så, gud, ingen lärare är perfekt.

[I] Det tycker jag låter väldigt rimligt.

[P] Den lärare som tror att den är perfekt eller strävar efter att vara perfekt har problem, haha.

[I] Ja, jag hör vad du säger.

[P] Det var bara ett litet hett tips så...

[I] Det är egentligen de frågorna som jag har men

[P] Men jag skulle ju säga en sak till.

[I] Ja, jag skulle säga det, att om du har något övrigt inom det här området, som handlar om uttal, och liksom, elevernas och lärarens uttal som du skulle vilja säga någonting om så är du väldigt välkommen att göra det.

[P] Två saker, det rör inte direkt uttalet på det sättet men det rör ordförrådet, att det skiljer sig faktiskt lite mellan brittiskt och amerikanskt ordförråd. Och ofta så, återigen, eftersom amerikansk engelska är vanligast, så har eleverna bäst koll på de amerikanska orden, och sen så säger man själv att, här kommer de här orden, ”men jag vet ju redan vad det här heter”, ja men du vet inte vad det heter på brittisk engelska, och så tycker de det är jättejobbigt att de måste lära sig det på brittisk engelska, och så måste man förklara att ni, härifrån sverige, vet aldrig vart ni landar i världen, om ni ska använda amerikansk engelska eller brittisk engelska, alltså måste ni kunna både delarna. Så den är ju ganska tydlig. Och sen, som sagt var så, jag pratar ju brittisk engelska och eleverna ofta amerikansk engelska, och det finns vissa ord som man uttalar olika. Alltså i mångt och mycket så... alltså det är ju samma språk, det är ju små detaljer som skiljer det åt. Men jag då, på min brittiska engelska säger ju you[tʃʊ:b], eleverna säger you[tʊ:b], haha. Och förra året var jag med om att eleverna hånade mig för att jag sa [tʃʊ:b] för de fattade inte att man över huvud taget kunde säga så, så de trodde alltså att jag uttalade det fel, bara för att jag sa [tʃʊ:b].

[I] Och där blev det en riktig uttalskonflikt..?

[P] Ja, haha.

[I] Och där kanske det blir viktigt som lärare att visa att man ändå vet hur det fungerar, tänker jag?

[P] Ja, ja, alltså jag säger ju inte fel. Men just det att förklara det för dem, att jag får lov att säga [tʃʊ:b], så, för jag pratar brittisk engelska och ni får lov att säga [tʊ:b], även om jag tycker det låter helt befängt att säga [tʊ:b], haha. Så fick dom en liten spark tillbaka.

[...] [after talking off mic for a bit I turned the mic back on].

[P] Alltså jag tycker fonetik är jätteanvändbart, att kunna de fonetiska tecknen, för att kunna slå upp vilket ord som helst i hela världen så kan du se hur man uttalar det. Och när jag började då, för mina 22 år sedan, så undervisade man en hel del om fonetik. Alltså vilka vokaler det finns och hur man uttalar dem osv. Konsonanterna är ju inte lika många men vi har ju ett par ljud där som är ganska viktiga att kunna skilja på. Idag håller man inte på med det alls i stort sett. Det är när man pratar om alfabetet. Och det är jättesynd, för det är jättebra hjälp, men det visar ju också på att man lägger mindre tid på uttal idag än vad man gjorde förr.

[I] Ja, för där hade man kanske automatiskt kommit närmare det att folk pratade mer enhetligt? Om det nu är det man är ute efter...

[P] Ja. Nej, så man lägger inte lika stor vikt vid uttalet.

#### **Participant 4 (Andy)**

**[I] For how long have you been working as an English teacher? Alltså hur lång tid har du jobbar som engelskalärare?**

[P] Let's, i started in 1986, so you can count, i'm not the mathematics teacher so I'm quite pleased with that. So it's... too many years, perhaps. I'm at the end of my so called career. Maybe two more years, I'm 64 today.

**[I] So can you tell me, briefly, about your general experience of working as an English teacher in Sweden, alltså kan du berätta lite om din allmänna erfarenhet av att jobba som engelskalärare?**

[P] Oh yeah, absolutely, it has become more and more, if I may say so, easy, if you understand me. That doesn't mean that teaching is easier, but the fact that the students today, compared with 1980s students, and later on of course, they were much less prepared coming to school. It was a new subject, it was a new language for them. But today, already when they start school, they're familiar with English, which means of course that it's a subject that, when you teach it, you have, in other subjects there might be some problems with the students reaching the goals, E, I'm talking about that, but those students today are much, much fewer today than it was in the beginning when we had to work a little harder to... at that time, it was another system of grading, but today it's, you have to reach the goal and I have to say that very very few students today don't do it. So it has improved, it is much more interesting of course, you can chose anything to teach about, and still, the students are with you, so to speak, yeah. And they know, maybe that's a later question, they know the importance of speaking English, and do it good, because every job today requires a portion of English.

**[I] I think that a good way of talking about what I'm going to ask you later, so that's great. So, the next question then: what is your focus when working with oral proficiency in English with your students? Alltså vad är ditt fokus när du undervisar i muntlig språkfärdighet i engelska?**

[P] Yeah, being able to express what you feel and what you think, of course, basically. Of course, there are different focuses, I myself focus, since 10-15 years very much on literature. Because, as I said, the students are at very different levels. And therefore, working with vocabulary and grammar, some students, they have a, of course, not perfect grammar, a very limited vocabulary, but some students are brilliant. I can say, much better than I, at speaking, and their vocabulary is absolutely amazing I would say, so in that sense it has become, yeah, a little more difficult I would say, so therefore my homework, the homework that I give the students is that they're going to read. We have a good library in this school, a good English library, and therefore I require that they read about 150 pages in 3, maybe 4 weeks sometimes depending on how the weeks look and so on, and yeah, in order to improve their vocabulary and also reading. The fact that they read means that they also learn the grammar, the spelling and everything like that, by just reading. So that's my homework. Every now and then when we come to a new chapter in the base book, where the texts are, they have a theme word list, then I say that you have to pick at least 15 words from the theme list, if you don't know them all, then you can go out and look for other words of course, but that's the only time where I do the word check, with them. Eventually, as the years go, they become more and more interested in this, and we have facts now that reading, and especially reading English books, is rising dramatically. We have the book shop down here in Visby, they had to open a new, not a department, but several new bookshelves because so many students come in with their parents very often, and buy English books, because they want to read English books. And I wouldn't say that it's my, my way of teaching that has made this possible, but I think that it has contributed to that, and yeah. So English is in one way an easy language to teach today, but you have to.... yeah.

**[I] Do you explicitly teach pronunciation, and if so, do you teach your students any specific kind of accent?**

[P] No, I wouldn't say that I specifically teach any accent. I myself try to speak, to use the British accent, even though I have a slight Swedish intonation, so, but I try to, and I see that my students, they smile a little when they hear me speak sometimes, and I hear them sometimes repeating my words when they hear that I pronounce it in the British way, because they are much more into the American way of pronunciation. But I say that it doesn't matter, you choose whatever pronunciation you want, as long as it is either British or American, or for that sake, if they have some other language, from home, so to speak, then you have to.. yeah. But try to choose from American or British, yeah. The most important thing is that they can communicate

of course, I mean, whether it's American or British doesn't matter, because they will feel good in the way that they can express themselves when they come out to Europe, compared to German students, to French students, who have terrible pronunciation when it comes to English, haha. And we know the reason for that, with the texting and... yeah.

**[I] So, do you think it is important if your students speak with an accent, or if they sound more nativelike, alltså om du tycker det är viktigt att dina elever, om dina elever pratar med någon sorts svensk brytning eller dialekt, eller om de låter mer naturligt engelskspråkiga?**

[P] Sometimes when they have these, as I said, homework reading, we have three ways of grading there, because I do that. The first, number one, is, then they do a group, they tell each other about the books in groups, I go around and I just check that they have done their homework, okay. So that won't be graded because I can't listen to them all. But, the second time there is a written one, yeah, and then they write down, you know digi exam, you know, you're familiar with digi exam, you know, everything is gone with spelling you know, that you can get help with it and so on. So they write about what they have read, and they hand it in, they send it in, and I grade that, from grammar and spelling and vocabulary and everything like that. And then the third time, there is an oral presentation, in pairs, and then the rest of the class work with something else, and then I listen to them. And then, I sometimes point out that you can improve your pronunciation, try to sound a little more English, you know, try to, yeah.

[I] So do you do this with all the students or do you this with the ones that are at a bit higher level?

[P] All students, all students do all this, yeah. I find that it's a good way for me it's and a quite easy way also to see how they can express themselves in English. And you get the feeling, and you can see exactly what they, what their abilities are when it comes to grammar and vocabulary and things like that, so it becomes clear, they write about something that they themselves have to, write, not copy, so to speak.

[I] So then... you almost answered that question already, but, **if you have a student that speaks with an apparent first language accent, for example very Swenglish, do you make him or her work on it to sound more nativelike, alltså om du har en elev som pratar engelska med en tydlig brytning, t.ex. svengelsk, försöker du då få den eleven att jobba för att förändra den?**

[P] Yeah, as I said, they get feedback and “try to work a little more”, I, normally those students are the ones on the E-level, so to speak, and they have many things to work with, perhaps, and therefore I would say that I don’t focus more on that, or the other way around, I focus more on the grammar and vocabulary of course than the intonation, absolutely, but it depends on what student it is. If it’s a student on the C- or A-level then absolutely, “work a little more on your intonation”, so, yeah. Then it’ll become a better grade, perhaps.

**[I] Yeah, so, what do think would be the pros and cons of trying to teach your students to speak more nativelike, alltså vad det kan finnas för fördelar och nackdelar med att jobba med att elever ska låta mer naturligt engelskspråkiga?**

[I] Well, I mean, this is hands on a subject that you really can use when you grow, and you hopefully go out travelling, working abroad or so. And if you come to that place or job, when you’re in, don’t necessarily have to be in England or America, could be Europe somewhere, could be far east or so, but if you come there with an accent, that they feel like “oh you’re from America”, “no I’m from Sweden”, but then I’ve... you could get a good self... what do you say... self-confidence, yeah, you can get more confident in using the English language, and it’s always a good feeling if someone takes you for an American or an English person, “oh you’re from Sweden, you speak very good English”, then, yeah, I think that’s positive. Was that the question? Hehe.

[I] Yeah, the pros and cons, so do you think there are any negative parts of trying to teach them more nativelike pronunciation?

[P] No, I wouldn’t say there are any cons, no. As long as they try to, yeah.

[I] So one of the other teachers I spoke to mentioned that it has become almost a status thing since students talk so good English, nowadays, that if you don’t speak very well, it’s... you become almost like an outsider, since everyone speaks so good, do you think that’s something...?

[P] That’s a hard question for me to answer, actually, because I guess that to observe that you have to go out in the.. outside the classroom so to speak.

[I] So you don’t feel like that in the classroom?

[P] I can’t say that.. of course the good ones or the A-students, they listen and they hear that they are very poor, actually I don’t have any, or very very few moments in the classroom when they have to speak out loud in the class, because I’m aware that some of the students, they are aware of the situation of course, the weak ones, and therefore I don’t force them to say thing in class, so to speak. They have pair discussions and so on, and group discussions, but not “can



your answer this question” or “can you say something more about that” in front of the whole class, I never embarrass them, because I think that could be worse, the English can get worse because they get traumatized by that, so I would say that... the question? Haha, I speak so much I forget the questions.

[I] No, that’s great. **So the last question then, do you think that it affects how the students view their teacher if he or she speaks with an apparent first language accent, alltså tror du det påverkar elevernas syn på läraren om hen pratar med en tydlig brytning, så?**

[P] The only thing I can say when it comes to that, is that I sometimes see and hear my students when I say something very British, when I, you know, try to speak very... not that I always try to speak very British, I hope I sound more British than American, and then hopefully not too Swenglish in my pronunciation, but when it comes to, I can’t take any examples now, but some words you know, when the pronunciation gets really British, then I see that they look at each other and then they... Because I think they are... they hear that I try to sound British, and I have no problem with that, it’s not a problem for me, absolutely not, I’m not ashamed of trying to do that, even though I fail sometimes of course, I’m not perfect in any way, no.

[I] But do you think your students are more prone to like American English?

[P] Absolutely, absolutely, yeah. And that comes from watching series and films and, yeah. Youtube I suppose as well, yeah. And when you’re out there, very many Americans are out there so they get influenced by that, I’m sure. The important thing is to try to express yourself, that’s the most important thing, whether it’s in the Swenglish accent or American or British, that’s...