

ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH VARIATIONS:

Finnish high school students' views on
American English, British English and Australian English

Bachelor's thesis

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June 2010

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kielten laitos
Tekijä – Author Emma Tarkki	
Työn nimi – Title ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ENGLISH VARIATIONS: Finnish high school students' views on American English, British English and Australian English	
Oppiaine – Subject englanti	Työn laji – Level Kandidaatintutkielma
Aika – Month and year 16.6. 2010	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 23 + 1 liite
<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Englanti on maailman kieli, joka kuuluu jokapäiväiseen suomalaiseen katukuvaan ja englannin eri variaatioita esiintyy ympäri maailmaa. Ihmiset muodostavat omat käsityksensä ja asenteensa näitä variaatioita kohtaan henkilökohtaisten kokemustensa ja maailmankuvansa kautta. Aiemmissa tämän tieteenalan tutkimuksissa on keskitytty pääasiassa asenteisiin, joita suomalaisilla on eri kielistä yleisesti. Aiemmat tutkimukset ovat keskittyneet yksittäisten ihmisten välisiin mielipide-eroihin, eikä niinkään sukupuolten välisiin asenne-eroihin.</p> <p>Tässä tutkimuksessa selvitettiin sitä, millaisia erilaisia asenteita suomalaisilla lukion kolmasluokkalaisilla oppilailla on englannin kielen eri variaatioita kohtaan. Tutkimuksessa pyrittiin myös selvittämään millaisia eroja poikien ja tyttöjen suhtautumisessa englannin kieleen on. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin Lappeenrannan Lyseon lukiossa helmikuussa 2010. Kyselyyn osallistui 41 iältään 18-19-vuotiaasta oppilasta.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat, että eroja poikien ja tyttöjen asenteissa englantia kohtaan todellakin on. Pojat näyttävät pitävän enemmän amerikanenglannista, kun taas tyttöjä miellyttää enemmän brittienglanti. Australian englantia kohtaan oppilaat suhtautuvat suhteellisen neutraalisti, koska heillä ei ollut suurempaa tietämystä tästä variaatiosta. Australian englantia ei useinkaan kuule Suomessa, eikä kouluissakaan juuri hyödynnetä tätä variaatiota.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tuloksia voidaan hyödyntää jatkossa englannin kielen oppitunteja suunniteltaessa. Tunneilla voidaan tuoda enemmän esille australian variaatiota ja myös muita paljon puhuttuja englannin variaatioita, kuten Intian englanti, Irlannin englanti ja Etelä-Afrikan englanti. Näin voidaan laajentaa oppilaiden tietämystä englannin lukuisista eri variaatioista ja heille voidaan opettaa suvaitsevaisuutta näitä vähemmän puhuttuja variaatioita kohtaan</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords American English, Australian English, British English, English variations, language attitudes	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

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1 Introduction

English is commonly known as the lingua franca of the world. In Finland one can see English in his or her every day-life on the street, sprinkled on tv, newspapers and commercials. Many young people use English phrases, such as 'Oh my god!' and different catch-phrases which they have heard on tv and in movies. This phenomenon may irritate some people and can affect their attitudes towards the whole English-speaking world. Especially the elderly can find this rather frustrating as most of them do not know any English.

The purpose of this paper is to discover what kinds of attitudes Finnish high school students have towards the three main variations of English which are American English, British English and Australian English. The research questions which are answered in the present study concern what kinds of attitudes Finnish students of a high school in eastern Finland have towards the variations of English and how these attitudes differ between the boys and the girls who participated in the study or do they differ at all.

There has been some research done in this field but it would be interesting to see whether the results of the previous studies differ from the current study. The previous studies (e.g. Haapea 1999, Pirskanen 2009) compared different classes, e.g. regular classes and classes which are taught in English to see whether their attitudes towards English language differ. The present study complements the previous ones by examining the differences in attitudes between genders.

The paper will begin by reviewing some previous studies on the issue. After that the method and data of the present study are presented. Next the results of the data are analyzed in detail. The final stage of the study is the conclusion in which the results are summarized and discussed, the limitations of the study are discussed and some recommendations for possible further studies are made.

2 Attitudes and English variations

This chapter deals with the theoretical background of the present study. The chapter is divided into three main sections. Firstly, the issue of attitudes is discussed, what attitudes are and how they can affect a person's behaviour. Secondly, the previous studies which have concentrated on attitudes towards languages are reported. Thirdly, the English variations investigated in the study are discussed.

2.1 Attitudes and behavior

As Triandis (1971:14) points out, attitudes are crucial aspects of people's daily lives because everyone has attitudes towards everything and those attitudes can differ greatly. Thus they are an interesting object of study. Attitudes are inferred from what a person says about an attitude object, from the way he or she feels about it and from the way he or she behaves toward it. Oskamp (1991:3) claims that attitudes can be considered to be the cause of a person's behavior toward another person or an object. The attitudes can go so far that a person is an actual racist towards other people just because they speak with a particular accent that the person does not personally like.

Oskamp (1991:75-76) writes that the attitudes a person has towards other persons and object reflects his or her own personality and values. If we apply this idea to accents, some people may think, for example, that the British accent sounds too posh and because of that, they use another English variation. On the other hand, some people try to sound like British people because it sounds so elegant and aristocratic to their ear. They, too, want to sound sophisticated and posh and that is why they choose to use the British variation. Others think that the Australian variation sounds very laid-back and easy-going. The people who think like this want to convey to others that they too share these characteristics in their personality and behavior and thus choose the Australian accent and ignore the other alternatives.

Attitudes and behavior are intertwined because, as Ajzen (2005:3) points out, an attitude is a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution or event. The attitudes we have towards the variations of English can thus affect our behavior. As mentioned

before, people can be even racist when they are in contact with a person who speaks with a particular accent. The person may use a variation that others greatly dislike and thus that person becomes the target of slander and negative remarks. This kind of racist behavior comes to surface because of the bad personal experiences people have had about that particular style of speech. This racism can be verbal or even physical and downright hostile. According to Ajzen (2005:5) verbal responses can be expressions of disgust or disdain. Facial expressions, as well as various physiological and other bodily reactions are often assumed to reflect affect in a nonverbal mode.

However, as Fontana (1977:110) points out, it is argued that research into attitudes gives us only a superficial and simplified picture of the individual as he really is. There is surprisingly little evidence that attitudes, when tested via questionnaires, are actually reflected in behavior. In other words, a person who shows high moral values in a questionnaire may not necessarily appreciate or follow those values in his actual behavior. The individual knows that it is socially desirable to express certain moral views in public but is quite unable in his personal life to live up to these ideals. Similarly, it is very easy to judge others and people may, for example, have negative attitudes towards seeing other people drinking, smoking or speeding yet they are quite incapable of giving up these practices themselves. (Fontana 1977:110)

2.2 Studies on attitudes towards English language

According to Cheshire (1991:28), there has been a great deal of research into the attitudes to linguistic variation in English. As Horvath (1985:21) states, studies on Australian English done in the UK reveal that the Australian variation sounds like Cockney English and, in British view, it usually means that it sounds supercilious and rude. Most of the descriptions of Australian English hold a rather negative view; it is said to sound very nasal and it lacks the inflection of the voice which is supposedly result of laziness to move one's lips.

In her study Haapea (1999) examined the attitudes Finnish students have towards varieties of English language and their speakers. Haapea (1999:102) points out that Finnish people had the most positive attitudes towards speakers of American English. They were seen as smart, friendly and self-confident. American English was considered to be easy to understand and beautiful. The British variation was seen as rather friendly but also introvert. The variation was reported to sound sophisticated but boring and rather difficult to understand.

All in all, it could be said that due to the fact that English is seen and heard in nearly every corner of the world, it has been studied greatly too, and not just the language in general but also its different variations.

2.3 The English variations

Only a few centuries ago, the English language consisted of a collection of dialects spoken by monolinguals in the Great Britain (Cheshire 1991:1). Nowadays, in terms of its speakers and their demographic distribution, English has already acquired a dominant status as a world language. The 300 million native speakers of English are now outnumbered by its 400 million non- native speakers, who are spread virtually all over the world, on every continent (Greenbaum 1985:207). In this section, the three main variations of the English language, American English, British English and Australian English are presented.

2.3.1 American English and British English

According to Cheshire (1991:13) more research has been done on the English that is spoken in the USA than on English spoken anywhere else in the world. The English language has been institutionalised in the USA and UK longer than anywhere else, and the standard variety of American and British English has held an unchallenged position as reference models for the teaching of English throughout the world (Cheshire 1991:13).

According to Baugh et al. (1978:348) the English language was brought to the United States by colonists from England who settled along the eastern coast of the new continent in the seventeenth century. After that, the English spoken in the United States has differentiated itself from the English in the UK through pronunciation, spelling and grammar. As Baugh et al. (1978:351) point out, a quality which is often attributed to the American English is the preservation of archaisms, the old features of the language which have gone out of use among the speakers of English, e.g. the preservation of the r- sound, which was abandoned in England at the end of the 18th century. Therefore, American pronunciation is somewhat old- fashioned compared to the variation in the UK (Baugh et al. 1978: 351).

The earliest changes in the English language in America, distinguishing it from the language in the mother country, were in the vocabulary and spelling, for example honor (Am.) – honour (Br.), traveler (Am.) – traveller (Br.), theater (Am.) – theatre (Br.), plow (Am.) – plough (Br.) and tire (Am.) – tyre (Br.). According to Baugh et al. (1978:361), these differences are quite invisible to the people because the British spelling is also current in America.

Furthermore, the American way of pronouncing words gradually differentiated itself from the way words were delivered in England. At the present time, American pronunciation shows certain well-marked differences from English use, perhaps the most noticeable being the vowel sound in words such as 'fast', 'path' and 'dance'. Also, the treatment of the letter 'r' is different in America than in Britain. In American pronunciation 'r' is pronounced in all positions (Baugh et al. 1978:367).

2.3.2 Australian English

As Cheshire (1991:213) states, the English language has been present in Australia for 200 years. In that time it has overthrown the original languages of the continent and English has been taught to the descendants of the original people so that nowadays it is the predominant language throughout Australia. The status of English in Australia is similar to its status in the United States: it overwhelmingly dominates the linguistic landscape of Australia, it is the language of practically all public and private life but it coexists with a variety of indigenous and immigrant languages (Cheshire 1991:215).

Cheshire (1991:218) states that the first settlers to live in Australia spoke various dialects of the British Isles, e.g. Cockney, Gaelic, Irish English and the jargon spoken by the British sailors. All these dialects have left traces in the current Australian English. In other words, Australian English is not a transplanted equivalent of any single English dialect. It is a mixture of many different regional dialects. For example, the vowel system of Broad Australian is very similar to Cockney and the educated Australian is close to RP.

As Australia is an isolated continent in the corner of Asia, it developed its own variety of English which differs from its original English variation, British English. The indigenous people of Australia, the Aboriginals, have influenced Australian English in terms of the plants and animals

found on the continent e.g. kangaroo and koala, as well as thousands of place names e.g. Wollongong and Murrumbidgee (Cheshire 1991: 216).

According to Cheshire (1991:218), regional variation is practically absent in Australia. As with most dialects of English, it is distinguished primarily by its vowel phonology. Australian English has a unique set of diminutives formed by adding -o or -ie to the ends of words abbreviating them. There does not appear to be any particular pattern in which these suffixes are used. Examples with the -o ending include abo - an aborigine, which is now considered to be a very offensive term, arvo (afternoon), servo (service station) and ambo (ambulance officer). Examples of the -ie ending include barbie (barbeque) and bikkie (biscuit). Unlike most varieties of English, Australian English has a phonemic length distinction: that is, certain vowels differ only by length (Cheshire 1991:219).

3 The present study

This chapter discusses the present study and the way it was conducted in more detail. It presents the research questions, the data and the data collection methods and also the motives for using these particular methods.

3.1 Research questions

In the present study, the aims were to discover what kinds of attitudes Finnish high school students have towards the three main varieties of English, American English, British English and Australian English. It was also studied whether they know what variation they use themselves in their speech and what variation the students would like to use. Furthermore, the differences in the attitudes between the male and female students were studied.

3.2 Participants

The participants (N=41) of the present study were 18-19 years old and in the third and thus final year of high school in Lappeenranta. The participants needed to be mature so that they would really think about the questions in the questionnaire provided for them on the topic and answer them with consideration. This is the reason why it was decided to collect the data from a high school, specifically those students, who are in the final grade. They are old enough to answer the questionnaire with care and concentration. As all of the students were 18 or 19 years old, it is natural to think that they do have some kind of understanding of which English variation they prefer and use themselves.

3.3 Data collection

Based on earlier studies in the field, questionnaires were deemed an appropriate method of data gathering. In the end of January 2010, the questionnaires were sent to the high school and the principal checked whether the questions were appropriate. The questionnaire was given to two

classes. It took 10-20 minutes to answer the questions and the students answered them in the beginning of the class.

The questionnaire, which is available as an appendix, contained two pages of questions and it consisted of three parts. The first part had three background questions about the students: one about their gender and age and a question whether they had lived abroad sometime during their life and for how long had they lived there. The first part's objective was to find out some basic information about the students. It was needed to know how many of the participants were males and how many were females so that it would be possible to compare the attitudes between the genders. The questionnaires that would ultimately be used in the study would have to be by students who were over 18 years of age. The questionnaire required concentration and thorough thinking, so the oldest and most mature students were deemed to be the best participants in the present study. Also, the question about whether the students had lived abroad was rather important because, depending on how long they had lived abroad, it might affect their attitudes towards English, especially if English was the language they mainly used while living abroad.

The second part of the questionnaire contained questions about the variation of English the students personally used in their speech. Firstly, it asked which is the variation the students are most frequently exposed to. Secondly, the students were asked what variation they would like to use themselves. Thirdly, the questionnaire had a question concerning the ways in which the students choose the particular variation to use in their speech.

The purpose of this part was to find out what the students think about their own English skills in terms of speaking. It was interesting to know whether the students were aware of which variation of English they use when speaking English and how they have decided to use this variation. As the participants were over 18 years old, it was rather clear that they had at least some idea of which form of English they use.

The third part of the questionnaire dealt with the actual attitudes the students have towards the English variations. The questions contained a list of adjectives and the students were told to tick the adjective which, in their opinion, suited the variation in question most accurately. Even though the present study concentrated mainly on the three main variations of English, the students were given the option of choosing a variation other than American, British or Australian English, if none of those were suitable to them.

The objective in this part was to actually discover the attitudes the students have towards the variations of English. As the questionnaires were handed in anonymously, the students did not have to fear the consequences of their answers and they were able to answer as truthfully and bluntly as they wanted.

4 Analysis and results

In this section the responses to the questionnaire are discussed. The first part of this section analyses the ways in which the students are exposed to the different variations of English language. It is also discussed how the students choose the variation that is the most comfortable for them. The second part discusses the attitudes the students have towards the three main variations of English; American English, British English and Australian English. The last part of the analysis focuses on the differences in the attitudes between the male and female students.

4.1 Bases for choosing a variation

Out of the 41 students who participated in the present study, 34 students said that they have been the most exposed to American English. The exposure has happened via different medias, tv, movies, the Internet and the radio through music. Seven of the students said that they had been exposed to American English through their friends and the exchange students they have been in contact with. Two of the students had had an American teacher in elementary school.

Out of the 41 students who participated in the present study, only six students reported being exposed the most to British English. They reported that they hear British English being used by their teachers, friends and relatives. They also reported that they hear British English in television, in video games and in films.

One student reported that he has not been exposed to any of the three main English variations in particular but to a mix of all the variations mentioned. The combination of the English variations is heard everywhere. None of the students reported to being exposed to Australian English.

As can be seen in Table 1, of all the participants who participated in the present study, 31 students reported that they prefer to use the variation they hear most frequently. Eight students reported that they choose the variation that suits them and feels natural to them. One student said that he uses his own mixture of all the variations. One student reported that he tries to speak in a similar way as his idol, the actor John Cleese.

Bases for choosing a variation	Number on students
"I use the variation I hear most frequently."	31
"I try to speak the same way as my friends."	0
"I try to speak the same way as my teacher."	0
"I try to speak the same way as my celebrity idol."	1
Something else	9

Table 1. The bases for choosing a variation according to the students

Nine of the participating students have lived abroad but only one of the nine students lived in an English-speaking country. The student lived in the USA for three years and thus, understandably, she adopted the American variation in her speech. She still uses that particular variation because it is the easiest for her to use.

4.2 Attitudes towards the variations

This part focuses on the different attitudes the students have towards the English variations. When looking at Table 2, it is quite obvious that Australian English is not very pleasing to the students whereas the British English is preferred by the students.

Variation	Most pleasing	Most displeasing
American English	13	14
British English	24	6
Australian English	1	10

Table 2. How pleasing the English variations are to the students

English is the lingua franca of the world and people can have very differing opinions and attitudes towards English language and its variations. Out of the 41 students 24 of them answered that British English pleases them the most. When asked why this is, the majority answered that British English sounds beautiful and fancy. It also sounds more polite and friendly than the other variations of English. The students like the tone and the accent of British English.

13 students answered that American English is the most pleasing to their ear. The majority of the students reported that it is the variation they are most accustomed to hearing and because of this, it sounds the best and the most believable. It was also reported that American English is more understandable and it "flows more easily" than the other variations.

Only one student answered that Australian English is the most appealing variation of English. The student reported that it sounds funny, thus making it the most likeable variation. Two students reported that they prefer hearing Irish English above all others. The students think that it sounds casual and care-free. According to them, it is a funny dialect and because it is not heard in Finland very often, it is the most pleasing variation of English. One student reported that Scottish English is the most likeable of the English variations because it sounds humorous and funny.

The students were also asked to answer which variation of English they find the least pleasing. 14 students reported that American English appeals to them the least. The reasons for this were multiple. The most common reason was that American English is heard everywhere and it has "lost its charm". Some students mentioned "the American rednecks" which displease them. American English was also reported to sound incomprehensible and the way the words are pronounced does not appeal to everyone. One student said that the whole variation itself does not irritate her but the different American accents do, particularly the ones that are spoken in the southern United States. One student reported that "the stupidity of the modern days is reflected in the American people and in their language".

Six students found British English the most displeasing. They said that this variation is difficult to understand and it sounds rather funny and confusing. It was also said that it sounds too posh and fancy for the students which does not please them. The students have also heard this variation too often and this has added to its displeasing nature.

Ten students found Australian English to be the most distasteful. The variation was said to be very incomprehensible and plainly weird. The pronunciation of the English words was said to be twisted and turned to the extreme, thus making the variation very difficult to understand. Another ten students found the various other variations of English to be the most displeasing to them. These variations included the English used by the people living in the Middle-East, Scottish English, the English used by Finnish people, Indian English and the British English used in the little villages in the peripheral Great Britain.

4.3 Descriptions of the variations

In this section the students' descriptions of the three main English variations are reported. In the questionnaire the students were asked to describe the variations of English. The students were asked to tick the adjective which correctly described the variation in their own opinion. The results are presented in Table 3. It should be noted that it was possible for the students to tick more than one description.

Description	American English	British English	Australian English
beautiful	2	5	3
ugly	5	3	6
easy-going	19	1	10
sophisticated	1	28	1
incomprehensible	4	3	12
something else	12	4	10

Table 3. The students' descriptions of the English variations

4.3.1 American English

19 students reported that the American English is very easy-going and chatty. The students suggested that this is because they are accustomed to the American variation. They hear American English everywhere in the media, thus making it familiar and understandable to them. Some students found the choice of words and the accent of the variant pleasing. One student also mentioned the southern accent which is pleasing to the ear. One argument given was that people living in the southern states elongate the syllables and because of that the accent sounds very

friendly and relaxed. A few students reported that they like American English because it sounds warm and welcoming and not too official, unlike the British variation.

Five students reported that in their opinion American English sounds ugly. They said that that the variation is inarticulate and dumb. Three students pointed out that the words sound incomplete and incomprehensible when spoken. One student said that she hears American English the most and it sounds the "normal" English, and thus ugly. Four students stated that the variation sounds incomprehensible, particularly in the southern part of the United States. Two students reported that the variation sounds beautiful. The reasons for this are that the variation sounds soft and pure. It is also comprehensible and the pronunciation of the words is "cool". In one student's opinion, the American English sounds sophisticated and soft. She reported that this might be because of all the American TV-shows that are shown on Finnish television.

The remaining 12 of the participating students had very variable opinions about American English. They thought that the variation sounds sometimes weird and ordinary because one hears it so frequently. One student reported that it is difficult to assess American English because it has so many regional dialects. It was also reported that the variation sounds "cool" because it is so often heard on the Finnish TV and comprehensible because the words are pronounced without any additional tongue-twisting which occurs in British English. One student stated that American English sounds like American English because he is politically correct and does not wish to assess the variation any further.

4.3.2 British English

According to 28 students, British English sounds sophisticated. The reasons for this are that British people use quite a lot of words of politeness in their speech and it emphasizes the sophistication. It was also pointed out that the emphasis of the words in British English is different than in American English and the speakers of British English sound very sharp and official and the way they pronounce the words makes the variation sound very fancy. The variation was said to sound rather old-fashioned and thus sophisticated. Some students said that the speech rhythm makes the variation sound sophisticated. One student stated that it takes quite a lot of effort to use the variation correctly but if a speaker succeeds in it, it makes the speaker seem intelligent. Another student reported that some British dialects remind her of the movies based on the books written by Jane Austen. It was

stated that universally, British people are considered to be polite and friendly people and because of it also their variation of English sounds sophisticated. One student reported that British English is the variation that is taught in Finnish schools and thus it is associated with sophistication.

In five of the participating students' opinion British English sounds beautiful. It was stated that the variation is understandable and clear and that the word stress is interesting and harmonious. The rhythm of the variation was said to be very classy.

Two students reported that the variation sounds ugly because of the way the words are pronounced. It sounds too fancy and makes the speakers sound arrogant. Furthermore, two students said that British English is incomprehensible because it usually has a careless tone in it and it makes the variation difficult for foreigners to understand. According to one student, British English sounds easy-going due to the fact that it is a common language of the world, similar to American English. Two students stated that the variation sounds humorous because of the accent British people have. One student pointed out that it sounds nice and more sophisticated than American English.

4.3.3 Australian English

Altogether 12 students reported that Australian English sounds incomprehensible. Many of the students said that Australian people pronounce the words in a peculiar way and it is very difficult to understand. The word stress was also stated to be weird. Six students said that the variation sounds ugly because a foreigner has to concentrate more on the listening when an Australian is speaking. Two students reported that the variation sounds like a blur. One student stated quite boldly that 'hybrids do not please me'.

According to ten of the participating students, Australian English sounds very laid-back and easy-going. Many of the students had an image that the Australian people are very relaxed and care-free and it also affects the way the students view the variation. One student pointed out that the way the words are pronounced conveys the feeling that the Australians do not have a rush to go anywhere and that they have time to have a cozy chat. Three students reported that the variation sounds beautiful because the pronunciation of the words is nice and relaxed.

Five students did not have a clear view on Australian English. They reported that they have not heard the variation much and thus they do not have an opinion of it. Two students said that the variation sounds very weird and difficult because it has quite many slang words which are completely unfamiliar to foreigners. Australian English reminds one student of the late Steve Irwin.

4.4 Gender differences in attitudes

Of the 41 students who participated in the present study, 15 were males and 26 were females. According to the results of the questionnaire, the female students view British English to be the variation that they wish to use in their own speech. The majority of the girls stated that British English is the most beautiful and sophisticated of all the variations of English and it sounds very posh and fancy compared to American English and Australian English. Most of the female students reported that the British variation pleases them the most and American variation the least. It was stated quite a few times that American English sounds too casual and sloppy. Some of the girls said that of all the English variations, they have been most exposed to the British variation. None of the girls perceived Australian English as being a variation which is the least pleasing to the ear. The girls' responses are summarized in Table 4.

Description:	American English	British English	Australian English
beautiful	2	5	2
ugly	5	2	3
incomprehensible	3	5	8
easy- going	10	0	8
sophisticated	1	16	1
something else	7	2	5

Table 4. How the female students described English variations

The majority of the male students seemed to think that Australian English is the least likeable variation of English because it sounds so weird and it is very incomprehensible, as can be seen in Table 5 below. All the boys agreed that American English is the variation which they have been most exposed to because of TV, movies and video games. The male students were more likely to report that British English sounds too posh and arrogant than the female students. According to the boys, British English is the most sophisticated variation, whereas Australian variation was not seen as sounding very intelligent and highly prestiged at all.

Description:	American English	British English	Australian English
beautiful	1	1	1
ugly	0	0	3
incomprehensible	0	0	5
easy- going	9	1	1
sophisticated	0	11	0
something else	5	2	5

Table 5. How the male students described English variations

It was interesting to notice that even though both male and female students agreed that the British English is the most sophisticated variation, sophistication means different things for them. According to the girls, the fact that British English sounds so sophisticated and elegant makes it the very pleasing to the ear and a desirable variation to use in one's own speech. According to the boys, on the contrary, the sophisticated tone of British English makes it sound too fancy and stuck-up which makes the whole variation displeasing.

To summarize the results, the students seem to choose the variation, which they use in their own speech, based on which they hear most frequently. Thus, according to the students who participated in the present study, the variation they use the most is American English. The students stated that they hear it the most on TV, movies, the Internet, video games and on the radio. Also, if the student had lived abroad, it affected the way he or she speaks English. These students found it hard to leave the learnt accent behind after they had returned to Finland, and they continued speaking English with that particular accent also in Finland.

The majority of the students seem to prefer British English. This is probably due to the fact that more girls than boys participated in the present study, and girls favored that variation. According to

most of the participants, British English sounds the most sophisticated and the most beautiful, whereas the American variation is the most easy-going and the most "common" form of English.

The students were unanimous in the status of Australian English in the Finnish school system. Based on the results, it can be said that Australian English is clearly in the shadow of the British and the American variations, the two dominant variations of English. Finnish students have not heard Australian English during classes nor on TV, which makes it difficult for them to describe variation. American and British English, on the other hand, are heard on television and in the movies every day in Finland and the students had rather clear views on those variations.

5 Conclusion

The reason for conducting the present study was to discover what kinds of attitudes Finnish high school students have towards English language and its variations and whether the attitudes differed between male and female students. Based on the results, it can be stated that boys and girls do have differing opinions about the three main variations of English. According to the data gathered for the current study, it is clear that girls prefer the British English to the other variations. They find British English fancy and more beautiful and appropriate than the rest of the English variations. The majority of the boys who answered the questionnaire reported that American English is more comprehensible and more relaxed than the other variations. Quite surprisingly, most of the students did not have a clear opinion of the Australian English because this variation is not heard very often in the media in Finland. It is clear that the English teaching in Finnish school is leaning towards the two dominating variations of English and leaving the ones which are not heard very frequently in Finland in the background.

The data gathering worked very well in the present study. Based on the received answers, the students were interested and eager to answer to the questions and share their own views on the attitudes towards the English variations. Obviously, the data could have been gathered from a larger group of students to make the results more reliable than they are now. The questionnaire could also have been given to people from different age groups and not just to senior students in high school. This leaves room for further research on the topic. Despite this, the research questions designed in the start of the study were adequately answered.

The results of this study are important because they give a clear view on the current situation on the attitudes Finnish students have towards English language. It is rather obvious that Australian English is not very renowned among the Finnish youngsters. This fact should be taken into consideration when planning English lessons in the future and the students should be made aware also of other English variations in addition to American English and British English, which seem to be the most common Englishes in Finland.

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APPENDIX: Questionnaire

Olet poika () tyttö ()

Ikä:

1. a) Oletko asunut ulkomailla? Kyllä () Ei ()
 b) Jos vastasit kyllä,
 1. Missä maassa asuit?
 2. Milloin asuit kyseisessä maassa?
 3. Kuinka kauan asuit kyseisessä maassa?

2. a) Mille englannin variaatiolle olet eniten altistunut?
 amerikan englanti () brittienglanti () australian englanti () muu, mikä? ()
 b) Missä olet sitä kuullut?

3. Mitä englannin kielen variaatiota haluaisit itse mieluiten puhua
 amerikan englanti () brittienglanti () australian englanti () muu, mikä? ()
 Miksi juuri tämä variaatio?

4. Millä perusteella valitset itsellesi sopivan variaation, jota käytät puhuessasi englantia
 - a) Käytän sitä variaatiota, jota kuulen eniten ()
 - b) Yritän puhua samalla tavalla kuin kaverit ()
 - c) Yritän puhua samalla tavalla kuin opettaja ()
 - d) Yritän puhua samalla tavalla kuin jokin idolini julkisuudesta ()
 Kuka?
 - e) Muu, mikä?

5. Onko oppikirjoista mielestäsi apua jos haluat apua tietyn sanan ääntämisessä? Miksi? / Miksi ei?

6. Mikä englannin variaatio miellyttää sinua eniten?

amerikan englanti () brittienglanti () australian englanti () muu, mikä? ()

Miksi juuri tämä variaatio?

7. Mikä englannin variaatio miellyttää sinua vähiten?

amerikan englanti () brittienglanti () australian englanti () muu, mikä? ()

Miksi juuri tämä variaatio?

8. Ruksita mielestäsi sopivin vaihtoehto

a) amerikan englanti kuulostaa mielestäni:

kauniilta () rumalta () epäselvältä () leppoisalta () sivistyneeltä ()

joltain muulta, miltä? ()

Miksi?

b) brittienglanti kuulostaa mielestäni:

kauniilta () rumalta () epäselvältä () leppoisalta () sivistyneeltä ()

joltain muulta, miltä? ()

Miksi?

c) australian englanti kuulostaa mielestäni:

kauniilta () rumalta () epäselvältä () leppoisalta () sivistyneeltä ()

joltain muulta, miltä? ()

Miksi?

KIITOS OSALLISTUMISESTASI!

