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American English at Swiss Gymnasia (secondary education)

1. Introduction

Purpose and preliminary considerations

The project we are concerned with in this report grew out of a topic handled in a seminar entitled «Aspects of American English» at the University of Zürich during the winter semester of 1978/1979; specifically, a survey was to be made as to the attitudes and policies of teachers at Swiss Gymnasia towards standard «American English» (as opposed to «British English»). The age level of the students taught by the teachers in these schools is, in general, between 14 and 20 years. At first, those working on the project envisaged sending a questionnaire only to teachers at the Zürich Gymnasia, in the assumption that this would bring in the desired information. It soon became evident, however, that in reality the problem was much more complex than one might at first imagine, and in order to insure valid conclusions, the survey would have to be made over a substantially larger spectrum than originally anticipated, meaning also, in turn, significantly more time and effort would have to be spent than was foreseen at the beginning. This was due not only to the fact that various aspects of the teaching and the learning of foreign languages needed to be examined, but also to the fact that this is really a many-faceted problem, needing to be considered from several perspectives: that of the student, the teacher, the rector, and the board of education. Furthermore, the following was to be investigated: would one find different trends in different cantons and/or the different language areas of Switzerland? Thus the survey was to be conducted on a national basis and with appropriate questionnaires sent to responsables in each of four categories:

- 1) the 380 Gymnasium teachers who are members of the Verein Schweizerischer Gymnasiallehrer (VSG)/Société suisse des professeurs de l'enseignement secondaire (SSPES);
- 2) Gymnasium headmasters who belong to the Konferenz der schweiz. Gymnasialrektoren;
- 3) the Boards of Education of each of the twenty-six Swiss cantons;
- 4) 2000 former AFS (American Field Service) students, who had spent a year as exchange students in the USA and subsequently returned to take their place again in a Swiss school.

The response received from each of these categories was most gratifying, the obvious interest in the topic being indicated by the fact that a large enough number of questionnaires was returned to be able to trust the validity of the results. It is generally agreed that for surveys a 30% return of questionnaires is enough to warrant acceptance of the results as reliable; this figure was reached in three of the four categories questioned, thus substantiating the reliability of the results and the conclusions drawn therefrom. Just for the record, the actual figures are given below:

Sent to	Number sent out	Number returned	% returned
Boards of education	26	20	77%
Headmasters	100	86	86%
Teachers	380*	128	36,5%
AFS students**	2000	353	17,6%

* 350 of the 380 are currently teaching; most of the others are retired.

** The AFS students were asked three questions. Although in this case the 30% figure was not reached, the fact that 353 questionnaires were nevertheless returned, many with supplementary comments, allows significant information to be deduced from them.

Before proceeding further with this report, we would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all those who, by their help and interest, have added to making this comprehensive project possible.

In 1919 MENCKEN predicted the following in the preface to his book «*The American Language*»:

«... the Englishman of late, has yielded so much to American example, in vocabulary, in idiom, in spelling and even in pronunciation, that what he speaks promises to become, on some not too remote tomorrow, a kind of dialect of American, just as the language spoken by the American was once a dialect of English.»

Though this is an extreme idea, it is undisputed that American English is of world-wide significance in many areas today:

- Political and economic developments since the end of World War II have seen America spring to the forefront in influence, partly at the expense of Great Britain, which has been pushed out of her former leading role. Switzerland, which counts heavily on its exports for a significant amount of its financial income, has substantially more trade with the USA than with the United Kingdom.

- Modern travel and communication opportunities have brought America and thus also American English into reach of most of the rest of the world. In recent years, charter flights and the favourable rate of exchange between the Swiss franc and the US dollar have enabled ever more Swiss to travel to the USA. In addition, many teen-aged Swiss have the opportunity to spend a year in the USA as exchange students with an organization such as AFS, Youth for Understanding or Christian Youth, whereas such institutionalized opportunities for an exchange year in Great Britain do not exist. Alone under the auspices of the AFS, more than 3000 Swiss students have spent a year in the USA since 1960.
- Modern music, songs, American movies and literature bring a very large number of youth of the world, including Swiss youth, into contact with American English.

These developments might lead one to think that American English would be given due consideration in the teaching of English in Swiss secondary education. The task before us now is to clarify, using the results of the returned questionnaires, to what degree American English is or is not accepted in Swiss educational circles. Also to be checked into is whether such prejudices against American English as existed in Switzerland not only in the 19th century but certainly in this century even up to the time of the Second World War continue to play a dominant role or have died down. One possible reason for at least a diminishing of such prejudice might be the international recognition which American literature has won, especially when one thinks of authors like Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Saul Bellow: all four Nobel Prize Winners. On the other hand, even as late as 1974 a book entitled *Will American be the Death of English?* by A.H. Newman was published. In this work American English still seems to be regarded with a great deal of scepticism.

Just what does an educated Swiss mean when he talks about «American English»? Based upon comments to various points on the questionnaires which were returned, a check-list was drawn up and presented to 20 «non-experts», i.e., English-speaking Swiss who are not, however, teachers of English. The characteristics of American English, at least as indicated by these Swiss in this list calling for intuitive, subjective responses, can be summarized as follows:

- American English appears to be more natural than British English, being unaffected, flowing melodiously and employing a colourful vocabulary.

- It is the language of a most influential world power today and thus ought to be acknowledged for economic, scientific, political and even cultural reasons.
- Although it is sometimes difficult for foreigners to understand, it is comparatively easy to speak.
- Compared with American English, British English is not only easier to understand, but also more beautiful.

These opinions about American English sound, on the whole, positive, though somewhat contradictory, but there can also be detected a pre-conceived and rather undifferentiating notion that American English is an inferior form of English or slang itself. The positive feelings some have about the «beauty» and «precision» of British English may be due in part to their being pre-conditioned to think of «slang» or muddled speech – forms inferior to the existent *standard* English in America – when they hear the term «American English». Often it is in this atmosphere that English is taught in Switzerland at upper school levels.

The crucial question for this project can now be formulated thus: «What is the position with respect to American English taken by the teachers and by the school and educational authorities who are responsible for directing the school and hiring teachers?» Also of interest is how exchange students returning to their Swiss school after having spent a year with a family in the USA felt their teachers and classmates reacted when confronted with their «made in America» brand of English.

II. Responses and views of the teachers

1. The teacher of English in Switzerland

In order to fully understand the nature of this project it seems important to characterize the teacher at Swiss upper level schools briefly. Those reached by the questionnaires are almost all of Swiss nationality, in most cases between 35 and 50 years old, holders of a *Lizentiat* or Diploma and/or a Ph.D. degree. Fifteen percent of those answering are not of Swiss nationality: eight percent British, three percent American and four percent other nationalities. Most of the American-born teachers are currently employed in the Italian speaking region of Switzerland. Some of those counted here among those with English mother tongue actually are bilingual persons, listing both English and one of the Swiss dialects as their mother tongues. Most have spent at least one year abroad, predominantly in Britain, meaning that they are familiar with the British variety

of English. In recent years a trend is evident that the USA is more often chosen than before for studies abroad. Nearly thirty percent of our informants have spent at least some time in the USA, some of these during their time of study and some later on in life.

The fact that the survey was directed to members of the Swiss Association of Teachers of English (a section of VSG) automatically meant a certain selectivity, since few younger teachers and almost none who teach English as a part-time occupation belong to this association and thus were not reached. Because of their standing within the school system, however, those reached by the questionnaires are in positions where their opinions are influential to a degree that cannot be discounted (see figures in the Appendix).

2. Freedom to choose textbook and reading material

With respect to the amount of freedom teachers are given in choosing textbooks and literature texts, it appears that the higher the level the class is, the more freedom of choice the teacher has in these materials. For beginners, one out of eight teachers has no say in the matter; for advanced classes, only one out of thirty-two has no choice. There is somewhat less freedom in the choice of audiovisual materials.

The teachers enjoy nearly full autonomy in choosing their literature texts. Only two percent need higher approval in this area, and less than one percent have absolutely no voice in the matter. Also perhaps worth mentioning is the fact that this question was answered without exception on every questionnaire, yet the question concerning textbooks for advanced levels was left unanswered in four percent of the cases and the one concerning textbooks for beginning levels was unanswered in ten percent of the cases.

The general conclusion one comes to in analysing this whole question is that the teachers have definitely more freedom than not in the selection of their teaching materials. As a result, one could expect the teaching of English in the Swiss gymnasia to evidence more variety (based on individual teachers' own preferences) than regimented unity. However, even when granted this freedom, general tradition and his own Swiss education probably keep the teacher away from extreme variations from the «norm».

3. Freedom to choose language used for teaching

Regarding the freedom of choice in the matter of the language used in communicating with the students during class, more than three-fourths

stated that they are free to choose, i.e., they may use only English, or a mixture of English and the language of their school area at their own discretion. However, one sixth had to follow the school's directives in this matter. The language actually used could thus be, at the teacher's discretion, British or American English or a mixture of both or a mixture of one type of English and the students' mother tongue. Consequently it was important to learn whether the teacher was forbidden to use any particular type of English – standard British English, standard American English, some sort of slang or any other type or variety. The answers revealed that not a single one was forbidden to teach written or spoken British English by any school authority. Standard American English – both written and spoken – was also not directly forbidden to most teachers, yet somewhat more hesitation in this question is evidenced by the fact that one tenth did not answer it. Regarding the use of non-standard forms, only four percent of the 104 teachers who answered the question are not permitted to use any slang forms in teaching English.

Nearly all of the teachers, in fact ninety-six percent, indicated that they use British English in the classroom. The main reason for this seems to be that most teachers had spent their study time abroad in England and thus still have a linguistic tie to Great Britain and, being consistent, designate their own speech as British English. In a few cases they are British citizens. Several teachers based their choice on the fact that more of their own students would have an opportunity to go to England than to America. Another reason mentioned was that English taught in Swiss upper level schools has traditionally been oriented toward British English. Yet it is interesting to note that among those under 36 years of age, one out of two teaches American English, whereas for those in the other age groups, 36–50 years and over 50, the ratios are, respectively, only 1:13 and 1:21.

Also interesting is the observation made by a few teachers that it is easier to learn an American accent after having learned a British accent than vice versa. Thus British English would serve as a basis for other varieties of English, to be acquired later either by study and/or a sojourn in the respective country. Little account is taken of the fact that today many of these varieties are considered as idioms in their own right. On the other hand, we must not fail to state that many teachers give recognition in the classroom to both British and American English.

4. Consistency of language used

In some cases the alternative (American) form is mentioned; in a few cases both forms are used nearly equally often. Yet all warn against using

an inconsistent mixture of the two «languages» and they especially avoid using both in beginners' classes, lest too much confusion (rather than enrichment) be the result. The small minority using American English is composed of American citizens and Swiss who spent their study time abroad in America, some of the latter referring also to the international significance today of the American forms. Regarding acceptance of alternative forms (i.e. in the areas of spelling, pronunciation and usage), most of the teachers are fairly consistent: if they allow an alternative form in one area, they usually allow it in the other areas as well. The most inflexibility shown was in the area of spelling: one-fourth refuse to accept any alternative form. It is somewhat more difficult to analyse the answers concerning acceptance of an alternative pronunciation: certain teachers would allow a certain amount of variety, yet to what degree is inconclusive. However, an inconsistent mixture of pronunciations was deemed unacceptable. A slightly higher percentage (77%) of teachers in the German part of Switzerland than in the «Romance» part (French and Italian areas) (66%) would accept American forms under certain circumstances, even though they teach British English themselves. Also, the younger teachers (those under 36 years of age) are nearly twice as «liberal» as the others when it comes to accepting alternative forms.

5. Teachers' reactions to students fluent in English

Among all the students who are taught by the 128 teachers answering the questionnaire, there are 107 whose mother tongue is English (either British English or American English, the ratio being approximately 1:1). The total number of students here who have already spent a considerable amount of time in an English-speaking country is 166, not a negligible number! The single country with the largest number of these – 75 – is America.

How do the teachers react when such a student, with a better mastery of the English language than his peers, sits in one of their classes? Especially, what do they do when this knowledge has been acquired in the United States? Each teacher responded by saying that he does (or would) accept the form of English such a student knows, whatever form it be.

Yet the students asked do not all seem to have experienced this open-mindedness (see under V.). Only three out of the 128 teachers (less than 3%) said they expected such students to conform with the type of English taught by the teacher, yet one-fifth of the responding AFS students said they met with criticism from their teachers. Thus the impression of the open-mindedness which one receives when reading the teachers' answers

seems to be contradicted by the experiences the students purported to have had. It must be kept in mind, however, that a simple comment, intended only as such by a teacher, might be interpreted by a sensitive student as criticism.

6. Films, songs, newspapers, magazines and books

The majority of teachers felt that songs, whether British or American, exert the largest influence by far upon the students. This is of course not at all surprising, considering how the youth of today are so taken by the modern pop music coming from both Britain and America. That this is not only of extra-curricular importance is shown by the fact that students sometimes ask their English teachers about things they have not understood while listening to such songs in the English language.

Further, it must be kept in mind that such texts confront the students with slang and dialectal varieties of both British and American English. Songs from America and Britain are used comparatively often, i.e. by approximately sixty percent of the teachers.

When it comes to the actual learning effect of such media, however, there is no uniformity of opinion. The general attitude is that the reading of literature, American as well as British, has the greatest learning effect, greater than songs or other media.

One might assume that English and American films would serve as an important stimulus for the teaching and learning of English as such. This then might imply that the language spoken in the films exercises an important influence on the choice of the language type used by the student. One might believe that films with American English perceptibly alter the student's pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary or even syntax. However, the majority of our informants felt that as to the actual learning of either the British or the American variety of English, the influence of films is rather slight.

This may be because the British film no longer enjoys the role it once did. In the sixties and the early seventies there was a series of famous films from Britain, e.g. «Look Back in Anger» ('59) and «A Taste of Honey» ('61), two films by the distinguished film director Tony RICHARDSON; «The Third Man», «The Servant» ('63) and «The Go-Between» ('70) by Joseph LOSEY (with the screenplay by Harold PINTER), many films of Richard LESTERS, especially those starring the Beatles and the famous works «If» ('70), «Family Life» ('71) and «Clockwork Orange» ('71). In recent years, however, there have been hardly any British film productions which have appealed to youth in general; some notable ex-

ceptions are the musical films «Tommy» and «Quadrophenia» starring the rock group «The Who». But these films are generally seen in the evenings and not as integrated elements of class-room teaching. This also holds for American films. The use of films in the classroom is, for various reasons, still an exception.

In conclusion, the materials which are actually used with the most frequency, namely songs and books (and magazines), are used for different reasons; songs tend to be used mainly for the motivation factor, written materials in the hope that something concrete will be learned from their use. Either the British or the American influence would thus be strongest in books and songs.

7. Literature in class

When it comes to the reading of literature in class, there is overwhelmingly little reticence to reading American literature: seven out of eight teachers use works by American authors with their classes. The authors mentioned most frequently are: Hemingway, Steinbeck, Miller, Wilde, Williams and Salinger. (See detailed list of authors and works in the Appendix). Even the number of authors mentioned may take one by surprise: 60 different writers! It is thus seen that teachers indeed choose from a wide spectrum of acknowledged works.

Wondering whether the current trend of reading a substantial number of American literature works is only a modern «fad» or not, we checked into the trend over the last ten years in one of the gymnasia in the Canton of Aargau, as an example. Throughout the last decade there, British literature and American literature have been taught with about equal emphasis, we found, and there has been no trend of change in this regard in this period. In didactics courses for prospective teachers of English at the University of Zürich, students are taught to give equal emphasis to both British and American literature. In both cases, however, the works read are predominantly those from the 20th century, which is not surprising if one assumes that the students should be learning a type of English which is currently in use.

In conclusion, the importance of the study of American literature in Swiss gymnasia seems to be both justified, and recognised, by the teachers: its place there is thus secure.

8. Willingness to use an American textbook

Nearly all of the returned questionnaires had an answer to this question. Of the 122 responses, about three-fifths rejected the use of an American

English textbook. Among frequent reasons given by those rejecting such a textbook were: their own insufficient knowledge of American English, which they felt should be a prerequisite for anyone teaching from an American textbook; the closer proximity of Great Britain (than of America) to Switzerland, meaning that British English would be more frequently used in travel or perhaps in later job exchanges by a majority of their students. The following isolated remarks were also to be found: an obligation to follow the old school tradition; a feeling of personal attachment to British culture and language; an insistence that «European» culture (of which Britain forms a part) should be emphasized; their own infamiliarity with American culture; the attitude that British English offered a more reliable basis for beginners; the position that British English is more consistent than American English.

It is important to mention, though, that among those who rejected the use of an American textbook, many qualified this by admitting that they would accept such a textbook if it was very outstanding, i.e., better than any available textbook offering British English, or that they would, under these conditions, be able to recommend the use of such.

The two-fifths who would accept a good American textbook also had their reasons: the feeling that both American and British English have the same value; a willingness to use any textbook, as long as it was a very good one; the fact that there are more people in the world who speak American than British English. One teacher felt American English was easier to understand, and another felt that textbooks offering information on English-speaking countries other than Great Britain were desperately needed.

With respect to this question, it is interesting to note that the younger teachers are much more favourably inclined towards an American textbook than the older teachers are: those under thirty-six years of age would accept such a textbook by a ratio of 2:1, those over fifty years of age would reject such by a ratio of 5:1 (a total difference factor of 10:1!!) and the middle age group is split on the question nearly fifty-fifty, though with a negative tilt. We may further note that, percentage-wise, twice as many teachers in the Romance areas of Switzerland as in the German parts (56% : 29%) would be willing to accept a good American textbook.

Perhaps not surprising are the results found when comparing the answers to this question with the place of study abroad: those having spent time in both England and America were split nearly 1:1 for/against an American textbook, whereas those having spent time only in England were against it 5:2 and those having spent time only in America favoured it 2:1! If we compare the answers to this question with the

type of school the respondents teach in, we find that those involved in adult education are more favourably inclined to an American textbook (55%) than those in other areas of education. Yet, among the others, there is more opposition, percentage-wise, among those in teachers' training colleges and in commercial schools (only 25% and 30%, respectively, would approve) than in gymnasia, where 40% would approve an American textbook.

III. Views of the Headmasters

The following three questions were submitted to the headmasters:

- 1) Does your hiring philosophy and practice preclude the appointment of a teacher whose training is in American English?
- 2) Were your school willing to employ such a teacher, would he be allowed to use his American English in teaching, or would he be expected to teach British English?
- 3) If an excellent American textbook were available, would you permit its use in the school?

We are most grateful to the seventy-four headmasters who were kind enough to send us their answers to these particular questions.

As to the first question, fifty, i.e. two-thirds of those answering, responded affirmatively: they would not rule out, *a priori*, the appointment of a teacher with an American English background. This is, however, not as clear-cut as it might appear at first glance, since many of the affirmative answers were qualified with comments such as the following: «If he enunciates clearly and uses no dialect . . .»; «. . . only for a short term and/or as a teachers' assistant, not, however, as a full-time teacher with tenure status.» Another would insist upon his total qualifications being better than those of a candidate with «British English» training. Thus when reading the obstacles which even those answering the question theoretically in the affirmative would place in front of such a candidate, it seems that, although a two-thirds majority is not willing to deny outright a position to an «American English» teacher, there is still a great deal of reticence about actually employing such a person.

As to the second question: one-third of the headmasters answering the first question affirmatively would require «British English» to be taught even by a teacher more experienced in American English, assuming he were hired at all. Most of these felt that «British English» was still the

language to be taught, at least at beginning levels. Yet this means that two-thirds of these felt it would be neither sensible nor realistic to try to make a teacher «change» his own natural type of English. Especially the gymnasia emphasizing the humanities (Types A + B), however, would expect that an introduction to British English and British life and culture be undertaken.

Regarding the use of an American textbook, two-thirds answered in the negative, basically stating that the step from British English to American English was easier than vice versa. In other words, teach the student British English in school, and he will be able to adapt to either British English or American English later in the world; teach him American English in school and he may never quite manage to adjust to British English later on. Thus, at least for beginners, most felt an American textbook would not be desirable.

Those who *would* accept a good American textbook also had their reasons: that totally ignoring American English was no longer a responsible position; that English is spoken in many areas other than only in England. One school would welcome a «neutral» English textbook.

An interesting observation can be made when comparing the answers of the gymnasia emphasizing the humanities with those emphasizing mathematics and the physical sciences. The former had a slight majority favouring British textbooks, indicating that the traditional relationship to England as the source of the English language is still quite prevalent; the latter had a majority favouring an American textbook, probably due to the fact that the predominant number of mathematical and scientific texts comes from America and that these schools are, in general, less bound to tradition and tend to view language basically as a tool for communication.

Not only state schools, but also private ones with state accreditation were included in the survey. Their answers, however, did not deviate sharply from those of the state schools. The only difference was that a somewhat greater percentage of them would be willing to accept a teacher speaking American English, yet more of these, percentage-wise, would require such a person to teach British English.

There were no marked trends of difference between schools in the various language areas of Switzerland.

IV. The Views of the Cantonal Boards of Education

With respect to the questions quoted in Chapter III, it was felt that the opinions of not only the school headmasters but certainly also of the

twenty-six Swiss cantonal Boards of Education – the highest school authorities in Switzerland – were important and should be included in our survey. We are most appreciative of the fact that as many as twenty of these took the time to respond and we extend our sincere thanks to each of these.

Especially their answers to the first question – would they accept the appointment of an English teacher with American English training (assuming otherwise good qualifications, of course) – deviated significantly from those of the headmasters: the Boards of Education were split fifty-fifty on this question, half answering in the affirmative and half in the negative. Thus there is more opposition among Swiss cantonal Boards of Education than among Swiss headmasters to American English being taught in the Swiss gymnasia. Comments added indicated that even those cantons which might accept an «American English» teacher were not without their reservations: either his total qualifications must be better than those of any other candidate and/or he must speak the «polished English of an educated American from the East Coast» – i.e. a sort of «Ivy League» English.

As to the responses of the Boards of Education to the second question, one-third of the school boards would expect American teachers employed in their schools to teach British English, which means their attitude towards American English in the classroom is identical with the one of the headmasters. The answers to the third question indicate more clearly the sceptical light in which American English is held by the highest Swiss school authorities: three out of four would not accept even a good American English textbook.

V. Views of the exchange students

Questionnaires were sent to 2000 former AFS exchange students who had spent a year in the United States of America, asking them about reactions of Swiss teachers and classmates to their «American» English, and about their own feelings and responses to the issue. Following is a summary of the answers given:

Four-fifths of the students met no particular criticism from their teachers, meaning that one-fifth faced definite criticism for at least some aspect of their American English: their vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and/or pronunciation.

Nearly three-fourths added comments to this question: some of the more frequently mentioned ones are: the teacher accepted their American English quite willingly (7% even had a teacher who spoke it); just

as many teachers were most outspoken against American English, however. Other comments mentioned by a few were: the teacher accepted American English, but most reluctantly; the teacher accepted it but pointed out differences from British English, some forbidding a mixture of American English and British English; the teacher found American English a stimulating challenge for himself.

All but about ten percent of those returning the questionnaire answered the question concerning the reactions of their classmates. These reactions can be summarized as follows: the positive reactions of classmates outnumbered the negative reactions by a ratio of approximately 2 : 1. Classmates tried to imitate the American English, admired it, or were grateful for help they could receive from the returned AFS student and interested in learning more about American English and the American way of life; the negative reactions met were laughing and teasing, indifference, jealousy, or simply the difficulty some classmates had in understanding the American English.

Only slightly more than half of the respondents mentioned their reactions to the negative attitudes of teachers and classmates. These reactions were split nearly evenly between those who did not feel personally affected and those who did. In the first category, some simply continued to use their American English while a few became aggressively defensive of it. In the other category, most simply circumvented the problem by avoiding American English and using British English in class, though a perhaps not totally insignificant number – twelve percent – became frustrated by this discrepancy between what they had acquired in America and what was expected of them in the Swiss classroom.

The additional comments listed were so varied as to not be able to be placed over a common denominator. Some saw little problem with the whole issue; others felt it was definitely a significant issue. Comments also ranged from those feeling that no American English should be taught in Swiss secondary schools to those advocating not only American English but more study of American culture in the Swiss schools. Some felt that American English and British English were two distinct languages; others pointed out that there is a good American English which is not slang; one even mentioned that he passed the Cambridge Test without any problem «in spite of» his American English background. Others emphasized not mixing British English with American English, still others advocated teaching a «pure» English, and, finally, some felt the whole aim should be one of communication and the question of American English or British English was irrelevant when the aim is understanding one another.

VI. Summary

In conclusion we would like to offer a synopsis of insights gained while analysing the returned questionnaires. There is scarcely any doubt that British English is still considered the prototype of the English language, «English» meaning «British English» to the overwhelming majority of English teachers at Swiss gymnasias and similar upper level schools. This concept is even more pronounced among the headmasters and the Boards of Education, and in all three groups the trend is equally apparent in each of the different language/cultural areas of Switzerland. Even in the Italian-speaking area, which has a high ratio of American teachers, we find that most of these are required to teach «British English». In comparison to American English, it is the greater prestige which «Oxford» or «the King's English» enjoys and the greater clarity which standard British English is purported to have. Little notice seems to be taken by Swiss educators of studies like that of A. HUGHES and P. TRUDGILL, *English Accents and Dialects*, Arnold London, 1979, showing that a «pure» Standard English is spoken today by only three percent of the British population, which means that in present-day England only a small minority uses this variety of English. By and large ignored is the fact that today it is American English which is so predominantly used in scientific journals, magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek* and *US News & World Report*, and in economic and political circles. A few, yet only a few teachers ventured the opinion that American English is a language of current international importance in travel, communications, and politics. Though American English is taught by some teachers, these are few and far between, and, of course, these are the few who are more familiar with American than with British English. Here and there is also a teacher to be found who regularly introduces certain aspects of American English as a comparison to British English, yet this seems to be nearly always accompanied with a warning to avoid an inconsistent mixture of the two «languages», especially when students who have spent time in America are in the class.

Neither among the teachers nor among the various school authorities is either the desire or the willingness to introduce more American English, let alone to teach it to the exclusion of British English, evident other than in isolated cases. Actually, most teachers do not have the necessary prerequisites to adequately teach American English. They have neither enough educational experience with American English nor a thorough knowledge of the «American Way of Life». The majority still considers English first and foremost, if not exclusively, the language of England.

Study time abroad is still usually spent in England, and English and the «British Way of Life» seem inseparably interwoven concepts.

There seems to be absolutely no indication that in the near future the Swiss schools will «yield» to international scientific, economic or political developments and introduce American English as the dominant form in their teaching of English. Many students, especially former AFS students, express the wish that American English be given due or even prime consideration in the English curriculum. There are indications that not only these students but also some of the younger teachers believe in the future of American English. Thus, while the present school authorities and the majority of the teachers are at least wary of American English, if not always adamantly opposed to it, this trend might gradually change as today's younger teachers become older, move into more prominent positions and have more influence within their schools. An interesting difference – contradiction? – to the traditional outlook of the teachers and school authorities to the teaching of English in the linguistic sense is the fact that there seem to be no qualms about accepting and reading American literature in the classes. American literature and British literature appear to be equally represented in the selections used by teachers and not a one criticized the use of the former. Can we assume, or not, that little mention is made of the difference between American English and British English in these works, and that they are read for their content and ideas, even at the expense of the students' seeing structural and dialogue forms which are characteristic of American English? When it comes to literature, the term «English» seems to cover both British English and American English. Thus «textbook» English remains British English, yet literature studies in advanced classes do seem to embrace both American and British styles. In practice, then, pragmatism does find some place for American English in Swiss upper level schools in spite of the traditional emphasis upon British English.

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Appendix

Responses from Teachers

The total number of teachers answering this questionnaire is 128. All percentage numbers refer to this total number. Numerical totals given in the subdivisions may deviate from 128: in some cases a teacher did not answer a given question, in other cases (e.g. study time abroad) he checked more than one item.

1. Personal Data

1.1. School

German speaking area	101	78,90%
French speaking area	19	18,84%
Italian speaking area	7	5,46%
Total	127	

1.2. Age

25-35 years	14	10,94%
35-50 years	68	53,13%
50 + years	35	27,34%
Total	117	

1.3. Sex

Male	103	80,46%
Female	25	19,53%
Total	128	

1.4. Nationality

Swiss	110	85,93%
English	10	7,81%
American	4	3,12%
Other	5	3,90%
Total	129	

1.5. Mother Tongue

German	92	71,88%
French	15	11,72%
Italian	2	1,56%
English	19	14,84%
Other	3	2,34%
Total	131	

1.6. Degrees

Lizentiat	36	28,13%
University Diploma	52	40,63%
Doctorate	54	42,18%
BA	20	15,62%
MA	13	10,16%
PhD	5	3,90%
Total	180	

1.7. Field of Study

Major in English	103	80,46%
Minor in English	20	15,62%
Total	123	

1.8. Study Abroad

America	3-6 months	10	7,81%
	6-9 months	7	5,47%
	9-12 months	14	10,93%
	one or more years	17	13,28%
	Total	48	37,50%
England	3-6 months	12	9,37%
	6-9 months	16	12,50%
	9-12 months	44	34,38%
	one or more years	35	27,34%
	Total	107	83,59%
Other	3-6 months	3	2,34%
	6-9 months	0	
	9-12 months	3	2,34%
	one or more years	6	4,68%
	Total	12	9,37%
Total		167	

1.9. Designation of English

American	16	12,50%
British	118	92,19%
Other	2	1,56%
Total	136	

1.10. Type of School

Private	11	8,59%
Public	75	58,59%
Total	86	66,40%
Gymnasium	117	91,40%
Teachers' Training College	23	17,97%
Commercial School	13	10,57%
Technical College	4	3,12%
Adult Education	15	11,72%
Total	172	

1.11. Hours per Week

1-6 hours per week	5	3,90%
7-12 hours per week	21	16,40%
13-18 hours per week	34	26,56%
18 + hours per week	70	54,68%
Total	130	

2. Classroom Teaching

2.1. Choice of Textbooks, Literature and Audio-visual Materials

(Are you as a classroom teacher free to choose or recommend the following?)

Textbooks for beginning students:

May choose	72	56,25%
May only recommend	27	21,09%
No voice	16	12,51%
Total	115	

Textbooks for intermediate students:

May choose	100	78,13%
May only recommend	14	10,93%
No voice	8	6,25%
Total	122	

Textbooks for advanced students:

May choose	112	87,50%
May only recommend	7	5,47%
No voice	4	3,13%
Total	123	

Literature (supplementary reading materials):

May choose	125	97,66%
May only recommend	2	1,56%
No voice	1	0,78%
Total	128	

Audio-visual materials:

May choose	92	71,87%
May only recommend	23	17,97%
No voice	4	3,13%
Total	119	

2.2. Language of Instruction

(Are you free to choose the language of instruction?)

Yes	99	77,34%
No	21	16,40%

(Do you teach using only the English language, or do you use a mixture of English and the mother tongue of the students?)

Only English	55	42,97%
Mixture of English and mother tongue	81	63,28%
Total	136	

2.3. Forms of English

(Are you free to use?)

British English spoken:

Explicitly allowed	33	25,78%
Explicitly not allowed	0	
No specific instructions	94	73,44%
Total	127	

British English written:		
Expl. allowed	34	26,56%
Expl. not allowed	0	
No specific instructions	92	71,87%
Total	126	
American English spoken:		
Expl. allowed	13	10,16%
Expl. not allowed	1	0,78%
No specific instructions	103	80,47%
Total	117	
American English written:		
Expl. allowed	13	10,16%
Expl. not allowed	1	0,78%
No specific instructions	101	78,91%
Total	115	
Non-standard forms of British English:		
Expl. allowed	4	3,13%
Expl. not allowed	6	4,68%
No specific instructions	93	72,66%
Total	103	
Non-standard forms of American English:		
Expl. allowed	4	3,13%
Expl. not allowed	5	3,90%
No specific instructions	91	71,09%
Total	100	
Songs:		
Expl. allowed	22	17,19%
Expl. not allowed	0	
No specific instructions	99	77,34%
Total	121	

2.4 Aims of Teaching

(Please number the following according to the priority which you give to each of these aspects when teaching your particular type of English classes: 1 = highest priority, 5 = lowest priority, etc.: Oral Comprehension/Reading Comprehension/Oral Reading Ability/Speaking Ability/Writing Ability)

Since this question is not primarily concerned with the main points of interest of this project, it is not included in the text. We do think, however, that the question is too important to be left out altogether.

Results:

		Priorities:					
		1	2	3	4	5	Total
Skills:	Oral Comprehension	49	35	15	13	7	119
	Reading Comprehension	44	27	28	14	6	119
	Oral Reading	15	12	28	18	42	115
	Speaking Ability	59	30	16	9	5	119
	Writing Ability	34	30	16	26	13	119
		201	134	103	80	73	591

It was not forbidden to consider two or more aspects as equal in importance. As a result, many simply assigned each aspect the highest priority number, 1. Was this based on their theoretical hopes, or on what they actually practised in the classroom? Can teaching really treat each of these aspects with exactly the same amount of emphasis, and, in fact, should it even try to, and irregardless of the level, at every level? We are left with the suspicion that many teachers have not consciously given a great deal of thought to the fact that this is indeed a problem, one where both the theoretical and practical considerations could long be debated, and that when suddenly confronted with this question, they decide to assume that their teaching demonstrates a good balance among these skills.

To simplify the analysis, we assume that those items given a «1» or «2» could be considered important, those with «4» or «5» less important, and those with a «3» remain rather neutral. The following chart could then be made, based on the answers received:

	Given a «1» or «2» considered important		Given a «4» or «5» considered not important	
Speaking Ab.	89	69,53%	14	10,94%
Oral Comp.	84	65,62%	20	15,62%
Reading Comp.	71	55,47%	20	15,62%
Writing Ab.	64	50,00%	39	30,47%
Oral Read. Ab.	27	21,09%	60	46,88%

«Neutral» «3»:

Reading Comprehension/Oral Reading:	28	21,88%
Speaking Ability/Writing Ability:	16	12,50%
Oral Comprehension:	15	11,72%

Thus a consistent pattern is seen to emerge, showing that the teachers consider speaking ability the most important and oral reading the least important aspect. Again,

whether or not a teacher sets his theoretical choice into practice remains an open question. What is striking, however, is the degree to which these priorities do not correspond to what most final examinations in the Gymnasia call for. In any case, it is to be hoped the inclusion of this question in the survey might stimulate more thought about the whole problem of priorities and goals in our teaching programs.

2.5. Designation of English

(Do you teach British English or American English?)

Written:	British English	123	96,09%
	American English	11	8,59%
Total		134	
Spoken:	British English	123	96,09%
	American English	13	10,15%
Total		136	

2.6. Alternative Forms

(If you emphasize British English/American English, do you accept alternate spellings, usages and pronunciations?)

Spellings:	Yes	93	72,65%
	No	30	23,43%
Total		123	
Usages:	Yes	97	75,78%
	No	20	15,62%
Total		117	
Pronunciations:	Yes	111	86,72%
	No	23	17,97%
Total		134	

2.7. Students with English Mother tongue/Stay abroad

(Do you have students with British/American mother tongue?)

British English mother tongue	52	40,63%
American English mother tongue	55	42,97%
Total	107	83,59%

(Do you have Swiss – or other – students who have spent a significant time abroad in:)

England	65	50,78%
America	75	42,97%
Other	26	20,31%
Total	166	

2.8. Acceptance of different forms used by the students

(If you have – or supposing you had – students with a good background in American/British English and you teach British/American English, do – or would – you then)

Accept the different forms used by the students:

Yes	128	100%
No	0	

Expect them to conform to the type of English you teach:

Yes	3	2,34%
No	119	92,97%

Total	122	
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2.9. Textbook

(Main textbook used, supplementary works used): see list «Textbooks»

2.10. Influence on students

(How strong do you consider the influence of the following to be on the students? Consider the influence both in terms of motivation and of actual learning. Indicate which ones you use.)

Motivation:	strong	average	minimum	used	
British songs	47	45	13	85	66,40%
American songs	50	42	11	65	50,78%
British films	13	39	32	20	15,63%
American movies	25	33	25	11	8,59%
British books/mag., newspapers	22	42	23	74	57,81%
Am. books/mag./newsp.	23	48	25	69	53,90%

<i>Actual learning:</i>	strong	average	minimum	used	
BE songs	7	42	46	85	66,40%
AE songs	5	45	35	65	50,78%
BE films	5	29	41	20	15,63%
AE movies	16	26	40	11	8,59%
BE books etc.	36	39	19	74	57,81%
AE books etc.	33	40	19	69	53,90%

2.11. American Literature

(Do you read American literature in class?)

Yes	112	87,50%
No	15	11,71%

Total 127

(If «yes», list authors/titles): see list «American Literature»

2.12. American English Textbook

(If a good textbook based on standard American English for beginners existed, would you use it or recommend it?)

Yes	49	38,28%
No	73	57,03%

Total 122

Responses of Headmasters

The total number of headmasters answering this questionnaire is 74. All percentage numbers refer to this total with the exception of question 2, where the total number is 50, namely all those answering question 1 with «yes».

1. Appointment of Teachers

(Does your hiring philosophy and practice preclude the appointment of a teacher whose training is in American English?)

Yes	50	67,57%
No	24	32,43%

Total 74

2. Language of Instruction

(Were your school willing to employ such a teacher, would he be allowed to use his American English in teaching, or would he be expected to teach British English?)

Yes	14	28,00%
No	32	64,00%

Total 46

3. American Textbook

(If an excellent American textbook were available, would you permit its use in the school?)

Yes	27	36,49%
No	40	54,05%

Total 67

Responses from Cantonal Boards of Education

The total number of CBoE answering this questionnaire is 21. All percentage numbers refer to this total number with the exception of question 2, where the total number is 11, namely all those answering question 1 with «yes».

1. Appointment of Teachers

(Does your hiring philosophy and practice preclude the appointment of a teacher whose training is in American English?)

Yes	11	52,38%
No	10	47,62%

2. Language of Instruction

(Were you willing to employ such a teacher, would he be allowed to use his American English in teaching, or would he be expected to teach British English?)

Yes	4	36,36%
No	7	63,64%

Total 11

3. American Textbook

(If an excellent American textbook were available, would you permit its use in the school?)

Yes	5	23,81%
No	15	71,43%

Total 20

Responses from exchange students

Teachers' criticism

Pronunciation	91	25,78%
Grammar	88	24,93%
Spelling	71	20,11%
Vocabulary	64	18,13%