Swedes' Attitudes to the Use of English in Swedish Advertising

Degree project ENA 309

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Term: Fall 2018
Abstract

English is commonly used on the Swedish consumer market today. Not only is English present in Swedish print media but it is also highly present in everyday communication amongst Swedes. The aim of this paper is to find out why English is often picked for promotion purposes and to find out if young Swedes have more positive attitudes towards English than Swedish – Both in general and when it comes to advertising purposes. This study investigates the possible advantages as well as disadvantages of using English in logotypes and brand names aimed at a target group that are learners of English as a second or foreign language. The study was performed using a questionnaire divided into two parts. The first part aimed at finding out about the informants’ knowledge of English and attitudes towards English. The second part was about Swedes’ preferences regarding English versus Swedish brand names. To do so six fictional logotypes in pairs of two’s were created: one with all Swedish text elements and one with all English text elements. The informants were to pick their favorite logotype and motivate why they picked it.

The results showed that Swedes generally have positive attitudes towards English and that they prefer English brand names to Swedish ones when the English used is on a certain linguistic level. A possible conclusion is that Swedes like English better for commercial purposes but only as long as they experience some familiarity with the words or expressions used.

Key words: Logotypes, brand names, advertising, Swedish, English, attitudes, connotation
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1. Introduction

It is not uncommon on the Swedish consumer market to find commercials, brand names and advertisements exclusively or partially in English. This phenomenon is not limited to Sweden, though, but can be seen in markets throughout the world. The purpose of this study is to question why. In Swedish society today, English is frequently used, not only as the language to bridge between different speaker groups but also by individual speakers expressing themselves in an everyday setting, to say nothing about the extensive use of English in Swedish media. A commonly accepted claim among linguists is that no language is better than another linguistically (Lindblom 2013:81). Still English seems to have some kind of advantage from a corporate point of view, being picked more often than Spanish for example; another world language (Lindblom 2013:79). More than that, perhaps one would expect Swedish advertisements and brand names on the Swedish market to be in Swedish but this is not always the case. I am going to present and discuss possible reasons for using English for promotion purposes. Furthermore possible advantages and disadvantages will be discussed of using English in a country where English is a foreign language (EFL) or second language (ESL) Definitions can be find in 2.1. Traditionally Sweden has been considered an EFL country, but it is currently being debated, and for this reason both possibilities will be considered.

1.1 Aim & research questions

This paper seeks to find out why English is often picked for promotion purposes. My hypothesis is that for Swedes, especially young ones, English sounds modern, new, and contemporary, and presumably this view will make them feel positive towards English. If so, this might be a reason for why English is being widely used in Swedish media and might be a reason for young Swedes to use English extensively in their everyday life. The aim of this study is to find out whether Swedes prefer English to Swedish in brand names and whether English has the ability to provoke more positive attitudes. The study was conducted with the help of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was arranged according to Alreck and Settle’s theory of surveys to conduct research about attitudes (2004:13). Three fictional brands were created. Each of them had a Swedish and an English version placed next to each another for the participants to choose whichever one they preferred. The study is quantitative. I will try to answer two main research
questions: Can English provoke positive attitudes among Swedish consumers? Do Swedish consumers prefer English brand names to Swedish ones?

2. Background

This section introduces different explanations for the frequent use of English for commercial purposes based on previous studies and the possible advantages and disadvantages to do so. Moreover definitions of some crucial concepts are covered followed by a more in-depth description of possible explanations why English is used extensively in media and what effects that might have.

There are several reasons/explanations for companies to use English for commercial purposes. All following theories will be explained at length in section 2.2 and 2.3. First of all English is claimed to have positive associations with such phenomena as modernity, westernization, and cosmopolitanism (Friedrich 2002:22). Brands that want to establish themselves with such connotations might for this reason use an English brand name or English in their advertising. Moreover English seems to be used as an extra bank of words and stylistic innovations to satisfy an everlasting need for new creative marketing campaigns (Friedrich 2002:22). Yet another reason for using English in advertisements can be simply practical. Using one and the same advertising campaign can save time and money for global companies that advertise in large parts of the world. English is the modern world language and accessible enough for most of the world’s population to understand and use (Friedrich 2002:22).

Reasons not to use English in an EFL or ESL country can be the level of proficiency in English that the inhabitants have reached. Studies prove that citizens of EFL or ESL counties usually do not understand an English message to the same degree as they would comprehend a message in their native tongue (Gerritsen et al. 2007:311). Using two codes for commercial purposes can even be a risk for the native language. A language that is threatened risks becoming weaker due to code switching. However the function of a foreign language can sometimes be valued by connotation rather than denotation, as House argues (in Kelly-Holms 2005:25). That is, communicative actions usually consist of a mixture of informative actions and symbolic actions, but the use of a foreign language can sometimes seem purely symbolic. There are even studies
that prove that the mother tongue is generally more prone to provoke certain feelings (Noriega & Blair 2008:81).

2.1 EFL and ESL definitions together with Kachru’s circles model

Today English is the lingua franca of global business. According to David Crystal the English language achieved its global status due to colonialism and economic power, which resulted in the desirability or rather the necessity for some countries to adapt English into some domains in society (2003:30). Due to the globalization of markets the monopoly of American advertisements and the English language has assumed a leading position.

The motives for and ways of using English can differ among countries and cultures. For this study two different categorizations of countries’ relationship to English will be used: English as a foreign language, EFL and English as a second language, ESL. It is currently debated whether Sweden should be considered an EFL or ESL country, though traditionally it has been considered an EFL country. An EFL country is defined as a country where “English [is] learnt in one’s native environment (e.g. France) for a context where most of the interlocutors will be members of a particular inner- (or outer-) circle speech community (e.g. Britain)” (Melchers & Shaw 2013:223). An ESL country is defined as a country where “(a) English [is] used in or learnt for an outer-circle context. (b) English [is] learnt in a foreign environment (e.g. by immigrants) for a context where most of the interlocutors will be members of a particular inner- (or outer-) circle speech community (e.g. Britain)” (Melchers & Shaw 2013:223).

These categorizations build on Kachru’s circles model. The circle model is divided into three circles of different sizes. The first circle is the smallest and is called the inner circle. In the inner circle most people have English as their first language. Countries that belong to this category are the UK, USA, Caribbean, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The next circle, the outer circle, is bigger. In the outer circle countries “people need English for secondary education, politics, law, business INSIDE the country” (Melchers & Shaw 2013:8). Countries belonging to this circle are India, the Philippines and large parts of Africa. Last is the expanding circle, which is the biggest circle. Countries in the expanding circle “need English for communication in business, politics, education, etc., primarily with speakers of other languages from OUTSIDE the country” (Melchers and Shaw 2013:8). To the expanding circle most of the European countries belong together with most of the countries of East Asia.
2.2 Code switching

Using two different codes/languages in advertisements is another common strategy among European advertising agencies. English is commonly one of them used together with a local language. This phenomenon is known as code switching (though it is a term mostly associated with spoken interaction). Code switching can have a desirable effect on a target group. By switching codes in an advert, companies can mark the adoption of another culture and in that way be perceived as bicultural. This type of switching would thus not carry much informational value (Kelly-Holmes 2005:11). According to Kelly-Holmes the choice of language sometimes appears to be driven by symbolic value, like using English words in a Swedish advertisement anticipating that the target group will feel positive towards the use of English (2005:25). Or language choice can be driven by informative function (2005:25). Kelly-Holmes points out that most communication usually consists of both of these aspects but that a distinction between the two can be useful to grasp the reason behind code switching in marketing, since the language seems to be driven by symbolism rather than information in this particular field (2005:25).

Code switching can moreover be used to attract attention. A target group that is used to seeing advertisements and brand names in their native language might pay more attention to advertisements that do not conform to the usual look (Santello 2015:114). Given that the ultimate goal of advertisements and brand names is to attract attention, any attempt to achieve that objective can be claimed to be successful. Code switching in advertisements can also be due to topic-related issues; meaning that a product or an advert which aims at a certain target group can use that target group’s lingua franca. For example, if an advertisement were targeting gamers, it would be in English because that is the language that that group normally shares. Similarly, code switching can be a way of greeting a particular group of people by using their language (Kelly-Holmes 2005:10).

Using two codes when creating logos and advertisements also means that more words, more grammatical functions and more ‘word play’ can be used to satisfy the creative and innovative need of the world of business (Friedrich 2002:22). Linguistic features often used in advertising and brand names are clipping and borrowings. Clipping is “the process of reducing a word of more than one syllable to a shorter form” (Yule 2010:284) while borrowing means “the process of taking a word from other languages” (Yule 2010:284). The purpose with using clipping and
borrowings is for words to sound or look more English, again, to obtain possible positive connotations of English but still not excluding an audience that does not master the language (Friedrich 2002:22).

2.3 Frequency and possible reasons to use English commercially

Using English words or phrases in advertisements and brand names is not a phenomenon that is exclusive for the Swedish market but is found globally. See for example the following studies: Friedrich (2002), Noriega and Blair (2008), Planken, van Meurs, and Radlinska (2010), Hornikx, van Meurs and de Boer (2010) and Hodzic (2013). A recent study of the frequency of English in Swedish print media proved that 51% of all the advertisements in Swedish magazines used English to some extent (Hodzic 2013:13). Further studies in other European countries prove an increased use of English in advertisements aiming for a young audience (Gerritsen et al. 2007:307).

One possible reason for using English advertising in EFL or ESL countries can be the so-called “overt prestige” or “high prestige” of English. A study conducted in Brazil claims the use of English in advertisements and brand naming is due to connotations of modernity and westernization that English has (Friedrich 2002:22). That way a product can get desirable connotations with a single English word. Similarly, it has been argued that the so-called “country-of-origin effect” works to give products stereotypical expertise from the country of origin whether it is America, England, Germany or Sweden etc. In that way brands can acquire desirable connotations of the foreign language and its consumer culture by simply putting a word or phrase from that language in their ad or on the product (Kelly-Holmes 2005:11). This phenomenon is commonly observed on the global market today. Kelly-Holmes argues that the desirable connotations of the English language are “modernity, internationalism or cosmopolitanism, trendiness, success and, in the context of CE Europe, the market and democracy” (2005:104). Furthermore the “made in” stamp or sticker on the product alone can be shown to bear enough stereotypical information for a product to be regarded as for example high quality, traditional or cheap (Nagashima 1970:74)

2.4 Possible disadvantages of using English in EFL and ESL countries

There seems to be a range of advantages for companies to use English in advertisements and
brand naming even if the target group is not native speakers of English. However, two recent large-scale studies conducted in Norway show increased positive attitudes towards Norwegian and an increase in negative attitudes towards English (Simonsen 2013:121). 46% of the Norwegian population feels negative towards the use of English and 52% think that English is generally used too extensively in Norway. When asked if they believed that English had a greater positive effect on consumers than Norwegian 20% agreed while 73% disagreed (Simonsen 2013:122). Another study conducted by Språkförsvaret, a Swedish organization that works to prevent domain losses for the Swedish language and to strengthen it instead, showed that even Swedish adolescents would not be more prone to buy a product exclusively based on the fact that the advertisement was written in English. In fact 13% of the participants answered that they have rejected products based on the fact that they carried English band names or were advertised using English (Rubensson 2013:161).

A recent study carried out in Poland, an EFL country, showed that no striking increase in buying intentions could be proved using English in advertisements. In fact Lindblom claims, after reviewing several large-scale studies on Germanic languages under the influence of English, that no general study regarding advertisements and marketing shows that consumers would prefer English over their respective first languages (Lindblom 2013:84).

Advertisements that are not culturally adapted by using the language of the target group might actually not provoke the kind of consumer behavior that the company would hope for (Planken, van Meurs & Radlinska 2010:238). Though producing one English advert instead of one for each country represented among the company’s costumers would save an organization time and money. Advertising agencies often claim that globalization allows for standardizations of English brands and advertisements, meaning that the globalized market makes worldwide products and brands more accessible to larger multitudes, which forces companies that are actors on the international market to either adapt to the respective markets or, in this case, standardize their products and brands using English only (Lindblom 2013:77). Similarly, another argument for using English on the European market is that a lot of Europeans generally have good English skills. However, this belief may not be entirely accurate. Previous studies made in this field point to a lack of understanding the message within certain target groups and preferences for the mother tongue depending on the linguistic level of the English text elements represented (Hornikx, van Meurs & de Boer 2010:238). A similar study carried out in the Netherlands
showed a symbolic value of the use of English in Dutch advertisements. English was preferred over Dutch when it was on the same linguistic level as the Dutch ads, whereas when the English and the Dutch used were perceived as difficult, participants did not show preference for either of the languages (Hornikx, van Meurs & de Boer 2010:238). Noriega and Blair further stress the benefit of using first languages in advertisements because they are easy for the consumer to process (2008:81). This study seems to show that the target group has a desire to know and understand what is promoted to them, which would be yet another reason to appeal to the target group in a language that they master and to make them feel engaged rather than confused.

Furthermore, studies in the Netherlands showed that only 36% of the participants understood and could give an accurate account of what was said in English on Dutch television (Gerritsen & van Meurs, 2013). A similar study a couple of years later showed that 66% of the Dutch participants were able to translate the textual elements of commercials correctly while only 47% of the German participants were able to do the same (Gerritsen et al. 2007). Evidently there is a high risk for companies that do not culturally adapt their language use to the target market. A good example of a company that is aware of the impact of language choice is IKEA, a successful, global Swedish company that normally adapts their advertisements to the respective target market. This is supported by a comparison of non-culturally adapted advertisements in Sweden (the all English Coca-Cola campaign launched around Christmas) with the local all-Swedish Julmust campaign. The Julmust, turned out to be more successful than the standardized Coca-Cola one (Gemzell 2013:152).

Pogarell claims that there is no language that can be claimed to be more efficient than another for commercial purposes. He further stresses that every company that wants to be active on the global market must be aware of the cultural differences in the respective markets and adjust brands and advertisements accordingly (Pogarell 2013:119). Standardization in an attempt to save time-consuming processes and money often comes at the cost of local languages being disregarded and English favored in advertising when in fact a local language might be more successful (Lindblom 2013:77).

It has been claimed that the English language has certain linguistic advantages apart from the social and economic advantages discussed above. Friedrich argues these advantages to be mainly the limited average length of words that makes it desirable for outer circle countries and
expanding circle countries to use in advertising and brand naming (2002:22). However claims that any language would have linguistic advantages are highly disputed. For example, Lindblom argues that languages can never be measured by the number of words or their ability to adapt foreign words (2013:83). These are constant processes in every language, but they need to be measured by the ability of the language in question to create new words for new things (Lindblom 2013:83). For this reason this paper is only going to take into account the supposed social and economical advantages of English.

In conclusion, the status of English in non-English-language media has been questioned, not only from a corporative perspective of the most efficient marketing strategy but also from a linguistic standpoint regarding language development.

3 Material and method

3.1 Selection of informants

The informants in this study were mainly students at Mälardalen University. The majority of the students are native speakers of Swedish and English would be their second language. For this study young people were targeted based on the assumption that their generation has been heavily influenced by English from an early age. 52 informants participated in the study. All submitted complete questionnaires that could all be used in the study.

3.2 Data collection

The data was collected through a digital questionnaire. The informants would either get the link from their lecturer or as an email message. All completed questionnaires were stored on the survio.com browser.

3.3 The questionnaire

A questionnaire was made for this study to collect data and ultimately test the thesis whether English can provoke positive attitudes among Swedish consumers and if Swedish consumers prefer English brand names to Swedish ones. My hypothesis was that young Swedes do have positive attitudes toward English and that those positive attitudes make them more prone to use English to a considerable extent in their everyday conversation and will make them more positive towards English brands names.
As Alreck and Settle (2004:13) claim, three areas need to be addressed for a questionnaire to be fit to research attitudes, namely knowledge, feelings and actions. The questions were arranged accordingly. To find out about the informants’ knowledge about Swedish and English, information like the following was asked for: “Please write your first, second and third language, in that order.”; “When communicating during an average week, how much Swedish/English would you use?”; “Can you find a Swedish equivalent to the phrase ‘state of mind’?” To find out about the informants’ feelings towards the languages, information like the following was asked: “Which language sounds more attractive to you: Swedish or English?”; “What is your opinion on the frequent use of English in Swedish media?”; “Please list the languages you know according to preferences: 1 for your first preference, 2 for your second and so on.” To find out what actions the informants would take based on their attitudes, information like the following was requested: “Do you normally use English to communicate with people even if you don’t have to?”; “Look at the two logos below. Which one would you use for this particular business [an organic restaurant in Gothenburg]?”

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1. Apart from traditional, simply textual questions without graphical elements, three questions were provided with pictures, like the one just quoted. The pictures represented three fictional businesses with their individual logotype and a short description of the business. In total six logotypes were created, in pairs of two. Three of the logos were provided with Swedish text elements and the other three with English text elements. Apart from the different languages used, the logotypes are more or less identical apart from some slight shift in color and size due to limitations in the program that was used when creating them. The reason for wanting the logos to look as similar as possible was to have the participants judge the language and not any other graphic element. The logos represent products and services that were judged to be gender neutral to minimize the problem of one product being more favorable to, for example, men than women. Another factor that could possibly affect the
outcome is whether the participants find the services useful, or desirable, or not. This factor has not been addressed in the questionnaire and could of course have had an effect on the outcome. To minimize this effect the items picked - an app, a restaurant and an optician - are judged to be products or services that the average person would use relatively regularly and products that have some degree of necessity or relative high priority. A third possible aspect that might affect the outcome of the study is the fact that most of the participants are native speakers of Swedish, and represent different degrees of fluency in English, which might affect their understanding of the questionnaire as such and the English representation of the logos.

3.4 Ethical principles

The informants were assured that the questionnaires were anonymous and voluntary; and furthermore, that they at any point were free to not take part in the study anymore or choose not to answer a particular question (Vetenskapsrådet 2017).

3.5 Method of analysis

The results of this study aim to provide possible answers to the following questions: Can English provoke positive attitudes among Swedish consumers? And do Swedish consumers prefer English brand names to Swedish ones? For the analysis, 16 out of the 29 questions were used for closer examination. The questions singled out for this purpose were questions that had a direct link to Alreck and Settle’s three areas: knowledge, feelings and actions (2004:13). The remaining questions were used for parts of the analysis when more information was needed to interpret the answers. Unfortunately, some technical difficulties made some of the resulting percentages invalid; however the major traits were still distinguishable. Analyzing the results, an objective attitude was continually aimed for. Moreover the analyses of previous studies were used to understand significant and more unexpected outcomes. As the analysis was performed, the main focus was to try to identify similarities and differences that became visible in the data.

Given that the study is quantitative the results have been analyzed and interpreted mainly based on quantitatively measurable results. Since the data was collected digitally, the results were collected through the online service used. The results for questions that offered different options for the informants to pick from were reported in percentages and in terms of how many of the informants had clicked a particular alternative. The results for questions that required the
informants to write their own answers were categorized according to content. The respective category was measured by the number of answers and then converted into percentages.

4. Results and discussion

As the data was analyzed, the anticipated result was for the English logos to be favored over the Swedish ones. Moreover the participants were expected to have positive attitudes towards English in general. However the analysis showed that most participants favored two out of three Swedish versions of the brands and only one English version. Regarding the participants’ general attitudes towards English, they seemed to match what was anticipated. The informants’ attitudes were generally positive, which was proved by the way the participants used English and regard English in Swedish society.

4.1 Demography

76 % of the 52 participants claimed Swedish to be their first language and 94 % of the participants were in the desired age group, namely 18-34 years old. 83 % of the informants were studying at the time. This analysis is not going to take into account any possible differences between genders.

4.2 Informants’ use of and belief about English

The majority of the first language speakers of Swedish agreed that Swedish were their first preference and English were their second, if they could choose. However 58 % of the informants thought that English were the more attractive language among the languages they knew, which for the majority of informants were Swedish and English. Furthermore English seemed to have a great effect on the Swedish vocabulary of most Swedes. 94 % of the informants recognized that they mixed English and Swedish to some extent and would in fact have used English to communicate even though it would not be necessary. The reason why Swedes mix English and Swedish or use English extensively even with Swedish speakers was not investigated in this study. Instead, previous studies will be relied on to understand motives and purposes. This aspect is discussed at more length in the discussion part.

58% of the informants considered English a more useful language than Swedish and about 30 % of the remaining informants argued that English was more useful for career purposes but that they would have used Swedish in their everyday life or in domestic environments. Based on the views
of the informants in this study, English seemed to have a strong position in Swedish society, especially in education and on the job market.

A large majority, 83 %, of the informants liked the idea of English being a world language. But as many as 17 % took the opportunity to point out that even though they liked the idea of English being a world language they felt an urgency for each country to preserve and develop their respective languages. In fact 69 % of the informants agreed that it is important for nations to preserve and develop their local language(s). Finally, 92 % of the informants were convinced that language was a very important part of culture. There thus seemed to be a certain discrepancy where the majority of the informants liked the idea of English being a world language but also valued other smaller languages and their preservation and development. Arguably English, being a stronger language internationally, would eventually trump smaller languages. Or perhaps these two aspects of efficient communication in a globalized world and celebration of diversity could coexist and are both possible, at least according to the opinions of the informants.

Concerning the frequent use of English in Swedish media, 40 % of the informants had positive feelings towards that, while 30 % said they did not think about it and 11 % felt negative about the frequent use of English in Swedish media. These numbers reflect the result for a similar question, namely whether English is used too widely in Sweden. 42% thought that English was too widely used to some extent while 56% of the participants did not think so at all. Only 2% fully agreed with the statement that English is too widely used in Sweden.

To conclude, the results regarding the first research question, whether English can provoke positive attitudes among Swedes, suggested the answer to be yes. The majority of the informants thought that English was the more attractive language and, arguably, were thereby letting English vocabulary influence their Swedish vocabulary. Furthermore a majority of the informants found English to be the more useful language even though most of them lived, studied and worked in Sweden. Again a large majority of the informants liked the idea of English being a world language, but an even larger majority was convinced that language was a very important part of Swedish culture. More often than not the participants liked the extensive use of English in Swedish media, which arguably supports the hypothesis that English does provoke positive attitudes among Swedes. However even though the many of the participants liked the use of
English in Swedish media, it was not an absolute majority. In questions about the English used on the Swedish market, informants seemed to be of two, even three minds.

4.3 The fictional brands

The second part of the questionnaire, regarding the fictional brands, was designed to test the second research question, namely: Do Swedish consumers prefer English brand names to Swedish ones? Six logos in pairs of two’s were created and designed to look as similar as possible in the Swedish and English versions respectively. The informants were asked to pick which logo they preferred and explain why they picked that particular one. Unfortunately, some technical difficulties made some of the resulting percentages invalid; however the major traits were still distinguishable. This part of the study is mainly quantitative, and hence the conclusions drawn from the results are mainly based on quantitatively measurable results, such as how many of the informants’ preferred a particular logo and how many of the informants comments were similar to each another.

4.4 Medvind and Tailwind

The first brand was created for a fictional weather app. The logos were more or less identical but one was called “Medvind” and the English equivalent “Tailwind”. This logo generated a majority for the Swedish option. The general argument given was that the respondents never encountered the word “Tailwind” before. Native speakers of Swedish claimed that the word sounded “weird” and that they would get connotations unrelated to weather. The word was tested on a native speaker of English as a preparation for the questionnaire and the native speaker expressed familiarity with the word used. The results could evidently be due to the level of English skills represented among the participants. Two previous questions, 11 and 12, aimed to get an understanding of the English skills of the informants as they were asked to translate an ambiguous word and a phrase that really does not exist in the same form in Swedish. 12 % of the informants were not able to provide an accurate translation for the English word and 31 % of the informants were unable to provide an accurate equivalent phrase or word for the English phrase.

The English version of the logo was preferred by 21% of the informants. However a fairly large percentage of the respondents left comments on this particular logo that said that their choice would depend on which market, the Swedish market or an international one, the app would be launched on. These comments were almost exclusively left for this pair of logos.
4.5 Växthuset and Greenhouse

The next pair of logos, “Växthuset” and “Greenhouse”, generated results contrasting with those for “Medvind” and “Tailwind”. The logos were said to be created for an organic restaurant. The English version, “Greenhouse”, was preferred by 63% of the respondents. Arguments as to why concerned the “softness” or “hardness” of some letters both graphically and phonetically. This example made most of respondents feel more critical about the Swedish version. However the 27% of the respondents that preferred the Swedish version of the logo claimed to do so because they thought “Växthuset” signaled high quality, locally produced, organic food. Of course this argument goes both ways, and it did in this survey. About the same number that picked the Swedish option due to associations like the ones mentioned earlier picked the English option based on the same associations.

With this pair of logos an exciting phenomenon surfaced among the comments. Native speakers of Swedish commented on the Swedish language and the associations they had to the Swedish option to a larger extent than they commented on the English one. They claimed that the Swedish version “Växthuset” seemed too “concrete” or too “common” and even “limited”. Further comments on why the English version “Greenhouse” was the better option were that “…a Swedish name would be a bit boring for a younger generation”; “Greenhouse sounds like a "fresh" place for youngsters…”; “…it looks a lot cooler”; “…the English word is more attractive”; and “it sounds better in English”.

4.6 Skarpsynt and Keen Sighted

The third fictional brand was named “Skarpsynt” in Swedish and “Keen sighted” in English and the logotypes were said to be for an optician. The results regarding this pair were more similar to those for the first pair of brands. 75 % of the informants preferred the Swedish version. This particular pair of logotypes was the most different from one another, both graphically and linguistically, due to the two words, and a slightly bolder font as for the English version. Unfortunately, the differences made some participants pick a logo because they liked the way it looked. Moreover, a significant number of the informants’ comments related to them never having encountered the expression “Keen sighted” beforehand; hence they did not like the sound of it, or preferred the Swedish version. Some comments, especially by native speakers of Swedish, concerned either distrust in the capability of the average Swede to comprehend the
message, or a confession that they themselves had little idea of what it meant (even though granted they had one possible Swedish translation represented just next to the English logo). Again, informants brought up that using the Swedish language signals quality and trustworthy products. This argument actually emerged in connection with all three pairs of logotypes to some extent. However, when the English version “Greenhouse” was preferred by the majority, this argument was only brought up in two comments. In other words, as the English logo was considered better suited for a product, arguments like the fact that Swedish signals high quality were replaced by the view that Swedish is “common” and “limited”

5. Summary and general discussion

5.1 Brief summary of the overall project

The aim of this study was to find out if English could provoke positive attitudes among young Swedes, and in particular if young Swedes had a preference for English regarding brand names and logotypes. My hypothesis was that the answer would be yes to both questions.

English has been used and spread over the world for centuries. Colonial and economic powers are some factors that have made the language strong on a global scale. Now in our modern world the English language is used to a great extent, even in countries where English is neither an official first nor second language but a foreign language.

The focus used to examine the impact and use of English in this study is foremost commercial English and especially the language used in brand names and logotypes. Possible reasons for companies to use English were examined along with possible advantages and disadvantages.

Reasons for companies to use English even in markets that have other native languages than English are many. One reason to do so seemed to be a belief that English has desirable connotations, which can sometimes be proven to be true. The connotations are argued to be modernity, westernization, democracy, and success. English is claimed to have overt prestige, which gives it a strong position on the market. Furthermore English is sometimes used to create an effect rather than to carry informational value, especially as two codes are used simultaneously. This means that an English word can be used in the middle of a Swedish sentence to make observers react to the mixing of languages, and in that way perhaps get people
to remember an advertisement more. This usage of English words may simply be a way of getting responsiveness (Santello 2015:97)

The reasons for companies not to use English is mainly that native languages often hold a stronger position in terms of understanding a message. Arguably, the majority of people in EFL and ESL countries cannot give an accurate account of what the English used in commercials says, according to Gerritsen et al. (2007). Culturally adapted advertisements and brand names were proved to be more successful in some cases like IKEA and the Swedish Julmust versus Coca-Cola (Gemzell 2013:152). In fact many recent studies made all over Europe have proved an increased preference for the native language of the region and an increased dislike of English (Simonsen 2013:121; Rubensson 2013:161). One factor to consider is also that introducing a new language to a certain country or market can threaten the native language and risk it becoming weaker.

To test the research questions if English can provoke positive attitudes among Swedish consumers and if Swedish consumers prefer English brand names to Swedish ones, a questionnaire was made. The questionnaire was designed so as to fit Alreck and Settle’s model of tracing attitudes (2004). Among other things, three questions, together with one follow-up questions each were asked in conjunction with pictures of fictional logotypes. Each logo had a Swedish and an English version for the participants to pick their preference. Participants were asked to explain their preference.

The majority of the informants thought that English was the more attractive language among the languages they knew, and even larger majorities would admit that they mixed English and Swedish and that they used English even if it was not necessary in the situation. While nearly all informants thought that languages are an important part of culture and that it is important to preserve and develop languages, 83% liked the idea of English being a world language, and 40 % of the participants had a positive view of the frequent use of English in Swedish media. On the other hand, 42 % of the informants thought that English was too widely used in Swedish media. However the majority - 56% of the participants - did not think that English was too widely used in Sweden in general.

The first pair of fictional brands, Medvind and Tailwind, generated a majority for the Swedish option. As to the second pair, Växthuset and Greenhouse, a majority preferred the English
version. Lastly, the third choice, Skarpsynt and Keen Sighted, generated a majority for the Swedish alternative.

5.2 Discussion of the results

76% of the participants claimed their first language to be Swedish. 58% out of those thought that English was the more attractive language compared to Swedish. Assuming that attractiveness is something positive, the majority of the participants seemed to have a positive attitude about English in general. This attitude can be based on countless reasons but one factor that seemed to have contributed was practical reasons like being able to communicate abroad, on the Internet and for career purposes. The exact same percentage of the informants that thought English was the more attractive language also thought that English was the more useful language, naming reasons like the ones just mentioned. Arguably, this strengthens the claim that Swedes feel positive towards English because it allows them to communicate in a more versatile manner.

Further interesting factors that seemed to speak for English provoking positive attitudes among Swedes was the degree to which Swedes admit that they mixed English and Swedish. 94% of the informants in this study admitted that they mixed English and Swedish to some degree and 72% would use English to communicate even if they did not have to. Thus large majorities of the informants would use English extensively in their everyday by choice. The question is why they mix. Were they aware of the positive connotations of English? Assuming that English triggers all the connotations that Kelly-Holmes (2005), Friedrich (2002) and Santello (2015) suggest, informants would have, by using English, claimed ownership of those positive connotations. These factors might be possible motives for Swedes to use English so extensively and feel positive towards it.

The positive views towards and extensive use of English shown in this study might have an effect on how Swedish is used over time. Today there is already some evidence that points to English being used to a higher degree than Swedish in some domains. For example, English is often used extensively in Swedish higher education, and Swedish students would have to know advanced levels of English to take part in this kind of education. Moreover it is common today that Swedish companies use English for brand names of new products (Lund 2013:62). Naturally, a potential colleague’s level of proficiency in English would be an important quality and perhaps
even more important than their skill to perform the work task in question. The majority of the informants that took part in this study agreed that languages are important parts of culture and that they should be preserved and developed. However their apparently extensive use of English seemed to support a more widespread use of English in Sweden which would strengthen its position in Swedish society even further, possibly making the region bilingual or even rendering the native language, in this case Swedish, weaker.

Another reason for non-native speakers of English to use English according to previous studies seemed to be to create an effect by switching or mixing codes (Kelly-Holmes 2005). However the studies were made on advertisements and brand names and not on interaction between people, which means results were exclusively based on the information the informants chose to share. Indeed the majority of the informants in the present study actually did admit to mixing English and Swedish, arguably to create an effect when communicating or to profit from the positive connotations or overt prestige of English.

Further reasons for Swedes to use English could be that Swedes feel the need to use English to give their language more words and more creative ways to express themselves. Arguably, the only evidence in this study that points to English being used to create certain effects were comments like this: “I guess English. English seems somewhat “cooler”, especially in connection with movies and music. Possibly because you can distance yourself more from the content when it is said in English” (my translation). Arguably this view further supports the claim that some young Swedes find English attractive. The description offered by the informant, about English being “cooler” than Swedish, demonstrates a positive quality that seems to apply only to English.

5.3 The fictional brands

The second question this study aimed to answer is: Do Swedish consumers prefer English brand names to Swedish ones? Out of three pairs of logos described above, the Swedish option was picked more often, two times, and the English one picked once. What was more interesting, however, were the motivations why a specific logotype was preferred. Where the Swedish option was preferred, a significant number of the informants commented on the word that was used for the logo to be unknown to Swedes and therefore not a good option for a brand name. About the same number of the informants claimed that a Swedish product that ought to be launched on the
Swedish market should have a Swedish name. However this argument was not given to the same degree for the logo where the English version was preferred. Instead, connotations to the Swedish version were described in much more problematic terms, like the Swedish version being too “limited” and “common”, while the English version had qualities such as sounding more “restaurant-like”. This phenomenon could be described as preference for familiarities and that is the phrase I will use to describe this phenomenon. Arguably, Swedes like English brand names, as long as they judge the words to be familiar enough and they have the capacity to grasp their full meaning.

Based on criticism that the informants expressed towards the two English options “Tailwind” and “Keen sighted”, one would expect the same kind of criticism to be directed towards “Greenhouse” as well. Yet, “Greenhouse” was appreciated by 63.46 % of the informants. If the sole reason for an informant to pick the Swedish version “Medvind” was because they were not familiar with the English word to the same degree, preference for familiarities seemed to be a reasonable explanation. The average Swede would encounter countless brand names daily; some based on an English word, or words from any other language for that matter, some simply made up. Arguably the familiarity of these brand names made them more acceptable. For example, there are already 3 companies registered under the name “Tailwind” in Sweden alone today according to Verksamt.se (2018).

It is hard to comment on how frequently the average Swede would encounter the English and Swedish words used in the logotypes. However thinking about “Greenhouse”, for example, arguably this is a word that most Swedes learn early in life and are probably also more likely to encounter on a more regular basis then “Tailwind” or “Keen Sighted”. Possibly, one would develop a closer relationship with more frequently encountered words, similar to the relationship a Swede has to the Swedish words “Medvind” and “Skarpsynt”, and maybe that would be a possible explanation why only one logo - “Greenhouse” - was preferred in English.

Even though English does seem to have a strong position in Swedish media and seemed to be appreciated by the majority of the informants in this study, there is plenty of evidence that the mother tongue, in this case Swedish, still holds a strong position. First and foremost, two out of three fictional logotypes were preferred in Swedish to a higher degree than in English. Whenever
Swedish was preferred, a good number of the informants brought up the credibility of Swedish products and that using a Swedish logotype would strengthen this credibility. Secondly, it seems the languages have different domains of dominance. The majority of the informants claimed to use English on the Internet and with friends to a great extent, yet a majority also expressed that they would use Swedish to an even greater degree in all the domains suggested in the questionnaire. On a similar note, 38 % of the informants said that if they could choose, they would prefer to use English to Swedish on the Internet, but 42 % stated that they would not prefer to use English over Swedish in any context. The exact same share 42 %, claimed that if they could choose what language they would speak in their domestic environment, they would prefer Swedish to English. Thirdly, as the informants were asked to list the languages they knew according to preference, 75 % put Swedish as their first preference and 65 % put English as their second one.

5.4 Implications

This study contributes more knowledge on how young Swedes use English and to what extent they use English. Moreover this study offers some insights into how young Swedes feel about the widespread use of English in Sweden as well as hint as to how the use of English might affect Swedish or is already affecting Swedish.

Through this study we learn the importance of knowing one’s audience when a brand name or advertisement is launched to get the most successful response (Gerritsen at el 2007:309). Possibly the results in this study can be used by Swedish companies that aim to target young Swedes as they develop their brands, logotypes and advertisements. Perhaps Swedish should more often be picked for promotion purposes to avoid information being lost in language barriers. Or perhaps Swedish companies would rather use Swedish to profit from connotations like “high quality” that the informants thought the Swedish brands symbolized to a higher degree than the English ones.

During the course of this study new interesting questions surfaced, such as: What difference would it make if the fictional brands had been given different names, perhaps with English words that the average Swede would encounter more? Why do young Swedes use English even if they do not have to? What causes young Swedes to mix English and Swedish to a great extent?
5.5 Limitations of the study and critical reflection:

The fictional logotypes were especially critical for this study as the results were based to a large extent on the results generated by them. Furthermore they could probably be subject to even more ambiguities than traditional questions. First of all the words themselves, which the logotypes were created from, might have certain connotations for some informants, perhaps different from the ones wished for. Moreover the product itself could make some informants feel reluctant or more positive towards the logotype as could the graphic elements of the logotypes. If the informants thought that one version of the logotypes looked more attractive than the other, they might choose that logotype, and there was some evidence of this in the answers.

As mentioned earlier, the rest of the questions in this questionnaire, which were not accompanied with pictures, could be interpreted in different ways as well, and that might have affected what the participants chose to answer. Ambiguous words like “attractive” could also have had an effect on the outcome of the results, as attractiveness is relative and individual.

The results and analysis were further critical points in this study, as they have been analyzed and interpreted by one person alone. The results are open to different interpretations and can be claimed to prove different points. While I have tried to be as objective as possible, I know that complete objectivity is impossible.

5.6 Agenda for future research

This study is limited to specific situations where Swedes encounter English frequently, namely in brand names. An interesting realm for similar studies would be to examine more domains where Swedes encounter English. Would a Swede have more positive attitudes towards English within other domains? Moreover, perhaps studies should be carried out to examine the likelihood that Swedes would be more positive towards English if the English used would be on the same linguistic level as the informants’ level of proficiency. The results of this study seem to show that Swedes feel less positive towards words they have not encountered before, and more positive towards words they are familiar with. Future projects in this field might want to explore this tendency more to prove its accuracy.

Another way in which this field could be further researched is to try to understand more how the frequent mix of English and Swedish affects the Swedish language. Possibly this is a tendency
among younger people. If it is, would even younger Swedes mix English and Swedish even more? How would that affect their language and how would the Swedish language at large be affected? What words are normally spoken in English rather than in Swedish?

English is frequently used in Sweden. In the domain of print media a recent study show that 51 % of all print advertisements used English to some extent in Swedish magazines (Hodzic 2013). Similar studies have showed similar results all over Europe. The extensive use of English seems to be motivated by the belief that English has positive connotations like modernity and cosmopolitanism and a so-called “overt prestige”. This study shows that young Swedes have positive attitudes towards English in general and that those positive attitudes can change if the informant does not feel familiar enough with certain words or does not master the linguistic level of the English used.
References


Appendix

English, Swedish and Swinglish

My name is Evelina. I'm currently working on my bachelor's thesis and I'm grateful that you are taking the time to help me by filling in this questionnaire. I assure you that whatever you choose to share will be handled with care and respect. This questionnaire is completely anonymous and voluntary. You may at any point decide that you do not want to take part in the study.

1. Age
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-

2. Gender
   - Female
   - Male
   - Other/Don't want to define

3. What is your main occupation?
   - [ ] Studying
   - [ ] Studying and working
   - [ ] Working
   - [ ] Other

4. Please write your first, second and third language, in that order

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[ survio logo ]

skapa din egen enkät – www.survio.com
5. When communicating, during an average week, how much Swedish would you use?

- Swedish exclusively
- Certain words and expressions in Swedish
- Mixing English and Swedish
- I would use both separately, but I don't mix
- I use other languages

6. When communicating, during an average week, how much English would you use?

- English exclusively
- Certain words and expressions in English
- Mixing English and Swedish
- I would use both separately, but I don't mix
- I use other languages

7. In what contexts do you normally use Swedish?

- On social media
- At work
- At school
- At home
- With friends
- Other

8. In what contexts do you normally use English?

- On social media
- At work
- At school
- At home
- With friends
- Other
9. If you could choose, in what context would you prefer to use Swedish instead of English?

☐ On social media
☐ At work
☐ At school
☐ At home
☐ With friends
☐ I would not prefer to use Swedish instead of English in any context
☐ Other

10. If you could choose, in what context would you prefer to use English instead of Swedish?

☐ On social media
☐ At work
☐ At school
☐ At home
☐ With friends
☐ I would not prefer to use English instead of Swedish in any context
☐ Other

11. Can you find a Swedish equivalent to the word ‘random’?


12. Can you find a Swedish equivalent to the phrase ‘state of mind’?


13. Do you mix English and Swedish?

☐ Yes
☐ Yes, sometimes
☐ Yes, rarely
☐ No
☐ Other

14. Please list the languages you know according to preference; 1 for your first preference, 2 for your second and so on.


15. Which one of the languages you know do you consider the most useful?


16. Which language sounds more attractive to you: Swedish or English?


17. What is your opinion on the frequent use of English in Swedish media?

- Positive
- Negative
- I don't think about it
- I don't care about it
- Other

18. Do you consider language an important part of culture?

- Yes, very
- Yes
- To some degree
- No
- Other

19. According to you, is it important that a country preserves and develops its language(s)?

- Yes
- To some extent
- No
- Other

20. Do you think the idea of English being a world language, is a good idea?

- Yes
- No
- Other

21. Would you say English is too widely used in Sweden?

- Yes
- To some extent
- No
- Other
22. Do you normally use English to communicate with people even if you don’t have to?

☐ Yes, often  ☐ Yes, sometimes  ☐ Yes, rarely  ☐ No  ☐ Other

23. Look at the logos below. Which one, in your opinion, would be better suited for the app?

☐ A new generation of weather forecast app.  ☐ A new generation of weather forecast app. (Svar 2)

24. Can you explain why you think one of the layouts would suit the app better?


25. Look at the two logos below. Which one would you use for this particular business?

☐ An organic restaurant in the heart of Gothenburg  ☐ An organic restaurant in the heart of Gothenburg (Svar 2)
26. Can you explain why you would prefer one of the logos?

27. Look at the two logos below. Which one would you use for this particular business?

☐ A modern optician
☐ A modern optician (Svar 2)

28. Can you explain why you would prefer one of the logos?

29. Do you think this questionnaire should have been written in Swedish?
☐ Yes
☐ No