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# A TASTE OF KIWI:

## DOES THE SWEDISH PALATE DIFFER IN SENSITIVITY AND PREFERENCE FROM THE NEW ZEALANDERS'?<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

For over 60 years Swedes have been exposed to spoken English in the media. This exposure has been complemented by English language teaching in school, where British English has been the primary foreign language taught since the 1950's. With the explosion of television channels over the past decade or so this exposure has increased. This paper examines through comparison with a body of New Zealand listeners, whose English language television exposure is only 19% home grown, the degree to which the Swedes' media exposure to English, primarily US and British, has resulted in (1) attitudinal responses to a range of English accents which are similar to the New Zealander's responses, (2) an ability to perceive the country of origin of an English speaker and (3) an appreciation of the reflection of social status in the accent of an English speaker. The results indicate that the Swedish palate differs in both sensitivity and preference from the New Zealanders, yet in a more subtle manner than expected.

### 1. Introduction

Ever since the 1930's Swedes have been exposed to English through the media. Initially this was in the form of subtitled English language sound movies and more recently through English language cinema, TV and pop

culture. Indeed, with the increasing availability of satellite and cable television possible exposure to English language television in non-English speaking countries in Europe has grown exponentially. Today it is not unusual to have access to channels such as BBC Prime, BBC World, CNN and Sky News.

In its subtitling policy Sweden groups itself with countries like Denmark and the Netherlands, and stands in contrast to countries like Germany, France, and Austria where foreign language cinema and television is dubbed into the national language. This difference results in a group of countries with an environment rich in English language media exposure and another poor in such exposure.

It is, however, unclear how much attention the non-native speaker pays to aspects of the speaker's voice which convey extra-linguistic information when listening to a film or television programme in a foreign language, whether non-native speakers acquire the socio-phonetic cues associated with attitude trait attribution through their extensive exposure to English language media outside of the classroom and how this may differ, if at all, from the native speaker's perceptions.

Most European students of English have a preference for British or American English. This preference of the European student for British or American English has been coupled to the degree of exposure to American accented English (see van der Haagen, 1998; Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck and Smit, 1997; Mobärg, 1998) and can be seen as indicating an awareness of variants of English. It ought, however, be remembered that in this context the British RP accent has traditionally been the variety of educational prestige. American and other varieties of English have until recently only been encountered through the media, youth culture and personal contact. Indeed, as pointed out by Mobärg (1998), for most of the last 50 years that English has been the primary foreign language in Swedish schools, the variety of English encountered was restricted to British English RP.

Accent preference and attitude trait attribution are not only found in the second language learner of English; native speakers also hold preferences. Bayard (e.g., 1990; 1995a: 97-107; 2000) undertook a long-running series of wide-ranging attitudinal accent evaluations with participants who were almost all New Zealanders. Bayard's studies with New Zealand listeners showed a strong culture cringe and a dislike of the 'taste' of Kiwi. This is evidenced by an expected high rating of RP on power/status variables, but a startling preference for North American (and Australian) accents over New Zealand ones in terms of solidarity/affiliation.

Comparisons between first and second language speakers based on the same perception test materials are few. Sullivan and Karst (1996) is one example; they compared the ability of fifteen Swedish students to identify the country of origin of, and discriminate between, six World English accents with a group of British English high school students. Sullivan and Karst found no significant difference on the identification task, yet the Swedes fared less well than the British English listeners on the discrimination task.

The question addressed in the first part of this study is whether, and if so how, the Swede and the New Zealander's palates as evidenced in attitude trait attribution differ? It is unlikely that many Swedes will be familiar with the New Zealand accent beyond perhaps seeing the film 'Once Were Warriors'. Thus, any traits which are attributed by the Swedish listeners as a group are most likely due to exposure to British and American English media. To what degree the exposure to foreign English language media in New Zealand has contributed to today's cringe towards the home accent is, as Bayard (2000) pointed out, difficult to establish, although much of the cringe probably stems from prescriptivist critics' complaints and self-help books on 'proper' pronunciation (i.e., RP) common in New Zealand up to the 1960s. This study may be able to contribute to the argument, especially if the Swede's palate, after exposure to North American and British English language media, is identical to the New Zealander's.

This second part of this paper examines the degree to which the Swedes' media exposure to English, primarily US and UK, has resulted in (1) an ability to perceive the country of origin of an English speaker and (2) an appreciation of the reflection of social status in the accent of an English speaker. It does this through comparison with a body of NZ listeners whose television media exposure, although almost wholly in English, is only circa 19% home grown; the rest of the programming derives from UK, Australia, and most massively US (Bayard, 2000).

## 2. Procedure

The experimental procedure used in this study is identical to that used in Bayard (1990; 2000). The administrator of the experiments in Sweden was not the same person as for the experiments in New Zealand. Multivariate analysis of the New Zealand study reported in Bayard (1990, 1991a) revealed no significant effect due to the different accents of the administrators (British

and North American). The effect of the administrator's accent in Sweden (Southern British) can, therefore, be considered to have had at most a minimal, effect upon the experimental participants' responses.

The questions 'Likely annual income' and 'Acceptability' were amended to fit the Swedish context. The former became 'Likely monthly income' (>10 000sek to <35 000sek), and the latter, 'Acceptability', was changed to *Exclude from Sweden* through to *Family member*.

### 2.1 Experimental Participants

The listeners were all students at Umeå University, Sweden, who had not lived in an English speaking country, were not students of English, reported no known hearing damage and had Swedish as their first language. There were 50 listeners (31 male and 19 female) aged 20 to 37. The number of hours spent watching English language TV or films ranged from 0 to over 20 hours per week. The mode was 5–9 hours per week. The Swedes were contrasted with a body of New Zealand undergraduate students (N=271; 186 female, 85 male; mean age 22.9) tested by Bayard in 1996-97.

### 2.2 Speech Material

The speech material consisted of eight recordings of individuals reading the same text (circa one-minute each). These individuals were: (1) younger female, lower middle class 'innovative' general New Zealand English accent; (2) younger female, lower class 'innovative' broad New Zealand English (NZE) accent; (3) older female, upper middle class, RP accent; (4) middle-aged male, middle class, Canadian North American (NA<sub>m</sub>) accent; (5) older female, upper middle class, cultivated NZE accent; (6) middle-aged male, middle class, general Australian English (AusE) accent; (7) older male, middle class, 'conservative' general NZE accent and (8) middle-aged male, upper middle class 'conservative' broad NZE accent. The terms broad, general and cultivated NZE are traditionally defined by the centring diphthongs e.g. (au), 1. [æu], Broad, 2. [aʊ], General, 3. [au], Cultivated, 4. [əu]. For further details about how these and the other phonological variables considered in the classification of these voices along the continuum, see Bayard 1991b, 2000. The terms *conservative* and *innovative* are used to describe whether the NZE speaker uses any of the phonological features currently being adopted in NZE. These include /iə/ – /eə/ merger (beer-drinking bears – bear drinking beers), /-l/ vocalisation to /-u/ (cool – coow) and /w-/ – /ʌ-/ merger as /w-/ (which, witch) (see Bayard 1995a, Chapter 4).

### *2.3 Listening Task, Format of the Questionnaire and Response Coding*

The participants first heard a 15-second sample of each of the speakers. Then, they heard each of the full one-minute recordings, during which they were asked to rate their impressions of each speaker on ten 5-point differential scales of 1(++) to 5(--), Pleasantness of accent, Reliability, Ambition, Sense of humour, Leadership ability, Likely monthly income (>10 000sek to <35 000sek), Educational level (from school leaver to advanced university degree), Self-confidence, and Intelligence, and on one, 6-point differential scale Acceptability (Exclude from Sweden through to Family member). Finally, the 15-second speaker samples were heard again and assessed for the speaker's nationality, social class background, and for the type of job held by the speaker. The participants responded freely; no choices or suggestions were presented to the participants.

In this paper the NZ group's responses Maori, Polynesian and NZ are compressed into NZ. The percentage of NZ listeners who responded Maori or Polynesian were 0.4%, 8.9% and 0.7% for speakers 1, 2 and 5, respectively. The distinction between Maori and Pakeha New Zealander has no meaning for the Swedish listener. British and English were both coded as British; Scottish, Welsh and Irish were coded as Other for the purposes of this paper. North American and Canadian were scored together and as distinct from American/US as in Bayard New Zealand studies. Full details of the criteria used to evaluate the socio-economic status may be found in Bayard 1990, 1991a. The task of assigning one of the five socio-economic levels based on the listeners' written estimates of job and class was generally simple.

## **3. Results**

Figures 1 and 2 show the mean values for the twelve traits awarded to each of the eight speakers by the New Zealanders and Swedes respectively. There are a number of similarities: RP rates highly in status in both groups, while the Canadian NAM voice is the clear leader in the solidarity traits (followed by the Australian voice). The cultivated NZE (#5) and hesitant broad NZE voice (#2) are clearly at the bottom for both groups. However, the differences outweigh the similarities. The Swedish students give overall lower ratings for almost all traits for almost all of the eight voices; the chief exceptions are the higher solidarity-trait ratings of the RP, Australian, and NAM voices. Tables 1 and 2 give mean overall values for the speakers and traits, and the significance of the

differences as determined by univariate ANOVA analysis. All Swedish mean scores are lower than the Kiwis except pleasant accent (due to the high rating of NAm). Similarly, all speakers are rated lower overall by the Swedes except for the NAm voice.

Figure 1. The average scores for 12 accents evaluation variable for 271 New Zealand students (Otago University, 1996–97).

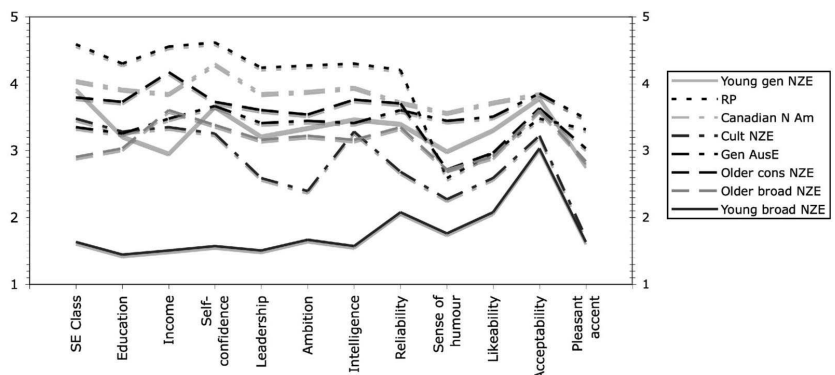


Figure 2. The average scores for 12 accents evaluation variable for 50 Swedish students (Umeå University, 1999).

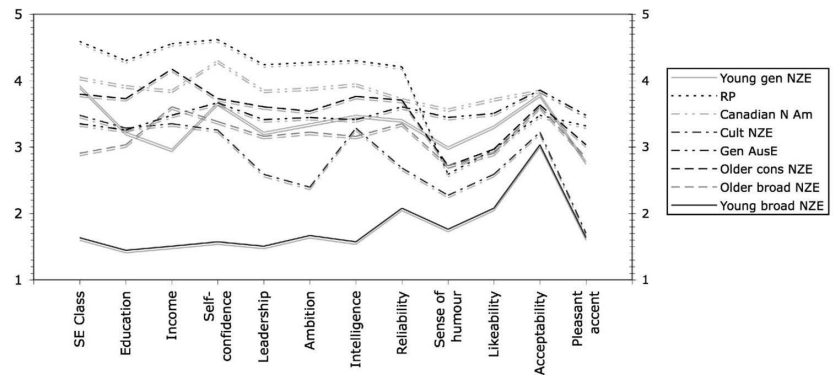


Figure 3. Factor analysis of 12 overall trait means for eight speakers. 272 New Zealand University Students (186F; 85M) from Bayard 1999, Fig 5.

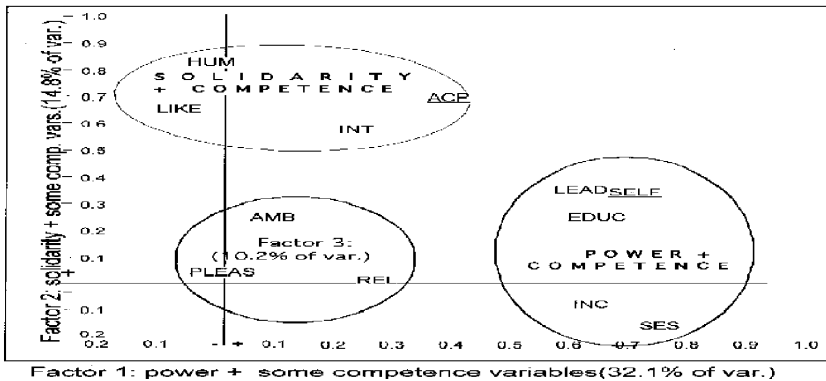


Table 1. Swedes' and New Zealanders' mean ratings for each *speaker* (univariate ANOVAs with  $df=1, 574$ )  
(key: significance < .001; significance .001 – .01; **significance** .01 – .05)

|  | NZ MEAN      | SWEDISH MEAN | F           | P           |
|--|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Old general conservative NZE</i>    | 3.490        | 3.237        | 8.95        | .003        |
| <i>Old cultivated conservative NZE</i> | 2.714        | 2.405        | 8.11        | .005        |
| <b>General AusE</b>                    | <b>3.450</b> | <b>3.264</b> | <b>4.72</b> | <b>.030</b> |
| <b>Old conservative RP</b>             | <b>3.837</b> | <b>3.665</b> | <b>4.57</b> | <b>.033</b> |
| <i>Young broad innovative NZ</i>       | 1.822        | 1.669        | 3.66        | .056        |
| <i>Old broad conservative NZE</i>      | 3.177        | 3.019        | 2.83        | .093        |
| <i>Young general innovative NZ</i>     | 3.269        | 3.133        | 2.77        | .096        |
| <i>Canadian NAM</i>                    | 3.750        | 3.830        | 1.06        | .304        |

(averaged F-test with  $df=8, 4592$ :  $F = 4.89$ ,  $p < .000$ )

**Table 2. Swedes' and New Zealanders' mean ratings for each trait**(univariate ANOVAs with  $df=1, 560$ )(key: *significance* < .001; *significance* .001 – .01; *significance* .01 – .05)

|                         | NZ MEAN      | SWEDISH MEAN | F            | P           |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| <i>Income</i>           | <u>3.209</u> | <u>2.659</u> | <u>58.49</u> | <u>.000</u> |
| <i>Leadership</i>       | <u>3.178</u> | <u>2.911</u> | <u>16.70</u> | <u>.000</u> |
| <i>Self-confidence</i>  | 3.517        | 3.314        | 9.69         | .002        |
| <i>Intelligence</i>     | 3.337        | 3.151        | 8.43         | .004        |
| <i>Reliable</i>         | 3.336        | 3.155        | 7.67         | .006        |
| <i>Socioecon. class</i> | 3.324        | 3.111        | 7.54         | .006        |
| <i>Education</i>        | 3.095        | 2.913        | 7.09         | .008        |
| <b>Acceptability</b>    | <b>3.398</b> | <b>3.148</b> | <b>6.52</b>  | <b>.011</b> |
| <b>Humour</b>           | <b>2.836</b> | <b>2.678</b> | <b>4.05</b>  | <b>.045</b> |
| <i>Ambitious</i>        | 3.240        | 3.119        | 3.71         | .055        |
| <i>Pleasant accent</i>  | 2.870        | 2.995        | 3.06         | .081        |
| <i>Likeability</i>      | 3.013        | 2.968        | 0.38         | .535        |

(averaged F-test with  $df=12, 6720$ :  $F = 10.83$ ,  $p < .000$ )

The results of factor (principal components analyses) of the Kiwi and Swedish mean trait scores, in order to establish how these are grouped into larger, more general **dimensions** like power and solidarity are shown in Figure 3 and 4, respectively. In general these two dimensions, plus a third that could be called competence, tend to occur throughout the Anglophone world, but vary in other cultures (e.g., Bayard 1995b). The Kiwi evaluators (Fig. 3) follow the usual pattern, but the Swedish results (Fig. 4) are harder to interpret. The primary factor (32% of variance) has power plus two competence traits, while factor 2 has three of the four solidarity traits plus intelligence. Factor 3 combines two competence traits (ambition and reliability) with pleasant accent. Due to the lack of studies dealing with Swedish attitudes toward different varieties of Swedish it would be unwise to attempt any further interpretation.

Based on the results reported in Sullivan and Karst (1996) one would predict that few Swedish listeners would assign NZ to a speaker as the country of origin. However, as shown in Table 3, this did not turn out to be the case here. Along with a consistently high *no response* (22–30%), there was a steady assignment of NZ as the country of origin, even for the British and Canadian speakers. In spite of a possible over-assignment of NZ as the speaker's country



Figure 4. Factor analysis of 12 overall trait means for eight speakers 50 Swedish University Students (19F; 31M)

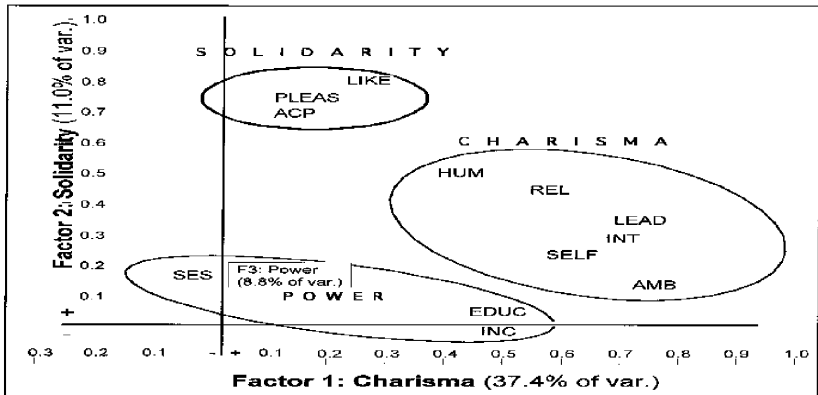


Table 3: Perceptions of speakers' national origin. The left-hand figure in each column is the Swedish listeners' response (N=50) and the right-hand italic figure in each column is the New Zealander listeners' response (N=271) (Bayard 2000). All figures are rounded percentages; — = no recorded response. The majority for each speaker and listener group is shown in boldface.

|               | SPKR 1<br>NZE<br>Y GEN | SPKR 2<br>NZE<br>BROAD | SPKR 3<br>RP<br>CONS | SPKR 4<br>CAN<br>NAM | SPKR 5<br>NZE<br>CULT | SPKR 6<br>AUSE<br>GEN | SPKR 7<br>NZE<br>O GEN | SPKR 8<br>NZE<br>BROAD |
|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| NZ            | 16 <b>86</b>           | <b>30</b> <b>87</b>    | 10 11                | 10 3                 | 20 39                 | 20 41                 | 20 <b>66</b>           | <b>28</b> <b>89</b>    |
| Aus           | 8 4                    | 6 3                    | — —                  | 4 1                  | 4 1                   | <b>30</b> <b>57</b>   | 14 20                  | 22 3                   |
| British       | <b>54</b> 7            | 28 6                   | <b>62</b> <b>86</b>  | 14 0                 | <b>40</b> <b>48</b>   | 14 0                  | <b>34</b> 8            | 18 1                   |
| Can/NAm       | — —                    | — —                    | — —                  | 8 30                 | — 0                   | 2 —                   | — —                    | 2 —                    |
| US            | — —                    | 6 —                    | — 0                  | <b>42</b> <b>62</b>  | 6 —                   | 8 —                   | 8 —                    | 6 —                    |
| No data/Other | 22 3                   | 30 4                   | 28 3                 | 22 4                 | 30 12                 | 26 3                  | 24 6                   | 24 7                   |

(Y = young, O = old, gen = general, cons = conservative, cult = cultivated)

of origin due to cues external to the task, such as knowing that the task administrator although British had been a post-doctoral fellow in NZ, the NZ and Swedish listeners concur in their non-NZ majority assignments of speakers 3, 4, 5 and 6. Although the range of confusion is greater for the

Swedish listeners, this result must be seen as demonstrating the power of English language media to convey more than simply the drama of the programme.

In respect of the remaining four voices a clear difference in the perception of general and broad NZE by the Swedish listeners can be observed which does not exist in the NZ listeners' responses. The Swedes are more willing to assign NZ as the country of origin to a speaker with a broad rather than a general NZE accent. The ability of the Swedish listener to detect such subtle differences concurs with the findings from Sullivan and Karst's (1996) accent discrimination task. The Swedish listeners had a less clear picture of the Canadian/North American and US accent than the NZ listeners. Aside from the Canadian speaker, only on two occasions do any of the NZ listeners assign Canada or the US as the speaker's national origin. However, only when more than 50% of listeners assign the voice as British did the Swedish listeners **not** assign voices to Canada or the US. There is apparently a small group who perceive English as British or non-British (read Canadian/US) unless strongly convinced otherwise.

With few exceptions the Swedish assignment of social class, as shown in Table 4, is what a Swede would call *lagom*. That is, Table 4 shows the moderation of the Swedish response; MC is selected for five of the speakers.

**Table 4. Perceptions of speakers' social status. The left-hand figure in each column is the Swedish listeners' response (N=50) and the right-hand italic figure the New Zealander listeners' response (N=271). All figures are rounded percentages; — = no recorded response. The majority/plurality for each speaker and listener group is shown in boldface.**

|         | SPKR 1<br>NZE<br>Y GEN | SPKR 2<br>NZE<br>BROAD | SPKR 3<br>RP<br>CONS | SPKR 4<br>CAN<br>NAM | SPKR 5<br>NZE<br>CULT | SPKR 6<br>AUSE<br>GEN | SPKR 7<br>NZE<br>O GEN | SPKR 8<br>NZE<br>BROAD |
|---------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| LC      | 4 1                    | <b>34 66</b>           | — 0                  | — 1                  | <b>30 7</b>           | 4 7                   | 4 3                    | 10 7                   |
| ULC/LMC | 2 11                   | 22 14                  | — 3                  | 4 6                  | 18 12                 | 18 20                 | 14 14                  | 18 <b>33</b>           |
| MC      | <b>52 20</b>           | 8 3                    | 22 6                 | <b>54 20</b>         | 28 23                 | <b>46 20</b>          | <b>38 11</b>           | <b>34 13</b>           |
| UMC     | 24 <b>33</b>           | — 2                    | 14 21                | 18 20                | 4 7                   | 18 19                 | 14 27                  | 14 16                  |
| UC      | 16 <b>33</b>           | — 9                    | <b>62 63</b>         | 20 <b>40</b>         | 16 27                 | 12 <b>21</b>          | 26 <b>29</b>           | 16 10                  |
| No data | 2 4                    | 2 7                    | — 7                  | 4 14                 | 4 24                  | 21 3                  | 4 16                   | 8 22                   |

(LC, UMC, etc. = lower class, upper middle class etc.; see Table 1 for other abbreviations)

In social status assignment the Swedish and NZ listeners diverged except in the clear extreme cases (voices 2 and 3), which were clearly perceived as LC and UC respectively. Interestingly, the Swedish listeners' responses correlate much better with Bayard's 1986 rather than his 1996-97 study; this is perhaps indicative of a greater move away from a social democratic society in NZ than in Sweden.

#### 4. Conclusions

It seems clear that the Swedes rank Australasian accents below those they are familiar with from the classroom and media (RP and NAm). Like the Kiwis they rate RP higher in solidarity and competence variables, but give the NAm voice highest marks for the solidarity variables of likeability, acceptability, sense of humour, and pleasant accent. They also rate it best in reliability, and find it the easiest to understand; oddly enough, no correlation is present between hours of English-language TV watched and ease of understanding of any of the speakers.

The factor analyses reveal that Swedes seemingly organise the traits along somewhat different dimensions than the Kiwis; competence traits are divided between power and solidarity clusters, and a puzzling third factor consists of ambition, pleasant accent, and reliability (or pleasant accent, reliability, and ease of understanding if the last is included in the analysis). Only further research into what Swedes think of different regional and social varieties of their own language can shed light on this question.

The Swedish and NZ listeners are similarly able to perceive the country of origin of non-NZ speakers of English. Although there was an agreement of plurality for each speaker, the Swedish responses were generally more widely spread across possible countries of origin. As expected, NZ listeners are better at identifying NZ voices. The listener groups had very different perceptions of the speakers' socio-economic statuses. Exposure to foreign English language media has given both groups the ability to identify an English speaker's country of origin. Yet, the native NZer still has the advantage. The assignment of socio-economic status relates more to the social structure and aspirations, of the home country than a perception gained by non-native speakers from the media.

## Notes

1. This paper is based on two conference papers I presented at Fonetik 2000 in Skövde, Sweden together with Donn in 2000. His contribution to the study, the argument of paper and the paper's text is central and I acknowledge this by placing Donn as the first author on this paper.

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