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ENGELSKA

# **Concord errors in written production of Swedish learners of English**

**Emelie Johansson**

Kandidatuppsats

Handledare:

Larisa Gustafsson Oldireva

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Examinator:

Joseph Trotta

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## **Abstract**

**Title:** Concord errors in written production of Swedish learners of English

**Author:** Emelie Johansson

**Supervisor:** Larisa Gustafsson Oldireva

This study has examined and discussed previous research about subject-verb concord and also examined the phenomena with help of essays and assignments written by students and teachers from the University of Gothenburg. The study found that even though Sweden has an easy access to English and Swedes easily develop their command of English, Swedes have problems with subject-verb concord. There are several reasons which create problems for Swedish learners of English with concord, and the problems may be connected to inter- or intralingual factors. Swedish and its grammar rules, as their mother tongue may affect Swedes' command of English in a negative way and since Swedish does not longer have subject-verb concord it creates further problems with the command in concord in another language than one's own native language.

**Keywords:** subject, verb, predicate, concord/agreement, error analysis, Swedish and English.

## **1. Introduction**

English and Swedish have a very close relationship and it is therefore relatively easy for Swedes to learn English (Smith & Swan, 2001:21). Swedish speakers are exposed to English all the time; TV, music, advertising, news and commercials in Sweden are affected by the English language, and English is used frequently in Sweden. English is Sweden's primary foreign language in schools; it is the most important international language for practical communicative purposes and the only foreign language that has ever been a compulsory subject in Swedish schools (Mobärg, 1997:249).

Despite the fact that Swedes have an easy access to English and their relationship is very close, they tend to make basic grammar errors, even at advanced levels of language acquisition. Since English is Sweden's primary foreign language it is significant that Swedes learn English grammar because the grammar plays an important role for communication purposes (Ljung & Ohlander, 1992:7). Concord errors, which are common among Swedish learners of English, are in the focus of the present study. Swedes have problems with subject-verb concord when they occur in different clauses, in the same clauses when the normal word order is changed, and even when there are no intervening words between the subject and the verb. This study falls within the field of error analysis and discusses inter- and intralingual factors related to the subject-verb concord phenomena.

### **1.1 Purpose**

This study's primary aim was to survey concord errors made by a small selection of Swedish learners of English at different levels and tasks. University students and teachers of English were examined since they have graduated both compulsory school and upper secondary school and should know the concord rules by now. Another aim was to find what different types of concord errors are the most common for Swedish learners of English and what Swedes find the most difficult when matching the verb and the subject. The most common concord errors found in this study are focused and they are also analysed and discussed.

## 2. Materials and Method

The material consists of pre-course assignments written by future teachers of English who are native speakers of Swedish<sup>1</sup>, of second (the second written assignment) summaries by distance course students<sup>2</sup>, pre-course assignments of distance students<sup>3</sup>, exam summaries<sup>4</sup> and finally essays written by Swedish teachers of English<sup>5</sup>. The material is from the University of Gothenburg, it is corrected by the teacher, and the selected data has been expedited by this study's supervisor. The material selection was made in an attempt to examine what kind of concord errors are made when the English users are at different levels.

The corpus of data consists of 77 essays, with a total of 38, 118 words, and it comprises 104 concord errors. The number of words between the subject and the predicate in each sentence was counted, and the grammatical factors in each sentence related to a concord error were taken into consideration when classifying the errors. If the number of words between two related items was four or more, the error has been classified as a distance concord error, and if there were two items next to each other, or rather close with less than four words intervening, they were classified as grammatical concord error. Since there were only few notional and concord of proximity types of error made in the material, they have been classified as "other" types of concord errors. Other types of noun-related problems for Swedish learners of English have not been included in the classifying because the grammatical and distance factors seem more prominent in the data analysed in this essay.

Several different types of concord errors were found in this study which resulted in three groups of concord errors; grammatical, distance concord errors and "other" types of concord errors. Grammatical and distance concord errors have been focused, analysed and discussed in the fourth section since they were found to be the majority of concord errors in the material analysed upon. The group, "other" types of concord errors, included several different types of concord errors which lead to a group-up. They have not been focused in the essay since they made up such a low percentage of concord errors. Figure 1 has shown the raw frequencies of concord errors and how more frequent the grammatical group was comparing to the "other" group of concord errors.

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<sup>1</sup> Group 1. Writings on the students' expectations of their future career as teachers

<sup>2</sup> Group 2. Summaries from a text

<sup>3</sup> Group 3. Writings about a book each student recently read

<sup>4</sup> Group 4. Writings of *Dagens Nyheter*

<sup>5</sup> Group 5. Teachers essays

The data will show what types of errors in concord students and teachers have made. The reasons for the concord errors have been discussed in terms of error analysis. The errors can appear because of inter- or intralingual factors, and that has also been discussed with the help of error analysis.

### 3. Theoretical Background

#### 3.1 What is concord?

The subject and the verb have to agree grammatically and that phenomenon is called subject-verb concord. The verb is considered to be the heart of the sentence (Woods, 2010:125) and it has to take the same grammatical form as its controller, the subject. The subject and the verb are the two most important items in a sentence (Estling-Vannestål, 2007:73). There are four different types of concord: grammatical, notional, concord of proximity and distance concord. Grammatical concord is when the verb and the subject "belong together" (*I have, he has*). Notional concord is focusing on the meaning of the whole entity (Crystal, 2004:75). For instance,

1. *Fifty dollars is a lot of money*

Concord of proximity does not, however, agree with the real subject in the sentence or the clause, it agrees with the closest noun and the numerous of that specific noun (Crystal, 2004:75). For instance,

2. *A teacher who lives in those urban areas are likely to use informal language*

Distance concord is when the subject and the verb/predicate appear in different clauses or there are intervening words between the subject and the verb/predicate. For instance,

3. *William's mother, who works at the mall, has bought a new pair of glasses*

In English sentences the subject and the verb can agree in different ways, and that makes it difficult for Swedes to keep track of the different rules of concord especially since Swedish no longer has subject-verb concord. The subject controls the verb/predicator, which has to have the same grammatical person and number features as the subject, the third person singular

demands *-s* or *-es* on the verb (*s/he plays, sings, cooks*), while the first and second person singular and all plurals demand no *-s* or *-es* to the verb (*I/we/you/they play, sing, cook*).

### **3.2 Concord in learners' grammar**

A good use of grammar is a condition for a comprehensive and creative ability (Ljung & Ohlander, 1992:7). On the other hand, concord has little to do with the ability to communicate and understand the message even though it can be conveyed in faulty grammar. However, Standard English is used in radio, TV, newspapers, books and is spoken by educated people, which means that Swedish learners of English should use Standard English (Ljung & Ohlander, 1992:13).

Swedes have problems with the subject-verb concord in both oral and written production, and even though there are information and explanations about concord in Swedish grammar books, Swedish learners of English still have problems with all types of different concord errors. Even young Swedish pupils learn the basic grammatical rules of concord in school but somehow Swedes still make concord errors. However, the errors may be performance errors but the rules of concord are not automatized among Swedish learners of English. Swedes usually know the basic rules of concord and know how they are used but somehow overlook these rules while writing or speaking English. Estling-Vannestål (2007) writes and defines concord in her grammar book *A University grammar of English with a Swedish perspective*, in which students are taught that the third person singular as the subject in the sentence requires the addition of *-s* or *-es* to the verb and *is* in the present tense of *be*, *has* in the present tense of *have* and *was* in the past tense of *be* (2007:80).

### **3.3 Concord in error analysis**

According to Ellis and Barkhuizen there are two different forms of errors, intralingual and interlingual, and they need to be distinguished. Interlingual errors are made under the influences of the mother-tongue, and intralingual errors are learning strategies that are universal (2009:65). Swedish does no longer have subject-verb concord and the concord errors which Swedes create when using English can be because of one of these reasons; Swedes lack the requisite knowledge, have insufficient knowledge about concord or forget the rules of concord when using English (James, 2004:76-80). Concord errors made by Swedish learners of English are an example of one of the differences between English and Swedish. If the learner's L2 forms are not yet automatized, they arise because of gaps or because of the

difficulty of processing forms in the L2 (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2009:62). We have to know the sources of the concord errors to understand why concord errors are made, in order to help learners of English. We need to identify the concord errors and classify them as grammatical, distance concord, notional or concord of proximity.

On the other hand, there is a distinction between errors and mistakes. Since it is difficult to categorize errors and mistakes, they have not been focused on in this study. Mistakes can be corrected by the author her/himself, in contrast to errors, where the author cannot correct them her/himself. It is important to know that students may have accidentally made a concord mistake, which can be of performance factors. However, it is difficult to distinguish errors and mistakes. Errors show teachers what learners have learned and what they have not yet learned and they therefore serve a pedagogical purpose, but they also show how languages are learned, and errors serve a learning purpose because learners have to understand the rules of the target language (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2009:51).

### **3.4 Is concord necessary for communication purposes?**

It seems that the ability to understand the message in oral and written communication does not depend on the command of the grammar rules regulating concord. The message can be clear without the right choice of concord forms as there are other ways of showing the number of the controller such as singular and plural forms of personal pronouns. For instance, here is an example from the data:

4. *He meet [meets] a girl, Allie, a rich 17 years old woman who's studing to be a good wife*  
(C)<sup>6</sup>

The grammatical number of the subject is already marked by the personal pronoun, so the grammatical concord in the verb *meet/meets* is redundant information which implies that the concord error in example (4) does not distort the communicative message of this sentence. By contrast, in German, concord is necessary in a sentence of a similar type for the understanding of the utterance message since the pronoun *sie* can have different agreements, for example, *hat, haben* and *haben*, depending on the number of the subject (*sie/sie/Sie*) (Freund et al. 1994:75). If one would make errors in concord in German, people would be confused and not know who is being talked about or referred to, however, that is not the case in English.

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<sup>6</sup> (C) = a concord error has been made



In English, the distinction between the singular *you* and the plural *you* is not expressed by means of grammar: neither the form of the pronoun nor the grammatical agreement convey the idea of the number as *have* agrees with the singular and the plural *you*. This can be problematic for a German learner of English who is used to the morphological distinction in pronouns and respective verb forms in such cases. Rules of concord are language-specific and can be redundant in one language but necessary in another language.

Swedes easily forget to show grammatical number by means of the agreement between the verb and its controller as it is absent in their native language. Since English and Swedish are rather close typologically and both belong to the same group of languages, the Germanic group, Swedes may have problems in taking in the idea of an extra means necessary in showing the number. Swedish learners of English may find it difficult to accept the fact that communication can be negatively affected by ignoring the rules of grammatical concord.

### **3.5 Previous research on concord**

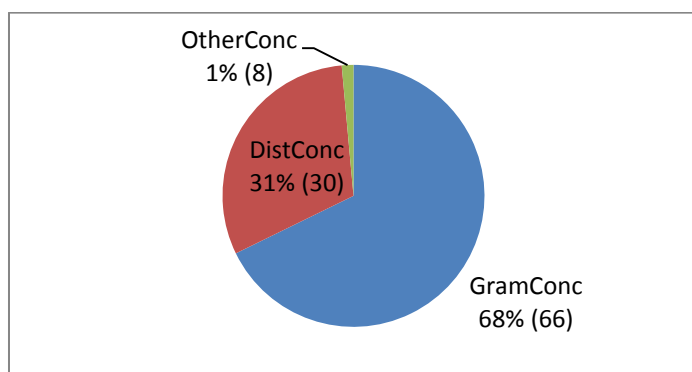
Thagg-Fisher (1985) has based her study on two types of test from the 1960s, translation and composition, which were made by Swedish learners of English. It was found that concord error density does not differ in spoken and written language, but it differs in creative and non-creative text production (Thagg-Fisher, 1985:69-70). Concord errors in translation texts are dependent on the choice of words and sentence structure in the source text, whereas Swedish learners of English can avoid making concord errors in creative text production (Thagg-Fisher, 1985:71).

Thagg-Fisher (1985) also found in her study that people make errors or mistakes owing to the *one –s principle*, which means that the final *-s* of the singular noun may be misinterpreted as the plural morpheme. Swedish learners of English have problems considering irregular and unmarked plural nouns; when plural nouns lack the regular *–s* morpheme, Swedes tend to make concord errors. Moreover, Swedes also have problems considering non-countable nouns, since these types of nouns can be classified differently in English and Swedish. Collective nouns are problematic for Swedes since they are a matter of the writer's perspective (Thagg-Fisher, 1985:77). Moreover, Swedes have to know whether the noun is regarded holistically (as one entity) or atomistically (as members making up a group) as concord depends on whether a collective noun is regarded as a single undivided body or a collection of individuals (Thagg-Fisher, 1985:78). Pronouns are difficult as well; sentences with, *everybody*, *every*, *none*, *some* and *each* can trigger concord errors (Thagg-Fisher, 1985:81).

Köhlmyr found that the most common problem for Swedish learners of English is when the subject is a personal pronoun and there are two types of errors; “either the subject requires the verb to take the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular –s or it does not” (2001:144). Another common problem for Swedish learners of English is when the subject is a noun or a noun phrase and there are three different noun types (1) countable nouns (2) non-countable nouns and (3) collective nouns (2001:146). Another previous research relevant to the present study focused on agreement with collective nouns in newspapers written by native speakers of English (Levin 2001). It has been found that when there is a long distance between the subject and the predicate, it is difficult to remember the number of the subject (Levin, 2001:93). Also, agreement errors become more frequent when personal pronouns occur in other clauses than their subjects/controllers. When a pronoun appears in another sentence than its controller it is more likely to produce plural concord than if the both two items appeared in the same clause (Levin, 2001:99-100).

#### 4 Results and Discussion

The statistical surveys of all errors provided by the written production of students of various written proficiency courses are presented in Figure 1 and Tables 1-2. Figure 1 shows the instances of errors classified into three groups and both percentage and number of concord errors are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Concord errors in students' essays by type

Figure 1 demonstrates that it is the grammatical type of concord that is the biggest problem for Swedish learners of English; this type of error is followed by the distance concord types of errors. Totally 104 concord errors were found in this study and Figure 1 shows that 66 out of 104 concord errors were of grammatical factors and only 30 concord errors were those of

distance factors, which suggests that students have problems with the grammatical rule of concord, which also has an effect on distance type of concord. Even Swedes at advanced levels have problems with grammatical concord. Grammatical concord covers different types of grammatical factors but in this study the majority of errors is related to pronouns, which was also the most common concord problem for Swedish learners of English according to Köhlmyr's study (2001).

It was also found in the present study that sometimes the line between grammatical concord and distance concord was difficult to distinguish. In some cases the grammatical concord problem seemed more significant than the problem of distance concord. For instance, here is one example from a second summary from the data:

*5. It has been shown by a lot of scientists and other important persons, such as professors, authors and philosophers that **whoever wants** to be creative, have [has] to work hard and let the imagination flow (C)*

To classify this type of concord error was difficult; however, the grammatical factors in this case seemed more important than factors of distance problems. The subject and the predicate in this sentence are rather close, which suggests the classification of this error as a grammatical concord error. Even though the subject and the predicate appear in different clauses, it is still a grammatical concord error.

The different types of concord errors being found in the present study was difficult to classify in some other ways. In some sentences, two different factors have been found which can cause the rise of a concord error. The most of these sentences have a noun-related problem. Here is one example from the data:

*6. Also, **Alcohol and Drug Information Center** maintain [maintains] that a large group of teenage boys and girls, tend to abstain from alcohol (C)*

*Alcohol and Drug Information Center* is a noun phrase and is regarded as one entity and must be treated with a singular verb/predicate. The word *and* can fool learners of English into believing that the phrase shall be treated as plural when it shall be treated as singular. This concord error was classified as a grammatical error because the grammatical factor seems more significant and the present study is focusing on grammatical concord errors and distance concord errors. Noun-related concord errors also show proof of grammatical problems for the learner.

The data has been provided by essays from different levels, and it is important to distinguish errors in relation to tasks and levels of language acquisition. Table 1 shows how many concord errors occurred, their classifications and how many words each group has written on their tasks.

**Table 1** Concord errors made by Swedish learners of English at different levels and tasks

Type of concord Error	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Total
Grammatical	4:1037	16:4451	15:7093	15:2330	16:23207	66:38118
Distance	0:1037	5:4451	3:7093	10:2330	12:23207	30:38118
Other	0:1037	2:4451	1:7093	3:2330	2:23207	8:38118
<b>Total</b>	4:1037	23:4451	19:7093	28:2330	30:23207	<b>104:38118</b>

The data surveyed in Table 1 is derived from a corpus of more than 38000 words, where more than 23000 words were written by Group 5, Swedish teachers of English who are experienced users of English, and their English is substantially more advanced than that of other students' essays. Nevertheless, even they make concord errors. However, Swedish teachers of English did not have the highest percentage of concord errors in the present data, as Table 1 shows. The essays made by Swedish teachers of English can thereby not be compared to Group 1, the pre-course assignments, where only four concord errors were found. Moreover, these pre-course assignments dealt with students' wishes and hopes of becoming future teachers; they wrote casually, and they had not prepared their assignments, as they got the assignment in the classroom, while the Swedish teachers of English wrote formally and at home.

As the material provided by the different types of assignments was not equal in size and frequencies are not comparable in such cases, Table 3 presents incidences of the same type of data per 100 words

**Table 2** Incidences of concord errors

Type of concord Error	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Grammatical	0.39%	0.36%	0.21%	0.64%	0.07%
Distance	0%	0.11%	0.04%	0.43%	0.05%
Other	0%	0.04%	0.01%	0.13%	>0.01%
Total	0.39%	0.52%	0.26%	1.2%	0.13%

Table 2 shows that Group 4 (the students writing exam summaries) made the most concord errors (0.64%), this figure is followed by Group 2 (the students' second summaries). One factor why the different essays and levels differ is that Group 1 and 3 (the both two pre-course assignments) had a different register and style than group 4 (the exam summaries), where they had to write about an article taken from *Dagens Nyheter*. Writing an exam summary, the students had to write in clearly structured sentences, in formal register and style, and they had to translate grammatical forms taken from the article that they were not used to. Varying language can be difficult if one is not used to changing one's usual style and register.

Register and style are ways to shift the language and its form in order to make it appropriate for different situations. It is also a matter of degree of formality: the discourse needs to be either formal or informal for its purpose or function in a given situation (Durant & Lambrou, 2009:7) and it may have an impact on the frequency of concord errors. Thus the present data is provided by two different pre-course assignments, one where the students made reviews about the best book which each student had recently read and the other was writings on the students' expectations and hopes on their future career as teachers. The former pre-course assignments were about 200 words per assignment and the latter were about 100 words per assignment, while the exam summaries were about 300 words each. Furthermore, the pre-course assignments, about the best book each student had recently read, were written at home, and those students were free to use grammar books and the internet while the other students, writing exam summaries, had a sit down exam and could not use any help. Group 3 (the students who wrote precourse assignments) had 0.21% grammatical concord errors while Group 4 (the students who wrote exam summaries) had 0.64% grammatical concord errors. This suggests that students need help with their writings and if learners of English do not receive any kind of help with their writings they usually create more concord errors and other grammatical errors than they would if they received help with their writings. The written

production in the exam summaries is what has been automatized and learned, the errors found there are problems for the student, however, errors found in essays written at home are also problems for students, but the written production cannot be seen as automatized since they have had help with their writing.

#### **4.1 Non-creative written production**

As the results have shown, Group 4 (the exam summaries) has provided the greatest number of concord errors. The exam summaries can be regarded as non-creative written production since the students had to write about an article taken from *Dagens Nyheter* and they could not write what they wanted. The students were not free to choose grammatical forms as they could do when they wrote free compositions or used English for private matters such as letters writing and internet chatting. Thagg-Fisher (1985) discovered, as mentioned earlier in section 3.5, that non-creative written production has more concord errors than creative written production. The data in the present study mainly includes non-creative written production, and that type which has provided the greatest amount of concord errors is an exam summary, which agrees with the findings of Thagg-Fisher. Thagg-Fisher (1985) claims as well as Corder (1981) that non-creative texts are the learner's attempt to reformulate the ideas and intentions of others (1985:68). They both maintain that a composition is a "spontaneous expression of the ideas and intentions of the learner" (Corder, 1981:38; Thagg-Fisher, 1985:68). According to Thagg-Fisher, it does not matter whether one writes in one's own native Swedish or in a foreign language when writing a composition because in this case students are required to create and arrange content and to organize and express their ideas (1985:68). Writing about others' ideas may be more difficult as students may be exclusively focused on the content, which is not their own creation, and do not keep track of grammatical rules. The content may always seem to be the most important aspect when writing, no matter if it is a creative or non-creative text production, but a written proficiency course mainly focusses on the language, form, style and register which requires from students to demonstrate their command of these particular aspects in writing. At the same time, these aspects can be easily neglected in the effort of summarizing ideas of other people. The exam summaries analysed in this essay are an outcome of what has been learned during the written proficiency course, and the errors indicate areas which the students have to learn further, the rules of concord being one of them. Richards (1974) compares learners of a second language to a child who is developing its mother tongue. Richards claims that no one expects from a child

correct grammar, and the child's incorrect utterances evidence that the child is in the process of acquiring a language (1974:22-23). The same attitude should be appropriate towards errors made by non-native users of English.

## **4.2 Remarks on the results**

The collected data has shown that Swedish learners of English have problems matching the subject and the predicate forms when there is a distance between them, just as the previous research has shown. They also have problems matching the subject and the predicate when they do not appear in the same clause. As mentioned before, a distance between the subject and the verb makes people forget the number of the subject; it is difficult to keep track of the number of the subject when there is no immediate contact between principal parts of the sentence. However, distance concord is not the biggest problem for Swedish learners of English in the present study, it is grammatical concord.

## **4.3 Examples from the data**

The results from the data in the present study appear to be similar to those of previous research, which suggests that Swedish learners of English have obvious problems regarding concord. Comparisons between the data in the present study and the material analysed in the previous research also show that concord errors are part of the English language acquisition process by Swedish learners as over the years their written production evidences similar problems in their command of concord in English. Thagg-Fisher's findings from 1985 are similar to the findings of the present study carried out in 2012. Even though English is the primary foreign language in Sweden, and Swedes have easy access to English all the time, Swedish learners of English still have problems matching the subject and the verb together. With almost 30 years difference from the year of Thagg-Fisher's findings, we can still see basic grammar errors or mistakes taking place in the productions, both oral and written, of Swedish learners of English. This section illustrates errors by examples from the present study and, when needed, compares them to the findings from the previous research.

Here are typical examples of grammatical and distance types of concord errors:

7. For example, there have [has] been *a focus* on working with parents (C)

8. *Drinking in Sweden has decreased among younger people in the last couple of years, but health problems related to alcohol consumption has [have] not* (C)

In these examples, the students do not follow the grammatical concord rule as the subject appears later than its controller in example (7) and that there is a four-word distance between them in example (8). Example (7) has also *there*, which can be another problem for the learner.

#### 4.4 Irregular plurals

Irregular plurals have shown to be one of the factors, which create problems for Swedish learners of English regarding concord; the present study also contain concord errors related to irregular plurals as in example (9)

9. *Also, children from families with alcohol abuse is [are] in a greater risk* (C)

The noun *child*, has an irregular plural form, *children*, which lacks the regular *-s* morpheme, typical of plurals of most English nouns. This might confuse the student, who is under pressure during the exam, and result in a concord mistake or error. The student has used the predicate in the singular form, but neither *children* nor *families* are in the singular form, which indicates that the student has problems with the grammatical concord rule. The mother-tongue influences could also affect the student. *Abuse* and *missbruk* belong to different noun classes in Swedish and in English; in English it is a regular countable noun using the *-s* morpheme in plural *abuses* (*abuse* 2012, *Oxford Dictionaries* [online]), but in Swedish this noun has a zero morpheme in its plural form: *ett missbruk vs. flera missbruk*.

Some examples from the present study are similar to some of Thagg-Fisher's data, such as the *one -s principle* and other problems for Swedish learners of English when the noun ends with *-s*.

10. *Similarly, 1 of 4 girls have [has] problems with their drinking habits* (C)

In example (10), the student may have problems with the *one -s principle* as the closest noun ends with *-s*; the error could also appear because of the distance between the subject and the predicate. The noun *girls* in the plural is closer to the predicate than the headnoun, which is the right subject, namely 1 (one) and this proximity triggers a concord error. This can be



classified as a performance error in which the attraction is exerted by a preverbal nonhead noun (Thagg-Fisher, 1985:189), in this case, *girls*.

In some cases, students made other kinds of concord errors when the subject/noun ended with *-s*. This is one example taken from the present study:

11. *This shows that the prevention **measures** has [have] failed* (C)

When the subject/noun ends with *-s*, it is easy to copy it onto the following clause element. The following word (in this sentence, *has*) has copied the *-s* morphem from the previous word (*measures*) and caused a concord error (Thagg-Fisher, 1985:189).

#### 4.5 Introductory subjects

Some clauses start with *there is/there are/it*, which is a common phrase in English. However, these introductory subjects are not the real subject in a sentence; in fact the real subject occurs later (Verspoor & Sauter, 2000:176-177). A sentence involving introductory subjects has both an extraposed subject (real subject) and a preparatory subject (*there is/there are/it*), however the Swedish word *det* is used for both *it* and *there*, which can create a problem for Swedish learners of English (Estling-Vannestål, 2007:294). The present study contains 6 concord errors related to introductory-subjects problems. These are examples taken from the present study:

12. *He found his uncles car and **there** was [were] **gunholes** in it....*(C)

13. *But **there** has [have] been **many prevention measures*** (C)

14. *[...] **there** are [is] **a very fine line** between genius and insanity* (C)

#### 4.6 Different clauses

In some cases, the subject and the verb appeared in different clauses which resulted in students making concord errors or mistakes, which was also identified by Thagg-Fisher (1985), consider the following example:

15. *After beating **Abdul**, who are [is] brought to tears having his toe stepped on by Sir Cedric, Hubert is knighted* (C)

Example (15) is a clear example when a student has made a concord error because of the predicate appearing in another clause than its controller. In Swedish, verbs maintain the same form whether they agree with the personal pronoun in singular or in plural; considering this, it is relatively easy to understand why Swedes may have problems with concord in sentences which have personal pronouns as their subjects as in the case of example (16).

16. *He meet [meets] a girl, Allie, a rich 17 years old woman who's studing to be a good wife* (C)

Swedish learners of English also have problems with the inverted order of the subject and the predicate after adverbials of time, manners or place. In such cases, concord errors may occur under the influence from the mother tongue (Barkho, 2010:68).

17. *Therefore has US started preparing their troops for an attack* (Informal)

18. *Therefore the US has started preparing its troops for an attack* (Correct)

#### **4.7 Summary of the results**

To sum up, the findings from the present study have shown similarities to the findings from the previous research, regarding collective nouns, distance factors and grammatical factors. Levin (2001) showed how distance factors create problems regarding concord, just as the findings from this study. Grammatical factors (which were the present study's most common type of concord error) such as concord related to pronouns were similar to the findings of Köhlmyr's data (2001). Moreover, several grammatical factors have been found in the present study, which are similar to Thagg-Fisher's (1985) findings, such as the *one –s principal*, performance errors, non-countable nouns, irregular plural forms etc. Furthermore, Thagg-Fisher (1985) found out that there is a difference between creative and non-creative written productions, where non-creative written productions, for instance translation parts, have been shown to be more problematic for Swedish learners of English, regarding concord, than creative written productions have been shown to be. The data in the present study is provided by one task of non-creative written production tests, the exam summaries, which was the one task with the highest percentage of concord errors.

## 5 Conclusion

In this study an attempt was made to examine Swedes' concord problems in written English. It is clear that Swedish learners of English have problems regarding subject-verb concord in English, and several reasons for this have been found in the present study and in previous research. However Swedes are not alone struggling with this type of grammar problems as even native speakers of English have problems with concord, which may suggest that the rules of concord might be redundant. Swedish does not have this type of concord, but it is relatively close to English typologically, moreover, other grammatical rules are similar in the two languages, which makes it rather easy for Swedes to learn English, especially regarding the fact that English has a large place in Sweden.

Swedes are exposed to English all the time; even their native language is affected by the English language as English is used frequently in Sweden in many spheres of life. However, Swedes of different levels of foreign language acquisition, beginners as well as advanced users of English, tend to make basic grammar errors such as concord. Some factors which cause concord errors have been found in previous research, which have been confirmed by the data in the present study. Factors such as the language-specific nature of collective nouns and pronouns, distance between the subject and the verb in a sentence are significant when it comes to the control over the rules of concord. The different types of concord errors have been identified and classified in the present study on the basis of the material provided by different types of language learners' written production. The data has shown that the grammatical types of concord errors are the most frequent errors of all levels collected for the present study.

The data showed that exam summaries had the highest percentage of concord errors. The students who wrote those summaries had no access to any kind of reference work when they wrote about an article from *Dagens Nyheter*, they summarized this article and were dependent on the original text in their use of English grammar. This summary belongs to the category of non-creative production, and according to the findings from Thagg-Fisher's data (1985), non-creative productions tend to have more concord errors than creative written productions. The data in the present study confirms this.

There is no grammatical concord in the Swedish language that is similar to English, and that may be one of the reasons which causes problems for Swedish learners of English, in particular, in the case of distance types of concord errors. Learners can easily disregard the number of the subject when there are four or more intervening words between the subject and

the verb. Furthermore, Thagg-Fisher (1985) found that when the closest noun ends with *-s*, it is easy to misinterpret the final *-s* of the noun as the plural morphem, and in these cases errors in concord easily occur.

It is difficult for Swedes to distinguish the different types of concord, such as grammatical concord, distance concord, notional concord and/or concord of proximity. The verb must agree in number with the grammatical form of the subject/noun, but sometimes the subject/noun is considered holistically (as one entity) or atomistically (as members making up a group). Collective nouns have shown to be another problem regarding concord, and not only for Swedish learners of English, but also for native speakers of English (Levin, 2001). It is therefore relatively easy to understand the problems which Swedish learners of English may have when it comes to their ability of consistently applying the rules of grammatical concord.

Even though people have problems making the right choices in concord, in most cases this does not affect communication and the understanding of the message especially in informal speech, dialogues and private conversations. However, different situations and context of language usage demand correct grammar and a good use of grammar is a condition for a comprehensive and creative ability (Ljung & Ohlander, 1992:7). Second language learners of English should therefore follow the rules of Standard English grammar since the language of TV, radio, newspapers follow these rules as well the speech of educated people. Concord errors are a marker of nonstandard English which has a lower status in English-speaking societies, and this aspect must be taken into account by Swedish users of English.

It has not been possible in this study to examine and discuss concord in written production written by upper secondary students of English or native speakers of English, but the both two groups are interesting for future examination in this study. It would also be relevant and interesting to do further research on this grammar problem in English with Swedish teachers of English since that group did not take much space in this study. Since both Swedish learners of English and native speakers of English have problems with subject-verb concord it would be interesting to compare these two groups in a possible future research.

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