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ENGELSKA

Grammatical Errors in Written Production by Swedish Learners of English

- A Quantitative Study of Concord Errors and Selected Verb Errors in 35 National Tests for the B-Course of English

By: Ida Norlander

Title: Grammatical Errors in Essays Written by Swedish Learners of English
Author: Ida Norlander
Supervisor: Joe Trotta

Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyse the most frequent grammatical errors made by students of the B-course of English in Swedish Upper Secondary School. As primary material, 35 national tests of written production have been used. In these essays, the most common errors have been found to be errors of concord and verb errors related to time and tense. These have been categorised, counted and compared to the errors found by Köhlmyr in her study from 2003.

Keywords: grammatical errors, concord errors, verb errors of time and tense, Swedish learners of English, Upper Secondary school

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction

During the time I have spent as a teacher trainee and teacher in different schools − both secondary schools and upper secondary schools, I have been surprised by the amount of grammatical errors made by students in their written compositions in English. Even in the B-course[1] of English at upper secondary school level, students seemed to make errors that they "should" have learnt not to make much earlier on. This made me curious to find out what kind of errors students make in their written compositions. In this study, I look at the most common errors made by students of the B-course of English at upper secondary school level in relation to the syllabus set by The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket). By way of introduction, I give a brief presentation of English language teaching in Swedish schools in the recent decades.

2. Background

2.1 The Development of English Teaching in Recent Decades

The syllabus for English in Swedish schools has changed in the recent decades, from being quite specific regarding how the teaching should be conducted, to being quite free, as long as students achieve its goals by the end of the course. For example, one can look at the syllabus for English for the Upper Secondary School of 1970, Lgy70. In the syllabus, there are directions for the teacher on what to teach students in each of the three school years. In the first year of Upper Secondary School, the focus was on pronunciation, listening- and speaking exercises, reading, vocabulary, writing, grammatical patterns and realia. In the second year, students were to develop their skills in the areas mentioned above, but also to learn about stylistics, synonymics, phraseology, word formation and the history of the language. In the third year, the teaching of English was to be differentiated and adapted for each programme (Lgy70 II, Supplement: 273).

Per Malmberg (2001: 17) discusses the changing role of grammar in language teaching in his article *Språksynen i dagens kursplaner*. He explains how the view on grammar teaching has changed in the recent decades. In the syllabus for compulsory schools from 1962, Lgr62, the description of English as a school subject implies that grammar and vocabulary should

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[1] This course was until autumn 2011 taken by students in upper secondary school at the age of 15 − 17 and was the second English course, after English A. The equivalent of English B is in the new syllabus from 2011 called English step 6 (Skolverket 2012 [online]).

come before anything else, though the role of language as a means of communication is also (however briefly) mentioned (Malmberg 2001: 19). Further, Malmberg argues that grammar teaching started changing in the 1970's syllabus (Lgy70), and that the change became more obvious in the late 1970's. Focus was shifted from grammar and vocabulary to a more communicative view on language learning. One of the spokesmen for the functional and communicative approach to language teaching was the English theorist David Wilkins who worked within the European Council. Wilkins claimed that the point of departure for language teaching should be communication and students should learn how to obtain and give information, ask permission, express their liking for something etc., instead of just studying words and grammatical rules (Malmberg 2001: 17).

The early eighties heralded the great breakthrough for the communicative approach not only in Sweden, but also in other parts of the world. This approach implied that students should have not only grammatical knowledge and knowledge of the vocabulary of a language, but also learn sociolinguistics, gain sociocultural competence and intercultural understanding (Malmberg 2001: 19).

2.2 English Teaching in the Swedish School Today

The syllabi used in Swedish schools until autumn 2011 (and thus the syllabi that are relevant for this study, since the student essays that were used for the analysis were all produced in 2006) were written in 1994 and have much in common with those written in the 1980's. Below, I briefly present the syllabi for English in compulsory school and upper secondary school.

2.2.1 Compulsory School

In the syllabus for the subject there are basic criteria for the students to have fulfilled at the end of the fifth year. The criteria are focused on communicative skills, and for students who finish their fifth year of compulsory school, the criteria concerning students' writing imply that students should:

- be able to make themselves understood in simple written form in order to convey information
- be able to reflect over their own learning of e.g. words and phrases

(Skolverket 2010 [online])

2

2.2.2 Upper Secondary School

After having finished compulsory school, most students continue on to the non-compulsory upper secondary school. For the two national programmes that are meant to lead to further studies at a higher level, the Natural Science Programme and the Social Science Programme, two courses of English are compulsory, English A and English B. The grading criteria for the written composition of the B-course are as follows:

> Pupils express themselves and interact in writing with coherence, structure and greater variation concerning contents obtained from a number of different areas. [Pass]
>
> Pupils write with variety and precision. [Pass with distinction]
>
> Pupils' written work is characterised by clarity, precision and variety. [Pass with special distinction]
>
> (Skolverket 2010 [online])

The grading is facilitated by national tests that are taken by students at the end of the A-course and the B-course of English. However, the test result is not necessarily the same as the final grade that is given by the teacher; the test is only one part of the assessment of the students' work. The national test is divided into four parts that each tests one aspect of the language: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Skolverket 2010 [online]).

3. Aim

The aim of this study is to describe, categorise and explain the most frequent grammatical errors made by Swedish Upper Secondary School students of the B-course of English in 35 national tests of written production, where students' written proficiency is tested.

The errors that are found are categorised and commented on in the Results section of the study. They are also compared to Köhlmyr's similar study from 2003. Further on, in the concluding section, the errors are discussed in relation to the goals and grading criteria of the syllabus of the year 2000.

4. Materials, Method and Terminology

As my point of departure I used thirty-five national tests in written composition from the B-course in English for upper secondary school in Sweden. The tests have been randomly selected amongst those which were given the grade VG (pass with distinction) and they were all taken in the spring of 2006. The reason for choosing tests which were given the grade VG is that I wanted the quality of the compositions to be as even as possible.

The subject of the written composition part of the test was *advertising*. The students were asked to write an article for a magazine on one out of eight topics, all regarding different aspects of advertising. The compositions reflect the students' opinions on the matter and are more or less argumentative.

The essays are hand written, thus no computer spell checking has been available, nor have the students had any help from teachers, dictionaries or grammar books. The time limit for writing the essays was 100 minutes. The average number of words for each essay is 575.

The errors made by the students were categorised by word class and subcategories and then counted in order to find a pattern for what kind of errors are the most common ones.

For the description of the large group of verb errors discussed in this study, I used Köhlmyr's 2003 terminology. She distinguishes between *category* errors and *realisation* errors. The category errors are errors on the first level, where the student has chosen the wrong grammatical category (e.g. using the wrong tense – *I <u>went</u> there tomorrow* / *I <u>will go</u> there tomorrow*).

In the case of realisation errors, the student has chosen the right category on the first level, somehow showing that he or she knows, for example, what tense to use, but failed in realising it (e.g. *have seed* instead of *have seen*).

Both category errors and realisation errors can be of three kinds: *substitution*, *addition* and *omission* errors. In substitution errors, an item in a phrase is replaced by another item which is wrong for the given context. One of Köhlmyr's examples of category substitution is ** Now I <u>lived</u> in X* [live], where the simple present has been replaced by the simple past tense. Another example of category substitution from Köhlmyr is **She sings <u>beautiful</u>* [beautifully], where the adverb has been replaced by the adjective. With the realisation substitution errors, the student has used the right grammatical category, but then failed in its realisation, by replacing an item by another. An example of realisation substitution that Köhlmyr gives us is **I will <u>drove</u>* [drive], where the student has used the right grammatical category (a future tense construction), but then has replaced the infinitive in the construction by a past form of

the verb. Another example of realisation substitution is *_gooder_, where the comparative form is used, but a regular form instead of the correct irregular form _better_.

In the category of addition errors, an item is wrongly added to a phrase. A category addition often results in what Köhlmyr calls a "doublet", as in *_I don't can…_ or *_I could might go…_ Another of Köhlmyr's examples of category addition is *_I want to learn me…_ [I want to learn], where an object is wrongly added to a non-reflexive verb. Examples of realisation addition are *_childrens_ or *_I was borned,_ where the correct category has been used (the plural and the simple past tense respectively), but the student has wrongly added an element (the plural −s and the regular −ed ending).

Köhlmyr's definition of category omission errors is that "a necessary grammatical category is omitted from a construction or a phrase which does not clearly indicate what form is intended". Some examples of this are: *_I take ø that you…_ [take it that] and *_My Grandmother famely_ [Grandmother's]. Realisation omissions are particularly common when it comes to more complex constructions, such as the progressive form and the perfective aspect. Köhlmyr's examples of realisation omissions are *_I ø going to X_ and *_I have ø to London_. In these examples the student has indicated the right category with _going_ and _have,_ but then failed in the realisation by omitting the auxiliary and the past participle respectively (Köhlmyr 2003: 31ff.). Table 1 below presents the classification of the error types that I will use in my data analysis.

Table 1. Error Types

	Category	**Realisation**
Substitution	*_Now I lived in X_	*_I will drove_
Addition	*_I don't can_	*_Many childrens_
Omission	*_I take ø that you…_	*_I ø going to_

5. Results

In this section, the results are presented and discussed. The most frequent errors throughout the essays have been errors of concord and other verb errors. The concord errors are presented separately from the other verb errors, since they make up such a large part of the total number

of errors (a total of 190 concord errors were found in the essays, compared to a total of 45 verb errors regarding time and tense).

In the examples taken from the students' essays, I have chosen to underline the errors that are used for exemplification of the category being discussed. In many of the examples there are also other errors, but since those are not relevant for the category in question, they are not marked.

5.1 Concord

The concord errors make up the largest part of the errors found in the essays. In all essays but two, at least one concord error has been found and in some of the essays up to fifteen errors of this category have been found. In total, 190 examples of concord errors have been found in the 35 essays. In this section, the concord errors are exemplified, categorised, discussed and, finally, presented in a table at the end.

5.1.1 Definition of Concord Mistakes

A concord error can be defined as a mismatch between two or several grammatical elements in a phrase. This mismatch may concern *number*, *gender* or *person* (Svartvik & Sager 1996: 351f.). In the English language, however, number and person are the most important, since the English language uses natural, as opposed to grammatical gender, and thus English speakers and writers do not have to worry about gender inflections (Svartvik & Sager 1996: 152) in the same way as those who speak French or German, for example (cf French: <u>une petite fille</u> – "a little girl" versus <u>un</u> petit garçon – "a little boy", where the article *un/une* varies and the adjective *petit* is inflected differently depending on the gender)[2].

Concord errors in number also concern determiners (e.g. <u>this</u> car and <u>these</u> cars as opposed to *<u>these</u> car and *<u>this</u> cars), whereas concord errors concerning the person are disagreements between the verb and the subject of a phrase (e.g. *I sees, *she like) (Svartvik & Sager 1996: 383). In the latter, the subject can be a noun or noun phrase (*the flower*), pronoun (*you*, *he*, *it*, *they* etc), a finite or nonfinite clause (*How you go there*/*To go there*) etc. (Köhlmyr 2003: 173).

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[2] It is also worth mentioning here that verbs in modern Swedish are not inflected for person (cf. for example Dahl 2003: 82).

In this study the *subject-verb* and *determiner-head* types of concord are in the focus, though it is possible to go deeper and discuss various kinds of subjects and determiners.

5.1.2 Concord Errors

The most frequent kind of concord error that has been found in the essays is of the type where the verb is in disagreement with the subject, as is the case in the examples below:

1.   a) <u>They sees</u> the ad in a comic and spend months saving up their money […]. [They see …]   1333[3]

        b) How do you think <u>radiostations like Nrj and Mix Megapol survives</u>? [radiostations … survive]   1361

        c) <u>Children who does not know</u> how to defend them selves […] […who do not know] 1350

        d) Think of <u>the damage it do</u> to the Environment. [the damage it does] 1351

        e) I guess <u>the compenies that makes</u> commercials know exactly how […] [the companies that make]   1375

        f) […] the thing about advertising is that it is <u>people who tries</u> to persuade you […] [people who try]   1328

In the examples above, the subjects are represented by personal pronouns (*they, it*) and nouns/noun phrases (*children, radiostations like Nrj and Mix Megapol, the companies* and *people*).

Out of the 190 concord errors in the essays, 16 concern determiner-head. Two examples can be seen below. Example 2 a exemplifies a concord error in which the determiner *this* is wrongly used to determine a noun in the plural form (*commercials*), while in 2b the determiner *these* is used to determine a noun in the singular (*kind*).

2. a) […] I know how important <u>all this commercials</u> are to the modern world […] [all these commercials] 1364

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[3] The number after the examples refers to the number used to identify the essay from which the example is taken.

b) Eventhough they clearly realise that <u>these kind</u> of commercials creates
stereotypes […] [this kind] 1373

In Table 2 below, the number of concord errors is presented for both concord categories,
subject-verb and determiner-head.

Table 2 – Concord Errors

	Determiner-Head	Subject-Verb	Total
Number of errors found in the essays	16	174	190
Percentage of total number of concord errors	8,4 %	91,6%	100 %

The results from this study coincide with the ones from Köhlmyr's dissertation in that the
largest part of concord errors in both studies was found to be of the type subject – verb
concord. In Köhlmyr's study, the subject-verb errors make up 72% of the total number of
concord errors (Köhlmyr 2003: 189), while they make up 91% of the total in this study. The
difference in the percentage may be due to the difference in the scope of the research material.

5.1.3 Summary of Concord Errors

Though it is one of the first rules that Swedish learners of English learn, the concord of
the verb in relation to the subject is thus the most frequent error that has been found among
the essays. One of the reasons for it being so common may be that students overgeneralise and
overuse the third person singular –s because it is something that they see as typically English.

This kind of overgeneralisation occurs when there is a form in the L2 (second or target language) that does not exist in the L1 (first or native language) (Köhlmyr 2003: 275).

The concord errors concerning determiner-head are not as numerous as the ones concerning person. One of the reasons is most probably the lower frequency of cases where a determiner needs to be in accordance with the head, and another reason could be that there is an analogy with Swedish, as one also must consider number when choosing a determiner in Swedish phrases.

5.2 Selected Verb Errors and Definitions of Time and Tense

The biggest problem concerning verbs has already been treated in the previous section – concord. However, there are plenty of other possible errors to make when using English verbs. The verb errors – concord excluded – still make up the second largest category of errors among the essays in this study. The results below are presented in following order. First errors in expressions of present time are discussed. They are followed by errors in expressions of past time, and finally errors in non-finite clauses. Due to the nature of the essay topic, future time constructions have rarely been used by the students and are thus excluded from this study. In the end of this section, the verb errors are summarised and discussed.

Before discussing the verb errors, some definitions and explanations concerning the concepts time and tense need to be made. Quirk et al. (1985: 175ff.) discuss various interpretations of the terms *time* and *tense* in relation to the verb. In short, the discussion concludes that the grammatical tense does not always match with the referential time. For example, the present tense may also be used to denote or include past or future time, as in *Paris stands on the River Seine*. This is a statement uttered in the present tense, but is true for the past, present and most probably for the future. Quirk et al. conclude that the simple present is the most general and unmarked category, which often includes both present, past and future time (1985: 176).

There are also two aspects of the verb in English: the progressive and the perfective aspect. The simplified explanation is that the perfective aspect denotes an action which is completed, while the progressive aspect denotes an action in progress. Examples of the two aspects are *he has examined* (past perfective – the action is complete) and *he is examining* (present progressive – the action is in progress) (Quirk et al. 1985: 189).

In this study, I have chosen to categorise the errors in terms of the intended time reference, which is why the present perfective (*have gone, has called*) ends up in the category "Expressions of past time", since it refers to an event that took place in the past, though uttered in a present tense. Before discussing the errors of time and tense in the essays, I define and discuss each category further in the introduction to each section.

5.2.1 Referring to Present Time

In the English language, there are two ways of forming the present tense. The *simple present* has three main meanings: *state present*, *habitual present* and *instantaneous present*. The definition of state present by Quirk et al. (1985: 179) is that a stative verb is used in the simple present "without reference to specific time: *ie*, there is no inherent limitation on the extension of the state into the past and future (unless such a limitation is indicated by adverbials or other elements of the clause)". The examples that are given by Quirk et al. are general timeless statements, such as *Honesty is the best policy, Two and three make five,* and proverbial, scientific or mathematical statements, such as *Peru shares a border with Chile*. The state present can also be used in cases where "our knowledge of the world tells us that the time span of the state is to a greater or lesser degree restricted", as in these examples: *Margaret is tall, This soup tastes delicious* (Quirk et al. 1985: 179).

The habitual present is used to describe a sequence of events, repeated over a certain period, as in these examples: *We go to Brussels every year, Bill drinks heavily*. In the examples, a dynamic verb is used in the simple present (Quirk et al. 1985: 179).

Finally, the instantaneous present describes an action that begins and ends at the moment of speech. It typically occurs in situations like commentaries: *Black passes the ball to Fernandez… Fernandez shoots!* and demonstrations: *I pick up the fruit with a skewer, dip it into the batter…* (Quirk et al. 1985: 180).

In addition to the simple present, there is also the present progressive. The progressive aspect is, as previously explained, used to denote an action in progress at a given time, thus the present progressive indicates an action that is going on "now". A sentence with the verb in the simple present like *Joan sings well* indicates that Joan is a good singer in general, while the sentence with the verb in present progressive *Joan is singing well* indicates that Joan is performing right now and that she does it well (Quirk et al. 1985: 197).

5.2.2 Errors in Referring to Present Time

Most of the errors found in the essays have been cases of category substitution, where the simple present tense has been replaced by a different tense, most of the times by the present progressive.

3.
   a) Almost everywere <u>we're turning</u> our heads, we meet commercials. It's good for the companies that want to sell their products and for thoose who works in the companies, 'cause the more their company <u>is selling</u>, the more money to them too. [we turn our heads / sells] 1318

   b) […] it just <u>not </u>having that kind of impact on me. [does not have] 1316

   c) The channels that <u>are sending</u> from abroad […] [send] (also a lexical error, the verb should be *broadcast*) 1346

   d) Advertising affects us when we go to school or work, when we drive in our car, when we <u>are taking</u> a walk […] [take] 1343

In the examples 3a, 3c and 3d, the students have used the present progressive in order to describe a habit (3a and d) or a state (3c), where they should have used the simple present instead.

In example 3b, there are two possible corrections to make. The first possibility would include a do-construction in the present tense, making this a category substitution error, where the student has chosen the wrong tense (the present progressive instead of the simple present). The second option would be to categorise the error as a realisation omission, in which case the student would have chosen the right category (the present progressive), but omitted the right form of *be*. In this case, we would end up with this version: "[…] *it is just not having that kind of impact on me*". However, judging from the context, the most correct choice would be to use the simple present, which is why I've chosen the first of the two alternatives, and to categorise this error as a category substitution.

Further, still in the area of category substitution, one example where the simple present has been replaced by the simple past was found:

4.   […] I can go to the bathroom or <u>caught</u> something from the kitchen.
        [catch/get] 1363

11

Apart from the errors of category substitution, also a few errors of realisation addition have been found. Here are two examples:

5.   a) they don't have to show the same commercial in every break then <u>we don't can</u> see so many new things […] [we cannot]   1363

           b) It's a good thing when it <u>let's</u> you know about the latest products on the market […] [lets] 1303

In both examples, the tense is right, but the students have added an item that should not be there. In 5a, a do-construction is added and in 5b, there is a superfluous apostrophe.

Two errors concerning the present progressive were found. Both are cases of realisation omission, where the students have chosen the right tense and aspect, but the correct form of the auxiliary *be* has been left out:

6.   a) First of all I belive that bad advertising <u>slowley taking over</u> the good advertising. [is slowly taking over] 1335

           b) You <u>looking</u> for this summers new bikini […] [are looking] 1365

The results can be seen in the table below, where the categories category addition, category omission and realisation substitution have been left out, since these did not occur in the essays:

Table 3 Errors in Referring to Present Time

	Simple Present		Present Progressive
Category Substitution	Into pres. progr. 13	Into simple past 1	0
Realisation Addition	5		0
Realisation Omission	0		2
TOTAL	19		2

These results correspond well to those of Köhlmyr's study, who also found that most of the errors in the simple present are those of category substitution, and especially substitution by the progressive form. It is interesting to see that most errors concerning the present tense are substitution errors, where the student has chosen the progressive aspect instead of the simple present.

This overuse of the present progressive can be referred to as overgeneralisation errors, just like the case with the third person singular –*s* in the concord section.

Although the simple present is the first tense taught to beginners (Köhlmyr 2003: 63f), it is also the tense with the highest error frequency in the essays. On the one hand, the students could be expected to master the present tense better, being the first tense they learn, but on the other hand, it is also the most frequently used tense, and thus the high number of errors is perhaps not so surprising after all.

5.2.3 Referring to Past Time

The most obvious way of expressing past time in English is by using the past tense. Quirk et al. (1985: 183) define two features of meaning of the past tense:

> (a) The event/state must have taken place in the past, with a gap between its completion and the present moment.

> (b) The speaker or writer must have in mind a definite time at which the event/state took place.

The past tense denotes *event, state* and *habit,* in analogy with the present tense as described in section 4.2.1. In a sentence like *The eruption of Vesuvius <u>destroyed</u> Pompeii¸* the dynamic verb *destroy* denotes an event that took place in the past. In the sentence *Archery <u>was</u> a popular sport for the Victorians*, the verb *was* refers to a state, while the verb in the sentence *In ancient times, the Olympic Games <u>were held</u> at Olympia in Southern Greece* is an example of habitual past (Quirk et al. 1985: 186f.).

In the material, three different ways of referring to past time have been used by the students: the simple[4] past, the present perfective and the past perfective. Below, I give a brief definition of these three possibilities of referring to past time.

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[4] "Simple" in the sense that it is not marked for aspect.

The simple past (i.e. *took, listened, went*) is used to express that an action took place in a specific time in the past, to express a habit that used to take place in the past or to express a state in the past (Quirk et al. 1985: 186f).

The present perfective (i.e. *have/has taken, have/has listened, have/has gone*) denotes an action that has started in the past but may continue into the present and even the future (Quirk et al. 1985: 190). Johansson & Lysvåg (1986: 61) exemplify the perfective aspect with the sentence *The boys have played football, so they may know something about the rules of handball*, and explain the perfective aspect as follows:

> Although it may be confusing, or even misleading, to identify one basic meaning of the perfective aspect, we venture to say that it basically expresses the idea of past action with present relevance, i.e. the playing of football took place in the past, but the fact that it did may be important at the moment of speaking (Johansson & Lysvåg 1986: 61).

The past perfective (i.e. *had taken, had listened, had gone*) expresses a past within the past and "can be regarded as an anterior version either of the present perfective or of the simple past" (Quirk et al. 1985: 195). All three meanings - state, event and habit – can occur in the past perfective (*She had lived in Paris since childhood* – state, *The goalkeeper had injured his leg* – event, *In two seasons, he had scored more goals than any other player* – habit) (Quirk et al. 1985: 196).

Finally, there is also the progressive aspect, which indicates an action in progress. Quirk et al. (1985: 198) exemplify the past progressive with the sentence *I was reading a novel yesterday evening*. However, since there are no occurrences of the past progressive in the material, I will not develop the definition of this aspect further here.

5.2.4 Errors in Expressions of the Past Time in the Essays

In the essays, most of the errors of past time expressions concern the present perfective. Nine errors concern the present perfective, while only three concern the simple past and none concern the past perfective.

The errors in the simple past are all cases of realisation errors, where the inflections of the verbs have been altered. Here are two examples:

7.   a) […] and they eaven had a doctor in the commercial that had made
        some test that <u>shownd</u> that the product really worked. [showed] 1335

     b) […] he have a body you could kill for and when he did the ad for the
        underwareline Calvin Klein the selling of white briefs <u>rised</u> to the
        top! [rose] 1343

In the present perfective, all the errors but three have been found to be realisation errors; three of them are cases of realisation substitution and three of them are cases of realisation addition.

Example 8a below exemplifies a realisation addition of a verb ending of an irregular verb (*show*). 8b exemplifies a realisation substitution, where the main verb (*consider*) has been written in the infinitive form, instead of the past participle.

8.   a) An other widely used quotation is "Need help? – call Polia", a commercial which
        <u>haven't been shownd</u> for years but is still in use by a few people. [hasn't been
        shown/showed] 1330

     b) If the commercial is about a product that you <u>have consider</u> to buy, it
        can be good to see. [have considered] 1359

Moving on to the category errors, two of them can be seen in the examples below:

9.   a) […] and if they hadn't advertised it, you wouldn't eaven <u>had give</u> it a
        thought. [have given] 1335

     b) I think it can be good with advertisments that helps us to see new
        products, that <u>maybe we never heard of</u> before. [we may never have
        heard of] 1363

In example 9a (apart from a correctly realised negated past perfective (!)), there is a case of both category and realisation substitution, where the present perfective (*have given*) has been replaced by an incorrectly realised past perfective (*had give*). In example 9b, the present perfective has been replaced by a simple present (*heard* instead of *have heard*).

An overview of the errors made in expressions of the past time can be seen in Table 4 below. The categories where no errors have been found have been left out.

Table 4 – Errors in Expressions of Past Time

	Simple Past	Present Perfective	Past Perfective
Category Substitution	0	3	0
Realisation Substitution	0	3	0
Realisation Addition	3	3	0
TOTAL	3	9	0

The largest group of errors is thus represented by errors in the present perfective. This comes as no surprise, given that it is one of the two more complex verb forms out of the three in the sense that it is composed with the auxiliary *have* (the past perfect being just as complex, but with a much lower frequency in the corpus, hence the lack of errors in this category). From another aspect, however, one could expect to find more errors in the simple past, given that it is a more common tense throughout the essays.

In Köhlmyr's study, the distribution of errors concerning past tenses looks rather different. In her study, more than half of the errors, 50.4 % are errors of the simple past. Almost as many, 47.8 %, are errors of the present perfective and only a small part; 1.7 %, are errors of the past perfective (Köhlmyr 2003: 79). In my study, however, the relation is 25 % for the simple past, 75% for the present perfective and 0% for the past perfective. The most interesting difference is that of the relation between simple past and present perfective, since the percentage is so different between Köhlmyr's study and mine. There is no obvious reason for this, but one possible explanation is that of the difference in size of the corpus – in Köhlmyr's study, the corpus is larger (383 compositions (Köhlmyr 2003: 7) compared to my 35 compositions) and thus a larger amount of errors.

5.2.5 Non-finiteness

A non-finite clause is defined by Johansson & Lysvåg (1986: 169) as being more compact and less explicit than a finite clause. They often lack a Subject and sometimes also a Predicator, and are not specified for tense and modality.

There are three non-finite verb forms in English, the infinitive with or without the infinitive marker *to* ((*to*) *call*) the *–ing* form/present participle (*calling*), and the *–ed* participle/past participle (*called*) (Quirk et al. 1985: 150). Corresponding to the verb forms, there are three major types of non-finite clauses (counting the two infinitive forms as one type).

The *to*-infinitive is used after certain verbs, such as *afford, refuse* and *desire*, as in the example *He refused to pay* (Ljung & Ohlander 1992: 133). Further, it is also used in clauses of purpose (*I sat down to rest*) and after *wh*-words in indirect interrogative clauses (*I wondered who to ask*) (Köhlmyr 2003: 97).

In addition to the "to-infinitive", there is also the bare infinitive. The bare infinitive is mostly used with causative verbs like *let* and *make*, with perception verbs like *see, hear, feel* and *watch* and with the verb *help*. Examples of the usage of the bare infinitive are: *The sergeant made the recruits run when the colonel arrived* and *We felt the ground give way under our feet* (Johansson & Lysvåg 1986: 172).

Examples of the usage of the *–ing* form are: *Major companies have quit distributing gasoline in many regions, They were accused of having been smuggling drugs into the U.S. for a number of years* and *She resents being spoken to in that fashion* (Johansson & Lysvåg 1986: 173). The *–ing* form is used after prepositions (*interested in doing*) and certain verbs (such as *enjoy*, *finish* and *give up*) (Köhlmyr; 102).

Finally, the *–ed* participle clause is often used as a reduced version of a passive construction: *Asked why the U.S. was reluctant to negotiate, the Secretary of State said…, Once elected president, she will no doubt change her mind* (Johansson & Lysvåg 1986: 174).

5.2.6 Errors Concerning Non-finiteness

All eleven errors found in the essays concerning non-finiteness are category errors. Three errors are cases of substitution into another verb form, where the bare infinitive should have been used:

10. a) So children tries to take after and <u>starting dieting</u> […] [start dieting]
        1335

      b) Maybe we let ourself <u>being fooled</u>. [be fooled] 1323

      c) They use celebreties and football stars in their commercial to make
         more people <u>to see</u> the commercial. [see] 1359

Four category substitution errors have been found regarding the to-infinitive:

11. a) Now, who ever reads the beginning of <u>this</u> text is bound <u>thinking</u>
        that I really must hate advertising […] [to think]   1364

      b) I agree that it would be nice to not <u>beeing</u> disturbed during a
         movie […][not to be] 1361

      c) This unknowing if it is true or if they lie in the commercials is so
         hard <u>to figering out</u>. [to figure out] 1363

      d) They are not trying <u>in forcing</u> me into <u>see</u> their movie […] [to
         force / into seeing (watching)] 1372

Example 11d above also includes another error in the non-finite category – a category
substitution where the –*ing* form has been replaced by a bare infinitive, which leads us to the
final four errors (counting 11d as two errors in one).

12. a) They are all over the place and we are allready so use to <u>see</u> them
        […] [used to seeing] 1360

      b) You see ads everyday, wherever you are, and without knowing it
         you get tricked into <u>buy</u> the products. [buying] 1370

      c) Do we want that everyone will grow up not <u>be</u> able to trust
         anyone? [being] 1328

An overview of the errors can be seen in Table 5 below:

Table 5 Errors Concerning Non-finiteness

	To Infinitive	Bare Infinitive	*-ing* form	-ed participle	TOTAL
Category substitution	3	4	4	0	11

In six of the eleven errors, the students have used an *–ing* form in order to express the non-finiteness, which makes category substitution by the *–ing* form the most common error.

However, four errors have also been found where the *–ing* form has been replaced by another non-finite verb form. Thus, non-finiteness seems to be a rather confusing subject altogether for the students.

5.2.7 Summary of Verb Errors

Altogether, the verb errors make up a large group of errors – the total number of which adds up to 44. Within the verb errors, the largest group consists of errors in referring to present time, 18 errors in the simple present and two in the present progressive. In past time constructions, 12 errors were found altogether, and in non-finite constructions, 11 errors were found.

As previously mentioned, the simplest explanation for the largest number of errors in the present tense is that this is the most commonly used tense throughout the essays. Regarding the errors in the past time expressions and the non-finite clauses, these are more complex than the present tense, in the way that two of the past time expressions include auxiliaries, and that the rules for the non-finite clauses are many and complex. Thus, expressions of past time and non-finite clauses are more difficult for learners to master, and one could expect more errors in these categories.

6. Discussion

As described in section 1.2. of this study, the English teaching in Swedish schools has shifted focus from being more grammar orientated to emphasising the communicative aspect of the

language. The aim of this study was to describe the grammar errors of students in their last course of English in upper secondary school.

The results show that students make grammatical errors in many categories, and that the biggest problem for them is concord, closely followed by various verb forms. These are two basic types of error that could perhaps easily be avoided if the focus of the teaching was more grammar oriented. However, the question is whether that would be a "goal to strive for" as the syllabus would put it, but that would be a completely different discussion. The students who have written the essays that make up my corpus have all been given the grade VG, accordingly to the grading criteria:

> Pupils express themselves and interact in writing with coherence, structure
> and greater variation concerning contents obtained from a number of
> different areas. [Pass]
>
> Pupils write with variety and precision. [Pass with distinction]
>
> (Skolverket 2010 [online])

In these criteria, there is no mention of grammatical correctness, but rather a desire that students communicate coherently, structured and with variety and precision. However, one cannot help but wonder what the authors of the syllabus are referring to with the word *precision.* Is it perhaps grammatical precision? And in lack of more detailed criteria, is it up to the teachers to interpret?

It could of course be further discussed whether or not the grammatical correctness on this level is where it should be, given that it is the last course of English which most Swedes ever take. Should they not have learned by now that there is an *–s* at the end of the verb when the subject is third person singular? And should there really be so many mistakes in the simplest of the verb forms – the simple present? The students do, however, communicate their meaning and that is what they are required to do by the syllabus.

In this study, I have only given a brief overview of the errors that students make concerning concord and verbs, due to the limitations of time and space. It would, however, be interesting to go further and look at other categories of errors, or even to compare errors in student essays over the past years to see if the amount of errors has changed.

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