"I want to stay in Sweden whole my life..."

A study and analysis of errors in the written production of Swedish pupils in the 9th grade

"It is not what is poured into a student that counts, but what is planted" (Linda Conway)

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Abstract

Title: *"I want to stay in Sweden whole my life…" A study and analysis of errors in the written production of Swedish pupils in the 9th grade*

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Abstract: This essay investigates errors in written production by Swedish pupils in the ninth grade. A total of 36 essays were randomly selected from the National Assessment Programme in English in 2010. When analysing the corpus, all errors from six different categories were marked and counted. The categories are *word order, plural of nouns, nouns / articles, adjectives / adverbs, verbs / concord errors* and *prepositions*. The aims of the study are to examine the frequency of the errors in the chosen categories and, if possible, explain how some common errors can be understood and explained in terms of so-called negative transfer. Much research has been carried out on second language acquisition and both Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA) have been useful as tools in that research. As hypothesised, most errors were found where L1 and L2 differ, (negative) transfer. A certain influence of the mother tongue was apparent in the pupils' L2 acquisition. According to the goals set in the curriculum for the subject of English, a development of communicative skills is important. The result of this study may give an idea of what grammar should be in focus when helping the pupils. As discussed in the essay, explicit grammar teaching and competent teachers will help the pupils to improve their language skills.

Keywords: Second language acquisition, error analysis, grammar, transfer, written production.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English is a compulsory subject in Swedish schools usually starting from the third grade. Already at an early age, the pupils are exposed to the English language through, for instance, media, music, the internet and computers. As a lingua franca, the English language is spoken in more than seventy countries and used by almost one out of four people around the world (Svartvik 2001:9). An immense input of spoken and written English is given to the pupils all the time and a language acquisition is going on without their knowing.

As we all know, learning a new language involves new grammatical rules, sounds, spelling and so on. Being quite closely related languages, English for Swedish learners does not cause too many difficulties because of several similarities, such as, for example, the letters being the same in both languages. However, sometimes, when there is a difference, the mother tongue can affect the learners. For instance, in Swedish there is no inflection for person or number when it comes to subject-verb agreement and therefore the pupils are likely to exclude the third person -*s* as is illustrated in the following example from the present investigation: *That <u>sound</u> really boring.* Another example from an essay where the mother tongue has affected the learner is evident in * *Sports means everything <u>for</u> me;* here, a direct translation was chosen, i.e., the Swedish preposition *för* was translated with *for* instead of *to.* The use of a structure from the mother tongue is mostly transferred unconsciously by learners of a second language.

This study looks into different errors made by pupils in the 9th grade in written compositions, and discusses instances of transfer when possible. In order to help the pupils to improve, it is essential for teachers to know what errors may occur. Such knowledge is helpful for everyone to promote second language acquisition.

2. AIMS

The purpose of this study is to investigate errors in the written production of Swedish pupils in the 9th grade. The errors I have focused on are restricted to grammatical errors and the method chosen is basically a traditional error analysis. Thus, different errors have been collected, identified, described and explained, and if possible evaluated.

The results of the analysis may be of help in teaching, in providing an idea of what grammar should be focused on in helping the pupils to avoid making specific errors. In this context, achieving a more successful grammar teaching is important. According to the goals

set in the curriculum for the subject of English, the aim is "through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop all-round communicative skills....being able to formulate one's thinking and interact with others in the spoken and written language, and the ability to adapt the use of language to different situations, purposes and recipients " (Skolverket Lgr 11[online]). With this in mind, the aims of the present study are the following:

- To investigate selected categories of grammatical errors produced by L2 learners in the 9th grade in written production
- To study the frequency of the errors
- To explain why some errors are common due to negative transfer or interference.

For an English teacher, this study will hopefully provide useful information about how to improve language teaching. In section 6, focusing on pedagogy, a discussion is provided about grammar teaching.

Based on my understanding of the previous research on the subject, my hypothesis is that grammatical errors are more frequent where the English language use differs from the Swedish language use, causing (negative) transfer. Even though the pupils understand the grammar rules, it is difficult to use them correctly.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Second Language Acquisition

The study of language acquisition (SLA) is about how second languages are learned. During the last 50 years, extensive research has been carried out on SLA, by for example Ellis (1994) and Krashen (1982), and this has resulted in different theories. Since some of the previous research on the subject is relevant and important in understanding the present study, a few of the basic concepts need to be sketched out and some definitions should be clarified; these topics are discussed below under separate headings (from 3.2 to 3.4).

First, a definition of second language acquisition must be provided. In some research, a distinction is made between second and foreign language acquisition. A second language is regarded as taking an institutional and social role in a local region or community having a communicative function; for example, the English language which is compulsory in Swedish schools and has an important role when it comes to different international purposes such as technology, research and science. A foreign language, on the other hand, has no major role

and is primarily learned in the classroom, for example French or German offered as an optional subject according to the Swedish curriculum. A broader definition made by, for example Ellis (1994:12) and Mitchell/Myles (1998:5), including the learning of any language is the one used in this study. Thus, no distinction is made, and second languages, commonly referred to as L2, are any languages other than the learner's mother tongue, which is also known as the native language/the first language or simply L1. The underlying processes are basically the same for the target languages, the languages being learned, no matter if they are more local or more remote. For L2 learners, it is an asset to know how languages work and it will consequently help them in their linguistic development in comparison to L1 learners. However, the mother tongue may cause incorrect wordings as well.

In SLA research today, the first part of the 21st century, the target language is highly likely to be English, due to the fact that about 375 million people have English as their first language and another billion use it as a second language (Mitchell/Myles 2004:23). Therefore, it is understandable that much research is carried out on the learning of English, both on children and adults. As mentioned above, extensive research has been carried out on second language acquisition throughout the 20th century, and two of the main theories which are relevant for this investigation are further discussed below, namely *Contrastive Analysis (CA)* and *Error Analysis (EA)*. In addition, terms such as *interlanguage* and *positive* and *negative transfer* are frequently used in the research in this field, and will therefore be described more closely in the following sections.

3.2 Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive Analysis (CA) has developed from behaviourism, a theory typically associated with B.F. Skinner, the American behaviourist and social philosopher, meaning that language learning is like all sorts of learning, as the formation of habits (*Behaviourism,* 2012, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [online]). According to this theory of psychology, learning is based on stimulus and response. The behaviourist theory initially dealt with L1 acquisition, as the language is learnt by imitation and repetition of behaviour. Later on, the behaviourist theory was applied to L2 acquisition as well. The focus of CA is to compare L1 with L2 in order to determine possible errors. During the 1950s and 1960s, CA dominated as an analytical method, focusing on the idea that there was a major influence from L1 when learning L2. By describing comparable features in L1 and L2, for example tense, and afterwards comparing the forms in order to see various divergences, it was possible to predict or explain areas of learning difficulty. Through this method it was said that up to 30 per cent of the errors made

by L2 learners could be explained or predicted depending on the similarity between L1 and L2 (James 1998:4). Ellis gives a similar explanation to the method:

> *Contrastive analysis (CA)* ... sought to predict the errors that learners make by identifying the linguistic differences between their L1 and target language. The underlying assumption of CA was that errors occurred primarily as a result of *interference* when the learner transferred native language "habits" into the L2. Interference was believed to take place whenever the "habits" of the native languages differed from those of the target language (Ellis 2002:47-48).

CA was dominant in the research on second language acquisition until the middle of the 60s. In teaching it was regarded useful, being a help in predicting learner errors in advance and therefore making it possible to prevent them. But criticism arouse due to the fact that it only focused on the negative aspects on L1 influence, without taking the positive effects into account. Besides, as Köhlmyr (2003:25-26) mentions, CA did not manage to give an explanation as to why all errors were not caused by the influence of L1. Furthermore, several predicted errors did not take place. In the end, this criticism about the limitations of CA led to a new theory, namely Error Analysis.

3.3 Error Analysis

Corder's (1967) article, *The Significance of Learner's Errors*, played a major role when Error Analysis replaced CA. According to Corder, attention should be paid to the importance of studying the errors made by L2 learners, because not all of them derived from the L1. The studies that followed during the 1970s involved a thorough description and analysis of L2 errors. As James states: "Error Analysis is the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language" (James 1998:1). Error analysts collect different kinds of errors, trying to understand how the L2 learners acquire the language in focus. In EA, Corder recommends the following steps (from Ellis 2002:48):

1. Collection of a sample of learner language
2. Identification of errors
3. Description of errors
4. Explanation of errors
5. Evaluation of errors

The present study is a type of error analysis, following the steps 1 to 5. Of main importance in this context is the distinction between an *error* and a *mistake*. An error is systematic and is not recognized as an error. The learners cannot correct themselves and the errors will occur repeatedly until the linguistic competence is adjusted. Mistakes, on the contrary, are slips

happening usually one time, in other words random errors. A person who makes a mistake is capable of correcting it, because of his/her recognizing it as a mistake. When studying compositions of the pupils in the 9th grade, it is not possible to determine if the errors are errors or mistakes.

3.4 Transfer

Transfer is an important concept when discussing the influence of the native language in second language acquisition, though the term has been controversial among linguistic scholars over the years. One definition is given by Odlin (1997), who states that "transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired" (1997:27).

As Odlin stresses, this definition only explains the word *transfer* but not the word *influence* (1997:27). Another term for transfer is *cross-linguistic influence*. The existence of language transfer has either been denied or questioned by some scholars, or considered as the "paramount fact of second language learning" (Odlin 1997:3). Gass's and Selinker's definition is that transfer is "...the psychological process whereby prior learning is carried over into a new learning situation" (2001:66). However, the general view of today is that transfer interacts with other factors that are not always understood, such as psychological factors caused by nervousness in a special situation. Errors may also be caused by communicative conditions. In spoken production, L2 learners tend to make more errors than in written production due to increased demands on time.

In what way does transfer serve as an aid in L2 learning situations? It depends on the nature of the transfer. *Positive transfer* is the use of the first language in a second language context when the resulting second language form is correct. Thus, similarities between languages facilitate learning. The similarities may be of different nature. Therefore, similarities in vocabulary will increase the reading comprehension of texts, similarities in vowel systems will facilitate the identification of different vowel sounds, and similarities in syntactic structure will facilitate acquisition of grammar (Odlin 1997:36). An example of positive transfer is shown in the following sentence:

1. a *Jag har läst boken.*

   b *I have read the book.*

In this example, the word order is similar in Swedish and English, the so-called SVO order (subject-verb-object), and no syntactic problem is caused for the Swedish learner. These

sentences prove to be an example of positive transfer, whereas the next example illustrates *negative transfer,* also known as *interferenc*e.

2. a *Ich habe das Buch gelesen.*

   b **I have the book read.*

German-speaking pupils make such typical mistakes, because their language, German, does not have the English word-order pattern. Instead, they carry over a mother-tongue pattern. Negative transfer is when errors are due to the divergences between L1 and L2 and where the English of the L2 learner carries the signature of his/her mother tongue. These divergences are often unproblematic to identify.

As Odlin (1989:36-38) points out, there are four different main categories of negative transfer, namely *underproduction*, *overproduction, production errors* and *misinterpretation*. Underproduction, or avoidance, implies that the learner produces few or no examples of some L2 structures. If the learner senses that there is a big difference between the particular structures in the target language and the native language, he/she avoids them. Consequently, the errors in the learner's production are very few. Odlin mentions one example, where Japanese and Chinese students show a tendency of using fewer relative clauses, comparing to those with a mother tongue with a similar linguistic structure. Overproduction is the opposite of underproduction, where a certain structure is used more often than it should be. In this case, the Japanese students tend to write too many simple sentences instead of relative clauses. However, overproduction may turn up due to other reasons. Hebrew speakers, who in their native language use apologies more frequently, tend to follow those norms when making apologies in English. Production errors, on the other hand, are the most common cases of negative transfer and arise from both similarities and differences in the native and target languages. They are in their turn divided into three categories. *Substitution* is when a native form is used in the target language. An evident example of this presented by Odlin is:

3. **Now I live home with my parents. But sometimes I must go <u>bort</u>.* (1989:37)

A *calque* is an expression borrowed by way of literal translation from the native language into the target language. This may cause an error in idiomatic sense, not grammatical, which the following example shows:

4. * *sleep suit* (pyjamas) (James 1998:150)

Such a literal translation possibly made by German-speaking pupils, depends on the L1 word *Schlafanzug*. The last type of production error is *alteration of structure,* which is an overreaction to a particular influence from the native language. In order to produce a correct language, a speaker who is aware of a particular phonetic transfer problem, for example, tends to make an error when trying to avoid it. An example is when Arabic speakers substitute the letter *b* with the letter *p* (**bicture/blaying*), because the phonetic distinction is not made in Arabic as it is in English (Odlin 1989: 38, 126). The last nature of transfer, according to Odlin, is misinterpretation, which includes differences in phonetics, word-order patterns and culture.

   Another term of importance in second language acquisition is *interlanguage*, a term introduced by Selinker in 1972, referring to the language produced by learners. The interlanguage is as a system not only composed of elements form L1 and L2, but elements not having their origin in either L1 or L2 (Selinker 2001:12). It is therefore a kind of a language created by L2 learners in the process of learning a new language. Being the learners' own versions of the L2, it mirrors their hypothesis about the target language. The interlanguage passes through different stages while receiving more input, until it finally approaches the rules of the target language. It is a dynamic system evolving over time, in which learners add new rules when meeting positive feedback in their hypothesis and revise old rules when receiving negative feedback. This progress in learning the forming of new rules is called an *interlanguage continuum* (Thagg-Fischer 1985:16). On the other hand, a so-called *fossilization* can also occur, referring to the cessation of learning. In other words, the interlanguage ceases to develop, despite further exposure to the target language. As Gass and Selinker (2001:12) say, there is a difficulty in determining when fossilization is reached, and a more appropriate way of expressing the situation is to call it a stabilization of linguistic norms.

   Finally, when discussing transfer, a distinction between *interlingual* and *intralingual* errors is of relevance; these are systematic errors, as Köhlmyr (2003:230) explains. Interlingual errors are transfer errors, occurring when the learners transfer structures from L1 to L2. Thus, interlingual errors, negative transfer, and interference are the same thing. Intralingual errors are different because those errors are based on L2. The reason why the errors are caused may be that a certain grammatical feature is used incorrectly. These errors are divided into three categories, namely *overgeneralisation*, *simplification* and *blends* (Köhlmyr 2003:231-235). An example of overgeneralisation often recognized in pupils' written production is the overuse of the progressive *-ing*-form. Simplification is when you

omit a necessary grammatical item, resulting in an incomplete structure. One example is when L2 learners omit auxiliaries. Blends are a mix between the two previous error types and appear when two alternative grammatical forms are combined. The following example illustrates this.

5. *We like to <u>go and fishing</u> togheter...* (L2 go fishing/L1 gå och fiska) (Köhlmyr 2003:235).

As shown above, there are several terms used in error explanation, and in linguistic research the terminology varies. All groups of errors are not analysed in my study, but as mentioned in the introduction (section 1), explanations of some concepts are of importance to understand the research on language learning and why certain errors occur in second language acquisition. In my study, based on a quantitative method, the intention is to focus on some categories, which are described in 4:1 below. Discussions about the errors typically committed by Swedish learners of English will then be integrated with presentations of the errors in section 5. In *Learner English*, Swan and Smith characterise the different kinds of English the learners produce; the categorizations, selected in my study are grammatical by nature because only grammar errors are of relevance (2001:26-33).

4. METHOD AND MATERIAL

4.1 Method

In this study a quantitative method is used, focusing on the collection and analysis of empirical data. The essays, written by pupils in the 9th grade, were read manually several times, and the errors were marked. As a tool for the classification of errors, Swan & Smith's study on the major problems which Swedish learners have in common was useful (2001:21-36). When choosing categories of the errors, Köhlmyr's, (2003), broad study of grammatical errors in written production by 16-year-old learners was helpful in working out the main error areas. The categories I chose are:

- Word order
- Plural of nouns
- Nouns/articles
- Adjectives/adverbs

- Verbs: Concord errors
- Prepositions

The categories were chosen, as mentioned above, because they are common areas of errors among Swedish pupils and also likely to contain clear examples of negative transfer. Errors from the categories are discussed in separate paragraphs in my study through figures, tables and selected examples from the material. A description of the type of error will follow together with the analysis of whether the error may be an interference error or not. When in doubt, Svartvik-Sager (1977) was useful in finding the correct form. In any such study, there is, of course, a possibility that some errors may be missed, but regardless of that, the errors included here should be sufficiently representative for an accurate analysis of general trends.

4.2 Material

The material used in the study is a corpus of 36 essays written by Swedish pupils in the 9th grade in 2010 as a part of the Swedish National Assessment Programme. This set of exams is taken in the obligatory subjects, namely English, Swedish and Mathematics, and the purpose is to find out whether pupils have reached the established goals according to the national curriculum and syllabi in the various subjects. The national tests aim at providing support for teachers in their assessment, thus having a complementary function in the ongoing work.

The essays, 16 written by females and 20 by males, were randomly selected from three classes. Pupils not having Swedish as their first language were excluded on the grounds that my purpose is to study the errors of native speakers of Swedish with a focus on negative transfer or interference. The school is situated in a suburb of Gothenburg, and has a population of more than 35 % of pupils with immigrant background, which explains the low number of essays. Even though the corpus is limited, my analysis should still provide some information about the errors being investigated and why they are produced.

The length of the essays was between two and six pages. In Figure 4:2 an overview is presented illustrating the length of compositions. They were handwritten and produced in 80 minutes. This work under pressure may have influenced the pupils in a negative way, having focused more on the task than the grammar. Due to the Swedish Secrecy Act (Regeringskansliet 2009 [online]), it is not possible to give a detailed description of the task, but in short, the pupils were given two topics to choose between. For my study, all their names have been removed and instead numbers have been given in order to keep them apart.
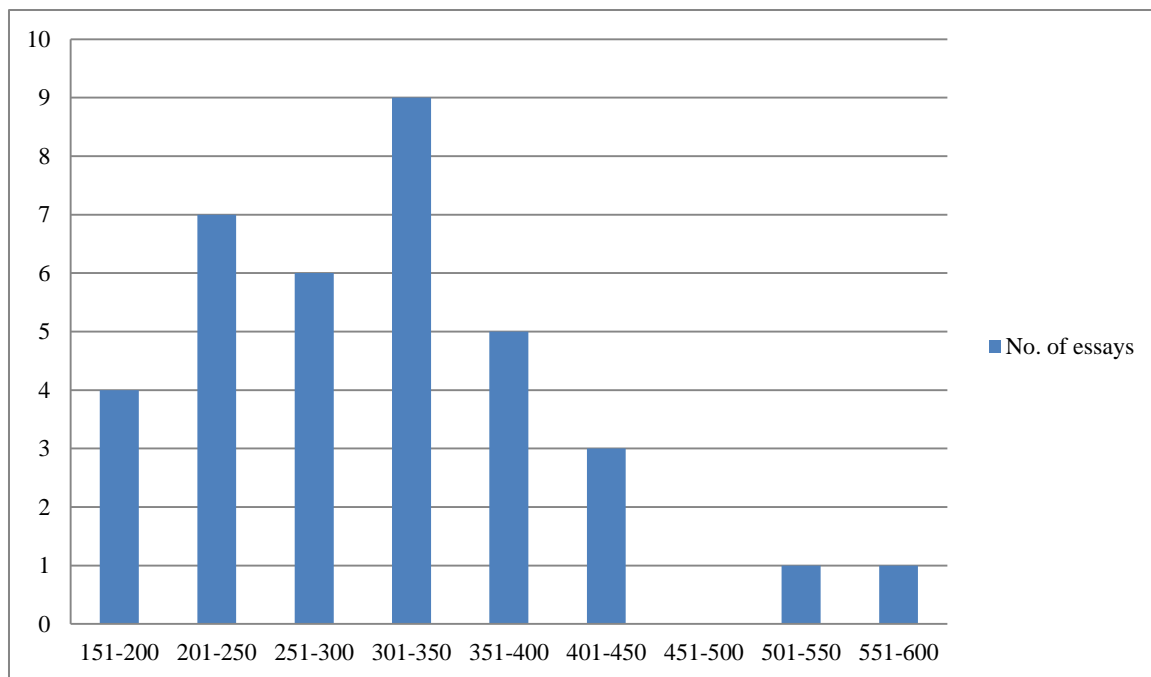
Figure 4:2 Length of the essays divided into groups by number of words

5. RESULTS

This section presents the results of my study, according to the order described in the method section 4.1. Subsequently, an analysis is given of the above mentioned categories that the pupils have major problems with. Since this is a quantitative study, the focus is on the collection and analysis of empirical data, namely the specific errors. When suitable, some errors are presented in numbers or tables in order to give an idea about their frequency in the pupils' written production. When analysing the categories, each type of error is described and then illustrated by some examples. They are citied as they were written. Possible transfer will also be discussed, as the error categories are chosen from that perspective. Both Swan and Smith (2001) and Köhlmyr (2003) have informed the analysis in this section.

A total of 271 errors were found in the written compositions, which gives an average of 7.3 errors per essay. Table 5 illustrates this. Furthermore, it shows the results from each error category, as regards averages per essay and percentages of total number of errors. The lowest number of errors in the essays was one and the highest number was 14. It is worth noting that there is no connection between the length of the essay and the number of errors produced by the pupils but rather in my material it depends on the level of proficiency.

Table 5 No. of errors in the pupils' essays, classified according to category

Type of errors	Word order	Plural of nouns	Nouns/ Articles	Adjectives/ Adverbs	Concord errors	Prepositions	Total
Sum	24	28	37	11	93	79	271
Average per essay	0.7	0.8	1.0	0.3	2.5	2.0	7.3
Percentage of total no. of errors	9	10	14	4	34	29	100

In Köhlmyr's study, which investigates written compositions by 16-year-old learners of English in Sweden in 1992 and 1995, an overview of the main error areas is given (2003:36). When comparing my study with Köhlmyr's, the result is similar. Errors involving concord and prepositions are overwhelmingly in the majority, followed by errors concerning nouns/articles. Thus, the time difference of approximately 20 years is of little significance to the types of errors found; the same categories are still troublesome for Swedish pupils today when learning English.

5.1 Word order

Word order may cause errors because the two languages differ. In Swedish, a sentence can begin with other sentence members than the subject, which is then positioned after the verb. In English, only adverbials are placed in the front of the clause, seldom causing subject-verb inversion. Intonation is used to give prominence to objects and complements. A typical mistake tends to be: *That have I not seen* (Swan and Smith 2001:26). Furthermore, the position of adverbs may cause problems, because in Swedish, the mid-sentence adverbs are commonly placed after the finite verb. This is not the case in English sentences with one-word verbs: * *Children leave often home nowadays* (Swan and Smith 2001:27).

   In this study, a total number of 24 word-order errors were found. Seventeen pupils did not produce single error of this type. The highest number of errors was three, found in two essays. English being a relatively fixed word-order language normally has basic SVO word order (Svartvik and Sager 1977: 408). Here, English and Swedish do not differ that much, but there are instances where the differences cause problems and consequently errors. One example is when an adverbial is fronted and does not trigger subject-verb inversion in English, but it does

in Swedish.Thus, as Köhlmyr points out, the verbs *be* and *can* create the most problems (2001:206).

Another complicated area is the placement of adverbials. According to Köhlmyr, adverbials can have different positions in a clause, sometimes causing difficulties in deciding if the position is correct or not (2003:197). One area which causes problems is that English has the same rules for the positioning of adverbials in both main and subordinate clauses, whereas Swedish has different rules depending on the clause. In main clauses the adverbials are placed after the finite verb, and in subordinate clauses the adverbials are placed before finite verbs. Finally, a category consisting of other word-order problems is presented. Five errors were found occurring with the determiners *both* and *whole*. Table 5:1 gives an overview of different problem areas concerning word order.

Table 5:1 Types of word-order errors

Subject-verb order	Adverbial position	Other word-order problems	Total
6 (25%)	13 (54%)	5 (21%)	24

In my study, six errors of subject-verb order were found. Example 6 is a typical example when the subject and the object have changed places in a wrong way.

6. a * *Now <u>have I</u> write down my biggest wish...*

   b   *Nu <u>har jag</u> skrivit ned min största önskan...*

The reason for this error may be that the pupil has followed the Swedish grammar rule when starting the clause with an adverbial at the front. The frequency of subject-verb order errors in the essays was rather low, only 25%, but it corresponds with Köhlmyr's comparison, which shows the same result (2003:207). Instead, the adverbial position was more problematic; 54 % of the word order errors were connected with that error type. Examples 7 and 8 show such mistakes:

7. a * *I <u>talked often</u> about the environment in school, at home and with my friends.*

   b   *Jag <u>talade ofta</u> om miljön i skolan, hemma och med mina vänner.*

8. a * *I <u>have also</u> ideas about the future*.

   b   *Jag <u>har också</u> idéer om framtiden*.

Many of these errors occurred with simple, one-word adverbials. The nature of the errors indicates that the errors are linked to transfer. When looking at the Swedish translations, the interference of the mother tongue is clear. In the third category, transfer also accounts for the error. The determiners *both* and *whole* cause problems with the position. Example 9 illustrates this:

9. a * *I want to stay in Sweden <u>whole my life</u>, because I like this country...*

   b   *Jag vill stanna i Sverige <u>hela mitt liv</u>, eftersom jag tycker om det här landet...*

The pupil has transferred the word order from L1. Five per cent of such errors were found in the essays.

5.2 Plural of nouns

This category of errors is related to many differences between English and Swedish concerning countability and number which can cause problems. In both languages the distinctions between countable-uncountable and singular-plural are to be found, but there is a difference in classifying nouns as countable/uncountable. Possible mistakes are: **informations, *a work, *many money, *a scissor* and **the police is* (Swan and Smith 2001:27-28).

    As pointed out above, the distinction between countable and uncountable can be found in both English and Swedish but errors may occur when the two languages differ in use. Often problems arise when the grammatical rule requires a plural form in both English and Swedish, but the realisation of the plural forms is different, which is illustrated in example 10. Kölhmyr has shown that the errors occur: when L1 has a regular plural and L2 no plural (*aircraft*), L1 has regular plural and L2 unmarked plural (*people*) and with count nouns in Swedish but noncount nouns in English (*homework*) (2003:262). Twenty-eight errors of this type were found in my study, thus comprising 10 % of the errors investigated. It is worth mentioning that three of the pupils made three errors each, which amounts to 32 % of the total sum. The following examples feature different errors made in the essays:

10. * *Topics can be about things that have happened in their <u>life</u>*.

11. * *I think it is important that <u>peoples</u> long for something because it make the life funnier to live.*

In (10) the writer has used the singular form, probably due to the Swedish form being zero plural "liv" (English *life-lives*). Example (11) shows an error made with the unmarked noun *people*. English, having the singular form *person* and the plural form *people*, is problematic for Swedes. Twenty-one per cent of the errors were made with that noun. In Köhlmyr's study these errors were also noticeable (2003:43). As she points out, language transfer is quite obvious when investigating this category, plural of nouns, and it is only discussed in pedagogical grammars for Swedish pupils. Furthermore, in my study, instances where a faulty construction concerning singular or plural was used, were included as well. Consider the following example:

12. * *Before I will go out and find a <u>women</u> who I can live with and make kids with...*

Sentences like this are mostly not caused by transfer. Instead, it shows an uncertainty in choosing the correct form

5.3 Nouns/articles

In Swedish, the definite article is used before an uncountable in general sense; no articles are used in English in these situations. * *Some people always blame the society for everything* (Swan and Smith 2001-28). Also, in idiomatic phrases there is a difference after prepositions such as *as, with* and *without*, which the following errors show: **As member of the family he wanted to come home* and * *a cat without tail* (Swan and Smith 2001:28).

According to Swan and Smith, the definite article *the* and the indefinite articles *a* and *an* often cause errors (2001:28). My study contained 37 errors caused by omissions or additions of articles. Most of the errors were made with the definite article, namely 29 errors. In English, no article is used in a general sense before uncountable nouns, but in Swedish the definite article is typically used.

The indefinite article can be found in both Swedish and English. Swedish has the non-neuter form *en* and the neuter form *ett*, while English, depending on whether the following word starts with a vowel sound or not, chooses between the forms *a* and *an*. One problem area, as mentioned in (3.5.3), emphasized by Swan and Smith, is when Swedish does not use the indefinite article when reference is non-specific, but English does (2001:28). Twenty-two per cent of the errors were due to omission or addition of this category. Thus, there is an indication that the indefinite article is less troublesome than the definite article for the pupils

in my study. Table 5:3 gives an overview of different problem areas concerning article errors.

Table 5:3 Types of article errors

The definite article		The indefinite article		Total
Omission	Addition	Omission	Addition	
10 (27%)	19 (51%)	3 (8%)	5 (14%)	37 (100%)

Consider Example 13, which shows the omission of the definite article:

13. * *I watch with a programe with _ name of "Andra Avenyn".*

The reason for the error is probably transfer. The English appositive genitive structure *by the name of* has the Swedish equivalent *vid namn*, and as Köhlmyr points out, this often leads to errors (2003:257).

Example 14 shows, as mentioned above, a case when using the definite article in a general sense.

14. * *It's a very big question to <u>the</u> society*.

Transfers from L1 were found in many sentences like this one. A possible explanation for such errors may be a difficulty among the pupils to understand what it means to say the reference is non-specific. Another problem area, when discussing the definite article, is the situation with abbreviations. An example, caused by transfer, when dropping the article, such as _ *USA* was found in the essays.

Finally, in this category, the following sentence features an error with the indefinite article:

15. * *My work in the future should be <u>a</u> good work*.

Actually, most of the errors with addition occurred with the word *work*. The tendency was the faulty use of the noun, mixing up the noncount word *work* with the countable *job*. The Swedish equivalent *jobb/arbete* requires a definite article. Many of the errors mentioned in this category are predictable and can be foreseen by CA.

5.4 Adjectives/adverbs

Because of the fact that Swedish adverbs of manner often have the same form as adjectives, it leads to mistakes such as: *She spoke to me quite polite*. (Swan and Smith 2001:29). The opposite mistake may be evident after verbs such as *look, sound, taste, smell* and *feel*, which take adverbs in Swedish but not English. An example is * *I feel terribly* (Swan and Smith 2001:29).

Adjectives are used either as an attribute, *a bad day*, or as a predicative, *The weather is bad*. Adverbs, on the other hand, have many functions, like modifying verbs*, I run quickly*, adjectives, *I am unusually tired*, or clauses *Unfortunately, I missed the train*. The most common way of forming an adverb is by using the suffix *-ly*, but there are many exceptions as, for example, *fast*.

The tendency to use adjectives instead of adverbs of manners, a so-called substitution, is manifested in my data because; however, in this category not many errors were produced by the pupils. Only 11 adjectives/adverbs errors were found, making 4 % of the total sum. Using an adjective instead of an adverb was more frequent, namely 73%, compared to the opposite situation, i.e. replacing an adjective with an adverb. A possible explanation for the low frequency of this kind of error may be that the pupils do not master this grammatical device. An avoidance or underproduction takes place, because of not knowing how to use the form. Köhlmyr's study shows the same result, with relatively few errors involving adverbs in the written compositions. (2003:118). Table 5:4 gives an overview of errors concerning adjectives and adverbs.

Table 5:4 Total numbers of errors involving adjectives and adverbs.

Adverbs	Adjectives	Total
8 (73%)	3 (27%)	11 (100%)

A typical example of replacing an adverb with an adjective is the following:

16. * *But many children don't take the school <u>serious</u>*.

Since Swedish speakers use a similar form as both adverb and adjective, this error may be caused by transfer. A few instances, actually three, turned up in the essays replacing *well* with *good*. One example is shown below:

17. * *....you have to have a <u>good</u> payed job...*

Fewer errors were made when replacing an adjective with an adverb. Transfer may not be responsible for this kind of error. Instead, they are probably simply mistakes. Example 18 illustrates this:

18. * *I've been dreaming all the time of a long and <u>hopefully</u> future with wife and one son.*

5.5 Verbs: Concord errors

In Swedish there is no inflection for person or number regarding verbs. A common mistake for Swedes is to drop the third person -*s* which the following example illustrates: **He fly to Copenhagen twice a week* (Swan and Smith 2001:30). There is also a tendency to use *are* for *am, are* and *is* because it is the form most similar to the Swedish form *är*. This leads to mistakes such as: **I don't know if she are ready yet* (Swan and Smith 2001:30).

In my study, concord errors were the most frequent type of errors. A total of 91 errors were found. Five essays did not contain any concord errors at all, while five to seven errors occurred in seven essays. The result was expected considering the findings of previous research. Studies on Swedish learner concord problems have been carried out by, for instance Thagg-Fischer (1985), and Holmqvist-Ericsson (2008). In Kölhmyr's study, concord errors are also frequent (2003:36).

The basic principle in English is that the verb agrees with the subject in number and person. However, learners tend to drop the third-person -*s,* since Swedish has no inflection for person or number. Transfer is evident when dropping the -*s* in the third person singular. Another common error is due to overgeneralisation, as the pupils use this form in the third person plural as well, which is illustrated in example 19. A further explanation to such errors may be that the pupils know that plural involves the addition of -*s*, but they mix up where to put it.

Are, being the form of *be* which is most similar to the Swedish form *är*, is also often used wrongly as it is easily mixed up with *am* and *is*. Actually, the uncertainty is apparent in both present and past tense. The category concord errors has been divided into two groups and statistics on the errors are reported in table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Types of concord errors

Be, have, do	Other verbs	Total
58 (64%)	33 (36%)	91 (100%)

19. *All this things <u>depends </u>on how you are like a person.*

As mentioned above, this is an example of overgeneralisation, probably because *things* is a plural form.

20. ** So I think most of the world <u>are</u> going for a better future*.

As shown in Table 5.5, errors with the verbs *be*, *have* and *do*, both in the present tense and the past tense, were more frequent than concord errors with other verbs. In Example 20, the error can be explained by transfer from the Swedish form *är*.

5.6 Prepositions

According to Swan and Smith (2001:33), prepositions are in general regarded as a common source of errors in language learning for Swedes. They cause a lot of trouble as the usage varies between the two languages. In Swedish, a preposition can be followed by a *that*-clause, which may result in errors such as: **They insisted on that they knew nothing about it* (Swan and Smith 2001:33). Prepositions in Swedish can be followed by an infinite construction, which leads to mistakes such as * *They dreamed of to emigrate* (Swan and Smith 2001:33), and in passive sentences the wrong preposition in front of the agent is chosen. In this case the following mistake is common: **The bone was eaten of the dog* (Swan and Smith 2001:33).

Quite many the Swedish prepositions have corresponding forms in English, for example *till* corresponds with *to* in many phrases, but not always. When the forms are equivalent, positive transfer is the result. Negative transfer is common when a literal translation leads to an error. The preposition may not be identical in English and Swedish, as it is in the example *listen <u>to</u>* and *lyssna <u>på</u>*. Kölhmyr points out two other types of errors, namely where L1 has a preposition and L2 has zero preposition (**cheer on* instead of *cheer*), and when L1 has zero preposition and L2 a preposition (* *...bor fortfarande hemma* / *live still _ home*) (2003:253). My study includes all instances where incorrect prepositions were used, i.e. so-called substitution. Three quarters of the errors were caused by substitution. There were alos errors caused by omission (6%) and addition (14%). Table 5.6.1 illustrates this.

Table 5.6.1 Types of preposition errors

Substitution	Omission	Addition	Total
60 (76%)	5 (6%)	14 (18%)	79 (100%)

The total number of prepositional errors in the written compositions was 79, making up 29 % of the total number of errors found. From a pedagogical aspect, this may be of interest, possibly giving an indication of what to focus in teaching grammar. This will be further discussed in section 6. The largest number of these errors in an essay was seven, while five essays had no preposition errors at all.

Table 5.6.2 The most frequent preposition errors

on	in	for	to	at	of	others	Total
13 (22%)	11 (18%)	9 (15%)	6 (10%)	6 (10%)	6 (10%)	9 (15%)	60 (100%)

Table 5.6.2 illustrates the six most frequent preposition errors in the essays, namely with the prepositions *on*, *in*, *for*, *to*, *at* and *of*. Compared to Köhlmyr's study, the present result is quite similar. In her study, five predominant prepositions (*to*, *in*, *at*, *of* and *for*) made up 78 % of the errors (Köhlmyr 2003:150). One difference between this study and Köhlmyr's is the preposition *at*, being the fifth most common error among the pupils in this study, and the third most common error in Köhlmyr's. The different types of errors mentioned above are illustrated by examples 21 and 22:

21. * *I'm quite interested <u>on</u> how teenagers in other countries have it in school.* (substitution)

Substitution often occurs when prepositions are preceded by an adjective, as in this case. This error is not a result of transfer, because in that case another preposition ought to have been chosen, namely *of*, since the Swedish translation is *av*. On the other hand, transfer is very obvious in example 22. Prepositional errors with adverbials of time are frequent among Swedes and often caused by influence of the mother tongue. *On* has replaced *in* because of the Swedish translation <u>*på min fritid*</u>.

22. * *Right now <u>on</u> my sparetime, I am training MMA - Mixes Matrial Arts...*

Omission and addition are illustrated below:

23. * *They came one days in the week and started __ 20.00.*

24. * *We can ask them _for_ a question.*

Omission is frequent in time and place adverbials, and in example 23 the explanation can be transfer, because Swedish does not use a preposition when expressing time. Addition, as shown in example 24, often occurs in a verb+object structure, where no preposition is required in L2.

6. PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS

According to the curriculum for the Swedish compulsory school, the aim in teaching English is "through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop all-round communicative skills" (Skolverket Lgr 11[online]). As mentioned in section 2, these skills involve interacting with others in spoken and written language, and a communicative competence is therefore necessary. The role of grammar in English language teaching has varied throughout the years. In the 80s, as Hedge points out, there was an anti-grammar movement based on the belief that grammatical competence could be achieved naturally from input and opportunities in the classroom without focusing on language forms (2000:143-145). This is not the case nowadays, and the role of grammar has changed, since linguistic competence involves a knowledge of grammatical rules. But what is the most appropriate way to deal with the pupils' errors? Are feedback and correction good? If that is the case, what types of errors should be corrected?

Recent studies have proved that feedback in various forms helps learners in their language acquisition, and students want this as well (Köhlmyr 2003:341). Different errors affect the message in various negative ways. Serious errors will lead to misunderstandings, or perhaps, a complete communication breakdown. A risk with not mastering the target grammar may lead to a situation where the speaker is regarded less competent and reliable. Errors, which impair communication, should be corrected. Correction is also important where L1 and L2 differ in grammar (Köhlmyr 2003:344). According to my study, the category of concord errors is such a category. It is worth keeping in mind that L2 learners pass through developmental stages when acquiring a new language. Intake of grammatical features will only occur if and when the pupil is ready (Hedge 2000: 150). If the learner has reached the developmental stage involving, for example, the use of adverbs correctly, no error will be made. Sometimes, as Köhlmyr mentions, a "delayed effect" occurs, meaning that what is

taught on one occasion may not be mastered until later on. Here the teacher has a difficult task. In the classroom the group of learners is heterogeneous, passing through the developmental stages at different rates. Their different L1 competence also plays a significant role. As a professional teacher, it is of major importance to provide individual help or meet the learner's needs.

Thus, the teacher's own language awareness is vital in acquainting grammatical competence. Köhlmyr emphasizes the knowledge of SLA, CA and EA, being tools to develop teaching, and I agree with her assessment (2003:349). A competent teacher is supposed to discover errors and offer the learners a corrective feedback. Furthermore, a variety in the classroom is necessary for the best language acquisition. A mix between communicative exercises and exercises focusing on grammatical issues is to be recommended.

To summarize, in helping the pupils to reach the goals in the curriculum about communicative competence, grammar is still very important. In my opinion, a competent teacher in language awareness, giving the appropriate feedback, is what every pupil ought to have.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aims of this study were to investigate errors in the written production of Swedish pupils in the ninth grade, to study the frequency of the errors and finally, to explain whether such errors are common due to negative transfer. The errors have been divided into six groups, namely word order, plural of nouns, nouns/articles, adjectives/adverbs, verbs/concord errors and prepositions. In addition, some categories of errors have been analysed in sub-categories.

The results show which areas cause most errors to the pupils. Not unexpectedly, when comparing to Köhlmyr's study *To Err Is Human...*, a great majority of the errors in the written compositions are related to concord (34%), prepositions (29%) and nouns and articles (14%). As pointed out in *Learner English*, these categories cause problems to Swedish pupils because of the differences between L1 and L2, which sometimes leads to transfer errors. This confirms my hypothesis that grammatical errors are more frequent where the English language use differs from the Swedish language use. Sometimes the errors may be explained by so-called delayed effects; these are cases when what has been taught in the classroom is not mastered yet.

To sum up, by using EA and CA to identify the language problems, information can be obtained on common trouble-spots in language learning. Being able to predict certain errors

may be useful to every teacher. Even though this is a small study and its results should not be over-interpreted, I have, on a personal level, become aware of common grammatical errors among pupils.

Finally, further research would be interesting to carry out, investigating pupils' errors in written production in a deeper perspective. One possible angle of approach would be to return to the pupils in my study after a few years to see if their language skills have been improved or the same kind of transfer errors occurs. Another approach would be to investigate errors made by pupils not having Swedish as their first language, since Sweden of today is a multicultural society. The group of learners in the classroom is therefore often heterogeneous when it comes to mother tongue. Here, aspects of third language transfer may be of interest.

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