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ENGELSKA

## **\*Grammatical progress**

a study of grammatical errors by Swedish students of English

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## **Abstract**

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<b>Title:</b>	*Grammatic progress - a study of grammatical errors by Swedish students of English
<b>Writer:</b>	Nils Lagnemo
<b>Purpose:</b>	To examine the grammatical issues in the written production of students of different ages.
<b>Method:</b>	A quantitative study of errors in seven test sentences which students have translated from Swedish to English.
<b>Material:</b>	99 students' translations of seven Swedish sentences.
<b>Main results:</b>	<p>Students of all grades need to practice their usage of the genitive form and the relative pronoun <i>whom</i>, since for most of the students under study these grammatical elements present problems.</p> <p>In contrast to the students of Köhlmyr's study who seem to do better when it comes to realisation errors, the students of this essay did better on how to use the singular form correctly.</p> <p>All in all, no essential differences between the results of boys and girls were found. However, boys tend to do better when using the present tense verb forms. The results also suggest that the present tense is less problematic for students of grade 7 than for students of the first grade in upper secondary school.</p>

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# **1. Introduction**

BBC reporter Iain MacInnes wrote an article about English spoken by Swedes in which he discusses whether English is slowly becoming a second language in Sweden, in contrast to what it is today. His conclusion is that “[o]ne thing is certainly clear – the Swedes value their language, but they also place an equally high value on the merits of bilingualism” (MacInnes: 2009). The influence of the English language in Sweden is growing day by day, maybe because of the social media revolution and the increase of online games in which English is the only language understood by all of the players, a lingua franca.

This is a fast growing process, and it might even be going so fast that students in the seventh grade in Sweden, in some aspects, master the English language in an equal or better way than students of the second grade in upper secondary school. As described in the title, this study investigates grammatical errors made by Swedish students. What kind of grammatical problems are common among students in the seventh grade and the second grade of the upper secondary school? In this study, 99 students’ results are analysed in order to generalise what kind of grammatical errors are common among Swedish students.

## ***1.1 Aim***

The aim of this essay is to examine students’ progress in mastering certain grammatical features of the English language, starting with students of the seventh grade and continuing to the second grade of the upper secondary school. When do they master certain areas of the English language and what they do not master after the second grade of the upper secondary school, which is usually their last school year

with English as a subject? Another interesting aspect is if the knowledge of this foreign language differs between boys and girls, which will be discussed in this essay. Lastly, the essay will discuss if the students in these classes make the same kind of errors as students did in the past.

Since the study called *To Err is human* of grammatical errors made by students of the upper secondary school has already been made by Pia Köhlmyr at Gothenburg University, a comparison of the results in this essay and her investigation will be discussed. In her study, she finds out that a vast majority of errors made by students are related to verbs (25%) and nouns and articles (22%). She also concludes that as much as 60% of errors were intralingual, which means that they were due to the students' first language, and that no differences between boys' and girls' results were found (Köhlmyr 2003: 354-356).

## **2. Method & material**

In order to be able to compare the English skills of students, their knowledge has been tested individually. Students of the seventh to the ninth grade and the first and second year of the upper secondary school were tested in the same way. They were given identical writing assignments consisting of seven sentences in Swedish, which they were supposed to translate into English. In the following paragraphs, the sentences will be given, along with an explanation of the grammatical areas tested. As the sentences were given to the students in Swedish, the Swedish original sentences are also given here, together with a translation as close to the Swedish sentence as possible. All of the sentences are taken from *English grammar check* (Plith 2001). It is a diagnostic material for students of the first grade in upper secondary school,

which means it is what students of the upper secondary school are supposed to know before finishing step five, the first course of English in upper secondary school in Sweden. These sentences are as follows:

1. Det finns två kyrkor i vår by [There are two churches in our village]
2. De flesta lärarna på vår skola är kvinnor [Most of the teachers in our school are women]
3. Fårens svansar är ganska korta [The sheep's tails are fairly short]
4. Mina systrar och bröder har alla sina egna rum [My sisters and brothers all have rooms of their own]
5. Till vem gav du pengarna? [To whom did you give the money? / Who did you give the money to?]
6. Mötte du någon igår natt? [Did you meet anyone yesterday evening?]
7. Han är glad för att han har haft ett väldigt bra liv [He is happy because he has had a very good life]

The first sentence tests the students' ability to use the plural form (*churches*). It also determines whether the students are able to choose between *it* and *there* or not. Lastly, the students must choose the correct preposition.

The second sentence also tests the students' ability to use the plural form. The preposition *in* is not a literal translation of the Swedish corresponding *på* in this situation. The last noun, *women*, is an irregular plural.

The third sentence mainly tests the students' usage of the genitive. The interesting thing to examine is which method to write the genitive the students prefer to use, especially since writing *the tails of the sheep* is not as acceptable as *the sheep's tails* since a sheep is a living creature (Cowan 2008:201). Moreover, *sheep* has a  $\emptyset$ -plural, which is also tested since the original sentence in Swedish gives the plural form of

*sheep*. As it is sometimes hard to determine whether it is lack of knowledge when it comes to usage of the genitive form or usage of the wrong plural form (as in the word *sheep's tails*), all of the students in this study who have used an *s* at the end of the word without any apostrophe at all (regardless the placement of the apostrophe in the word), [*sheeps*], will be counted as if the *s* is an attempt to write the word in the plural form. If there is an apostrophe and an *s* somewhere in the end of the word, i.e. *\*cheeps*, it will be counted as an attempt to write the word in the genitive form. According to Köhlmyr (2003:55-56), the omission of the apostrophe should not be counted as a grammatical error and will not be counted as an error of the genitive in this essay either.

The fourth sentence tests the usage of the present tense. Since the word *have* refers to a group of people there is a subject-verb agreement and the students must use the word *have*.

The fifth sentence tests several elements of the English language. The pronoun *whom* is rarely used in English, but in this situation it is a grammatically correct answer to the question. Since the students were told to translate as close to the original sentence as possible, the usage of *whom* is seen as a better way of translating the sentence in this situation. The *do*-construction is also an important element tested, as well as the usage of verbs in the present tense after the construction.

The sixth sentence gives the students a second opportunity to show that they master the *do*-construction. The indefinite pronoun *anyone* is also a word tested.

The seventh sentence tests a mixture of the present and the present perfect tense: *He is happy because he has had a very good life.*

The results of the study will be compared regarding gender and the differences between the results of the students in secondary school and in the upper secondary school to investigate what is learnt during their last school years.

In total, 99 students participated in this study. The participating students were from Sörgårdsskolan and John Bauer-gymnasiet located in the municipality of Mölndal. The table below shows the total number of students in each class.

Table 1. Total number of students in each class under study

<b>Grade</b>	7	8	9	1	2	<b>Total</b>
<b>Boys/girls</b>	9/14	7/15	13/8	16/4	12/1	57/42

When the results were received, all of the sentences were corrected separately to ensure all of the sentences were corrected in the same way. Afterwards, all of the errors were categorised depending on what kind of words were included in the error. Noun errors were subcategorised in number and case errors, verbs were subcategorised in tense and aspect and the *do*-construction, prepositions were categorised depending on if the students had problems using the preposition *in* or *to*. Lastly, the category about pronouns was not subcategorised but discussed in a separate section.

### **3. Results and discussion**

On the following pages, all of the errors found during this research will be provided.

A discussion will follow each table.



### **3.1 Nouns**

In this section, errors relating to the nouns in the sentences will be discussed. Since these errors are number and case errors, they are discussed in two subsections.

#### **3.1.1 Number – the singular and the plural**

Some of the students in this study have problems with the usage of the singular and the plural form. Firstly, among all of the 99 students, only one showed to have problems in using the singular form. This error, made by a girl in the seventh grade, was made in Sentence 1: *There are two churches in our village*. Her attempt to translate the sentence from Swedish into English, *Ther'e is two church in our villages*, suggests that she has not yet fully understood how to use English nouns in the singular form; this error could be a slip as well. This student, however, has failed to translate the first noun of the sentence (*church*) into the correct plural form as well, which strengthens the hypothesis that this student does not master this feature of the English language.

According to Köhlmyr's results, errors with the singular form are often substitutional ones in which countable nouns are written in their plural form (Köhlmyr 2003:40). This is exactly what has happened in this translation, but only one student had problems with this. Since Köhlmyr's data were provided by students' creative writing, that explains why she found a lot more errors in this area.

Secondly, errors included here are regular (with a plural *s*, as in *teachers*) as well as irregular plural errors, such as the plural form of *sheep* (*sheep*). These were found in sentences 1-4.

In Sentence 1, a total of 11 errors were recorded. 5 of them were made by boys and 6 of them were made by girls.

Table 2. Correct Sentence 1: [There are two] *churches* [in our village]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 9</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
church	0/0	0/0	1/2	3/1	1/3	5/6

The correct usage of countable nouns is a basic requirement of English grammar. It is quite alarming that as many as 11 out of 99 students wrote sentences such as *There are two church in our village*. In the syllabus of English for the third year in the Swedish school, “simple descriptions and messages” is included as core content (Skolverket 2011:33). Since 17,4% of the students in the seventh grade failed to use the plural form correctly, compared to 18,2% of the eighth graders in this study, this could be an alarming situation for their teachers. Cowan (2008:5) discusses the importance of managing the basic grammar of a language to be able to communicate in different media, which is hard if the student does not see the difference between the singular and the plural form.

As reported in Table 3, 23 errors were recorded in Sentence 2, 10 by boys and 13 by girls.

Table 3. Correct Sentence 2: [Most of the] *teachers* [in our school are] *women*

<b>Error</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 9</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
woman	0/0	1/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/1

womans	0/0	1/0	1/0	0/1	0/1	2/2
womens	1/0	2/1	2/0	0/4	1/1	6/6
teacher	0/1	0/0	0/2	0/0	1/1	1/4

As seen in Table 3, the plural word *teachers* was surprisingly commonly written in the singular form by girls. An example of this is a girl in the ninth grade, who wrote *The most of the teacher on our school is women's*. But the most surprising error was the double plural form *womens*, which was the most frequent one (12 occurrences). In Köhlmyr's study (2003:42), only 14% of the plural errors were realisation errors (double plural), but in this study 60% of the errors were realisation ones. Köhlmyr also states that overgeneralisation, which includes this kind of error, is "a kind of simplification of the grammatical system" (2003:248), which is a plausible explanation why so many students made the error.

In Sentence 3, 90 errors were recorded. 56 of them were made by boys and 34 of them were made by girls.

Table 4. Correct Sentence 3: [The] *sheep's tails* [are fairly short]

Error	Grade 2	Grade 1	Grade 9	Grade 8	Grade 7	Total
	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls
tails of the sheep	2/0	6/0	1/2	1/3	2/2	12/7
sheeps	7/1	6/1	5/1	2/5	7/10	27/18
sheep	0/0	0/0	2/0	1/1	0/1	3/2
tail	3/1	3/1	3/0	3/1	2/4	14/7

When it comes to the irregular plural, an example of this is the word *sheep*, which is, incorrectly, commonly written in the plural as *sheeps*. In the sentence translated by the students, they were supposed to write the word *sheep* in the plural genitive, and as seen in Table 2, this was something the students had trouble doing, boys as well as girls. However, according to the results, this kind of error is not as common in the upper secondary school as it is in the seventh grade. All of the errors reported in Table 4 occurred when the word was spelled without the apostrophe; other errors are reported in the section on the genitive.

A boy in the ninth grade wrote *The sheep's tail are pritty short*. This study shows that the usage of plural nouns after a genitive noun is a fairly common problem among Swedish students. Some students tried to rephrase the sentence when translating it, but as an eighth-grader's version, *The tail of the cheep are pretty short*, is ungrammatical since a sheep is an animal, and such nouns are generally spelled with an apostrophe in the genitive (Plith: 12). This grammatical rule has also been taught to the students participating in this research, according to their teachers.

In Sentence 4, a total of three errors were recorded, one of them made by a boy and 2 made by girls.

Table 5. Correct Sentence 4: [My] *sisters* [and] *brothers* [all have rooms of their own]

Error	Grade 2	Grade 1	Grade 9	Grade 8	Grade 7	Total
	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls
sister	0/0	0/0	1/1	0/0	0/0	1/1
brother	0/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1

As seen in Table 5, this was not a problematic grammatical area for the students. Since none of the students used the wrong form of *sisters* and *brothers*, the most plausible explanation of these errors is that they are slips.

### 3.1.2 Case – the genitive

The genitive 's and the *of*-construction are the main forms of the genitive, which is commonly a way of noting the possession of something (the *sheep's* tails). The case-related errors were found in Sentences 2, 3 and 4.

In Sentence 2, 4 errors were recorded, 3 of them made by boys and one error made by a girl.

Table 6. Correct Sentence 2: [Most of the] *teachers* [in our school are] *women*

Error	Grade 2	Grade 1	Grade 9	Grade 8	Grade 7	Total
	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls
apostrophe added	0/0	1/0	1/0	1/1	0/0	3/1

In this sentence, only one student of the upper secondary school used an apostrophe incorrectly, suggesting the use of the *of*-construction is not a problem among students of the upper secondary school. As presented below, since the apostrophe is not a feature of the Swedish language, its use tends to present problems for Swedish learners of English.

In Sentence 3, 13 errors were recorded, 5 of them made by boys and 8 by girls. These errors are reported in Table 7.

Table 7. Correct Sentence 3: [The] *sheep's* [tails are fairly short]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 9</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
apostrophe error	0/0	3/0	0/2	2/5	0/1	5/8

The genitive plural form of *sheep* (*sheep's*) was the most frequent one of genitive errors. However, it seems that the plural genitive is not a problem for seventh-graders and second-graders since only one student of the seventh grade used the apostrophe incorrectly, a girl who wrote *The tails of the \*sheep's \*is pretty short*. No one in the second grade in upper secondary school made errors related to the genitive form, suggesting that this is not a problem among students either in the seventh or the second grade. By contrast, students from the eighth grade and the first grade seem to have problem using the genitive plural correctly, since most of the apostrophe errors (12 out of 13) were errors made by students of these grades.

In Sentence 4, seven errors were recorded; 4 of them were made by boys and 3 of them were made by girls.

Table 8. Correct Sentence 4: [My] *sisters* [and] *brothers* [all have rooms of their own]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 9</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
apostrophe added	0/0	2/0	0/0	2/3	0/0	4/3

In this sentence, five students incorrectly added an apostrophe to the words, resulting in noun forms such as *brothers'* and *sister's*. In Köhlmyr's study, no errors of this kind are reported, but her data was provided by texts from students of the upper secondary school, whereas the present errors are made mostly by students of grade 8. Since there is no reason to use apostrophes in this sentence, it can be assumed that these are slips. The absence of the apostrophe in the Swedish language is also a plausible explanation to these results.

## **3.2 Verbs**

In this section, errors related to the verbs in the sentences are discussed. Since these errors are related either to the categories of tense and aspect or the use of the *do*-construction, they are discussed in two subsections.

### **3.2.1 Tense and aspect**

In this section, errors relating tense and aspect are discussed. At first, it could be surprising that as many as 49% of the boys and 64% of the girls made errors related to the simple present tense. However, Köhlmyr explains this by stating that “it is also the tense most commonly used, so from this point of view, errors should be expected” (2003:64). Since most of the errors are in the simple present tense, this will be the main subject in the present discussion. These errors are also related to the use of grammatical agreement as all the test sentences include verb forms which agree in number with the number of the respective subject.

Errors related to the simple present tense occurred in Sentences 1, 2, 3 and 7. The statistics on the occurrence of these errors is presented in Table 9. A total of 55 errors were recorded; 28 were made by boys and 27 were made by girls.

Table 9. Correct Sentence 1: [There] *are* [two churches in our village]

Correct Sentence 2: [Most of the teachers in our school] *are* [women]

Correct Sentence 3: [The sheep's tails] *are* [fairly short]

Correct Sentence 7: [He] *is* [happy because he has had a very good life]

Error	Grade 2	Grade 1	Grade 9	Grade 8	Grade 7	Total
	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls
is	2/2	10/0	7/4	6/9	3/12	28/27

As seen in Table 9, boys in the seventh grade tend to master the simple present tense better than boys in the first grade in upper secondary school. However, girls did a lot better in grade 1 than in grade 7. Among the female students of grade 7, most of the errors occurred in the *village*-sentence, suggesting that use of the simple present was a larger problem for girls than for boys in this class.

The students were given three test sentences in which *are* should be used in accordance with the subject-verb agreement rules; the first one in which the plural form is obvious due to the numeral *two* (*There are two churches...*), the second sentence in which the reader has to focus not on the closest noun but on the subject of the sentence (*Most of the teachers in our school are women*), and lastly a sentence in which *are* is preceded by the noun phrase with the genitive of an irregular noun (*The sheep's tails are...*). This study shows that the students tend to make errors, regardless of the sentence type (see statistics on Sentences 1, 2, 3 and 7 in Table 9).



Karlsson (2002:71) came to the same conclusion in her investigation, pointing out several factors affecting choices of verb forms. However, the same students generally did not make the same simple present tense error in all sentences. This suggests that the wrong usage of the simple present tense depends on the situation. If the student is influenced by the last noun of the sentence, *village*, this could be an explanation to the choice of *is* instead of *are*. This kind of error, known as a performance error, is however the least common error made by learners of English (Cowan 2008:43).

Another problem related to the simple present is the usage of *have*. The errors related to this verb were found in Sentences 4 and 7. In Sentence 4, several cases of the incorrect simple present tense of *have* are represented. All in all, 11 errors were recorded; 5 of them were made by boys and 6 of them were made by girls.

Table 10. Correct Sentence 4: [My sisters and brothers all] *have* [rooms of their own]

Error	Grade 2	Grade 1	Year 9	Year 8	Year 7	Errors
	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls	boys/girls
has	0/0	1/0	2/1	1/4	1/1	5/5
had	0/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1

As this study shows, students of the upper secondary school do not tend to have any problems with the plural usage of *have*, with just a few exceptions. For instance, a girl in the second grade had difficulties with the simple present *have*, resulting in the sentence *My sisters and brother their had they one rooms*. A similar problem was highlighted by Köhlmyr when she commented on the example *We had live in X for over 10 years now, but I was born in Y* (2003:71).

In Sentence 7, 70 errors were recorded. 38 of them were made by boys and 32 of them were made by girls.

Table 11. Correct Sentence 7: [He is happy because he] *has had* [a very good life]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 9</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
have had	4/0	4/0	0/1	1/2	0/2	9/5
have has	0/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/0
had have	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/0	0/0
had had	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/0	0/1
has	0/0	0/1	4/0	2/3	3/2	9/6
had	5/0	5/1	2/4	3/5	4/10	19/20

It should be noted here that the total number of students in the lower secondary school is larger than the number of students in the upper secondary school (66 students in grade 7-9, 33 students in grade 1-2), which implies that the results of Table 11 may be misleading. However, percent wise, the male students of the lower secondary school seem to do better than all of the students of the upper secondary school when it comes to the use of the perfect aspect. 21 errors were found in the translations made by the older students (64%), but among the males of the lower grades only 19 errors were found (29%).

Another interesting observation also refers to gender differences in the use of aspect forms. Thus, ten girls in grade seven (71%) wrote *He is happy because he had a very good life*, which suggests that the present perfect is a problematic category for girls of this grade.

### 3.2.2 The *do*-construction

The statistics on the usage of the *do*-construction includes the usage of *do* (*To whom \*do you give the money?*) and the non-finite form (*To whom did you \*gave the money?*) of the main verb. In Sentences 5 and 6, these grammatical elements were tested. These sentences will be dealt with together in Table 12. 49 errors were recorded; 24 by boys and 25 by girls.

Table 12. Correct Sentence 5: [To whom] *did* [you] *give* [the money?]

Correct Sentence 6: *Did* [you] *meet* [anyone yesterday evening?]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 9</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
<i>do</i> - construction	0/1	0/0	1/3	2/4	0/2	3/10
verb	3/0	8/3	5/2	2/4	3/6	21/15

In Köhlmyr's study, errors relating to the *do*-construction are fairly rare. (2003:82) In this study, however, several types of *do*-construction-errors have been reported. Moreover, this study shows that the problems with the *do*-construction increase from grade seven to grade nine, especially among girls (see totals in Table 12: 3 versus 21 and 10 versus 15 errors for boys and girls respectively).

### 3.3 Prepositions

Some of the errors made by the students are related to the usage of prepositions; this issue will be discussed extensively in this section. The prepositions tested with the

translation sentences are the preposition *to* and two alternative uses of *in*. Since none failed to use the correct preposition in Sentence 1, the tables below do not include this sentence. Therefore, the only sentences reported in the tables are Sentences 2, 5 and 6.

### 3.3.1 The preposition *in*

In Sentence 2, 49 errors were recorded. 32 of them were made by boys and 17 of them were made by girls.

Table 13. Correct Sentence 2: [Most of the teachers] *in* [our school are women]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
at	3/0	4/1	3/1	0/2	0/2	10/6
on	5/1	7/2	4/3	3/3	3/2	22/11

The fact that not a single student failed on the first *in*-preposition (*There are two churches in our village*) is quite interesting. It shows that students participating in this research do not have any trouble when it comes to the usage of the preposition *in* as a marker of place. A possible explanation for this result could be the similarity to the Swedish sentence the students got to translate. The Swedish preposition *i* is most commonly used as *in* when translated into English. Köhlmyr calls this kind of translation literal translation; it is “based on the false assumption of a one-to-one correlation between Swedish and English usage of prepositions” (2003:252). Since it is an inappropriate way of translating texts, it is strongly advisable not to take up this approach, but students’ translations of the sentence show that students usually choose

a one-to-one correlation. In this case, it was the right thing to do, but as the results of the other translations show, it is not always a successful way to translate texts.

When it comes to the *in*-sentence in Table 13, a lot of students failed in their translation. As Köhlmyr has pointed out, “in the cases where Swedish has *på* English requires *at, for, in, of* or *to*, but instead [...] we find \*on.” (2003:252). The data of this essay confirm this conclusion, since exactly one third of the students (33/99) chose the preposition *on* instead of *in*, and 16 students chose the preposition *at*. Among the results of the students in Köhlmyr’s study, errors with replacing the preposition *in* with *at* is the second most common one (2003:150), which shows this is still a problem among students.

According to the results presented in Table 13, the students in the seventh grade tend to do better than the students of the second grade in the upper secondary school. There are more students in the lower grades, but still there are more errors made by students in the upper years, which indicates that the students of the schools in this research know more about the usage of the preposition *in* than students of the upper years.

### **3.3.2 The preposition *to***

The errors with the preposition *to* were found in Sentences 5 and 6. In Sentence 5, 49 errors were recorded. 29 of them were made by boys and 20 of them were made by girls.

Table 14. Correct Sentence 5: *To* [whom did you give the money?]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
preposition omitted	1/1	2/0	0/0	2/3	2/2	7/6
<i>to</i> in the end	2/0	4/0	2/1	2/3	5/9	15/13
Double usage of <i>to</i>	0/0	2/1	2/0	0/0	1/0	5/1
Till	0/0	2/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	2/0

When it comes to the sentence where the usage of the preposition *to* is tested, it must be clarified that the students who translated the sentence into English by writing *Who did you give your money to?* did not mistranslate the sentence. The reason why their translations are mentioned in the table above is that the students were asked to translate the sentences as close to the Swedish original (*Till vem gav du pengarna*) as possible. Therefore, the preferable way of translating the sentence would have been *To whom did you give your money?* The results show that 15 boys and 13 girls chose to translate the sentence as close to everyday English as possible, namely *Who did you give your money to?* Cowan (2008:8) states that the grammar of a language is changing all the time, and the translation version chosen by Swedish students may reflect the fact that *whom* is an outdated grammatical element, since it is not as applicable as *who*.

Some of the students wrote *To who did you give your money \*to?*, which is totally ungrammatical in English. Table 14 demonstrates that this usage is mostly common

among boys in the ninth grade or the first grade in upper secondary school. Neither students in the second grade of upper secondary school nor any students of grade eight made this error, and only one student in the seventh grade used the double preposition (*To whom did you give your money to?*) when translating the sentence. A reasonable explanation for this error could be that students are used to putting the preposition at the end of the sentence, as in *Who did you give your money to?*, but they have literally translated from Swedish into English by putting the preposition in the beginning of the sentence. Even among advanced learners of English, literal translations are common. Karlsson (2002:127) shows this with the sentence “In the 1980s, around two million people were, in (on) average, unemployed”, in which the student clearly translates the Swedish expression *i genomsnitt* literally.

The most common error with the preposition *to* was a total omission of the preposition. Translations such as *Who did you give the money?*, *Who did you gave the money?* and *Who gave you the money?* were recorded. In Köhlmyr’s study, the same kind of error is recorded in Sentence 1015a “...sent money to the poor but not *ø* niggers” (2003:301). According to Köhlmyr, the reason why a preposition could be omitted in a case like this is that it is possible to do so in Swedish (2003:302). Even though it is ungrammatical to omit the preposition in Swedish by saying *\*Vem gav du pengarna?*, it is used by young people in spoken Swedish. That is most likely the explanation why it is the most common error made by the students.

If the usage of *to* in the end is not counted as an error (which is true), the study shows that the students of the seventh grade again did better than the students of grade one in upper secondary school. Seven out of 20 students in grade one made a prepositional error in this sentence in comparison to the seventh grade in which five out of 23 students made the same kind of error. The students who did best with this

sentence were the eight-graders since only 9% of the students failed to translate the sentence correctly.

### 3.4 Pronouns

This last section is about errors related to the use of pronouns in the test sentences. Throughout the section, the pronouns of each sentence will be discussed separately, except the first and the second sentence, which will be discussed together since they are testing the same word.

In Sentences 1 and 2, nine errors in the use of pronouns were recorded. 5 of them were made by boys and 4 of them were made by girls.

Table 15. Correct Sentence 1: [There are two churches in] *our* [village]

Correct Sentence 2: [Most teachers in] *our* [school are women]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
misspelled	0/0	0/0	0/0	4/0	0/0	4/0
were I live	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/0	0/1
my	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/2	0/2
the	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/0	1/0
they	0/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1

As seen in Table 15, the students in this research did not seem to have problems with the usage of the possessive personal pronoun *our*. There are some students who did not use the correct pronoun. The girl in the eighth grade who wrote *there are two*



*chourches, were I live* failed to translate the sentence properly, but she succeeded in forming a fully understandable sentence. This is not the case with the girl in the second grade, who translated the second sentence by writing *Most of teacher on they school are wimman*. It is possible she meant to write the possessive form *their*, but this attempt to translate the sentence is less appropriate than the translations made by the seventh graders.

The translations *There are two churses in the villiage* and *There's two churches in my town* are most certainly a result of misreadings by the students since they have used the correct personal pronoun in the second sentence. Therefore, they should not be seen as a result of lack of knowledge about personal pronouns, but slips.

In Sentence 1, 4 errors were recorded. 3 of them were made by boys and 1 mistake was made by a girl.

Table 16. Correct Sentence 1: *There* [are two churches in our village]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
It	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	2/1
That	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/0	0/0	1/0

When it comes to the existential *there* as the pronoun in this sentence is called, it seems that this was also something the students knew very well. It is quite easy to mix up when to use *it* or *there*, but since only three students failed to use the correct pronoun, one can assume this is something the students of today master in contrast to the students in Köhlmyr's study, in which it was the most common error among errors related to pronouns (2003:290).

In Sentence 6, 44 errors were recorded. 25 of them were made by boys and 19 of them were made by girls.

Table 17. Correct Sentence 6: [To] *whom* [did you give the money?]

<b>Error</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 7</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>	<b>boys/girls</b>
who	7/0	9/4	7/7	1/7	1/1	25/19

The errors included in this table are only those in which the students have translated the sentence by starting with the preposition *to*. Since the usage of pronouns in the translation *Who did you give the money to?* is grammatical, those answers are excluded from the table.

It is quite clear that this feature problems for Swedish learners. Almost all of the seventh graders chose not to start with a preposition when translating this sentence. There were only two students of that grade who tried, resulting in the ungrammatical translation *To who did you give the money.*

## 4. Conclusion

This study shows that there are differences in the knowledge of English grammar between students of all grades. However, since only one class from each grade has been tested, the results should not be seen as general when it comes to how students of different grades manage the grammar of the English language. Thus, only tentative conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the present data.

To begin with, there are some differences between the results of the seventh graders and the students of the upper secondary school. For instance, when it comes to the genitive form, this feature of English grammar is a problem for all grades, but not that big for the older students. Interestingly, girls in the lower secondary school tended to do better than boys of the same age as 49% of the girls and 59% of the boys showed difficulties in the usage of the genitive form. The students in the upper secondary school still have difficulties with the genitive, since 46% of the boys and 40% of the girls failed to use the correct form of *sheep*. Students need to practice the use of this feature more often, especially since it differs from Swedish.

An interesting observation in this research is that students in general tended to do well in the preposition test. When it comes to different meanings of the preposition *in*, it seems that this reposition does not create problems for Swedish students, but they should be instructed to avoid literal translations of prepositions from Swedish to English.

Among the errors related to pronouns, the usage of *whom* is worth mentioning. Since this pronoun is not used in everyday English as often as other pronouns, many students do not know how to use it. Thus, the translation *Who did you give your money to?* was a common one in the present data, which makes it impossible to decide whether the students know how to use *whom*. A test with gap sentences would have been a better way of testing this grammatical feature of the English language.

As for the use of tense and aspect forms, the boys of the seventh grade tended to do better than boys of the first grade of upper secondary school, when using these grammatical features. Grade 1-2-students did better than grade 7-9-students; thus, 62% of the grade 7-9-students had difficulties in contrast to 42% of the grade 1-2-students. Moreover, boys of grade 7-9 tended to do better than girls of the same

age when translating a sentence with the present perfect verb form. Apart from that, no dramatic gender-related differences were found.

The results of this study have been regularly compared to those of Köhlmyr (2003); however, since Köhlmyr's data were provided by students' creative writing, comparison can be only tentative. However, some differences between Köhlmyr's results and the results of this essay were notable. For instance, the students in Köhlmyr's study seem not to do realisation errors to the same extent as the students in this essay. The double plural of *woman* (*womens*) is a good example of this as 60% of the students in this essay used the double plural, in comparison with 14 % of students in Köhlmyr's study.

Also, this study shows that some students of the seventh grade are better in English grammar than some students in the second grade of the upper secondary school. This could be due to varied individual competences of the participating students. Since the backgrounds of each and every student have not been investigated, it is not possible to investigate if the varied results are due to different home conditions or if some of the underperforming students have recently got to their current class or school. To be certain about these results, a more comprehensive study must take place.

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