

English grammar – like it or not!

A study of the attitudes towards the importance of
teaching and learning English grammar in Latvia and Sweden

”Like everything metaphysical the harmony
between thought and reality is to be found
in the GRAMMAR of the language.”
Ludwig Wittgenstein 1889-1951,
Austrian Philosopher

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Abstract

The intention of this study has been to find out the attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge. The answer to this question was sought on three levels – in research theories, in the National Syllabi as well as by gathering information from students and teachers. Since the author of this essay originates from Latvia and aims to practice teaching there the attitude towards the importance of English grammar has been studied in the National Syllabi for both Sweden and Latvia as well as in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The methods used in this study are questionnaire and interview.

It was found that the attitude towards the importance of English grammar is positive in research and in teachers' and students' opinion. The attitude expressed in the national documents differs between countries.

Key words: English grammar, importance, CEFR, National Syllabi, students' and teachers' attitude.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

When I went to school in Latvia the norm of grammar teaching was drilling the rules and translation. Nowadays as teacher trainee in Sweden I have to concentrate on the communication and the four skills of language - reading, writing, speaking and listening. During the time I have been studying teaching of Swedish and English as school subjects I have come across different theories about grammar teaching. Some of the theoreticians suggest that grammar teaching can be put aside in favour of the lexical approach (Lewis 1993:148), others; however, point out that grammar needs to be taught and concentrate on various ways of approaching grammar teaching.

Furthermore the concentration of foreign language teaching all over Europe seems to lie on communicative skills and communication since the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) emerged in 2001. It is interesting how the attitude towards grammar teaching has changed over time. The question that arises is: where is the place of grammar now?

My main interest is to find out what is the attitude towards English grammar today. In particular my interest falls on the national syllabi for English teaching as well as experienced teachers' attitude towards this issue. I am also interested in the students' attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge.

Since I come from another European country and study to become a teacher of languages in Sweden I am interested in the differences (if there are any) in attitude towards teaching and learning English grammar. Particularly I am interested in finding out about the attitude towards English grammar teaching and learning in Sweden and Latvia. Since Latvia is my country of origin and possibly also my future place of work it is profitable to gain knowledge about the attitude towards one of the target subjects of my profession.

My interest falls on grammar because this is usually the subject towards which students tend to be most negative. I am also interested in the reasons for their attitude.

Grammar knowledge is crucial in the process of learning a language, especially if it is a foreign language. As a teacher trainee I am interested in the attitude towards English grammar in order to decide what position I should take when practising my future profession.

1.2. Aim and scope

The aim of this study is to find out what is the prevailing attitude towards the importance of grammar teaching and learning. This question is going to be addressed on three levels - in research theories about second and foreign language acquisition; in the national syllabi for teaching English (Latvian and Swedish) at upper secondary school and in the the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR), and by finding out the teachers' and students' attitude towards grammar.

What is meant here by English grammar are the grammatical forms that are taught to students at upper secondary level in schools. This includes the building of different sentence types, word order in sentences, the clause constituents and concord, the word classes – nouns (countable and uncountable, collective and proper etc and the use of these) and noun formation, pronouns and the use of these, adjectives (comparatives and formation and use of these), numerals, verbs and tenses (including modal verbs and use of these), adverbs and adverbial phrases, and formation and the use of these. However, it was not clearly and explicitly explained to the participants in this study what the author of this essay meant by English grammar and this is a limitation that the author of this essay is aware of.

This study focuses on the attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge and the attitude towards teaching and learning English grammar. Therefore the answers towards the question whether it is important to teach English grammar will be sought in theories with a pedagogical background.

National syllabi, since they are used as guidelines for language teaching in schools, are political documents and thus reflect the attitude towards the importance of different skills that students should attain in school. Therefore answers about the question on importance of grammar will also be sought here as well as in the guidelines for language learning, teaching and assessment - CEFR.

Teachers are the actual performers of English grammar teaching and thus their attitude shapes what is taught at schools their attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge is of utmost interest. Furthermore their attitude towards the stated goals in the National syllabi for English grammar teaching influences their approach to such teaching.

This study emphasizes upper secondary school students, who have reached an age where they can reflect on their attitude towards an abstract phenomenon such as grammar. The main intention is to find out their attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge

and their own perception of their level of proficiency of English grammar. The aim of this study is to find out the students' attitude, not their actual knowledge and proficiency level of English grammar.

1.3. Method and material

The methods used in this essay are quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative aspect is carried through by use of questionnaires. The qualitative method that was used is interview.

1.3.1 Questionnaire

The statistical survey includes gathering of information on students' opinion regarding the importance of learning English grammar. The informants are first year upper secondary school students in Sweden and Latvia. The upper secondary schools chosen for the survey are situated in a major city of respective country. The students chosen for the survey are studying different upper secondary school programmes, both social sciences and natural sciences. The students' were informed and asked to partake in the study. The participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The questionnaire consists of 15 questions (see appendices Nr.1-3) where each question is supplied with five or more alternative answers from which the informant can choose. The questions were arranged in order to find out students' attitude towards the importance of English grammar. The questionnaire was given to the students in their native language because the interest of the survey is to find out their attitude, not their actual knowledge of English. Students' age and gender were noted.

In total 126 first year upper secondary students between 16 and 17 years of age were interviewed in both countries, namely 65 Latvian and 61 Swedish students. Of all students 84 are girls and 42 are boys. For further description of the results and comparison between the results on boys and girls by nationality contact the author of this essay (gusvasij@student.gu.se).

1.3.2 Interview

The qualitative method chosen for this essay is an interview. The interview consists of 10 open questions (see appendix Nr.4). The questions are arranged in order to find out teachers' attitude towards teaching English grammar, the importance of English grammar knowledge and their ideas about the changes in attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge that have taken place during the years they have been practising their profession.

The interviews were carried out with three upper secondary school English teachers in both Latvia and Sweden. The participation in the interviews was voluntary and anonymous. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The interviews were carried out by meeting each teacher individually at the local schools where they work. The interviewed teachers all have experience from teaching English language at upper secondary level and were currently teaching English to first year upper secondary school students. The interviews were performed in English and were recorded. The device used for recording the interviews was a recorder of the type Sony TCM-400DV. The three tapes used for recording were of the type TDK D-IEC1/TYPE1 and each of the used tapes had the capacity to record 90 minutes. All together there is 198 minutes recorded interview material (see appendices Nr.6-11 for transcribed interviews).

1.3.3 Material

The material for this essay consists of the Swedish and Latvian National syllabi for English, the Common European Framework of Reference for Language.

Both Latvia and Sweden are members of the European Union. "The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment" was recommended by a European Union Council Resolution in November 2001 to be used as a basis for language policies in Europe. In order to find out the attitude towards the importance of English grammar expressed in the policy documents the National syllabi (Swedish and Latvian) for English language teaching will be described, analysed and compared to the attitude towards the importance of English grammar expressed in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

1.3.4 Plan of study

The plan of study is as follows:

1. to find out what the attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge is in the theories of second and foreign language teaching;
2. to find out what the attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge is in the Swedish and Latvian National syllabi for English as well as in the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Language);
3. to find out Latvian and Swedish teachers' and students' attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge.

2. Previous research

During the 19th century when language learning was seen as the acquisition of another type of behaviour, the main approach to foreign language teaching was studies of grammar rules and translation (Ohlander 1999:108). A shift of view on how knowledge is attained and also how language is acquired took place in the 1960's with Chomsky's ideas about the cognitive rather than behaviouristic approach of gaining knowledge. This changed the view on language teaching and also the attitude towards grammar teaching and learning. Research on language acquisition placed focus on Chomsky's theory about Universal Grammar and the Natural approach (ibid:110).

As a result, during the 1980's ideas emerged about language being acquired without explicit teaching of vocabulary or the rules of grammar, but due to exposure to comprehensible input in the target language. Consequently, it was believed that learners of the target language will acquire its grammar as a consequence of use of the language and explicit grammar teaching is not needed. This resulted in negative attitude towards grammar teaching and learning (Hedge 2000:143ff).

One of the most widely known theories in this field is Krashen's *input hypothesis* (Krashen 1982:20ff). The American linguist suggests that language is acquired through exposure to the target language and that a sufficient amount of contact with the target language on a comprehensible level gradually provides the development of perceptive and productive skills and the knowledge of language structures e.g. grammatical skills. What is more, Krashen concentrates on the meaning of utterances, not on the form, since, according to him, learners acquire the meaning of the language first and then the form – e.g. the grammar of the language (ibid:21).

Krashen's research on language acquisition was done within the field of Second language (SL) acquisition and the results were also applied to Foreign language (FL) teaching, though the input that can be provided in FL classrooms differs greatly from the amount of exposure to the target language compared to SL teaching. FL teaching in classrooms cannot provide enough of adequate input in order for the students to acquire all the aspects of grammar to the extent needed and therefore the theories that are functional for SL teaching are not useful in FL teaching to the same extent. What is meant here is that comprehensible input is not enough to affect successful FL acquisition and that grammar studies are needed in the process of learning English as FL (Hedström 2001:72).

The focus of today's language teaching, however, is on the communicative competences. It is often interpreted as speaking skills only and thus grammatical skills are not given the same emphasis as they were before. However, Larsen–Freeman argues that: “Even though such language use approaches as task-based and content-based are in favour these days, educators agree that speaking and writing accurately is part of communicative competence, just as is being able to get one's meaning across in an appropriate manner.” (Larsen-Freeman 2001:251). In short, the attitude towards the importance of teaching and learning grammar has shifted from the question of *whether or not* towards concentrating on the approach and methods of teaching grammar.

Furthermore, Larsen–Freeman stresses the importance of teaching grammar in order to achieve accuracy in forms of language and thus develop the communicative skills of language knowledge. Moreover she claims that: “Grammar is about form and one way to teach form is to give students rules; however, grammar is about much more than form, and its teaching is ill served if students are simply given rules.” (ibid). What is pointed out here is that grammar has an important role when it comes to accuracy of productive skills and that grammatical skills need to be developed through practice, not only through learning the rules.

Likewise, Fotos points out that language acquisition has the higher possibility to take place in Second Language (SL) teaching than in Foreign Language (FL) teaching, since the linguistic environment in society when learning a SL provides opportunities for real communication in the target language. She argues that the demands on grammatical accuracy and the few opportunities of real communication and use of the target language in FL classrooms often result in two different approaches: “[...] teacher-led classrooms and formal instruction on a series of isolated language forms, versus a purely communicative classroom, with its emphasis on group work and no focus on linguistic forms whatsoever.”(Fotos 2001:268). What Fotos reasons for is a combination of form and meaning in the communicative approach in language teaching. However, the emphasis is not on communication alone, but also on the correctness of it. Grammar is given a positive role.

Consequently grammar has reclaimed its place in the language classroom, but in a different meaning than before. During the 19th Century grammar knowledge equalled knowledge of the foreign language and it had important function in language teaching and was the target of language studies. During the 20th Century it lost its position to the Natural approach and partly also the lexical approach. Now it has got the role of ensuring that the communication is correct and successful.

3. Results

3.1 A comparison of the Swedish and Latvian National Syllabi and CEFR

In the following the National Syllabi for English language at first year Upper secondary level and CEFR will be described as regards the attitude towards the importance of English grammar.

3.1.1 The Latvian National Syllabi

The Latvian National Syllabus (LR, IzM 1993) that is in use now was first introduced in the year 1993. There will be a change of syllabus in 2008, when the new syllabus (ISEC 200?), which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (further called CEFR) will be introduced.

Regarding grammar the current Latvian National syllabus states that one of the goals of foreign language acquisition includes “mastering the grammatical structures and the lexical material and the use of these in the receptive and productive representation” (LR, IzM 1993:4, *author’s translation*). There are supplementary explanations of what is meant by this, namely “The grammar themes that have been acquired in compulsory school should be repeated and developed and students should be taught how to use these skills in conversation” (ibid:12, *author’s translation*). Moreover in the chapter on written proficiency it is stated that “a student should master the linguistic rules practically” (ibid: 11, *author’s translation*). Furthermore there is a special grammar chapter where the grammar items that should be taught are stated. The grammar items are stated very explicitly describing 17 grammar themes (ibid:12-14).

The forthcoming Latvian National syllabus is quite different in structure from the preceding syllabus. It is organized with emphasis on two main competence areas, namely, communicative and linguistic competence and the socio-cultural competence. One of the main aims of the school subject of English is “knowledge of the fundamental elements of the language and the use of these in spoken and written texts about communicative topics, using the norms of literary language” (ISEC 200?:3, *author’s translation*). The syllabus is organized on the basis of topics, where skills in both the communicative and linguistic competence and the socio-cultural competence are stated. For first year upper secondary level students the requirements regarding grammatical competence are as follows “Using quite a wide range of language structures and vocabulary in a naturally integrated manner within the topic” and “Reasonably effectively using the rules of the English language and language styles in

concrete situations related to the topic” (ibid:5-12). Furthermore there is a special grammar chapter where 16 grammar themes are specified and described (ibid:29-31).

Regarding the descriptions of aims for learning English grammar in the Latvian National syllabi it can be said that emphasis is placed on grammar teaching and thus the attitude expressed in the syllabi towards the importance of grammar is positive.

3.1.2 The Swedish National Syllabus

The Swedish National Syllabus (EN1201, 2000) is different from the Latvian National Syllabus. It is divided into three levels, A, B and C, and is organized on the basis of aims and goals.

In the aims of the subject is stated that “The subject aims at developing an all-round communicative ability” (ibid:1). This is further explained and grammar is mentioned once in the part where the structure and nature of the subject of English is described, namely: “The different competencies involved in all-round communicative skills have their counterparts in the structure of the subject. Related to these is the ability to master a language's form, i.e. its vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, spelling and grammar. Competence is also developed in forming linguistically coherent utterances, which in terms of their contents and form are progressively adapted to the situation and audience.” (ibid:2). However, linguistic competence is discussed in the goals to aim for. The Swedish National Syllabus states that:

“The school in its teaching of English should aim to ensure that pupils: refine their ability to express themselves in writing in different contexts, as well as develop their awareness of language and creativity, develop their ability to analyse, work with and improve their language in the direction of greater clarity, variation and formal accuracy (...)”

(ibid:2)

The linguistic competence is further mentioned in the goals to achieve: “Pupils should: be able to formulate themselves in writing (...) as well as have the ability to work through and improve their own written production” (ibid:4). Furthermore in the grading criteria for pass the following is mentioned: “... [p]upils write in clear language...” (ibid:5). It should be mentioned that grammatical correctness is not mentioned in the Swedish National syllabus. There is no grammar section in the Swedish National syllabus as there is in the Latvian National syllabus and no emphasis is placed on specific grammar knowledge. It could be understood that grammar knowledge is implicitly included in the aims and goals, but it is not clearly stated.

3.1.3 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) is a document of reference that was introduced in 2001. It consists of guidelines for constructing syllabi and course curricula for language teaching, learning and assessment all over Europe.

Among competences for learning a foreign language stated in the CEFR are linguistic competences, among which grammatical competence has a place (CEFR 2001:112-115). What is meant by grammatical competence is formulated as follows: “Grammatical competence may be defined as knowledge of, and ability to use, the grammatical resources of a language.” (ibid:112).

Regarding grammatical competence and the importance of grammar knowledge CEFR states that “Grammatical competence is the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognizing well-formed phrases and sentences in accordance with these principles (as opposed to memorising and reproducing them as fixed formulae).” (ibid:113). Furthermore CEFR provides a detailed list of grammatical topics and a chart on grammatical accuracy organised by level of proficiency (ibid:114f).

Grammatical competence and grammar knowledge are given place and explanation in the CEFR. Although the emphasis is on communicative skills and the goals are practically oriented, it can be said that the attitude towards the importance of grammar knowledge in the process of learning English as a foreign language is positive.

3.2. Comparison between Latvian and Swedish student questionnaire surveys

For the charts over the complete results of the Latvian and Swedish student surveys see appendix Nr.5.

3.2.1 Frequency of lessons in English and in English grammar

As for the frequency of lessons in English there are differences between Latvian and Swedish students. The Swedish students have English lessons twice a week whereas only 20% of Latvian students have lessons twice a week. The majority of Latvian students (71%) have English lessons three to four times a week and 9% have lessons even more often than three to four times a week (See charts Nr.6a-b in appendix Nr.5). This means that Latvian students have English lessons more frequently during a week's time than Swedish students. It is however not known how long the lessons are.

Furthermore there are differences in the understanding of how often students are taught English grammar at school. The majority of the Swedish students (87%) say that they do not study English grammar at school more frequently than a few times a month, whereas the majority of Latvian students (66%) state that they study English grammar no less than once a week (see charts Nr.7a-b in appendix Nr.5).

What is also interesting is that 46% of the Latvian students and 57% of the Swedish students are satisfied with the amount of grammar taught to them, while 37% of the Latvian students and 23% of the Swedish students would like to have more of English grammar at school. At the same time 17% Latvian students and 20% Swedish students would absolutely not want any more grammar at school (see charts Nr.8a-b in appendix Nr.5). This indicates that the majority of students are satisfied with the amount of English grammar taught at school.

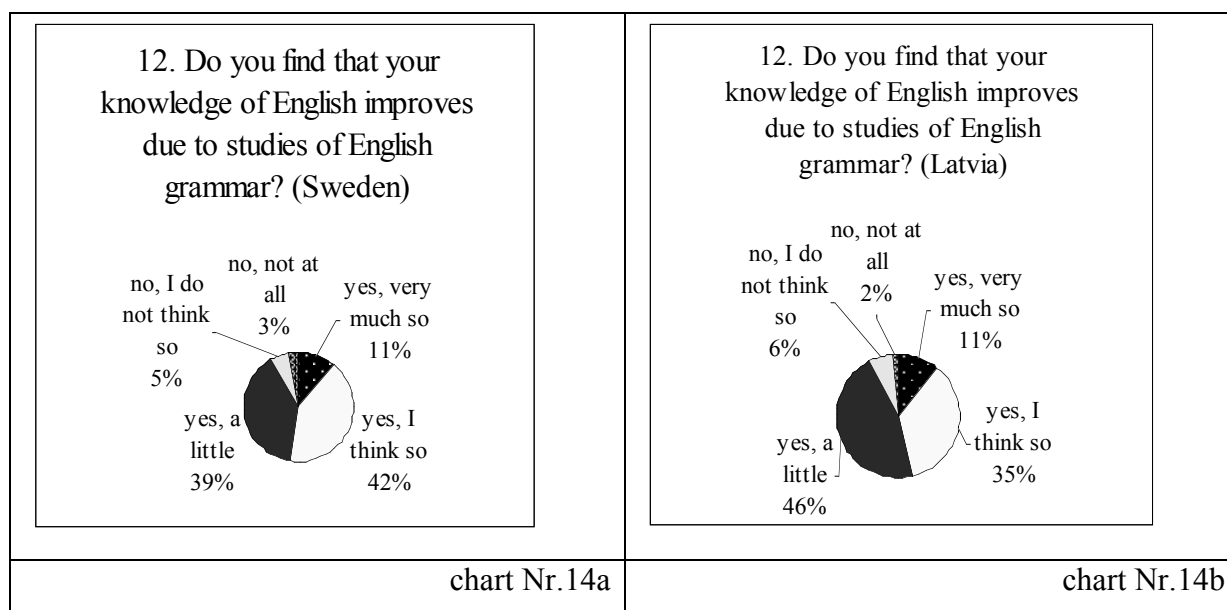
3.2.2 Students' attitudes towards the ways of learning English grammar

As for the best ways of learning English grammar there are both similarities and differences in attitude. The most common answers among Latvian students are building new sentences after a given pattern (63%) along with learning the rules and how to use them (53%), translating to and from English (43%) and reading a lot of examples and guessing the rule (30%). Only 17% find that the best way of learning English grammar is learning the rules by heart and 13% think the best way is through learning ready-made phrases. The most frequent answers among Swedish students for the best ways of learning English grammar are learning the rules and how to use them (52%) followed by building new sentences after a given pattern (34%) but learning the rules by heart and learning ready phrases are equally common (24%). 23% Swedish students think translating to and from English is the best way of learning English grammar, while only 11% think that the best way is reading a lot of examples and guessing the rule (see charts Nr.9a-b in appendix Nr.5). This shows that the most common ways of learning English grammar as students perceive it are learning the rules and how to use them and building new sentences after a given pattern, which are both methods of deductive language teaching.

3.2.3 Students' reasons for learning English grammar and their perceived effect of it

However, the reasons for learning English grammar seem to be quite similar among students from both countries. Students state that they study English grammar because it improves their knowledge of English language (Latvian 60%, Swedish 69%) and that it helps them to express themselves grammatically correctly (Latvian 58%, Swedish 75%). Moreover 46% Latvian students and 34% Swedish students state that they study English grammar because it helps them to understand spoken and written English. However the reason for studying because English grammar is compulsory at school is higher among Latvian students (58%) than among Swedish students (38%). Only 3% of the students from each country state that their reason for studying English grammar is their fondness of it (see charts Nr.10a-b in appendix Nr.5). This shows that the main reasons why students study English grammar are based on practical and utilitarian ideas.

When asked their opinion on whether they perceive that their knowledge of English improves due to studies of English grammar 92% of the students from either country give positive answer whereas 8% state that they do not believe it (see charts Nr.14a-b below). This shows that students perceive that studying English grammar improves their English knowledge in general.



3.2.4 Students' attitude towards the importance of studying English grammar

As for the importance of studying English grammar the majority of students from both countries find it important (Latvian 92%, Swedish 86%), 3% of the students from both countries do not know if studying English grammar is important. However 5% of the Latvian

students and 11% of the Swedish students find that studying English grammar is not very important (see charts Nr.11a-b in appendix Nr.5). This indicates that the majority of students both Swedish and Latvian have a positive attitude towards studying English grammar.

There are no major differences in attitude among the students when asked whether they would choose to study English grammar if given free choice. The majority of students (91% Latvian, 90% Swedish) would proceed studying English grammar, while a mere 9% of the Latvian students and 10% of the Swedish students would prefer not to have any further grammar studies. The main reason that both among Latvians and Swedes is that they see grammar studies as a necessity in order to advance their knowledge and correctness of English and thus get higher marks in the exams (see charts Nr.18a-b below).

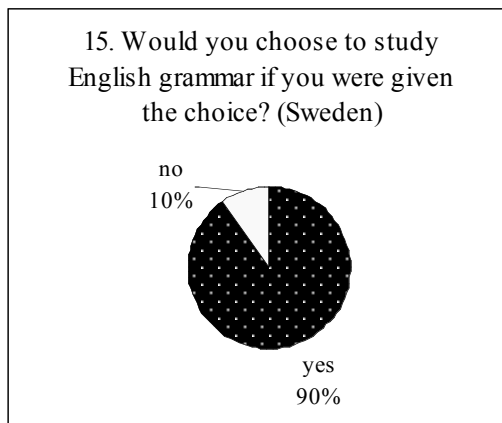


Chart Nr.18a

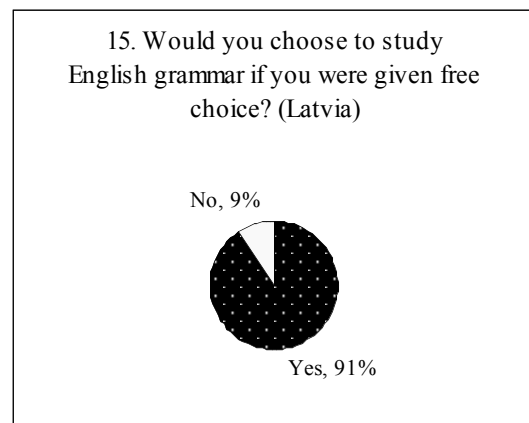


Chart Nr.18b

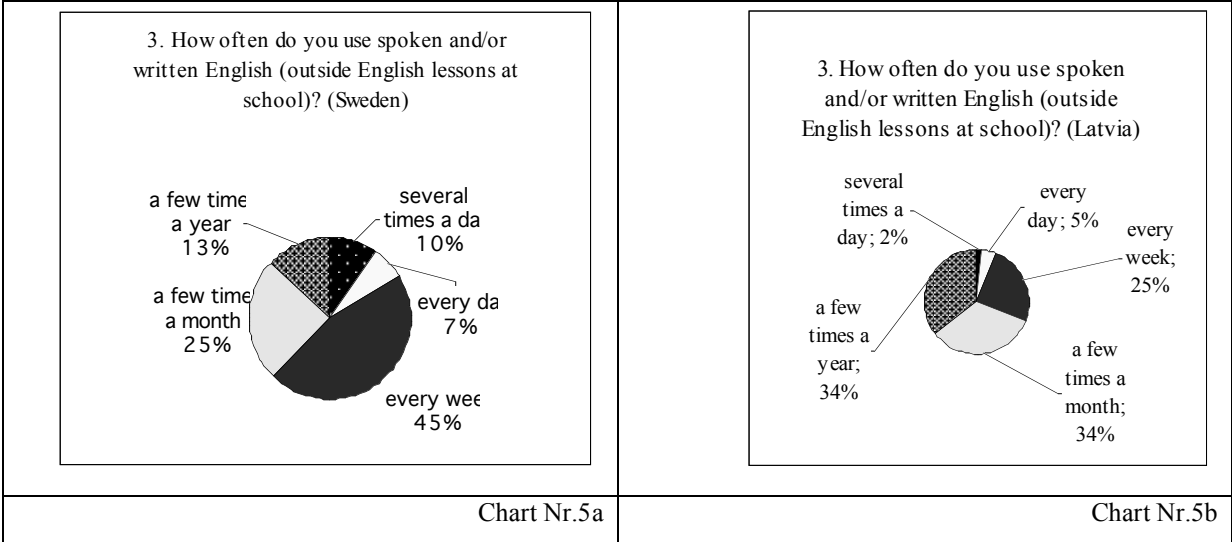
3.2.5 Students' perception of their proficiency level of English grammar

Regarding the students' perception of their proficiency level of English grammar there are some major differences between Swedish and Latvian students. 52 % Swedish students value their knowledge of English grammar as being good or very good, whereas only 11% of the Latvian students do that. Nevertheless 28% of the Latvian students and 31% of the Swedish students find their knowledge of English grammar satisfactory. 61% of the Latvian students find that their knowledge of English grammar is less than satisfactory or poor, whereas only 17% of the Swedish students share this view of their own proficiency (see charts Nr.12a-b in appendix Nr.5). This denotes that the Swedish students value their knowledge of English grammar higher than the Latvian students do.

3.2.6 The frequency of the use of English grammar and English outside school

There are also differences in how often Swedish and Latvian students think that they have use for their knowledge of English grammar outside school. As many as 52% of the Swedish students state that they have use for their knowledge often or very often, as completed to 14 % of Latvian students. 29% of the Latvian students and 37% Swedish of the students state that they sometimes use their knowledge of English grammar. Furthermore 57% of Latvian students acknowledge that they seldom or never have use of their grammar knowledge, while only 20% of the Swedish students have the same opinion (see charts Nr.13a-b in appendix Nr.5).

This could be put in comparison to the students’ opinion on how often they use spoken and written English outside school. From the students’ answers can be understood that 17% of the Swedish students use English several times a day or every day and 45% of them use their English every week. On the contrary only 7% of Latvian students state that they use English language outside school several times a day or every day and 25% state that they use English language every week. While 38% of the Swedish students state that they use English a few times a month or year, as many as 68% of Latvian students agree with these statements (see charts Nr.5a-b below). This indicates that Swedish students use and have the possibility to use English language and also their knowledge of English grammar more often than Latvian students.



3.2.7 Students' ideas about future use of English grammar

Regarding students' opinion on future ways of use for knowledge of English grammar both the Latvian and the Swedish students state that they believe they will have use for it in future studies (Latvian 60%, Swedish 90%) along with the use for English grammar knowledge when travelling (Latvian 72%, Swedish 83%), followed by the use for English grammar knowledge in future work (Latvian 50%, Swedish 54%). 29% of the students from both countries find that they will have use for their knowledge of English grammar in their spare time interests. 29% of the Swedish students and 12% of the Latvian students find that they will have use of English grammar knowledge when learning another language. (see charts Nr.16a-b in appendix Nr.5).

This shows that both Latvian and Swedish students find that they will have use for their knowledge of English grammar in their future studies, when travelling and in their future work as well as in their spare time interests.

3.2.8 Students' attitude towards the aspects which are important to know in English grammar

From the students' answers concerning what is important to know in English grammar we see the following: as the most important aspect Latvian students (69%) recognise knowing the rules and how to use them (64% of Swedish students agree on this), along with the ability to use correct grammatical forms in speech, to which 56% of the Swedish students agree. However, 69% of Swedish students and 40% of Latvian students consider the ability to express themselves grammatically correctly to be most important. 55% of Latvian students and 62% of Swedish students state the ability to use correct grammatical forms in writing important. For 41% of the Latvians students and for 39% of the Swedish students it is important to be able to detect and correct their own grammatical mistakes. A minority of both Swedish students (29%) and Latvian students (21%) find grammar knowledge to be of minor importance compared to the ability to communicate. Only 18% of the Swedish students and 29% of the Latvian students find the explicit knowledge of grammar rules important (see charts Nr.17a-b in appendix Nr.5).

This shows that both Swedish and Latvian students find the ability to express themselves grammatically correctly in speech and writing and the knowledge of the grammatical rules along with the knowledge how to use them as well as the ability to detect and correct their own mistakes more important than the knowledge of the precise grammatical rules.

3.3. Teacher interviews

Three teachers from each country were interviewed and will further on be called LV1, LV2 and LV3 (for the Latvian teachers) and SW1, SW2 and SW3 (for the Swedish teachers). For the transcribed interviews see appendices Nr.6-11.

3.3.1 Teachers and their experience

Five of the interviewed teachers have experience teaching English as a subject at upper secondary level longer than ten years, however one of the teachers (LV2) has been teaching at upper secondary level only one year.

3.3.2 Reasons for teaching English grammar

All three Latvian teachers and two of the Swedish (SW1 and SW2) teachers state that they teach grammar to their students. The main reason stated by the Latvian teachers is that they think that grammar is the basis or structure of language and therefore is important in language acquisition. LV3 states that: "We can not make the language function if we do not know its grammar." (See appendix Nr.11). This is further explained by LV1, saying: "So, if he (*the student*, my comment) is going to learn the language, he must know the structure, because the structure is the frame on which you build things." (See appendix Nr.9)

The Swedish teachers, however, state that they teach grammar to their students because they find that at upper secondary level they are mature enough to comprehend grammatical rules and in order to give them some structures. SW1 explains this further: "Of course, English and Swedish are fairly closely related languages, so you do get a lot of grammar for free, so you do not have to think about it that much. For those parts where it differs grammar can be great help and I think that some of the students discover that by learning the rules it simplifies things a lot." (See appendix Nr.6)

Another reason is described by SW2: "I was taught grammar in school and if you really want to advance your language then I think it helps. I would like my students to have the possibility to advance and that is why I teach them grammar." (See appendix Nr.7)

In contrast to the other two Swedish teachers SW3 states that she does not teach English grammar to her students. She motivates it by saying that: "I have met so many pupils who are more or less allergic to grammar. They do not see why they should know grammar and they do not understand it. It is so abstract to them. I have found that in every class I have there is always at least a handful of students who cannot go through grammar because it only slows

them down. Their time and my time is wasted. So I have to go through the open door – which is speaking, reading and listening.” (See appendix Nr.8)

From the teachers’ answers on the question why they teach English grammar to their students can be understood that the Latvian teachers do it because they find grammar the basis of a language. Two of the Swedish teachers find that English grammar teaching simplifies language learning for students and advances their knowledge of language. However, one of the Swedish teachers does not agree with this. In short, most of the teachers of this study, both Swedish and Latvian, are positive towards teaching English grammar.

Furthermore all teachers of this study find that English grammar knowledge is important, but not the most important factor in language acquisition. Both Latvian and Swedish teachers stress that the main emphasis of their teaching is on communication.

3.3.3 The teachers’ attitude towards the effect of English grammar knowledge

The Latvian teachers point out that all of the language skills, both receptive and productive, improve due to studies of English grammar. For example LV2 states: “Their use of language becomes more fluent and they become less fearful to express themselves spontaneously. A student with good knowledge of grammar has the possibility to express themselves in greater detail and usually they also do that.” (See appendix Nr.10) In addition LV1 says:” It helps them to understand the language both written and spoken.” (See appendix Nr.9)

The Swedish teachers, on the other hand, stress that: “Their productive skills benefit from grammar knowledge – especially writing - and speaking as well.” (SW2). (See appendix Nr.7)

Regarding the teachers’ attitude towards the effect of grammar knowledge can be said that all of them find that learning grammar improves the students’ knowledge of English language.

3.3.4 The importance of knowing English grammar rules

There are no major differences in the attitude between Latvian and Swedish teachers regarding whether or not students should know the rules of grammar. The teachers from both countries stress that there are some basic rules that students should know, but that it is more important that they can apply the rules practically than to be able to cite the precise rules of grammar. Still, the teachers find the knowledge of grammar and the use of it important. One of the Swedish teachers, SW1, explains it by saying: “I think that in learning a foreign language like English it is important that the students get the grammar right to a level that

most native English speakers would find acceptable. So if they get about 80-90 per cent correct I think that is achievable and it is ok.” (See appendix Nr.7)

3.3.5 The changes in attitude towards English and English grammar

When asked whether the attitude towards English grammar and the teaching of it has changed over time both Latvian and Swedish teachers answer in the affirmative.

The Latvian teachers reveal that the attitude towards English as foreign language in general has changed, as well as the purpose for studying and teaching it, grammar included. The main changes, as the Latvian teachers say, have occurred in the goals and approach of language teaching, as well as in the attitude towards the purpose of foreign language knowledge. LV3 explains: “Oh yes, the attitude has changed. Some 15-20 years ago we were applying the translation method in all language teaching. There was a text and it was usually taken from fiction. Students were supposed to translate the text, analyse, and answer some questions. Grammar was completely separated from the texts and the rest of language teaching. We taught the rules one by one. Now, since Latvia gained its independence and later on joined the European Union, the approach to language teaching has completely changed. Now we are applying the communicative method. But it is not only one method; it is a kind of mixture of all the things we have been using before. But no more translation. Grammar is not any longer the central point of language teaching.” (See appendix Nr.11)

The Swedish teachers also find that there are differences in attitude in comparison to earlier years, but their answers differ. For example SW1 finds that: “There is less emphasis on the grammar now. It was more when I started.” (See appendix Nr.6); while SW2 says: “Yes, I think that nowadays students accept grammar more than they did in the 70’s and 80’s. In those days grammar was not so popular. Those were the days when grammar books were almost thrown out of schools and so on. Now they have returned. It might have to do with the change of attitude towards English as a language. All the students say: ‘I want to be good at English’. They know it is important.” (See appendix Nr.7). This could have to do with the difference in how long these teachers have been professionally active. SW1 has been teaching English for 11 years and speaks thus about the time round year 1996, whereas SW2 refers to earlier years.

What can be understood from the interviews with the Swedish teachers is that grammar has both lost and regained its importance during previous years. From the interviews with the Latvian teachers can be understood that grammar has lost its central role in foreign language studies to give place for communicative skills. Consequently English grammar is not any

longer taught for the reason of acquiring a foreign language but to establish successful communication.

3.3.6 The teachers' perception of their students' attitude towards English grammar

When asked about change in students' attitude towards grammar in particular, the majority of teachers from both countries say that it has not changed much. Moreover, SW2 states: "I think they have become more positive towards English in general as you find their interest for other languages has gone down, but the attitude towards grammar is more or less the same." (See appendix Nr.7). Nevertheless, most of the teachers find that they meet students who are very negative and students who are very positive towards grammar.

For the most part the teachers find that students are not very positive towards learning grammar, but see it as a necessity. For example SW1 says that: "I think that most of them see it as a necessity. There is always a small minority in a class of 30 students maybe two or three who do not see the point at all. But the rest think it is necessary. You also find in most classes one or two who love grammar and who ask for more grammar and think it is so clear and logical. But most of them think it is ok. And that has not changed over time." (See appendix Nr.6).

LV3 explains her view on students' attitude towards grammar in following way: "But when it comes to grammar it is still negative. There might be some slight difference, but it is still something they do because they have to. They don't want to but they have to. More or less they study to get the good marks, because if they use correct grammar they get higher scores at the exams." (See appendix Nr.11).

What can be observed from the interviews with teachers from both countries is that students attitude towards grammar has not changed that much over time, although they have become more positive to English in general. From the teachers point of view students see grammar as a necessity even if they do not like to study it.

3.3.7 The teachers' attitude towards National Syllabi

It should be remembered that the National Syllabi are different when it comes to grammar in Latvia and in Sweden. The grammar part is stressed more in the Latvian National Syllabus for teaching English than it is in the Swedish National Syllabus (see chapter 3.1. for more detail).

There are differences in the teachers' attitude towards the importance of English grammar expressed in the National Syllabi. This can be seen not only between Latvian and Swedish teachers but also among teachers from the same country.

SW1 expresses her attitude in following way: “I find it vague. I think generally the national syllabus is very open. Sometimes that is a problem. They do not state the level to which certain skills should be trained.” (See appendix Nr.6). SW3 agrees with this by saying: “It is too vague when it comes to the grammar part; it has to be much more specific.” (See appendix Nr.8). SW2 explains it further: “If you look at the national syllabus there is no emphasis on grammar and it actually does not say whether grammar is that important or not. I think that grammatical correctness should be a part of the syllabus.” (See appendix Nr.7).

Consequently it can be said that the Swedish teachers find the National syllabus too vague as concerns grammar in general and request some more specifications regarding grammatical correctness.

The Latvian teachers find the National syllabus both too vague and too specified as concerns the extent to which certain grammatical forms should be taught. At the same time they are satisfied with the new syllabus (that will be introduced in January 2008) because it gives them more freedom in their approach when teaching grammar (See appendices Nr.9-11).

4. Discussion

4.1 Previous research

The attitude towards the importance of English grammar and grammar teaching has changed over time. It has shifted from having the main role and being the target of all studies concerning language to losing its central role to the Natural approach. This happened due to the change of view on knowledge from behaviouristic to cognitive. During the time when emphasis was not on grammar, a different approach to language acquisition was established. However, grammar has regained its place in the language classroom even though in a different shape than before. The focus of today's knowledge of language is on communication and grammar has gained the role of providing accuracy and comprehensibility of communication.

4.2 The syllabi

The attitude towards the importance of English grammar expressed in Latvian and Swedish National Syllabi for English differs. There is more emphasis on grammar in the Latvian syllabus. This could be explained by the fact that Latvian and English are very different in terms of grammar and that in order to achieve fluency and proficiency of English language grammar teaching and learning is given weight. In total 17 grammar themes are presented and in the new syllabus even methods for teaching English language and grammar are provided. However, this does not make it very restrictive – teachers are free to choose which approach they want to use in their classrooms.

The Swedish National syllabus for English for first year upper secondary school is goal-oriented. Neither grammar nor grammatical correctness is given emphasis in the syllabus. This could be explained by the emphasis on communicative goals. Grammar competence can be interpreted to be implied in several of the goals stated, but it is not clearly written. This puts higher demands on the language teacher to interpret the goals and to find the role of grammar in the syllabus, which can have effect on the quality of teaching of English in schools across the country. It also places a great deal of pedagogical powers in the hands of textbook authors.

This has, however, not always been the case. Today's syllabus from year 2000 compared to the syllabus for compulsory school from year 1962 differs in many ways. In the previous Swedish National syllabus (Lgr62:191) grammar was given much more space – with

descriptions on the grammatical forms and the methods and examples of how to approach the teaching of English grammar. In many ways the 1962 Swedish National syllabus is similar to the Latvian National syllabus that is in operation now. This can be explained by the fact that grammar still had a central role in language teaching, which has changed over the years. Previously knowledge of grammar was evidence of certain knowledge of English language, whereas now all the concentration lies on communicative skills and the ability to get the meaning across. Grammar is given a marginal role in the present Swedish National syllabus.

It is interesting to compare the attitude towards grammar expressed in Latvian and Swedish National syllabi with the attitude towards grammar expressed in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR). Since both Latvia and Sweden are members of European Union both countries have used CEFR as guidelines in forming the National syllabi. The attitude towards grammar in CEFR is highly positive. What is also interesting is that communicative skills and competences are highly stressed in CEFR exactly like in both Latvian and Swedish National syllabi. In contrast to the Latvian National Syllabus and CEFR there is no emphasis on grammar or the importance of grammatical correctness expressed in clear statements in the Swedish syllabus. This makes the Swedish National syllabus from the perspective of grammar importance somewhat vague, which has been criticised by Jörgen Tholin, who accuses the Swedish National syllabus of being both vague and possible to interpret in many different ways (depending on the teachers' competence) and of being without content relevant for the subject concerned (Tholin 2005:221).

4.3 Students' questionnaires

The students' questionnaires in Latvia and Sweden gave interesting results on the attitude towards the importance of English grammar. Surprisingly enough the majority of students from both countries find it important and would choose to study grammar if given a free choice. This could be interpreted as positive attitude towards grammar knowledge or rather a high awareness of the positive consequences of grammar knowledge in language acquisition.

This is interesting when put in comparison to the reasons that students give for studying English grammar. The majority of students from both countries state it improves their knowledge of English language and that it helps them to express themselves grammatically correctly. Alarmingly high is also the frequency to which students from both countries state that they study grammar because it is compulsory, but this is not surprising.

Consequently, it can be said that students from both countries find grammar studies important both due to the progress and accuracy in their language proficiency, but also because it is compulsory.

Half of the Swedish students (52%) value their knowledge of grammar of being good or very good, whereas the majority of Latvian students (61%) find that their knowledge of English grammar is less than satisfactory or poor. It would have been interesting to do a grammar test with the students from both countries in order to find out whether their self-evaluations correspond to reality, but that is beyond the scope of this study.

Consequently, the Swedish students value their knowledge of English grammar higher than Latvian students, though Latvian students perceive that they study English grammar more often than the Swedish students. It is also interesting that the results show that Swedish students are to a higher degree exposed to English language outside school and thus also use their knowledge of grammar more often.

The students from both countries find the ability to express themselves grammatically correctly in speech and writing more important than the knowledge of the precise grammatical rules. A majority of all students believe that they will have future use for their grammar knowledge.

In total there are no major differences in attitude towards English grammar – the students from both countries have a positive attitude towards the importance of it, the future use for it. No major differences were found in the students' attitude regarding the aspects of grammar that they find important in language acquisition along with the ways of acquiring those. The differences occur in exposure to English language and own use of English outside school and thus also self-evaluation of grammar knowledge.

4.4 Interviews with teachers

Regarding the teachers' attitude towards the importance of English grammar it can be said that there are no major differences between Swedish and Latvian teachers. The majority is positive towards the importance of English grammar, but stress that grammar is not as central in language teaching as it used to be before. Latvian teachers state that both students' productive and perceptive skills benefit from grammar studies, while Swedish teachers stress the positive impact on the accuracy of productive skills. This could be explained by the fact that Latvian students are not exposed to authentic English to the same extent as Swedish students and that due the structural differences between Latvian and English, the perceptive skills benefit along with the productive skills.

What is interesting though is that teachers from both countries find the National Syllabi too vague in their guidelines for teaching grammar. This is not surprising in the case of Swedish teachers, because some more specification regarding the importance of grammatical correctness in writing could indeed be requested. However, though the Latvian syllabus has a special chapter on grammar themes, the Latvian teachers still call for more specification regarding the extent to which grammatical skills should be trained.

5. Concluding summary

The attitude towards the importance of English grammar and grammar teaching expressed in the theories has changed over time. It has shifted from having the main role and being the target of all studies concerning language to losing its central role. The focus on today's knowledge of language is on communication and grammar has gained the role of providing accuracy and comprehensibility of communication.

There are differences in attitude towards the importance of English grammar expressed in the Latvian and Swedish National syllabi. The attitude towards the importance of English grammar expressed in Latvian National syllabus is more positive than the attitude expressed in Swedish National syllabus. The Latvian National syllabus like the Common European Framework of Reference is specific regarding grammatical correctness and knowledge of grammar as well as the contents of grammar courses. The Swedish National syllabus lacks this emphasis.

In total there are no major differences in attitude towards English grammar among students from Latvia and Sweden. Students from both countries have a positive attitude towards the importance of knowledge of English grammar. The students from both countries find the ability to express themselves grammatically correctly in speech and writing more important than the knowledge of the precise grammatical rules. A majority of all students believe that they will have future use for their grammar knowledge. The differences occur in exposure to English language and use of English outside school and thus also self-evaluation of grammar knowledge.

Almost all teachers from both countries are positive towards the importance of English grammar, but stress that grammar is not the central part in language teaching as it used to be before. Despite the differences in the National syllabi teachers from both countries find the National Syllabi too vague in their guidelines for teaching grammar and call for some more specification.

Consequently, the attitude towards the importance of English grammar is positively expressed in the theories, in Latvian National syllabus and in CEFR as well as among teachers and students in Latvia and in Sweden.

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Age_____

Boy Girl

Study programme: _____

Hi,
through this questionnaire I would like to find out *Your opinion* towards the importance of English grammar. Read the questions carefully and choose the answer that suits you best. In some of the questions you may choose several alternative answers. Good luck!

1.How often do you hear authentic spoken English
(apart from lessons in English at school)?

several times a day every day every week a few times a month a few times a year

2.How often are you exposed to authentic written English
(apart from lessons in English at school)?

several times a day every day every week a few times a month a few times a year

3.How often do you use English (spoken and written) outside English lessons at school?

several times a day every day every week a few times a month a few times a year

4.How often do you have lessons in English at school?

every other week once a week twice a week 3-4 times a week more often than 3-4 times a week

5. How often do you study English grammar at school?

- every English lesson once a week once every second week a few times a month a few times in a term

6. Would you like to study English grammar more often?

- yes, a lot more yes, some more lessons I like it the way it is no, there are too many grammar lessons already no

7. Think about the way you learn English grammar. Which of the alternatives would you consider the best way of learning the rules of English grammar? You may mark several alternatives.

I learn English grammar by:

- Learning the rules by heart
- Learning the rules and sample sentences (examples)
- Reading a lot of examples and guessing the rule
- Learning ready phrases
- Building new sentences after a given pattern
- Translating to and from English

8. Why do you study English grammar? You may mark several alternatives.

I study English grammar because:

- grammar improves my knowledge of English
- it helps me to express myself correctly
- it helps me to understand spoken and written English
- I like English grammar
- my teacher tells me to

9. How important do you find it is to study English grammar?

- very important important not that very important not important at all I do not know

10. How good do you consider your skills in English grammar?

- very good good satisfactory less than satisfactory poor

11. If you think about your skills of English grammar, how often do you use them outside school?

- very often often sometimes seldom never

12. Do you find that your knowledge of English improves due to studies of English grammar?

- yes, very much so yes, I do believe so yes, a little no, I do not think so no, not at all

13. Do you think that you will have use of English grammar in future? You may mark several alternatives.

- yes, in my future studies
- yes, if I will study some more languages
- yes, in my future work
- yes, when I will travel
- yes, in my spare time (hobbies)
- no, not at all
- another answer: _____

14. What do you think is important regarding knowledge of English grammar? You may mark several alternatives.

It is important:

- Knowing the rules
- Knowing the rules and how to use them practically
- Being able to express myself grammatically correctly
- Being able to use correct grammatical forms in speech
- Being able to use correct grammatical forms in writing
- Being able to detect and correct ones own mistakes
- It is not that very important to have knowledge of grammar, it is more important to be able to communicate
- Other answer: _____

15. Would you choose to study English grammar if you were given the choice?

yes

no

Because _____

Thank you for participating!

Ålder: _____

Kille Tjej

Gymnasieprogram: _____

Hej!

Med hjälp av denna enkät vill jag få reda på *Din attityd* gentemot engelsk grammatik. Läs frågorna och kryssa (X) för det alternativ som passar dig bäst! I vissa frågor får du välja fler än ett svarsalternativ. Lycka till!

1. Hur ofta exponeras du för autentisk talad engelska

(utanför skolundervisningen i engelska)?

flera gånger om dagen varje dag varje vecka några gånger i månaden några gånger om året

2. Hur ofta exponeras du för autentisk skriven engelska

(utanför skolundervisningen i engelska)?

flera gånger om dagen varje dag varje vecka några gånger i månaden några gånger om året

3. Hur ofta använder du engelska i tal och/eller skrift (utanför skolundervisningen i engelska)?

flera gånger om dagen varje dag varje vecka några gånger i månaden några gånger om året

4. Hur ofta har du lektioner i engelska?

var annan vecka en gång i veckan två gånger i veckan tre till fyra gånger i veckan oftare än 3-4 gånger i veckan

5. Hur ofta får du undervisning i engelsk grammatik?

- varje lektion i engelska en gång i veckan var annan vecka några gånger i månaden Några gånger i terminen

6. Skulle du vilja få mer undervisning i engelsk grammatik?

- ja, mycket mer ja, några fler lektioner jag tycker att det är bra som det är nej, det är redan för mycket nej

7. Tänk på hur du lär dig engelsk grammatik. Vilka av följande alternativ upplever du är bästa sättet för dig att lära dig grammatikreglerna på? Du får välja flera alternativ.

Jag lär mig bäst genom att:

- Lära mig grammatikreglerna utantill
- Lära mig reglerna och exempelmeningar
- Läsa många exempelmeningar och gissa mig fram till reglerna
- Lära mig vissa fraser som jag kan använda för att uttrycka vissa saker
- Göra drillövningar (bilda egna meningar och former efter mall)
- Översätta texter från svenska till engelska och omvänt

8. Varför lär du dig engelsk grammatik? Du får välja flera av alternativen!

Jag lär mig grammatik för att:

- kunskaper i grammatik förbättrar mina kunskaper i engelska språket
- det hjälper mig att uttrycka mig mer korrekt
- det hjälper mig att förstå skriven och talad engelska
- jag tycker om engelsk grammatik
- för att min lärare kräver det

9. Hur viktigt upplever du att det är att lära sig engelsk grammatik?

- mycket viktigt viktigt inte jätteviktigt inte alls viktigt jag vet inte

10. Hur bra är dina kunskaper i engelsk grammatik enligt din uppfattning?

- mycket bra bra helt ok kunde vara bättre inte alls bra

11. Hur ofta har du användning av dina kunskaper i engelsk grammatik utanför skolan? (t.ex. i fritiden, i dina hobbies, vänner etc.)

- mycket ofta ofta ibland sällan nästan aldrig

12. Upplever du att dina kunskaper i engelska språket blir bättre ju mer du läser engelsk grammatik?

- Ja, mycket Ja, jag tror det Ja, något Nej, jag tror inte det Nej, inte alls

13. Tror du att du kommer att ha användning av dina kunskaper i engelsk grammatik i framtiden? Du får välja fler än ett alternativ!

- Ja, i mina framtida studier
- Ja, när jag lär mig andra främmande språk
- Ja, i mitt framtida arbete
- Ja, när jag reser
- Ja, i mina fritidsintressen
- Nej, jag tror inte det
- Annat: _____

14. Vad tycker du är viktigt att kunna beträffande engelsk grammatik? Du får välja fler än ett alternativ!

Det är viktigt att:

- kunna reglerna
- kunna använda reglerna i praktiken
- kunna uttrycka mig grammatiskt rätt
- kunna använda rätta grammatiska former i tal
- kunna använda rätta grammatiska former i skrift
- kunna upptäcka och rätta sina egna fel genom kunskap av grammatikreglerna
- grammatikkunskaperna är inte så viktiga, det är viktigare att kunna kommunicera
- annat: _____

15. Skulle du välja bort undervisning i engelsk grammatik om du själv fick välja? Varför?

Ja

Nej

Därför att _____

Tack för din medverkan!

6. Vai Tu vēlētos, lai Tev angļu valodas gramatiku māca biežāk?

- jā, daudz biežāk jā, mazliet biežāk nē, ir labi, kā ir tagad nē, jau tā ir par daudz nē

7. Kā Tu vislabāk apgūsti angļu valodas gramatiku? Atzīmē sev pieņemamos atbilžu variantus!

Es vislabāk apgūstu angļu valodas gramatiku:

- iemācoties gramatikas likumus no galvas
- iemācoties gramatikas likumus un to pielietojumu teikumos
- lasot paraugteikumus un uzminot gramatisko likumu
- iemācoties gatavas frāzes
- veidojot teikumus pēc parauga
- tulkojot tekstus no latviešu valodas angļu valodā un otrādi

8. Kādēļ Tu mācies angļu valodas gramatiku? Atzīmē sev pieņemamos atbilžu variantus!

Es mācos angļu valodas gramatiku, jo:

- tā uzlabo manu angļu valodas prasmi
- tā palīdz man lietot pareizu angļu valodu
- tā palīdz man saprast angļu valodu rakstos un runā
- man patīk angļu valodas gramatika
- skolā man to prasa

9. Cik svarīgi, Tavuprāt, ir mācīties angļu valodas gramatiku?

- ļoti svarīgi svarīgi mazsvarīgi nav svarīgi nezinu

10. Kādas ir Tavas zināšanas angļu valodas gramatikā?

- ļoti labas labas pietiekamas viduvējas vājas

11. Cik bieži Tu pielieto savas angļu valodas gramatikas zināšanas ārpus mācību stundām?

- ļoti bieži bieži reizēm reti gandrīz nekad

12. Vai Tu jūti, ka, apgūstot vairāk angļu valodas gramatiku, uzlabojas Tavas angļu valodas zināšanas?

- jā, ļoti jā, man tā šķiet jā, nedaudz nē, man tā nešķiet nē, nemaz

13. Vai Tavām angļu valodas gramatikas zināšanām būs pielietojums arī nākotnē? Atzīmē sev pieņemamos atbilžu variantus!

- jā, turpmākajās studijās
 jā, ja macīšos vēl kādu svešvalodu
 jā, manā nākotnes darbā
 jā, ceļojot
 jā, mana brīvā laika intresēs
 nē, es tam neticu
 cita atbilde: _____

14. Kādas angļu valodas gramatikas prasmes ir visnepieciešamākās angļu valodas pielietošanai? Atzīmē sev pieņemamos atbilžu variantus!

Ir svarīgi:

- zināt gramatikas likumus
- prast gramatikas likumus pielietot praksē
- prast lietot gramatiski pareizas formas
- prast gramatiski pareizi izteikties runā
- prast gramatiski pareizi izteikties rakstos
- atrast un izlabot savas kļūdas
- nav svarīgi zināt gramatikas likumus, svarīgāk ir spēt komunicēties
- cita atbilde: _____

15. Ja Tev būtu brīva izvēle, vai tu mācītos angļu valodas gramatiku? Kāpēc? Paskaidro!

Jā

Nē

Jo _____

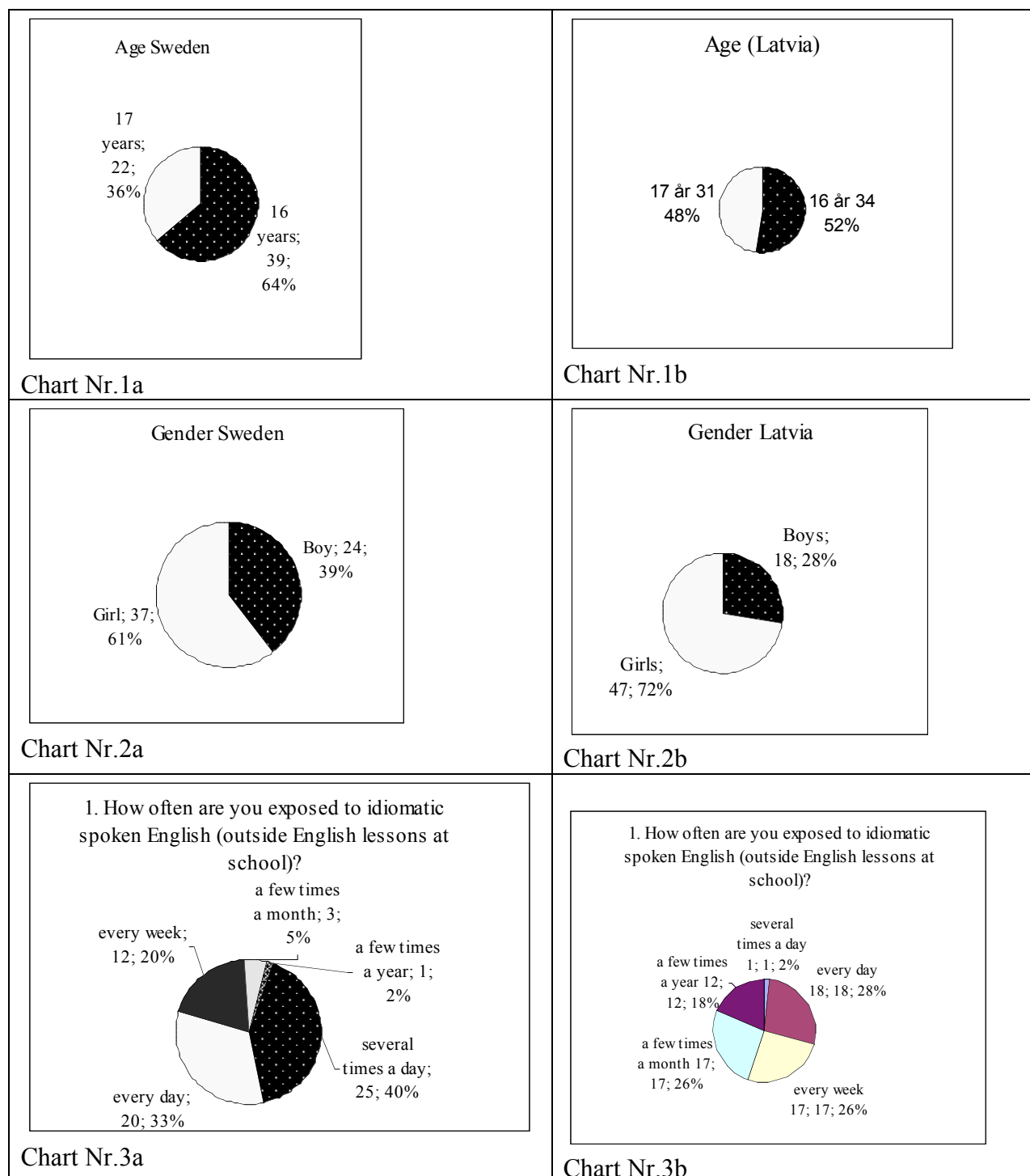
Paldies par atsauksmi!

Interview questions

1. How many years have you been teaching English? For how long time at upper secondary level?
2. Do you teach English grammar to your students? Why?
3. What would you say is your attitude towards teaching/ learning English grammar?
4. Do you find grammar knowledge important in language acquisition? Why, why not?
5. What effect would you say grammar teaching has on students' language acquisition?
6. If you think about English grammar teaching and learning during the years you have been working as a teacher, would you say that the attitude towards grammar teaching and learning has changed? If yes, in what ways?
7. What would you say about student's attitude towards English grammar? Has that changed over time? In what matters?
8. What would you say would be your attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge? (students'; expressed in the standards of National syllabi for English)
9. Do you find it important, that your students know the grammatical rules of English language? Why, why not?
10. What is your attitude towards the instructions regarding teaching and goal achievement expressed in the national syllabus for English language?

Appendix Nr.5

Combined totals over the results of student questionnaire from Sweden and Latvia. The results in the left hand column are from the Swedish survey (indicated with the letter a) and in the right hand column from the Latvian survey (indicated with the letter b) .



2. How often are you exposed to authentic written English (apart from lessons in English at school)?

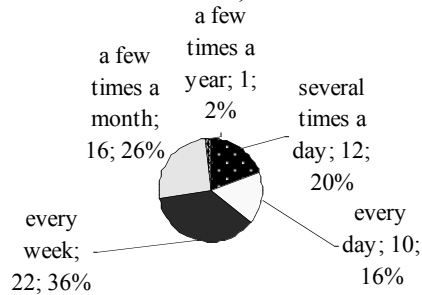


Chart Nr.4a

2. How often are you exposed to authentic written English (outside English lessons at school)?

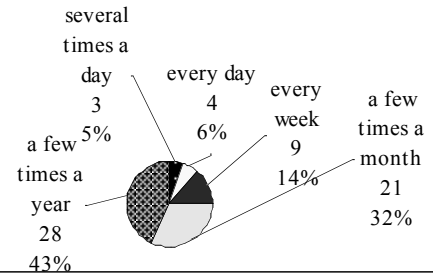


Chart Nr.4b

3. How often do you use spoken and/or written English (outside English lessons at school)? (Sweden)

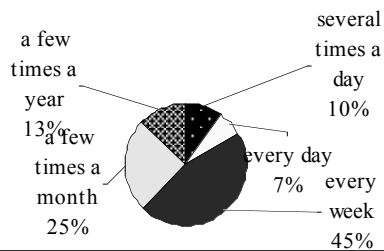


Chart Nr.5a

3. How often do you use spoken and/or written English (outside English lessons at school)? (Latvia)

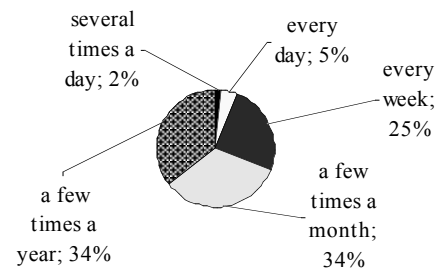


Chart Nr.5b

4. How often do you have lessons in English?



Chart Nr.6a

4. How often do you have lessons in English?

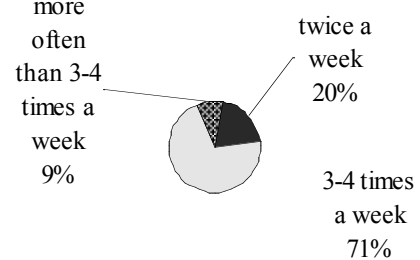


Chart Nr.6b

5. How often do you study English grammar?

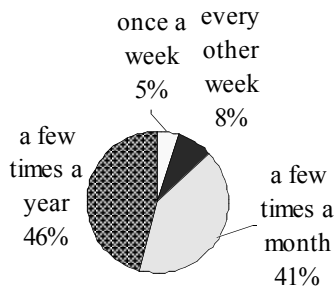


Chart Nr.7a

5. How often do you study English grammar?

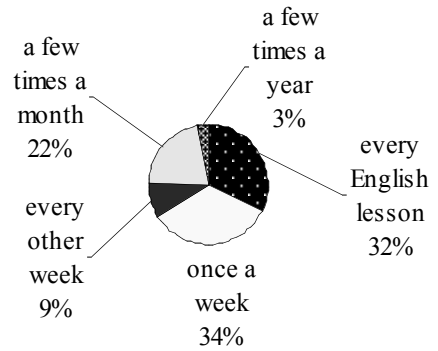


Chart Nr 7b

6. Would you like to study English grammar more often?

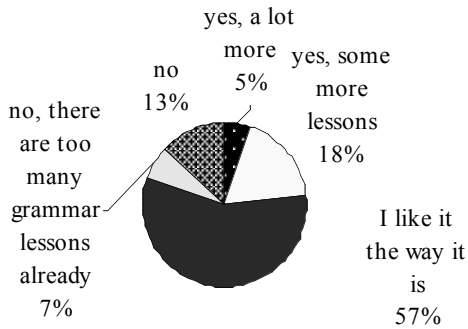


Chart Nr.8a

6. Would you like to study English grammar more often?

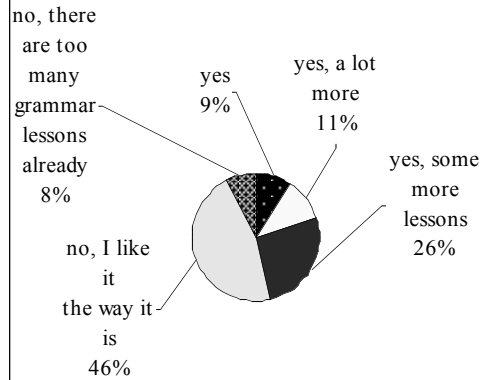


Chart Nr.8b

9. How important do you find it is to study English grammar? (Sweden)

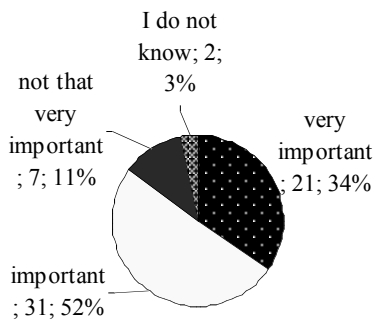


Chart Nr.11a

9. How important do you think it is to study English grammar?(Latvia)

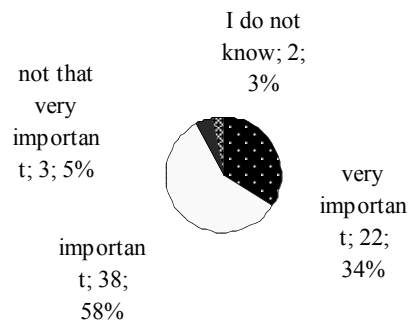


Chart Nr.11b

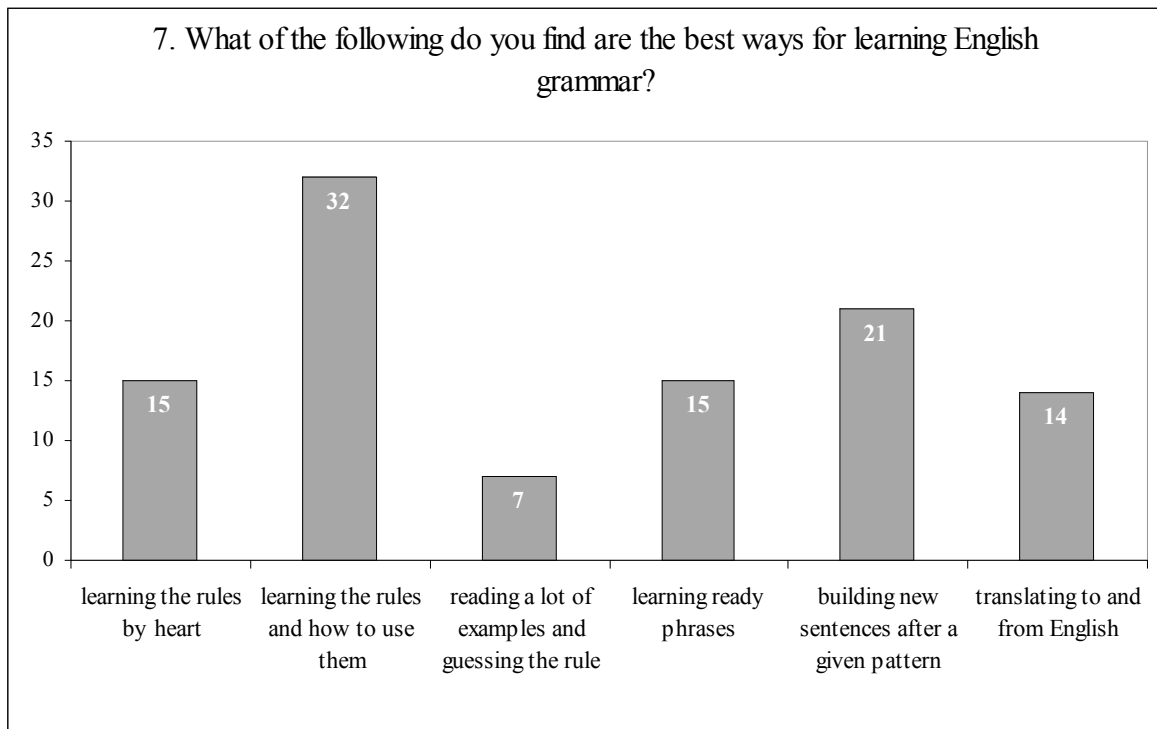


Chart Nr.9a

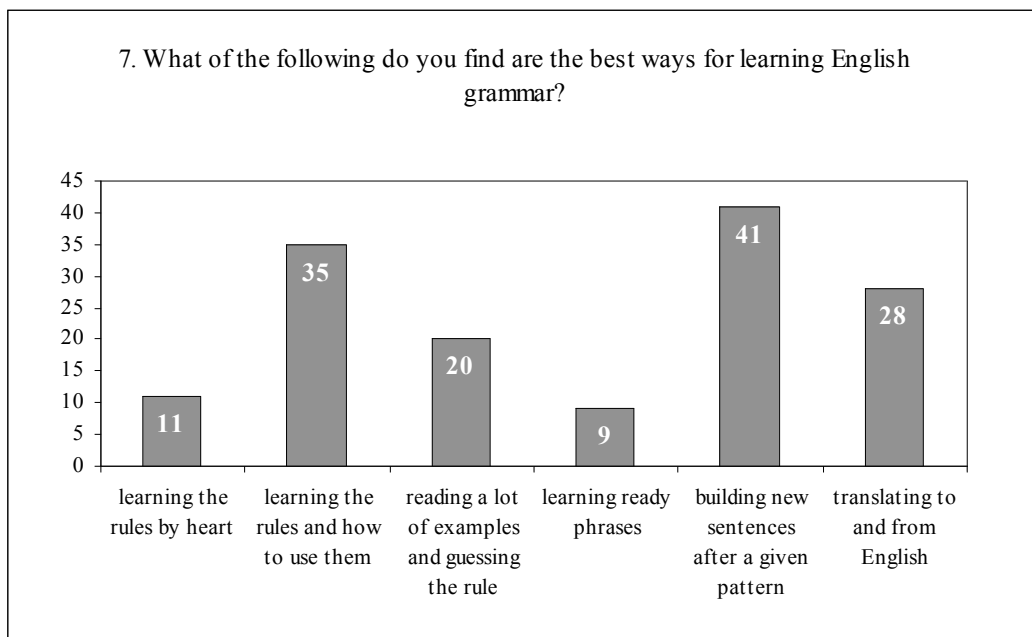


Chart Nr.9b

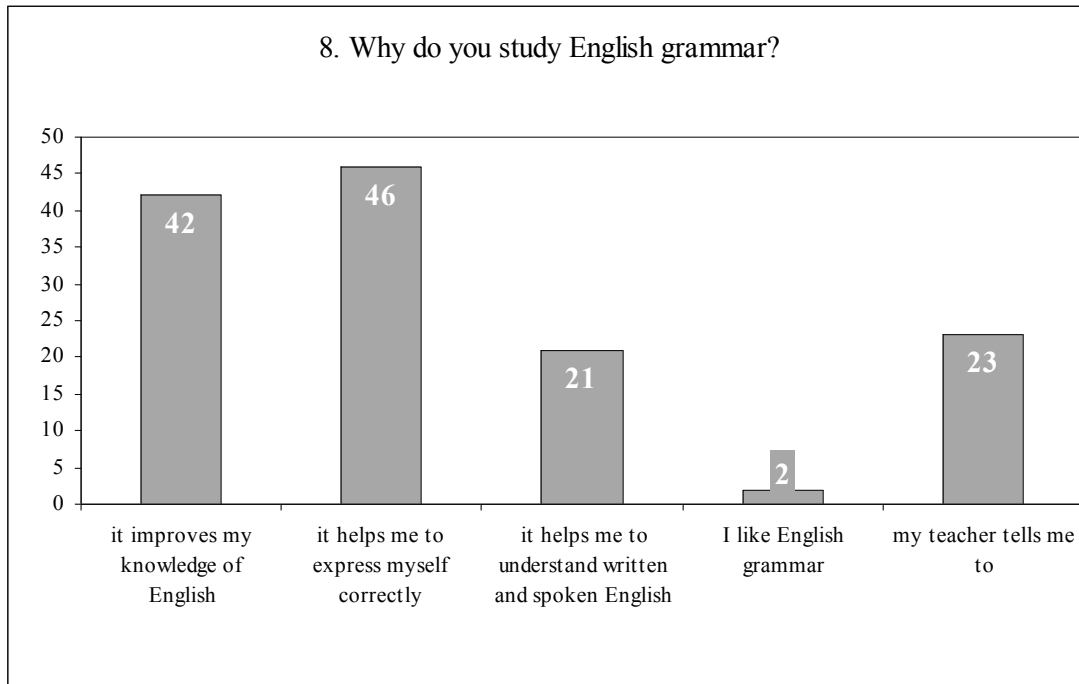


Chart Nr.10a

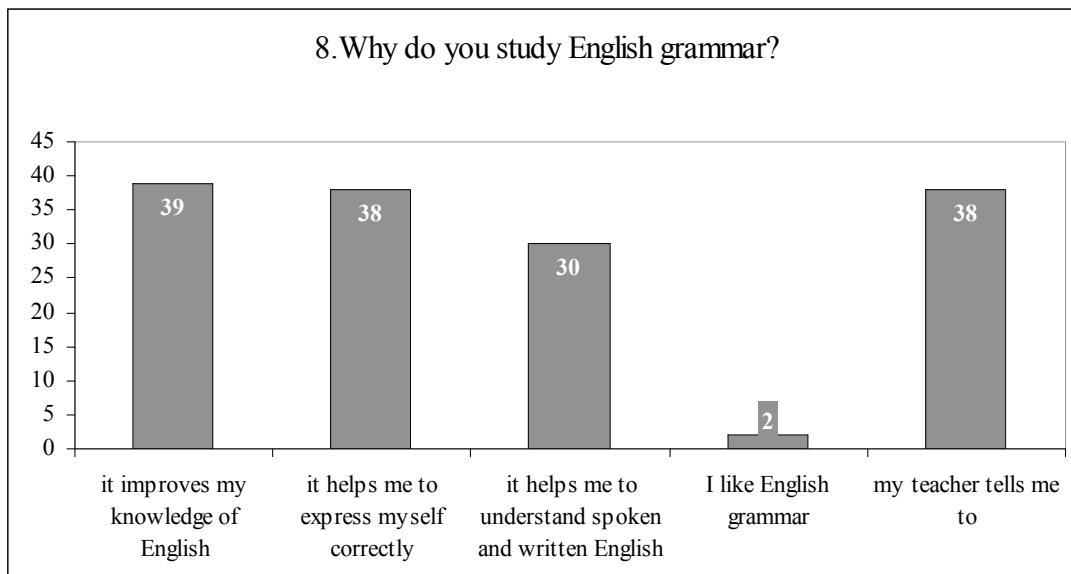


Chart Nr.10b

10. How good do you consider your knowledge of English grammar?

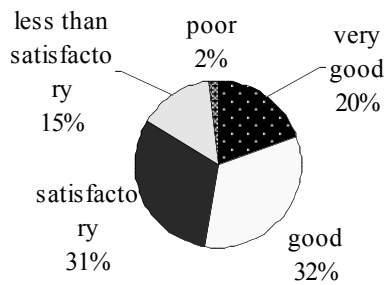


Chart Nr.12a

10. How good do you consider your knowledge of English grammar?

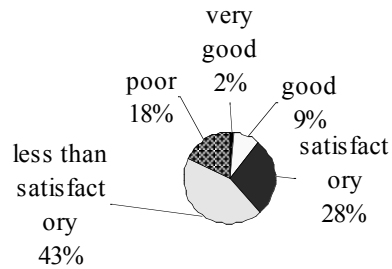


Chart Nr.12b

11. To what extent do you use your knowledge of English grammar outside school?

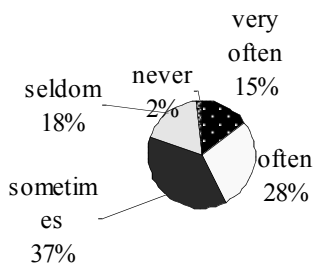


Chart Nr.13a

11. To what extent do you use your knowledge of English grammar outside school?

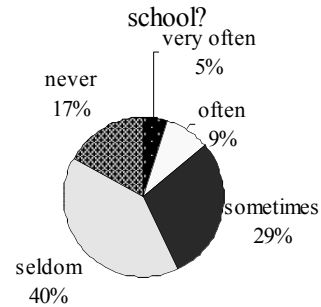


Chart Nr.13b

12. Do you find that your knowledge of English improves due to studies of English grammar?

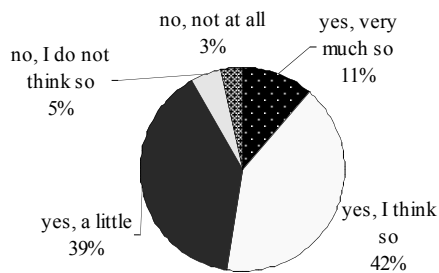


Chart 14a

12. Do you find that your knowledge of English improves due to studies of English grammar?

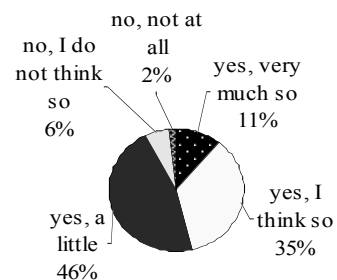


Chart Nr.14b

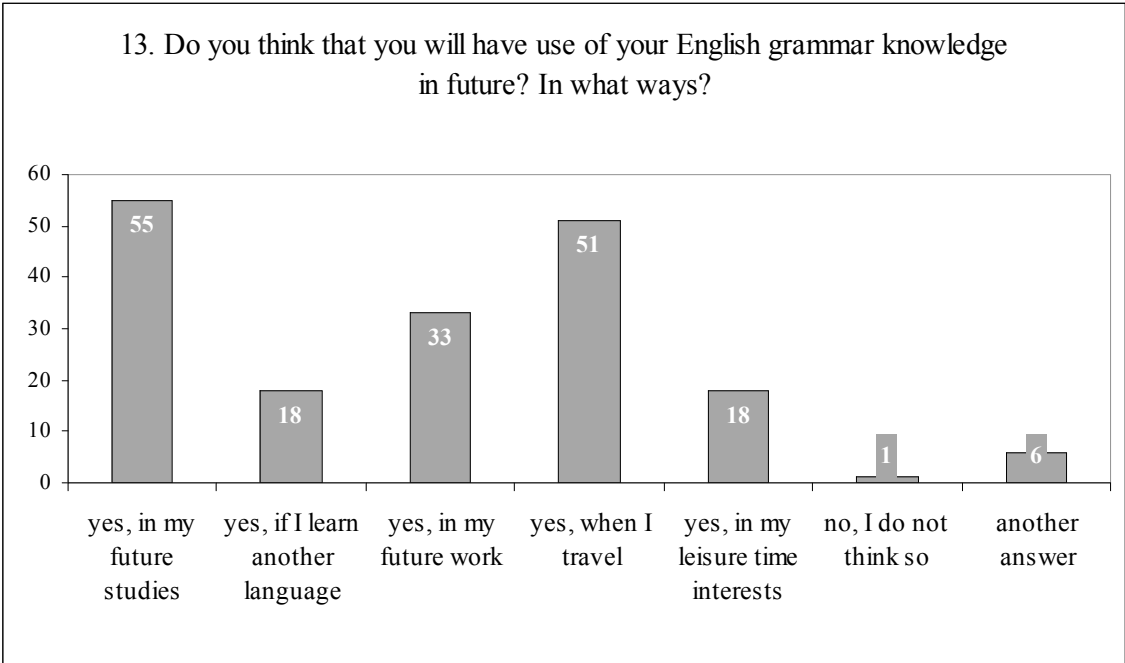


Chart Nr.16a

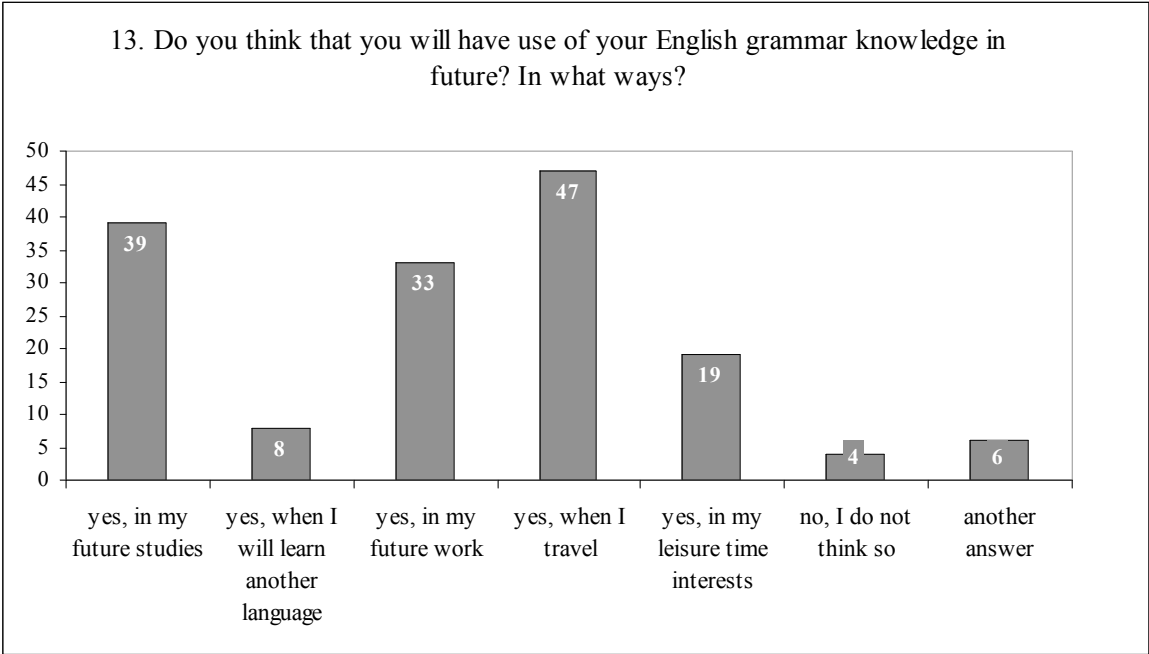


Chart Nr.16b

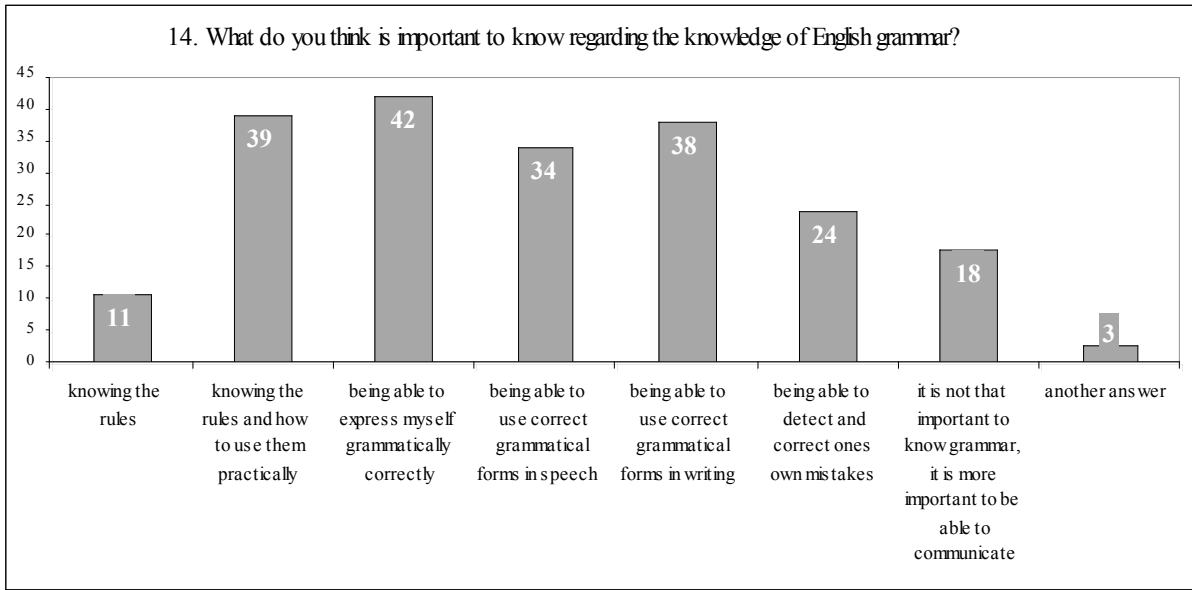


Chart Nr.17a

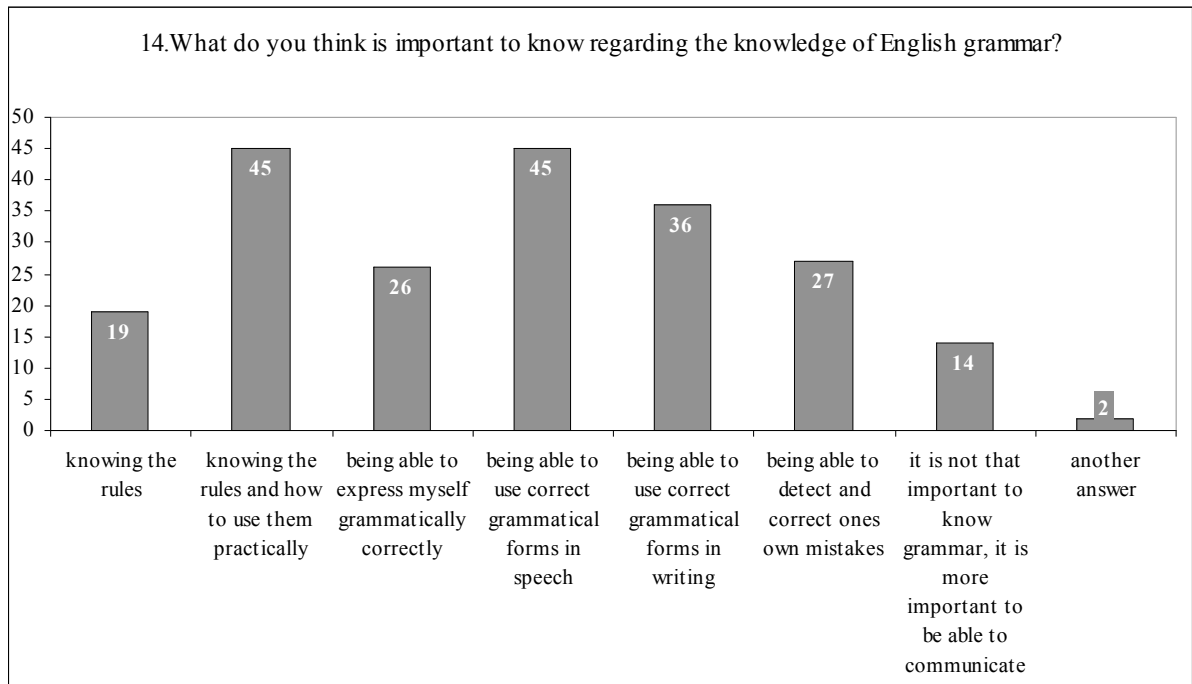


Chart Nr.17b

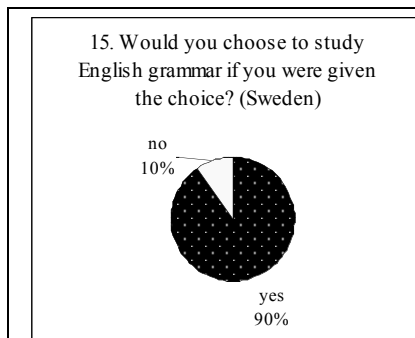


Chart Nr.18a

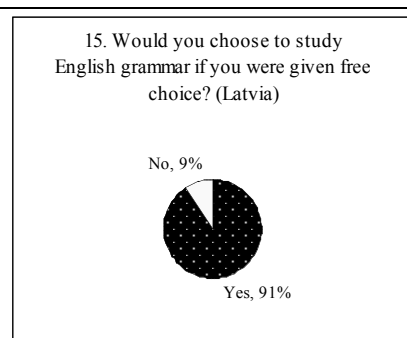


Chart Nr.18b

Teachers Interview SW1

1. How many years have you been teaching English? For how long time at upper secondary level?
I have been teaching English for 11 years. And all the time at upper secondary level.
2. Do you teach English grammar to your students? Why?
Yes, I do. I think that in order to learn a language for someone beyond the age of say 10 or so, you do need to learn some structures. And they have a huge advantage while learning English that they hear a lot of authentic spoken English and also authentic written English is available to them and they do not have a problem with it. But I think that you still need some of the structures with certain parts of the grammar.
3. What would you say is your attitude towards teaching/ learning English grammar?
Well, I never particularly enjoyed learning grammar, but I could always see the point in it. I think that the students have the same attitude – they do not particularly enjoy it, but some of them do not like it at all, but most of them can see the point of it and it is necessary. Of course, English and Swedish are fairly closely related languages, so you do get a lot of grammar for free, so you do not have to think about it that much. For those parts where it differs grammar can be great help and I think that some of the students discover that by learning the rules it simplifies things a lot.
4. Do you find grammar knowledge important in language acquisition? Why, why not?
I think it is in some ways. It is not as important as communicative skills. Communication is always more important. There are students who are very good at grammar but as soon as it comes to expressing themselves they do that in a stiff way both orally and in writing and it become in a way unnatural and in a way hard to understand. Anyway, grammar knowledge is not the most important thing but it does matter.
5. What effect would you say grammar teaching has on students' language acquisition?
Well, I think it does. Often students say that they do not apply the rules that they just listen to what sounds right. They do not think that grammar learning has so much effect on their language acquisition. I think when it comes to learning a language at beginner's level and if it is another language (German, French or Spanish) and you do not hear the language as much and you simply need the rules in order to understand and use the language. I think that this is not the case with English, especially at this level. I think that the key factor now for them is learning the words and to expand their vocabulary.
6. If you think about English grammar teaching and learning during the years you have been working as a teacher, would you say that the attitude towards grammar teaching and learning has changed? If yes, in what ways?
Yes, not a lot, but a little. There is less emphasis on the grammar now. It was more when I started. I do not think that students' attitude towards learning grammar has changed. I think it is about the same. There are of course some students who love it but most of them do not. So I think it is about the same.
7. What would you say about student's attitude towards English grammar? Has that changed over time? In what matters?
I think that most of them see it as a necessity. There is always a small minority in a class of 30 students maybe two or three who do not see the point at all. But the rest think it is necessary. You also find in most classes one or two who love grammar and who ask for more grammar and think it is so clear and logical. But most of them think it is ok. And that has not changed over time.

8. What would you say would be your attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge? (students'; expressed in the standards of National syllabi for English)

It is important to be able to apply the rules. I mean unless you are a teacher of English it is not really necessary to be able to explain the rules. It is of course always helpful if you know the rules or at least some of the rules, especially when it comes to rules of word order, because that is what Swedish students often get wrong. I think that students' attitude varies in this question. Some find that there is no point in knowing grammar and some love it. The attitude expressed in the National syllabus are positive towards grammar, they do not say that you do not have to teach grammar, but no exact words about this. But they do not really encourage it a lot, that is clear.

9. Do you find it important, that your students know the grammatical rules of English language? Why, why not?

No, I would not say that, as long as they can apply them. You are rarely going to find a foreigner who speaks the foreign language completely grammatically correct. But then again you would not find a native who speaks their native language completely grammatical either. I think that in learning a foreign language like English it is important that the students get the grammar right to a level that most native English speakers would find acceptable. So if they get about 80-90 per cent correct I think that is achievable and it is ok.

10. What is your attitude towards the instructions regarding teaching and goal achievement expressed in the national syllabus for English language?

I find it vague. I think generally the national syllabus is very open. Sometimes that is a problem. They do not state the level to which certain skills should be trained. But then again I do have the national exams to go after and adjust the level to which their knowledge and skills should be developed. I have experience of working abroad and there the syllabuses are much more specified. I think that too much specification can become too unbending and rigid.

Teachers Interview SW2

1. How many years have you been teaching English? For how long time at upper secondary level?

I have been teaching English since 1972, so it is 35 years. More than 20 years at upper secondary level.

2. Do you teach English grammar to your students? Why?

Oh, yes I do. Especially at the A-course. Because I think that the age they have reached now is that they have to have some rules. If they have not had them before they are mature enough to have them now in order to advance their language. I think it is important, not for all of them, but I give them the chance.

3. What would you say is your attitude towards teaching/ learning English grammar?

Well, I am so old and probably have a rather positive attitude towards grammar. I was taught grammar in school and if you really want to advance your language then I think it helps. I would like my students to have to possibility to advance and that is why I teach them grammar. And those who do not want it – they can reject it, but I would like them to choose to advance. I use grammar books and when I talked to them about certain grammatical mistakes that they make or other grammatical forms they could use to express themselves more clearly I always make them look in the grammar book. To make them realize that it is a great help to use. I do not want them to say later that they have never looked into a grammar book and I do not know how to use it.

4. Do you find grammar knowledge important in language acquisition? Why, why not?

Yes, I think it is important if you want to advance your language and especially if you live in Sweden. It is another thing if you live in the country where you hear and use your language every day. But here we have English twice a week at school and I think if you are really to develop your language skills then you profit by knowing grammar.

5. What effect would you say grammar teaching has on students' language acquisition?

I think that the ambitious students benefit from it and I do see that as a teacher, but the lazy ones do not care and are not interested in grammar part and avoid it. Still I find very few who reject grammar completely. Most of them try to learn and use grammar, but some of them are lazy about it. Their productive skills benefit from grammar knowledge – specially writing and speaking as well.

6. If you think about English grammar teaching and learning during the years you have been working as a teacher, would you say that the attitude towards grammar teaching and learning has changed? If yes, in what ways?

Yes, I think that nowadays students accept grammar more than they did in the 70's and 80's. In those days grammar was not so popular. Those were the days when grammar books were almost thrown out of schools and so on. Now they have returned. It might have to do with the change of attitude towards English as a language. All the students say I want to be good at English. They know it is important. But now grammar is back. Still, students think they are much better than they actually are – because they are good at the receptive skills and talking, but writing is the big trouble.

7. What would you say about student's attitude towards English grammar? Has that changed over time? In what matters?

As I said I think their attitude is better. They have realized the difference between written and spoken language. You see in English you cannot write as you speak. Nowadays I hardly hear the question about why I as a teacher do not accept certain things in writing though they have heard it in films and television. Most of them have realized this difference, but not all of them of course. This attitude was much more common some 15 years ago. I think they have become

more positive towards English in general as you find their interest for other languages has gone down, but the attitude towards grammar is more or less the same.

8. What would you say would be your attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge? (students'; expressed in the standards of National syllabi for English)

Yes I think grammar is important in order to become really good at English, I think that grammar is important to know. Some students speak quite frequently about that it is good that I explain grammar, because nobody has explained it in their earlier years at school and now they finally realize how language is put together only at upper secondary level. If you look at the national syllabus there is no emphasis on grammar and it actually does not say whether grammar is that important or not. On the other hand if you look at the national tests in English, especially the grammar part it is not that important if you look at it, because it really come up only in the essay part. I find that the students' writing is not that good nowadays. Perhaps more grammar is necessary for them to understand that they need to be more correct when they write.

9. Do you find it important, that your students know the grammatical rules of English language? Why, why not?

I think that knowing the rules is important for the students who want to be able to correct themselves. In general I think it is more important that they know how to apply the rules. I think you should know the basic rules and how to use them.

10. What is your attitude towards the instructions regarding teaching and goal achievement expressed in the national syllabus for English language?

Grammar is not important in the syllabus. I think they should stress it a little more. When you come to the steps from A to B, it is really big gap. I think that grammatical correctness should be a part of the syllabus. Because if you look at the Common European Framework (CEF) and the Swedish syllabuses – the difference between steps ABC in CEF are not as big as the difference is in our syllabus. So I think there are changes to be made.

1. How many years have you been teaching English? For how long time at upper secondary level?

I have been teaching for about 15 years. Eight years at upper secondary school and I have also been teaching adults.

2. Do you teach English grammar to your students? Why?

Not very much any longer. Earlier I did teach grammar a lot. More and more I do go for the natural way of learning a language.

3. What would you say is your attitude towards teaching/ learning English grammar?

I do not like it that much. I have met so many pupils who are more or less allergic to grammar. They do not see why they should know grammar and they do not understand it. It is so abstract to them. I have found that in every class I have there is always at least a handful of students who cannot go through grammar because it only makes them slow. Their time and my time is wasted. So I have to go through the open door – which is speaking, reading and listening.

4. Do you find grammar knowledge important in language acquisition? Why, why not?

In a way I think it is. Grammar is the structure of language and for an advanced learner grammar can help a lot. It is a quick way of learning a language. If you are not afraid of the non-concrete theories of grammar then it helps you as a learner, but nowadays students do not have the knowledge of grammar in general to that extent. So for them it is really abstract.

5. What effect would you say grammar teaching has on students' language acquisition?

Some students learn fast due the help grammar provides them. Linguistically interested students gain from grammar. But the majority of students are not interested in grammar. They become more correct in writing due to studies of grammar. But I would say that nowadays students' English is much better than it was years ago. Probably it is because of all the media and internet and so on. They are exposed to English all the time, so it is easier for them to snap up things.

6. If you think about English grammar teaching and learning during the years you have been working as a teacher, would you say that the attitude towards grammar teaching and learning has changed? If yes, in what ways?

Oh yes, we used to do a lot of grammar and did a lot of tests and exercises on grammar. It was almost only grammar. Nowadays we do not do so much grammar. We are looked at as almost little old fashioned and mean if we do grammar. So I have almost to apologise to my students if I am to teach grammar. It is not modern.

7. What would you say about student's attitude towards English grammar? Has that changed over time? In what matters?

When I was teaching adults – they found it very helpful, but students at school do not have the same attitude. As I said before – they do not find it is modern to learn grammar. I would say that students were more positive towards grammar before than they are nowadays.

8. What would you say would be your attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge? (students'; expressed in the standards of National syllabus for English)

It is important. It is the shortcut into a language, really. But for an average class of students I do not think they find grammar knowledge that important. You know, we have always to look to the weakest students (who have hard time learning) and that is why we do not teach a lot of grammar.

In the national syllabus they do not mention the importance of grammar. I do not think they really mention the word. They set the goals that the students should achieve but they do not talk about the ways how we should get there and that has an effect on us teachers of course.

9. Do you find it important, that your students know the grammatical rules of English language? Why, why not?

Yes I think so, especially the basic rules about simple present third person singular and so on. I do not think they should know all the rules and all the exceptions, but the basic rules they have to know, especially the forms where they often make mistakes. Also grammar rules are helpful if we come to an argument about what is wrong and what is right in written language. Then I can always go back to grammar and say – this is how it should be.

10. What is your attitude towards the instructions regarding teaching and goal achievement expressed in the national syllabus for English language?

Oh, it is far too vague. It is too vague when it comes to grammar part; it has to be much more specific. You can interpret it in many different ways.

Teacher Interview LV1

1. How many years have you been teaching English? For how long time at upper secondary level?

I have been teaching since 1973, which makes 34 years of teaching and all these years I have been teaching at upper secondary level.

2. Do you teach English grammar to your students? Why?

I do. Well, grammar is the structure of the language. So, if he is going to learn the language, he must know the structure, because the structure is the frame on which you build things. So that is why I think it is important.

3. What would you say is your attitude towards teaching/ learning English grammar?

Do you mean if I like it much, or slightly or not at all? In fact I think I like to teach grammar, because I know that it will help the students. I know that when I was young (which was a long time ago), that there was a method – not to teach grammar, but to teach the language through patterns. And the experience was that they (students) were repeating patterns and nothing has been taught to them. Certainly they can use those patterns, but when they are on their own, they are helpless. And therefore I didn't like that method and I decided that the structure of the language is very important. Maybe it is not so important to teach the subtle things (some facts or something like that), but they should have as English like to say the big picture. So that they understand the difference between English language and Latvian language and the structure, the sentence structure and those things which are important in order to form a normal sentence.

4. Do you find grammar knowledge important in language acquisition? Why, why not?

I do. Because, for example, if you take a text and they have to understand the text; I think that without the knowledge of grammar it is much more difficult to understand the text. Grammar is also to know the parts of speech. If he knows that this word is an adjective and this word is a noun and so on and so forth it is easier for him to find the essence and the meaning of the sentence. He knows which is the subject and which is the predicative and so forth and that is grammar knowledge. So he knows that the subject comes first and all these things help the student to understand text. It helps them to understand the language both written and spoken.

5. What effect would you say grammar teaching has on students' language acquisition?

Ah, you know that now we teach for two purposes. One is for life, and the other is for the examination. Certainly I think is not good. But do you want to ask me about examinations or no?

You can answer about both!

If we start about the examinations. Our centralized examinations are very complicated. This is the moment when we start to compare our national examinations to the goals set in the Common European Framework (CEF). The experts who put together our national examination (*to be taken at the end of the third year of upper secondary school – my comment*) state that the students who reach A level (*the highest out of A-F – my comment*) they reach C1 level for the standards of CEF. And I find that the level is too high for a secondary school student. The demands are too specific. But our politicians want the examination to be very serious, very difficult. And therefore, as some teachers say, we are lucky, that at our school we have five lessons a week. So we have time to teach for both life and the examination. Those teachers, who have only three lessons a week say that the last year of upper secondary school goes entirely for preparing the students for the final exam. Lately, however, they (*who put together the exam*) have understood that the texts they choose for the exam are too complicated. What our people at the education department say in the ministry is that they want this exam also for competition. The higher education establishments want to pick out the best students.

But if we talk about the requirements stated in CEF I think if the students meet the requirements, they should be given the A level of our national final examination.

Yes I think it does. Language is not only reading and understanding, it means also usage of the language. And to be able to use the language freely grammar helps a lot.

6. If you think about English grammar teaching and learning during the years you have been working as a teacher, would you say that the attitude towards grammar teaching and learning has changed? If yes, in what ways?

Yes, quite a lot. I started teaching in 1970's. The main aim of teaching the language was different. The goals we had to reach and the demands were different. My task was not to teach the language but pretend that we were teaching the language. Certainly that is too harsh. We had to teach the students to be able to work with written texts. They had to be able to read the text, to understand it and basically to read the literature. If they were going to study at higher levels, they had to be able to read the literature needed. It was not for speaking purposes and not for active usage. But then we started teaching English also for communication and the methods and the manner of teaching changed. This was when the systems changed (1990's). The approach changed because the aims and goals changed. The students had to be able not only to read, but also use the language actively – producing language.

Students. Yes, their attitude has changed. In the old days students didn't see the purpose why they should study English grammar. Those, who wanted to go on with their studies (higher educational establishments) needed the language, but it wasn't that important. The usual comment was: I shall never go abroad, I shall never get abroad, I shall never meet a foreigner. What do I need the language for? I shall never use it. And then, when the political situation changed, the attitude towards foreign languages changed completely and now everybody wanted to know the language. But you know students; they didn't want to learn just to know it. Certainly they started working harder on their language skills. If I compare myself at the time when I completed secondary school with the students I have now (first year secondary school), I could do certain things what they can now only when I was in the second or third year at upper secondary. They can speak on different themes and give book reviews freely. I could not do it at that time. The approach was different and the purpose was different.

7. What would you say about student's attitude towards English grammar? Has that changed over time? In what matters?

Certainly the attitude differs from class to class and from one student to another. We do not have plain grammar classes. I try to have lessons for all the aspects (skills – listening, reading and so on). It is not so monotonous. Maybe, when I started it was more monotonous and the training of certain skills was parted out – you know now we read, now we listen etc. But since the system has changed our methods of teaching have changed as well. When I started my teaching methods used for teaching grammar were more deductive, but now they are more inductive. The approach is different. And this keeps their interest. I do use both methods, because the deductive method helps to save time and also in classes where the knowledge of grammar is lower among students. It is easier for them if I present the rule and we drill some patterns first, but certainly not always. Whenever they discover something themselves they remember it better and they like to use it. They are proud.

8. What would you say would be your attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge? (students'; expressed in the standards of National syllabi for English)

If I want my students just to be able to understand others and to be able to communicate (and only to communicate) then it is not very important. You know that now the students have the possibility to meet other students from other countries. When they return from summer camps they ask why am I making them to study all this grammar because they have made themselves understood and have understood what the others mean. This is just one level of the language -

the every-day use of it. If this is the goal of ones studies of English – then it is not necessary to spend a lot of time studying grammar. I think that this school should be left by students, who can use the language in a normal literary and good way – just correct language.

9. Do you find it important, that your students know the grammatical rules of English language? Why, why not?

Well, I do not think they should know the rules by heart. The usage of the rule is more important than the rule itself.

10. What is your attitude towards the instructions regarding teaching and goal achievement expressed in the national syllabus for English language?

I do not like the new syllabus. The syllabus states what should be taught, but does not state what should be the scope of the certain parts that students should master. It can be just brief mentioning and it can be some serious learning. The coming syllabus gives just some vague guidelines and is not helpful for me as a teacher. How can I know to what extent should I teach the certain parts of language? I do not get a clear picture myself. How can I be convincing in the classroom if I do not have a clear picture of the demands myself? The syllabus does not state that we should teach them just the rules. But I need the information of the minimum demands that should be achieved. I find it positive that the teacher has more freedom now in their approach.

Teacher Interview LV2

1. How many years have you been teaching English? For how long time at upper secondary level?

I have been teaching English for three years and one year at upper secondary level.

2. Do you teach English grammar to your students? Why?

Yes, of course I do. How should students be able to speak correctly and form correct sentences if they are not taught grammar?

3. What would you say is your attitude towards teaching/ learning English grammar?

My attitude is positive, though teaching grammar is quite hard because children do not like to study grammar as such. But I am positive.

4. Do you find grammar knowledge important in language acquisition? Why, why not?

Yes, of course. You meet grammar everywhere – if you write an essay or speak. If you express yourself grammatically incorrectly, you run the risk of being constantly misunderstood. If you cannot use the grammatical rules correctly in writing you will not be able to write a correct essay or letter. Grammar knowledge is essential in every aspect of English language use.

5. What effect would you say grammar teaching has on students' language acquisition?

It has a positive effect if the grammar is acquired. You can notice this by the way students use the time expressions in both writing and speaking. Their use of language becomes more fluent and they become less fearful to express themselves spontaneously. A student with good knowledge of grammar has the possibility to express themselves in greater detail and usually they also do that.

6. If you think about English grammar teaching and learning during the years you have been working as a teacher, would you say that the attitude towards grammar teaching and learning has changed? If yes, in what ways?

I have not been working so long, but I can remember how it was when I went to school. The grammar teaching was usually very conservative and traditional. The teacher gave a short lecture on the rules and we would do certain drilling-exercises afterwards. And of what I remember grammar was not taught any other way. I think that a lot has changed in this way. If we talk about small children – there are a lot of different fun ways to teach grammar – through songs, plays, rhymes and games. The traditional grammar teaching methods are not used there any longer because children do not like to study this way. At upper secondary level however the traditional methods are still in use. I have tried different approach, but students say that the grammatical rules are clearer to them if I give the definition and show how to use the rules practically and then we work in different ways with the new rule. It is more comprehensible for them and it saves time.

Could this have something to do with the difference in grammar between English and Latvian? Yes, I believe so. The traditional approach is also possible to use with upper secondary students because they have quite some knowledge of grammar in Latvian and it is easier to explain the grammatical things that are alike in these two languages. You cannot have the same approach with small children.

7. What would you say about student's attitude towards English grammar? Has that changed over time? In what matters?

In general student's attitude towards grammar is negative and I do not think that this has changed that much over time. There are of course some very goal-oriented students, who are aware of the importance of grammar knowledge in their language learning and who are motivated. Usually the children who do not like to study grammar do not like to study the subject of English at all. It is difficult also for me as a teacher to give them the positive attitude,

because I do understand that English grammar is so different from Latvian grammar and in many ways incomprehensible for them.

8. What would you say would be your attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge? (students'; expressed in the standards of National syllabi for English)

It is positive, and of course it is important to know English grammar. How can a language function without grammar? Every language has grammar!

In the syllabus it is stated that grammar is important. For example ten years ago we did not study passive voice at primary and lower secondary level, only in the last forms at upper secondary level. Now we teach passive voice in year 7. But if you ask me if the results (student's knowledge of grammar) are better from this I would be doubtful. The demands are higher and children not always understand what and why they need to know. Also their knowledge of Latvian grammar has decreased during the years. I also think that previous grammar knowledge has influence when learning English grammar. Consequently if they lack the knowledge of grammar in their mother tongue they have trouble understanding and acquiring English grammar. This is often the case. There are also some children who are better at English grammar than in Latvian grammar.

9. Do you find it important, that your students know the grammatical rules of English language? Why, why not?

No I think that it is not so very important that they can cite the rule itself. The most important thing I find is that they know how to use rules practically. They should know how and when to use simple past, passive voice and how to form a question for example. There are grammatical features I think are important that they know though they often find it boring and complicated and sometimes incomprehensible.

10. What is your attitude towards the instructions regarding teaching and goal achievement expressed in the national syllabus for English language?

All in all I am satisfied with this. The instructions are clear – I know what I have to teach and when I have to teach this. What I could say though is that the demands and goals in the national exams become more and more difficult and challenging with every year. And not all students manage to learn what they should in order to get the highest scores at the exams.

Teacher Interview LV3

1. How many years have you been teaching English? For how long time at upper secondary level?

It's round about 20 years. All these years at upper secondary school.

2. Do you teach English grammar to your students? Why?

Of course! I belong to the conservative scholars and I believe that grammar is the basics of each language. We can not make the language function if we do not know its grammar.

3. What would you say is your attitude towards teaching/ learning English grammar?

I am positive to it. I have still not found the right approach to teaching grammar. I have been trying different methods – from the classical direct (deductive) and the indirect (inductive). I have tried giving the rules first and applying them in exercises and the other way round – giving them texts and sentences where they have to look for similarities and they come up with the rules themselves. I have tried both of them. I would say that the inductive method is more interesting. Then they say – oh I have discovered this myself, but not all the students are ready to use this method. The ones whose knowledge of grammar is lower prefer the deductive methods. And then sometimes for fun I use the inductive method. I have a collection of exercises in communicative grammar – grammar in dialogues. I use that as a follow up for the grammatical themes we have been through. The students find it a lot of fun. And then I have to persuade them that we should have both – a kind of balance between serious grammar drilling and some grammar with laughter.

4. Do you find grammar knowledge important in language acquisition? Why, why not?

Yes, I think it is. There are some scholars who say that grammar should not be taught explicitly but through lexical chunks. I do still teach each separate grammar item. I believe it helps them to become more fluent when they are on their own without the book at their help. I think grammar has a positive effect on both writing and speaking. Grammar helps. Our curriculum is based on the four skills – writing, speaking, listening and reading. Our syllabus concentrates though on the communicative skills. There is no special part for grammar skills! So I have to find some gaps and some space to put in grammatical coverage to develop all four of these skills.

5. What effect would you say grammar teaching has on students' language acquisition?

Yes, I do believe that grammatical skills help in the student's language acquisition and that it helps them improve their knowledge of English language. But at this present moment the emphasis does not lie on grammar knowledge but on communicative skills. But in any linguistic situation they need their grammatical skills. They are helped by the grammar knowledge.

6. If you think about English grammar teaching and learning during the years you have been working as a teacher, would you say that the attitude towards grammar teaching and learning has changed? If yes, in what ways?

Oh yes, the attitude has changed. Some 15-20 years ago we were applying the translation method in all language teaching. There was a text and was usually taken from fiction. Students were supposed to translate the text, analyse, and answer some questions. Grammar was completely separated from the texts and the rest of language teaching. We taught the rules one by one. Now, since Latvia gained its independence and later on joined the European Union the approach to language teaching has completely changed. Now we are applying the communicative method. But it is not only one method it is a kind of mixture of all the things we have been using before. But no more translation. Grammar is not any longer the central point of language teaching.

7. What would you say about student's attitude towards English grammar? Has that changed over time? In what matters?

Oh, the attitude towards English language in general has changed. Before, when we were a part of the Soviet Union and were placed behind the iron gates nobody saw the use of English. There

were no possibilities for the soviet people and Latvians including to go anywhere abroad to apply their knowledge. Now I have classes where the student's parents are currently working abroad (Ireland, England). Most of these students have visited their parents abroad at least once. They see the use for learning. They see that they can use the language.

I do not think that the attitude towards English grammar in particular has changed greatly. It is difficult to say if their attitude towards grammar has become more positive. Anyway, very few students really enjoy studying grammar. They want to speak and listen, do group work and projects. But when it comes to grammar it is still negative. There might be some slight difference, but it is still something they do because they have to. They don't want to but they have to. More or less they study to get the good marks, because if they use correct grammar they get higher scores at the exams.

8. What would you say would be your attitude towards the importance of English grammar knowledge? (students'; expressed in the standards of National syllabi for English)

Oh, it is very important. As I said before – I think that grammar is the very base of the building of a language. If the pediment is instable it means the whole building will be instable. The teaching methods do not have to be monotonous and boring though. Grammar can be made fun. There are different fantastic materials on grammar that one can use on computers. Unfortunately we have no possibility to use it at school – due lack of computers. But students have the possibility to borrow the CDs with them.

The National Syllabus says that the upper secondary student should be able to communicate at an appropriate level. In the National syllabus the grammatical forms the students should acquire are stated one by one. Those are the guidelines we use in language teaching.

9. Do you find it important, that your students know the grammatical rules of English language? Why, why not?

I have been trying different methods. Up until this year I had never made my students to learn the rules by heart. I have always found that it is more important that they know how to use the rules practically rather than them knowing only the rules. So this year I made the students learn the different formulas for forming different grammatical forms. What happened on the test was that they wrote the rules excellently, but there were a lot of mistakes in the practical part. As a teacher of language my concern is that they should know the rules. But when I see that in reality they bring the same results whether they know the rules by heart or not, I do not find it so important any longer. So I would say that it is more important to know the practical use of grammar than the rules themselves explicitly.

10. What is your attitude towards the instructions regarding teaching and goal achievement expressed in the national syllabus for English language?

I do not like the stated grammatical parts of it. I am for the academic freedom. I have the national final exams from previous years as a guideline for what level is needed of my students. I find that it is too much specified on the national syllabus. There is a clash between the stated things in the national syllabus and the actual demands on the national exams. The stated forms in the national syllabus are often not enough in order to help the students to achieve the level they need to manage a good grade at the national final exams. And sometimes the demands on the national exams are too sophisticated and far-away from our students' previous knowledge and social experience. I understand that the national exams are at a very high level in order to guarantee that the students' who get the highest marks have good possibilities to enter any university in the European Union. And sometimes the demands are too high. Not everybody of our students will go to study abroad and therefore I believe we are doing unjust for the average students. So the demands are very varying between the national syllabus and the final exams. This makes it harder on me as a teacher to choose to which of these demands and goals to adjust my teaching.

