Third language development for multilingual pupils at the individual programme’s introduction course from a Dynamic Systems Theory point of view

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This thesis uses a Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) perspective to explain language development and metalinguistic awareness in five third language learners (L3) of English at the individual programme’s introduction course (IVIK). From a DST approach it is evident that every complex dynamic system, like multilingual learner systems, develops according to internal self-organizational properties and to the interaction between the learner and the environment. Every system consists of different interacting subsystems that can be competitive or connected growers. In this thesis, rates of word length, text length and vocabulary ratio have been measured and compared. The results reveal that there are competitive relationships between the subsystems’ word length and text length along with vocabulary ratio for four of the five students. Student motivation, length of schooling, amount of languages and proficiency levels and length of schooling in English is also analysed in consideration of language development as well as metalinguistic awareness. The results show no strong correlations between these factors apart from the student who has the highest motivation and a longer English schooling also has the highest metalinguistic awareness. Furthermore, results also indicate a positive correlation between metalinguistic awareness and L3 proficiency. This confirms previous research about the positive effects of multilingualism and higher cognitive and metalinguistic ability.
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1. Introduction

As I am a teacher at the individual programme’s introduction course (IVIK), in an upper secondary school in Södertälje, I decided to write a thesis about my students’ language development and metalinguistic awareness. In Södertälje municipality a large population of its inhabitants have foreign background, around 40 per cent of the people are immigrants and there are as many as 80 different languages spoken in Södertälje (Facts on Södertälje, 2010:3). Consequently multilingualism is more common than monolingualism. In comparison with other Nordic countries Sweden has a large population of foreigners with 10 per cent of its nine million people having a non-Nordic background. A refugee is someone who has fled from his or her homeland due to fear of persecution for reasons of race, political opinion, religion or nationality. Those people that receive a resident permit are immigrants. In order to facilitate for immigrant children in Sweden there are different policies and programs available. Pupils that arrive in Sweden after or at the end of the nine-year compulsory school have a possibility to enter the individual programme’s introduction course (IVIK) at upper secondary school. This programme prepares the student for future studies at national level or other programmes at for instance “folkhögskola”, folk high-school.

The municipality of Södertälje decided in 2010, in line with their Greenhouse Process of Continuous Improvement in the municipality, to increase the amount of tutor-led courses for students at IVIK. Along with a new way of measuring the students’ abilities according to four different levels of educational attainment, instead of the previous one level target, this would increase students’ performance at IVIK at upper secondary school. However, despite the extra amount of tutor-led hours for pupils the English topic was restricted by the shortage of one teacher. Instead of having four different student groups divided according to levels of educational attainment there were only three. Nevertheless, despite teacher shortage having been a teacher for a year and half at this school I can see proof of the multilingual pupils’ growth and development in English.

According to Skolverket, the National Agency for Education in Sweden, the performance of pupils in general at this upper secondary school is below average (S
Jedenborg 2011, pers. comm. 25 February) despite the fact that the majority are highly motivated students striving to enter university to read medicine or law. The explanation for the lower results is most probably due to students’ lack of proficiency in Swedish as well as English. Many of the students have deficiencies in Swedish and lack basic knowledge in English when they start at Naturvetargymnasiet in Södertälje. Yet, statistically most of the pupils studying English reach the national targets during their schooling. The average time for students at IVIK is two to three years before they can enter a national course at this upper secondary school (S Jedenborg 2011, pers. comm. 25 February).

There is a strong connection between the age when children immigrate and their later performance. Yet, if Swedish society and its National Education Agency continue to measure quality after the normative majority language and culture pupils with multilingual background will be at a disadvantage. Instead of looking at these pupils as assets, with multilingual competence and experiences that are valuable for national progress, society only assess language proficiency according a native-like ability. Research shows that multilingual students prove examples of having cognitive abilities that are missing in monolingual speakers (Jessner, 2008: 270). According to a Dynamic Systems perspective, which uses a holistic approach, multilingual language development does not take place in a linear static movement but in a complex, changeable and dynamic process with progress and regression. The social and cultural environments as well as resources of time and energy have great influence on multilingual development. Awareness and knowledge about third language development are vital for assessing and enhancing pupils’ language acquisition such as successfully teaching immigrant students at IVIK.

1.2 Aim of thesis
The aim of this thesis is to study language development and metalinguistic awareness with a Dynamic Systems Theory method. Language development and metalinguistic awareness are explained and analysed with this perspective. This thesis also tries to establish whether there are any connections between development of vocabulary, word-
and text length. Furthermore, the thesis attempts to measure whether students are reflecting and analysing their language production. Evidence of this would prove metalinguistic awareness. How do factors like length of schooling, proficiency and skills in English and in other languages, total amount of languages, length of stay in Sweden and motivation affect language development and metalinguistic awareness?

1.3 Abbreviations and definitions

Some frequently used abbreviations have the following definitions: L1 (first or native language), L2 (second language), L3 (third language) and L4 (fourth language) etcetera refer to the chronological order of acquiring a language irrespective of whether any of the first or later learnt languages are at a higher or lower proficiency level. IVIK is the individual programme’s introduction course for foreigners. DST stands for Dynamic Systems Theory. DMM is the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism with the development of different individual language systems. Throughout the essay the term multilingualism will be used interchangeably with third language acquisition or any fourth, fifth etcetera learnt languages. Language development is from a DST perspective explained as growth resulting from iterations. Yet, development is not only linear growth but includes regression, stagnation and progress depending on the relationship between the system’s self-organisation and the environment (De Boot, 2008: 171). Metalinguistic awareness is the proficiency to objectify language and the ability to change focus between form, function and meaning (Jessner, 2008: 277).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The multilingual student

Compared to other European countries Sweden has received a high amount of refugees who have enriched our country in many ways. However, together with these new cultural and linguistic influences there are also new difficulties in Swedish society and education. Immigrant children face language problems that affect their general educational attainment. Especially immigrant children who arrive in Sweden after preschool age are having school problems (Skolverket, 2005:12). Whether the child has
a native language, which is typologically close to Swedish, is also influential in this context. A child who has an Indo-European mother tongue will face less difficulty than for example children with an Arabic native language (Lindblad, 1982: 6). How well a pupil succeeds in English is strongly connected to its knowledge in Swedish (Lindblad, 1982: 45). Quite logically, if the pupil is struggling with mastering Swedish there will consequently be less motivation or resources available for English.

Different reports from Skolverket, the National Agency for Education in Sweden, and other authorities have stated that pupils with foreign background perform less well and don’t reach the goals and the same level of scholastic knowledge as native-born children. However, these reports also reveal that the educational achievement is dependent on other variables such as the migrant-pupil’s socio-economic and cultural parental background as well as country of origin and length of stay in Sweden (Skolverket, 2005: 5 f). There is a strong connection between parents’ level of education and pupils’ result. The higher the parental education is the better the pupil’s performance is. Added to this is also parents’ employment history (Skolverket, 2005: 8). Interestingly, when these socio-economic facts are considered many of the differences in proficiencies or results vanish between immigrant and native pupils. Consequently, the differences between native and foreign pupils are mainly dependent on socio-economical facts and not on the foreign background as such. Yet, for those pupils that have arrived at a later stage in their educational schooling the differences in target levels remain (Skolverket, 2005: 10).

According to the Swedish Education law all children have the same right to education and are guaranteed extra support if needed (Läroplan Lpf 94: 6). Students in compulsory and upper secondary school whose native language is not Swedish are entitled to first language instruction. Students may also be provided with help in their first language in other topics. Participation is not compulsory but municipalities must provide first language lessons for students that have at least one parent with another mother tongue than Swedish and who daily use this language. However, if the municipality has less than five students in one language group or if there is no suitable teacher available the school is not needed to offer this support (Skolverket, 2008: 13).
Mostly, first language instruction is offered outside the regular school hours and handled separately to other school topics even if the actual education takes place at the same school (Skolverket, 2008: 18). A majority of the pupils taking part in first language instruction are from homes with a higher education background (Skolverket, 2008: 19). At upper secondary school students are able to study their first language as a language or individual option. Furthermore, students with a migrant background can also study Swedish as a Second Language. The topic is equal to Swedish in consideration for entrance for further studies at university. The difference between the topics is related to adaption of the topic as a second language acquisition instead of as a first (Skolverket, N.d).

Reports from Skolverket show that pupils who have had first language instruction at compulsory school reach higher grades than those students who have studied Swedish as a Second language as well as pupils who have a native Swedish background. A possible explanation for this is not only due to the pupils’ socio-economical background but that there are reasons such as pupils and parents with high motivation and ambition. Also, second language instructions seems to have greatest affect for second generation pupils, which clearly indicates that first language knowledge is very important for second generation students’ learning and development (Skolverket, 2008: 19-20).

Furthermore, Skolverket claims that schools, which have a high amount of students whose first language is not Swedish have a more organized and better prepared schooling programme in Swedish as a Second Language for their immigrant students. Usually these schools have recruited teachers with knowledge and experience in second language teaching and the topic has a higher status than in general among pupils (Skolverket, 2008: 15-16). Research has indicated the need to adjust education for pupils with another mother tongue than Swedish. This should not result in simplified tasks but with improved tuition like teachers with multilingual competence, knowledge among teachers in general about second and third language learning, Swedish as a Second language as a topic on its own and not as remedial instruction and the act of involving first language instructors in other topics. Above all, to have the multilingual
pupils’ need as the norm and to view multilingualism as an asset (Skolverket, 2008: 24-25).

Cummins refers to the power relationship between the dominant groups of pupils and the subordinate ones. Education and tests are planned and performed after the dominant language. According to this educational structure the minority pupils get the blame for failure and not the system (1996: 140f). There is still a norm that bilinguals and multilinguals should have similar native-like knowledge in each of their languages as monolinguals. But bilinguals and multilinguals use their languages in different contexts and situations where the languages complement each other. Some researchers claim that what is possible to express or communicate in one language may not be possible to do in another language at the same level. Instead of looking at each language according to a native-like standard a better way would be to look at the overall language ability (Lindberg, 2002).

2.2 Research about multilingualism and third language acquisition

Today’s increasing globalization, where people need and use multiple languages, acknowledges the importance of understanding multilingualism. Consequently, there has been a growing interest in research about multilingualism or acquisition of a third or additional language in the last few years in contrast to previous dominant research about second language acquisition. The difference between second and third language acquisition is that third language learners (L3) “have more language experience at their disposal as second language learners, are influenced by the general effects of bilingualism on cognition, and have access to two linguistic systems when acquiring a third language” (Cenoz, 2003: 71). Most multilingual research has dealt with cross-linguistic influence and transfer, influence of bilingualism on third language learning, trilingualism for children and university education (Jessner, 2008: 271). Traditionally the term cross-linguistic influence and transfer refers to second language learners’ or L2 code-switching, interference, and language loss (Jessner, 2006: 18). The multilingual language acquisition process is more complex than second language acquisition. The latter process has only two languages involved, which can influence each other whereas
in a third or multilingual acquisition process at least three languages are involved (Cenoz, 2001: 2). Jessner states four potential learning processes in third language acquisition: All three languages can be learned consecutively, all languages can be learnt at the same time, first or native language (L1) and second language (L2) can be learnt simultaneously and thereafter the third language (L3) is learnt or after the acquisition of L1 both L2 and L3 are learnt simultaneously (2008: 271).

In cross-linguistic transfer situations in third language acquisition, there are several factors determining what language will be of influence. One factor, which has proved to be of strong importance, is linguistic typology. This has been proved in many research studies. For example Rothman claims that syntactic transfer from L1 or L2 into L3 is dependant on proximity in the linguistic typology or the perceived proximity, which is labelled psychotypology (2011: 108 ff). In a study about multilingualism and previous linguistic influence with one group of native Italian students learning English as a L2 and Spanish as a L3 and another group of native English pupils learning Spanish as a L2 and Portuguese as a L3, Rothman finds evidence for transfer from the typologically closer Romance language into L3, no matter whether this was a L1 or L2 language or due to factors like time or order of acquisition (2011: 120). Also other research studies support this typological/psychotypological factor, like the study by Montrul, Dias and Santos who find evidence of influence from structural similarity in transfer from L1 and L2 in L3 acquisition (2011: 54). This stands in contrast to other researchers’ claim that L2 has a stronger influence in L3 learning than L1 no matter its typological closeness (Montrul et al, 2011: 23). This is explained as a so called foreign effect, where the multilingual learner transfers more from the L2 as this seems more “foreign” than the native language (De Angelis & Selinker, 2011: 56).

Generally cross-linguistic transfer in second language acquisition is dependant on the learner’s knowledge in the target language. If the learner has little knowledge in the developing language there is evidence of more transfer from L1 than if the learner would have a higher level of proficiency. When it is a case of a third language acquisition, Cenoz stresses the importance of considering the multilingual learner’s level of proficiency in all languages. Moreover, this makes the study more complex as
“multicompetence is not the sum of monolingual competences” (2001:9). Another factor that influences cross-linguistic transfer is recency of use. It is more common to transfer from a language, which is frequently used than from a language that is seldom used. Participants and choice of topic taking part in a communication act do also affect cross-linguistic transfer choice. Furthermore, the choice of another language than the target language can be related to age. Adults and older children have developed higher cognitive abilities and metalinguistic awareness than younger children and can therefore advance faster in second and third language learning. They are able to make more accurate choices of language transfers (Cenoz, 2001:9-10). The term metalinguistic awareness is “the ability to focus on linguistic form and to switch focus between form and meaning” (Jessner, 2008:277) and to be aware of the language form and content. This is an ability to objectify the language and reflect over it (Jessner, 2008:277).

Several studies have proved the positive influence of L2 transfer in third language development if the learner has achieved a high proficiency level in the L2 (Hammarberg, 2001: 23). In a study by Tremblay on the influence of L2 proficiency and exposure on cross-linguistic influence from L1 English, L2 French on L3 German, there is evidence that the results are depending on the learners’ level of attainment (2006: 116). Previous research on bilingualism has proved that a first level of knowledge is needed in both languages to avoid the negative effects of bilingualism and a second higher level or threshold to make the learner take advantage of the cognitive and linguistic bilingual qualities (Jessner, 2006: 20). Similar result is found in Tremblay’s multilingual study. Unless the learner has reached a certain L2 level of achievement, a threshold level, the language will not affect the L3 language in a positive way like enabling code-switching and lexical invention. This is also probably likely when the L1 is more similar to L3 than L2 (2006:116 f).

Moreover, research has showed positive influence of bilingualism in third language acquisition. Sanz gives evidence of this in a study about L3 learners of English with Catalan/Spanish background from a cognitive perspective. Sanz uses the term bilingualism in the meaning of biliteracy, where all participants in the study are able to
write and read two languages. The study’s aim is to look at whether bilingualism contributes to better L3 learning independent of other factors such as motivation, socio-economical factors and intelligence. Apart from bilingualism the two factors motivation and exposure resulted in higher language achievement. However, bilingualism showed higher results in L3 learning independently of motivation and exposure, which is in line with previous research. The reasons behind this can be explained by multilinguals’ enhanced cognitive knowledge and metalinguistic awareness (2000: 32 ff).

2.3 Dynamic Systems Theory (DST)

Traditionally Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) has been used within biology, neurology and sociology but has recently achieved attention within the linguistic field (Plaza-Pust, 2008: 251). DST tries to explain complex systems as a whole instead of looking at different parts in isolation. According to this theory dynamic systems interact and develop with their environment along with internal processes. Complex systems like language development evolve over time but not in a linear pattern but show patterns of progress and regression (De Boot, 2008: 167). What is characteristic of dynamic systems is that there is almost always some trace of change between different subsystems. Yet there can be different levels of variability depending on the degree of stability of the system. When there is a period of high variability this indicates that a system is transforming (Verspoor et al, 2008: 215). Van Geert points at specific phenomena within dynamic systems such as “attractor state”, which a system is trying to develop in (like passing an exam) and “repellor state” that is any phase or behaviour that is not wanted. Furthermore, each system has self-organizational properties that are adaptable and flexible and these internal processes can result in the emergence of new states (2008, 181).

In DST theory language development is regarded as a recursive process where new information is added in a cumulative way (Jessner, 2008: 275). A person’s wish to develop his language ability is dependent not just on internal factors but also with the physical and social circumstances. How the human cognitive system develops is dependent on available resources such as motivation, memory ability and amount of
time. Even if the system has restricted amount of resources there is as mentioned interaction between the subsystems, which can compensate for a lack. For example a shortage of time can be compensated by a higher amount of motivation (De Boot, 2008: 1169f). Furthermore, as the resources are limited this can result in various subsystems developing positively while others will decline. Either there is a supportive connection or a competitive relationship between the subsystems. However, different subsystems need various amounts of resources. Subsystems that are connected need less support than those that are unconnected. A supportive relationship is also conditional. For instance a growth in a child’s vocabulary of two- and three-word phrases is dependant on the minimum level of one-word vocabulary. In a competitive relationship the increase in one subsystem might lead to a decrease in another subsystem (Van Geert, 2008: 192 f). A person’s language development of sentence complexity can for instance interfere with lexical growth (Verspoor et al, 2008: 222f). Yet, van Geert states, “the competitive relationship is, in all likelihood, a transitive relationship” (Van Geert, 2008: 194), as there are no similar competitive relationships in native language speakers’ longer sentences (Verspoor et al 2008: 225).

2.4 DST in a multilingual context and metalinguistic awareness

By looking at multilingual development as a dynamic process the Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) is an applicable methodological tool. Herdina and Jessner use a DST approach to multilingualism in their Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM), which considers development as a whole and looks at changes over time (Jessner, 2006: 32). In the DMM, the attention is at the development of different individual language systems, like LS1, LS2, LS3 etc, as part of a psycholinguistic system. This contrasts the traditional aim where L1, L2, L3 etc refer to how the languages were chronologically acquired and exert influence, with the L1 being more dominant than the L2 etc. In reality the first language may not be actively used by the multilingual and thus not exert any dominance over the other languages. In a DST approach a multilingual system has properties that are adaptable and changeable where any language system can develop or debilitate. Furthermore, the different psycholinguistic systems are dependant on social and psychological factors such as the multilingual learner’s social and cultural situation or
identity. Language selection or use is related to the multilingual learner's apprehended communicative need (Jessner, 2008: 273). This can also depend on other factors such as socioeconomic status, language skill and the formality of the situation (Jessner, 2008: 274).

Also, according the DMM language stability is connected to language maintenance. As resources are restricted the learner's amount of time and energy spend on acquiring and preserving a language is limited. If a learner does not spend enough time or energy on one language this will result in language loss or attrition. Moreover, other factors affect the stability like “the number of languages involved, the maturational age at which a language is learned and relative stability established, the level of proficiency at which this takes place, and the time span over which the language system is maintained” (Jessner, 2008:274). The DMM points at the reciprocal relation between language systems instead as being independent systems. The holistic approach in DMM enables a comprehension of multilingualism’s different subsystems dynamic interplay. A multilingual system is affected by factors like motivation or the person’s goals, that can be contradictory like the wish to pass a test but also a desire to socialize with friends, language aptitude, self-assurance and anxiety (Jessner, 2008: 274 f).

In the multilingual development model, see figure 1 (Herdina & Jessner, 2002: 124), Herdina and Jessner show the multilingual systems’ development. The model shows how three language proficiencies develop according to a certain period of time. The first language system is dominant throughout the time but the second and the third language systems change. The third language system is dependent on the acquisition of the first languages (2002:123 ff). The model shows the possible language developments in regard of time needed, which is an ideal graph. Yet, in reality the first language is not constant but can vary. As mentioned a multilingual development is not linear but is subject to change, is reversible, can lead to language loss and is above all complex (Jessner, 2008: 272).
As previously referred to the different language systems interact. In the DMM the definition of multilingual proficiency is the cumulative relationship between the different psycholinguistic language systems (Jessner, 2006: 32f). According to Jessner multilingual cross-linguistic transfer are code-switching, interfering, borrowing but also the cognitive results from multilingual proficiency. Within this multilingual proficiency there is also a higher ability of metalinguistic awareness that is part of the Multilingual factor. The Multilingual factor (M) has developing abilities that can accelerate third language learning. The most influential part of the M effect is metalinguistic ability, which has developed due to prior language and cognitive abilities. According to the DMM the multilingual learner is able to use more than one language system, which enables an advanced monitor ability that can detect errors, separate and cross-check between the languages. Within individual multilingualism, language maintenance is dependent on language use and language awareness. The latter refers to conscious ability to manipulate and consider language rules whereas the former is the activating part of keeping a language alive. Altogether, these multilingual skills result in heightened
metalinguistic awareness that monolingual learners lack (2008:275 f). Jessner states that the multilingual learner’s metalinguistic awareness stimulates, as mentioned, creative thinking and communicative skills but also results in natural translation skills (2008: 277).

Ever since researchers detected a positive relationship between bilingualism and intelligence where bilingual children performed better than their monolingual counterparts in for example creative thinking, verbal skills and different metalinguistic performances, there has been an assumption of positive transfer from the bilingual ability that affect both cognitive and linguistic skills (Herdina & Jessner, 2002: 14-15). There has been a general attitude within research that the positive results “of bilingualism on metalinguistic awareness has (...) /led to/ a higher ability to reflect on language and to manipulate it “[Cenoz, 2003: 73]. For instance Ringbom explains the higher level of metalinguistic awareness found in Swedish speaking Finns when learning L3 English due to their bilingual characteristics, which the monolingual non-Swedish speaking Finns lack (2007: 95-96).

However, lately some researchers have also indicated restrictions in the overall positive attitude towards the effects of bilingual proficiency in cognitive and metalinguistic awareness as some studies have shown no advantages for bilinguals over monolinguals (Bialystok, 2001: 169 f, Cenoz, 2003: 71). As Bialystok mentions, there is no general agreement on what differs metalinguistic skills with linguistic capability in general and how to measure this (2001: 177). Bialystock herself defines children’s metalinguistic skills as being based on two cognitive processes. The first one is process of analysis, which is the children’s ability to make representational structures of linguistic knowledge, and the second one is control of attention, which is the ability to survey the linguistic process and make active alterations (2001: 177-178). According to Bialystok bilingual children perform better than monolingual children on some metalinguistic tasks connected with word awareness and tasks that require a high level of control. Also bilinguals with high proficiency in both languages outperform monolinguals in tasks that require a heightened level of analysis (2001: 177 f). Yet, in other tasks there are no difference between monolinguals and bilinguals’ metalinguistic awareness or even the opposite is the case with monolinguals being at advantage. In a grammatical judgement test with bilingual Spanish-English children who were tested to determine sentences containing errors, it was proved that monolingual Spanish children
were better at correcting the sentences (Bialystok, 2001: 175). However, when comparing monolinguals with bilinguals it is also necessary to look at other factors that can affect cognitive and metalinguistic skills like age, proficiency level and motivation (Cenoz, 2003: 83).

Moreover, Kowal stresses that metalinguistic awareness is an ability that is capable of growth in her study of Polish L3 learners of Swedish (2009: 160). According to her longitudinal 2-year study the students’ metalinguistic awareness is developing more than the linguistic ability (Kowal, 2009: 170). Kowal claims that there is a relationship between text production and metalinguistic awareness in a writing process as the writer reflects over the written text at the same time as the text is being produced. The writer does not only exert his or her cognitive and linguistic ability but also handles this consciously in a varying degree. Kowall also stresses that metalinguistic ability to reflect over the language does not necessarily mean that the outcome is linguistically correct nor should metalinguistic awareness be mixed up with linguistic proficiency even if they are often related (2009: 158).

3. Method

3.1 Language development

The first study aims at describing and explaining language development in five L3 learners of English at IVIK in an upper secondary school in Södertälje. From a DST aspect language development is not restricted to linear growth but includes regression, stagnation and progress. Every language system has its own specific development depending on the relationship between the system’s internal self-organisation and outer facts. Each individual has for instance different levels of motivation, language proficiency and amount of time (De Bot, 2008: 171). There are several variables that can be used to study language development such as sentence length, sentence complexity and number of finite verbs. It is only a question of choosing adequate variables for the intended survey, which are in this case relatively new learners of L3 English. Therefore language development is measured by vocabulary use, word- and text length in a longitudinal study, as these are variables that are relevant to measure in beginners. In the study of language development the text length is measured by the amount of words
in the texts and the variation of words is calculated by the type-token ratio (TTR), which gives the rate of variations of words. Finally, also the average word length is gauged in the texts. Altogether this gives an overall picture of how each student’s language ability is developing.

When measuring the word length spelling mistakes have been corrected. The correct spelling of the word is used as the length of the word. There has been no other grammatical correction though. Swedish words, proper names and figures have been omitted as these otherwise give an unjust amount of words or length of words. Word length is measured according to amount of letters or tokens. Moreover the same principle with the correct spelling and omitting Swedish words, proper names and figures has been used when looking at the type token ratio.

3.2 Metalinguistic awareness

If students’ language proficiency is only measured according to a native like ability, then this will not reflect multilinguals’ higher cognitive skills like metalinguistic awareness (Jessner, 2008: 276). In the second study evidence of metalinguistic awareness is measured and analysed in one cross sectional study in the same L3 learners in a cross sectional analysis. The students were asked to write with an ink pen and clearly indicate any type of correction by drawing a line over the word or expression and then writing the new word/words after or simply omitting any further words. In this way I could trace their awareness of the language process that is their metalinguistic ability in the same way as a similar study made by Kowal. Kowal used the computer programme ScriptLog, which records all different typing activities such as amendments, pauses and cuts, in order to find records of writing activities for establishing metalinguistic awareness. Yet, metalinguistic awareness is an internal process and is difficult to thoroughly measure.

According to Kowal the proportion between corrected errors and uncorrected remaining errors in written assignments gives the metalinguistic awareness. In order to measure the level of metalinguistic skills with these L3 learners I used the same method by calculating the rate between corrected errors and uncorrected
errors. The higher the rate is the higher the metalinguistic awareness should be according Kowal (209:161). I will use Kowal’s definitions for the various types of revisions that students made during their writing assignments. The students’ revisions are divided into different categories. Kowal herself used Faigley and Wittes’ Analyzing Revision model (1981, 403) as a prototype but also adjusted the model to multilingual learners. Kowal divides the revision changes in two subcategories; formal changes and meaning changes, where the latter refers to changes that affect the content and the former only affects spelling, grammar or lexicon (2009: 162f). In sum, the following taxonomy within revision made by Kowal is used with a slight adjustment: spelling, grammar, lexicon and content as a head category instead of the subcategories iterations, quantitative changes and reformulations. As mentioned the first three categories are formal changes and the last one a change of meaning. Spelling adjustments involve corrections and grammar revisions are changes to syntax such as word order and morphology. Lexicon or vocabulary changes involve changes from an incorrect Swedish word to an English word or to a word that the student rated as having a better value. Meaning revisions alters the actual content of the text like for example adding information or deleting parts, which can be done to enable the use of different strategies in writing like perhaps avoiding a difficult construction or be evidence of conceptual awareness regarding the text production. Furthermore, adjustments regarding the content can also be simply reiterations to stress something or reformulations (Kowal, 2009: 163ff).

3.3 Research material
The research material for the first study of language development consists of fifteen different texts from three different occasions, the first one in August 2010, the second in April 2011 and the last one in the middle of May 2011. The students were asked to write texts about themes that were familiar to them, with the two first texts dealing with presentations of themselves and their families and the last one with hobbies and future plans. The participants’ last text in the first study in May 2011 is also used for the metalinguistic awareness study as well.
3.4 Background variables

Furthermore the thesis will look at the correlations for the students’ language development and metalinguistic ability by considering the factors age, motivation, length of schooling and education in English and proficiency level in their different languages. As there were differences between how many languages the pupils speak and variations of language proficiency as well as other factors that affect language development such as amount of schooling years a detailed participant questionnaire was needed, see appendix 1. Additionally, some of the pupils are frequent attendees while a few of them are less present. Consequently, all students were asked to fill in a questionnaire detailing questions regarding native language, their amount of schooling years in Sweden and in their native country together with education length in English, proficiency levels in their different languages as well as chronological acquirement of languages. Every student was also to grade his language proficiency in a scale from one to five according to the following definitions 1: Knowledge of a few words. 2: Knowledge in understanding and producing simple words and expressions, both oral and written 3: Knowledge in understanding and producing longer sentences and expressions, both oral and written. 4: Knowledge in understanding and producing more complex and longer sentences, both oral and written. 5: Fluent. To this I have added the factor degree of motivation for each pupil, which I have graded on the scale from one to three, with one being the lowest motivation and three the highest. As I am their regular teacher I could make a reasonable judgement in rating this according to their attendance record, achievement during lessons and tests as well as on their performance in homework. These background factors are important to consider in a holistic perspective in order to explain language development.

3.5 Participants

As mentioned the participants in the studies consist of five L3 learners of English at IVIK. The participants are all of similar age, around 17 years old or 16 at the start of the research except for one who was 18, student 4 and also the only girl. Furthermore, all of them come from Iraq. At the time of the first study the pupils had been studying English to a varying degree for a few months to 2-3 years time and often with a pause between
previous studies in Iraq and subsequent studies in Sweden. Yet all these students had been placed in the same group according introductory proficiency tests in English at the beginning of the autumn term 2010, which indicates that none of them were complete beginners nor at a higher level than the proficiency level similar to Swedish students at grade 5 in English at compulsory school. As mentioned students at IVIK are measured according to four levels of education attainment where the first level is beginner’s course, the second is for students with proficiency levels similar to grade 3 to 5 in English at compulsory school, the third then being equal to level 5 to 7 and the fourth follows the level of 7 to 9 in English at compulsory school. All education in English was directed and took place in a classroom at IVIK in Södertälje.

3.6 Data
In the processing of data, the developments are plotted and visualized by diagrams, graphs and tables. Furthermore, development patterns are traced by recording correlations between the different variables. With the help from my tutor, Solbritt Schyberg, correlation coefficients over the studied variables have been calculated and obtained statistically. See appendix 2 for a detailed overview of the correlation coefficients. The data from the variable “vocabulary ratio of types” has been collated afterwards and is not included in the tables.

3.7 Ethics
The participants were informed about the nature and contents of the different studies. All the participants’ names have been coded in order to hide their identities. However, the data is not of very sensitive nature.

4. Results
4.1 Questionnaire
The results from the questionnaire show that most of the participants have Arabic as native language except for student 1 who has Chaldean as his first language. All students rate their first language proficiency as fluent with the exception of student 1 who only has oral knowledge. Moreover, everyone except student 3 is studying English as their L3, L4 or L5. Student 3 is studying English as his L2. On the other hand, student 3 has only been studying English for a couple of months before arriving in Sweden, which virtually
makes the language being taught simultaneously as Swedish.

No matter whether Swedish is the students’ third, fourth or fifth language they all rank their proficiency level to 4 which is the next highest level. Four of the students know four to five languages to different degrees but one student, student 3, knows only three languages. Student 1 claims to be fluent in both his first and second language, which none of the other students are in their L2. Student 5 rates his L2 according to level 4. The remaining three students grade their L2 to level 1 or 2. The students’ L3 are all rated to level 1-4. The languages involved are Arabic, Chaldean, Kurdish, English, Mandaic, Swedish and English. Among the students only one of them, student 1, shows high motivation to study English according to test results, attendance records, performances during lessons and homework. Student 2 and 4 show a medium level of motivation and student 3 and 4 show low motivation.

4.2 Language development

By analyzing the language development from a DST point of view there is evidence of great diversity within and between the participants and each student shows a different development pattern. The development of the text length, which is measured by the amount of words in the texts, shows varying results among the students, see figure 2. The text length for student 1 increases between the different assignments and especially at the last assignment, in total from 29 words in the first text to 107 words in the third text. The text length also successively increases for student 3 and 5, from 43 to 69 and 30 to 51 words per text respectively. Yet, for student 2 and 4 there is evidence of oscillating developments where the text lengths first increase at the second assignment and then decrease at the last one.
Figure 2. Development of text length for student 1-5 from the first to the third assignment.

Also the development of the word length shows different trajectory patterns for the students. In the first assignment student 1 has an average of 3.7 letters per word. The word length increases to 4.2 letters in the second assignment but decreases to 3.7 letters per word in the last assignment. Students 2 and 5 show more general increase between the first text and the last, from 3.2 to 3.6 and 3.6 to 3.9 respectively. Here the learners use longer words as time progresses. Student 3 on the other hand has a decreasing developing curve from initially 4.5 letters to 3.4 letters per word in his texts. Finally, student 4 has first a decreasing development and then it is increasing with 4.2 letters in the first assignment, 3.3 in the second and 3.6 in the third, see figure 3.
The vocabulary variation in the students’ different texts is calculated by looking at the type-token ratio. To get the amount of tokens in a text the number of words are counted. The same token or word may be used several times (like for example the token “we” might occur five times) but within the total number of tokens there is also a so called type, which is every unique word like for example “but”, “and”, “there” etc. So in one text there might be 50 different types but these types might be repeated so the total amount of tokens might be 70. Similarly, as in the previous word- and text length development there is a great degree of variability among the students. Student 1 has a vocabulary ratio in the first assignment that decreases between the tree stages from 75.9% to 55.10%. Students 2 and 3 show a pattern of continuous growth from 48.8% to 66.70% and 58.10% to 65.20% respectively, see figure 4. Yet, these results may be deceptive as there is no consideration of the text length. For example, the text length for student 1 increases as mentioned from 29 words in the first text to 107 in the last. Accordingly, there is most likely a higher vocabulary rate in the first than in the last.
text as also results prove. In order to estimate the increase of vocabulary rate the different types are counted in figure 5.

Figure 4. Development of vocabulary ratio for student 1-5 from the first to the third assignment.

In figure 5 then there is another pattern for the participants. Instead of a decreasing vocabulary rate student one has a steady progress from 22 to 59 different types between the different texts. Instead of a continuous progress student 2 first develop positively before there is a slight decrease in the last assignment with a vocabulary type rate of 42 to 40 between the two last texts. Student 3 shows the same positive developing progress as before with a rate increase of 25 to 45 vocabulary types between the first and last text. Student 4 and 5 who previously decreased on the second assignment but then increased in the last one now show different development curves. Student 4 now progresses to 40 from initially 23 types before reverting to a similar level at 24. Student 5 now progresses continuously, albeit little, from 26 to 32 different types.
in his texts, see figure 5.

Figure 5. Development of vocabulary types for student 1-5 from the first to the third assignment.

The different oscillating results and developing patterns are difficult to interpret unless compared to each other. When looking at the development of text- and word length as well as vocabulary type ratio with student 1 there is evidence of a competitive relationship between the text- and word length. At first there is a general increase for both variables but when the text length in the third assignment becomes considerably longer the word length decreases. For graph readability purpose the average word length score has been multiplied with 10 and henceforth enabling the use of a similar y-axis for word- and text length and vocabulary ratio type. However, both the text length and the vocabulary ratio type increase, see figure 6.
Figure 6. Development of text-and word length and vocabulary type for student 1 from the first to the third assignment.

Also student 2 shows an oscillating pattern with first an upward trend for both text length and vocabulary ratio type and then a downward tendency in the last assignment. Yet, when these variables go down the word length goes up, if not drastically yet clearly distinguishable, see figure 7.
Also student 3 has a competitive relationship between word length and text length along with vocabulary ratio type with the two latter ones increasing while the first variable is consistently decreasing, see figure 8.
Furthermore, student 4 shows the same oscillating pattern. When the text length and vocabulary ratio increase the word length decrease or vice versa. Yet as student 2, here there is no linear progress for text or vocabulary as in the third text there is a major drop in text length and vocabulary, which results in an increase in word length, see figure 9.
However, student 5 shows a different development pattern than the other students. Here there is no similar correlation between the text length and the word length. In fact here all the variables show a continuous progress even though the text length increases more, see figure 10.
Figure 10. Development of text-and word length and vocabulary type for student 5 from the first to the third assignment.

The positive progress seen in the text length and vocabulary ratio types for student 1 might be explained with high motivation. There is also a positive correlation between length of schooling in English and motivation albeit not significant. This student has also been studying English for three years. Apart from student 2 all the other students have less English schooling. The sudden drop in text length in the third text for student 4 might be explained with low motivation. This is not the cause for the similar decrease in the text for student 2 who has a higher motivation. Instead this is more probably due to competing subsystems. In this study there appears to be a strong positive correlation between language proficiency in L3 and word length in text 1 for all students. There is also a positive correlation between vocabulary ratio (types/tokens) in the second assignment and the third text length as well as between vocabulary ratio in the third text (types/tokens) and the text length 1 and 2, that is these have higher vocabulary rates and longer texts. However, there don’t seem to be any clear patterns regarding the other students due to total amount of languages and proficiency levels,
length of schooling or stay in Sweden and motivation level in regard of attainment levels. As for instance student 3 who has only studied English for 1 year and has low motivation has a longer text and vocabulary ratio (types/tokens) in the third text than student 5 who has higher motivation. On the other hand, student 5 has longer words.

4.3 Metalinguistic awareness

The measurements of the metalinguistic awareness, which is only studied in the last assignment, shows a top score for student 1 whose rate between corrected and uncorrected errors is 42.80%. Student 4, who as mentioned has low motivation, has also a similar percentage with 38.5 % but her text was also significantly shorter with only 33 words compared to 107. In total, the writers’ awareness is highest at spelling. The majority of the changes concern spelling amendments, like for instance student 2 who only has spelling alterations. Apart from that there are no similar amendment patterns. Interestingly, student 4 also shows a great diversity between different types of changes in contrast to student 5 who has a higher motivation but only gives evidence of 5.9 % metalinguistic awareness, see figure 11.

From this and the other two text assignments there have been instances of Swedish words in the text, which indicate the use of Swedish as a supporter language for English. In according with other research this indicates a connection of transfer between typological/psychotypological close languages.

In general, there is a positive correlation between language proficiency in L3 and metalinguistic awareness albeit not statistically significant. Yet, strangely enough there seems to be a negative correlation between total amount of languages and metalinguistic awareness from this study. Furthermore, the study gives evidence of a negative correlation between spelling and metalinguistic awareness. As before these appear not to be significant. Also, this study only includes five participants and the metalinguistic awareness is only calculated in one text, which makes wider conclusions uncertain. Furthermore, even though the students were in agreement with the task, metalinguistic awareness is an internal process that is hard to measure with this method.
5. Discussion

5.1 Language development

In the study of language development there is evidence of a similar pattern of variability and oscillating development as has been proved in other research within DST. The intra-individual differences can be explained by the earlier mentioned self-organization of a system with connected growers or competitive subsystems as well as how each student interacts with his/her environment. The relationship between the different subsystems may result in an increase in one system and a decrease in another due to the restricted amount of resources (Van Geert, 2008: 193f). A high degree of development variability is also an indication of system reorganisation. Research has proved that language development can both develop in progress and regression especially for beginners who may develop in a constant back and forth process before entering a more stable period (Verspoor el al, 2008: 217). Research has also indicated a positive connection between...
the amount of strategies used and later performance (Verspoor et al, 2008: 218 f).

In the first study there was evidence of a competitive relationship between the participants word length and text length together with the vocabulary type ratio. If the word length increases the text length and vocabulary ratio (amount of types) decreases or vice versa. As mentioned this is a clear pattern of competitive subsystems due to restricted amount of resources. This competitive condition is only temporary as there is no such disturbance evident with fluent or native speakers (Verspoor, 2008: 225). On the other hand student 5 has a different developing trajectory than the other students with no similar correlation between the text length and the word length. In fact here all the variables show a continuous progress even though the text length increases more, which might indicate that this student is able to distribute his resources equally to all subsystems or that they are connected growers in this system (Verspoor et al, 2008: 226). Stagnation in language development can also be related to that the system is immune to changes until a certain level has been reached that is until a critical stage has been built up (De Bot, 2008: 173). In all these L3 learners there is a high amount of variation, which shows the dynamic interplay of language development. In order to find out when the different learners’ subsystems stabilize and find their “attractor” states, more and longer data measurements are needed.

According to DST development is not only dependent on internal self-organizational patterns but also on the interaction between the learner and environment itself. Language development is also occurring at different times and all variations affect the acquisition process (De Bot, 2008: 175). There is a positive correlation between length of schooling in English and motivation in the study even though this appears not to be significant. The positive progress in text length and vocabulary ratio type for student 1 is possible to explain with the evidence of high motivation and that the student has a longer schooling English. Also, the major decrease in the third text length for student 4 can be conceivable to interpret with low motivation. Yet, oscillating developments can also be explained in general as mentioned with competitive subsystems like for example the cut in text length for student 2 who shows higher motivation. In this study there appears to be a strong positive correlation between language proficiency in L3 and word length in text 1 for all students. This might indicate a positive influence of multilingualism when learning a new language if the student has high proficiency in previous languages. As previously mentioned in the
thesis research has found evidence of positive effects from bilingual proficiency in acquiring a new language and that this can be explained by a higher metalinguistic awareness (Jessner, 2008: 270).

5.2 Metalinguistic awareness
In the DST perspective of multilingual development the most important factor is metalinguistic awareness. The heightened linguistic ability to cross-check and monitor language production is the reason for the catalytic effect from multilingualism (Jessner, 2008: 275 f). When the different strategies in changing and correcting the language are conscious this is evidence of metalinguistic awareness (Jessner, 2008: 278). In the study of metalinguistic awareness, which as mentioned is measured by calculating the rate between corrected and uncorrected errors, the participants’ changes are generally concerned with spelling corrections. Furthermore, student 1 who shows the highest motivation also has the highest metalinguistic ability. As metalinguistic awareness is an explicit awareness this shows the learners’ attitude toward the language. Student 1 has as referred to also a longer schooling in English than the other students, apart from student 2 who has a similar length of English education. This study shows a positive correlation between metalinguistic awareness and L3 proficiency, however it is not statistically significant. Yet, this confirms previous research about the positive effects of multilingualism and higher cognitive and metalinguistic ability.

Contradictory, there is also a negative correlation between metalinguistic awareness and total amount of languages even if this is not significant. Furthermore, the study gives evidence of a negative correlation between spelling and metalinguistic awareness. Maybe this can be interpreted as due to the fact that many of these participants are still at low proficiency level in English. Additionally, none of them has yet become fluent in Swedish. A student who is at a low level in many of his languages has most likely a conflict in the language development. The positive correlation will most likely appear at a higher proficiency level, which research also indicates (Kowal, 2009:157f). A high amount of effort will ultimately lead to fatigue. A student who not yet masters a language at an automatic level will need to use more effort than an advanced student. The better a student becomes in the studied language the lesser amount of resources it will need and consequently suffer less fatigue (Van Geert, 2008: 191).

Furthermore, the participants’ texts have instances of Swedish words that
indicate the dominance of Swedish as a supporter language. This confirms the role of transfer from typological/psychological close languages. There are no other traces from other languages in the texts, whether syntax or words. The use of a supporter language and the search for similarities in supporter languages during multilingual production is as Jessner states also an indication of metalinguistic thinking. Yet, the awareness can be explicit or implicit like in for example the use of cognates (Jessner, 2008: 279). A transfer from Swedish into the English text as in this case is most probably due to language shortage. As metalinguistic awareness is an internal process it is difficult to measure this in a writing process.

However, apart from these possible conclusions there are no further general correlation patterns within or between the participants in relation to the total amount of languages and proficiency levels, length of schooling or stay in Sweden and motivation level in regard of attainment levels or metalinguistic awareness. Yet, this is a small and short study of language development and metalinguistic awareness. Nevertheless, the method of a DST approach in this thesis hints at different and possible explanations for various development patterns.

5.3 Future research

In these studies several possible development patterns are evident. As the applied method in the metalinguistic awareness study resulted in uncertain statistics further research is needed. A more valid collection of data would have been to use a specific computer software program like Scriptlog for the measurement of metalinguistic awareness together with a higher number of participants and longitudinal studies with repeated measurements in both the language development and metalinguistic awareness studies. This thesis used a DST theory in focusing on language development by studying variations and interactions of variables as well as measuring metalinguistic awareness by the proportion between corrected and uncorrected errors. This is by all means not the only way to trace language development or metalinguistic awareness but one approach that can compliment other methods.
6. Swedish summary; sammanfattning

I jämförelse med andra europeiska länder har Sverige tagit emot många flyktingar de senaste åren. I mångt och mycket har detta berikat vårt land både kulturellt och språkligt, men det har också bidragit till nya problem inom samhället och inom skolan. Många av de eleverna som har utländsk härkomst har svårt att nå samma nivåer som elever med svensk härkomst inom speciellt svenska och engelska. Dock missgynnas elever som kommer från andra länder om normen utgörs av inhemska svenska elever. Efter att ha arbetat inom IVIK på en gymnasieskola i Södertälje under 1,5 år beslöt jag mig för att undersöka elevernas språkutveckling och metalingvistiska medvetenhet.

Uppsatsens syfte är att studera 5 elevers språkutveckling och deras metalingvistiska medvetenhet genom ett dynamiskt systemteoretiskt perspektiv. I mätningen av den språkliga utvecklingen kommer även eventuella samband mellan vokabulär, ord- och textlängd att analyseras. Huruvida eleverna har förmåga att analysera, reflektera och objektifiera över sin språkproduktion visar på om de har en metalingvistisk förmåga. Vidare granskas även om det finns samband med hur bakgrunds faktorer som skollängd, kunskapsnivå i engelska och andra språk, totalt antal språk, tidsvistelse i Sverige och motivation påverkar språkutveckling och metalingvistisk förmåga.


Dynamisk systemteori försöker förklara komplexa system som språkutveckling som en helhet istället för att se på olika delar enskilt. För att bedöma en


I den andra studien mättes huruvida elever var medvetna om den språkliga processen genom att se om de granskade, kontrollerade och ändrade i sin språkprocess vid ett tillfälle. Alla elever fick tydliga instruktioner om att skriva med bläck och att markera eventuella ändringar med att dra ett streck över tidigare ord/uttryck. I likhet med Kowal som gjort en liknande mätning kunde jag härmed se varje elevs metalingvistiska medvetenhet (Kowal, 2009: 157). Den metalingvistiska medvetenheten togs fram genom att se på proportionen mellan korrigerade och okorrigerade fel. I båda studierna analyserade jag resultaten genom att se på bakgrundsfaktorer som motivation, antalet skolår, kunskapsnivå i engelska och andra språk och det totala antalet språk.

Från den språkliga studien visade resultatet i likhet med andra studier inom dynamisk systemteori att utvecklingen hade stora pendlingar och variationer.
Vidare visade det sig att för fyra av eleverna fanns det undersystem som konkurrerade med varandra i utvecklingen, vilket kan förklaras med begränsad tillgång av resurser. När deltagarnas ordlängd ökade så minskade textlängden och variation av ord (antalet olika typer minskade) och när textlängden ökade liksom variationen av ord så minskade ordlängden. Vidare fanns det ett positivt samband mellan skollängd och motivation i studien även om det inte var statistiskt signifikant. För student 1 kan den positiva utvecklingen i hans textländ och variationen av ord (antalet olika ord) förklaras med hög motivation och att studenten har läst engelska en längre period än vad merparten av de andra eleverna har gjort (endast en elev hade läst engelska lika länge). Den stora minskningen av textlängd som elev 4 visar i text 3 kan på liknande sätt förklaras med brist på motivation. I studien finns även ett starkt positivt samband mellan språkförmåga i tredjespråk och ordlängd i text 1 för alla elever.

I mätningen av metalingvistisk medvetenhet visade elev 1 ha högst medvetenhet över sin språkliga produktion, vilket kan förklaras med hög motivation och längre utbildning i engelska. Studien visar även på ett positivt samband mellan metalingvistisk medvetenhet och tredjespråksförmåga även om det inte är statistiskt signifikant. Detta stöder även tidigare forskning som pekat på ett positivt samband mellan flerspråkighet och högre kognitiv samt metalingvistisk förmåga. Dock finns även negativt samband mellan metalingvistisk förmåga och totalt antal språk liksom mellan stavning och metalingvistik. Ingen av dem är signifikanta. Förklaringen till detta är möjligen att dessa elever fortfarande är på relativt låg färdighetsnivå i engelska liksom att de ännu inte har nått högsta nivå i svenska. För att språken ska inverka positivt krävs det att man har nått en högre nivå annars kan det bli konflikt och påverka språkutvecklingen negativt. Från båda studierna fanns även inslag av svenska ord i texterna, vilket tyder på att svenska använts som ”transfer”- eller ”supporter”-språk. Detta stöder tidigare forskning som pekat på att typologiskt lika språk i större grad påverkar varandra.

I övrigt fanns inga större samband mellan eller inom deltagarna och deras språkutveckling samt metalingvistiska förmåga gentemot de tidigare nämnda bakgrunds faktorerna totalt antal språk, färdighetsnivå inom de olika språken, antalet skolår, skolår i engelska, tidslängd i Sverige eller motivation.

Denna studie var liten och begränsad i både antalet deltagare, observationer och tidslängd. Dock går det att se genom ett dynamiskt systemteoretiskt...
perspektiv ett antal möjliga utvecklingsförlopp. För att få säkrare statistik bör fortsatt forskning ha tillgång till flera deltagare, flera observationer under längre tidslängd liksom ett dataprogram som registrerar elevernas skrivprocess.
7. Bibliography


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8. Appendix 1

Name -

Date of birth -

Country of origin -

Native language -

Year of arrival in Sweden -

Length of schooling in home country -

Previous studies/amount of schooling years in Sweden -

What languages do you know? According to what proficiency level -

Amount of schooling years in English -

Level 1  Only a few words  
Level 2  Understand simple words and expressions  
Level 3  Understand simple sentences and expressions, both orally and written skills  
Level 4  Understand complex sentences, both orally and written skills  
Level 5  Fluent

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