Slips or errors?

A study of the grammatical mistakes in Swedish pupils’ written production of English

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Abstract

Grammar is an important aspect of language learning and is thus of concern in language teaching as well. This study sets out to investigate the kinds of grammatical mistakes Swedish secondary school pupils make in their written production of English and the possible causes behind these different mistakes. Forty essays from pupils in year nine have been used to study the phenomenon of frequently occurring mistakes and their causes, and the salient mistakes have been quantitatively and qualitatively accounted for in the study.

Common mistakes found in the material were subject-verb concord mistakes, mistakes involving plural nouns, incorrect article usage as well as problems using prepositions correctly. Interlingual transfer, i.e. negative transfer from the pupils’ L1, proved to be one significant factor causing mistakes in the material. However, other causes could be traced as well, such as intralingual transfer for example.

Consequently, the findings of this study point in the direction of areas which need specific attention in English L2 learning in Swedish classrooms. Thus, the study contributes with valuable insights for English teacher and teacher trainees to consider in their future practice.

Keywords

Second language acquisition (SLA), grammar, mistakes, slips, errors, interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, negative transfer, L1, L2, Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis.
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1 Introduction

In today’s Swedish society, English is not a language confined within the walls of school; rather it appears almost everywhere. People hear English, for example, when watching TV and movies, and when listening to music. However, to receive the English language when listening and reading is one thing and to produce the language when speaking and writing on one’s own is another. It is in one’s own production of English it becomes evident that English is a second or a foreign language (henceforth L2) for most Swedes – a language that is being learned when one already has knowledge of a first language (henceforth L1). Mistakes in L2 use become particularly visible in one’s own production, and in the context of L2 learning in schools the issue of mistakes is vital for both teachers and pupils since school is supposed to teach and through teaching develop the pupils’ knowledge. For the teaching community it is therefore important to become aware of the causes behind mistakes, in order to improve both teaching and learning.

This study sets out to investigate the written production of a selection of Swedish pupils learning English as an L2 in year nine in secondary school. When learning the L2 the knowledge of the L1 manifests itself through L1 transfer in the use of the L2. Transfer is one of several terms used in research to describe the impact that the L1 has upon the acquisition process of the L2 (Ortega, 2009: 31). Additionally, the terms interference and crosslinguistic influence are frequently used (Ortega, 2009: 31). This study will henceforth use the term transfer when referring to the phenomenon of L1 knowledge affecting L2 learning. (For further exploration of these three terms and the choice of transfer for this study see Section 2.1.)

According to Brown (2007: 102), transfer from L1 to L2 can be both helpful in the sense that a grammatical rule, for example, is transferable from the L1 to the L2 and functions in the same way, but also hindering when the rule is non-transferable which results in a mistake being made in the use of the L2. These phenomena are termed positive and negative transfer, respectively. When the transfer is positive no harm is done since the rules in both languages correspond, but when it is of the negative sort an issue appears and the latter is what this study mainly discusses (Brown, 2007: 102).

The study deals with the analysis of mistakes made in essays written by above mentioned pupils. The mistakes in focus are grammatical ones and the aim is to search for their causes, whether the mistakes are stemming from transfer of Swedish L1 in the acquisition of English L2 or whether they have other causes. Estling Vannestål (2013:
defines grammar as both a “system” and a “theory”. The system is how the language is structured in terms of meaning and how different words function together and the theory is "how grammar works” (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 27). She further on states that there are different kinds of grammar theories which differ in their understanding of the function of grammar (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 27). This essay will henceforth deal with grammar in the sense of the structure it provides to the language (See Section 2.1 for further discussion of the definition of grammar) (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 26).

The curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and recreation center 2011 (in Swedish: Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011, henceforth Lgr11) (Skolverket, 2011a) currently dictates the terms for what is supposed to be learned in Swedish compulsory schools and it is the guideline with which teachers and pupils should comply. When discussing grammar, especially in a school context, accuracy is a concern. This, however, is something that is not included in the syllabus for English year 7-9 in terms of pupils having to express the language in an accurate way in order to pass the subject (Skolverket, 2011a: 32-42). Harmer (2013: 142) discusses accuracy in terms of correctness in language use, such as using grammar according to generally accepted rules and spelling in line with set standards for example. However, pupils in Swedish secondary schools are to, both regarding reception, production and interaction, study “[l]anguage phenomena such as […] grammatical structures and sentence structures” (Skolverket, 2011a: 35). Even though accuracy is not of direct concern in the syllabus and its knowledge requirements (Skolverket, 2011a: 32-42), it is nonetheless an indirect issue dealt with in Swedish schools since a good knowledge of correct grammar is one important factor needed in gaining a good knowledge of a language (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 17).

The fact that the Swedish National Agency for Education ordain grammar studies (Skolverket, 2011a: 35), together with grammar being an important component in having a good knowledge of English (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 17) makes it interesting to analyse the causes of grammatical mistakes within a Swedish school context of English as L2 learning. If the sources of different kinds of mistakes were to be traced, this study, although limited to a case study, could contribute with valuable insights for L2 English teachers and L2 English teacher trainees to be used in the future practice of their profession. It is relevant to study contemporary and authentic material produced by pupils in order to follow the development of a constantly changing society.
Additionally, with the current syllabus, Lgr 11, only having been in effect for about four years (to present date), it is interesting to engage in a study founded on material within the frame of this particular syllabus.

1.1 Aim, research questions and scope

The aim of this study is to investigate mistakes made in L2 learning in the context of Swedish pupils learning English in a secondary school classroom by focusing on grammatical mistakes in the pupils’ written English in order to find possible reasons for their potential mistakes made. To fulfil this aim the following research questions are posed:

1. What kinds of grammatical mistakes do pupils in year nine make, if any, when writing in English?
2. What causes of the potential mistakes in L2 can be found in the present material?
3. What impact, if any, has Swedish L1 in the production of these mistakes?

The investigation is focused on the grammatical aspects of the pupils’ writing and how the mistakes can be linked either to negative transfer from L1 to L2 or to other possible sources of incorrect grammatical language use. The following aspects of the pupils’ written production will not be included in the present study: content of the texts, spelling mistakes without clear bearing on grammatical issues, punctuation and instances of sentence structure mistakes, either run-on sentences or sentence fragments. Since this study deals with grammatical mistakes in writing, the content of the texts is not of interest since it is not probable that mistakes are made depending on the topic of the texts. The topics of the essays will, however, be presented (see Section 3.1) in order to describe the material used for the study.

Spelling mistakes lie outside of the scope of this essay in order to be able to focus more extensively on grammatical mistakes. However, it can been argued that spelling is a grammatical issue (Quirk et al., 2010: 12) but since it is possible to separate spelling as its own category of lexical mistakes, distinguished from others, it is not included in this study. Punctuation is another category of mistakes that easily separates from grammatical mistakes made with words and is therefore excluded in this study. Lastly, the exclusion of run-on sentences and sentence fragments was made for a number for reasons. First, the essays have been written by pupils in year nine in upper secondary
school and they are thus between 15-16 years old. Therefore, it can be argued that they might not have dealt with avoiding these phenomena in more formal writing since it is common and accepted in fictional writing (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 78-79). Secondly, it can also be discussed to what level these essays are formal in their style, even though they are argumentative texts. Thirdly, mistakes including these phenomena are occurring when pupils write in Swedish as well and are thus not exclusive for either writing or learning English. Due to limitations in the material as well as the limited number of essays included, gender differences lie beyond the scope of this study.

This section has introduced the present study and presented the aim of the study together with the research questions and scope. In the next section, theoretical terms are defined, the theoretical background to the research field is given and previous research is discussed.

2 Theoretical background

In this section the relevant terms are discussed and presented as they function in the study. The definition of terms leads up to a presentation of the general background to the research field before the previous research is reviewed and discussed.

2.1 Definition of terms

The research on L2 learning is often referred to as Second Language Acquisition (henceforth SLA). The field of SLA emerged toward the end of the 1960s as an interdisciplinary field combining “language teaching, linguistics, child language acquisition and psychology” (Ortega, 2009: 2). It is a research field that today has reached the identity of being a discipline of its own and concerns the human learning of other languages than one’s L1 (Ortega, 2009: 1).

The L1 is the first language a person acquires and is also commonly referred to as mother tongue and native language (Lightbown and Spada, 2013: 217). L2 is the second language being learned by someone after having acquired proficiency in L1. Another term for L2 is foreign language, which implies that any language besides the L1 is included in the definition of the L2 (Lightbown and Spada, 2013: 223). Interlanguage is the language an L2 learner uses in the process of learning and it includes characteristics from both the L1 and the L2, as well as universal ones commonly included in interlanguage in general (Lightbown and Spada, 2013: 220). Intralingual transfer refers
to the transferring of rules from one structure to another within one language, which is causing mistakes due to non-corresponding structures. Overgeneralization is mentioned as one example of intralingual transfer (Brown, 2007: 264). Lightbown and Spada (2013: 221) define overgeneralization as "trying to use a rule or pattern in a context where it does not belong, for example, putting a regular –ed ending on an irregular verb, as in 'buyed' instead of 'bought'” (Lightbown and Spada, 2013: 221). Interlingual transfer concerns the transfer of rules between the native language and the target language, such as the negative transfer of L1 knowledge in L2 use where structures in the L1 are used in the L2 although they are not compatible (Brown, 2007: 263).

Transfer is one term that refers to the influence that the knowledge of L1 has upon the learning/acquisition of L2 (Lightbown and Spada 2013: 224). Crosslinguistic influence and interference are two other well-known terms besides transfer, but according to Ortega (2009: 31) transfer or crosslinguistic influence are preferred in recent research due to interference being regarded as a term that implies that the L1 has a negative impact on L2 learning in the sense that it disrupts the learning of another language. In order to avoid such negative connotations within SLA by using the term interference, this study uses, as previously stated, the term transfer consequently throughout. Brown (2007: 102) calls transfer ”a general term” and states that transfer includes both positive and negative conveyance of language structures from L1 to L2. Even though positive transfer lies outside of the scope for this study, the term transfer proves to be more inclusive than the term interference due to its mentioned negative connotations (Ortega, 2009: 31). With regards to the term crosslinguistic influence, Lightbown and Spada (2013: 59) state that the benefit of using crosslinguistic influence is that it shows that the influence between L1 and L2 goes both ways, i.e. L2 influences L1 as well. Odlin (2003: 436) confirms the line of thought in research on transfer and crosslinguistic influence by stating that he uses both of these two terms for the reason that they are generally preferred by the research community. In conclusion, researchers seem to agree on the issue of what terms to use even though all of the terms available lack full adequacy to the issue (Odlin, 2003: 436). Even though crosslinguistic influence and transfer are equal as concepts the term transfer was chosen for this study in order for clarity by making use of one of the terms consistently.

Positive transfer, on the one hand, occurs when rules and systems in the L1 and L2 correspond and possess approximately the same functions in both languages. The knowledge of the L1 thus eases the acquisition of the L2 (Brown, 2007: 102). An
example of positive transfer is that the existence of an article system in Swedish facilitates the article usage in L2 English for L1 Swedish speakers compared to learners with L1s without article systems, such as Finnish, for example (Ringbom, 1987: 93, 95). Negative transfer, on the other hand, occurs when a rule or a system in the L1 is not transferable to the L2 due to the fact that the rules differ in usage between the two languages. Thus, the knowledge of the L1 has a negative influence when using the L2 and a mistake is made (Brown, 2007: 102). Subject-verb concord (also referred to as agreement) is an example of an issue where many learners of English are affected by negative transfer from their L1 and have difficulties in using the structure correctly (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 80). Concord with the subject in third person is regarded “the most important type of concord in English” (Quirk et al., 2010: 755) and the rule is that a singular subject takes a singular verb, while a plural subject takes a plural verb (Quirk et al., 2010: 755). Therefore the correct forms are: "He loves his dog." but "They love their dog.". L1 Swedish speakers are likely to make subject-verb concord mistakes since that rule does not apply in Swedish verb usage. Consequently, negative transfer plays a role when making concord mistakes (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 80).

*Mistake* is a broad term and it can mean a variety of things in language learning. In order to make distinctions between different kinds of mistakes this study uses the definitions presented by Harmer (2013: 137) where mistakes are divided into three categories: “slips”, “errors” and “attempts”. *Slips* are mistakes that pupils make despite the fact that they know the correct version and can thus correct the mistakes themselves once they are made aware of them. An example of a slip is when one throughout uses the correct subject-verb agreement (concord) and adds an –s to the verb in third person singular, expect for in one instance where subject and verb does not agree, and "he love” is written, for example. *Errors* are mistakes made due to lack of knowledge of the correct grammatical structure or spelling for example. This becomes visible, for example, when one systematically makes concord mistakes in subject-verb use, such as lacking the –s on the verb when the subject is in third person singular, for example writing "he love” repeatedly and thus being unaware of the fact that the correct verb form in this case is "he loves". *Attempts* are when learners do not know the correct way of saying something, due to not having learned its structure, but try to without doing it correctly. However, attempts are not included further in the study since it is difficult to know whether the pupils have made attempts or not, without extensive awareness of their knowledge of language structures and grammatical rules in English. Brown (2007:
257-258) utilizes another definition of the terms mistake and error. Brown’s definition of mistakes can be interchanged with the term slip, as defined by Harmer (2013: 137), but the definition of error is the same in both Brown and Harmer. Thus, mistakes according to Harmer (2013: 137) include three types of faults while Brown (2007: 257-258) defines mistakes as one type of fault. Whenever the term mistake is used henceforth it will include all of the three distinctions defined by Harmer (2013: 137). The reason for this is that it is difficult to distinguish between the mistakes and errors as defined by Brown (2007: 257-258) without making further observations on each of the pupils who contributed with material to the investigation. Brown (2007: 258) states that "self-correction”, i.e. to be able to correct one’s own mistakes, can be a measurement in order to distinguish between a mistake and an error, for example, but whether or not a learner is able to correct a mistake is not possible to know without observing a possible self-correction. Brown states further “if no such self-correction occurs, we are still left with no means to identify error vs. mistake” (2007: 258). Without such possibilities for the current study, the mistakes have not been as distinctly categorised as Brown’s (2007: 257-258) version of mistake and error; thus, Harmer’s (2013: 137) broad definition of mistake is more advantageous to use due to the lack of further observations. However, it could, on the one hand, be argued that if there are few occurrences of the same sort of mistake then they are probably slips since the pupil only makes the mistake once or twice but expresses it correctly at other times and then, if the mistake is made over and over it is an error since the pupil clearly does not know the rule or system. Therefore, this study includes a discussion on whether it is possible to make a distinction between slip and error or not but when referring to faults in general the term mistake will be used as the generic term including all types of faults, i.e. both slips, errors and attempts.

As stated above, this study defines grammary partly in line with Estling Vannestål’s (2013: 26) definition where grammar is seen as the structure of a language. The other part of the definition of grammar for this study is that grammar includes syntax (the system of allowed combinations of words and their order (Harmer, 2013: 32) as well as the "aspect of [morphology] (the internal structure of words) that deals with [inflections]” (Quirk, et al., 2010: 12). Spelling and lexicology as aspects included in grammar are discussed by Quirk et al. (2010: 12) and they state that these phenomena can be included if the definition of grammar is widened. However, this study confines
the definition of grammar to the narrow one including only structure and morphology (see Section 1.1 for discussion of scope).

2.2 General background to the present research field

Within the SLA research, the notion of *interference* appeared in the 1950s when the idea that learners who shared the same mother tongue might have similar problems when learning another language was brought into focus. Out of this evolved the method of *Contrastive Analysis* (henceforth CA)\(^1\) where differences and similarities between two languages were compared in an attempt to find patterns “to predict when negative transfer will occur and what errors will be produced by particular L1 background groups of L2 learners” (Ortega, 2009: 31). If patterns were to be found, it could be beneficial to L2 teachers in knowing the most common difficulties they would encounter among their pupils (Ortega, 2009: 31).

However, the CA method was later shown to be limited given the fact that not all difficulties in learning the correct rules and systems of an L2 could be traced back to the L1 of a language learner. Difficulties in learning a new language were a mixture of different factors, negative transfer of the L1 being only one of these (Brown, 2007: 255). What followed was a way of analysing mistakes in language use where not only one factor was seen as the source for mistakes made. Rather, numerous factors were taken into account when *Error Analysis* (henceforth EA) entered the research field. Due to the failure of accounting all mistakes in L2 use to L1 transfer, EA replaced the theory of CA by offering varying possibilities for mistakes made (Brown, 2007: 259). Brown (2007: 259) gives, except for negative transfer, the following factors as sources for the mistakes: “intralingual errors within the target language, the sociolinguistic context of communication, psycholinguistic or cognitive strategies, and no doubt countless affective variables” (Brown, 2007: 259).

However, EA was not a full-proof method in analysing mistakes either and its implementation has shown shortcoming as well (Brown, 2007: 259). Brown (2007: 259-260) presents four areas where EA fails. Firstly, he points to the fact that acquiring communicative skills is the aim of learning languages and to put too much focus on mistakes might hinder the development of communication since much time is then spent on correcting or informing on mistakes. Secondly, the lack of including receptive skills (listening and reading) when analysing learner language is a flaw of the method.

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\(^1\) Also called Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) (Lightbown and Spada, 2013: 215).
Thirdly, the issue of avoidance, where a learner avoids a structure due to lack of knowledge of how to use it or due to its difficulty, has not been included in EA. Learners might, therefore, lack full competence in a language due to avoidance of problematic structures and the structures are thus not visible in research either. Fourthly, Brown (2007: 260) states that the research on EA often engages in "specific languages rather than viewing universal aspects of language" (Brown, 2007: 260). However, using EA can nonetheless point in the direction of why certain types of mistakes are being made and the method is useful, although not comprehensive, in spite of said flaws (Ringbom, 1987: 70-71).

Odlin (1989: 152-153) contributes to this line of thinking and states that transfer is influential on several levels in L2 learning and concludes among other things that it is affecting both children and adults as well as it is affected by the linguistic distance between the L1 and L2. However, he is careful in pointing out that transfer is one of many possible contributors to the mistakes made in language learning. Brown (2007: 268-269) explores this further when he puts focus on the impact of variation between different learners, which is another factor to keep in mind when dealing with L2 grammar teaching.

To analyse grammatical errors requires consulting grammar books and Estling Vannestål (2013) together with Quirk et al. (2010) were the main university grammars consulted in order to support this study. Estling Vannestål’s (2013) grammar book presents a contrastive grammar of English and Swedish, with the addition of pointing out ”multi-contrastive aspects” (Estling Vannestål 2013: 21), i.e. difficulties for other L1 speakers than L1 Swedish speakers. In Estling Vannestål’s (2013: 39) own experience in teaching Swedish students she has learned that mistakes made in L2 English often relate to language structures in L1. Examples of language structures especially difficult for Swedish learners of L2 English are ”the use of articles” (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 39), concord mistakes (which however is something difficult for most learners of English and not just Swedish ones) (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 81) and prepositions which are not comparable in meaning in English and Swedish, causing many learners to use the wrong ones, according to Estling Vannestål (2013: 368).

The main aim of Quirk et al.’s (2010: 12) grammar is to provide readers with a description of the English language. Descriptive grammar (a description of how the language is used) is contrasted with prescriptive grammar (a prescription of how the language should be used) and the authors state that the lack of ”an Academy of the
English Language” (Quirk et al., 2010: 14) leads to problems in using prescriptive grammar since no one source can be seen as the ”authoritative” one (Quirk et al., 2010: 14). When discussing varieties within the English language, interference (term used by authors) is brought up as a variation concerning L2 English speakers. Quirk et al. (2010: 27) agree with the fact that knowledge of different L1 language backgrounds in L2 language teaching can facilitate learning if specific difficulties are known beforehand. The acceptability of the structures of the grammar used is based on syntax and morphology (Quirk et al., 2010: 33).

In addition to these two grammars, Lindstromberg’s *English prepositions explained* has functioned as a complement on certain particulars concerning the mistakes made with prepositions. This grammar on prepositions was written due to a perceived lack of useful resources on the particular word class (Lindstromberg, 1998: 1) and was used as such in this investigation as well. Furthermore, Cambridge University Press (2015) was used as a complement to the main grammars when dealing with adverbial positions.

2.3 Previous research

In her doctoral dissertation Köhlmyr (2001) aimed “to investigate what grammatical errors Swedish 16-year-old learners of English make in English written production […], to establish the frequency of different grammatical error types, and to analyse the causes of the errors made” (Köhlmyr, 2001: 3). Köhlmyr further on discusses the relevant national curricula for each of the years, *Lgr 80* for the texts written in 1992 and *Lpo94* for the ones written in 1995 in order to discuss whether the different curricula in effect at the different years of the writing might have affected the outcome due to different approaches to grammar teaching (Köhlmyr, 2001: 2-3). Both CA and EA are used as methods to analyse the results found through the investigation (Köhlmyr, 2001: 19).

In her study, Köhlmyr categorized errors according to word class as a first instance but then added one category on word order and one on concord (2001: 27). The findings are that 60 percent of the errors can be explained as “intralingual errors”, which is expressed as “overgeneralisation, simplification by omission or blends” (Köhlmyr, 2001: 276). The remaining 40 percent are interlingual errors caused by negative transfer (Köhlmyr, 2001: 276). The results of Köhlmyr’s study will be an interesting comparison with the findings of the present study, despite the present one being more limited in its execution compared to Köhlmyr’s doctoral dissertation.
Ringbom (1987: 2, 4) has made a comparative study between L1 Finnish-speaking and L1 Swedish-speaking Finnish learners of L2 English with the intention to discuss L2 learning in relation to crosslinguistic influence (as expressed by Ringbom). Through the method of EA, Ringbom has analysed and compared said learners in "comprehension and the oral skills" (1987: 80), spelling and "grammar and word frequencies" (1987: 90-92). The grammar issues in Ringbom’s study are of relevance for the present study. The result of Ringbom’s (1987: 108-109) study is that Swedish-speaking learners of English are generally better than Finnish-speaking learners at the same stage of learning which indicates that the crosslinguistic influence has a positive effect since Swedish is more closely related to English than Finnish is. Swedish and English are both Germanic languages and this does thus help Swedes in their early years of learning L2 English, something Finnish-speaking L2 English learners do not experience since Finnish and English are not in the same language family (Ringbom, 1987: 19-20, 108-109). Thus, Ringbom’s study shows how L1 transfer into L2 can function positively and that L1 Swedish speakers who are learning L2 English have an advantage when learning English compared to L2 learners with non-Germanic L1s. Ringbom (1987: 94, 109) also concludes that L1 transfer has a larger impact on L2 usage in the beginning of the learning process rather than later on based on his and previous studies on transfer in varying age groups with different amounts of years learning English.

Further more, Ringbom (1987: 143-144) puts emphasis on how important grammar proficiency is in order to gain accuracy in language use. Therefore, to take L1 influence into account in L2 teaching and stress similarities and differences is a method to aid pupil’s learning in grammar, which in effect means that teachers should be aware of both positive and negative transfer in order to improve the grammar teaching.

Odlin and Jarvis (2004) have, in line with Ringbom, made a comparison between L1 speakers of Swedish and L1 speaker of Finnish in their L2 English learning in order to see how the two languages influenced English in the process of learning (2004: 123). It is important to keep in mind the fact that the Finns in the study also have varying knowledge of Swedish and vice versa (2004: 127). Odlin and Jarvis (2004: 123, 127) took both positive and negative transfer into account in their study and found that L1 Swedish speakers profit more from the transfer between their L1 into L2 English than the Finns do and thereby confirming the results presented by Ringbom (1987). This success was explained by the benefit of Swedish and English both being Germanic
languages and having a closer relationship than what Finnish and English has, which led to a larger extent of positive transfer between Swedish and English than between Finnish and English. Additionally, this led Finns to go via their knowledge of Swedish in their process of learning English (2004: 127). These results presented in Odlin and Jarvis’ study show that the learner’s L1 has a substantial impact on L2 learning when it comes to Swedish and English and also proves that there is positive transfer as well since Finns could make use of their knowledge of Swedish in order to facilitate their L2 English learning (Odlin and Jarvis, 2004: 127).

Miller (2005) has researched the use of articles among English as a second language (henceforth ESL) students and she claims that incorrect use of the English articles is one of three grammatical aspects commonly occurring in writing created by learners of English. The article system is said to be especially difficult for learners with L1s without corresponding structures. Furthermore, mistakes in this area are less likely to disappear over time and rather continue to cause problems in spite of learners increasing their knowledge (Miller, 2005: 80).

Thus, Miller (2005: 82-83) studies this phenomenon in order to try to investigate how the article usage can be improved in writing. This was done with the help of foreign students at a university in Australia who were supposed to do exercises on the English article system that were meant to “encourage students to formulate their own rules governing English article use” (Miller, 2005: 83). The results of the study, although somewhat limited in number of participants, were that article usage cause problem even for L2 learners of English at university level but also that the students were able to improve their knowledge on article usage. The study shows, therefore, that grammar teaching addressing these issues is both needed and shown to be helpful (Miller, 2005: 85).

In this section key terms have been defined and discussed, a general background to the research field has been presented and previous research has been reviewed. The following section deals with the material used for the study and discusses the methodological procedures applied together with ethical considerations that are essential to any research that includes human subjects.
3 Material and method

This section presents and discusses the material of this study before the methodological procedures are dealt with. The importance of ethical considerations and how these have been taken into account in the present study will complete this section.

3.1 Material

The material used for this study consists of 40 pupil essays collected from pupils studying English in year nine at a secondary school in southern Sweden. The texts were collected from two different classes and thus 40 different pupils, whereof 23 were girls and 17 were boys. Five pupils did not have Swedish as their L1, two of them, one girl and one boy, had Arabic as their L1, two girls had Albanian as their L1 and one boy had Farsi as his L1. According to the teacher, all pupils are proficient in Swedish – even though Swedish is not the L1 of all of them. Therefore, in terms of possible negative transfer all pupils can be affected by Swedish in their use of English. Pupils with other L1s than Swedish might however transfer language structures from two languages – Swedish and their L1. Further on, this issue causes an implication on the use of the term L2 since the L2 for pupils with another L1 than Swedish in reality is Swedish and therefore English for them is a L3 being learned, in case Swedish was learned before English. However, as discussed in S 2.1, L2 includes both second and foreign languages and the L2 is thus seen as any language being learned besides the L1.

To have knowledge of two or more languages when learning an additional language means that all of the previously learned languages will transfer language structures into the language being learned. Thus, pupils with knowledge of more than one language before learning English are affected in their use of English accordingly (Ortega, 2009: 31). As is shown in Ringbom (1987) as well as Odlin and Jarvis’ (2004) studies on comparing Swedes and Finns English learning, languages are assets which you profit from in different ways. The Finns in Odlin and Jarvis’ (2004: 123, 127) study could use their knowledge of Swedish in order to easier relate to structures in English, and in that way the Finns’ English improved with the help of another language. Bilingualism can function in two different ways depending on the context in which you are. On the one hand, the context can be additive which means that the L2 is learned without implications for the L1. On the other hand, the context can be the reversed, namely subtractive, and the L1 is thus replaced by the L2 which instead becomes the most
important one (Baker, 2011: 4). This is necessary to take into account when dealing with bilingual pupils, but is not within the scope of this essay. The study has, however, taken into account the fact that five pupils have other L1s, which might influence the acquisition of English through transfer as well.

The essays are on average one and a half pages long and consist of 286 words each. The essays vary between three topics: 19 out of 40 essays have been written on the topic "Is fashion important?", 14 out of 40 essays have been written on the topic "Is homework harmful or helpful?" and 7 out of 40 essays have been written on the topic "Do curfews keep teens out of trouble?". For reasons of keeping the essays anonymous as well as being able to distinguish between them when analysing, the pupils’ essays were numbered randomly from 1-40. No distinction was made between the classes since all of the pupils had the choice of selecting one of the three topics for the essay.

All but one of the pupils’ essays were handwritten and all of the essays included the teacher’s corrections along with the pupils’ writing. The documents were scanned into digital form and emailed by the teacher. It was however possible to identify the teacher’s corrections since the teacher had crossed over words, underlined words/letters or added comments in another handwriting as well as beside or above the pupils’ writings. Therefore, there should not be any confusion over what the pupils have written and what the teacher has corrected.

The small amount of the 40 essays studied together with the fact that all essays originate from the same school is a limitation of the investigation, given that the findings cannot be generalized outside the current group of pupils and teacher behind the material provided if an extended study on the topic is not conducted. The results can, however, point to interesting and valuable aspects of teaching and learning English as an L2 that can be useful for teachers and trainee teachers to take into account in their future teaching.

Some limitations to the material were discovered during the analysis, given the essays being handwritten. A small number of words has been difficult to read due to the scanning being too light, but in general the writing has been readable throughout all essays but one. In this essay, one section was too lightly written and was thus not possible to read. This section, however, was only five lines out of approximately sixty lines and this essay was, even without the unreadable part, longer than the average essay. The reliability of the data should therefore not be affected by this reduction in that one essay.
3.2 Method

This study is both quantitative, in terms of the documentation of how frequent different mistakes were, and qualitative, in terms of the analysis of the mistakes and their different causes. The causes of possible grammatical mistakes made in the pupils’ essays are however the main focus. The study is not focused on the content of the material but rather on the linguistic aspects focusing on the grammar used by the pupils and to the extent their mistakes relate to their L1, which is Swedish for the majority of the pupils, and to the extent other causes can explain the mistakes made in L2 use.

3.2.1 Analytical procedures

The mistakes found in the essays were at first colour coded into two categories: grammar mistakes and spelling mistakes. Spelling mistakes were, however, not included further since they lie outside of the scope of this essay but were acknowledged in this very first instance. In a second set, the mistakes were inserted in their context onto a separate computer-written document, with the mistake highlighted, and categorized according to which word class the mistake belonged to (see Köhlmyr, 2001 and S 2.3). Estling Vannestål’s (2013: 50) division into nine word classes was used; thus, the categories were the following: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, numerals, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections. In addition to these categories of word classes, a category of word order was added since word order does not confine to a specific word class but rather deals with clause elements (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 39, 64). For each essay, instances of uncertainty were noted as well.

When all mistakes in all essays were noted on a separate document, they were counted and classified into different sub-categories within each main category, depending on characteristics either of the specific category or of the different mistakes made (for the detailed classification see Section 4 and Tables 1-6 of all the mistakes). After counting and classifying the mistakes, only the most frequent ones were chosen to be included in the study, in order to point to the most salient mistakes made in the essays. A number of at least ten mistakes for each sub-category was chosen as a limit in order to make the results of the study reliable. Less than ten mistakes in forty pupil essays were not seen as sufficient enough to draw any sort of conclusion upon. This limitation ruled out adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions while no mistakes related to numerals or interjections could be found and all of these five categories were therefore
deleted. This means that only four categories of word classes are taken into account in the study; nouns, verbs, pronouns and prepositions. Thus, in total there are five main categories, with their different sub-categories, analysed in this study.

The mistakes were then compiled into one table per category, which showed the frequency of each sub-category of mistakes. Odd mistakes within the word classes were added to the tables as well, in order to see the total extent of the mistakes and to be able to compare the salient mistakes with the total number for each category. The odd mistakes were, with a few exceptions, not discussed in any detail. The possible sources of every sub-category of the salient mistakes were analysed and discussed in terms of possible traces of either negative transfer of Swedish grammatical structures into the learning of the English ones or other sources to making the different mistakes.

The mistakes made with one word, thus not mistakes including word order, have been categorised into the word classes the words belong to, which means that if a pupil has written a preposition where an adverb would have been the correct word class, the mistake was placed within the category of prepositions; for example writing *to* when meaning *too*. Sometimes there appeared more than one mistake in a sentence or paragraph and all of the mistakes have been accounted for within the word class the word belongs to. In the given examples from the pupils’ essays there might appear several mistakes but only the mistake within the category currently dealt with has been highlighted (in bold) as a mistake. Other possible mistakes in the examples have been dealt with within the category they belong to and are thus not attended to in other categories than the one the mistake belongs to. There were instances where the meaning of sentences are difficult to understand, such as:

(1) Someone did not like it, someone dont like it but need to do it.

In these instances, the grammatical mistakes have been addressed as they appear in the sentence and the possible ambiguity of the sentence has not been regarded. If a mistake appeared where the word order was wrong and words had to be moved in order for the sentence to be grammatically correct and thus a word was missing after the change, the missing word was not added to the table as a mistake in the category of missing words. The following is one example of this:

(2) […] and what you were, have nobody a opinion about.
In order for the word order to be correct *nobody* has to come before *have* but a *should* has to be added as well (i.e., *nobody should have an opinion on what you wear*), *should* is then a missing verb but is not marked as such in the verb-table since the word order change demanded the word to be added and the mistake was thus not made by the concerned pupil. The mistake of writing *were*, in the same sentence, instead of *wear*, which was intended, was however included in the verb-table since it was a mistake the pupil made.

3.3 Ethical considerations

To practice research with human subjects demands a high degree of consideration for people who, in one way or another, are involved in the research. The Swedish Research Council has developed a criteria to follow in order to secure an ethically implemented research which discusses four main claims that have to be taken into account when dealing with the demand of individual protection within research (Vetenskapsrådet, n.d.: 6).

The first demand is to inform participants about the aim of the study (Vetenskapsrådet, n.d.: 7); for this study this has been accomplished by informing the teacher about the investigation and the teacher forwarded the information to the pupils involved. The second demand is that consent to participation is given by the subjects but the degree of consent can vary depending on the nature of the study. The consent from a teacher is sufficient if the research is not based on private or sensitive material (Vetenskapsrådet, n.d.: 9). In line with this, this study relies on the consent of participation from the teacher who provided the material, i.e. the pupil essays. Thirdly, the individuals involved in the research have to be guaranteed anonymity and personal information should not be possible to find out by people reading the study (Vetenskapsrådet, n.d.: 12). The teacher who provided the material for this study deleted the pupils’ names before sending the essays which guaranteed their anonymity. Additionally, both the pupils and the teacher have been informed of the anonymity of the investigation and that it will not be possible to connect the study neither to them nor to the specific school. In this study, the anonymity was assured through the deletion of all names or other information that could be connected with specific persons or the specific school. The fourth and last demand posed by the Swedish Research Council (n.d.: 14) is that the collected material is not to be used for any other purposes besides
what is needed to reach the aims of the research. The material had thus served its purpose once this study was completed and will not figure in other circumstances.

In this section the material and method have been presented. A line of reasoning on the ethical considerations of research in general and this study in particular concluded the section. This section is followed by the results of the present study, presented and discussed quantitatively in terms of number of mistakes and qualitatively in terms of reasons for the mistakes made.

4 Results

This section presents the results of this study and begins with a general introduction to the total number of mistakes. The categories of mistakes included in the study, nouns, verbs, pronouns, prepositions and word order, will be dealt with in said order. Each sub-section presents a table of the most frequently occurring mistakes found in the material, after which they will be discussed in further detail.

4.1 Introduction to results
The different categories included in this study have been organized into their own tables, which will follow further below, and in these tables the different mistakes have been compartmentalised further. Each table has been followed by an analysis of the kinds of mistakes that have been made together with examples given from the material. The mistakes in the examples from pupils’ essays are marked in bold in the example sentences/phrases and followed by a correction within brackets. Spelling mistakes have not been commented upon due to the fact that there were no difficulties in understanding the intended work due the poor spelling. Thus, the spelling is kept as written in the actual material.

All categories have a sub-category called ”other mistakes” and these are mistakes within the categories which only occurred one or a few times in total and did not qualify for their own categories. They are nonetheless mistakes and therefore they were included in the quantitative compilation of the mistakes.

In Table 1 below the total number of mistakes in all five categories of frequent mistakes distinguished in the material is presented as an overview of the distribution of the mistakes made in the different categories.
Table 1. Total number of mistakes in all categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY OF MISTAKE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF MISTAKES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nouns</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Verbs</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pronouns</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prepositions</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Word order</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of mistakes</strong></td>
<td><strong>515</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that five pupils had other L1s than Swedish has been taken into account when analysing the pupils’ essays regarding mistakes made in order to possibly detect certain structures causing difficulty depending on negative transfer from their different L1s. However, these five pupils have shown to produce few mistakes in general, and there are no traits of certain structures which seem to cause problems for them and which distinguish them from their fellow pupils who have Swedish as their L1. Thus, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the bilingual pupils in this study. In order to be able to say something further about influences from Arabic, Albanian and Farsi when producing written English in a Swedish context further research has to be conducted.

4.2 Nouns

The mistakes made with nouns can be generally distinguished as mistakes according to the following categories: articles, plurals and genitive mistakes. In Table 1 below the mistakes are further distinguished and counted quantitatively.

Table 2. Mistakes made with nouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOUNS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF MISTAKES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Article mistakes</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Plural mistakes</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Genitive mistakes</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other mistakes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of noun mistakes</strong></td>
<td><strong>130</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of mistakes, counting all grammatical mistakes, is 515 and consequently, noun mistakes make up 25 percent of the total number of mistakes.
4.2.1 Articles mistakes

The group of mistakes made with articles is extensive and includes 48 mistakes in total. One or more of these mistakes can be found in 27 of the 40 pupil essays analysed. Ten pupils made mistakes with the indefinite article (*a/an*) and twenty-three pupils made mistakes with the definite article (*the*). For the indefinite article, each pupil made between one and three mistakes per essay and between one and four mistakes per essay were made with the definite article. The number of mistakes with articles indicates that the structure of the definite article (*the*) is more difficult than the structures of the indefinite articles (*a/an*) for the pupils included in this study.

Seven of the mistakes made with the indefinite article *a/an* are mistakes where the pupils have written *a* for *an* and vice versa:

(3) […] *a* eye for fashion […]. *[an eye]*

This indicates lack of knowledge of the rule for using *a/an* in English since the pupils do not use *a* with nouns that start with a consonant sound and *an* with nouns which begin with a vocal sound (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 123).

Four mistakes are due to use of indefinite articles where one is not used or not correct to use, such as in:

(4) […] if we have *a* homework […]. [have homework]

In this example it is clear that the pupil has used the indefinite article in English where an indefinite article would be used in Swedish and that the rule therefore has been transferred into English erroneously. The Swedish counterpart for this example would be *en läxa*, with the indefinite article (*en*) before the noun (*läxa*). This is not the case in English, in which *homework* instead is an uncountable noun and is not used with indefinite articles (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 99). This mistake is thus likely caused by negative transfer from the L1.

However, in the remaining three mistakes indefinite articles were used where they were not needed and these are mistakes where the Swedish counterpart would not have used an indefinite article either, such as in:

(5) […] for an example […] [no article needed]
These mistakes are not likely interlingual transfer mistakes but rather intralingual mistakes or possibly caused by faulty learning or lack of learning of the grammatical rules of article usage.

One grammatical rule important here is the one of countability together with article use, which according to Miller (2005: 81) is essential in learning the correct use of articles. It is evident from the material that the lack of knowledge on countable and uncountable nouns causes problems for the pupils when they are using the articles, as the occurrence of a homework is a clear example of.

The two last mistakes are one where an indefinite article has been left out where needed and one where an indefinite article occurs where a numeral should be instead. One out of every four students have made one or more mistakes with the indefinite article and the appearing mistakes seem to have been caused by both interlingual and intralingual transfer.

Primarily, the pupils have clear problems with the use of the definite article the according to the analysis since 35 mistakes divided between 23 pupils have been made in total. Twenty-two of the mistakes including the are instances where the definite article has been added where it is not used:

(6) **The most pupils** agrees to this. [Most pupils]

Thus, it seems as if the pupils overuse the definite article in their writing but a closer look on the mistakes made shows that many of the mistakes are due to lack of knowledge of where definite article is not used, as with uncountable nouns (as discussed above) as well as with plurals which are meant in generic sense (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 129). "School", "people", "teens" and "fashion" are examples of nouns found in the essays that the pupils mean in generic sense but still use with the definite article, as is exemplified by the following phrases:

(7) […] can help you in the school […]. [in school]
(8) Sometimes the fashion makes […]. [Sometimes fashion]

According to Estling Vannestål (2013: 128) this is a common mistake made by learners and the fact that it occurs as many times as this in a limited sample of learners’ essays
proves it is a difficulty for L1 Swedish speakers when learning L2 English, which points to negative transfer as influential. Causes for why Swedish speaking pupils find the use of the difficult might be because of the fact that the function of the definite article in Swedish is not present as its own word before the noun but as a suffix at the end of the noun, skolan is the definite form of skola (school), for example.

In eleven of the instances the definite article has been omitted, such as one pupil has done four times when writing:

(9) […] maybe you took [X] wrong size […]. [the wrong size]

This mistake has been made in all four instances where the concerned pupil writes something about the wrong size of clothes. In essays where only one mistake has been made with the definite article it is arguable whether the mistake is a slip or an error, in this case, however, the pupil clearly makes an error, omitting over and over again the article when writing about size. It is likely that this mistake is due to negative transfer from L1 since the definite article is not used when it comes to wrong sizes of clothes in Swedish, the Swedish equivalent would be: Du kanske tog fel storlek.

4.2.2 Plural mistakes

The mistakes involving plural nouns in the table are grouped together and are in total 69 mistakes and this section discusses the ones most frequently made. The largest number of mistakes has been made with uncountable nouns which do not exist as plurals. Forty-three plural mistakes have been made with uncountable nouns and all but one of these mistakes were made with the uncountable noun homework (Quirk et al., 2010: 252):

(10) […] how it would be without homeworks […]. [homework]

It is justified to label these mistakes errors because of the fact that the pupils who have made the mistake of writing homeworks, have made it between five and seventeen times each in their essays. It is of relevance here to mention that 14 essays were written on the topic "Is homework harmful or helpful?" and in six of the essays on this topic this error occurs. Since the equivalence for homework in Swedish is a countable noun (en läxa, flera läxor) the mistake can be explained by the negative transfer of the structure in Swedish into the use of English. However, since eight pupils using the word homework
have not made this mistake, it seems as if some pupils have learned that homework is uncountable in English while other pupils have not learned that structure and are therefore influenced by their L1.

Eleven mistakes have been made with regular plurals, such as:

(11) […] a jacket, that many of the girl like […]. [girls]

These mistakes made with regular plurals are spread between seven pupils and it is thus difficult to draw any conclusions due to most pupils only making the mistake once or twice. The same goes for the remaining mistakes with the plural rule of English, too few mistakes have been made to be able to analyse them generally in detail. However, the fact that 70 mistakes were made with plurals in the essays in total points to the fact that many pupils have difficulties with plural nouns and, as we have seen, not knowing the rule about uncountable nouns and countable nouns causes a great number of mistakes being made.

4.2.3 Genitive

To express possession in English, two structures are possible – the genitive and the of-construction (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 116). In these essays the genitive is of interest since eleven mistakes have been recorded where the apostrophe and –s are not used correctly:

(12) […] in your friends eyes […]. [friends'/friend's eyes]

The small amount of eleven mistakes occurs in nine essays and are thus only found in about one fourth of the pupils’ essays who have made the mistake one time each on average. Thus, this does not seem to be an extensive problem but it is nonetheless interesting to mention since the Swedish equivalent is to just add the –s to the noun, without the apostrophe, such as i dina/din vänners/väns ögon, using example 12. In all but three of the mistakes the pupils seem to have transferred the Swedish structure of only adding the –s without including the apostrophe. Consequently, it is likely that the mistake has been caused by negative transfer for L1 Swedish speakers learning English.
4.3 Verbs

Table 3 below presents the mistakes made with verbs. The category called apostrophe omission includes mistakes where two words have been written as one, without the required apostrophe used to distinguish between them, and where one of these words is a verb.

Table 3. Verb mistakes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERBS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF MISTAKES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Subject-verb concord mistakes</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Wrong verb form use</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Apostrophe omission</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Verb omission</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other mistakes</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of verb mistakes</strong></td>
<td><strong>195</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of mistakes, counting all grammatical mistakes, is 515 and consequently, verb mistakes make up 38 percent of the total number of mistakes.

4.3.1 Subject-verb concord mistakes

As seen in Table 2 subject-verb concord mistakes are by far the most common mistakes the pupils have made within the word class verbs. In total, 109 mistakes have been made by 32 out of 40 pupils. More than seventy-five percent of the pupils have thus made this mistake and they have made it between one and eleven times each which creates an average of about three mistakes per essay (out of the thirty-two having made the mistake). Here follows three examples of subject-verb concord mistakes made in the essays:

(13) […] and so we **survives** the years we have left […]. [we survive]
(14) […] the students **gets** very […]. [students get]
(15) […] your teen **have** been grounded […]. [teen has]

Ten of the thirty pupils making this mistake have only made it once, which makes it difficult to decide whether the mistake is a slip or an error for said pupils. However, the 20 pupils who have made the mistake more than once probably have problems with the rule and it can thus be said that they make errors by not implementing the structure in its correct form.
It is not possible to distinguish a certain type of subject or a certain type of verb that more frequently than others appear as concord mistakes, the subjects are mixed and there are approximately as many mistakes with singular subjects as with plural subjects. This points to the fact that it is the structure of concord at large that is problematic for the pupils, not certain compositions of words.

As previously discussed and stated, concord is a difficult structure for most learners of L2 English and can thus be explained to be caused by negative transfer from the L1 (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 81) and Swedish is in this case no exception since the verb is always unchanged independently on the form of the subject “jag ser, du ser, han/hon ser, vi ser, de ser” etc.

4.3.2 Wrong verb form use

The wrong verb form has been used 30 times in 17 essays, which are almost half of the pupils. The two verb forms most often incorrectly used is the infinitive and the progressive with nine incorrect usages each. Examples of the two mistakes are the following:

(16) When you have **find** the right clothes […]. [found]
(17) I like to **wearing** jeans […]. [to wear]

The verb form that most of the mistakes should be written in instead is the infinitive form as well, with eight instances where an infinitive form of the verb should have been. This shows that the pupils in general find it difficult to know when to use the infinitive form or not when writing. An example where the infinitive should have been used instead, can be found in essay 34:

(18) I think that we do not **learning** something to do homeworks. [learn]

Even though some verb forms are mistakenly used more often than others the number of mistakes are too few to discuss why certain verb forms are used incorrectly in detail. However, using the correct verb form considering all verb forms is a distinct problem for the pupils involved in this study.

A possible reason for confusion with the infinitive might be the fact that the Swedish **att** is used before the infinitive in Swedish and that the English equivalent, the **to-**
infinitive, can be mistaken for the preposition to. The Swedish word att does not have any parallel meaning. Problems with the progressive form might also be a case of confusion by the lack of a Swedish counterpart (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 191). L1 transfer might therefore be an influencing factor leading to the production of these mistakes.

4.3.3 Apostrophe omission

The mistake of omitting apostrophes between verbs and other words, which are meant to distinguish them in contractions, has been made by nine pupils seventeen times in total. "Contractions are phonologically reduced or simplified forms" (Quirk et al., 2010: 123), which are used both when speaking and when writing and are characterized by an apostrophe between the contracted words, such as in I don’t (do not) like apples. Contractions are, however, preferred in informal language and should therefore be avoided in formal writing (Quirk et al. 2012: 123). The most common combination of words where the apostrophe was left out in the material was do, does and not, occurring nine times, however only by four pupils. Below is one example:

(19) […] if you don’t have […]. [don’t/do not]

The other words that are not distinguished as two separate words by apostrophes are let us, I am, that is and what is. This can point in the direction of lack of knowledge on how to use contractions since there is no existing equivalent to contractions in Swedish. Thus it implies that negative transfer might play a role in this situation. Nonetheless, the fact that contractions are common in speech might pose a problem when writing since one does not have to think about where to place the apostrophe when speaking and thus the causes might include intralingual transfer or lack of knowledge of the structure. The implications for teaching are that it might be good to stress the fact that the pupils should not use contractions in formal writing in order to avoid these kinds of mistakes and also in order to learn the words that are actually included in contracted forms. Additionally, it is also detectable when a pupil might not know that he/she has written two words as one, such as lets instead of let’s, and therefore the lack of knowledge can be met and adjusted.
4.3.4 Verb omissions

Twelve pupils have omitted sixteen verbs in total incorrectly, ten omitted verbs are auxiliaries and the remaining six are main verbs. The auxiliary verb do has been omitted four times, will has been omitted three times, have has been omitted two times and can has been omitted one time.

(20) […] if you [X] not like your body […] [do]
(21) Do not do that and you [X] have a good body […] [will]

The likelihood of example 20 being due to negative transfer becomes clear when translating it to its Swedish corresponding form, om du inte gillar din kropp, which is the correct phrase in Swedish when directly translated. The problem is however that the correct English is not possible to directly translate from Swedish in this instance and thus a mistake was made. In the second example the mistake can also be linked to negative transfer due to lacking corresponding structures in English and Swedish with expressing the future. Estling Vannestål (2013: 188) presents this is as a mistake Swedish L1 speakers often make since the structure is not transferable from Swedish into English.

The main verbs omitted vary and with six mistakes no one or two verbs can be concluded to pose particular problems although it is a quite frequently occurring mistake when including all mistakes with omitted verbs. Despite this, it is difficult to elaborate on the causes for omitting these verbs and due to the small number of mistakes they are likely to just be slips due to negligence.

4.4 Pronouns

In a first instance, the pronouns were divided according to the categories presented by Estling-Vannestål (2013:291-329) with the exception of exclamatory pronouns due to lack thereof in the material. When counting all the mistakes within each sub-category, only mistakes with personal pronouns and relative pronouns exceeded the minimum number of mistakes in order to be seen as frequent. Therefore, Table 4 below presents the number of mistakes within these three sub-categories of pronouns and the remaining mistakes with pronouns are counted in one column in order to present the picture of the total number of mistakes made with pronouns.
Table 4. Mistakes made with pronouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRONOUNS</th>
<th>Number of mistakes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Personal pronouns</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Relative pronouns</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other mistakes</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of mistakes</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of mistakes, counting all grammatical mistakes, is 515 and consequently, pronoun mistakes make up twelve percent of the total number of mistakes.

4.4.1 Mistakes made with personal pronouns

The mistakes occurring in this sub-category are diverse and include eight instances where the subject form and object form of the personal pronouns have been exchanged incorrectly, four where the personal pronoun *I* have been spelled wrongly (*i*), three where another type of pronoun should be exchanged for the personal one and three cases where the personal pronoun has been wrongly omitted. Eleven of the pupils have made one or more of these mistakes and thus about twenty-five percent of the pupils have treated the personal pronoun incorrectly in the current material. There was also one instance of agreement mistake between the subject and the personal pronoun used:

(22) […] to give your child curfews when *they* have done something terrible […] *[he/she]*

Since referring to a child the personal pronoun should agree with that one child and be *he/she* instead of *they*.

The most frequent, and thus most interesting, mistake within this sub-category is the one where the subject forms and the object forms of the corresponding personal pronouns have been confused. An example of this is the following:

(23) […] *them* don’t know the homework […] *[they]*

In this clause, the noun, *homework*, is object and the pronoun is subject, but the pupil has mistakenly used the object form *them* for a subject pronoun. This mistake occurs six times in total. Four of them are made by the same pupil which makes it clear that it is an error since the pupil repeats the wrong structure.
This mistake can be traced to the common misuse in Swedish of the Swedish equivalents – *de* (subject form they) and *dem* (object form them). Thus, it seems as if the pupils have negatively transferred an incorrect structure from L1 Swedish into L2 English and thus made a mistake in the use of the English pronouns *they* and *them*. The other two mistakes where the object and subject forms have been interchanged are one with *he/she* instead of *him/her* and one where the reversed situation occurs which seem to be slips due to only one occurrence of each and also being made by two different pupils. Clearly, in this type of mistake the pupils only have trouble with personal pronouns in third person, such as *he-him, she-her* and *they-them* (Quirk et al., 2012: 346).

The instances where the personal pronouns have been spelled wrongly are included due to its grammatical implications of influencing the meaning of the pronoun. The fact that Swedish pupils write *i* instead of *I* might be due to the fact that the Swedish equivalent *jag* only is spelled with lower case letters (if not beginning a sentence, then it is of course spelled *Jag*). Swedish pupils are therefore not used to the idea of writing the personal first person pronoun with a capital letter. However, seeing to the fact that these are pupils in year nine they have been studying English for about six years and should therefore have learned to write *I* correctly. Negative transfer is therefore not a plausible explanation and the lasting reason for the mistake is then negligence.

### 4.4.2 Mistakes made with relative pronouns

Seven pupils have made the eleven mistakes with relative pronouns, which are pronouns that refer back to an antecedent and ”introduce relative clauses” (Quirk et al., 2012: 365). Six mistakes involve using *who* for things that are not human or animal, which are the two categories of words that *who* should refer back to (Estling-Vannestål, 2013: 308). In these instances, *who* should be replaced with *which, that* or *what* in order to concur with what is being said. An example of a mistake involving *who* is:

(24) There are many countries *who* does not have […]. [which]

A plausible explanation for the mistake made with *who* is that L1 transfer makes itself reminded since the Swedish relative pronoun *som* is used frequently when referring back to something, independently of whether the thing referred back to is human or not since it can function with both. Thus, this may lead to the lack of consideration on
whether to change the relative pronoun due to the subject/object referred to or not. This is probably also the reason for why the other mistakes within this category have been made, such as:

(25) […] it was wrong that she/he did […]. [what]

The Swedish translation of this would include the relative pronoun *det som* (*det som han gjorde var fel*), and thus the mistake might be explained as due to negative transfer. Another plausible reason might be the fact that according to Estling-Vannestål (2013: 312) *that which* could be used instead of *what* as a relative pronoun. *That which* is however rarely used in English today and it is therefore unlikely that the mistakes are due to confusion concerning that alternative.

4.4.3 Other mistakes

The odd pronoun mistakes can be linked to all of the remaining sub-categories of pronouns except for exclamatory pronouns, which of there were no mistakes found in the material. Few mistakes were found within each of the other sub-categories but there are three features worth discussing in spite of the fact that they were less frequently appearing in the material. The first issue is an instance of what can be regarded as a spelling mistake but also has grammatical implications and that is the distinction between *your* and *you’re* (*you are*) since one of the pupils writes *your* when meaning *you are* two times and two pupils write *youre* when meaning *your* as can be seen in the following examples:

(26) […] *your* not cool […]. [you’re/you are]
(27) It is about creating *youre* own style […]. [your]

This is interesting since it is a common mistake made by native speakers of English as well and is therefore not likely caused by negative transfer from Swedish but rather from intralingual transfer (Oxford Royale Academy, 2014). The grammatical implications are most evident in example 27 since the possessive pronoun *your* is used where the personal pronoun *you* should be used together with the verb *are* in order to correctly say that someone is something (as in this example). In example 28 the issue is that an *e* has been added to the possessive pronoun *your* and it might be dismissed as a spelling mistake but since it is close to the contraction of *you* and *are*, it nevertheless
has grammatical implications since one might question whether it is supposed to be you’re or your. Thus, it can be questioned whether the pupils making this mistake are aware of the differences between your and you’re (you are). For second language teachers of English this can therefore be an issue to keep in mind independently on the L1s of the pupils since it is not visibly linked to L1 Swedish.

A second interesting finding in the material is three mistakes made where the quantifying pronouns many and much have been mixed up. Many is only used with plurals while much is only used with uncountable nouns (Estling-Vannestål, 2013: 324) and this is the exact mistakes that the pupils made, using many with uncountable nouns and using much with plural nouns. In Swedish, many can be translated into många and much can be translated into mycket and the same rule as in English applies in Swedish, where många is used with plurals and mycket with uncountables which should mean that the mistake is not due to L1 transfer, but rather an intralingual error. However, this mistake might also be due either to faulty learning of the grammatical rule or to failure of having learned the rule at all. In any case, this is an example where the L1 does not negatively influence but nonetheless does not influence positively either, even though there should be opportunity to do so, which implies that interlingual transfer cannot be concluded to be a cause of this mistake.

Thirdly, the mistakes regarding there and it are worth discussing even though only nine mistakes were made in the essays. Four of the mistakes involve the use of the preparatory subject it when there should be the preparatory subject due to the fact that the extraposed subjects are noun phrases as in the following example:

(28) It is many teenagers […]. [There are]

Out of the four remaining mistakes, two are ones where another pronoun should have been placed and the last two are mistakes where the whole phrase is wrong but where there are should be used instead in order to correct the phrases. A possible cause regarding mistakes with there and it is negative transfer from L1 since the equivalent structure in Swedish only utilises one word, det, which causes mistakes to be produced in Swedish pupils written English (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 294).
4.5 Prepositions

In Table 5 below it is visible that three words have been noted to appear more frequently than others in the occurrences of prepositional mistakes, namely mistakes with the prepositions *at* and *on* and involving *to vs too*. The total number of mistakes with prepositions was large but except for the three mentioned mistakes the mistakes were made with various prepositions and are not dealt with in detail due to inability to make generalizations.

Table 5. Mistakes made with prepositions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREPOSITIONS</th>
<th>Number of mistakes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>At</em></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>On</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>To vs too</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other mistakes</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of preposition mistakes</strong></td>
<td><strong>93</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of mistakes, counting all grammatical mistakes, is 515 and consequently, prepositional mistakes make up 18 percent of the total number of mistakes.

4.5.1 Mistakes with the preposition *at*

*At* is evidently the most common mistake made with prepositions by the pupils involved in this study and 25 percent of all pupils have made this mistake at least once in their essays. However, one of the pupils has made the mistake of using *at* three times in what seems as an attempt to write the Swedish *att* (the equivalent of infinitive *to*). Nonetheless, 15 mistakes involved *at* being used where a different preposition should have been. The following two examples are found in two of the pupil essays:

(29) […] the match at saturday […]. [on]
(30) […] I am going at a school with much homeworks […]. [to]

According to Lindstroemberg (1998: 165) *at* is particularly difficult for L2 learners of English owing to ”the subtlety of its meaning” (1998: 165), which coincide with the results of this study. Since *at* has been used instead of a various number of other prepositions in the material, it has proved to be a difficult preposition to deal with in terms of meaning and one reason for that might be the fact that *at* can correspond to a
number of Swedish prepositions, such as på, i, hos, vid etc. Thus, the mistake involving at can be traced to negative transfer from Swedish L1 since the pupils seem to have chosen an appropriate Swedish preposition and translated it directly to English without consideration for the correctness of that preposition in the resulting English phrase.

4.5.2 Mistakes with the preposition on
Thirteen mistakes were made by nine pupils with the preposition on and eight of them should have in instead, as in this example:

(31) […] with the teacher on the lesson […]. [in]

Evidently, the pupils have difficulties distinguishing between on and in. However, no mistakes were made the other way around, i.e. with in being used where on would be the correct preposition. This might be possible to explain with negative transfer since the most common translation of in is i, while on is used for a range of Swedish prepositions, such as på, vid, mot etc., just as at is. Also, in the example above where in should be used the Swedish equivalent is på lektionen not i lektionen, which is a likely reason for why the pupil has made the mistake. Consequently, the negative transfer seems to cause pupils to choose the preposition that is correct in the corresponding phrase in Swedish without considering possible differences in English prepositional usage regarding on as well as the above discussed preposition at.

4.5.3 To vs too mistakes
The mistake of exchanging to for too has been made by ten pupils thirteen times in total, such as in this example:

(32) […] fasion is taken to seriously […]. [too]

Thus, these mistakes involve writing a preposition when an adverb is intended. The reversed situation was not appearing in the material which implies that the pupils have not learned to distinguish the adverb too from the preposition to. Twenty-five percent of the pupils have made this mistake at least once, which implies that it is a quite common mistake. One reason for the mistake being made might be due to the lexical similarities between to and too, with only one letter differing, and thus pointing in the direction of a possible spelling mistake. Another reason can be that pupils might not consider the
meaning of the word they have written when using to in these instances. This mistake is thus likely to be caused by faulty learning as well as a possible lack of knowledge about the different word classes and their functions, among these pupils, since they have interchanged words from two different word classes.

4.5.4 Other mistakes

The other mistakes made with prepositions are varied and include a large number of prepositions either used incorrectly or omitted from the sentence at large, as can be seen in the following examples from three different pupil essays:

(33) […] the reason to why I think so […]. [for]
(34) […] you can not be accepted of every one in […]. [by]
(35) […] you need to practice [X] home not just in school […]. [at]

This leads to the conclusion that prepositions are difficult to deal with. Possibly, L1 negative transfer can be causing a number of these mistakes seeing to the fact that Swedish and English prepositions do not correspond on an individual basis. The three examples 33-35 are proofs of that since all of them would be correct in Swedish when directly translated. Firstly, in example 33 the Swedish equivalent would be anledningen till att jag tror så, where till is the direct translation of to. Secondly, of, used in example 34, can be translated to the Swedish av which in Swedish would be correct usage. Thirdly, the omission of at in example 35 also corresponds to the same phrase in Swedish where one would express it without a preposition; du måste öva hemma.

Consequently, the results of this study show that prepositions should be seen as an important area to stress in L2 English teaching situation in Swedish schools.

Regarding the discussion on the distinction between slips and errors it is difficult to decide whether these are slips or errors when analysing the mistakes in detail. On the whole, however, the mistakes made could be concluded to be errors since a total of 93 mistakes are made with prepositions in 40 essays, which on average is more than two mistakes per essay. The pupils might not have learned the different functions of different prepositions in English and are thus making errors, from time to time, when using them due to using them with the corresponding Swedish prepositions instead.
4.6 Word order mistakes

The mistakes in the category of word order is a matter of how different clause elements are placed and how they relate to each other in clauses. In English, subject-verb-object (S-V-O) word order is used predominantly and means that the subject precedes the verb, which precedes the object (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 64, 73). As is evident in Table 6, the correct word order is an issue in the material but the adverbial element is also causing problems in the pupils’ essays. The sub-category “other mistakes” is made up of split-infinitive mistakes and contributes to the total number of mistakes. However, these mistakes will not be discussed in further detail due to the small number of mistakes made.

Table 6. Mistakes made with the word order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD ORDER</th>
<th>Number of mistakes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. S-V-O word order mistakes</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Adverbial position mistakes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other mistakes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of word order mistakes</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of mistakes, counting all grammatical mistakes, is 515 and consequently, word order mistakes make up seven percent of the total number of mistakes.

4.6.1 Subject-verb-object word order mistakes

Ten different pupils have made the thirteen mistakes found where the S-V-O word order is incorrect. One clear example is from essay 23 where the pupil has written:

(36) Now **have I** told you […] [I have]

*I* is the subject in this declarative sentence and in order to comply to the subject-verb-object word order *I* has to come before the verb *have*, which has to precede the object *you*. This specific example is a likely example of negative transfer from L1 since the word order written by the pupil would have been used if this phrase had been expressed in Swedish, (*Nu har jag berättat för dig*).

The probability that word order mistakes are closely connected to L1 transfer is visible in most of the phrases where the mistake appears. As opposed to Swedish, English mainly uses the reversed word order (verb-subject) in questions while it is
commonly used in statements in Swedish as well (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 402). This explains the prevalence of L1 transfer that causes the word order mistakes when the Swedish pupils write in English.

4.6.2 Adverbial position mistakes

Evidently, the placement of adverbial elements causes problems for the pupils in this study. Nineteen mistakes have been made by thirteen pupils, which is about thirty percent of the total number of pupils. Estling Vannestål (2013: 70) explains that adverbials give us “information about the situation, for example when, where, how often or why something happens” (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 70). Further on, she says that adverbials do not have a fixed placement within a clause, but can rather alter between different placements (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 70). Quirk et al. (2010: 490-491) confirm that the position of adverbials can alter but add that “the meaning of the sentence” might change depending on where the adverbial is placed. Furthermore, there are certain adverbials that more often occur in certain positions than in others and therefore the adverbial can be placed incorrectly in a sentence as well (Cambridge University Press, 2015). The following examples show three different types of adverbials that the pupils have placed in the wrong position:

(37) […] or you **maybe** took wrong size when you order it. [maybe you]

(38) People said **often**: ‘the inside..’ [often said]

(39) […] That **sadly** is all time I have and remember […]. [Sadly, that]

In example 35 **maybe** is the adverbial in incorrect position and according to Cambridge University Press (2015), the adverb **maybe** is usually placed in initial position or alternatively in the end after a comma. Therefore, the pupil does, in this case, the mistake of placing the adverbial in medial position, i.e. after the subject you. Moreover, **maybe** is one of the adverbials most frequently misplaced by the pupils in this study, nine mistakes in this category have been done with **maybe** in the wrong position.

Example 36 shows an adverb of frequency (**often**) which can be placed either in initial, medial or end position but is usually is placed in medial position (Cambridge University Press, 2015). The mistake made here is that the adverbial is placed after both the subject and the verb, while when placing adverbials in medial position the clause element functioning as an adverbial should be placed after the subject and before the verb (Quirk et al., 2010: 491). The final example, example 37, is an adverb of
evaluation (*sadly*) which most often occurs in initial position and outside of the clause which means that there has to be a comma between *sadly* and the rest of the clause in order to write this correctly (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

In terms of differences in meaning being dependent on where the adverbs are placed and together with certain punctuation, as Quirk et al. (2010: 490-491) discuss, the material shows a number of instances where the intended meaning does not correlate with how the sentence is actually structured with special stress on where the adverb is placed. In some of the mistakes it seems as if the pupil has translated the structure directly from Swedish, and thereby showing probability of negative transfer. An example of this is the following:

(40) […] they **maybe** can be [maybe they can]

The Swedish equivalent, *de kanske kan vara*, is correct but in English the adverbial element has to be placed in the beginning of the clause or at the end, which causes the pupil to make a mistake when translating directly from Swedish. The majority of mistakes made in this category can, in this manner, be linked to negative transfer through direct translation for the L1. A further explanation for why a number of pupils have made mistakes with this structure has to do with the mobility of adverbial elements in a clause. With adverbials being a clause element which is possible to place in a number of different positions it enhances the chances of it being treated incorrectly (Estling Vannestål, 2013: 71).

In this section, the results of the study have been counted and accounted for by discussing what kinds of mistakes the pupils have made and possible reasons for why the mistakes have been done. In the following section these results will be discussed and compared to previous research.

5 Discussion

This section discusses and analyses the results in connection to previous research and studies presented earlier on. The different categories of mistakes made in the material will be discussed separately, within their own paragraphs, and overall conclusions drawn from the study ends the section.

Many mistakes have been identified during the work with the material, both errors and slips, but due to the interest for frequently occurring ones the main focus has been
put on the mistakes that many pupils have made in their writing. As such, the most frequent mistakes found in the material were produced within the four word classes verbs, nouns, pronouns and prepositions and within sentence structure mistakes due to incorrect word order usage or incorrectly placed clause elements. Consequently, the results were presented in five categories of mistakes in total.

When analysing the results of this study it can be argued that negative transfer is one of the causes of mistakes being made and that the influence from Swedish structures thus affects pupils when writing L2 English. Negative transfer is not, however, the single cause of mistakes in the production of written English among these pupils. The influence from L1 transfer is supported in previous studies and Odlin (1989: 153) states that transfer has a broad influence on L2 language acquisition and that it is certain that the L1 is an important factor when learning another language besides the L1. However, what is debatable, he says, is how significant it is since it is not the only affecting factor in L2 acquisition. This study confirms, through a limited sample of essays, that transfer in reality does influence interlanguage and has shown areas in which the most frequent mistakes occur. The results further comply with Estling Vannestål’s (2013: 39, 81, 368) experiences of structures which causes specific difficulties for Swedish learners, such as article usage, subject-verb concord mistakes and certain prepositions. This study has further proved causes of mistakes to lie beyond the scope of interlingual transfer and thus be dependent on intralingual transfer, faulty learning or not yet having learned a certain structure for example.

Therefore, the results of the study contribute to stating the complexity of language acquisition. With regards to negative transfer, this study has pointed to grammatical areas that seem to be especially difficult for Swedish pupils in year nine when writing in English. Hence, these results can hint in the direction of which areas that need specific attendance in English grammar teaching in Swedish classrooms. Even though correct grammar is not a requirement to pass English in year nine, grammar is still of concern in teaching according to the Swedish National Agency for Education (2011a: 37-38). As previously stated, the curriculum (Lgr11) states that pupils should be given the opportunity to study ”grammatical structures” as well as ”sentence structures” (Skolverket, 2011a: 35). Some of the mistakes made seem more likely than others to be caused by negative transfer but nonetheless, this study has pointed in the direction of what types of mistakes are likely to be encountered in a Swedish secondary school classroom. Furthermore, the knowledge acquired in secondary school is the foundation
for the future learning in upper secondary school and at this stage of English "opportunity to develop correctness" (Skolverket, 2011b) is included in the overall aim of the subject, which points to the importance of correct grammar use. Additionally, Estling Vannestål (2013: 17) claims that grammar is essential in order to acquire a good knowledge of a language.

In the category of nouns the sub-categories in which the mistakes were found were articles, plurals and genitive. Concerning the findings of the article usage this study’s results are in line with Miller’s (2005: 81) discussion on that the "notion of countability" is problematic for L2 learners of English. In order to use the correct indefinite article or to know whether a definite article should be used or not, one has to have knowledge of which nouns are countable and which ones are uncountable. The fact that there are differences between Swedish and English in this case seems to cause trouble for pupils when writing. Nouns that are countable in Swedish might not be so in English, and vice versa, and mistakes are then made when pupils for example treat Swedish countables as such in English as well, even though they might not correspond. The results of this study therefore confirm Miller’s (2005: 80) study which stated that this is an area that needs attendance in L2 English learning.

The "notion of countability” discussed in Miller’s (2005: 81) study also has implications for the use of plurals according to the current study. As presented in the results, the largest number of mistakes has been made due to lack of knowledge of which nouns exist as countable ones and which do not. Thus, the importance of knowing this structure is shown to be essential even though negative transfer plays a role for the pupils when writing as well, as seen in the example of homework used in plural which is a countable noun in Swedish but is an uncountable one in English. Important to stress here is the fact that 42 out of 70 mistakes in the plural category involved the confusion on whether homework is countable or uncountable. Thus, the total number of plural mistakes might be misleading considering 60 percent of the mistakes are caused by one single word. However, this also points to the importance of countability in the category of nouns (Miller, 2005: 81).

When dealing with the category of verbs the most common mistake in the material presented was the subject-verb concord mistake. With 109 mistakes made this was the mistake most frequently occurring independently of category and 80 percent of all pupils had done it at least once in their essays. Thus, this study confirms the previous findings by Köhlmyr (2001: 276) which state that subject-verb agreement is one of the
most commonly occurring mistakes in the writings made by Swedish L2 English learners. Köhlmryr (2001: 284) further discusses the seriousness of this mistake, which most likely are errors in this study due to the frequency in most pupils’ texts, and the relevance of focusing on learning the subject-verb agreement structure. She states that concord errors are mistakes that in writing expose non-native speakers and that the mistake also is "condemned" by native speakers of English (Köhlmyr, 2001: 284). Thus, the results of this study, and previous ones, point to the importance of teaching the structure of concord and to work thoroughly with it in school.

The category of pronouns was the word class category included in the study where the fewest number of mistakes occurred. Sixty-two mistakes were made in total and this, together with the fact that the mistakes were quite mixed and difficult to distinguish, indicate that the pupils in this study do not experience many general problems when using pronouns. The sub-categories of pronouns that stood out were personal pronouns and relative pronouns. However, a concern being raised, due to the distribution of the mistakes compared to the results of Köhlmyr’s (2001) study, was that the set-up of the material might contribute to certain sub-categories of pronouns being used more often. This is therefore an area in which further studies could contribute to more insights concerning frequency of mistakes.

The results regarding pronouns of this study differ from Köhlmyr’s (2001) results gathered from 16-year old pupils. Important to keep in mind is that Köhlmryr (2001: 101) included pronominal determiners² in her study as well, which was not included in this study. Köhlmryr (2001: 118) found that the most common mistake in the pronoun and pronominal determiner category was the sub-category she created of mistakes with there/it/so, mistakes which in this study were not frequent enough to make up its own category and was thus included in the other mistakes-category. Personal pronouns, which was the most frequently occurring mistake in this study’s material was the third largest category of mistakes in Köhlmryr’s study, making up twelve percent of the mistakes in total. The equivalent for this study was thirty percent, which shows that there is a significant difference between the two studies.

The category of relative pronouns was found to be the second largest group of mistakes in this study and also one out of only two sub-categories of pronouns where the mistakes were frequent enough to make up a category of its own. In Köhlmryr’s

² Pronominal determiners in Köhlmryr’s study (2001: 101) are when pronouns function as determiners and the term is used in order to differentiate between pronouns as functioning as pronouns or as determiners.
(2001: 118) study, on the other hand, mistakes with relative pronouns are the second smallest category of mistakes out of a total of eight categories of pronouns and pronominal determiners. In this study, the percentage of relative pronoun mistakes was almost eighteen percent, while the corresponding number in Köhlmyr’s study was six and a half percent.

However, this study has been conducted on material produced by pupils in 2014 while the pupils in Köhlmyr’s study wrote their essays in 1992 and 1995 (Köhlmyr, 2001: 2-3). Even though it is difficult to deduce specific differences in results based on which years the different materials were produced, it could be a contributing factor depending on possible differences in teaching methods or regulations in curricula for example. Consequently, this is important to keep in mind in the comparison between the two studies, but supplementary research is a requisite in order to be able to comment upon the issue further.

Correct usage of prepositions proved to be problematic for many learners included in this study, which was clear when analysing the results of the mistakes made. Some of the mistakes were likely caused by negative transfer, since the pupils used prepositions in English which would have been correct in Swedish, if directly translated. However, prepositions differ in function between English and Swedish and are thus not always compatible to translate directly. Other mistakes were likely made because of a lack of knowledge of correct usage. Regardless of cause in the case of prepositions there seems to be a need for approaching the learning of prepositions as suggested by Estling-Vannestål (2013: 364), which is to learn the prepositions as learning vocabulary in general – one needs to learn which prepositions function with what kinds of words in order to express them correctly in use.

As was presented in the results, the prepositions most frequently involved in incorrect usage in this study’s material were *at, on* and *to vs too*. The most common prepositions causing mistakes in Köhlmyr’s (2001: 124, 134) study were *to, in, at, of* and *for*. The mistake involving *at* was similar in percentage in the two studies, with 19 percent in this study compared to 15,5 percent in Köhlmyr’s study (2001: 124). However, mistakes including *on* showed a substantial difference between the studies, causing 14 percent of the prepositional mistakes in this study but only 4 percent in Köhlmyr’s (2001: 124) study. However, the limited sample used for this study might therefore have led to certain prepositions being used more often due to content of the texts and at the same time left others out of them.
As was evident from the analysis of the most frequent mistakes, writing *to* when meaning *too* caused some trouble for the pupils in this study. On the contrary, this was not a mistake visible in Köhlmyr’s (2001) study. Accordingly, the conclusion is that pupils involved in this study clearly have a problem with distinguishing the preposition *to* from the adverb *too* but that this problem might not extend beyond the participating pupils in this study. However, since the mistake made up 14 percent of all prepositional mistakes, teachers and trainee teachers are nevertheless urged to pay attention to this as a mistake which might potentially be produced in pupil writing.

Mistakes including word order have been found within two sub-categories; subject-verb word order mistakes and mistakes involving an incorrectly positioned adverbial clause element. The results of this study thus coincide with the results of Köhlmyr’s study where the same two categories are the two main ones with an addition of a small group of other mistakes in Köhlmyr’s (2001: 160) study. In this study 37 percent of these mistakes are due to subject-verb word order and 54 percent are due to incorrectly positioned adverbial elements. The corresponding numbers for Köhlmyr’s (2001: 170) study are 38 percent for subject-verb word order and 53 percent for adverbial position. As is visible the results are remarkably even. As was stated in Section 4.6.1, the probability of negative transfer affecting word order confusion is confirmed when comparing these two studies (Köhlmyr, 2001: 170).

Similarly, Köhlmyr (2001: 170) compared her results to two other studies in which the results were somewhat corresponding as well. As a result, it can be concluded that the positioning of adverbial elements is likely to cause problems for L2 learners of English. The adverbial *maybe* was the one most outstanding in this study and Köhlmyr (2001: 164) found the same mistake frequently produced in her study, which implies that *maybe* is a generally misplaced adverbial by L2 learners of English at this level.

As is evident from the results, a large number of the mistakes made by the pupils included in this research can be traced to negative L1 transfer. However, given the difficulty, due to a limited sample of essays, to decide whether a mistake is an error or a slip the actual role transfer plays is difficult to determine (Odlin, 1989: 153). It seems as if Swedish L1 was influential within all categories even though it was not so in all sub-categories. Other possible causes to mistakes made in the study are intralingual errors, faulty learning, the fact that a structure has not yet been learned and negligence. Nevertheless, the four most frequently occurring mistakes, independently of category, seem to have been mainly influenced by negative transfer. Subject-verb concord
mistakes constituted 21 percent of the total amount of mistakes and these mistakes are largely caused by L1 transfer. Mistakes including plural nouns constituted about 13 percent of the total amount of mistakes and these too were to some extent caused by negative transfer. Moreover, mistakes with articles (nine percent of all mistakes) and numerous prepositions showed clear connections to structures in Swedish grammar and seemed, thus, to have been affected by L1 influence.

This study confirms the complexity of teaching grammar due to the many possible causes of incorrect language use in written production and due to individual variation (Odlin, 1989: 152-153; Brown, 2007: 268-269). The fact that this study points in the direction that certain mistakes, supposedly errors, are more likely to be explained by negative transfer from Swedish L1 than others indicates that there are certain areas where focus on contrastive grammar can facilitate the teaching and learning processes of English grammar structures in the English L2 classroom (Ortega 2009: 31; Ringbom, 1987: 143-144). Even though this study did not indicate any differences in mistakes made by the pupils with other L1s than Swedish, it can be valuable to keep in mind that bilingual pupils might encounter other difficulties caused by negative transfer from their L1 as well (Ortega, 2009: 31).

This section has discussed the results of this study in connection to previous studies. In the next section a conclusion of the study will be presented.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate mistakes made in L2 learning in the context of Swedish pupils learning English as an L2 by focusing on grammatical mistakes in the pupils’ written English in order to find possible reasons for the potential mistakes made. In SLA research, interlingual transfer has been a discussed as a cause to mistakes in L2 production since the 1950s but has over the years been complemented by other theories of why mistakes are made (Ortega, 2009: 31; Brown 2007: 255). In order to reach the aim, the following research questions were posed to the material, which was made up of 40 pupil essays collected from two year nine classes in a secondary school in southern Sweden:

1. What kinds of grammatical mistakes do pupils in year nine make, if any, when writing in English?
2. What causes of the potential mistakes in L2 can be found in the present material?

3. What impact, if any, has Swedish L1 in the production of these mistakes?

The results showed that the most frequently occurring mistakes made by the pupils in this study could be found within five different categories; nouns, verbs, pronouns, prepositions and word order. These five categories were compartmentalised further into sub-categories, where different mistakes within the main categories were distinguished. The quantitatively count of all mistakes included in these categories showed that structures being especially problematic for these L2 learners of English were subject-verb concord (21 percent of the total number of mistakes), plural nouns (13 percent of the total number of mistakes) and articles (nine percent of the total number of mistakes). Thus, the categories of nouns and verbs were the ones causing the largest number of mistakes in total. Additionally, prepositions as a general category also proved to cause substantial problems for the pupils in their writing. The prepositions that were used incorrectly were, however, quite varied and pointed to the fact that prepositions are difficult to deal with in general.

These results were supported by previous studies, which have pointed to concord, article usage and prepositional usage as main problems in L2 learners production of English, where Swedish learners have shown to produce certain kinds of mistakes due to negative transfer from their L1 (Köhlmyr, 2001; Miller, 2005; Estling Vannestål, 2013). Consequently, the results of this study indicate that the L1 of a learner impacts the process of acquiring an L2 and that interlingual negative transfer is one cause of mistakes made in pupils’ written production of L2 English. In addition to interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer is also causing learners to make mistakes when learning L2 English (Brown, 2007: 259; Odlin 1989: 152-153). Further possible causes found in the material used this study are faulty learning, a lack of yet having learned a certain structure and in some cases also negligence. As a result, this study points to the complexity of teaching grammar in the context of a Swedish classroom of L2 English education due to many factors influencing the learning process and numeral causes to incorrect language use.

The study had a quantitative part where the different mistakes were counted and the frequency of each category and sub-category were presented. The quantitative part was complemented by a qualitative part, which analysed the possible causes of the mistakes
made. The method could have been further developed by analysing more than one essay from each pupil. Thus, the results could have shown, to a larger extent, whether the pupils made slips or errors when conducting their different mistakes. The material used in this study, although limited in number of essays, have proven to contribute to valuable insights in L2 English teaching, which teachers and trainee teachers can make use of in their future grammar teaching (Ortega, 2009: 31; Ringbom, 1987: 143-144). However, if one were to extend the study and include a larger number of pupil essays into the analysis the results would be further generalizable.

Further research could favourably be conducted based on the findings of this study. Interesting areas to develop with extended studies would be to deepen the analyses of certain of the categories presented in this study as causing particular problems for learners of English. Moreover, future research within the SLA field could be performed as studies based on classroom observations on grammar teaching or based on teachers’ corrections with regard to grammar in written assignments produced by pupils. Furthermore, since the current study was conducted on secondary school pupils in year nine it would be interesting to see possible changes and differences compared to pupils in upper secondary school, in order to discover probable progress as pupils develop their learning in L2 English.

Regarding the fact that five out of forty pupils included in this study had different L1s than Swedish, studying bilingual learners of English in a Swedish context would be an interesting take on further research in relation to learning English in Sweden. Due to this study’s main focus on the distinction between interlingual transfer and other causes of the mistakes made, another possible topic for future research could be to turn the main focus to intralingual transfer visible in pupil essays and deepen the analysis and discussion on the causes behind the mistakes intralingual transfer produce.

This section has presented a conclusion of the research conducted by restating the aim of the study together with posing the research questions. The main results of the study have been commented upon and the methodological approach has been discussed as well as the material that the investigation was based upon. Suggestions for further research concluded the section.
References


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