The Nordic syllabi and the Common European Framework of Reference

Similarities and differences

Author: Svante Bjäremo
Supervisor: Christopher Allen
Examiner: Ibolya Maricic
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Abstract
This study examines the similarities and differences between the Nordic syllabi (the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian syllabi) and the influence CEFR has had on their structure and development. This was carried out using the method of hermeneutics, looking for similarities and differences using seven different dimensions of comparison. The study shows that there are similarities between the Nordic syllabi which have all been influenced by the CEFR. The most notable similarity between the documents is the communicative nature of teaching and assessment. This could give a deeper understanding of the Nordic countries' similarities and differences when it comes to language teaching. Further studies are needed using quantitative methods to say if these findings and connections between the Nordic syllabi are due to the influence of the CEFR or if other factors have been just as influential.

Keywords
CEFR, language teaching, syllabus design,

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1 Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference (henceforth CEFR), is a result of political cooperation between the European nations, to unify and promote the understanding of different European languages. It is a result of the awareness of the importance of foreign language learning in the post World War II era of European development. It is a peace effort between the nations, because the ability to communicate and understand other cultures is essential for keeping good relations. The CEFR seeks to influence the nations of the European Union, in terms of making their educational systems for languages comparable. The CEFR does not officially state how teachers should teach in the different countries. However, it gives its point of view and promotes the communicative language teaching approach. The CEFR has since its launch in 2001 had a major impact on both assessment and language teaching, within the European Union. The Nordic countries are no exceptions; their English teaching is said to have been greatly influenced, both in terms of the commitment to communicative principles and how the assessment criteria are applied. This study seeks to determine if the CEFR has been influential in development of the Nordic countries’ syllabi.

The success of the CEFR is due to two points:
Firstly, governments want to have a reliable source to connect their language teaching, learning and assessment programs to. Governments want their language teaching to focus on the use of the language (implicit language knowledge) rather than explicit knowledge of language function (explicit language knowledge). Secondly, the grading criteria are based on “can do” statements (See section: CEFR). It is the positive wordings of the grading criteria and the openness for the use of different methods and languages that has made the CEFR successful, not only in Europe but all over the world. In its making over the past 50 years, its striving for communicative teaching and implicit language assessment, the CEFR has truly changed the view of language teaching.

Even though the CEFR has had a major impact on language teaching, countries within the European Union are not obligated to incorporate the CEFR communicative principles into their syllabi. That is why this study is set out to investigate the similarities and differences between the Nordic countries’ syllabi and how they might
be influenced by the CEFR. The CEFR project was meant to be used to design and harmonize the education systems for modern languages within the European Union. The question is whether the CEFR has worked and whether there are clear similarities between the nations in terms of its implementation in their national syllabi. The study’s purpose is to give a deeper understanding about the connection between the Nordic countries’ syllabi and the CEFR, and also show similarities and differences between the Nordic countries’ syllabi.

1.1 Aim and scope
The aim of this essay is to investigate similarities and differences between the Nordic countries’ syllabi, with a focus on how they are influenced by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The essay will also discuss possible consequences these similarities and differences might have on language teaching, in terms of the research questions outlined below:

1. What has been the influence of the CEFR on the Nordic syllabi in English for high school (Finland, Sweden and Norway)?

How do the Nordic countries syllabi differ in terms of:
(1) the relationship between the L1 and L2 in the language acquisition process;
(2) the role of translation in the EFL classroom;
(3) the role of grammar / structure / focus on form;
(4) models of pronunciation in terms of the nativeness vs. intelligibility principles respectively;
(5) reception and production;
(6) ICT and the role of technology in language learning;
(7) grading and assessment?

The dimensions of comparison were chosen based on a presentation at a teacher conference in 2013 by Bo Lundahl at Linnaeus University, which addressed the influence of the CEFR on the syllabi for compulsory and upper secondary education of the Nordic countries.
2 Theoretical background
This section starts with a general overview of different types of curricula and syllabus. The following section gives an interpretation of MLT/ELT and how the different language syllabus can be divided into two types (type A and type B).

2.1 Curriculum and cultural differences
The terms curriculum and syllabus might be somewhat confusing because they are used differently around the world. This essay will adopt the practice of British English usage and that of the Nordic countries. Curriculum is the totality of the content and aims a school and/or an educational system has. Syllabus refers to the content or subject matter of an individual subject/course (White 1988: 4). The curriculum is in its complexity a framework of rules that can be strict in its formulation with regards to how subjects/courses are to be taught, giving the teacher a limited number of options in what and how to teach. It can also be open giving the teacher the freedom to choose how to teach. The curriculum can also reflect abstract values such as gender equality and democracy etc, (Skolverket [www]). However, the focus of importance has shifted over time and in terms of its use in different countries. That is why educational systems look different around the world. Curriculum researchers divide the theoretical notion of the curriculum into three different categories: the content oriented/focused curriculum, the processed oriented/focused curriculum and the result-based curriculum (Wahlström 2015: 76-77).

The content oriented curriculum gives specific guidelines to what the students can expect to do in different courses, in terms of what is to be taught and how. The main focus is on what is to be taught. Some curricula also specify what course books should be adopted during different courses or have a set of teaching materials that the teacher can choose to use in his/her teaching (a so-called canonical specification). This type of curricula presumes that what is taught in the classroom is also what the students know/understand after each course (Wahlström, 2015: 76-77).

According to Wahlström (2015: 77) the process oriented curriculum is focused on the students’ learning process. It contains less predetermined content, and has a greater focus on students’ progress as individuals, in groups and in society. The focus is thereby on how the teacher should teach each class and individual on a cognitive level, to widen
the students’ experience and understanding, rather than extending their knowledge of the subject in the given course.

The result-based curriculum is a combination of the content- and process-oriented curricula, a competence-based curriculum. It specifies what the students should have learnt in relation to predetermined minimum levels. These predetermined levels are what in each course is represented as grades. The focus is thus what the students can perform in relation to what is defined by the curriculum as knowledge (Wahlström, 2015: 77-78). There are different types of curricula and syllabi. They reflect and put emphasis on different parts of knowledge, as seen above. When it comes to language teaching according to White (1988: 7-8), two approaches can be used to define the scope of their knowledge, and they are based on two separate intertwined traditions of development.

2.2 MLT/ELT syllabus design
Modern language teaching (MLT) and English language teaching (ELT) have both developed over time. Before the 19th century learning a foreign language was rather uncommon. During the 19th century educational opportunities became greater, and modern language became a part of school curricula in Britain and America. However modern language teaching was not taken seriously, becoming increasingly influenced by the teaching of the classical languages, making use of the grammar translation method (White, 1988: 7-12). Even after these changes MLT became institutionalized due to the fact that universities still did not take it seriously. It was not until the 1960s that changes in modern languages teaching were made to synchronize programmes of study with language teaching theories.

The ELT tradition has had a strong position in schools for a long time. It did not take the same approach with regards to grammar-translation methodology as the MLT. Evolving on linguistic theories of language teaching, the ELT moved beyond the borders of Britain and America. Due to the number of immigrants coming to America and Britain, language teaching had already been adapted for second language teaching, making the transition to other countries much easier. However, the most important benefit for ELT has been the dominant position of the English language; English has now risen to be the world language, a lingua franca between nations. English is now
taught in compulsory schools worldwide, due to the influence and global reach of the language, while the incentive to learn other languages has declined (White, 1988: 7-12). Language teaching and syllabi are constantly evolving, however according to White (1988) cited in Long and Crookes (1992: 1-3) approaches to the design of a syllabus can be divided into two categories: Type A and Type B.

Type A: These syllabi focus on what is to be learnt, the L2. It is an interventionist approach; someone pre-selects what is to be taught, and divides it into parts that can be understood by the learner. What is to be learnt during a lesson is decided in advance. The type A syllabus is teacher-centered, meaning that the student is outside of the teaching process and is more of a receiver of information. Assessment is carried out by the level of achievement reached by the student or mastery of the language (White 1988 cited in Long and Crookes 1992: 1-3). A content-based syllabus would include categories as a type A syllabus, and could be presented in terms of a topic-, structural-, situational-, functional-notional, skill- or lexical syllabus, where the focus of the teaching is based on a specific aim or skill, for example. The situation-based syllabus focuses on how the student can handle specific task such as ordering coffee, or renting a hotel room. This type of syllabi gives the learner a more analytic view of the language; it does not make the students prepared for unplanned conversations; this in contrary to the type B syllabus (Ellis 1984 cited in White, 1988: 46).

Type B: This approach to the syllabus focuses on how a language is to be learnt. It is non-interventionist. It does not involve preselected materials. It lets the objective of the learning process to be determined by a process of negotiation between the teacher and the students as the course progresses. The decision making is joint between the learner and the teacher, emphasizing the process of learning rather than the subject material and assessing the accomplishment in relation to the set criteria for the course (White 1988 cited in Long and Crookes 1992: 3).

2.3 Dimensions of comparison
This next section will review the theoretical basis for the seven dimensions of comparison to be used in this study based on a presentation by Bo Lundahl at a teacher conference on 31st October 2013 at Linnaeus University, Kalmar Sweden about the
similarities between the Nordic countries’ syllabi and how they have been influenced by the CEFR. These dimensions are the areas or focuses for the analysis.

2.3.1 The relationship between L1 and L2 in the language acquisition process

Skinner (1938, 1953) (cited in Holt et al, 2012: 248-253) believes that we learn through exposure and repetition. We learn from the different stimuli in our environment. According to Skinner's theory the stimuli (exposure) of language would lead to language learning through repetition and encouragement. Skinner's behavioristic approach is as said based on repetition and encouragement; however, if the encouragement is not enough punishment can also be used as a motivator that triggers a response; the response in this case would be language learning.

According to Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar (Chomsky 1965, 1981) people are born with an innate ability to learn languages and grammatical structures. This means that any language can be learnt through exposure, and that language is learnt intuitively (Ellis, 2008: 557-559, White, 2003: 8). Chomsky (1981) cited in Lundahl, (2009: 147) claims that the Universal Grammar (UG) is a set of principles for syntax of how a language is constructed; all languages universally contain nouns, verbs and have a basic grammatical structure. All languages consist of a lexicon and a set of grammatical structures. Chomsky claims that this understanding of grammatical structures is something that we are born with: it is part of our biological make-up. Thus on this basis, language learning should be the same for both the mother tongue and a second language. Support for the UG theory in recent studies can be found in morphemes, for example “any language that has a verbal dual morpheme also has a verbal plural morpheme” (Eckman 2004 cited in Ellis 2008: 558).

Plurilingualism is the understanding of other languages’ connection to each other. It is the understanding of how languages interact and intertwine with each other. In contrast to Chomsky’s theory of Universal Grammar, plurilingualism is not confined to understanding languages’ connection to each other; it also includes the contextual impact different languages have on the environment they are used in (CEFR [www]).

2.3.2 The role of translation in the EFL classroom

Malmkjaer (2008: 63-64) claims that translation and language learning in the classroom is to the students’ disadvantage, due to the fact that it encourages thinking in one
language and transferring it into another which imposes interference from the translated language. This is in line with the contrastive analysis hypothesis which claims that mistakes from the L1 could be found in the L2; however, this is dependent on the level of difference between the L1 and L2; the bigger the difference the bigger the interference (Wardhaugh, 1970: 1). Malmkjaer (2008: 63-64) claims that translation makes it more difficult for the teacher and the student to teach and learn from each other because they have to work with two languages instead of focusing on the target language; it gives a false sense of knowledge of the language when simple words are translated due to their ability to have more than one meaning, etc. Malmkjaer (2008: 64-65) claims that changes to the current way of using simple translation of words, could be beneficial, if translation were aimed at a specific subject and setting within the language. For example, use of non-literary texts such as business texts or text dealing with educational theory, originally written in the target language, about English-speaking countries, of a specific length. With these simple filters the teacher would be controlling the syntax and lexical choices that are felt to be inappropriate. Controlling the translation makes it easier for the teacher to evaluate students’ work; in doing this the translation can be fitted and measured through word frequency programs and readability programs (Malmkjaer 2008: 65). This together with contextualized drills borrowed from audiolingual principles, would be beneficial for the students’ language performance (Malmkjaer 2008: 67-68). However, there are no studies that show that translation has any positive effect on language acquisition (Malmkjaer 2008: 63).

2.3.3 The role of grammar
Explicit grammar teaching has traditionally had an important role in language teaching/learning. Explicit grammar teaching means that the focus when it comes to language teaching is on the structure, metalanguage and form of the language. The students are subject to presentations and explanations of how to use certain grammatical structures; i.e. grammar is taught deductively with the presentation of rules which are then applied in production. This has been shown to lead to a good understanding of how the grammatical structures work during certain condition such as test and where structures are taken out of context. However, research has shown that when students try to use the grammatical structures to write a text, or use it to communicate, many grammatical mistakes/errors are made. This is believed to be due to the lack of context when the grammatical structures were learnt (Lundahl, 2009: 195-196, 148, 39-42).
This has led to a more general focus on grammar through implicit grammar teaching and consciousness raising.

Implicit grammar teaching does not address grammatical structures directly. This approach to grammar teaching means that the grammatical structures are acquired unconsciously by exposure to the language. Implicit knowledge of language is intuitive, process-based and varies in its character. It can be used automatically, without thought, in unplanned speech. The drawbacks are that we cannot explain how and why we use the language in a specific manner, due to that we only 'know that it sounds correct' (Lundahl, 2014: 42-46). Smith & Truscott (2011:11-12) claim that based on explicit language teaching in relation to implicit language teaching not only promotes language acquisition but language understanding that can help students reach the set goals for different courses (grammatical consciousness raising). Consciousness raising is about addressing key points of a language to trigger implicit language learning. For example, this can involve addressing certain grammatical structures to improve the understanding of different structures (Smith & Truscott 2014: 2).

2.3.4 Models of pronunciation

There are two principles for pronunciation: the nativeness principle and the intelligibility principle. The first focuses on accurate reproduction of the target language’s phonemes, stress and intonation patterns and the other on form and fluency (Levis, 2005: 1-2). When it comes to nativeness and pronunciation most countries refer to Britain and the United States of America as “the correct pronunciation”. The aim is to make the students sound the same as the native speakers of the country. Some common methods used are audio files that have speakers recorded with native speakers of the target language. There are also repetitive tasks such as listening to audio material in language laboratories where the students for example, repeat after an audio tape recorded with a native speaker (Levis, 2005: 1-2). The problem with this model is that it is very difficult to achieve the desired pronunciation, due to the fact that it has to be achieved at an early age, and the pronunciation that is the aim is often only spoken by a small portion of the population; for example, RP (received pronunciation) is only spoken by less than 2% of the British population although it has been the goal of pronunciation of Swedish schools for a long time (Lundahl 2009: 84-88). Cook, 2001:179 cited in Lundahl (2009: 87) claims that ‘the model for language teaching should be the fluent L2 user, not the native speaker’.
The *intelligibility principle* on the other hand means that exposure and use of a target language, starts an innate process for language learning. The focus is not on the accent of the student; it is instead on students making themselves understood. The intelligibility principle recognizes that the students’ foreign language interference might be strong; however, this is not a determiner of the students’ understanding of the language (Levis, 2005: 1-2). The intelligibility principle promotes language understanding, usage, progress and thereby focus on pronunciation is not helping any of those, therefore the focus should be on aspects that can help in the understanding of language rather than segmentals (Levis, 2005: 1-2).

### 2.3.5 Reception and production
Reception and production are the cornerstones of language teaching and the understanding of language. There are four language skills, two built on reception (listening and reading) and two built on production (speaking and writing) (Spinner, 2003). However, language teaching might address these skills differently depending on the aim of the teaching; for example, the Swedish syllabus says that the students should be exposed to different genres of written and spoken texts and the same is for reading and listening respectively. “*Texts of different kinds and for different purposes, such as manuals, popular science texts and reports.*” (Skolverket [www]). This means that the exposure and use of different types of text might be addressed differently, depending on the aim of the teaching.

### 2.3.6 ICT and the role of technology in language learning
ICT (information and communication technologies) has been a part of language teaching for the past 15 years (although the use of technology has been part of language teaching for over 50 years). There have never been so many tools and opportunities as today to implement technological aids in the language classroom. ICT involves using the Internet, mobile devices and electronic tools to promote the learning of the L2. It might involve smartphones, smartboards, computers etc. One of the benefits of ICT is that learning is no longer confined to a classroom. Students can interact and work together with people around the world. The teacher can use interactive games to activate the students and raise their motivation. Most students in Europe already use and interact on the Internet; this makes the use of these tools more natural to the students (Dudeney & Hockly, 2012). However, Thornbury (2000) claims that the access and use of
technology in the classroom distance the students from language learning in the natural sense of conversations and interaction between people. Thornbury (2000) advocates the Dogme principle, where the only tools used, should be centered around what is happening between the people in the classroom, keeping advanced technology away from the learning process.

### 2.3.7 Grading and assessment

Assessment is a popular, however often misunderstood term in the current educational practice. Assessment and testing are often seen as synonyms which is not strictly the case. Tests can be used to assess students’ knowledge, although it should be seen as a method for assessment and not as assessment as a whole. There are many different assessment types with different purposes (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010: 3-5). However, the most common ones used in result-based (criterion-based) classrooms are the formative and summative assessments.

The formative assessments’ purpose is to assess the students’ knowledge at the moment, to help the students’ progress in the direction of greater language proficiency. The aim for this type of assessment is not to keep score of the students’ achievement in a course to be able to grade them. However, summative assessment can also be formative in its construction, both giving the teacher grading criteria, and helping the students’ knowledge to progress, by giving feedback to the student (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010: 7-8).

The summative assessments’ aim is to assess the students’ knowledge so far. The summative assessment often comes at the end of a course to be able to grade the student. However as explained above the summative and formative assessment can be interconnected, both being a tool for the teacher to progress with their teaching based on the knowledge of the student and to be able to assess in relation to the grading criterion, when a result-based syllabus is used (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010:7-8).

### 3. Methodology

This study compares and analyses the influence of the CEFR on the Nordic countries’ syllabi (Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian). The analysis was done using seven different focuses/areas in accordance with the theoretical areas reviewed above:
(1) The relationship between the L1 and L2 in the language acquisition process
(2) The role of translation in the EFL classroom
(3) The role of grammar / structure / focus on form
(4) Models of pronunciation in terms of the nativeness v intelligibility principles respectively
(5) Reception and production.
(6) ICT and the role of technology in language learning
(7) Grading and assessment.

In order to carry out this comparative study the research methodology has to be operationalized. This analysis uses the hermeneutic core of general interpretation, which is a general overview of how, in this case, the CEFR and the Nordic syllabi interconnect and what possible consequences this relationship might have on language teaching.

The method was chosen with regards to the complexity of measuring connections between these documents. The questions could not be answered within the timeframe using a quantitative method. This type of qualitative method also has the ability to give a more in-depth understanding about the connection between the documents than would be possible using a quantitative method.

3.1 Material

The materials that has been analyzed are:

- the CEFR
- the Finnish syllabus for English, high school level (*Utbildningsstyrelsen*).
- the Swedish syllabus for English, (LGY11) high school level (*Skolverket*).
- the Norwegian syllabus for English, high school level (*Utdanningsdiktoratet*).

The CEFR
The CEFR is the result of cooperation between the countries of the European Union. During most of the 20th century researchers had been trying to understand how we learn languages and how to come up with a program for language learning, teaching and
assessment. After World War II and the Korean War, international conflicts made it apparent that learning foreign languages to be able to communicate and interact with other nations in both social interactions and for information transfer was of great importance (Figueras, 2015: 1). In 2001, the European council published *The Common European Framework of Reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR) as a response to the challenge of language learning and assessment. The CEFR has ten years after its launch been as a successful initiative in language education. It has been translated into more than 40 languages (including all languages within the European Union and sign language) and it has found its way into most European countries’ educational institutions (Figueras *ibid.*: 3). One of the most influential parts of the CEFR is the assessment grid (Figueras *ibid.*: 3).

The CEFR in its complexity has two official aims: firstly, it is to make the practitioner reflect on how we learn a language and in what context the language is set to be used. Secondly, it seeks “*to make it easier for practitioners to tell each other and their clientèle what they wish to help learners to achieve, and how they attempt to do so.*” (CEFR [www]). However, one of the more important aims of the CEFR is to harmonize assessment practices and increase the mobility within the European Union via influencing the countries’ L2 teaching (CEFR [www]). The CEFR is not set out to control how and what to teach; it gives examples and arguments as to why it could be done in the presented manner. This is in line with the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) (CEFR [www]).

Even though the main principle with the CEFR is to harmonize assessment practices within the EU, it is also a document that is meant to give practitioners and institutions tools that could help in language learning/teaching and to be used to assess a user's level of proficiency in a foreign language. The CEFR is not bound to any language, which means that it can be used to assess knowledge of any L2. The assessment is based on six different steps from A1 which is very basic language knowledge, to C2, which is mastery of the language (See Appendix 1). These steps are divided into five different uses of the language, listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing. The levels of language skills are measured in terms of *can do* statements (descriptors) such as ‘*I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak*
slowly and clearly’ for A1 listening (CEFR [www]). These criteria and can do statements are based on Ek and Trim’s Waystage programs (CEFR [www]). These programs represent courses with descriptors; thus when the learner has finished a course s/he should have reached the course’s intended level of proficiency (CEFR [www]). For example, the Waystage course/program is equivalent to the A2 level of the CEFR.

The Nordic syllabi of English language teaching
All the Nordic countries use the same model of schooling: elementary school for nine or ten years, and high school (gymnasieskola) for three years. Their curricula and syllabi are result-based (criterion-based) and their English course contents and teaching should be influenced by the CEFR. However, the aims and structure for courses are different between the countries. Even though the courses are different English is still mandatory for all students studying at high school. The main aims and structure of the English courses in each country are presented below.

One of the aims for the Finnish syllabus for English is to “advance as a user of English as part of a diverse world, in both local, national, European and global contexts....” (author’s translation) (Utbildningsstyrelsen, [www]). Finland has one English course, divided into 8 different sub-courses, two of which are obligatory for all students at high school: English and my world and Human social networks (author’s translation) (Utbildningsstyrelsen, [www]). They are presented as different courses although the main aims for the courses and level of language proficiency stay at the same B2.1 level. The grading criteria and language courses of the Finnish syllabus for foreign language teaching look the same for all foreign languages except the English one, where the level of proficiency to pass the course is higher than the other foreign languages. The different “focuses” for English in Finland do not specify any method that should be used in the classroom. However, these focuses specify that technologies should be used in the second sub-course and that the students should learn to work alone and in groups. The grading criteria used are an almost exact translation of the CEFR’s assessment grid (more information in the analysis). The Finnish school system has a grading range for each course from 4-10 (4= fail, 5= pass, 10= pass with excellence). However, they do not have any criteria for each grade, making it the teacher's job to assess their ability in relation to the aim for the whole course (Utbildningsstyrelsen, [www]).
The teaching of English in Swedish high school is divided into three different courses, English 5-7. English 5 is compulsory for all students and the student has to finish each course in their numbered order to continue to the next. All the courses have the same aims and assessment criteria. However, the level of proficiency required to pass the course becomes higher with each course. Within each course there are grades ranging from A-F (F= fail, E= pass, A= pass with excellence). However only the grades A, C and E have specified criteria for grading (Skolverket, [www]). The grading criteria for English is based on a number of can do statements similar to the CEFR.

The Norwegian syllabus of English consists of 4 different aims: Language learning, Oral communication, Written communication and Culture, Society and Literature. Each of these aims states what the student should be able to accomplish after finishing the course. They are based on a can do statement; here is one example from the oral communication section: the students should be able to “understand and use a wide general vocabulary and an academic vocabulary related to his/her own education programme” (Utdanningsdirektoratet [www]). The Norwegian syllabus does not have any grading criteria; the grade is set by the teacher with no references other than the aims for the course. However, the Norwegian school system has the same grading structure as Sweden, ranging from A-F.

3.2 Method

Hermeneutics is about the understanding, interpretation and mediation of different phenomena. This method was chosen due to fact that the author already had the data to be analyzed, in the form of public documents. The author needed an interpretative methodology rather than a methodology such as questionnaires, interviews etc, which are intended to gather empirical data from scratch. Thus hermeneutics was chosen as method for the interpretation of the documents in this study. Hermeneutics can for example advantageously be used to mediate young people's understanding of different phenomena in and about school. It could be for example be bullying, homework or conception of time. Within the hermeneutic research area there are different orientations of the hermeneutic interpretation process. However, the three primary orientations of hermeneutics are outlined below.
3.3.1 Existentially focused hermeneutics
This is also called psychologically-focused interpreting theory. This type of
interpretation tries to understand the authors of texts better than they do themselves. The
research tries with empathy and expressions to understand the author's dreams, projects,
intentions or existence (Ricoeur, 1988 cited in Fejes, 2015: 74-76). Sartre's
Existentialism is often used in interpretation processes that involve human choices and
circumstances. One other commonly used theory is Freud's Psychodynamics, when
interpreting people's dreams, crises or projects that they cannot achieve or come to
terms with (i.e. investigating how their suppressed self is interfering with their daily
lives). The researcher's preconception of a phenomena is often a major part of the
interpretation that could bring a deeper understanding to the analysis, if for example,
researchers are examining the alienation of students at a school and they have
themselves experienced the same phenomena. A problem with preconception is that the
researcher often classifies the people in the study in a positive or negative light; it is
therefore important for the researcher to write a comment about the preconception of the
phenomena that are being studied (Sköldberg & Alvesson, 1994 cited in Fejes, 2015:
73).

3.3.2 Hermeneutics of suspicion
This sub-specialization of hermeneutics is used to understand the content of a
phenomenon. If a text for example is to be analyzed, the material could be split into
separate parts such as words or clauses and analyzed (structure analysis). The researcher
could also examine how often and in what context specific words or clauses are used by
the author. This means that quantifiable data such as word counts etc, can be used
within the approach known as the hermeneutics of suspicion, to interpret different areas
and also give a more scientific basis to the study (Ricoeur, 1988 cited in Fejes &

3.3.3 General theory of interpretation
The general theory of interpretation is the third and most widespread focus within
hermeneutics; within this method it does not matter what material is to be analyzed.
Even though the most commonly analyzed material is different types of texts, such as
journals, essays, letters or documents. This type of interpretation compares different
types of texts against each other, searching for similarities and differences, with the
ambition of finding a general connection between them. The interpretation is not valid if
parts of the interpretation go against the main theme. The main idea of general interpretation is in contrast to the hermeneutics of suspicion not to give explanations; instead it is to show relations and to provide a deeper understanding of their connections (Fejes & Thornberg 2015:74).

A text can never stand on its own; it is colored by the writer and the time it was written. The researcher has to examine and search for answers with regards to the connection between a text and the intentions of the author. However, it is important to realize that most of the time an author cannot be interviewed or listened to in terms of intentions. That is why hermeneutics can offer an approach in terms of looking and examining a text in relation to for example the time period etc, to give an impression of the intention or implicit meaning of the text (a deeper understanding). If the interpretative material is not put in relation to the whole the interpretation becomes 'naive' (Fejes & Thornberg 2015:76). This is described in more detail in the next section.

3.3.4 The connection between text components
Texts written by the same person, at different moments can be compared with each other, and can be seen as different parts that refer to each other and thereby to the whole. It is the connection between the parts that determines the accuracy of the interpretation. The more extensive material the researcher has as the basis for the interpretation the stronger the liability the interpretation has. The researcher has to have enough material to convince the reader that the interpretation is correct, otherwise the interpretation will not be valid (Fejes & Thornberg 2015:77).

There is no general model to use when doing the analysis/interpretations within hermeneutics; this is due to the fact that researchers have different preconceptions governing their choice of how to analyze the material based on the preconception. If we take the same scenario of alienation as before, however the researcher had been a bully at his/her school, the interpretation of the material would not be the same as if he/she had been the victim (Ödman, 1994:186 cited in Fejes, 2015: 81). The hermeneutic process could be compared with a spiral where the researcher is partially searching for new information and acquiring a deeper understanding (ibid 2015: 81). In this research the spiral would represent the material that is being analyzed, which gives the author a deeper understanding of the content of the document and their relation to each other. It
is difficult to give “hands on” information about how this process works; however, there are a few general principles governing the process that are described below.

The preconception can, as mentioned before, both be a resource and make our interpretation closer to the truth or make it fallacious. We need to be aware of our convictions, prejudice and preconceptions, because they will influence the interpretation process. Even a subconscious prior stimulus may affect the interpretation. That is why it is important for the reader of the researched text to understand that the researcher is colored by his/her background. This study is no exception. The bias and background of the author might have affected the interpretation of the text, for example. A teacher with 25 years’ experience of using other methods might find different connections and draw different conclusions from the similarities and differences in the documents in this study. The strong focus on communicative language teaching within the author’s education might affect the analysis in a negative or positive manner. That is why the researcher should have an open-minded approach to the material that is to be analyzed. Researchers should not have too many questions when the material is examined; it should be the material that is “talking” to the researcher. The researcher should be open to adopt different directions of interpretation that was not intended when the research started. The researcher should not be afraid to go beyond or in greater depth than the research questions intended. That is why hermeneutics is sometimes discussed as a knowledge-based theory in its own right, and an ability to learn from the unknown. This might also be the reason why there should not be a significant cultural difference between what is studied and the researcher.

It is important to know that all texts and data might not be the best for a hermeneutic interpretation, such as short/terse interviews. The material should be extensive and leave room for interpretation. If the material is gathered from interviews, the researcher should make the questions as open as possible giving enough room for the informant not to be confined by them, so that a “true” statement can be given. The materials used in the analysis for this study are extensive public documents which have been drafted by teams of experts in government education departments and authorities like Skolverket. Thus the amount of material should be large enough to leave room for an interpretation to be made.
When the open-minded interpretation of the material has been made, the interpretation should be related to prior research, with the purpose to ensure that the analysis and results are supported by previous research. If the analysis goes against prior research the connections and interpretation have to be sound, so that the foundations for further research on the subject can be laid. To improve the validity of a study, Westlund (1996: 74) (cited in Fejes, 2015: 86) claims that researchers should ask themselves the following about the connections made:

- Is there a logical connection between the texts?
- Are there parts of the texts that go against the main questions?
- How can these parts in that case provide a more in-depth interpretation of the texts?
- Can the interpretation be connected to prior research and the main theme of the interpretation?
- Is the interpretation viable due to circumstances such as culture, environment where the text was made?
- In what way could the interpretation be dependent on a specific situation or point in time?
- How have alternative interpretations been dealt with?

The analysis and interpretation should be presented in different steps in the results and analysis part. It should be made clear where the interpretation/connection arose from, the empirical material described, the background literature consulted, the basis for the construction of categories in any tables of analysis, the results of an interpretation or frequencies of words re-occurring.

3.3.5 Problems and limitations
As with all qualitative studies there is always the possibility of subjective bias and misinterpretation. One problem is the length of the CEFR, due to the amount of material that has to be set into relation to the different syllabi; some parts might be missed in analysis. This has mainly to do with the time that available for this study. However due to the nature of the study, small amounts of information that might have been missed in the analysis should not have a major influence on the analysis or credibility of the study.
This study intended to include the Danish syllabus in the analysis, due to the central place occupied culturally and historically by Denmark in relation to the Nordic countries. This was however not possible, because the author of the text was not able to fully understand Danish. This means that if the Danish syllabus had been included the interpretation might have been unreliable. The Swedish and the Norwegian syllabi have English translation, reducing the problem of misinterpretation. The Finnish syllabus does however not have an English translation; it does nevertheless have a Swedish translation, making it understandable for interpretation by the author. The language used in the syllabus document might however affect the interpretation of the material in some way. This is due to the fact that the Finnish’ syllabus of English has to be translated to English from Swedish.

A qualitative research project has a problematic relationship to the concepts of reliability and validity; some even go as far as to exclude this terminology because it is not directly applicable to qualitative research. These terms are defined below.

Reliability is the extent the research is trustworthy and given the same circumstances could be redone with the same results (Dörnyei, 2010: 49). As with all qualitative research, the researcher's subjective view is always a problem when analyzing the same area repeatedly; this is due to the fact that this study does not use any quantifiable data such as word counting etc, as a way of finding similarities. This means that other researchers trying to carry out a similar research project might come to different conclusions. Due to the importance of certain elements in a given text, there might be a number of possible interpretations. However, as has been previously mentioned the qualitative research goal is not to give a “truth” but to show connections that can later be researched using a quantitative methodology.

Validity on the other hand is the extent to which a concept or measurement is well-founded and corresponds to the real world (Dörnyei, 2010: 49). This study attempts to find similarities and differences between the Nordic syllabi and how they are influenced by the CEFR. This has been done by looking at similarities between the documents. The validity of the study is therefore down to the credibility of the similarities found during the comparison of the documents and how trustworthy the representation of these findings are against the pedagogical and linguistic backgrounds of the CEFR and
national syllabi (external validity). The internal validity is to the extent the study has minimized systematic errors or bias (Dörnyei 2010: 34). The bias of the interpretation is described in the paragraphs above, which are the bias of the interpreter etc.

4. Results and analysis

The results and analysis section of this essay describe similarities between the CEFR and the Nordic syllabi, looking at the different dimensions of comparison (described in the theoretical background (Section 2.3 and 2.4)) and how they are described and presented in the different syllabus document texts. At the end of each “dimension” a more extensive analysis between the similarities and differences between the syllabi is discussed.

4.1. The CEFR and the Nordic syllabi

4.1.1 The relationship between the L1 and L2 in the language acquisition process

According to the CEFR the first and second language do not stand on their own, they are intertwined:

The learner of a second or foreign language and culture does not cease to be competent in his or her mother tongue and the associated culture. Nor is the new competence kept entirely separate from the old.

(CEFR [www]).

The CEFR sees the knowledge of different languages as one skill that is evolving. The first language does affect the second language for the better or worse. The CEFR also sees the exposure to and use of the language as the main way of learning a language. This is very much as both Skinner’s (1938, 1953) and Chomsky’s (1965, 1981) theories of language learning. However, the CEFR does not describe its view on the subject if learning a language is a skill that humans are born with or if it is the exposure to the environment and imitation as the basis of habit formation that is the source of language acquisition. Although the CEFR is mainly communicative in its nature, promoting the use of the language to acquire as a skill, explicit language knowledge is also of importance when learning and using a language. This is due to the fact that without the
knowledge of basic structures and pronunciation, the learner will have difficulty using the language in a manner that can be understood without the use of other aids such as hand gestures etc; it is also difficult to structure sentences without a knowledge of syntax and morphology. Thus the knowledge of basic grammatical structures is of great importance for language learning (CEFR [www]).

The implication here is that we do need explicit knowledge of the fundamentals of language structures. However, the exposure and repetitive usage of the language are what drive the learning forward, when the basic rules have been learnt. The CEFR does not however say how this explicit knowledge should be learnt. It might be that this explicit knowledge could be learnt through implicit exposure to the language, making explicit language teaching redundant.

According to the CEFR language usage/learning could be divided into three categories:

- the necessary competences...
- the ability to put these competences into action....
- the ability to employ the strategies necessary to bring the competences into action.

(CEFR: 131 [www]).

This means that the person using a language in any context needs to have: knowledge about the subject that is discussed; the person needs to have the expertise to use the language to communicate (language competence); the person also needs to have developed strategies to use the language in the context at hand.

The Finnish syllabus does not explicitly describe how the students are to learn a language, only that it should be done in a communicative manner. The connection between the first and second language is not discussed in the Finnish syllabus, which could mean that the language should be learnt without reference to the first language. However, the syllabus does say that 'written and spoken communication is to be addressed in a number of different ways in the courses, even if the focus of each may vary' (author’s translation) (Utbildningsstyrelsen [www]). This indicates that the focus is on usage of the language, usage or repetition which is in line with Skinner’s (1938,
1953) behavioristic view of language learning: learning through exposure and repetition.

The Swedish syllabus says that teaching should encourage students’ curiosity about language, and how different languages support and interact with each other:

Teaching should encourage students' curiosity in language and culture, and give them the opportunity to develop plurilingualism where skills in different languages interact and support each other

(Skolverket [www])

This means that the Swedish syllabus confirms that there is a connection between the learning of the L1 and L2, following the claims of Chomsky’s (1981) theory of Universal Grammar. The idea of Plurilingualism described in the Swedish syllabus that languages support each other, is very much the same view as the CEFR has on languages. This concept gives us a better understanding of other cultures and values by understanding other languages. However, the use of other languages than the target language should be avoided in the English classrooms in Swedish high school, according to the Swedish syllabus (see 4.1.2). This is in contrast to the CEFR, where the understanding of the connection between languages includes the understanding and knowledge of other languages as well.

The Norwegian syllabus says this on the subject of language learning:

The main subject area Language learning focuses on what is involved in learning a new language and seeing relationships between English, one’s native language and other languages. It covers knowledge about the language, language usage and insight into one’s own language learning...

(Utdanningsdiktoratet [www]).

Thus the Norwegian syllabus acknowledges the connection between the first and second language, following the theoretical concept of the UG as outlined by Chomsky (1981).

The Swedish and the Norwegian syllabi and the CEFR do show similar interpretations concerning the view of a connection between the first and the second language.
However, the Finnish syllabus does not show that they share the view of a connection between the processes of first and second language acquisition. What can be seen in all of the documents is the view of the importance of language usage and practice to acquire skills. The Norwegian syllabus is also the only syllabus that involves the connection between the first and second language when it comes to language skills and aims for the English course.

### 4.1.2 The role of translation in the EFL classroom

The CEFR addresses translation as a tool for language learning, which can be used as mediation for communication and explanation, when producing text or explaining a phenomenon. It can be used as a training exercise where a student has to translate, explain or summarize a text in English to another student, without affecting the meaning/information of the text.

The language learner/user’s communicative language competence is activated in the performance of the various language activities, involving reception, production, interaction or mediation (in particular interpreting or translating). Each of these types of activity is possible in relation to texts in oral or written form, or both.

(CEFR [www])

For the teacher it can be useful to translate important items of information that the class needs to be able to do an exercise. For example, if the information/instruction is complex and needs to be understood correctly, a translation might be in order so that the students can complete the task correctly.

Translation within the CEFR is also listed as one of the semantic competences within language “knowledge/skill”. This is the ability to find and use ‘translation equivalence’ (CEFR [www]).

However, the CEFR does not explicitly say that one should use translation in language teaching. However, the CEFR document does state translation as a viable method to use in the classroom and that using translation might benefit the user/student.

The Finnish syllabus does not promote the use of translation within the classroom or have it as a basis for assessment. Even though the CEFR does see it as a semantic skill,
it is not included in their assessment grid and therefore not included in the Finnish grading system. However, the Finnish syllabus does not condemn the use of a first language, because it is not mentioned. Thus the teacher is free to use the first language as a tool in teaching; however the skill itself should not be assessed.

The Swedish syllabus states that 'Teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English' (Skolverket [www]). This means the teacher should try to avoid using Swedish in the classroom; however, the teacher is allowed to use translation if the teacher sees the need for it, because it is not explicitly forbidden. However, translation or the use of the first language is not mentioned in any context in the Swedish syllabus. Thus the Swedish syllabus and the CEFR take different approaches to translation and how the first language should be used.

The Norwegian syllabus does not explicitly say that different translation methods should be used. However the document does say the following:

The main subject area Language learning focuses on what is involved in learning a new language and seeing relationships between English, one's native language and other languages…

(Utdanningsdiktoratet [www])

This relation between the first and second language as described in Section 4.1.1 could use translation as a basis to search for similarities between the first and second language. This could be done by translating the text and looking for similarities between the two. However, the first language has to be involved in some type of comparison or analysis to meet the aim for the syllabus definition of language learning.

Even though translation is seen as a skill in the CEFR, the Nordic syllabi do not have the same view of the importance of translation in the classroom. The Swedish syllabus almost goes to the extent of completely excluding other languages than the target from the English classroom. The Swedish Syllabus gives the impression of viewing other languages as distractions in the classroom and tries therefore to exclude them as far as possible, showing the same fear of interference as described by Malmkjaer (2008: 63-64). The CEFR on the other hand views translation as a language skill that could be of importance in the classroom and in the real world. However, as the CEFR also states, the aim of the teaching is what should be taken into consideration when choosing the
classroom focus (CEFR [www]). This means that if one of the aims of the teaching is to be able to translate, the teaching should also involve translation. As mentioned previously, the CEFR also states that it is not its intention to advocate a specific language teaching method that can be used in all situations, although giving examples of methods that can be used in the classroom (CEFR [www]). However, none of the Nordic syllabi condemn the usage of translation, which means that it is a method that can be used by the teachers if they see the need for it.

4.1.3 The role of grammar

The CEFR gives examples of different types and views of grammar and focus on form. When learning the basics of a language, grammar and form are essential for the learner to understand the concept of the language (See 4.1.1). However, when the learner has mastered the grammatical structures, the process of using them becomes one which makes use of the students’ implicit language knowledge. The CEFR states that declarative knowledge (knowledge of how something is) is something that the students do not easily retain, which is why it is important that what is taught becomes part of the students’ procedural/implicit knowledge (how to do something), because the procedural knowledge is not as easily forgotten (CEFR [www]).

The precise procedures which the teacher uses in grammar teaching are, according to the CEFR, of lesser importance, as long as the teaching is done communicatively, promoting implicit learning of language. However, the CEFR states that grammatical competence is necessary due to its importance in communication. Thus knowledge of how to structure and formulate sentences is necessary, although explicit knowledge of grammar functions is of less importance:

An analysis of the functions, notions, grammar and vocabulary necessary to perform the communicative tasks described on the scales could be part of the process of developing new sets of language specifications.

(CEFR [www])

The Finnish syllabus does not mention how grammar and structure are to be addressed in the classroom; it is up to the teacher. However, as grammar is part of communicative competence, students still have to know how to form sentences, although ’written and
spoken communication is to be addressed in a number of different ways' (author's translation) (Utbildningsstyrelsen [www]). This does not necessarily mean that explicit grammar teaching is a part of that, but it could be.

The Swedish syllabus does not mention grammar or grammar teaching. However, as grammar is part of communicative competence, the students still have to know how to form sentences (Skolverket [www]). It is also a part of the grading criteria, which puts a focus on how the students have structured their sentences and their use of different strategies. However, as grammar teaching approaches and exercises are not explicitly mentioned in the Swedish syllabus the teacher is allowed to choose freely how to address grammar in the classroom.

The Norwegian syllabus similarly to the other syllabi leaves the option open to the teacher. However, the aim for the course gives a more explicit focus by mentioning grammar as one of the focuses for developing writing, within the statement of aims / purpose section of syllabus:

The main subject area involves developing a vocabulary and using orthography, idiomatic structures and grammatical patterns when writing. It also covers creating structure, coherence and concise meaning in texts.

(Utdanningsdiktoratet [www]).

The CEFR, Finnish and Swedish syllabi does not state how to address grammar and focus on form in the classroom; the CEFR does however give examples of ways to address it, leaving the teacher with the choice to address it in an explicit or implicit manner. As grammar is not a part of the assessment criteria/aims in the Finnish syllabus, the focus should mainly be on implicit grammatical knowledge or consciousness raising. The Swedish syllabus does put some focus on the form of the language when it comes to grading the students’ performance. Explicit (declarative) grammar knowledge is however not mentioned as a criterion. Thus the focus of the teaching should probably be most beneficial if it has the same focus as the Finnish syllabus. Even though it is not stated directly, the Norwegian syllabus can be interpreted as putting a greater focus on grammar (Utdanningsdiktoratet [www]). However as in the other syllabi, how this should be accomplished is not described, leaving it up to the teacher to decide if it should be a more explicit form of grammar.
teaching or if it should be done through consciousness raising. Thus how the grammatical structures are to be learnt is up to the teacher in all of the syllabi, in showing connections to the CEFR, that there is no given method to be used to 'boost' language acquisition. This is due to the fact that the language aims of the Nordic syllabi and the CEFR are language skills, involving the productive usage of the language to communicate.

4.1.4 Models of pronunciation (nativeness vs intelligibility principle)

The CEFR recommends that we need knowledge of how words are pronounced to be able to develop our own pronunciation (see 4.1.1). However, this knowledge is only valid if the explicit knowledge of how something is pronounced is practised and taken in as our own. Knowledge representation has to go from explicit knowledge to procedural/implicit knowledge. This statement is connected with the claim that: 

*phonemes in L2 may not be present in L1. If they are not acquired or learnt, some loss of information is entailed and misunderstandings may occur.* (CEFR [www]). Thus the CEFR claims that we need to learn how words are pronounced in order to use the language. However how this knowledge is to be acquired is not specified. This could be done through exposure (the intelligibility principle) to the language or by practicing using the nativeness principle.

The CEFR does however bring up the fact that the age of the learner is of importance in how easily the learner will acquire the ‘correct' pronunciation. The CEFR also points out that learning the incorrect pronunciation and then changing it, is much more difficult than learning it correctly from the beginning. The CEFR promotes the nativeness principle as a faster option for learning the correct pronunciation:

> To raise phonetic errors into consciousness and unlearn the automatised behaviours only once a close approximation to native norms becomes fully appropriate, may be much more expensive (in time and effort) than it would have been in the initial phase of learning, especially at an early age. 

(CEFR [www])

The Finnish syllabus does not state explicitly in its aims or courses what method is to be used to practise oral proficiency; it is up to the teacher to decide. However due to the
fact that the grading criteria are based on the CEFR’s assessment grid, intonation is a part of the examination of oral performance (*Utbildningsstyrelsen [www]*). This means that some sort of focus on pronunciation/intonation has to be made, the same type of focus that is made in the CEFR. This promotes the nativeness principle, although it should be done in a communicative manner, because the grading criteria for both the Finnish syllabus and the CEFR promote communication above everything else.

The Swedish syllabus does not have any focus on pronunciation, in the aims, the instructions for the course or in the grading criteria (Skolverket, [www]). Thus the focus on pronunciation should not be part of English teaching in the Swedish high school. The teaching in Swedish schools should focus on the intelligibility principle and fluency of the language, instead of the focus on pronunciation.

The Norwegian syllabus states that students should be ‘learning to speak clearly and to use the correct intonation’ (*Utdanningsdiktoratet [www]*). This indicates that there should be a focus on pronunciation in the teaching of oral performance, indicating that the Norwegian syllabus should use the nativeness principle with regards to oral performance. However, this could be complemented using a method that is communicative and more in line with the aims of the syllabus, for example: ‘when we meet people from other countries, at home or abroad, we need English for communication’ (*Utdanningsdiktoratet [www]*) which is clearly promoting communication.

One can say that the CEFR, together with the Finnish and Norwegian syllabi, promote a mixture of both focus on pronunciation and focus on communication, which is in contrast to the Swedish syllabus, where the focus is on communicative skill (fluency) as an important aspect of oral proficiency. However, the main focus of the Nordic syllabi and the CEFR is communication; thus the ability to use the language should outweigh the role of pronunciation. However, this claim cannot be made for certain because pronunciation is a part of the Finnish syllabus as well as constituting the basis of the CEFR’s grading criteria. This is the ability to produce complete sentences in relation to having a perfect pronunciation of single words. The ability to produce complete sentences should logically outweigh the importance of the ability to pronounce words.
perfectly; this is due to the focus on the ability to communicate, which is the main focus of the assessment criteria of the CEFR (see 4.1.7).

4.1.5 Reception and production.

The CEFR ([www]) defines both reception and production as essential for interaction; they are however displayed as different items of language knowledge, although the CEFR states that they cannot be measured separately (by another person/teacher).

The CEFR’s assessment grid which is based on *can do* statements, is built upon the focus on three different areas of competence: reception, interaction and production. The CEFR provides numerous examples of different types of activities that use these types of activities. However as stated before the CEFR’s objective is not to give a single answer to what method is to be used or what type of language objective the teachers should follow. This means that even though the CEFR gives many examples of different areas that could be addressed in the language classroom, what to teach depends on the focus of the teaching. This means that the CEFR does not give an answer to what material or focus should be used in the classroom. However, the focus of the different skills is on communication, ranging from mono-production to interaction between individuals, at different levels (CEFR [www]).

The Finnish syllabus English course is divided into different subcategories. These subcategories have different aims and affect different types of material. This means that the student will be exposed to and use both reception and production for different purposes. As an example the first subcategory is *English and my world* (author's translation) (*Utbildningsstyrelsen* [www]). In this course the students are supposed to reflect about the position of the English language in the world; this should also be connected to the life of a student and in what way English might be important to him/her. This means that what Finnish students are to address in terms of text and subject, depends on what program the student has chosen.

The Swedish syllabus says that students should be exposed to written texts and speech of different types that *instruct, relate, summarise, explain, discuss, report and argue* (Skolverket [www]). They should also be able to produce different texts and speech in the context, to *summarise, explain, comment, assess, give reasons for their opinions,*
*discuss and argue* (Skolverket [www]). How well they produce and understand in these various settings is also part of the grading criteria. This means that the Swedish syllabus wants the students to be able to understand and produce different types of text and for different settings.

Within the area of reception and production, the Norwegian syllabus says that the student should be able to adapt to various types of text. They should be able to understand content and details in text and speech of various lengths and about different topics (*Utdanningsdiktoratet* [www]). They should also be able to 'interpret and use technical and mathematical information in communication' (*Utdanningsdiktoratet* [www]). What types of text or speech the students are supposed to work with is not described in any detail. However, from the information one can interpret that, there should be various types of interaction and the aims for the tasks are to make the students able to communicate and understand various communicative settings.

Even though the description of the Nordic syllabi differs, the materials that the students face during their time in school are more similar than one would first think. The most substantial differences between the syllabi are that the Finnish syllabus has eight different subcategories/sub-courses. These subcategories have different topics which separately address different types of reception and production. However, in doing so it is also the most narrowly defined of the three and the Norwegian syllabus is the most open one. One can see that the openness of the Swedish and the Norwegian syllabi are very similar to how the CEFR has been constructed, leaving the option of what material is to be addressed to the teacher. However, the main goal of Nordic syllabi is to give the students a broad knowledge of different types of texts and speech in terms of both reception and production.

**4.1.6 ICT and digital literacy**

As mentioned previously the CEFR promotes communicative language teaching; however, it does not promote any one method or tool that should be used in every classroom in any given situation; instead it gives examples of how different language teaching might achieve the same goal, the acquisition of the target language. As for ICT and digital literacy, the use of such tools in the classroom is, according to the CEFR, up to the teacher to decide; thus its importance depends on the focus of the teaching:
What use can and should be made of instructional media (audio and video cassettes, computers, etc.)?

a) none;
b) for whole-class demonstrations, repetitions, etc.;
c) in a language/video/computer laboratory mode;
d) in an individual self-instructional mode;
e) as a basis for group work (discussion, negotiation, co-operative and competitive games, etc.);
f) in international computer networking of schools, classes and individual students.

(CEFR [www])

This is an example of how the teacher should take on the use of media in the classroom; it shows that the teacher could choose not to address/use media/technology in the classroom at all (following the Dogme principle). However due to the fact that digital media and computers are becoming of greater importance for keeping good relations between nations (a tool for communication) a commitment to their use should also be implemented in the language classroom. In other sections, the CEFR is more explicit in stating that technology and media should be used:

To promote the national and international collaboration of governmental and non-governmental institutions engaged in the development of methods of teaching and evaluation in the field of modern language learning and in the production and use of materials, including institutions engaged in the production and use of multi-media materials.

(CEFR [www])

This means that the CEFR sees the future communication between nations and people being through the use of multi-media (internet/technology) since the CEFR came into force at around the time of the appearance of Web 2.0 technologies and collaborative/sharing practices on the Internet. That is why the CEFR promotes the use of technology to find information, communicate, build relations, etc.

The Finnish syllabus states that the students should 'with the help of different media participate in different contexts of communication, with varied linguistic and cultural difficulty, including international contexts' (author's translation) (Utbildningsstyrelsen [www]). They should also: 'reflect over the importance of technology and the digitalisation for communication and wellbeing' (author's translation)
This means that the Finnish students should not only have an understanding of the impact technology has had on people's lives and communication; they should also be in a position to use different types of technology to communicate in international contexts at different levels of difficulty. Thus, the Finnish syllabus states that the teacher should incorporate different types of media into the classroom.

The Swedish syllabus states that 'Students should be given the opportunity to interact in speech and writing, and to produce spoken language and texts of different kinds, both on their own and together with others, using different aids and media' (Skolverket [www]). Thus media/technology should be used in the classroom, for both written and spoken interactions and production. This means that the incorporation of technology in the English classroom of Sweden is compulsory, making ICT a central part of English teaching in Sweden's high school.

The Norwegian syllabus includes 'digital skills' as one of its aims for the English course:

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Digital skills in English means being able to use a varied selection of digital tools, media and resources to assist in language learning, to communicate in English and to acquire relevant knowledge in the subject of English....

(Utdanningsdiktoratet [www]).
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The Norwegian syllabus requires that teachers use the technological tools that are available to them. In this way, ICT is made a central part of language teaching in Norwegian high school system.

The CEFR says on one hand that it is up to the teacher to decide to what degree the use of technology should be implemented in the classroom. On the other hand, although technology is not essential to modern language teaching, it has become an essential part of communicating in the modern world and should thereby be a part of the classroom. The Nordic syllabi have a strong connection to ICT-based teaching, the Norwegian syllabus having the strongest and most explicit, due to the fact that the Norwegian syllabus has incorporated 'digital skills' as a part of the aims of the course. The Finnish syllabus includes the understanding of technology as one of its aims, meaning that the
Finnish syllabus not only promotes the usage of technology but also the understanding of the potential and impact of technology in everyday life.

4.1.7 Grading and assessment

The CEFR promotes criterion-referenced assessment of procedural (as opposed to declarative) knowledge. Thereby the focus of the assessment (when grading) should be based on what the student can do and nothing else; even if the course itself addresses more than just English proficiency. The assessment criteria have to be relevant to what research sees as language competence/skill, otherwise the validity of the language competence assessment might be negatively affected (CEFR [www]). There are different types of assessment that the CEFR ([www]) brings up as valid ways of assessing a student's language skills, such as tests, checklists, observation, etc. However, the CEFR does not put importance on what method is used when assessing knowledge, only that the method of assessment should embody the principles of a commitment to validity and reliability, so that it is language proficiency/communicative competence and no other factors that are being measured.

The CEFR’s self-assessment grid could be seen as a form of both summative and formative self-assessment, due to the fact that one of the aims of the self-assessment grid is for the practitioner of language to assess if his/her language skills are sufficient or not; this is to be able to apply to for example an educational course in another country. Thus before the application, the practitioner can carry out his/her own assessment of his/her language skills. Thus the practitioner can choose to address areas of the language that are difficult before applying.

The Finnish syllabus assessment follows the line of the CEFR in that it is up to the teacher to decide the best method to evaluate the knowledge that the students have in the classroom, along with the view on the importance of self-assessment that is shared between the CEFR and the Finnish syllabus ‘evaluate how one's own skills have progressed and advance them further” (author's translation) (Utbildningsstyrelsen [www]). The grading aims of the English course used in the Finnish syllabus are an almost exact translation of the CEFR assessment grid. This shows that the importance after the course is what the students can do with the language and not declarative
knowledge. However, the Finnish syllabus only has general aims for language skills when it comes to assessment, after the course the students should have a language proficiency equivalent to the level B2.1 in the CEFR’s assessment grid (see Appendix 1). This means that the syllabus does not have any criteria for how to refer their different grades for the same course. This is a somewhat confusing, meaning what if a student shows skills at the B2.2 level (See Appendix 1), would they be awarded a higher grade or is it something else that is of importance?

The Swedish syllabus, like the Finnish syllabus, and the CEFR, does not specify what method is to be used when assessing the student’s knowledge/skill. However, the grading criteria make use of the ‘can do’ statements as the CEFR.

In oral and written interaction in various, and more formal contexts, students can express themselves clearly and with some fluency and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation. In addition, students can choose and use essentially functional strategies which to some extent solve problems and improve their interaction

(Skolverket [www]).

As seen in the citation above the Swedish syllabus includes grading criteria for the different language skills; this one describing the criterion for oral and written interaction etc. The including of grading criteria in the Swedish syllabus shows that it puts emphasis on reliability and validity in the assessment and grading of students. The Norwegian syllabus does not explicitly state how the assessment of the student’s skills/knowledge should be conducted, except that:

The pupils may be selected for a written examination. The written examination is prepared and graded centrally. The pupils may also be selected for an oral examination. The oral examination is prepared and graded locally. The examination covers the entire subject (140 teaching hours).

(Utdanningsdiktoratet [www])

As a result of the fact that all students might not be subject to these examinations, this recommendation can only be seen as a supplementary assessment method. The main methods of assessment are up to the teacher, because the students after they have finished the course should be awarded an 'overall achievement grade'
This statement is based on the aims of the course. The problem with the English course in Norway when it comes to assessment is that the syllabus designers do not have any grading criteria for the course, only aims. This makes their validity and reliability questionable due to the fact that they only have the general aims of the course to relate their different grading criteria to.

There are clear differences between the syllabi when it comes to assessment. The reliability and validity may be compromised in both the Norwegian and the Finnish syllabi due to the fact that they do not have any clear grading criteria for the different grades. This could mean that the assessment abilities of the teacher are much more in focus than in the Swedish syllabus. This could put much more stress on the teachers, because they do not have anything to reference their grading to. The author believes that the requirements of communication between different teachers both within the same and other schools must be much higher in Finland and Norway than in for example Sweden which has different grading criteria for each grade. As the CEFR (www) says the most important fact is not the method used to assess language skills; it is that the method of assessment is reliable and valid. It is questionable how one could achieve even a reasonable degree of reliability and validity when the teacher does not have any criteria to reference either.

5. Conclusion:

The aim of this essay was to investigate similarities and differences between the Nordic countries’ syllabi and the CEFR, within seven dimensions of comparison. The Nordic syllabi and the CEFR certainly share many similarities for example when it comes to their communicative nature of teaching and assessment, their view of ICT and many other factors. This is however mainly due to the communicative nature of teaching and assessment that has been adopted in the separate documents that is the most significant contributor to the similarities, especially the assessment grid and the can do statements, that can be found in the Nordic syllabi (even if they might be implemented differently). This study does not however claim that the similarities between these documents are due to the influence of the CEFR or if other sources have
been just as influential. It seems however to be the case that the CEFR has had a major influence on the structure of the Nordic syllabi, even if it cannot be stated as a truth.

Future studies could involve a more in depth study of the separate dimensions that are addressed in this study. It could also investigate if the Norwegian and Finnish English teachers' grading and assessment of students is affected due to the lack of grading criteria.
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