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Interlangugage or Intralanguage?

A study of errors in English essays produced by Swedish pupils

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

A person who lives in Sweden today is immensely exposed to the English language, whether it is from advertisements in magazines, music, on the radio or other sources. Since English has the status of “lingua franca”, and has had it for at least fifty years, this contact is practically unavoidable for Swedish people. Before Swedish children have begun their obligatory courses in English, which usually takes place during their third year in school, most of them have already picked up some basic words and expressions.

English and Swedish are two closely related languages, and this may facilitate the learning process of English as a second language for Swedes. For example, many parts of the vocabulary of the two languages are identical or similar. Also, both Swedish and English are part of the Germanic language branch and share many characteristics. One of these is the fact that Swedish and English are both SVO-languages, i.e. they have a subject-verb-object order. Also, there are no new letters in the alphabet for a Swedish learner who studies English.

However, despite the many similarities, there are also differences that may cause problems for learners. For example, pronunciation does, in many cases differ. The phonological sounds in English is commonly an area among beginners where a lot of errors are produced, since some of the sounds in the English language do not exist in the Swedish language. The /θ/, the initial sound in the word *third*, is an example of a new sound for a Swedish beginner in English, and is commonly pronounced as either a /f/ or /t/. Furthermore, many of the letters are pronounced similar in both languages, but not exactly the same. An example is the letter “*r*”, which is usually produced with the tip of the tongue in Swedish, but in English, it is produced further back in the mouth, giving it a slightly different sound.

Another area that may be difficult for learners is word order. The Swedish language is structured with a V2 word order, where the verb is usually the second clause element in the clause. English, on the other hand, is one of the few Germanic languages that do not use the V2 word order.

Due to the fact that Swedish and English are closely related, but nevertheless have a number of differences, it can be expected that the source language of learners will be reflected in their English production. This study discusses instances where the influence of Swedish can be seen in the written English of Swedish students in their 9th year of education.

1.2 Aims

The aim of this essay is to investigate a number of errors that have been related to negative transfer and whether some of these errors are more common than others. Transfer refers to instances where the student's native language causes a grammatical or lexical error in the target language (see 1.3). In this case, the influence is from Swedish on English. I will also attempt to find out which grammatical or lexical feature in Swedish is responsible for the error.

The frequency of the errors is thus an important matter. A sub-aim of the thesis is to compare the results to previous research and studies on second language acquisition in order to see whether transfer is a big problem for Swedish students. Furthermore, the essay takes up the question whether the pronunciation of English words by Swedish students affects spelling, since there are examples where the incorrect spelling is based on difficulties with certain words and sounds in English.

1.3 Transfer

There are many ways to define transfer and its importance, and it is an area that often causes disagreement among linguistic researchers. An often cited attempt at a definition was given by Odlin (1997:27):

Transfer is the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired.

While these lines give one explanation to the meaning of transfer, there are other things that need to be made clear. Transfer can be of either positive or negative nature. An example of positive transfer from Swedish to English can be seen in a simple sentence such as:

1 a Jag har sett filmen.

b I have seen the movie.

The sentence shows the similarities in word order between English and Swedish. As both languages use a subject-verb-object word order, the English language is not likely to cause syntactical problems for a Swedish learner. This can be compared to the same sentence in German, also a Germanic language, in which the verb is placed after the object in sentences in the past tense:

2 a Ich habe das film gesehen.

b I have the film seen.

According to (Odlin1997:36), this comparison, as in example 2 ab, between two, or more, native languages and their target language is necessary in order to prove that it is an example of positive transfer.

An example of negative transfer would be at play in an incorrect sentence such as: **I looked on TV*. The Swedish prepositional verb *titta på* is the equivalent to the English *watch* in this context, i.e. watching TV, but to the English prepositional verb “look at” in other contexts, where the Swedish language also uses the verb *titta på*. An illustration is given in 3ab):

3 a He is looking at a painting.

b Han tittar på en tavla.

Transfer is not a new concept, but goes back to the extensive studies in second language acquisition beginning in the middle of the twentieth century. At that time the phenomenon was often referred to as “interference”, which reflected the focus on language errors and the negative aspects of language transfer. However, the term “substratum transfer”, or simply, transfer, was used relatively early to describe how the native language of a learner affects the

acquisition of a second language. Soon, transfer was an accepted phenomenon and was thought of as the most important, if not the only, noticeable reason for errors and difficulties among language learners.

In the 1960s, opinions on transfer started to become more divided among scholars. The so-called “behaviourists” saw transfer as something purely based on old habits (Odlin 1997:15). Linguists such as B.F. Skinner and Robert Lado argued that transfer could be either good or bad and they used contrastive analyses to find evidence supporting their claim. The behaviourists’ view on language was criticised during the 70s, mainly because they did not use empirical data to support their theories. Experiments using empirical data showed that learner errors and difficulties were not always based on differences between the L1 and the target language, but could also be a product of “transfer of training”, i.e. it was suggested that the errors produced may be a result of the way in which the learner had been taught.

The error analyses of the 60s and 70s showed that the same type of errors could be observed among learners with very different linguistic backgrounds and whose native languages varied. As a result, the validity of transfer was questioned. Furthermore, these analyses were used to prove that there are developmental errors that can be compared to the errors a child produces in its native language. For instance, omissions of articles or the verb *is*, are examples of what is usually thought of as developmental errors that occur in the production of English learners, as well as in the acquisition of the L1 (first language) in many different languages.

The idea behind “developmental sequences” is based on the knowledge that a learner goes through a set of fixed “stages” in their acquisition of a language (Lightbown *et al.*, 1999:4, 5). These stages are fixed and “reached” in a certain order, and are detectable in both L1 and L2. One of these stages is reached when the learner has begun using the *-ed* suffix on verbs when he or she wants to indicate the past tense (Ellis 2000: 20f). The learner then uses this suffix as a part of the set of “rules” he/she applies on the language production. These sequences might interfere with previously learned stages and that explains why a child may start saying things like: * *I goed there yesterday*, despite the fact that the child has been able to use the correct form *went* at an earlier age.

The notion of developmental sequences was introduced mostly with the help of the studies by Dulay and Burt (1974). They examined the grammatical errors in the production of two

groups of bilingual children. The first group had Spanish and English as their mother tongue, while the second group consisted of Chinese-English bilinguals. Both groups had, for example, problems with sentences in the past tense and often failed to include the possessive marker (Odlin 1997: 21). With their cross-sectional studies, Dulay and Burt argued that the similarities in the order of acquisition among the children in both groups provided evidence for the existence of fixed developmental structures, and also that the degree of transfer in language acquisition was low and not of any great importance. These types of conclusions and opinions came as a major setback for the linguists that argued for the significance of research in the area of transfer. The behaviourists made attempts to expand the view on transfer and in what areas it could be found. While grammar still played a major role, areas such as phonology and semantics was given an increasing amount of attention.

Since the notion of transfer is in focus in this essay, another term which needs to be taken into consideration is that of *interlanguage*. The term was introduced by Selinker (1972). It describes the language of a learner who has not yet mastered the target language. An interlanguage is not the same as the L1 or the L2. It is seen as a separate language which has its own set of rules (Mason 2008). These rules may however be traced back to the L1, which is then seen as a sign of negative transfer. While negative transfer is seen as a part of interlingual errors, there is also a term called intralanguage, which is also a system of its own, with the difference that intralanguage errors are based on L2. Intralingual errors can be detected where a rule or construction in the target language has been acquired, but used where it should not be used, which is called overgeneralization (Köhlmyr 2001:193). One example of overgeneralization is seen when a pupil has learned the progressive *-ing* -form and uses it where the simple present is correct.

While the existence of transfer is generally accepted today, there are scholars who question the terms negative and positive transfer. For example, Gass & Selinker argue that there is only transfer, since: “The terms refer to the product, although the use implies a process.” (2001:68). As there has been quite extensive research in terms of corpus-based studies, a lot of focus seems to be put on how to use this information to improve the methods of language teaching. In addition, as Odlin (1997: 155f) notifies, some areas of transfer need more attention. Some of these areas are the difference between the comprehension and production of a second language, as well as more longitudinal studies, where learners are observed during

a longer period of time. This will give information on the order of developmental sequences in L2, which can be useful for educational purposes.

It is difficult to find recent studies that are completely devoted to language transfer. The trend seems to be that scholars want to know more about how transfer interacts with other parts of learning.

1.4 Material

This study is based on a corpus of 41 essays, written by Swedish students in the 9th grade, as a part of the Swedish National Assessment Programme, a nationwide set of exams, taken in the compulsory subjects Swedish, English and Mathematics (<http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/170>). The assessments are constructed to get a good perception of the knowledge and abilities of the students and the results of the tests are often taken into consideration when the final grades are set. The material for this study is assignments where the students have been instructed to write a short essay on a given topic. The topics vary from year to year, and in this study they are entitled either “I can’t live without” or “Living in this world”.

The number of essays was originally 44, but since the focus of my work is on teenagers with Swedish as their first language, and three of the essays were, through information given in the text, written by students of other nationalities, these essays were excluded. It would, however, have been interesting to obtain more essays written by children who had other languages than Swedish as their mother tongue and compare these children’s errors to those made by Swedes, but such a study falls outside the scope of this essay.

All the essays are handwritten and between two and six pages long. The essays were produced in a timeframe of a few hours, which has some disadvantages as well as positive aspects. The short amount of time given is more likely to increase the number of non-systematic mistakes made by the students. If, however, the essays were produced during a longer period of time and on a computer, some of the errors, especially in spelling, would already have been corrected by the word processor, thus reducing the amount of material for this study. To maintain anonymity of the pupils, all names had been removed from the material before I received them.

1.5 Method

The research in this essay is based on empirical data. The essays have been read manually and errors have been marked and assigned to a specific category. These fairly general categories are:

- Word order
- Prepositions
- Omissions and additions of determiner

The categories above have been chosen because they are common areas of errors among Swedish students, but also because they are errors that are likely to contain instances of negative transfer. Errors from each category will be discussed in separate paragraphs, each containing examples and quotes from the material, as well as a description of the type of error and comparisons between the English and Swedish systems in that specific category. Errors that do not fit into any specific category will not necessarily be ignored if they are relevant in other ways, such as examples of what does not constitute transfer. All type of errors will be noted, but not categorized. If a certain type of error occurs many times, but cannot be fitted into any of the categories, that error needs to be discussed separately.

2. Results

2.1 Introduction

This study includes some terminology that is used differently in different studies and it is therefore important to make some clarifications. One difficult area is represented by the

various definitions of mother tongue; for example L1 and first language may have slightly different meanings, depending on the theoretical approach. For reasons of simplicity, however, I will use the two terms to describe the same thing: the mother tongue and the first language a person acquires and/or feels the most comfortable using.

Another important distinction is between “error” and “mistake”, and was first defined by Corder (1967). An error is produced when the learner lacks linguistic knowledge or competence about a rule or the system of the second language. This can be seen in texts where a specific type of error occurs several times. A “mistake”, on the other hand, is non-systematic and appears more randomly. It does not necessarily indicate the knowledge of a learner, but rather problems in production. Mistakes are most common in speech but can also be found in writing. This study is based on errors, but since it is difficult to rule out mistakes, some mistakes will be sorted under errors. The examples from the material will be cited as they were written, without corrections, except a few cases when slight corrections are needed to make sense of the sentence. Each type of error will contain a description of the error, followed by examples and a brief summary of the instances of that error found in the material.

2.2 Word order

In this study of 41 essays written by Swedish students, 47 errors based on word order were found. Twelve essays did not contain any word-order errors at all. The highest frequency of this type of error in each essay was three, which occurred in five essays. Eleven essays contained only one error in this category. The word-order related errors that will be in focus are: subject-verb order and the position of adverbials.

2.2.1 Subject-verb order

As previously mentioned, Swedish and English word orders do not differ to a great extent, but there are some constructions and situations that are not the same. The subject-verb order is the dominant word order in both English and Swedish. While English is a language preferring SVO order in the unmarked case (Quirk *et al.* 1985:51), the Swedish language has more exceptions, mainly due to the V2 constraint. One example of this is sentences where the

subject and verb are preceded by an adverbial, which results in the reversed positions of the subject and verb. Examples 4a and b, illustrate the V2 constraint, showing a sentence from the material in its original form (except for the spelling of the words *they're*, which has been altered to make it more comprehensible), as well as the Swedish translation:

4 a. * Sometimes is it like they're my family...

b. Ibland är det som om de är min familj...

Example 4 a. is written with the verb *is* before the subject *it*. The reason for this is most likely the fact that the pupil has followed the rules of the Swedish language, resulting in an incorrect English sentence. However, this type of error, where the subject and object have incorrectly switched place, only constitutes a small portion of the total number of errors involving word-order errors in my material. Of the 47 word errors found, only six are errors of the verb-subject type, found in four essays. This means that the frequency of verb-subject order among word-order errors is rather low, about 13 %, which is somewhat lower than I expected and shows that this type of error is not a major problem, at least not among the students whose essays constitute this study. Example 5. and 6. illustrate the two further errors in this category:

5. * ...when I eats, can I think on the other kids.

6. * The best food in the world can my aunt cook.

2.2.2 Position of adverbials

Another aspect of word order that tends to be difficult to learn is the placement of adverbials. However, this is also a problematic area to investigate since, as Köhlmyr (2001:162) points out, it is not easy to decide what constitutes an incorrectly placed adverbial. An adverbial can often be placed at different places in a sentence, and often consists of words from different word classes. One of the major differences between the positioning of adverbials in English and Swedish is the fact that in the former language the rules for positioning are the same in main and subordinate clauses, whereas in Swedish, adverbials in main clauses are usually positioned before the modal auxiliary in subordinate clauses (Svartvik & Sager, 2005:401, 402).

A total of 20 instances in which the adverbial has been placed incorrectly were found in the material, amounting to 43 % of the word order-related errors in this study. The majority of these adverbials are so called “light adverbials”, where the adverbial is realised by one single word, as seen in example 7:

7. * I have always taght that I always would be the one.

In a Swedish translation of this sentence, the Swedish correspondence of *would*, *skulle*, would appear in the position exemplified above, i.e., before the adverbial *alltid* (always). The nature of this type of error suggests that interference from the mother tongue has been at play. Examples 8. and 9. are other instances where the interference of the L1 is definitely the reason why the pupil has written the words in an incorrect order.

8. My friends take me to some place where I never have been before...

9. ...If I give you some candy you maybe would say...

While the number of incorrectly placed adverbials is quite high, it must be pointed out that a lot of borderline instances were excluded from the study. Furthermore, many instances of word-order-related errors do not seem to derive from the influence of L1, but rather seem to be examples of intralanguage, previously discussed in section 1.2 (examples 10. and 11.). There are also some cases of errors that might be the result of incorrect Swedish expressions being translated into English (12.). It is not completely certain that these errors should be sorted under errors caused by interference, but the resemblances with structures of causally spoken, incorrect Swedish should not be ignored.

10. * I never can be without the animal at our earth.

11. * For the whole wide world I hope there will be peace

12. * Never that I cud survive without all my wonderful friends.

2.3 Prepositions

Prepositions can be divided into three categories: basic prepositions, systematic prepositions and idiomatic prepositions (Karlsson 2002). The categorisation is based on the type of

preposition and the semantic role of the preposition. This study would preferably be based on these categories and the errors divided into the types of prepositions, but because of limitations on scope and time, no such division has been made.

Prepositions are interesting in terms of transfer since the errors are in many cases easy to trace back to the L1. When you compare the number of existing prepositions in Swedish to English, the latter has a larger set of prepositions. Many prepositions in Swedish have corresponding forms in English, i.e. *på* is the equivalent of *on*, in many situations, but not all. The Swedish *för* can often be used to translate the phonologically similar *for*, but not always. The fact that many Swedish prepositions have a relatively clear English correspondence can lead to positive transfer. However, it is also possible that these similarities create “false friends”, where words seem similar in both languages, but have different meanings. A further problem is the fact that there are many Swedish prepositions that have several semantic equivalents in English, e.g. *till*, which is used for English *to*, *for* or *at*, to name a few.

The total number of errors of prepositions that were found in the material is 107. This includes instances where incorrect prepositions were inserted, which account for the majority of the instances. There were also a few errors that were caused by the incorrect omission or addition of a preposition, constituting four errors each (4%). 35 of the 41 essays contained at least one prepositional error. The essay with the largest amount of errors had ten preposition errors, while nine essays included only one preposition error.

Table 2.3 Prepositional errors

Type	Preposition	Othe <i>r</i>	On	At	In	To	Of	Over	Omissions	Additions
Instances	107	26	20	14	11	11	9	8	4	4

Table 2.3 shows the six most common prepositions that were incorrectly used in the material, namely *on*, *at*, *in*, *to*, *of* and *over*. However, this does not necessarily mean that these were the prepositions that caused most difficulty for the pupils, only that these were most commonly used incorrectly. The results presented in Table 2.3 are in many ways similar to Köhlmyr’s (2001: 25) table of substitution of prepositions. One of the differences between the current study and Köhlmyr’s study is that in this study *at* is the second most common error, whereas in Köhlmyr’s study, *at* is the third most common error. Furthermore, Köhlmyr’s study is

significantly larger than this study, which also might be the reason why the results between the studies vary.

A lot of errors including prepositions had to be excluded since they were part of idiomatic expressions that were incorrect in several ways, as illustrated in example (13). Instances where the incorrect preposition was preceded, followed by, or in other ways connected to a word that was also wrong, thus rendering an incoherent clause, were also excluded from the study. One of the essays contained so many errors that it was almost impossible to figure out what the writer intended to communicate. This is illustrated in example 14 and 15, where the student has overused the word *to*, inserting *to* where pronouns and conjunctions would have been correct.

13. I could not live without people in my near

14. ...she and I are take some to twins.

15. But one pursen to I can't live without...

One pattern that could be found was that the preposition *of* was often replaced by other prepositions when preceded by an adjective, e.g. * *afraid to getting mugged* and * *proud over me*. The latter error is, quite evidently, a result of negative transfer, since the Swedish translation *stolt över mig* uses the very similarly sounding preposition *over*. Another instance of the word *over* was used in a sentence with a translation of the Swedish idiomatic expression *rakt över gatan* (across the street) which became * *right over the street*.

The cases where a preposition was either incorrectly omitted or added were few, only four of each type was found, and they were distributed among seven essays. A tentative pattern was that a preposition was omitted was before temporal expressions. This pattern can be transfer related, as Swedish does not use prepositions before dates, but a determiner. However, this instance had neither, which makes it hard to determine its cause. The three remaining instances of omission had no obvious negative influence from the first language.

When it comes to the incorrectly added prepositions, they were few and two of them may possibly occur in non-standardised English. The remaining two errors are definitely not acceptable, not even in informal or spoken English.

16. * I play hockey four day in a week.

Example 16. is an example of negative transfer, where the Swedish corresponding preposition *i* would have been used in the L1.

The relatively high number of prepositional errors makes this a fairly common error among the pupils whose essays this study is based on. They were found in approximately 85% of the compositions which makes it a well-spread error.

2.4 Omissions and Additions of determiners

When it comes to difficulties among Swedish learners of English, determiners are often given special attention, usually in the same section as pronoun issues (see Smittenberg 2007). The problem of choosing either *it* or *there* is something that is often discussed. In this study, however, I have chosen to concentrate on instances where the determiners have been incorrectly left out or added. The material contained 47 errors in this category. Interestingly, the occurrences were distributed more unevenly than the errors discussed so far, since they occurred in 26 essays. Omission of determiners constituted 11 (30%) of the instances found.

Perhaps not very surprisingly, the dominant problems were errors related to the indefinite articles *a* and *an* and the definite article *the*. A construction that was particularly popular was *in the school*, in the sense of attending school in general, and not a specific school.

Considering the fact that Swedish uses the definite form *skolan* (the school), L1 interference is the most likely reason for this phenomenon, i.e. *in the school* is a typical case of negative transfer. Furthermore, the insertion of *the* as in * *in the 9th grade*, was found in a couple of essays. Why the pupils have chosen to add a determiner in these cases is not as obvious as in the previously mentioned error. The Swedish corresponding construction *i nionde klass* (in ninth grade) does not have a determiner to indicate *ninth*, but for some reason the determiner has been inserted in the pupils' essays. One possible explanation for this is that *nionde* can be perceived as quite specific, triggering the addition of a determiner; to make it more distinct.

As previously mentioned, the incorrect addition of *the* in the material is almost always a result of a particular difference between Swedish and English, where Swedish includes the *en-* or *ett-* suffix to render the definite form, and English uses a determiner. The fact that the Swedish language does not indicate the definite form with a separate word probably makes it difficult for Swedish students to formally recognize the difference between the definite and indefinite form in their mother tongue. This difference probably explains why one essay contained the clause * *in the Scandinavia*, since the Swedish word *Skandinavien* ends with *-en*. This is an error that would not be produced by someone with English as their mother tongue.

The cases involving omissions of determiners constitute a third of the errors in this section. Some of these instances are borderline cases where I am not completely certain about the error (17.), and since it is not always easy to know what the writers of these essays intended to say, determining the cause of the error is a difficult task. Consider, for instance, 18, where the definite article *the* could be inserted, but the student refers to him/herself which makes the possessive pronoun *my* a more suitable choice.

17. * All ø bands I have name is realy great bands

18. * ... someone that had a best friend to spend all ø (?) time with.

Other cases where the definite article is omitted were without doubt mistakes, and therefore not of great interest in this study.

The omissions of determiners is perhaps a narrow area to investigate, but I had nevertheless expected to find more interesting cases in the material. Since the introductory courses in English grammar at Swedish universities devote a considerable amount of time on when to use determiners, and when to leave them out, it is a little disappointing to see such a low frequency of instances concerning this type of error. One possible explanation for this is the fact that some errors involving determiners in this study had to be excluded because as they were part of sentences where many errors were involved. If the material would have consisted of essays from pupils studying at university level, they might have had a lower number of such errors, and perhaps more clear cases of error.

2.5 Transfer: A major issue or not? A discussion of some further types of errors

The field of transfer and analysing errors is, as Odlin (1997: 151) points out, not without difficulties. The effect of negative transfer seems to vary a great deal between studies. Since one of the main purposes of this study was to find errors in some categories where negative transfer was likely to occur, the results may suggest that interference is an important factor. In addition, many other categories that would have been interesting to include in this study, had to be left out for several reasons. The low frequency of other types of errors is one reason for this, another is the limited scope of this essay. Furthermore, had the number of categories been expanded substantially, each category would not have been given enough time and space to investigate. The total number of instances of negative transfer-related errors has not been specified exactly in this study, but a reasonable estimate of it would be about 30-40% of all the errors in the material.

The categories included in this study did all contain several cases where negative transfer was without doubt the reason why they occurred, at least according to the definitions and methods of previous studies of negative transfer. There were cases where the influence from Swedish was obvious and even some instances where Swedish words that have no resemblance to English words were inserted, as in *ärtor whit fläsk* (pees with pork). This brings me to another area namely the incorrect spelling of some English words. In many essays the word *with* was spelled * *whit*, which I find a little peculiar, and almost alarming. I had expected a correct spelling of such a common word after such a long period of studies in English. One explanation for the spelling might have to do with the pronunciation of the word *with*, which is often pronounced with a /t/ or /f/, especially by Swedish people, most likely because Swedish does not have the *th*-sound and therefore Swedes use sounds which are closest to what they are used to.

When looking at the errors found in the material, one particular type dominates: concord errors, i.e. errors where the subject and the verb do not agree. * *we is*, * *people doesn't* and **there is many poor families* are some examples of concord errors in the material. To say that the L1 is a contributing factor behind these difficulties is possible. Swedish is a language

which does not have different verb forms depending on first or third person and singular or plural as the subject.

Another frequently occurring area of errors in the material has to do with tense. There are many examples of tense shifting in the essays, as well as instances where the past and present tenses have been used incorrectly within the same sentence. I believe that some of this type of error occurs quite frequently in students' essays in their first language as well, but perhaps not to the same extent as in English. Tense shifting can be quite important to emphasise, since it is, in many cases, impossible to know whether the pupil is trying to describe something that has occurred or something that is ongoing, which may cause confusion for the reader. By looking at the material and studying the errors and production of English, it seems like the pupils are at a fairly similar level. A few essays stood out by having some seriously incorrect errors and incoherent constructions that were very difficult to interpret, but only a couple of essays were at a level clearly above the others, with a very low frequency of errors. The fact that the majority of the students are at the same level is perhaps not a surprise, on the contrary: it is rather an indication of where they are in their education.

2.6 Pedagogical implications

The results presented in this study suggest that transfer is a contributing factor in errors made by Swedish students of English as a second language. One way of using this type of data is to try to make suggestions about teaching of English, and how the errors can be prevented or remedied. A great issue when it comes to error analysis is whether corrections are of any use in teaching. As Ellis (2000: 584) points out, several linguists argue that errors should not be corrected, since the effect on acquisition is minimal, or even harmful, depending on the method. I have to say that this point of view does not seem completely plausible. Some sort of correction needs to be made, the problem is rather how and when corrections of errors are necessary. As previously mentioned in section 1.3, there is a notion of developmental stages, and as a teacher it is important to be aware of these stages. The question of when to introduce different terms and correct certain errors should be adjusted according to the current development of the students. However, this is a difficult task, since students may not reach the stages at the same time. According to Spada (1987), exercises in class should consist of both

“free” speech, where communication is the main purpose, as well as exercises where more focus is put on purely grammatical issues. I agree on this and think that such variation is needed. There is disagreement among linguists whether formal instructions and feedback from the teacher has any effect on the acquisition of language or not. Those who argue for the lack of efficiency have, however, several times been disapproved, and the current view seems to be that instructions have positive influence (Köhlmyr 2001:286), which I find quite reasonable. If not, teachers of language would be almost redundant.

When it comes to the categories in the material, I do not perceive them as equally important and serious errors. Prepositional errors, for example, is probably difficult to teach, since there are no complete set of rules for which preposition is appropriate, it seems more arbitrary. The most efficient way of acquiring an L2 is by exposure to the language, by reading texts, and in that way recognising prepositional phrases.

3. Conclusion

The aim for this study was to investigate the errors produced in essays produced by Swedish students, and to look into some specific types of errors where interference from the L1 could be the main reason why they occurred. The frequency of the incorrect forms found in the material was also of great interest. Judging by the results, negative transfer plays a significant role in the English language production by Swedish students, which, to some extent, confirmed my expectations. Of the categories of errors included, prepositions was the category with the highest frequency of instances.

The initial intention was to include more categories in the study, but because of the lack of such errors in the material, they were excluded. Another approach that probably would have been fruitful would have been to concentrate the study on one single category or type of error, as this would give a more in-depth analysis. In retrospect, I think that I should have put some more thought into what I actually wanted to achieve with this study, and to have made a more defined outline of the results section, but I still think that some important issues have been mentioned and dealt with.

4. References

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