

# Swedish dissertations on foreign language education in Sweden: A research survey of the years 2000–2009

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## Abstract

This article surveys doctoral dissertations in language education written in Sweden over the ten years from 2000 to 2009. The survey concentrates on foreign languages. 23 dissertations are studied, 12 dealing with English, five with French, two with German, one with Spanish, one with Italian, and two with no specific language. Eighteen of the dissertations principally deal with years seven to nine of primary/lower-secondary school and with upper-secondary school, two deal with language studies at university level, and one deals with upper-secondary school and university. The article ends with a short follow-up on the researchers surveyed and the research they have conducted since writing their dissertations.

The contents of the dissertations allow six overall research themes to be discerned: The concept of culture, Assessment of students' oral and written proficiencies, Error analysis and transfer, English outside the English classroom, The professional practice of teachers and Language acquisition.

**Keywords:** language education, dissertations, language didactics, foreign languages

## 1. Introduction

This article surveys doctoral dissertations in foreign language education<sup>1</sup> written in Sweden during the years 2000 to 2009. The survey excludes theses treating Swedish and Swedish as a second language, and concentrates on the foreign languages. The article ends with a short follow-up on the authors of the theses surveyed and the research they have conducted after writing their dissertations.

The Swedish Higher Education Act (1992) establishes that higher education in Sweden is to be based on a scientific or artistic foundation and on reliable experience. When a new teacher education system was launched in 2009, the requirement of a clear subject-didactic foundation was emphasized.

The report attaches great importance to the significance of *subject didactics*.

The didactic perspective is to be present in the subjects of instruction [...]. Strengthening the national centres that exist for certain subjects is suggested, as is building up new

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<sup>1</sup> In this article the term 'language education' for the Swedish *språkdiradaktik* ('language didactics') will be used. In Sweden, the term 'didactics' is applied to individual subjects, as in 'mathematics didactics', 'history didactics', etc., and it is also used as a general term for all 'subject didactics' (*ämnesdidaktik*). The concepts of 'didactics' and 'subject didactics' are used in the introduction to set the context of the discussion in Sweden.

subject-didactic centres. It is suggested that each major subject have a national resource centre. (Government Bill 2009/10:89, p. 68; author's translation)

Connecting teacher education with research into subject didactics calls for clarification of the concept of subject didactics means. As noted by Lindberg (1998), the concept of didactics, when introduced into teacher education in Sweden, was debated, unclear, and contradictory. A possible reason for the debate was the fact that it was initially unclear how didactics was to be taught and on what scientific foundation it rested. Marklund (1990) defined didactics in a way that tied it to the school's steering documents, as "the method and art of teaching methodically through a systematic review of the teaching material according to given curricula" (p. 562).

The present article deals more specifically with didactics of foreign languages, i.e., foreign language education. In an interview and literature study of teachers at the Department of Education at Uppsala University, Tornberg (1998) examined, among other matters, how teachers defined foreign language didactics, finding a large range of definitions. Many of the teachers tied their definitions to so-called key questions (Arfwedson & Arfwedson, 1991) in their teaching and teaching planning (*what, why, how, and for whom*). One group emphasized the political elements of the concept and claimed that foreign language teaching needed to be seen in relation to societal development and school steering policy. Others stressed historical aspects, emphasizing the purpose of language teaching and how it has been carried out over the years. Still others spoke of how foreign language didactics needs to accommodate international views and stated that language teaching in Sweden needs to be compared with that in other countries. Lorentzen (1998) delimited the concept of subject didactics to such work-relevant research and science that may help teachers understand and develop language teaching.

Lorentzen's definition is the broadest leaving to the teachers to decide what kind of research is relevant to the development of the classroom practice. In this article, I have chosen to focus on theses within the area of foreign language education that treat schooling and formal education. I have also added theses that are not directly related to education but whose results could nevertheless be of interest and use to language teachers.

## **2. Research into foreign language education – a overview of 23 theses**

Tying all components of language teacher education in Sweden to language education research in a scientific way requires extensive research, as teacher education is a complex and multi-faceted educational stream. Searching the websites of Swedish higher-education institutions reveals that 21 of them offer teacher-training programmes for future language teachers for years seven to nine of primary and lower-secondary school and/or upper-secondary school. These institutions are: University of Gothenburg, University of Borås, Dalarna University, Kristianstad University, Halmstad University, University of Gävle, University West, Karlstad University, Linköping University, Linnaeus University,

Luleå University of Technology, Lund University, Malmö University, Mälardalen University, Mid Sweden University, Stockholm University, Södertörn University, Umeå University, Uppsala University, and Örebro University.

This article surveys doctoral dissertations treating foreign language education written in Sweden over the ten-year period from 2000 to 2009. These were the years leading up to a new teacher education system, in which the government demanded that didactics be part of all teacher education. I began this survey assuming that little research into language education had been carried out in Sweden and that the research that did exist dealt mainly with the subject of English, largely neglecting the other foreign languages taught in Swedish lower- and/or upper-secondary schools, for example, Italian, French, Russian, Spanish, and German.

The starting point of this work was what the Higher Education Act says about research in didactics, namely that it is a perspective that should be present in all the subjects of instruction in teacher education. This has guided my choice of theses to survey, and I have concentrated on theses dealing with schooling or formal education, as well as theses that do not directly deal with school situations but that, in their thematic foci, are highly relevant to teacher education.

Language didactics, or language education, exists as an established discipline in Swedish academia since quite recently. Hence, none of the dissertations reviewed here were written directly within this discipline. To gain a complete overview, dissertations in pedagogy, pedagogical work, and science of education, as well as dissertations from language departments that touch on language education were scrutinized. Such a search resulted in 23 dissertations, 12 dealing with English, five with French, two with German, one with Spanish, one with Italian, and two with no specific language. Eighteen of the dissertations principally deal with years seven to nine of primary/lower-secondary school and with upper-secondary school, two deal with language studies at university level, and one deals with upper-secondary school and university.

Of the 23 dissertations, six come from University of Gothenburg, five from Lund University, four from Karlstad University, three from Stockholm University, two from Uppsala University, and one each from Umeå University, Örebro University, and Malmö University. 21 of the 23 dissertations examined were written by women.

As mentioned above, dissertations treating language education can come from various subject disciplines, something which may have resulted in my having missed certain dissertations treating the subject; bearing this reservation in mind, the following dissertations are treated in this article (here listed in chronological order):

- Bardel, C. (2000). *La negazione nell'italiano degli svedesi*.
- Tornberg, U. (2000). *Om språkundervisning i mellanrummet – och talet om "kommunikation" och "kultur" i kursplaner och läromedel från 1962 till 2000*.

- Apelgren, B.-M. (2001). *Foreign language teachers' voices: personal theories and experiences of change in teaching English as a foreign language in Sweden.*
- Bentley, C. (2002). *The roots of variation of English-teaching.*
- Lundgren, U. (2002). *Interkulturell förståelse i engelskundervisning – en möjlighet*
- Flyman Mattsson, A. (2003) *Teaching, learning, and student output: a study of French in the classroom.*
- Gagnestam, E. (2003). *Kultur i språkundervisning – med fokus på engelska.*
- Granfeldt, J. (2003). *L'Acquisition des catégories fonctionnelles. Étude comparative du développement du DP français chez des enfants et des apprenants adultes.*
- Köhlmyr, P. (2003). "To err is human ...": *an investigation of grammatical errors in Swedish 16-year-old learners' written production in English.*
- Miliander, J. (2003). *We get the answer we deserve: a study of vocabulary in a corpus of spoken and written learner English.*
- Sundh, S. (2003). *Swedish school-leaving students' oral proficiency in English: grading of production and analysis of performance.*
- Sylvén, L.K. (2004). *Teaching in English or English teaching? On the effects of content and language integrated learning on Swedish learners' incidental vocabulary acquisition.*
- Forsberg, F. (2006). *Le langage préfabriqué en français parlé L2: Étude acquisitionnelle et comparative.*
- Lindqvist, C. (2006). *L'influence translinguistique dans l'interlangue française. Étude de la production orale d'apprenants plurilingues.*
- Rosén, C. (2006). "Warum klingt das nicht deutsch?" *Probleme der Informationsstrukturierung in deutschen Texten schwedischer Schüler und Studenten.*
- Rebenius, I. (2007). *Talet om learner autonomy: språkinläring, autonomi och ett demokratiskt medborgarskap: ett gränsland till moralfilosofi.*
- Greek, A. (2008). *Reading cultural encounter: literary text and intercultural pedagogy.*
- Kjellén Simes, M. (2008). *Room for improvement? A comparative study of Swedish learners' free written production in English in the foreign language classroom and in immersion education.*
- Ågren, M. (2008). *À la recherche de la morphologie silencieuse. Sur le développement du pluriel en français L2 écrit.*
- Österberg, R (2008). *Motivacion, aptitud y desarrollo estructural: Un estudio sobre la actuación lingüística a aprendientes Suecos de español L2*
- Dragemark Oscarson, A. (2009). *Self assessment of writing in learning English as a foreign language: a study at the upper secondary school level.*
- Sundqvist, P. (2009). *Extramural English matters: Out-of-school English and its impact on Swedish ninth graders' oral proficiency and vocabulary.*

- Valfridsson, I. (2009). *Nebensätze in Büchern und Köpfen. Zur Bedeutung der Begriffsvorstellungen beim Fremdsprachenerwerb*

The contents of the dissertations allow seven thematic areas to be discerned:

*The concept of culture* (Tornberg, Lundgren, Gagnestam, and Greek).

The concept of culture is one that changes greatly from one course syllabus to another at both the primary/lower-secondary and upper-secondary school levels. It also forms part of language teaching, justified in different ways at different times, for example, in different course syllabi, and is therefore given different contents in the language teaching classroom.

*Assessment of students' oral and written proficiencies* (Sundh and Dragemark Oscarson).

This theme prompts interest in the development of students' free production skills, possibly because teachers often find oral and written production difficult to assess. This raises questions regarding how various aspects of language production are to be weighed in assessments. Other questions concern the assessors: To what extent are independent assessors in agreement? Does it matter whether an assessor, for example, is a native speaker of the target language or a Swedish language teacher?

*Error analysis and transfer* (Miliander, Köhlmyr, Valfridsson, and Rosén).

This type of research focuses on the errors students make when learning a new language; some of it deals with errors stemming from *transfer*, i.e., when students transfer structures and constructions from their mother tongue to a new language.

*English outside the English classroom* (Sylvén, Kjellén Simes, and Sundqvist).

In the 1990s the trend of teaching school subjects entirely or partly in a foreign language, above all English, started in Sweden – content and language integrated learning (CLIL); in Swedish *Språk- och innehållsintegrerad inlärning och undervisning* (SPRINT). According to a report from 2000, some form of subject instruction was carried out in English in 4% of Swedish primary/lower-secondary schools and in 20% of upper-secondary schools (Nixon, 2000). This led to questions about whether this approach helps students improve their English, and about what happens to their knowledge of Swedish.

*The professional practice of teachers* (Apelgren, Bentley, and Flyman Mattsson).

This is a research theme that concerns what teaching practice is like and which factors determine changes in a teacher's instruction practice.

*Language acquisition* (Bardel, Granfeldt, Forsberg, Lindqvist, and Åberg).

Five dissertations concerning language acquisition defined more generally could well be included in the selection: four of these deal with the learning of French and one with Italian.

*Learner autonomy and motivation* (Rebenius and Österberg).

Within this final thematic area, we find two theses that treat factors related to the language learner that may affect the learning process.

In the following, I will review these six thematic areas one by one.

## **2.1 The concept of culture**

One of the first dissertations published in the period 2000–2009 was Ulrika Tornberg's *Om språkundervisning i mellanrummet – och talet om "kommunikation" och "kultur" i kursplaner och läromedel från 1962 till 2000* [On language teaching in the space between – and the talk of "communication" and "culture" in course syllabi and study resources from 1962 to 2000] (Uppsala University, 2000). As the title indicates, this dissertation deals with the course syllabi and curricula of compulsory primary and lower-secondary schooling in Sweden up to 2000.

In this dissertation, Ulrika Tornberg problematized the goals and content of language teaching, doing this by starting with two concepts central to language teaching – Tornberg calls these cardinal concepts – namely, *communication* and *culture*. She tied these concepts to the relationship between language teaching and democracy. The notion that language teaching plays an important role in democratization was first mentioned in Sweden in 1948 by the School Commission, which drew up guidelines for school development. The Commission stated that, in the future, language teaching should not be reserved for a small group of students but be compulsory for everybody. The basic idea was that language teaching opens a window onto the surrounding world. As a result of this, English came to be a compulsory subject when compulsory primary/lower-secondary schooling was introduced in Sweden in 1962. The curricula and course syllabi that then governed English teaching, however, no longer mentioned the notion of democratization; instead, linguistic proficiencies constituted the teaching goals. According to Tornberg, this gap between the democratization and proficiency goals of language teaching had remained in all language curricula and course syllabi since 1962. Tornberg analysed curricula and course syllabi between 1962 and 2000 according to how the concepts of *communication* and *culture* were presented and defined, the weight these concepts were given, and the liberty the teacher had to address them. Her analysis also addressed other documents that have governed language teaching, for example, comments on steering documents as well as a selection of study resources used in schools over the 40-year period examined. Tornberg argued that language teaching had great potential to contribute to ongoing democratization by fostering a polyphonic creation of meaning that gives the students democratic experiences.

Tornberg defined three ways of looking at culture in language teaching: 'culture as a fait accompli', 'culture as a competence for the future', and 'culture as a meeting in open landscapes'.

'Culture as a *fait accompli*' implies a traditional approach in which culture is regarded as to some extent static and finished: in this view, a culture is a defined and separable entity that can be compared with other cultures. In language teaching, this is reflected in cultural descriptions of what can be defined as 'mainstream cultures', which Tornberg characterized as static, national cultural descriptions. The second concept of culture, 'culture as a competence for the future', builds on the basic assumption that students should learn to adapt to how people from other cultures interact and, in so doing, learn to understand people from other cultures. 'Culture as a meeting in open landscapes' starts from the idea that incompatible cultural differences may remain in the meeting with *the other*, but that unique individuals can still meet and together build hybrid cultures. Tornberg believed that the third definition had great potential in language teaching, as it gives language students opportunities to create culture themselves, instead of merely reproducing facts about other countries.

In Ulla Lundgren's dissertation *Interkulturell förståelse i engelskundervisningen – en möjlighet* [Intercultural understanding in the teaching of English: an opportunity] (Malmö University, 2002) the concept of culture is also central. The research question here concerns how three levels – i.e., authority, research, and teachers – define and communicate the concept of intercultural understanding. How these levels affect each other is then examined. The focus of the study is the subject of English in secondary school (i.e., grades seven to nine of primary/lower-secondary school). In her results, Lundgren stated that the ideal of language teaching was to create 'the intercultural language user'.

Lundgren found that intercultural understanding was a concept emphasized both in international declarations and in treaties that Sweden has ratified, for example, the UN Declaration of Human Rights and recommendations from UNESCO, the EU, and the Council of Europe. At the national level, the concept also appears in the Education Act, the curriculum for primary/lower-secondary school, and course syllabi for English. Lundgren, however, was critical of the fact that the concept of culture was only explicitly addressed in comprehensive course syllabi for languages. She noted that no criteria were provided for grading how well students have attained intercultural understanding, arguing that this proved that the concept was not regarded as important in primary/lower-secondary schooling.

Lundgren claimed that there was an ongoing power struggle between authorities, researchers, and teachers in which the authorities determined the regulations and requirements to be followed by schools. The authorities often used research to justify new regulations. Teachers were, in Lundgren's description, the last link in this chain, experiencing management steering from several directions: public authorities, municipal authorities, and school administrations. Teachers were not given practical opportunities to critically examine the concepts of the steering documents, interpret the steering documents locally, or discuss alternative interpretations. The students, in turn, found themselves in a disadvantageous position relative to their teachers and were left dependent on their teachers'

interpretations, Lundgren claimed, although she did not directly address the student level in her dissertation.

The main thrust of Lundgren's dissertation was the examination of international and national steering documents on the basis of which teachers must act. In her dissertation, *Kultur i språkundervisning – med fokus på engelska* [Culture in the teaching of languages – with a focus on English] (Karlstad University, 2003), Eva Gagnestam adopted a completely different perspective, claiming that steering documents do not always play a decisive role in determining how teachers actually teach. Approximately a third of the teachers studied even said that the curricula and course syllabi did not have a steering function in their teaching. Gagnestam's dissertation about English teaching in upper-secondary school is based on questionnaires and in-depth interviews with upper-secondary students, practicing upper-secondary teachers, and student teachers, asking about their views of *culture* and *language* and of the role of these two concepts in teaching.

A point of departure for the dissertation is the notion that the concept of culture in English teaching is often treated as implying purely factual information, mainly about two countries, Great Britain and the USA. Against this, Gagnestam set international language research demonstrating that this traditional view is incompatible with an updated definition of concepts such as culture, identity, nationality, and language. Nor is this view compatible with the goals of language teaching in Swedish upper-secondary schools, which state that the teaching is to lead to intercultural understanding and competence. Gagnestam claimed that English teaching often faced bigger and more contradictory requirements than did the teaching of other languages. As English has increasingly come to be used as a lingua franca in communication between individuals from non-English-speaking backgrounds, the language is more frequently used in new cultural and national contexts differing from those earlier assumed to apply.

Gagnestam demonstrated that language teachers often felt insecure about how to address culture in their language teaching. Student teachers did not feel that they had received the tools they needed in their training in order to carry out up-to-date and well-thought-out teaching about culture. Upper-secondary school students would like to see a more modern view of the relationship between language and culture. The difference between the teachers' and students' viewpoints became clearest regarding the matter of cultural context in language teaching. The teachers claimed that language and culture always belonged together, culture often being interpreted as national culture in such claims. The students had a different view, regarding English as a contact language without either a cultural or national context. These diametrically opposite viewpoints were attributable, Gagnestam claimed, to the fact that the students had grown up during the Internet revolution and were used to regarding English as a lingua franca.

Another finding of the dissertation was that the formulations found in Swedish course syllabi about starting from the students' own cultures and experiences when teaching intercultural understanding and competence seemed to have had no



effect in school. Many teachers still believed that they had to be experts in the areas taught, which in turn led to the learning of mere facts about specific countries. Nor did the experiences of students from other cultural backgrounds than the Swedish one affect language teaching to any considerable degree.

Both Tornberg and Lundgren mainly used written documents, usually steering documents for teaching, as the empirical basis for studying the concept of culture: these documents included international agreements, curricula, course syllabi, research results, and study resources. With Gagnestam's dissertation, which asked teachers, student teachers, and students about the concept of culture, we take a step closer to the language classroom. In Anna Greek's dissertation, *Reading Cultural Encounter: Literary Text and Intercultural Pedagogy* (University of Gothenburg, 2008), this direction is developed. A different approach is used here, to get closer to the classroom, although the dissertation never actually takes us into one. Greek cited previous research into the concept of culture, advancing this research by comparing the concept of culture in curricula and course syllabi with the contents of two novels that students often study in the subject of English in upper-secondary school, i.e., *Across the Barricades* and *Fruit of the Lemon*. Greek's theoretical framework was inspired by both cultural studies and the research tradition of general literary studies. A few assumptions constituted the starting point for her research. One of them was that teachers often view fictional texts as mere glossary banks or agglomerations of various sentence constructions, while their contents and cultural context play a more secondary role. Another assumption was that language teachers in their teaching generally stress linguistic correctness and skills practice at the cost of aspects such as language use or intercultural understanding and competence.

Greek diverged from earlier research, above all Tornberg's, particularly regarding how the view of culture was manifested and expressed in various course syllabi in English, tying together the various views of research into culture and how it can be defined. She noted that the definition of culture depended entirely on how we viewed the concept of identity. Greek used two views of culture: the *static view of culture*, in which culture was conceived as an unchanging concept, and the *dynamic view of culture*, in which culture was conceived as constantly being redefined and changed. In the two novels that Greek analysed, she demonstrated that both views of culture were represented. She claimed that this made the texts very usable in the English language classroom for discussing and problematizing, for example, different views of culture and of culture meetings. By way of conclusion, however, she claimed that there was no systematic way to work with fiction to address matters of culture when teaching English – much depended on the individual teacher.

Research into the concept of culture mainly constitutes frame-theoretical curriculum research – that is, it never enters the language classroom. The next group of dissertations approaches the classroom from another perspective, though again without entering it.

## 2.2 Assessment of student's oral and written proficiencies

Two dissertations deal with language proficiency tied to the concept of assessment, specifically in the context of English language learning.

Stellan Sundh's dissertation *Swedish School-leaving Students' Oral Proficiency in English: Grading of Production and Analysis of Performance* (Uppsala University, 2003) deals with the assessment of oral language proficiency. The empirical basis consisted of the oral production of 29 upper-secondary school students. These students were tested three times and assessed by three people, one upper-secondary school teacher of English with Swedish as mother tongue, one university teacher of English with Swedish as mother tongue, and one person with English as the mother tongue. Each assessor graded the student's oral production in a conversation on a five-point scale according to set criteria. The structure was the same on the three assessment occasions, but the contents of the conversations differed. The research question of the thesis concerned the factors that were decisive for assessing oral proficiency and whether assessors with different backgrounds stressed different factors. The results indicated that the factors that carried most weight when assessing oral proficiency were the students' communicative proficiency and fluency, though vocabulary and ability to speak grammatically correctly were also regarded as important to the overall assessment. The assessors felt that, when it came to pronunciation, many students had acceptable rhythm and intonation but still a clear Swedish accent. The students' capacity to use compensatory strategies, for example, paraphrasing and reformulation, was also regarded as important. Sundh's results also indicated assessment differences between the groups. The teachers, irrespective of whether they were at the upper-secondary school or higher-education level, seemed to put more stress on grammatical correctness in their assessments, while the native speaker put more stress on communicative capacity. The native speaker in this case seemed to tolerate a fairly large number of grammatical errors if the student displayed good communicative ability. Other factors that affected the assessment were confidence versus hesitation in production, to what extent the student used various types of fillers, in what order the interviews were conducted (i.e., how many tests the assessor had administered on the same occasion), how the assessor behaved in the test situation, and how the assessor interpreted the assessment criteria.

Sundh concluded by identifying three areas that require further work and discussion in order to improve the assessment of oral proficiency: 1. The clarification of the purpose of assessing oral proficiency. 2. The construction, realization, and assessment of oral tests. 3. The need for the continuing professional development of language teachers.

While Sundh's research deals with assessment conducted by teachers, Anne Dragemark Oscarson adopted another perspective. Her dissertation, *Self-Assessment of Writing in Learning English as a Foreign Language* (University of Gothenburg, 2009), examines students' self-assessments and self-evaluations. Dragemark Oscarson studied 102 students of English in the technical stream of

upper-secondary school. The students first read examples of other students' free written production and, guided by the course goals in the curriculum, discussed how the texts were graded. The students were then given their own writing assignments to evaluate and grade themselves. The students filled in self-assessment forms, where they had to decide what they were satisfied with in their language production, including the areas of grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and expression capacity. They could also express opinions about what they needed to improve. They were allowed to grade their achievements in two rounds, and the teachers corrected and commented on the texts but did not grade them. The students were given time to rewrite the texts, hand them in again, and conduct new assessments to see whether they had met the course objectives. The teachers received the texts again and not until this round did they grade the students' achievements. After this process, in-depth interviews were conducted with two teachers and eight students. The purpose of the dissertation was to examine whether the students could develop a more active and responsible role in their own learning in a way that was encouraged and even required in the curricula and other steering documents.

The results indicated that the students were well able to assess their own competence and that they improved with practice. (A 'good' assessment was defined as one in conformity with the teacher's assessment; no external assessors were used.) The students became better at assessing themselves by evaluating their achievements and working with the course objectives. This demonstrated that the curriculum objectives, expressed as the capacity of students to take responsibility for their own learning, could actually be implemented. However, for this to be the case, the students had to be given the opportunity to practice self-assessment. Dragemark Oscarson claimed that it was not enough to have the students perform according to the criteria, perhaps discussing the grading criteria only once at the beginning of the course. For the students to understand the steering document formulations, they needed practice in how to assess their own achievements in light of the objectives and what they needed to do to improve.

### **2.3 Error analysis and transfer**

Despite the fact that assessing students' language proficiency is central to language teachers' daily work, only two dissertations problematize assessment as such. The next group of dissertations, which deal with error analysis and transfer, i.e., to what extent learners of a foreign language bring linguistic structures from their mother tongue to the learning of a foreign language, address different forms of assessment, though the research questions do not concern assessment as such.

June Miliander started with learners' free production, in this case both oral and written production. In her dissertation, *We Get the Answer We Deserve: A Study of Vocabulary in a Corpus of Spoken and Written Learner English* (Karlstad University, 2003), she examined university-level students of English in semester three or four of their English studies (the students had previously studied English seven to nine years in primary/lower-secondary school and upper-secondary

school). Many students who study English at this level do so to become teachers of English themselves, and this was largely a study of the English proficiency of future English teachers. The students received identical assignments for oral and written production, including set subjects to speak/write about and an image to describe. The purpose of the dissertation was to examine the students' active vocabularies to see whether there were differences between their spoken and written language. Miliander analysed the empirical material in terms of four aspects. The first aspects were quantitative, i.e., the type/token ratio, lexical density, and use of frequent words in the texts. The distribution and use of the lexical parts of speech were then analysed, first in the whole material and then in a limited number of written and oral texts. The results indicated large and significant differences between spoken and written texts in terms of the word frequency, type/token ratio, and lexical density. The written texts contained a small number of the 1900 most frequently used words in English and had higher lexical density than did the spoken texts. At the same time, there were great similarities between the spoken and written texts; perhaps unsurprisingly, the same words were the most common in both, these belonging to the basic vocabulary of English. The distribution between the parts of speech in both speech and writing resembled that of native language users. Miliander identified a number of language production strategies and demonstrated that many of the learners displayed various forms of interlanguage and transfer from Swedish.

In her dissertation, "*To Err is Human ...*": *An Investigation of Grammatical Errors in Swedish 16-year-old Learners' Written Production in English* (University of Gothenburg, 2000), Pia Köhlmyr examined the occurrence of grammatical errors in the written production of 16-year-old students. She also identified transfer, i.e., errors stemming from the Swedish language. Köhlmyr analysed 400 written compositions from the Swedish national tests in English administered in 1992 and 1995, conducting both an error analysis and a contrastive analysis. Köhlmyr attempted to determine, for example, what type of grammatical errors Swedish students made in English, which errors were the most common, which errors were the most 'serious', what role transfer from Swedish played, and which pedagogical implications could be drawn from the results.

In her analysis, Köhlmyr concentrated on grammatical errors, leaving aside errors of spelling or vocabulary. The errors were classified according to parts of speech and were of two kinds, concord errors and word order errors. She claimed that the errors could be divided into two main types: errors depending on ignorance of the grammatical rules, and errors in which the student apparently understands which rule to apply but still makes a mistake. An example of the latter is when a student knows that a verb has to be conjugated in the past tense, but writes the wrong verb form, for example, \*goed instead of 'went'. The most common error type was verb errors, which represented 25% of all errors in the material. Köhlmyr found empirical support for the assumption that verb-related errors are 'serious', as they cause great irritation in people with English native speakers. The results also indicated that the same error types were made by all

students regardless of their grade in English. Most errors concerned very frequent and often practiced grammatical structures. Köhlmyr claimed that this indicated a great difference between knowing about a grammatical rule and being able to apply and use it correctly. Transfer of grammatical structures and rules from Swedish explained many of the errors, but overuse of certain English forms also occurred. For example, the students overused the regular plural form of nouns and the regular conjugation of verbs.

On the basis of her results, Köhlmyr discussed the issue of correctness versus communicative competence. She advocated adequate grammar teaching, the need to give students various forms of feedback on written production, and other pedagogical aspects, for example the importance of general linguistic awareness and of teacher competence.

The matter of transfer is also considered in Ingela Valfridsson's dissertation *Nebensätze in Büchern und Köpfen. Zur Bedeutung der Begriffsvorstellungen beim Fremdsprachenerwerb* [Subordinate clauses in books and minds: the meaning of the term representations in language learning] (Umeå University, 2009), which deals with Swedish students' use and understanding of the concept of the subordinate clause in German. Her departure point was the big individual variation among students of German when it comes to their capacity to produce correct subordinate clauses. Valfridsson was inspired by mathematics learning research demonstrating that learners' difficulties in mathematics sometimes depend on their not understanding basic concepts. She hypothesized that the same thing might apply to language learning, so she examined students' understanding of the concept of 'subordinate clause' and to what extent their understanding correlated with their capacity to correctly produce subordinate clauses in German. Valfridsson also examined how the subordinate clause is defined and explained in Swedish textbooks and grammar books.

The empirical data used in the dissertation, besides textbooks, comprised written tests and interviews with 12 students who studied German at university level. At the written test, the students were also asked to reflect on and explain their answers. The students were then interviewed about their earlier school experiences of German and their knowledge of German grammar. The results indicated that many students had difficulties defining what a subordinate clause was and that some of them simply had incorrect notions, for example, claiming that a subordinate clause always comes last in a sentence, or that a subordinate clause must be preceded by a comma. Despite the fact that several students had unclear or erroneous notions of the subordinate clause concept, they seldom had difficulties producing German subordinate clauses or correcting clauses with an incorrect word order. Valfridsson concluded that the students' previous contact with German contributed to a feeling of what sounds right in German and that this was more important to producing correct language than a correct understanding of the concepts – a result somewhat contrary to that of Köhlmyr.

The thesis concluded by discussing the didactic implications of the research results. Valfridsson claimed that a reasonable approach would be to let students

start by learning complete phrases in a foreign language. In the next step, the students would look at these phrases to find regularities in how they are constructed. In this way, Valfridsson argued, the students could themselves come to understand the grammatical rules, which would then in a natural way be included in the teaching.

As the title suggests, Christina Rosén's doctoral thesis *Varum klingt das nicht deutsch?* ["Why doesn't it sound German?"] (Lund University, 2006) also deals with the learning of German. It stands alone in its treatment of language learning at both the lower-secondary school and upper-secondary school/university levels. The dissertation is based on the written production of beginners (14-year-olds), intermediate learners (16-year-olds), and advanced learners (20–25-year-olds). The empirical material for the dissertation was approximately 400 written compositions collected in the 1999–2005 period. Here, too, the research question concerned transfer. Rosén examined how the information structure in German texts produced by Swedish students differed from that of native speakers of German. The Swedish students' written production was compared with control corpora by writers with German as mother tongue. The texts written by the advanced group (university students) were assessed by 60 native speakers of German. The results indicated that even though the texts produced by the Swedish students were grammatically correct, the texts would still sometimes be considered 'un-German' by the German assessors. The Swedish students structured and sequenced information differently from the common way to do it in German. This is another type of transfer than that examined in previous research, which focused on the transfer of linguistically distinctive features. Rosén claimed her results to have implications for language education, and that the focus in teaching about transfer should be expanded to include pragmatic aspects, that is how languages are used.

#### **2.4 English outside the English classroom**

Students learn languages not only through formal language teaching in school. Swedish students come into daily contact especially with English, through film, music, books, and the Internet. To strengthen students' exposure to English, several upper-secondary schools and some primary/lower-secondary schools offer programmes, in which teaching of different subjects is conducted in English. The English terminology (content and language integrated learning – CLIL) has been adapted to Swedish with *Språk och ämnesintegrerad undervisning (SPRINT)*. It is difficult to establish exactly how widespread CLIL is in Sweden. The numbers cited often refer to how many schools offer such activities rather than to how many students participate in them. Still, researchers agree that CLIL is growing in Swedish schools.

In her dissertation, *Teaching in English or English teaching? On the Effects of Content and Language Integrated Learning on Swedish Learners' Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition* (University of Gothenburg, 2004), Liss Kerstin Sylvén examined how the vocabulary of upper-secondary school students developed in

the first two years of upper-secondary school in a group of students studying according to the regular course syllabus and in a group of CLIL students. These students studied in schools that incorporated CLIL elements to different extents in the teaching. Sylvén tested the students' vocabularies on three occasions: when they had just begun upper-secondary school, at the end of school year one, and at the end of school year two. The results indicated that the CLIL students already had a larger vocabulary than the control group students when they began their upper-secondary studies. Both groups then displayed significant improvements between the test rounds, but the CLIL students improved more than the control group students. Is it possible, by means of these results, to conclude that the CLIL method produces students who are better at English? Sylvén was doubtful about such an interpretation. She examined background factors in both groups and found differences that may be equally important in explaining the differences in the students' levels of achievement, for example: the CLIL students read more books and magazines in English outside of school than the control group; they came from different socio-cultural environments, the parents of CLIL students having, for example, a higher level of education; the CLIL students' motivation was higher and they had a more positive attitude towards their studies. Sylvén made two important observations in relation to background factors. First, the high-achieving students in both groups seemed to have more in common than the high- and low-achieving students within the CLIL group, but there were more high-achieving students in the CLIL group. Second, it was the students with the lowest amount of CLIL in their upper-secondary studies that improved the most.

Marika Kjellén Simes built partly on Sylvén's study in her dissertation *Room for Improvement? A Comparative Study of Swedish Learners' Free Written Production in English in the Foreign Language Classroom and in Immersion Education* (Karlstad University, 2008). Kjellén Simes' research question was fairly similar to Sylvén's. She examined whether CLIL students became better at English than those who studied English in a 'customary' way. However, Kjellén Simes questioned Sylvén's conclusion that background factors, rather than the method itself, may explain the success of CLIL students, pointing out that results of other international studies were the opposite from Sylvén's results. Besides background factors such as leisure activities, Kjellén Simes investigated to what extent the students' knowledge of English prior on admission to upper-secondary school and their motivation to study English could explain their success in English.

The dissertation reports on a contrastive, longitudinal study of 86 upper-secondary students. One half were taking the International Baccalaureate with English as the working language (CLIL) and one half were taking regular upper-secondary programmes, studying English in accordance with the regular course syllabus. The empirical material consisted of students' free written production and of responses to a questionnaire about attitudes towards and motivation for studying English. When assessing the free written production, no traditional holistic assessment was conducted; instead, Kjellén Simes focused on two

aspects: vocabulary, based on how many low-frequency words the students used in their compositions, and grammatical competence, based on their use of verbs, specifically, the change of tenses in the written compositions. After the students' first test, they were divided into three groups in accordance with their achievements: above average, average, and below average. The results indicated significant differences in terms of both language proficiency and motivation in favour of the CLIL students.

Pia Sundqvist's dissertation does not deal specifically with CLIL but treats the learning of English outside the English language classroom. In her dissertation, *Extramural English Matters* (Karlstad University, 2009), Sundqvist attempted to determine the extent to which students' use of English in their spare time and extramural activities affected their knowledge of English.

Sundqvist examined 80 students at the senior level of primary/lower-secondary school. The students answered questions about their use of English in seven areas – i.e., reading books, reading newspapers, watching TV, watching films, surfing the Internet, playing computer games, and listening to music – plus one miscellaneous category. The students were also asked to keep a diary of their extramural activities in two separate weeks. The students' questionnaire answers and diary entries were compared with their results on an oral and a written test. The oral test was assessed by three assessors using a profile scheme. The written test, featuring free written production, was used to measure the students' vocabularies.

In both the questionnaire responses and diary entries there were major differences between the sexes. The boys' most common activity was playing video games, while that of the girls was listening to music. The results also indicated that the time that the students spent on extramural English activities correlated with their results in English in terms of both oral proficiency and vocabulary, though particularly the latter. The more productive the activities the students engaged in, the better their effects on English proficiency. Playing video games, surfing the Internet, and reading books and newspapers had better effects than did activities such as watching TV or films or listening to music. Sundqvist also studied several background factors and demonstrated that extramural English activities had positive effects regardless of the student's socio-cultural background.

## **2.5 The professional practice of teachers**

Three dissertations describe teaching practice, two examining the form of the practice and the other examining how and why the form of practice changes over time.

In *Foreign Language Teachers' Voices: Personal Theories and Experiences of Change in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Sweden* (University of Gothenburg, 2001), Britt-Marie Apelgren examined how upper-secondary-school teachers of English changed their work practice and the factors that seem to make them do so. Apelgren was interested in the teachers' personal understanding of



teaching and learning and their experience of the National Curriculum's intentions and objectives. Apelgren examined this using questionnaires administered to teachers. Based on the questionnaire responses, she defined three themes for further investigation: 1. continued professional development for language teachers, 2. attitudes towards changes in language teaching, and 3. factors initiating, facilitating, and hindering development of practice. Apelgren then undertook in-depth interviews with 14 teachers of English about their professional careers and teaching experiences in order to examine how they defined the teacher's role. The interviews also dealt with the teachers' experience of changes in, and the development of, their teaching practice.

Apelgren found four reasons for why teachers changed their teaching practice: 1. the teachers found inspiration 'outside', for example, through continued professional development; 2. they adapted their teaching to new directives, new curricula, and new course syllabi; 3. they changed their teaching in collaboration with school colleagues; and 4. they changed their teaching inspired by more experienced colleagues. Several of these factors may have acted together. Many teachers examined in the study were inspired to change their practice by continued professional development, in the form of courses about learner autonomy and the writing process. The teachers were more positive towards professional development courses than towards their teacher education when it came to inspiration for change, especially in the case of young teachers. Most of the teachers (89%) claimed that an extended stay in an English-speaking country would be an important or very important factor in changing their teaching.

Most studied teachers embraced a communicative view of language teaching, and thought that a good language teacher must be open to new ideas and plan the teaching so that it offers progression and variation. They also emphasized the importance of evaluating the teaching and learning, both by themselves and together with the students. They tended to describe the generic and personal characteristics of a good language teacher, rather than specific subject competences.

Anna Flyman Mattsson also examines teacher practice in her dissertation *Teaching, Learning, and Student Output: A Study of French in the Classroom* (Lunds University, 2003), while simultaneously addressing the learning performance of students in upper secondary school who study French. Flyman Mattsson is interested in the relationship between teaching and students' learning of French. Her research addresses teachers' and students' speech and what kind of exercises are more or less suitable for practicing grammar and for improving students' vocabulary. Her research is based on earlier findings that indicate that practicing of oral skills is fundamental to language learning (for example Krashen's output hypothesis).

Based on approximately 40 hours of recordings made in three classrooms in upper-secondary schools over three years and on individual recordings of eleven students, Flyman Mattsson conducts five different analyses. The first analysis is based on a review of the teaching methods used in the three classes along with a

quantitative account of the student output. Flyman Mattsson claims that it is extremely important to create a communicative classroom situation. Especially in languages such as French (or German or Spanish) where the vast majority of students speak and hear the language only in the classroom, it is important that the classroom time is used in an optimal way. The analysis indicates that the teaching becomes more communicative and the students' output increases the longer the students have studied the language. The second analysis investigates teachers' questions and students' answers. The results indicate that the students do not always take the opportunities given to them to use the language. Teachers' questions are an important means of encouraging students to speak. However, teachers often ask questions that students can answer with a word or two. Many students avoid saying more than absolutely necessary in class and often get away with a *oui* or *non* to their teacher's questions. Flyman Mattsson states that many students seem happy to say as little as possible and that it is therefore essential that teachers design their questions in a way that encourages students to produce more than a few words. Flyman Mattsson's next two analyses consider students' use of verbs, forms and functions as well as semantics. Classroom conversation mostly requires present tense and the students get very little practice in using other tenses. Flyman Mattsson demonstrates that the frequency of different verb forms in the teacher's speech exerts an important influence on the students' speech. Finally, the last analysis investigates the relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and language production. When Flyman Mattsson interviewed students about French grammar, she found that students often knew the rules, but still found it difficult to apply them in speech. There was a gap between the teaching of grammar and actual language use. The investigation of how various factors interact in the classroom represents an important step towards improved language teaching and student language production.

In *The Roots of Variation of English-Teaching* (University of Gothenburg, 2002), Christine Bentley summarized the pedagogical currents and concepts of language learning that have influenced Swedish language teaching. She then carried out in-depth interviews with a limited number of teachers of English in primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary schools as well as in adult education. From these interviews, she extracted four categories describing qualitatively different ways of teaching. These categories also corresponded to the different ways the teachers conceptualized English.

The first group of teachers tried, as far as possible, to imitate communicative situations in which English was learnt unconsciously. These teachers conceptualized English primarily in terms of the content that the language conveys. The second group of teachers arranged situations in which the students, by reading and listening, encountered authentic English. For these teachers, the concept of English was synonymous with what the students encountered when they read or listened. In the third group, the main focus of the teaching was on presenting and practicing the descriptive language system, primarily through learning grammatical structures and terms. Consequently, these teachers

conceptualized English as a descriptive system. For the fourth group of teachers, English teaching was characterized by students *learning to learn*. This was assumed to occur mainly through individual work and taking responsibility. Students were also encouraged to reflect on their learning in order to improve it. These teachers conceptualized English as similar to any other school subject.

## 2.6 Language Acquisition

I also consider dissertations dealing purely with language acquisition in this article. I found five such dissertations from the 2000–2009 period. They are presented briefly in this section, partly to illustrate how I selected texts for examination and partly to demonstrate that such dissertations can be very interesting for language teachers even though they do not say anything directly about school or how teaching should be organized.

A language is not merely a set of rules. Another measure of fluency and accuracy in a foreign language is to what extent a learner can use set expressions or formulaic language, for example, *to have breakfast* in English or *prendre le petit déjeuner* in French. This is the theme of Fanny Forsberg's thesis from 2006, *Le langage préfabriqué en français parlé L2: Étude acquisitionnelle et comparative* [Formulaic language in spoken L2 French: acquisitional and comparative study] (Stockholm University, 2006). Forsberg examined the development of formulaic language use in spoken French, covering both native and non-native speakers, from the beginning to advanced levels. Four measures were used to characterize the learners' development: extent of formulaic language used, category distribution, type/token ratio, and frequency of types.

The results indicated that a learner's knowledge of formulaic language greatly influenced proficiency, fluency, and idiomaticity. Forsberg suggested five categories of formulaic language (also called 'prefabs'): lexical, grammatical, discourse, situational, and idiosyncratic. Using prefabs is often very demanding and Forsberg's results indicated that only very advanced learners of French, often those who had spent a lot of time in France, could produce prefabs to the same extent as native speakers. The extent of learners' use of prefabs increased as their knowledge developed, so native speakers and very advanced learners used them more frequently than the less advanced learners observed in the study. Forsberg also demonstrated that the distribution of learners' use of the various categories of prefabs became increasingly similar to that of native speakers the more advanced the learners became. Situational and idiosyncratic prefabs were most common for beginners, while lexical prefabs were mastered later in the learning process and constituted a major difficulty for many students when learning French.

Jonas Granfeldt's *L'Acquisition des catégories fonctionnelles. Étude comparative du développement du DP français chez des enfants et des apprenants adultes* [The acquisition of functional categories: a comparative study of the development of the French DP in children and adult learners] (Lund University, 2003) focuses on bilingual children and adult second-language learners of French. Granfeldt's field of interest was how learners learned to master determiner

phrases. This thesis differs from the others examined here in that it focuses more than the others on how a new language is learnt. A point of departure for Granfelt was the concept of *Universal Grammar*, assuming that certain characteristics are shared by all human languages. The role of the researcher in this context is to determine through observation and experimentation what abilities are innate and what properties are shared by all languages. The thesis contains three separate but interrelated analyses. In the first one, Granfeldt demonstrated that children and adults differed in how they acquired the underlying grammar of determiner phrases, already in the initial stages of development. First, children, unlike adults, underwent a stage in which determiners were generally absent. Second, there was correlation between the use of determiners and linguistic development in the children but not in the adults. The next analysis dealt with the use of the definite article. The children had few problems with elision, or with incorporating articles with prepositions, for example, *au/du ventre*, whereas the beginning adult learners rarely elided, but instead produced, for example, *à le/de le bar*. While the children quickly identified the grammatical aspect of the definite article, the adult learners began with a lexical way of mastering the definite article that successively became grammaticalized. The third analysis identified similarities between children and adults in how they acquired the features number and gender: whereas number was accessible from an early stage, gender was absent at the initial state, this being the case in both groups.

In conclusion, Granfeldt's thesis demonstrated that the language acquisition of bilingual children and adult second-language learners was guided by two principles, both claimed to be part of *Universal Grammar*. The children followed a structural economy principle in positing *categories as small as possible*. The adult learners aimed to establish *as few categories as possible*, which led them to form larger syntactic categories. This difference was significant in all three areas studied, i.e., the structure of DP, the status of definite articles, and the development of gender features.

Christina Lindqvist's thesis, *L'influence translinguistique dans l'interlangue française. Étude de la production orale d'apprenants plurilingues* [Cross-linguistic influence in French interlanguage: a study of the oral production of multilingual learners] (Stockholm University, 2006), takes a deeper look into lexical transfer. Lindqvist considered transfer when learning a second foreign language, or a third language (L3), and, more specifically, the influence of both previously acquired languages – often Swedish and English for Swedish students learning French. Lindqvist's study consists of two parts. In the first study, she examined the oral production of 30 Swedish learners of French: beginners, secondary-school students, and university students. The results indicated a correlation between proficiency in French and the number of instances of cross-linguistic influence, beginners producing more cross-linguistic lexemes and university students fewer. The level of proficiency in French also correlated with the use of Swedish or English in code-switches, the lower the proficiency in French, the more the other languages were used. In the second part of the thesis,

Lindqvist analysed the oral performance in French of students with different first and second languages. The analysis contains six case studies of conversations in French and examines how the background languages influence the oral production in L3. One result was that learners tended to use an instrumental language, i.e., a language used fairly strategically for a communicative purpose. For many learners, this was Swedish or English since these languages were shared with the interviewer.

Malin Ågren's thesis, *À la recherche de la morphologie silencieuse. Sur le développement du pluriel en français L2 écrit* [In search of the silent morphology: on the development of the plural in written L2 French] (Lund University, 2008), does not focus on transfer as such but instead on certain specific difficulties for learners of French, whose mother tongue is Swedish. The thesis analyses the written French of learners ranging from beginners to lower advanced levels. More precisely, it concentrates on the developmental sequence of number morphology and the factors influencing this development. The thesis presents an analysis of number marking and agreement in the production of the morphemes *-s* in noun phrases and third-person-plural *-nt* verb phrases in written French. Learners seem to find this a special challenge since number morphology is often silent in oral French and therefore difficult to produce in writing. The results from the group of Swedish learners of French were compared with those of a French-speaking control group. Ågren demonstrated the clear and gradual development of the learners in producing number morphology. The first item the learners mastered was the plural marking of nouns/pronouns and quantifiers; the next step was to learn determiner noun agreement, then subject-verb agreement, and, last of all, noun-adjective agreement. The results also indicated that semantically motivated plural markers were learnt early and that high morphological regularity in the plural, and possibly also transfer, affected the acquisition process especially at the beginning level. Ågren continued with a longitudinal study of 15 learners, the results of which largely echoed those of the first study. In the analyses of the second study, Ågren introduced the term 'intra-stage sequencing' to refer to differences within developmental stages. Ågren concluded that learners displayed a gradual and fairly early development of plural marking in written French.

Camilla Bardel's dissertation applies a multilingual perspective (cf. Lindqvist, above). Her *La negazione nell'italiano degli svedesi* [Negation in the Italian of Swedes] (Lund University, 2000) deals with oral language proficiency in Italian. Bardel examined Italian as a second language and the basic data comprised recordings of Swedes living in Italy who had learnt Italian both formally and informally. Twenty-nine spontaneous dialogues were analysed with regard to the use of negations. The research question concerned transfer, more specifically, the placement of negation. The results indicated that the capacity to correctly place negations differed considerably between informants. One factor of great importance concerned what other languages the learners had previously mastered. It was easier for those who had studied French or Spanish before learning Italian to correctly place negations than for those who had, for example, studied German.

This was possibly because all Romance languages have similar ways of placing negations in sentences, while Germanic languages have another structure. The results indicated that transfer occurs not only from a learner's mother tongue but also from other languages he/she has mastered.

## **2.7 Learner autonomy and motivation, two dissertations**

One dissertation unrelated to any of the others examined here deals specifically with the concept of learner autonomy, although the concept is treated incidentally in several other dissertations from different perspectives. In recent decades, there has been discussion in Sweden of students' independent studies. In language teaching, this has in particular been manifested in efforts to implement the Council of Europe's concept of *learner autonomy*. In the dissertation *Talet om learner autonomy: språkinlärning, autonomi och ett demokratiskt medborgarskap: ett gränsland till moralfilosofi* [Talk of learner autonomy: language learning, autonomy, and democratic citizenship – on the margins of moral philosophy] (Örebro University, 2007), Inga Rebenius attempted to clarify a number of significations embedded in the discourse that frames the concepts of independent studies, autonomy, and citizenship.

The dissertation had three intermediate goals: to revitalize the concept of democratic citizenship, which has been a political priority in the development of Swedish schooling, to examine how the discourse of learner autonomy is expressed in the curricula and course syllabi for languages, and to clarify and discuss a number of possible didactic consequences of the concept of learner autonomy.

A recurrent question for Rebenius was whether it was possible to develop autonomous students in a school environment. According to her, the autonomous student is independent and rebellious, so it is paradoxical that it should be possible to form such a student in school, which is based largely on socialization. One finds this paradox in the concept of *raising rebels* contained in the latest Swedish curricula and course syllabi, according to Rebenius. She performed a critical pragmatic textual analysis of the steering documents connected to a theoretical tradition in curriculum studies that focuses on the choice of content. Rebenius identified five significations of the concept of student autonomy, i.e., autonomy as a way to: build democratic citizenship, create efficiency in language learning, produce well-adapted independent students, give students a social context, and foster students' critical awareness. As its title indicates, Rebenius' dissertation is largely philosophical, but it also contains significant language learning elements. Rebenius devoted the last sections of her dissertation to problematizing the didactic consequences of various ways of treating the concept of autonomy in a school context.

Another thesis that does not fall into the above categories either is Rachel Österberg's *Motivacion, aptitud y desarrollo estructural: Un estudio sobre la Actuación lingüística a aprendientes Suecos de español L2* [Motivation, aptitude, and structural development: a study of language performance in Swedish learners

of Spanish L2] (Stockholm University, 2008), which consists of three sub-studies that in various ways address motivation and talent as success factors in language studies. One study was based on longitudinal data consisting of recorded interviews and conversations in Spanish in Swedish upper-secondary school. This study examined how the development of syntactic complexity and accuracy in spoken Spanish L2 is related to two parameters, namely, motivation and aptitude, in which individual differences are often claimed to correlate with successful second language learning. For three years, Österberg followed the oral language development of a group of high-school students who studied Spanish. The development of syntactic complexity and accuracy in oral performance was chosen as the main indicator of proficiency. Correlations were computed between proficiency levels, development coefficients, quantitative outcomes of aptitude tests, and quantified motivation assessment. In her research, Österberg observed that the linguistic complexity increased over the three years of the study – students used more descriptions, subordinate clauses, and relative clauses, for example – but except in a few cases, students did not improve in grammatical linguistic correctness. Österberg said that this might be because, when the complexity of speech increases, a student must take chances. The few students who improved their linguistic correctness were more cautious, choosing to play it safe and not daring to try.

In another study, Österberg conducted in-depth interviews with students to examine their motivation. Discourse analytical methods were applied to the interviews to identify the motivational types expressed by the learner and the strength of each type. These were represented in terms of values on a self-determination scale, ranging from *intrinsic* to *extrinsic* motivation. An aptitude test was also administered to the participants and the results analysed. One finding from the interviews was that the teacher played a major role in the student's progression: if students had a teacher they esteemed and if they were 'seen' by this teacher, this increased their willingness to work on the language, while having a teacher they did not esteem quickly reduced their motivation. Good teaching was defined by the students as varied and incorporating elements of authentic materials, such as movies, chat, and real news, and not based solely on the textbook.

In the third study, the students' linguistic aptitude was tested. Österberg found no relationship between linguistic aptitude and language proficiency – linguistic aptitude accelerates progress; that seems to be all. However, she found a clear correlation between progress in second language proficiency and motivation.

Österberg's thesis clearly identifies a relationship between motivation and learning. The author concluded that student motivation, extrinsic or intrinsic, was more important than talent in language acquisition. Extrinsic motivation can be a desire to get good grades or a good job. Intrinsic motivation can be a desire to study because it is satisfying and fun. A student may, of course, have both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations to learn a language. The students who continued to study Spanish for three years were often highly self-demanding

students. They had great inner motivation and great confidence when it came to learning a new language. The students who dropped out were often more instrumentally oriented. One reason for dropping out was that the students did not achieve grades that were high enough, so instead they prioritized other subjects. Many felt that they were not progressing as quickly as they had expected. None of the students who dropped out switched to another language. They reasoned that they could study Spanish later if they wanted to. The interviews also illustrated that many students lacked confidence in language studies.

Österberg concluded that teachers should talk more with their students about learning, commenting on curricula and providing students with a meta-language so that they can talk about their learning: what they are doing and why they are doing it. It is also useful to help students find and understand their own motivations and help them catch sight of themselves as learners. Teachers should also emphasize and discuss what students can do if their motivation is not high enough.

### **3. What happened after the public defence of the doctoral thesis?**

The aim of following up the surveyed researchers and examining the research they conducted after defending their dissertations was to emphasize the need for more research into language learning in order to create relevant research and viable research environments.

A long time span is represented by the examined theses and the researchers presented in this survey have had very different opportunities at very different times to conduct additional research after publicly defending their doctoral theses. For some researchers, the public defence happened just five years ago, for others 14 years ago, and three of the researchers have now retired. I have attempted to conduct a follow-up based on the websites of higher-education institutions, published articles and book chapters, and sometimes recurring to personal communication.

Of the 23 researchers examined here, two have not been employed at a university or higher-education institution after publicly defending their doctoral theses, nor have they continued with their research. Three researchers have pursued research in another direction than that of language education. The 18 who remain have, to varying degrees, been engaged in research since defending their theses. Several of them have published a relatively extensive body of popular science articles, mainly in journals for professionally active teachers. They have also contributed in other ways to disseminating their research to language teachers, for example, by participating in teachers' seminars and other in-service education fora.

If one surveys more traditional research publications, for example, peer-reviewed articles or book chapters, one finds that six researchers have published very sparsely since the public thesis defence. Most of the research into foreign language education carried out since the public defence of the theses examined here is attributable to ten of the researchers reviewed here.



To return to the government bill on teacher education, which so clearly emphasizes the importance of subject didactics, one can observe that, when it comes to foreign language education, the scholarly basis is often thin, not least as regards languages such as Spanish, German, Russian, Chinese, or Italian. Nor has the government established any centre for subject didactics research, something that was first announced in the bill on new teacher education. In 2011, a major review of teacher education in Sweden was carried out. The entitlements to award qualifications of all teacher training programmes in the country were then withdrawn and the higher-education institutions had to apply for new entitlements. Studying the applications that the higher-education institutions submitted and how these institutions and the review groups reasoned about a scientific foundation in foreign language education would make an interesting subject for further research.

#### **4. Concluding reflections**

It is striking that so many dissertations treat English and that they fundamentally treat seven areas, two of which are represented by only two dissertations each. It is actually only in the areas of *The concept of culture* and *English outside the English classroom* that we can say that the research presents a unified, coherent picture in which the dissertations supplement and build on each other. With so few dissertations published per year in Sweden in foreign language education, large areas remain under-investigated. Naturally, a small country like Sweden cannot be expected to produce research in all areas of foreign language education, but it is worrisome that this research is so concentrated on English. In Spanish, a language in which several higher-education institutions conduct teacher education in Sweden, only one dissertation was produced during the ten years considered here. There is reason to question whether the government's decision to demand subject didactics in all teacher education was realistic at the time it was introduced. There are important questions concerning conditions typical for the Swedish context, where we cannot rely on international research, for example:

- An often-discussed matter is the age at which English instruction should start and how it should be organized. Another is the fact that teachers at the junior and intermediate levels of primary/lower-secondary school increasingly lack English studies in their Bachelor of Arts in Education, but nevertheless teach English. Which are the consequences for their students' knowledge development? No dissertations treat English at the junior and intermediate levels of primary/lower-secondary school, and the existing research provides no answers to these questions.
- Never before have so many pupils dropped out of language studies (other than English). A quarter of the students, mostly boys, who choose foreign languages drop out at some point during primary and lower-secondary school (Lindkvist & Tholin, 2009). What lies behind this phenomenon? How can we motivate more students to engage in language studies? What explanatory models are there at the

individual, organizational, and social levels? Why are the gender differences so great?

- The last ten years have seen dramatic changes in the language choices of students. Spanish is increasing rapidly in popularity while interest in German has been declining. Among girls, the share choosing German has more than halved in only ten years. What models are there to explain this development? What is influencing the students' choices?
- Sweden today has a large group of students whose mother tongue is not Swedish. The special opportunities and difficulties that these students have when it comes to learning additional languages, primarily English, but also, for example, French, Spanish, or German, is an area not directly treated by the research that has been conducted in Sweden.
- Research into foreign language education in Sweden during the particular period examined here still has difficulties addressing the principal question: How do students learn languages? What does and does not constitute efficient language teaching? In this context, it is also worth noting that only a couple of the dissertations examined here take their point of departure in classroom research. This means that we do not know much about what actually happens in Swedish language classes. Interesting questions about the pedagogical process, language use in the classroom, interaction between students, and gender aspects of language teaching also remain under-researched. There is also a lack of input about how students experience what happens in the classroom. There can be no single objective picture of what happens in the language classroom, which is why it is important to elicit and present various pictures and voices.

I have chosen the 2000–2009 time span, because a new teacher education programme was introduced in Sweden in 2009 including clear requirements for 'didactic perspectives'. Looking at activities taking place in foreign language education from 2010 to date, it seems as though new dissertations have been written recently, treating a more variegated array of languages and themes than in the period examined here. One positive event is the graduate school in foreign language education, FRAM (for teachers of English, French, German, Italian and Spanish), carried out cooperation between the universities in Gothenburg, Lund, Stockholm, and Växjö. The first research reports have already been published by researchers from this school. Principal research areas for this graduate schools are individual language learning, ICT in learning and teaching languages, and forms of assessment in language studies. So there is reason for optimism, as development seems to be headed in the right direction.

A final comment may be in order. From a methodological point of view, it turned out difficult to find Swedish theses in foreign language education, and some pertinent studies may therefore have been involuntarily omitted. For teachers interested in the topic it will not be an easy task to find relevant dissertations or other research originating in Sweden. Creating a digital library of Swedish research in foreign language didactics would be a commission for any Swedish university that would like to take the lead in this area.

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