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# **SFL...why not EFI?**

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A Study of the teaching practices applied when teaching English to  
immigrants in Sweden

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## Abstract

My aim with this study is to investigate the teaching strategies applied in teaching English to students with another mother tongue than Swedish.

According to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, factors such as age, language competence and mother tongue influence can affect language acquisition. SLA theory also states that multilinguals tend to select one of their languages as their primary source of information and this language is the language that most resembles the target language; Swedish and English are both Germanic languages and therefore share language closeness. Results showed that regardless of age and mother tongue, equal numbers of students chose to source Swedish only or both Swedish and their mother tongue when translating texts from English; only 3 chose to source their mother tongue only. There is to date little research that directly connects teaching approaches with SLA, particularly when dealing with multilingualism. I believe a potential area for research could be to investigate the possibility of developing teaching strategies that can potentially harness prior language knowledge.

My investigation also showed that English is taught to native and non-native Swedish speakers alike through the medium of the Swedish language; that is to say the course books consist of English text with vocabulary translations and grammatical exercises from Swedish to English. A suggestion would be to reduce the use of the English to Swedish translation methods, particularly for students with a limited knowledge of Swedish, and incorporate into lessons more communicative teaching methods using authentic materials and real situations.

**Keywords:** Swedish for Immigrants / Svenska för Invandrare, SFI, Second language acquisition, SLA, Cross Linguistic Influence, CLI, Teaching English, English as a second language, ESL.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the post-war period Sweden's demographic constitution has changed as a result of immigration. In recent years the single most common country of birth for two parents is Iraq, after which come those countries that were part of former Yugoslavia (Statistics Sweden, 2010). A consequence of this demographic change was the increased need for both Swedish and English language teaching at all levels in the education system. Swedish language teaching is offered to both immigrant teenagers and adults. Newly arrived migrants and refugees aged 16-20 years attend an immigrant individual introduction program in upper-secondary (gymnasiet) school (IVIK) ([www.gymnasium.se](http://www.gymnasium.se)). Adult immigrants belonging to a different category, which is adults registered in the population register aged 16 and up, would attend Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) classes (Skolverket.se 2010). The teaching of English as a Second Language is compulsory in Swedish schools and deemed a very important part of the curriculum: "English is the mother tongue or official language of a large number of countries, covering many different cultures, and is the dominant language of communication throughout the world"(Skolverket, 2000-07).

I am a native English speaker, currently in training to become an English language teacher. During my school placements, I became aware of a number of students who were learning English as a third language. It was my observation that a number of the students had not yet mastered the Swedish language and learning English was difficult for them. Furthermore, the course books I was provided with consisted of English text with vocabulary translations and grammatical exercises from Swedish to English and vice versa.

I myself emigrated from England in 2002 and needed to learn Swedish and I attended SFI classes every day; 20 hours per week for about 20 weeks. I had very little previous experience of learning a foreign language, and none at all in the country where the language I needed to learn is the mother tongue, and therefore no prior experience as to how the language would be taught. The class-group I attended was multilingual with many different languages represented. The teacher spoke only in Swedish and all learning material was exclusively Swedish so all students had their own language dictionary for translations. I thought this teaching method was very effective, and taking this into consideration I wondered why this method wasn't being used to teach immigrants English.

## 1.1 Aim

My aim with this study is to investigate the teaching strategies applied when teaching English to immigrants and how the students evaluate and experience their Swedish and English lessons, with the aim to address the question - Do educators use the most appropriate approach when teaching non-Swedes (or those with another mother tongue than Swedish) English as an additional language?

## 1.2 Method

I sent a letter to a selection of educational institutions (Appendix 1. p.25) requesting an opportunity to interview both teachers and students. I observed four English lessons and interviewed (Appendix 2. p.26) four respective class teachers. Students from these classes were selected for interview; they were not selected directly by me, but were those that fitted the criteria of having a mother tongue other than Swedish and were willing to participate; so the number of students and their age, gender and mother tongue are random. I formulated a questionnaire (Appendix 3a p.27 & 3b p.28), which each student completed prior to the interview. The questions were designed to gain contextual information about the students. The interview guide consisted of 12 structured questions; I also used additional probing questions to gain more information when it was needed. I asked the questions in English, but printed copies (Appendix 4a p.29 & 4b p.30) were available in both English and Swedish if the students needed clarity. The students could also opt to answer verbally in either English or Swedish. I recorded and transcribed the interviews; I also translated the Swedish to English if necessary. I then coded the data into coding frames for analysis (Bryman, 2008 Chapters. 8, 9, 10 &12).

## 2. Background: Language Acquisition and Language Teaching

### 2.1 Language Acquisition

According to Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, (2007) the majority of people learn a first language (L1), also called a native language (NL) or a mother tongue, without any real conscious effort. Children are not taught grammar by their parents, they acquire a system or rules that enable them to construct and understand sentences which they have probably not heard before.

During the past 30-40 years Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has developed into an independent discipline concerned with how language is learned, and is defined as the process of learning another language after the first has been learned, regardless of whether it is the third or fourth. A second language (L2) is defined as a language acquired in the country where it is spoken, usually as a native language (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Furthermore, “language acquisition is separate from the study of language pedagogy, although it does not imply that there are no implications that can be drawn from SLA to the related discipline of language teaching” (Ibid. p.6).

When a learner attempts to learn a second language – referred to as the target language (TL) – the basic assumption is that L2 learners create a language system (which should not be considered deficit language) called an interlanguage (IL). The IL is filled with random errors but nonetheless it is a system that has its own structure with elements from the NL and the TL. The IL is also characterised by new language forms from neither the NL nor the TL. Some learners appear to get “stuck” in an interlanguage; others progress to near-native competence. One feature associated with non-progress is fossilisation; fossilisation is a rule or linguistic form that is permanently established in the IL as a deviant form of the TL and continues to appear regardless of exposure to the TL (Gass & Selinker, 2008). In this sense fossilisation is synonymous with ‘error’ fossilisation. However, other researchers suggest that fossilisation is a process as well as a product, therefore, incorporating the fossilisation of correct as well as of incorrect forms of the TL. Furthermore, it is suggested that fossilisation may represent the ultimate outcome of L2 learning (Han, 2003).

### 2.1.1 Factors that affect SLA

Although it is not easy to predict who will get stuck and who will progress, there are a number of mitigating factors that can affect L2 acquisition such as age, knowledge of languages, mother tongue but also a learner's personality, motivation and learning strategies.

### 2.1.2 Age

Evidence shows that young children are more likely to attain near-native proficiency in SLA, particularly relating to phonology, than are teenagers or adults; whereas adults often learn more quickly those parts of the language typically relating to morphology and syntax.

Studies do not agree on whether there is a critical period or a sensitive period for age to determine language proficiency. However, evidence predicts that a defining period is before the age of 12 with decreasing probability of near-native phonology between the ages of 12 and 15, becoming quite weak after 15 (Moyer, 2004 ; Sanz, ed. 2005). Younger second language learners become rapidly fluent in the language of day-to-day communication, but without explicit support these learners may not be able to master the more academic registers, even after five or six years in mainstream classes. Their perceived conversational fluency can mask their real language needs (Gibbons, 2008). Adults as second language learners bring a great deal of life experience and cognitive maturity to the classroom. They also have many reasons to learn another language and may have to make a personal sacrifice to attend lessons (Hilles and Sutton, 2001).

### 2.1.3 Mother tongue influence

Cross-linguistic influence (CLI) is described as “the influence of the mother tongue on the learner's performance in and /or development of a given target language; by extension, it also means the influence of any ‘other tongue’ known to the learner on that target language” (De Angelis 2007 p.19). There is wide agreement among researchers that transfer is more likely to occur between languages that are closely related to one another than between languages that are distantly related (ibid. p. 22). Furthermore, if you learn a language closely related to your L1, prior knowledge will be useful, but if the languages are very distant, not much prior knowledge is relevant. Research into how Finns and Swedes encounter English shows a distinct advantage for Swedes since Swedish and English are Germanic languages, while Finnish is a Finno-Ugric language (Ringbom, 2006).

According to De Angelis (2007), multilinguals tend to select one of their languages as their primary source of information, usually the language that most resembles the target language, which is not necessarily their native language. A proposed hypothesis (Ibid.) is the existence of two interacting constraints which block native language influence in favour of non-native language influence. These two constraints are perception of correctness and association of foreignness. De Angelis (2007) describes perception of correctness as L1 information that is perceived by the learner to be incorrect from the start, and this perception of incorrectness facilitates an increased acceptance level for non-native words into the target language. Association of foreignness refers to the cognitive association that learners establish between non-native languages, which are assigned the common status of ‘foreign languages’ (Ibid.).

#### **2.1.4 Language competence**

Another factor is a learner’s level of language proficiency, which will determine whether it serves as an asset or hindrance. One proposed hypothesis, Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis, refers to the cognitive interdependence relating to learning multiple languages and that “learners must reach the first level in order to avoid the cognitive disadvantages associated with bilingualism, and must reach the second level to enjoy the benefits of improved cognitive functioning” (De Angelis 2007 p.115). Another proposed hypothesis is the Threshold Hypothesis, which suggests that “learners’ linguistic competence in the L2 is partly dependent upon the competence already achieved in the L1, as the skills developed in the first language can be transferred and used in the second language” (ibid.).

## **2.2 Overview: Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language**

Teaching English to immigrants in England is categorised as teaching English as a Second Language (ESL); whereas teaching English as a Foreign Language (ELF) is the general term used when English is taught for use in non-English speaking countries. However, “while this distinction can be convenient, it cannot be taken for granted that learners in these two different situations necessarily learn in two different ways without proper research evidence” (Cook 2008 p.12). Moreover, language learners are not homogeneous and they adopt a variety of learning styles, mainly based on the learners’ biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics, which can render some teaching styles wonderful for some and terrible for others (Oxford, 2001).

### 2.2.1 Teaching approaches

Many different teaching approaches have periodically come in and out of favour.

The grammar translation approach is an extension of the technique to teach classical languages and is characterised by the focus on grammatical translation from the L1 to L2 or vice versa, with little use of the spoken target language by teacher or student. As a reaction to this the direct approach emerged; the teacher would primarily be a native speaker, who communicated only in the target language and did not have to know the learner's language, as no use of the learner's mother tongue was permitted. Later, the communicative approach was developed from the work of anthropological linguists who saw language as a system of communication. Although, Cook (2008) points out that since SLA research is independent of language teaching there has been no easy link between SLA and teaching methods.

Communicative teaching methodologies included role play in different social contexts as well as the use of authentic classroom materials and real situations. The teacher needed to be fluent in the target language and the teacher's primary role was to facilitate communication, with error correction as the secondary role (Celce-Murcea, ed. 2001).

### 2.2.2 Discourse in ESL – L1 use in the classroom

One of the main discourses in teaching ESL is the use of L1 in the classroom. Teaching methodologies have varied over the years, but nearly all have tried to dissuade students from using L1 in the classroom, though depriving students completely of L1 support by immersing them in a strange environment and has been identified as one possible source of demotivation. Recent research shows that teachers do use L1, particularly in a monolingual classroom where all the students speak the same language. Conversely, there are many situations where a teacher uses the TL all the time, one of them could be because he or she cannot speak the students' L1 (Littlewood and Yu, 2011). However, SLA research provides no evidence as to why L1 should not be used in teaching (Cook, 2008). Research demonstrates that L1 use can serve as a tool in the classroom in a complementary role, namely to give correctional feedback or maintain discipline. However, the study concludes that there is near consensus that teachers should aim to make maximum use of the TL (Littlewood and Yu, 2011). In the language classroom a non-native speaker is considered ideal if they have near native proficiency in English, an essential attribute of a good language teacher; in contrast a native speaker's ideal attribute is to achieve a fair degree of proficiency in the students' native language (Medgyes, 2001).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Teachers - interview questions 1 to 7

The following table shows the answers given by teachers A, B, C and D to interview questions 1 – 7. Teacher A taught elementary English (levels 1, 2, 3) at the Adult Education Centre. Teacher B taught English (levels 1, 2, 3) at the mainstream elementary school. Teacher C taught upper-secondary English (levels 4, 5, 6) at an educational institution for students who have not completed, but wish to continue their secondary education. Teacher D taught English in the IVIK program.

**Table 1:** Teachers’ answers to questions 1 - 4

Questions:	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D
1. How many students do you teach in this/these classes?	About 50 – the lesson times are flexible - 3 times a week – students are at different study levels	20	15 to 20 per class	9
2. How many males/females?	I don't know but more women	7 boys 13 girls	About 3/4 female and 1/4 male – mostly women.	7 boys 2 girls
3. How many do not have Swedish as their mother tongue?	It is easier to say how many have Swedish, which is 3 and the rest of them have some other language.	2 students	90 to 95 percent	All of them
4. Do they have to learn Swedish before they can attend English classes?	No, but we like them to because we have a book and there are translations into Swedish.	Yes (but not theoretically)	No, but we want them to. We want them to study SAS A then English A because they mix them. And they live in Sweden so they should learn that first.	Yes. At least one year or perhaps two. It depends.

The majority of students, approximately 95 percent, are non-native speakers and approximately 75 percent the students are female. Although it is not mandatory for students to be competent in Swedish before they begin to learn English it is preferred that they are.

**Table 1:** (continued) Teachers' answers to questions 5 - 7

<i>Questions:</i>	<i>Teacher A</i>	<i>Teacher B</i>	<i>Teacher C</i>	<i>Teacher D</i>
5. Do you use a course book (s)?	Yes Visions 1, 2, 3. It is for adults. But I want to change it.	Yes but I have not chosen it - it was what the school had.	Yes, Progress Gold A - it is for both teenagers and young adults. But next year we are not going to use a course book. We will use novels to teach vocabulary and grammar.	Yes, checkpoint- it's an excellent book with lots of exercises and good language. It is to prepare them for the national test in year nine. But it is still difficult for some of the students.
6. What are your main teaching methods /strategies when teaching ESL?	Here it is difficult we try to have something in the morning that would interest all of them - talk about something in the world. Then they gather around a table "find a friend" and work in groups.	Focus on vocabulary, grammar, comprehension and speaking freely.	Do a lot of vocabulary and verbs and I let them speak at least 30 minutes every lesson, discussing, questioning or reading aloud.	I ask if they understand the words and I write on the board – we do a lot of grammar exercises – we read a lot in English and ask questions and they have to answer in English
7. Do you have to adapt your teaching methods to accommodate students who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue?	I think it is better to go around and ask individually what they need. But many of them have learned how to plan and take responsibility.	No, not this year. But one student is far behind but there are other issues.	Yes and no it's the same as if you are teaching a Swedish class I to say to them if they don't understand the Swedish translate it into your own language.	Oh yes of course because none of them have Swedish as a mother tongue so it's not easy.

All of the teachers used a course book; Teacher A indicated that the course books Visions 1, 2, 3 she used consisted of English text with vocabulary translations and grammatical exercises from Swedish to English and vice versa. I examined these books, also the course books used by Teacher C (Progress Gold A) and Teacher D (Checkpoint) and they followed this format. Teacher C said she planned to use novels instead of a course book in the future. All of the teachers applied a variety of teaching strategies due to the diversity of the students regarding age, level of Swedish competence and mother tongue.

## 3.2 Students – results from questionnaires and interview questions

### 3.2.1 The students and their background

The total number of students interviewed was 21, of these 12 were male and 9 were female. The information gathered from the questionnaires showed that the age-range and gender of the students (Figure 1) was varied; males were more represented in the lower age-range and females in the higher, with the age-group 25-39 being the most represented. The mother tongues of the students were varied, but Arabic, Somali and Bosnian were the most represented.

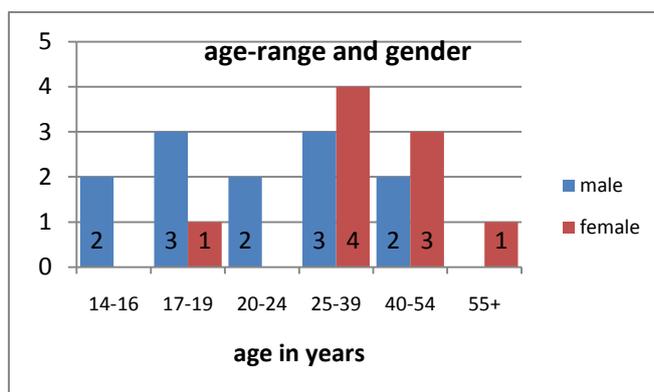


Figure 1: numbers of males and females according to age-range.

A number of the students had knowledge of other languages other than their mother tongue; Arabic, Assyrian and Serbian were the most represented. Six students had knowledge of one additional language and two had knowledge of two additional languages (excl. Swedish or English). In addition, 76 percent of the students indicated that they had previously studied English, whereas 24 percent had not.

Most of the students were teenagers or young adults when they arrived in Sweden (Figure 2) with the age-group 17-25 being the most represented with seven students, and 26-39 the next highest with six students.

The majority of the students – fifteen (71 %) had completed elementary education in their homeland (10-12 years in school); approximately 47 % had attended higher education. Three of the students had not attended any formal education before moving to Sweden. All but one of the students had studied Swedish as a Second Language (SAS) in school.

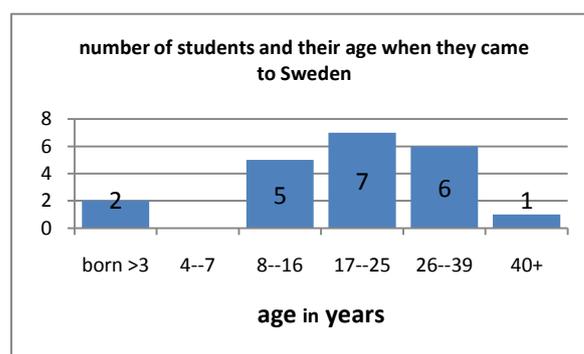


Figure 2: number of students and their corresponding ages when they first came to Sweden

### 3.2.2 Analysis of translation preference (based on Table 2: Appendix 5 page 31)

Students A to J were adults who studied at an adult education centre; students K to O were studying at an upper-secondary educational centre; students P to S were in the IVIK programme and students T and U were students at elementary school. (For further information see Table 2: Student Data, Appendix 5, page 31)

The students whose translation preference was to Swedish only were students D,E,J,P,Q,R,S and U. Student U is aged 14 and was born in Sweden so this could be considered normal. Among the other students, their ages varied – 6 students are 25 years old or under and one is 40. The number of years this group of students have lived in Sweden ranges between 1 and 5 years and the number of months they have spent in education studying SAS ranges between 6 and 30.

Students A,C,F,H,I,K,L,N,O and T sourced both Swedish and their mother tongue to translate from English. Student T is aged 14 and came to Sweden as a baby and attends an elementary school. Among the other students the ages varied – 4 students are 35 or over, 5 are between 17 and 25 and the number of months spent learning SAS ranges between 12 and 36. The number of years living in Sweden is split between a very short time and a relatively long time – 6 students have lived in Sweden under 3 years; while student C is aged 40+ and has lived in Sweden over 20 years, students H and I are both 40+ and have lived in Sweden circa 12 and 15 years respectively.

Three students sourced only their mother tongue when translating from English. Student B is 55+ and has lived in Sweden over 20 years, and has studied SAS for 41 months. It is however significant that Student B remarked during her interview that she had used Esperanto to communicate at home with her partner. Students G and M are 35+ and 40+ respectively and have both lived in Sweden circa 1, 5 years, and they have good knowledge of English.

### 3.2.3 Student answers to questions 1 - 12

#### Question 1: Is/was Swedish difficult for you to learn? How, Why?

Table 3 represents answers to question 1; as some students gave more than one reason the left column represents the frequency of the answer and not the number of students.

Answers given	Answer frequency
No - it was easy. I learn from my friends. I have learned languages before.	3
Yes - at first but not now	4
Yes - the grammar is difficult	4
Yes - it was very hard – the pronunciation. My language is a very different language. Maybe I am a little old to learn. I have not been in school before.	11

**Table 3: answers to question 1**

Students B, C, E, F, G, M and N all expressed a difficulty with learning

Swedish because of their mother tongues being so

different to Swedish, those being Japanese, Gujarati, Albanian, Turkish, Turkish, Arabic and Persian respectively. Students G and M also remarked that they were perhaps a little old to learn a new language. Students T and U did not think it was so hard and they learned mainly through speaking with friends. Students P, Q and R indicated that they had difficulties in the beginning, particularly with grammar, but not now. Student S said he didn't think it was so difficult because he spoke French and English, and that he thought that English was almost the same as Swedish so knowing English helped with learning Swedish.

#### Question 2: When learning Swedish did you receive any instructions in your mother tongue?

None of the students received any formal instruction – that being from a teacher in their mother tongue. Nine of the students sought or received help from other sources, namely friends and relatives.

Answers given	Number of students
No – not at all	12
Yes – from a classmate	1
Yes- from a friend or relative	6
Yes – no explanation	2

**Table 4: answers to question 2.**

**Question 3: Did you have to translate a lot of words from Swedish to your mother tongue before you could understand anything at all?**

The majority of students had to translate a lot of words; they used a traditional dictionary or online dictionary. Student K said she did not use a dictionary and translated in her head and Student I said she learned mostly from speaking and listening. Student T said he learned from his mother and student U said that in the beginning he had to look up words but not now as he knows more Swedish than his mother tongue, Bosnian.

Answers given	Number of students
Yes- a lot	12
Yes – only a few	4
No – not at all	2
No data	3

**Table 5: answers to question 3.**

**Question 4: How well do you understand the Swedish language now?**

The majority of students have rated their Swedish as good to very good. Student G said his Swedish was not so good and Student M also rated his Swedish as not so good and said that he thought he had learned too fast and he does not have any contact with native Swedish speakers to practice.

Answers given	Number of students
Not good	2
Good	7
Very good - everything	9
No data	3

**Table 6: answers to question 4.**

**Question 5: How good was your Swedish when you started to learn English?**

Student G said that his Swedish was not good when he started to learn English because he started to study both at the same time – the student had studied English before. Student M also rated his Swedish as not good but he had also studied English before. Student L said he could understand

Answers given	Number of students
Very good	4
good	7
Not good but OK	5
No data	5

Swedish quite well now but thought that learning English and Swedish at the same time was difficult. Student N said that she understood Swedish quite well but she had studied English before but had forgotten everything now she is learning Swedish – she said all of her Swedish teachers advised to forget English if she wanted to learn Swedish, so as not to mix them up.

**Table 7: answers to question 5.**

**Question 6: Why are you learning English?**

Table 8 represents answers to question 6; as some students gave more than one reason the left column represents the frequency of the answer and not the number of students

Answers given	Frequency of answer
It's a very important global language	12
It is for my job/work	4
For further education.	3
I want to learn for me	6
No data	6

The majority of students have a positive attitude to learning English, and mainly for personal reasons, with less focus on the need to learn for work-related reasons or for further study.

**Table 8: answers to question 6.**

**Question 7: Are the course books/texts /instructions mainly in English or Swedish?**

Students T and U said the course book was mainly in Swedish. The majority said they thought it was mainly in English.

Answers given	Number of students
Mainly Swedish	3
Mainly English	8
Both English and Swedish	2
No data	8

**Table 9: answers to question 7.**

**Question 8: During English lessons, does the teacher speak mainly in English?**

The majority of students said that the teacher speaks mainly in English; those that said the teacher sometimes spoke Swedish indicated that the Swedish was to explain grammar or translate vocabulary or give out other important information.

Answers given	Number of students
Yes – a lot , most of the time	12
Yes – but sometimes Swedish	6
No data	3

**Table 10: answers to question 8.**

**Question 9: During English lessons, do you receive any instructions in your mother tongue?**

The majority of students did not receive instructions in their mother tongue during English lessons. Those that answered “yes” did not clarify the answer.

Answers given	Number of students
No – not at all	15
Yes - other	3
No data	3

**Table 11: answers to question 9.**

**Question 10: Do you translate English to Swedish or to your mother tongue?**

Students B, G and M said they only translated from English to their mother tongue. Student M said the reason was that he was still learning Swedish so he didn't know many words, the student also said that of course if he was Swedish he would translate to Swedish. Students D, E, J, P, Q, R, S and U only translated to Swedish. Student Q was learning his mother tongue as well as Swedish and English; Student R said he had forgotten his mother tongue and Swedish was his language now. Of those that used both languages, Students C, H and T translated mostly to Swedish; Students A, F, L, I, K, N and O translated sometimes to Swedish and sometimes to their mother tongue.

Answers given	Number of students
English to Swedish	9
English to mother tongue	3
both	9

**Table 12: answers to question 10.**

**Question 11: Is learning English easier or harder than learning Swedish? How, Why?**

More of the Students thought that English was easier to learn; some had learned before. Student F said he thought it was easier because he had heard the language in the media.

Answers given	Number of students
Easier because you hear it all the time.	5
Easier because I have learned before.	6
Harder.	7
I don't have enough information to answer	1
No data	2

**Table 13: answers to question 11.**

Student K thought that grammar was easier. Students T and U said they thought English was harder because they live in Sweden and no-one speaks English here. Students Q and R said it was harder because they could already speak Swedish and have not had enough time to learn English.

**Question 12: Are you happy / satisfied with your English lessons?**

**Table 14: answers to question 12.**

<b>Answers given</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
Yes – very happy.	12
Yes – but would like more conversation.	1
Yes – but would like more time.	5
Did not say “no” but expressed some dissatisfaction	2
No data	1

The majority of Students are happy with their English lessons; Student R wanted more teaching in conversational English and less grammar. Student N said she would like more personal attention because compared to others in the class, she felt that she needed more help. Five students expressed that they would like more time to learn English.

#### 4. Discussion.

From my own experience when learning Swedish (SFI), and that of the students I interviewed, the teaching approach most commonly applied could be described as the direct approach; as the teacher communicated only in the TL. Although the direct method worked for me when I was learning Swedish, and may even prove to be effective for if applied when teaching English to some immigrants, but probably not everyone (Oxford, 2001 p.8; Littlewood and Yu, 2011 p.9). An additional reason the direct approach is favoured when teaching Swedish to immigrants is the lack of qualified teachers able to speak the variety of students' mother tongue. No such constraint is applicable when teaching English, as Swedish is considered the de-facto mother tongue.

Although English is not an official language in Sweden, it is seen as important for both education and business and therefore generally not categorised in the same way as a foreign language; in Sweden it is taught to Swedes as a second language. All of the evidence indicates that non-native speakers of Swedish are taught English in the same way. According to teacher C, the teaching strategy is the same as if teaching a Swedish class (Table 1: p.11). It is therefore necessary for newly arrived immigrants to learn Swedish before they can attend English classes; some exceptions are made if the student is already considered extremely competent in English; in these cases students study both languages side by side.

Information obtain from students' interviews showed that a majority thought the course book was mainly in English; however, the course books consist of English text with vocabulary translations and grammatical exercises from Swedish to English and vice versa (although Teacher C intends to switch to using novels in the future p.11). Furthermore, the students specified that the language of the classroom was mainly English, with only grammar and instruction given in the Swedish language (Question 8. p.17). Moreover, the majority of students interviewed in this study already had some level of competence in English and were extremely motivated to continue to learn more. It was also evident to me that the students themselves were very aware of their language needs and the obstacles they faced in attaining language proficiency. Opportunities to communicate with others were cited as a very good way to learn a language (Question 1. p.14 & Question 3. p.15). Conversely, a lack of opportunity to practice speaking the target language was considered a hindrance to progress (Question 4. p.15 & Question 11. p.18). The majority of students were happy with their teachers and English lessons; one student explicitly said he would like to practice more

conversation in class, and five students felt that the time allocated to learning English was too short (around 3 hours per week), especially when compared with the time allocated to SFI (around 20 hours per week).

In addition to being immersed into Swedish learning, some students were discouraged from continuing to study English at the same time; Teacher C remarked “they tend to mix them up”. A result of this can be that students can forget their previous knowledge of English; as experienced by student N (Question 5. p.16). This “mixing up” is what SLA theorist call the interlanguage, and part of the process of learning. Moreover, Student S remarked that having a good command of the English language helped with learning Swedish (Question 1. p.14). It is of course of paramount importance that immigrants learn Swedish, and SFI is very demanding; but it is sometimes at the expense of students’ prior English knowledge. With regard to students’ competence in Swedish, SLA theory regarding multilinguals suggests that proficiency in the non-native language – in this case Swedish – can influence whether it can serve as an asset or become a hindrance when learning a third language – English (page 8). The level of competence in Swedish among the students was varied (Question 5. p.16), however, it is unlikely that any of them would be considered to have near-native proficiency, and assessing students’ competence is not always straightforward (Gibbons, 2008 p.7). The level of attainment is particularly relevant if during lessons the evaluation criterion incorporates translating English to Swedish because incorrect translations may be due to the students’ level of Swedish knowledge and not necessarily a lack of competence in English, as explicitly expressed by students B, G and M (Question 10. p.18). English and Swedish are both Germanic languages and therefore closer in resemblance than any of the students’ native languages, consequently it could be presumed that they would use Swedish as their main source language; this is not always the case. Although students T and U are both 14 years old and have experienced similar circumstances, student U chooses only Swedish whereas student T opts for both. The greatest variation in behaviour is to be found in the group that sources both L2 and L1 when learning L3, those students that are over 40 and have lived in Sweden a long time still rely to some extent on their mother tongue – in spite of the fact that L2 and L3 share language closeness. The group that opts for only Swedish are on average the youngest group – 7 out of 8 are under 25. They have all spent a relatively short time in Sweden and in formal language education. The reasons for choosing Swedish could be that they are in “foreign language mode” or are influenced by the “perception of correctness” when learning English (De Angelis, p.8)

## 5. Conclusion.

To begin with I should like to address the question: Do educators use the most appropriate approach when teaching non-Swedes? I based this question largely on my personal experiences, and presumed that the direct approach would be the best method, which seems not to necessarily be the case.

Regarding present teaching strategies, the important ingredients appear to be: teachers who speak the TL competently and use it for the most part in class, reverting only to the students' native, (or in this case the students' "common" language – Swedish) for a complementary purpose. The information gathered during this study leads me to believe that this is principally the case. My main observation is that more could be done to adapt the teaching strategies to accommodate the increasing number of non-Swedes; that is to say less reliance on English to Swedish course books and the translation method, especially for students with a limited knowledge of Swedish. I would suggest incorporating more communicative teaching methods using authentic materials and real situations, as the students (explicitly and implicitly) have conveyed that communication is good for their language learning, and the classroom could be for some the only place they have the opportunity to communicate in the English language.

Language acquisition and language pedagogy encompass many factors described in this thesis. There is to date little research that directly connects teaching approaches with SLA (as they appear to be the two sides of the same coin), particularly when dealing with multilingualism. I believe a potential area for research could be to investigate the possibility of developing teaching strategies that can potentially harness prior language knowledge, so that learning more than one non-native language at a time can be compatible.

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## Appendix 1.

Hej!

Mitt namn är Elaine Draper och jag skriver ett examensarbete om undervisning av engelska inom lärarprogrammet vid Högskolan för Lärande och Kommunikation i Jönköping. I min undersökning jag vill utreda på hur elever med annat modersmål än svenska uppfattar engelska språk och på hur de upplever undervisning av engelska. Jag vill också ta reda på lärarens undervisningssätt.

Jag har utformat en enkät och intervju frågor och skulle gärna observera några engelskundervisningslektioner och intervju några utvalda elever som går på IVIK eller komvux eller grundskola senare år (med annat modersmål än svenska).

Jag skulle vara tacksam och du kunde kontakta mig så att vi kan bestämma en ömsesidigt lämplig tid för min undersökning.

Det betyder mycket för mitt examensarbete. Jag kommer naturligtvis varken att nämna ert, skolans eller elevens namn i min undersökning.

Telefon: hem  
Mobil

Med vänlig hälsning

Hello!

My name is Elaine Draper and I am writing a thesis on the Education of English in the teacher program at the School of Education and Communication in Jönköping. In my study I want to investigate how students with mother tongue other than Swedish perceive the English language and on how they feel about the teaching of English. I would also take account of the teacher's teaching methods.

I have designed a questionnaire and interview questions and would like to observe some English lessons and interview a selection of students who are at IVIK or adult education or in the final years of primary education (with a mother tongue other than Swedish).

I would be grateful and you could contact me so that we can determine a mutually convenient time for my study.

It means a lot to my thesis. I will of course not to mention yours, school or student's name in my study.

## **Appendix 2.**

### **Interview guide – teachers**

**When recording interview name teacher A/B/C etc.**

**Note: Teacher interview is not connected to specific students' interviews.**

1. How many students do you teach in this/these class(es)?
2. How many males / females?
3. How many of them do not have Swedish as their mother tongue
4. Do they have to learn Swedish before they can attend English classes?  
... if yes – why? How many months/years?
5. Do you use a course book(s) when teaching English?  
...if yes - Why have you chosen this/these book(s) and what is the main contents/structure/language of this/these book(s)?
6. Generally, what are your main teaching methods/strategies when teaching EFL?
7. Do you have to adapt your teaching methods to accommodate those students who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue? How?

## Appendix 3a

### Questionnaire – students

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle ○ the correct alternative or answer the question in the space provided:

1. I am a: man / woman
2. I am aged between years: 14-16 / 16-19 / 20-24 / 25 – 39 / 40 – 54 / 55 +
3. How old were you when you came to Sweden? \_\_\_\_\_ years.
4. What country do you come from (your birth country)? \_\_\_\_\_
5. My mother tongue is: Arabic / Somali / Thai / Polish / Kurdish / Bosnian / Croatian / Serbian / Persian / Turkish / or other \_\_\_\_\_
6. Before I came to Sweden I studied in school for (years) 0 – 3 / 4 – 6 / 7 – 9 / 10 – 12 / 13 +
7. How many months/years have you studied SFI \* and/or SAS \*? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Have you studied any English before? Yes / No ... if No go to question 9  
  
... If yes – how would you rate your English? not very good / quite good / good / very good
9. What level of English are you studying now? Level 1/ level 2 / level 3/ level 4 / level 5/level 6
10. Do you speak any other language(s) other than Swedish or English? Yes / No  
  
...if yes what is it /they \_\_\_\_\_

**Please bring this questionnaire to the interview.**

Interview complete

## Appendix 3b

Enkät – studenter

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Vänligen ringa in  rätt alternativ eller svara på frågan i luckan :

1. Jag är en: man / kvinna
2. Jag är i åldrarna mellan år: 14-16 / 16-19 / 20-24 / 25-39 / 40 - 54 / 55 +
3. Hur gammal var du när du kom till Sverige? \_\_\_\_\_ År.
4. Vilket land kommer du ifrån (din födelse land)? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Mitt modersmål är: arabiska / somaliska/ thailändska / polska / kurdiska / bosniska / kroatiska / serbiska / persiska / turkiska / eller övriga \_\_\_\_\_
6. Innan jag kom till Sverige gick jag i skolan (år) 0 - 3 / 4 - 6 / 7 - 9 / 10 - 12 / 13+
7. Hur många månader/år har du läst SFI \* och / eller SAS \*? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Har du läst engelska innan? Ja / Nej ... om svaret är nej gå till fråga 9  
... Om svaret är ja - hur skulle du bedöma din engelska? Inte bra / ganska bra / bra / mycket bra
9. Vilken steg i engelska läser du nu?        steg 1 / steg 2 / steg 3 / steg 4 / steg 5 / steg 6
10. Talar du något annat språk än svenska eller engelska? Ja / Nej  
... Om svaret är ja vad är det / de \_\_\_\_\_

**Vänligen tar med denna enkät till intervjun.**

Intervju utförde

\*SFI = Swedish for Immigrants

\*SAS = Swedish As a Second language

## Appendix 4a

### Interview guide questions – students

1. Is/was Swedish difficult for you to learn? How, Why?

Prompts- for example grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation.

2. When learning Swedish did you receive any instructions in your mother tongue?

Prompts – what you had to do – explanations

3. Did you have to translate a lot of words from Swedish to your mother tongue before you could understand anything at all?

Prompts – use a dictionary a lot.

4. How well do you understand the Swedish language now?

Prompts – do you still have to translate a lot of words – compare the grammar with your mother tongue?

5. How good was your Swedish when started to learn English?

6. Why are you learning English?

Prompts – what is your main motivation – certificate and / or to learn English?

7. Are the course books/texts / instructions mainly in English or Swedish?

8. During English lessons, does the teacher speak mainly in English?

9. During English lessons, do you receive any instructions in your mother tongue?

10. Do you translate English to Swedish or to your mother tongue?

Prompts – if you are unsure or need to understand something better.

11. Is learning English easier or harder than learning Swedish? How, Why?

Prompts – for example has learning Swedish made learning English easier/harder. Do you confuse both languages?

12. Are you happy / satisfied with your English lessons?

Prompts – Is there anything you would want to be different? What, Why?

## Appendix 4b

### Intervjuguide – studenter

1. Är / var det svårt för dig att lära Svenska ? Hur, varför?  
(till exempel grammatik, ordförråd, uttal.)
2. När du lärt sig svenska, fick du vissa instruktioner på ditt modersmål?  
(till exempel vad var det för uppgift – förklaring)
3. Blev du tvungen att översätta en hel del ord från svenska till sitt modersmål, innan du kunde förstå något alls? (använda mycket ett lexikon)
4. Hur väl förstår du det svenska språket nu? (blir du tvungen att fortfarande översätta en massa ord - jämför grammatiken med ditt modersmål?)
5. När började lära sig engelska, hur var din förståelse/uppfattning på svenska språk?
6. Varför lär du dig engelska? (vad är din främsta motivation - betyg / att lära sig engelska?)
7. Är kursböckerna / texter / instruktioner huvudsakligen på engelska eller svenska?
8. Under engelsklektioner, talar läraren i huvudsak på engelska?
9. Under engelsklektioner, får du några instruktioner på ditt modersmål?
10. Översätta du engelska till svenska eller till ditt modersmål?  
(om du känner osäker eller behöver förstå något bättre.)
11. Är det lättare eller svårare att lära dig engelska än att lära dig svenska? Hur, varför?  
(till exempel- har att lära dig svenska gjort att lära dig engelska lättare / svårare.  
Blanda du ihop både språk?)
12. Är du nöjd med dina engelska lektioner?  
(Är det något du skulle vilja vara annorlunda? Vad, Varför?)

## Appendix 5

**Table 2:** Student Data

Student	Gender	Mother tongue	Age	Years in Sweden	Months in SAS	Translation preference	Studied English before
A	female	Arabic	35+	< 2 years	12	both	yes
B	female	Japanese	55+	> 20 years	41	mother	yes
C	male	Guajarati	40+	> 20 years	36	both	yes
D	female	Bosnian	25+	> 5 years	12	Swedish	no
E	female	Albanian	40+	> 2 years	24	Swedish	yes
F	male	Turkish	25+	> 3 years	24	both	yes
G	male	Turkish	35+	>1,5 years	14	mother	yes
H	female	Bosnian	40+	> 12 years	12	both	no
I	female	Somali	40+	> 15 years	3	both	yes
J	male	Serbian	25+	> 2 years	6	Swedish	yes
K	female	Albanian	25+	> 3 years	6	both	yes
L	male	Somali	20+	> 8 years	school	both	yes
M	male	Arabic	40+	< 1 year	8	mother	yes
N	female	Persian	25+	> 1,5 years	14	both	yes
O	female	Arabic	17+	> 3 years	36	both	no
P	male	Kurdish	17+	> 1 year	No data	Swedish	yes
Q	male	Persian	17+	> 2 year	24	Swedish	no
R	male	Rumanian	17+	> 2,5 years	30	Swedish	no
S	male	Somali	20+	> 2 years	18	Swedish	yes
T	male	Kurdish	14+	> 12 years	12	Both	yes
U	male	Bosnian	14+	14 years (born)	school	Swedish	yes