

Making a Difference

Exploring the Teaching and Learning of the
English Progressive Aspect among
Swedish 6th Grade Students

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JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

Licentiate Thesis in Education with
Specialisation in English

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Abstract

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The aim of this study is to generate knowledge about what 6th grade students (12-13 years old) need to discern in order to be able to use the English progressive aspect (PROG) in a syntactically and semantically accurate way. This object of learning is not only complex, but it is unmarked grammatically in Swedish, which poses considerable difficulties for English language learners. The theoretical framework has been the Variation Theory of learning which was used to design and analyse teaching and learning. A basic assumption is that learning is being able to discern critical aspects by seeing and experiencing variation and not sameness. The method chosen to answer the research question was Learning Study, an interventionist, iterative classroom-based approach, characterized by the double aim of improving teaching and at the same time developing theory. Three secondary school English teachers and the teacher researcher, collaborated to plan, teach, evaluate and analyze a series of six lessons with the Variation Theory as the pedagogical principle. Empirical data consisted of interviews, pre- and post-lesson assessments, and video recordings of the lessons. The results show that the students in this study needed to discern the following four critical aspects: (1) to differentiate between tense and grammatical aspect, (2) to differentiate between simple aspect and progressive aspect, (3) to discern the concept of ongoingness and (4) to differentiate between stative and non-stative meanings. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that (1) the necessity of separation, (2) treating the PROG as an undivided whole and (3) the use of carefully chosen and powerful examples encourage an enhanced understanding of the PROG.

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Clare Lindström

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The casual observer might assume that a teacher, after many years of teaching English as a foreign language, would know what students need to learn. This, unfortunately, is not always the case. In the English language, and arguably every language, there are pockets of knowledge and concepts that remain a thorn in the side of many teachers, and probably most students. One such irritating thorn, especially for Swedish speakers, is the grammatical structure called the progressive aspect. Despite well thought-out lesson plans, colourful power points and countless explanations, it seems that the progressive aspect contains a complexity of meaning that is often overlooked, or conveniently forgotten. But what would happen if the teacher, instead of starting with the instruction of the progressive aspect from a textbook perspective, took a step back and began with the students themselves? In what ways do the students understand the progressive? What do they already know and what are they missing?

What critical aspects are necessary for them to discern, and how should they be presented, in order for the students to more fully understand this grammatical structure? The answers that may emerge from taking such an approach are likely to open up possibilities for student learning and give the teacher a clear advantage when designing teaching and learning in the classroom.

I.1 IMPROVING PRACTICE BY BRIDGING THE GAP TO THEORY

Marton (2005) asserts that school practice is seldom built on a theoretical foundation. Research, where theories are generated, can be perceived by teachers as a protracted process undertaken by people who observe praxis solely from a distance. Teachers working at the chalk-face are more likely to rely on experience and are used to making instant decisions and responding flexibly to rapid changes and demands. This perceived gap between theory and practice (Nuthall, 2004) creates tension, which may account for why much educational research has been considered as irrelevant, and consequently has received a rather tepid reception from teachers. A report published by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Sundell & Stensson, 2010) appears to corroborate the view that educational research has not helped in any substantial way to solve problems that teachers face in the classroom, when teaching subject matter. Out of hundreds of Swedish doctoral theses in education, the vast majority (89 percent), dealt with conditions and issues surrounding education, such as the leadership role of head teachers in public inquiries. Only 18 theses dealt with teaching methods, of which only one single thesis was judged by the authors of the report, to be a comparative study with detailed descriptions of experimental conditions in student groups (ibid.).

In response to this apparent vacuum within educational research, the Swedish Education Act, implemented in 2011, contains the directive that

education shall be based on a scientific foundation and proven experience (SFS 2010:800, 1 Ch. 5§). Where teachers should look for this scientific foundation is however, not specified.

At the intersection of the types of knowledge essential for teachers, is that which Shulman (2004) calls pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). This is a type of knowledge that is, or should be, specific for teachers and includes “ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others” (ibid., p.203). PCK refers to knowing the what, how and why within a specific subject domain and the necessary relationship between these types of knowledge, all of which should be taken into consideration in a teaching situation (ibid.).

I.2 TRANSFORMING CONTENT INTO VIABLE INSTRUCTION THROUGH LEARNING STUDY

Both Shulman (2004) and Klafki (1995) emphasize being able to teach the subject content as of the utmost importance. Shulman calls it “the missing paradigm” (2004, p.195) because he feels that the focus on teaching subject-matter has been absent in the discourse on teaching and learning. In order to carry out the “outrageously complex activity of teaching” (ibid, p.231) he acknowledges that a teacher needs more and *different* knowledge than someone who has only studied the subject-matter without a view to being able to teach it.

The core of this different knowledge is pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 2004), described by Abell (2008, p.1408) as the knowledge of how to “transform subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge into viable instruction”.

Echoing Shulman, Holmqvist (2006) also argues for an integration of subject matter knowledge, teaching knowledge, and knowledge in applying a

scientific perspective to learning. The school-based research approach Learning Study is an example where all three competencies are not only welcome but also necessary (ibid.). Marton is credited with developing this model for educational development and practice research known as Learning Study (Lo, 2012; Marton & Tsui, 2004). Its origins are an amalgam of different influences, tracing back both to the Japanese teaching improvement process Lesson Study and also to Design Experiment, a practice-based research method for testing and improving teaching and education (Gustavsson & Wernberg, 2006; Holmqvist, 2011). Hundreds of Learning Studies have been carried out in Hong Kong during the last decade, and there is a growing number of studies of this kind taking place in Sweden and elsewhere (Runesson & Kullberg, 2010). This cyclical and systematic model has been found to develop a rich understanding of specific subject-matter among students. Teachers collaborate to plan, evaluate and analyse lessons with Variation Theory¹ as the theoretical foundation and framework (Lo, 2012; Marton, 2015). Variation Theory has been used as a tool to analyse classroom learning, however the recent development of Learning Study has also seen the theory used as a starting point for designing learning – in other words, implementing theory as a foundation for planning, executing and revising lessons. It is this that distinguishes Learning Study from its predecessors (Runesson & Kullberg, 2010). The theory has developed out of the research approach known as phenomenography, which for over 30 years has contributed to the knowledge base about how different phenomena can be experienced. There are numerous phenomenographic studies (Marton & Booth, 1997)

¹ A description of Variation Theory and associated central concepts can be found in Chapter 3.

and insights have proved particularly fruitful within mathematics education (Runesson & Kullberg, 2010).

The emergence of Variation Theory as a further development of phenomenography (Marton & Booth, 1997; Bowden & Marton, 1998) heralded “a theoretical turn of the research approach” (Runesson & Kullberg, 2010). Runesson (1999) carried out a study of five mathematics teachers and analysed how the same topic – fractions and percentages – was handled in five classes. It was demonstrated that the students’ possibilities to learn about these mathematical concepts varied in the classrooms despite the teachers working with the same topic and in a similar environment (ibid.). Runesson’s study, using Variation Theory as a theoretical framework, revealed that different patterns of variation and invariance could be determined. By using these patterns, (although in an unthinking way), the teachers opened up so-called dimensions of variation and it was demonstrated that the students’ possibilities to learn about mathematical concepts varied depending on which teacher did the teaching.

1.3 THE “MOST DIFFICULT THINGS” – PEDAGOGICALLY CHALLENGING CONTENT MATTER

Every society benefits from a well-educated population (OECD, 2013). Knowledge of English is especially important and it automatically carries a certain weight in the Swedish compulsory school system because it is a core subject (Lgr11). English is also a popular school subject which students consider important (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005; Skolverket, 2004). This is hardly surprising when one takes into account how widespread the use of English has become, not only as the leading Internet language but also as a global *lingua franca* (Crystal, 2003). Students are aware of the need

to be proficient in a language which allows them to communicate internationally, both now and in a future, potentially filled with foreign travel, studies, work and business opportunities.

This study takes its point of departure in the need for subject-specific, classroom-based research which starts with the sort of pedagogical problems that teachers face every day, for example, why students have difficulties in learning the progressive aspect. According to Nuthall (2004), the relationship between learning and teaching is underdeveloped. By concentrating on an important issue of teaching and learning English, this study will hopefully make a contribution to the field of content-oriented, subject matter research with a basis in classroom practice.

The research method used in this study is Learning Study with a focus on exploring how 6th grade students can improve their knowledge of the grammatical category known as the progressive aspect. It is my experience as a secondary school teacher of 30 years that learners of English as a foreign language often have difficulties in understanding and using the progressive aspect. Swedish youngsters are by no means alone in having these problems. According to Dahl (1985, p.44), aspect categories "... notoriously belong to the most difficult things to master in a foreign language". It is hoped that this study will develop knowledge and insights into improving the teaching and understanding of these "most difficult things" and thereby impact positively on students' learning and achieving educational goals in the subject of English.

1.4 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The overall aim of this thesis, with Variation Theory as the theoretical point of departure and Learning Study as research method, is to contribute to creating knowledge that may improve student learning of English grammatical structures in a meaningful way. A difficult area for English

language learners to master is the grammatical tense/aspect system, in particular the progressive aspect. Central to this study is the focus on what students have to discern in order to enhance their knowledge of the progressive aspect - the object of learning.

With this aim in mind the research question is:

- What aspects are critical for 6th grade students to discern in order to be able to use the progressive in a syntactically and semantically accurate way?

I.5 THE DISPOSITION OF THE THESIS

The disposition of the thesis is as follows: following this introduction is Chapter 2 on previous research relevant to the study. Chapter 3 provides an account of the theoretical underpinning of Learning Study, that is, the phenomenographic research approach and Variation Theory. The next chapter, Chapter 4, outlines the design of the study, which was conducted with six classes of 6th grade learners of English as a foreign language. Chapter 5 presents the main findings of the study expressed as critical aspects, that is, the aspects that the students must discern in order to be able to use the progressive in a syntactically and semantically accurate way. In the concluding chapter, Chapter 6, the findings are discussed in relation to the research question, the research method chosen, and also in the light of previous research.

CHAPTER 2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The chapter begins with a brief historical and current overview of competing theories of second language learning and their consequences for language pedagogy. The discussion is then narrowed down to the role of grammar in the second language curriculum. This is followed by a section providing the reader with a description of the grammatical category focused upon in this study, the progressive aspect, and why it is particularly challenging for learners of English as a foreign language. The last section of this chapter is a discussion of some empirical classroom studies involving grammar, with a particular emphasis on previous Learning Studies.

2.1 SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION RESEARCH AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY

Although an interest in language and how it is taught and learnt can be traced back thousands of years (Kelly, 1969; Howatt, 1984; Nassaji & Fotos, 2004), the systematic study of language learning as a scientific field of research began to take shape around the 1960s (Lundahl, 2012). Mangubhai (2006), for example, dates the genesis of applied linguistics to the publication of the ground-breaking book by Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens in 1964. Larsen-Freeman (1991) estimates that the study of second language acquisition as an independent field emerged during the early 1970s.

Research up until the 1960s was based mainly on behaviouristic theories and constructs such as habit formation, imitation and the ‘scientific’ comparison of the native and the target language known as Contrastive Analysis (Matsuoka & Evans, 2004). Behaviourism, with B.F. Skinner as one of the figureheads, emphasized language input and external environmental factors, alongside positive reinforcement of what was considered correct language use, and errors were treated as deviations (Lundahl, 2012). However, the influence of behaviourism as an explanatory model for language acquisition was greatly diminished by Chomsky’s (1959) scathing criticism of Skinner. Chomsky pointed out that despite a meagre input, children are able to learn language at a rate and a proficiency that exceeds the language of the immediate environment (*ibid.*). His conclusion was that language is an innate ability owing more to genetics and biology than environment (Chomsky, 2006). Out of this biolinguistic approach the theory of Universal Grammar developed, according to which the learner’s brain is biologically ‘wired-up’ with a language acquisition device (*ibid.*).

According to this theory, second language learning follows the same development as first language learning and consequently learning takes place through maximum exposure to target language input (*ibid.*). Chomsky’s

(1959) structural view of language sees language as an abstract system and distinguishes between competence, that is, the underlying language ability, and performance, which is language in use. Language ability is positioned in the head as “an internal, mental process” (Long, 1997, p.319). The consequence of this dichotomy for pedagogy is that structures should be learnt first before language users start actually using the language. However, this view has been challenged and the definition of competence has widened to also include the notion of communicative competence (Hymes, 1986; Canale & Swain, 1980). Communicative competence includes grammatical competence, viz. the rules of morphology, syntax and semantics. It also includes sociolinguistic competence, that is, how language is used in different social situations, and strategic competence such as the use of communication strategies, for example, reformulations and body language (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Although it seems reasonable to suppose that children have an innate predisposition to acquire their first language (L1)², it is a point of discussion whether this applies to second language learning, since there are several crucial differences between a person’s first and second languages and the conditions for learning (Lundahl, 2012). For example, a child’s conceptual understanding of the world is established through their first language/-s and thus, acquisition goes hand-in-hand with the cognitive development of the child (ibid.). Furthermore, the first language is learnt by informal means in an environment where the language is used for everyday communication, which contrasts with the formal learning environment of the classroom. It follows that the second language is not accessible in the same way and to the same extent as the first language (ibid.).

² L1 refers to the learner’s first language. The target language can be referred to as L2.

The second language does not fill the same function as the first language, as the latter is learnt as part of the individual's identity and socialization process (ibid.) and, in this way, is about "learning to mean, and to expand one's meaning potential" (Halliday, 1975, p.113). Thus, there are fundamental differences between learning a first language and learning a second language (Nunan, 1999).

Krashen's (1988) monitor model, (including the input hypothesis), makes a clear distinction between language acquisition and language learning. According to Krashen (ibid.), acquisition is a subconscious and intuitive process which leads to fluency, whereas language learning is a formal conscious process that is focused on form and will not lead to fluency. To be able to develop a fluent communicative language it is necessary for the learner to be exposed to a great deal of natural and comprehensible input (ibid.). However, critics of Krashen's theory point out that the one-sided focus on only communicative content, has been at the expense of language accuracy (Lundahl, 2012). Studies in Canada have shown that language immersion programmes guided by Krashen's theories on language acquisition have not resulted in a sufficiently acceptable level of language competence (ibid.). Another consequence of Krashen's focus on target-language input is the rejection of L1 use in the foreign language classroom. However, research has shown that the occasional use of L1 is warranted if it results in increased comprehension and learning (Cook, 2001; Meyer, 2008; Tang, 2002; Wells, 1999). Some of these occasions could be when giving instructions and explaining complex ideas and grammar (Tang, 2002), to facilitate finding cognates and linking knowledge between languages (Cook, 2001) and during analysis and discussion of cognitively challenging grammar (Auerbach, 1993).

Other issues of contention which have similarities with the acquisition/learning dichotomy are those between implicit and explicit knowledge and learning. Implicit knowledge is knowledge *of* language

whereas explicit knowledge is knowledge *about* language (Ellis, 2008). Krashen (1988) claims that explicit knowledge cannot become implicit, and therefore instruction should offer comprehensible input to encourage the development of implicit knowledge (Ellis, 2008). This is known as the non-interface position (*ibid.*). A weak-interface position is held by Ellis (1997) who sees explicit knowledge as a type of facilitator to acquiring implicit knowledge. When translated into instruction, this position means that the two types of knowledge are considered separately, namely, explicit knowledge should be taught through consciousness-raising tasks, and implicit knowledge should be taught through task-based teaching (Ellis, 2008). The strong interface position is held by DeKeyser (1998). This position holds that knowledge begins in declarative form and is then transformed into procedural knowledge through communicative practice. More specifically, instruction should first teach declarative rules of grammar and after this, communicative tasks should be practised (Ellis, 2008).

Despite efforts to include more socially orientated views, the growing influence of linguistics and psychology on the field of language acquisition during the second half of the 20th century has contributed to the domination of cognitive theories, described by Ellis (1997, p.87) as “the computational metaphor of acquisition” and a more balanced treatment of cognitive and social aspects may be called for (Arik, 2012). Atkinson (2002, p.525), for example, supports this position in arguing that language and language acquisition is “... simultaneously occurring and interactively constructed both ‘in the head’ and ‘in the world’”. Furthermore, Hill (2007) sees no incompatibility between cognitive theories and sociocultural theories as a way of explaining language development.

2.2 THE PLACE OF GRAMMAR IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The term grammar is complex. It can be seen as a scientific system of language, or an internalized system of meaning, or a social system of “linguistic etiquette”. Thornbury (1999, p.4) describes grammar as “a process for making a speaker’s or writer’s meaning clear when contextual information is lacking”. Grammar inevitably emerges in all languages in a gradual process of historical development (Hurford, 2011). There is even evidence of syntactical structures in the animal world, for example, in the communication systems of certain birds, whales and primates (Tomasello, 1999). As social actions and activities become more challenging, grammatical structures become increasingly more complex (*ibid.*), so the journey from constrained monophrasal language forms to the complex systems of human language is a protracted historical and cultural process (Hurford, 2011).

There has been much debate as to whether grammar has a rightful place in the language classroom, and if so, in what ways it can and should be incorporated (Ellis, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Thornbury, 1999). As with the study of language in general, the place of grammar in foreign language education has been the subject of debate for more than 2000 years (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004; see also Kelly, 1969, and Howatt, 1984 for historical overviews). There are those who have propagated for the explicit teaching of grammar as a primary focus for all foreign language learning, whereas others have argued that knowledge of grammar is subordinate to meaning and can impede learning (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004). Explicit grammar teaching, they claim, should therefore be eliminated from language instruction (*ibid.*). This argument, however, is built on the assumption that grammar equates with rote learning of prescriptive rules and does not include meaning. Recent and current research (cf Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Larsen-Freeman, 2015) supports the

viewpoint that grammar is as much about making meaning as it is about grammatical rules.

According to Newby (1998) foreign language teaching methodologies have been characterized by a “dogma-driven ‘pendulum effect’” (ibid., p.2). On the one end of the pendulum swing is what is known as ‘traditional’ grammar teaching, exemplified by the Grammar-Translation method. This method in practice means that forms and structures have a dominant role compared to contextualization and meaning (Newby, 1998). The method derives primarily from the traditions of teaching Latin and Greek but was also influenced by early and mid- 20th century research in structural linguistics (Ur, 2010).

On the other end of the pendulum is the position taken by Krashen (1988) that formal and explicit learning of rules does not lead to communicative fluency. According to Krashen (ibid.) only natural exposure to the target language leads to implicit procedural knowledge and true acquisition, whereas formal explicit grammar instruction results in purely declarative knowledge (ibid.).

The second half of the last century saw the rise of what has become known as “the communicative approach” (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1986; Nunan, 1999). This is characterized by teaching language with an emphasis on meaning and “contextual appropriacy” (Ur, 2010) rather than structures and adherence to formal correctness. According to Ur (ibid.), linguists have failed to provide sufficient theoretical support to teachers when it comes to integrating grammar into the communicative approach and, in some quarters, explicit grammar teaching has been frowned upon completely (Ellis, 1997; Ur, 2010).

Other approaches to teaching grammar take their source of inspiration from holistic and humanistic orientations with an emphasis on the learner herself (Newby, 1998). According to these learner-based approaches, grammar cannot be taught but is acquired, which means that the task of the teacher is to facilitate learning rather than to teach in the traditional sense of the word (ibid.) However, Lightbown and Spada (1990) argue that grammatical accuracy can be promoted by deliberately attending to the formal properties of the language. This is in line with Schmidt's (1990, 2001, 2010) *noticing hypothesis*, which proposes that in order for target language input to become intake³, language learners must consciously pay attention to the input. This "consciousness raising" (Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1985, 1988; Schmidt, 1990, 1995, 2010) makes it possible for the learner to make conscious comparisons between their own language production and the parts of the target language input that they notice. Nevertheless, the second language learning process is neither simple nor linear (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). Learners can appear to have mastered grammatical structures only to backslide when faced with the demand of learning and restructuring new ones (McLaughlin, 1990).

Although teaching may affect the rate at which students learn language, all learners follow the same specific and pre-determined routes or paths of development (Pienemann, 1985). These routes appear to be somewhat impervious to instruction (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004), however, Lantolf (2005, p.339) refers to studies conducted by Galperin which have shown that both the rate and route of mental development is shaped by instruction.

³ Input is language that is presented to the learner in a way that makes it possible to be processed (Gass, 1997). Intake is input that is filtered and processed (Van-Patten, 1996)

Brindley (1987) concludes that teachers should not expect their students to master language structures that are beyond their developmental capabilities and Klafki (1995) also advises against introducing children to overly complicated concepts as they then run the risk of misconceiving them. On the other hand, Hirst (1993) believes that low achieving children in particular should not be denied access to complex concepts that are a part of every subject in school. On the contrary, these children should be exposed to challenging tasks and not excluded from certain forms of knowledge. He strongly attacks what he calls “the anti-intellectualism of certain contemporary movements in education” (ibid., p.28).

The place of grammar instruction in the English language classroom has been in a state of flux for the last few decades, and research on second language learning has not provided sufficient answers to pedagogical concerns on this matter (Larsen-Freeman, 1991, 2015). However Nassaji and Fotos (2004, p.127) see the start of a “reevaluation of grammar as a necessary component of language instruction”. An increasing body of research points to inadequacies associated with teaching exclusively meaning-focused communication, with no explicit attention to accuracy and form (Swain, 1985; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1997). However, Larsen-Freeman (2015) points out that grammar in itself is both form-focused and meaning-focused. It is not a case of meaning-focused instruction as opposed to grammar - the very forms of grammar convey meaning (Thornbury, 1999). The question that emerges is how grammar can be incorporated into an instructional design that takes account of both the grammatical forms of the language and the meanings that the grammatical forms convey (ibid.). Negueruela and Lantolf (2006) report on a study, in which it was shown that teaching which focused on the conceptual understanding of grammatical structures, rather than unrelated surface descriptions of rules, resulted in more advanced language performance. On the other hand, there is some research that points to

the importance of explicitly highlighting or ‘attending’ to grammatical structures (DeKeyser, 1998; Schmidt, 1995; 2001). In Norris and Ortega’s (2000) meta-analysis on the effects of instruction on learning, the authors conclude that there are considerable positive effects if the instruction allows for explicit focus-on-form. Ellis (2008) however, warns the reader that there is no agreement in the research community about definitions of common words such as explicit and implicit grammatical knowledge, and deductive and inductive learning of grammar, which makes comparisons between research studies problematical. The meta-study (Norris & Ortega, 2000) corroborates the findings of DeKeyser (1998), and Schmidt, (1995, 2001), by proposing that raising awareness of grammatical forms has an effect on increased student learning of grammar. To sum up, current research student learning outcomes in grammar appear to be positively affected by *explicit* teaching instruction (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004).

2.3 THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECT

In a grammatical context, the *tense* of a verb designates whether an action or event can be related to the present or the past (Svartvik & Sager, 1983). However, in English, verbs also express an *aspect*. Aspect does not denote time but rather the speaker’s way of looking at a verb action (ibid.). The progressive aspect⁴ is used to refer to “the temporal unfolding of the action of a verb” (Hudson, Paradis & Warren, 2008, p.64). This activity-, action-, or event-in-progress is marked grammatically by conjugating the verb *be* and attaching the suffix *-ing* to the main verb (ibid.). According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) the core meaning of the

⁴To avoid confusion with the Variation theoretical terms ‘aspect’ and ‘critical aspect’, the grammatical structure known as the progressive aspect is referred to in this thesis, where possible and appropriate, by the conventional linguistic abbreviation PROG.

PROG is “imperfective, meaning that it portrays an event in a way that allows for it to be incomplete, or somehow limited” (ibid., p.116).

Let us take the following two sentences to help exemplify the difference between the grammatical categories of tense and aspect:

- 1 (a) Susan and John live in Stockholm.
- (b) Susan and John are living in Stockholm.

Both sentences contain the verb in the present tense (*live/are living*)⁵ but they express different aspectual meanings. In sentence 1(a), the verb is in the simple aspect which conveys the meaning that the event is conceptualised as a complete whole (Hirtle, 1967). In this specific instance, the impression is that Susan and John have their permanent home in Stockholm. They may have lived there for some time, and there is no indication that they are planning to move. In contrast, in sentence 1(b) the verb is in the progressive aspect (PROG). This portrays the event/action as being imperfective, that is to say, limited and somehow incomplete (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). There is the implication that their living in Stockholm is temporary. They have lived somewhere else before moving to Stockholm and it is very possible that they will be moving again in the future. In these instances, we can see that the contrasting aspectual meanings can be seen as (a) an event or action that is permanent (simple aspect – *live*) or (b) one that is temporary (PROG – *are living*).

As can be seen by the above examples, grammar is not just a system of rules describing how the language works, but also a conveyor of meaning.

⁵ Technically speaking, the auxiliary verb *are* in example (b) is tensed in the present, whereas the *-ing* form is non-finite and hence tense-less.

Another contrast in meaning that can be expressed by means of grammatical aspect is completeness and incompleteness. An example of this would be the semantic difference between the following sentences:

- 2 (a) I read *Pride and Prejudice* yesterday.
- (b) I was reading *Pride and Prejudice* yesterday.

Sentence 2(a) means that I have completed the task and finished the book, whereas sentence 2(b) means that I am in the process of reading and have not yet finished the book.

There are different viewpoints as to where the boundaries are to be drawn between what qualifies as tense and aspect respectively, with some scholars describing all the combinations of tense and aspect as twelve tenses (Zhang & Chan, 2009) and others making a clear distinction between tense and aspect boundaries (Richards & Schmidt, 2013, p.35). Bielak and Pawlak (2013, p.151) refer to the “progressive present tense” and the “non-progressive tense”, implying that aspect is a sub-category of tense. Richards and Schmidt (2013) acknowledge only two grammatical aspects – the progressive and the perfect. However, for the purpose of this study, the definition of Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) has been used. This states that there are four aspects – *simple* (or *zero*), *perfect*, *progressive*, and the combination *perfect progressive* (ibid.). There are also differences as to what terminology is used when referring to the PROG. Sometimes it is referred to as the *continuous aspect*, and sometimes it is called the *progressive form*. Because of the suffix ending *-ing* which is attached to the main verb, it is sometimes referred to as the *-ing form*. However, this may be confusing because the suffix is not used exclusively as a present participle as with the PROG; it can also be used to form gerunds, adjectives, nouns. Let us take the following instances of the *-ing* form to illustrate its varying functions:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (a) Maisie is singing. | -ing as PROG |
| (b) Maisie is amazing. | -ing as present participle/adjective |
| (c) Maisie's hobby is singing. | -ing as gerund/verbal noun |

In this thesis it will be consistently referred to as the progressive aspect (PROG).

What does it mean then to know the PROG? To be able to make a claim to knowing something there are certain criteria that should be fulfilled. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) refer to three dimensions of grammar, namely, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Learning the PROG is not only restricted to learning the accurate form (at the morphosyntactic level), but the communicative dimension must also be addressed. This means recognising that this grammatical structure is used to express meaning (semantics) in context-appropriate situations (pragmatics). Saussure (cited in Berger, 1999) points out the redundancy of learning concepts without taking into consideration the actual meaning of the concept: Indeed, Saussure maintains that concepts cannot exist without being named. Therefore, to fully understand the PROG, the learner must know how it is formed, what it means, and when and why it is used (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

At the morphosyntactic level, knowing entails that the learner can correctly form the structure in question that is, that the PROG always consists of a form of the verb *be*, and that the suffix *-ing* is attached to the main verb, for example, I *am* living, they *will have been* living, she *had been* living. It follows in this connection that knowing also entails the learner's recognition that there must be agreement between the subject and the verb *be*, for example, I *am* living, *you are* living, *he is* living. In other words, knowing about the PROG also encompasses knowing about subject-verb agree-

ment, known as concord. Finally, the learner must recognise that it is always the verb *be* that carries the tense, whereas the main verb remains invariant, for example, I *am* living, I *was* living.

At the semantic level, learners who ‘know’ the PROG should know the various meanings of the structure, that is, that in the present tense it is used for action happening at the moment of speech and also to denote something of a temporary nature, for example, “Mary is living with her parents until she can find her own flat”. Learners should also know that the PROG indicates an incomplete action, for example, “The team was losing, so the star player was ordered onto the field.”, as opposed to the completed action denoted by the simple aspect, “The team lost”. In addition, they should be able to discern between the concept of activity versus state, for example “I am thinking about which dress to wear”, representing a mental activity and “I think this one is pretty”, representing a mental state.

There is also the pragmatic dimension, which the ‘knowledgeable learner’ has to take into account. At the pragmatic level, learners should be able to determine when and where the use of the PROG is appropriate. Consider, for example, the following sentences

- 3 (a) You’ve got to joke!
(b) You’ve got to be joking!

In these examples, we can see that the choice of grammatical aspect radically changes the meaning of the two sentences and has pragmatic implications on how the speaker is viewed by others. The border between meaning and use, the semantics and pragmatics of the aspect system is not clear cut (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

2.4 WHY LEARNING THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECT IS DIFFICULT

Aspect is not a universal grammatical category. It does not exist in approximately one third of the world's languages (Dahl, 1985). In the English language, being able to express aspectual distinctions is considered important (Thornbury, 1999) but in Swedish the progressive aspect does not exist as a marked form which means that it is likely to be especially problematic for learners (Swan & Smith, 2001). Other reasons why the PROG is difficult is because it is missing in many languages, for example, German and Scandinavian languages. Even if the speaker's L1 has the PROG, there is no guarantee that they are used in the same way. Many language learners over-extend the PROG to areas that would be permissible in their own language (ibid.).

It may be that it is not just a matter of what Swedish or English allow us to express but just as importantly what these languages force us to express. Some have put forward the idea that the presence or absence of linguistic categories in different languages has consequences for how we think – the so-called *Whorfian hypothesis*. Slobin (1987) makes a distinction between a strong form and a weak form of the hypothesis with the former suggesting that language *determines* thought, and the latter meaning that language only *influences* thought. Chiu, Leung and Kwan (2007) suggest that the grammar of the foreign language may not affect the thoughts of the user but that it does limit what tools are available when communicating and negotiating for meaning. Chen, Benet-Martinez and Ng (2014) have also examined the relationship between language and cognition. Whether Chinese-English bilinguals spoke Chinese or English in their study was shown to have an effect on their thinking and behaviour. There does not appear to be consensus as to the extent language influences thought.

2.5 SOME EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON TEACHING AND LEARNING GRAMMATICAL CONCEPTS

Although there is an ever growing number of Learning Studies, especially in mathematics, there appears to be not as much research undertaken among language teachers. The following empirical studies on teaching and learning grammatical concepts come primarily from China, Hong Kong and Sweden.

In a LrS described by Lo (2012),⁶ students were having problems using the simple past tense and the teacher gave them the task of writing a letter to a friend. The teacher asked one of the students which tense is appropriate to use and the student thought it was the simple past tense. In this instance, the past tense is the correct answer to the teacher's question because the letter should describe things that had happened in the past. However, when the teacher examined the post-lesson letter that this particular student had written, it could be seen that the student had consistently chosen the present tense. The teacher wanted to know why the student chose to use the past tense when writing the pre-lesson letter and the present tense in the post-lesson letter. Further questioning revealed that the student believed the choice of which tense to use was dependant on how much time passes between writing a letter and when the recipient reads it. Because the post-lesson letter was handed over to the teacher immediately after writing it, the student had used the present tense. In the pre-lesson letter, the student imagined the fictitious friend reading the letter a long while after it being sent and, hence, the choice of past tense was appropriate according to the student's logic. The student's answers were based on an incomplete understanding of when to use tenses which meant that his choice would only be valid in certain situations. The

⁶ LrS VL097 from the VITAL project, described in Lo, (2012, pp. 75-76).

teacher had a preconceived idea of how students understand tenses and the way this particular student understood tenses was not predicted. If the teacher had not insisted on trying to understand the student's logic, she would not have been able to diagnose the source of his problems with tense, nor be able to determine what needs to be made clear. The teacher could now tackle the problem in a more informed way than before, and adjust the instruction accordingly.

The importance of finding out what students already know (or do not know) can also be seen in a study by Zhang (2009). In a LrS on teaching and learning pronouns with secondary school students, the participating teachers had predicted before the study began, that both the form and function of pronouns would pose a problem to the learners. However, data from the pilot test and interviews indicated that the students had already mastered the form. The teachers were surprised that almost all of the questions related to form had been answered correctly. Their initial intuition about what was problematic for their students, turned out to be wrong, giving further support to the claim that evidence-based judgments are better than taken-for-granted assumptions when designing for learning (ibid.). Furthermore, the teachers had initially made the decision to avoid using the passive voice because it was considered too confusing for the students. However, after analysis of the first research lesson, the teachers discovered that it was specifically the contrast between the active and passive voices (which meant that the position of “doer” and “receiver” of an action is changed), that allowed for the functions of subject and object to be discerned in a more powerful way (ibid.). Zhang (ibid.) concludes that exposing the students to the more complex structure viz. the passive, enabled the critical aspect to be discerned in a more powerful way.

In a study by Chik and Lo in Lo (2012), on learning personal pronouns, the meaning of individual words changed whether they were seen in isolation (as single words) or whether they were part of a sentence. The true meaning of the word could not be discerned until the word was seen to be part of a whole. (Lo, 2012, p.58). In some LrSs carried out in a Swedish context (Holmqvist & Molnár, 2006), the results point to that a joint focus on form and meaning leads to improved learning outcomes. Selin (2014), showed that the use of strategic competence can be taught, supporting the claim that explicit teaching of language competencies has a positive effect on student learning outcomes. Similar support for explicit teaching can be found in a LrS on Chinese characters carried out by Lo (2012). The findings point to the positive effects on learning of simultaneously pointing out the critical aspects and of being explicit. In a study by Quible (2008), two groups of students were compared when receiving instruction on grammar concepts. The findings revealed that the treatment group who had received instruction with strategy-based materials performed significantly better than the students in the control group who received rule-based materials. Also Lo (2012) describes a LrS about learning strategies⁷ to guess the meaning of new words in English. After the research lesson the students were able to answer all of the questions correctly because they had used the strategies learned during the lesson.

2.6 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION AND RELEVANCE FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Research suggests that explicit instruction of grammar concepts gives a positive effect on learning outcomes (Norris & Ortega, 2000), but that

⁷ LrS VL036 from the VITAL project, described in Lo, (2012, pp. 89-90).

materials should be less based on rules and prescriptive grammars and more on giving students opportunities to work with materials that are based on strategies (Lo, 2012, p.89-90; Quible, 2008).

The importance of explicitly paying attention to language items is extensively researched (cf Schmidt's noticing hypothesis, 1995, 2001, 2010). However, in a LrS described by Lo (2012),⁸ it was found that mentioning and drawing attention to a concept in a general sense does not necessarily mean that students will learn what is intended. According to Lo (ibid.), what is needed is a deliberate manipulation of the content matter by means of patterns of variation, in order for the critical aspects to be discerned and understood by the students. In other words, raising the students' awareness of concepts is important, but it must be done in a purposeful way with specifically designed tasks and activities. Language awareness does not happen by itself – it needs help.

Previous LrSs appear to give support to a joint focus on form and meaning when learning grammatical concepts, and also to treating the object of learning as a whole (Holmqvist & Molnár, 2006; Lo, 2012).

The LrSs outlined above, show that there are interesting findings that may contribute to increased student learning of grammatical concepts. However, there is a lack of empirical research on the PROG. I have not yet found a study that specifically focuses on teaching and learning the PROG, *irrespective of a specific tense*, in English as a foreign language. The PROG is an important part of the English tense/aspect system, but it is very difficult to master (Dahl 1985; Swan & Smith, 2001). Therefore, I suggest that this study is needed and that it fills a gap in the research.

⁸ LrS VL042 from the VITAL project, described in Lo, (2012, pp. 74-75).

CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Before researchers design their studies, certain preliminary considerations must be addressed. Decisions include which assumptions the researcher has about the world - his *worldview*. Creswell (2009, p.6) uses this expression to signify “a basic set of beliefs that guide action”. Other ways of defining these philosophical assumptions include the terms epistemology and ontology.⁹ According to Creswell (2009) these philosophical worldviews, although often hidden in research, are of

⁹ Epistemology is the theory of knowledge which addresses questions about the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is acquired. Ontology is the study of the nature of being, existence or reality. It deals with questions concerning what entities exist and how they can be categorized (Thomassen, 2007).

great influence and should be made explicit to help explain why a certain approach and method has been chosen.

The main factor that the researcher must consider when deciding which approach and design to choose is the research problem itself. Certain types of problems call for specific approaches. For example, if the research problem calls for the test of a theory, or demands the identification of factors that may influence or predict an outcome, then a positivist-inspired quantitative approach is preferable (Creswell, 2009). If a research problem consists of understanding or exploring the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem or concept, then a hermeneutic-inspired qualitative design is appropriate (*ibid.*). This would fit in with the aims of the present study.

Shavelson and Towne (2002) argue that the principles for conducting scientific research in education are the same as those in other sciences, be it social or natural sciences. However, the realization of these principles is dependent on the specific traditions and standards that have emerged historically in a particular field (Burr, 1995). This means that research on different objects of investigation will call for different designs, methods, analyses and interpretations (*ibid.*).

The theoretical framework of this thesis is Variation Theory, which has its roots in phenomenography (Runesson & Gustavsson, 2012).

3.1 VARIATION THEORY

If traditionally the focus of phenomenographical research has been on describing variation in conceptions of phenomena (see Marton & Pong, 2005), known as the ‘first face of variation’, a more recent interpretation of phenomenography, the ‘second face of variation’, is the attempt to de-

scribe the nature of ways of experiencing a phenomenon and the differences between these ways of experiencing (Pang, 2003). This later development in phenomenography is the theoretical framework known as Variation Theory (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004). The point of departure of Variation Theory is the view that learning means being able to simultaneously discern a number of different aspects of whatever is to be learned (Marton, 2015). People experience phenomena in different ways because they discern different aspects. Thus, our conceptions and understanding of phenomena are a function of which aspects we have been able to discern (ibid.). Obviously, the aim of any learning situation is for learners to learn. However, if by learning we mean the learning of something *specific and in a certain way*, then the learners must be able to discern those certain aspects that will enable them to experience the phenomenon *in the way intended*. A necessary condition for discernment of these special or crucial aspects is that the learner experiences a variation within the aspects (Marton, 2015).

Variation Theory says nothing about specifics, such as what must be understood, or what capabilities or aspects that should be highlighted to understand a specific subject content. Instead the theory can be seen as a guiding principle for how to arrange for learning and a tool for educational design (Runesson & Kullberg, 2010).

3.1.1 CENTRAL CONCEPTS

There are a number of concepts associated with Variation Theory which are relevant for the current study.

The object of learning

An *object of learning* in variation-theoretical terms is a distinct and specific ability, competence, or knowledge, which the teacher wants the student to learn and develop an understanding of (Marton, 2015). Whatever is

meant to be learned in a learning situation is the *intended* object of learning. This is the object of learning from the teacher's point of view (Marton, Runesson & Tsui, 2004). In this study, the intended object of learning is connected to the planning phase. How this is then realized in the classroom, as seen from the researcher's (or teacher's, or teacher researcher's) perspective, is the *enacted* object of learning, in this study, what is studied on the video-recordings of the lesson. The limitations of the enacted object of learning provide the limitations to what is possible to learn in that specific learning situation (ibid.). There is no causal relationship between intention and enactment. Learners may or may not learn what was intended to be learned, or may even learn something else, not at all intended by the teacher. However, if the learner is not exposed to the *possibilities* of learning, then learning can and will not take place: "No conditions of learning ever *cause* learning. They only make it possible for learners to learn certain things" (ibid., p.22). The outcome of learning, as seen from the learner's perspective, is the *lived* object of learning, which means what the learners actually learn (ibid.). This can be observed in this study through the pre- and post-lesson assessments.

Critical aspects

If it is assumed that learning is the simultaneous awareness of certain important aspects of what is to be learned, and if it is also assumed that a phenomenon is experienced in different ways depending on which aspects are discerned, then the consequence for the learning situation is that it must be arranged in such a way that makes it *possible* for these critical aspects to be presented and discerned (Runesson & Kullberg, 2010). The arrangements of the learning situation, however, have nothing to do with general conditions for learning, such as what teaching materials are used, how the students are seated, lighting or other practical considerations; rather, what is meant is that the object of learning and its critical aspects must be made the focus of the learning situation (Marton & Tsui, 2004).

But we are not talking about necessary conditions for all kinds of learning, or about necessary conditions for specific groups of learners, but about necessary conditions for the learning of specific objects of learning. (ibid., p.231)

Thus, the identification by the teacher of the critical aspects is of vital importance as they specify and define the boundaries of what is actually made possible to learn. This raises two important questions that the teacher should be able to answer in order to design the instruction: firstly, how are critical aspects found? And, secondly, how can aspects be discerned by the students? It is not sufficient to merely point out the critical aspects to the learners (Marton, Runesson & Tsui, 2004). Marton and Booth (ibid.) refute the Platonic division of reality by asserting that the inner, subjective world experienced by a person and the outer, 'real' world are not separate. On the contrary, they are inextricably connected to each other. Critical aspects are therefore relational, meaning they must be experienced and discerned by the learners themselves. The consequence of this cannot be underestimated – critical aspects cannot only be found in an analysis of the subject matter from a first order perspective (such as in grammar books or teaching handbooks and materials). They are found empirically, in the classroom, by studying the qualitatively different ways a group of learners understands the specific object of learning, from a second order perspective (Holmqvist, 2006; Lo, 2012; Zhang, 2009). The teacher's role and responsibility is to direct the learners' awareness towards these critical aspects so that they learn what the teacher intends for them to learn (Marton *et al.*, 2004).

Simultaneity and awareness

In order to discern (or 'see' or 'perceive') a particular aspect, a variation in that aspect must be experienced (Marton, 2015). For example, in order to experience a child's temperature as alarmingly high, the parent must have encountered other instances of human temperature which were

within a normal range. If these other temperatures have never been experienced, felt or perceived, there is no point of reference as regards the high temperature. These previous experiences, encountered at different points in time, are called into play at the same time as the present experience. As the parent puts their hand against the child's forehead, the temperature is simultaneously felt in the present moment together with the memory of other variations in temperature awareness. This simultaneous awareness of the past and the present is called *diachronic* simultaneity (Marton, Runesson & Tsui, 2004).

The ability to see or discern different co-existing aspects of the same phenomenon is called *synchronic* simultaneity (ibid.). These aspects can be related to each other in different ways, either as an *aspect-aspect relationship*, meaning two aspects of a phenomenon, or as a *part-whole relationship*. This is where different parts of a phenomenon are discerned in relation to the wholeness of the phenomenon and its delimitation within a context (ibid.).

Both diachronic and synchronic simultaneity are functions of discernment. However, diachronic simultaneity is a prerequisite for synchronic simultaneity because it is impossible to discern two or more aspects of the same thing together without having discerned variation in each aspect separately. This presupposes the concept of diachronic simultaneity (ibid.).

Patterns of variation

Learning as defined by Marton *et al.* (2004, p.5), is “the process of becoming capable of doing something ... as a result of having had certain experiences”. These capabilities can include new knowledge, understanding,

skills, behaviour or values. In order to develop such capabilities, it is necessary that learners in a learning situation experience *patterns of variation* that enable the critical aspects to be discerned (ibid., 2004).

These principles can be used to design instruction and help to make the critical aspects visible. The theory does not say anything about what should vary or be invariant in every separate case or for every object of learning. Variation Theory takes the position that we learn by seeing differences, that is to say, contrast, and not sameness. This differs from more common ways of seeing, where commonality is the basis for discernment (Marton, 2015)

These patterns of variation can be divided into three different categories (Marton, 2015). The first category is contrast, which means comparing the aspect with something that it is not. For example, if we are interested in the concept of the colour green, then in order to be able to discern ‘greenness’, the learner must be confronted with not only a green ball, for example, but also with a blue ball and a red ball. The aspect which is in focus is that which will be discerned. However, to fully understand ‘greenness’, it is also necessary to experience the varying appearances of ‘greenness’, for example, a green ball, a green cucumber or a green pencil.

Contrast comes before similarity. For example, to understand what the present tense is, you need to experience another tense such as the past tense. Let us take the contrast walk – walked. ”Walk” is only one instance of the present tense, so to be able to understand that other verbs can be in the present, viz. to generalize the concept), you must be exposed to other verbs in the present tense and with other conjugations (sing/sings). Contrast comes therefore before generalisation, which happens by means of separation from the instance.

The last category is fusion where all the critical aspects are focused upon simultaneously (Marton *et al.*, 2004). Fusion means that we can differentiate the present tense from other tense, and its conjugations (walk, walks, walked, has walked) and other verbs. The authors maintain that fusion “... analytically separated but simultaneously experienced ...” (ibid., p.16), is a powerful and efficient way of equipping learners with the ability to adapt to different conditions. Bowden and Marton (1998, p.8) express similar sentiments: “Thanks to having experienced a varying past we become capable of handling a varying future”.

3.2 LEARNING STUDY AS ARRANGEMENT FOR CLASSROOM RESEARCH

The research method employed in this thesis is the collaborative, school-based, professional development and research model known as Learning Study (LrS¹⁰). The choice of method is relevant in relation to the research question because LrS affords the tools to deepen our knowledge of the nature and constitution of the object of learning (Marton, 2015; Marton & Runesson, 2015; Wood, 2015). It involves data production, is theoretically informed, open for scrutiny and critique by disclosing data and method. The method aims “to generate data that enable us to establish the relationship between teaching and learning” (Pang & Lo, 2011). This is of crucial importance if I want to be able to say something about the relationship between what the students should learn, how this subject matter is presented and made available to the students, and what is actually learned.

¹⁰ The letters LS are frequently used to signify Lesson Study, but to my knowledge, there is no established abbreviation for Learning Study. Therefore, to avoid confusion between these two models, I have chosen to use the letters LrS to signify Learning Study in this thesis.

Carlgren (2005) describes LrS as requiring co-dependency between teachers and researchers. It is multifaceted inasmuch as it aims at generating knowledge that is both general and specific, and it deals with epistemic issues as well as concrete subject-content issues (ibid.). The conceptual framework of this research approach consists of two key elements. Firstly, the underpinning of the Variation Theory of learning and, secondly, the focus on the object of learning (Pang & Lo, 2011). Whereas LrS was initially an arrangement for testing Variation Theory, more recently a development has taken place where the focus is designing units of teaching to enhance specific objects of learning (Carlgren, 2012). Knowledge goals and objectives are formulated in the school curriculum, but objects of learning are not explicitly formulated as such. The gap between the knowledge goals and how teaching should be arranged, as well as which tasks and activities to be included can be filled by the implementation of LrS (Runesson, 2011). The focus is not on the lesson as such but rather on the students' learning and how teaching can be improved to allow for the *possibility* of learning. Both the (teacher) researcher and the teacher team share this knowledge object (ibid.).

According to Runesson and Gustafsson (2012), LrS has knowledge generating properties, meaning it is able to contribute to general learning research and subject-specific research. The results of a LrS can be communicated to others, thus making the results transformable to new contexts (ibid.). This means that rather than being an ad hoc short-term project, LrS provides a possible model for sustainable practice within and across schools. The knowledge products generated by LrS are the critical aspects related to a specific learning object and they are "... sharable and dynamic, and can therefore be changed and developed" (ibid.). Teachers therefore co-produce knowledge that could be directly applicable in the classroom. This knowledge, gained in the field, is then spread further

among teachers to other classes and teams and becomes a way of thinking and an approach (Kullberg, 2010).

LrS has been described as “... a fusion between lesson study and design experiment” (Holmqvist, 2011, p.497). Its origins are therefore an amalgam of different influences, tracing back both to the Japanese teaching improvement process known as Lesson Study (LS) and also to design experiment (DE), a practice-based research method for testing and improving teaching and education (Gustavsson & Wernberg, 2006). The point of departure in LS is the assertion that the most effective way to improve student learning is to concentrate on a lesson or sequence of lessons designed, implemented and evaluated by a team of teachers (Fernandez, Cannon & Chokshi, 2003; Lewis, 2000; Marton, 2003). However, in LrS the focus is not on the lesson as such, but LrS does share many similarities with LS. Both models are school-based, collaborative and systematic processes and they both employ cyclic, iterative processes of observation, analysis and reflection which build the basis for further lesson revision and development (Runesson & Gustafsson, 2012; Kullberg, 2010). Learning goals, which are set based on teachers’ experiences, are tested in a natural setting directly in the classroom (Lewis, 2000). LS also shares with LrS a desire to transform teachers from knowledge consumers to knowledge producers (Carlgren, 2012; Hiebert et al, 2002, Runesson, 2011). This enables the professional knowledge base to expand and reach greater relevance by disseminating and sharing knowledge among teachers, making results public and well documented, and enabling teachers to move away from a situation where the interpretation of academic disciplines take precedence over the interpretation of teachers themselves (Runesson, 2011).

One challenge that faces LS is the lack of “critical elements that allow the approach to work, such as the development of tasks that reveal student

thinking and discussion protocols that maintain teachers' focus on student learning" (Pang & Lo, 2011, p.3). LrS, however, addresses these challenges and has significant features that add appreciable value (ibid.). While LS has been described as an exploration of *teaching* (Lewis, 2000, Kullberg, 2010), LrS is an exploration of student *learning*, most often subject-specific (Kullberg, 2010), but also a study of the object of learning and what is necessary to discern to develop a certain knowledge or capability (Marton, 2015)

However, what particularly distinguishes LrS from LS is the explicit use of a theory of learning (Elliott, 2012; Marton, 2005). Elliott (2012) contends that the use of a theory increases the quality of teacher discussion and analysis. He also discusses the possibility of using different theories, but, as yet, the theory most closely connected with LrS has been the Variation Theory of learning and its accompanying concepts - the object of learning, critical aspects and the particular emphasis on subject content (Marton, 2005).

Design-based approaches to educational research, also known as design experiment (DE) or design and development research, are conducted to generate, develop and test theories (Cobb *et al*, 2003). DE was developed in the 1990s as an alternative method of undertaking educational research (Gustavsson & Wernberg, 2006). DE aims at obtaining knowledge of critical variables through a systematic approach of intervention and observation (Cobb *et al*, 2003; Marton, 2003). It is researcher-driven (Cobb *et al*, 2003) as opposed to exclusively teacher-driven as in LS (Lewis, 2000) and optionally researcher- and teacher-driven as in LrS (Pang & Marton, 2003). DE situates the study of learning in real-life classrooms as opposed to earlier educational research in laboratory settings. However, design researchers admit that the move into the classroom involves "an increasing trade-off between experimental control and richness and reality" (Brown, 1992, p.152). DE has its point of departure in a theory of learning like

LrS, however, DE is carried out on a much larger scale than both LS and LrS, involving longitudinal study and control groups (Cobb et al, 2003) which may explain Nuthall's (2004) criticism that it is difficult to pinpoint the relationship between student learning and parts of the design.

Accordingly, it can be argued that LrS as a research method is suitable for this study because (a) it allows the researcher and teachers to acquire relevant knowledge about the relationship between teaching and learning (Pang & Lo, 2011), (b) a clearly delimited object of learning can be studied and analysed (Marton & Runesson, 2015), (c) the focus is on designing units of teaching to enhance specific objects of learning (Carlgren, 2012), and (d) the iterative design allows for assumptions about what is critical for learning to be tried and tested in the classroom.

3.2.1 LEARNING STUDY PROCEDURE

The actual implementation of an LrS is not confined to one single fixed procedure or method (Pang & Lo, 2011, p6). Two types of LrS are distinguished. In one type, reminiscent of design experiment, the study is conducted with experimental and comparison groups consistent with quasi-experimental studies. The other type has its point of departure in the iterative cyclic model reminiscent of LS (*ibid.*) and it is this latter type of model that has been chosen for this study (see also Adamson and Walker, 2011; Holmqvist 2006, 2011; Pang and Lo, 2011).

The teacher researcher and a group of teachers who teach the same subject, draw on their experience and agree upon an object of learning, in other words, what they want a specific group of students to learn (Runesson & Gustafsson, 2012; Marton & Runesson, 2015). They plan a lesson with the overarching perspective of Variation Theory. To get a first indication of how the students perceive the object of learning, interviews may be carried out with students of the same age as those taking part in the

LrS. A pre-test or pre-assessment is administered, not only as a point of reference to be compared with later results, but also to find out what the students have and have not already discerned (that is, already know) about the object of learning (Lo, 2012). A delimitation of the object of learning may be required, based on what the students experience as difficult. In this way students who may have valuable insights are involved in the process. The interviews and pre-assessments, together with the teachers' combined knowledge and experience, form the basis for a discussion of what the students need to discern in order to develop the specific knowledge or capability. These potential critical aspects are embedded in a lesson design informed by Variation Theory. The lesson is video-recorded and post-assessment of the students is administered. The lesson recordings, transcripts and the post-assessments are analysed by the teachers, using Variation Theory as the analytical tool. On the basis of the analyses, new knowledge is gained about the nature of the object of learning and what was made possible to learn during the lesson. In the light of this, the lesson design is revised and fine-tuned.

During the lesson planning, the teachers and researcher must be attentive to the different types of variation that students experience in regard to the object of learning. These different ways of seeing things should not be regarded as difficulties but rather embraced as opportunities to enhance learning (Pang & Lo, 2011). Other things to consider are the varying ways in which teachers deal with the object of learning based on their previous experiences. When these issues have been raised, teachers are able to determine the critical aspects of the object of learning. When the critical aspects are discerned by the students, it will enable them to experience the object of learning in a new, more powerful way and thus learning will take place (ibid.).

The process described above constitutes one LrS *cycle*. Further cycles are implemented with new groups of students, resulting in adjustments, and

the specifying and potential discovery of more critical aspects (Mårtensson, 2015) which affect the students' opportunities to learn (Pang & Lo, 2011).

CHAPTER 4 THE RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN

The aim of the thesis at hand is to create knowledge about what is critical for students to learn in order to be able to use the progressive aspect (PROG) in an accurate (syntactical) and meaningful (semantic) way. The research method chosen is Learning Study (LrS), the design of which follows the description as outlined in the previous chapter. This chapter describes the specific procedures and participants of the study as well as the production and analysis of the empirical data on which the results of the thesis are based.

4.1 PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

The participants in the LrS consisted of myself as teacher researcher, and three qualified and experienced secondary school English teachers and six

classes (109 students in total) from the 6th grade of a lower secondary school in Sweden. Even though all the English teachers at that school were interested and willing to take part, it was decided that it was more practical to limit the participant teachers to three. This meant that there was not so much disruption to the teachers' existing timetables and the other teachers could act as back-up for the participant teachers if they needed someone to take their regular lessons when they were occupied with the research lessons. The three participating teachers including myself as teacher researcher are referred to in the thesis as "the research team" since, for the duration of the LrS, the teachers were also part of the research process.¹¹

The research team decided that the 6th grade was the ideal grade to participate in the study, since we had observed that this group of students were having difficulties with the PROG.

The students who took part in the first three cycles in the spring of 2013 had already completed more than half of the 6th grade. Those taking part during the autumn of 2013 belonged to a new 6th grade that were on average 6 months younger than the students in the first three cycles. However, because of the research timeframe we could not wait until they were the same age as the first group of 6th graders (cycles 1-3) and so we were obliged to start in the autumn. During these last three cycles (cycles 4-6) we were not able to detect any noticeable differences between the two samples of students as regards ability, types of answers, interaction in the classroom, willingness to take part and respond etc. Even if the 4th lesson was marked by interruptions (including an unannounced fire drill) and was generally uneasy, the results of cycles 5 and 6 showed the biggest improvements in student learning, (meaning difference in results from

¹¹ A more developed discussion of my role during the LrS, can be found in section 6.2.7.

before and after the research lessons) so it is difficult to judge if and in what way the age of the second group of students affected the outcome of the LrS.

4.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In LrS the research focus is if, how, and to what extent the learning of specific subject content has been facilitated and enhanced. This means that, although the research object is the learning of *something*, it is always and inevitably *someone* that does the learning. Research involving people requires ethical rules and regulations to protect the participants from exploitation and to safeguard their integrity. In Sweden, researchers are obliged to follow the guidelines for good research practice which have been laid down by the Swedish Research Council (2011). As noted in these guidelines, much of what is agreed upon as good ethical research is rooted in “general life rules” (ibid. p.12). This includes, for example, telling the truth, not stealing results, not harming people, and openly accounting for methods and results.

As regards this specific study, both teachers and students have been filmed and sound recorded. Some students have also been interviewed and all participating students have written pre- and post-lesson assessments from which excerpts have been taken. In addition, excerpts of student responses during the lessons have been cited in the thesis. This poses ethical questions of consent and confidentiality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, it was important that everyone involved in this study took part voluntarily and were informed both orally and in writing about the purpose and conditions of the LrS. Special care was taken to inform the students’ guardians and written consent (see appendix 2) was requested and received for each participating student in accordance with the ethical guidelines outlined by the Swedish Research Council (2011). It was also made clear that participation could be terminated at any time and

for whatever reason. Adhering to the demand for confidentiality, neither name nor school is mentioned in this thesis and where excerpts are given, it is only apparent if it is a student or a teacher who speaks. It is of no importance which particular student or teacher said what, but rather whether the utterance is relevant in relation to answering the research question.

It is unavoidable that the teachers in this study are able to identify both themselves and each other from the recordings. They know which teacher took which class and therefore they are able to identify excerpts and quotations that they have uttered. The analysis has also referred to specific teachers. These issues were discussed by the research team but the teachers agreed to these conditions since all the planning, teaching, and analysis was done collaboratively, it took the focus off the individual. They considered that the focus of the study was on the object of learning and not on them as teachers.

4.3 DATA GENERATION

The first empirical material was generated in February 2012 in connection with the survey interviews. These six interviews were sound recorded and transcribed verbatim to form six written transcripts corresponding to each of the participating students. Between January 2013 and November 2013 six LrS cycles were carried out. Each cycle consisted of (1) pre-lesson assessments of every student in each class, (2) research team planning meetings, (3) one research lesson per cycle, (4) post-lesson assessments and (5) research team evaluation meetings. The first three cycles took place during the spring term of 2013 and the last three cycles took place during the autumn term of that same year. All of the research lessons were video recorded with two separate cameras; one main camera operated by

the teacher researcher, and a stationary camera as back-up. These recordings (but not the ones from the back-up camera) were transcribed verbatim to form six written transcripts, one for each research lesson.

The first research team planning meetings took place during the autumn of 2012, the term before the first cycle began, and the meetings continued each week throughout the course of the LrS, and for some weeks afterwards. The purpose of these meetings was to evaluate student pre- and post-lesson assessments, analyse, plan, revise and evaluate the lessons. In this way the participating teachers contributed with their experience and competence to become a part of the research process, even if the teacher researcher was the driving force behind the theoretical analyses and responsible for maintaining a scientific approach. By unveiling teachers' often tacit knowledge, the movement back and forth between scientific praxis and teacher praxis have enriched each other. Two of the three participating teachers took it in turns to teach the six research lessons.¹² My role during the lessons was primarily to film, observe and make observational field notes. However I took a more active role when I occasionally took part in some student group discussions. Within one to three days after each research lesson the class took the post-lesson assessment.

4.4 SURVEY INTERVIEWS – STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECT

When starting any LrS it is beneficial to begin by investigating the variation of conceptions to be found in the student group concerning the phenomenon or aspects of the phenomenon (Marton, 2003). Applied to this

¹² The intention was that all three teachers should participate in the actual teaching, but unforeseen circumstances meant that the third teacher could not take the lesson as planned. However, this teacher fully participated in the regular research meetings during cycles 1-3. This same teacher started new employment after the summer 2013, and was therefore unable to take part in cycles 4-6.

LrS, it meant gaining knowledge of how 6th grade students understand the PROG. Getting access to the different ways in which students understand a phenomenon provides the first point of departure towards defining the object of learning and the critical aspects, because it reveals not only what the students already have discerned of the phenomenon (what they already know), but, more importantly, what they have not yet discerned (what they have not yet understood). This provides valuable knowledge when planning the first cycle and gives clues as to how potential critical aspects that are necessary for learning can be formulated.

4.4.1 INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

Interviews were carried out by the teacher researcher in February 2012 with six students who would not be taking part in the LrS a year later, because by then - spring 2013 - they would be in the 7th grade. In order to select participating students an initial contact was established with the English teacher who taught these students and who would subsequently be one of the participating teachers in the forthcoming LrS. The English teacher picked out six students from across the 6th grade (at least one student from each of the four classes belonging to the 6th grade). The point of departure was to create a certain spread, as the aim was to capture the different ways of experiencing the PROG that represent this age group in this particular school. The teacher had taught these classes for a year and had good knowledge of their results from yearly diagnoses and general term examinations. The sample resulted in two girls and four boys. Based on the teacher's experience and judgment, these six students represented a wide range of competence in English.

The length of the interviews varied from fifteen minutes to twenty-five minutes. All interviews took place at the students' school and were conducted in a quiet and private setting, free from disruption. The interviews were recorded on a small mp3 player, which meant that the participants

were not distracted by cumbersome equipment. The students were briefly informed again about the study, however, information regarding the research question was omitted so as to allow the students to approach the phenomenon, the progressive aspect, spontaneously.

The interviews were of a semi-structured character. Each student was asked the same initial questions guaranteeing the same opening scenario and the same planned inputs (Bowden, 2005). Here are examples of the opening questions posed:

- when you look at those two sentences, what do you see?
- why do the two sentences look different; does that mean anything?
- when and in what circumstance would you use (write or say) the first/second sentence?

After these initial questions, the questions were adapted according to each student's reply, however remaining focused within the research area. The students can therefore be said to have had some influence on the course and outcome of the interviews in line with McCracken (1988, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p113) who refers to the "laws of non-direction" emphasizing the need to let the participant describe his or her own experience without being led too much by the interviewer.

First, a list of six pairs of sentences¹³ was presented to the students. The sentences within each pair were identical to each other except that the first sentence contained the progressive aspect of the verb, and the second sentence contained the simple aspect. For example "Susan and Carl are living in Stockholm" was contrasted with "Susan and Carl live in Stockholm". The reason for this was that the researcher wanted to isolate

¹³ Appendix 3

the concept of grammatical aspect by contrasting simple aspect with progressive aspect. If the students expressed different conceptions after the lessons when compared to before, then it was interpreted by the research team that changes in conceptions were attributable and reflected the instruction they had received. Furthermore, each pair of sentences contained a different verb tense. A further list consisting of 21 different sentences¹⁴ was shown to the students. These sentences had a variety of tenses but all contained the progressive aspect.

Despite the same initial questions, the students showed a large variety of answers, corresponding to their own individual experiences and perception of reality. As each interview progressed, the students began to anticipate the line of questioning, so the researcher did not have to ask for clarification or explanation as much as at the beginning of the interviews. The students appeared to become more comfortable with the situation when they were assured that that this was not a test situation and that they should answer freely even if they were unsure.

4.4.2 HOW THE SURVEY INTERVIEWS WERE ANALYSED

The analysis process began with the verbatim transcribing of all six recorded interviews by the teacher researcher.¹⁵ This formed the survey's empirical material together with the interview recordings. The next stage involved a repeated, thorough reading of the material in order to get at

¹⁴ Appendix 4

¹⁵ As the language of the students is Swedish, and the thesis is written in English, all excerpts featured in this thesis have been translated into English in order to be understood by the reader. The translation has been done solely by the teacher researcher. It is possible that some effects of this can be that small differences in language nuances are overlooked, or even given an incorrect meaning. However, the researcher has a good command of Swedish and it was not deemed a problem.

the meanings behind the words. As every transcript was read, conceptions, or rather, the meanings behind the conceptions were noted and sorted into categories. Heeding Bowden's advice that "each new reading of the transcripts brings new insights" (2005, p.29), continued analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in a more powerful understanding of the data. This procedure continued until all meaning-laden statements had been accounted for and categorised into groups signifying different ways of seeing and experiencing the PROG. The desire was to maximize *coherence within* categories whilst at the same time maximizing *differences between* the categories (ibid).

The following excerpt, from the first interview, can be used to exemplify how student utterances were interpreted by the researcher. It is an exchange from near the beginning of the interview where the student is asked to account for any perceived differences between the sentences "He was writing a letter" (past PROG) and "He wrote a letter" (simple past).

Excerpt 4.1. From student interview 1, (R) Researcher, (S) Student

- [1] R: Shall we look at the next ones? "He was writing a letter"
- [2] "He wrote a letter". What are you thinking? About the first
- [3] one?
- [4] S: *He wrote a letter (Swedish: Han skrev ett brev.)*
- [5] R: What's the difference?
- [6] S: "He **was**"
- [7] R: In what way are they different? If you translate sentence 2,
- [8] what would it be?
- [9] S: *He wrote a letter. (Swedish: Han skrev ett brev)*
- [10] R: And sentence 1? What about that one?
- [11] S: *He wrote a letter. (Swedish: Han skrev ett brev.)*
- [12] R: The same?
- [13] S: *Mm.*
- [14] R: Then why do you think there are two different ways to
- [15] ... you can write it in two ways? What are they trying to get
- [16] across?
- [17] S: *The present ... and the past ...*

The teacher researcher has the intention of getting the student to think about the difference in meaning between the simple aspect and the progressive aspect. The student in line 2 is asked to talk freely about the two sentences. In line 6, by emphasizing the word “was”, the student describes the difference between the sentences in terms of the *form*. The interviewer attempts to direct the student’s attention to any potential differences in *meaning* by asking the student to translate both sentences (lines 7, 8 and 10) and then (in lines 14 and 15) to reflect on whether there is a connection between the difference in form and any possible difference in meaning. The student at first says that despite the sentences looking different (a difference in form) they mean the same (line 12). However in line 17, the student goes on to say that the first sentence (in the PROG) signifies the present tense, and the second sentence (in the simple aspect), signifies the past tense. This excerpt can be seen to contain two conflicting conceptions of the PROG, namely (1) that the past PROG “was writing” and the simple past “wrote” mean the same thing (line 12). In other words, the past PROG is seen as another way of expressing the same tense and does not have any aspectual function and (2) the past PROG “was writing” signifies present tense and the simple past “wrote” signifies past tense (line 17). However, what both of these utterances have in common is that they both conceive of the PROG as having something to do with *marking tense*. Consequently, these two conceptions have been categorised as “experiencing the PROG as a marker for tense”. All of the utterances have been treated in a similar fashion so that the meanings behind them have been uncovered, and have resulted in three categories, as described in the following section.

Some conceptions were represented by all of the six students whilst some were only represented by one or two. However, no consideration was taken as to which individual had said what, or if the same student expressed conflicting conceptions i.e. expressed both limited and more

powerful understandings of the PROG. It is the variation of conceptions that is interesting, not how often or how many students hold these conceptions (Marton, 2015).

These categories were analysed as regards to differences or similarities between them and subsequently put together to form new and fewer categories of description. The final stage was the analysis of the structured relation between the different categories of description. These categories were then compared with each other and with the phenomenon in question to form a hierarchical structure as can be seen below (table 4.1).

4.4.3 WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECT

After analysis and re-analysis of the students’ utterances a structure emerged consisting of three distinct but related categories.

Table 4.1. The categories of description over the students’ ways of experiencing the progressive aspect

	Ways of understanding
Category A	The PROG as marker for <i>discourse</i>
Category B	The PROG as marker for <i>tense</i>
Category C	The PROG as marker for <i>ongoingness</i>

The first category (A) holds the least developed conceptions of the PROG. This way of experiencing contains conceptions that describe the PROG as connected to discourse (and not to aspect). Types of conceptions were for example, that the PROG is used when writing English as opposed to spoken English (simple aspect). Other conceptions were that older people use the PROG and younger people the simple aspect. Yet another conception held by the students was that the PROG is more formal than the

simple aspect. These conceptions can be grammatically categorized as *register*, *mode* and *tenor* respectively (see Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p.24) and were gathered together and interpreted as expressing a way of experiencing the PROG as a marker for discourse. Thus, because these conceptions in category A are the furthest removed from experiencing the PROG as a linguistic means of expressing grammatical aspect, this category contains the most limited and least developed ways of experiencing the PROG.

Category B contains conceptions that equate the PROG with expressing tense, as described in section 5.5.2. The most developed way of experiencing the PROG can be found in category C. Here we find conceptions that describe the PROG in terms of its aspectual constituent parts e.g. that the PROG expresses a sense of incompleteness, temporariness, and open-endedness etc.

These categories have contributed to the research team's understanding of how the students could comprehend the PROG. The knowledge gained has been utilised in two ways: firstly, it can be seen as instrumental in initially limiting and defining the object of learning for the LrS. The ways the students do and do not see the PROG also give clues as to what should be brought to the fore in instruction, and, by extension, what presumptive critical aspects may be. Secondly, the ways of experiencing the PROG as expressed in table 4.1 have been used as a template for evaluating the pre- and post-lesson assessments. The reasoning behind this is that the different ways of understanding the PROG are hierarchically related to each other, from less to more powerful ways of experiencing the PROG. Thus the aim of instruction must be to help students reach the most powerful conceptions of the PROG, as manifested in category C. Therefore, when evaluating student responses on the pre- and post-lesson assessments, it was considered legitimate to use these categories as a measurement for evaluating the quality of these responses.

4.5 PRE- AND POST-LESSON ASSESSMENTS

The assessments had both a summative and formative purpose. They were used summatively to evaluate if there had been a positive development in the students' learning as a result of the research lessons. These results could then be compared with the results from before the lesson and as such, conclusions could be drawn as to the efficacy of the teaching in terms of if, and in what way, the CAs were made visible in instruction. There could also be other CAs which were not expected, that is to say, new CAs can be found in this way and can be refined and specified. The assessments were also used formatively inasmuch as the results influenced the design and content of the following lessons. The ways in which the students had problems in understanding the PROG gave good indications as to how the lesson design could be fine-tuned to reach better results.

A trial test of the assessment was carried out with 8 students to test if the questions were easy for students of that age to understand, and also to find out the validity of the questions; in other words, if we would be getting the information we were looking for. The research team's starting point was the meaning we attributed to this object of learning and the aspects we presumed to be critical at the start of the LrS. The meaning of the initial object was defined as being able to use the present PROG in an accurate and meaningful way. This meant that the research team wanted to evaluate students' ability to handle the PROG both as regards the form, and also the meaning of the PROG. Each part of the assessment was related to making visible one or more of the presumptive critical aspects. In this way it was hoped that a relationship between the treatment of the critical aspects during the lesson and the post-lesson results could be established.

4.5.1 ASSESSMENT PART 1, SERIES OF PICTURES

The first part of the assessment was concerned with form, i.e. being able to use the PROG in a morphosyntactically accurate way. It consisted of a stencil¹⁶ with a series of three pictures with the following instructions:

“What is happening in every picture? Describe using a complete sentence. Write in English!”¹⁷

The purpose was to trigger the students into producing the PROG to see if and how they used the PROG in an appropriate way and if they knew the appropriate form, that is, that the suffix *-ing* is attached to the main verb, and that there must be an auxiliary verb with subject/verb agreement. The research team hoped that getting the students to respond spontaneously, without any prompts as to which pronoun, tense, aspect or verb to use, would give a good overall picture of their present knowledge of the object of learning as regards the form.

4.5.2 ASSESSMENT PART 2, SERIES OF SENTENCES

Based on experience of teaching the PROG, and supported by the results of the survey interviews, the research team’s assumptions were that students either do not attribute any aspectual meaning to, or they confuse the meaning attributed to simple aspect and the progressive aspect. We wanted the second part of the assessment to contribute information about how the students’ level of understanding concerning knowledge of the meaning of the PROG might have developed from before the research lessons to after the lessons.

¹⁶ Appendix 5

¹⁷ In Swedish: ”Vad händer i varje bild? Berätta med en hel mening! Skriv på engelska!”

The assessment part 2 consisted of another stencil¹⁸ with three pairs of sentences with the same questions and instructions to each pair:

“Is there a difference in meaning between these two sentences?
Yes? No?”

What does sentence 1 mean? What does sentence 2 mean?

When would you use one or the other sentence? Motivate your answer. Explain how you think. Write in Swedish!”

The purpose of these questions was to ascertain if, and in what ways the students were able to see a difference in meaning between the simple aspect and the PROG. Another purpose was to see if the students could differentiate between some specific meanings of the PROG. The first part of the assessment, the picture stencils, were collected before the sentence stencils were handed out because we did not want the students to read the sentences on the second stencil, and then have the possibility to go back and change their un-reflected answers on the first stencil.

The principles for analysing the assessments can be found in section 4.8.1.

4.6 LESSON DESIGN

The lesson design for all six cycles was structured around principles from Variation Theory. The instruction was planned in order to make visible the critical aspects that were connected with the object of learning. This meant that as the critical aspects were refined throughout the LrS, the lesson design was necessarily modified to reflect this. Although a strict focus was maintained on the object of learning, there was continuous interaction between the teacher(s) and the students. Attention was also given to the results of the interviews and the assessments and linguistic

¹⁸ Appendix 6

research influenced, for example, choices of some specific examples and verbs.

The lesson design for cycle 1 is based on the aspects that were presumed to be critical in relation to the initial object of learning, the presumptive critical aspects (PCAs).

In this section, there is a general description in table form of the main features of the instruction design for every cycle. However, revisions and refinement in lesson design are described, analysed and accounted for in more detail in the following chapter.

Table 4.2. The lesson design for cycle1

	Learning activities
Task 1	Picture of school children working. Task (whole class) is to describe the picture orally.
Task 2	Written text with 10 sentences. Task (in pairs) is to underline all verbs. Mixture of present simple and present PROG. (appendix 7)
Task 3	Example sentence in present PROG on whiteboard. Task (whole class) is to discern the form.
Task 4	Contrasting sentences on whiteboard. Task (first individually then whole class) is to discern a difference in meaning.
Task 5	Same written text as task 2. Task (whole class discussion) is for students to explain why the PROG is appropriate or not.
Task 6	Same picture as task 1. Task (individual and in pairs) is to make up own appropriate sentences using the present PROG.
Task 7	Series of pictures on youtube. Task (whole class) is to orally produce appropriate sentences in the present PROG that describe each picture.

As the object of learning and the PCAs were modified to take into account the results of the post-lesson assessment for lesson 1 and the research team’s analysis of the first lesson, the design of lesson 2 was revised.¹⁹

Table 4.3. The lesson design for cycles 2-3, and for cycles 4-6.

	Learning activities Cycles 2-3		Learning activities Cycles 4-6
Task 1a	Contrasting pairs of sentences in <i>present</i> tense (simple and PROG aspect). Task (whole class discussion) is to discern the difference in meaning.	Task 1a	Contrasting pairs of sentences in <i>past</i> tense (simple and PROG aspect). Task (whole class discussion) is to discern the difference in meaning.
Task 1b	Written text (same as for task 2, cycle1) on whiteboard with missing verbs. Task (first in pairs then whole class) is to fill in appropriate missing verbs both in simple and PROG aspect.	Task 1b <i>(Now optional and moved to end of lesson)</i>	Written text (same as for task 2, cycle1) on whiteboard with missing verbs. Task (first in pairs then whole class) is to fill in appropriate missing verbs both in simple and PROG aspect.
Task 2	Contrasting pairs of sentences in <i>past</i> tense (simple and PROG aspect). Task (whole class discussion) is to discern the difference in meaning.	Task 2	Contrasting pairs of sentences in <i>present</i> tense (simple and PROG aspect). Task (whole class discussion) is to discern the difference in meaning.
Task 3	Series of 9 sentences with cognitively challenging content. Task (whole class discussion) is to motivate for the use of either the simple or the PROG aspect for every sentence.	Task 3	Series of 9 sentences with cognitively challenging content. Task (whole class discussion) is to motivate for the use of either the simple or the PROG aspect for every sentence.

¹⁹ An extensive discussion of the source and relationship between the PCAs and CAs is found in section 5.3.

4.7 OVERVIEW OF EMPIRICAL DATA

The table below summarizes the data which have formed the basis for the analysis and the findings of this study.

Table 4.4. Summary of the empirical data

	Inter-views (N)	Sound recordings (length of time)	Video recordings of lessons (length of time)	Written transcripts (number of pages)	Written student assessments (N for pre+post lesson)	Field notes
Survey	6	approx. 2 hours	-	44	-	-
Cycle 1	-	-	47 mins	13	16+16	Yes
Cycle 2	-	-	63 mins	10	18+18	Yes
Cycle 3	-	-	55 mins	14	15+15	Yes
Cycle 4	-	-	59 mins	12	19+19	Yes
Cycle 5	-	-	55 mins	10	21+21	Yes
Cycle 6	-	-	63 mins	16	20+20	Yes
Research team meetings	-	approx.10 hours	-	-	-	Yes
Total	6	approx.12 hours	approx. 6 hours	119	218	-

4.8 ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

4.8.1 HOW THE PRE- AND POST-LESSON WRITTEN ASSESSMENTS WERE ANALYSED

The series of pictures – analysing the form (syntax)

Student answers were evaluated by the research team as follows: to be considered correct each answer should consist of a whole sentence containing (1) an appropriate pronoun, (2) the auxiliary verb, and (3) the main verb + *-ing* (the PROG marker). Different subjects were accepted, for example, “the man”, “Bolt” or “he”. Similarly, a variation of main verbs was allowed as long as they were appropriate to the situation, for example, “running”, “sprinting” or “winning”. Before cycle 1, the research team considered it important that the auxiliary verb was conjugated²⁰ correctly. However, after lesson 1, the team reconsidered this as not being critical because in those cases where students had included the auxiliary, there were very few instances of incorrect subject/verb agreement. In other words, this was not something that the students had problems with and, consequently, this factor was no longer considered as an assessment criteria.

If both criteria were met (inclusion of auxiliary verb and insertion of *-ing* suffix to the main verb), then the student response was considered correct. The figures presented in the results chapter, section 6.1.2, represent the number of students who provided complete and morphosyntactically accurate responses for all three picture stimuli.

The series of sentences – analysing the meaning (semantics)

The second part of the assessment consisted of three pairs of sentences where the only difference within each pair was the aspect - either the simple aspect, (“they live in London”), or the progressive aspect (“they are living in London”). Here the students were qualitatively assessed by the research team as to how they described the difference in meaning between

²⁰ Subject/verb agreement e.g. He is running, and not *He am running

the two sentences in each pair. Evaluation of the quality of the students' responses was based on the three categories of different ways of experiencing the PROG (the results of the survey interviews). If different qualities of understanding were manifested in categories A, B and C (table 4.1), then it was considered legitimate to use these categories as a measurement for evaluating the quality of the student assessments as regards the meaning of the PROG. One of the reasons for administering pre- and post-lesson assessments was to be able to compare the level of understanding from before the research lesson with the level of understanding after the lesson. If a movement of students from groups A and B to group C is discernible, this would be interpreted as an increase in the number of students able to discern the PROG in a more developed and powerful way. This is also taken as support for the claim that specific ways of treating the object of learning during the lesson has implications for the possibility for students to learn. Particular attention was given to whether the students were able to discern the difference between tense and aspect and if they were able to distinguish some of the meanings of the progressive aspect, such as activity-in-progress, incompleteness, and temporariness.

4.8.2 HOW THE TREATMENT OF THE OBJECT OF LEARNING DURING THE LESSONS WAS ANALYSED

The analysis of the lesson cycles took place in two stages. The research team analysed the data generated during the implementation of the LrS. After the completion of the whole LrS, the teacher researcher continued and deepened the analysis of the data. Between cycles, the research team watched the video recordings and, keeping in mind the critical aspects, tried to see in what ways they were made visible to the students. Variation Theory has been used as an analytical tool to see in what way dimensions of variation were opened up and how they enabled conditions for learning the PROG in an accurate and meaningful way. The transcripts of the video recordings were analysed partly during the cycles and more thoroughly

after their completion. A qualitative text analysis could reveal meaning-laden student statements which further illuminated their conceptions of the progressive. These micro-analyses proved crucial in helping to determine inclusion or revision of the critical aspects in the following lesson.

4.9 THE DISPOSITION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this thesis are presented in the following chapter which consists of three sections. The first section, 5.1, presents the results of the pre- and post-lesson assessments as regards the form (syntax) of the PROG and also the meaning (semantics). The second section, 5.2, accounts for the empirical foundations upon which the identification of the critical aspects has been based. The main findings of this study, comprising the critical aspects, can be found in the last section, 5.3. This section describes what students need to learn to be able to use the PROG in a syntactically and semantically accurate way.

Four aspects have been found to be critical and each are presented in turn, with a description of how they emerged, how they were treated in the lesson design and instruction, and how the assessment results can be related to them. The last section, 5.3, also contains examples and excerpts from the LrS cycles. Tables, figures, and excerpts from the lessons are numbered sequentially within the chapter. In the excerpts, the initial T stands for teacher utterance and S for student utterance.

CHAPTER 5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 RESULTS OF THE PRE- AND POST-LESSON ASSESSMENTS

This section outlines the results and analysis of the pre- and post-lesson assessments (appendix 5 and 6). During the LrS, the results of these assessments were related to each other and to the lesson content in every cycle. In so doing, they have provided clues as to what the critical aspects (CAs) of the PROG might be and consequently how a design for enhanced learning might be constructed. The post-assessments have also given an indication if, in what way, and to what extent, the instruction had an effect on student learning. The relationship of the assessments to instruction and student learning will be discussed in more detail in section 5.3.

A small number of students completed the pre-lesson assessment but did not take part in the research lesson; in other cases a few students did not

do the pre-lesson assessments but took part in the research lesson. The data collected from these students (in total, no more than 5) have been excluded from the compilation of results. The results presented are for those students who attended the research lessons and also completed both the pre-lesson and the post-lesson assessments.

The students' responses have been analysed according to the procedures and criteria described in the previous chapter.²¹ The quality of students' knowledge of the object of learning has been judged according to the meaning with which it has been attributed. This has meant that both the meaning (semantics) and the form (syntax) of the PROG have been used as assessment parameters and the analysis is therefore divided into two sections. The first section (5.1.1) is an account and analysis of the results in regard to the students' ability to understand the meaning of the PROG. The next section (5.1.2) is about the students' ability to understand the form of the PROG.

5.1.1 THE MEANING OF THE PROGRESSIVE - ASSESSING STUDENTS' ABILITY TO USE THE PROGRESSIVE IN A SEMANTICALLY ACCURATE WAY

As described in the previous chapter, analysis of the survey interviews culminated in three ways that the PROG is experienced (or seen, understood) by the group of particular students. A brief reminder of the meaning of these categories is in order. Some students see the PROG in a powerful way as marker for ongoingness, (category C), meaning that they can discern the concept of ongoingness and generalize this to other tenses. Other students see the PROG as something that expresses tense itself, rather than something that expresses a specific grammatical aspect (as marker for tense, category B). Still other students see the PROG as a way

²¹ Chapter 4, section 4.8.1

to distinguish written from spoken English, formal from informal language, or that the PROG is used when communicating with adults but not with children. These are modes of discourse and represent the least powerful way of experiencing the PROG (as marker for discourse, category A).

Accordingly, the overarching aim of instruction during the LrS has been to create possibilities for the students to experience and understand the PROG in a more powerful way than before instruction. Successful teaching and learning can thus be measured by looking at how many students have progressed from less powerful ways of experiencing, to more powerful ways. In other words, the research team wanted as many students as possible to reach category C – to discern the PROG as a marker for ongoingness. These qualitatively different ways of experiencing the PROG have therefore been used, not only as a means to gain knowledge about how students experience the PROG, but also as an analytical tool for evaluating student responses regarding the meaning of the PROG.

Table 5.2 shows the results from the assessments administered before and after each of the research lessons in every cycle. The aim of this part of the assessment (the series of sentences, appendix 6) was to find out if, how, and to what extent the students had discerned the meaning of the PROG. As described in chapter 4, the students were required to consider three different pairs of identical sentences, where one sentence in each pair was in the simple aspect and the other was in the PROG. The students were encouraged to describe, explain and motivate for the difference between the sentences. As the LrS cycles progressed, the research team wanted the assessment to better mirror the changes that were taking place as regards the lesson design and the emergence of CAs, therefore an extra

pair of sentences in the past tense was added from cycle 4 onwards²². To facilitate comparison of results across all six cycles, the results of the additional question on the assessment sheet have not been incorporated into the other results. Instead, they stand separately in brackets in the result columns for cycles 4, 5 and 6. The categories on the left are the same as the categories for ways of understanding, namely: category A= the PROG is seen as a marker for discourse; category B = the PROG is seen as a marker for tense; and category C = the PROG is seen as a marker for ongoingness.

Table 5.1. Compilation of results from pre- and post-lesson assessments as regards the meaning of the PROG. The number of students represents those who provided responses corresponding to the description for each category. Numbers in brackets refer to the responses given to the extra question, added to the assessment from cycle 4 onwards.

		Cycle 1 N=16	Cy- cle 2 N=18	Cycle 3 N=15	Cycle 4 N=19	Cycle 5 N=21	Cycle 6 N=20
Category A	pre	5	10	7	5 (1)	5 (4)	8 (5)
	post	2	0	0	1 (4)	1 (3)	1 (3)
Category B	pre	11	8	8	14(17)	16(17)	11(13)
	post	14	12	6	11 (8)	5 (10)	3 (4)
Category C	pre	0	0	0	0 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)
	post	0	6	9	7 (7)	15 (8)	16(13)

In the first cycle, it can be seen that before the first research lesson, eleven students saw the PRES PROG as a marker for tense. After lesson 1, three students were able to advance from category A to category B, but there were no students who were able to discern the concept of ongoingness as captured in category C, neither in the pre- or post-lesson assessment. This is interpreted as the students, despite the support of instruction, not

²² The emergence of the critical aspects and the treatment of the object of learning in relation to these will be discussed later on in this chapter in sections 5.2 and 5.3 respectively.

having developed their ability to discern the core meanings of the PRES PROG.

As will be discussed in further detail in section 5.3, the nature of the object of learning at the time of the first cycle was limited to the PROG in the present tense. This probably obstructed the students from discerning the essence of ongoingness, and the research team hypothesized it was because it limited the range of meanings to only those connected with the present tense. With the redefinition of the object of learning before cycle 2, which amounted to disconnecting the PROG from a specific tense, the common denominator of ongoingness in all tenses was allowed to be discerned. This seemed to impact positively on the results from cycle 2 onwards, with a marked difference between cycle 1 and 2. With the exception of cycle 4 (discussed later in section 5.3), there was a steady progression of students who advanced to the most developed category (C) throughout the cycles, ending up with 15 of 21 students in cycle 5, and 16 of 20 students in cycle 6. Another significant result is that only a handful of students, 5 out of the total of 109, remained in the category containing the least developed understanding of the meaning of the PRES PROG, suggesting that the instruction was particularly effective in regards to the weakest students (see the total number of students who are in category A, even after instruction).

With the redefinition of the object of learning and the refining of CAs, the extra question included in the assessments for cycles 4, 5 and 6 was of interest to study. This question required the students to generalise the core meaning of the PROG (ongoingness) and compare two sentences both in the past tense. As with the original questions, the results of this extra question showed a consistent improvement from seven students reaching category C in cycle 4, to thirteen students in cycle 6.

The following excerpts, taken from cycle 6, are representative examples of how three students' responses developed from pre-instruction to post-instruction. Part of the assessment required the students to consider if there was any difference in meaning between "The boat sank" and "The boat was sinking". They were also asked to explain and motivate their responses.

Excerpt 5.1: Quotations taken from students' written responses in the pre- and post-lesson assessments (from cycle 6)

Student 1:

From pre-lesson assessment

The boat sank and the boat is sinking - same thing. Present time and past time.

From post-lesson assessment

Yes, there is a difference. "The boat sank" means that the boat has sunk whereas "The boat was sinking" means that the boat was on its way to sink – it was sort of not finished – the 'sinking' I mean.

Student 2:

From pre-lesson assessment

It means the boat has sunk. It did it like yesterday. The second sentence means the boat is sinking now, not tomorrow. The boat is sinking now!

From post-lesson assessment

Yes, there is a difference. The first sentence is in the simple form. It means the boat sank – nobody managed to save it. But the other sentence is in the progressive form and means that the boat was sinking, but, like, a shark came and saved them.

Student 3:

From pre-lesson assessment

They mean "The boat sank, the boat sinks" It becomes "sinks" because it's the -ing word.

From post-lesson assessment

*Yes, there is a difference. The first sentence is "The boat sank". The second sentence means "The boat **was** sinking".*

In the excerpt above, each of the students in the pre-lesson assessment correctly translate the first sentence as “The boat sank”. However, the second sentence in the PAST PROG (“was sinking”) is incorrectly interpreted as meaning the present progressive “is sinking” (student 1), the present perfect “has sunk” (student 2) and the simple present “sinks” (student 3).

The three student responses in the post-lesson assessments are not only accurate (recognition of the PROG in the past tense) but are also longer and more considered. Each student highlights different facets of ongoingness - (1) the notion of incompleteness of a past action, (2) the susceptibility to change inherent in the PAST PROG and (3) the student emphasizes the ‘pastness’ of the PAST PROG. Although each of these notions fall under the general concept of ongoingness, they are particularly associated with the progressive aspect in the past tense. This suggests that the instruction in cycle 6 enabled the students to not only disassociate the core meaning of the PROG from solely the present tense, but also to generalize the richness and different nuances of the concept of ongoingness from one tense to another. In other words, the students were differentiating between grammatical aspect and grammatical tense (CA 1), and they were differentiating between simple aspect and progressive aspect (CA 2), and were also discerning the concept of ongoingness (CA 3).

5.1.2 THE FORM OF THE PROGRESSIVE - ASSESSING THE STUDENTS’ ABILITY TO USE THE PROGRESSIVE IN A SYNTACTICALLY ACCURATE WAY

In addition to *meaning*, the other parameter that was assessed pertained to the *form* of the PROG (appendix 5, series of pictures). Here the purpose of the assessment was to evaluate to what extent the students were able to use the PROG in an accurate way. Despite a few student responses requiring some discussion and interpretation by the research team, the criteria

used to evaluate responses were of a quantitative character²³. The results are summarized in the following table (table 5.2)

Table 5.2. Compilation of results from pre- and post-lesson assessments as regards the form of the PROG. The figures represent the number of students who provided complete and morpho-syntactically accurate responses for all 3 picture stimuli.

	Cycle 1 N=16	Cycle 2 N=18	Cycle 3 N=15	Cycle 4 N=19	Cycle 5 N=21	Cycle 6 N=20
pre	8	7	8	3	5	9
post	14	14	12	6	14	17

The analysis of the student assessments regarding the form of the PROG indicates that, with the exception of cycle 4, an increase in accurate responses from pre-lesson to post-lesson was made in all cycles. The results from cycle 4 exhibit a certain discrepancy which may be attributed to the unsatisfactory learning conditions surrounding the fourth lesson. In cycle 1, 14 students were able to produce the correct form (insertion of present participle *-ing* and the auxiliary verb) for each of the three series of pictures. This appears to be a very good result, however, if it is seen in relation to the results of the other part of the assessment (table 5.2, cycle 1), it can be interpreted that the increased accuracy was at the expense of understanding the meaning. It is possible to see this as a consequence of the lesson design, based on presumptive critical aspects which did not allow the meaning of the PROG to be discerned. This will be discussed more fully in the section dealing with the treatment of the object of learning and the relation to the critical aspects (section 5.3).

²³ Analysis principles and examples are described in chapter 4, section 4.8.

5.2 IDENTIFYING CRITICAL ASPECTS

At the outset of this study the critical aspects (CAs) were not defined and had to be tried and tested in practice in the classroom. The iterative process of refinement and continuous improvement, at the heart of LrS, provided the opportunity to assess and re-assess the validity and tenability of the CAs leading to significant changes in design and instruction being made, in particular between cycle 1 and cycle 2. This section describes the sources of the aspects that were found to be critical for students to use the PROG in an accurate and meaningful way. A more detailed discussion of how the CAs were manifested in instruction during the LrS and how they relate to the treatment of the object of learning can be found in section 5.3.

The CAs have emerged from the research team's analysis of empirical data – the survey interviews, the pre- and post-lesson assessments and the research lessons. Also linguistic research and the research team's combined experience of teaching have contributed to finding CAs. Figure 5.1 below shows the different sources and the relationship to the CAs that were found to be critical for student learning of the PROG. If the CAs are in brackets this indicates that these were not fully developed and needed to be specified and refined as the LrS progressed.

To give an example, the teachers' experience contributed in finding CA2 and CA3. However, up until the start of the LrS, these CAs were believed to be valid only in relation to the present tense. It was not until cycle 2, after having tested the PCAs in practice in cycle 1, that it was understood that the CAs should be untied from the present tense in order to allow the students to see (a) the concept of grammatical aspect *as a whole*, and (b) to see something *other than* grammatical tense. Therefore, in the figure below, CA2 and CA3 are shown as having several sources, and in those

cases where they were constituted as being limited to the present tense, (and therefore not as yet fully developed), they are shown in brackets.

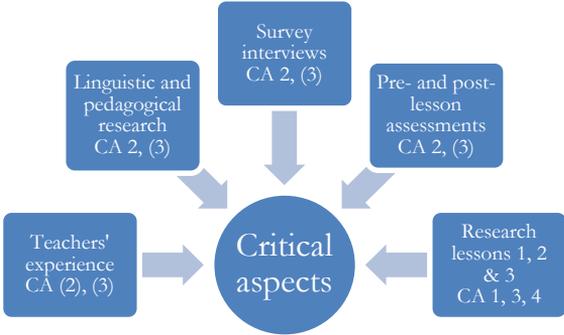


Figure 5.1. Sources for identifying the critical aspects (CA) of the progressive. Numbers in brackets refer to a less developed version of that particular CA.

As can be seen in figure 5.1, the most fruitful source of critical aspects was the actual research lessons and the analyses of them. This is discussed later in section 5.3 which deals with the treatment of the object of learning during the research cycles. Of course, at the beginning of the LrS, there were no lesson analyses. Thus, at first, the research team drew on what they already knew from years of teaching, namely, that learners of English have great difficulties knowing when and how to use the PROG. Either the simple aspect is incorrectly chosen instead of the PROG, or the PROG is overused instead of the simple aspect. As discussed in chapter 2, the teachers' empirical knowledge is also corroborated in linguistic research (Comrie, 1976; Dahl, 1985; Higginbotham, 2004) and pedagogical research (Ur, 2010; Thornbury, 1999) which finds that grammatical aspect is one of the most difficult concepts to master in the English language. The PROG is often handled (categorised, explained, taught) one tense at a time, starting with the progressive in the present tense (PRES PROG). The student responses in the survey interviews (category B) and the pre-lesson

assessments (results from cycles 1-3) confirmed the view that *students confuse the PRES PROG with the simple present, both as regards the form and also the meaning.*

As outlined in section 5.1, student responses on the pre-lesson assessments indicated a lack of accuracy when producing the PRES PROG, most notably an absence of the present participle *-ing*, which is the marked form for the progressive, and absence of the auxiliary verb.²⁴ Student responses also showed that the meaning of the PRES PROG could be experienced as solely carrying information about tense rather than information about aspect (category B). A majority of students responded to the request to explain and motivate the difference between the pairs of sentences by writing that the PRES PROG was interchangeable with the simple present and had no separate distinct meaning.²⁵ Many students also saw the PRES PROG as a means to mark the past tense. Typical responses were that sentences in the simple present were (correctly) seen as marking present tense, but sentences in the PRES PROG were (incorrectly) seen as marking past tense.²⁶ The students were not able to differentiate the function of the PRES PROG to express ongoingness in the present (temporary, activity-in-progress, at the moment of speaking), from the function of the simple present to express states (habit, permanence, general situations). Out of a total of 109 students who completed the pre-lesson assessment, only one student was judged to be able to account for these different expressions of ongoingness in the most powerful and meaningful way.²⁷ Based on (a) knowledge gained from teaching experi-

²⁴ See table 5.2

²⁵ See results of pre-lesson assessments in table 5.1

²⁶ See table 5.1

²⁷ See table 5.1, cycle 6, category C

ence, (b) the influence of linguistic and pedagogical research, and (c) analyses of the interviews and pre-lesson assessments, the research team judged that *it was important that instruction make visible that the PRES PROG is form-wise and meaning-wise distinct from the simple present*. The following presumptive critical aspects (PCAs) were formulated as a basis for lesson design in cycle 1. PCA1 and 2 are related to making visible the meaning of the PRES PROG, and PCA3, 4 and 5 are related to making visible the form of the PRES PROG.²⁸

- PCA1: To differentiate between the present simple and the present progressive.
- PCA2: To discern the core meaning of the present progressive.
- PCA3: To discern that the present progressive requires an auxiliary verb.
- PCA4: To discern that the auxiliary verb carries the tense.
- PCA5: To discern that the auxiliary verb is governed by the subject and must be in agreement with it.

These PCAs formed the basis around which the first lesson was designed. However, as will be presented in the next section (5.3), the research team's intention with the lesson (to enable the students to enhance their learning of the PROG in regards to both the form and the meaning) was not in alignment with what actually happened in the classroom. The design of the lesson, together with the actual PCAs and the way they were treated during the lesson, had not allowed the team's intentions to materialise in practice. The results of the post-lesson assessment for cycle 1 showed that although students had improved their knowledge of the form of the PRES PROG, there were no improvements as regards the meaning. As a

²⁸ A more extensive discussion of the source and relationship between the PCAs and CAs is found in section 5.3.

result of analysing the video recording and transcripts of the first lesson and during the subsequent lessons, the following CAs emerged as critical for students to be able to use the PROG in an accurate and meaningful way:

- CA1: To differentiate between tense and grammatical aspect
- CA2: To differentiate between simple aspect and progressive aspect
- CA3: To discern the concept of ongoingness
- CA4: To differentiate between stative and non-stative meanings

The following section contains an analysis of how the critical aspects of the object of learning were manifested and treated in instruction. The account is not chronological but thematic, taking its point of departure in each critical aspect.

5.3 THE CRITICAL ASPECTS – WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO LEARN TO BE ABLE TO USE THE PROGRESSIVE IN A SYNTACTICALLY AND SEMANTICALLY ACCURATE WAY

In variation theoretical terms, learning is a function of discernment, and discernment is conditional upon variation (Marton, 2015). Accordingly, a teacher's role involves (1) finding what needs to be discerned (expressed as critical aspects), and (2) designing instruction that makes it possible for students to notice these critical aspects. The study at hand is concerned with the learning of the PROG and the main results are the critical aspects that have been found to make a difference to students' ability to use the PROG in a syntactically and semantically accurate way. Arguments will be put forward to support the claim that the four critical aspects have been found to enhance the teachers' possibilities to teach the PROG and the students' possibilities to learn.

5.3.1 CRITICAL ASPECT 1: TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN TENSE AND GRAMMATICAL ASPECT

The linguistic category of grammatical aspect has a specific and distinct function in the English language. It is specific because it adds a special viewpoint or extra layer of aspectual meaning to an action, event and activity. It is distinct because it has exclusive properties that are not to be confused with other grammatical structures, in particular, the category of tense.

How CA1 emerged.

The categorization of the results of the survey interviews²⁹ and the results of the pre-lesson assessments³⁰ indicated that most students held less developed conceptions of the PROG, frequently seeing the PRES PROG, when contrasted with the simple present, as simply another way of expressing the present tense. Students experienced the PRES PROG not only as another type of present tense, but also as being semantically identical with the simple present. The PRES PROG was thus seen by many as a marker for tense, and its aspectual function and meaning was not discerned. The following examples from the pre-lesson assessment for cycle 1, is representative for students who held such conceptions. The students were asked to account for any differences between “*he plays hockey*” and “*he is playing hockey*”. They were also urged to consider when these sentences might be appropriate.

²⁹ See table 4.1

³⁰ See table 5.1

Excerpt 5.2. Some student responses from the pre-lesson assessment (cycle 1) regarding perceived differences between “he plays hockey” and “he is playing hockey”.

Student 1:

No, there is no difference. It doesn't matter which one you use because both mean the same thing – he plays hockey.

Student 2:

No, there is no difference. You can use both of them when you want to say “he plays hockey”.

Student 3:

No, I don't think there is any difference. It's just in the sentence. You can use both of them at the same time.

Because the research team had agreed that the object of learning in cycle 1 was the use of the PROG *in the present tense*, it was seen as unnecessary to present verbs in the past tense. The tasks during lesson 1 were limited to contrasts between verbs in the simple aspect and progressive aspect, however all in the present tense. The following excerpt comes from lesson 1 and is representative of how the teacher explains the meaning of the progressive in the present tense.

Excerpt 5.3. From lesson 1, some teacher explanations of the meaning of the present progressive

They are eating lunch right now ... Right now, and then it's right now ... The present progressive is when something is going on now ... and that sentence is you do it right now ... They are sitting down right now, the present progressive ... -ing on the end, and something's happening right now.

The teacher is insistent on defining the PRES PROG as “right now”. No other explanations are given, it is considered sufficient that “right now” encapsulates the meaning of the aspectual part of the PRES PROG. However, by pointing out the “nowness”, it is the tense part of the PRES PROG that becomes highlighted. The intention of instruction was to help the

students to see the progressive as something *other than* the simple aspect. But it appears to have had the opposite effect than was intended, leading to students' notions as expressed in the post-lesson assessment that the simple present and the PRES PROG were *interchangeable*. The phrase "right now" was therefore insufficient as a definition or explanation of ongoingness (the core meaning of the progressive regardless of tense). "Right now" is only a *consequence* of the sort of ongoingness which happens to be at the moment of speech, in the present. Far from *encapsulating* the meaning of the PROG and thereby facilitating its discernment, the use of the PRES PROG might have *excluded* the possibility (or at least made it more difficult) for the students to discern the core meaning - ongoingness.

Consequently, binding aspectual meaning to one particular tense was not a successful way of helping the students to get at the core meaning of "progressiveness". To be able to see the PROG in a powerful way, students must be able to see that it performs an aspectual function which is in contrast to the temporal function of tense. *This necessitates that the grammatical category of aspect be contrasted and separated from the grammatical category of tense*. In order to achieve this, the object of learning must be freed from any specific tense in order for the concept of ongoingness to be generalised in all tenses. From cycle 2 onwards the object of learning was redefined as the ability to use the progressive (not the *present* progressive) in a syntactically and semantically accurate way, that is, the whole of the progressive was the focus. From one perspective, it could be argued that the object of learning was *widened*, inasmuch as it now encompassed the PROG as a whole and not only one part (one tense). However, by removing the present tense, it meant that the focus was exclusively on the aspectual function, and as such, the object of learning was *specified and refined*.

As regards the form of the PROG, the research team had discussed before cycle 1 that tense is bound up in the auxiliary verb and that to be considered grammatically accurate there were certain criteria of form to be met.

Form was considered important for accuracy hence the three PCAs concerned with form - PCA 3, 4 and 5. After the redefinition of the object of learning, the main focus of the lesson design and the tasks was on the meaning of the PROG. However part of being able to differentiate between tense and aspect (CA1) involves being able to see where tense is located. Knowing that it is the auxiliary verb that carries tense, makes it easier for learners to see that the marked form of the PROG (the *-ing*) does not signify tense and therefore expresses something else, that is, grammatical aspectuality.

From this could now be seen that CA1 – to differentiate between tense and aspect - is composed of two parts. One part is the differentiation of tense and aspect as regards the *meaning* – that tense is about anchoring an event in time whereas aspect is about the temporal unfolding and aspectual texture of an event. This insight that emerged after analysis of the first lesson and the post- lesson assessments resulted in the implementation of CA1 into the design of subsequent lessons. The other part of CA1 is the differentiation of tense and aspect as regards the *form* – that the auxiliary verb carries the tense. Although PCA4 has therefore merged into the new CA1, form is used here as a support to help differentiate the meaning, rather than standing independently as in PCA4.

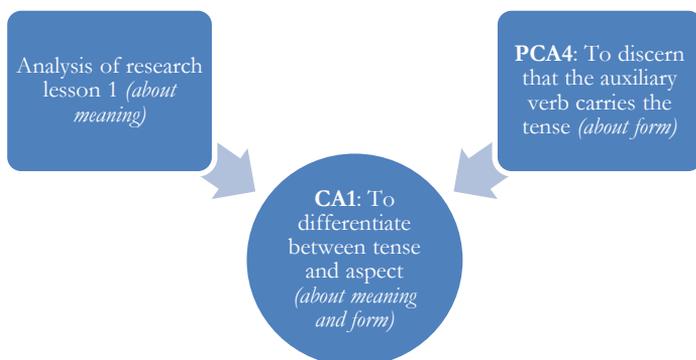


Figure 5.2. Showing how analysis of research lesson 1 contributed with meaning of the object of learning, and PCA4 (Presumptive Critical Aspect) contributed with form of the object of learning, to create CA1

How CA1 was treated in design and instruction

It is established that the differentiation of tense from grammatical aspect was not addressed in cycle 1 because the research team did not see this as critical to learning the PRES PROG. After the object of learning was redefined, this necessitated a revised lesson design which should include instances of the past tense in order to be able to separate and generalise the core meaning to other tenses. If we analyse the treatment of the relationship between tense and aspect from a variation theoretical perspective, we see differences between the cycles. In cycle 1, tense was not seen as an issue and was kept invariant throughout the tasks. Despite that grammatical aspect was varied by contrasting simple aspect with progressive aspect (suggesting that possibilities for discernment were afforded), it was problematic because discernment of the PROG was conditional upon *the extent to which “progressiveness” occurred in the present tense*. It was found that the use of contrast in itself does not automatically lead to greater discernment. Inherent restrictions (such as limiting the object of learning to the present tense only) are built into that which is contrasted, which effects the potency of the pattern of contrast.

For cycle 2, new tasks were designed which included contrasts between aspects in the past tense also.³¹ The sequence of tasks was designed so that grammatical aspect was first discerned by varying simple and PROG aspect and keeping the present tense invariant. Then the past tense was introduced in task 2 and kept invariant against varying grammatical aspects. The purpose was twofold; (1) to help the students transfer their tentative conceptions of the PROG into a new temporal context (to generalise to novel situations) and (2) to increase the students' awareness of grammatical aspect as something other than tense. The following tables show the patterns of variation and invariance for lesson 1, lessons 2 and 3, and for lessons 4, 5 and 6 respectively

Table 5.3. Patterns of variation (v) and invariance (i) in lesson 1

	Tense	Grammatical aspect
All tasks	i (present)	v

Table 5.4. Patterns of variation (v) and invariance (i) in lessons 2 and 3

	Tense	Grammatical aspect
task 1a, 1b	i (present)	v
task 2	i (past)	v
task 3	v	v

³¹ Overview of lesson designs table 4.2 and 4.3.

Table 5.5. Patterns of variation (*v*) and invariance (*i*) in lessons 4, 5 and 6

	Tense	Grammatical aspect
task 1	i (past)	v
task 2	i (present)	v
task 3	v	v
addition to task 3 (cycle 6)	v	i (progressive)

The results of the post-lesson assessments showed that with the exception of cycle 4, there was a steady progression in student learning from cycle 2 to cycle 6, meaning that students were progressing from less powerful ways of experiencing the PROG to more powerful ways. If we are to account for these changes then we must look at differences in lesson design, and also differences in how the content was handled by the teachers.

If we begin with lesson design, it can be seen when comparing the above tables that, as regards CA1, the lesson design from cycle 2 to cycle 6 was very similar. The only notable difference was in the *sequence* of tasks. Whereas grammatical aspect in cycles 2 and 3 was first presented in the present tense (task 1) and then in the past tense (task 2), the reverse happened in cycles 4, 5 and 6. In these latter lessons, the first tense the students met was the past tense. When the sequence proceeded from present tense to past (in cycles 2 and 3), some students still remained stuck in associating the PROG with “right now” despite being able to see that the form was in the past tense. The following excerpt is taken from lesson 3 and is an example of one such student. The teacher asks the class if there is any difference between sentence 1 “he drowned” and sentence 2 “he was drowning”.

Excerpt 5.4. from lesson 3

- [1] T: What's the difference between saying "he drowned" and
[2] "he was drowning"?
- [3] *S: I don't know if it means this but, like he, he has almost drowned*
[4] *many times and he drowns right then. No, I don't know.*
- [5] T: Do you mean the sentence "he was drowning"? What did
[6] you say?
- [7] *S: He is drowning right now.*
- [8] T: He is drowning right now?
- [9] *S: Or maybe, no, no, no!*
- [10] T: Ok, now it's not present tense any more. Now we've
[11] changed the tense to the past. "He **drowned** in the
[12] pool, he **was** drowning in the pool." So it's no longer in the
[13] "now"
[14] S: Hmm!
- [15] T: So what's the difference then?
- [16] *S: Well, it's sort of past time and now time.*
- [17] T: No! Both are in the past.

The teacher tells the student explicitly and numerous times (lines 10, 11, 12, 13, 17) and also emphasises with his voice (lines 11, 12: "he **drowned**, he **was** drowning") that both sentences are in the past tense and not the present. In line 3, the student says that the first sentence is in the present perfect ("has drowned") and in line 4, the second sentence is in the present simple tense ("he drowns"). A few lines later (lines 7 and 16), the student insists that the first sentence is in the past and the second is in the present. The possibility that the progressive aspect can occur in the past tense is obscured from the student because the progressive aspect is so strongly associated with the present tense.

When the sequence was reversed, beginning in cycle 4, and students were introduced in the first task to the object of learning *through the past tense*. This encouraged a discussion of ongoingness that was not bound up with this specific tense. Furthermore, it could be observed that when attention was later turned to task 2 which was in the present tense, the students

were able to take their more powerful conceptions of the progressive that had been discussed in task 1 (discerning ongoingness in the past tense) and apply them to the new sentences in the present tense (task 2). Starting the lesson with the past tense seems to have prevented students in associating the present progressive and the participle *-ing* with the default conception “right now”.

Apart from the small, yet notable difference in lesson design described above (sequence of tasks), the other significant difference between the cycles as regards CA1 was how the teacher in the later cycles, particularly cycle 6, frequently referred back to the examples that had been discussed at the beginning of the lesson. The students were thus exposed to the two tenses simultaneously which may have enabled CA1 to be discerned in a more powerful way, which is also evident in the improved results of the post-lesson assessments for cycles 5 and 6.

Summary of results regarding CA1

Teaching the PROG in the present tense only (the PRES PROG), appeared to hinder the students from (a) discerning the core concept of ongoingness, and (b) generalising this concept to other tenses.

The sequence in which the tenses were introduced seems to have had an effect on student learning. Beginning the lesson with the past tense and then generalising to the present tense, appeared to have a more positive effect on student outcomes than beginning with the present tense and then attempting to generalise to the present tense.

5.3.2 CRITICAL ASPECT 2: TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN SIMPLE ASPECT AND PROGRESSIVE ASPECT

The PROG expresses a particular aspectual perspective or viewpoint. It is one of four grammatical aspects in English, of which the simple aspect

and the PROG are the most common (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). It is a difficult concept to master and for those students whose first language does not have a marked form for the PROG (for example Swedish), it is particularly challenging (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Dahl, 1985; Higginbotham 2004). If learners of English cannot differentiate between simple and PROG aspect they will not understand the nuances of meaning embedded in the aspect system. Neither will they be able to access aspectual meanings in their own English language production, leading to a paucity of semantic choices and possible misunderstandings.

How CA2 emerged

Already before the LrS began, the research team was aware of the importance of getting the students to differentiate between grammatical aspect (simple and PROG). This was born out of experience of teaching the PROG, supported by research literature, and evident from the results of the interviews and the assessments. If we look at the pre-lesson assessments we find that in every cycle, the majority of students were unable to see differences between the simple aspect and the PROG. The PROG was seen as meaning the same thing as the simple aspect, and as such, devoid of any particular aspectual viewpoint and merely another way of expressing the present tense (and in some cases, the past tense).³² Leading up to cycle 1, this led to the formulation of PCA1.³³ Following the analysis of lesson 1, the object of learning was re-defined from focus on PRES PROG to solely PROG, which meant that connection to present tense needed to be removed from PCA1. This modification resulted in CA2. The research

³² Table 5.1, see the rows for pre-lesson assessments, categories A and B.

³³ i.e. to differentiate between the present simple and the present progressive

team also reasoned that noticing the difference in form between the simple and the PROG would help to support students' identification and discernment of the PROG as something different from the simple aspect. The differences in form amount to the presence of an auxiliary verb (PCA3) and that the present participle *-ing* is attached to the main verb. Figure 5.3 shows the two sources for CA2.

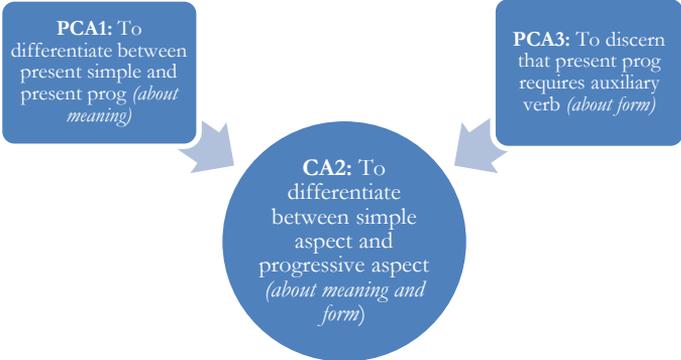


Figure 5.3. Showing how PCA1 and PCA3 (Presumptive Critical Aspects) when untied from present tense, contribute with meaning and form to create CA2 (all tenses)

How CA2 was treated in design and instruction

Now released from the present tense, the object of learning could be decomposed³⁴ into the different meanings manifested in all tenses. To this end, the learning tasks were constructed around contrasting PROG with simple aspect (sequentially, in present tense first and then past tense) and the sentences presented to the students were identical except that the

³⁴ See Marton, 2015, p.145

grammatical aspect varied. The assumption here, based on Variation Theory, is that which varies is more likely to be noticed if it is against a background of invariance (Marton & Booth, 1997).

Figure 5.4 below shows the main meanings of the simple and PROG aspect, and how they are related to each other. The selection does not claim to be fully comprehensive of all meanings, but is the research team's interpretation and synthesis of descriptions and definitions from grammar books authored by recognized linguists and language researchers.³⁵

In compiling the two lists for each aspect and the terms chosen, consideration has been taken to covering as many meanings but with the fewest number of terms. This is to make the lists manageable and comprehensible to both the research team and the students.

³⁵ The following scholarly books were consulted. (Complete references at end of thesis) Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) *The Grammar Book. An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course*; Comrie (1976) *Aspect*; Dahl (1985) *Tense and Aspect Systems*; Depraetere and Langford (2012) *Advanced English grammar: A linguistic approach*; Estling-Vannerstål (2007) *A University Grammar of English*; Payne (2011) *Understanding English grammar*; Quirk and Greenbaum (1993) *A University Grammar of English*; Svartvik & Sager (1983) *Engelsk universitetsgrammatik*

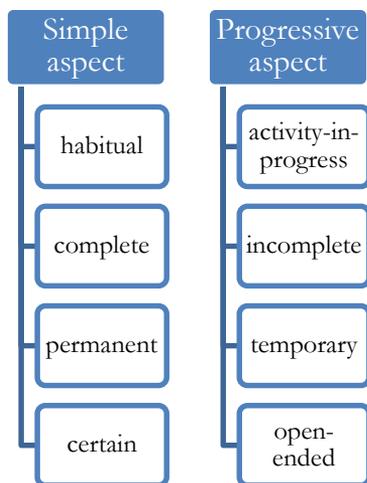


Figure 5.4. Variation of aspectual meanings that can be expressed using the simple and progressive aspects respectively

It can be seen that for each meaning (in the PROG) there is an inverse meaning in the other aspect (simple aspect). The research team designed the learning activities in cycles 2-6, so that different types of ongoingness could be experienced by the students. The lessons were designed so that each “meaning pair” was presented to the students. Each of the meanings understood to constitute the PROG (activity-in-progress, incompleteness, temporariness, open-endedness) were embedded in contextually derived variants in sentences. The first two tasks consisted of “meaning pairs” where each meaning of the PROG was systematically contrasted with the corresponding opposite meaning of the simple aspect.³⁶ For example, to

³⁶ See figure 5.4

exemplify completeness (simple aspect) and incompleteness (PROG aspect), accomplishment verbs were chosen³⁷ where events could be conceptualised either as complete wholes allowing for no further development, for example, “He read a book yesterday”, or conversely as limited and a portion of a whole “He was reading a book yesterday”.

If we examine the results of the assessments³⁸, we see that there was a marked increase in the number of students in cycles 5 and 6, who managed to discern the PROG as a marker of ongoingness, meaning that they were able to satisfactorily account for the different meanings. If we look at the meaning pair permanent/temporary, only a third of students in cycle 2 could distinguish these concepts from each other when comparing the two sentences. In cycle 6, 16 students out of 20 managed. In the following excerpt, students’ responses can be seen to have developed from before the lesson to after the lesson.

Excerpt 6.5: Quotations taken from students’ written responses in the pre- and post-lesson assessments comparing “They live in London” with “They are living in London” (from cycle 6)

Student 1:

From pre-lesson assessment

No. there’s no difference. I don’t know how to explain, but you can say whichever when you want to say someone lives in London.

From post-lesson assessment

Yes, there’s a difference. The first sentence means that they have lived in London maybe nearly all their lives. It’s their real home. And the second sentence means they are living there only temporarily.

³⁷ The research team chose accomplishment verbs, (one of the lexical aspects) but were not consciously aware of this. A discussion of lexical aspects and how they interact with grammatical aspect, can be found in section 5.3.4.

³⁸ See table 5.1

Student 2:

From pre-lesson assessment

No, there's no difference.

From post-lesson assessment

In Swedish you translate them in the same way. There's not a huge difference. But in sentence number 2, if a family lives in London at the moment and maybe soon they are going to move, I would use the second sentence "They are living in London".

Student 3:

From pre-lesson assessment

No difference. They live in London.

From post-lesson assessment

Yes, there's a difference. If you've settled in London, bought a house and LIVE there, then you say "I live in London". The other sentence is if you are there temporarily. Like you don't live there really, only for a while, temporarily.

The meaning 'temporary' was treated in a different way in lesson 2 compared to lesson 6.

Excerpt 5.5. from lesson 2: Students/ teacher dialogue about the sentences: "He lives in London" and "He is living in London".

[1] S1: *The first is that he was born in London and the other is, I think, that he*

[2] *lives there right now.*

[3] S2: *That's stupid!*

[4] S1: *Well, I don't know.*

[5] T: *Lives. So, he must live there too. OK. And the other is he lives there*

[6] *right now. Ok.*

[7] S3: *Maybe the second one is that he comes from Sweden and he has moved*

[8] *to London.*

[9] S4: *Maybe an exchange student?*

[10] T: *Ok, exchange student. And lives there right now then.*

Instead of opening up the meaning of temporary in relation to the PROG, the teacher opens up the meaning of "right now" in line 5, which is connected to activity-in-progress, at the moment of speech. "Right now" is further reinforced in line 10.

- [11] T: Ok. “He’s living in London”. Do you have to be there right now? Does
 [12] he have to be in London right now?
 [13] S2: *When does the lesson finish?*
 [14] T: So the student who lives there right now, he doesn’t need to be in
 [15] London, maybe? Maybe he’s on holiday in Sweden or Hawaii. But he lives
 [16] there temporarily. He’s living in London.
 [17] S4: *He’s an immigrant.*
 [18] T: He lives in London. Should we just look at the first sentence? He lives
 [19] in London. But how much? Usually? Ok. Where otherwise more then?
 [20] Does he have two houses? One in Liverpool and, what do you think?
 [21] S4: *It could be that.*

The teacher tries to open the dimension of temporary by using the word for the first time in line 16. He also tries to get the students to understand that “he’s living in London” does not necessarily imply that you are in London right now. This can be seen as a throwback to the first task of the lesson where contrasts were made between habit (simple aspect) and activity-in-progress at moment of speech (PROG). In line 15, the teacher suggests that you can live in a place but at the same time be on holiday, away from that place. The opportunity to discuss this further is closed by the student in line 17. The student cannot have properly understood the word ‘temporarily’, because he goes on to illustrate this meaning by using the word ‘immigrant’, which on the contrary, means someone who moves *permanently* from one country to go and live in another country.

The attention in line 18 moves swiftly away from the PROG and the dimension of habit and regularity (simple aspect) is again opened up in line 19 when the teacher asks how much and how often the person lives in London, instead of contrasting temporary with the corresponding opposite meaning, i.e. permanent.

- [22] T: Now let’s look at this (points at the whiteboard) If you usually live there
 [23] or if it’s a habit, then it’s permanent. Are there other words that fit in here?
 [24] You say he usually lives here.
 [25] S4: *No. He lives there, It’s more like he’s a citizen of England. He lives there in*

[26] *London and has his house there. He plans to stay there.*

[27] T: It's permanent. That's where he lives. He lives there. He's not going to

[28] move either. You just say "he lives there" permanently.

[29] S4: *Temporarily permanent.*

Finally, in line 23, the word 'permanent' is used by the teacher for the first time as contrast to 'temporary'. However, in line 29, the student uses the words in the wrong way – they are semantic opposites and cannot be used to qualify each other in this way. This suggests that the student has not understood the meaning of these words for the whole sequence and is therefore unable to discern temporary and permanent as two contrasting features of grammatical aspect. In this excerpt, although the teacher made an attempt to open up the dimension of variation with the values 'permanent' and 'temporary', they were not in the foreground of the students' attention and therefore remained concealed. Neither was it established if the students actually understood the meaning of these words. Instead, the teacher erroneously opened up the dimension of variation with the values 'habit' and 'moment of speech', which had been already dealt with at the beginning of the lesson. The post-lesson results³⁹ for cycle 2 show that on question 3 which required the students to see the meaning 'temporary' and be able to contrast with 'permanent', only 6 students were able to satisfactorily explain this difference. If we want to get at a more developed discernment, it is important to offer students possibilities to experience the different qualities of ongoingness embodied in the PROG.

In the first cycle, the object of learning had been defined as accuracy of form and meaning when using the progressive *in the present tense*. Because of this, the examples presented to the students were limited to the PRES PROG and the simple present. But even before contrasting sentences were shown, the first 10 minutes of the lesson began with a general discussion

³⁹ Table 5.1, results for cycle 2, row for category C (6 students)

about tense – both past, present and future. Even grammatical terminology such as *tense*, *verb*, *conjugation*, *preterite* and *adverbial*, was introduced by the teacher. It was not until 13 minutes of the lesson had passed before the PROG was introduced for the first time. In the following excerpt the teacher has just told the class that there are two ways of speaking about the present – PRES PROG and present simple. He asks the students if they can see any difference between “they are working” and “they work”.

Excerpt 5.6. from lesson 1

- [1] T: What’s the difference then?
[2] S1: One ends in *-ing*.
[3] T: Ends in *-ing*.
[4] S2: In the present progressive you add an “*-ing*” and you put an “*are*” in front. You
[5] *haven’t done that in the simple present.*
[6] T: Did you hear what she said? In the progressive you add an *-ing*. I’ll
[7] explain that actually. And in the simple you just say “they work”. Let’s take
[8] another ... look at this, which is the progressive. That’s what we’re going to
[9] learn about today. It says “they are working” doesn’t it? And now you see
[10] that the word “they” is in blue. What sort of word is “they”?
[11] S3: *Pronoun?*
[12] T: Pronoun, right!

The teacher’s intention in line 1, is to get the students to reflect on the aspectual differences between “work” and “is working” but it is not made clear to the students whether he means differences in form or differences in meaning. When S1 picks out the present participle *-ing* as being significant in line 2, and this is reinforced by the teacher repeating what the student said, S2 then picks up the thread in line 4 and gives a further description of the form. At this point, the opportunity is missed to connect the difference in form with the difference in meaning between the two aspects - PROG and simple.

The discussion moves even further away when the teacher starts to talk about pronouns. This excerpt is representative for more such sequences

throughout the lesson where the meaning of the PROG ends up in the background and the form is in the foreground.

After cycle 2, there were nearly as many students as in cycle 1, who showed good results on the post-lesson assessments regarding the form of the PROG. This was despite no explicit teaching. However, this was compensated for as they were given ample opportunities to experience and notice the form; it was written on the whiteboard, ppt presentation, T dialogue and S discussions. Can the argument then be made that purely *exposure* to form (input), can be a way to *learn* form?

In lesson 4, there was no attention to form, no task in the present tense, and no task 3 either. There were many interruptions and we had to change classroom at the last minute. The fire alarm went off and on returning to classroom to resume the lesson, one student had damaged his foot (had run out without wearing his shoes), also two students left the lesson to go have a piano lesson. The lesson started eating into the students' break time which was not popular. The students were not only unsettled but they missed parts of the intended lesson design and therefore received much less exposure to form. If the suggestion that exposure is a factor when learning about form, then the students' rather disappointing results regarding form, may strengthen the claim that learning form is contingent upon exposure to form.

Summary of results regarding CA2

The students were given limited possibilities to discern the meaning of the present progressive in lesson 1 which the results of the post-lesson assessment confirm. By experiencing different qualities/meanings of the PROG, students are given opportunities to discern what the common denominator is for them all, that is, ongoingness. Some qualities are easier

discerned in the past tense, for example, open-endedness and incomple-
tion. Therefore teaching the PROG only in the present tense appears to
make generalisation of ongoingness more difficult.

5.3.3 CRITICAL ASPECT 3: TO DISCERN THE CONCEPT OF ONGOINGNESS

If CA2 is seen as dealing with decomposition (deconstruction, breaking
down) of the object of learning into constituent parts, (the different
meanings expressed by the PROG), then CA3 can be seen as a re-compo-
sition and synthesis through discernment of ongoingness. Whether we
define the PROG as “an internal portion” of an event (Comrie, 1976, p.3-
4), an incomplete situation in progress (Aarts, Chalker & Weiner, 2014),
or “ongoing, dynamic processes” (Payne, 2011, p.291), the common de-
nominator is the speaker viewing an event/situation/action from the in-
side perspective. In other words, the temporal beginning and end-points
are not important, but rather the “being-in-the-middle-of-something”
perspective, which I term ongoingness. Figure 5.5 shows the four differ-
ent meanings or “qualities of ongoingness” that the research team have
used during the lessons.

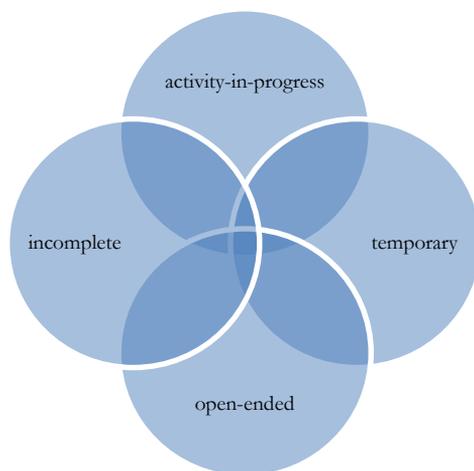


Figure 5.5. Different meanings of the progressive that merge to express 'ongoingness'

How CA3 emerged

The importance of discerning the core meaning of the PROG was already acknowledged by the research team before the LrS began, leading to PCA2. The teachers' experience of teaching the PROG was that students had difficulties understanding the meaning. This was confirmed by the results of the interviews and the pre-lesson assessments. Furthermore, linguistic and pedagogical research emphasizes the complexity of the aspect system and that it is a semantic (meaning-laden) category. Because all the PCAs were bound to the present tense, only a part of the meaning was possible to be discerned. However, after lesson 1, the revised CA could fully reflect the whole of the meaning, see figure 5.6.

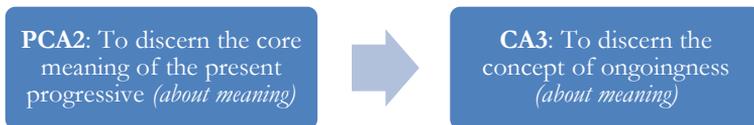


Figure 5.6. The core meaning of the PROG from ‘part’ (PCA2, only the present tense) to ‘whole’ (CA3, all tenses).

How CA3 was treated in design and instruction

Some ways of treating this CA proved more powerful than others as regards conveying the concept of ongoingness. Let us take one example and examine how the teachers refined and developed their teaching from lesson 2 and through to lesson 6. If we look at the following excerpt, the teacher asks the students what “he was drowning in the pool” means. S1 replies “he carried on” which is interpreted as meaning ongoing. However, many of the students think that the man survived the drowning incident. When the teacher asks how it is possible to know this, S2 gives a very interesting answer (line 8). This student does not see the open-endedness of the PROG because he is very sure that the man survives.

Excerpt 5.7. from lesson 2

- [1] T: But “he was drowning in the pool”? What does that mean then?
- [2] S1: He “carried on”
- [3] T: He “carried on” with drowning. But ...?
- [4] S1: ... something happened to him.
- [5] T: Aha! Ok. Is he alive now?
- [6] Ss (many): Yes! Yes!
- [7] T: How do you know that?
- [8] S2: If he didn’t drown, then he must have survived.

When the teacher dramatized the “being-in-the-middle” together with the past tense, it highlighted not only incompleteness but also the open-endedness of the PROG. The following excerpt is taken from cycle 5

Excerpt 5.8. from lesson 5: Student responses regarding the meaning of “he drowned in the pool” and “he was drowning in the pool”.

- [1] T: What does it look like when you are drowning? Can you imagine it?
[2] S1: *The man splashes around a lot. (student waves his arms around over his head)*
[3] T: He splashes around a lot. Yes! Ok, we’ve got someone here in the pool
[4] like this. Ohhh! (teacher gesticulates and shakes his arms). That was poor
[5] acting!. He DROWNED in the pool (points at the whiteboard. Well, if you
[6] are drowning, if you have drowned, that’s the question. Has he died in any
[7] of these sentences? (points at the whiteboard) The first one – that sentence
[8] says that he drowned in the pool. Full stop! It was over there. Oh dear, dear,
[9] dear! An accident! He drowned in the pool. He is dead. The other one – he
[10] WAS drowning in the pool. You said ”ing”. He carried on drowning in the
[11] pool. Do you know if he has died or not? Has he died?
[12] S: *No!*
[13] T: Here he is! (starts to wave his arms) Oh help, help, help, help! I am in [14]
the middle of drowning!
[15] S: *(laughter)*
[16] T: Can you say that? Is that a strange expression? ”I’m not finished
[17] drowning yet. I have a little chance left to survive”

In the above excerpt (line 1), the teacher urges the students to create a mental picture of drowning and to imagine that they also are in the middle of drowning. The pivotal question to unlocking the open-endedness of the PROG in this example is when the teacher asks the students “Do we know if he died or not?” (line 11). The teacher takes this example a step further in lesson 6 by personalizing the drowning

Excerpt 5.9 from lesson 6:

- [1] T: “Sven drowned in the pool” and “Leonard was drowning in the
[2] pool”. Who would you rather be?
[3] S1: *In that case, it’s obvious!*
[4] T: Ok, let’s see. You’ve noticed that someone drowned?

[5] S2: Yes, Sven. He drowned in the pool. So what has happened to him?
 [6] S3: He's dead!
 [7] S2: Yeah, he died.
 [8] S4: He must have skipped his swimming classes!
 [9] T: How did it go for Leonard? Can anyone explain? (the teacher dramatizes
 [10] someone drowning)
 [11] S5: He was drowning.
 [12] T: Here he is! (gesticulates) Help, help, help, help! Leonard was drowning in
 [13] the pool ...when Alex came and saved him.
 [14] S4: Or?
 [15] T: Or what?
 [16] S4: He was drowning in the pool ... and then he died.
 [17] T: Yes, good! It's not clear what actually happened later. It's sort of open.
 [18] It's the same with the example "was writing" earlier in the lesson. Do you
 [19] all remember? We don't know if she carried on writing or was interrupted.

In line 2, the teacher asked the students who they would rather be – Sven or Leonard? This example proved very powerful because it not only illustrated the PROG in the past tense, but also allowed the students to experience the open-endedness of the PROG. The meaning of the sentence "Leonard was drowning in the pool" allows for the possibility that he was saved and therefore avoided death. For Sven, all hope was gone! Which grammatical aspect was chosen was actually a matter of life or death. These more complex discussions during lessons 5 and 6 may have affected the positive results of the post-lesson assessments.

In the contrast "The team is winning/was winning", the open-endedness that was discussed in relation to 'drowning' (past tense) could now be generalised back to the present tense in a much more powerful way than when present PROG was defined as 'right now'. This opens up a richer meaning of PROG in the present tense, more than is possible if the present tense is taken first.

Summary of results regarding CA3

When the teacher dramatized the drowning, it seemed to help the students sense the feeling of being in the middle of an activity, event, action or process. This experience of something ongoing was associated with both the now (present) and then (past). The PROG allows for the possibility of further development or change, a temporariness, whereas simple aspect conveys a sense of permanence.

It appears to be important to use powerful examples. The students got emotionally involved when the teacher personalised the ongoingness. The teacher took advantage of the possibilities that were opened up by using the verb *drown*.

5.3.4 CRITICAL ASPECT 4: TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN STATIVE AND NON-STATIVE MEANINGS

Verbs can be categorised as stative verbs, activity verbs, accomplishment verbs and achievement verbs (Vendler, 1967). Stative verbs are non-dynamic whereas activity, accomplishment and achievement verbs are dynamic (ibid.). These intrinsic properties⁴⁰ encourage or discourage their use with the PROG. Since stative verbs refer to stable states, this means that they do not involve change. The consequence of this is that stative verbs do not normally take the PROG because of the semantic conflict between the ongoingness embedded in the PROG and the stative quality (lexical aspect) of stative verbs (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

⁴⁰ Known as lexical aspect or Aktionsart (German for *kind of action*). (See for example, Comrie, 1976; Vendler, 1967).

Table 5.6. The four categories of lexical aspect and examples of verbs⁴¹

Stative	Activity	Accomplishment	Achievement
have	run	paint (a picture)	recognize (something)
contain	walk	make (a chair)	realize (something)
seem	swim	build (a house)	lose (something)
want	live	write (a novel)	find (something)
like	study	grow up	win the race

However, there are instances where the PROG may occur together with stative verbs to communicate specific meanings.⁴² Since some stative verbs can be used in this way, it may be more useful to draw a dividing line between stative meanings and non-stative meanings, the latter of which can include so called stative verbs.

How CA4 emerged

This CA was found in the interaction between the students and the teachers during the research lessons, first emerging in lesson 2 with the introduction of a particular task, and then more clearly in lesson 3 when a specific example was discussed with the class. From cycle 2 onwards, the research team considered it important to point out to the students that some verbs “sound strange” if used with one or the other aspect - simple and PROG. However, the research team’s theoretical knowledge of lexical aspect was rudimentary, and we had not considered that it interacts with grammatical aspect. This meant that we did not fully realise the signifi-

⁴¹ Table 5.6 is an adaptation from Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999, p119)

⁴² For list of different meanings which can be achieved by using “progressive statives” see e.g. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p.121)

cance of lexical aspect until the students themselves started asking questions why the PROG was not appropriate with certain verbs. Some examples of this will be given in the next section.

It was only after the LrS was completed and the data were re-analysed by the teacher researcher, that this aspect was identified as critical. The figure below 5.7, shows the source of the CA4 firmly embedded in the LrS research lessons, in other words, CA4 emerged empirically.

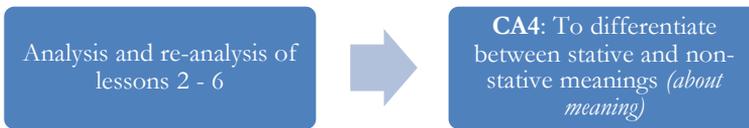


Figure 5.7. CA4 emerged empirically from the research lessons 2-6

How CA4 was treated in design and instruction

With the reconceptualization of the research lesson from cycle 1 to cycle 2, the research team created new tasks for the students. With inspiration from literature on Variation Theory (Lo, 2012), one specific task combined different aspects and different tenses (fusion). The students should work in small groups and using their knowledge from earlier on in the lesson, they should now try to apply this knowledge with a fusion of aspects and tenses.

The research team wanted the students to discuss the appropriacy of when to use the PROG or not, therefore grammatically incorrect examples were also included to foster discussion. The list below shows the sentences that the students discussed.

Example from lesson 2: List of sentences presented to students.

- 1 He is running every day.
- 2 He is having big feet.
- 3 He likes pizza.
- 4 He was waiting for the bus.
- 5 He eats lunch at the moment.
- 6 He is playing tennis on Mondays.
- 7 He dies.
- 8 He is thinking cola is tasty.

Sentences 1 and 6 are grammatically incorrect because the adverbials of time (every day, on Mondays) suggest regularity and habit, and therefore the simple aspect is required.⁴³ In a similar way, the adverbial in sentence 5 (at the moment) suggests something happening now at the moment of speech, and therefore the PROG is appropriate.⁴⁴ Sentence 4 could be seen as a ‘red herring’ since there was no grammatical error here. Without sufficient contextual information, sentence 4 would have been correct both in the simple aspect and the PROG. Also sentence 3 was correct. However, it is correct because *like* is a stative verb and therefore lends itself to the simple aspect. That leaves us with sentences 2, 7 and 8. As can be seen, some of them are semantically challenging because of the inherent conflict between stative meanings and use of the PROG. The students were required to judge the aspectual appropriateness of each sentence and be able to motivate their answers. By using the variation pattern – fusion (tense, aspect and verb varied) and deliberately presenting grammatically incorrect examples, the students were forced to take into consideration multiple CAs in order to solve the task.

⁴³ Sentence 1 should be “He runs every day”. Sentence 6 should be “He plays tennis on Mondays”.

⁴⁴ Sentence 5 should be “He is eating lunch at the moment”.

In the following excerpt from cycle 3, the teacher takes an everyday example of a stative verb, “I love you”, and uses the students’ familiarity with such an expression to highlight the stative nature of the verb *love*.

Excerpt 5.10 from lesson 3

- [1] T: Can you say to your partner “I’m loving you”?
[2] S: No, you say “I love you”.
[3] T: Why can’t you say “I’m loving you”? What’s up with the
[4] verb love? Do you remember the example earlier on with
[5] feet? I’m having big feet. And her with the pizza? (referring
[6] to stative verbs mentioned earlier in the lesson, used in
[7] unconventional ways)
[8] S: “Loving” would be actually sort of right now. But “love” is all the
[9] time.
[10] T: It’s that thing we talked about before. A state. Either you
[11] have big feet or you don’t have big feet. Either you love
[12] your wife or you don’t.

In lines 3-4, the teacher points out that there is something different about the nature of the verb *love*. In doing this, the dimension of lexical aspect is opened up by contrasting stative verbs (for example, *love*, *have*, which have an intrinsic “stateness”), with the other non-stative/dynamic verbs previously used as examples during the lesson. These non-stative verbs can be used with both the simple and the PROG aspect, unlike stative verbs which normally only take the simple aspect.

From cycle 3 onwards, the research team added an extra example to the list – the McDonalds slogan “I’m lovin’ it!” to further exemplify the concept of state and non-state (dynamic). Although it was first presented as an example of grammatical error, and therefore something to be avoided, the slogan was used in later lessons as an example of a stative verb to which a dynamic texture had been added by using the PROG.

In lesson 3, the students were asked to consider the McDonald's slogan "I'm lovin' it!" and discuss whether it was semantically possible to combine speaking about love (a stative verb) with the PROG.

Excerpt 5.11. from lesson 5

(The McDonald's slogan appears on the screen and all the students spontaneously start singing the jingle.)

T: Exactly, "I'm loving it!" But is that right?

S1: (*surprised*) *Is it wrong?*

S2: (*agitated*) *It's got to be right because otherwise we've been saying it wrong for 40 years!*

S3: (*confused*) *But why do McDonald's say this then?*

These students became indignant about the fact that McDonalds uses an advertising slogan that is grammatically "incorrect". The error lies in the semantic conflict of putting a stative verb *love* with the PROG. This example opened up an opportunity to explore not only a discussion of stative and non-stative meanings but also a discussion about the possibility of deliberately using this semantic conflict (the combination stative verb plus PROG) to achieve another layer of meaning. In each of the lessons where this example was used, a lively discussion arose about why McDonalds would deliberately manipulate the language in such a way and what the company was trying to achieve. By using this combination (stative verb and PROG), the students were able to see that grammar is neither static nor fixed. It is evolving and can be used in creative and unexpected ways to convey new meanings.

Discussion of results regarding CA4

When designing the content of the lessons, the research team wanted to create tasks that contrasted the simple aspect with the PROG. Sentence pairs were constructed where everything (subject, verb, object etc.) was

kept invariant except that one sentence was in the simple aspect and the other in the PROG. This meant that the research team intuitively chose non-stative (dynamic) verbs because they can be used both with the simple aspect and the PROG. The desire on the part of the research team to create contrasts between the two aspects, simple and PROG, necessitated the use of non-stative verbs (the only verbs that can be used in identical sentences where both aspects are varied). The importance of lexical aspect (the intrinsic semantic qualities of verbs) as a critical aspect, and how it restricts or encourages the use of the PROG, was not noticed by the research team until the task with “wrong” examples was discussed with the students during the lesson. It is suggested that some vigilance must be observed when constructing examples of contrast, since the contrast *per se*, necessitates the use of only certain types of verbs that can take both aspects.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

This study is concerned with exploring the teaching and learning of the PROG among Swedish 6th grade students. The focus is to ascertain what the students need to discern, (expressed as critical aspects), in order to be able to use the PROG in a syntactically and semantically accurate way.

The research process has resulted in four critical aspects:

- CA1: To differentiate between tense and grammatical aspect
- CA2: To differentiate between simple aspect and progressive aspect
- CA3: To discern the concept of ongoingness
- CA4: To differentiate between stative and non-stative meanings

In this chapter, these findings and how they relate to previous research will be discussed and also the choice of method and the study's reliability and claims to generalization. The chapter concludes with a discussion

of my role as both researcher and teacher, and lastly there are some suggestions for further research.

6.1 KNOWLEDGE CONTRIBUTION

If we regard the four CAs as a whole and relate them to how they have been treated in instruction, certain interrelated features or themes emerge. These can be summarized as follows: (1) the necessity of separation (2) the concept of the undivided whole and (3) the importance of choosing powerful examples.

6.1.1 THE NECESSITY OF SEPARATION

Both CA1 and CA2 require differentiation between grammatical categories (between tense/aspect, and between simple aspect/PROG). The students' ability to separate these grammatical categories is a function of the effectiveness of the pattern of variation, viz. contrast. Since different examples of contrast afforded different possibilities for discerning the CAs, it is suggested that the use of contrast may not in itself necessarily lead to separation. In this study, the effectiveness of the contrast pattern was found to be dependent on how powerful the example is that is used to exemplify the contrast.

Saussure posits that "Concepts have meaning (...) due to their relationships with other concepts; nothing has meaning in itself" (cited in Berger, p.224). If this is so, can it be argued that separation is the process by which concepts acquire meaning? Before concepts, such as the simple aspect and the PROG, are discerned, they have no meaning because they are not differentiated from each other.

Separation is also a pre-requisite for being able to generalize the meaning of these grammatical concepts to other examples/tenses. The students' ability to generalize is contingent upon the extent to which they have been

able to separate the grammatical categories from each other. Thus, the necessity of separation is emphasized and can be seen as both a state and a process –a state from which generalisation can be achieved and a process wherein meaning is created.

6.1.2 THE CONCEPT OF THE UNDIVIDED WHOLE

One could ask if teachers facilitate increased student learning by breaking up a concept into its constituent parts and teaching them as such, in the belief that this makes the concept easier to teach and learn (cf Hirst, 1993). It was only from lesson 2 onwards, when the object of learning was treated as an undivided whole, that is, not bound to one specific tense and thereby carrying a limited significance, that possibilities to understand the core meanings of the PROG, as expressed in CA3, were opened up and observed. Indications for this were found when comparing the results of the post-lesson assessment with how the object of learning was treated during lesson 1. Some teachers may give students a simplified explanation in the mistaken ambition that it makes the chosen object of learning easier to learn. An example of this from the study is the reduction of the PROG to meaning ‘at the moment’ and ‘right now’ and therefore initially enforcing the association of the PROG with only the present tense. The PROG, in my experience, is also exemplified in this way in many school course books and grammar teaching materials. However, giving the students what appears at first to be a ‘quick fix’ may be doing them a disservice in the long run, since it means that difficulties may arise later when students encounter the PROG in relation to other tense/aspect combinations. If only an isolated part of a larger concept has been taught, then it may be difficult to relate this part to a new part if the students have not grasped what is holding the parts together (the relationships between the parts) and how they relate to the whole (the relationship of the parts to the whole). (cf Lo, 2012, p.58). Therefore, it may be more fruitful for the teacher to present the object of learning as an undivided whole, even if

we suspect that many students at first will have a ‘fuzzy’ understanding of what the whole is. Learning is a continuous process of replacing the fuzziness with clarity, and thereby moving from less powerful to more powerful ways of understanding.

6.1.3 CHOOSING AND MANIPULATING POWERFUL EXAMPLES

The effectiveness of the contrast is never greater than the limitations of the examples chosen. Therefore, examples must be chosen and manipulated with care. In this study it has been suggested that not any verb can be used to exemplify a contrast pattern because some verbs do not allow for progressiveness to be opened up. CA4 requires the learner to distinguish between stative and non-stative meanings because verbs that carry a stative meaning are unsuitable to convey ongoingness.

Other factors that affect the efficacy of the examples can be if the verb has another quality that makes it problematical. Consider the verb *live* which was used in one of the lesson tasks. It was difficult to get across the meaning of temporary versus permanent because the verb *live* can be translated into Swedish as meaning *to stay (at a hotel)*. Staying at a hotel is for the vast majority of people a temporary arrangement and thus, not suitable to use in the example in the simple aspect, where the concept of permanence was required in order to contrast with the temporariness of the PROG.

Another factor that affects how powerful an example has the potential of becoming, lies in the hands of the teacher. Consider the contrast example from lesson 5:

- 4(a) He drowned in the pool. (simple aspect)
- (b) He was drowning in the pool. (PROG)

This proved to be a powerful example because the verb *drown* lends itself very well to dramatization and the students can become engaged. Moreover, putting the verb in the past tense and asking the class if the man in (b) was dead, enabled the students to see the outcome of the event as open-ended, as compared to the finality of the simple aspect. Now let us turn our attention to the same contrast, this time in lesson 6:

- 5 (a) Sven drowned in the pool.
(b) Leonard was drowning in the pool.

It has been suggested⁴⁵ whether the teacher's substitution of *He/He* with *Sven/Leonard*, was an instance of fortuitous pedagogical inspiration and that the power of this example was not derived from Variation Theory. I would suggest that the first version of contrast (using *He/He*) was an enabling factor which allowed the teacher, in the moment, to think of an even more powerful contrast. The first version facilitated the creation of the second, improved version and it seems less likely that the second version (*Sven/Leonard*) would have been thought of without the use of VT in the first place. There has been some criticism (Skolverket, 2013) that doing a LrS with the theoretical framework VT, may impede teachers' possibilities to improvise and react to spontaneity in the classroom. The lessons can also be perceived as rigid and artificial (ibid.). I would argue, using the examples from the research lessons, that VT may have facilitated the teachers to access their tacit knowledge and that VT may be a contributing factor to liberating teachers to think creatively. When examples are fully exploited by the professional teacher, they become more powerful than originally intended and designed.

⁴⁵ Yrjö Engeström, personal communication, 28/08/15

6.1.4 FORM VERSUS MEANING, OR BOTH?

Larsen-Freeman (2015, p.263) makes the somewhat surprising reflection that "not much second language acquisition or applied linguistics research on grammar has made its way into the classroom." It may strike the reader as noteworthy that this knowledge has not been distilled into current instructional practice when the amount of research produced in the fields of language acquisition and linguistics is taken into consideration. However, it may not be fruitful to readily apply research results directly onto pedagogical practice (*ibid.*).

Positive results of drawing students' attention to form have been widely investigated (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 1997; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Schmidt, 1990; Spada, 2011; Williams, 2005). Although research supports a focus on grammar in the language classroom, this has not been implemented in practice as widely as one might expect (Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Pica, 2002). Can the argument be made that the concept of grammar has been misconceived by practitioners as only dealing with a narrow definition of itself? In other words, to what extent have teachers assimilated the notion that grammar does not only concern itself with accuracy of form, but is also to do with meaning and use (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Ellis, 1997, Larsen-Freeman, 2015)? In this respect, the results of this study seem to support the necessity of integrating the three aspects of grammar (see Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), namely accuracy, meaning and use. Analysis of the first lesson showed that the design was weighted towards highlighting the form of the PROG and the students' results may have reflected the teaching. In other words, whilst the correct reproduction of the form was observed in the post-lesson assessments after lesson 1, the assessments also showed that the students did seem to achieve a noticeably deeper understanding of the meaning of the PROG, and consequently most of them were not able to use the PROG in a meaningful way. From cycle 2 onwards, however, when bringing the

meaning of the PROG to the fore was taken into consideration, both in the lesson design and in the treatment of the object of learning, a positive progression of results could be observed. These results appear to lend support to Mitchell's (2000, p.297) claim that instruction in grammar needs to be "embedded in meaning-oriented activities and tasks".

It is interesting to note in the study at hand, that the students' accuracy in reproducing the correct form of the PROG does not seem to have been compromised by the shift of focus to the meaning of the PROG, from cycle 2 onwards. The focus on meaning throughout the lesson was manifested in numerous examples both spoken and written, and sustained through continuous discussion between the students and the teacher. A majority of students in every cycle showed mastery of the form in the post-lesson assessments, regardless of whether the design and treatment of content during the lesson emphasized the form or not. This suggests that a focus on the meaning of the PROG may not be detrimental to learning about the form of the PROG. This can be interpreted that it may be more effective to design instruction of the PROG that concentrates on its meaning, since the students will "pick up" the form anyway, than compared with first providing instruction about the form and subsequently talking about the meaning. These interpretations are not supported by previous LrSs that found that a double focus on form and meaning was required. However, Larsen-Freeman (2015) remarks that it is impossible to not observe the form during a grammar lesson, even if the instruction focuses on the semantics and pragmatics of grammar. I understand this remark as allowing for the possibility that students can implicitly learn the form of the PROG, especially when the design of the lesson contains considerable input concerning the form.

This study can be seen as consolidating two proposals for the integration of form and meaning in language instruction. Doughty and Williams' (1998) proposal consists of three models. This study has taken the third

model as a starting point, namely the *explicit* and *integrated* attention to both form and meaning. Ellis (2006) also proposes three models, one of which, using planned tasks to elicit the specific grammatical structure, has been used as inspiration. In Larsen-Freeman's (2015) review of the research literature on grammar learning, she describes form-focused instruction, (such as the two models described above), as having a greater impact on student learning than instruction inspired by the 'non-interface position',⁴⁶ which posits that formal, explicit learning has no effect on language acquisition. Larsen-Freeman (ibid.) points out that the potential for an even greater impact on grammar learning can be realised if, and when grammar is reconceptualised. Signs that this may be happening may be seen in areas such as corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics, content and language integrated learning and the study of grammar at the discourse level (ibid.). However, what appears to be missing from her list is classroom based research that addresses the questions of what to teach, how to design for learning, and why the student learned or did not learn. The above-mentioned language research areas are not known for taking their point of departure in an interventionist approach to solve the real-life linguistic problems that students face every day at school. A reconceptualisation of grammar may not necessarily lead to an improvement in student learning of grammar unless the reconceptualisation involves the practitioners. Therefore, I would suggest that it may also be a reconceptualisation of grammar *instruction* that might have the potential to impact positively on student learning of grammar concepts.

⁴⁶ See Krashen (1988) for a discussion advocating the non-interface position.

6.2 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND TRANSFERABILITY – THE STUDY’S CLAIMS TO RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Educational science covers a vast array of areas, and the aim of research is not only concerned with understanding education-related phenomena but also with improving practice (Burr, 1995.). The common denominator within education is human learning and it is this fact that makes research in education so complex and variable. Whereas the natural sciences have a tradition of controlled experiments, the notion of measurability, and objectivity in relation to bias, research on human learning is embedded in “sites of practice” (ibid., p.95). If these contextual conditions of learning are not recognized and accounted for, research runs the risk of making simplistic interpretations (ibid.).

6.2.1 MANY VARIABLES

It cannot be denied that research entailing intervention in the complex social life of the classroom is “inherently multiply confounded” (Brown, 1992, p.166). Shavelson *et al* (2003) doubt whether the knowledge claims of classroom studies are warranted because research in the classroom can neither account for all the variables nor disregard them, which inevitably affects the reliability of a study. In this study, focus is on the nature and constitution of the object of learning. This is not to say that other variables are of little importance to the results. The classes in each cycle differed from each other and the lessons were taught by two different members of the research team. Procedural reliability is therefore compromised by the fact that there are many variables to take into consideration and the notion of engineering a control group is difficult not only because of practical reasons but also for moral reasons (Brown, 1992). In response to Brown’s criticism, it can be argued that the classes in each of the LrS cycles can be seen as control groups in as much as each subsequent class

receives different treatment (i.e. instruction) from the class before and can then be compared with each other. The differences in results may be able to be related to the different treatments of the object of learning in instruction.

Creswell (2009) recommends various validity strategies, such as triangulation, rich description and clarifying the self-bias as a means to check the findings for accuracy and also to persuade the reader, whereas Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) refer to the correctness and strength of a statement. According to Shavelson, Phillips, Towne, and Feuer (2003,) classroom research, which often relies heavily on the narrative form, lays claim to validity by appealing to “the reasonableness of the argument” (ibid., p.27). In other words, does the researcher make a convincing argument and does the method investigate what it purports to do? (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, Shavelson *et al* (2003) are critical to the narrative approach and question the validity of knowledge claims in such studies.

6.2.2 AMOUNT OF DATA

The LrS has generated a richness of data which in itself created certain difficulties for analysis. Because of time restraints, the lessons had to be taught no more than two weeks apart. This meant that the amount of data to examine (video-recorded lessons, transcripts, and pre- and post-lesson assessments) was considerable. There is always the risk that analyses end up being superficial and the risk of overlooking something important has always been present. The time factor meant that it was not possible to do a deep analysis of each recorded lesson between cycles. If time had allowed, the research team may have been able to analyse the data in more detail and it is possible that other interpretations would have been made. However, the fact that the research team had a limited amount of time to spend on planning and analysis during the research cycles, resulted in time effective meetings, where focus was kept solely on the research project.

6.2.3 DISCUSSION OF ASSESSMENTS

One component in the study that was affected by the tight schedule was the pre-and post-lesson assessment. The research team could have used standardized tests, like the national tests in English which are used in Swedish schools every year. However, these tests do not contain questions that focus specifically on individual grammatical categories. Therefore the team decided to construct their own assessment that would be tailor-made for the purpose of the LrS. The assessment was kept the same throughout the LrS process because of the desire on the part of the team for internal validity. The reasoning was that if the assessment was identical throughout all cycles, this would mean that it would be easier to compare results from before the lesson with the results after the lesson and also to compare groups between different cycles.

Because the assessment was not sufficiently sensitive to what went on in the classroom, it lost some of its validity as a measure of student progress. This is not to say that it was of little value. On the contrary, it provided valuable data and showed a clear progression of student learning from before the lesson and after. However, the research team judged that the results were not a true reflection of the learning that was made visible during the actual lessons. In other words, there was a discrepancy between the somewhat limited questions on the assessment sheet (series of sentences) and the more complex and challenging student discussions taking place during the lessons. It is therefore reasonable to assume that this part of the assessment only showed us a part of the student learning that had taken place as a result of the research lessons. Before embarking on a LrS it is well-advised to create assessments or tests that are sufficiently flexible to reflect the possible further identification of critical aspects during the LrS. Alternatively, the assessments or tests should be extensive enough right from the beginning, in order to encompass a variety of examples

and eventualities that may not have been anticipated before the start of the LrS.

The first part of the assessment - the series of pictures - was intended to facilitate spontaneous production of the PROG. It could be argued that having only three pictures is too small a basis for making judgments about students' knowledge of the form of the PROG. However, the team argued that if the student answered correctly on each picture, then it was reasonable to assume that the student knew the form. Conversely, if the student was not able to reproduce the form on any of the pictures, then it was unlikely a case of bad luck. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to only use three pictures and still be able to get sufficient data to analyse.

As for the content of the pictures, they were chosen to portray ongoing actions in a simple and non-fussy way and the verbs required (run, dance, read) were considered simple enough for everyone to reproduce. However, it was impossible to portray the events as taking place in the past. When the assessment was constructed there was no way for the research team to know that the object of learning would be extended to include all tenses from cycle 2 onwards.

What may have influenced the results of the picture series was the wording of the question used to trigger the students into writing sentences with PROG. In Swedish, there are two possible ways of asking "What's happening?" viz. "Vad händer?" and "Vad är det som pågår?". The team considered using the second variant, but it does not sound completely natural for a 12-year old to say. Also, the word "pågår" means approximately "going on" or "ongoing". It is possible that some students may have connected this word with the English PROG so the team chose the other question because we did not want to make it too easy for them.

6.2.4 DISCUSSION OF INTERVIEWS

The pilot interviews were carried out with only six students. This was a small sample of students and therefore it is not possible to draw statistically supported conclusions. A larger sample would have given a more solid foundation which would have been desirable. The categories of student conceptions that emerged from the interview data formed the basis for evaluating the second part of the assessment. This means that the data carry a considerable weight when judging the validity of the study. However, the students were chosen with great care by the teacher who taught the whole 6th grade. These six students were judged by the teacher to have a wide range of knowledge of English and therefore, it was hoped the students would also reveal a sufficiently wide range of conceptions of the PROG. Furthermore, Swedish classes are not streamed unlike many other schools abroad and therefore, classes on average should exhibit a great range of student ability. It could be argued that it may be easier to get a wide range of conceptions in a Swedish class compared with other countries because there is a good cross-section of student ability already built into the system.

6.2.5 CLAIMS TO GENERALISATION

The significance of the results has not been tested statistically, and it is possible that other factors have played a part. The validity of this study can be addressed by asking if the conclusions are reasonable and credible - for example, whether the critical aspects are as significant to learning as stated, or if there are other factors that could also explain the learning, and if the data could be interpreted in other ways (Kullberg, 2010). It is not asserted that the aspects which emerged as critical in this study are necessarily critical for other groups of students and therefore generalizable in that way. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that the term generalization has a complexity of meaning and should not only highlight one aspect of the word (Larsson, 2009). The question of generalization in

qualitative research is sometimes expressed in terms of the transferability of results to other contexts (Creswell, 2009; Runesson, 2011; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Kullberg (2010) posits that it is possible to communicate knowledge gained from a LrS to other 'new' teachers. Swedish teachers have used the results of a Hong Kong LrS as a resource (ibid.). These studies have shown that teachers produce useful and transferable knowledge about conditions for learning (ibid.). Runesson (2011) grants that some criticism may be warranted towards the LrS approach, namely that the lesson design inhibits teachers from responding to the unplanned situations that inevitably arise in every teaching situation and also that the results of a LrS can be implemented in such a way that they become technical handcuffs and thus hardly suited to dealing with the unpredictable and multi-dimensional reality of the classroom. In response to this criticism, it can be seen in this LrS that the participating teachers were able to exploit the iterativity built in to the design, thanks to a continued refinement and specification of the examples chosen to highlight contrast, from cycle to cycle. The iterativity also allowed for the identification of further critical aspects during the actual LrS, thereby creating a dynamic process.

Other ways of fulfilling the criteria for generalization can be accounted for. For example, if the researcher gives sufficiently rich descriptions of the research context, then readers can reach their own conclusions as to whether their own context and practice is similar (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Larsson, 2009). While this type of generalization may be applicable, another type of generalization described by Marton and Runesson (2015) is of more relevance to this study. They propose that the theoretical descriptions of critical aspects are universal since they are descriptions of the nature of the object of learning and not tied to a specific context. The critical aspects in this study may not be critical for certain students or critical for students in other contexts, but they are tied to the object of learning and as such the knowledge generated (i.e. the critical aspects) can

be seen to be general for this object of learning. It is therefore reasonable to assume that to develop the ability to use the PROG in an accurate way, students must discern the critical aspects as identified in this study. The knowledge generated, therefore, is a theoretical description of the critical aspects assumed to be significant for student learning of the PROG

6.2.6 AVOIDING BIAS

When compared with Lesson Study, which uses no explicit learning theory, the use of Variation Theory not only gives a clear advantage for designing teaching (Elliott, 2012), it also adds validity to this study as the design and analysis are anchored in a scientific approach (*ibid.*). However, the very adherence to the theory has the capacity to influence the researcher's analysis in a negative way since its use as both a design tool and analytical tool exposes the results to a circular reasoning, as the theory may influence the analysis (Kullberg, 2010). Bias can inadvertently creep into my interpretation of what actually happened in the classroom, which sequences were deemed significant, and what was ignored and therefore backgrounded. Our natural instinct as teachers is to want to contribute to enhancing student learning, and participation in this LrS may have been regarded as an opportunity to make a difference. If this was the sole desire, then it may be questioned as potentially leading to an unwarranted positive interpretation of the results. As for the participating teachers, it became apparent during the team discussions that intellectual curiosity and desire to develop professionally as English teachers were the main driving forces behind participation. The lessons were designed and analysed collaboratively and student results were not used in any way as a basis for later student grading. Therefore the teachers had no direct vested interests in misinterpreting or embellishing the student results.

6.2.7 PRIMUS INTER PARES⁴⁷ - BOTH RESEARCHER AND TEACHER

It is not entirely unproblematic to take on the role of teacher researcher with colleagues. The relationship between myself as teacher researcher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990) and the other teachers engaged in the collaborative research raises ethical questions (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). There is the issue of who legitimately owns the research question and also who has the authority to construct knowledge.

In the case of Lesson Study and the more emancipatory wing of action research, these power issues appear to be resolved in favour of the teachers, but the issue is more complicated in LrS. Advocates of action research argue that values which inform practice are not available from outside and that in order to gain access to this practice it is necessary to involve the practitioner (Elliott, 1991; Rönnerman, 2011). As I was doing research at what was at the time “my own school” I can be considered an “insider” researcher (ibid.). This has endowed me with practical advantages, such as familiarity with the setting, students and culture, but it also means that a particular awareness must be maintained towards my colleagues to uphold my new role as researcher-colleague and not only as teacher-colleague, at least for the length of the LrS. This potentially “messy collaboration” (Adamsson & Walker, 2011) begs the question that Carlgren (2012) poses as to whom is the research object. As the lessons are video-recorded in LrS, it is tempting for the uninitiated to assume that it is the teacher that is being observed. Indeed Cain (2011) maintains that “any inquiry into the classroom must include inquiry into the teacher” (p.12). In this LrS, the teacher researcher and the participating teachers have taken joint responsibility for the lesson design because it is not *teacher-*

⁴⁷ A Latin phrase meaning “first among equals”. Used to describe a person in a group who is formally equal in rank but who enjoys a special authority.

specific variables tied to the nature of the teacher that are explored or accounted for, but rather *teaching*-specific variables such as how the critical features of the object of learning are made available for student discernment. As Hattie (2009, p.126) remarks:

Maybe we should constrain our discussion from talking about qualities of teachers to *the quality of the effects of teachers on learning* – so the discussion about teaching is more critical than the discussion about teachers.

Cain (2011) maintains that research involves undertaking public action and since action research is no exception, it does not escape political implications. In action research, I am part of the structure that is being observed and therefore one of the actors that perpetuate the structure that needs to be changed (Newton & Burgess, 2008). Who, then, can say what “improvements” need to be made? By taking part in collaborative research with fellow practitioners, I am also participating in an endeavour to legitimize teacher research in the eyes of the academic community (Cain, 2011). This is an act which may have consequences for the perceived reliability of both the research and the researcher. Even if the teachers in this LrS were enthusiastic and readily agreed to participate, the choice of research object and research question was influenced initially by what I consider to be worthwhile. However, the issue of what I deem to be worthwhile, is in turn coloured partly by prevailing political ideologies as expressed in the current curriculum. The research team was therefore aware that they were entering a discourse on what is worthwhile learning, that is, what is deemed worthy to be learned.

The research team took part in a collaborative venture. It is acknowledged that the often tacit knowledge of practitioners can be made visible and make valuable contributions to research on practice (Carlgren, 2012). For myself as teacher researcher, the increased scientific competence gained from taking part in the Learning Study research school, combined with

pedagogical and practical experience-based knowledge, was an enriching factor to this research project (cf Elliott, 1991). However, my growing knowledge of Variation Theory created a discrepancy of understanding between myself and the rest of the research team. Discrepancies may have also existed between the participating teachers, but these were neither explicitly manifested in the discussions nor in their teaching.

Action research is open to criticism of researcher bias and validity issues by the fact that it is interested parties who undertake the research (Hammersley, 2004). Since the researcher is the primary data collection instrument, this is an area where it is warranted to identify personal values to add to the reliability of the study (Creswell, 2009). As for bias on the part of the teacher researcher, it is acknowledged that the desire to enhance teaching and learning of the PROG has been one motive for participating in this research project. But this desire is based on the belief that searching for possible solutions to problems inevitably means being prepared for setbacks. Results, that may on the surface be classed as disappointing, not only give valuable information as to how students understand the PROG but also point towards improved lesson design and should therefore not be dismissed as a failure from a research perspective. Vigilance about bias may even result in an overly cautious interpretation of results, but because the LrS was a collaborative venture both in design, implementation and initial analysis, it is reasonable to assume that individual tendencies towards bias, whether positive or negative, were tempered by other members of the research team.

Research on and in the researcher's own practice requires an awareness of pre-understandings that may otherwise be left unchallenged or taken for granted (Larsson, 1994). The research teams' responsibilities in this study have been to deal with the responsibilities of planning, analysing and carrying out the research lessons. However, my double role as researcher and teacher has required a joint focus - not only on practicalities

and action, but also on my ability to distance myself from the data in order to reflect and analyse, both during the LrS and after. Participating in a research school has meant that I have been able to receive input from outside the research team, in the form of lectures, seminars and qualified supervision. These opportunities to reflect provided opportunities to distance myself from the data during the actual LrS. The passing of time from when cycle 6 finished in late autumn, 2013, has further contributed to creating a deeper distance to the data, which is necessary when analysing the results. This is in line with Larsson's (ibid.) appeal for the researcher to be self-conscious in order to be critical, especially so when the research takes place with colleagues.

6.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

If the knowledge generated by this study is to have a cumulative effect, then it should not only build on the work of previous scholars, but also provide a springboard and inspiration for further research. A suggestion for deepening knowledge of the nature of the PROG would be to carry out a study with the main results of this study (the critical aspects) as the starting point (cf. Runesson & Gustavsson, 2012). The research might focus on whether there are more critical aspects to be found and could be carried out with other groups of students, e.g. younger learners or pre-service teachers. A similar suggestion would be to investigate if the ways of understanding the PROG (as discourse, tense, and ongoingness) as expressed by the students in this study are comparable or generalizable to other student groups such as those mentioned above.

The present study is concerned with the PROG, which is one instance of the grammatical category of aspect. It is therefore tempting to investigate the other instances of grammatical aspect, namely the perfect, the perfect progressive and the simple aspect.

An interesting line of research, which was beyond the scope of the present study, would be to record and analyse student utterances when they sit in groups during the lesson and discuss between themselves the different contrasts embedded in the example sentences. Research into this might result in finding more critical aspects which could provide a further refinement of knowledge as to the relationship between the students and the object of learning, and also for designing effective instruction.

By researching what aspects are critical in order to use the PROG in a syntactically and semantically accurate way, it is hoped that that this study has made a theoretical and practical contribution to the knowledge base of grammar instruction in English as a foreign language.

SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

Att göra skillnad. Undervisning och lärande av engelskans pågående form i en svensk skolkontext.

Bakgrund

Vad behöver elever kunna för att utveckla förmågan att använda pågående form (PROG) i engelska? Denna studie handlar om sökandet efter och identifierande av vad som kan vara kritiskt för lärande av denna grammatiska struktur.

Pågående form är svår att lära sig för de som inte har engelska som modersmål (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Dahl, 1985). En del av svårigheten ligger i att strukturen i sig är komplex och sammanbunden med tempus. En annan källa till svårigheter, särskild ur ett svenskt perspektiv, är att PROG inte finns i en markerad form i det svenska språket.

Låt oss ta följande två meningar för att illustrera skillnaden mellan de två grammatiska kategorierna, tempus och aspekt:

- (a) Susan and John *live* in Stockholm.
- (b) Susan and John *are living* in Stockholm.

Båda meningarna är i presens (tempus), men de uttrycker olika innebörder som har med grammatisk aspekt att göra. I mening (a), är verbet i enkel aspekt som förmedlar innebörden att händelsen är tänkt som en helhet (Hirtle, 1967). I detta specifika exempel, är intrycket att Susan och John bor permanent i Stockholm, de har troligtvis bott där en längre tid och har inga planer på att flytta.

I mening (b) är verbet i pågående aspekt (PROG). Den skildrar händelsen som begränsad och oavslutad (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Implicit i (b) är känslan att Susan och John bor i Stockholm temporärt. De har bott någon annanstans innan de flyttade till Stockholm, och det är mycket möjligt att de flyttar därifrån i framtiden. I dessa två exempel ser vi att enkel aspekt förmedlar att någonting är permanent, medan PROG förmedlar att någonting är övergående, pågående, temporärt.

Lingvistisk forskning kan berätta om vad PROG är (cf Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Comrie, 1976; Dahl, 1985; Quirk & Greenbaum, 1993; Svartvik & Sager, 1983). Men det finns väldigt lite pedagogisk forskning om vad och hur PROG kan läras ut, det vill säga, vad behöver komma fram i undervisningen för att eleverna ska ha möjlighet att lära sig använda PROG. Därmed är kopplingen mellan forskning och undervisning svagt utvecklad (Larsen-Freeman, 1991, 2015).

Det finns alltmer forskning som tyder på att explicit undervisning om grammatiska begrepp, som PROG, påverkar lärandet positivt (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004; Norris & Ortega, 2000). Dock kvarstår språklärares frågor om vad denna explicita undervisning ska innehålla och hur den ska manifesteras. Denna studie bidrar till ämnesdidaktisk forskning genom att generera kunskap om vad elever behöver lära sig för att kunna förstå och använda PROG.

Forskningsfrågan är:

- Vilka kritiska aspekter behöver elever i årskurs sex urskilja för att kunna använda pågående formen på ett syntaktiskt och semantiskt korrekt sätt?

Teoretisk utgångspunkt

Den teoretiska utgångspunkten i denna studie baseras på variationsteorin som har sin bakgrund i fenomenografi (Pang & Marton, 2003). Teorin är en pedagogisk teori om lärande och grundar sig i två antaganden. Den första är att våra uppfattningar av världen (fenomenet) är olika eftersom vi urskiljer och fokuserar på olika aspekter av fenomenet. Det andra antagandet är att vi bara urskiljer nya aspekter när de varierar (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton, 2015).

I en pedagogisk situation innebär det första antagandet att läraren först måste ta reda på hur eleverna uppfattar lärandeobjektet, dvs. vilka aspekter som är urskilda. Det ger kunskap om vad eleverna behöver få syn på. Aspekter som är ännu ej urskilda är kritiska och de är nödvändiga för en fördjupad förståelse av lärandeobjektet (Lo, 2012; Marton, 2015). Konsekvenserna för undervisningen är att den måste planeras med syftet att synliggöra dessa kritiska aspekter så att lärande kan möjliggöras. Det andra antagandet innebär att uppgifter måste utformas så att det som ska urskiljas varierar mot en invariant bakgrund. Detta kan ske genom användning av olika variationsmönster såsom kontrast, generalisering och fusion. På så sätt, öppnas en dimension av variation upp och nya kritiska aspekter blir möjliga att se (ibid.).

Metod

Metoden i föreliggande studie har varit learning study som är en intervernerande, undervisnings-utvecklande forskningsansats som syftar till att ge kunskap om hur ett lärandeobjekt är konstituerat (Marton, 2003; Marton & Runesson, 2015). I denna studie är lärandeobjektet förmågan att an-

vända pågående formen (PROG) på ett korrekt och meningsfullt sätt. Genom mikroanalyser av hur lärandeobjektet behandlas under forskningslektionerna kan antaganden göras om vad som kan vara kritiskt för att kunna lära sig denna förmåga. Dessa kritiska aspekter behöver urskiljas av eleverna och därför planerar forskarlaget en serie lektioner (lektionscyklar) med syftet att göra de kritiska aspekterna synliga i undervisningen. Varje cykel består av följande moment: förbedömningar av elevernas kunskaper, planering och genomförande av lektioner, efterbedömningar, analys och utvärdering av bedömningarna och lektionerna i relation till varandra, och slutligen, eventuella revideringar av lektionsdesignen inför nästa cykel.

Studiens genomförande

Den empiriska studien genomfördes på en högstadieskola i en mindre kommun i södra Sverige. Totalt deltog 109 elever i årskurs sex, från sex olika klasser, samt utöver den forskande läraren, tre erfarna lärare i engelska. Studien började med en pilotstudie där 6 elever intervjuades. Syftet var att ta reda på vilka uppfattningar de hade av PROG. Dessa olika uppfattningar ger kunskap om vilka svårigheter elever kan ha och följaktligen, vad som möjligen är kritiskt för lärande.

Efter intervjuerna, genomfördes sex learning study cykler. Innan varje lektion gjorde eleverna en förbedömning för att forskarlaget (lärarna och forskaren) skulle få kunskap om elevernas kunskapsnivå beträffande lärandeobjektet. Bedömningen bestod av (1) en serie bilder som syftade till att generera spontan skriftlig produktion av PROG., och (2) en serie meningar där varje par var identiska förutom att verbet i den ena meningen var i enkel form och den andra var i PROG. Eleverna uppmuntrades att skriftligen motivera hur de förstod skillnaden mellan varje mening. Också

av intresse var att veta om de förstod varför och i vilket sammanhang, den ena grammatiska formen eller den andra formen var mer lämplig att använda. Elevernas svar på bildserien analyserades utifrån om eleverna hade använt formen på ett grammatiskt korrekt sätt, det vill säga, om hjälp verbet fanns och om ändelsen *-ing* var med på huvud verbet. Svaren på den andra delen av förbedömningen var av en mer kvalitativ karaktär, där elevernas svar analyserades och bedömdes utifrån vilken motivering de hade skrivit. Resultaten från intervjuerna, det vill säga, tre olika sätt att förstå PROG, användes som underlag för att bedöma elevernas kunskaper på för- och efterbedömningarna. Varje forskningslektion spelades in och analyserades av forskarlaget med variationsteori som analysredskap. För- och efterbedömningarna relaterades till hur lärandeobjektet behandlades under lektionerna och nya kritiska aspekter växte fram.

Resultat

Resultatet av intervjuerna (pilotstudien) visade att eleverna förstod PROG på tre kvalitativa olika sätt: att se PROG som (1) markör för diskurs, (2) markör för tempus, och (3) markör för ”pågående” (att något är pågående). Det första sättet att förstå är den minst utvecklade förståelsen och det tredje sättet är den mest välutvecklade. Dessa olika förståelser gav forskarlaget en grund för att söka efter lärandeobjektets kritiska aspekter. Vissa antaganden formulerades och omsattes i lektionsdesignen inför den första cykeln. Efter analys av lektion 1 var forskarlaget överens om att både designen och de presumtiva kritiska aspekterna behövde revideras radikalt. Från och med cykel 2, testades och förfinades de nya kritiska aspekterna i en ny undervisningsdesign som baserades på olika variationsmönster.

Huvudresultatet av studien är lärandeobjektets fyra kritiska aspekter:

- Att särskilja tempus och (grammatisk) aspekt
- Att särskilja enkel form och pågående form
- Att urskilja innebörden av ”pågående” (dvs. vad det betyder att något är pågående)
- Att särskilja statiska och icke-statiska (dynamiska) innebörder

De två första kritiska aspekterna har med både den grammatiska formen (morfosyntaxen) att göra och med strukturens mening (semantiken). Den tredje aspekten har att göra med de olika innebörder av PROG som manifesteras när olika tempus används. Den sista aspekten betyder att man måste kunna se att alla verb har en inneboende lexikal betydelse (antingen statisk eller icke-statisk) som påverkar om man kan använda PROG eller inte.

Diskussion

Studiens kunskapsbidrag är de fyra kritiska aspekter som beskriver vad eleverna behöver kunna för att använda PROG på ett korrekt och meningsfullt sätt. Om vi behandlar dessa kritiska aspekter som en helhet, framträder vissa sammanhängande teman: (1) nödvändigheten av separation, (2) betydelsen av den odelbara helheten, och (3) betydelsen av kraftfulla exempel. För att kunna uppfatta PROG på ett utvecklat sätt, måste eleven både kunna separera grammatisk tempus från grammatisk aspekt, och kunna separera enkel form från pågående form. Dessutom, noterades bättre elevresultat när lärandeobjektet behandlades som en helhet. Inför cykel 2, utvidgades lärandeobjektet till att omfatta hela PROG oavsett tempus (och inte bara i presens som i cykel 1). På detta sätt kunde eleverna komma åt de olika innebörder av PROG som manifesteras i olika

tempus. För att kontrasten ska vara framgångsrik är valet av exempel avgörande. Till exempel, skymde vissa verb kontrasten medan andra gav ett mervärde.

Sammanfattningsvis, när de kritiska aspekterna gjordes synliga i undervisningen, noterades en klar progression i elevernas förståelse av PROG, både vad gäller svaren på efter-bedömningarna och kvalitén på diskussionerna under lektionerna. Den här studien stödjer att en undervisning baserad på variationsteori gör skillnad på elevernas förmåga att använda PROG på ett syntaktiskt och semantiskt korrekt sätt.

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APPENDICES

I ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS

PROG	the progressive aspect
PRES PROG	the present progressive
LrS	Learning Study
LrSs	Learning Studies
LS	Lesson Study
VT	Variation Theory
PCA(s)	presumptive critical aspect(s)
CA(s)	critical aspect(s)

2 INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM SENT TO STUDENTS' GUARDIANS

Informationsbrev om Learning Study, 2013-10-24

Hej!

Sedan några år tillbaka har vi på [REDACTED] arbetat med Learning Study – en modell där lärare arbetar tillsammans med att planera, genomföra, analysera och förbättra undervisningen. I första hand har modellen använts i matematik, men i arbetslag 6 kommer vi att göra en Learning Study i ämnet engelska. Detta är ett forskningsprojekt som genomförs i samarbete med Högskolan i Jönköping.

För att kunna analysera undervisningen behöver vi filma några lektioner för att se om undervisningen blev som vi hade tänkt. När vi analyserat en lektion ändrar vi på den och försöker förbättra den innan vi genomför lektionen i en ny klass. Fokus kommer inte att ligga på vad enskilda elever gör, utan på hur undervisningen kan läggas upp på bästa sätt. Vårt syfte är att öka kvaliteten på undervisningen så att eleverna ges möjlighet att lära och utvecklas så mycket som möjligt.

Deltagandet är frivilligt och bygger på att du som förälder/målsman ger tillstånd till att ditt barn deltar. Naturligtvis kommer inspelningarna att behandlas varsamt, enligt de riktlinjer som finns för forskningsetik. Detta innebär att filmerna aldrig kommer att publiceras på internet eller annan offentligt forum. Däremot kan delar användas i utbildningssyfte för lärare, dvs. vid föreläsningar och seminarier eller i forsknings-sammanhang. Vid dessa tillfällen kommer filmerna aldrig att distribueras vidare utan endast visas.

Vill ni veta mer om Learning Study eller har andra frågor får ni gärna kontakta mig.

Med vänlig hälsning

Clare Lindström

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXX-XXXXXX

Målsmans tillstånd till deltagande i Learning Study

_____ Ja, jag ger tillstånd för mitt barn att delta i studien. Inspelningarna får användas i projektet samt i utbildning och vid forskningskonferenser.

_____ Nej, jag vill inte att mitt barn deltar i studien.

Elevens namn: _____

Målsmans underskrift: _____

Namnförtydligande: _____

3 INTERVIEW SENTENCES – SHEET I

1a Susan and Carl are living in Stockholm.

1b Susan and Carl live in Stockholm.

2a He was writing a letter.

2b He wrote a letter.

3a They will be going to the party.

3b They will go to the party.

4a He has been playing football.

4b He has played football.

5a They had been walking every day.

5b They had walked every day.

6a We will have been living here for 2 years.

6b We will have lived here for 2 years.

4 INTERVIEW SENTENCES – SHEET 2

- 1 He is talking on the phone now.
- 2 I am studying biology at Malmö University.
- 3 Johanna is living with her parents.
- 4 Henrik is kicking the football in the school yard.
- 5 She is coming home tomorrow.
- 6 He is always telling jokes.
- 7 She is becoming more and more like her mother.
- 8 He was walking to school at 8.30 this morning.
- 9 Karin was washing her hair when the phone rang.
- 10 John was coughing all night long.
- 11 I was hoping you could give me 500kr.
- 12 He will be taking a test at 9.00 tomorrow.
- 13 Malin will be working on her book for the next two years.
- 14 Tony has been dating Alice.
- 15 I have been reading a book.
- 16 The students have been getting better and better.

- 17 You have been smoking again!
- 18 Lena had been working hard, so the doctor told her to take a vacation.
- 19 We had been planning to drive to Stockholm, but changed our minds after listening to the weather forecast.
- 20 I had been wanting to see that movie, so I was happy when I won the tickets.
- 21 On September 16 we will have been living in the same house for 20 years.

5 ASSESSMENT SHEET, PICTURES

Namn: _____ Klass: _____

Vad händer i varje bild? Berätta med en hel mening! Skriv på engelska!



1 _____



2 _____



3 _____

6 ASSESSMENT SHEET, SENTENCES

Namn: _____ Klass: _____

1 He plays hockey.

2 He is playing hockey.

Är det skillnad *i betydelse* mellan dessa meningar? Ja ____ Nej ____

Vad betyder mening 1? Vad betyder mening 2? När skulle du använda den ena och den andra meningen? Motivera ditt svar! Förklara hur du tänker! Skriv på svenska!

3 She walks to school.

4 She is walking to school.

Är det skillnad *i betydelse* mellan dessa meningar? Ja ____ Nej ____

Vad betyder mening 3? Vad betyder mening 4? När skulle du använda den ena och den andra meningen? Motivera ditt svar! Förklara hur du tänker! Skriv på svenska!

5 They live in London.

6 They are living in London.

Är det skillnad *i betydelse* mellan dessa meningar? Ja ____ Nej ____

Vad betyder mening 5? Vad betyder mening 6? När skulle du använda den ena och den andra meningen? Motivera ditt svar! Förklara hur du tänker! Skriv på svenska!

7 The boat sank.

8 The boat was sinking.

Är det skillnad *i betydelse* mellan dessa meningar? **Ja** ___ **Nej** _____

Vad betyder mening 7? Vad betyder mening 8? När skulle du använda den ena och den andra meningen? Motivera ditt svar! Förklara hur du tänker! Skriv på svenska!

7 TEXT FROM LESSON 1

The children go to school every day. They are in the classroom. Right now, they are sitting down. All of the children are holding pens.

One girl has blond hair and she is wearing a pink sweater. She is reading a book. She likes to study.

The boy has dark hair and he is wearing a red sweater. He is writing answers in his notebook.

They are working hard today.