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It's about time

A study on Swedish transfer in temporal adverbials

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1. Introduction

It is well established that learners of English as a second language (L2) are influenced by their mother tongue or first language (L1). This is known as cross-linguistic influence or language transfer (Odlin, 1989). Transfer can be both positive and negative. When the two languages are similar in form or structure, this will facilitate the learning process (Benati & Angelovska, 2016). This is a form of positive transfer. When the first language and the target language or second language, differ the result is negative transfer which causes production errors (Odlin, 1989). For Swedish learners of English as L2, negative transfer is frequently seen in the use of prepositions (Jansson, 2006). This study will focus mainly on prepositions in temporal adverbials, since these are known to cause particular difficulties (Köhlmyr, 2001, p.156). Errors made in the use of prepositions can cause unintentional and unnecessary misunderstandings as well as confusion. That is why I believe it is important for the L2 learner to avoid these errors and develop their level of accuracy.

The purpose of this study is to identify occurrences of transfer from Swedish into English. For this purpose a test with temporal adverbials including prepositions is used as a way of illustrating that school learners are influenced by their mother tongue. Can examples of both negative and positive transfer be identified? If negative transfer can be proven, in which expressions or phrases is this most prevalent? Will the test results show that students with Swedish as their L1 have a higher error rate than students with a different first language? Is there any difference between the results for students in year 7 compared to those in year 9? To what extent can pedagogical material and/or methods influence the test results?

The main research method consists of a test with 15 questions that is handed out to more than 100 students at three different municipal schools in Kristianstad. The error frequency of the test may prove to be a result of transfer, but could also be linked to the pedagogical challenge that these linguistic differences give rise to. The teachers of the students taking part in the study are therefore interviewed and asked to give an account of their experience of transfer, particularly with temporal adverbials including prepositions. The teaching methods and materials vary between schools and this aspect will be taken into account when comparing the test results. In this context it is meaningful to have a closer look at the guidelines of the National Curriculum for the compulsory school. (National Agency for Education, 2011). The section about English will be examined in further detail to see how much (if any) emphasis is put on accuracy in student production.

In the background section, the most essential terms used in this essay are defined and explained. The findings of the study are presented in the result section and then further analysed discussed in the subsequent sections. Finally the essay presents my conclusions drawn from the above-mentioned findings as well as suggestions for further study.

It is likely that negative transfer from Swedish will occur among students with Swedish as their first language. In cases where a learner has Swedish as their L2 and English as a third language, L3, transfer may occur not from their L1 but from their L2 (Benati & Angelovska, 2016, p. 88).

Second language learning is a process that requires that the learners are taught various grammatical features explicitly and practice these repeatedly until they are well established (Bentati & Angelovska, 2016, p. 63). In all probability students in year nine

will therefore score better in the test than the students in year seven. I also believe that instruction and pedagogical materials play an important role and that this will mirror the test results. Raising awareness about transfer as well as directed pedagogical measures are crucial for successful second language learning.

2. Background

Literal translations from a first language to the closest semantic equivalent in the target language (L2) is based on a false assumption that there is a one-to-one correlation between the languages (Köhlmyr, 2001, p. 251). This assumption is the cause of transfer errors. The sub-sections below define the terms of transfer, temporal adverbials with prepositions and the types of errors referred to in this study. The first sub-section gives a brief account of some of the previous research carried out within the field of Swedish L1 transfer in general and particularly with regard to prepositions in temporal adverbials.

2.1 Previous research on prepositions in temporal adverbials

I have not found any study that comprises transfer of prepositions in temporal adverbial phrases only, but there have been studies made on common errors in English made by Swedish native speakers. One extensive study is a doctoral dissertation called *To Err is Human* by Pia Köhlmyr (2001). She identified the most common errors in written production by Swedish 16-year-old students in the compulsory school. Her investigation encompassed 383 compositions which were analysed in view of identifying the most frequent errors which were then divided into sub-categories.

The Köhlmyr study concluded that verb and noun related errors were the most prevalent, followed by prepositional errors (p. 36). Interestingly, she found that most of the prepositional errors involved adverbials. These accounted for 42 % of all the preposition errors (p. 156). Errors relating to adverbial phrases with the prepositions: *in, at, for, on, to*, were the most frequent ones (p.156). Köhlmyr makes a distinction between errors caused by interference from the student's mother tongue, so called interlingual errors, and errors caused by an erroneous use of an L2 rule, intralingual errors (p. 231). Intralingual errors involve an overuse or misuse of a rule, for example: *I'm playing football in a club called XIF* (p. 233). Transfer errors, however, belong to the first category. When a literal translation from Swedish was made, this error was considered a transfer error. Examples: Swedish: *Sjunger du?* translated as: **Sing you?* or *Jag vill lära mig mer* translated literally into: **I want to learn me more* (p. 233). Out of all the errors found in the study, 40 % could be explained by transfer from Swedish (p. 251). Köhlmyr identified three main forms of transfer. These error types are explained in further detail in section 2.4.

There are other studies that have investigated native Swedish speakers' use of English prepositions in various contexts. One example comes from Örebro University and is a bachelor thesis called *Native Swedish Speakers' Problems with English Prepositions* by Hanna Jansson (Jansson, 2006). In her study she investigated 19 student compositions by native Swedish speaking students in their second year at senior high school (Jansson, p. 15).

In this qualitative study she analysed errors in the use of prepositions. She refers to three preposition categories: basic prepositions, such as *on* in the phrase “*on the table*”, systematic prepositions, such as “*come on Friday*” and idiomatic prepositions, for example “*comment on a speech*” (Jansson p. 11). The systematic prepositions, which are relevant to this study, showed to cause more difficulties for the students than the basic prepositions. She explains the reason for this as being that the use of them is governed by rules and therefore less predictable than for basic prepositions (p.11).

The errors found in Jansson’s study are categorized in the same way as in the Köhlmyr study. The majority of all errors were caused by the students making a literal translation of a Swedish preposition instead of using the accurate English equivalent. She therefore concluded that interference was the predominant cause of these errors (p. 32).

Another essay about Swedish transfer has been written by Veronica Dahlin, Lund University. She chose to study Swedish students’ errors in English prepositional verbs (Dahlin, p.12). She tried, among other things, to identify if there was any difference between students with Swedish L1 and students with a different first language, using a similar test method to mine in this study. Her questionnaire consisted of 45 questions, or gap sentences, where a preposition was to be filled in. The corresponding Swedish preposition was in most cases given in parenthesis (p. 12). A group of 25 students in upper secondary school, aged 15-16, and equally many students on the university English A-level participated in her study. She established that students in the lower age group made more transfer errors than the university students did. Due to insufficient replies she was unable to establish whether or not negative transfer from Swedish was more common among Swedish L1 students.

2.2 Definition of temporal adverbials with prepositions

The prepositions *at*, *on*, and *in* are all prepositions that could indicate a point of time or a period of time (Quirk et al. (1985) p. 687). *On* could, for instance, be used for referring to part of a day, as in “*On the morning of 5th June*” or a full day, “*on Monday*”. There is one such example in the test handed out to the participating students (Appendix 1). This preposition is included because the same one is used in Swedish and may therefore lead to positive transfer.

In denotes measurement from the present time into the future (Quirk p. 688). There are three such examples in the test I used for this study. Question 1, for example, reads: “Filmen börjar **om 20 minuter**” which translates into “The film starts **in 20 minutes.**” The preposition *in* can also be used for measuring forward from a time in the past (Quirk et al (1985) p. 689). In Swedish, the corresponding preposition is *på*, as in question 10: “De gjorde tre mål **på tio minuter.**” In English this sentence is translated as: “They scored three goals **in ten minutes.**”

In temporal adverbial phrases, *for* is used to indicate duration. It answers the question: *How long?* Sometimes *for* can be left out in duration expressions (Quirk p. 694). In the test there are several such examples: Question 4: “Vi har bott här **i sju år**” which could be translated into “We have lived here **for seven years**” or “We have lived here **seven years**”.

The adverb *ago* is used for describing a span to a time in the past (Quirk p. 687). Question 2 is an example of this expression: “Jag såg filmen **för en vecka sedan.**” which translates into: “I saw the film **a week ago.**”

2.3 Definition of transfer

“Transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (Odlin, 1989, p. 27). Transfer can be considered as cross-linguistic influence from one language to another. If there are similarities in the linguistic structures, this may facilitate the learning of the new language. This is referred to as positive transfer (p.36). An example of this could be a Swedish sentence such as: *Jag bor i Sverige*, which can be translated literally: *I live in Sweden*.

Transfer does not solely occur in the acquisition of a second language. It also occurs when children learn their first language (L1). Transfer takes place when old knowledge is used in a new context. Children make appropriate adjustments as their knowledge base of their native language grows (p. 154). When there are structural differences between two languages, this may lead to negative transfer. Learners’ production errors are then due to divergences from the norms in the target language (p. 36).

There are also other factors than diverging language structures that may lead to transfer. Odlin mentions motivation, class size and individual variation as possible explanations of why transfer occurs. The personality of the learner, as well as his or her language proficiency level will affect the occurrence of transfer (p. 129). Less proficient learners will rely more on their native language, thus leading to more negative transfer errors. The relation between proficiency and transfer has been questioned, because it only takes negative transfer into account. According to Odlin, there is a great likelihood that positive transfer will also take place. Positive transfer will occur in the advanced stages of second language acquisition just as much as in the beginners’ stages (p.133).

The more structural similarities there are between two languages, the more likely it is that transfer will occur. The English and Swedish languages, for example, have more in common than English and Arabic. Learners who cannot fall back on their first language are less prone to make false assumptions about the structures of the target language (p. 27).

2.4 Definition of errors

Production errors are defined by Odlin (1989) as substitutions when a native language form is used in the target language (p. 37). When words are translated literally from one language to another, these errors are “calques”. (p. 37). According to Odlin, both substitutions and calques are transfer errors. He also mentions simplifications, which lead to the use of a more simple linguistic structure than the target language norm (p.41). Overgeneralizations are errors that occur when a learner uses a linguistic rule in the target language beyond the scope of that rule. (p.18). Simplifications and overgeneralizations are not necessarily transfer errors, as they may have other explanations. There is a degree of uncertainty when determining which error derives from transfer and which does not (p.42).

Köhlmyr classifies the error types as either category errors or realization errors (Köhlmyr, 2001, p. 32). Category errors are errors that occur when the learner is unable to identify the correct grammatical category (p. 32). Realization errors, on the other hand, are

errors that arise when the learner has certain knowledge of the target language structure but is unable to select the correct form (p.32). These two error types are then divided into three sub-groups each:

- Category substitution: wrong item is used: “*in an age of*”
- Category addition: words added to a grammatical structure: “*for three years ago*”
- Category omission: words are left out: “*I to the U.S.A. every year*”
- Realisation substitution: wrong use of selected category: “*I will drove*”
- Realisation addition: superfluous addition of form: “*more larger*”
- Realisation omission: word left out of chosen category: “*I going to*”

In Köhlmyr’s study, there is a distinction made between cases when the learner does not know the correct answer and therefore borrows an L1 substitute (transfer error) and cases when the learner knows the L2 word but fails to access it. Likewise, some researchers distinguish between interference errors, which are caused by ignorance of the correct form and interference mistakes, caused by a failure to access the correct form although it is known (James, 1998, p. 175).

I have not been able to make this distinction due to lack of knowledge about what prior knowledge the participants had when they did the test. When the correct answer is unknown to a learner and he/she borrows a Swedish semantically equivalent preposition, in other words makes a literal translation, the consequence is a transfer error. In this study I have used the terms *substitution*, *addition* and *omission* to categorise the students’ errors. In some cases the *substitution* was considered a transfer error and in some cases simply a *substitution*, with no direct link to Swedish. It can be defined as any other form than the correct form (Jansson, p.6). Any answer that was incomplete has been considered a case of *omission*. Some students left out one or more words in their answers or even left a blank space and these errors were placed in the *omissions* category. Similarly, when a word was wrongly added to an answer it was categorized as an *addition*.

3. Method and material

The main material used in this study is a test on temporal adverbials along with a questionnaire for the English teachers who have taught the participating students. I have also analysed the pedagogical material that these teachers normally use. The National Curriculum contains guidelines and general objectives for English L2 education in Swedish schools. I have looked closer at these and in particular with regard to the matter of accuracy in student production.

3.1 Test

In order to identify occurrences of both positive and negative transfer, I handed out a test to 108 students in school years 7 and 9 in three different municipal schools in Kristianstad. The students have all studied English as a school subject for at least three years. The students, the

teachers and the schools remain anonymous. The test comprises 15 temporal adverbial phrases with prepositions that should be translated from Swedish into English. The phrases are parts of complete sentences and the task is to translate the adverbial expression only. The students were also asked to indicate if Swedish is their mother tongue, or first language. The results are presented and analysed in section 4 and its sub-sections.

3.2 Questionnaire for teachers

I have interviewed the three English teachers who have taught the students taking part in my study. I was interested in finding out more about their experience of negative transfer from Swedish into English. Did they perceive this as a difficulty for their students and, if so, how do they help their students to overcome this problem? The teacher questionnaire is appended to this essay. (Appendix 2).

3.3. Schools and pedagogical material

All of the schools participating in my study are located in the municipality of Kristianstad. The municipality is divided into several school districts. School A belongs to the western district and has 240 students in years 7-9. It is a multi-cultural school with students from both Swedish L1 and other L1 backgrounds. This school offers a special handball profile, where one class in every school year has additional handball lessons as a part of their syllabus. These classes are quite popular and the school enrolls students from neighbouring municipalities as well.

The second school, School B, has classes ranging from year 1-9. There are 140 students in school years 7-9. It is a school located in a village some 30 km outside Kristianstad, but is still a part of the town's western school district. The students come from the village or its surroundings, which are rural areas. School B differs a little from the other two schools in that it is smaller in size and its students mainly come from a Swedish L1 background.

School C is located in the northern school district and has a total of 750 students, from the pre-school classes up to year 9. There are about 400 students in school years 7-9. It is one of the largest schools in Kristianstad. This school also offers special music profile classes, one in every school year, starting from year 4. These classes are available for students who pass the entrance test. School C is multi-cultural and has many students with another L1 than Swedish, just like School A.

The pedagogical text-and workbooks that are used in the schools participating in the study have been examined. The three schools use three different book series. The grammar sections of the workbooks were of particular interest to me and I looked at how and at what stage they introduce and explain the use of prepositions in temporal adverbials. The results are presented in section 4.4.

3.4 The National Curriculum

All schools in Sweden, municipal or private, must follow the guidelines of the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum is established by the Swedish National Board of

Education and was last updated in 2011. There is a chapter for each school subject taught in the compulsory school, indicating what level each student should have reached after school years 7 and 9. I looked closer at the chapter on English and in order to find out what is required of students in school year 9 to get a passing grade.

4. Result

4.1 Overall test result

The test (Appendix 1) was completed by a total of 108 students, 52 in year 7 and 56 in year 9. The students had not been given any information about the contents of the test beforehand. They were told to read the instructions carefully and were allowed to ask questions for clarification purposes only. They had 20 minutes at their disposal to complete the test. In a few cases, when a student was diagnosed with dyslexia, a teacher's assistant helped them by reading the questions and then writing the student's oral answer. This way the test was completed by everyone to the best of their ability and the students appeared to take the task seriously.

Before they began translating the adverbial expressions, the students were asked some initial questions. They should first indicate whether or not their mother tongue (L1) was Swedish. The total number of students with Swedish L1 was 79 out of 108 (37 in year 7 and 42 in year 9). There were 29 students with another L1 (19 in year 7 and 10 in year 9). One of my research questions aimed at finding out whether transfer from Swedish could be seen more frequently among Swedish L1 students. All of the students with other L1 backgrounds had spoken Swedish since early childhood and gone to school in Sweden only. In the presentation of the test results per question category, the students are divided into four groups.

The test consisted of 15 temporal adverbial phrases, most of them with prepositions. All expressions should be translated from Swedish into English. The phrases were parts of complete sentences, but the students were asked to translate the words in bold type only. When correcting the tests, I overlooked spelling errors and accepted answers as long as the preposition or expression asked for was comprehensible. The maximum result was 15 points. The total average scores per school year and per school are indicated below:

Table 1: Total average score per school year

Year 7: Swedish L1: 6.19/15
Year 7: other L1: 6.05/15
Year 9: Swedish L1: 8.19/15
Year 9: other L1: 9.10/15

Table 2. Total average score per school

<u>Result per school (all students)</u>	<u>School A</u>	<u>School B</u>	<u>School C</u>
Year 7	7.5/15	4.94/15	5.21/15

Looking at the overall result, the students in year 9 scored better than the students in year 7. The average result for Swedish L1 students does not differ much from the results for students with another L1 when comparing the total test results. The next sub-sections will present the results for each question category. The correct answers are listed in tables showing the score per school and per school year, also indicating the results for Swedish L1 students compared to other L1 students. The erroneous answers are analysed with regard to the type of errors (*substitutions, omissions* and *additions*) that were most frequent. The errors made by students in year 7 and year 9 have been compared as a way of showing how the erroneous answers differ between the age groups.

4.2 Results per question category

The test questions have been categorized into five different groups with a set of questions involving a particular preposition within a temporal adverbial expression. The first four question categories aim at identifying occurrences of negative transfer and the last one occurrences of positive transfer. Question 11 is an idiomatic expression and was originally included in the test as a way of measuring the proficiency level of the students. Sub-section 4.2.6 provides a presentation of the results for this question, which falls somewhat outside the scope of the study.

4.2.1. Results for Swedish preposition *om* ----) English *in*

The test questions 1, 6 and 8 are examples of temporal adverbial expressions where the Swedish preposition *om* in English corresponds to *in*.

Question 1: Bion börjar **om 20 minuter**.

Answer: (The film starts) in 20 minutes.

Question 6: De åker på semester **om tre dagar**.

Answer: (They are going on holiday) in three days.

Question 8: Matchen börjar **om fem minuter**.

Answer: (The match starts) in five minutes.

4.2.1.1. Correct answers

The table below shows how many students answered each question correctly.

Table 3. Scores correct answers questions 1, 6, 8

Score question 1:	School A	School B	School C	Total	Total in %
Year 7 Swedish L1	12/17	4/16	1/4	17/37	46%
Year 7 other L1	3/3	1/1	5/15	9/19	47%
Year 9 Swedish L1	14/17	6/13	4/12	24/42	57%

Year 9 other L1	2/2	1/3	4/5	7/10	70%
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Score question 6:

Year 7 Swedish L1	12/17	6/16	0/4	18/37	49%
Year 7 other L1	2/3	1/1	6/15	9/19	47%
Year 9 Swedish L1	14/17	7/13	6/12	27/42	64%
Year 9 other L1	2/2	2/3	5/5	9/10	90%

Score question 8:

Year 7 Swedish L1	13/17	5/16	1/4	19/37	51%
Year 7 other L1	2/3	1/1	6/15	9/19	47%
Year 9 Swedish L1	14/17	7/13	5/12	26/42	62%
Year 9 other L1	2/2	2/3	5/5	9/10	90%

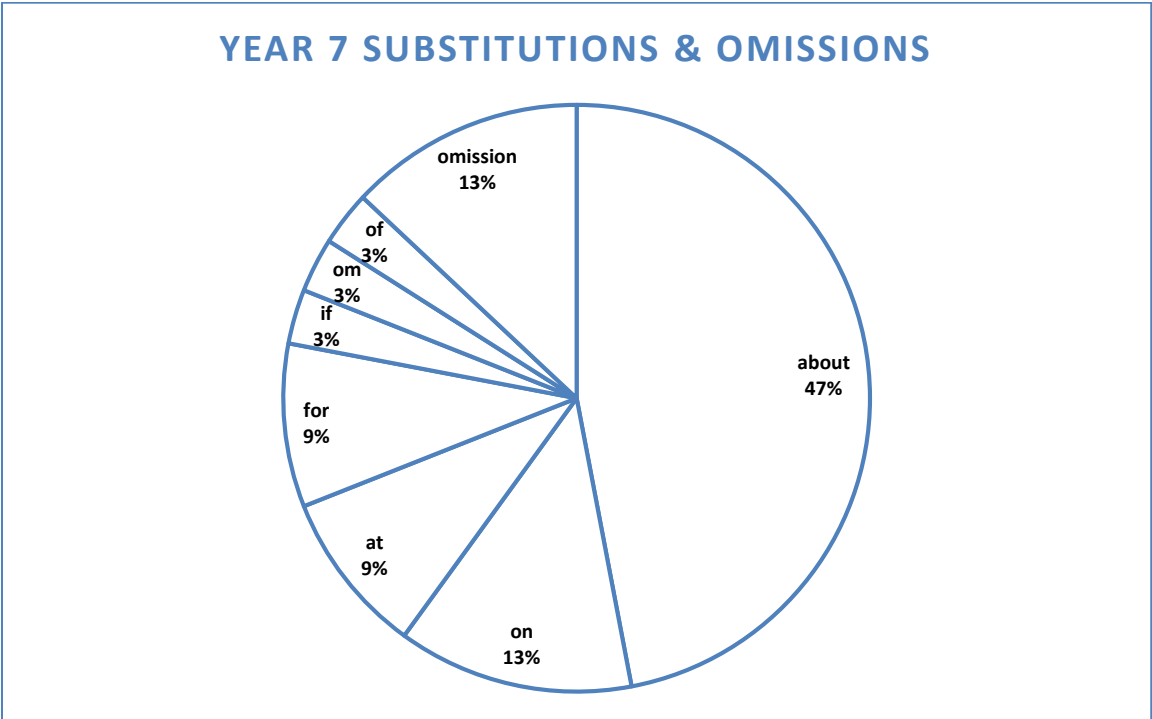
When I added the results for all students in year 7, regardless of L1 background, I found that an average of 48% answered the three questions correctly. In year nine the corresponding figure was 65%. This shows a clear improvement from year 7 to year 9. The differences between the results of students with Swedish L1 and other L1 were not obvious in year 7. In year 9, however, the students with other L1 backgrounds were more successful. The following sub-section gives an account of the most common errors for these questions, first for students in year 7 and then for those in year 9.

4.2.1.2. Erroneous answers

In year 7 more than half of the students failed to provide a correct answer to the questions 1, 6 and 8. These students' errors have been categorized as either *substitutions* or *omissions* (see Background section 2.4.2). There were 56 students in year 7, so the total possible score for the three questions was 168. The total number of errors was 87 out of 168. Most errors consisted of *substitutions*, 87%, while 13% were *omissions*. In the latter case the students left a blank line.

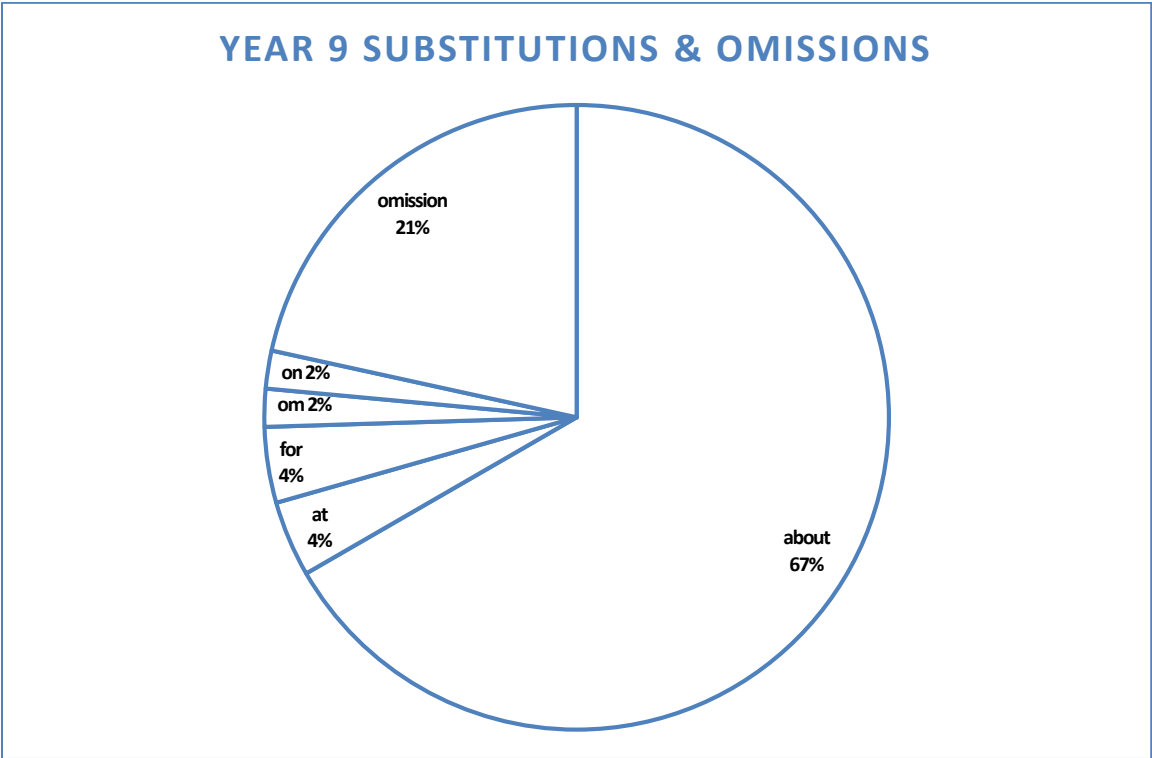
The preposition *about* was used in 41 instances out of the total 87 errors, making this *substitution* the most common one in this question category. The Swedish word *om* can be translated as *about* in other contexts, but not here. Among the incorrect answers there were also other *substitutions*, for instance: *if*, *of*, *at*, *for* and *on*. The pie chart below shows the most common errors made by students in school year 7. The chart shows that *about* was used in nearly half of the instances where an erroneous answer was given.

Chart 1. Most common errors in % of total number of errors for school year 7:



There were 52 students in year 9, which means that the total possible score for the three questions was 156. The total number of errors was 54 out of 156 and again the most frequent answer was *about*. There were more cases of *omissions* in year 9 than in year 7, as this pie chart shows.

Chart 2. Most common errors in % of total number of errors for school year 9:



4.2.2 Results for Swedish preposition *på* ---) English *in*

The test questions 7, 10 and 13 are examples of temporal adverbial expressions where the Swedish preposition *på* in English corresponds to *in*.

Question 7: Han kan springa 100 m **på 12 sekunder**.

Answer: (He can run 100 m) in 12 seconds.

Question 10: De gjorde tre mål **på tio minuter**.

Answer: (They scored three goals) in 10 minutes.

Question 13: Jag åker **på morgonen**.

Answer: (I'm leaving) in the morning.

4.2.2.1. Correct answers

Table 4. Scores correct answers questions 7, 10, 13

<u>Score question 7</u>	School A	School B	School C	Total	Total in %
Year 7 Swedish L1	10/17	4/16	1/4	15/37	41%
Year 7 other L1	2/3	1/1	9/15	12/19	62%
Year 9 Swedish L1	12/17	5/13	4/12	21/42	50%
Year 9 other L1	1/2	1/3	5/5	7/10	70%
<u>Score question 10</u>					
Year 7 Swedish L1	9/17	5/16	1/4	15/37	41%
Year 7 other L1	1/3	1/1	8/15	10/19	53%
Year 9 Swedish L1	13/17	6/13	4/12	23/42	55%
Year 9 other L1	2/2	1/3	3/5	6/10	60%
<u>Score question 13</u>					
Year 7 Swedish L1	10/17	7/16	3/4	20/37	54%
Year 7 other L1	1/3	1/1	8/15	10/19	53%
Year 9 Swedish L1	14/17	5/13	5/12	24/42	57%
Year 9 other L1	2/2	1/3	4/5	7/10	70%

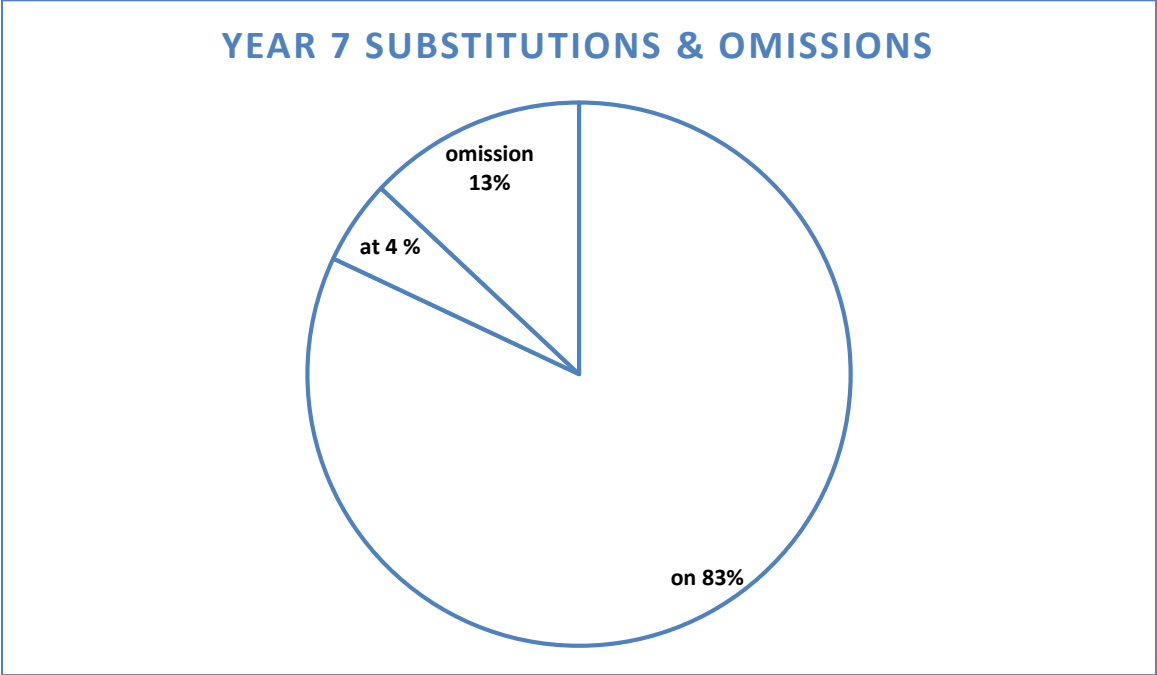
The average score for students in year 7, regardless of linguistic background, was 49% correct answers. For year 9 the figure was 56%. In conclusion, around half of the students were able to answer these three questions correctly. The students with other L1 generally scored a little better than those with Swedish L1.

4.2.2.2 Erroneous answers

There were both *substitutions* and *omissions* among the erroneous answers given by the year 7 students. Out of a possible 168 answers for the three questions, there were 86 errors. The most common *substitution* was *on*, used 71 times. This is an example of negative transfer from

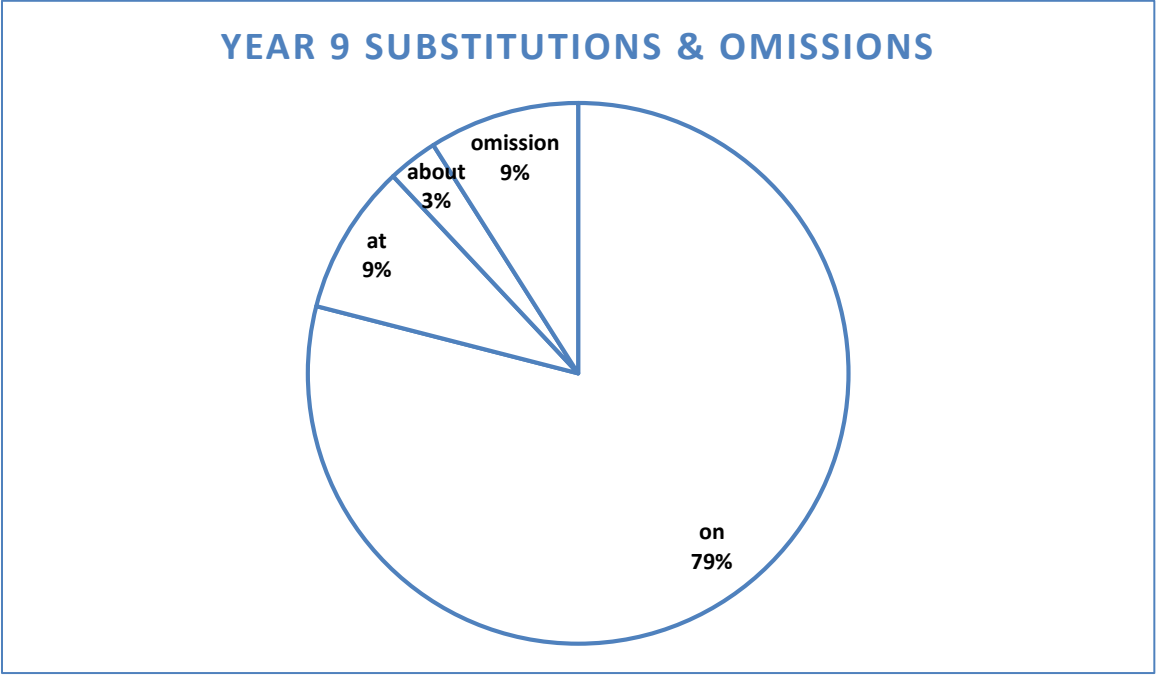
Swedish, since the students have translated the preposition *på* literally. The second most frequent *substitution* was *at*.

Chart 3. Most common errors in % of total number of errors for school year 7



For the year 9 students the total number of erroneous answers was 68 out of a possible 156. In this age group, *on* was used as a *substitution* 56 times. Other *substitutions*, such as *at*, and *about*, were also found, but none of these were used to any large extent. There were also fewer *omissions* among the answers from the year 9 students, as the following pie chart shows.

Chart 4. Most common errors in % of total number of errors for school year 9



4.2.3 Results for Swedish preposition *i* ---) English *for*

The test questions 3 and 4 are examples of temporal adverbial expressions where the Swedish preposition *i* corresponds to *for* in English.

Question 3: Filmen varar **i två timmar**. Answer: (The film lasts) **for two hours** or **two hours**

Question 4: Vi har bott här **i sju år**. Answer: (We've lived here) **for seven years** or **seven years**.

4.2.3.1 Correct answers

Table 5. Scores correct answers questions 3, 4

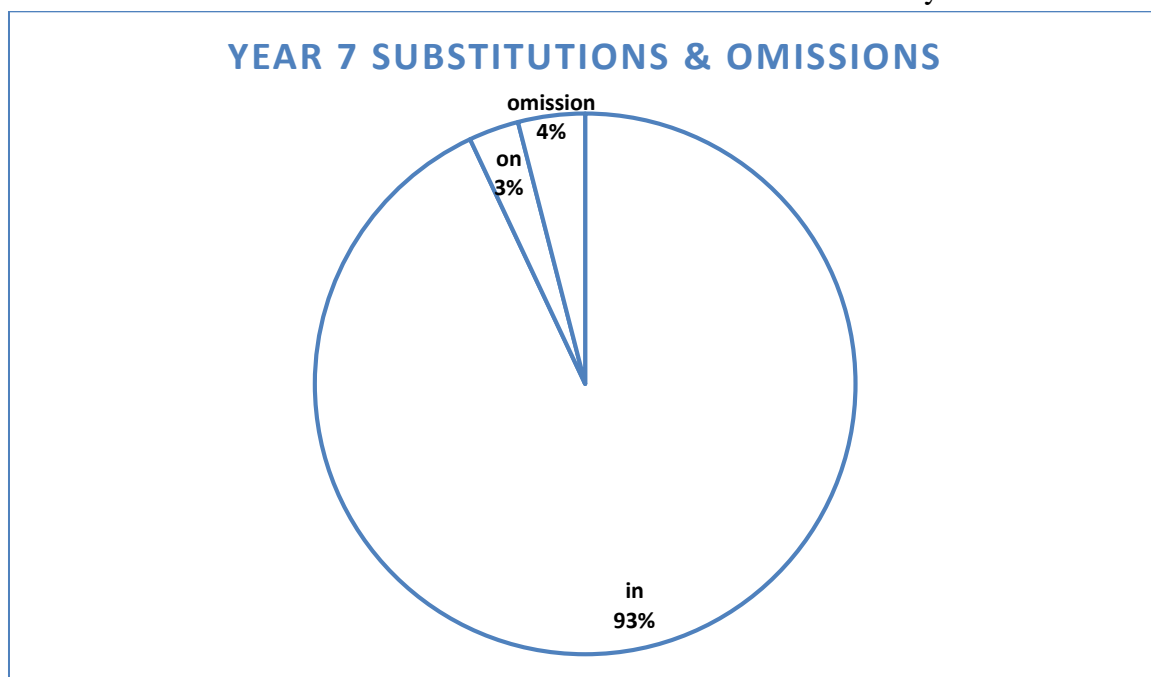
<u>Score question 3:</u>	<u>School A</u>	<u>School B</u>	<u>School C</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Total in %</u>
Year 7 Swedish L1	5/17	3/16	0/4	8/37	22%
Year 7 other L1	1/3	0/1	3/15	4/19	21%
Year 9 Swedish L1	9/17	5/13	3/12	17/42	40%
Year 9 other L1	1/2	1/3	0/5	2/10	20%
<u>Score question 4:</u>					
Year 7 Swedish L1	3/17	0/16	1/4	4/37	11%
Year 7 other L1	0/3	0/1	3/15	3/19	16%
Year 9 Swedish L1	7/17	4/13	3/12	14/42	33%
Year 9 other L1	1/2	1/3	2/5	4/10	40%

The average score for questions 3 and 4 was 11% correct answers for year 7 and 35% for year 9. This shows a significant difference between the two school years, but is a result that is much lower than for the two previous question categories. It is somewhat surprising that the results for year 7 differ between the two similar questions. It seems that the preposition *i* was difficult for students to translate accurately in these expressions. The result above concurs with the findings by Köhlmyr (2001), who concluded that the preposition *i*, as well as *på*, are the most problematic ones for Swedish students (p. 252). In her study *på* caused more errors than *i*, but in this study the opposite is true.

4.2.3.2. Erroneous answers

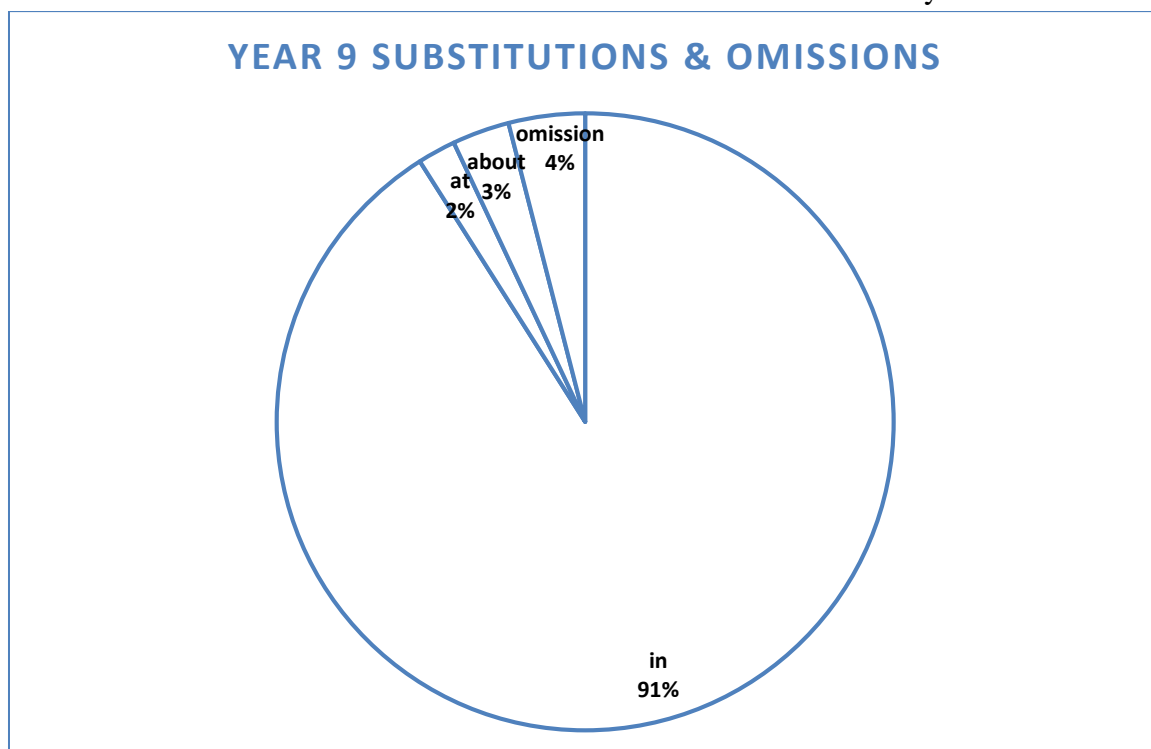
The students in year 7 mainly used *substitutions*. There were also some cases of *omission*. Questions 3 and 4 yielded a possible score of 112. There were 93 errors found. This means that a vast majority of the students answered the questions incorrectly. The most common *substitution* was *in*, used 87 times out of the total 93 errors. This is another example of negative transfer from Swedish.

Chart 5. Most common errors in % of total number of errors for school year 7



The students in year 9 had a total of 67 errors out of a possible 104 for questions 3 and 4. In this age group, the *substitution in* was used 61 times. This result shows that the year 9 students are also influenced by negative transfer from Swedish.

Chart 6. Most common errors in % of total number of errors for school year 9



4.2.4. Results for Swedish preposition *för*....*sedan* ----) English *ago*

The test questions 2, 5, 9 and 14 are examples of a temporal adverbial expression where the Swedish phrase *för*....*sedan* corresponds to *ago* in English.

Question 2: Jag såg filmen **för en vecka sedan**.

Answer: (I saw the film) **a week ago**.

Question 5: Grannarna flyttade hit **för två år sedan**.

Answer: (The neighbours moved here) **two years ago**.

Question 9: Det andra laget vann **för två veckor sedan**.

Answer: (The other team won) **two weeks ago**.

Question 14: Jag var här **för länge sedan**.

Answer: (I was here) **long ago / a long time ago**.

4.2.4.1. Correct answers

Table 6. Scores correct answers questions 2, 5, 9, 14

Score question 2	School A	School B	School C	Total	Total in %
Year 7 Swedish L1	8/17	3/16	1/4	12/37	32%
Year 7 other L1	1/3	0/1	9/15	10/19	53%
Year 9 Swedish L1	11/17	4/13	6/12	21/42	50%
Year 9 other L1	2/2	2/3	2/5	6/10	60%

Score question 5	School A	School B	School C	Total	Total in %
Year 7 Swedish L1	5/17	1/16	0/4	6/37	32%
Year 7 other L1	1/3	0/1	2/15	3/19	16%
Year 9 Swedish L1	9/17	4/13	5/12	18/42	43%
Year 9 other L1	1/2	1/3	3/5	5/10	50%

Score question 9	School A	School B	School C	Total	Total in %
Year 7 Swedish L1	7/17	2/16	2/4	11/37	30%
Year 7 other L1	1/3	0/1	6/15	7/19	47%
Year 9 Swedish L1	10/17	5/13	5/12	20/42	48%
Year 9 other L1	2/2	1/3	1/5	4/10	40%

Score question 14	School A	School B	School C	Total	Total in %
Year 7 Swedish L1	6/17	4/16	2/4	12/37	32%
Year 7 other L1	1/3	1/1	6/15	8/19	42%
Year 9 Swedish L1	10/17	7/13	7/12	24/42	57%
Year 9 other L1	1/2	1/3	4/5	6/10	60%

A correct answer was provided by 31% of the students in school year 7 and by 50% of the students in year 9, regardless of L1 background. The results above show that students with other L1 generally scored slightly better than those with Swedish L1, except for the group other L1 year 7 who unexpectedly were less successful with question 5.

4.2.4.2. Erroneous answers

In year 7 there were 155 erroneous answers out of a possible 224 for these four questions. This means that on average 69 % of the answers were incorrect. There were only ten cases of *omission* and instead the answers to this question category were mainly various forms of *additions*. The variety of answers was much greater than for any of the previous question categories. I will therefore limit the presentation of them to the most common examples. The expression: “*for.....ago*” was used 75 times. According to Köhlmyr (2001) these errors are *category additions*, as described in section 2.4. Here are some examples:

- (1) for two years ago
- (2) for long ago

Alternative constructions with *for* were also used, as in these two examples:

- (3) for one year
- (4) for one week late

There were also other cases of *additions* where the prepositions *by* and *of* were used:

- (5) by a week ago
- (6) of two weeks ago

All the examples above are influenced by Swedish and the expressions have been translated more or less literally. They are therefore considered to be examples of negative transfer. The answers from students in year 9 were similar to the ones given by the students in year 7. There were, however, only two cases of *omission* in this group. The total number of errors was 104 out of a possible 208. In other words, 50 % of the answers were erroneous. A large portion of these, 86 answers, were errors of *addition*. Again many answers included “*for...ago*”, similar to examples (1) and (2) above. The year 9 students also made other *addition* errors:

- (7) before a long time ago
- (8) in a week ago

Most students used the word *ago* in their answers in some way. There were only 11 answers from year 9 that did not include *ago* at all. This indicates that the students have awareness of this English adverbial expression, but are not yet fully able to use it accurately.

4.2.5 Results for questions 12 and 15

These two questions are included in the test as a way of identifying positive transfer. The expressions can be translated literally into English. I will therefore only list the scores of correct answers to these two questions.

Question 12: **Hur länge** stannar du?

Answer: **How long/For how long** (will you be staying?)

Question 15: Vi ses **på måndag**

Answer: (See you) **on Monday!**

Table 7. Scores correct answers questions 12, 15

Score question 12	School A	School B	School C	Total	Total in %
Year 7 Swedish L1	15/17	15/16	4/4	34/37	92%
Year 7 other L1	3/3	1/1	9/15	13/19	68%
Year 9 Swedish L1	15/17	13/13	11/12	39/42	93%
Year 9 other L1	2/2	3/3	5/5	10/10	100%

Score question 15	School A	School B	School C	Total	Total in %
Year 7 Swedish L1	16/17	16/16	3/4	35/37	95%
Year 7 other L1	1/3	1/1	6/15	8/19	42%
Year 9 Swedish L1	16/17	10/13	12/12	38/42	90%
Year 9 other L1	0/2	3/3	4/5	7/10	70%

As expected, the students were able to answer this question category more easily than the others. There is clearly a difference between the scores of students with Swedish L1 and those with another L1. The results show that Swedish L1 students generally scored better. Both the year 7 and year 9 students may have been helped by positive transfer from Swedish, since the preposition is the same in both languages. This confirms the statement by Odlin (1989) in section 2.3, that positive transfer will occur in all stages of L2 acquisition.

4.2.6. Results for question 11:

Question 11: Hej! **Det var länge sedan jag såg dig!**

Answer: I haven't seen you for a long time! / It's been long since I saw you / Long time, no see!

The answers above are some examples of acceptable alternatives. This question differs from the others in the test, as it is not an adverbial phrase with a preposition, but rather an idiomatic expression. The categorization of error types could therefore not be made in the same way as for the previous questions. I expected the students in year 9 to score better than the year 7 students, which turned out to be the case. The table below shows how many students answered the question acceptably.

Table 8. Scores correct answers question 11

<u>Score question 11</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Total in %</u>
Year 7 Swedish L1	7/37	19 %
Year 7 other L1	1/19	0.5%
Year 9 Swedish L1	10/42	24%
Year 9 other L1	2/10	20%

The erroneous answers were of such a divergent character that I could not place them into the *addition* or *substitution* categories. The answers often consisted of a combination of the two. There were only a few *omissions* among the answers, 5 in year 9 and 14 in year 7. The incorrect answers indicate some signs of transfer from Swedish, as the examples below will show. In most cases I believe that the students' expressions would still be comprehensible to a native speaker.

Examples year 7:

- (9) It's been a long time then I saw you
- (10) It was a long time ago when I saw you
- (11) It was a time since last

Examples year 9:

- (12) It was a long time ago
- (13) That was not yesterday!
- (14) It was for a long time I saw you

4.3 Summary of teacher questionnaire

All of the teachers that I interviewed confirmed that they have identified negative transfer from Swedish. Two said it happens very often and one answered occasionally. My second question was if they had identified temporal adverbials as a particular difficulty for their students. Again, two out of three answered that they had found this to be the case very often. The next question concerned their experience of negative transfer from Swedish among students with a different first language. None of the teachers could give any account of this at all. They all replied that they did not know. As regards the pedagogical material, these three teachers used both text and workbooks (see section 4.4) and other resources such as material retrieved online. According to the teachers I interviewed, temporal adverbials, with or without prepositions, are usually taught in year 8. They were in agreement that students in year 7 probably are not yet familiar with some of the expressions. Two of the teachers (school A and B) indicated that at least some of the expressions in my test should be familiar to the students in year 9. None of the teachers had taught temporal adverbials in preparation for the test.

4.4 Analysis of English L2 text- and workbooks

In school A the main pedagogical material for year 7- 9 is called *Magic Textbook* and *Magic Workbook* (Hedencrona et al., 2013). Each textbook contains six chapters with texts of various lengths. At the end of the book there is a grammar section and an alphabetical word list. In all of the three textbooks, year 7, 8 and 9, there is a page about prepositions in expressions of time. The prepositions mentioned are: *on*, *in* and *at*. Examples: *on Sundays*, *in March*, *at 3 o'clock*. (Textbook year 7 p. 114, textbook year 8, p. 122, textbook year 9, p. 138).

The *Magic* workbooks 7-9 contain a variety of exercises relating to the texts in the textbooks. Searching through the three workbooks, I found only two exercises dealing explicitly with prepositions in temporal adverbials. These were in the workbook for year 7 (p. 104). Both exercises included the prepositions *at*, *in* and *on*. The students are asked to fill in either one single missing preposition in sentences such as: “See you _____ Friday!” or several prepositions as in “He was born _____ January 15 _____ 7:30 _____ the morning.” (p. 104).

School B uses the books *Wings year 7*, *Wings year 8* and *Wings year 9* (Mellerby, A., 2010). All workbooks contain a grammar section at the end of the book. In *Wings Workbook 7*, only temporal adverbials without prepositions are mentioned: *sometimes*, *often*, *never*, *usually* (p. 50). In workbooks 8 and 9, there are longer grammar sections and prepositions in adverbial phrases are defined and exemplified more extensively. In *Wings workbook 8*, there are also a few exercises where the use of these phrases is practiced. The exercises include both translation tasks from Swedish into English and from English into Swedish. In one exercise the students are asked to write sentences of their own, using temporal adverbials with prepositions (p. 67-69).

Wings workbook 9 does not include any exercises on temporal adverbials, but prepositions in temporal adverbials are mentioned in the grammar section of the workbook (p. 154). The explanations and examples are identical to the ones in *Wings workbook 8*.

The pedagogical material used in school C for both year 7 and 9 is *Good Stuff Textbook* and *Good Stuff Workbook* (Cooms et al., 2012). The textbooks in the *Good Stuff* series all contain texts divided into chapters and a word list at the end of the book. There are no grammar sections. In the workbooks, there are exercises relating to the chapters in the textbook. At the end of each workbook there are also special grammar exercises, independent from the texts that have been studied. There are no exercises involving prepositions in *Good Stuff* for year 7. In the *Good Stuff* workbook for year 8, the use of the prepositions *at*, *on*, *in*, *for* and *ago* is explained (p.152). There are also example sentences with each of the prepositions. In connection to this explanatory part, there is one exercise where students should fill in the missing preposition in 21 sentences (p.153). These are similar to the ones in the test used in this study.

The setup of *Good Stuff* year 9 is the same. Again, there are exercises revolving around the textbook chapters, followed by a section with grammar exercises (p.114-172). In this workbook there are three exercises concerning prepositions in general. The first two exercises contain gap sentences that are to be completed with a missing preposition (p. 152-153). Unfortunately none of them include prepositions in temporal adverbials. The final exercise on

prepositions is a writing task. The students are asked to write a sentence using one or more prepositions to indicate points in time (p.153).

4.5 Analysis of the National Curriculum

The National Board of Education issues the National Curriculum for the compulsory school in Sweden. The curriculum contains both guidelines for the content of English studies in different school years, as well as the knowledge requirements for a passing grade. The National Curriculum only sets out general guidelines and leaves the pedagogical implications of these to the schools and teachers to determine. I was therefore not expecting to find any specific mention of temporal adverbials with prepositions. What I wanted to find out was if there was any emphasis put on accuracy in student production.

The guidelines for years 7-9 include a description of what kind of texts and spoken English that are useful for students in this age group. Teaching should give students the opportunity to develop their skills in communication, reception (reading and listening), interaction and production (National Board of Education, 2011). Under the headline "*Speaking, writing and discussing – production and interaction*" there are two lines that are of interest to this study. Firstly, the curriculum indicates that students should be given the possibility to work on their personal communications, so that they are able to "*vary, clarify and specify*". Secondly, students should also encounter language phenomena that will "*clarify, vary and enrich*" communication, for example "*pronunciation, intonation and fixed language expressions, grammatical structures and sentence structures*" p. 35).

The grading system ranges from A to E for a passing grade, where A is the highest grade. The curriculum stipulates the knowledge requirements for the grades E, C, and A, and explains that in order to get a grade D, a student must fulfill the requirements for E and most of the requirements for a C. In a similar fashion, grade B is awarded to the student who has fulfilled all the requirements for a C and most of the A requirements (p. 37-38).

I have looked closer at what is required of students for a grade A at the end of year 6 and grade A at the end of year 9. The curriculum mentions the ability to understand spoken English and simple texts. They should also be able to express themselves simply, relatively clearly and relatively coherently in oral and written production (p. 37).

For a grade A at the end of year 9, the curriculum says: "*in oral and written production pupils can express themselves in relatively varied ways, clearly and coherently*"... "*with ease and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation*". Furthermore, the students should "*work on and make well-grounded improvements to their own communications*". This is an important aspect. Improvement in L2 language learning takes place after restructuring and adapting their previous knowledge to new information (Benati & Angelovska, p. 86).

5. Analysis and Discussion

The processes involved in the learning of a second language follows certain orders or stages (Benati & Angelovska, p. 92). Less proficient learners make more transfer errors than more proficient ones (Köhlmyr, p. 354). It would therefore be reasonable to believe that students in

year 9 have come further in their learning of grammatical structures in English L2. The test results show this clearly as well. When comparing the overall result and the results per question category, the same pattern appears.

The results from the test indicate that students in year 9 make fewer errors, but that these errors are still of the same kind as in year 7. The test results per question category show that many students still rely on their L1 and answered with various *substitutions*. In questions 1, 6 and 8 where the Swedish preposition *om* was to be translated as *in*, this became very evident. Many students chose *about* as their answer. This *substitution* is an example of negative transfer and indicates interference from Swedish.

The next question category (numbers 7, 10, 13) is another example of negative transfer. The Swedish preposition *på* should be translated as *in*, but many students instead answered *on*. The results show that many students are unfamiliar with this temporal adverbial. The word *på* can be translated as *on* in some contexts, such as when describing the location of something, but here it is clearly a sign of L1 interference. The students have made literal translations. Some students opted for *at*, which shows some awareness and reflection on the differences between the languages, although it is still not correct.

The questions that seem to have caused the most difficulty for the students both in year 7 and 9, concerned the preposition *for*. In question 3 and 4 this is clearly visible. The expressions in Swedish include the preposition *i*, and a majority of the students answered *in*. This results concurs with the findings of Köhlmyr (2001) as well. She concluded that out of all the temporal adverbial expressions with prepositions, the one that appeared to be the most difficult for the students was *for* (Köhlmyr, p.157).

The expression *för... sedan* in Swedish (questions 2, 5, 9, 14) seems to have been rather difficult for the students as well. The expressions were frequently translated as *for...ago*. The students both in year 7 and year 9 answered in a similar way, with variations of the same answer. *For* is an *addition* and another example of negative transfer.

When I examined the answers it was evident that most students were aware that *ago* should be included somehow. This shows some awareness of the differences between the languages. It is another example of learners being at a certain level in their learning process. The students gradually incorporate linguistic properties of the target language (Benati & Angelovska, p. 25). The differences in the scores for these questions was unexpected. The students may not have noticed the similarity between the questions, explaining their inconsistency.

Questions 12 and 15 were included in the test as way of identifying positive transfer. The score for these two questions by far outreached the results for the previous question categories. The expressions in Swedish could be literally translated into English. When the form is similar or the same in both the target language and the source language, positive transfer makes learning easier (Benati & Angelovska, p. 87). The students with Swedish L1 scored better on these two questions, but considering the limited size of the group of students with another L1, it is not possible to determine with any certainty that these students were at any disadvantage.

The next question I wanted to investigate was whether pedagogical methods and materials can be a successful way of overcoming negative transfer. It is encouraging that all the teachers that were interviewed were in agreement that temporal adverbials are difficult for

students to learn. This shows that the problem is well recognized and considered important. They all said that usually temporal adverbials are taught in year 8.

Raising awareness of language differences is one of the major purposes of grammar instruction (Köhlmyr, p. 345). Grammar instruction should be given an important part in language teaching and feed-back of different kinds and at different times is vital to help learners raise their awareness of language differences (Köhlmyr, p. 355). This way learners will, in time, be able to take responsibility for their own learning, including grammar (p. 355).

When I analysed the pedagogical material used by the three schools, I primarily focused on when temporal adverbials were introduced and how the use of them was explained. I found that all three of them contained very few exercises where the students could practice their skills and use these expressions. When learners' own production, or output, is encouraged, it will prompt them to produce language correctly, precisely and appropriately (Benati & Angelovska, p. 27).

The book *Magic* introduces temporal adverbials already in year 7 and every textbook contains a grammar section. The results in for School A year 7 were generally better than for the other schools. Possibly, the students in this school have encountered expressions with temporal adverbials to some extent already. All the teachers that were interviewed indicated that they also used other pedagogical material apart from the textbooks and workbooks in order to give their students more opportunities to practise their skills.

It is however not possible to determine how much practice these participating students have had before doing this particular test. Pedagogical material, formal instruction and directed exercises can only partly explain the results of the test. Students may or may not have learned to use expressions with temporal adverbials in their spare time. Learning does not take place in a school environment only.

6. Conclusion

The test results strongly show that transfer errors are very common among students in both years 7 and 9. The preposition *for* seems to be the most difficult one of all. This is the clearest example of negative transfer that I found in my study. There were many other examples as well.

Was there a difference between the results depending on the learners' L1? There were 29 students with another L1 participating in the study. In most of the question categories this group scored a result that was equivalent to the Swedish L1 students. There were however instances when the students with other L1 backgrounds scored better, such as in questions where the preposition *på* corresponded to *in*. Likewise, in expressions where *för...sedan* corresponds to *ago*, these students were able to provide a correct answer to a larger extent. This may suggest that this group of students are less influenced by Swedish. In my study the students did not specify which L1 they had. Further study would be needed to find variations in L2 proficiency between students from different L1 backgrounds.

The results of this study show that there is a clear improvement in the results from year 7 to year 9. It is likely that the students in year 9 have had more practice and been exposed to

more input which has resulted in a higher level of proficiency and accuracy in their production. They have had more time to develop their language skills.

This brings me to the last but most difficult question in this study, to determine if pedagogical material help to improve the results. I believe that to some extent it can, but above all the teachers have a pivotal part in the L2 learning process and it is through their awareness, knowledge and experience that the students can be given the opportunities they need to improve their language skills. The results for the year 9 students may be explained by them having reached a higher level of language awareness and with time have gradually corrected some of their previous errors. Teachers are the door openers, providing the students with both instruction, opportunities for practice, feedback and possibilities to restructure their knowledge.

The National Curriculum (NC) emphasises the importance of developing the students' communicative skills. Köhlmyr (2001) claims that increased emphasis on form, awareness of grammatical systems, is necessary to achieve the NC goal of communicative competence (p. 351). Errors caused by transfer will be detrimental to communication, especially with native English speakers as they do not have the background knowledge of Swedish needed to guess the intended meaning (p. 349).

In my view, using the wrong preposition in temporal adverbials may lead to serious misunderstandings. Time is important to all of us, and therefore it is certainly worthwhile to raise the learners' awareness about the differences between the languages and this way avoiding negative transfer from Swedish. Looking at the results of my study, I believe that striving for accuracy should be a guiding principle in language teaching in order to facilitate and enhance comprehensibility. This is a continuous effort, with the aim of closing the gap between what is taught, the input, to what is actually learned, the intake. The learning process will also take place outside the classroom, in many other situations, contexts and at different times.

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Appendix 1

TEST årskurs _____

Är svenska ditt modersmål? Ringa in ditt svar. JA NEJ

Om du svarat NEJ: När började du började lära dig svenska? _____

Hur länge har du haft engelska som ämne i skolan? _____

Översätt bara orden och uttrycken som är markerade i **fetstil till engelska**. *Lycka till!!!*

1. Bion börjar **om 20 minuter**. _____
2. Jag såg filmen **för en vecka sedan**. _____
3. Filmen varar i **två timmar**. _____
4. Vi har bott här i **sju år**. _____
5. Grannarna flyttade hit **för två år sedan**. _____
6. De åker på semester **om tre dagar**. _____
7. Han kan springa 100 m **på 12 sekunder**. _____
8. Matchen börjar **om fem minuter!** _____
9. Det andra laget vann **för två veckor sedan**. _____
10. De gjorde tre mål **på tio minuter**. _____
11. Hej! **Det var länge sedan jag såg dig!** _____
12. **Hur länge** stannar du? _____
13. Jag åker **på morgonen**. _____
14. Jag var här **för länge sedan**. _____
15. Hej då! Vi ses **på måndag!** _____

Appendix 2

QUESTIONNAIRE for teachers

1 .In your professional experience, have you identified negative transfer from Swedish L1 among your students?

- Yes, very often
- Yes, occasionally
- No, only very rarely
- No, never

Comment: _____

2. In your experience, have you identified temporal adverbials as a particular difficulty for your students?

- Yes, very often
- Yes, occasionally
- No, only very rarely
- No, never

Comment: _____

3. As a teacher, have you found that Swedish L1 students make more mistakes in this area than students with a different L1?

- Yes, they make more mistakes
- No, they make equally many mistakes
- I do not know

Comment: _____

4. In which school year do you introduce this grammatical feature? (circle your answer)

- Year 7 Year 8 Year 9 In every school year

Comment: _____

5. What pedagogical material do you use?

- L2 textbook and/or workbook - own pedagogical material - combination of both

Comment: _____

6. Have your students been taught how to translate temporal adverbials before doing this test today?

- Yes, the students have practiced this recently
- Yes, the students are familiar with some of the expressions
- No, the students have not studied this specifically
- No, the students have not practiced this at all