In English, please!

- Teacher reflections on the use of target language in instructional settings of lower secondary ESL learners.

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Abstract

Kind of essay: English for Students in Teacher Education (Lower Secondary School: Compulsory Years): Independent Project 15 credits

Title: In English, please! - Teacher reflections on the use of target language in instructional settings of lower secondary ESL learners.

Swedish title: På engelska, tack! Lärarens reflektioner över högstadieelevers användning av målspråket, engelska, i undervisningssituationer.

Key words: use of spoken English, oral proficiency, English, compulsory School, sociocultural perspective, history of language teaching, use of the target language

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Background: Previous research on the teaching of English has focused on the teacher’s role in enhancing students’ proficiency in speaking. It has additionally focused on the relationship between students and teacher, and how the teacher should or/and should not act in the classroom, in order to improve the student’s acquisition of the spoken language.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify how a group of teachers from southern Sweden reflect and act when it comes to encouraging students to speak in English in the classroom and, thus, help them develop their communicative skills.

Method: A qualitative study with semi-structured interviews as a tool.

Result: The issue of making students speak is not seen as a real problem. The teachers involved in this essay stated that they believed it to be a natural process, where teachers have to be creative and find different approaches and where the students feel motivated and more willing to speak in front of others. Additionally, the teachers all emphasize the importance of always using the target language during lessons which they believe will create a good atmosphere where students will attempt to do the same.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

I first became interested in the topic of this essay, how teachers reflect on learners’ use of the target language, during one of our VFU (teaching practice) periods. I was currently working with a teacher whose students did not use the target language, English, during lessons. The reasons for this are not entirely clear. However, during the observations that I executed in the course of the five weeks’ practice, I could detect that the demands from the teacher were not that high. The teacher consistently spoke in the target language; yet, she never required this from the students. Those who were more motivated answered and spoke to each other in English, but most of the class (9th graders) used Swedish regularly as the working language during the lesson. When I brought this up with the teacher, I was met with some surprise. She had allowed the students to speak Swedish for so long that she did not even think about it. Even though all teacher-communication was executed in English, the students seldom responded in the same language.

This made me curious, since the ability to speak in the target language is one of the four main skills (listening, speaking, writing and reading) and, therefore, of great importance. I then asked the same question to another teacher at the same school in order to see how others handled the issue of students who did not use the target language, English, in the classroom. When asking him how he approached the issue of encouraging the students to use the target language, he responded by saying that he used two factors for motivation. The first was quite simple, the grades. He told the students that without speaking English there was no way of reaching a passable grade (E) in English. The second approach was that he utilized the other students as a motivational factor. By making a game out of the lessons, where the students acted as though they did not understand Swedish, the teacher forced the students to try to speak English. He made sure motivation came both from the students’ peers as well as from the teacher.

1.2 Purpose & question formulation

The aim of this study is not to find any definitive answers to the problem of how to encourage students to use the target language during English lessons. That cannot be achieved in a study such as this. Instead the focus of this essay is to discover how a small group of teachers from southern Sweden reflect and act regarding the topic. I mostly do this for myself, as well as for other teachers in order to receive inspiration for future ways of motivating students. Another
goal is to attempt to connect the teachers’ different approaches to current theories and views on the use of English in the classroom.

With this essay, I hope to disclose how a few selected teachers work in order to encourage their students to speak English, and, thus, develop their speaking skills. The questions that this essay is based on are as follows:

- How do the teachers interviewed for this essay encourage students to use the target language, English, during lessons?
- How do the interviewed teachers encourage students who are reluctant to speak English?

2. Literature Review

2.1 A brief history of language teaching

How languages are taught depends on individual teacher beliefs, as well as current theories that influence the profession. Approaches to language teaching have varied over the years in regard to different theories and circumstances related to the topic. As Richards and Rodgers state in *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*: “Changes in language teaching throughout history have reflected recognition of change in the kind of proficiency learners need, such as a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study.”\(^1\)

When it comes to language study in Sweden today, it is the English language that is predominantly in focus. However, 500 years ago it was Latin, not English. It is clear that, throughout history, the teaching of Latin has affected the way languages have been taught. During the 16\(^{th}\), 17\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) centuries Latin was predominately used, according to Richards and Rodgers.\(^2\) From a European point of view (not specifically Sweden), Latin was taught with the aim of conveying grammatical and structural proficiency to students. When modern languages were first introduced, these methods were still in use. Textbooks were used which showcased grammatical rules as well as vocabulary lists and sentences that were to be transcribed (copied). The goal was not to speak since the students only spoke when translating the sentences given to them. This can be connected to the fact that the use of language was

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\(^2\) Ibid, 6.
intended primarily for academic purposes, such as reading and writing, rather than for speaking to others. Latin was a language where the focus was to write and read, not to speak. By the 19th century, this Grammar Translation Method was standardized, and according to Richards and Rodgers, it dominated the European teaching of language from the 1840s to the 1940s.³ Richards and Rodgers also state that this method is still somewhat used in language teaching today. Admittedly, they write from a British perspective, but since they do so in a general fashion and state that this method dominated the European teaching of language, it approach can also be applicable to a Swedish perspective.⁴

Nils-Erik Nilsson discusses the influence of Latin in Sweden, from the Middle Ages to the middle of the 19th century.⁵ Latin was seen to be the ideal language of education “with its fixed rules for the correct expression.”⁶ According to Nilsson, Latin was in focus because of its stronghold in schools where both teaching and interaction amongst students were executed in Latin.⁷

Another author who discusses the history of language teaching from a Swedish perspective is Ulla Tornberg.⁸ In Språkdidaktik, Tornberg states that, during the second half of the 19th century, Latin started to be replaced by Swedish when it came to which language was used in teaching.⁹ Protests arose against the traditional language teaching approach with a grammatical focus, and attempts to change the language teaching in Sweden were made, according to Tornberg and Nilsson.¹⁰ All attempts had a general idea in common, which was to focus on the spoken language rather than grammar and translation.

Richards and Rodgers argue that due to the increased communication between the European countries, there was a shift in focus from structural knowledge to oral proficiency.¹¹ Latin was mostly used in an academic context, so not all students were taught how to use Latin. The use of a Modern language was more general, and was not only for academic purposes but also for

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid, my translation.
⁷ Ibid, 12, my translation.
⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid, 13.
¹¹ Richards & Rodgers, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching, 9.
work and leisure. Therefore, more people were taught Modern languages, such as the languages often taught in Sweden today which are German, French and Spanish.12

One method for teaching foreign languages, English in particular, that arose in the mid-20th century was the Natural Approach which claimed that language teaching “must encourage direct and spontaneous use of the foreign language in the classroom.”13 Below is a list of some of the principles included in the Direct Method, which is a branch within the Natural Approach.14

- Instructions needed to be conducted exclusively in the target language
- Everyday vocabulary and sentences needed to be in focus
- Oral communicative skills were to be organized around the exchange between teachers and students. It had to be a carefully constructed progress where students were in small intensive classes
- Grammar was taught inductively which meant that students analyzed information and then displayed their conclusions. Induction is a method based on repetitive tasks and learning through experience
- New teaching points were to be introduced orally
- Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects and pictures while abstract vocabulary was taught by associations of thoughts and ideas
- Speech as well as listening comprehension were in focus
- Grammar as well as correct pronunciation was emphasized

According to Richards and Rodgers, the 20th century was called “the methods era” which alludes to the fact that a great many different methods and approaches to the teaching of English were introduced such as the Audiolingual Method, the Situational Method, the Communicative Approach and so forth, which are described below.15

The Audiolingual Method is one method where students, through repetitive drills, repeat what the teachers say. They learn through mimicking their teachers. It was believed that by using

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid, 11.
14 Ibid, 12.
15 Ibid, 15.
repetitive drills, and positive reinforcements, good habits within language learners would be generated.16

An example for an audiolingual activity could be:
- Teacher: “There is a cat on the sofa…Repeat.”
- Students: “There is a cat on the sofa.”
- Teacher: “Pillow.”
- Students: “There is a pillow on the sofa.”
- Teacher: “On the chair.”
- Students: “There is a pillow on the chair.”

The *Situational Method* is characterized by two major features. The first focus is on vocabulary and reading, since the situational method states that mastering a good reading skill is done through emphasizing the vocabulary. The second feature aims to internalize grammatical rules through analysis of a language’s grammatical structures and sentence patterns. Since it is a *Situational Method*, it focuses on teaching grammatical structures based on diverse situations such as words and sentence patterns used in a café, in a restaurant and also different roles. One example could be that the students pretend to be tourists so that they have to be able to ask for directions.17

A *Communicative Approach*, also called *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT), altered the focus from how language was formed (grammatically and vocabulary wise) to a focus on “what language was used for.”18 CLT centers around the belief that “language is communication” and that students should participate in meaningful communicative tasks where language learning comes naturally.19 The Swedish curriculum is based on a communicative approach and has been since its breakthrough with Lgr 80.20 That the curriculum is based on a communicative approach is in accordance with Jeremy Harmer’s statement that “most English teachers in the world today would say that they teach communicatively […]”.21

Harmer further argues that CLT is a broad term and that it could be quite difficult to define it since there are different ways of looking at it. He provides two examples of branches of CLT. The first states that CLT transferred the focus from teaching the foundations of language to

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
emphasizing what language was used for. The focal point was on teaching the language connected to situations and contexts where language was necessary. An illustration of this could be to learn a language in relation to contexts such as the role of a tourist. The students have to know how to express themselves when arriving at the airport, when taking the train downtown and when arriving at the hotel.  

The second branch that Harmer mentions is based on the ideas that “language is communication” and that “language learning will take care of itself.” Harmer states that this is done through communicative tasks where students are involved in realistic communication, often through role-play and different simulated activities. These activities were often less teacher-controlled than traditional activities. The teacher’s role was to observe and let the students attempt to mimic a realistic communicative situation. An example of a communicative activity is found in Bo Lundahl’s Engelsk Språkidaktik: Texter, Kommunikation och Språkutveckling. Lundahl gives an example where Student A has access to a London map, while Student B has a sheet with different tasks that encourages her to ask Student A about the direction to different locations. This is a task where students practise their ability to ask for directions and to give directions. Harmer states that these communicative tasks often resulted in students being focused on the “the content of what they were saying or writing […] rather than focusing on a particular language form.”

Many of these approaches are seen in the classroom to this day. Some teachers still use the more traditional Grammar Translation Approach while others focus more on the Communicative Approach.

2.2 Assessment

Even though this essay does not focus on the assessment of students’ speaking skills, it is still imperative to mention it since this is, after all, what the students are working towards. Students are working in order to improve their proficiency in English which is then assessed by their teachers or others. The goal of this section is to explore current theories about assessment as well as what the Swedish curriculum demands of the students.

22 Lundahl. Engelsk Språkidaktik, 143.
24 Lundahl. Engelsk Språkidaktik, 143.
2.2.1 Theories about assessment
In Annamaria Pinter’s *Teaching Young Language Learners*, it is stated that ongoing assessment, as well as alternative assessment methods, ought to be used primarily when it comes to language teaching.\(^{26}\) Pinter emphasizes the importance of having a varied range of assessment tasks by utilizing assessment instruments such as portfolios, observations, project work and students’ self-assessment. She argues that using varied assessment throughout teaching would ensure an enhanced view of the students’ different levels, as compared to when teachers do, what she calls, traditional “paper and pencil tests.”\(^{27}\) Pinter also claims that by combining teacher assessment of assignments with students’ self-assessment a positive experience would be generated. In addition, the students would increase their knowledge since they have to analyze their own work.\(^ {28}\)

Jeremy Harmer’s *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, discusses the subject of *summative feedback* and *formative feedback* regarding assessment.\(^ {29}\) Harmer states that it is important to give the students a positive experience when it comes to this aspect of learning. *Summative feedback* is used when students have completed a task, and where the teacher has to point out what was done. *Formative feedback* is used to give students feedback about what they need to work on.\(^ {30}\)

2.2.2 English curriculum in Sweden
The English curriculum in Sweden argues that language is of great importance when it comes to thinking, communicating and learning. The Swedish Education Agency (Skolverket) states that by having knowledge of several languages, the students will gain perspectives about the world around them, as well as increase their opportunities to connect and have a greater understanding of different ways of life.\(^ {31}\) The subject is seen to hold great importance since English surrounds us and is used in a vast number of different areas such as politics, education and economy. The curriculum highlights the importance of the English language since knowledge in the subject strengthens an individual’s opportunities to partake in different

\(^{27}\) Ibid, 132.
\(^{28}\) Ibid.
\(^{30}\) Ibid.
social and cultural contexts and also their participation in international education and work-life.\textsuperscript{32}

As previously mentioned, this study does not focus on assessment on a deeper level. Nevertheless, since the students are working with their proficiency in English towards specific goals, I believe that it is important to show what those goals are. In this chart I will provide a description of the two grades, E and A, and the curriculum’s different levels of demands on students’ knowledge.\textsuperscript{33}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade E</th>
<th>Grade A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pupils can understand</strong> the most essential content in clearly spoken, simple English at a relaxed pace in simple texts about daily and familiar topics. Pupils show their understanding by reporting content in a simple form with comments on content and also with acceptable results act on the basis of the message and instructions in the content.**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pupils can understand the whole and important details</strong> in clearly spoken, simple English at a relaxed pace in simple texts on daily and familiar topics. Pupils show their understanding by presenting an overview with their comments on content and details and also with good results act on the basis of the message and instructions in the content.**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To facilitate their understanding of the content of the spoken language and texts, pupils can choose and apply a strategy for listening and reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To facilitate their understanding of the content of the spoken language and the texts, pupils can to some extent choose and apply strategies for listening and reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils can choose texts and spoken language of a simple nature and from different media and with some relevance use the selected material in their own production and interaction. In oral and written production, pupils can express themselves simply and understandably in phrases and sentences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils can choose from texts and spoken language of a simple nature and from different media and in a relevant and effective way use the material chosen in their own production and interaction. In oral and written production, pupils can express themselves simply, relatively clearly and relatively coherently.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To clarify and vary their communication, pupils can work on and make some simple improvements to their communications. In oral and written interaction, pupils can express themselves simply and understandably in words, phrases and sentences. In addition, pupils can choose and use a strategy that solves problems and improves their interaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To clarify and vary their communication, pupils can work on and make simple improvements to their communications. In oral and written interaction, pupils can express themselves simply and clearly in words, phrases and sentences, which to some extent are adapted to purpose, recipient and situation. In addition, pupils can choose and apply several different strategies to solve problems and improve their interaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils comment in simple forms on some phenomena in different contexts and areas where English is used, and can also make simple comparisons with their own experiences and knowledge.\textsuperscript{34}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils comment in overall terms on some phenomena in different contexts and areas where English is used, and can also make simple comparisons with their own experiences and knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 31-33. Please note that the following text is a direct quote from Skolverket’s publication and any errors found in the text are in the original.

\textsuperscript{34}``Publikationer'' (``Publications''), Skolverket . 6 January, 2016.
2.3 The learning and teaching of English through a sociocultural perspective

A great deal of research on the subject of communicating in English has been carried out. Those who have made the biggest impact on my understanding of the problem are Roger Säljö, and his interpretation of Vygotsky, and Jeremy Harmer, a prolific author of English language teaching textbooks. These two will be introduced later on in this paper, but first I want to consider other scholars, who also focus on the importance of English oral communication.

In *Språkdidaktik* Ulla Tornberg addresses the importance of separating teacher-dominated language education from collaborative learning. She claims that the teacher-dominated language education is based on the assumption that providing students with knowledge is equal to transferring information. Tornberg argues that it is of great importance to separate the two since collaborative learning ensures that students will own their newfound knowledge. She adds that if students are involved in their own learning process, it will enhance the possibilities for more active and motivated English-speaking students in the classroom. The involvement of students can be carried out in different ways. One approach is to use their reality as a base when learning, which is highlighted in *Entreprenöriell Pedagogik i Skolan – Drivkrafter för Elevers Lärande*. Entrepreneurial learning aims to motivate students by constructing tasks related to their lifeworld:

In entrepreneurial learning you proceed from the lifeworld of students, which means that the teaching is adapted based on what is important for the student, and that the tasks are created in order to give relation and relevance to the students.

These authors also state that this could affect the outcome of the task, whether it will succeed or fail. However, the students need to see the tasks as meaningful in order for this to be a success.

One of the main factors for linguistic development is oral communication. According to Anne Palmér, language is the foundation of all linguistic skills. She asserts that reading and writing

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35 Ibid.
36 Tornberg, *Språkdidaktik*, 32.
38 Ibid, my translation.
39 Ibid, my translation.
develops with the spoken language as a base.\textsuperscript{40} By concentrating on verbal communication, not only will the speaking skill be developed but also the rest of the skills, which are reading, writing and listening. Palmér additionally states “Language and the oral communication is a very important recourse within learning, and something that we humans use to convey information, process knowledge, explain complicated process, negotiate for different ways of interpreting our surrounding world as well as question and critically analyze knowledge.”\textsuperscript{41}

Olga Dysthe in \textit{Dialog, Samspel och Lärande} emphasizes the importance of the social context when it comes to the students’ way of learning spoken communication.\textsuperscript{42} Her emphasis is on the connection between dialogue, interaction and learning. Dysthe states that the greatest challenge within the field of education is to find the balance between the individual and the group. According to her, the school has to allow for an individual learning experience as well as a focus on enhancing the collaboration process. Dysthe claims that the most important link between individual and group-based learning is communication, where the spoken language is in focus.\textsuperscript{43}

As mentioned earlier, Roger Säljö’s interpretation of Vygotsky’s theory on learning, as presented in \textit{Lärande i Praktiken: Ett Sociokulturellt Perspektiv}, is one of the main ideas explored in this paper. Vygotsky asserts the importance of learning through interaction and cooperation with others in a social environment, where opportunities to exchange perspectives and knowledge will be created for students. Additionally, Vygotsky emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through cooperation with others. Säljö states that communication and the use of language is the central link between the child and its surroundings.\textsuperscript{44} Säljö also believes that we would not be where we are today without the ability to communicate, and to pass on knowledge to others. With this ability, humans are not forced to “invent the wheel several times over.”\textsuperscript{45}

Säljö’s interpretation of Vygotsky

\textsuperscript{40} Palmér, Anne, \textit{Muntligt i Klassrummet: Om Tal, Samtal och Bedömning}, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2010, 10.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 10, my translation.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 32.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 37-38.
The sociocultural learning theory points out several different activities that lead to learning. The different activities are set in different contexts: social, mediated, situated and creative.

*The social* activity emphasizes individual learning in group-related exercises over individual learning. The focus here lies on learning by playing, both in school and outside of it.

*The meditative* activity stresses that the key to learning is to work with the students’ social and cultural background as a focal point. According to the sociocultural theory, it is through the students’ exchange of experience of their different backgrounds that a path is made for learning.

By *Situated activities* is to be understood different social contexts, environments and places that influence the individual way of learning. Furthermore, people’s actions are based on the situation in which they find themselves: “It is easier to teach a car mechanic in a garage than on a deserted island. Similarly, it is much easier to learn German in Germany than in Russia.” Finally, according to Vygotsky, there are the *creative activities* which are based on the fact that people do not only learn through relations, means and situations, but that we also can *reform* them. It is when children and young people are a part of constructing their learning situations that learning and knowledge development really can take place according to Vygotsky.

As mentioned earlier, Jeremy Harmer is a prolific author of books on English language teaching. *The Practice of English Language Teaching* is a core textbook used in the education of English language teachers both in the UK and internationally. In this book, Harmer mentions that when students refuse to speak English in class it is often considered to be a student/teacher failure. But why do the students speak in their native tongue? Many people have tried to answer this question, and Harmer also provides his point of view on the subject. He lists several reasons why the students turn to their native tongue in an English class. The first reason is based on the task and its level of difficulty. Perhaps the subject is too difficult. Harmer states that the students are sometimes forced to turn to their native tongue since the subject is too hard and, thus, makes them linguistically incapable of using it. The second

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
argument why students return to use their native tongue is that it is a more natural way of speaking, according to Harmer. He states that “when we learn a foreign language we use translation almost without thinking about it […] This is because we try to make sense of a new linguistic (and conceptual) world through the linguistic world we are already familiar with.”

Another reason why students choose to speak in their native tongue, according to Harmer, is that the students are mimicking the teacher. Teachers need to be aware what kind of example they themselves provide. If the teacher talks in their native tongue, the students will think this is acceptable. The final argument is based on the fact that students learn differently. Based on different learning styles and abilities, some students need to use their native tongue more while others try to speak English from the very beginning.

With Harmer’s help we have now seen some explanations to why students speak in their native language during English lessons. However, one might ask if all communication in the native language is a negative thing. Harmer compares two scholars’ attitudes towards the subject of native language usage in the classroom. The scholar who believes that the native language is a positive addition in the second language acquisition is David Atkinson. He thinks that the native tongue could enhance the acquisition of the foreign language. According to Harmer, Atkinson specifically focuses on activities such as grammar explanation, checking comprehension and giving instructions. Atkinson states that by using the native tongue in these activities, they will be “expedited more efficiently.”

The scholar who opposes these theories in Harmer’s book is Peter Harbord. Harbord believes that the above-mentioned activities are ideal for ensuring that the students acquire the new language. Harbord belongs to a group which can be connected to the Direct Method. As mentioned earlier, this method is based on the idea that all use of the native language should be avoided. The main aim is to talk and to teach the language by using the language itself rather than learning about the language in the students’ native tongue.

Many scholars claim that the best way of learning a language is by using it. According to John Eldridge, students will always speak in their native tongue in the classroom, no matter what the teacher does or says. According to Harmer, Eldrigde claims that there is no evidence that

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54 Ibid, 132.
55 Ibid.
forbidding the use of the native tongue will improve language efficiency. There is a bigger risk that the students, when not allowed to use their native language as a back-up, will not speak at all.

So, one might wonder what teachers ought to do to ensure that students try to use the target language more. According to Harmer, teachers could:

- Set clear guidelines: when is it preferable to use the native language? When is it not?
- Choose appropriate tasks: the tasks need to be at the students’ level so they are capable of mastering them in English
- Create an English atmosphere
- Use persuasion and other forms of inducement: Harmer gives an example of a persuasion method where students had to pay a “fine” if they used the native tongue in class. Moreover, he emphasizes the importance of friendly encouragement at all times

In this list, Harmer mentions that teachers have to “create an English atmosphere.” But is it the only “atmosphere” that needs to be created? Throughout my studies I have come across the term classroom atmosphere which is said to have a great impact on students’ way of acquiring knowledge. In the following section, a deeper explanation of the classroom atmosphere will be provided.

2.3.1 Classroom atmosphere

In order to make students relax, teachers have to help them lower what Stephen Krashen calls “the Affective Filter.” The Affective Filter is the barrier caused by students’ anxiety. In order to lower the barrier, teachers have to create an environment in which students feel comfortable speaking.

Many teachers wonder why some groups are so pleasant and willing to cooperate while others are frequently troublesome and chaotic. Gudrun Ekstrand and Balli Lelinge state in Klassen Som Gud Glömdes that some teachers try to explain this by “blaming” individuals, the area in which the school is located or parents’ unemployment and/or exclusion in society. Ekstrand

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid,131-133.
58 Ibid, 386.
59 Ekstrand, Gudrun & Lelinge, Balli, Klassen som Gud glömdes, Malmö: Gleerups kompetensutveckling, 2013, 11.
and Lelinge write that the decisive factor for whether a class works or not is based on the classroom environment, also called the classroom atmosphere.⁶⁰

When Ekstrand and Lelinge write about classroom atmosphere, they refer to different factors that could influence how groups are able to work together. These factors are:

- Positive attitude
- Security
- Kindness⁶¹

Ekstrand and Lelinge claim that the relations in the class, and in the school as a whole, are of great importance when it comes to the atmosphere in the classroom. If students show each other respect and kindness, it has a positive effect on the atmosphere. Provided below is a list of things that Ekstrand and Lelinge believe are important when it comes to creating a good classroom atmosphere:⁶²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A good classroom atmosphere:</th>
<th>A negative classroom atmosphere:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good relation between students</td>
<td>Bad, or no relation at all between students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent participation</td>
<td>Parents are kept outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness and positive expectations</td>
<td>Harsh atmosphere and negative expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure students and teachers</td>
<td>Uncertainty on all levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear rules and routines</td>
<td>Uncertainty when it comes to rules, no routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tone is humble and respectful</td>
<td>Hard jargon and bad language usage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These examples are of a general nature when it comes to creating a positive school environment. Still, these ideas can be transferred to the teaching of language as well as schoolwork in general since it is up to the entire school, not only to specific subjects, to emphasize the importance of a favorable environment in which students are allowed to learn.

Another author that writes about the subject is Karin Åberg. In Bland Stjärnor och Syndabockar, she mentions her definition of the ideal classroom atmosphere. She describes it to be when students walk into the classroom, safely knowing that;

- Here I know what I am allowed to do and what not to do, and I also know why these boundaries are there
- Here others will listen to me
- Here I am met with tolerance and understanding

⁶⁰ Ibid, 18.
⁶¹ Ibid, 11.
⁶² Ekstrand & Lelinge, Klassen som Gud glömde, 18.
Here people see, and tell me, what I am good at
- Here I will receive help with my difficulties
- Here I will be able to test my ideas
- Here others care what I feel and think
- Here I can feel that I am good enough
- Here I am someone\textsuperscript{63}

Åberg states that a good classroom atmosphere affects learning and creates a positive working environment, both for students and teachers. She claims that strict rules and boundaries will create a safe environment, as well as provide students with a social discipline for how to interact with others.\textsuperscript{64}

In order to create a good atmosphere of tolerance and respect in the classroom, it is important to remember the aspect of allowing mistakes. They are a part of learning and, as such, not to be viewed negatively. Students need to realize that mistakes could lead to further learning and improvement. It is imperative to establish an environment where students show each other respect, where mistakes are not laughed at and where students do not mock their peers.

Harmer mentions different approaches to mistakes in his chapter on Feedback, mistakes and correction. He writes about different aspects of correction, such as different ways of responding, when to correct, what to correct, who ought to do the correction, and so forth.\textsuperscript{65} When it comes to what to correct, Harmer emphasizes the importance of avoiding overcorrection since the goal is to encourage students to be active in their use of the target language. He states that it is important to reflect on each mistake and see if it is an error or just a slip.\textsuperscript{66} If it is a slip, then perhaps the students are able to correct it themselves, but if the teacher believes that it is an error that is more deeply rooted in the student, a correction ought to be made by the teacher.

Harmer states that mistakes could be related to anything from grammar to pronunciation errors and that it is up to the teacher if correction is needed or not. According to Harmer, the timing of the correction is of great significance, and crucial to the outcome. It is not always positive to interrupt students who are actively participating in a communicative activity. While the activity itself is to be considered positive, and could lead to further learning and

\textsuperscript{63} Åberg, Karin, Bland Stjärnor och Syndabockar, Solna; Ekelunds Förlag Ab, 1995, 31, my translation.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 32.
\textsuperscript{65} Harmer, The Practice of English Language Teaching, 5th edition, 154-167.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 157.
improvement of the students’ language usage, a correction could create a negative effect. Another aspect of letting students make their own mistakes, without interfering, is that within the communicative task there are chances of collaborative learning. If a teacher interrupts to make a correction, there is a risk of losing an opportunity where students could have helped each other, both through correction, by asking questions, and/or providing with reformulations.67

3. Method

3.1 Data collection

I have chosen to take a qualitative approach to this essay, since the purpose is to obtain teachers’ reflections of learners’ usage of the target language in the classroom. A qualitative approach in this context means that I have chosen to focus on the specific views of a few selected teachers, rather than focus on quantifying the general responses of a larger mass. Thus, I sought to have a deeper conversation with each teacher.

In order to do this, I interviewed five teachers of English who work in lower secondary schools in Southern Sweden. I have chosen to name the respondents Sara, Fredrik, Johanna, Charlotte, and Jenny. All but one (Jenny) came from the same school, and all of them are teachers that I personally knew before carrying out the research, which made it easier to conduct the interviews. Generally, they have a vast range of experience, from Sara who has been working since 1996, to Fredrik who has been working only since 2014. They all teach in classes 7 to 9. Jenny is the only one who has several classes at the different age levels. The others teach the same age group. Fredrik teaches 8th graders, Sara and Charlotte teach 9th graders and Johanna teaches 7th graders. All five teach in schools that are of a medium size.

The interviews took place face to face, where a set of questions and a recorder were used in order to execute the interviews. I chose to conduct the interviews in Swedish since I am inexperienced when it comes to executing interviews. Additionally, it made the conversation flow better, as well as making it easier for me to work with. All interviews, apart from one, were carried out in the same manner, which will be further explained in the section of “reliability.”

67 Ibid.
The questions were used as a guideline. However, during the interviews, I tried not to control the conversation too much. The goal was instead to let the teachers focus on what they perceived to be important, whether that was students refusing to speak, or different ways of solving the problem. The guiding questions for the interviews were as follows:

- How do you work in order to ensure that the students are active when it comes to using the target language during lessons?
- Many teachers find it difficult to make students use English during lessons. Do you feel the same?
- How do you approach students who refuse to speak English?
  - Do you find it difficult to help those who refuse to speak?
- How much do you work with speaking exercises?
  - Do you think that speaking exercises are important/not important?

3.2 Reliability

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of this essay, I chose to record the interviews. The aim was to recover as much information as possible, since a great deal of information could have been omitted if I had taken notes only. Another issue with only taking notes during the interviews is that my interpretation of the answers could be inaccurate, and that there could be a discrepancy between what I heard and what was actually said.

As mentioned earlier, one interview was not executed in the same fashion as the others. The interview with Jenny did not take place as a direct conversation (face to face) where I could record the interview. Instead it was executed via email since Jenny was sick on the date of the scheduled meeting. I have chosen to include the results from the interview anyway since we have had communication both before and during the process of writing.

3.3 Ethical approach

When executing research of any kind, the researcher has to follow a set of rules when collecting and interpreting data. With the assistance of Vetenskapsrådet, I found four basic rules to abide by, regarding the ethics of conducting interviews:68

- Information demand: the researcher informs the participants about the end goal of the study as well emphasizing that the participation is voluntary (where the subject can stop the participation at any time)

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- Demand of consent: the researcher has to receive the approval of the participant when it comes to using their answers in the study
- Confidentiality demand: the researcher has to swear professional secrecy
- Usage demand: the researcher has to ensure that the participants’ responses will be used for this purpose alone

Before starting the interviews, the respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, the weight of their contribution as well as the confidentiality of the data. To make sure that nothing of importance was omitted, I asked for permission to record the interviews. Apart from asking for this permission, it was also clarified that the recordings were anonymous and for my ears only.

4. Result
In this section, the results of the interviews will be presented. The results are based on the five interviews undertaken. Even though their backgrounds as teachers vary, the answers from all of the respondents were quite similar. They expressed a slight frustration when it came to students’ aversion to speaking English. However, they all seemed to perceive it to be a natural process of learning, rather than a real problem. All of the teachers had a great many ideas and methods when it came to solving the issue of how to make students use the target language more actively.

In order to have a cohesive structure to the responses, I will now focus on the following areas:

- Reasons why oral communication in English is important
- Difficulties with getting students to speak English
- Different ways of working with speaking skills

4.1 Reasons for why oral communication in English is important
Before interviewing the teachers, I was prepared that someone would perceive the speaking skill to be equally important as the other skills required in the English curriculum. However, all of the interviewed teachers pointed out that they believed that oral communication is the most important skill needed within the English subject. Apart from it being one of the main aspects highlighted in the curriculum, it is also an important skill when it comes to the future life of students. All of the five respondents were focusing on the fact that it is through the

69 Ibid.
spoken language that you have communication, and that learning is done through conversation with others. Charlotte stated that “Language is to communicate,” and Jenny answered that “language is communication.”

Sara stated that oral communication is the most important skill of all, based on the fact that people, in this case students, need to be heard. She claimed that without the ability to be heard you won’t “feel as you’re good enough as a person […].” She also stated that “It is through conversation that learning is done, through the exchange of information and knowledge.” This can be connected to what Vygotsky’s statement that without communication we would not be able to grow. Without the knowledge of how to convey information, we could still be inventing the wheel over and over again.

Johanna stated that she found the oral communication of great importance since it gave an opportunity to speak about topics that the students thought interesting. She stated that if the students were allowed to talk about themselves and things that they like, they would become more interested on a deeper level. She focused on the aspect of allowing students to express themselves as individuals, as well as enhancing their ability to speak. Johanna’s focus on highlighting learning by utilizing the students’ interest and lives can be connected to the aforementioned theory of entrepreneurial learning. When speaking about a topic relevant to the students, you increase the probability for a successful learning experience. It is not only the theory of entrepreneurial learning that highlights the importance of relevant tasks. The English curriculum in Sweden also emphasizes the importance of speaking about topics relevant to the students.

The teachers all agreed that the speaking skill was the most important one to work with, based on the experience that not all students will write in English on a daily basis. According to the interviewed teachers, the English speaking skill is seen as a more usable skill than writing, reading or listening since many people travel abroad on holidays and need to communicate in English.

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70 My translation of the interviewed teachers’ response.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Säljö. Lärande i Praktiken, 37-38.
4.2 Difficulties with getting students to speak in English

Out of the five interviewed teachers there was only one, Johanna, who stated that she did not believe that she had a problem making students speak English. She stated that she always spoke to her students about topics that they found interesting and, thus, wanted to discuss: “They do not refuse to speak since you are showing your interest in them. For example, you can ask where they bought their shirt. [...] I focus on building bridges... to have personal contact with the students.” Once again, Johanna’s focus lies on creating tasks which are connected to students’ situation in general, as well as making the tasks relevant to them.

Making students speak in English was not seen as a problem on a general level but on specific occasions where individuals, for different reasons, refused to speak. Fredrik, Sara, Jenny, and Charlotte all agreed that this is connected to students being afraid of making mistakes and/or being laughed at. Fredrik discussed the importance of the group dynamics and environment in the classroom:

> It is a problem when a group is not homogeneous. When we have these really weak students and those who are stronger... Then it is often the weaker ones who won’t dare to speak since they are afraid of being hushed or reprimanded by the stronger students. An essential effort that has to be made in the entire school, to create acceptance towards others... To make sure that they feel safe in their own skin and in the classroom.

Additionally, Jenny pointed out that the social structure and students’ “popularity” in the classroom also had a great deal of importance. If the student is one of the less “popular” ones in the classroom, Jenny believed that he/she perhaps would not speak as much in comparison to one who has a higher status. Once again, the response of the teachers is connected to the classroom environment and the students’ ability to feel confident, which is in accordance with what Ekstrand, Lelinge and Åberg state when it comes to the importance of students’ self-esteem in the classroom.

Charlotte stated that students avoid speaking in English, since they have been allowed to answer in Swedish before: “The students have had permission not to speak in front of a bigger group. They have not tried … and have not received verification that they can do it. And I

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76 My translation of the interviewed teachers’ response.
77 Ibid.
think that, they should, already in preschool and in the first grade, stand in front of others and say a couple of words… So that they feel comfortable.”79

Vygotsky, Tornberg, Dysthe, Harmer and many other pedagogues emphasize learning through a social context.80 A foundation needs to be established, which includes creating an environment where students feel comfortable. Most of the respondents in this essay mention the classroom atmosphere at some point in the interviews. Earlier in this section, Fredrik discussed the importance of making students feel comfortable in their surroundings, as did Charlotte who argued the importance of having rules regarding mistakes. She emphasized one rule which was that ”They can laugh with me but not at me.”81

All of the teachers seemed to agree on the importance of creating good relations and positive expectations in the classroom, which makes students secure and confident in themselves (Ekstrand/Lelinge).82

4.3 Different ways of working with speaking skills

All five teachers stated that it is important to include all different skills in the classroom, not only speaking but also writing, listening and reading. According to Charlotte, it is important to make sure that all abilities are included in each lesson since “All abilities are connected…”83 She described an ideal lesson which included oral communication, where students both had to speak and listen, read, and write, but most important of all, where they had to interact and collaborate with others.

Jenny and Charlotte both emphasized the importance of including speaking skills regularly in the classroom. This can be achieved through a more structural form, where the students are forced to answer some questions, or if they are freer to converse on their own. One thing that all of the five teachers highlighted, was the importance of the teachers’ actions in the classroom. Teachers have to speak in English in order to encourage the students to speak in English themselves, which is in accordance with the CLT-method mentioned earlier.84

Apart from always speaking in English themselves, Jenny and Charlotte accentuated the importance of encouraging the students to respond in English as well. It was important to try

79 My translation of the interviewed teachers’ response.
81 My translation of the interviewed teachers’ response.
82 Ekstrand & Lelinge, Klassen Som Gud Glömde, 14.
83 My translation of the interviewed teachers’ response.
84 Harmer. The Practice of English Language Teaching. 5th ed., 57.
to use different strategies (such as a different way of explaining) before reverting back to Swedish. This can be connected to the Direct Method, which is mentioned earlier and describes the importance of using the target language when giving instructions and new teaching points. The Direct Method is a branch of the Natural Approach and, therefore, emphasizes that learning is done by doing.

The teachers had other approaches, apart from consistently using English, when it came to pursuing a more active use of the target language. From the interviews undertaken, two approaches could be established. The first approach accentuated that learning is best done through fun and play, whereas the second focused on content-based learning. Fredrik and Johanna stated that learning is best done through non-strict situations, where students are free to let their imagination flow. Below, Fredrik describes an exercise that can be connected to Säljö’s version of Vygotsky’s creative and social learning activities:

I have done an exercise that I call “MacGyver” which is all about improvisation. There is no right or wrong. You are supposed to make it as abstract as possible. They receive a situation and five random cards with pictures on them, it could be everything from a picture of a diaper or a carton of milk. Then they are supposed to improvise from this and make a story.

Johanna said that she does something similar. She takes an object and puts it behind her back. She then lets the students ask questions and guess what the object is. Both teachers claimed that by doing exercises such as these, the students would forget about the pressure of making mistakes, and being assessed on their ability to speak. Learning by playing is what Johanna and Fredrik thought was the most efficient way of learning.

The second approach that emerged through the interviews was Content Based learning, also known as Content Based Instructions (CBI). CBI is an approach where the language is used as the medium that conveys learning, rather than focusing on learning the language itself. Sara highlighted the importance of giving the students the correct tools for content-based activities, such as specific vocabulary relevant to the subject. She stated that the students could work within an area, for example, book reviewing, where they use what they already know: “Let

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85 Richards & Rodgers, Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching, 12.
86 Ibid.
88 My translation of the interview with the teacher.
the students speak about their work and what they have done. If the students are familiar with the subject, it is easier for them to speak more fluently. Sara mentioned that she is the students’ Swedish teacher as well, and is, thus, able to connect what they are working with in one subject to the other subject. By this she claimed that the students could obtain a deeper understanding about the subject. For example, when she had literature work in a Swedish class she stated that she could connect it to a literature review done in English.

Another aspect that all teachers highlighted was the importance of allowing mistakes in the classroom. The teachers had different methods of demonstrating that mistakes were something positive and nothing to be worried about. The methods were often quite similar which is shown when comparing two of the respondents’ methods.

Fredrik stated that he frequently pointed out when he himself made an error or if he had to rely on a dictionary if there were words he did not know. Jenny claimed that she emphasized that everyone had something that they did not know, herself included. She emphasized this by utilizing a dictionary if there were words the students did not know, or if there were words she did not know herself. The teachers all stated that allowing mistakes is important in order to enhance students’ confidence, which would also be necessary in order to create a safe and positive environment in the classroom.

5. Analysis
Throughout my education, I have realized that students’ unwillingness to speak is not just based on their level of knowledge but that so much more could influence them. I have realized that the environment around the students is of great importance, and that it is through a positive atmosphere in the classroom that learning is achieved. As a teacher, I have to create a favorable atmosphere where students dare to challenge themselves and attempt to speak in front of others.

In order to structure the discussion as clearly as possible, and to connect the result to the aforementioned theories, I have chosen to divide this chapter into two sections: the issue of students’ willingness to speak and course of action.

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90 My translation of the interview with the teacher.
5.1 The issue of students’ willingness to speak

One conclusion I have drawn, while doing this study, is that there are a great many students who are not making any progress in their acquisition of a second language. The result of the interviews, as well as my own observations during my time at different VFU-periods, indicates that the lack of progress is based on fear of making mistakes. This can be connected to Stephen Krashen’s theories about why some students do not successfully acquire a language. Krashen states that some people, even though exposed to a language in a larger quantity, cannot acquire the language successfully due to what he calls “the Affective Filter hypothesis.” This refers to the fact that, even though learners are receiving appropriate input, they still cannot acquire the new language. Since “affect” refers to motives, feelings attitudes, emotional states and needs, this theory claims that learners who are tense, nervous, or bored may “filter out” the information and input given to them and are, thus, unable to acquire the new language.

Some of the interviewed teachers thought that there might be some issues in the 7th grade, based on the fact that many students have had different learning experiences in their earlier years. Apart from starting off on diverse levels, they also believed that it could be connected to the relationship between the teacher and student, but above all between students. The so-called classroom atmosphere has to be of a positive kind if the quieter students are to find confidence in their own ability. Additionally, the atmosphere has a considerable effect on whether the students dare to make mistakes or not.

An element that Tornberg and Dysthe have in common is the fact that they both talk about giving the students room to learn, both individually and in groups. Dysthe emphasizes the importance of dialogue and communication in groups, while Tornberg points out the fact that teachers have to step back and let the students “roam free.” She focuses on less teacher-dominated education, which is something that Jenny brought up. She said that it is important to occasionally take a step back, and just let the students talk in order to merely talk, not in order to be assessed. That way they will be more comfortable when speaking since no pressure is put on the actual speaking.

One head teacher once said to me that teachers cannot teach anyone anything, and that instead it is the student who has to learn. This sounded really strange to me in the beginning, since I saw no clear distinction between the two, but now I am starting to understand what she meant.

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As a teacher, you have to adapt your way of teaching in a manner that suits the students in front of you. You cannot teach a student who does not want to learn. In order to make students want to learn you have to be able to adapt and change, so that the way you teach will capture their attention.

5.2 Course of action

The teachers had a great many different ideas and solutions when it came to making students use the target language, English, during lessons. They utilized different games, both card games and games where the students had to guess hidden items by asking various questions such as “is it small?” “is it round?” and so forth. I too have a set of games that I use when I am working with students who do not like to talk in front of others. I use a game that is called “med andra ord.” This is a game where the students have to describe the word without actually saying it. These games are both creative and social activities that enhance learning based on Vygotsky’s theories. I agree with the teachers that using games and fun activities is a way of approaching the subject of oral communication. The students forget what they are really doing (practicing speech) and are instead caught up with having fun.

The approach of using games as a means of developing students’ speaking skills can be connected to Lightbown and Spada’s chapter “Second Language Applications: Learning by Talking.” In this chapter, the two authors state that it is through collaboration and interaction with others that the second language is acquired. By coercing students to play games where they have to talk in an improvised manner, it “pushes learners to process language more deeply.” It is language usage that mediates language learning, which is similar to the above-mentioned description of both CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) and CBI (Content Based Instructions).

Lightbown and Spada mention the importance of access to both comprehensible input and conversational interactions, with other students as well as with the teacher. They argue that learners are more compelled to “negotiate for meaning” when they are given the chance to interact with others. Negotiating for meaning refers to students focusing on expressing

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92 Lightbown & Spada. How Languages are Learned, 47.
93 Ibid, 48.
94 “Content Based Instruction.”
themselves, clarifying their intentions, thoughts, opinions and so forth. One example where this kind of negotiation could take place is through the use of games, such as those presented by the interviewed teachers.

Another aspect which a few of the respondents, especially Sara and Fredrik, had in common is their view on mistakes. In accordance with Ekstrand/Lelinge and Åberg both Sara and Fredrik seem to focus on creating a classroom atmosphere where students can feel secure in themselves, and where mistakes are allowed, rather than avoided.

I believe that children will see mistakes as an opportunity to improve if they are shown early on that there is nothing of which to be embarrassed or frightened. As Carol Dweck writes in *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, “Children young as toddlers pick up these messages from their parents, learning that their mistakes are worthy of judgement and punishment. Or learning that their mistakes are an occasion for suggestion and teaching.”

According to Harmer, and as pointed out earlier in this essay, it is important to know the students you are working with, who they are and what they need in order to improve their abilities in the English language. He points out the importance of having clear guidelines and appropriate tasks. Students need to be able to solve the tasks and thus feel that they are good enough. Harmer also points out the importance, as did the interviewed teachers, of an English environment. The last thing Harmer mentions is persuasion and other inducements which quite simply means: bribe them! It could be rewards through compliments or rewards through cookies and so on. If students feel that they are improving, and also that they are being seen, they will be more likely to attempt to speak in front of others.

Apart from constructing tasks that are within their level of knowledge, it is also important to remember to create meaningful tasks. As previously mentioned when discussing entrepreneurial learning, it is crucial for teachers to construct tasks which the students feel motivated to participate in. Motivation is of great significance, so it is imperative that the students see the task as meaningful. If they feel that the tasks are relevant to them, it may lead to more motivated students.

95 Lightbown & Spada, *How Languages are Learned*, 150.
6. Discussion

6.1 Discussion of method

I believe that my choice of method was adequate to this research since the goal was to obtain a deeper understanding of teachers’ reflections on learners’ use of the target language. During my analysis of the teachers’ responses, I saw a great many similarities, which could be connected to the fact that I used a semi-structured form of interview, where the similarities can be based on the formulations of the question.

Even though one interview was conducted in a different fashion than the others, I still believe that I received many interesting answers that were essential for this essay. The answers and different approaches to the subject will be very valuable when it comes to future ways of working with improving students’ speaking abilities.

The selection of respondents was done through personal contact, both through work and previous VFU periods. I chose to interview five people in order to gain more aspects on how different teachers’, different both in experience, gender, and age, reflected upon the topic of learners’ use of the target language.

6.2 Discussion of future research

I believe that a great deal of different research can be done when it comes to the topic of students’ communicative abilities. A focus could be on the development of students’ speaking skill, where one could follow a group during a longer period and see what methods would be suitable in order to improve their speaking abilities. Another approach could be to research different groups and compare them when it comes to the result. Can the result be connected to the different teachers and their different teaching methods? How does the teachers encourage their students and what kind of relationships are there in the classroom?

If I were to continue this research I would like to do an empirical study where I could implement different tasks (such as situational/communicative/creative etc.) in order to see which effect the different tasks have on students’ language acquisition.

7. Personal reflection

One might wonder what personal gain I have received from working with this essay and I will therefore mention what I have learned from this experience.
While I was carrying out this study, I was simultaneously working as an English teacher for 7th graders in a school in Helsingborg. There were about 65 students divided into three groups: group 1, 2, and 3. For some reason, group 1 and 2 were working more efficiently than group 3, especially when it came to using the target language during lessons. Initially I thought this was connected to the group dynamics and the level of knowledge. But after a while, and as I started to draw conclusions from the present study, I could see a pattern. Group 3 had the misfortune of always having English in the last hour of the school day, which meant that they were tired and so was I. Moreover, we had English on the longest days of the week (the students usually finished around 2 or 3 in the afternoon, but these days they finished as late as 15.40), which often resulted in chaotic lessons.

So, the first conclusion I drew was connected to the schedule. Similarly, the second conclusion was connected to the time of the day, but most importantly, the role of the teacher; me. After working with this group for a couple of weeks, I noticed that I allowed the students in this group to speak more often in Swedish than in the other two groups. I also noticed that my own use of the target language was not as focused as with the other two groups. I am not entirely certain if this was caused by tiredness or non-awareness of my own actions. However, when I finally realized what differences there were between the three groups, I understood that I had the power in my own two hands. Since the theories, and the interviewed teachers in this study clearly state that the teacher need to lead by example, I knew that the first step was to focus on my own participation in the classroom.

Now, a couple of weeks after my discoveries, I can see some improvement in the students use of the target language. I am not entirely sure if the changes are based on a more structured use and demand of the target language on my part, or on the fact that we have changed the group-formations. Nevertheless, with the help of this study I am now more able to help my students. I have a greater understanding of how to motivate students, how group dynamics are structured, what kind of classroom atmosphere is needed to create a positive climate for the students. Consequently, the importance of leading by example has definitely increased.

8. Conclusion
During my time as a student, on different VFU periods and with the help of this study, I have learned that the main thing you have to do in order to obtain more actively speaking students,
is to remember the importance of always setting a good example by speaking in English yourself. This is what the responding teachers also seem to agree upon. We also agree on the importance of the teachers’ enthusiasm, and the relationship with the students. Through encouragement and enthusiasm, the teachers are more likely to obtain more inspired and enthusiastic students, which, hopefully, will encourage them to speak more actively in the target language. It is when the teacher always focuses on speaking in English, with and around the students, that English is used as the working language. By doing this, you will create a safe climate and an inviting atmosphere where the teacher always speaks in English and invites the students to do the same.
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