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Master’s Level
English, Swedish or both?

An empirical study on teachers’ choice of language in the EFL classroom

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Abstract:
There are different ideas when it comes to the use of either Swedish or English during EFL lessons. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate teachers’ choice of language in the upper elementary EFL classroom in Swedish schools and their arguments for the use of one or the other. In order to find out which language different teachers use and why, semi-structured interviews with six different teachers were carried out. All respondents were currently teaching English in grade 4-6. The results of the study show that the teachers’ most commonly used language in the EFL classroom is English. However, several of the teachers mention that they also use Swedish, for example when it comes to explaining difficult instructions or grammar. All teachers participating in this study mention the importance of hearing and using English in order for the pupils to learn English and therefore they try to use mostly English. Nevertheless, this study only has six participants, all living in the same county and working at schools with many similarities, which makes it difficult to draw any generalizable conclusions. To be able to draw better conclusions, a study would have to be conducted with more participants within a larger area.

Keywords: language use, first language, second language, English instruction, Swedish Elementary school
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1. Introduction

English is a language that most people in Sweden come in contact with, in one way or another. Knowledge in English, among other languages, can give the opportunity to create contacts around the world and the possibility to better understand the world. One of the goals for English instruction in Sweden is to give pupils the opportunity to develop their communication skills in English (Skolverket, 2011, p. 30). Learning the language and communicating in English is then both something that can develop you as a person and something you are intended to do in school.

Thus, English language use in the classroom is an important issue, according to the curriculum (Skolverket, 2011). In order for the pupils to develop their communication skills in English in English they must both hear and use the language. A literature review conducted by the author of this essay showed that there are both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to choosing a language to use during English instruction. What is important is to have a clear idea of why and when to use either language. The review also showed that the choice of language can affect the pupils’ motivation to learn a second language, and therefore the choice of language is crucial during English instruction (Newstam, 2016). Personal reasons for choosing this subject include the desire to make the best instructional choices possible, including knowing when to use English, Swedish or both during English class. By carrying out this empirical study I am now better informed to make research-based decisions on the choice of language. In addition, this thesis can serve as an encouragement for teachers already working in school to make conscious choices for language use in the classroom.

1.1. Aim and research questions

The aim of this empirical study is to investigate teachers’ choice of language (L1 or L2) in the upper elementary EFL classroom in Swedish schools. The following research questions are asked:

- Which language do teachers think should be used during English lessons?
- What reasons do teachers give to use either English or Swedish during English lessons?
- In what ways do teachers work with the first and the second language during English lessons?

2. Background

In this section, different terms will be defined in order to facilitate the reading of this essay. Furthermore, this section will present what the curriculum says and what previous research has established regarding teachers’ choice of language in the EFL classroom.

2.1. Definition of terms

2.1.1. English as a foreign language (EFL)

English as a foreign language is taught in countries where learners do not use English outside the classroom to a large extent. In contrast, English as a second language (ESL) refers to the English that is taught where children live in an English-speaking environment and also use it outside the classroom (Pinter, 2006, p. 166). In Sweden some believe that English instruction should be considered as ESL since English is prevalent in Swedish society. However, in this thesis the term EFL will be used.
2.1.2. Code-switching

*Code-switching* is a term referring to the use of two languages at the same time. One language does not have to be used all the time but the first language can be switched to the second language when there is a need for it (Cook, 2001, p. 408). An example of code-switching is if the teacher gives an instruction in the second language but realises that not all students understand what to do, so the teacher may give the entire instruction or parts of it in the first language too.

2.1.3. Translanguaging

In addition to code-switching, there is also the concept of *translanguaging*, which was introduced by Cen Williams (2012). Translanguaging can be explained in a similar way as code-switching, for example when two languages are used simultaneously in the classroom. However, the term translanguaging goes further than code-switching since it includes multiple languages rather than only two (García, 2009, p. 45). Since the term translanguaging is broader than code-switching it is used more commonly nowadays and therefore it will be used in this essay.

2.1.4. Bilingual

Being bilingual can be described as being able to use two languages. However, it is important to distinguish between bilingual ability and bilingual usage since some people who are bilingual are fluent in two languages but do not use both of them. On the other hand, some people are not as fluent but uses both languages anyway (Baker, 2011, p. 15-16).

2.1.5. L1 and L2

L1 refers to a person’s first language, also called the native language. L2 means a person’s second language which is the language a person learns after the native language.

2.2. What does the curriculum say?

According to the English syllabus, a part of the aim of teaching English in Sweden is for the pupils to understand spoken English, to speak English and to adapt their English to different situations. The pupils should also develop their English to the extent that they feel secure in using it in many different situations (Skolverket, 2011, p. 30).

In the core content it is also written that the pupils should be able to understand and give oral instructions and descriptions. They should also be exposed to different forms, such as conversations, dialogues, interviews, movies, songs, fairytales and poems. In addition to this they should also develop strategies to comprehend meaningful words and the context of spoken language (Skolverket, 2011, pp. 31-32).

2.3. Previous research

This section will present what previous research has established regarding teachers’ choice of language in the EFL classroom.

2.3.1. Why use the first language?

Hall and Cook (2013, p. 25) write about first language use in the EFL classroom and how it can be used to ensure comprehension among the students. An example of this is brought up by Rui and Chew (2013, p. 322-323) and Rabbidge and Chappell (2014, p. 12-13) who write about the use of the students’ first language during EFL lessons when giving instructions to the students. Facilitating comprehension among the students is not only done by giving instructions in the first language; it can also be done by translating and clarifying words and phrases that might be difficult for the students (Hall & Cook, 2013, p. 25; Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2014, p. 8). Cook
(2001, p. 415) also writes about the importance of comprehension among the students and how it can be crucial to give instructions in the students’ first language since the task is wasted if the students do not know what to do.

The students’ first language can also be used in order to create a good pedagogical as well as a comfortable and social environment (Hall & Cook, 2013, p. 16). A comfortable environment can be created by having discipline and organisation in the classroom which, according to Rui and Chew (2013, p. 324), can be helped by using the students’ first language. Cook (2001, p. 415) also discusses discipline and writes that it is often easier to uphold discipline in the students’ first language since they take it more seriously than in the second language.

2.3.2. Why use the second language?
If students receive input in the second language there is a greater chance that they will want to communicate in the second language (Knell & Chi, 2013, p. 80). Knell and Chi (2013, p. 82) write that if there is a will to communicate students often achieve better results in reading and oral communication. Hall and Cook (2013, p. 18) also write about this and mention that if the students use and encounter the first language too much it can impair their skill to communicate in English. If the students are not exposed to the second language they do not get the chance to improve their communication skills which can have negative implications for their development (Lundberg, 2007, p. 164; Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2014, p. 1).

According to Lundberg (2010, p. 23-24) pupils should get used to hearing English which can be achieved when teachers use as much English as possible during English lessons. If the teacher always translates everything to the first language the pupils will not pay as much attention as they should and there is a risk they will not concentrate on what is being said when the second language is used. Because of this, it is important for the teacher to explain to the pupils that they do not have to understand every word of what is being said and also inform the pupils of the advantages of speaking English instead of Swedish during English lessons (Lundberg, 2010, p. 24).

2.3.3. Why use both the first language and the second language?
Rui and Chew (2013, p. 323-324) write about the use of both the first language and the second language, called code-switching, when teachers want to make sure that the students understand everything in the EFL classroom. The use of the first language together with the second language can also be useful when giving feedback to the students. Lundberg (2007, p. 97) also writes about the benefits of using both languages and gives a specific example: when reading a book in the second language a good idea can be to read it in the first language first. A combination of the first and the second language can also be used when there is a need to give the students directions of different kinds, such as telling them to be quiet, getting their attention or when giving instructions (Rabbidge & Chappell, 2014, p. 8).

Further, Oga-Baldwin and Nakata (2014, p. 10) emphasize that the first language can be used as long as the second language dominates. Cook (2001, p. 413) agrees with this standpoint, but adds that second language learning can actually be supported by the first language in many different ways. Examples of when the first language can support the learning of the second language is when explaining grammar, organizing tasks or checking the meaning of different words. By this way of working in the classroom the teachers feel that the use of the second language becomes more natural and fluid (Cook, 2001, p. 414).

García (2009, p. 45) writes about the term translanguaging which refers to the use of multiple languages. Translanguaging can for example be used in a bilingual family where the degree of
knowledge in different languages varies. Translanguaging can then be used in order to speak to each other in an uninhibited way, by switching languages. Another example of when translanguaging is used can be during a lesson where an instruction can be given in the first language, the pupils and the teacher speak in the second language and then the first language can be used again to facilitate the meaning of certain words. The essential part of translanguaging is that the language use varies (García, 2009, p. 302).

3. Theoretical perspectives
This section will present the theoretical perspectives used for this empirical study. The first theoretical perspective is the sociocultural theory and the second theoretical perspective used for this essay is the concept of scaffolding.

3.1. Sociocultural theory
To communicate is an essential part of the learning process and therefore it is important to think about what language to use, for example, during an English instruction. The language used by the teacher is important since the child mainly learns from this language (Pinter, 2006, p. 12). This way of learning can be recognized in the sociocultural theory which was first formulated by Lev S. Vygotsky (1978, p. 84). The most central aspect of this theory is that mental functions are developed through social interaction. This means that people appropriate ways of thinking and acting by working together with other people. For example, learning a first language would not be possible without interaction with other people (Säljö, 2011, p. 177).

The teacher plays an important role when it comes to the sociocultural theory, since interaction with people with more knowledge is a good way to develop knowledge. Interaction with a teacher gives pupils the chance to encounter perspectives that they are not used to (Säljö, 2011, p. 179). This does not only concern teachers and pupils but an important part of the sociocultural theory is that an individual with more knowledge supports and helps one with less knowledge. With support from someone with more knowledge it is possible to achieve more. This concept is called the Zone of Proximal Development and was established by Vygotsky. The Zone of Proximal Development can be described as an optimal way to learn and means that you receive support from someone with more knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

3.2. Scaffolding
The concept of scaffolding also stems from Vygotsky’s theory and is based on the Zone of Proximal Development. This means that a more knowledgeable peer supports the one with less knowledge by asking questions. These questions are focused on the essential parts of what should be learned and by these questions the one with less knowledge can learn more. In the beginning there is much support needed but it will eventually be reduced with the goal that no support is needed. Scaffolding then means that knowledge is appropriated from someone with more knowledge (Säljö, 2012, p. 194).

Even though scaffolding is associated with Vygotsky, the concept of scaffolding was first coined by Jerome Bruner (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976, p. 90). The authors mention the process of scaffolding where for example a child is able to carry out a task with help from an adult. The adult can control and help with the parts of the task that are too difficult for the child to accomplish, which means that the child can focus on the parts that are within his or her competence. With assistance the child can then also accomplish the parts that are beyond his or her competence (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90).
4. Material and method
This section will present the method for this study. Further, reliability and validity together with the ethical aspects for this essay will be described.

4.1. Chosen method
The chosen method for this empirical study is a qualitative method, where data is collected in order to obtain deeper knowledge about research questions. The data collection can be done in different ways, such as through observations, stories and interviews (Eriksson Barajas, Forsberg & Wengström, 2013, p. 127). In this empirical study only interviews have been used to collect data. Interviews were chosen as a method because there is a need to gather more in-depth data about teachers’ opinions on a specific subject (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 411), which in this case is to investigate teachers’ choice of language (L1 or L2) in the EFL classroom in Swedish schools.

Eriksson Barajas et al. (2013, p. 128) write about the differences between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. In structured interviews the questions are formulated with the intention that they should be comprehended in the same way by the interviewees. A semi-structured interview is a more open way to conduct an interview since the order of and the way of asking the questions is decided during the interviews. An unstructured interview is an interview where the interviewee is encouraged to speak more openly about a specific subject. For this essay a mix of structured and semi-structured interviews has been used. This is because the interview questions used were formulated and also piloted in order to ensure that the respondents understand them in the same way. At the same time, the order of the questions could be changed depending on the answers given by the respondents. Eriksson Barajas et al. (2013, p. 129) also write about the importance of encouraging the interviewee to elaborate on their thoughts. This can be done by asking supplementary questions but also through encouraging body language. During the interviews used for this essay, supplementary questions were asked if there was a need for it.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 172) write about using an interview guide and how it either can include a few subjects that the interview will deal with or can be a detailed interview guide with all the interview questions written down. During the interviews conducted for this study a detailed interview guide (Appendix 2) was used.

4.2. Piloting the instrument
In order to implement the best interviews possible and to make sure that the interview questions were clear and easy to understand and also to ensure reliability, a pilot interview was conducted (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 205). The pilot interview was carried out on an individual who was similar to the intended informants. During the pilot interview the interview was conducted and questions about changes and uncertainties were also asked. The pilot interview was recorded so that the author could go back and listen and then be able to concentrate on the responses during the interview. The pilot interview took approximately 40 minutes, a time frame which was used as a target for the main study interviews. After the pilot interview, questions that were repetitive and unnecessary were removed from the interview guide.

4.3. Selection of informants
The aim of this study is to investigate teachers’ choice of language (L1 or L2) in the EFL upper elementary classroom in Swedish schools. To be able to investigate why teachers choose one language or the other, teachers need to be interviewed. The criteria for teachers to interview was that they had to currently teach English in grades 4-6 in Swedish schools.
An email was sent to 35 principals and assistant principals at 24 schools in central Sweden where they were asked for contact information to English teachers in grades 4-6. In this email the aim of this study was presented. Some principals then forwarded contact information and the author of this study was able to contact the teachers by herself. Some principals forwarded the email to the English teachers in grades 4-6 at their schools and the teachers contacted the author themselves. When mail correspondence with the teachers had started a letter of consent (Appendix 1) was sent out as well as a request for dates and times when the teachers could be available for interviews. In the end, six interviews were booked and completed.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 156) write that the number of respondents used can vary depending on what type of study it is. It can also vary due to a time limit and how easy it is to find respondents that are willing to participate. However, the number of respondents are usually between 5 and 25. There are advantages to implementing a small number of interviews. It gives the researcher better possibilities to be more accurate since more time can be spent on the analysis of the interviews. If there are many interviews and also a time limit, the analysis will naturally not be as detailed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, p. 157). The goal for this study was to carry out at least eight interviews. Due to the time limit and the difficulties in getting in contact with teachers the final number of respondents was six. Even if this is fewer than the intention it is still within the range of respondents set by Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 156).

4.4. Implementation
As mentioned, a total of six interviews were conducted for this study. All interviews took place at the informants’ workplace, either in classrooms or in smaller study rooms and all interviews were conducted in Swedish. The time for the interviews varied between 20 minutes and 40 minutes. The interviews started with a short introduction of the author and the aim of the study. The informants were also asked whether the interview could be recorded.

The interviews emanated from the interview guide that had been designed before the interviews. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 172) there are different ways to approach an interview. Either the order of the questions can be determined in advance and then the interviewer keeps to that or the interviewer can change the order of the questions and ask supplementary questions. In the interviews conducted for this essay the interview guide was used but if the respondent had already answered questions to be asked later, these were skipped. Also some supplementary questions were asked when the respondent talked about something that could add information of interest.

4.5. Method of analysis
McKay (2006, p. 57) defines content analysis as identifying and coding key topics in the collected data. A content analysis can be done by reading the collected data many times while looking for key topics and ideas. When reading the data, it can be wise to use some sort of tool to label the topics, such as a highlighter pen or post-its. When analyzing the data for this essay the recorded interviews were first transcribed by listening to the recordings at least two times. If there was anything that seemed unclear, the passage was listened to again. The interviews were transcribed entirely except for sounds such as “eh” and small words that did not contribute anything to the interview. All interviews were conducted in Swedish and therefore quotes used in the essay have been translated by the author. When the transcriptions were done, these were printed and read through several times. When reading the transcriptions, a highlighter pen was used in order to highlight key topics and ideas. It might seem outdated to print out the data and
use a highlighter or post-its, instead of keeping it in the computer but it is an easy way to get a better view of the data (Malmqvist, 2007, p. 125).

When the printed transcriptions had been read through several times and key topics and ideas had been highlighted, all key topics were categorized. According to McKay (2006, p. 57) the goal of a content analysis is to get a list of categories where the topics in the data are determined. These categorizations were created from the answers obtained in each interview. If the respondents gave similar answers, these were highlighted with the same color and categorized under the same heading. All categorizations and headings were written down on a paper. The headings used were instructions, grammar, speak English/oral, variation, ways to learn English, advantages with English, disadvantages with English and lessons. To give an example, if some of the teachers talked about variation as a good way to learn English these parts of the transcriptions were marked with a special color and then gathered under the heading “variation”. These headings then guided the creation of headings in the result part in this essay.

4.6. Reliability and validity
Reliability means that a study should be conducted in such a way that it can be replicated by someone else and this person should be able to achieve similar results (Eriksson Barajas et al., 2013, p. 103). However, it is important to remember that different informants may give different answers. To ensure reliability a structured interview guide can be used where all questions and the order of the questions are the same for all respondents. It is also important that all respondents interpret the questions in the same way which can be done by piloting the interview questions before the actual interviews (Silverman, 2015).

Validity means that what is intended to be measured is measured (Eriksson Barajas et al., 2013, p. 105). In order to ensure validity in interviews, it is important for the interviewer to minimize the amount of preconceptions and to try to be neutral when asking the interview questions. The interviewers’ thoughts and ideas about the subject should in no way be revealed (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 204).

4.7. Ethical aspects
Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 227) write about ethical aspects and confidentiality and how these are important when it comes to interviews. It is of great importance to treat the recorded interviews and the transcriptions with caution to keep the information confidential. The identity and personal information of the informants should also be anonymized (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, p. 228).

According to the Swedish Science Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011, pp.7-14) there are four areas of requirement to take into consideration when it comes to carrying out a study like this. The first one is called the requirement of information and it means that the individuals affected by the research should be properly informed about the aim of the study and their part in it.

The second requirement regards consent. This means that the respondents should give their consent to take part in the study and they should also be informed that they are allowed to cancel their participation whenever they want without further explanation. The third requirement regards confidentiality which means that personal information should be treated with care in order to avoid revealing the identity of the respondent. Finally, the requirement of usage means that gathered information should only be used for the research and the writing of the essay and nothing else.
After the email request for participation was sent, the respondents were also sent a consent letter with information about the study, confidentiality, and usage. The respondents read and signed this consent letter before the interviews could be performed.

5. Results
This section will firstly present the participants of this study. It will also present the findings of each interview based on the research questions formed for this empirical study.

5.1. Presentation of participants
This section will present the participants of this study. These participants gave their approval to be interviewed. All names are fictional and all have been changed to female names in order to not reveal the identity of any participant. No personal information other than their approximate age, their education and experience will be disclosed.

Camilla is between 50 and 55 years old and has worked as a teacher for 31 years. She has taught English during all of these years in the upper elementary school. Camilla is certified to teach English and she thinks that English is fun and that there are great possibilities to inspire the pupils.

Anna is between 40 and 45 years old and has worked as a teacher for 17 years. Anna teaches English in upper elementary school and secondary school. She is certified to teach English and believes that English is an important language.

Hanna is between 40 and 45 years old and has worked as a teacher for 19 years, during which she has consistently taught English. She is certified to teach English in upper elementary school which is where she currently works. Hanna thinks that English is the best subject to teach since everything is possible.

Nina is between 40 and 45 years old and has worked as a teacher in English for 3 years. She is certified to teach English and at the moment she teaches English in a grade 5. Nina believes that English is an important language because of how crucial it is to know English when it comes to future working life.

Emilia is between 60 and 65 years old and has worked as a teacher for 19 years. She teaches English in upper elementary school and is certified to teach English. Emilia has only positive thoughts about teaching English and believes that it is a benefit to know many languages.

Kathrin is between 35 and 40 years old and has worked as a teacher in English on and off for 10 years. She is not formally certified to teach English. Kathrin thinks that English is fun but she often experiences that the pupils find it difficult.

5.2. Analysis of the empirical data
This section will present the results from the interviews conducted.

5.2.1. Giving instructions and explaining grammar
All respondents say that they use both English and Swedish during English lessons. How much and when English and Swedish is used varies among the respondents. However, the respondents who mention that they use Swedish say that they use it when it comes to giving instructions and/or explaining grammar.
Camilla and Anna mention that they use Swedish when it comes to some instructions that they experience the pupils have trouble understanding. They both mention that they try to use as much English as possible but that it is necessary to also use Swedish if they notice that the students do not understand what they are supposed to do. Camilla says that she does not use Swedish with the whole class but only with specific pupils if she notices someone who does not know what to do. Anna teaches English in both grade 4 and 5 and in grade 4 she gives instructions in both Swedish and English, while in grade 5 she tries to give instructions in only English. Nina and Emilia also mention that they sometimes use Swedish when giving instructions if they, like Camilla and Anna, notice that someone does not understand.

Hanna mentions that her use of Swedish during English lessons is very limited. The only time she uses Swedish is when explaining difficult grammar which also is very limited since she believes that teaching grammar is unnecessary in elementary school. Thus her use of Swedish is almost non-existent. The use of grammar in elementary school varies among the respondents in this study. In contrast to Hanna, Nina mentions that she works with grammar quite a lot. She thinks that it is important to work with grammar because it is vital to know grammar in order to know some rules of English when, for example, it comes to writing. Nina tries to use English during grammar instruction but feels that it is often necessary to also use Swedish to ensure the pupils’ comprehension.

We practice grammar quite a lot even though there are disputed opinions whether to work with grammar or not. But I think it is good that they have something to rely on when they start writing. Then we use Swedish. (Nina)

Emilia is another respondent who mentions that she works with grammar. As she always works with grammar in the Swedish subject at the same time as in English, she mostly gives the English grammar instruction in Swedish. She explains that it is easier to compare and to find similarities and differences when using Swedish. Anna also talks about grammar instruction. Even though she tries to use English as much as possible during English lessons she stresses that it is very important that the grammar is understood correctly and therefore she uses Swedish when talking about grammar.

5.2.2. Advantages and disadvantages of using English
All respondents talk about the advantages of speaking English during English lessons and give examples of the benefits of using English. According to Camilla and Kathrin it is positive to use English in order for the pupils to get used to the language so that they are not afraid of using the language themselves.

Anna talks about the importance of the pupils hearing her speak British English since they always hear American English in their everyday lives, when listening to music or watching American movies for example. She also mentions the need for the language to become natural and fluent among the pupils and that this can be achieved by them hearing her use the language.

Other advantages of using English is that the goal is to make English so natural that the pupils always speak English during lessons and then I have to set an example by only speaking English. (Anna)

Hanna and Kathrin also talk about how important it is to hear the language and how that is crucial when learning a new language.

According to Nina and Emilia the advantages of them using English is that the pupils can find the courage to speak English themselves.
They hear that I do not speak English perfectly and because of that they also dare to speak. (Emilia)

Nina also mentions that if she and the pupils are only using English during English lessons the talkative pupils get a better working environment, since they do not talk as much as they usually do. In addition, Nina thinks that it is good that the pupils are forced in a way to use English. In that way, according to Nina, the pupils can learn both in a better and faster way than if only Swedish was used.

Even though all respondents think that there are many benefits to using English only during English lessons, they all mention that in some cases it can be a hindrance to only use English. Camilla talks about pupils who think that English is difficult and that it sometimes feels like they become exposed, when they have to use it.

Hanna uses for the most part English only during English lessons and in the long run she does not see any disadvantages to only use English. However, in the short term some pupils may find it tough to only use and hear English in the beginning of grade 4. She says that some pupils mention that they find it difficult that everything is in English and that they do not understand anything. As a result, Hanna always talks with these pupils and tries to explain that hearing and using English is the best way to learn, and she reassures them that they do not have to understand everything.

Emilia does not really see any disadvantages with only using English but she does mention that it can be obstructive if she is not observant. An example is if she is giving instructions in English and she does not realise that someone does not understand what to do, then it can be a disadvantage to only use English since this pupil may lose interest in what to do.

If we work with the workbook the instructions are in Swedish. But if we work with something else and I give the instructions in English I have to really make sure that they understand. (Emilia)

Anna also talks about some disadvantages when it comes to giving instructions in English only. She says that some pupils may not understand everything and because of that they can become insecure.

According to Kathrin it can be disadvantageous to only use English when it comes to newly arrived pupils who have not had contact with English before. These pupils can have trouble understanding if everything is in English. However, Kathrin mentions that they work a lot with ways to prioritize language among all pupils at the school, such as supporting words with pictures.

Since we work a lot with ways to prioritize language at this school, in all subjects, this way of working also characterizes the English lessons. You always clarify everything, use supporting pictures, and we use the projector a lot. (Kathrin)

5.2.3. Lessons

According to all the teachers in this study, the main goal is to speak as much English as possible during English lessons. However, how much they use English differs among the teachers, and the structure of their lessons also differ, even though there are also some similarities. Anna, Nina and Kathrin relate that they always begin their lessons in the same way to be able to give the pupils a clear structure. On the white board they write down the planning of the lesson in English, in order for the pupils to know what they will do.
Both Hanna and Camilla talk about how they often work with oral activities during their lessons. These oral activities can include plays to act out, making their own movies, and giving speeches. Hanna gives an example where pupils worked with a chapter in their workbook, which was about “superstition”, and from that they prepared their own play in English. Camilla also gives an example of how they have worked with making movies, where the pupils get the opportunity to prepare pictures and an accompanying text in English and then record it and play it for the class.

Emilia mentions the importance of listening to different kinds of English in her lessons and if they work with a text for example, they always listen to it first. Then she also believes that it is important for the pupils to hear each other speak and therefore they always read the same text several times, both in English and in Swedish. This is also mentioned by Kathrin and Hanna who also always let the pupils read the same text several times. According to Hanna, this way of working gives pupils the opportunity to fortify expressions in English and not only separate words.

It is not called “eat dinner”, it is called “have dinner” for example. There is no idea to only give “dinner” as homework, because they have to learn the entire expression. (Hanna)

5.2.4. The best way to learn English according to the teachers

All teachers who participated in this study talked about what they think is the best way to learn English. Anna, Hanna and Kathrin mention the need for variation. They say that there is not only one method to learn English. They also mention the importance of getting in contact with the language in many different ways. Anna also adds that she believes that the pupil can generally achieve more than she or he thinks.

There is always the idea that the pupil can achieve more than I think, than the pupil thinks. (Anna)

Kathrin adds that a good way to learn English is to dare to make mistakes and Hanna says that in addition to variation the best way to learn English is to use it as much as possible. Camilla also mentions the need to use English frequently in order to learn. She also says that it is important for the pupils to see a purpose in what they are doing during English lessons.

Then I believe that what you do becomes real. That it has a purpose, what you do in class. That what you do can be used in an actual context. (Camilla)

According to Nina the best way to learn English is to travel to a country where English is spoken. However, that is not possible to do in school and therefore she tries to use English in order for the pupils to regularly hear English. She also believes that it is important for the pupils to become inspired to learn English, which can only be done by using English during lessons.

But I believe that they have to find an urge to want to learn and my idea is that when you speak English in lessons and we work with words, it becomes an urge to make yourself understood. (Nina)

Emilia discusses conversations and how that is one of the best ways to learn a new language. However, as important as talking is, it is not possible without good vocabulary. Therefore, Emilia thinks it is very important for the pupils to strengthen their vocabulary along with their conversation skills.

5.2.5. The importance of speaking

All respondents talk about speaking and conversation and how these are both important and an activity they try to perform often. Camilla talks about finding opportunities to speak in every
lesson. For example, before reading a text, they start by talking about certain words that may come up in the text. They also talk about what the text might be about, and when they have read the text they talk and answer questions about the text. She also says that they often prepare and present different speeches where the pupils get the chance to talk in front of the whole class. Camilla thinks that it is important for the pupils to speak and that they have the courage to speak.

Like Camilla, Anna tries to have some sort of conversation practice in every lesson. She has a part in every lesson that she calls “oral”, where the pupils get the opportunity to practice their oral skills in different ways. Her goal is that the pupils speak English in every lesson. Nina also has a goal that the pupils should speak English in every lesson and she thinks that it is positive if every pupil says something in English in order for them to get used to speaking English.

I try to take in something oral, so that they always say something every lesson. So that the pupils are not quiet. (Nina)

Hanna talks about how when her pupils speak English during lessons they get encouraged and through this they also learn English. And by creating an environment where it is okay to make mistakes, the pupils dare to speak even though they do not know every single word.

It is about creating this tolerant and forgiving environment. It can be good even if it is wrong. (Hanna)

Emilia has three lessons in English every week and she tries to structure these differently. Sometimes they work with the work- and activity book and sometimes they work with grammar. But she also tries to plan lessons where the pupils are supposed to speak. Often the pupils get the opportunity to share something with the rest of the class, for example about their living situation or their plans for the weekend. Sometimes they also use cards and pictures in order to facilitate the speaking for the pupils. The main idea of these lessons is that the pupils should only speak English and avoid Swedish as far as possible.

According to Kathrin, during her lessons, they talk a lot in English. Even though she has some pupils who find it tough to speak in English in front of the others she always tries to get them to say something in English. Sometimes they can only repeat what she is saying but according to Kathrin that is sometimes good enough. It might not be grammatically correct or the pronunciation can be wrong, however, in this case that is not the most important part.

I encourage them to always answer in English and say it in English. If they do not know I try to support them. Sometimes even by saying the entire answer, word by word and they just repeat what I say. Only to make them dare to say it. (Kathrin)

6. Discussion
This section will firstly discuss the method used for this essay, including the limitations of this thesis study. Then the main findings of the study are discussed and connected with previous research and the theoretical perspectives used for this study.

6.1. Discussion of methodology
This study is a qualitative study based on interviews. Interviews were used since the aim of this study was to investigate teachers’ choice of language and their opinion about language use in the EFL classroom. In order to conduct interviews, potential interviewees had to be contacted and asked to participate in the study. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 156) the number of respondents in a study like this can vary, but are usually between 5 and 25. The goal
for this study was eight respondents. Even though 35 principals and assistant principals at 24 different schools were contacted and asked for contact information for teachers in English in grades 4-6, only six teachers replied and confirmed their participation in the study. Even if this number is smaller than the intention it is still within range of participants recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 156). If there had been more time, it might have been possible to get in contact with more teachers and therefore also conduct a larger number of interviews. On the other hand, most of the teachers asked to participate declined, which most likely would have been the case even if there had been more time.

As mentioned, this study is based on interviews which only gives the teachers’ opinions about language use in general and what they say about their own language use. In order to give a better idea of what language is used in the classroom, it would be necessary to also do observations. When only conducting interviews, it is not possible to see how the teachers actually work, and so we only have access to what they say that they are doing. If observations had been conducted as a complement to the interviews it would probably have been easier to draw better conclusions about the choice of language. However, in order to do observations as well, there would have to be more time.

All interviews for this study were recorded and then transcribed. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 218) write about transcribing interviews and how this can be complicated since body language and tone are taken away. Some things, such as irony, are also difficult to reproduce in writing and therefore complicate the transcription process. However, the recordings and the transcriptions have been listened to and read through several times in order to avoid misunderstandings.

6.2. Main findings

The aim of this study has been to investigate teachers’ choice of language in the upper elementary EFL classroom in Swedish schools. Six teachers have been interviewed and the following research questions have been taken into consideration during the interviews and the writing of this thesis:

- Which language do teachers think should be used during English lessons?
- What reasons do teachers give to use either English or Swedish during English lessons?
- In what ways do teachers work with the first and the second language during English lessons?

The teachers participating in this thesis study all think that English should be used during English lessons. They also state that English is the language they try to use. However, some of the teachers mention that they in some cases use Swedish since it is necessary, for example when explaining grammar or giving instructions that may be difficult for the pupils to understand. One of the main reasons for using English during English lessons that the teachers give is that it is important for the pupils to hear English in order for them to learn. Learning English functions in the same way as learning any other language, which is done by hearing other people use the language. This can be connected with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1978, p. 84), which is about how mental functions are developed through social interaction. If the teacher does not use English during English lessons the pupils may not be able to hear English anywhere else and therefore not learn English in the best possible way. Lundberg (2010, p. 23-24) also writes about this, that the teacher should use English as much as possible in order for the pupils to get used to hearing English.
All teachers mention the importance of speaking and how vital it is to be able to communicate in English. This is also a reason they give for using English themselves during lessons, since it is easier to encourage the pupils to use English if they do so themselves. This is also discussed by Knell and Chi (2013, p. 80) who write that input in the second language increases the chances of also communicating in the second language. In addition, Knell and Chi (2013, p. 82) also write that if there is a will to communicate the results in reading and oral communication often become improved.

As mentioned, the teachers try to use English whenever it is possible and several of the teachers also try to implement oral activities during every English lesson in order for the pupils to gain confidence to speak English. In order to learn English, the pupils have to get the opportunity to use it and all teachers try to encourage the pupils as much as possible. According to Lundberg (2010, p. 24) it is also crucial to inform the pupils about the advantages of speaking English instead of Swedish.

In contrast, one reason to use Swedish is, according to some of the teachers, when there is a need for clarification. This may be when giving instructions to the pupils or when talking about grammar, for example, which can be too difficult for the pupils to understand in English. Bruner (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976, p. 90) presented the term scaffolding which can be recognized in this way of working with Swedish in the EFL classroom. The teachers’ aim is to use as much English as possible in order for the pupils to learn. However, whenever the pupils do not understand and do not know what to do they get support from the teachers in Swedish. This support is given when the teachers clarify some parts of an instruction in Swedish, or when they explain grammar that may be difficult in Swedish. According to Wood et al. (1976, p. 90) scaffolding means that the pupil can accomplish more if they get assistance with what they find difficult. In other words, the first language can be used in order to facilitate instructions and grammar specifically. This is also discussed by Hall and Cook (2013, p. 25) who write that the use of the pupils’ first language can help the pupils to understand. In addition, the first language may be used advantageously when giving instructions (Rui & Chew, 2013, p. 322-323; Rabbidge & Chappell, 2014, p. 12-13).

Several of the teachers talk about using both the first language and the second language during lessons in order to ensure the pupils’ comprehension. This means that the teachers see the pupils’ first language as a way to support the learning of the second language. Even though none of them uses the term translanguaging, their way of working can be recognized as such. According to García (2009, p. 302) translanguaging is when the language use in the classroom varies. There is no need to use only one language since that is not beneficial for the pupils if they are bilinguals. If there is a need to explain or clarify something in another language than the one being taught that is positive for the pupils since there is a chance they will have a better understanding (García, 2009, p. 302).

Translanguaging is, in contrast to code-switching (Cook, 2001, p. 408), about the use of more than two languages. Kathrin talks about newly arrived pupils with a first language other than Swedish. This is common at her school and these pupils are often neither used to hearing Swedish nor English, which can make it difficult to only use English. Even though she does not mention the term translanguaging, it is interesting to think how these pupils’ understanding might be different if their native language were also used. It seems like the term translanguaging is not well-known in schools today, even though most teachers seem to work in a way that can be described as translanguaging. Working with translanguaging can also be connected to the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This is because the Zone of Proximal
*Development* can be described as when someone with less knowledge can achieve more with support from someone with more knowledge. This is similar to the use of translanguaging, where the second language is supported by the first language; when a pupil does know a word in the second language, she or he can be supported by the first language and then be able to understand and learn more.

Using the second language seems to be the best way to learn it. However, to keep rigidly to the second language might not always be positive. An important part of learning a new language is to find it interesting and fun, which can be lost if you do not understand anything. Therefore, the teachers taking part in this study try to use English as much as possible but allow themselves to also use Swedish if that is necessary for the pupils’ understanding. Another important part of learning a new language is to find a reason to learn it. When the teachers use it in class, the pupils may see the advantages of learning English in order for them to understand what the teacher is saying.

Even though the teachers in this study all have different ideas of their choice of language, all of them give sound arguments for choosing one or the other. In a literature study conducted by the author of this essay it was concluded that teachers must be wise in their language choice. Teachers cannot only choose the language they feel most comfortable with since that language may not be the best for the pupils (Newstam, 2016, p. 14). However, if the teacher knows the pupils well she or he will probably make the best decision regarding language use for the pupils and for their learning process.

**7. Conclusion**

The main idea among all teachers in this study is to use English as much as possible. However, this is done in different ways and the ideas of why and when to use English also differs among the teachers. The teachers who say that they use Swedish occasionally say that they do it when giving some instructions and if they talk about grammar. Otherwise they try to use English. The reasons they give for using English is to give the pupils the opportunity to hear English and by that learn as much as possible. Even though the teachers still use Swedish there is no one who believes that Swedish should be the main language or thinks that the pupils should only use Swedish.

Even though it is written in the English syllabus that the pupils should be able to understand spoken English (Skolverket, 2011, p. 30), there are no rules regarding which language should be used during English lessons. It is therefore up to the teacher to decide and the results of the study conducted for this thesis show that the most commonly used language is English.

**7.1. Further research**

This study presents the opinions and ideas of six different teachers in a limited area in central Sweden. The study has shown that the choice of language in the EFL classroom is mostly English and the teachers participating in the study have all given sound arguments for their choice of language. This study only focuses on a limited area of Sweden, therefore in further research it would be interesting to implement this kind of study in a larger geographical area. Also, in this study the majority of the respondents are female, older than 30 years old and have worked as teachers for more than 15 years. If possible, further research could include the same number of female and male participants and with a wider age range and experience to be able to see if there are any differences when it comes to those aspects.
References


Newstam, L. (2016). *To speak or not to speak English during English lessons - A literature study on language use in the elementary classroom*. Falun: Högskolan Dalarna


**Appendix 1**

Information letter

**Information om deltagande i intervjuundersökning i ämnet engelska för årskurserna 4-6**

Hej!
Jag heter Lina Newstam och studerar sista terminen på grundlärandeprogrammet, inriktning 4-6, vid Högskolan Dalarna. Just nu skriver jag mitt examensarbete inom engelska och jag ska där göra en undersökning i just ämnet engelska. Syftet med studien är att undersöka lärarens användning av svenska och/eller engelska på engelsklektioner i årskurs 4-6.

För att samla information till den här undersökningen behöver jag intervjua lärare som undervisar i engelska i årskurs 4-6.


Ditt deltagande är helt frivilligt och kan när som helst avbrytas. Resultaten från denna undersökning kommer att presenteras i form av ett examensarbete vid Högskolan Dalarna samt vara tillgängligt på DiVA (Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet) på internet.

Jag väljer att delta i undersökningen     Ja ☐   Nej ☐
Deltagarens underskrift: __________________________

Ytterligare upplysningar lämnas av nedanstående ansvariga.

Student: Lina Newstam
v13linne@du.se
XXXXXXXX

Handledare: Christine Cox Eriksson
cce@du.se
XXXXX

XXXXX

Ytterligare upplysningar lämnas av nedanstående ansvariga.
Appendix 2
Interview guide

Jag heter Lina Newstam och studerar sista terminen på grundläararprogrammet, inriktning 4-6, vid Högskolan Dalarna. Just nu skriver jag mitt examensarbete inom engelska och jag ska där göra en undersökning i just ämnet engelska. Syftet med studien är att undersöka lärarens användning av svenska och/eller engelska på engelsklektioner i årskurs 4-6.


Att anteckna:
- Datum och tid - Respondent

1. Hur gammal är du?
2. Vad har du för utbildning i engelska? Har du lärarlegitimation?
3. I vilka årskurser undervisar du i engelska?
4. Vilka årskurser finns på din skola?
5. Hur länge har du undervisat i engelska?
6. Vilka är dina tankar och känslor kring språket och ämnet engelska?
7. Hur många lektioner (längd på lektioner?) engelska undervisar du per vecka?
8. Använder du något läromedel?
9. Vilka språk använder du på dina lektioner?
10. Hur är lektionerna uppbyggda?
12. Vilket sätt anser du vara det bästa för att som elev lära sig engelska?
13. Om du använder både engelska och svenska, när använder du engelska?
14. Varför använder du engelska?
15. När använder du svenska?
16. Varför använder du svenska?
17. Vilka fördelar ser du med att använda engelska på engelsklektionerna?
18. Vilka nackdelar ser du med att använda engelska på engelsklektionerna?
19. Vilka fördelar ser du med att använda svenska på engelsklektionerna?
20. Vilka nackdelar ser du med att använda svenska på engelsklektionerna?
21. Använder eleverna samma språk som du använder? Dvs, svarar de på engelska om en fråga ställs på engelska?
22. Har ni några ”regler” på engelsklektionerna gällande vilket språk som får användas? Om ja, vilka är dessa regler?
23. Hur upplever du att eleverna ”hänger med” på lektionerna när du använder svenska respektive engelska?
24. Visar eleverna olika språk av stabilitet? Om ja, hur?
25. Om idén är att prata så mycket engelska som möjligt på lektionerna, på vilket sätt uppmuntras eleverna att prata engelska?
26. Om du har undervisat engelska i alla årskurser (4,5,6), är det någon skillnad i hur du använder engelska respektive svenska i de olika årskurserna?
27. Är det något du vill tillägga gällande val av språk på engelsklektioner?