Degree Project

English Language Teaching in Two Countries in the European Union—Spain and Sweden

A comparative study

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Abstract

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a tool, developed by the European Commission, which has been used as a base in the development of curricular documents in many countries. This would suggest a high level of similarity between the language teachings in different European countries, but how similar are they really? The aim of this thesis is to make a comparison between the general approach to foreign language teaching in two European countries, Spain and Sweden. It is important to note that the purpose has only been to find out what differences and similarities can be found between the two countries and not to make any kind of judgement as to what English teaching is preferable. A design consisting of two methods has been used to carry out the investigation: text analysis and in-depth interviews. The analysed texts are the English syllabus for upper secondary school in Sweden and the syllabus for the first foreign language in the Spanish upper secondary school. As a complement to the text analysis, interviews have been made with two English teachers from each country. The results that were found show that the two syllabi are similar in the way that both have been inspired by the CEFR and both promote Communicative Language Teaching. However, they also show several rather striking differences. The Spanish syllabus appears, for example, to focus much more on grammatical and phonetic knowledge than the Swedish one does. The results of the interviews, which cannot be generalized, indicate that the two English teachers in Sweden look for guidance in the syllabus and other official documents, while their Spanish colleagues prefer to turn to the textbooks, since they trust that the editors have made sure they follow the official regulations. This study shows that there are many differences
between the language teaching in Spain and Sweden, despite the fact that both syllabi relate to the CEFR.

Keywords: English teaching in Europe, English in upper secondary school, English teaching in Spain and Sweden, The Common European Framework of Reference, Communicative Language Teaching.
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1. Introduction

The knowledge of foreign languages has become increasingly important as we move towards a more international and global society. The European Union, with all its 23 official languages, is understandably concerned about the learning and teaching of foreign languages in its member states. The European Union’s language policies aim at promoting knowledge of languages and protecting linguistic diversity. “The goal is a Europe where everyone can speak at least two other languages in addition to their mother tongue” (European Commission, 2012). Various studies have been made to compare language proficiency in different countries, the most recent being The European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC). To make such comparisons possible, the European Commission has developed the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which has been used in many countries as a base in the development of curricular documents. This tool was created to help making the teaching and evaluation of foreign languages more similar in different countries, but the question is how similar they really are.

The two countries that were chosen for the study of this paper, Spain and Sweden, are both members of the European Union and the most frequently taught foreign language in each of these countries is English. Several international studies comparing students’ English proficiency in different European countries have shown a significant difference in the results of Spanish students and that of their Swedish peers. This is one reason why a comparison between these two countries could be of interest. Another reason why a comparison of the English teaching in Spain and Sweden was chosen as topic for this thesis is that I gained some insight into the teaching of English in different countries while doing my teacher training practice in schools in Sweden, Spain and England. This experience served as a reminder of the fact that by broadening one’s knowledge of the teaching in other
countries one begins to see the teaching in one’s own country with new eyes. One also gets to reflect on items which one took for granted and would not have noticed otherwise.

2. Aim

As the introduction of this thesis shows, the European Union expresses a great concern about foreign language teaching within its member states and the creation of the CEFR can be seen as an attempt to make language teaching more similar. This study will explore how similar foreign language teaching in the two European countries chosen for this investigation, Spain and Sweden, really is.

The aim is to make a comparison between the general approach to foreign language teaching in Spain and Sweden. Underlying guidelines, as well as the actual practice, will be investigated and analysed. The purpose is only to investigate what similarities and differences can be found, not to make any conclusions about what country has the best language teaching. The research questions that have served as a base for the study are:

1. What similarities and differences can be found in a comparison between the aims, contents and evaluation criteria that are established in the official documents regulating foreign language teaching in Spain and Sweden?

2. How do the official documents relate to the Common European Framework of Reference?

3. What seem to be the guidelines that the four teachers taking part in this study turn to when they plan their teaching and when they assess and grade their students?
3. Overview of the contextual background

With the purpose of facilitating the reading of this thesis, a brief overview of the contextual background has been made. This part of the thesis gives some background information about the Common European Framework of References and of the Spanish and Swedish education system.

3.1 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* is a tool developed by the Council of Europe. It is meant to provide “a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe” (Council of Europe, 2001:1). The Framework defines six successive stages of language learning and can be used to compare the level of language competence in an international context. The different stages are identical regardless of language. In 2011, Sweden got new syllabi for lower and upper secondary school and, although these have seven stages instead of six, they are explicitly linked to the CEFR. One of the reasons to change the curriculum was that the goals and grading criteria of the previous one were considered too open to interpretation and there was a need to make standards of grading more equivalent between schools. (Dragemark and Oscarson. 2010:83).

3.2 The Spanish Education System - background

The different stages in the Spanish school system are:

- Infant Education – from 0 to 6 years of age.
- Primary Education – from 6 to 12 years of age.
- Lower Secondary Education – from 12 to 16 years of age.
- Upper Secondary Education – from 16 to 18 years of age.
- University Education/Advanced Vocational Training – from 18 years of age.
Of these levels, Primary Education (Educación Primaria) and Lower Secondary Education (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria) are compulsory. The stages of most interest for this study are the Lower Secondary Education, commonly known as “la ESO” and Upper Secondary Education, which includes “el Bachillerato”; Intermediate and Advanced level of Vocational Training; and Specialized Education such as art and design.

The Spanish official documents establish that the students have to study a foreign language from the first level of the compulsory education, but they do not specify what language this should be. It is up to each school to decide what languages they want to offer the students. However, the majority of the Spanish students study English as their first foreign language.

In 2011, the Spanish Ministry of Education developed an Integral Program for Foreign Language Learning (Ministerio de educación, 2011). This program establishes that the first approach to foreign language learning ought to take place in the second cycle of Infant Education (age 3-6). Since this stage is voluntary, it does not change the fact that the foreign language teaching is compulsory for the Spanish students from the stage of Primary Education (age 6) (Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación).

The Spanish grading system is based on a scale of 10, where 10 is the highest grade. In order to pass, the student needs to attain at least the grade 5.

### 3.3 The Swedish Education System – background

The Swedish school system consists of the following stages:

* Pre-school – for children who have not yet started school.
* Pre-school class – 6 years of age.
* Compulsory school – from 7 to 16 years of age.
• Upper secondary school – from 16 to 19 years of age.
• University studies, Folk High Schools or Higher Vocational Education – from 18 or 19 years of age.

(Skolverket, 2011a)

All of these stages in the Swedish educational system are voluntary, except the nine years in the Compulsory school. In Sweden, English is a compulsory subject from the fourth grade (age 10), but each municipality can decide if they want the English teaching to start earlier, and many children study English from their first year in school (age 6 or 7).

The official documents that regulate Swedish education are defined by the Parliament and the Government. The National Agency for Education (‘Skolverket’ in Swedish) has the mission to actively work for the attainment of the goals (Skolverket, 2011a).

As mentioned earlier, Sweden has recently changed the grading system to make it less open to interpretation and more equivalent. Earlier the grades consisted of IG (fail), G (pass), VG (pass with distinction) and MVG (pass with special distinction). The new grades are a scale of letters from F to A, where A is the highest and the student needs an E to pass. In order to get the grade D the student has to fulfil all the criteria for E and most of the criteria for C. The same principle applies to the grade B, where the student needs to fulfil all the criteria for C and most for A.
4. Previous research

This part of the thesis presents some of the related research that has already been made.

4.1 Comparative Language Studies within Europe

Through the years there have been several comparative language studies and both of the countries that are subject to this thesis, Spain and Sweden, have taken part in many of these studies. The most recent one is *The European Survey on Language Competences* (ESLC), which was carried out in 2011. It was made at the request of the European Commission, and the results were published in July 2012. The 14 countries taking part in the survey\(^1\) had students in their final year of secondary education take a test to assess their language competence. Each country tested its two most frequently taught European languages. In Sweden these were English and Spanish and in Spain, English and French. In the first foreign language (English) the Swedish students showed the best results of all the countries taking part, while the Spanish students performed below average. The tool that was used to assess the students’ language competence was the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

As part of the ESLC, students, teachers and head teachers were asked to fill out a questionnaire. In their study, de la Rica and González de San Román (2012) compare the answers given by the Spanish students and the ones given by their Swedish peers, and they find several interesting differences. One difference they mention is that the Spanish language is spoken by far more people around the world than Swedish, and the size of the mother tongue could affect the need to master a second language. In their study, they find that Spanish students dedicate much more time to homework.

\(^1\) Belgium (Flemish, French and German Communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, England, Estonia, France, Greece, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.
in English than Swedish students, and that they are given approximately 50 minutes more of English lessons every week. Yet, this does not prove to have any effect on the result, nor does the fact that the pupils in Spain begin learning English, on average, three years before their Swedish peers. Something that does seem to have had a positive impact on the Swedish students’ results is the fact that a much higher percentage of these students have parents who have a high level of English proficiency than their Spanish peers. The Spanish students that have been given extra English lessons outside of school show a better result than those that have not. This discovery makes the authors speculate about the possibility that maybe the lessons in the language academies are based on less traditional methodologies than the ones in the schools. The authors point out that the Swedish students practically do not attend this kind of extra lessons outside of school. This difference and the fact that Swedish students have less homework in English make them think that maybe something in the methodology inside the Spanish classrooms is not working as it should, and that maybe the focus is still too traditional.

Vez et al. (2012) focus on the fact that exposure to and use of a foreign language in an informal context improves oral comprehension. This is a claim that is supported by other studies: *Europeans and Their Languages* (European Commission, 2006); *Study on the use of subtitling* (European Commission, 2011) etc.

In the Special Eurobarometer *Europeans and their languages* (European Commission, 2006) Sweden is the country where most people prefer subtitling (96%) and Spain is one of the countries where the lowest number of people prefers subtitling instead of dubbing (24%).

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2 In this context it can be of interest to note that in the 1940s, Spain’s former dictator Francisco Franco “passed a law banning the films in their original version” (Pantaleoni, 2008). His goal was to protect the Castilian language but it might have created a tradition in favour of the dubbing of films and against subtitling.
In 2002, The European Network of Policy Makers for the Evaluation of Education Systems commissioned a survey called *The Assessment of Pupils’ Skills in English in Eight European Countries*. It was published the year after, and, as the name suggests, the study assessed pupils’ English skills in eight European countries\(^3\), among them Spain and Sweden. In the report we can read, apart from the results of the study, a description of the foreign language education in each of the countries taking part. The results of the study show that the pupils from Finland, Norway and Sweden demonstrated the best English skills, and that the French and Spanish students obtained the lowest results. However, the authors point out that the results of the study should not be generalized for different reasons. In several of the countries it has not been established that the sample is representative, and the test has also been done at different moments of the students’ schooling. Some countries carried out the test at the beginning of the academic year and some at the end, for example, with the result that some students had come further in their English studies when the test was made.

### 4.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching is a method that, in contrast to, for example, the grammar translation method, focuses more on the communicative skills than the linguistic forms, such as grammar. Lundahl (2009) tells us that in the 1960s, the prevailing opinion within Swedish foreign language teaching was that you had to learn to master the structure of a language before you could start to use it. This is quite the opposite of the communicative language teaching. According to Lundahl, nowadays, *communicative language teaching* has become an umbrella term, which contains different views and methods (Lundahl 2009:116 – 121).

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\(^3\) Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden.
Harmer (2011) argues that it is difficult to define the term *communicative language teaching* because it “means different things to different people” (Harmer 2011:69). He compares the term to an extended family, and says that one of the things that are embraced within the family is the concept of how to use a language. In order for an activity in the language classroom to be communicative, Harmer says, the students need to have a desire to communicate something. There should be an information gap to fill, rather than the teacher asking questions where everyone is aware of the fact that the teacher already knows the answer to the question. The teacher should also try not to intervene and stop the communication in order to correct language mistakes. Similarly to Lundahl (2009), Harmer describes communicative language teaching as follows:

CLT [...] with its different strands of what to teach [...] and how to teach it [...] has become a generalized ‘umbrella’ term to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students’ ability to communicate. This is in stark contrast to teaching which is aimed more at learning bits of language just because they exist – without focusing on their use in communication.
(Harmer 2011:70).

4.2.1 Communicative Language Teaching in Sweden and Spain

In their study, Fritzon and Larsson (2012) investigate the content and methods used by some English teachers in Sweden and also what meaning these teachers put into the term *communication*. The conclusion the authors draw is that all the teachers taking part in the study used different methods and focused on different content in their teaching. The teachers also interpreted the meaning of *communication* differently. All the six teachers give very different answers, and the authors have difficulties categorizing their view of English teaching. They could all be sorted into more than one
category, and this can give us an idea of how different views and methods teachers have, even when they are from the same country. The authors point out that the results of the study cannot be generalized.

Cerezo’s (2007) study aims to determine if the foreign language teaching in upper secondary schools in the Spanish region of Murcia followed the teaching methodology suggested by the curricular guidelines set by the education authorities. Based on analysis of the official documents the author comes to the conclusion that these documents indicate that the teaching method that should be used in the foreign language classroom, has its focus on communication. However, a series of classroom observations and analysis of teaching material, such as textbooks, show that the communicative teaching method is not the one being used in the observed lessons. The author mentions two reasons why this is the case:

1. The activities performed in the classes have not been of a communicative nature.
2. Neither the students nor the teachers nor the teaching material play the part they should according to the communicative teaching method.

In many of the activities observed and analyzed by the author, the students answer questions formulated by the teacher who already knows the answers. The student is aware of the fact that the teacher knows the answer to the questions, and therefore the student does not feel that what he or she is saying will fill any information gap. The students do not feel that they are using the second language (L2), but rather that they are practicing it. In communicative activities, there has to be a wish to communicate and a clear communicative function. There ought to be an information gap between the participants in a conversation, and what is being said should be more important than how it is said. The author sees no reason to doubt that the main aim of the lessons is to
teach the students to communicate in the L2. However, the method used in these classes is not communicative.

A study made by Criado and Sánchez (2009) also investigates the application of the official regulations in foreign language teaching in Spain. The difference is that instead of studying how the regulations are applied in the language classroom, this investigation focuses on analysing textbooks that are frequently used in English teaching for secondary school. Like Cerezo (2007), the authors of this study state that the official regulations in Spain “fully advocate the Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT)” (Criado and Sánchez, 2009:1). The conclusion that is drawn from this investigation is that 50-80% of the content of the textbooks are communicative activities and the rest are formal or linguistic activities (Criado and Sánchez, 2009:13).
5. Methods and material

5.1 Methods

In order to carry out this investigation, a design consisting of two research methods has been employed. The two methods are text analysis and in-depth interviews. The main method has been to analyse and compare official documents regulating the English language teaching in Spain and Sweden. As a complement to this analysis, interviews have been made with two English teachers in each country. The purpose of the interviews has been to give more depth and new perspectives to the investigation.

The analysis of the documents has focused on what aims, contents and evaluation criteria are mentioned in the official regulations for the teaching of English in each country. It looks at what differences and similarities can be found and if there is any explicit link to the Common European Framework of Reference.

5.2 Material

5.2.1 Text analysis – material

Due to the limited time, the text analysis has focused on English teaching in upper secondary school in the two countries: “gymnasiet” in Sweden and “el bachillerato” in Spain.

The Swedish texts that have been analysed are:

- Läroplan, examensmål och gymnasiegemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011 (Skolverket, 2011b)
- Kommentarer till gymnasieskolans ämnesplan i engelska (Skolverket, 2012)

The Spanish texts are:
• Real Decreto 1467/2007, de 2 de noviembre, por el que se establece la estructura del bachillerato y se fijan sus enseñanzas mínimas.
• ORDEN ESD/1729/2008, de 11 de junio, por la que se regula la ordenación y se establece el currículo del bachillerato.

5.2.2 In-depth interviews – material

Four teachers, in all, took part in the interviews: two from Spain and two from Sweden. All of them were women and they came from two different schools, one in each country. The Swedish school is an upper secondary school in a small town in the region of Småland, and the Spanish one is a school with students from both lower and upper secondary school, situated in a town outside of Barcelona in the region of Catalonia. I got in contact with all of these teachers while doing teacher training practice at their schools. Due to ethical considerations, the teachers will remain anonymous, but to make it possible for the reader to distinguish between the teachers’ answers, each teacher has been assigned a letter. The two Swedish teachers have been given the letters A and B and their Spanish colleagues, the letters C and D.

While the interviews with the teachers in Spain were made in person, the Swedish teachers were interviewed at a distance. Due to technical circumstances, one of the interviews with a Swedish teacher was made via Skype and the other by email. The four teachers taking part in the study either have Swedish as their first language or are bilingual in Catalan and Spanish. In order to make the interviewees feel as comfortable as possible, the interview guide was written in Spanish and Swedish in addition to English (see appendices 1-3), and before the interview, the interviewee was asked which language she preferred. Both of the Spanish teachers said that it did not matter to them and then (probably as a favour to me) they decided that they wanted to be interviewed in English. The Swedish teacher who was interviewed via Skype also said at first that it did not matter to her which
language we used, but then she chose to be interviewed in Swedish. The reason was probably that Swedish is both her and my first language and communicating in Swedish was therefore felt to be most natural. The other Swedish teacher, the one who answered the questions in writing, chose to answer in Swedish as well.

The interview guide consisted of twenty questions in total, of which the first seven questions were meant to give some background information about the interviewee and the rest of the questions were more open and general. In the more general questions the teacher had room to give more elaborated answers and this was a way to try to be open to new information and not let my presuppositions dictate the information I would get. Kvale (1996:33) emphasizes that “[t]he interviewer should be curious, sensitive to what is said – as well as to what is not said – and critical to his or her own presuppositions and hypotheses during the interview.” Kvale’s proposal has functioned as a fundamental guideline in this investigation.

5.3 Problems and limitations
5.3.1 Text analysis – problems and limitations
Spain consists of seventeen autonomous communities, each of which has the legal power to make decisions about their own educational system to a certain degree. This made it somewhat difficult to compare the English education in Spain as a whole with the one in Sweden. This difficulty was overcome by the decision to compare the Swedish curriculum with the Spanish official documents that establishes the curriculum that applies to the education system of the whole nation.

It was surprisingly difficult to find the official documents that regulate English teaching in Spain, despite the fact that a couple of Spanish teachers of English were kind enough to help me. I even started to analyse some documents from 1992 and 2000 before I realized that there was a more
recent version of the English syllabus, from 2007 and 2008. Fortunately, there was still time to analyse these later documents instead and I do not think the time I spent reading the earlier documents was wasted since it gave me a fuller understanding of the more recent syllabus.

5.3.2 In-depth interviews – problems and limitations
The fact that both the teachers in each country come from the same school could be seen as a problem, since it delimits the possibility to make generalizations based on the results of the study. However, it could be argued that even if they had been from different schools in different parts of the country their answers to the interview questions would still only reflect the ideas of these two individuals and not be representative of the whole nation, making generalization impossible. It is true, however, that teachers from different schools probably would have given answers that were less similar to each other’s. The decision to delimit the interviews to these teachers in particular was made based on the fact that the purpose of the interviews was not to give significant results in themselves, but rather to complement the text analysis of the official documents, which is the focus of this study.
6. Results and analysis

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 5.1 presents a contrastive text analysis of the Spanish and Swedish syllabi that regulate the education of the first foreign language in the two countries. Section 5.2 complements the document analysis by providing the views of Spanish and Swedish teachers on the effect of the syllabi on their professional practice.

6.1 Text analysis

In this part of the thesis, the different sections of the two syllabi, English teaching in Sweden and teaching of the first foreign language in Spain, will be examined, compared and analysed. Section 5.1.1 compares the introductions of the syllabi. Subsequently, Section 5.1.2 contrasts the aims that are mentioned; Section 5.1.3 compares the contents; Section 5.1.4 presents a brief summary of the evaluation criteria of each syllabus and Section 5.1.5 compares the evaluation criteria. Finally, Section 5.1.6 compares the link between each syllabus and the CEFR.

6.1.1 Introduction Section

One significant difference between the introductions of the two texts is the difference in length and content. The Spanish syllabus has a much longer introduction than the Swedish one. While the Swedish introduction text consists of only one paragraph, giving some examples of why it is beneficial for the individual to know English, the Spanish introduction spans one and a half page, and apart from explaining why it is important to know foreign languages in today’s society, it also introduces the structure of the subsequent text.
6.1.2 Aims Section

The parts of the two syllabi that state the aims of the English or foreign language teaching are different in some ways, for example in the way they are presented, but they also have many features in common.

**Receptive and productive skills:** Both texts state that the students should develop an understanding of the language in speech as well as in writing. The Swedish syllabus combines these two skills in one sentence and sorts them under the title *Reception*, while the Spanish one divides them into different section and is more specific in its way of expressing exactly how the understanding should be manifested. The same applies to the students’ ability to express themselves in speech and in writing. The Spanish syllabus talks about these skills separately and the Swedish one sorts them under the title *Production*.

**Interpretation:** Something else that the aims of the two syllabi have in common is that they both establish that the students must be able to interpret what they read. A difference is that the Spanish text adds that the interpretation should be made in a critical way, and that the Swedish syllabus includes that the students should be able to interpret spoken language as well as written.

**Appropriate language use and strategies:** The Swedish syllabus states that the students should be able to adapt their language to different purposes, receivers and situations. Similarly, the Spanish syllabus establishes that the students, in their writing, should use an appropriate style adapted to the readers for whom the text is aimed. Both syllabi also stress the importance of using language strategies in different situations to aid communication.

**Cultural knowledge:** In the aim section of both syllabi, it is established that the students should have knowledge of other cultures. The
Swedish syllabus says that the students should be able to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. The Spanish syllabus, on the other hand, wants the students to have knowledge of the fundamental social and cultural features of the foreign language, to better understand cultures that are different from their own, and to be able to interpret and understand the language they are learning. The Spanish syllabus also wants the students to value the foreign language as a means to access other knowledge and cultures and be aware of the similarities and differences between cultures. Similarly, the Swedish syllabus establishes that the teaching should stimulate the students’ curiosity of languages and cultures.

The structure of the text: As mentioned earlier, even though the two documents have much in common, they also differ in some ways. The ways in which the aims are presented in the two syllabi are significantly different. The Swedish syllabus begins by presenting the aims of the English teaching in a running text and later summarizes them in five short and concise bullet points, while the Spanish syllabus presents the aims in ten bullet points which seem more elaborated and are preceded only by the introduction to the foreign language section.

Focus on form and auto-evaluation: Another difference is that the Spanish syllabus seems to put more emphasis on the fact that the students should use the language in a correct way regarding grammar, spelling, pronunciation etc. It also states that the students should develop skills in auto-evaluation. This is something that the Swedish syllabus does not mention.

How to express themselves: The aims of both syllabi state that the students should be given the chance to develop the ability to express themselves in a certain way, but the manner in which they should do this seems to differ somewhat. The Swedish syllabus says that the students should be able to express themselves with variation and complexity, while the
Spanish syllabus states that they should learn to express themselves orally in a spontaneous, comprehensible and respectful way, with fluency and precision.

### 6.1.3 Contents Section

**The structure of the text:** The Spanish foreign language syllabus is almost one and a half times longer than the Swedish English syllabus. This difference is especially noticeable in the part of the contents, where the Spanish syllabus is four times more extensive than the Swedish one. The way of structuring this part of the document is different in the two syllabi. In the Swedish syllabus, the contents section is divided into three parts: “The contents of the communication”, “Reception” and “Production and interaction” (Skolverket, 2011b) [my translation]. The contents in the Spanish syllabus are divided into four blocks: “1. Listening, speaking and conversing”, “2. Reading and writing”, “3. Knowledge of the language” and “4. Socio-cultural aspects and intercultural consciousness” (Real Decreto 1467/2007) [my translation]. The contents section of the Spanish syllabus is divided into the first and second course and the Swedish one into English 5 and 6. In both countries’ syllabi, the contents of the first course has the same structure as the second one.

**Grammar and pronunciation:** The Swedish syllabus does not mention grammatical knowledge and pronunciation at all, while the Spanish one puts quite a lot of emphasis on these aspects. When the Spanish syllabus refers to speaking, it points out that the students should show a reasonable grammatical accuracy, and in the second course the students should also have a proper pronunciation, rhythm and intonation. This is a significant difference since the Swedish syllabus does not mention these aspects at all and the Spanish one seems to consider it an important part of the language teaching and learning. The Spanish syllabus even has a block in the contents section
dedicated to the “knowledge of the language”. Almost nothing in this block can be found in the Swedish syllabus. Among other things, it deals with grammatical structures, phonologic features, rhythm, intonation and pronunciation. The Spanish syllabus states that the students should be taught to use the phonetic alphabet in order to improve their pronunciation.

**Comparing and contrasting with the students’ First language:** A very significant difference is that the Spanish syllabus states that the students should be taught to analyse and reflect on the use and meaning of different grammatical structures through comparison and contrast with their own language. The Swedish syllabus not only does not mention grammatical structures, but establishes in the aims that teaching should, essentially, be conducted in English. The document *Kommentarer till gymnasieskolans ämnesplan i engelska* (Skolverket 2012), designated to assist the interpretation of the Swedish English syllabus for upper secondary school, explains that there are several reasons why the education essentially should be conducted in English. One of these reasons is that the students may have a mother tongue different from Swedish and a contrastive perspective based on the Swedish language is usually not meaningful for these students. This issue is not addressed at all in the Spanish documents.

**Affecting the students’ emotions, interests and values:** In the contents section of the Spanish syllabus, words like interest, appreciation and acknowledgment are used several times. For instance, the students are supposed to be taught to appreciatethe foreign language in international relations and as a means of communication. The teaching should also give the students an interest in reading various texts in order to obtain information, to learn, to expand their knowledge, for enjoyment or to learn about other worlds and cultures. The students should develop an interest in the production of clear and understandable written texts, with a suitable structure, based on different communicative needs and purposes. It is also stated, in the
Spanish syllabus, that the students should develop an interest in establishing communicative exchanges and to know cultural information of the countries where the foreign language is spoken. There are several similar examples, where evaluative words and expressions have been used. All this is very different from the contents section of the Swedish syllabus, which does not at all mention how the teaching is expected to affect the students’ interests, values or way of looking at things. It is true that the first chapter of the Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school does establish what values the school should transmit to the students. In the first part of the first chapter it is stated, for example, that the Swedish school system should promote development and a lifelong desire to learn and also convey respect for the human rights and the fundamental democratic values (Skolverket, 2011b). However, the Swedish syllabus of English seems to focus only on the abilities and skills that the students are expected to attain. It establishes that the communication in the teaching should deal with topics related to, for example, emotions, opinions, thoughts, ideas, experiences, relations and ethics, but it does not specify how this should affect the students’ thoughts, values or opinions.

Learning how to learn: Some of the points that are mentioned in the Spanish syllabus but not in the Swedish one seem to aim at improving the students’ way of learning. In the contents part, the Spanish syllabus states, for example, that the students should learn to be aware of the importance of understanding a message, globally, without having to understand every element of it. They should also learn to use strategies for self-correction and self-evaluation to progress in independent language learning. Another example is that the students should be taught to acknowledge the errors as part of the learning process, identify their causes and implement strategies for corrections. We can, however, find some point in the Swedish syllabus that could be considered to aim at improving the students’ learning process. The
Swedish students should, for example, be taught different ways of making comments and taking notes when they listen to and read productions from different sources. They should also learn strategies for searching for relevant information in large amounts of texts or longer sequences of spoken language to understand perspectives and implicit meaning.

**Strategies:** As in the Aims section, both syllabi repeatedly mention the use of strategies. The Spanish syllabus talks about many different strategies, both for production and reception, while the Swedish syllabus focuses on receptive strategies. Both syllabi mention communicative strategies.

Appropriate language use: Something else that the contents texts of the two syllabi have in common is that they state that the students should be taught to distinguish between informal and formal language and also know what language to use in different situations and for different purposes. Both syllabi mention that the students should learn how different parts of the language can be used to create structure and give coherence and context to speech and writing. In both syllabi there is a transition, from one course to the next, towards topics that are both concrete and abstract.

**Cultural knowledge:** Both syllabi state that the students should be given some knowledge of social and cultural conditions in the place or context where the foreign language is spoken. The Spanish syllabus talks about the behaviour and beliefs that the speakers of the foreign language have. The Swedish syllabus, instead, talks about the living conditions and the social, political and cultural conditions. Something that is mentioned in both documents is the knowledge of customs, attitude and values. A significant difference is that the Spanish syllabus talks about the countries where the foreign language is spoken, while the Swedish one talks about the different contexts and parts of the world where English is spoken and not the countries. The Spanish syllabus states that the students should learn to
appreciate the most important cultural elements, such as literature, art, music and films, in the countries where the foreign language is spoken. The closest the Swedish syllabus comes to this description is that the students should learn to understand contemporary and older fiction, poetry, drama and songs. In the Swedish syllabus, we can read that the students should be aware of the English language’s distribution and position in the world. The Spanish syllabus speaks more of the fact that the students should learn to appreciate and acknowledge the importance of the foreign language in international communication and to access knowledge which is of interest for their academic and professional future.

A critical approach: The Spanish syllabus states that the students should learn to have a reflective and critical attitude towards messages that imply any kind of discrimination. In the Swedish one we can read that the students should learn different ways to search for, select and analyze texts and spoken language in a critical way. They should also learn to use strategies for a critical attitude when they listen to and read productions from different sources and in different media and learn how language, images and sounds are used to influence, for example, in political speeches and advertising.

Working in groups: The contents part of the Spanish syllabus states that the students should be taught to use the foreign language to carry out communicative tasks in groups, assuming individual responsibility and making decisions cooperatively. The Swedish syllabus gives a similar message, but in the section of the aims instead of the contents. In the aims section, the Swedish syllabus states that the students should be given the opportunity to interact in speech and writing and produce spoken language and various texts on their own and together with others, and with the assistance of different tools and media.
Production and reception of written and spoken language: As expected, both syllabi establish what skills the students should be given the opportunity to learn to master. They both give examples of what kind of spoken and written language the students should be taught to understand and produce. Some of the mentioned examples are the same in the two syllabi and some are different. For instance, both the Spanish and the Swedish students should be taught to produce language where they tell a story or justify their opinion and to write summaries and instructions. The Spanish syllabus includes that the text should be written in a clear way, with simple language and with sufficient grammatical and lexical adaptation. This is not mentioned in the Swedish text. Apart from the examples of written texts and spoken language, the Spanish syllabus focuses a lot on the theoretical knowledge of how the language works and this is very different from the Swedish syllabus.

Examples of reception and production: The following is an attempt to summarize the examples of language skills that are given in the two syllabi, but this should in no way be interpreted as a complete reflection of the text. The intention is to give an idea of what kind of examples are mentioned in the two documents and some have been left out.

Listening: In both syllabi the students should be taught to understand language spoken with different accents and transmitted by media. The Spanish syllabus does not specify what kind of spoken language the students should be taught to understand. It only states that the topics should be familiar and known to the students and presented in a clear and structured way. The Swedish syllabus is a little more specific in this case and establishes that the students should be taught to understand both spoken and written language that is instructive, narrative, summarizing, explanatory, discursive, reporting and argumentative. It also states that the students should be taught to understand spoken language of various kinds, such as interviews and, in the course English 6, debates and lectures.
**Speaking:** As regards speaking, the Spanish syllabus is more specific than it is as regards listening. The Spanish students should be taught to make descriptions, tell a story, and make a prepared presentation. They should learn to express their point of view about known topics, justify their opinions, convey simple information and emphasise what they think is most important. The students should be taught to take part in improvised conversations, expressing their personal opinion and exchanging information. In the second course they should also learn to take part in prepared debates and discussions about current issues, defending their point of view and learn to use strategies as an aid in the conversations. The Swedish syllabus states that the students should learn to produce various kinds of oral and written texts, where they give instructions, narrate, summarize, explain, comment, evaluate, justify their opinions, discuss and debate.

**Reading:** As regards written reception, the Spanish syllabus specifies that the students should be taught to understand general, specific and detailed information in press, advertising, correspondence, reports, instructions and literary texts related to familiar topics. In the second course they should also be taught to understand short official documents and texts that relate to their academic and personal interests and future profession. The Swedish syllabus defines the kind of text the students should be taught to understand in the same sentence as the spoken language they should be able to receive, listening. Apart from this, it also states that the students should learn to read different kinds of fiction. In the course called English 6 they should be taught to read both contemporary and older fiction, poetry, drama and songs. Furthermore, the Swedish syllabus states that the students should learn to understand various kinds of texts with different purposes, such as manuals, popular science texts and stories. In the course English 6, the Swedish students should also be taught to read formal letters and reviews.
**Writing:** The Spanish syllabus specifies that the students should be taught to write, on paper and digitally, describing experiences and events, write about real and imagined events, and make reports and summaries about familiar topics. In the second course the students should learn to write texts where they describe feelings and reactions, tell stories, write short essays and write about their opinions on specific facts concerning everyday matters. Just as with the oral and written reception, the Swedish syllabus specifies the kind of written texts that the students should learn to produce in the same sentence as the examples of the production of spoken language. The examples are therefore the same for both speaking and writing in the Swedish syllabus.

### 6.1.4 Evaluation Criteria Section

**The structure of the Swedish text:** The text that states the evaluation criteria in the Swedish syllabus is divided into two courses, English 5 and English 6. There is also a course called English 7, but since it is not a subject that is common for all students at the Swedish upper secondary school, it has not been included in *Läroplan, examensmål och gymnasiegemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011* (Skolverket 2011b). In addition, the Spanish curriculum for upper secondary school, only includes two courses in the first foreign language, so to facilitate a comparison, the course English 7 has not been included in this study.

In the Swedish syllabus the criteria for each course is further divided into the different grades E, D, C, B and A. The grades D and B are a little different from the rest. To get the grade D or B, the student must fulfil all criteria of the lower grade and the majority of the criteria of the higher one. For example, to get the grade D, the student must fulfil all criteria for the grade E and most of the ones for the grade C. The exact same structure has been used for each grade's evaluation criteria, and the only difference between the criteria for the different grades within the same course consists
in a number of words written in bold type. These words follow a pattern of increasing difficulty and complexity and they are very subjective and open to interpretation. The use of these words is probably an attempt to enable an equivalent and objective assessment, but instead it seems to make the evaluation more subjective. Some examples of these words are: ”…with an acceptable result…”, ”…with a satisfactory result…” and ”…with a good result…” (Skolverket, 2011b) [my translation]. The problem is that the teacher still has to decide what is acceptable, satisfactory and good.

**Differences between the two Swedish courses:** Even though the difference between the evaluation criteria for the courses English 5 and English 6 is very little, it shows a shift towards a greater demand on structure and on more complexity. The students also seem to be expected to be more independent in their search for information in the course English 6 than in English 5.

**The structure of the Spanish text:** The part of evaluation criteria in the Spanish syllabus is also divided into the first and second course. The text about the first and the second course are practically identical and where they differ, the difference does not always seem logical because there does not always appear to be an escalating level of difficulty. It is true, however, that most of these differences make perfect sense and show a movement towards a more comparative and contrastive perspective and a higher demand on adaptation to the purpose and situation. It was also observed that a criterion in one course is not mentioned in the other, so that these parts of the text take up completely different criteria. Sometimes the text is different, but the meaning does not change at all and the difference only consists in a different choice of words or a change of the order in which the sentences or parts of a sentence are presented in a certain paragraph. This makes a comparison between the two courses more complicated.
In the Spanish syllabus the evaluation criteria vary slightly between the first and the second course and in the Swedish one there are small differences both in the comparison between the courses English 5 and English 6 and between the different grades within the same course. To make it possible to overview and to facilitate a comparison between the two documents, an attempt has been made to summarize the evaluation criteria for the two countries’ syllabi. Only what could be considered true about both courses has been included and, in the case of the Swedish syllabus, what the criteria for all the grades within the same course have in common.

**Spain:**
The first criterion talks about the students’ **listening** skills. The students should understand the main idea and the most important details in spoken messages in communicative situations face to face or by media, provided the language is clearly articulated and that the development of the discourse is facilitated by explicit markers. After stating what each criterion refers to, the text seems to try to clarify exactly what should be evaluated. The specification of the first criterion basically repeats the definition of the criterion with very little difference, but this is only the case of this criterion and not of any of the following ones.

The second criterion concerns the students’ **speaking** skills. The students should be able to express themselves with a certain degree of fluency in conversation and in different kinds of speech, depending on whether they are in the first or second course. They should use appropriate communication strategies. In this criterion, the teacher should assess the students’ ability to organize and express their ideas in a clear way, make descriptions of a variety of known topics, describe real or imagined facts and plots in books or films, describing feelings and reactions. The students’
communicative ability in interaction with others will also be assessed in this criterion.

The third criterion is about the students’ reading skills. They should be able to understand written texts from various sources and we are given a number of examples of such texts. As in all criteria, after having stated what this criterion is about, the text goes on to specify what should be assessed for this criterion. It evaluates the students’ ability to understand the relevant information and identify specific information in authentic texts, with sufficient accuracy and detail to be able to make a critical analysis. They should also apply strategies that are necessary to perform a task. Furthermore, the criterion evaluates the students’ ability to autonomously use digital, computer and library resources to find information and solve comprehension problems.

The fourth criterion is about the students’ writing skills. As in the contents section, the text points out that the students should be able to express themselves in writing both on paper and digitally, with different purposes, formal correctness, cohesion, coherence etc. They should also appreciate the importance of planning and revising the text. This criterion aims to assess the students’ ability to compose a text with a clear organization and whether they show interest in planning and revising texts, making subsequent versions until the final version. It also assesses how good the presentation of their written texts is, both on paper and digitally, with respect to spelling and typographical standards.

The fifth criterion is about the students’ linguistic knowledge. The students should use their linguistic knowledge in a conscious way to help the learning. What should be assessed for this criterion is whether the students are able to handle grammatical structures, the expansion of their vocabulary, the refinement of phonological features and their spelling. It should also assess their ability to assess themselves and their peers.
The sixth criterion is about the students’ ability to use learning strategies and all the means at their disposal to assess and identify their language skills. This criterion prescribes that the teacher should assess the students’ ability to use strategies and skills that help their learning, for example, assessment of their own progress. The intention is that the students should be able to identify what they can do with the foreign language. Other things that are assessed are the students’ use of information and communication technology as a tool for international communication and learning and the students’ conscious use of learning opportunities in and outside of the classroom.

The seventh criterion is about knowledge of the relevant geographical, historical, artistic, literary and social aspects of the countries where the foreign language is spoken. This criterion assesses the students’ cultural knowledge of the countries where the foreign language is spoken and their ability to identify some specific features, characteristic of these contexts about social and cultural diversity.

Sweden:
While the evaluation criteria in the Spanish syllabus are complicated to compare, the structure of the Swedish syllabus facilitates comparison sentence by sentence, between the evaluation criteria of the two courses and between the different grades. The following is a summary of the common features of the evaluation criteria for the different grades in the first and second course, English 5 and 6:

For the lowest pass grade, E, the students should understand the main idea and perceive clear details in language spoken in varying speed and clearly formulated written language in different genres. In the course English 6 the first sentence of the evaluation criteria is very similar to the one in the previous course, but in order for the students to get the grade E in this
course, they have to fulfil the same criteria as for the highest grade, A, in English 5. The course English 6 includes the requirement that the students also should be able to understand more formal texts.

The students should show their understanding by describing, discussing and commenting on the content and details and also by acting in an appropriate manner on the messages and instructions they receive. In the course English 6 the students should also be able to draw conclusions on the basis of what they read and hear, but otherwise the sentence is identical in the evaluation criteria for each grade in the two courses.

The students should be able to select and use strategies to help them understand and examine the content of spoken and written English in a critical way. In the course English 6, the strategies that the students ought to be able to use should help them to search for relevant information and evaluate the reliability of different sources.

The students should be able to choose texts and spoken language from different media and use the selected material in a relevant way in their own production and interaction. If the students want a higher grade than E they also have to do this in an effective way and for A it should be done in a relevant, effective and critical way. This part of the evaluation criteria is identical for each grade in the two courses. In other words, this criterion for the grade E in English 5 is the same as for E in English 6 and so on.

The students should be able to express themselves in a relatively varied, relatively clear and relatively coherent way, in oral and written production in different genres. This is the criterion for the grade E in English 5. In order for the student to get the grade C, the production should also be relatively structured and for the grade A the criterion is the same but the word “relatively” has been omitted. In the course English 6, the same criterion does not include the requirement that speech and writing should be coherent, but it
states that it should be structured for grade E and for grade A it should also be nuanced.

The students should be able to express themselves with fluency (for grade E in English 5, some fluency) and, to some extent, adapt to the purpose, recipient and situation. This criterion is almost identical in the different grade levels and in the two courses. The only difference is a small increase in how much fluency and adaptation to the purpose, recipient and situation they have to show.

The students should be able to process, and make improvements to, their own productions. For the grade C the improvements should be informed and for A they should also be nuanced. This criterion is essentially the same in both courses.

In oral and written interaction in different contexts, even more formal, the students should be able to express themselves with clarity, some fluency and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation. For the grade A in English 5 the students should also be able to express themselves relatively freely. In the course English 6, the students should be able to interact in more complex contexts and already for the grade C they should express themselves relatively freely.

The students should be able to select and use effective strategies to solve problems and improve interaction. For the grade A in English 5, the strategies should, apart from improve the interaction, carry it forward in a constructive way. This criterion is essentially identical in the two courses.

The students should be able to discuss some phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is spoken. The difference between the grades E and C lies in how detailed the discussion should be. For the grade A, the students should also be able to make a highly developed comparison to their own experience and knowledge. This criterion is identical in the two courses.
**Comparing the evaluation criteria:** The structure of the evaluation criteria in the two syllabi is completely different from each other. The Spanish syllabus makes a more elaborated presentation of each criterion and specifies exactly what should be evaluated. The Swedish curriculum, on the other hand, expresses all its evaluation criteria in only ten sentences divided into six paragraphs. Then the same ten sentences, though somewhat modified, are used to establish the evaluation criteria for the grades E, C and A in both of the courses.

When the syllabi refer to the students’ listening skills, both establish that the students must be able to understand the main idea and the most important details, but the Spanish syllabus also indicates that the spoken language which the students ought to be able to understands has to be clearly articulated, something which the Swedish curriculum does not mention. Both of the syllabi refer to strategies in their evaluation criteria, but in the Spanish syllabus these are learning strategies and in the Swedish one they are strategies to help the students understand and improve the communication. Something else that the two syllabi have in common is the fact that they both evaluate the students’ cultural knowledge and understanding.

A difference between the syllabi is that the Swedish one evaluates the students’ ability to choose texts and elements of spoken language and use it in their own production. This is not mentioned in the evaluation criteria in the Spanish syllabus. One of the evaluation criteria in the Spanish syllabus mentions linguistic knowledge, something that is not evaluated in the Swedish one. The most extensive difference between the evaluation criteria of the two syllabi is probably that the Swedish one establishes the criteria for each grade and the Spanish syllabus does not. The Spanish syllabus seems to establish what should be evaluated but not how the grading should be done.
6.1.5 Common European Framework of Reference

If we compare the current Spanish first foreign language syllabus to the previous one, some important changes have been made. For example, in the earlier version there was a different section dedicated to each foreign language: French, German, English, Italian, Portuguese and English. In the current syllabus all foreign languages are included in the same text. This could maybe suggest a move towards the CEFR where the same rules or theories apply regardless of language.

In the introduction, the Spanish syllabus mentions the CEFR and says that the guidelines that this presents have been a key reference in the curriculum for the bachillerato (the Spanish upper secondary school). The Swedish curriculum does not mention the CEFR at all, but in another official document called *Kommentarer till gymnasieskolans ämnesplan i engelska* (Skolverket, 2012), which was created as an aid in the interpretation of the curriculum, it is explicitly stated that the different stages of languages in the curriculum relates directly to the ones described in the CEFR. This document also says that there is a match between the Swedish syllabus of English and the CEFR in the way of looking at language learning. Formulations, expressions and descriptions from the CEFR have also been used in the Swedish curriculum when this has been possible. The CEFR divides the language skills into receptive, productive and interactive and this division can also be found in the Swedish syllabus of English. As already mentioned, the Spanish syllabus has another way of dividing the language skills.

6.2 In-depth interviews

This part of the thesis presents, compares and analyses the results of the in-depth interviews with the four teachers taking part in the study. It highlights the similarities and differences considered to be of most interest and relevance.
6.2.1 Lesson planning

How do the teachers plan their lessons?

There seems to be quite a significant difference in the way the teachers from the two countries plan their teaching. The Swedish teachers both answer that they plan their lessons based on the official documents that regulate the English teaching in Sweden. One of the Swedish teachers (A) mentions that she does not plan her lessons until she has discussed the regulating documents with the students in each group and heard their ideas and opinions. She makes a rough plan together with the students and then makes a more detailed plan for each week. This could maybe be considered an example of the students’ influence that the Swedish official documents promote. The other Swedish teacher (B) makes a general plan for the first semester and then plans in more detail before each week. She does this in case any unpredicted event should occur and she also says that she needs to get to know the students before she can make a detailed plan for them, because “you cannot make plans for each group in the exact same way” (Teacher B).

One of the Spanish teachers (C) explains that the textbook that they use is very well structured and that when they start a new unit of the book, she looks at the topic, the activities and exercises there, and decides what to use. She points out that all exercises do not suit all groups of students and she can choose to add or omit activities but the plan is based on the textbook. She spends more time planning her other subject, “Alternative to Religion”, which is practicing English through theatre. In this subject they do not have a textbook to follow, so more planning is needed and she does this in the summer, during the last 15 days of holidays. In the Spanish classes for the ESO (the Spanish lower secondary school) they have three different levels and one of the Spanish teachers (D) explains that this multilevel methodology
makes it especially important to plan in advance. She says that she plans her lessons in July, but adds that you always have to readjust the plan as you go. She teaches two classes at the same level and they need to keep up with each other in the textbook, so this can be one reason for her to readjust the plan.

6.2.2 What to teach
How does a teacher in each country know what to teach?

In response to this question, both of the Swedish teachers refer to the official documents that regulate the teaching in the Swedish schools. The Spanish teachers also refer to the official documents for Catalonia and for all of Spain, but when asked if that usually is how a teacher knows what they are expected to teach, one of the teachers (C) says that you usually do not need to read these document because the editors of the textbooks are aware of the regulations. Therefore, by seeing what the books contain the teachers know what they should teach. The other Spanish teacher (D) also refers to the books and says that the law is very general and it is much easier for the teacher to follow the book. She says that she supposes that there must be some kind of filter when an editor publishes a new book, to control that it follows the official regulations, but that she does not know if this is the case.

6.2.3 Students’ level
How does the teacher know what level the students are supposed to reach after a course?

When asked this question, both the Swedish teachers refer to the evaluation criteria in the Swedish curriculum. One of the Swedish teachers (A) also mentions the national test, both as an end of course exam and as a tool for the teachers when they discuss in order to make the assessment more equivalent.
One of the Spanish teachers (C) refers to the official documents but then says that the teachers trust the editors that have made the textbooks “because you know that they have done it well” (Teacher C). The other Spanish teacher (D) says that the teacher only needs to look in the textbook to know the level the students are expected to have reached after the course.

6.2.4 The students’ mother tongue

What is the teachers’ view on the use of the students’ mother tongue in the classroom?

All four teachers strongly prefer that the communication in the classroom takes place in English, but they can also all see some situations where the students’ mother tongue could be a useful tool. These situations mainly have to do with a need to save time or make sure everyone understands important information. Both the Swedish teachers mention that it can be of value to use the student’s mother tongue in the teaching of grammar, either to show connections to the students’ first language or to facilitate explanations that are difficult for the students to understand. When asked if she prefers to use the students’ mother tongue in the teaching of grammar, one of the Spanish teachers (D) says that sometimes she does prefer to use the students’ mother tongue for this purpose, when she sees that many students do not understand and she is running the risk that they might “switch off” (Teacher D) if she does continues the explanation in English. The other Spanish teacher (C) answers that she prefers to use English when teaching grammar because “grammar is so intuitive, in fact, that you don’t need to explain it in Catalan or Spanish” (Teacher C). She can sometimes use the students’ mother tongue to give instructions if she sees that the students do not understand, but not to explain grammatical rules.
6.2.5 How is assessment and grading dealt with?

Another important difference seems to be the way in which the teachers in the two countries assess and grade the students. One of the Swedish teachers (A) explains how she uses old national tests and gives the students written comments on their oral and written production. This is to help them see what they need to improve in order to get a certain grade at the end of the academic year when they have the current national test. In other words, she uses formative assessments during the course of the year and then summative assessment at the end of the course. The other Swedish teacher (B) answers that she uses the evaluation criteria given by Skolverket (The Swedish National Agency for Education) to decide what grade to give each student. When answering a later interview question she also explains that she sometimes uses a document, where you can see the different criteria for each grade, and shows it to the students to let them see what level they have reached in different practices and what they need to improve in order to get a higher grade. It seems that this teacher is also practicing some form of formative assessment during the course. Both the Swedish teachers seem to be concerned about making the students aware of what they know, what level they have and what they need to improve to reach a higher grade. It is possible that the Spanish teachers also do this, but the answers from the interviews do not seem to suggest this. It is, however, important to remember that these results cannot be generalised.

The Spanish teachers seem to assess and grade everything the students do where they show their language proficiency. By the end of the trimester all the work that the students have produced during the term is assessed. The final grade is divided into different categories that are worth different percentages. Of this grade, 10% is dedicated to attitude, 10% to how well presented the student’s dossier is (the dossier is a compilation of all the work the student has done since the first day of the trimester and it has to be
presented at the end of it), 25% of the final grade shows productive skills, 25% receptive skills and 30% grammar and vocabulary. When asked if these percentages are the same in all schools one of the Spanish teachers (C) said that she thinks that it is virtually the same everywhere but maybe the exact percentage can vary a little, for example from 30 to 35%. It seems that the law establishes a minimum of the percentage but that it is later up to the teachers of the schools to decide it in more detail. The answers in the interviews indicate that their assessment is more summative than formative.

**How do the teachers grade their students?**

One of the Swedish teachers (A) says that she does not give the students grades during the course “as a result of the focus on formative assessment” (Teacher A). Instead, she gives them comments to let them know what level they have reached in different aspects of, for example, writing. It is possible that the students fulfil the criteria for a certain grade in some aspects but not in others and therefore have to focus on improving the latter. She does not give a summative grade until the end of the course. The other Swedish teacher (B) says that she usually does not grade exams but gives the percentage of correct answers instead, to show the students how well they have done. She explains that she does this because she wants the students to develop over time. She takes notes of all the results to make sure the students are heading in the right direction and that they manage to perform some activities that they have to do, for example, to read a book and write a book review.

One of the Spanish teachers (C) says that every September the teachers in the school meet and decide what percentage each aspect of the final grade should have. Usually they think that the skills, writing, reading, listening and speaking, are the most important and therefore they give them a higher percentage. The other Spanish teacher (D) says that the students often
think that the exams are the only thing that counts for the grades but that she is assessing them and giving them grades as soon as they, for example, do a reading or have a conversation. At the end of a trimester she might have 20 grades for each student and then she uses the program Excel to calculate what grade the student should be given. When asked if she takes the development of the student into consideration when she grades an activity done at the beginning and at the end of a course, she answers that the activities’ level of difficulty increases along the course. This means that in order for a student to get a certain grade on an activity at the beginning of the course they do not have to perform at the same level as at the end. She says that of course you take into consideration the development of the course and to pass English the students need to pass two of three trimesters and one of them has to be the last one, because in the last trimester the students are assessed in everything they have learnt. This seems to be an example of summative assessment, but since the book increases the difficulty level the students do not have to be affected negatively by this, as long as they develop in the same pace and way as the book does.

What do the teachers take into consideration when they grade their students?

Probably one of the most interesting differences is what the teachers from each country are supposed to take into account when they grade their students. One of the Swedish teachers (A) says that she has to remain professional and only take into account what the students perform in relation to the evaluation criteria. She points out that this means that a student that has a high level of absence, but has shown that he or she meets the criteria for the highest grade, A, also has to be given this grade. The other Swedish teacher (B) also says that she is not allowed to take either attendance or attitude into account in her grading. She adds that the attitude can affect the grade in other
ways. It is, for example, easier to communicate with a student who has a nice manner, and a student who does not want to take part in the activities, sabotages his or her own chances to learn. She says that the teacher can try to explain this to a disruptive student and that since the Swedish teachers are not allowed to assess the students’ attitude you have to try to find other ways to make the students realize that they have to behave well.

Both of the Spanish teachers seem to have a series of criteria that they use for each activity that they assess. These criteria consist of aspects of the task that the teacher considers important for the students to learn, for example, to look the audience in the eyes when making an oral presentation or the students’ ability to follow instructions. For the final grade they also take the student’s attitude into consideration and it is worth 10% of this grade.

**Criteria for each grade**

When asked if there are any criteria the students have to fulfil to get a certain grade, both the Swedish teachers refer to the evaluation criteria at Skolverket’s webpage.

One of the Spanish teachers (C) says that you can pass with different criteria fulfilled. Maybe a student has a 3 (you need a 5 to pass) in grammar and vocabulary but compensates for this with skills (receptive and productive) and a good attitude. “With all the average, they should pass 5. Perhaps there are students that are not so good at speaking, but they are very good at grammar and it is a question of percentage” (Teacher C). The other Spanish teacher also says that some skills can make up for other skills. “Some… most students are very good at grammar and vocabulary but when they have to put that into practice… so they might get a 5” (Teacher D). When asked if there are different criteria for each grade she answers that the
students already know what they have to do in order to achieve a certain grade, so the teachers do not have to tell them this.

**Is there any way of making sure the assessment is equivalent?**

Both the Swedish teachers mention the national test and the fact that the teachers within the same school and from different schools cooperate and discuss assessment. One of the Swedish teachers (B) says that they get very clear instructions from Skolverket on how to grade the national tests.

One of the Spanish teachers (C) says that in theory if all the teachers follow the official curriculum and teach different levels in the classes the teaching should be the same, but that everyone is different, every group and every teacher, and that this is life. There is an external test in English for the students in the fourth year of ESO. The students who finish the second year of Bachillerato and want to go to university, have to make a series of exams called “la Selectividad”, where English is one of the subjects that are tested. The grades from school together with the result of la Selectividad then determine what the student can study at university level. The grades from school are worth 60% and the ones from la Selectividad, 40%. This is rather interesting and could maybe be an effective way of making the access to university more equal. So even if there are no specific criteria for each grade, the exams of la Selectividad could probably even out any major differences.

**6.2.6 Streaming in the English classroom in Spain**

According to the interviewees, there are three levels in each class of ESO in the Spanish schools, and for each level the teacher has different expectations. This means that a student in a lower level does not need to perform as well as a student in a higher level in order to get the same grade as this student. Everyone competes on their terms and everyone has the possibility to succeed. A positive and hardworking attitude is rewarded. The grade tells a
lot about the effort made and not only about the actual proficiency. One skill can also compensate for the lack of another one. When asked if a student from a higher group will get a worse grade than a student from a lower group if they perform at the same level, one of the Spanish teachers (C) says yes, because they do not have the same exams and the exams for the higher group are more difficult.

The three different levels is a try to adapt to the students’ individual potential and not penalize their shortcomings. These groups are not fixed and can change if the students start to perform on a different level than before.

6.2.7 Exams
Do the teachers design their own tests or exams? If not, where do they get them from?

One of the Swedish teachers (A) says that she uses old national tests where the confidentiality has been released and also other material from Skolverket’s webpage. Apart from this she designs her own tests and she points out that she has very few exams, but more assignments and larger tasks that the students have to present orally or in writing. At the beginning of the course the students are given diagnostic material, which has been put together by the special education teacher, to identify any difficulties the students might have. The other Swedish teacher (B) sometimes uses the tests that come with the course book and sometimes designs her own tests. If she uses the test that comes with the book, and they have not read the entire chapter, she can omit these parts from the exam.

One of the Spanish teachers (C) also usually uses the exams that come with the course book and the books come with different exams for the three different levels. She says that she uses these exams but that she chooses the exercises that she likes, occasionally she makes an exercise of her own and sometimes she lets all levels do the same exercise if she thinks that it is
appropriate. The other Spanish teacher (D) says that she usually does not use
the exams that come with the course book, only if it is an emergency and she
has not prepared anything. Most of the time, she designs her own exams,
“because I know what I have taught and how I’ve taught that” (Teacher D).
She says she might have a look at the exam that comes with the book but then
maybe change everything.

In this case, there are just as much differences between the answers
of the teachers from the same country as of those from different countries.

6.2.8 Textbooks
How do the teachers use the textbooks?

In the course of carrying out the in-depth interviews, some
differences seemed to stand out in particular and one of these differences was
the way in which the teachers use the textbooks.

One of the Swedish teachers (A) says that she always tries to follow
recent events in her lessons and because of this, they have not used the
textbook so much during the autumn and instead followed the events
concerning the US elections. “My philosophy is that the textbook is good to
have, but that the world is not designed as a textbook, which justifies my
choice” (Teacher A). When asked how she uses the books, the other Swedish
teacher (B) says that she uses it about two or three times a week because the
texts and exercises are very good. I ask if she feels that she needs to finish the
book before the end of the academic year. Her answer is no, the teachers can
choose the parts that they find interesting and they think can give the students
something. When asked if she has to use the texts in the book in a
chronological order or if she could skip from one chapter to the next in the
order she wants, she answers that since the chapters are not based on each
other the teachers can use them in the order they want.
One of the Spanish teachers (C) describes the textbooks like a skeleton or as guidelines that she follows in the lessons. When asked what material she uses in class, she answers that if she has to do a reading, a listening and a writing, and there are some in the book, she prefers to use the books because they are good. She uses the texts in the books and if she thinks that she can improve anything with some other resource she does it, but she usually relates it to the topic in the book.
7. Conclusion

Text analysis

The aim of this study was to make a comparison between the general approach to foreign language teaching in two European countries, Spain and Sweden. Despite the fact that the official documents that regulate the teaching of English, or of the first foreign language, in both of these countries appear to have drawn inspiration from the CEFR and promote CLT, the text analysis of these documents shows several significant differences.

One important difference is the way in which the two syllabi are presented and structured. The Swedish syllabus is short and concise and it gives the impression of being addressed directly to the teachers. A lot of effort appears to have gone into making it as easy to understand as possible. The Spanish syllabus is more complex and seems concerned about not leaving out any important detail. It gives more the impression of a legal document than a manual for the teachers to use in their daily work. Perhaps this could explain why it, based on the interview answers, seems as though teachers in Spain prefer to follow the textbooks rather than look for guidance in these documents. The complexity of the Spanish syllabus probably makes it harder for the teachers to keep it all in mind when they plan their lessons, teach and assess their students.

In the analysis of the official documents, other remarkable differences were found between the two countries. One such difference is the fact that the Spanish syllabus states that the students should be taught to use the phonetic alphabet, and puts much more emphasis on grammatical knowledge and pronunciation than the Swedish syllabus does. Maybe this could have to do with the fact that the Swedish students are much more exposed to spoken English in their everyday life (European Commission, 2006) and therefore have a better knowledge of the pronunciation to start with. Another possible reason could be the fact that the Swedish language is
grammatically more similar to English than the Spanish language is. Perhaps many of the differences between the ways of teaching in the two countries are a result of the fact that the conditions are not exactly the same and that this gives rise to different needs. Or maybe the focus on form and pronunciation could be an aspect that has been lost in the language education in Sweden and ought to be given more importance. However, the performance of the Swedish students in the international studies, presented in Section 3.1, appears to suggest otherwise.

The results of the international studies presented in this thesis indicate that the Swedish students have a higher proficiency in English than their Spanish peers. There could be many possible reasons for this and it does not mean that the teaching is neither better nor worse in any of the two countries. The Swedish students are exposed to the English language in their everyday life to a much higher degree than their Spanish peers. This is in great part due to the fact that most films and TV shows in Sweden are seen in the original version, whereas in Spain most people appear to prefer dubbing to subtitling (European Commission, 2006). Other possible reasons that de la Rica and González de San Román mention in their study are the need the students feel to learn a second language due to the size of their own mother tongue and the level of English of the students’ parents. This would mean that the Swedish students are more motivated to learn a second language than their Spanish peers because of the lower number of Swedish speakers in the world. It would also mean that the fact that the parents of the Swedish students have a higher level of English has a positive influence on their children’s language learning. This shows that the students’ performance in the international studies does not necessarily have to be linked to the foreign language teaching in each country.

Another striking difference between the two syllabi is the fact that the Swedish syllabus appears to be careful not to interfere with the students’
thoughts, opinions and values. The Spanish syllabus, on the other hand, seems to consider it part of the teachers’ mission to affect the students’ views of and attitude towards different parts of the subject in a positive way. Could there be a relation between this and the fact that the teachers in Spain are supposed to take the students’ behaviour and attitude into account in their grading? According to the official documents and the interview answers, this is not the case for the Swedish teachers, at least not explicitly and openly. It is most certainly difficult for any teacher to disregard the students’ behaviour and attitude completely. To be honest, it is probably impossible, but this is something which the Swedish official documents appear to prefer to overlook.

**In-depth interviews**

Even though it is important to keep in mind that the results of the interview study are not possible to generalize, it can give us interesting insights into the views of a few Spanish and Swedish teachers and also serve to give a different perspective of the results of the text analysis.

As mentioned earlier, based on the results of the in-depth interviews, it would appear that the Swedish teachers turn to the official documents and the Spanish teachers to the textbooks for guidance when planning their lessons. Since the Spanish teachers are supposed to follow the structure of the textbooks, they do not need to worry about reading the official documents. The Swedish teachers, on the other hand, are expected to be familiar with these documents. They can use a textbook in their teaching, but as opposed to their Spanish colleagues, they do not have to follow it chronologically nor cover all of it within the course. Maybe this could have to do with the students’ language level. The Spanish textbooks usually seem to consist of different units that build on each other and therefore the teachers have to follow them chronologically. The textbooks that the Swedish teachers use in
upper secondary school usually consist of independent chapters that the teacher can use in the order he or she finds most suitable.

The fact that the Spanish teachers seem to prefer to follow the textbook rather than reading the official documents does not necessarily mean that this has to lead to less consistency in the teaching of English in Spain. The use of textbooks could perhaps serve to give structure and even make the teaching more equivalent if many teachers use the same textbooks or ones that have similar content and structure. However, it could also be limiting if the teachers feel that they cannot do activities they think would suit the group and if they have to hurry to the next unit even though the students need more time to learn.

One of the most important differences that were found in this study is the way in which the teachers grade the students. One could wonder how the Spanish teachers can manage to make the grading equal without having any set criteria for each grade. However, the Swedish evaluation criteria might not be as objective as they could superficially seem at first. The Swedish syllabus was changed in 2011, as an attempt to make it less open to interpretation and more objective (Dragemark and Oscarson. 2010:83), but the result was a series of highly subjective words, in the text of the evaluation criteria, that still have to be interpreted by the teachers. Is it possible that grading could never be completely objective and that the complexity of language proficiency makes objective assessment impossible?

In the interviews, the Spanish teachers mention three different levels in the English lessons in lower secondary school. They explain that this is an attempt to give every student the chance to develop and succeed. This is not something that was mentioned by the Swedish teachers. One of the Swedish teachers did, however, talk about a special education teacher who gives the students a test at the beginning of the course and this could maybe also be considered an attempt to help all students to develop on their individual level.
The teachers’ explanations of how they grade their students show another of the most significant differences. Based on the interview answers, it seems the Swedish teachers try to only grade the students’ language proficiency and are not allowed to take the students’ behaviour or attitude into account. For the Spanish students, on the other hand, 10% of the final grade is dedicated to attitude and behaviour. When we consider the fact that in Spain, a student with a higher capability can be given a lower grade than a student with a lower capacity if they perform on the same level, we see a similar pattern. Effort and a positive attitude are rewarded. This is far from what the Swedish teachers are instructed to do.

The education system that the Spanish teachers describe also seems to imply summative assessment, while the Swedish teachers describe that they use formative assessment during the course and summative at the end of the course.

As mentioned earlier, the Spanish teachers do not seem to have any established criteria to follow in the moment of grading their students and the fact that attitude and behaviour are also assessed leads to think that it would be difficult to obtain equivalence. However, the fact that the grades from school only count for 60% and la Selectividad (the entrance exam to go to university) count for 40% of the total that decides what the student can study at university level could probably even out any larger differences. This exam only measures the students’ language proficiency and it is exactly the same for all students.

The descriptions given by the Swedish teachers in the interviews seem to indicate a wish to make the students involved in their learning. It is possible that the Spanish teachers also have this wish, but it was not reflected in their answers. The Swedish teachers taking part in the study seem to be concerned about letting the students know their level at different stages during the course and what they need to improve in order to get a certain
The fact that the Swedish syllabus establishes specific criteria for each grade, as oppose to the Spanish syllabus, could perhaps also show a desire to make it clear to the students as well as the teachers what is required for each grade.

Apart from all these differences there are also many similarities between the English teaching or first foreign language teaching, in the two countries. Though structured differently, both syllabi establish aims, contents and evaluation criteria for each course. Both syllabi also establish that apart from learning receptive and productive skills, the students should learn to use different kinds of strategies and gain knowledge of different cultures. The teachers taking part in the in-depth interviews all said that they usually cooperate with their colleagues, sharing material and helping each other with assessment and grading.

This study might serve to shed some light on the fact that there are many differences to be found between foreign language teaching in two European countries that both promote CLT and have drawn inspiration from the CEFR. It is possible that the different conditions in the countries make these differences in language teaching necessary and that total uniformity would not be preferable. It could, however, be useful to be aware of the fact that, despite of obvious attempts to make foreign language teaching within the European Union more similar, these differences still exist. By giving an account of the foreign language teaching in two different European countries, the study might also allow its readers to view foreign language teaching in their own countries with new eyes.
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Appendix I: Interview guide (English)

Background information:
1) What ages are the students that you teach?
2) How many students are in each class?
3) How many hours a week do you teach English?
4) How long is an average lesson?
5) Do you teach more than one subject? If yes, what subjects do you teach?
6) For how many years have you been teaching English? Have you always been teaching at the same school?
7) How many English teachers are there at your school? Do the teachers usually cooperate with each other? If yes, in what way?

More general questions where the teachers get more room to give elaborated answers:
8) How do you usually plan your lessons?
9) What skills are most important for you to emphasize in your teaching?
10) Could you describe a typical lesson?
11) How does an English teacher in your country know what contents to include in their teaching?
12) What kind of resources do you use in your teaching, e.g. textbooks, photocopies, CDs, DVDs, the internet, etc.?
13) What is your view of the use of the students’ mother tongue in the English classroom? Something which should be avoided, a useful resource, etc.?
14) How do you assess your students’ abilities?
15) How does a teacher in your country know what level the students are supposed to have reached after a certain course?
16) How do you grade your students?
17) When you **grade** your students, what do you take into consideration? E.g. behaviour, development, attitude, etc.?

18) Are there any **criteria** the students should fulfil in order to pass or get a certain grade?

19) Do you design your own **tests and exams**? If not, where do you get them from?

20) Is there any way to make sure that the teaching and grading of different teachers and schools are **equivalent**? E.g. a common test for all students of a certain course? (In this case, is it for Cataluña or all of Spain?)
Información general:
1) ¿Qué edades tienen tus alumnos?
2) ¿Cuántos alumnos hay en cada clase?
3) ¿Cuántas horas a la semana das clases?
4) ¿Cuánto tiempo dura una clase en general?
5) ¿Enseñas más de una asignatura? En este caso, ¿qué asignaturas enseñas?
6) ¿Cuántos años has enseñado inglés? ¿Siempre has estado en la misma escuela/instituto?
7) ¿Cuántos profesores de inglés hay donde trabajas? ¿Los profesores colaboran normalmente? En este caso ¿cómo?

Preguntas más generales donde el profesor tienen más espacio para dar respuestas elaboradas:
8) ¿Cómo planificas tus clases normalmente?
9) ¿Qué destrezas son los más importantes de enseñar para ti?
10) ¿Podrías describir una clase típica?
11) ¿Cómo sabe un profesor de inglés en España que contenidos tiene que incluir en su enseñanza/sus clases?
12) ¿Qué tipo de recursos usas en tus clases? Por ejemplo: ¿libros de texto, fotocopias, CD, DVD, el internet, etc.?
13) ¿Qué opinas del uso de la lengua materna de los estudiantes en el aula de inglés? ¿Algo que se debería evitar, un recurso útil, etc.?
14) ¿Cómo evalúas las habilidades de tus alumnos?
15) ¿Cómo sabe un profesor en España que nivel los alumnos deben haber alcanzado después de un curso en concreto?
16) ¿Cómo les pones notas a tus alumnos?
17) ¿Qué tienes en cuenta cuando das una nota a un alumno? Por ejemplo: ¿comportamiento, desarrollo, actitud, etc.?
18) ¿Hay algunos criterios que los alumnos tienen que cumplir para aprobar o conseguir una nota en concreto?
19) ¿Haces tus propias pruebas y exámenes? Si no, ¿dónde los consigues?
20) ¿Hay alguna manera de asegurarse de que la enseñanza y las notas de diferentes profesores y diferentes institutos son equivalentes? Por ejemplo, ¿Hay una prueba en común para todos los alumnos de un curso determinado? (En este caso, ¿es para Cataluña o toda España?)
Appendix III: Interview guide (Swedish)

*Bakgrundsinformation:*

1) Hur gamla är dina elever?
2) Hur många elever är det i varje klass?
3) Hur många timmar i veckan undervisar du i engelska?
4) Hur lång är en genomsnittlig lektion?
5) Undervisar du i mer än ett ämne? I så fall, vilka ämnen undervisar du i?
6) Hur många år har du undervisat i engelska? Har du alltid varit på samma skola?
7) Hur många engelsklärare finns det på din skola? Brukar lärarna samarbeta med varandra? I så fall, hur?

*Mer allmänna frågor där lärarna får mer utrymme att ge utvecklade svar:*

8) Hur brukar du planera dina lektioner?
9) Vilka färdigheter är viktigast för dig att lägga vikt vid i din undervisning?
10) Skulle du kunna beskriva en typisk lektion?
11) Hur vet en engelsklärrare i ditt land vilket innehåll som ska ingå i undervisningen?
12) Vilken typ av resurser/material använder du i din undervisning, t.ex. textböcker, kopior, CD, DVD, internet, etc.?
13) Hur är din syn på användandet av elevernas modersmål under engelsklektionen? Något som bör undvikas, en användbar resurs, etc.?
14) Hur utvärderar du dina elevers färdigheter/kunskaper?
15) Hur vet en lärare i ditt land vilken nivå eleverna förväntas ha uppnått efter en viss kurs?
16) Hur betygsätter du dina elever?
17) När du betygsätter dina elever, vad tar du med i beräkningen? T.ex. uppförande, utveckling, attityd etc.?
18) Finns det några kriterier som eleverna måste uppfylla för att bli godkända eller få ett visst betyg?
19) Designar du dina egna prov och tester? Om inte, var får du dem ifrån?
20) Finns det något sätt att säkerställa att olika lärares och skolors undervisning och betygsättning är likvärdig? T.ex. ett gemensamt prov för alla elever i en viss kurs?