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Mother Tongue: Aid or Obstacle?

Errors Made by Finnish- and Swedish-speaking Learners of English

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TIIVISTELMÄ:

Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on ollut selvittää tekevätkö suomen- ja ruotsinkieliset oppijat erilaisia virheitä englanninkielisissä kirjallisissa töissä ja vähenevätkö erot kieliryhmien välillä opintojen edetessä. Tutkimuksen materiaalin muodostivat suomen- ja ruotsinkielisten yhdeksäsluokkalaisten kirjoittamat aineet, suomen- ja ruotsinkielisten yliopistoon pyrkivien pääsykoekokelaiden kirjoittamat aineet sekä suomen- ja ruotsinkielisten englannin kielen pääaineopiskelijoiden kirjoittamat seminaaritutkimukset. Tutkimuksen metodina oli virheanalyysi. Kaikki aineistosta löytyneet virheet luokiteltiin kieliopillisiin ja sanastollisiin virheisiin sekä epäidiomaattisen kielen käyttöön.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että suomenkieliset yhdeksäsluokkalaiset tekivät selvästi enemmän kieliopillisia virheitä kuin ruotsinkieliset, jotka taas tekivät enemmän sanastollisia virheitä. Kieliryhmien tekemien virheiden välillä erot olivat suurimmat artikkeli- ja prepositiovirheissä, joita suomenkieliset oppilaat tekivät enemmän sekä kirjoitusvirheissä, joita taas ruotsinkieliset tekivät eniten. Pääsykoekokelaiden kirjoittamien aineiden virheissä erot kieliryhmien välillä olivat pysyneet lähes ennallaan lukuun ottamatta verbivirheitä, joita ruotsinkieliset pääsykoekokelaat tekivät huomattavasti enemmän kuin suomenkieliset pääsykoekokelaat. Yliopisto-opiskelijoiden kirjoittamissa seminaaritutkimuksissa määrälliset erot kieliryhmien tekemien virheiden välillä olivat tasoittuneet, mutta kieliryhmät tekivät vieläkin erityyppisiä virheitä. Suomenkieliset opiskelijat tekivät edelleen enemmän artikkeli- ja prepositiovirheitä ja ruotsinkieliset opiskelijat enemmän verbivirheitä. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että äidinkielen vaikutus näkyy selvimmin yhdeksäsluokkalaisten tekemissä virheissä ja se on lähes yhtä voimakkaana nähtävissä pääsykoekokelaiden tekemissä virheissä. Äidinkielen vaikutus on vähentynyt yliopisto-opintojen edetessä, mutta sen vaikutus on vieläkin nähtävissä seminaaritutkimusten virheissä.

AVAINSANAT: foreign language learning, error analysis, interlingual errors, intralingual errors

1 INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a complex and intriguing area of research, and it has for long interested researchers. For many of the learners of a foreign language, English is the language they first begin to study since it is taught as a foreign language in over 100 countries (Crystal 1997: 3). Over 400 million people speak English as their mother tongue and in Finland almost all pupils choose English as their first foreign language (Hiidenmaa 2003: 74). One of the areas of foreign language learning that has interested researchers has been the effect that the mother tongue has on the learning process, and there is disagreement on how much it influences the learning of a foreign language.

Different studies show conflicting results of the effect of the first language on foreign language learning. For example, Dulay and Burt (1974) who studied grammatical errors made by 179 Spanish-speaking children learning English in the United States found that less than five per cent of the errors reflected the children's mother tongue. Another study, conducted by White (1977), which examined English-speaking adults learning German and Spanish in the United States found that the proportion of errors that showed influence from the learners' mother tongue was from 8 to 23 per cent. (White quoted in Dulay et al 1982: 102-103.) Some researchers are, however, of the opinion that the first language has a stronger effect on the learning of a foreign language. For example Hecht & Mulford (1976) and Wode (1978) found that transfer from the first language occurs in the speech of children at certain times in their learning process, and they argue that interference from the first language is important in foreign language learning. (Hecht & Mulford and Wode quoted in McLaughlin 1984: 14.)

Some previous studies conducted in Finland, which have compared differences between Finnish- and Swedish-speaking Finns learning English, have found that Swedish-speaking learners have an advantage over Finnish-speaking learners because of their mother tongue. They have concluded that, overall, the mother tongue does affect the learning of a foreign language, and it is easier to learn a foreign language which is related to the learner's mother tongue.

A study by Håkan Ringbom and Rolf Palmberg (1976) found that on a lower level of studies, Swedish-speaking learners of English made clearly fewer errors than Finnish-speaking learners, whereas later, in the entrance exam for university level English studies, Swedish-speaking university applicants were only slightly better than Finnish-speaking applicants. Also, after one year of university studies, the Swedish-speaking university students no longer had an advantage over the Finnish-speaking students.

For the study of the effect of the mother tongue on learning English, Finland provides a favourable setting, as it has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. Approximately six per cent of the population in Finland have Swedish as their mother tongue. The Swedish-speaking population is mainly concentrated on the coastal areas in the south and in the west. The Swedish-speakers in cities are more likely to be bilingual, but in the areas surrounding the cities the population is mostly Swedish-speaking. There are Swedish-speaking kindergartens, schools and universities in Finland and the Swedish-speaking Finns can have their education in their own language.

It can be expected that the Finnish-speaking learners would make different type of errors in learning English than the Swedish-speaking learners, since Swedish and English are related languages, whereas Finnish and English are not related. English and Swedish belong to the Indo-European branch of languages and they have structural similarities, whereas Finnish belongs to the Finno-Ugrian branch of languages. Although Finnish and Swedish are structurally different from each other, the language groups share a common cultural background.

While previous studies conducted in Finland have focused on finding out if Swedish-speaking Finns have an advantage over Finnish-speaking Finns in learning English because of their mother tongue and if they make fewer errors than the Finnish-speaking learners, the purpose of this study will be to find out if there are differences in the type of errors that the learners with different mother tongues make and if the influence of the mother tongue can be seen in the errors made by the different language groups. The aim is also to examine if the effect of the first language decreases when the learners advance in their studies.

The material of this study consists of essays written by Finnish- and Swedish-speaking ninth graders in two schools in Vaasa and Seinäjoki in the autumn 2005, those written by university applicants in the entrance exam for the English department at the University of Vaasa in spring 2005, and seminar papers written by English majors at the University of Vaasa who have studied at least four years. The method of this study is error analysis. The study is interested in both grammatical and lexical errors and their relation to the learners` mother tongue. Errors were categorised thus first into grammatical and lexical and within these two main categories classified according to the type of error.

In the following sections, the material and method of this study are introduced in more detail. In Chapter 2, the effect of the first language and bilingualism on foreign language learning is discussed, followed by an account in Chapter 3 of different error types in foreign language learning and their possible reasons. The method of this study, error analysis, is introduced in Chapter 3.2. Grammatical and lexical differences and similarities between Finnish, Swedish and English are scrutinized in Chapter 4. After the theory section the errors made by the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English at different stages of learning are analysed and, finally, conclusions are drawn concerning the differences in the errors between the different language groups.

1.1 Material

This study aimed to find out if Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English make different type of errors at different stages of learning. The purpose of this study was also to examine if the influence from the mother tongue could be seen in the errors made by the different language groups. The material of this study consisted of essays and seminar papers written by Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English at different stages of learning. It included 38 essays written by pupils in the ninth grade in comprehensive schools in Vaasa and Seinäjoki in the autumn 2005, 52 essays written in the entrance exam for the English department at the University of Vaasa in the spring

2005, and six seminar papers written by English major students at the University of Vaasa during the academic year 2004-2005.

The pupils in the ninth grade in the comprehensive school wrote altogether 38 essays, of which 19 were written by the Finnish-speaking pupils in Seinäjoki Lyseo and the same number, 19, by the Swedish-speaking pupils in Borgaregatans Skola in Vaasa. In the ninth grade, the pupils are, on average, 15 or 16 years old, and the grade is the final year of their compulsory education. The pupils in Seinäjoki Lyseo, a Finnish secondary school in the town of Seinäjoki, where the population consists of a Finnish-speaking majority, have studied English six years as in Finnish-speaking schools pupils usually begin to learn English in the third grade. The pupils in Borgaregatans skola, a Swedish secondary school with a Swedish-speaking majority on the west coast in the city of Vaasa, have studied English four years. In most of the Swedish-speaking schools pupils begin to learn English in the fifth grade. The Finnish-speaking pupils have thus studied English two years longer than the Swedish-speaking pupils. It has to be, however, noted that in Borgaregatans Skola there might be bilingual pupils and pupils whose parents are Finnish-speaking. Both schools might also have immigrant children and children of foreigners.

For the present study, the ninth graders were asked to write an essay of around 100-150 words in the autumn 2005. They could choose between two topics and write either about their plans for the autumn holiday or about their summer holiday. These topics were chosen since they were current at the time, and it was expected that the pupils would find these topics easy to write about. Twelve Finnish-speaking pupils and ten Swedish-speaking pupils wrote about their previous summer holiday, whereas seven Finnish-speaking pupils and nine Swedish-speaking pupils wrote about their plans for the autumn holiday. While writing the essays the pupils did not know that the essays were going to be used for this study. If the pupils had known that their essays would not be graded, this might have affected their motivation to write as well as they could.

The material from the entrance exam for the English department at the University of Vaasa in June 2005 consisted of 52 essays. Of these essays 26 were written by Finnish-

speaking and 26 by Swedish-speaking applicants. Before attending the exam the applicants had to inform the organizers about their mother tongue since one part of the exam tested their knowledge of that. In all, only 26 Swedish-speaking applicants took part in the entrance exam and, therefore, all the essays written by the Swedish-speaking applicants were included in research data. In consequence, the total number of essays of the university applicants was determined by the number of the Swedish-speaking applicants: 26 essays by Finnish-speaking applicants of the total of 201 needed to be chosen for the study. This was done by choosing the first 26 essays alphabetically according to the writer's surname, and they extended from A to J.

In the entrance exam, the applicants were asked to write an essay of around 500 words based on the set novels they had read for the exam. They could choose between two novels, *Emerald Underground* by Michael Collins and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, and were given two alternative topics for the essay for each novel. Fifteen Finnish-speaking and sixteen Swedish-speaking applicants chose *The God of Small Things*, while eleven Finnish-speaking applicants and ten Swedish-speaking applicants chose *Emerald Underground*. It can be assumed that the applicants tried to write as well as they could since they were trying to get a place in the English Department. There was, however, a time limit for completing the exam and therefore some applicants might have run out of time. In the essays included in the present study there was, however, no indication of that.

The six seminar papers were written by students whose major subject was English at the University of Vaasa and who had studied English at least four years. Of these seminar papers, three were written by Finnish-speaking and three by Swedish-speaking students and they were 20-25 pages long. According to the faculty's study guide, the students are recommended to attend the seminars when they have studied at least three or four years (Humanistisen tiedekunnan opinto-opas 2004-2005: 137). The subject areas of the seminar papers used in this study were literature and translation studies. Three of the seminar papers were from literature and three from translation studies. The seminars used for this study were written during the academic year 2004-2005, which was a year before the degree reform.

The English Department's requirements for attending the seminars are that the students have completed the introductory course for the subject area, and that they have written two proseminar papers of 10-15 number of pages. In order to qualify for the seminars, the students need to get the average grade of 3 of the total 5 for these courses. In addition, they need to get at least the grade 3 for the following courses: *Grammar and the Use of English*, *Contrastive Grammar*, *Translation II: English-Mother Tongue* and *Academic Writing*.

The essays and seminar papers have been given a code number and they are referred to by those numbers later in this study. The essays written by the ninth graders were numbered in such a way that those written by the Finnish-speaking pupils ranged from F1 to F19 and those written by the Swedish-speaking pupils from S1 to S19. The essays written by the university applicants were numbered in such a way that those written by the Finnish-speaking applicants ranged from FA1 to FA26 and those written by the Swedish-speaking applicants ranged from SA1 to SA26. The seminar papers written by the Finnish-speaking students ranged from FS1 to FS3 and those by the Swedish-speaking pupils from SS1 to SS3.

1.2 Method

The aim of this study was to find out if there are differences in the type of errors made by Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English at different stages of learning and also to examine if the influence from the mother tongue could be seen in the errors made by the different language groups. It was also of interest to this study if the differences in the errors between the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English would decrease when the learning progresses.

The concept "error" was defined as suggested by Dulay et al. (1982: 138) as the elements of learners writing which deviate from the selected norms of language. In this study we identified as an error every part of the learners' writing which deviated from the norms of written Standard English. Both British and American spelling and use of

prepositions were accepted. In our study the norms used were those of written Standard English and they were checked against *A University Grammar of English* and *A Communicative Grammar of English*. *A University Grammar of English* was chosen because it is used on the grammar courses at the University of Vaasa.

According to Wardhaugh (1986: 30) the norms of a language have been selected through standardization. It is a process that involves the development of grammars and vocabularies. Once a language has been standardized it is possible to teach it in a deliberate manner. Wardhaugh adds that the selection of norms can, however, be difficult since choosing one vernacular as the norm means favoring the people who speak that variety. Usually the variety which is spoken by the elite is chosen. According to Andersson and Trudgill (1990: 119) the language forms which are considered to be correct are those associated with the upper class dialect which is known as Standard English. Trudgill (quoted in Wardhaugh 1983: 31) adds that Standard English is the variety of English that is usually used in print and is taught in schools and to the non-native speakers learning English. Standard English is also used in news broadcasts and other similar situations.

According to Wardhaugh (1986: 31, 32) today Standard English is codified to the extent that the grammar and vocabulary of English are much the same everywhere in the world where English is used. The different variations, for example, Irish and South African varieties, are almost similar in grammar and vocabulary. Standard English has become so powerful that the dialects of England have considerable pressure to converge toward the standard. However, according to Chambers (1995: 252) the standard dialect should not be seen as linguistically superior. The standard dialect only has the articulate forces on its side as it is the language spoken by the powerful and privileged.

As was stated above, in this study we identified as an error every part of the learners' writing which deviated from the norms of written Standard English. The errors were categorized according to the type into three categories: grammatical errors, lexical errors and the use of non-idiomatic language. Grammatical errors were those that broke the norms of written Standard English as defined in *A University Grammar of English*

and *A Communicative Grammar of English*. An example of a grammatical error is the use of double negation, such as, *I don't have no money* (I don't have any money), which is used in spoken language but not considered grammatically correct in grammars describing British or American English. (Andersson & Trudgill 1990: 9).

In this study grammatical errors included article errors, preposition errors, verb errors, pronoun errors, errors in the word order, errors in plural formation, conjunction errors and the use of double negation. These grammatical error categories were determined by the deviations from Standard English on the errors found in the essays and the seminar papers. Lexical errors included spelling errors and vocabulary errors. Cases where the learners had used the right word but had spelled it wrong were considered spelling errors, for example *Afrika* (FA5) (Africa). Vocabulary errors included cases where the learners had used a wrong word or expression, or had added or omitted a word. For example, the use of the noun *despise* (FA21) as a verb would be a vocabulary error. Sentences which were grammatically correct but not idiomatic English were categorized as non-idiomatic language, for example, *The car was very big so it didn't care.* (S1) (The car was very big so it didn't matter.). This sentence is grammatically correct but the expression is not idiomatic English.

In order to determine the possible reasons for the errors the concepts of *intralingual* and *interlingual* errors were used. Intralingual errors, which are also called developmental errors, are errors that are similar to the errors made by children learning their first language, for example they use the regular past tense marker *-ed* to an irregular verb *drived* (S12) (drove). Interlingual errors are errors that reflect interference from the first language. For example, the learners transfer words from their mother tongue, such as the Swedish word *lokal* (S11) (local). (Dulay et al.1982: 165, 171.) If the difference in the number of errors between the language groups was significant, it was probable that the error was interlingual.

Also, the grammatical and lexical similarities and differences between Finnish, Swedish and English were taken into account when the errors were analyzed. The errors were compared with the corresponding elements in the learner's mother tongue in order to

find out, for example, if a grammatical structure of the mother tongue was similar to a grammatical structure of English. For example, if the learner had made an article error in English, the system of articles in the learner's mother tongue would be compared with that of English. This comparison was used in determing whether an error could be interlingual or intralingual.

1.3 Cohorts

The groups that were examined in this study were Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English who were at different stages in their learning. In this study, the groups that were on the lowest level were pupils in the ninth grade in comprehensive school in Seinäjoki and Vaasa. Their ages in the ninth grade are 15 to16 years. In the comprehensive school, the majority of the Finnish-speaking pupils study seven years of English and three years of Swedish. They begin to study English as the first foreign language in the third grade in the elementary school at the age of nine or ten and Swedish in the seventh grade when they are some 13 or 14 years old. Of the students who graduated from upper secondary school in 2004, 99 per cent had studied English as their first foreign language (Tilastokeskus 2005).

Consequently, Finnish-speaking ninth graders have studied English approximately six years and Swedish approximately two years, while the Swedish-speaking pupils usually study seven years of Finnish and five years of English in the comprehensive school. Swedish-speaking pupils begin to learn Finnish in the third grade at the age of nine or ten and English in the fifth grade when they are 11 or 12 years old. This means that the Swedish-speaking ninth graders have studied English approximately four years and, therefore, somewhat less than the Finnish-speaking pupils.

Swedish is not considered a foreign language for the Finnish-speaking pupils since it is the second official language in Finland. For most of the Finnish-speaking Finns, Swedish is, however, a foreign language, and they learn it like all the other foreign languages. This is the case, for example, in the town of Seinäjoki which is not situated

in a bilingual area. Vaasa, however, is a bilingual town and approximately 25 per cent of the inhabitants are Swedish-speaking. There are five Swedish elementary schools, two lower secondary schools and one upper secondary school in Vaasa. (Folktinget.)

According to a study done by the Åbo Akademi in 2006, Vaasa is the most bilingual town in Finland and every third of the inhabitants in Vaasa are bilingual. Therefore, some of the Swedish-speaking learners in this study can be expected to be bilingual. According to Åbo Akademi's study, the majority, that is the Finnish-speaking inhabitants, and the minority, that is the Swedish-speaking inhabitants, are able to communicate with both languages quite well. Some 11,4 per cent of the inhabitants in Vaasa are fluent in both languages, and 23,7 per cent are able to communicate well with both languages. Of the inhabitants of Vaasa 17,5 per cent understand the other official language passively, which means that they understand it but for some reason they do not use it. (Myllymäki 2006: 12.) In this study we consider a person bilingual when s/he has an equal command of both languages, which in this study are Finnish and Swedish.

For the present study, the findings of the Åbo Akademi's study mean that of the Swedish-speaking ninth graders, approximately two out of ten can be expected to be bilingual. The same percentages do not necessarily apply to the Swedish-speaking university applicants because not all of them come from Vaasa. Many of the Swedish-speaking university applicants come from the west coast and from areas near Vaasa. The areas surrounding Vaasa are more strongly Swedish-speaking than Vaasa.

The university applicants in both language groups examined in this study have usually studied English at least ten years. Most of them have graduated from the upper secondary school which usually takes three years. They have passed the English exam in their matriculation examination most likely with a good grade, and they probably are among the best at English in their age group. Most of the applicants are 19-20 years old. The applicants come from all over Finland but most are from the Western Finland from the area near Vaasa. It should be noted that the applicants whose essays were studied did not necessarily get a place in the English department.

The university students that were examined in this study have usually studied English at least 14 to 15 years out of which 4 to 5 years at the university. When the students attend the seminars their level of English should, therefore, be good. They should have a good command of the English grammar and academic writing, as they are the requirements for attending the seminar.

In the following theory section, the effect of the first language and bilingualism in foreign language learning are discussed. Most common reasons for errors in foreign language learning are discussed and the method to examine the errors, the error analysis, is presented. The error analysis section is followed by a discussion of the grammatical and lexical differences and similarities between Finnish, Swedish and English.

2 FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

This study aims to examine the learning of English of pupils and students whose mother tongue is Finnish or Swedish. For them English is a foreign language which they are learning in a non-native environment in Finland. English is not necessarily chronologically the second language that the pupils learn at school as, for example, the Swedish-speaking pupils usually begin to study Finnish as their second language in the third grade in the comprehensive school. In this study, the term *foreign language learning* rather than *foreign language acquisition, second language acquisition or second language learning* is used as it best describes the language learning situation in this study. Foreign language acquisition or second language acquisition usually refer to language learning which happens in a natural environment, for example, a Finn learning English in England, although *acquisition* may also be used to refer to foreign language learning not happening in a natural environment. (Sajavaara 1999: 75-76.)

2.1 The Effect of the First Language on Foreign Language Learning

One of the unsolved questions in foreign language learning is how the mother tongue affects the learning process, or if it affects it at all. Researchers' views differ significantly about this. According to Ellis (1991: 19), one popular view is that the learner's first language has a strong influence on the learning of a foreign language, which is supported by the accents that can be heard in the speech of the foreign language learners. For example, when a Frenchman speaks English, his English sounds "foreing" or French. Apart from the level of phonology the learner's first language has an effect also on other language levels, that is, on for example vocabulary and grammar.

If it is agreed that the first language does affect the learning of the foreign language, the effect that it has can be seen as a negative or as a positive factor in the learning process. According to Ellis (1991: 6 - 7) the effect of the first language is usually regarded as negative and, indeed until the 1960s, it was believed that the first language was a major source of problems in foreign language learning. It was believed that most of the

learners' difficulties and, therefore, most of the learner's errors in foreign language learning were caused by their mother tongue. A popular view has been that the process of learning a foreign language means overcoming the effects of the first language and slowly replacing its features with those of the foreign language. More recently, however, the mother tongue has no longer been seen purely as an obstacle and source of errors in foreign language learning.

It has also been argued that the first language does not affect the errors the learners make, or the effect is at least fairly small. The claims about the impact of the first language in foreign language learning derive from a number of studies which arrived at conflicting conclusions. For example, Dulay et al. (1982: 96, 173) found that less than five percent of the grammatical errors made by Spanish-speaking children learning English in the United States could be traced back to their mother tongue. They, therefore, argue that learners do not construct a foreign language on the basis of a transfer or comparison with their first language (L1), but rather rely on their ability to organize the foreign language as an independent system, in a similar way that children acquire their first language. They suggested that L1 interference may be a significant factor only in phonology.

Other studies, however, do not agree with Dulay's findings. In studies conducted between the 1970s and 1990s, the mean percentage of errors that could be traced back to the learners' mother tongue has been approximately 33 per cent. These studies examined adult learners of English with different mother tongues at different levels of their studies. For example, Grauberg (1971) studied German-speaking adults learning English at an advanced level at the university and found that 36 per cent of the learners' errors could be traced back to their mother tongue. Among these studies, the highest pre cent of L1 interference errors, that is 51 per cent of all errors, was found in the study done by Tran-Chi-Chau (1974), who studied Chinese-speaking adults learning English at different levels of their studies. Compared with these studies and to the average per cent of L1 interference errors found in other studies, Dulay and Burt's three per cent is conspicuously lower. (Ellis 1991: 28-29.)

Differences in views and results of studies might be due to the method of the study, and for example Sajavaara (1999: 79) argues that the method might have an impact on how the influence of the mother tongue shows in the findings of the studies. Dulay et al (1982) found that the first language did not have an effect on the learners' errors in foreign language, while other studies which used, for example, error analysis found that the effect of the first language was quite strong.

According to Ringbom (1987: 63-64), the first language does affect the learning of a foreign language but what the effect is, is not clear. He argues that the role of the first language is important at the early stages of learning, while its effect decreases when the learning progresses. For the present study, this would mean that the effect of the learners' mother tongue, Finnish or Swedish, would show more clearly in the errors made by the ninth graders than in the errors made the university applicants and the university students.

Even though researchers disagree about the effect that the first language has on foreign language learning, they all agree that it has some kind of effect. The term that has been introduced to indicate the learners' reliance on their first language is *transfer*. When there are similarities between L1 and the foreign language, transfer functions positively, and when there are differences between the languages transfer works negatively. The two functions are, therefore, called *positive transfer* and *negative transfer*. (Ellis 1991: 6-7.) The concept of transfer has been found, however, to be too narrow to cover all the aspects of L1-influence on foreign language learning, and a broader term, *cross-linguistic influenc*e has been suggested to cover phenomena such as transfer, interference, avoidance and borrowing. It has been regarded as a better term to indicate the influence of the first language on foreign language learning. (Ringbom 1987:2.)

One significant aspect of cross-linguistic influence is the importance of similarity and difference between the first language and the foreign language. According to Ringbom (1987: 33), foreign language learners are constantly trying to use their previous linguistic knowledge of what they already know about the foreign language, their mother tongue and, possibly, about some other languages. Many researchers have

previously focused on the differences between the L1 and the foreign language, but, more recently, the importance of similarity has been emphasised.

The similarity of the languages is usually considered to be an aid in the learning process. Ringbom (1987: 33) claims that the natural procedure in learning something new is to connect it with the knowledge already in the mind. Learners cannot establish negative relations until they are sure that a positive connection does not exist. This means that learners of a foreign language always first try to find a connection between an aspect of the foreign language and that of their L1. Only if they cannot find similarities, can they establish a negative connection, that is, that an aspect of the foreign language differs from that of their mother tongue.

The similarity between the first language and the foreign language is not, however, always a positive factor. According to Ringbom (1987: 44), the similarity is an advantage for the beginners, and helps the learners to understand a related language, but, because of the similarity, the cross actions between the languages hinder the process of a thorough knowledge of the foreign language, whereas in learning an unrelated language, the problems are reversed. The beginning is more difficult and the understanding of the foreign language takes more time, but when the initial difficulties have been overcome, it is easier to achieve a thorough knowledge of the language, because there is not that much disturbance from the L1.

According to Ringbom the advantage of having a similar mother tongue to the foreign language decreases when the learning progresses. Therefore, when the learner is achieving a near native proficiency of a foreign language, the cross-linguistic similarity between the mother tongue and the foreign language either has no significance or may even have a negative effect. (1987: 44, 57.) For the present study, this assumption would mean that the Swedish-speaking learners would have an advantage over the Finnish-speaking learners at the lower level of their studies, but the advantage would disappear when the learning progresses. The Finnish-speaking university students might even have an advantage over the Swedish-speaking students since their L1, Finnish,

does not disturb them, because there are practically no cross actions between Finnish and English.

Cross-linguistic influence can be divided according to the effect of the similarity and the lack of it into *covert cross-linguistic influence* and *overt cross-linguistic influence*. Covert cross-linguistic influence means that the gaps that the learner has are compensated for L1-based procedures and the items which seem redundant from the L1-point of view are frequently omitted or avoided. Thus, for example, an English learner of Finnish sees the Finnish noun endings redundant, while a Finn learning English sees the articles and prepositions as redundant. Avoidance is therefore a result from a covert cross-linguistic influence. While covert cross-linguistic influence results from the perceived lack of similarity, overt cross-linguistic influence results from perceived similarities. Transfer and borrowing are examples of overt cross-linguistic influence. (Ringbom 1987: 51.)

Overall, it is generally agreed that the first language has an effect on foreign language learning, but whether the effect is positive or negative is debatable. This study aims to examine the influence, whether it is positive or negative, of the first language on the errors made by the foreign language learners with different mother tongues at different levels of their study. As was stated in 1.3, some of the Swedish-speaking learners in this study might be bilingual and the next section discusses the effect that bilingualism has on foreign language learning.

2.2 Bilingualism in Foreign Language Learning

The term bilingualism has various definitions. For example, a two-year old child whose mother speaks English and father French is considered to be bilingual although the child's entire vocabulary may consist of only a hundred words in English and another hundred words in French. However, a student who has spent two years in France studying the language is not considered bilingual although his/her vocabulary is considerably larger than that of the child. (Hoffman 1991: 14.) One of the shortest

definitions of bilingualism is offered by Uriel Weinrich (quoted in Hoffman 1991: 15): “The practice of alternately using two languages will be called bilingualism, and the person involved a bilingual”.

In this study a person is considered to be bilingual when s/he has an equal command of Finnish and Swedish, and, therefore, has two mother tongues. This is often the case when the learners have one Finnish-speaking parent and one Swedish-speaking parent, and they use both Finnish and Swedish at home. In this study a person who is able to determine his/her mother tongue is not considered to be bilingual. If a person has the knowledge of another language in addition to his/her mother tongue, but the command of that language is weaker than the command of the person’s mother tongue, the person is not considered to be bilingual.

It is generally accepted that the learners of a foreign language try to use any relevant prior knowledge about language that they have. They try to make the learning easier by assuming that there is equivalence between the foreign language items and the items of their first language. If the foreign language learners try to learn a foreign language unrelated to their L1, they will be able to make very little use of that language. On the other hand, if the learners have the knowledge of another language in addition to their L1, they can make use of that other language they are familiar with, if it is related to the foreign language that is being learned. (Ringbom 1985: 9, 41.)

Learning a foreign language is considered to be easier for bilinguals than for monolinguals. It is commonly believed that there is positive transfer from the learner’s second language, L2, when learning a third language, L3, if the languages are related (Genesee & Genoz 1998: 19). Even if the languages are not related, bilingual language learners who are learning a third language, L3, already have the knowledge of two other languages and, therefore, more cues they can make use of than foreign language learners who are learning their L2. Bilinguals are also more aware of language variation and can use different linguistic means to express the same idea. If the learners are not bilingual but have the knowledge of another language in addition to their mother

tongue, the learners must reach a certain degree of fluency in order to have an advantage from the language they are already familiar with. (Ringbom 1985: 54.)

The learning of L3 is easier if the learner's L2 and L3 have similarities and are learned in similar situations. If the learner has acquired his/her L2 in a natural environment, for example, in a country where the language is spoken, this helps the learning of L3 in a similar environment, but less in an artificial learning environment, for example, the classroom. (Ringbom 1985: 54.) In the present study, the Swedish-speaking learners learn Finnish in a natural environment but English in the classroom. As was stated above, the similarities between the L2 and L3 are significant. L2, which is related to L3, is more important than the knowledge of a language which is not related to the foreign language being learned. (Ringbom 1985: 54.) For the Swedish-speaking pupils Finnish is their L2 and it is not related to English and, therefore, according to Ringbom (1985: 41) it is not a significant aid in learning English as L3. The Finnish-speaking pupils usually begin to study English as their L2 and, therefore, are not able to make use of another language in addition to their mother tongue.

The influence of a second language, when it is not the learner's mother tongue, on the learning of a new foreign language has not been widely studied. It has been suggested that the influence of such a L2 occurs mostly in the lexis, whereas the effect on grammar and phonology is not that significant. The two foreign languages must have some cross-linguistic similarities in order for the influence from the second language to take place. For example, there is no evidence of the influence of Finnish on the English of Swedish-speaking Finns, not even on the lexis, whereas if the Finnish learners are familiar with Swedish, the lexical influence from Swedish can be seen on the English produced by the Finnish-speaking learners. (Ringbom 1985: 41.)

All in all, it can be concluded that if the learners are bilingual or if they are familiar with another language in addition to their mother tongue, this has a positive effect on the learning of additional languages. The effect increases if the language(s) the learner is already familiar with is related to the L3 being learned and if the learning situations are similar. In this study this means that the learning of English is easier for the Swedish-

speaking pupils since their L1 is related to the foreign language being learned. If the Swedish-speaking pupils are bilingual, it is also an aid in learning a third language, since they are more aware of language variation and can use different linguistic means to express the same idea (Ringbom 1985: 54). However, since Finnish is not related to English, the bilingual Swedish-speaking learners will not be able to make much use of Finnish.

3 ERRORS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Errors are the parts of speech and writing that differ from the selected norms of language. Anyone learning a language makes errors, and it is not even possible to learn a language without making errors. Analysing the errors has at least two purposes: it gives the necessary data for drawing conclusions about the language learning process, and errors also show to teachers which parts of the foreign language the learners have most difficulties with. (Dulay et al. 1982: 138-139.) According to Littlewood (1984: 22) errors should not be seen as sings of failure but as evidence that the learner is developing. The errors also give information about how the learners process the data they receive. In the following, the errors that are related to the learner's mother tongue, that is *interlingual errors*, and errors that resemble the errors made by children learning their first language, that is *intralingual errors*, are discussed in more detail.

3.1 Error Types

Interlingual errors are due to interference from L1, whereas intralingual errors result from an inadequate knowledge of the rules of the foreign language. Sometimes it is difficult to identify the cause of an error, and it can be both interlingual and intralingual. (Dulay et al. 1982: 138-139, 165, 171.) Interlingual errors cover phenomena such as interference and transfer which are frequently used to indicate L1 interference on foreign language learning. An interlingual error is identified by comparing the grammatical form of the sentence produced by the learner in the foreign language with the learner's mother tongue to see if similarities exist. By comparing the sentences it can be seen if the learner's L1 structure is visible in the foreign language sentence. (Dulay et. al. 1992: 171-172.)

While interlingual errors are related to the learner's mother tongue, intralingual errors are similar to the errors made by children when they are learning their first language (Dulay et al. 1982: 165). It has been widely debated whether the learning of the first and a foreign language have similarities, and the differences in the learning of L1 and a

foreign language are the result of various factors. The L1 learners have only little knowledge about the world and they are limited by their insufficient information processes. Foreign language learners, on the other hand, usually have a greater cognitive maturity (McLaughlin 1984: 59, 62; Sharwood Smith 1994: 44) since children often begin to learn their first foreign language at the age of nine or ten.

In addition to the cognitive maturity, the learning situation and motivation for learning is different for L1 and a foreign language. The L1 learners are not afraid of making mistakes, and they are motivated to communicate in the language they are learning, whereas foreign language learners may have different levels of motivation. Children also usually learn the L1 in a natural communicational situation and through their own experience, while foreign language learners are usually taught in an artificial environment, and the learning involves formal instruction. (Sharwood Smith 1994: 44.) In this study the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English learn it in an artificial environment, that is, the classroom.

Despite these differences the learning processes in foreign language learning are not considered to be significantly different from the way a child acquires the first language. According Dulay et al. (1982: 165), when foreign language learners make errors resembling those made by children that cannot be due to interference from any other language, it is reasonable to suggest that the underlying mental mechanisms for learning a language are at work instead of the learner's native language.

According to Taylor (quoted in McLaughlin 1984: 62) the errors made by children acquiring their first language and those of foreign language learners have similarities. Both L1 and foreign language learners regularize the structure of the language they are learning and overgeneralize the rules of the foreign language being learned. For example, the omission of the past tense marker of verbs has been found in the language production of both children acquiring English as their first language and learners who are learning English as a foreign language (Erwin-Tripp quoted in McLaughlin 1984: 63).

During the 1970s, the focus in language research was on the errors made by the learners of a foreign language and the mental processes that were involved in the learning of a foreign language (Sharwood Smith 1994: 43). By the end of the 1970s, methods for the study of foreign language learning were needed and error analysis provided an alternative for the other more restrictive approaches, such as Contrastive Analysis, which aimed at predicting the errors by comparing the learners mother tongue with the foreign language being learned (Dulay et al. 1982: 140). In the following the method for analysing foreign language learners' errors, error analysis, is discussed in more detail.

3.2 Error Analysis

In the 1970s errors began to be seen as an important part of foreign language learning, and this shifted the focus in foreign language research from pedagogical issues to the errors the foreign language learners make. Errors in foreign language learning were no longer seen as resulting from faulty imitation but as indicators that learners were trying to understand some rule-governed system for the language they are learning. Errors became a field of interest not only for teachers but for linguistics and psychologists as well (Gass & Selinker 1994: 66-67), and the growing interest led to the rise of error analysis.

According to Dulay et al (1982: 40) error analysis was a more comprehensive alternative to the earlier contrastive analysis, which aimed at predicting errors that the learners would make by comparing the foreign language with the learner's mother tongue. The difference in the learner's L1 and the foreign language were considered to be the primary cause of learners` errors. It was claimed that almost all errors reflected interference from the learner's L1 and that the ease of learning depended on the sameness of the mother tongue and the foreign language. (Sharwood Smith 1994: 85.)

The error analysis can be characterized as an attempt to account for the learner's errors that the contrastive analysis could not explain, since it was noticed that the learners made a number of errors which could not be predicted or were not the result of the

learner's first language. Dulay et al. (1982: 140-141) add that the error analysis has given attention to the different sources of errors and succeeded in promoting the status of errors as research object and indicators of learning state.

Error analysis is a linguistic analysis that compares the errors the learners make in producing foreign language with the norms of the foreign language. While in contrastive analysis the comparison is made with the learner's mother tongue, in error analysis the comparison is made with the foreign language. The method of error analysis begins with the collection of data. The data has traditionally been written, although oral data can also serve as material for error analysis. Then the errors are identified from the data and classified according to the type of error. For the analysis, a definition is needed of what is considered to be an error, and the categories for the different types of errors have to be determined. Finally, the errors are quantified and the source of the errors is analyzed. (Gass & Selinker 1994: 66-68.)

As was stated earlier, the two main sources for errors identified in error analysis are usually interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are the result of the learner's mother tongue, whereas intralingual errors result from language being learned and are independent of the mother tongue. (Gass & Selinker 1994: 68.) Errors are always due to one source or another, but sometimes any one single source cannot be identified, and the learner's production may be influenced by several sources simultaneously.

Error analysis has also received criticism. According to Gass & Selinker (1994: 68) one of the disadvantages of error analysis is that errors are only one part of the foreign language production, and in order to obtain a more accurate view on the learner's language production both errors and correct forms of the foreign language should be taken into consideration. According to Ringbom (1987: 69) for example, the influence of mother tongue does not manifest itself only in errors, and not all mother tongue influence leads to errors.

Sometimes in error analysis the description of the surface structure of the error and the cause of the error is confused. According to Dulay et al. (1982: 141-142) error description refers to the spoken or written language the learner is producing, whereas the cause of an error refers to the underlying processes involved in the learning of a language. In error analysis, the first step is to describe the surface structure of the error, which can be done by comparing the mother tongue and the foreign language. Only the second step is to determine the cause of the error, which can be the result of the influence of the learner's mother tongue. The errors may also be similar to that a first language learner could make. For example, if a Finnish-speaking learner of English uses the regular past tense marker *-ed* of the verb to an irregular verb, for example *swim*, the error is similar to error made by a L1 learner who in this case overgeneralizes the rules of the language being learned.

A third disadvantage of error analysis is that the classification of the learner's errors is sometimes simplified. An error cannot be determined to have only one source because the learning process is an interaction between the environment and internal factors. Environmental factors include, for example, the training procedures and communication situations, while internal factors are, for example, transfer and overgeneralization. It is therefore difficult to use categories in explaining the source of the error, and categories should only be used in describing the surface structure of the errors. (Dulay et al. 1982: 144.) In this study the error categories are formed according to the surface structure of the errors, for example, whether the error is grammatical or lexical and whether the error concerns verbs or articles, and only after that the source for the error is analyzed.

The proponents of error analysis do not claim that a complete picture of the learner's underlying linguistic behaviour could be given. Instead, a better understanding of this behaviour can be achieved. If the disadvantages of error analysis are taken into account, it can provide useful knowledge about the processes involved in foreign language learning. Error analysis has been chosen as the method of this study because it takes into account all the learners' errors and all the areas of the learners' language.

The differences and similarities between the learner's mother tongue and the foreign language being learned is one of the factors that has an effect on the errors that learners of a foreign language make. Therefore, the grammatical and lexical differences and similarities between the study groups' mother tongues, Finnish or Swedish, and English are discussed in the following.

4 DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN FINNISH, SWEDISH AND ENGLISH

Finland is a bilingual country with a population of circa 5.2 million people and has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish. Some 94 percent of the Finns have Finnish and about six percent Swedish as their mother tongue. There are also some other minority languages in Finland which have a few speakers. (Tilastokeskus 2005.) The Swedish-speaking population is mainly concentrated on the coastal areas in the south and in the west, where most of the main cities are located. Usually, the areas surrounding the cities are more strongly Swedish-speaking, whereas most of the Swedish-speakers in the cities are bilingual or are at least quite fluent in Finnish. This also applies to the situation in Vaasa as well.

The rights of the Swedish-speaking minority have been well protected by the law. According to the Finnish constitution, an area is officially bilingual when the percentage of the minority language group is at least six per cent or at least 3000 people. When this is the case there has to be both Finnish- and Swedish-speaking schools in the area. The Swedish-speaking Finns can have their education in their own language from kindergarten to university. Every citizen is also guaranteed to have the right to use his or her own mother tongue in official contacts. The street names must also be in both languages in a bilingual area. (Folktinget.)

The Swedish-speaking Finns are well integrated into the majority population. They do not live in isolation but rather in frequent contact with the majority. Most of the Swedish-speaking Finns consider themselves Finns who just have a different mother tongue than most of the population. Most of the Swedish-speaking Finns, especially young people, are fairly fluent in Finnish which means that they are able to communicate in Finnish. They have generally learnt it as a second language in a natural environment since they live in a Finnish-speaking country and, therefore, they are exposed to Finnish, for example, through media. They also learn it at school as the first language after their mother tongue.

Most Finnish-speaking Finns are more willing to speak English than Swedish and almost all the Finnish-speaking pupils choose English rather than Swedish as their first foreign language at school and the attitude towards learning Swedish is sometimes quite negative (Kyllönen 2006). Of the students who graduated from upper secondary school in 2004, some 99 per cent had studied English as their first foreign language (Tilastokeskus 2005). All the Finnish-speaking pupils must begin to study Swedish at the latest in the seventh grade, that is, when they are 13 to 14 year old, comprehensive school. Until the year 2004, the Swedish exam was a compulsory part of the matriculation examination, whereas nowadays it is optional. (Kyllönen 2006.)

Because of the differences between Finnish, Swedish and English, it can be expected that the Finnish-speaking learners would make different type of errors in learning English than the Swedish-speaking learners. Whereas Swedish and English belong to the Germanic languages, which form one of the branches of the Indo-European language family, Finnish belongs to the Finno-Ugrian language family. Swedish and English are, therefore, related languages while the closest official language to Finnish is Estonian.

There are many differences between the languages, and these are visible on many levels. One of the differences concerns the phonology: Finnish and Swedish are phonemic languages, which means that there is almost one-to-one correspondence between a letter and a phoneme in formal language use, and the primary stress usually lies on the first syllable of the word. English is a non-phonemic language which means that the spelling and the pronunciation of words differ from each other. There are grammatical and lexical similarities in Swedish and English, whereas the grammatical and lexical structures of Finnish differ for the most parts from both English and Swedish.

4.1 Grammatical Differences and Similarities

The most noticeable grammatical difference between English, Finnish and Swedish is that Finnish is a synthetic language, while English and Swedish are analytic languages. The structures of language, which in synthetic languages are expressed by affixes, are in analytic languages expressed by individual words. English and Swedish use independent words such as prepositions, pronouns, auxiliaries and adverbs while Finnish uses affixes. Words may, therefore, become quite long in Finnish. Several different kinds of morphemes may be attached to the root, for example, the Finnish word *käsittämättömyydessäänkin* is divided into several different morphemes *käsi-ttä-mä-tö-m-yyde-ssä-än-kin*. In the example, eight different morphemes are attached to the root *käsi*. (Korhonen 1994: 55.)

Indo-European languages such as English and Swedish are more analytic than Finno-Ugrian languages such as Finnish. For example, the Finnish expression *talo-ssa-ni-kin*, which consists of four morphemes, is in Swedish expressed by four independent words *också i mitt hus* (*kin-ssa-ni-talo, also in my house*) and in English *also in my house* (*kin-ssa-ni talo, också i mitt hus*). Each Finnish morpheme has an individual word as its counterpart in both English and Swedish. The following example illustrates how English and Swedish use the prepositions similarly and in Finnish the same is expressed by a postposition. The English expression *under the tree* equals the Swedish *under trädet* and Finnish *puun alla*. The Finnish word *alla* corresponds to the Swedish and English words *under*. In Finnish the word *alla* is used as a postposition after the main word, whereas in Swedish and English the word *under* is used as a preposition before the main word. (Korhonen 1994: 55-56.)

In Finnish the nouns have 15 cases, while in Indo-European languages there are usually only 1 to 6 cases, and it is not easy to establish a one to one relationship between a Finnish case ending and an English or Swedish preposition, pronoun, auxiliary or adverb. There are no articles in Finnish either. In colloquial Finnish, there are, however, some article like words such as *se* (that) and *yksi* (one). (Korhonen 1994: 56.) Both English and Swedish use articles and both languages use the indefinite article, for

example, when something is mentioned for the first time. The article is placed before the noun and all the words that determine it. In English and Swedish the definite article is used, for example, when something has been mentioned before or is clear from the context. The use of the definite article, however, differs in the two languages. In Swedish the definite article is often attached to the root, for example, the indefinite form of the word *student* in Swedish is *en student* and the definite form is *studenten*. In English the definite article is used similarly to the indefinite article. (Quirk & Greenbaum 1993: 72, Thorell 1973: 19.)

Another difference between Finnish, Swedish and English is that in Finnish the possessive pronoun is expressed by attaching a possessive ending to the main word, whereas Indo-European languages such as Swedish and English use possessive pronouns. For example, the Finnish expression *poika-ni* equals the English *my son* and the Swedish *min son*. In Finnish it is also possible to use the possessive pronoun, in this case *minun poikani* but in informal language the pronoun *minun* can be left out.

The nouns in Finnish and English differ from those of Swedish in that there is no grammatical gender and the third person pronoun is the same regardless of whether the subject is male or female (Karlsson 1983: 13). In Finnish the third person pronoun is always *hän*, whereas in Swedish a distinction is made between *hon* which refers to a female and *han* which refers to a male. In English the third person pronouns are *she* for a female and *he* for a male. (Korhonen 1994: 56.)

The word order is the same, SVO (subject-verb-object), in all three languages. The word order in synthetic languages such as Finnish is, however, freer than that in analytic languages such as Swedish and English. The more the relationships between the sentence elements can be established by inflecting the words, the freer the word order is. In a Finnish sentence, elements and their relationships do not need to be established by word order, whereas in Swedish and English the word order can easily change the meaning of the clause. (Korhonen 1994: 74-75.)

All in all, Swedish and English have quite a few similarities in their grammar, whereas the grammatical structures of Finnish differ from the structures of English and Swedish significantly in almost all the areas of grammar. Swedish and English also have similarities in their vocabularies, while the lexis of Finnish differs from them lexis of those languages.

4.2 Lexical Differences and Similarities

Finnish differs from most European languages because it often has not made use of well known Latin and Greek elements, and has instead formed new words like *puhelin* (telephone). The Finnish vocabulary has a relatively small number of loan words compared with English and Swedish. There has been a negative attitude towards direct loans particularly if the foreign word has not conformed to the phonological rules of Finnish. (Ringbom 1985: 44.) The Finnish vocabulary has little similarities with English and Swedish but recently Finnish has adopted new loans especially from English.

All Germanic languages have similarities in their vocabularies. Both English and Swedish have used words from Greek and Latin instead of forming new ones. There are many words in English and Swedish that are similar in both form and meaning. However, sometimes the similarity of words is only formal not semantic, for example, the word *god* (S12) in Swedish means *good*, whereas in English the word means *God*. This phenomenon is called false friends. Although the two languages have similarities in their lexis, the words are often both written and pronounced differently. The Swedish and Finnish alphabets have three vowels: *å*, *ä* and *ö*, which do not belong to the English alphabet.

As Swedish and English have similarities in their vocabularies, Swedish-speaking learners sometimes use Swedish words in their English. The influence of Swedish shows, above all, in cases where Swedish and English words are formally similar although not identical, and semantically identical, or almost identical (Ringbom 1985: 45). For example, in the data of the present study the Swedish-speaking pupils spelled

the word *hotel* according to the Swedish spelling *hotell* (S4). The English word *hotel* and the Swedish word *hotell* are identical in meaning and similar in form. Other examples of words that have an identical meaning and only a minor difference in spelling are *local* and *football* which in Swedish are spelled *lokal* (S11) and *fotboll* (S12). These words have the same meaning in both languages and only a minor difference in spelling.

According to Ringbom (1985: 43) Finnish and English have so few formal similarities in their vocabularies that even if the Swedish-speaking learners are bilingual, the influence from Finnish on their English is rare. Finnish-speaking and/or bilingual learners, who have the knowledge of both Finnish and Swedish, do not try to use Finnish words or spelling in English. For the present study this means that even if the Swedish-speaking pupils are bilingual they do not rely on Finnish when learning English.

5 ERRORS MADE BY NINTH GRADERS

In the following the errors made by the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English are discussed. First the essays written by the ninth graders, followed by the essays written by the university applicants and finally the seminar papers written by the English majors are analysed. The errors are analysed in order to find out if the different language groups make different types of errors and if the influence from the mother tongue could be seen in the errors made by the different language groups, and if the influence from the mother tongue decreases as the learners advance in their studies.

The material consisted of 38 essays, of which 19 were written by Finnish-speaking pupils in Seinäjoki Lyseo and the same number by Swedish-speaking pupils in Borgaregatans Skola in Vaasa. The pupils in Seinäjoki Lyseo have studied English approximately six years since in Finnish-speaking schools pupils usually begin to learn English in the third grade. The pupils in Borgaregatans skola have studied English approximately four years. In most of the Swedish-speaking schools pupils begin to learn English in the fifth grade. The Finnish-speaking pupils have thus studied English two years longer than the Swedish-speaking pupils. For the present study, the pupils were asked to write an essay of around 100-150 words in the autumn 2005. While writing the essays, the pupils did not know that the essays were going to be used as material for this study.

The Finnish-speaking ninth graders made more errors than the Swedish-speaking ninth graders. Overall, the Swedish-speaking pupils wrote more fluent and longer essays than the Finnish-speaking pupils even though both language groups were asked to aim at same number of words. Only a few Finnish-speaking pupils wrote the required 100-150 words, whereas nearly all the Swedish-speaking pupils wrote the required number of words. The essays written by the Finnish-speaking pupils had on average 82 words and the Finnish-speaking made approximately 16,60 errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking pupils had approximately 129 words per essay and they made approximately 8,94 errors per every hundred words. The Finnish-speaking pupils made almost twice as many errors as the Swedish-speaking pupils. The errors in the essays

will be discussed in three categories: grammatical errors, lexical errors and non-idiomatic language. Figure 1 shows the percentages of errors in each category made by the Finnish-speaking ninth graders.

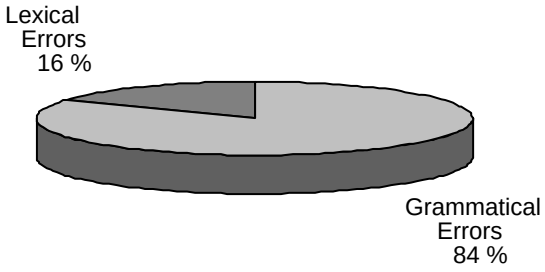

Figure 1. Errors of Finnish-speaking pupils.

Most of the errors, that is, 84 per cent, made by the Finnish-speaking pupils were grammatical errors and only 16 per cent of the errors were lexical, and there were no clear cases of the use of non-idiomatic language in the essays of the Finnish-speaking pupils. This differs substantially from the proportion of grammatical and lexical errors made by the Swedish-speaking pupils. Figure 2 shows the percentages of errors in each category made by the Swedish-speaking ninth graders.

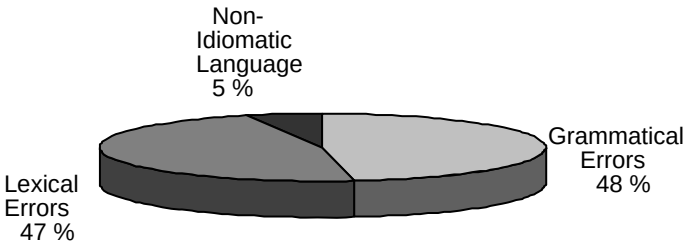

Figure 2. Errors of Swedish-speaking pupils.

The Swedish-speaking pupils made almost as many lexical errors as grammatical errors, and five per cent of the errors were cases where the pupils had used non-idiomatic language. In the following the errors of both language groups in the different categories are discussed in the order of importance. The grammatical errors will be analyzed first as they were the most common errors were both language groups, and after that the lexical errors and the use of non-idiomatic language will be discussed.

5.1 Grammatical Errors

Grammatical errors break the norms of written Standard English, for example, the use of double negation which is used in spoken language but which is not grammatically correct (Andersson & Trudgill 1990: 9). In this study, grammatical errors included errors in articles, prepositions, verbs, pronouns, word order, plural and conjunctions. The total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words in is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Grammatical errors of ninth graders.

Grammatical Errors	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Prepositions	60	3,87	35	1,42
Articles	58	3,74	11	0,45
Verbs	58	3,74	35	1,42
Pronouns	19	1,23	10	0,41
Word order	10	0,65	10	0,41
Plural formation	9	0,58	1	0,04
Conjunctions	-	-	3	0,08
Total	214	13,82	105	4,27

Overall, the Finnish-speaking pupils made noticeably more grammatical errors than the Swedish-speaking pupils. The Finnish-speaking pupils made altogether 214 grammatical errors, which means there were 13,82 grammatical errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking pupils made altogether 105 grammatical errors, which means that there were 4,27 errors per every hundred words. The Finnish-speaking pupils made three times as many grammatical errors as the Swedish-speaking pupils. The Finnish-speaking pupils made clearly more errors in articles, prepositions and verbs than the Swedish-speaking pupils, and the difference in the errors was most significant in the use of articles. The Finnish-speaking pupils made 58 article errors, while the Swedish-speaking pupils made only 11. This means that the Finnish-speaking pupils made more than eight times as many article errors as the Swedish-speaking pupils.

In what follows, the grammatical error categories are discussed in the order of significance. The significance is decided on the basis of the most significant difference between the language groups. The most prominent category, articles, will be discussed first, followed by the next two most significant categories of prepositions and verbs. The other categories, which had fewer errors, were those involving pronouns, word order and plural formation and these will also be discussed in separate sections. The category of conjunctions will not be discussed separately since the Swedish-speaking pupils made only three and the Finnish-speaking pupils made no errors in this category.

5.1.1 Articles

The difference in the errors between the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking pupils was most significant in the use of articles. Article errors were the second most frequent type of all errors made by the Finnish-speaking pupils, and for the Swedish-speaking pupils they were the third most common type of error. To identify the errors, they were further divided into three categories of the omission of an article, the use of a wrong article and the addition of an article to where there should not be any. The total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Article errors of ninth graders.

Error Category	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Article omitted	46	2,97	6	0,24
Article added	7	0,45	5	0,01
Wrong article	5	0,32	-	0,20
Total	58	3,74	11	0,45

There were altogether 58 article errors in the essays written by the Finnish-speaking pupils, and they made approximately 3,74 article errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking pupils made only 11 and had 0,45 article errors per every hundred words. The use of articles did not seem to be a problem for the Swedish-speakers, which was expected since their L1 has a similar type of article system as English. The most common article error of the Finnish-speaking pupils was the omission articles. They omitted 46 articles, whereas the Swedish-speaking pupils omitted only six articles. Typical omissions included cases like those in Examples 1 and 2.

> (1) I had great time with other discusthrowers. (I had *a* great time with *the* other discus throwers.) F2

> (2) I have engine and gearbox for it at home. (I have *an* engine and *a* gearbox for it at home.) F16

In the above examples, the Finnish-speaking pupils have omitted both the indefinite and definite articles before nouns that would require an article. Overall the use of articles seemed to be difficult for them, which is in line with the previous studies. It has been found that the use of the English articles is particularly difficult for learners whose mother tongue does not have articles. The Finnish-speaking learners tend to see articles as redundant and they do not pay much attention to them in reading or writing. (Ringbom 1987: 93-95.) The omission of articles could also be seen as intralingual errors, since children learning English make similar errors (Dulay et al 1982: 155), but

as the Swedish-speaking pupils did not make as many errors in the use of articles, the article errors can be seen as interlingual errors.

In some cases, both language groups added an article before a noun that does not require it. The Finnish-speaking pupils added seven and the Swedish-speaking pupils five superfluous articles. These additions were mostly cases which were exceptions to the rule of using articles. For example, articles are not usually used before proper names, whereas in the essays some pupils used articles before them as is the case in the following examples.

(3) I was in *the* Helsinki. (I was in Helsinki.) F3

(4) Some days befour me and my two other friends visited *the* Rock Perry. (Some days before me and my two other friends visited Rock Perry.) S8

In both examples, the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking pupils may have overgeneralized the rule of using articles. They are aware of the rule that in general an article proceeds a noun, but not of the exception that an article is not usually used before a proper name. Overgeneralization is likely to be a developmental error, and since both language groups added almost as many articles, these errors do not show interference from the mother tongue.

Only the Finnish-speaking pupils used wrong articles. In some cases they used an indefinite article when the definite article should have been used and the definite article when an indefinite article should have been used. Occasionally they used the wrong indefinite article. Overall there were, however, only five such cases. The Swedish-speaking pupils never used a wrong article. In the example below, the pupil has used a wrong article.

(5) Because I am *the* girl, I like to shop. (Because I am *a* girl, I like to shop.) F7

In the above example, the Finnish-speaking pupil is not aware of the difference between indefinite and definite article. Since only five of the 58 article errors made by the

Finnish-speaking pupils involved using the wrong articles, the problem seems to lie in identifying the cases when they should use an article, not which article to use.

The influence from the mother tongue showed clearly in the article errors. The Finnish-speaking pupils tended to omit articles, since articles are not used in their mother tongue, while the Swedish-speaking pupils have a reference frame for using articles in their mother tongue. In the categories of wrong articles and superfluous articles the difference in the errors was not that significant. After errors with articles, the difference between the language groups was most noticeable in preposition errors which will be discussed in the following section.

5.1.2 Prepositions

Although errors with prepositions were the most frequent type of error in the essays written by both language groups, the difference in the errors between the language groups was noticeable. The preposition errors were not all similar and could be further divided into three categories: the omission of a preposition, the use of a wrong preposition and addition of a preposition where there should not be any. Table 3 presents the total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words, and shows the differences between different types of errors made by the language groups.

Table 3. Preposition errors of ninth graders.

Error Category	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Preposition omitted	34	2,19	8	0,32
Wrong preposition	18	1,16	21	0,85
Preposition added	8	0,52	6	0,24
Total	60	3,87	35	1,42

The Finnish-speaking pupils made altogether 60 preposition errors, and there were 3,87 preposition errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking pupils made altogether 35 preposition errors, and there were 1,42 preposition errors per every hundred words. This means that the Finnish-speaking pupils made almost three times as many preposition errors as the Swedish-speaking pupils. The most common preposition error for the Finnish-speaking pupils was the omission of prepositions. They omitted 34 prepositions, whereas the Swedish-speaking pupils omitted only eight. The following examples are typical examples of situations when the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking pupils omitted a preposition.

> (6) My birthday was in July, but because it was Saturday, I got my driving licence two days after in Monday. (My birthday was in July but because it was *on* Saturday, I got my drivers license after it on Monday.) F16

> (7) The midle of the summer I and my friends was on a trip to Stockholm. (*In* the middle of the summer me and my friends were on a trip to Stockholm) S12

In Example 6, the pupil has omitted a preposition which changes the meaning of the clause. The pupil has intended to say that his birthday was on Saturday instead of just saying that the day was Saturday. It seems that the Finnish-speaking pupils have difficulties in knowing how and where to use prepositions. The Swedish-speaking pupils tended to omit preposition from sentences referring to time as in Example 7. The omission of prepositions could be seen as an intralingual error since it is also common for L1 learners. In this study, however, the Finnish-speaking pupils omitted clearly more prepositions than the Swedish-speaking pupils, and, therefore, the omission of prepositions could be seen as an interlingual error for the Finnish-speaking pupils.

Whereas the Finnish-speaking pupils tended to omit prepositions, the most common type of preposition error for the Swedish-speaking pupils was the use of wrong prepositions. They used wrong prepositions 21 times as in the following examples.

> (8) Before we go to Norway we are going to Levi *with* car. (Before we go Norway we are going to Levi *by* car.) S3

(9) I have been very much *on* our summer place *i* Åbo. (I have been very much *at* our summer place *in* Åbo) S12

In Example 8, the pupil has used the English equivalent *with* for the Swedish preposition *med*. In Swedish the preposition *med* is used, for example, to refer to the method of travelling, *Jag reser med bil* (I travel by car). In Example 9, the negative influence from the mother tongue is even clearer as the Swedish-speaking pupil has used a preposition from his/her own mother tongue. The pupil has used the Swedish preposition *i* instead of the English preposition *in*. These prepositions have the same meaning in both languages. The pupil has also used the wrong preposition *on* when the preposition *at* should have been used. The Finnish-speaking pupils tended to use the preposition *in* instead of the correct preposition *on* before dates and weekdays. For example, the pupils frequently used the expression *in* Monday in stead of the correct expression *on* Monday as in Example 6.

The pupils in both language groups also added some prepositions. There were eight cases where the Finnish-speaking pupils had added a preposition and six cases where the Swedish-speaking pupils had added one. In the following example the Finnish-speaking pupil has added a preposition.

(10) We visited *at* Tallin and drove around the Finland. (We visited Tallinn and drove around Finland.) F4

The verb *visit,* which does not require a preposition, seemed to be difficult for the Finnish-speaking pupils because, of the eight added prepositions, four were after the verb *visit* like in Example 10. The pupils might have overgeneralized the rule of using prepositions, which is an intralingual error, and there was no significant difference between the language groups. This could, however, also be interference from Finnish since there is an expression in Finnish *käydä jossain* (visit someplace).

The difference between the two language groups in the preposition errors was not as great as that in the articles, but it was still visible. As with article errors, the Finnish-speaking pupils tended to omit prepositions, and the difference in the errors was the

most significant in the omission of prepositions. This is probably because Finnish does not have articles or prepositions and the omissions can, therefore, be seen as interlingual errors. In the categories of wrong and added prepositions the difference in the errors was not that important.

5.1.3 Verbs

Verb errors were as common as article errors for the Finnish-speaking pupils and as common as preposition errors for the Swedish-speaking pupils. The errors in verbs fell into three categories: errors in the verb tense, the subject-verb concord and other verb errors which did not fall into the two previous categories. The total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Verb errors of ninth graders.

Error Category	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Tense	36	2,32	10	0,41
Concord	14	0,90	15	0,61
Others	8	0,52	10	0,41
Total	58	3,74	35	1,42

There were 58 verb errors in the essays written by the Finnish speaking pupils. This means that there were 3,74 verb errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking pupils made considerably fewer errors, altogether 35, in the category of verbs and had 1,42 verb errors per every hundred words. The most frequent type of verb error for the Finnish-speaking pupils was the use of the wrong verb tense, of which there were 36. The Swedish-speaking pupils used the wrong tense only ten times. The following examples illustrate errors in the verb tense.

(11) I had many competitions too and I *succeed* quite well. (I had many competitions too and I *succeeded* quite well.) F2

(12) But we *find* it. (But we *found* it.) S14

(13) I go “puhalla nollat” concert in Friday. (I will go to “puhalla nollat” [“blow zeroes” refers to a concert that you are not able to get in if you have drunk alcohol] concert on Friday) F19

In Examples 11 and 12, the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking pupils have used the correct verb, but they should have used the past tense instead of the present one. For the Swedish-speaking pupils all their errors in the verb tense concerned irregular verbs. In Example 11, the Finnish-speaking pupil has omitted the past tense marker *-ed*, and the verb *succeed* might have confused the pupil since it already has an *-ed* ending. The Finnish-speaking pupils also frequently omitted the auxiliary verb *shall*/*will* which indicates the future tense as in Example 13. When the Finnish-speaking pupils were telling about their plans and what they were going to do, they often used the present tense instead of the future tense. The errors in verb tense are usually developmental errors.

Both language groups made almost as many errors in the subject-verb concord. The subject-verb concord means that the subject and the verb must agree in number and in person. This was the most frequent type of the verb error for the Swedish-speaking pupils, and they made 15 errors in this category. The Finnish-speaking pupils made 14 errors in the subject-verb concord. The following examples illustrate typical errors in this category.

(14) There *is* rabbits, sheep, cats, geese and cows. (There *are* rabbits, sheep, cats, geese and cows.) F13

(15) My plans for the autumn holiday *is* that I am going to drive moped very much (My plans for the autumn holiday *are* that I am going to drive a moped very much.) S11

In almost all the errors concerning the subject-verb concord, the pupils had used the singular form of the verb instead of the plural. It could be expected that the Finnish-speaking pupils would make fewer errors in the subject-verb concord since in Finnish the verbs are inflected in all persons both singular and plural, whereas in Swedish there is only one verb form for all persons and therefore the pupils may find it difficult. However, the Finnish-speaking pupils made more errors in the subject-verb concord than the Swedish-speaking pupils. It also appeared that the first person pronoun (my and I), as in Example 15, may confuse the pupils, and they use the singular form of the verb although the main word or the head word of the phrase would require the use of the plural form.

The Finnish-speaking pupils made eight and the Swedish-speaking pupils ten errors which concerned neither the verb tense nor the subject-verb concord. For example, they overgeneralized the rule about forming the verb tense as in the example below.

> (16) My father *drived* the car to Åbo, but lather we only used the bike and a lot of boats. (My father *drove* the car to Åbo, but later we only used the bike and a lot of boats.) S1

The pupil has known that the past tense should be used and formed it by using the marker *-ed* of weak, irregular verbs, while the verb in Example 16 illustrates an exception since *drive* is an irregular verb. The pupil might have overgeneralized the rule about forming the past tense which could be an intralingual error since children learning English as their L1 often use the *-ed* marker to irregular verbs (Dulay et al 1982: 157).

The difference in the errors was the most visible in the verb tense. The Finnish-speaking pupils made more errors in the verb tense than the Swedish-speaking pupils, but in other error categories the differences were not significant. The three categories discussed, articles, prepositions and verbs, had the majority of the errors, and also the difference in the errors between the language groups was most visible in them.

5.1.4 Pronouns

Overall the Finnish-speaking pupils made more pronoun errors than the Swedish-speaking pupils. When pronoun errors were analysed, they fell into four different categories: the omission of a pronoun, the use of a wrong pronoun, the addition of a pronoun where there should not be any, and errors in the possessive case. The total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words in each category is shown in Table 5. In the table the most significant differences between the language groups are clearly in the use of wrong pronouns and omitting pronouns.

Table 5. Pronoun errors of ninth graders.

Error Category	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Wrong pronoun	8	0,52	4	0,16
Pronoun omitted	6	0,39	1	0,04
Pronoun added	3	0,19	2	0,08
Possessive case	2	0,13	3	0,12
Total	19	1,23	10	0,41

All in all, there were 19 pronoun errors in the essays written by the Finnish speaking pupils, and 1,23 pronoun errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking pupils made 10 errors and had 0,41 pronoun errors per every hundred words. For the Finnish-speaking pupils the most common pronoun error was the use of a wrong pronoun, which occurred eight times. They usually used the subjective case of the pronoun when the objective case should have been used. Example 17 is a typical case in point. The Swedish-speaking pupils used wrong pronouns four times.

> (17) Usually I helped *he* a office work. (Usually I helped *him* with the office work.) F6

(18) I want to go an cinema in Lasipalatsi and see something good movie. (I want to go to a cinema in Lasipalatsi and see some good movie.) F7

In the above example, the pupil had used the subjective case of the pronoun *he* when s/he should have used the objective case *him*. The choice of the pronoun *he* is correct in terms of gender since the pupil is referring to his/her father, but the objective case of the pronoun should have been used. The Swedish-speaking pupils also made two errors similar to the errors in Example 17. They used the subjective case of the pronoun *I* when the objective case *me* should have been used. In Example 18, the Finnish-speaking pupil has used the partitive pronoun *something* when s/he should have used the determiner *some*. The pronoun *something* cannot be used to refer to a noun but it can be used to refer to an adjective, for example, to see something beautiful. The determiner *some* requires a noun, and it cannot be used independently like the word *something*. (Quirk & Greenbaum 1993: 108-109). The pupil seems to be unaware of the difference between these words.

The pupils in both language groups omitted and added pronouns although the number of such problems was low. The Finnish-speaking pupils omitted six and added three pronouns, whereas the Swedish-speaking pupils omitted one and added two pronouns. The omissions and additions usually involved the objective case, and the following is a typical example of the omission of a pronoun.

(19) And our dog are with too. (And our dog is with us too.) S3

In the Example 19, the pupil has omitted the pronoun *us* which should have followed the preposition *with*. In Swedish the use of the objective pronoun in this sentence is not required as the sentence In Swedish would be *Vår hund var också med*. The pupil might have used the structure of his/her mother tongue and, therefore, omitted the pronoun.

Both language groups also made a few errors with the possessive case but these were quite rare. The Finnish-speaking pupils made two and the Swedish-speaking pupils three errors in the possessive case. The pupils in both language groups left out, for example, the apostrophe which indicates the possessive case. They wrote *mothers* (S17)

(mother's), *friends* (S2) (friend's) and *sisters* (S5) (sisters`). In the following example the pupil has added the apostrophe to a pronoun which is not formed by using the apostrophe.

> (20) There were a big consert *it's* name was Sandwawe. (There was a big concert and *its* name was Sandwawe.) F3

In Example 20, the Finnish-speaking pupil might have overgeneralized the rule of forming the possessive case by using the apostrophe or mixed the expression with the contracted form *it's* of *it is*. Overgeneralization is usually considered to be an intralingual error. The possessive pronoun *its* is an exception to the rule of forming the possessive case and the pupil does not seem to be aware of it.

The difference in the errors between the language groups was not significant and the influence from the pupils` mother tongue was, therefore, not visible in the pronoun errors. The Finnish-speaking pupils made more pronoun errors, but, overall, the number of pronoun errors was not that great for either language group. The effect of the mother tongue could not been seen in the word order errors either since both language groups made the same number of errors in that category. In the following the errors in word order and plural are discussed.

5.1.5 Word Order

In this study word order errors were sentences where one or more words were misplaced. The word order error could change the meaning of the clause or make the sentence grammatically incorrect. Errors in word order were not common, since both language groups made only ten such errors. The Finnish-speaking pupils had 0,65 word order errors per every hundred words, and the Swedish-speaking pupils had 0,41 errors per every hundred words. The following examples present cases where one word has been misplaced in a sentence.

> (21) And I *too* clean up there. (And I clean up there *too*.) F6

(22) And *there* happened a lot of funny things. (And a lot of funny things happened *there*.) S1

In Example 21, the error in the word order changes the meaning of the clause. The pupil intended to say that among other things s/he does also clean up there. The word *too* is a linking adverb when it is used to mean *in addition* or *also*, and it is usually placed in end position in the clause (Quirk & Greenbaum 1993: 213). The Swedish-speaking pupils had problems with placing the word *there* since half of the errors were similar to Example 22. In English the adverbs that indicate place are located in the end position in the clause, whereas in Finnish and Swedish they are usually placed at the beginning of the clause. For both language groups, many of the errors in this category involved the expressions of time.

5.1.6 Plural-formation

In this study plural errors included cases where the pupils had used the singular form of the noun when the plural form would have been required, or when they had used the plural form of the noun instead of the singular form they should have used, or when they had misformed the plural form. The Finnish-speaking pupils made nine singular/plural errors, while the Swedish-speaking pupils made none. The following examples present different types of plural errors.

(23) I will play video *game* and buy *candys*. (I will play video *games* and buy *candy*.) F5

(24) I sell ice creams for *a* kids. (I sell ice creams for kids.) F19

In Example 23, the Finnish-speaking pupil had made two errors. S/he had omitted the plural ending *-s* from the word *game*. The pupil intended to say s/he will play several different games instead of just one game. The pupil has also overgeneralized the rule of forming the plural with the ending *-s*. The word *candy* is an exception to the rule, since it is in itself a plural form. The plural form *candies* can also be used, but the form *candys* is wrong because when the vowel *y* follows a consonant, it changes to *ie* before

the *s*-ending. In Example 24, the noun *ice cream* is an exception to the rule of forming the plural since it cannot appear in the plural form because it is an uncountable noun.

Overall, in the grammatical errors made by the ninth graders, the influence of the mother tongue was most visible in preposition and article errors, which are probably therefore interlingual errors. The Finnish-speaking pupils made significantly more errors in the use of articles and prepositions since their mother tongue does not have articles or prepositions.

The difference in the errors was also visible in the category of verbs. The Finnish-speaking pupils made more errors in the verb tense and these are usually developmental errors. They cannot be regarded as interlingual errors. The influence from the mother tongue can, however, be seen in the subject-verb concord errors, since the Swedish-speaking pupils made almost as many errors as the Finnish-speaking pupils, even though they generally made clearly fewer grammatical errors than the Finnish-speaking pupils. In Finnish the verbs are inflected in all persons, both singular and plural, whereas in Swedish there is only one verb form for all persons and, therefore, the Swedish-speaking pupils may find it difficult. The other grammatical categories did not have so many errors, and the differences were, therefore, not so significant.

5.2 Lexical Errors

In this study, lexical errors consisted of errors in spelling and vocabulary. Spelling errors included cases where the pupil had used the right word but had spelled it wrong, whereas vocabulary errors included the cases where the pupils had used a wrong word or expression, added or omitted a word.

The Swedish-speaking pupils made almost as many lexical errors as grammatical errors, whereas the Finnish-speaking pupils made clearly fewer lexical errors than grammatical errors. They had 13,82 grammatical errors per every hundred words and only 2,71 lexical errors. The total number of lexical errors and the number of lexical errors per

every hundred words in Table 6 shows the major difference between the language groups and the categories of errors.

Table 6. Lexical errors of ninth graders.

Error Categories	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Spelling	36	2,32	101	4,10
Vocabulary	6	0,39	2	0,08
Total	42	2,71	103	4,19

The Finnish-speaking pupils made 42 lexical errors which means that they made altogether fewer lexical errors than the Swedish-speaking pupils. The Swedish-speaking pupils made 103 lexical errors and had 4,19 errors per every hundred words. The spelling errors made by the Finnish-speaking pupils were mostly minor spelling errors which would probably not cause misunderstanding, while the spelling errors made by the Swedish-speaking pupils showed the influence of their mother tongue. In the following the lexical errors will be discussed in the order of significance.

5.2.1 Spelling

Spelling was the only error category in which the Finnish-speaking pupils made clearly fewer errors than the Swedish-speaking pupils, and, in addition to conjunctions, it was the only category in which the Swedish-speaking pupils made more errors than the Finnish-speaking pupils. The Swedish-speaking pupils made 101 spelling errors, whereas the Finnish-speaking pupils made only 36. Spelling errors were the most frequent type of error of all the errors that the Swedish-speaking pupils made.

The Finnish-speaking pupils could have been expected to be worse than the Swedish-speaking pupils in spelling, since Finnish is a language with a good fit between writing

and pronunciation, whereas the spelling and pronunciation in Swedish do not always have that fit, and in English the spelling and pronunciation differ even more significantly from each other.

Most of the spelling errors made by the Finnish-speaking pupils were only minor spelling errors, for example, *arriwed* (arrived) (F4), and almost all involved only one wrong letter. There were also six errors, where the Finnish-speaking pupils had made compounds of words that should have been written separately, for example they wrote the words *bigbrother* (F14) (big brother) and *summerplace* (summer place) (F12) as one. In Finnish compound words are more common than in English, and the Finnish-speaking pupils might, therefore, more easily write the words as one.

For the Swedish-speaking pupils the most common spelling errors, altogether 45 out of 101, were those in which the pupils had written the words in accordance with the English pronunciation of the word, for example *aut* (out) and *praud* (proud). Swedish is a phonemic language which means that the spelling and pronunciation of words are closer to each other than in English which is a non-phonemic language. The Swedish-speaking pupils might, therefore, try to spell the words as they are pronounced.

The Swedish-speaking pupils also made another 12 spelling errors which showed the influence of their mother tongue. These included spelling errors like *lokal* (local) (S11) and *god* (good) (S12). These might have their explanation in that English and Swedish are related languages and, therefore, have similarities in their vocabularies. The Swedish-speaking pupils made errors in the spelling of the above words because they used the spelling of their mother tongue. The Finnish-speaking pupils cannot get help from their mother tongue and, therefore, cannot use Finnish words. The Swedish-speaking pupils made also minor spelling errors and errors in compound words similar to those that the Finnish-speaking pupils made.

5.2.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary errors in this study include cases, where the pupils had used wrong words or expressions, added or omitted words. Spelling errors were not included in this category because in those the word itself was correct but it was only misspelled. The Swedish-speaking pupils made only two errors in this category; they added one and omitted another word. The Finnish-speaking pupils used wrong words six times. A typical vocabulary error is illustrated by the following.

(25) I have many video *plays* at home. (I have many video *games* at home.) F6

In Example 25, the Finnish-speaking pupil had used the verb *plays* as a noun. Most of the vocabulary errors were similar to the Example 25, where the pupil had mixed the word classes. The Swedish-speaking pupils did not make similar errors.

In lexical errors, the influence of the pupils` mother tongue could be seen most clearly as spelling errors. The Swedish-speaking pupils spelled some words as they would be spelled in their mother tongue, whereas the Finnish-speaking pupils did not try to use the Finnish spelling of the words. The Swedish-speaking pupils also spelled words frequently as they are pronounced in English. It could be expected that the Finnish-speaking pupils would spell words as they are pronounced since Finnish is a phonemic language. They did not, however, spell words as they are pronounced, and their spelling was therefore more accurate.

5.3 Non-idiomatic Language

In this study, non-idiomatic language refers to structures and sentences that are grammatically correct but are not idiomatic language. For example, the sentence “My friend from Molpe comes to me.” (S4) is an example of non-idiomatic language. The sentence is grammatically correct, but the pupil intended to say that the friend is coming to visit him/her.

There were no clear cases of non-idiomatic language in the essays written by the Finnish-speaking pupils, whereas the Swedish-speaking pupils made 12 errors in this category. The following examples illustrate the use of non-idiomatic language by some Swedish-speaking pupils.

> (26) The car was very big so it didn't *care*. (The car was very big so it didn't *matter*.) S1
>
> (27) We were *looking for* some rally racing. (We were *watching* some rally racing.) S13

The sentence in Example 26 is grammatically correct, and it could also be true semantically. The problem is that the car is an inanimate object while the verb *care* requires an animate subject. Also, the pupil intended to say that they had to sleep in the car, but it did not matter since the car was big enough. The sentence in Example 27 is also grammatically correct, but instead of searching for rally racing the pupil intended to say that they we watching rally racing. Mostly the errors in non-idiomatic language concerned verbs as in the examples. The Swedish-speaking pupils have only studied English for four years, and at this point are probably not aware of the different usage and meaning of words.

Overall, the Swedish-speaking ninth graders made fewer errors in all other categories except spelling. The Finnish-speaking pupils made clearly more grammatical errors and the Swedish-speaking pupils clearly more lexical errors. The Finnish-speaking pupils made most errors in prepositions, articles and verbs, and the Swedish-speaking pupils in spelling, prepositions and verbs. Also, the difference in the errors between the language groups was most significant in these categories. The greatest difference was in the use of articles, since the Finnish-speaking pupils made approximately six times as many article errors as the Swedish-speaking pupils. Therefore, the positive influence from Swedish and the negative influence from Finnish was most noticeable in the article errors. Swedish has a similar type of article system as English, whereas Finnish does not have articles. The negative influence of Swedish was most noticeable in the spelling

errors, since most of the spelling errors made by the Swedish-speaking students showed the influence of their mother tongue.

A previous study by Ringbom & Palmberg (1976) found that on a lower level of studies the Swedish-speaking pupils made clearly fewer errors than the Finnish-speaking pupils, whereas in the entrance exam for university level English studies the Swedish-speaking applicants only had a minor advantage over the Finnish-speaking applicants. In the following section the errors made by the university applicants in the entrance exam for the English department at the University of Vaasa are analyzed in order to see if the difference in the errors between the language groups has decreased.

6 ERRORS MADE BY UNIVERSITY APPLICANTS

The essays of the university applicants are analyzed in order to see if the two language groups still differ in errors they make in English and if the difference is still as noticeable as it was in the essays written by the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking ninth graders. The university applicants have studied English from 8 to 10 years and they have passed the English exam in their matriculation examination and most likely with a good grade. At this stage of their studies, their knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary should be quite good.

The material from the university applicants consisted of 52 essays written in the entrance exam for the English Department at the University of Vaasa. Of these essays 26 were written by Finnish-speaking and 26 essays were written by Swedish-speaking applicants. Before attending the entrance exam, the applicants had to inform the organizers their mother tongue since one part of the exam was testing that. In the exam, the applicants were asked to write an essay in English of around 500 words based on the novels that had been set for the exam. The novels in spring 2005 were either *Emerald Underground* by Michael Collins and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, and the applicants were asked to choose one. They were given two alternative topics for the essay for each novel. There was a time limit for completing the exam, and some applicants might therefore have run out of time. In the essays studied there was, however, no indication of that.

The university applicants in both language groups, applying for the English department, wrote almost the same number of words, and, again, the Finnish-speaking applicants made more errors than the Swedish-speaking applicants. The Finnish-speaking applicants had approximately 518 words per essay and they made altogether 258 errors making the average of 1,92 errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking university applicants had approximately 529 words per essay and made altogether 184 errors. There, thus, were 1,34 errors per every hundred words in their essays. The errors made by the university applicants were divided into three error categories: grammatical

errors, lexical errors and the use of non-idiomatic language. The following pie charts illustrate the proportion of errors in each of the main error categories.

Figure 3 of the percentages of errors in each category made by the Finnish-speaking university applicants shows that grammatical errors were by far the most significant errors category.

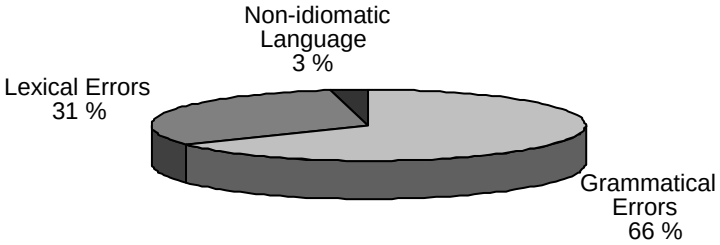

Figure 3. Errors of Finnish-speaking university applicants.

Most of the errors, 66 per cent, made by the Finnish-speaking university applicants were grammatical errors. When compared with the errors made by the Finnish-speaking ninth graders, the proportion of grammatical errors of all errors had, though, decreased since 84 per cent of the errors made by the Finnish-speaking ninth graders were grammatical errors. The proportion of lexical errors of all the errors was larger than it was in the errors made by the ninth graders. From the errors made by the Finnish-speaking university applicants 31 per cent were lexical errors, whereas, from the errors made by the Finnish-speaking ninth graders some 16 per cent were lexical errors. The following pie chart illustrates the errors made by the Swedish-speaking university applicants.

Figure 4 shows the percentages of errors in each category made by the Swedish-speaking university applicants. The largest category was lexical errors although these were quite close to grammatical errors in number.

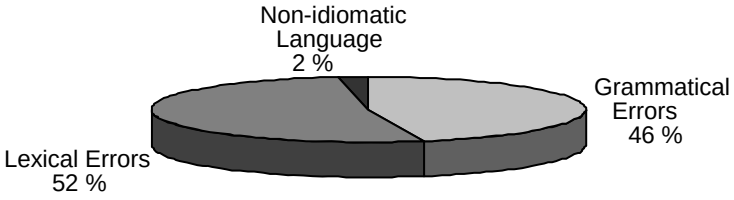

Figure 4. Errors of Swedish-speaking university applicants.

The Swedish-speaking applicants made more lexical errors than grammatical errors but the proportion of grammatical and lexical errors had not changed considerably when compared with the errors made by the Swedish-speaking ninth graders. From the applicants' errors 52 per cent were lexical and 46 per cent grammatical, whereas, from the errors made by the ninth graders 47 per cent were lexical errors and 48 per cent were grammatical errors.

In the following, the errors in different categories will be discussed. Grammatical errors will be analyzed first, and then lexical errors and the use of non-idiomatic language are discussed. The errors made by the university applicants are also compared with the errors made by the ninth graders in order to see if the applicants in different language groups still make different type of errors and if the influence from the mother tongue is still visible in the errors they make.

6.1 Grammatical Errors

The Swedish-speaking university applicants made almost as many grammatical errors as lexical errors, whereas for the Finnish-speaking university applicants grammatical errors were clearly the most significant error category. In the present study, grammatical errors made by the university applicants included errors in articles, pronouns, prepositions, word order, verbs, conjunctions, plural and double negation. The total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words in is shown in Table 7. which indicates that article errors as well as preposition errors were still common for the Finnish-speaking university applicants, whereas the Swedish-speaking applicants had problems with verbs.

Table 7. Grammatical errors of university applicants.

Grammatical Errors	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Articles	52	0,39	8	0,06
Pronouns	51	0,38	31	0,23
Prepositions	48	0,36	5	0,04
Verbs	6	0,04	34	0,25
Word order	6	0,04	4	0,02
Plural Formation	3	0,02	1	0,01
Conjunctions	2	0,01	3	0,02
Double Negation	2	0,01	1	0,01
Total	170	1,26	87	0,60

Overall, the Finnish-speaking university applicants made many more grammatical errors than the Swedish-speaking applicants. The Finnish-speaking applicants made 170 grammatical errors, which means that there were 1,26 grammatical errors per every hundred words, while the Swedish-speaking applicants made 87 grammatical errors,

that is some 0,60 grammatical errors per every hundred words. Grammatical errors were, thus, a more serious problem for the Finnish-speaking applicants than for the Swedish-speaking applicants.

The Finnish-speaking applicants made clearly more errors in articles, prepositions and pronouns. The difference in the errors between the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking university applicants was most significant in the use of prepositions, articles and verbs. For Example, the Finnish-speaking applicants made nine times as many preposition errors as the Swedish-speaking applicants. Whereas, the Finnish-speaking ninth graders made clearly more verb errors than the Swedish-speaking ninth graders, the Swedish-speaking university applicants made more verb errors than the Finnish-speaking applicants. The Finnish-speaking applicants made only six verb errors, while the Swedish-speaking applicants made 34 verb errors, more than six times the number made by the Finnish-speaking applicants. In what follows, the grammatical error categories are discussed in the order that they appear in Table 7. The categories of plural formation, conjunctions and double negation are not discussed separately since there were only few errors in those categories.

6.1.1 Articles

Article errors were the most frequent type of error for the Finnish-speaking university applicants. There were altogether 52 article errors in the essays written by the Finnish-speaking university applicants, that is 0,39 article errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking applicants made only eight article errors, that is 0,06 article errors per every hundred words. In the category of articles, the Finnish-speaking applicants still made noticeably more errors than the Swedish-speaking applicants. The Finnish-speaking ninth graders made eight times as many article errors as the Swedish-speaking ninth graders, and the Finnish-speaking university applicants still made more that six times the number of article errors when compared with the Swedish-speaking applicants. In what follows, the article errors are divided into three categories: an omission of an article, the use of a wrong article or a superfluous article. The total number of errors in each category is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Article errors of university applicants.

Error Categories	Finnish applicants	Swedish applicants
Article omitted	35	3
Article added	13	1
Wrong article	4	4
Total	52	8

As for the ninth graders, article errors were still one of the most common types of errors that the Finnish-speaking university applicants made, and the quantitative difference between the Finnish- and Swedish speaking learners had not decreased. The Finnish-speaking applicants still made clearly more errors in the use of articles. The most common article error for the Finnish-speaking applicants was also still the omission of an article. The Finnish-speaking applicants omitted 35 articles, whereas the Swedish-speaking applicants omitted only three. The following examples, illustrate a typical case of an omitted article.

> (28) Angel, young and homeless prostitute, was something mysterious to Liam. (Angel, *a* young and homeless prostitute, was something mysterious to Liam.) FA1
>
> (29) Father plays a big role in Liam's life. (*The* father plays a big role in Liam's life.) FA3

The Finnish-speaking applicants omitted both definite and indefinite articles. This is illustrated by the examples. In Example 28, the applicant had omitted an indefinite article, whereas in Example 29, the applicant had omitted a definite article. Since the Finnish-speaking applicants still omitted noticeably more articles than the Swedish-speaking applicants, it could be seen as an interlingual error, whose source lies in the fact that Finnish does not use articles and, therefore, Finnish-speaking learners' have no reference frame for using articles in their mother tongue.

For the Finnish-speaking applicants the second most common type of article error was the addition of articles. The Finnish-speaking applicants added 13 superfluous articles, while the Swedish-speaking applicants added only one. This suggests that the Swedish-speaking university applicants know where and how to use articles, whereas the Finnish-speaking applicants still have problems with them even after 10 years of study. The following examples illustrate typical mistakes where the Finnish-speaking applicants have added superfluous articles.

> (30) In the book mother had *a* cancer and she was dying. (In the book the mother had cancer and she was dying.) FA1
>
> (31) They got to know *a* Bill Hayes and his family. (They got to know Bill Hayes and his family.) FA17

In Example 30, the applicant had added an indefinite article before the word *cancer* where it cannot be used as *cancer* is an uncountable noun. In Example 31, the applicant had added an indefinite article before a proper name although in the singular, indefinite articles are not used before them. In both examples the applicants have overgeneralized the rule of using articles. Overgeneralization is usually seen as an intralingual error, but in this study the additions of superfluous articles could be seen as interlingual errors since they reflect the different structures between Finnish, Swedish and English. Finnish does not use articles and, therefore, the Finnish-speaking learners have difficulties in using them, whereas the Swedish speaking learners do not seem to have problems with articles since their L1 uses a similar type of article system.

Both language groups also used the wrong articles four times. For the Swedish-speaking applicants the use of wrong articles was the most common type of article error, while for the Finnish-speaking applicants this was the rarest type of article error. In the following examples the applicants have used wrong articles.

> (32) Rachel returns to her hometown Ayenem when she is an adult for *an* reunion with her brother Estha. (Rachel returns to her hometown Ayenem, when she is an adult, for *a* reunion with her brother Estha.) SA7

(33) *The* aspect of the book was to be a winner. (*A*n aspect of the book was to be a winner.) FA9

In Example 32, the applicant had used the indefinite article *an* when the indefinite article *a* should have been used, following the spelling and pronunciation of the following word. In Example 33, the applicant had used the definite article even though s/he means that this was only one of the aspects in the book and therefore s/he should have used the indefinite article *an*.

Overall, the use of articles still seemed to be a problem for the Finnish-speaking university applicants since they made clearly more article errors than the Swedish-speaking applicants. Even though article errors can be seen as intralingual errors, in this study they appear to be interlingual because the difference in the errors between the language groups is so noticeable. The findings of the present study do not support those of the one by Ringbom and Palmberg (1976: 75) who found in their study that the difference in article errors made by the university applicants was no longer that significant. The present study, however, found that the difference between the language groups was still noticeable and had not decreased when compared with the ninth graders.

6.1.2 Pronouns

Pronoun errors were not very common in the essays written by the Finnish-and Swedish-speaking ninth graders and, therefore, it was surprising that pronoun errors were that common in the essays of the university applicants in both language groups. There were 51 pronoun errors in the essays written by the Finnish speaking university applicants, that is, 0,38 pronoun errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking applicants made 31 errors in the pronoun category and 0,23 pronoun errors per every hundred words. The pronoun errors were divided into four different categories: errors in the possessive case, omission of pronouns, the use of wrong pronouns and the use of unnecessary pronouns. The number of errors made by the university applicants in each category is shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Pronoun errors of university applicants.

Error Categories	**Finnish Applicants**	**Swedish Applicants**
Possessive case	40	21
Pronoun omitted	4	-
Wrong pronoun	4	10
Pronoun added	3	-
Total	51	31

For both language groups the second most common type of grammatical error was pronoun errors. Both language groups made unexpectedly many errors in the possessive case. The ninth graders in both language groups made only few errors in the possessive case, and it did not seem to be a problem for them. Therefore, the large number of errors with possessive pronouns made by the university applicants was, therefore, unpredictable. The Finnish-speaking university applicants made 40 errors while the Swedish-speaking applicants made 21 errors in this category. The following examples illustrate typical errors in the use of the possessive pronouns made by the university applicants.

> (34) The novel is about love and *it* laws. (The novel is about love and *its* laws.) FA13

> (35) I got a pretty good idea about India as a country and *it's* culture. (I got a pretty good idea about India as a country and *its* culture.) FA20

Both language groups made also several errors in forming the possessive case. In many cases they had added the *s*-ending to indicate possessive case but had omitted the apostrophe which is used with the ending *–s* to indicate the genitive. In Swedish the genitive is indicated by adding the ending –s but without the apostrophe. For the Swedish-speaking applicants this might, therefore, be negative transfer from the mother tongue. The Finnish-speaking applicants might also confuse the Swedish rule with the English rule. In Example 34, the applicant had omitted the *s*-ending and has not

indicated the genitive at all. In Example 35, the applicant had overgeneralized the rule of forming the possessive pronoun by adding the ending *–s* and the apostrophe. *Its* is an exception to the rule, and it seems to be difficult for the applicants to learn its use, since the Finnish-speaking applicants made eight and the Swedish-speaking applicants two similar type of errors.

The Finnish-speaking applicants also omitted four and added three pronouns, while the Swedish-speaking applicants did not add or omit any pronouns. The Swedish-speaking applicants used the wrong pronoun ten times. They had, for example, used the plural *they/their* when they should have used the singular *she/he* or *his/her*. The Finnish-speaking applicants used the wrong pronoun four times out of which three were relative pronouns. They used the relative pronoun *that* when *which* should have been used.

6.1.3 Prepositions

Preposition errors were common for both language groups in the essays of the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking ninth graders, but the Finnish-speaking ninth graders made clearly more preposition errors than the Swedish-speaking ninth graders and this was also the case with the university applicants. The Finnish-speaking university applicants still made more errors in prepositions than the Swedish-speaking applicants, and in fact the difference between the language groups in the grammatical errors was most significant in the use of prepositions. There were altogether 48 preposition errors in the essays written by the Finnish speaking university applicants. This means that there were 0,36 preposition errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking applicants made only five errors in the preposition category, that is, 0,04 preposition errors per every hundred words. The errors were divided into three categories: the use of a wrong preposition, the omission of a preposition and the use of an unnecessary preposition. The total number of errors made by the university applicants in each category is shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Preposition errors of university applicants.

Error Categories	**Finnish Applicants**	**Swedish Applicants**
Wrong Preposition	25	3
Preposition omitted	18	1
Preposition added	5	1
Total	48	5

Preposition errors were still one of the most common types of errors that the Finnish-speaking applicants made. Moreover, the differences between the errors made by the Finnish- and Swedish speaking learners had not decreased but rather increased as compared with the ninth graders. When the Finnish-speaking ninth graders tended to omit prepositions, the most frequent type of preposition error for the university applicants was the use of wrong prepositions. They used the wrong preposition 25 times, while the Swedish-speaking applicants made altogether only five preposition errors. The following examples present cases where the Finnish-speaking applicants had used the wrong preposition.

> (36) Liam fell in love *to* a 16-year old prostitute, Angel, who was pregnant. (Liam fell in love *with* a 16-year old prostitute, Angel, who was pregnant.) FA1
>
> (37) He holds a grudge *for* his father for sending him to the United States. (He holds a grudge *against* his father for sending him to the United States.) FA15

In Example 36, the applicant had used the preposition *to* when the preposition *with* should have been used, while in Example 37, the applicant has used the preposition *for* when s/he should have used the preposition *against*. *Fell in love with someone* and *to hold a grudge against* someone are idiomatic phrases that have to be learned by heart. Foreign language learners must memorize such expressions since there is no logic in what determines the preposition in these phrases. While the Finnish-speaking ninth graders tended to omit prepositions, the Finnish-speaking university applicants are more aware of the use of prepositions but they do not always know which preposition should be used.

The Finnish-speaking applicants still omitted quite a few prepositions, altogether 18, while the Swedish-speaking applicants omitted only one preposition. The Finnish-speaking applicants also added five prepositions and the Swedish-speaking applicants only one. The following examples illustrate cases where the Finnish-speaking applicants had omitted prepositions.

> (38) I think that was close the truth. (I think that was close *to* the truth.) FA10

> (39) I'm the same age as she was in the book, not old, not young, but viable, die-able age. (I'm the same age as she was in the book, not old, not young, but *at* a viable, die-able age.) FA14

In Example 38, the applicant has omitted the preposition *to* in the phrase *close to*, meaning, near something. In Example 39, the preposition *at* has been omitted.

Overall, the use of prepositions still seems to be a problem for the Finnish-speaking university applicants since they made clearly more preposition errors than the Swedish-speaking applicants. The Swedish-speaking learners seem to master the use of prepositions, even though, the preposition used in English does not always correspond to the preposition used in Swedish in a similar expression. The difference in preposition errors between the language groups had not decreased but increased as compared with the ninth graders. In consequence, preposition errors appear to be interlingual because the difference in the errors between the language groups was still so noticeable.

6.1.4 Verbs

The only grammatical error category, in which the Swedish-speaking university applicants made more errors than the Finnish-speaking applicants, was the category of verbs. The Swedish-speaking university applicants made altogether 34 verb errors, that is, 0,25 verb errors per every hundred words. There were only six verb errors in the essays written by the Finnish speaking applicants, that is, 0,04 verb errors per every hundred words. The verb errors were divided into three categories: errors in the subject-

verb concord, the tense and other verb errors. The total number of errors in each category is shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Verb errors of university applicants.

Error Categories	Finnish Applicants	Swedish Applicants
Concord	4	20
Tense	1	7
Others	1	7
Total	6	34

The Swedish-speaking applicants made overall more verb errors than the Finnish-speaking applicants, almost six times as many. This was the only grammatical category in which the Swedish-speaking applicants made more errors. Whereas the Finnish-speaking ninth graders made more verb errors than the Swedish-speaking pupils, the Swedish-speaking university applicants made verb errors more frequently than the Finnish-speaking applicants. The most common verb error for both language groups was an error in the subject-verb concord. The Swedish-speaking applicants made 20 errors and the Finnish-speaking applicants made four errors in the subject-verb concord. The following examples illustrate such cases.

> (40) He and some couch *decides* that Liam should race against the local high school's five best runners. (He and some couch *decide* that Liam should race against the local high school's five best runners.) SA4

> (41) His diabolic first weeks in America *makes* him feel dead inside. (His diabolic first weeks in America *make* him feel dead inside.) SA15

In Example 40, *he and some couch* are the subject of the clause and therefore the verb should agree with pronoun *they* and not *he* or *some couch*. *He* and *some couch* are third person pronouns which require the *-s* ending to the verb and therefore the Swedish-speaking applicant might have added the *-s* ending to the verb. Proximity could also be

the source of this mistake. The principle of proximity indicates that the verb should agree with the noun or pronoun that closely precedes it, sometimes even in preference to agreement with the subject (Quirk & Greenbaum 1993: 177). However, the principle of proximity does not apply to the sentence in Example 40. The Swedish-speaking applicants had five similar errors and seemed to have difficulties if the clause included a third person pronoun which was not always the subject of the clause as in Example 41. In Example 41, the verb should agree with the subject *his diabolic first weeks* and not with *him*. The Finnish-speaking university applicants did not have similar problems with subject-verb concord as the Swedish-speaking applicants.

The Swedish-speaking university applicants made also more errors in the verb tenses than the Finnish-speaking applicants. The Swedish-speaking applicants made seven errors in the verb tense, whereas the Finnish-speaking applicants made only one such error. The following example presents a case where the applicant has used the wrong verb tense.

(42) All Liam wanted to do *is* run. (All Liam wanted to do *was* run.) SA24

In Example 42, the applicant had used the present tense *is* when the past tense *was* should have been used, and also the other errors in the verb tense were similar to that.

The Swedish-speaking university applicants made also seven other kind of verb errors which did not concern the verb tense or subject-verb-concord, while the Finnish-speaking applicants made only one other kind of verb error, an omission of a verb. The Swedish-speaking applicants, for example, overgeneralized the rule of forming the verb tense as in the example below.

(43) He *teached* in India for some time before he returned to his parents' house. (He *taught* in India for some time before he returned to his parents' house.) SA2

In Example 43, the applicant had used the regular marker *-ed* to an irregular verb and does not seem to recognise an irregular verb. S/he has then overgeneralized the rule of

forming the past tense, making an intralingual error. The Finnish-speaking applicants did not make similar errors.

In this study, verb errors could also be seen as interlingual errors since there was a noticeable difference in the errors between the language groups. In Swedish, verbs are not inflected according to the person and number, and therefore the Swedish-speaking learners might have difficulties with verbs. In Finnish, verbs are inflected according to the person and number and there are more endings in verbs in Finnish than in English. The inflection of verbs might be easier to the Finnish-speaking learners.

6.1.5 Word Order

Word order did not cause many problems for the Finnish-and Swedish-speaking ninth graders and it did not seem to be a problem for the university applicants either. The university applicants in both language groups made some errors in the word order. The Finnish-speaking applicants made six and the Swedish-speaking applicants four errors in the word order. The Finnish-speaking applicants, thus, had 0,04 and the Swedish-speaking applicants had 0,02 errors per every hundred words. The following examples present typical cases of word order problems.

> (44) It was clear to me all along *also* that Liam and Angel would fall in love. (It was *also* clear to me all along that Liam and Angel would fall in love.) FA17

> (45) Because of that was *Ammu* considerd to bring shame to the family. (Because of that *Ammu* was considered to bring shame to the family) SA22

In Example 44, the applicant has misplaced the word *also*, which is generally difficult for learners of English. In Example 45, the applicant has placed the auxiliary verb *was* before the object *Ammu*. The word order in Finnish, Swedish and English is quite similar. All these languages mainly use subject-verb-object structure. The word order in Finnish is, though, freer than in English and Swedish. The word order in English might, therefore, cause more problems for the Finnish-speaking learners than for the Swedish-speaking learners.

The university applicants made also few other kinds of grammatical errors which did not concern any of the previously discussed categories. The Finnish-speaking applicants made two errors in forming the plural. They, for example, used the singular form of the noun when the plural form should have been used. The Swedish-speaking applicants made one error in the plural formation. The Finnish-speaking applicants had two errors and the Swedish-speaking applicants had three errors in conjunctions. They omitted or added conjunctions such as *but* and *even though*. The Finnish-speaking pupils used double negation two times and the Swedish-speaking applicants once.

Overall, in the grammatical errors made by the university applicants the influence of the mother tongue was most visible in the use of preposition, articles and verbs which may be interlingual errors. In the other grammatical categories the difference in the errors was not that significant. As grammatical errors have been the weak point for the Finnish-speaking ninth graders and university applicants, lexical errors seem to cause more problems for the Swedish-speaking learners. In what follows, the lexical errors made by the university applicants will be discussed.

6.2 Lexical Errors

The Swedish-speaking ninth graders made almost as many lexical errors, that is 47 per cent, as grammatical errors, that is 48 per cent, and the situation was almost the same with the Swedish-speaking university applicants. The Swedish-speaking university applicants, however, made some more lexical errors, that is 52 per cent, than grammatical errors, that is 46 per cent, whereas only 31 per cent of the errors made by the Finnish-speaking university applicants were lexical errors. In the present study, lexical errors included errors in spelling and vocabulary as explained in 5.2. The total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words in is shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Lexical errors of university applicants.

Lexical Errors	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Spelling	69	0,51	89	0,68
Vocabulary	12	0,09	3	0,02
Total	81	0,60	92	0,68

For Swedish-speaking learners lexical errors were the biggest problem, whereas for the Finnish-speaking learners it was the grammar. The Swedish-speaking university applicants made more lexical errors than grammatical errors, whereas the Finnish-speaking applicants made clearly fewer lexical errors than grammatical errors. The Finnish-speaking applicants made also altogether fewer lexical errors than the Swedish-speaking applicants. The Swedish-speaking applicants made 89 spelling errors, whereas the Finnish-speaking applicants made 69 spelling errors. The Finnish-speaking applicants still made fewer lexical errors than the Swedish-speaking applicants, but the difference in the errors had decreased when compared with the ninth graders.

6.2.1 Spelling

Spelling errors were the most frequent type of errors for both the Finnish- and the Swedish-speaking university applicants. For the Finnish-speaking ninth graders spelling errors were the fourth most frequent type of error and for the university applicants it was the most frequent type of error. The Swedish-speaking applicants still made more spelling errors than the Finnish-speaking applicants, but the difference in the errors had decreased.

Most of the spelling errors made by both language groups were only minor spelling errors, for example, *fulfill* (fulfil) (FA5) and *describe* (describe) (FA16) where only one letter was missing or a wrong letter had been used. There were also two errors, where the Finnish-speaking applicants had made compounds of words that should have been

written separately. The Swedish-speaking applicants made nine such spelling errors. Since Finnish uses compounds more than Swedish, it could have been expected that they would make more such spelling errors than the Swedish-speaking applicants.

Both language groups also spelled words in accordance with the English pronunciation of the word, for example, *reliefed* (relieved) (SA8) and *lowsy* (lousy) (SA15). Both language groups spelled 23 words in accordance with the English pronunciation. The Finnish-speaking ninth graders did not spell words as they are pronounced but the university applicants used this kind of spelling.

The Swedish-speaking applicants also made nine spelling errors which showed influence from their mother tongue, for example, *novell* (novel) (SA12) and *kast-system* (caste-system) (SA2). The Finnish-speaking applicants spelled the words like *european* (FA 12) with a lower letter instead of the correct form *European,* which might show influence from the mother tongue, since in Finnish nationalities are not spelled with capital letter. The Finnish-speaking applicants also wrote words that include letters such as *c* and *b* with letters *k* and *p* as in the following words: *landskapes* (landscapes) (FA11) and *descripes* (describes) (FA16). This might also show negative influence from the mother tongue, since letter c and b do not belong to the original alphabet of Finnish, and they are usually used only with foreign or loan words.

6.2.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary errors included cases where the applicants had used a wrong word or expression. The Finnish-speaking university applicants made more vocabulary errors than the Swedish-speaking applicants. The Finnish-speaking applicants made 12 errors and the Swedish-speaking applicants three errors in this category. The following is a typical example of a vocabulary error.

> (46) The family and their feelings of love, hate, *despise*, desire, happiness and grief are the heart of this novel. (The family and their feelings of love, hate, *contempt*, desire, happiness and grief are the heart of this novel.) FA21

(47) The language in the novel is *describing* and playful. (The language in the novel is *descriptive* and playful.) FA11

In Example 46, the applicant had used the verb *despise* as a noun in a list of feelings. The Finnish-speaking applicants used the verb *despise* as a noun three times. The applicants might not have known that *despise* is a verb and cannot be used as a noun. The Finnish-speaking pupils also used a few times the word *even* as the conjunction *even though*. In Example 47, the applicant had used the verb *describing* when the adjective *descriptive* should have been used. For both language groups the use of the wrong class of word was a quite common vocabulary error.

6.3 Non-idiomatic Language

There were no clear cases of the use of non-idiomatic English in the essays of the Finnish-speaking ninth graders, while the Swedish-speaking ninth graders used non-idiomatic language a few times. The university applicants in both language groups used non-idiomatic language a few times. The Finnish-speaking university applicants used non-idiomatic language seven times and the Swedish-speaking applicants five times. The following examples show typical cases of the use of non-idiomatic language.

(48) The race was to end their journey together, and *make Sandy to lick his fingers*. (The race ended their journey together, and *left Sandy with nothing*.) FA17

(49) *The world of thoughts* in India is something far different than in Europe. (*The way people think* in India is something far different than in Europe.) FA13

In Example 48, the applicant had translated the Finnish saying *jäädä nuolemaan näppejään* directly into English meaning: *to leave someone with scratch*. The phrase *make Sandy to lick his fingers* is not idiomatic English and it has a different meaning in English than in Finnish. This can be seen as negative transfer from the mother tongue. In Example 49, the applicant has also translated the Finnish expression *ajatusmaailma* ‘world of thoughts’, that is, the way in which people think or view something directly

into English. The expression *the world of thoughts* is not idiomatic English and cannot be used to refer to the way people think.

Overall, the difference in the errors between the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking university applicants was most significant in grammatical errors and especially in the use of prepositions, articles and verbs. The Finnish-speaking applicants made clearly more errors in articles and prepositions and the Swedish-speaking applicants made more errors in verbs and spelling. The Finnish-speaking learners still have problems with grammar, whereas the Swedish-speaking learners have more difficulties with lexical errors.

In what follows, the seminar papers of the university students will be analysed. The ninth graders had studied English four to six years and the university applicants from 8 to 10 years. The difference in the errors had not evened out considerably. The writers of the seminar papers have studied at the university at least four years. The following section aims to find out, if the university studies have evened out the differences between the language groups.

7 ERRORS MADE BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

In order to find out if the influence of the mother tongue on the learners` errors decreases as the learning progresses, the errors in the seminar papers written by the university students at the University of Vaasa were analyzed and compared with the errors made by the ninth graders and university applicants.

When analysing the errors made by the ninth graders and the university applicants, it was found that most of the errors made by the Finnish-speaking ninth graders and university applicants were grammatical, while the Swedish-speaking ninth graders and university applicants made more lexical errors. For the Finnish-speaking university applicants the proportion of grammatical errors had decreased compared with the ninth graders, but they still made most errors in articles and prepositions. The Swedish-speaking applicants made clearly more verb errors than the Finnish-speaking applicants, and the proportion of lexical errors made by the Swedish-speaking applicants had not dropped significantly when compared with the Swedish-speaking ninth graders.

The six seminar papers chosen for this study were written by six English major students at the University of Vaasa. When attending the seminars, the students had studied English at least four years. Of these six seminar papers, three were written by Finnish-speaking and three by Swedish-speaking students. The seminar papers were 20-25 pages long, and the subject areas for the seminar papers were literature and translation studies. Three of the seminar papers were from literature and three from translation studies. Of the seminar papers written by the Finnish-speaking students one was from literature and two from translation studies. Of the seminar papers written by the Swedish-speaking students two were from literature and one from translation studies.

The seminar papers differ from the entrance exam in several ways. In the seminars the writers are students who have concentrated on learning English and have possibly spent some time abroad in an English-speaking country. The seminar papers are usually written by Microsoft Office programme *Word* which has a spell checker tool that usually underlines or corrects the misspelled word. The seminar papers are also

approximately ten times longer than the essays written in the entrance exam. In the entrance exam there is a time limit for writing the essays and the applicants are not allowed to use any source material. The university students, on the other hand, usually have approximately three months to write their seminar papers and they are allowed to use source material. This should improve their writing and limit the number of both grammatical and lexical errors.

The Finnish-speaking university students had approximately 4517 words per seminar paper and they had 0,42 errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking university students had approximately 4856 words per seminar paper and they had 0,45 errors per every hundred words. The number of errors has decreased compared with the ninth graders and the university applicants. The Finnish-speaking ninth graders had altogether 16,60 and the applicants 1,92 per every hundred words hundred words. The Swedish-speaking ninth graders had 8,94 and the applicants 1,34 errors per every hundred words. This means that the Finnish-speaking ninth graders and university applicants had more errors per every hundred words than the Swedish-speaking university applicants, but in the seminar papers the Swedish-speaking students had more errors than the Finnish-speaking students. In the seminar papers, the difference in the errors between the language groups is, however, not significant.

The errors made by the university students were divided into two categories of grammatical errors and lexical errors to make them comparable with errors made by the other two cohorts. Non-idiomatic language was not found in the seminar papers and the category was thus excluded. As was stated above, the seminar papers are written by *Word* which has a spell checker tool and, therefore, errors in spelling were not expected to occur in the seminar papers. The spell checker tool also helps to eliminate grammatical errors, such as, problems with the subject-verb concord. Overall, the errors in the seminar papers must be analysed with this in mind. There were, however, some errors which either shows that the spell checker tool did not catch all errors or that the students had not used it.

Figure 5 shows the percentage of grammatical and lexical errors made by the Finnish-speaking university students.

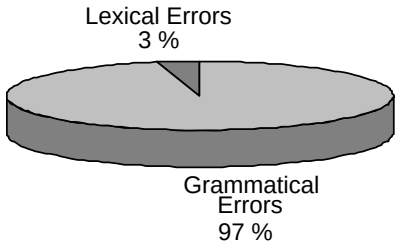

Figure 5. Errors of Finnish-speaking university students.

Almost all the errors, 97 per cent, made by the Finnish-speaking students were grammatical and only three per cent of the errors were lexical. When the result is compared with the number of lexical errors made by the Finnish-speaking university applicants, 31 per cent, there has been a dramatic drop. However, bearing in mind that the spell checker tool has helped to eliminate spelling errors, the overall number of lexical errors has remained low. For the Swedish-speaking students the number of lexical errors has also dropped dramatically. Figure 6 shows the percentages of errors in each category made by the Swedish-speaking students.

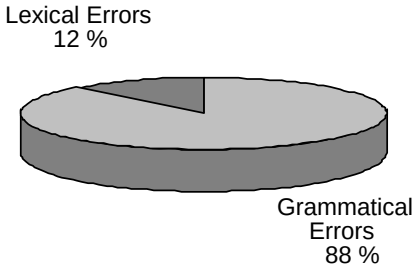

Figure 6. Errors of Swedish-speaking university students.

Most of the errors, 88 per cent, made by the Swedish-speaking students were grammatical. The proportion of lexical errors for the Swedish-speaking students was 12 per cent, and they still made more errors in spelling and vocabulary than the Finnish-speaking learners. The proportion of lexical errors made by the Swedish-speaking students has, however, decreased compared with those made by the Swedish-speaking applicants.

In the following the errors in the different categories are discussed in detail. The errors are compared with the errors made by the university applicants and the ninth graders to see if the students in different language groups still make different type of errors and if the influence from the mother tongue is still visible.

7.1 Grammatical Errors

Overall, both language groups made approximately the same number of grammatical errors in the seminar papers, while the Finnish-speaking ninth graders and university applicants made clearly more grammatical errors than the Swedish-speaking ninth graders and applicants. In the seminar papers the Finnish-speaking students made altogether 55 grammatical errors, which means that there were 0,41 errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking students made altogether 58 grammatical errors and there were 0,40 errors per every hundred words.

Grammatical errors made by the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking university students included errors in verbs, prepositions, articles, word order, pronouns, conjunctions and plural formation. Table 13 shows the total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words in each grammatical category, and the differences between different types of errors made by the language groups.

Table 13. Grammatical errors of university students.

Grammatical Errors	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Articles	29	0,21	13	0,09
Prepositions	20	0,15	13	0,09
Verbs	5	0,04	16	0,11
Pronouns	-	-	7	0,05
Conjunctions	-	-	5	0,03
Word Order	1	0,01	3	0,02
Plural	-	-	1	0,01
Total	55	0,41	58	0,40

The difference in the grammatical errors between the language groups has evened out, although the Finnish-speaking students still made more errors in articles and preposition, and the Swedish-speaking students more errors in verbs. The Finnish-speaking students made approximately twice as many articles errors as the Swedish-speaking students, and the Swedish-speaking students made approximately three times as many verb errors as the Finnish-speaking students. However, the difference in the errors between the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners is no longer significant.

In the following, the grammatical error categories are discussed in the order that they appear in Table 13. This is, to some extent, also their order of significance. The order of the categories was determined by the number of errors made by the Finnish-speaking students. They made most errors in the use of articles and, therefore, the articles errors are discussed first. After that the categories of prepositions, verbs and pronouns are discussed.

The categories of conjunctions, word order and plural are not discussed separately since both language groups made only few errors in those categories. The Finnish-speaking students did not make any errors in conjunctions and plural formation, and they made

only one word order error. The Swedish-speaking students made only five errors in conjunctions, three word order errors and one error in forming the plural.

7.1.1 Articles

Article errors were still the most common type of errors that the Finnish-speaking students made. They were also the most common type of errors made by the Finnish-speaking ninth graders and university applicants. There were altogether 29 article errors in the essays written by the Finnish-speaking students, which means that they made 0,21 article errors per every hundred words. The Finnish-speaking ninth graders had 3,74 and the applicants had 0,39 article errors per every hundred words. This means that the number of article errors has decreased as the learners have advanced in their studies.

The Swedish-speaking students made 13 errors in the article category, and there were 0,09 article errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking ninth graders had 0,45 and the applicants had 0,06 article errors per every hundred words. This means that the Swedish-speaking students made more article errors than the applicants. The difference in the proportion of article errors between the applicants and the students is, however, not significant. The errors made by the language groups were of two types: the omission of an article and the use of a wrong article. The total number of errors and the number per every hundred words in each article error category is shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Article errors of university students.

Error Category	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Article omitted	27	0,20	11	0,06
Wrong article	2	0,01	2	0,01
Total	29	0,21	13	0,09

The difference in the article errors between the language groups had decreased significantly, and the students in either language group no longer added superfluous articles. The most common article error for the Finnish-speaking students was still the omission of articles, and they omitted 27 articles. The Swedish-speaking students omitted 11 articles. The following shows a typical example of the omission of definite article in the seminar papers.

> (50) In concerns of names of characters there are no big diversions from the source text in any of the translations. (In concerns of *the* names of *the* characters there are no big diversions from the source text in any of the translations.) SS3

In Example 50, the Swedish-speaking student has omitted the definite article *the* twice from the expression *names of characters*. The definite article should be used if a term is defined using the *of*-genitive. In the sentence in the example the student was also referring to the certain names of certain characters. Both language groups also used wrong articles twice.

The Finnish-speaking learners still made more than twice as many article errors as the Swedish-speaking students. However, the difference in the article errors between the language groups has decreased notably compared with the university applicants. In the category of prepositions, which is discussed in the following, the difference between the language groups was even less significant.

7.1.2 Prepositions

The Finnish-speaking students still made more preposition errors than the Swedish-speaking students, but the difference in the errors between the language groups had decreased. There were altogether 20 preposition errors in the essays written by the Finnish-speaking university students, which means that there were 0,15 preposition errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking university students made 13 errors in the preposition category, and there were 0,09 preposition errors per every hundred words. The errors were divided into three categories: the use of a wrong

preposition, the omission of a preposition and the use of a superfluous preposition. The total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words in each category is shown in Table 15.

Table 15. Preposition errors of university students.

Error Category	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Wrong preposition	13	0,10	9	0,02
Preposition omitted	5	0,04	2	0,01
Preposition added	2	0,01	2	0,01
Total	20	0,15	13	0,09

The most common preposition error for both language groups was the use of wrong prepositions, which was also the most common preposition error for the university applicants. In the seminar papers the Finnish-speaking students used wrong prepositions 13 and the Swedish-speaking students nine times. The following examples illustrate typical preposition errors.

> (51) One aspect that could be studied is the relationship *of* the films and the books. (One aspect that could be studied is the relationship *between* the films and the books.) FS3
>
> (52) In the old translation a language which is closer to the original and a style of language that was used in Sweden *of* the 19th century is used. (In the old translation, a language which is closer to the original and a style of language that was used in Sweden *in* the 19th century is used.) (SS3, p. 14)

In Example 51, the student has used the preposition *of* when the preposition *between* should have been used since s/he is referring to the relationship that exists between the film and the books. In Example 52, the student has used the preposition *of* when the preposition *in* should have used. The preposition *in* is used to refer to, for example,

centuries, decades, years and months. The students in both language groups had also omitted and added few prepositions.

The Swedish-speaking university students made more preposition errors, 0,09 per every hundred words, than the Swedish-speaking university applicants, 0,04 per every hundred words, but the difference in the errors in not significant. Between the language groups, the difference in the preposition errors had decreased notably compared with the applicants and the ninth graders. The Finnish-speaking learners made more preposition errors than the Swedish-speaking learners at all stages. This suggests that the preposition errors might be interlingual since the Finnish-speaking learners do not have a reference frame for using prepositions in their mother tongue. In the category of verbs the Swedish-speaking applicants made clearly more errors than the Finnish-speaking applicants. In the following the verb errors made by the university students are discussed.

7.1.3 Verbs

There were five verb errors in the seminar papers written by the Finnish speaking university students. This means that there were 0,04 verb errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking students made altogether 16 errors in the category of verbs and there were 0,11 verb errors per every hundred words. The Swedish-speaking students thus made more than twice as many verb errors as the Finnish-speaking students.

In the essays for the entrance exam the Swedish-speaking applicants made more than five times as many verb errors as the Finnish-speaking applicants, which means that the difference in the verb errors has decreased as the learners have advanced in their studies. The verb errors were divided into two categories: subject-verb concord and tense. The total number of errors and the number of errors per every hundred words in both categories is shown in Table 16.

Table 16. Verb errors of university students.

Error Category	**FI Total**	**FI /100 words**	**SW Total**	**SW /100 words**
Concord	5	0,04	14	0,10
Tense	-	-	2	0,01
Total	5	0,04	16	0,11

As was stated above, the Swedish-speaking university students still made more errors in verbs than the Finnish-speaking students, but the difference in the errors had decreased notably. The most common verb error for both language groups was an error in the subject-verb concord. The Swedish-speaking students made 14 and the Finnish-speaking students five errors in the subject-verb concord. In both language groups the students made more errors in the subject-verb concord than was expected since the spell checker tool usually underlines such errors. In the verb tense the Finnish-speaking students made no errors, and the Swedish-speaking students made two. The following examples illustrate typical errors made by the students in the subject-verb concord.

> (53) Sir is one of the terms of address that *are* most frequently used in both plays. (Sir is one of the terms of address that *is* most frequently used in both plays.) SS3
>
> (54) In other words the ability to interpret the foreign words in the text *make* the person feel better about his/her linguistic abilities. (In other words the ability to interpret the foreign words in the text *makes* the person feel better about his/her linguistic abilities.) FS2

In Example 53, the student has used the auxiliary verb *are* when s/he should have used the auxiliary verb *is* since the subject, *Sir*, is in singular. The plural expression *the terms of address* might have confused the student to use the plural auxiliary. The principle of proximity indicates that the verb should agree with the noun or pronoun that closely precedes it, sometimes even in preference to agreement with the subject (Quirk & Greenbaum 1993: 177). However, the principle of proximity does not apply to the sentence in Example 53. In Example 54, the student has used the verb form *make* which

does not agree with the subject which is in singular and, therefore, requires the verb form *makes*. The plural expression *the foreign words* might also have confused the student to use the plural form *make*.

The Swedish-speaking students made almost three times as many verb errors as the Finnish-speaking students. The difference in the errors between the language groups had, however, decreased compared with the applicants since the Swedish-speaking applicants made six times more verb errors than the Finnish-speaking applicants.

In the category of pronouns, which is discussed in the following, the Finnish-speaking students made no errors and the Swedish-speaking students only seven, while for the applicants in both language groups pronoun errors were the second most common type of error. In the following the categories of conjunction and word-order are also briefly discussed.

7.1.4 Pronouns

As was stated above, pronoun errors were not found in the seminar papers written by the Finnish-speaking students, although they were the second most common type of error for the Finnish-speaking university applicants. The applicants made most of their errors in forming the possessive pronoun and, since the spell checker tool usually corrects these errors, it is understandable that they have decreased.

The Swedish-speaking students made seven errors in the category of pronouns. This means that there were 0,05 pronoun errors per every hundred words. For the Swedish-speaking university applicants the pronoun errors were also the second most common type of error. The pronoun errors were divided into three different categories: the use of wrong pronouns, omission of pronouns and errors in the possessive pronoun. The Swedish-speaking students used wrong the pronoun five times, omitted one and made one error in the possessive pronoun. In the following example a student has used a wrong pronoun.

> (55) In one way or the other, theatre texts are always adjusted to *its* reception and society in which they are received. (In one way or the other, theatre texts are always adjusted to *their* reception and the society in which they are received.) SS3

In Example 55, the student has used the possessive pronoun *its* when the possessive pronoun *their* should have been used, since the pronoun refers to *the other theatre texts* which is a plural form. The student, however, used the singular to refer to *texts* only once and even uses the plural of *texts* later in the same sentence in the expression *they are received*, which means that this could only be a careless mistake. Three of the pronoun errors made by the Swedish-speaking students were similar to the error in Example 55.

The Finnish-speaking students did not make errors with conjunctions, whereas the Swedish-speaking students made five. They used the wrong conjunction twice, added two conjunctions and omitted one. The conjunction errors concerned conjunctions such as *that, and, because* and *as*. For example, a Swedish-speaking student used the phrase "the use of a vulgar language is not *that* unusual today *as* it was 100 years ago"(SS3). The student used the conjunction *that* when the conjunction *as* should have been used. In addition, the Finnish-speaking students made one error in the word order, and the Swedish-speaking students made three errors in the word order. Out of these four word order errors, three were clauses where the word *also* was misplaced.

Overall, the number of grammatical errors in both language groups had decreased significantly compared with the university applicants. The difference in the errors between the language groups had also evened out, although the Finnish-speaking students still made more errors in articles and prepositions, and the Swedish-speaking students made more verb errors. The fact that the seminar papers were written with a word processing programme, which usually has a spell checker tool, probably had an effect to the number of grammatical errors that the students made. The impact of the spell checker tool should be even more visible in the number of lexical errors which are discussed in the following.

7.2 Lexical Errors

Lexical errors include errors in spelling and vocabulary. The Finnish-speaking students did not make spelling errors and they made only two vocabulary errors, while the Finnish-speaking applicants made 69 errors in spelling and 12 vocabulary errors. The Swedish-speaking students made three spelling errors and five vocabulary errors, while the Swedish-speaking applicants made 89 spelling errors and three vocabulary errors. This means that the number of lexical errors made by both language groups has decreased significantly, even though the seminar papers are longer than the essays written in the entrance exam. This indicates that the students have probably used a spell checker tool.

The Swedish-speaking students had, for example, misspelled words such as *aswell* (as well) and *some times* (sometimes). The spell checker tool should have indicated the spelling error in the word *aswell* but it does not indicate the error in the latter example because the words *some* and *times* can also be written separately with a different meaning.

The vocabulary errors made by the university students were all different types. For example, the students used wrong word classes as in the Example 55, or they used the wrong word or added an unnecessary word.

> (56) Additions are together with omissions probably the most *noticeably* changes that happen in translation. (Additions are together with omissions probably the most *noticeable* changes that happen in translation.) FS1

In Example 56, the student had used the adverb *noticeably* as an adjective, maybe because they are formally almost similar. The spell checker tool does not catch these errors since also the adverb *noticeably* is a possible word.

Overall, the difference in both the grammatical and lexical errors between the language groups seems to have evened out after the learners have started their university studies.

Students in both language groups made approximately the same number of grammatical errors, although at the lower levels the Finnish-speaking learners made clearly more grammatical errors than the Swedish-speaking learners. At the lower levels the Swedish-speaking learners made more lexical errors than the Finnish-speaking learners, but at the university level the difference in the lexical errors between the language groups was no longer significant. However, the results in the errors might have been different if the seminar papers had been written without the spell checker tool.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to find out if there are differences in the type of errors that the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English make. The purpose was then to examine if the effect of the first language could be seen in the errors made by the different language groups, and if the influence from the mother tongue decreases when the learners advance in their studies. A previous study by Ringbom and Palmberg (1976) showed that on a lower level of studies the Finnish-speaking learners made clearly more errors than the Swedish-speaking learners, but after one year of university studies the differences between the language groups had decreased.

The material of the study consisted of essays and seminar papers written by Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English at different stages of learning. The material included 38 essays written by pupils in the ninth grade in the comprehensive school. The Finnish-speaking pupils have studied English approximately six years and the Swedish-speaking pupils four. The Finnish-speaking pupils study in Seinäjoki Lyseo and English is the first foreign language they begin to study. The Swedish-speaking pupils study in Borgaregatans skola in Vaasa and English is the second foreign language they begin to study. The material also included 52 essays written in the entrance exam for the English department at the University of Vaasa. The university applicants have usually studied English for ten years and most of the applicants come from the Western Finland. In addition, the material included six seminar papers written by the English major students at the University of Vaasa. They have studied English approximately 14 to 15 years and should, therefore, have a good command of the English grammar. The seminar papers differ from the essays in that they are written by a word processing programme which usually has a spell checker tool. This might have had an impact on the findings of this study.

The errors made by the cohorts were categorized according to the type of error into grammatical errors, lexical errors and the use non-idiomatic language. Grammatical errors included article errors, preposition errors, verb errors, pronoun errors, errors in the word order, errors in plural formation, conjunction errors and the use of double

negation. Lexical errors included spelling errors and vocabulary errors. Spelling errors included cases where the learners had used the right word but had spelled it wrong, whereas vocabulary errors included cases where the learners had used the wrong word or expression, or if they had added or omitted a word. Sentences which were grammatically correct but not idiomatic English were categorized as non-idiomatic language.

This study found that the Finnish-speaking ninth graders made almost twice as many errors as the Swedish-speaking ninth graders. Most of the errors, that is 84 per cent, made by the Finnish-speaking pupils were grammatical errors, while only 16 per cent of the errors involved lexis. The Swedish-speaking pupils made almost as many lexical errors as grammatical errors. Overall, the Finnish-speaking pupils made noticeably more grammatical errors than the Swedish-speaking pupils and the difference in the errors was most significant in errors that involved articles, prepositions and verbs.

In the grammatical errors of the ninth graders, the influence of the mother tongue was most visible in preposition and article errors, that is, the difference between language groups was most noticeable in these errors. It can, therefore, be concluded that these errors might be interlingual errors, that is, errors that are related to the learner's mother tongue. The difference in the errors was also noticeable in verb errors. The Finnish-speaking pupils made more errors in the verb tense which are usually developmental errors.

The most common grammatical errors for the Swedish-speaking ninth graders were verb errors together with preposition errors. The Swedish-speaking pupils made almost as many errors in the subject-verb concord as the Finnish-speaking pupils, even though they generally made much less grammatical errors than the Finnish-speaking pupils. In Swedish, verbs are not inflected according to the person and number, and therefore the Swedish-speaking learners might have difficulties with verbs. In Finnish, verbs are inflected according to the person and number and there are more endings in verbs in Finnish than in English. The inflection of verbs might be easier to the Finnish-speaking learners.

Spelling errors were the most frequent type of all errors that the Swedish-speaking ninth graders made. They made almost as many lexical errors as grammatical errors, whereas the Finnish-speaking pupils made clearly fewer lexical errors than grammatical errors. Spelling was the only error category in which the Finnish-speaking ninth graders made clearly less errors than the Swedish-speaking pupils. The spelling errors made by the Swedish-speaking pupils showed the influence from their mother tongue and, therefore, they might be seen as interlingual errors. The Finnish-speaking pupils, on the other hand, did not try to use Finnish words of spelling in their English since Finnish and English have so few formal similarities in their vocabularies (Ringbom 1985: 43).

Most of the errors made by the Finnish-speaking university applicants were grammatical errors, while the Swedish-speaking university applicants made more lexical errors. Overall, the Finnish-speaking university applicants made more than twice as many grammatical errors as the Swedish-speaking applicants. This was expected since Swedish and English are related languages and, in addition to lexical similarities, also have similarities in their grammars.

The Finnish-speaking applicants made clearly more errors in articles, prepositions and pronouns and the Swedish-speaking applicants more errors in verbs. Spelling errors were the most frequent type of errors of all errors for both language groups. The difference in the errors between the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking university applicants was most significant in the use of articles, prepositions and verbs and it can be concluded that they might be interlingual errors. Finnish does not have articles and prepositions and, therefore, the Finnish-speaking learners have difficulties in using them. Swedish and English, on the other hand, both use articles and prepositions, which means that the Swedish-speaking learners have a reference frame for using them in their mother tongue. The errors made by the Swedish-speaking applicants in the use of verbs resembled the errors made by children learning their first language, but, since Finnish-speaking applicants made only few verb errors they might also be seen as interlingual. In Swedish verbs are not inflected according to person and number, and most of the errors made by the Swedish-speaking applicants concerned the subject-verb concord.

Almost all the errors made by the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking university students were grammatical and the language groups made approximately the same number of grammatical errors in their seminar papers. The Finnish-speaking students still made more article and preposition errors than the Swedish-speaking students, which were the most common type of errors that the Finnish-speaking students made. They made more than twice as many article errors than the Swedish-speaking students. The Swedish-speaking university students still made more errors in verbs than the Finnish-speaking students. The difference in the errors between the language groups had, however, decreased.

The aim of this study was to find out if the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking learners of English make different type of errors and if the influence from the mother tongue decreases as the learners advance in their studies. This study found that the two language groups made, indeed, different type of errors. Article and preposition errors were the most common type of errors for the Finnish-speaking learners at all stages. Verb errors were also common to the Finnish-speaking ninth graders and the Finnish-speaking university applicants had also problems with pronouns and spelling. Verb and spelling errors were the most common type of errors for the Swedish-speaking learners at all stages. Preposition errors were also a problem for the Swedish-speaking ninth graders. As for the Finnish-speaking university applicants pronoun errors were also common for the Swedish-speaking applicants.

It could be concluded that the differences in the errors between the language groups are most significant in the areas in which the languages differ from English. Both language groups made almost the same number of errors in the areas in which the languages have similarities, for example, the learners in both language groups made almost the same number of errors in word order. The difference in the errors was notable between the language groups in the errors made by the ninth graders and the university applicants and the difference in the errors between the language groups had not decreased. In the seminar papers the difference between the language groups had decreased significantly, but the students still made different type of errors.

It has to be, however, noted that essays written by the ninth graders and the university applicants were written without a spell checker tool, whereas the seminar papers were written by a word processing programme which usually has a spell checker tool which catches most spelling errors and also some grammatical errors.

A previous study by Ringbom and Palmberg (1976) found that on a lower level of studies, the Finnish-speaking learners of English made clearly more errors than the Swedish-speaking learners, whereas later, in the entrance exam for university level English studies, the Swedish-speaking university applicants were only slightly better than the Finnish-speaking applicants. Also, after one year of university studies, the Swedish-speaking university students no longer had an advantage over the Finnish-speaking students. The findings of this study concerning the ninth graders support the findings of Ringbom and Palmberg. However, this study found that the difference in the errors between the language groups in the entrance exam for the university had not decreased. Ringbom's claim that after one year of university studies the difference between the language groups would have evened out, is supported by this study in some extent. This study found that the quantitative difference in the errors between the language groups had evened out, but the language groups still made different types of errors. The Finnish-speaking students still made more article and preposition errors, whereas the Swedish-speaking students still had problems with the verbs.

This study could be developed further by focusing more on the university students. The errors made by the students during the first years of their studies could be examined and compared with the students at the final stages of their studies. The study could also focus on the students' spoken skills and it could be compared with their written work to find out if they make different type of errors in spoken and written languages.

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