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## **Learning Swedish adjective agreement in Finnish lower secondary school**

The article studies how well Finnish students in grades 7–9 acquire the Swedish adjective agreement. In Swedish, the adjective agrees with the noun in gender and number. The difference between singular and plural forms is familiar to the students from their mother tongue; however, the grammatical genders (uter and neuter) do not have equivalents in the Finnish language. The students' mastery of adjective morphology was tested with a cloze test. The test results indicate that the base form, i.e. the singular uter, was mastered overwhelmingly best and was generally used as a default form. The plural form was mastered better than the neuter form. Whether the adjective was in attributive position or in predicative position did not seem to have a significant influence. Forms acquired as chunks were generally known somewhat better than other forms. The differences among grades 7, 8 and 9 were small, whereas individual differences were great.

**Keywords:** Swedish as L2, adjective morphology, formulaic sequences

## 1 Introduction

Although adjectives constitute a relatively small word class, they carry a great deal of communicative importance. Swedish adjectives are, grammatically speaking, quite complex: the same adjective has several forms, which need to agree with the noun that the adjective refers to. In Finnish lower secondary schools<sup>1</sup>, the students who study so-called B Swedish ('short' Swedish) are introduced to the grammar of adjectives fairly soon after beginning their studies in Swedish in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Adjective morphology is then taught explicitly through inflectional paradigms and grammatical rules. Producing adjective forms and choosing the right form in different contexts are practised in several ways.

The aim of the present article is to study how well Finnish students in grades 7, 8 and 9 of lower secondary school acquire the different forms of Swedish adjectives and are able to use them in two different grammatical contexts: in attributive and in predicative position. Our assumption is that, in addition to explicit learning, the students will also acquire grammatical forms and structures implicitly through the linguistic input received in class. The aim of this article is also to report on a methodological case study. As one of the authors is a teacher of Swedish in a Finnish school, it was possible for us to test the mastery of Swedish adjective agreement of her students. Furthermore, we were also able to analyse the impact of adjectives that the learners have been exposed to not only in the textbooks and exercises but also in the oral input provided by the teacher.

The study is based on a cloze test that we created. The linguistic form and contents of the test resemble those found in the textbooks used in class. The students had encountered the adjectives used on the test in their textbook, but they also had to use some adjectives in forms that did not appear in the book or in exercises done in class. We assume that it is easier for the students to use an adjective in the correct form in those cases where the same form has been used in the textbook or in other linguistic input than it is in cases where they have to produce the correct form themselves by using a rule or model they have learned.

Previous research has shown that some adjective forms are easier to acquire for those who learn Swedish as a second or foreign language than other forms are. It has also been assumed that choosing the correct form is easier when the adjective functions as an attribute than when it functions as a predicative (see references below). In this article, we will also examine our test results from this perspective.

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1 In Finland, lower secondary school consists of the 7th, 8th and 9th grades, and the students are aged between 13 and 16 years.

## 2 Swedish adjective morphology in attributive and in predicative position

In Swedish, adjectives must agree with the noun in gender and number, and they also have a definite form (see, for example, Glahn, Håkansson, Hammarberg, Holmen, Hvenekilde & Lund 2001: 393–394). The form to be used depends on which noun or pronoun the adjective refers to. Swedish nouns are divided into two genders, which are called *uter* (*en*-gender) and *neuter* (*ett*-gender). Of the adjective forms, the *uter* (*en*-form) has no suffix, whereas the *neuter* (*ett*-form) has the suffix *-t* or *-tt*, for example, *stor-Ø*, *stor-t* ('big'), *ny-Ø*, *ny-tt* ('new'); compare *en stor bil* ('a big car'), *ett stort hus* ('a big house').

In the plural form, most adjectives have the suffix *-a*, for example, *stor-a*, *ny-a*. The root of the word may also experience changes. For example, the word *gammal* ('old') has the plural form *gamla*. If the noun phrase is definite, the adjective functioning as its attribute is in the definite form, which is identical to the plural form, for example, *den stora bilen* ('the big car'), *det nya huset* ('the new house'). The definite form of the adjective had not yet been taught to the 7<sup>th</sup> graders when the test was administered.

Adjectives are used in two different syntactic functions: as attributes and as predicatives. An adjective used as an attribute agrees in gender and number (and definiteness) with its headword, for example, *en stor bil* (INDEF, UTER, SING), *ett nytt hus* (INDEF, NEUT, SING), *stora bilar* (INDEF, PLUR), *nya hus* (INDEF, PLUR), *den stora bilen* (DEF, SING), *det nya huset* (DEF, SING), *de stora bilarna* (DEF, PLUR), *de nya husen* (DEF, PLUR).

An adjective used as a predicative agrees with the subject, for example, *Bilen* (DEF, UTER) *är stor* (UTER) ('The car is big'), *Huset* (DEF, NEUT) *är nytt* (NEUT) ('The house is new'), *Böckerna* (DEF, PLUR) *är nya* (PLUR) ('The books are new'). An adjective used as a predicative does not have a definite form (Glahn *et al.* 2001).

Gender is something that does not exist in the students' mother tongue. Instead, adjectives in Finnish are inflected in number and in all morphological cases to agree with the headword. Adjective agreement is therefore something that the students are familiar with from their L1, but they are not familiar with the grammatical category of gender. Neither does gender exist in the English language, which the subjects in our study started studying before they began learning Swedish.

The singular *en*-form is a base form with no suffix, and is the most common form of adjective. It is also fairly easy for learners of Swedish to master. Research has also shown that those who learn Swedish as a second or foreign language usually acquire the plural form (*a*-form) before the neuter form (*ett*-form) (e.g. Glahn *et al.* 2001).

According to the Processability Theory (PT), which relates to the order in which grammatical structures are acquired, adjective agreement is learned first in cases where the adjective functions as an attribute, and only afterwards in those cases where it

functions as a predicative (see, for example, Pieneman & Håkansson 1999: 398). According to PT, procedures that take place within a phrase are learned before those that take place within a clause. As for the order between attributive and predicative agreement in Scandinavian languages, the research findings discussed in Glahn *et al.* 2001 support the predictions of PT. In Paavilainen's study of Finnish learners, however, there was no clear difference in adjective agreement between attributes and predicatives (Glahn *et al.* 2001; Paavilainen 2010: 128–129).

Our study has two hypotheses:

1. The subjects will master the use of plural form (the *a*-form) better than the use of neuter form (*t*-form).
2. The correct form of adjective will be chosen more often when the adjective functions as an attribute than when it functions as a predicative. Alternatively, the syntactic function of the adjective may have no significance.

### 3 The adjectives and their forms on the test and in the textbook

We studied the development of adjective morphology in the grades 7, 8 and 9 using a paper-based cloze test. The test consisted of three texts in dialogue form. This type of text is common in Swedish textbooks. The text included 39 + 6 gaps which the students were asked to fill in with the correct adjective in the correct form. The choice of adjective was based on Finnish translations of the texts.

A total of 40 students took part in the test: 11 from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 17 from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 12 from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Sixteen of the students were boys and 24 were girls<sup>2</sup>. The test included 18 different adjectives (see Table 1). Most adjectives appeared in the test more than once.

In 15 cases the adjective was to be entered in its base form with no suffix, that is, the *en*-form (e.g. *gammal*). Eleven of these were attributes and four were predicatives. In 14 cases the adjective was to be entered in the plural form, that is, the *a*-form (e.g. *gamla*). Seven of these were attributes and seven were predicatives. In 10 cases the adjective was to be entered in the neuter form, that is, the *t*-form (e.g. *gammalt*). Four of these were attributes and six were predicatives. In six cases the prompt was a definite noun phrase which required the adjective to be in the definite form. Because the 7<sup>th</sup>

2 The number of girls was 5 in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 11 in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 8 in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The number of boys was 11, 17 and 12, respectively, in the different grades.

grade students had not yet been taught the definite form, we will not discuss this part of the test here.

The following table shows which adjectives were included in the test, in which form they were meant to be used and which syntactic function they had (ATTR = attribute, PRED = predicative). If the same forms had appeared in the textbook, this is indicated in brackets.

TABLE 1. The adjectives included on the test, their forms and numbers. (The number of times the forms were used in the textbook is in brackets.)

Adj.	-Ø, ATTR	-Ø, PRED	-t, ATTR	-t, PRED	-a, ATTR	-a, PRED
<i>brun</i> 'brown'	1	-	1	-	-	-
<i>fin</i> 'fine'	- (1)	- (1)	-	-	1	- (1)
<i>gammal</i> 'old'	1 (2)	2 (2)	1	1	1	-
<i>glad</i> 'glad'	-	-	-	-	-	1 (1)
<i>god</i> 'good'	1 (1)	-	-	-	-	-
<i>grön</i> 'green'	1 (1)	-	-	-	1 (1)	-
<i>gul</i> 'yellow'	1 (1)	-	1	-	-	-
<i>jobbig</i> 'tough'	-	- (1)	-	-	-	1 (1)
<i>mysig</i> 'cosy'	-	1 (1)	-	-	-	-
<i>liten</i> 'little'	- (1)	1 (2)	1 (1)	-	-	-
<i>ny</i> 'new'	- (3)	-	-	1 (1)	-	-
<i>rolig</i> 'funny'	-	-	-	1 (1)	-	1
<i>röd</i> 'red'	- (1)	- (1)	- (1)	-	1	-
<i>snäll</i> 'kind'	- (1)	-	-	-	-	1
<i>stor</i> 'big'	3 (4)	- (3)	0	2	-	-
<i>trevlig</i> 'nice'	2 (1)	- (2)	-	1	1	1
<i>vacker</i> 'beautiful'	-	-	- (1)	-	1	1
<i>vit</i> 'white'	1	-	-	-	1	1
TOTAL	11 (17)	4 (13)	4 (3)	6 (2)	7 (1)	7 (3)

The 18 adjectives used in the test appeared a total of 39 times in the textbook used by the students in the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The singular base form with no suffix had the highest frequency by far, as it was used a total of 30 times in the textbook. The neuter forms of the adjectives were used five times and the plural forms only four times throughout lower secondary school.

## 4 Teaching adjective morphology and agreement in lower secondary school

The teaching of B Swedish begins in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade in lower secondary school. From the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students attend an average of two hours of Swedish lessons a week. According to the curriculum, adjective morphology is to be taught in lower secondary school, as it is seen as one of the central structures of the Swedish language.

The students that participated in the study used a series of textbooks called *Klick*. In the book, adjective morphology is taught at the beginning of the spring term of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The base form, *t*-form and *a*-form of the adjective are treated both as attributes and as predicatives. The rules are revised in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

In the textbook it is taught that the base form of the adjective is used with nouns of the *en*-gender, a *-t* is added to the adjective with nouns of the *ett*-gender, and the adjective ends in an *-a* when in the plural form. This is practised in all three grades by writing down a few adjectives in all three forms in a table. In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the students mainly practise adjective agreement by choosing the correct form out of alternatives provided and filling them into gaps in a text. It is not until the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade that the students themselves get to produce the correct forms of adjectives from the base form; there are, however, only a few of these exercises in *Klick*.

In the *Klick* series, vocabulary and grammar is taught through short texts. The students listen to the texts, repeat them and read them aloud. In the workbook, the expressions from the texts are practised in written and oral form. Through repetition the students can also learn the adjective forms implicitly, as unanalysed wholes (see below). Also, phrases repeatedly used by the teacher, such as *God morgon!* ('Good morning') and *Trevligt veckoslut!* ('Have a nice weekend') provide the students with the possibility to acquire an understanding of adjective agreement through linguistic input.

## 5 F-sequences in acquiring grammatical forms

Grammar is mainly learned in two different ways: implicitly or explicitly (DeKeyser 2003). Children learn the grammatical structures of their mother tongue implicitly through linguistic input and natural communication. A second language can also be learned implicitly in a natural language environment, where the learner hears the language in question and can communicate by using that language. A second language learnt in school, that is, a foreign language, is usually learnt mainly explicitly through formal teaching and conscious learning processes (see, for example, Long & Robinson 1998).

In addition to conscious learning, implicit learning can also take place in formal teaching. The requirement is that the students receive enough oral and written linguistic input in school. SLA-research has shown that **chunks** have a central role in learning grammatical structures (Ellis 2003). A chunk refers to a sequence of two or more morphemes which the learner acquires through linguistic input as a complete “package” or unanalysed whole. A chunk can be either a sequence of two or more words or, for example, an inflected form. Sequences acquired as wholes have been referred to using many different terms, such as **chunk**, **formula**, **formulaic sequence** and **prefabricated sequence** (Wray 2002: 9). In this article, we will use the abbreviation **F-sequence**, and the learning of grammatical structures that takes place through them we call **FS-learning**.

Many frequent Swedish verbs in the present tense, such as *spelar* ('play'), *tycker* ('like') and *bor* ('live'), are evidently learnt as chunks, as they figure relatively often in the textbooks, and are always rendered in the correct form in the students' written texts (Sundman 2011: 333–334). The frequency of the *t*- and *a*-forms of adjectives in the textbooks is very low, however (see Table 1 above). Because the texts are repeated and read aloud several times during class, it is possible that the wordings in the texts can be acquired as unanalysed wholes. The students can also use them as models when producing forms of other adjectives. Apart from the texts, the students also receive both oral and written linguistic input during class from the examples used by the teacher, in-class exercises and classroom oral interaction. In this article, we are trying to find out what significance the linguistic input received in class may have on the acquisition of Swedish adjective morphology in foreign language learning.

According to researchers (e.g. Ellis 2003: 68–69), F-sequences make up the first phase of acquiring a grammatical structure in implicit learning. Language learners acquire one or several unanalysed sequences in which the structure in question appears, and use it in their own utterances. Initially, they may not be aware of the internal structure of the expression, in other words, which morphemes or words the expression consists of. Unpacking a structure becomes possible when the learner encounters the same structure in several different expressions. Therefore, FS-learning requires a great deal of linguistic input where the same structures appear in many different lexical contexts. For example, the implicit learning of the *t*-forms of Swedish adjectives requires that the learner encounters linguistic input containing the *t*-forms of many different adjectives (e.g. *stort*, *gammalt*, *nytt*) and also different forms of the same adjective (e.g. *stor*, *stort*, *stora*). Once the student has become aware of the structure of adjective forms, it is possible to produce the correct form creatively (productively), in other words, to inflect any adjective using the same model (see, for example, Ellis 2002, 2003).

F-sequences play an important role in mother tongue acquisition (e.g. Wray 2002: 105–127). In fact, a large number of the expressions that we use in our speech are F-sequences that we have acquired as wholes (Erman & Warren 2000). It is evident that those who study foreign languages also benefit from forms and sequences acquired as chunks (Wray 2002: 172–173). Chunks are also the first step when acquiring new grammatical structures or forms (Myles, Hooper & Mitchell 1998: 327, 358; Schmitt & Carter 2004: 12).

As we have seen above, Swedish adjective morphology is taught explicitly in Finnish lower secondary school through the use of examples, inflection paradigms, rules and various oral and written exercises. Inflection rules are fairly simple, and choosing the correct form also follows a simple principle (see above). However, teachers have noticed that adjective morphology and adjective agreement in different syntactic contexts are not things that easily become automated. Instead, Finnish students use numerous forms with no suffix in contexts that require a *t*- or *a*-form.

## 6 Results: adjective agreement in attributive and in predicative positions

When analysing the test results, we have tried to answer the following questions:

1. Which of the two forms was easier to acquire and use correctly, the plural *a*-form or the neuter *t*-form? (The base form was assumed to be the easiest form.)
2. Is the mastery of adjective agreement better for attributes than for predicatives?
3. What is the importance of the linguistic input received from the textbook, examples and exercises? Is it easier to use the correct form in those cases that appear in the textbook, for example?
4. How do the test results of 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders vary from each other? Is there any progress in adjective agreement during their school career?

The level of mastery of adjective agreement was measured by using an accuracy percentage, this is, by calculating how large a proportion of the students used the correct form in a context where it was required (a so-called 'obligatory context'). Each context (i.e. gap) was analysed separately. The comparison is made more difficult by the fact that different adjectives were used in the test in the *a*- and *t*-forms and as attributes



and predicatives. The results show that the choice of the correct form varied somewhat from one adjective to another.

As we assumed, the mastery of the base form of the adjective with no suffix (the so called *en*-form) was the highest by far; the results were so unambiguous that we will not present them in a table (cf. Paavilainen 2010). The *en*-form can be seen as a kind of default form, which language learners use when they do not know the other forms of the word, or do not know when they should be used (Glahn *et al.* 2001: 412). In the textbook, the base forms were much more common than the *a*- and *t*-forms (see Table 1). Of all the occurrences of adjectives in the *Klick*-series, 74 adjectives were base forms, while the *t*-form appeared 22 times and the plural *a*-form only 12 times. Thus, out of all the adjectives that appeared in the textbooks, 68.5% were in their base form.

Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate the use of the plural adjective form (*a*-form) on the test for different grades. The students were supposed to produce 14 plural adjectives: 7 in attributive position and 7 in predicative position. The percentages demonstrate the portion of students from each grade who chose the correct form.

TABLE 2. Use of plural forms as attributes.

	fina	gamla	gröna	röda	trevliga	vackra	vita	total
7th grade	27%	18%	27%	27%	64%	18%	9%	27%
8th grade	29%	6%	24%	24%	29%	6%	29%	21%
9th grade	58%	42%	67%	50%	75%	17%	42%	50%

TABLE 3. Use of plural forms as predicatives.

	glada	jobbiga	roliga	snälla	trevliga	vackra	vita	total
7th grade	64%	45%	82%	36%	64%	45%	27%	52%
8th grade	29%	29%	18%	24%	35%	6%	41%	26%
9th grade	42%	42%	58%	42%	75%	17%	42%	45%

When using plural forms as attributes, the average accuracy percentage was 27% in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 21% in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 50% in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The results indicate improvement between grades 7 and 9 in choosing the form of an attributive adjective. The accuracy percentage of plurals as predicatives was 52% (7<sup>th</sup> grade), 26% (8<sup>th</sup> grade) and 45% (9<sup>th</sup> grade). This development thus resembles a typical U-shape where the use of a new structure is relatively correct in the start, and then the mastery of the structure seems to

weaken as language learning advances, until the learner finally acquires the correct use of the structure.<sup>3</sup>

In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade the result was better in the predicative than in the attributive position. In grades 8 and 9 the syntactic function of an adjective does not appear to have had great significance in the test. Three of the adjectives in the test were in the *a*-form both as attributes and predicatives, specifically *trevliga*, *vackra* and *vita*. The tables indicate that the accuracy percentages were somewhat similar in both functions. According to PT, adjective agreement is easier when the adjective functions as an attribute, in other words, it is a part of the same phrase as the noun to which it refers. In Finnish, adjectives agree with the noun in number both in attributive and in predicative position. Therefore, it is possible that for Finnish speakers the use of the adjective plural form is natural regardless of whether it functions as an attribute or a predicative. In class, both functions were dealt with simultaneously.

Tables 4 and 5 present the students' mastery of the adjective *t*-form in attributive and in predicative position.

TABLE 4. Use of neuter forms as attributes.

	brunt	gammalt	gult	litet	total
7th grade	18%	36%	18%	18%	23%
8th grade	24%	29%	12%	29%	24%
9th grade	17%	25%	8%	42%	23%

TABLE 5. Use of neuter forms as predicatives.

	gammalt	nytt	roligt	stort	stort	trevligt	total
7th grade	27%	55%	0%	9%	18%	18%	21%
8th grade	18%	18%	12%	12%	18%	29%	18%
9th grade	8%	33%	50%	33%	33%	50%	35%

The test included 10 different contexts in which the adjective in the *t*-form was required. In four cases the adjective was an attribute and in six cases a predicative. The adjective *stort* functioned as a predicative in two contexts.

The average accuracy percentage of *t*-forms functioning as attributes was 23% among 7<sup>th</sup> graders, 24% among 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 23% among 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Thus, no substantial difference between the different grades was detected. The accuracy

<sup>3</sup> We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this observation.

percentages of predicatives were, on average, 21% (7<sup>th</sup> grade), 18% (8<sup>th</sup> grade) and 35% (9<sup>th</sup> grade). The result of the 9<sup>th</sup> graders was somewhat better than the result of the two lower grades.

As a conclusion, the students' mastery of the *t*-form was somewhat weaker than their mastery of the plural *a*-form. The biggest difference was among 9<sup>th</sup> graders when the adjective functioned as an attribute. An average of 50% of the 9<sup>th</sup> graders used the *a*-form in an obligatory context, whereas only 23% used the *t*-form in an obligatory context in this case. In predicative position, students in grades 7 and 8 were able to use the *a*-form more often than the *t*-form, whereas among students in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the accuracy percentage did not differ greatly for using the *a*- and *t*-forms.

These results are similar to previous research results, which have shown that the *a*-form is easier to acquire than the *t*-form for those who learn Swedish as L2 (Glahn *et al.* 2001: 407; Paavilainen 2010: 88). The phenomenon has been explained by the fact that the *t*-form is determined by the gender of the noun, a grammatical category that has no semantic meaning. However, the difference between the singular and plural is semantically significant (Glahn *et al.* 2001: 401, 412). Thus, the lack of the adjective suffix *-t* does not cause a change in the meaning or semantic vagueness, whereas the lack of the suffix *-a* might make the expression difficult to understand (compare e.g. \**Lärarna* (PLUR) *är trevlig* (SING) 'The teachers are nice').

It can be noted that there was a slight improvement in the mastery of the adjective agreement between grades 7 and 9. However, the accuracy percentages are quite low. Whether the adjective was in attributive or in predicative position was not of great significance in these tests. Instead of using the *a*- or *t*-form of the adjective, the students most often used the base form, which has no suffix, the so called *en*-form.

As indicated earlier, the use of the correct form varies between different adjectives. Exceptionally high, or sometimes also low, accuracy percentages can often be explained by the influence of linguistic input, which will be discussed in the following section.

## 7 The significance of linguistic input

Our original aim was to study the adjectives in the textbooks and their significance to the mastery of the adjective morphology. However, the frequency of adjectives is very low in the textbooks used by the subjects (cf. Ellis 2002). As can be seen from Table 1, the adjectives included in the test appeared in the textbook series only 39 times, and in 30 of the cases the adjectives were in the base form. Most of the adjectives included in the test appeared in the textbooks only in the base form, and most of the *a*- and *t*-forms only appeared once in the texts.

However, textbooks are not the students' only source of linguistic input. In class, students acquire the language through several written and oral exercises, and the teacher uses Swedish in addition to Finnish when talking to the students. Therefore, many expressions may be acquired in the classroom from the oral and written input provided by the teacher. Since one of the authors of this article worked as the teacher of our subjects, we were able to study the input received in class and its influence on acquiring the adjective morphology and the agreement with the noun.

The test results imply that the adjective forms found in textbooks have an influence on how well students acquire a specific form and are able to use it in correct contexts. One of the phrases in the test included two adjectives (*snäll* 'kind' and *glad* 'glad'), which were to be used as predicatives in the *a*-form (*Alla är också snälla och glada* 'They are also kind and glad'). Of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students 64% used the word *glad* in the correct form (the *a*-form), whereas only 36% of them used the *a*-form of the word *snäll*. This difference is presumably due to the fact that only the word *glad* appears in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade textbook in the *a*-form. Another example is the *t*-form *nytt* (from the adjective *ny* 'new'), which appears in the textbook. Among 7<sup>th</sup> grade students this adjective had overwhelmingly the highest accuracy percentage (55%) of all adjective *t*-forms functioning as a predicative. The form *stort* (from the word *stor* 'big'), which occurs in the same phrase (*Huset är nytt och ganska stort* 'The house is new and quite big'), had an accuracy percentage of only 9%.

On the other hand, the test results indicate that the high frequency of the base form of an adjective may act as an obstacle for the usage of the *a*- and *t*-form. The base form may be acquired as an F-sequence, and it may be overused in contexts that require the *t*- or *a*-form. The adjective *gammal* ('old'), for example, is quite typical in textbooks, in which it occurs as a predicative, particularly in the expression *X är Y år gammal* ('X is Y years old'). The expression is often used in oral exercises, and the students acquire it as an F-sequence. As a consequence, many students use the form *gammal* instead of the forms *gammalt* and *gamla*, especially in predicative position. However, the students are more successful in using the *t*-form as an attribute (*ett gammalt hus* 'an old house') (compare Tables 5 and 6).

The plural *a*-form of the adjective *trevlig* ('nice') has a relatively high accuracy percentage. More than half of 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students use the *a*-form *trevliga* correctly in the phrases *Vi har väldigt trevliga lärare* ('We have very nice teachers') and *De är trevliga* ('They are nice'). Although the form does not appear in the textbooks, it is common in the examples used by the teacher. The neuter form *trevligt* is familiar to several students from phrases used by the teacher such as *Ha ett trevligt veckoslut!* ('Have a nice weekend!'). The adjective *trevlig* is common in the Swedish language, which is why the

word itself is familiar to students. It is possible that familiar words are easier to creatively use in correct form than less familiar words.

The use of the *t*- and *a*-form of an adjective in a wrong context may be due to the fact that the suffix form has a high frequency in linguistic input, which is why it is acquired as an F-sequence. Some of the students overused the *t*-form in the test, for example in the contexts *\*trevligt* (> *trevlig*) *skola* ('a nice school') and *\*trevligt* (> *trevliga*) *lärare* ('nice teachers'). Examples of the overuse of the *a*-form are *Jag har en \*jättetrevliga* (> *jättetrevlig*) *familj* ('I have a really nice family'), *Vi har alltid \*roliga* (> *roligt*) *tillsammans* ('We always have fun together') and *Huset är nytt och ganska \*stora* (> *stort*) ('The house is new and quite big').

Sometimes the students were able to produce the correct form from the example of another word. An example of this is the *a*-form *roliga* (from the word *rolig* 'funny'). In the test the *a*-form was required as a predicative in the phrase *Pojkarna är roliga* ('The boys are funny'). Although the adjective *rolig* is quite common in the Swedish language, it does not occur in the textbook in the *a*-form; instead its synonym *skojig* occurs in the *a*-form (*skojiga*) several times. Many students were able to produce the form *roliga*, possibly using the example given by its synonym.

The test results indicate that many of the students are able to creatively produce inflected forms of adjectives in correct contexts on the basis of explicit language teaching and possibly from implicit acquisition, as well. However, independently produced forms can be incorrect. For example, the plural form of the word *vacker* ('beautiful') cannot be produced using the basic rules, since in the *a*-form the root of the adjective changes (*vackr-a*). The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students produced the *a*-form by adding the suffix *-a* to the root (*\*vacker-a*). Only by the 9<sup>th</sup> grade had students acquired the correct form *vackra*. The word *gamal* ('old') was similarly inflected in the plural as *\*gammal-a* (> *gamla*).

Individual differences within all grades were great. Even in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, most of the students did not use the *t*-form at all or used it only once. However, there were students in all grades with a good mastery of both the *a*-form and the *t*-form, that is, they used them correctly in several contexts.

## 8 Summary of the results

As expected, in all grades the students' mastery of the base form that has no suffix (i.e. *en*-form) was the strongest. The base form is overwhelmingly most frequently used in textbooks and in the Swedish language in general. The incorrect *a*- and *t*-forms used on

the test instead of the correct *en*-form were rare, and presumably they were learned as unanalysed wholes, as F-sequences.

Earlier learner language studies have shown that the Swedish adjective plural form (the *a*-form) is learned better than the *t*-form used with neuter gender nouns (see references above). This was also apparent in our test results. The syntactic functions of adjectives did not seem to have an effect on the mastery of adjective agreement; the small differences between attributes and predicatives that were observed could well be coincidental.

No clear differences were detected between grades 7, 8 and 9. The result was weakest in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, where the teaching of grammar concentrated on verb conjugations and adjectives were not dealt with as much. The 9<sup>th</sup> grade students had revised the adjective morphology and agreement rules twice after the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and they had also encountered different forms of adjectives in linguistic input more often than the younger students. Thus, the older students were more likely to learn the different adjective forms and their use implicitly.

Our test results show that both explicit grammar instruction and the linguistic input influence learning the adjective morphology and the adjective agreement in Swedish as L2. Therefore, it is important to make sure that texts in textbooks and exercises include abundant examples of adjectives in different forms, and that students themselves produce sentences in which they use adjectives both as attributes and as predicatives.

In further research on the development of Swedish adjective agreement of Finnish students we are going to test many more students, not only in lower secondary schools but also in upper secondary schools. Our aim is to describe the emergence of adjective agreement in written learner language by analysing the individual development of systematic use of the three forms in two different syntactic contexts. We will also compare the emergence of the forms of different adjectives with their frequency in the textbooks (cf. Pallotti 2007; Paavilainen 2010).

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