A cross-linguistic analysis of the English verb cut and its Swedish counterparts

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ABSTRACT
This paper is a cross-linguistic analysis of the English verb *cut* and its Swedish counterparts. The essay examines whether there are any differences or similarities between the usage of *cut* and its equivalences. It also examines whether the instruments used to perform the cutting in the different contexts affect the choice of equivalent or not. Due to the limited size of the essay, the analysis does not cover all contexts *cut* can occur in. However, it examines the verb, as a single verb, and its counterparts both in some literal and metaphorical senses. The examined contexts are chosen from about forty examples in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. The analysis shows that there are many counterparts to *cut* in Swedish which are easier to determine if they occur in a concrete context performed with a specific tool, than in a metaphorical context. The essay also discusses the cross-linguistic analysis of *cut* and its equivalences in relation to second language learning.
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1 INTRODUCTION

The meaning of a word might be considered ridiculously easy to understand when it comes to a person’s native language. Growing up, people every now and then, come across words or expressions that they do not fully comprehend. However, a short explanation will sometimes be enough to quickly erase a person’s possible doubts. The meaning of words when it comes to the study of a second language is naturally not as easy to understand as when the words are expressed in a native language. The fact that some words can have several different meanings does not make the process of learning the definitions of words any easier.

Even though English and Swedish are historically related the two languages differ a great deal from one another. Scandinavian words have influenced the English language, mainly in the period of the late 9th century to the early 11th century, and English, being a world language, constantly influences Swedish. Still, there are many words in both the Swedish and the English lexicon that have not derived from other words, but are completely new due to the fact that recent inventions and concepts need new names.

Words that are shown to be related, by studying the etymology of the words, can also, over a period of time, start diverging from each other, so that the relatedness is no longer obvious. So just because two words are related it does not mean that the meaning of the words are definite. Related words can also behave differently from one another when used in different situations and in different tenses. They may, for instance, have different inflections. However, it is of course also important to point out that two words also can behave identically.

This essay will concentrate on the English verb cut and explain the similarities and the differences between one of the billions of words existing in English, and its Swedish counterparts.

1.1 AIM

The aim of this paper is to do a cross-linguistic analysis of the English verb cut to examine possible differences and similarities between the use and the meaning of the verb cut and its Swedish counterparts. The aim is also to examine whether a special tool, used to perform the cutting, affects the choice of Swedish counterpart, and if the equivalent varies depending on whether cut occurs in concrete or metaphorical contexts.
1.2 METHOD AND MATERIAL
By mainly using English and Swedish dictionaries, a comparison and an analysis of the usage and the meaning of the verb *cut* in different contexts have been made. The study is based on examples of contexts in which *cut* can occur, taken from the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, and on some examples from the *British National Corpus*. Swedish dictionaries have been used to present the correct definitions of the counterparts of the verb *cut*.

As material for the analysis, the following dictionaries with given abbreviations have been used:

*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE)*
*Norsteds Comprehensive English-Swedish Dictionary (NCESD)*
*Norsteds Comprehensive Swedish-English Dictionary (NCSED)*

The following corpus and encyclopaedia have also been used as primary sources:

*British National Corpus (BNC)*
*Nationalencykopedien (NE)*

Regarding the *BNC*, only the A-files have been used.

1.3 LIMITATIONS
Due to the limited size of the essay, *cut* as an English phrasal verb will not be examined. Nor will the analysis cover all possible contexts that *cut* can occur in. The focus will be on *cut* as a single verb, that is, as a verb without a particle, in six different categories that contain situations where the verb occurs. The contexts are chosen from a number of examples in the *LDCE*. The focus lies on more common, everyday situations rather than contexts only associated with certain hobbies, medical treatment etc.
2 BACKGROUND

2.1 PREVIOUS STUDIES

Learning a language is to learn that certain strings of sounds mean different things, and learn how to combine these smaller units into larger units to be able to express thoughts, feelings and ideas. Whether a person communicates by producing vocal sounds or by a sign language, every individual is capable of producing sentences and interpret sounds or signs produced by others. No matter how young or how old people are they have knowledge of some kind of language. It might seem easy, but the simplest conversation requires profound knowledge that most people are unaware of (Fromkin & Rodman 1998:4). Hearing individuals have an unconscious knowledge of what sounds can occur in a language, and what sounds cannot. They also know in what positions these sounds can occur and in what combinations. There are restrictions in all languages, and in English, for example, consonant clusters such as stl- and stk- are not in conformity with the sound system of the language.

The knowledge of a language also includes the knowledge of the meaning of words even though there is an arbitrary relationship between the form and the meaning. This means that there is no logical tie between the sound of a word and its concept. If people hear a language they do not know they would not understand what the speaker was saying due to the fact of the arbitrary relationship (Fromkin & Rodman 1998:5).

Linguists make a distinction between a person’s linguistic competence, which is what a person knows, and a person’s linguistic performance, that is, how the knowledge is used (Fromkin & Rodman 1998:12). A person with the knowledge of a language possess the ability of producing and understanding an infinite set of sentences of any length never spoken or heard before.

As first language speakers, people, in other words, know the meanings of thousands of words. They know how and when to use them without having to think about in which contexts they may occur (Fromkin & Rodman 1998:158). When learning a second language, there are many established strategies, methods and theories. One of them is a method based on contrastive grammar analysis, which involves the teaching of grammar and the translation of texts from a native language into a target language. This strategy is used to increase the students’
knowledge about the structure of the two languages (Tornberg 2000:29), and has been used within the teaching of second languages since the 18th century.

In the late 1980s, Susan Gass presented a theory on a learning process (Lightbown & Spada 2006:45). The theory is based on the understanding that learning takes place when people see or hear features that differ from their expectations and thereby contribute to new knowledge of the language. Richard Schmidt (Lightbown & Spada 2006:44) suggests that noticing the features of a language is an essential starting point when it comes to learning a language. Without noticing a feature it cannot be acquired, but Schmidt also points out that there is more to learning a second language that just to notice a feature to make it a part of a person’s linguistic knowledge.

Based on the facts of earlier studies presented, there seems to be a connection between contrastive grammar analysis and the understanding of how the languages studied are used. A cross-linguistic analysis is in some ways similar to a contrastive grammar analysis since they both make comparisons between words of two or more languages. Due to the comparison, the similarities and differences between the languages become more evident. This seems to be a step in the right direction for the best results regarding the learning of a second language. It is a fact that also Viberg (2002:129) supports, as he writes that cross-linguistic studies of the lexicon are relevant to the field of second language lexicon.

2.2 PROPERTIES OF THE VERB *CUT*

A cross-linguistic analysis requires a linguistic knowledge of the properties of the word that is being examined, in this case the verb *cut*. The properties of a verb are the characteristics important to be familiar with to understand why a word acts in a certain way, such as its inflection, what other constituents are needed in a phrase to make it grammatically correct etc. It is also important to know the characteristics of a verb in order to make a correct analysis, since linguistic knowledge facilitates for the person making an analysis, and especially when it comes to accounting for the differences between the languages studied. The characteristics of the verb *cut* will be further examined in this section.

When it comes to verbs they function as members of a word class and as an element in a clause. As a clause constituent, verbs can be divided into three major categories depending on
their function in a verb phrase; full verbs, primary verbs and modal auxiliaries. Cut belongs to the group of full verbs which function as main verbs in a sentence, and it is also an irregular verb which means that cut does not take the –ed inflection in the simple past or in the past participle. Cut is one of the few irregular verbs that only has three forms whereas others have five forms (Greenbaum & Quirk 1990:24-25). To clarify these facts, examples on the forms of a regular verb (play), an irregular verb with five forms (write) and the irregular verb cut can be studied in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Verb forms of regular and irregular verbs

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Base form</th>
<th>-s form</th>
<th>-ing participle</th>
<th>Simple past</th>
<th>Past participle</th>
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<tr>
<td>play</td>
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<td>write</td>
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<td>cut</td>
<td>cuts</td>
<td>cutting</td>
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Expressed in the base form, in the –s form and in the –ing participle the three different verbs follow the same pattern. However, when it comes to the simple past and the past participle only the regular verb play and the irregular verb cut have an identical inflection within both forms. The irregular verb write has two different inflections within the categories used in the past tense, and, therefore, it has five verb forms in total. The most evident difference between the three examples above is, as has already been stated, that cut only has three verb forms due to the fact that its form is identical within the base form, the simple past and the past participle (Greenbaum & Quirk 1990:25).

Swedish verbs differ from English verbs in some ways. To mention some differences, Swedish verbs do not have different inflections depending on the number of the person performing the action. Neither are there any Swedish verbs that share the same characteristics as the verb cut when it comes to the example regarding the three verb forms.

As a main verb, a verb can be either transitive or intransitive. An intransitive verb does not require an obligatory object to complete its meaning, such as sleep. The following sentence is therefore considered grammatical, since the subject (S) is followed by a verb (V) that does not need an object (O):
A transitive verb must be followed by an object to complete its meaning. *Cut* is a transitive verb which is demonstrated by the following examples:

(2a) * Lilly cut. [SV]
(2b) * Lilly klippte. [SV]

(3a) Lilly cut her hair. [SVO]
(3b) Lilly klippte håret. [SVO]

The first sentence (2a) does not contain an object and is therefore considered ungrammatical whereas the second one (3a) is not, based on the information that Lilly cut ‘her hair’. Swedish verbs are, as shown in examples (1b-3b) above, also either transitive or intransitive.

*Cut* is also polysemous, with the meanings ‘to chop’, ‘to slice’, ‘to mow’ and ‘to saw’ among others, which means that it is a word that has multiple meanings that are conceptually or historically related (Fromkin & Rodman 1998:164). Homonyms are words that are pronounced identically, and like polysemous words they also deal with multiple meanings. Homonyms, however, are not related, such as *bat* ‘the animal’ and *bat* ‘the instrument used for hitting in baseball’ (Fromkin & Rodman 1998:163). When looking up words in dictionaries, a distinction between polysemous words and homonyms can be made, based on the fact that polysemous words are listed under the same lexical entry, whereas homonyms are given two separate entries (Saeed 2003:64).

### 2.3 THE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGLISH AND SWEDISH

English and Swedish are historically related languages. They both belong to the same branch of the Indo-European languages, a very large language family, which covers most of the languages spoken in Europe and India. Indo-European was at a given point in time spoken from Scandinavia in the north to the Mediterranean in the south, from Ireland in the west to India in the east. Proto-Germanic, the parent language of English and Swedish, was a dialect of Indo-European and by 300 BC there was an expansion of the Proto-Germanic speaking people in all directions, which led to different dialects becoming more marked. It resulted in three Germanic dialects, namely North Germanic (West Scandinavian and East
Scandinavian), which Swedish belongs to, East Germanic (Gothic, Vandal and Burgundian) and West Germanic, which is the branch that English belongs to. By the beginning of the Common Era, however, speakers of Proto-Germanic still formed a relatively homogenous cultural and linguistic group (Barber [1993] 2000:81).

In *The English Language: A Historical introduction*, Charles Barber ([1993] 2000) mentions two different Old English (700-1100) verbs that are related to or associated with the meaning ‘to cut’. One of them is the verb *heawan*, where the vowel *e* is pronounced with a long sound. *Heawan* is, according to Barber, related to the Swedish verb *hugga* (Barber [1993] 2000:86). When it comes to the meaning of the verb *cut* in some contexts, it has the same meaning as ‘to hew’ which directly translated into Swedish means *hugga*. The other Old English verb with the meaning ‘to cut’ is *sceran* (Barber [1993] 2000:121). *Sceran* is, according to the *OED*, related to the Old Norse *skera*, and modern Swedish *skära*.

Although Swedish and English are related, many centuries have passed since the first raid of the Viking’s (787), which means that it has been many years since the Scandinavian influence on the English language was at its peak. There are still many English words, belonging to the word classes of nouns, adjectives and verbs, with a Scandinavian origin existing in the English lexicon. To mention some examples, there are the nouns *cake* and *sky*, the adjectives *loose* and *odd*, and the verbs *take* and *raise* (Barber [1993] 2000:133).

### 2.4 ETYMOLOGY OF *CUT*

*C*ut is found at the end of the 13th century but was not commonly used until the 14th century. In Old English, before *cut* was introduced, people used the words *snīdan* or *ceorfan* for the same action. The early forms *cutte*, *kitte*, *kette* are parallel to the early variants of *shut*, *scyttan* in Old English, and point to *cyttan* or *kytten* as the original form (*OED*). *Scyttan*, has later on been the object of changes both in its spelling and phonology. The letter *y* has changed into a *u* and the *y*-sound has turned into the *ʌ*-sound, pronounced as *u* in *cut*. The word *cut* is, as already mentioned, not recorded in Old English, nor in any of the West Germanic dialects as a matter of fact. There is also a lack of a verb corresponding to *cut* in Romance languages. In Modern Norwegian, however, a variant related with *kutte*, ‘to cut’, is primarily used by sailors, namely the verb *skjære* (*OED*).
2.5 PREVIOUS LINGUISTIC RESEARCH

Previous cross-linguistic studies of verbs have been made, however, none of the verb *cut*. Forsberg (2006) presents an analysis of the behaviour of the English word *break* and its Swedish counterparts. The analysis is carried out mainly by a comparison of the behaviour of the word and its equivalents, based on definitions and translations in dictionaries and by using a corpus. *Break* is examined in different contexts within the categories ‘Concrete meanings of the word *break* caused by physical impact’, ‘Concrete meanings of the word *break* not caused by physical impact’ and ‘Metaphorical meanings of the word *break*’. The result of the analysis is that *break* has several counterparts in Swedish. The choice of counterpart depends on whether *break* is used in concrete contexts or metaphorically, intentionally or unintentionally, or whether an object is broken due to the work of physical impact or not (Forsberg 2006:18).

By using corpus data, Nordlund (to appear) analyses the usage patterns of the Swedish verb *ta*, ‘take’. Through a contrastive study of the usage patterns of Swedish *ta* and English *take*, Nordlund finds that *ta* is a verb of a wide and differentiated range. Nordlund’s study is based on material from the Swedish corpus *PAROLE*, and by using several dictionaries she has established the translations into English. *Ta* is analysed within 12 semantic groups which show that *take* is not the only counterpart to *ta*. The two verbs, *ta* and *take*, had originally only a concrete meaning which has nowadays been extended to also being used metaphorically. The result of the study shows, among other things, that in metaphorical use, non-humans or abstract agents are often involved, and the object is most commonly something that cannot be touched or removed. Nordlund also concludes that the rate of agreement, when it comes to the different meanings of *ta* in English, differs greatly from one semantic group to another.

Newman (1996) examines the properties of ‘give’ verbs across languages in his *Give: A Cognitive Linguistic Study*. The study is a different kind of linguistic research than the ones mentioned above, since it covers more than two languages on a more detailed level, under the term cognitive linguistics. This means, in other words, that the verbs’ syntax and semantics are examined, such as how the entities a giver, an object and a recipient, which are always involved, affect the internal complexity of the verb (Newman 1996:34). Newman covers the meaning of give within different domains, and he also studies the verb in constructions with both literal and figurative meaning.
3 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 PRESENTATION
The use of the verb *cut* is divided into six different categories depending on the result of the action. The boundaries between the categories are not clear cut since some contexts might be considered to figure in more than one category. Furthermore, the analysis, as mentioned, examines if the means used to perform the action is of any significance for what counterpart is used in Swedish.

3.1.1 To shape something
The word *cut* can be used with the meaning of shaping something artistically. In this context, professions such as directors, designers, authors, hairdressers and craftspeople working with, for example, wood or stone are involved. In other words, films, texts, hair and wood can be cut, among other things. When people of such professions perform their artistic work, different instruments are being used, but in English the use of different tools does not affect the choice of verb as it does in Swedish. In English, cutting can be performed both with a knife and with a pair of scissors, which is not the case in Swedish, where the different actions are connected with two separate verbs.

When it comes to shaping something, the Swedish counterparts of the word *cut* in the examples above are *klippa*, *redigera*, *tälja* and *skära*. The Swedish verb *klippa* is, according to the *NE*, used with the meaning of dividing something with a pair of scissors by pressing both blades of the scissors against an object. This explanation is valid when it comes to the cutting of hair and the cutting of paper where the Swedish word *klippa* is used. However, a hairdresser can use both a pair of scissors and a razor blade for cutting hair. In the context of using a razor blade, the Swedish counterpart for the verb *cut* is not *klippa* but *skära*. *Skära* is a verb that is used when an object is separated or divided into parts by the means of a knife or a similar sharp tool (*NE*). In examples (4a) and (5a) below, taken from the *BNC*, the barber could have used either a razor blade or a pair of scissors, but people would probably assume the barber used the latter. In Swedish, the verb would have given us the information about what instrument or instruments were being used.
(4a) He was our college barber; and at a time when most of us were penniless he cut hair for a shilling.

(4b) Han var vår collegefrisör; och en gång då de flesta av oss var utan pengar klippte han hår för endast en shilling.

(5a) Get your hair cut!
(5b) Ta och klipp dig!

Note that the mentioned examples, in fact all the examples in this paper taken from the LDCE and the BNC, show that the Swedish equivalents do not share the same characteristics as the verb cut when it comes to its irregular inflection, with only three verb forms.

Working with woodcraft involves the process of cutting in the material wood, bit by bit, until the result is accomplished. This process could be expressed as the following example from the LDCE:

(6a) The chair had been cut from the trunk of a tree.
(6b) Stolen hade skurits ut från en trädstam

Since the example is expressed in the past tense the correct Swedish translation is skurits ut. If the example would be expressed in the present tense, the Swedish counterpart would be skära ut. Whether the Swedish counterpart, in this case, is expressed in the past or in the present tense it must be followed by the particle ut ‘out’ contrary to the example containing cut, which is not followed by a particle. The Swedish word tälja, can also be used when working with woodcraft, cutting out objects with more details. Tälja can be translated into ‘to carve’ as well as ‘to cut’. According to the LDCE, carve means ‘to make an object or pattern by cutting’.

Working with a text on a computer often involves making changes. By using a word processing program, it is possible to move paragraphs or smaller parts of a text without having to delete and rewrite. In these situations a function called ‘cut and paste’ is used, where the corresponding word for the command in Swedish again is klippa but expressed in the imperative combined with a particle, klipp ut. Due to the previously mentioned translation of the particle ut ‘out’ in English, the conclusion can easily be drawn that here it helps to convey the meaning of removing an object.
When working with film the meaning of the verb *cut* is synonymous with the meaning ‘to edit’. In this sense *cut* means, according to the *LDCE*, either ‘to remove parts from a film [...] because it is too long or might offend people’ or ‘to put the parts of a film together so that they could make a continuous story, and get rid of the parts you do not want’. Also in this context *klippa* is one of the correct words to use in Swedish, but the word *redigera* could be used as well, although looking at the entry of *redigera* in the *NCSED* it seems to be a verb that is closer to the verb *edit*, since *edit* is the only translation out of the two discussed which is described in the dictionary.

A conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is that even though cutting in the senses of editing a film and writing on a computer is performed through a technical device, which has nothing to do with a pair of scissors, the Swedish counterpart still is *klippa* due to the fact that the action performed is similar to the action of cutting hair and paper. Another historical fact important to mention is that before digital film and the means of cutting film via computers were introduced, film was actually literally cut with a pair of scissors. To cut something out of something, as in woodcraft, is not a similar action and that is the reason why another verb is used in Swedish in this context.

### 3.1.2 To reduce the length of something

The verb *cut* is not only used in the context of shaping something artistically in association with certain professions, but it is also a verb that is used regularly in all people’s everyday life. For instance, it is used in situations for people grooming themselves and trimming their garden.

As mentioned, the Swedish word *klippa* is used when an action is performed with a pair of scissors. Based on this fact, the Swedish equivalent for cutting nails and cutting a hedge is the verb *klippa*, since both actions involve the instruments scissors; nail scissors and hedge shears. In this sense *cut* is synonymous with the meaning ‘to pare’ (*NCESD*), which, according to the *LDCE*, means ‘to cut off the outer layer of something, using a sharp knife’. However, ‘pare a hedge’ is not translated into *klippa* in the *NCESD* but to *beskära*, indicating that unwanted parts of a hedge is being cut off (*NE*). In the *BNC*, an example of a sentence containing hedge cutting is given:
(7a) He also weeds the existing beds, prunes the roses and, as well as all the other seasonal jobs, cuts the lawns and hedges.
(7b) Han renser också ogräs i de befintliga rabatterna, beskär rosorna och, liksom alla de andra säsongssrelaterade arbetsuppgifterna, klipper han också gräs och häckar.

The action of cutting grass involves a lawn mower. People who are only familiar with the lawn mower equipped with one sharp blade rotating in only one direction, may get confused by the Swedish counterpart klippa, since the machine mentioned do not perform the cutting with a pair of scissors. The way that grass actually is cut off by the blade of this machine is similar to the example with the razor blade in 3.1.1, with the explanation that the grass is cut off by the means of a knife. However, the first lawn mowers were designed to cut grass by a sharp blade rotating towards another fixed blade. By using this type of machine, two sharp blades are pressed together in a rapid movement which can be compared to the movement of the blades of a pair of scissors. This is probably the explanation why the counterpart in Swedish is klippa and not skära. Example (7a) above, shows the verb cut in the context of cutting grass. In this context cut is, according to the NCSED, synonymous, with the meaning ‘to mow’, defined by the LDCE as the action of cutting grass using a machine.

People who smoke cigars always have to cut the tip of a cigar in order to be able to smoke it, that is, they cut the cigar. To cut a cigar is in Swedish translated into snoppa. Snoppa is a verb that is used very seldom as opposed to the verbs skära and klippa, but then those actions are more regularly performed than the former. According to the NE, snoppa is used when an unnecessary protrusive part of something is removed. In the NCSED, the verb cut here is synonymous with the meaning ‘to snip’, which, according to the LDCE, means ‘to cut something by making quick cuts with scissors’. However, the Swedish use of the verb snoppa does not necessarily have to involve a pair of scissors. The tip of a sausage can for example be cut (snoppad) for a dog, the wick of a candle can be snuffed (snoppas) and a person can top and tail (snoppa) a berry (NE). When it comes to cutting a cigar, the tool that is used can be of different designs. While the design of some is similar to a pair of scissors, others function more like a guillotine with blades cutting from two directions.

Also in this category, there is clear evidence that the choice of a Swedish equivalent depends on what tool is being used to perform the specific action.
3.1.3 To divide or to split something into two or more parts

This category contains some exemplifications of the verb cut in the context of actions that for about hundred years ago were of a direct decisive importance for people’s survival. Examples of objects that can occur in the same expressions as cut in this sense, and can be literally cut, are wood, hay and timber.

‘To cut’ in the context of cutting wood is synonymous with the meaning ‘to chop’, which, according to the NCSED, means to cut something into smaller pieces. That is also the exact definition written in the LDCE, from where the following example is taken:

(8a) He went outside to chop some more wood for the fire.
(8b) Han gick ut för att hugga lite mer ved till brasan.

Since ‘to chop’ is synonymous with the meaning ‘to cut’, the verb chop in the example above can be replaced by cut. The instrument used for cutting or chopping wood is an axe, which means that the Swedish counterpart to cut in this context is hugga. The NE gives hugga the definition ‘hitting with a sharp weapon or tool to divide a thing into pieces, to make a gash or more generally to process or damage something’. In other words, it means that an object being exposed to this action is not necessarily divided into two or more pieces.

Before cutting or chopping wood a tree has to be cut down. In this situation the equivalent to cut is fälla. The NE defines fälla as the action people perform when they, by using physical strength in reference to creatures or (some) objects, cause something to take a horizontal position. In Swedish, it is also acceptable to say hugga ner, directly translated into ‘cut down’. According to the entry for fälla in the NCSED, it is acceptable for people to say ‘cut down’ or ‘chop down’ a tree. At the entry for hugga, the NE also gives the information about the earliest found sources of the Swedish word, which is in Old Swedish (800-1500), during the time of the writing of runes. Here, the relatedness to the Old English word heawan, according to Barber polysemous, with the meaning ‘to hew’ ([1993]2000:86), is obvious although hew is not used with the meaning of cutting wood in any of the dictionaries used in this study. In the NCSED, at the entry for hugga, the verbs cut, hew and strike are possible alternatives when the action is performed with a weapon or a tool. Hew however, only occurs with the objects timber and stone. According to the LDCE, hew means ‘to cut something with a cutting tool’. Since the instrument used for cutting wood is an axe, which definitely can be classified
as a cutting tool, it is very strange that an example of wood is not given at the entry of *hugga* in the combination with *hew* in the *NCSED*. However, the *BNC* has an example of *hew* combined with wood:

(9a) No one thought the speaker should have added that they would not *hew* wood for Lord Salisbury.

(9b) Ingen tyckte att talaren skulle ha tillagt att de inte skulle *hugga* ved för Lord Salisbury.

According to the *NE*, the word *hugga* is a Germanic word supposedly related to the word *hay* (*hö* in Swedish). However, when it comes to hay, it is cut although English speakers do not say that farmers *hew* hay. When it comes to the Swedish language, Swedish speakers do not say *hugga* hay or *kapa* hay, but a totally different word is used. The *NCESD*’s translation of cutting hay is *slå* hay or the word *meja*. There is no deeper definition of the verb *slå* in combination with hay in the *NE*, than ‘a more general sudden or rhythmical movement performed to hit something animate or inanimate’. However, there is one of the verb *meja* where a definition of instrument needed for the action is presented. *Meja* means to cut off, with a scythe or some other cutting tool, mostly in reference to some kind of corn. Of course, the action *slå* is also dependent on an instrument in this case, see example (10a) below from the *BNC* where no machines are included, which means that the same tool is needed. When farmers cut hay with a scythe they push the instrument in front of them making a sudden crescent movement so powerful that the hay is being cut off, divided in twos with one part still rooted to the ground and the other spread on the ground ready to be gathered.

(10a) Their hay would be fed as it had been *cut*, handful by handful, and should be enough with seaweed and oat straw to feed her till she was helped out in the spring.

(10b) Deras hö skulle serveras som det hade *slagits*, näve för näve, och skulle tillsammans med sjögräs och strån med havre räcka för att mätta henne tills hon fick hjälp till våren.

Looking up meja in *NCSED*, the verb *cut* is the first one out of the two given words associated with corn. The other alternative is the verb *reap*, which is used in the same sense (*NCESD*) even though it is not mentioned as an alternative word to *cut* within the entry of *cut* in the *LDCE*. The reason for this becomes clearer when *reap* is looked up in the *LDCE*. According to the *LDCE*, the verb was commonly used in the past in the context of cutting and collecting the crop of grain, but used today it would sound old-fashioned. That is the reason why *reap* is not an alternative to *cut* in the *LDCE*, and why *cut* is the appropriate word to use.
An example of an action of direct decisive importance for the matter of life and death of today is the process of cutting out people from means of transportations at accidents, in other words, to free someone. This is exemplified in the following way in the *LDCE*:

(11a) She had to be *cut* out from the wreckage of her car.
(11b) Hon var tvungen att *klippas ut* ur sin kvaddade bil.

At accidents, the fire department is the one who cuts people out of their crashed vehicles. The instrument used is a pair of scissors that are so powerful that they can cut through metal. Once again, when it comes to a pair of scissors, the Swedish counterpart is *klippa* for the same reason mentioned in 3.1.1 and 3.1.2., but here it is used together with the particle *ut*.

All the actions mentioned are, of course, still of importance today but there is a great difference between people’s lives nowadays and the life of people who were self-sufficient. Something that is of importance as well, is that the tools used affect what counterpart is used when speaking Swedish. This category also shows that there are more equivalents to *cut* than *klippa* and *skära*, even though they dominate so far. It is a fact that should affect second language learners and especially English speaking people studying Swedish, since there are a lot of counterparts to *cut* to learn in Swedish.

### 3.1.4 To reduce the amount of something

When people *cut* an amount of something, for instance flour or sugar in a recipe, it has an entirely different meaning than the ones mentioned previously. The meaning of *cut (down)*, as to reduce the amount of something, has its Swedish counterpart *skära ned på*, consisting of three words contrary to a single word used in English. The following example is taken from the *LDCE*:

(12a) You need to *cut* the amount of fat and sugar in your diet.
(12b) Du måste *skära ned på* fett och socker i din kost.

Even though the word *skära* is used in Swedish, it has nothing to do with using a knife or a similar sharp instrument, literally. However, people can in their minds visualize the use of a knife when talking of cutting something metaphorically. The fat and the sugar are not
separated nor divided into parts in the same literal meaning as in the case above, where hair is cut with a razor blade (see 3.1.1). In this case, it either means that the addressee should not eat food containing as much sugar and fat as the food the person normally eats, or when people are preparing their food they should use less fat and sugar than it says in the recipe. The NCESD also finds the Swedish verb minska acceptable, which the NE defines as the action of reducing something in number or in extent. If the word minska is preferred by the speaker, in example (12a) above, it must be followed by the Swedish particle på ‘on’ in a translation, in order to produce a grammatically correct sentence.

When food is literally cut, for example a cake or a steak, a knife or a similar sharp tool is used. Once again, based on the explanation in the NE, cut in the examples (13a) and (14a) below from the BNC has the equivalent skära, sometimes expressed with the particle upp ‘up’:

(13a) Now he watched in horrified silence as Donald cut himself a giant slice of poisoned meat.
(13b) Nu såg han under förskräckt tystnad på hur Donald skar sig en jättestor skiva förgiftat kött.

(14a) The patient might manage to cut up his own food with a combined knife and fork, or he may even learn to cut his food with one hand, alternating cutting and eating using a normal knife and fork.
(14b) Patienten kanske klarar av att skära upp sin egen mat med en kombinerad kniv och gaffel, eller så kanske han till och med lär sig att skära upp maten med en hand, alternanderandes mellan att skära och att äta genom att använda en vanlig kniv och gaffel.

To survive financially is crucial for companies, no matter the size. In order to do that they have to make sure that both ends meet. Changes that the companies can do to affect the results are to either cut the prices on products or services they are selling, or to cut costs. Examples on both alternatives are taken from the LDCE:

(15a) The major aviation companies need to cut prices if they are to compete with budget airlines.
(15b) De stora flygbolagen måste sänka priserna om de ska kunna konkurrera med lågpris flygbolagen.

(16a) 700 jobs will be lost in order to cut costs and boost profits.
(16b) 700 arbeten kommer att gå förlorade för att minska kostnaderna och öka vinsten.
Both examples are about reducing the amount of something. The speaker or the writer producing the first sentence is talking about reducing the costs for a provided service, while the person in the second example wants to reduce the expenses of the company. In Swedish, the counterpart to cut in (15a) is sänka, according to the NCSED. NE’s definition of the word sänka is ‘to decrease the extent in some dimension concluded by the context; especially regarding number, strength, intensity etc.’. Sänka is therefore a counterpart to cut in (16a) as well, as it has to do with reducing the costs of a company. Here, people can also choose the verb minska or they can say skära ner på (NCSED), where ner and på are particles. To clarify this, minska in (16a) can be replaced by either sänka or skära ner på depending on what word, or words, the informant prefers to use. Minska means in Swedish to reduce something regarding number or extent, while skära ned på is used particularly in the context of reducing expenses and contributions (NE). To achieve a result changes must be made. In this context, it is a matter of decision making and priority, rather than the usage of a specific direct instrument (see 3.1.1). However, literally, the costs, as in example (16a), are to be cut by a certain percentage.

Sometimes people want to, for instance, retell a story they have heard, talk about something they have experienced or talk about something that they have seen happen to others etc. However, before that special event people sometimes have experienced several other things. In some cases they tell us the whole story and at other times, maybe due to lack of time or lack of importance, they skip some parts of the story. At such cases, to get to the point, people can use the phrase ‘to cut a long story short’ which idiomatically means ‘för att göra en lång historia kort’ in Swedish, where göra is the equivalent to cut. Again, cut has nothing to do with an instrument used to reduce an amount of something, basically it is a figure of speech ‘used to say that you are only going to mention the main facts of something’ as the LDCE puts it. Metaphorically, it could be compared to the procedure performed when editing a film, where unwanted parts are removed.

In this category, the only example with a clear cut literal meaning of the verb cut is the one with the context of cutting food. Once again, there is an evident pattern of what counterpart to choose on the basis of what instrument is being used in a certain context. However, it should be more difficult for an English speaking person to learn what counterpart to use in Swedish, since they are not used to having to take a specific tool into consideration. This is a fact that
will become more evident in the presentation of the following sections with examples of cut in more metaphorical contexts.

### 3.1.5 To hurt oneself or someone else

People can hurt themselves and they can hurt others, both physically and mentally, and intentionally or unintentionally. In the cases where knives are being used, the Swedish counterparts to cut vary depending on the movement performed by the people hurting themselves or by the attackers. If a victim is stabbed for instance, the verb hugga is the correct counterpart, however, when a gash is made, as in the examples below taken from the BNC, (17a), and the LDCE, (18a), skära is the correct translation:

(17a) You’ll cut yourself one of these days.
(17b) Du kommer att skära dig själv någon dag.

(18a) I noticed he’d cut his finger quite badly.
(18b) Jag lade märke till att han hade skurit sig rätt svårt i fingret.

The Swedish translation is here in agreement with the same definition presented in 3.1.1, that skära is a verb which is used when an object is separated or divided into parts by the means of a knife or a similar sharp tool (NE). The body parts that are the objects of the actions do not have to be separated from the body, as in these examples where simply the skin is divided by a gash. The same translation is used whether people hurt themselves or someone else. This means that ‘his finger’, in the sentence (18a), could easily be replaced by ‘her finger’ without affecting the choice of counterpart to cut. There is also no difference in the choice of word whether the cutting with a knife is intentional or unintentional.

### 3.1.6 To quit or stop something, or to fail to appear

The English language is known for its politeness and does therefore contain many different ways of telling people to stop talking, but one way involving cut is not very civil. ‘Cut the...’, crap for example, is explained in the LDCE as ‘an impolite way of telling someone to stop doing something because it is annoying you’. The phrase ‘cut the...’ is, according to the LDCE, a phrase which nearly always is used only in conversations. In combination with the
word *crap*, it could mean that you want a person to stop saying things that are not true, things that are nonsense or things that are irrelevant for the context.

(19a) *Cut* the crap! I saw his car outside your house.
(19b) *Sluta* snacka skit! Jag såg hans bil utanför ditt hus.

In this sense, as understood by the examples from the *LDCE*, the lies are not literally cut which means that no instrument is being used. It is just a verbal way of telling someone to stop telling lies. In the *NCESD*, there is no definition of *cut* in this phrase, however, there is one defined example of ‘cut (out) that noise!’, which is in this sense similar to ‘cut the crap’.

The Swedish counterpart to *cut* in these contexts is *sluta* in combination with the particle *med*. The *NE’s* definition of *sluta* is ‘to come to an end’, and actually the whole phrase ‘cut the crap’ can be expressed simply by the word *sluta*. As understood in this sense, no instrument is used in this context either, which is in accordance with the *NE* since no information about an instrument needed to perform the action is given. This is due to the fact that it is a command. When used as a command, in the imperative, the equivalent to *cut* does not have to take an object in Swedish.

*Cut* is also used in the context of dropping something completely. For instance, people can cut their job, cut drinking coffee or alcohol, and directors can exclaim *cut* to stop filming, among other things. At the process of making films, directors and their crew often shoot several different scenes from different angles. Every shoot is controlled by the director who decides whether the shooting of a scene is completed or not. At the end of every scene, the director calls out ‘*cut!*’. Swedish directors, shooting with a crew that speaks Swedish, call out ‘*bryt!*’, which is the imperative form of the infinitive *bryta*, in this sense to stop an action. There is actually no given example of *bryta* in the context of making a film in the *NE*. This might depend on the fact that this is not a situation where *bryta* is most commonly used in Swedish. Another reason could be that in this case, it is expressed in the imperative form and not in the base form.

A person who cuts coffee stops drinking coffee completely. The counterpart to *cut*, in the context of cutting coffee, is, according to the *NCESD, sluta med*. As in (19a), no specific instrument is being used in this context either. However, it is not due to the reason that it is a
command. It is simply a question of willpower. Metaphorically, people can visualize the person cutting coffee as cutting out an unwanted part in his or her life.

*Cut*, in ‘to cut a job’ however, could either be translated into *sluta*, which is already explained with the definition from the *NE*, or *säga upp sig*, if expressed in the present tense. *Säga upp sig* means that a person quits his or her job on their own decision. The verb *säga* means ‘to verbally express something in the reference of an opinion, thoughts from the point of view of content etc.’ (*NE*). However, in Swedish, people use the phrase *säga upp sig* even though they talk about their handing in letters of resignation.

There is a difference between ‘to cut a job’ and ‘to cut class’ even though they both deal with the fact that the person will not show up. However, the first example includes that the person takes responsibilities for his or her actions, behaving more maturely as they inform their employer of their decision. The other example means that the person just decides not to show up without any acceptable reasons. The *LDCE* defines *cut class* as ‘to deliberately not go to a class that you should go to’:

(20a) She started *cutting* classes.
(20b) Hon började *skolka* från lektionerna.

The Swedish equivalent in ‘to cut class’ is *skolka*, partly based on the definition in the *NE* of the Swedish verb, that is, ‘to fail to appear from mandatory school teaching without official leave’. The *LDCE* is very clear in pointing out that the phrase ‘cut class’ is mainly used in American English in normal conversations, and may not be suitable for the use in more formal contexts. In this case, there is a difference between the transitive verb *cut*, which has always taken an object so far, and its Swedish counterpart, except for when used in the imperative form. Used in the imperative, the verb *skolka* does not necessarily take an object in Swedish.

The Swedish equivalents of the English verb *cut* are of great variety. Especially when *cut* is used in more metaphorical senses, since many of those situations cannot be connected to a specific tool which might give the person a hint of what counterpart to choose. Even though this implies, as mentioned in previous sections, that it might be harder for English speaking people to learn the equivalents to *cut* in Swedish, the Swedes must, however, at the same time
learn what verbs are translated into *cut*, since they are not used to a verb of such a huge semantic field as in the contexts examined. In the next chapter, a table containing *cut* in discussed contexts and its counterparts can be found.
The examples discussed in the analysis show that it is easier to determine which Swedish counterpart to use to *cut* when a certain instrument is used, than when no tool is needed. In metaphorical use, it is much harder since there are not any real guidelines to follow. In other words, there are no regular correspondences, but since the analysis does not cover all contexts *cut* can occur in, there might be some cases where the use of a certain instrument does not necessarily imply one and the same counterpart at all times.

Conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis in the examined contexts are that when a pair of scissors is involved the counterpart to *cut* is always *klippa*. This is based on the definition in the *NE* that the verb *klippa* is used in situations when something is divided with a pair of scissors, by pressing both blades of the scissors against an object. However, new inventions by society might affect the meaning of a word as in the example with the lawn mower (see 3.1.2). Swedes still use the verb *klippa* in the context of cutting grass even though the way a modern lawn mower is designed does not involve the instruments scissors. The verb used with the first lawn mower, where the action of cutting was similar to the use of a pair of scissors, has continued being used even though there have been some changes in the design of the machine through time. Another conclusion is that *skära* always occurs when an object is literally separated or divided into parts by the means of a knife or a similar sharp tool (*NE*). It can also be used in some contexts where people metaphorically can visualize something being *cut* by these means. Then there are some situations where *cut* has other counterparts on the basis of different definitions in the *NE*, which can be studied in Table 2 below. Note that there are also some situations in language where *cut* is used metaphorically, not translated into *klippa, skära, hugga* etc., but into another Swedish word to produce an idiomatically correct sentence, as in the example with the phrase ‘to cut a long story short’. The expression would not be semantically correct if the phrase would be translated into ‘*klippa*/skära en lång historia kort’. The correct translation of *cut* in this context is therefore *göra*.

The fact that all people can use the verb *cut* when speaking English in the situations examined, might imply that it is much more difficult for native English speakers to learn Swedish, since they must take the context in which the cutting occurs into consideration. The usage of a tool does not affect the usage of a word for the action in English, but in Swedish it is very essential since there are many words to choose from; *hugga, klippa, skära, snoppa,*
slå, sluta, fälla etc. In Table 2, the counterparts to the single verb cut in the situations examined are presented within the different categories:

Table 2. *Cut* and its Swedish counterparts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1.1 To shape something</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> hair                              klippa or skära</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> paper                             klippa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> from wood                         skära ut or tälja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘<strong>cut</strong> and paste’                       klipp ut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> film                              klippa or redigera</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1.2 To reduce the length of something</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> nails                            klippa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> hedges                           klippa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> grass                            klippa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> cigars                           snoppa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1.3 To divide or to split something into two or more parts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> wood                                               hugga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> trees                                              fälla or hugga ner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> hay                                                slå or meja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> someone out of a vehicle                          klippa ut</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1.4 To reduce the amount of something</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> the amount of something                           skära ned på or minska på</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> food                                              skära</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> prices                                            sänka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> costs                                             sänka, minska or skära ner på</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to cut a long story short’                               göra</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1.5 To hurt oneself or someone else</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> yourself                                         skära</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> someone                                          skära</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1.6 To quit or stop something, or to fail to appear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘<strong>cut</strong> the crap’                                       sluta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘<strong>cut</strong>!’                                                bryt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> coffee                                           sluta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> a job                                            säga upp sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cut</strong> class                                             skolka</td>
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</table>

The equivalents *skära* and *klippa* are dominating within the categories 3.1.1, 3.1.2 and 3.1.5. These are the sections containing the largest number of examples of concrete contexts including a knife or a pair of scissors. In situations where the amount of something is reduced (see 3.1.4) *sänka, skära (ned på)* and *minska (på)* are most commonly used. In 3.1.3 and 3.1.6, however, the greatest varieties of counterparts to *cut* can be found.
Cut differs from its Swedish counterparts in the way that all the Swedish words for the action of cutting have more than three verb forms. This is also a fact that implies that it should be more work behind learning the counterparts to cut in Swedish, not saying that it is easy learning English. It takes both time and effort for a Swedish student, as well, to learn which words that have cut as their counterpart in English.

As can be seen in all examples, cut always takes an object as transitive verbs do except when it is used in the imperative form, as in the example regarding film making in 3.1.6, and when used in the command ‘cut and paste’. The same goes for the Swedish counterparts. However, among the Swedish equivalents there is also a verb, which is not expressed in the imperative, that is not transitive, and that is skolka.

By studying the differences and the similarities in the examined situations people can hopefully acquire a deeper linguistic knowledge (Lightbown & Spada 2006:45) and the noticed features contribute to new knowledge about the two languages (Lightbown & Spada 2006:44).
5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This essay has presented an analysis and discussion of the Swedish counterparts to the English verb *cut*, used in some parts of the language chosen from examples in the *LDCE*. The contexts analysed are the ones that most commonly occur in people’s everyday lives presented in six different categories. The boundaries between the categories, however, are not clear-cut as some examples can be considered to occur within more than one category. The material used for this analysis has mainly consisted of the dictionaries the *LDCE*, the *NCSED* and the *NCESD*, along with the corpus *BNC* and the encyclopaedia *NE*.

The aim of the essay was to do a cross-linguistic analysis of *cut* and its Swedish equivalents to examine whether there are any similarities or differences when it comes to the usage of the verb. The aim was also to examine whether the tool used to perform the action affects the choice of counterpart. Conclusions that could be drawn from the analysis were that English *cut* includes many different actions, performed with a number of different instruments, while in Swedish the counterparts vary depending on the instrument needed for the situation. The analysis also showed that when *cut* is used metaphorically it can be difficult for a person to determine what equivalent to use. However, if a person knows by what means an object is cut in a concrete meaning they might be able to determine the correct counterpart. Furthermore, the analysis shows that even though an instrument used to perform an action gets a new design, people might keep the old verb for the action. The action performed with a modern lawn mower, designed with a sharp rotating blade, is still used with the Swedish verb *klippa* even though the action is more in conformity with the definition of the verb *skära* (see 3.1.3). When trying to determine the correct counterpart, people must also consider whether the verb occurs in an idiomatic expression or not (see 3.1.4).

The dominating equivalents of *cut* in the examined contexts are *klippa* and *skära*, both in literal and metaphorical situations. In the metaphorical contexts examined, the counterparts *sänka, minska, skära ner på* and *sluta* also occur rather frequently. The analysis implies that it might be more difficult for a native English speaker to learn the Swedish equivalents to *cut*, with an emphasis on *might*, than vice versa. Regarding the properties of the verb, the irregularity of *cut* is not identical with the inflection of any of the Swedish counterparts, since none of the equivalents have only three verb forms. Whereas *cut* is always transitive, only one of the counterparts is not, namely *skolka*. 
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