Assessing Oral Skills

A study comparing the Swedish and Norwegian English syllabi with the Common European Framework of Reference

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Abstract
This is a comparative study of the Swedish and Norwegian syllabi for English for the minimum courses required in order to be allowed to apply for university courses in both countries. The study focuses on the assessment of oral production and what guidelines teachers and students are provided with in order to know what is to be assessed. As a reference point while comparing, the Common European Framework of Reference has been used as a framework for this study.

The comparison has been done solely in a text-oriented manner, comparing both of the syllabi with the reference document. In the conclusion, the results drawn from this comparison will be put against each other in order to see any differences between the two syllabi and the ways in which they have interpreted the reference document.

The conclusion was that both of the syllabi were largely inspired by the reference document and so turned out to be very similar in many aspects within oral proficiency assessment, as well as there were some aspects where they were quite different. The most obvious of these were the aspect of descriptors of different grade levels which was an aspect where all three documents differed in some manner, the Norwegian syllabus being the document that was least alike the two other documents.

Keywords: English, Assessment, Pronunciation, Oral skills, ENGENG06, ENG1-03, Grading, Grading scales, Swedish syllabus, Norwegian syllabus
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1 Introduction

What do we actually do when we speak (or write) to each other? What enables us to act in this way? How much of this do we need to learn when we try to use a new language? (Language Policy Unit, 2001)

This quote is the very beginning of the Common European Framework of Reference (henceforth referred to as the CEFR). By just looking at these three questions one realises that they are close to impossible to answer with one universal truth. Language is such a complex means of communication that it would be impossible for it to use itself to describe what limitations it has. To clarify this thought, because of the limitations in our languages, there could very well be that human thinking is limited to what language is able to express (Brook & Stanton, 2000). Therefore the question also arises: what differs a good language user from a bad one?

Language is an endless labyrinth of different sounds, referred to as phonemes in linguistics, composed together to form a meaning that the producer wants a receiver to interpret in the way it was intended to by the producer. Often these phonemes can be roughly similar but still be essential for the message to be conveyed correctly. For language users who are not used to these sets of phonemes it can be very hard to differentiate between some of them both when producing but also when listening (for instance the differences between /s/ and /z/ is a common problem for people of Scandinavian origin to grasp) (Swan & Smith, 2001, p. 23).

As teachers of EFL (English as a foreign language) we are expected to have the ability to differentiate between students who are “proficient” respectively ”less proficient” at these skills of communication, which means that teachers must inhabit an awareness of what the difference is between a student who in practice knows how to differentiate between the different phonemes of the English language. Some might argue that this undertaking by teachers of EFL is impossible to do justice to since so much depends on the subjective interpretation of a single teacher, with only a few (arguably, vague) documents at hand.

As Bo Lundahl also discusses in his book Engelsk Språkdidaktik (2009), the communicative means at disposal are not restricted to the language in its own form but important factors that contribute to the message conveyed are body language, context and other visual aspects that can be used to distort or bend the meaning of what is actually said to help the receiver
interpret the meaning in such a way as it was intended by the producer (Lundahl, 2009, p. 110).

This complex correlation between the different forms of language we use as human beings is what will constitute the very foundation of this study. Several limitations, and exclusions will therefore be consciously made in this study in order to maintain a clarity and validity throughout the whole study. Just as teachers need to be clear about what is being assessed, so science also needs to be clear about what is being researched upon.

Looking at how much criticism teachers get for their assessment and grading in Sweden, one could claim that this is the hottest topic in the Swedish school system today. New teachers are often astounded by the fact that assessment (especially language assessment) is so ambiguous. When listening to a student’s speech, which is seldom more than 5 minutes long, there is not much to go on except for the teacher’s own intuitive thoughts and subjective claims.

So, both from a teacher and from a student’s view, it is in both their interest to make sure this subjective assessment becomes a more concrete one, since it affects the students’ grades significantly. It would also be a great relief for teachers to know that the grades they are giving are in concordance with what the general guidelines for the education states. As it works in Swedish schools today students grades are more or less totally in the hands of the teacher, whose interpretation of the course syllabus is what decides the grades.

Comparing the Swedish and Norwegian syllabi for English will immensely improve the external validity of this research as well as give this research an insight into how much the assessment criteria of both countries are expressed and how much room is left to the teacher’s interpretation.

### 1.1 Aim and research question

Figueras (2012) mentions that the level descriptors of the CEFR have influenced the curricula and syllabi of the European world but that this has been very little documented or acknowledged. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact the CEFR had on the Swedish and Norwegian syllabi for English as a second language. The aim is to find out whether these three different documents (Swedish syllabus for English 6, Norwegian syllabus for English and the CEFR) support one another and have the same view on assessing oral proficiency or if there is any lack of congruence.
The exact documents compared are the Swedish syllabus for English 6 (2011), the Norwegian syllabus for ENG1-03 (2006) which will both be compared to the CEFR (Language Policy Unit, 2001). In other words, the Swedish and Norwegian syllabi will not be cross-referenced with each other but only with the CEFR and later these results will be compared.

The research questions stated for this study are as follows:

- What differences can be found in each of the respective syllabi and the CEFR, in the passages relevant to oral education in English as a foreign Language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL)
- What traits or philosophies in the passages relevant to oral education can be traced directly, or indirectly, to the CEFR from the syllabi?

2 Background and theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research consists mainly of two different parts; firstly the Brown and Abbeywickrama’s taxonomy (2010) (further described in section 2.3) acts as the source for the limitations applied in order for the research to not become overwhelmingly extensive. In other words, this is a tool used for focusing the research on its goals and to clarify what will be included in the term spoken language.

Secondly, the CEFR in itself also provides, arguably to the greatest extent, the pedagogic theories present in this research. Since the purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent the two syllabi have been influenced by the CEFR, the CEFR in itself will prove a very natural and accessible framework to use.

2.1 Background of the CEFR

The CEFR was not the first document of its kind and it has not been produced without previous research and work done in order to pave a path for it. This section will explain the background of how the CEFR came to be and why.

The first document produced in the chronology leading up to the CEFR was the Rüschikon Symposium which today can be seen as a pilot study (even if it may not have been intended as such and definitely is more thorough than a pilot study) outlining the needs and practical
applications a common reference system would need in order to be practically applicable in L2 education all over Europe (North, 2007). This document laid the foundation in order for the CEFR to be developed and was developed on the initiative of The Federal Swiss Authorities in collaboration with the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Directors of Education (EDK), The Eurocenters Foundation, The Migros Club Schools and the Interuniversity Commissions for Applied Linguistics (CILA) (Trim, 1992).

The Rüschlikon Symposium concluded that the document that would be the central framework for language education in the whole of Europe needed a great deal of coherence in order for it to be practically implied in the every day language education, but it also needed transparency in its objectives and goals in order for it to be applicable with the different syllabi already existing in the L2 educational institutions all over Europe (Trim, 1992, pp. 11-13).

There was a consensus of a “common core” or large block of “transversal features” which would be relevant to and present in all language learning situations at this stage or, expressed differently, which would serve all language learning efforts at this stage. (Trim, 1992, p. 33)

Many of the traits and general philosophies found in the CEFR can be traced back to the Rüschlikon Symposium held by the Council of Europe in 1991 in Switzerland as this was the report guiding the creators of the CEFR when they began drawing the outlines of how the document actually should look. Ideas such as the possibility for learners to assess themselves (Trim, 1992, p. 34), the descriptive scales (Trim, 1992, p. 31) and diverse perspectives on assessment (Trim, 1992, p. 31) are all questions and proposals discussed at the Rüschlikon Symposium. In the CEFR they were elaborated into a coherent document.

The CEFR was then written with several goals in mind as proposed by the Rüschlikon Symposium. One was that it would help students and teachers alike to understand and see through syllabi and curriculum with a more “objective” reference as a means to measure the different levels of language proficiency. Its aim was to create some sort of coherence in L2 education in Europe in order to help international comparisons of language proficiency and to help teachers of different nationalities to reference their own evaluation and assessment (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 1).

It was also intended to help “the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe.” (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 1). This means that the intended goal of the CEFR was not only to help those working pragmatically on a
daily basis reference their own work, but also to influence the guidelines and frameworks by which these practitioners work. Its goal, in other words, is not only to aid the teachers and students to understand the, often complex and vague, criteria of the syllabi; but also to change the way language knowledge is perceived on an international basis. It did even succeed in this goal since now most test providers, textbook writers and curriculum designers claim links to the CEFR as a sign of quality and modern language teaching (Anon, 2011).

2.2 Previous studies

The act of analysing and discussing language teaching syllabi has existed for well over fifty years now and continues to be a hot topic of discussion within the educational community. Several papers and books have been published on the topic of how second language education is most efficiently conducted. One of the first was The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching written by M.A.K. Halliday, A. McIntosh and P. Strevens (Wingard, 1965). It was published in 1964, and was one of the first research studies to “offer major conceptualizations of curriculum in language teaching”, (Stern, 1984, p. 6). The main concepts here were selection, gradation, presentation, repetition and testing. Stern (1984) claims that the connections between applied linguistics to educational theory was too weak in these early studies of curriculum design and that further attempts on a comprehensible curriculum would need to adapt a perspective that allowed a fusion between the two different research areas (Stern, 1984, p. 6).

The University of Cambridge (no author specified) has published a guide on how the CEFR should be used in foreign language education, as well as how it was not intended to be used. One could say that this article was written due to misinterpretation and misuse of the CEFR (Anon, 2011, p. 2).

In this guide, there is even a section named Using the CEFR in Curriculum and Syllabus design, which breaks down and summarises what is already in the CEFR into a more feasible text. The anonymous author of this article also claims that professionals within language teaching have expressed a relatively strong opinion on the CEFR being hard to interpret and use in their work, that is the reason for the birth of this document (Anon, 2011).

The author also states that using the CEFR as a guide for assessing language learners is not without difficulties or possible misuses. The main argument that the Using the CEFR document presents is that the CEFR is not context-related. Any document will have its
limitations regarding context since it would be practically impossible to describe all aspects of language in all its different applications and contexts.

The scales of in the CEFR are not exhaustive. They cannot cover every possible context of language use and do not attempt to do so. Whilst they have been empirically validated, some of them still have significant gaps, e.g. at the lowest level (A1) and at the top of the scale (the C levels). Certain contexts are less well elaborated, e.g. young learners. (Anon, 2011, p. 4)

This quote deals with the fact that the descriptors in the CEFR do not include the context of learners at different ages, only levels. Young learners will most likely live in a totally different every day context than adult learners, which also would change the social situations they might find themselves in. In this regard, a learner seeking to learn language suited for business and economics has, to a vast extent, different goals with his/her L2 compared to a learner who has just moved to a new country and needs to acquire language for social interaction with new acquaintances and therefore has other goals with his/her L2 learning (Anon, 2011).

Similar work has been done as the Using the CEFR in Curriculum and Syllabus Design by Brian North (2007). North, who also contributed to the Rüschlikon Symposium (see section 2.1), describes in his article how the level descriptors of the CEFR (earlier discussed by the Rüschlikon Symposium) were developed (something that is not described in the CEFR) (North, 2007, p. 4). North also attempts to clarify certain expressions and terms used in the CEFR, such as communicative language competences and provides additional explanations of the level descriptors (North, 2007, p. 4).

North (2007) clarifies what is meant by the CEFR being “comprehensive”. It means that the CEFR does not promote any teaching methodology as being better than any other simply because if that was the case, it would be an impractical tool to use for English teaching institutions whose methods are not compatible with those of the CEFR (North, 2007, p. 5).

In The impact of the CEFR (2012) Figueras studied the general impact of the CEFR in the world. This article is not restricted to language education but also discusses how the “vertical dimension” (the grading scale used by the CEFR which will be explained in the “Material” part of this study) was put to use by organisations looking for employees with a certain level of language proficiency. This was originally the article which raised the question that became the foundation for this study. In this article several claims are made about the impact the
CEFR has had on language education and the assessment of language beyond the realms of education (Figueras, 2012).

Figueras states that two areas of the CEFR have been more adopted by the European EFL-teaching community than others (Figueras, 2012, p. 479). These areas are firstly the reference levels, referring to the vertical scale of the CEFR (Language Policy Unit, 2001; see Appendix 1), and the descriptors of each respective level. The claim is that the grading scale (A1-C2) has been implemented in society as a general “currency” of language proficiency level (Figueras, 2012, p. 479).

The use of the CEFR level labels, with or without their accompanying level descriptors, is very visible and has become commonplace in all educational levels in Europe (not only for adults and young adults learning foreign languages, but also for young learners and for L1 learners) by different stakeholders (government officials, publishers, admissions officers at universities, immigration authorities) with different degrees of validity. (Figueras, 2012, p. 479)

One common belief in language education is that a high degree of language proficiency would be to reach, or nearly reach, a language sounding similar to that of a native speaker. However, Andreou and Galantomos (2009) state in their article The Native Speaker Ideal in Foreign Language Teaching that this is a simplified term often used where further specificity is needed. Andreou and Galantomos suggest that there is a difference between innateness and expertise, where the latter does not refer to social group identification but rather the measurable aspects of language proficiency (Andreou & Galantomos, 2009, p. 202).

Lundahl (2009, p. 74) also addresses the native-speaker ideal in his book Engelsk språkidaktikk. This is, as described in the book, a trait in the English as second language education that puts a great value on whether the student sounds like a native English speaker, or not, when talking. However, Lundahl claims that this ideal is unrealistic; he claims that there are a number of reasons as for why teachers should not assess their students based on whether they sound like an American, a Brit or an Australian. One of the reasons for this being that most students never reach the proficiency of sounding as if they are from somewhere they are not, but also because the regional dialects of English with their grammatical and pronunciational variations, are no smaller than those of non-native speakers (Lundahl, 2009, p. 77).
George Yule (1996) discusses second language acquisition in his book *The Study of Language*. Yule here concludes that the single hardest area for second language learners to gain a high proficiency in is speaking. This is based on the aforementioned native-speaker ideal, meaning that second language learners very rarely learn how to sound like a native speaker of the language. Yule proposes that this is only true with adult learners and that the human brain loses its ability to learn a language with a native-like proficiency around puberty (called the *Critical Period*) (Yule, 1996, p. 191).

### 2.3 A taxonomy of oral proficiency

To get a better grip on the area of oral proficiency and what the term means, Brown and Abbeywickrama (2010, p. 184) have divided oral skills into five different categories (henceforth referred to as Brown and Abbeywickrama’s taxonomy).

- The first one being the *Imitative* category, students who are at this level of speaking can only do the repeating of what someone else has already said. Here focus lies on intonation and pronunciation of words or sometimes very short sentences as well. Pronunciation is the highest priority when assessing from this perspective and creating unique sentences or original meanings is completely put aside in this aspect of oral production.

- The second aspect is what Brown and Abbeywickrama call *Intensive*. This aspect of language assessment is focused on larger linguistic segments than the previous imitative aspect. Here focus lies on elements such as intonation, stress, juncture etc. What is assessed is, in other words, how well the student masters the production of sentences, rather than just words. Focus is still not on meaning, though, but rather how the sentences “sound”. Alas, the difference between imitative and intensive speaking is merely the complexity of the sentences.

- Going on to the third category of language assessment, this is called the *Responsive* category. This is the first category that actually includes interaction between two people, even if the situation is very artificial and each question and response is very much thought out beforehand. Standard phrases such as “Hi, how are you; fine, and you?” are typical when assessing this category of speech.

- The *Interactive* category is not very different from the Responsive save for the length and complexity of the interaction. Interactive oral proficiency can then be broken...
down further into two subcategories, *Transactional* which is the purpose of exchanging information, and the *Interpersonal* which maintains personal relationships. According to Brown and Abbeywickrama the Interpersonal category is more complex and much more spontaneous than the Transactional and is also more dependent on slang, colloquial language, intonation etc.

- The fifth, and last, category listed by Brown and Abbeywickrama is the *Extensive* category. This category is based on monologues, such as speeches, storytelling etc. and contains no interaction at all. This could be used in social situations as well as where someone might retell a trip they have made or tell a humorous story, which involves none or very little interaction. The difference between this category and the intensive one is the language complexity and sentence length.

Furthermore Brown and Abbeywickrama (2010, p. 185) also divide spoken language into two other different categories, called micro skills and macro skills. In this perspective micro skills cover the ability to control phonemes, stress patterns and intonation contours. Macro skills on the other hand focus on the communicative functions, styles, body language and other language strategies. Even if this taxonomy is relatively extensive and complex the categories listed are by no means absolute. No test can only be isolated into one single category but usually covers all of them with some being more focused than others.

It is not the aim of this research to prove one of these categories as more important than others, or one category as a meaningless way of assessing language. These categories are solely used as a means for clarifying what aspect of spoken language will be focused on in this study. This will be clear in the Results section of this study where excerpts will be drawn from each document of the material available for this study, and the basis on which this excerpts will be chosen are founded in the Brown and Abbeywickrama taxonomy. Here it helps specify which passages in the documents deal with the parts of oral production the study aims at investigating and which passages are not within the limitations for this work.

Brown and Abbeywickrama (2010, pp. 184-191) also attempt to provide a definition of fluency. In their definition pauses can become so frequent that it will disturb the intelligibility of the sentences produced. Therefore, by this definition, fluency and pace are not interconnected but fluency is assessed by how steady the flow of words is and how many unwanted pauses are present. Brown and Abbeywickrama use the native speaker ideal as a goal for fluency “speech is a smooth and effortless, closely approximating that of native speaker” (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, pp. 184-191).
2.4 Fluency and Oral Skills

The word fluency is frequently present in the material used for this study. The CEFR (2001) describes fluency as the ability to “produce clear, smoothly-flowing, well-structured speech…” (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 36). Since structure is not a part of the extensive or intensive categories in Brown and Abbeywickrama’s taxonomy (2010), fluency is a vital aspect of this study since it includes structure as well as the ability to produce phonemes in ways necessary to control the language.

Other suggestions towards what fluency might be defined as have been how many words the student can produce in one minute while talking, comparing that with measurements done with native speakers in order to ensure whether the student has reached native-like speech or not (Götz, 2013).

“One of the most common fluency notions is ‘smoothness or continuity of speech’” (Götz, 2013). Götz (2013) also describes that even if this is the most common definition of fluency, it is also quite impossible to measure smoothness and therefore also impossible for teachers to assess it with a decent amount of accuracy. Götz (2013) therefore implies that fluency could be measured by the number and duration of unwanted pauses given that these pauses are filled with productive semantic text and not “fillers” (such as “eh”, “like” etc.) (Götz, 2013).

The latter definition of fluency has been adopted in this study and anywhere the term “fluency” appears throughout the material or in this study, this is the definition that has been adopted.

3 Material and Method

This chapter will first present the material that has been used and analysed in order to find an answer to the research questions posed for this study. In this chapter, there will only be a short presentation of the documents as their contents will be explained in more depth in the results chapter (section 4.1). This chapter will also explain the method used when approaching the material constituting the foundation for this study.
3.1 Material

The material used in this study is basically only three documents whose correlation is observed and analysed. The documents are the Swedish syllabus for English 6 (ENGENG06; Skolverket, 2011), the Norwegian syllabus for English course Vg1 (ENG1-03; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013). The reason for using these two documents is that they both are the lowest level of English needed for students having the ambition to apply for a university, or other equal higher educational institutions, in both countries.

The third document is what will act as a reference point for the two syllabi and be the standpoint from which this whole study originated, i.e. the CEFR (Language Policy Unit, 2001).

3.1.1 ENGENG06

The general aim of the Swedish syllabus for English focuses very much on the communicative parts of English education. The single most prominent goal is for the students to learn how to communicate with other English speaking people in “different situations and for different purposes” (Skolverket, 2011). The course syllabus ENGENG06 is a partial English course based on the previous English course in the Swedish school system called ENGENG05 (Skolverket, 2011).

The Swedish syllabus for English 6 is divided into two different parts, each presenting one aspect of the course, one being the Core content and the other the Knowledge requirements. The core content states what content will constitute the course, describing for both teacher and student what themes and elements should be included in the course and what areas of language education will be focused upon. This core content is further divided into three areas: Communication content, Reception and Production and interaction (Skolverket, 2011).

Regarding the aspects of contents of the course these are simply stated in a bulleted list under a heading saying “teaching in the course should cover the following core content” (Skolverket, 2011). In this content, not only English language use is listed, but also the culture in different English speaking parts of the world, as well as historical and political conditions, are also part of the core content in ENGENG06 (Skolverket, 2011). More than this, literature and film should also be covered in the course, treating the literary periods and their themes, ideas and form (Skolverket, 2011).
Knowledge requirements are presented on a scale from E-A; E being passed and A highest grade, states what the student has to be able to do with the English language in order to get a certain grade. These, as well, are both meant for the student when he/she sets out her goals for the course and for the teacher to look at when assessing different areas of the course. These requirements state all criteria of assessment for three of six grade levels (leaving the levels B, D and F out) touching on each of the language skills (writing, listening, speaking and reading) in each level descriptor (Skolverket, 2011).

3.1.2 ENG1-03

The Norwegian and Swedish syllabus differ quite a bit in terms of general outline and especially when it comes to the grading criteria. The Norwegian syllabus is based on aims during the whole course and is then assessed by a final examination, determining the overall grade for the student. The student is then graded on a scale of 1-6 based on his/her overall achievement in regards to the aims of the course (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013).

The ENG1-03 begins with a section called Language learning. This section states that one of the main goals for the students is to create an awareness of how language learning takes place and for the pupil to take responsibility over his/her own language learning for further L2 development (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013).

The section named Oral communication (the one focused on in this study) contains what the student should be able to do at the end of the course. Here the aims are listed in an action-oriented form. This section not only focuses on oral production, but also interaction, and listening skills are included here (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013).

The Written communication section will not be included in this study at all since its realm is outside that of the limitations of this study. The last section, however, Culture society and literature, is very interesting for this study since it also describes not only the linguistic aspect of the oral use of English, but also how to behave like a native English speaker since courtesies and contextual behaviour play a big part in oral communication between people. Aspects such as how to address people with titles and phrases of politeness are important to convey messages and meanings in the way they were intended to (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013).
3.1.3 The CEFR

The CEFR, unlike this study, is not only focused on the oral part of language proficiency but treats all aspects of language learning and what defines them. This makes the CEFR not only an even more complex and larger document, but also a more feasible one since it looks at language in its truest context, and as a whole, instead of the micro-cognitive parts of language learning (Language Policy Unit, 2001).

The CEFR also puts values on what is “good knowledge” and what is “unnecessary knowledge”. It points out that the aim of language learning has been modified over the years and that now it is not about having a true goal of “native-like proficiency” but rather of extending the linguistic knowledge in order to enhance communication as a whole, and not isolated into a single language. In other words, several languages may be used in order to help communication between interlocutors to ensure that the intended message is communicated correctly. It also means that paralinguistic knowledge also has a place in communication. Examples of paralinguistic features could be Body language (gestures, facial expressions, body contact etc.), Extra-linguistic speech sounds (sh, ugh, humph etc.), and prosodic qualities (voice quality, pitch, loudness and length). These features could, according to the CEFR, be used by students in order to help them achieve the goals in the courses they study.

Furthermore, aiding in the understanding of language learning, as well as enhancing the transparency of associated documents, the CEFR also helps with the generalization of grades and other evaluations for students who move or switch between educational systems. Not only does this facilitate students’ life decisions regarding their mobility, but it also helps teachers whose students come from different educational institutions.

3.2 Method

The study will be carried out in a qualitative way with all focus on the written documents making the foundation for the research being conducted. With no actual complete curriculum in its stead, the CEFR is the closest one gets to a comprehensive document for L2 learning and teaching with a considerable amount of philosophical questions and discussions included. The philosophical questions and discussions of the CEFR will be a central expression for this study. It refers to the general perspectives of L2 education the CEFR has adopted from a holistic point of view, for example the discussion whether native-like proficiency is a
reasonable goal for students learning English as a second language, or even what teaching methods are advocated in the CEFR.

With this said, this study does not try to imply that the CEFR is the ultimate guide to successful language education; it is only the theoretical platform on which this study stands and it was originally produced with the intention that syllabi and curricula in Europe should have it as a common reference point when drafting these documents.

The method implied in this study is a qualitative method which consists of two comparisons to the CEFR, one syllabus at a time, in order to find out the extent to which they actually relate to the CEFR. In order to determine the amount of influence that has taken place there will be a need to analyse the quantity of adoptions the syllabi have made, i.e. how many criteria for assessment, as well as definitions of proficiency that can be traced to the CEFR in each syllabus (Van Peer, et al., 2012).

Some of the similarities between the syllabi included in this study and the CEFR could in many ways be considered as coincidences; this, however, is not relevant to the questions stated earlier in this study since the aim is to find out whether the syllabi relate to the CEFR or not. The question whether these similarities are intentional by the authors of the syllabi, or not, is irrelevant. In other words, any similarities that can be found between the syllabi used in this study and the CEFR will be interpreted as verification of the CEFR being the source for the observation in question.

### 3.2.1 Hermeneutics

A hermeneutic approach has been chosen as the most feasible method to use for this type of study, mainly because of its natural inclination towards text-based material; originally these texts were solely those of the Holy Bible. Today the hermeneutic method is widely used in all social sciences and is now considered a method which has its place within science (Kinsella, 2006).

The most obvious flaw within the hermeneutic method is its elusive ways of interpreting data and how big a part of this interpretation comes down to the researcher him/herself. This is the main reason why hermeneutics has not been adopted more widely than it has in the scientific realm. It has a considerably lower amount of reliability than, for example, a quantitative research, which would look more or less the same no matter who conducted the research, given that the material is identical. In hermeneutics, however, identical material may very
well give totally different conclusions depending on the researcher analysing the material (Kinsella, 2006).

The reason for choosing a hermeneutic method, even though it has such a low reliability, is because it can reach a deeper level of understanding which is seldom achieved by the means of a quantitative study. “The goal of a hermeneutic approach is to seek understanding, rather than to offer explanation or to provide an authoritative reading or conceptual analysis of a text”, (Kinsella, 2006, § 2.1). Thus hermeneutics seeks to interprete a written text in order to falsify its essential meaning and study it in a more in-depth manner (Kinsella, 2006).

For this study in particular, the goal is to falsify the notion that the CEFR has influenced the two syllabi of the English subject ENGENG06 and ENG1-03. These three documents were analysed with the goal of an in-depth understanding in order to contrast not only the terminology used but also the deeper fundamentals of language education and their philosophical traits leading the reader to understand what the author recognizes as good language education as opposed to bad. For this reason, a corpus comparing the terminology would not provide sufficient depth for the purpose of this essay.

Hermeneutics is also a good choice when dealing with contexts as it focuses on more than one aspect at a time, and can interconnect findings in order to draw further conclusions. In contrast, a quantitative research method would propose a static result with less understanding of the different parameters included in the research. This will affect the outcome of the research, the quantitative method giving a static result and being very little open for interpretation. The other option, which this study has adopted, is the qualitative method which focuses on understanding rather than certainty of the results generalizations (Kinsella, 2006).

The risk for subjectivity is most prominent when it comes to interpreting the documents that constitute the material for the study. Since all text has to be interpreted by a receiver, and this interpretation occurs in the human mind, the whole material can be considered as subjectively analysed by the researcher. It is therefore important to use quotes from the original document to clarify for the reader how the text in question was interpreted, and also to let the reader decide whether the interpretation is a relevant one or not. Also, using the same terminology as the original document is paramount to ensure that the the study is not lacking too much in validity (Van Peer, et al., 2012, p. 33).

One way to ensure that subjectivity does not contaminate the study too much (to some extent, subjectivity will always contaminate every study) is to raise the awareness of the risk for the
researcher’s subjectivity and to consistently express this awareness with each find in the results as well as to state the conclusions in a non-absolute way (Van Peer, et al., 2012, p. 35).

3.2.2 Reliability and Validity
Reliability is always a substantial area of uncertainty when dealing with hermeneutic methods since the interpretation of the data is ambiguous and will definitely vary depending on the researcher. However, as described in the previous section, hermeneutics is the most feasible method available for this study and the Brown and Abbeywickrama’s taxonomy (section 2.3) is the tool chosen to help maintain reliability in this study. Reliability suffers when deciding what is seen as a relevant passage to add into the results and which passages are deemed as not of relevance to this study. The Brown and Abbeywickrama taxonomy defines the oral production and categorises it so that it is clear for both researcher and reader why certain passages were chosen and why others may have been excluded from this study.

Reliability is also attained through the usage of quotes which show how the original text looks and helps the reader follow the conclusions the researcher draws from these exact excerpts. This will give the reader a chance to decide whether the interpretation is a justifiable one or if the researcher has drawn conclusions which may not be adequately founded in the material and results for the study.

Regarding the validity of this study the main concern would be the fact that any similarities could be merely coincidences and not evidence of adoption from the CEFR. This may seem as an uncertainty that can never fully be overlooked. On the other hand, in a study based on a hermeneutic method, this question will never be fully solved, but understanding will hopefully be achieved. In order to reach a higher validity, two syllabi were chosen instead of one to ensure some sort of internal validity. If the two syllabi included in the study show completely different results when compared to the CEFR the claim that the CEFR has influenced the European syllabi for L2 education would be falsified. Still, if both the documents show evidence towards having reasonably strong connections with the CEFR they both strengthen the validity of this study since the risk of “random similarities” is far less probable than if there were only one document showing inclinations towards such similarities (Trochim, 2006).
3.3 Limitations

As in every study, this one too has problems and certain sensitive areas that can be questioned i.e. whether some conclusions really are generalizable or not; or if the conclusions drawn are sufficiently based on the material. Given that this is a hermeneutic study, dealing with texts and the interpretation of them, the subjectivity in this study risks to be more present than it would have been in a quantitative study or one drawing its conclusions from empirical studies (Van Peer, et al., 2012, p. 33).

Another problem is the different ways the two syllabi included in the study are structured. Considering that the Swedish syllabus consists of a considerable part criteria for the different grades and the Norwegian has no grading criteria, the question then is unavoidable whether this part of the Swedish syllabus should be included as merely another part of the syllabus. Including the grading criteria would give more material to the research and further help the reader to understand the philosophical questions of the curriculum implied in the document. For this study, however, the decision was made to include the grading criteria in the study and to merely treat it as another part of the syllabus giving the reader more opportunity to grasp the content of the syllabus on a deeper level of understanding (Van Peer, et al., 2012, p. 35) and also allow a comparison of the assessment of oral skills in the two syllabi vs the CEFR.

Due to the time given for this essay a compromise had to be done choosing only two different syllabi for comparison, while the original intent was to compare all the Nordic countries, since the time span would not allow for this kind of extensive study. Therefore, a comparison between two Nordic countries was chosen, this resulting in a study that is not as generalizable as it would have been with a higher number of syllabi compared. This could very well be an area for further research, conducting a similar study with more syllabi included in order to make it more generizable, thus falsifying The impact of the CEFR (Figueras, 2012) even further.

The study does not extend into the entire curriculum for the school system of the two nations involved in the research, because the curricula treat so many different areas of education and institutions not related to L2 education.

Another limitation that has been made in order for this study to be more feasible, is that the criteria and goals concerning reception will not be included. This is, however, not in unity with the philosophy of the CEFR since it states quite clearly that in order to make conversation one needs to develop one’s skills in interpreting spoken language as well (see
Brown and Abbeywickrama’s taxonomy in section 2.3). Using Brown and Abbeywickrama’s taxonomy, this study will be more focused on how teachers assess the so called *Extensive* and *Intensive* categories; thus focusing on the oral production of the student, not his/her ability to fare well in social contexts.

The reason for the choice of the extensive (monologues, speeches etc.) and intensive (spontaneous spoken sentences) categories is that all other categories in Brown and Abbeywickrama’ taxonomy include some form of listening skill as well as the act of speaking. How well a student of English listens and understands what he/she listens to is not what this study set out to investigate and therefore passages in the material connected to these types of assessment have been excluded from the results of this study.

4 Results and analysis

This section will first present the excerpts drawn from the study of each respective document constituting the material of this study (i.e. the two syllabi and the CEFR). After the results from the documents have been presented, an analysis will be done, comparing the two syllabi with the CEFR and highlighting their similarities and their differences.

4.1 Results

This part of the study will contain the results drawn from the material for this study. It will contain no interpretations, subjective thoughts or any form of analysis of the material itself, but of course, the choice of specific points in the documents that are relevant for the analysis is subjective. All excerpts drawn from each document have been analysed with the the Brown and Abbeywickrama taxonomy (see section 2.3) in mind in order to solely focus on the oral skills of the students and not the, often accompanying, interactive and listening skills.

4.1.1 ENG1-03

In the Norwegian ENG1-03 the only topic relevant to this study is the topic called *Oral communication*. This is written in a dotted list of different aims that the students are to reach in order to pass the course. The relevant parts of this list are:
• (...) use suitable (...) speaking strategies adapted for the purpose and situation
• (...) use a wide general vocabulary and an academic vocabulary related to his/her programme
• Express oneself fluently and coherently in a detailed and precise manner suited to the purpose and situation
• Introduce, maintain and terminate conversations and discussions about general and academic topics related to one’s education programme
• Use patterns for pronunciation, intonation, word inflection and various types of sentences in communication
• (...) use technical and mathematical information in communication.

These 6 topics are the foundation on which the teachers of ENG1-03 make their decisions as to how proficient a student is in his/her oral communication and production. Note that the excerpts above are the only ones in the ENG1-03 connected to the Brown and Abbeywickrama taxonomy (see section 2.3) and are the only passages in the document where isolated oral skills are described.

There is another section in the ENG1-03 called *Culture, society and literature*, which would (according to the CEFR (Language Policy Unit, 2001)) be a very large part of being able to speak a certain language. However, since these sections of the syllabus are not compatible with the Brown and Abbeywickrama taxonomy (see section 2.3) these have not been included as a part of the study and can not be analysed as a part of teachers’ guidelines in assessing oral skills.

The pupils may also be selected for an oral examination. The oral examination is prepared and graded locally. The examination covers the entire subject (140 teaching hours). (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013)

As seen in the quote above, the ENG1-03 uses what is called a *fixed-point assessment* where all students are assessed and graded for the whole course based on one examination.

### 4.1.2 ENGENG06

The first part of the Swedish syllabus, which is integrated in this section, is not strictly a part of the points selected in the syllabus for analysis in this study, but is a basis on which this course syllabus stands. The chapter is called *Aim of the subject* and includes the aims and goals for all English courses in the Swedish upper secondary level. From this passage, some
excerpts have been taken to further understand and interpret the goals and purposes in the ENGENG06.

- “(…) adapting their language to different situations purposes and recipients.”, (Skolverket, 2011, p. 1).
- “In addition, students should be given the opportunity to develop their ability to use different strategies to support communication and to solve problems when language skills are inadequate.”, (Skolverket, 2011, p. 1).
- “Students should be given the opportunity to (…) produce spoken language and texts of different kinds”, (Skolverket, 2011, p. 1).

Also the teaching in the course should give students the opportunity to develop:

- The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech
- The ability to use different language strategies in different contexts
- The ability to adapt language to different purposes, recipients and situations.

(Skolverket, 2011)

The results stated this far are only taken from the general syllabus for the English subject, regardless of level, and is not exclusively for the ENGENG06. It was, however, included in this study since it makes the foundation on which the ENGENG06 stands.

The Swedish syllabus, ENGENG06, does not make any distinction in the core content between the expansive part of oral production and the interaction. First it covers what content should be included in the course, also in a dotted list.

- Oral and written production and interaction in different situations and for different purposes where students argue, report, apply, reason, summarise, comment on, assess and give reasons for their views.
- Strategies for contributing to and actively participating in argumentation, debates and discussions related to societal and working life.
- Different ways of commenting on and taking notes when listening to and reading communications from different sources.
- Processing language and structure in their own and others’ oral and written communications, and also in formal contexts. Adaption to genre, situation and purpose.
As stated earlier, the list above is solely stating what content should be included in the course and not what the students should learn during the course. The part called Knowledge requirements states the different goals for each grade respectively, here stating what is needed for a passed grade (the E level).

- Students show their understanding by in basic terms giving an account of, discussing, commenting, and drawing conclusions on content and details, and with acceptable results act on the basis of the message and instructions in the content.
- In oral (…) communications of various genres, students can express themselves in a way that is relatively varied, clear, and relatively structured. Students can also express themselves with fluency and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation. Students work on and make simple improvements to their own communications.
- In oral (…) more formal and complex contexts, students can express themselves clearly with fluency, and with some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation. In addition, students can choose and use essentially functional strategies which to some extent solve problems and improve their interaction.
- Students can discuss in basic terms some features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used, and can also make simple comparisons with their own experiences and knowledge.

The E level of the grading scale is the only level used in this study since it is the only level that can be compared to the ENG1-03 which only has criteria for a passed grade (see section 4.1.1). Criteria for higher grades, in the ENGENG06, can therefore not be seen as equal, therefore not comparable, to those of the ENG1-03.

What has been listed above is, as earlier stated, the criteria for passing the course ENGENG06. All the criteria for the higher grades will look the same as this in structure and disposition, the only thing that changes are the expressions marked in bold, which will change the level of the oral proficiency required. An example of this is the word relatively which is completely excluded in the criteria for the highest grade level (grade A) as well as the word acceptable has been replaced with the word good (Skolverket, 2011).
4.1.3 CEFR

Regarding the CEFR, the same selecting process has been applied as in previous documents, selecting only the parts in concordance with the categories chosen from the Brown and Abbeywickrama taxonomy (see section 2.3), which can later work as reference for the analysis part of this study.

Establishing cut-off points between levels is always a subjective procedure; some institutions prefer broad levels, others prefer narrow ones. The advantage of a branching approach is that a common set of levels and/or descriptors can be ‘cut’ into practical local levels at different points by different users to suit local needs and yet still relate back to a common system. The numbering allows further subdivisions to be made without losing the reference to the main objective being referred to. (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 32)

This quote from the CEFR describe how areas of language have been broken down into smaller “subareas” which can be assessed separately. This can be related to the Brown and Abbeywickrama taxonomy (see section 2.3), where a similar attempt to narrow what is being assessed is done and very similar cut-off points have been established. First, language proficiency has been broken down into Overall oral production, which then is broken down into even further smaller areas: Sustained monologue: Describing experience, Sustained monologue: putting a case, Public announcements and Addressing audiences. Each of these areas have their own grading scale, with the same structure as the general vertical scale of the CEFR (see appendix 2) (Language Policy Unit, 2001, pp. 59-60).

The CEFR also discusses the different types of assessment that could be used in language education. One of these types is the Fixed point assessment, which uses the entire course for education, leaving the assessment until the very end of the course and then testing all skills at once, resulting in a grade for the entire course based on one single assessment. The fixed point assessment’s counterpart is called the Continuous approach. This type of assessment tests the students on several occasions during the course, often focusing on one skill at a time. (Language Policy Unit, 2001, pp. 185-186)

When it comes to the vertical scale of the CEFR (see appendix 1), it requires some knowledge as to how to read the scale, and some instructions for how to read the scale are also therefore included in the document.
Each level should be taken to subsume the levels below it on the scale. That is to say, someone at B1 (Threshold) is considered also to be able to do whatever is stated at A2, (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 36).

The author then further specifies this thought:

Not every element or aspect in a descriptor is repeated at the following level. That is to say that entries at each level describe selectively what is seen as salient or new at that level. They do not systematically repeat all the elements mentioned at the level before with a minor change of formulation to indicate increased difficulty, (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 37).

These statements regulate the ways a grading scale should be outlined, but also how to read different scales. It clearly states that no level has the same goal as the previous, and each level has its own challenges and goals which must be reached in order for the student to be considered to be at that specific level.

Activities that include these forms of language production could, for example, be:

- Reading a written text aloud
- Speaking from notes, or from a written text or visual aids
- Acting out a rehearsed role
- Speaking spontaneously
- Singing.

To put all level descriptors of each subarea of oral production in this section would be too extensive and therefore the choice was made that whenever it becomes relevant in the analysis, each descriptor actually used will then be referenced.

One thing that the CEFR is clearly emphasising is the use of language strategies in oral production. The CEFR clearly states that “communication strategies should (…) not be viewed simply with a disability model – as a way of making up for language deficit or a miscommunication.”, (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 57). The CEFR states that all native language users make use of their communication strategies regularly, complementing the oral language and not making up for it. Therefore mastering these skills should be considered as an equally important part of oral production as the ability to produce clear sound with one’s speech organs (Language Policy Unit, 2001).

There is one more vertical scale in the CEFR that should be used as a reference point for this type of study; this is the vertical scale called Phonological control (Language Policy Unit,
The descriptor for the highest level on this scale is “Can vary intonation and place sentence stress correctly in order to express finer shades of meaning” (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 117).

A general problem with the CEFR, doing this study, is that not all levels have accompanying descriptors. For instance, the last named scale does not have a descriptor for the highest level (C2). The reason for this is not stated in the document so the assumption is made that describing the higher levels of these parts of language is too complex a task to be fitted into this document. And so the highest level of phonological control is not possible to describe. Due to this phenomenon, the highest descriptors available will be used as the highest assessable level of language.

4.2 Analysis

In the analysis section the comparison between the different documents will be in focus. Already having the listed points of comparison from the previous section, there will be no other texts or quotes that have not previously been introduced in the section 4.1.

4.2.1 Comparing the ENG1-03 with the CEFR

Probably the biggest difference between the CEFR and the Norwegian syllabus is the fact that the Norwegian syllabus has no grading criteria. This is probably due to the fact that the ENG1-03 has one examination for the entire course. However, even if the written examination is assessed centrally, the examination of oral proficiency is not. It is also a fact that an oral examination is not compulsory since the syllabus clearly states that “the pupils may be selected for an oral examination” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013). In the CEFR, this way of assessing students is called *Fixed point assessment*. It refers to “assessment which takes place on a particular day, usually the end of the course…” (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 185).

The only thing a teacher, following the Norwegian syllabus, can base his/her assessment on, concerning oral proficiency, is in other words the general goals for the entire course. These goals can however also be interpreted as the minimum requirements for passing the course, and if so, it is impossible for a teacher to know what differs a higher grade from a passing grade.
The CEFR highlights both the strengths and the weaknesses of this type of assessment; it is favourable because of its reliability, i.e. it tests what the students know when finishing the course and knowledge forgotten during its time will not be seen as knowledge achieved. It also puts less strain on the teacher always having to be objective with students he/she might know relatively intimately. Seeing that 140 teaching hours are included in the course, it can be expected that the teacher has certain expectations on certain students based on their relation in the classroom, not based on the actual examination. The opposite to fixed point assessment, called continuous assessment, can also, according to the CEFR, change the student’s experience of the course into a single long examination rather than a valuable course for its L2 development, as well as a “bureaucratic nightmare for the teacher” (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 185).

The ENG1-03 also follows the guidelines and philosophical fundamentals of the CEFR in more than the aspect that there is a positive outcome in having a fixed point assessment; it has a grading scale with 6 levels. According to the CEFR several years of different language learning research has led to the conclusion that 6 levels is sufficiently narrow to determine which level of language proficiency the learner has reached, but also broad enough for the examiner to differentiate between the different levels. The CEFR also uses 6 levels in the vertical scale ranging from A1 to C2 (Language Policy Unit, 2001, pp. 22-23). This is true no matter what sub-area of language is assessed; using 6 levels has proved a suitable number for all types of language assessment, (Language Policy Unit, 2001).

There are, however, also some aspects of L2 teaching and learning where the CEFR and the ENG1-03 differ in their arrangement. One of these differences is that in order to facilitate the orientation, for both learners and teachers alike, there should be a more detailed description of the different language learning categories. This should, according to the CEFR, take form in 6 descriptors describing each level of the different language categories in detail, explaining the requirements the students have to fulfil in order to reach a certain grade in each respective category (Language Policy Unit, 2001). An example of how this may look is visualised in a grid in the CEFR with 6 different level descriptors for five different categories of language learning: Listening, Reading, Spoken interaction, Spoken production and Writing (Language Policy Unit, 2001, pp. 26-29).

Not only do the teachers have no information concerning the assessment of the oral examination, a vital part of language teaching is also what is called formative assessment. This assessment has nothing to do with examination but rather is a feedback meant to
enlighten the student of what needs to be worked on and where further language development is needed in order to reach the goals.

As far as where to put the cut-off points for the different grades at hand, the CEFR does not specifically have any guidelines as to how to define these or how broad each level should be in order to make it feasible. It does, however, clearly state that establishing the cut-off points is a completely subjective task and so it becomes not a task for a document as the CEFR to restrict, or even to advise, how these definitions are to be made. The ENG1-03 has nevertheless, as mentioned before, followed the CEFR’s recommendations regarding using 6 levels, no matter how broad or narrow they are.

The description for the goals of the course ENG1-03 are stated as in what the course should “enable” students to do (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013), and so it bases the formulations of the goals on the assumption that students do not have these abilities before the course is given. This aspect puts more focus on the course as a learning situation and not as much focus on what is demanded for a passed course. This puts the ENG1-03 in a position where it is seen as more of a place for learning rather than, as the CEFR is, a reference for how high a proficiency the student has. Not as much focus is put on the outcome of the course, but rather on what learning opportunities the course should contain (very much alike the core content part in ENGENG06 (Skolverket, 2011; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013)).

The CEFR stresses the use of language strategies as a part of a “native-like” language usage. The ENG1-03 does not express any value to this competence, though. It is, however, not stated anywhere in the document that it is not a part of the goals of ENG1-03 and can, quite easily, be interpreted as a part of some of the goals for the course. Goals such as “Express oneself fluently (…) suited to the purpose and situation” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013) could very well include the use of language strategies in order to make the language “fluent” or “suited to the situation”. Since it is not specified in the syllabus, on the other hand, it cannot be seen as a qualitative necessity for students to learn in order to acquire a pass grade in the course.

Regarding the phonological control, as the CEFR has made a specific vertical scale for this topic, the ENG1-03 is not very open for interpretation on this subject. The syllabus clearly states that these are all demands for a pass grade in the course. “Use patterns for pronunciation, intonation, word inflection…” and “Express oneself fluently” are both stated in the goals for the ENG1-03, and so in accordance with the interpretation of the goals of the ENG1-03 made for this study, these are all skills that are required for this level of English
learning. Each of these goals requires the phonological control as stated in the CEFR and as such this will be a requirement in the ENG1-03.

4.2.2 Comparing the ENGENG06 with the CEFR

Looking at the Aim of the subject part of the Swedish syllabus, which, as stated previously in the results, is not an integral part of the syllabus but acts as the foundation for all English education in the Swedish upper secondary school, one soon finds that this is not very directed to students but is rather meant as an introduction to the educational philosophies regarding L2 language learning that the Swedish school system has adopted.

One can clearly see in this passage of the document that the foundation of the ENGENG06 focuses on teaching which makes use of the communicative competences and puts a value on extra lingual strategies that complement spoken communication or help solve linguistic problems as for example gestures or facial expressions. It does not, on the other hand, consider language strategies as much a part of the language as the CEFR insinuates. The statement “ability to use different strategies to support communication and to solve problems when language skills are inadequate.” (Skolverket, 2011) clearly defines that language strategies are a supplement for the English language and not considered something that enhances and complements the language. That not being said that language strategies have no value in the ENGENG06, merely that it is not valued to the same extent as in the CEFR.

Looking at the ENGENG06 specifically, and not its complementary documents, it becomes clear that no distinction has been made between the interactive and the extensive forms of oral communication. This should not be too much of a problem for this study since it still makes a distinction between reception and production, even if the heading for the spoken language is named Production and interaction. This is still, also, a part of the core contents for the course and so these passages are not tools for the teacher to use when assessing the students.

Unlike the ENG1-03, the ENGENG06 actually has grading criteria, not only for a pass, but for all grades available. This is quite a big difference and might very well depend on the fact that the teacher here is expected to do all examinations and have all the information necessary to put an objectively fair grade on each and every student by the end of the course; if this is done as in ENG1-03 using the fixed point assessment approach or by the continuous approach is not defined in the ENGENG06.
Looking at the grading scale adopted for the ENGENG06, this too has used 6 grading levels in accordance with the suggestions made by the CEFR that this has proved to be a generally good quantity for grading scales easing both the problem of keeping the grades separate from one another as well as eliminating the problem of students with vastly differing language proficiency getting the same grade (Language Policy Unit, 2001, pp. 22-23). The ENGENG06 does not use the same scale as the CEFR, though, (a vertical scale ranging from A1-C2) but uses a scale in an alphabetical order with A being the highest grade and E being the lowest grade for a pass (Skolverket, 2011).

On the other hand, the grading scales only have descriptors for the levels E, C and A; thus making the grades B and D harder to define. As previously mentioned in section 4.1, though, the CEFR too does leave out descriptors where they seem superfluous or too complex to define, and so this has been interpreted as the Swedish “Skolverket” follows the ways of the CEFR (Skolverket, 2011). The grading scale descriptors are also systematically repeated in the ENGENG06 replacing only certain words or minor phrases. This is a direct opposite of what the authors of CEFR consciously chose not to do (see section 4.1.3).

As mentioned in section 4.1 this study will not analyse grades higher than the ones required for a passed course, in this case this is the grade E. This is not because the other grades are not interesting to science in this area but mostly because there are no more goals stated than the ones required for a passed course in the Norwegian syllabus (ENG1-03). Another reason for this is the fact that the descriptors for the grades do not change much. Only certain highlighted words of qualitative sort are changed, while the foundation of the descriptor remains the same in each and every one of the three descriptors.

This aforementioned fact about the descriptors not changing is of interest for this study, since the CEFR discusses the subject of such descriptors explicitly. The way the CEFR has constructed its level descriptors is described as follows:

Not every element or aspect of a descriptor is repeated at the following level. That is to say that entries at each level describe selectively what is seen as salient or new at that level. They do not systematically repeat all the elements mentioned at the level below with a minor change of formulation to indicate increased difficulty. (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 37).

This is a subject where the Swedish syllabus directly diverts from the philosophic grounds of the CEFR; it does something that the authors of the CEFR consciously decided not to do. Although there is no stated reason for this choice to find anywhere in neither of the
documents, it could very well be interpreted that the authors of the ENGENG06 also made a conscious decision not to adopt this specific aspect highlighted by the CEFR. Even if it certainly seems meant for aiding in the production of L2 syllabi.

Furthermore the descriptors of the ENGENG06 fit into what the CEFR calls the User-oriented scale while the CEFR itself clearly uses a holistic Constructor-oriented scale (Language Policy Unit, 2001, pp. 37-39). This can have many reasons, but it seems that the most plausible one is that the CEFR was to a high extent created as a reference for the process of writing a syllabus or other similar documents. The ENGENG06, however, was created to be used in a classroom and help students and teachers grasp the complex requirements a student must reach in order to pass a course. In this aspect, the awareness of various recipients does not mean that the ENGENG06 diverts from the philosophical foundations of the CEFR, merely that this document was created with other recipients in mind.

Both the CEFR and the ENGENG06 utilize a positive wording in their grading scale descriptors. According to the CEFR, this is the favoured approach when formulating these type of texts; however, it also states that the assessor-oriented approach often uses negative wordings, since, when correcting students teachers more often look for the errors rather than what is being done correctly (Language Policy Unit, 2001, p. 38).

Even if this positive wording is the same in both documents, there are some other differences in their approaches and the formulations of the text. The CEFR clearly argues for the action-oriented approach as well. What this means is that it views learners of language as social agents and therefore concentrates on what social tasks a student can carry out. The question concerning how the task is carried out is not relevant in this case, and any strategy or alternative of carrying out the task is always allowed. In contrast to this, the ENGENG06 focuses significantly more on linguistic forms such as variety, structure and fluency (Skolverket, 2011).

4.3 Final Remarks

Due to the factors found in the CEFR differentiating this document from the two syllabi, one can at an overall impression with a high degree of certainty state that both the ENG1-03 and the ENGENG06 are similar to the CEFR in a number of instances. This is in accordance with
The impact of the CEFR (Figueras, 2012) and the statements made in this article about the CEFR being widely adopted into Europe’s EFL syllabi.

There were also a few examples of where both syllabi had clear connections to the CEFR without necessarily being very similar to each other in the ways in which they had interpreted its philosophies. The most obvious of these instances would probably be the grading criteria, or lack of them.

Since the ENG1-03 contains no grading scale but only has descriptors for what the goals of the course are, this differs quite drastically from how the CEFR has been developed, since it has numerous different grading scales all depending on what aspect of language is being assessed. From this perspective, the ENGENG06 would be considered more alike since it has a grading scale of 6 grades with descriptors for three of them, and deals with a more overall approach to the assessment but still includes most of the language skills.

It would seem that the ENG1-03 totally deviates from the CEFR and its ways of designing syllabi, but instead it just uses another approach, one which also is quite in line with the thoughts of the CEFR. Since the ENG1-03 has adopted the use of fixed point assessment the use of grading scale descriptors could be argued to become quite superfluous. The CEFR clearly states that none of the approaches adopted by the different syllabi has proved to be better than the other and so both syllabi included in this study have been considered as following the CEFR’s guidelines on this point.

Figueras (2012) discusses this phenomenon of different syllabi that appear to have a completely different approach to their way of dealing with grading scales, but in reality they do both follow the guidelines of the CEFR. The reason for this is that, even if a vast number of syllabi designers may have used the CEFR as a reference point, they have adapted the level descriptors and grading system to fit their own school system and syllabus (Figueras, 2012, pp. 479-480). This is also the reason, according to Figueras (2012), for the CEFR not being referenced or identifiable in any of the syllabi present in this study.

There is one aspect from which one would see obvious differences between the CEFR and the ENG1-03. As mentioned in section 4, the CEFR explicitly encourages syllabus designers to use descriptors on all grade levels available, describing what is required of the student for each level. It also should describe what is required for each level for each language skill, resulting in a total of four descriptors per grade level (one for each respective skill). This aspect has been taken into account by the ENGENG06 since it covers the whole assessment
scale with descriptions for each skill, describing what is expected of the student at the various levels.

Regarding the oral production, both the ENGENG06, the ENG1-03 and the CEFR place a relatively large focus on the phonological control. Students must be able to produce spoken English with a high enough phonological accuracy to control syntactic differences changed by factors such as intonation and pronunciation. In other words, native-like pronunciation is not a criterion for any grade in the two syllabi present in this study; this trait is also traceable to the CEFR. How this is to be assessed is not specified in either of the documents though, more than it is up to the examiner to decide what is considered as good pronunciation and what is not.

When comparing the ENG1-03 with the ENGENG06 there are, first of all, numerous similarities to be noted. Both of the syllabi in question follow, to a relatively high extent, the guidelines proposed in the CEFR. Nevertheless the aspect of the level descriptors is the most relevant one in this study. While the ENG1-03 has no level descriptors available, the ENGENG06 offers descriptors for three out of six levels. Apart from this clear deviation from the guidelines provided in the CEFR, both of the documents analysed and compared have proven to be relatively aligned with what has been written on the subject in the reference material available.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between the two syllabi ENGENG06 and ENG1-03 and the CEFR. The study focuses on the assessment of oral language skills and what general approach and disposition the two syllabi have adopted regarding this aspect, comparing this to those of the CEFR.

As previous researchers have shown in similar studies concerning syllabi from other countries, the CEFR has had a considerable impact on English syllabi in Sweden and Norway. There is no question whether the two syllabi in this study are in compliance with the CEFR even if they have adapted to it in different ways, the Norwegian ENG1-03 being a bit more open for interpretation and not as detailed as the Swedish ENGENG06. Still, the ENG1-03 deviated from the CEFR regarding the level descriptors for each grade, which in the CEFR are stated as a recommendation for all syllabi (see section 3.1.3). This has been interpreted as
the most significant deviation found when analysing these documents. For this reason the ENG1-03 has been interpreted as being less similar to the CEFR than the ENGENG06 is.

The present study was solely intended to investigate the relationship between the Norwegian and Swedish English syllabi and the CEFR. Therefore the conclusions drawn in this study can not be assumed to be valid for all foreign language teaching syllabi in Europe. In order to make the general claim that the CEFR has had a considerable and noticeable impact on L2 syllabus design in all the European countries, more extensive research with a larger selection of syllabi would need to be conducted.
References

Primary sources


Secondary sources


### Proficient User

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Independent User

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Basic User

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2 General vertical scale of the CEFR

### OVERALL ORAL PRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>C2</strong></td>
<td>Can produce clear, smoothly flowing well-structured speech with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C1</strong></td>
<td>Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B2</strong></td>
<td>Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B1</strong></td>
<td>Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A2</strong></td>
<td>Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A1</strong></td>
<td>Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines, likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE: Describing experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>C2</strong></td>
<td>Can give clear, smoothly flowing, elaborate and often memorable descriptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C1</strong></td>
<td>Can give clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects. Can give elaborate descriptions and narratives, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B2</strong></td>
<td>Can give clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest. Can give straightforward descriptions on a variety of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest. Can reasonably fluently relate a straightforward narrative or description as a linear sequence of points. Can give detailed accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions. Can relate details of unpredictable occurrences, e.g. an accident. Can relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions. Can describe dreams, hopes and ambitions. Can describe events, real or imagined. Can narrate a story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B1</strong></td>
<td>Can tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points. Can describe everyday aspects of his/her environment e.g. people, places, a job or study experience. Can give short, basic descriptions of events and activities. Can describe plans and arrangements, habits and routines, past activities and personal experiences. Can use simple descriptive language to make brief statements about and compare objects and possessions. Can explain what he/she likes or dislikes about something. Can describe his/her family, living conditions, educational background, present or most recent job. Can describe people, places and possessions in simple terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A2</strong></td>
<td>Can describe his/her family, living conditions, educational background, present or most recent job. Can describe people, places and possessions in simple terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A1</strong></td>
<td>Can describe him/herself, what he/she does and where he/she lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE: Putting a case (e.g. in a debate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>C2</strong></td>
<td>No descriptor available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C1</strong></td>
<td>No descriptor available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B2</strong></td>
<td>Can develop an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail. Can develop a clear argument, expanding and supporting his/her points of view at some length with subsidiary points and relevant examples. Can construct a chain of reasoned argument. Can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B1</strong></td>
<td>Can develop an argument well enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time. Can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A2</strong></td>
<td>No descriptor available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A1</strong></td>
<td>No descriptor available</td>
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</table>

### PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C2</th>
<th>No descriptor available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Can deliver announcements fluently, almost effortlessly, using stress and intonation to convey finer shades of meaning precisely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Can deliver announcements on most general topics with a degree of clarity, fluency and spontaneity which causes no strain or inconvenience to the listener.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Can deliver short, rehearsed announcements on a topic pertinent to everyday occurrences in his/her field which, despite possibly very foreign stress and intonation, are nevertheless clearly intelligible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Can deliver very short, rehearsed announcements of predictable, learnt content which are intelligible to listeners who are prepared to concentrate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>No descriptor available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The descriptors on this sub-scale have not been empirically calibrated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADDRESSING AUDIENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The descriptors on this sub-scale have been created by recombining elements of descriptors from other scales.