Developing English language online -
A study of ten Swedish adolescents' Internet habits and language proficiency

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Abstract
This study aimed at investigating some of the possible effects of the computer on adolescents’ language development. As a base for the study Sundqvist’s (2009) study on extramural English (EE) was used. The work of David Crystal provided a substantial background on the English language, which was complemented by the work of Halliday among others.

In the study ten national writing tests were examined and analyzed, and a small survey of the ten students’ Internet habits was performed. The mistakes and errors made by the students in the tests were compared to their value of exposure to Internet English (EIE) in order to establish possible links between their Internet habits and their writing mistakes. The study found that the five boys that took part spent more time online and engaging in activities where English was used than the girls of the study. It was also found that the students who spend the most time online made substantially more errors and mistakes regarding the apostrophe, mainly in contractions. It was also found that the students who spent little time online and had a low value of EIE were more likely to make mistakes and errors regarding verbs and agreement.

Although the study was too limited for any generalizations to be made, it hinted at some possible links between Internet habits of adolescents and their performance on the national test and their general language proficiency.
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1. Introduction

In modern day society of the industrialized world, the computer has come to have a central role in both our professional and social lives. The computer is used as an aid in both our work lives and social lives, and to find an office in a country in the Western world that does not have computers is well-nigh impossible. The computer is a feature that is present in a large percentage of the homes as well, with 88% of the population of Sweden, for example, having access to the Internet and 85% having access to broadband at home. Among the Internet users in the age 12 to 44, nine out of ten use the Internet on a daily basis (Findahl 2011). Not only are computers a standard feature to be seen in any home, but the users range from young to old.

With the Internet being a very common feature in adolescents’ lives, schools in Sweden are now starting to use computers as an aid in education more and more frequently. In some schools every student has their own computer, with constant access to the Internet and all the social interactions that come with it. The students bring their computers with them home at the end of the day, and it is not at all uncommon for students to use the computer in order to socialize with their peers.

With this in mind, it would be interesting to investigate in what way computer usage influences their learning in school. The most commonly used language on the Internet is, without question, English, and English is as Jim Erickson puts it “the default choice” (1998:1). In his article, Erickson draws attention to a situation where the eight-year-old son of the President of Kyrgyzstan, central Asia, informed his father that he had to learn English, because it was the language that his computer spoke (1998). This goes to show that the use of computers is not restricted to adults, and a direct result is that the users are exposed to a foreign language at an early age.

This essay will focus on analyzing texts produced by a group of Swedish students who study in upper secondary school, and have read English in school for close to ten years. During this time it is also highly likely that they are exposed to what Sundqvist (2009) refers to as extramural English. Extramural English, henceforth EE, is in rough terms any form of English that students encounter through various activities outside of school. As Swedish adolescents likely spend significant amounts of time with online activities, many of which are likely to be in English, it would be interesting to see if, and how, these activities influence their use of the English language. The essay will also give a detailed view of what kind of language is likely to be used online, referring to a study by Österljung (2011) that established a formality level of chat language compared to that of written and spoken English. A small
A survey concerning the students’ Internet habits was performed, along with an analysis of student texts.

### 1.1 Presentation of aims

The aim of this essay is to investigate if there is a link between the Internet usage of adolescents and the way they use the English language. As indicated by Österljung (2011), the language used in the forums where adolescents are likely to interact showed some interesting grammatical patterns. This essay will attempt to find out what kind of errors and mistakes the group of students in the study made, and investigate a possible link between their Internet habits and their writing. The study will analyze formal texts written by upper secondary level students, a national writing test in this case, and search for some of the features that were previously found to be common in chat language.

The research question is thus: Is there a link between Internet usage and the English language proficiency of Swedish adolescents and if so, how does this link affect their more formal writing?

### 2. Background/Previous research

In this section a brief historical overview of English as a subject in Swedish schools will be given, as well as where the focus has previously been placed, and where the focus is placed today. In addition, the global standing of the English language will be accounted for, as well as a short presentation of the different kinds of language that Swedish adolescents are likely to encounter while engaging in online activities. The importance of such activities and the exposure to extramural English will also be addressed.

#### 2.1 English in Swedish schools

The status of the subject of English in Swedish schools has been strong for a significant amount time. One indication of this standing is the fact that in order to advance to a program in the upper secondary school one must pass three subjects, English being one along with Swedish and mathematics. The strong standing of English as a subject in Swedish schools may stem from the increasingly strong global position that English has gained in the last decades or so. This global standing of English will be further investigated later on in the essay.
English is the only foreign language that is taught as an obligatory subject to every student in Swedish schools. Although a second foreign language is chosen for the vast majority of the students, this language can vary between German, French and Spanish. It is also possible, in case there is a certain need, to drop the second foreign language for individual students in order to give additional aid in English and Swedish. This is another indication that English is considered an exceptionally important subject in the Swedish school system. Strong as the position of English may be today, it is interesting to see how this has developed throughout the years.

Going back to *undervisningsplan för rikets folkskolor* roughly translated as *educational plan for the country’s public schools* from Kungl. Skolöverstyrelsen (1955), the standing of English as a subject was rather less prominent than it is today. Although it was an obligatory subject back then as well, it was not the only foreign language that was considered obligatory, as German had the same status. Since then, the status of German has been reduced somewhat and is now one of three choices as a second foreign language that is most commonly picked up in the seventh school year. English on the other hand has gone from being one of two obligatory foreign languages to become the foreign language in Swedish schools.

Moving on to the syllabus from 1969, there has been a clear change in the standing of the two languages. The importance of English as a subject seems to have increased, while German has become an optional subject. Somewhere between 1955 and 1969 English came to be considered an important subject in the Swedish school system, which is indicated by the fact that it is now the only obligatory foreign language taught. This standing has then further increased throughout the decades and been established in several of the subsequent syllabi. This is a consequence of the increasing global role and importance of English.

### 2.1.1 Focus of English education

According to the curriculum for upper secondary school, the English subject should aim to develop the language skill of the students, so that they can, want and dare to use the language in different situations and for varied purposes. The curriculum also expresses that teaching should, as far as possible, be in English and that the students are to come in contact with both written and spoken English of a varied nature (Skolverket 2011). The curriculum also states the importance of the English language in Sweden and why the skills are necessary for young Swedes to develop, as English is an important language for politics, economics, education as well as culture. Having a good knowledge of English will enable the students to engage in a largely globalized study- and working life. Several times the curriculum places focus on the
term communication. The most important part appears to be to have the students communicate, and that they are not afraid to use and apply the language in different situations. The curriculum states certain aspects that the course should include and what the students are expected to learn. The curriculum divides these into three main categories: communicative content, reception as well as production and interaction. Out of the three categories it is the third that poses the most interest for this study. The course should include oral and written production and interaction in various situations and forms, including those of a more formal nature. The course should also aim to develop strategies for the student to interact and contribute to discussions with a connection to society and work life. The course should also include (something which is of particular interest for this study) processing of the produced oral and written communication in order to diversify, clarify and detail as well as to create a structure and adapt to the purpose and situation. In this is included the use of words and phrases that clarify causal connection and the aspect of time. All the course content and the course aims presented thus far are from the course Engelska 5 from the new syllabus from 2011. How do the content and aims of this course differ from the previous English curriculum?

In the curriculum from 1955 it is stated that students are to engage in reading exercises, listening exercises, and speaking exercises as well as continued written application of the English language. By the fifth year of studying English, certain weight is also placed on observing and correcting any problems with pronunciation and intonation. Certain weight is also placed on accidence and syntactic phenomena. This stands in stark contrast to what the corresponding curriculum from 2011 states for the same school year. Two words that are given particular importance in the curriculum from 2011 are develop and communicate. The education in English has the main objective of developing certain sets of skills. Among the skills that are to be developed are the abilities to understand and interpret the content in both spoken and written English, communicate in speech and writing, use strategies to understand and to be understood as well as reflect upon living conditions and cultural events and proceedings in different parts of the world where English is used. Not once does the curriculum from 2011 mention things such as pronunciation or accidence. In addition, the term communicate is absent in the curriculum from 1955, as well as in the curriculum from 1969. Instead there seem to be a focus on correct form and grammar. The curriculum used today advocates communication as the important aspect, not adhering to a set of grammatical rules. In other words, it seems to be preferable to speak much slightly wrong, than to speak little but correctly.
2.1.2 The national writing test

The national tests are developed by the Swedish Education Administration (Skolverket) and replaced the previously used tests called “standardprov”, meaning standardized test. The general idea of the national test is to support equal and fair evaluation and grading. The test is also used as a basis for evaluating how well the knowledge demands are met. The test may also act as a help in implementing the syllabus and providing clear guidelines regarding the students’ target achievement. National tests in English for upper secondary school are held in both English 5 and English 6, previously known as English A and English B (Skolverket 2011).

2.2. Extramural English and language development

In the work Advanced Language Learning, H. Byrnes, along with several other contributors, discuss the importance of directed learning and instructed learning environments. Her volume focuses on advanced foreign language learning. She argues that the attaining of advanced levels of L2 ability may not be dependent on the location of the study but rather the learning opportunities that are offered and the nature and breadth of said opportunities. Opportunities such as those mentioned may be provided in instructed learning environments, giving students the opportunity to advance their abilities. Although making the point that location may not the “operative factor” (Byrnes 2006:3), Byrnes does not reject the fact that an L2 learner would benefit from a cultural sojourn. With the help of the Internet, which basically means having the world just a click away, students are able to engage in discourse with native speakers of English, much like one would during a stay at an English speaking country. The language that the students are then exposed to is likely to be the language commonly used in computer mediated communication, CMC.

In a study about extramural English, EE, and how it affects Swedish learners of English, Pia Sundqvist (2009) found that EE had significantly positive effects on both the oral proficiency and vocabulary of the students. The study also showed that activities that required the student to be active, such as the Internet and video games, affected the students more than activities where the user is passive, such as films and music. The Internet and the activities that the adolescents engage in are all extramural activities, and it is therefore of interest to investigate if such activities have a positive effect on the students’ writing as well.

Another benefit from the exposure to EE is the possibilities of two learners engaging in conversations where a negotiation of meaning and understanding is forced. Gass & Mackey
(2006) pointed out that learner-learner interactions are beneficial in L2 acquisition. Such interactions are not at all uncommon on the Internet where the users may have different first languages and are likely to resort to English as a means of communication.

2.2.1. The lingua franca
The Internet has become a worldwide phenomenon, and the fact that most of the world is now able to connect and go online has created a need for a common universal channel of communication like never before. Erickson observes that “If we are going to engage in digital discourse and commerce across the Internet, a common currency is required for easy exchange” (1998:1). There is simply a need for a language that has a global status and is a default choice, since this eliminates need for interpreters and a language with a status as a global language will help countries focus education towards a foreign language that will be of great use in international relations. This is also observed by Crystal in *English as a global language* (1997). Lingua franca, meaning roughly “common language” has been established previously in regions with many different languages. Previously in Europe for example, German held a high status in the northern parts during the 16th and 17th centuries. In the 18th century the “common language” was French, as France was the cultural and political superpower of the time. In the same way, English has established such a status today, and has reached a previously unprecedented global spread. A rough estimate puts the number of people able to communicate in English at around 1 400 million speakers (Crystal 2004).

With the arrival of the Internet, the interactions between people of different language backgrounds have exploded, and therefore a need for a lingua franca has never been greater. Few languages can rival the status of English, and this is due to three major factors. In order for a language to be considered global, it will need to be recognized and have a special role in almost every country. This can be in countries where it is the first language, for English this goes for USA, Canada and Britain for instance. No language has however achieved first language status in more that roughly a dozen countries. English has established itself as an official or semi-official language in a larger number of countries than any other language has achieved in the past. This is due to historical expansions made by both the UK and the USA. Thirdly, a special role of a language can be achieved by being the first choice language in foreign language teaching. English is today the most common foreign language taught, with around 600 million people able to speak it as a foreign language (Crystal 2004). These factors all contribute to making English the undeniable lingua franca of today.
2.2.2. English and the Internet
The most frequently used language on the Internet, and when it comes to computers in general, is without doubt English. In 1998, roughly 80% of the content on the Internet was in English (Erickson 1998). To give a similar figure today would be more difficult than in 1998, mostly due to the enormous growth the Internet has seen since then. It would be hard however to dispute the fact that most content is still in English. The reasons behind English being the language of choice are a few; one deciding factor could be the previously established status of English as a lingua franca. This status is today strong enough that in a conversation between two Scandinavians, who both speak languages that are closely related, there is a significant chance that they will use English. Similarly, when operating on international forums on the Internet, it is customary to use English, at least until the nationality and native language of the recipients can be established. Even after establishing a nationality of the desired recipient, it is not uncommon to stick to English on a forum as a way of not excluding other forum participants.

Another factor that is likely to have contributed to English being a “default” language choice on the Internet and in the computer world in general, is the fact that the leading producers and developers of both hardware and software are based in the US, where both the industry and the Internet was born (Erickson 1998). Even though one can observe that more and more softwares support an increasing amount of languages, far from all softwares support languages that are considered small and have a low number of users, such as Swedish. Therefore, if one wants to use most of the software available on the market, one must, as the eight-year-old in Kyrgyzstan concluded, learn English.

Apart from factors related to the origin of the computer industry and the status of lingua franca to explain the position of English on the Internet, there is another strong contributing factor. As mentioned, there are multiple different software and hardware that need to work together. This has created a need for standardized platforms and sets of rules. This need and desire has not arisen from, as Erickson puts it “any pull toward universal brotherhood” (1998:1), but rather from practicality.

2.2.3. Computer mediated communication (CMC)
Communication by computer, CMC, is a debated issue. When the Internet was on the rise, many warned that it spelled the doom for language diversity and claimed that individual languages would end up as Internet casualties. Some also proposed that the relaxed standards of CMC would spell the end of literacy and spelling as we know it. About two decades after
the Internet dawned; these voices are now less significant; still there are those who warn that CMC and the Internet have a negative effect on language from a linguistic point of view. However, as Crystal (2006) points out, similar concerns were raised when the printing press emerged, and again with the discovery of broadcasting. In hindsight, it is difficult to find anything more significant and beneficial to the advancement of language than the printing press since… well the written word itself. Perhaps with the Internet, just as with the printing press, people were a bit hasty in their judgment.

CMC can be divided into two major categories, synchronous and asynchronous CMC, with the difference between the two being whether the response is direct or indirect, in other words, if the communication plays out in real time or not (Crystal 2006). In asynchronous CMC, the communication is played out much as it would through the postal system. One participant sends a message, waits for the recipient to read the message and return a reply. The delay in feedback can range from minutes to days, even weeks. In synchronous CMC however, the feedback is direct and the participants are able to read the message the instant it is sent, and this type of CMC therefore resembles spoken conversation. For the purpose of this study, it is the synchronous type of CMC that is the most interesting to look at.

2.2.4. Synchronous CMC, the language of chat

Communicating over the Internet allows a user to enter into multi-party conversations with any group of people with access to the Internet anywhere in the world. This communication can be both synchronous and asynchronous, and goes by many different names. When referring to chat in this essay, it is the synchronous multi-party communication that is in question. In chat, the user enters an ongoing conversation that can be either synchronous or asynchronous and can take place between two or multiple participants (Crystal 2006). As mentioned previously, it is synchronous chat that is of interest here, and thus when referring to chat it is the synchronous, multiple user type that is referred to unless something else is stated. Sauro & Smith (2010) define written synchronous CMC as chat, or text-chat, and gives a few example of how this can be applied to teaching situations. Normal spoken conversations have limitations that chat eliminates. Among these, as Sauro & Smith point out, are the introduction of a lag time between receiving a message and responding to it. This lag time gives the user time to prepare an appropriate response, removing the pressure to do so under the users “turn”. Spoken conversation is turn-based, meaning that only one participant is able to speak at once in order to make the conversation audible and understandable. If this rule is broken, a conversation is soon disintegrated and turned into anarchy. This turn-based rule is
also eliminated by the chat environment, as the users can all prepare their messages at the same time, then post them simultaneously. The message or statement remains visible for a substantial time, which enables the user to backtrack and reread previous contributions, and also take time to make sure that the message is understood (Sauro & Smith 2010).

2.2.5. The mode of chat
Mode is a systemic functional linguistic term that relates to the way the language functions in a situation, for instance whether it is spoken or written (Hewings & Hewings 2005). Mode is a part of the three aspects of context, the other two being tenor and field. Tenor refers to the participants of a discourse and their relationships towards each other, field represents the subject or content that is discussed and mode is the channel through which the discourse takes place. The three aspects are in relation to each other, and all have a significant importance when it comes to the language that is produced in a discourse (Halliday 1985). In a recent study to define the formality level of the language used in online games, a comparison was made between chat in online gaming, speech and writing. It was established that the degree of formality is very low and there were several indications suggesting that chat differentiates itself from speech and writings in ways that make it viable to speak of chat as a separate mode. The study also indicated that there were certain grammatical patterns that seemed to be similar to most gaming environments. Although a majority of the data for the corpus used in the study was gathered in World of Warcraft (WoW), some of it, roughly 30 %, was gathered in the game Starcraft 2 (SC2) and the chatrooms belonging to the game. These two games produce very different gaming situations, SC2 being a lot more time pressed and hurried. Yet the grammatical structure of the two games was very similar (Österljung 2011).

It can of course be argued that the corpus used in the study was too small, and that only two games cannot be said to represent online gaming as a whole. Still, the games have a large number of users and they represent two very different kinds of online gaming, WoW being a role playing game (rpg) and SC2 is a real time strategy (rts) game. While the two game types produce, very different opportunities for communication, they were nonetheless found to share a similar pattern.

2.2.6. Common features of chat language
The most notable feature of the online gaming chat, found by Österljung (2011), was the frequency of subject and verb ellipsis. It was argued that this was in part due to a time saving measure, as a player is often pressed for time when delivering a message. This also accounts
for the habit of removing the apostrophe, thus writing “its” rather than “it’s” and so on. There are also features that were less common in online gaming chat than in speech or writing, such as coordination and subordination, subordination hardly being used at all (Österljung 2011). While this way of writing is commonly accepted in the gaming environment, it would come off as grammatically deviant in other writing situations. It is in some ways limited to the mode of chat in online gaming. For a more detailed description of differences between speech, writing and online gaming chat, see Österljung (2011).

2.2.7. Language in online gaming

After establishing that Swedish adolescents are frequent users of the Internet, it is important to look at what they are doing. Many forums are international, meaning that the default choice of language will undoubtedly be English. Therefore, Swedish students who spend time on international forums are exposed to more use of English than the students who are not. One very likely kind of forum where this holds specifically true is the world of online gaming. Many Swedish teenagers spend time playing games such as World of Warcraft (WoW) and League of Legends. According to their own figures, both games have over 10 million users each in writing moment, many of whom are located in Europe. More updated number can be found on battle.net and leagueoflegends.com.

Crystal (1988) identifies that there are differences in the grammar between speech and writing. This is an effect of the difference of the situation the speakers or writers are in. When writing, it is possible to plan ahead what to write, correct the text, pause, reflect on it and even change what is written and thus remove unwanted information form the end result. Many of these abilities and possibilities are removed when speaking. (Crystal 1988).

2.2.8. Online activities, a gender perspective

As previously mentioned in this essay, Swedish adolescents are likely to spend significant amounts of time on the Internet and engaging in different activities. It has also been established that these activities can vary between activities where the user produces language and where the user is a passive recipient. Furthermore, Sundqvist (2009) found that activities that forced the user to actively partake and produce language had a significantly greater effect on the oral proficiency and the vocabulary. In her study, Sundqvist lists several activities where video games and the Internet are two activities of particular interest for this study, and both are considered to be of the active and producing nature. However it can be argued that there is a difference between certain activities performed online, as will be discussed further
on in this essay. As the aim of this study is to examine the Internet habits of Swedish adolescents, it is of some significance to note that it is possible to distinguish between active and passive online activities.

In the study, Sundqvist points out that there is a significant difference in the types of activities performed by the students depending on their gender. The boys that took part in the study engaged in more productive activities, that is to say, in activities where the user produces language. The girls on the other hand seemed more inclined to use more passive activities, thus being more on the receiving end, while the boys where more producing. This gender perspective is interesting for this study as well. Even though the number of students in this study does not permit any generalizations to be made, it would be interesting to see if there are any differences between what activities the male and female students of the study engage in, and if Sundqvist’s observations apply to these students as well.

3. Method and theory

Swedish adolescents spend a lot of time on the Internet, and as previously established a majority of the content on the Internet is in English. It is therefore of interest to examine how time spent on the Internet affects their knowledge of English and specifically their writing skills. As the Internet is bursting with social media in various forms and shapes, the language used in different forums can vary greatly between different channels of communication. One of the aims of this essay is to examine if the communicative mode of chat intrudes in the students’ more formal writing. The type of error made by the students is thereby taken as possible indications that there may be cases of “chat language” intruding in their writing. Any intrusions of this kind are however much dependent on the nature of the incorrectness, as will be discussed further on in the essay.

In order to answer the questions posed by this study, student texts of a more formal nature were examined. The writing part of the national test in English would provide a good framework for a student to write such a text, and therefore a number of national writing tests in English were analyzed. The national tests are a way to ascertain a sort of national standard of knowledge across all schools in Sweden. Note that the test is not the sole factor when it comes to grading students in Swedish schools; they do however act as an aid for teachers to make sure that the knowledge level is roughly where it should be at, and can help teachers to find out where to focus the education for individual students. The national test should be
considered and used as a tool for teachers to help determine the students’ progress, rather than be decisive when it comes to grading.

3.1 Gathering the material
When selecting material for a study of this sort, it is always important to look at what one wishes to find, and what the best method for finding it is. While a quantitative study would make it possible to draw more general conclusions about the findings, it would still only count for the schools and the area where the study was performed. In order to make a quantitative study yield any result that can be applied to the Swedish schools and Swedish students in general, a large number of schools from different parts of Sweden would have to be included. That kind of study would be substantially larger than what is made possible by the limitations of this work. That kind of quantitative study would be a later project where such an extensive study could be performed.

In order to be manageable and still give interesting and meaningful results, a term paper within the teacher programme necessarily has to be narrowed. Instead of analyzing a large number of tests and counting grammatical features, a smaller number of tests was examined. This allowed for a more detailed review of the tests, as well as allowing for some thought as to how incorrecness occurred. It also allowed for a small survey of the students’ computer habits and what kind of activities they engage in online. Most importantly, it was possible to establish a rough estimate of how much of the content that was in English, thus directly relating the study to the research question. It would be a likely hypothesis that students that engage in conversations in English and explore content in English would be more likely to show signs that chat language influenced their writing.

The student texts that were used for this study were selected in agreement with the students’ teacher, and ten texts were chosen. Five texts written by male students as well as five texts written by female students were chosen. The gender was taken into consideration as it is likely, yet not proven, that male and female adolescents engage in somewhat different activities online. Each of the students was then contacted, and asked to participate in the study. It was made sure with utmost certainty that all students agreed to have their text examined and take part in the small survey. All students were from the same school, and they all have the same teacher. They study in the Swedish equivalent of high school, and live in an average sized Swedish town. In order to protect the students’ anonymity, the students will simply be referred to as Male Student (MS) 1-5 and Female Student (FS) 1-5.
3.1.1 The survey

Each of the students participating in the study was asked five questions regarding their Internet habits and how much English content they use, as well as if they are members of any English speaking online community. Although short and simple, the questions, if answered truthfully, would give a good picture of what their computer habits look like and what type of content they use, and thus how much English they are exposed to from the Internet. Especially questions four and five are of particular interest for the study at hand, as it is precisely that kind of online activities that are bound to result in a lot of exposure to English. It is also highly likely that the language used will be of a chat oriented nature. The survey will also help to distinguish any difference between students who do partake in online activities and conversations in English, compared to students who do not. However it is important to note that there can be no generalizations made based on this study, neither for students in general nor for the online activities of male and female students. The results from this study will undoubtedly be very individual for the students included in the study. For results to be generalized, a much more substantial study would have to be performed, as previously mentioned.

1. Do you have access to the Internet at home? (yes/no)
2. How much of your spare time do you spend online? (estimate hours/day)
3. In your own estimate, how much of the content you use on the Internet is in English? (in percentage)
4. Are you active in any English speaking online community (games, forums, YouTube channels and so on)?
5. If you answered yes to question 4, what kind of community/communities?

The five questions used for the study give a better understanding of the amount of English that each of the students that took part in the study is exposed to at home. Comparing this with their results could enable us to explain some of the possible errors and mistakes made by the students. Supposing that some of the students make errors concerning the communicative mode, such as subject/verb ellipsis in a formal text or the lack of apostrophe in contractions, a possible explanation could be that features of chat language are mistakenly used in a formal text. This survey is intended to make it possible to establish this link with a particular student. The answers from the survey were processed and values for each individual student were elsewhere presented. This value will illustrate the amount of exposure to Internet English,
henceforth EIE, and will be a value between 1 and 5 where the value 5 represents a high amount of EIE. More details on the values and meanings of the EIE will be given in the analysis section.

3.1.2. Why this test?
As previously mentioned, the national test is a standardized method used to ascertain a national standard of knowledge. It aims to make sure that all teachers grade students equally. The national test consists of three parts, a reading comprehension test, a listening comprehension test as well as a writing test. The writing part of the test provides an opportunity for students to write about a subject in a formal way, often arguing a case or explaining why they are of a certain opinion. What this does is forcing students to enter a writing environment that has certain rules that need to be adhered to in order to maintain the desired level of formality. The emphasis here is as much on the form as on the communicative capacity. In a school where the emphasis is on the communicative aspect, as has previously been established, the national writing test differentiates somewhat from what the students are normally tasked with. For the study at hand, which is to examine if the students are able to adapt their language in order to adhere to the rules and formality of the given situation, the writing part of the national test is well suited.

It could be argued that it would have been more suitable to have students perform a writing assignment that was formed specifically for this study. However, such an assignment would not guarantee that the students treated it with the seriousness required in order to draw any conclusions about their ability to adapt their language and adhere to a given set of rules, such as using the correct tense, as well as subject and verb agreement. It would also provide additional problems, such as the creation of the assignment itself, and what instructions to give the students taking the assignment. It would be very difficult to create an assignment that would accurately examine the students’ ability to adapt their language, if the students are aware that they are writing the assignment for that purpose. Using a national writing test, a test that the students have to write regardless of any ongoing study, guarantees a serious mindset in the students. After all, most students strive to perform well on a national test. In addition, this limits the effect the process of gathering the data may have on the outcome, thus somewhat limiting any contamination of the data from the researcher. And as mentioned, since the nature of the assignment is to write a formal text, this provides an opportunity to investigate how well students perform when writing formal texts. Investigating the texts enables us to identify any possible incorrectness made by the students.
3.2. The grammatical cues

Analyzing the national writing tests will hopefully provide insight into the level of adaptability to a specific situation of the students in the study. The students are likely to make some grammatical errors, as it is highly unlikely that they have reached grammatical perfection, if such a thing even exists. Naturally however, not all the incorrectness made by the students can be explained by the intrusion of chat language in a formal text. The features that were most conspicuous in the previous study by Österljung (2011) were subject/verb ellipsis, also common in speech but even more so in the language used in chats, as well as the missing apostrophe in contractions. It was also found that chat language used very little subordination compared to written texts, and if the student texts show little use of subordination, chat language could be an explanation. Another explanation could simply be that the student is at a very basic grammatical level and is unable to subordinate clauses. Hopefully, for the sake of the educational system, that is not the case.

The grammatical cues found in the students’ texts could, when related to the small survey they also took part in, answer the question about how well the students are able to adapt their language to the given situation. It will also give a good view on what kind of incorrectness these students made, and if there was any link between the incorrectness made and their Internet habits.

3.2.1. Possible outcome

When analyzing the national tests and searching for a certain type of incorrectness and grammatical features in the texts, there is of course the chance that none of these features will be found. The students could possess a well-developed capacity for writing a text of this nature and thus not make the anticipated incorrectness. Or they could simply be making a long list of other errors or mistakes that would not be relevant in relation to the study at hand. The knowledge level of the individual students taking part in this study was unknown beforehand, and it is therefore impossible to hypothesize about the outcome. However regardless of what is found when analyzing the texts, some conclusions can be made for each individual student. If there are no errors or mistakes indicating that the students are unable or poor at adapting their language to a specific situation, then it is likely that the student is able to adapt the language to the situation at hand. There is also the possibility that some of the students are at a level where they have trouble to write a text of this nature at all, and in these instances it would be hard to establish a link between the errors and mistakes made and the
students’ Internet habits. But as mentioned, regardless of what is found in the students’ texts, some conclusions can be made.

3.2.2. Errors and mistakes

As the study at hand is based on an analysis of national writing tests, and the mistakes and errors made in them, it is important to establish exactly what the two terms mean. In order to do this, Ellis’s theory on L2 acquisition will be used, where a distinction between errors and mistakes is made. Ellis (1997) argues that even native speakers and users of a language sometimes make incorrect use of the language. Such incorrectness is referred to as mistakes, in other words where a user is pressed for time or otherwise not paying full attention. Errors on the other hand, Ellis argues, represent occasions where the user lacks certain knowledge required in order to make correct use of the language in a given situation. For the study at hand, Ellis’s distinction of errors and mistakes will be used. In other terms, whenever there is a case of incorrectness in a text that is rarely occurring, and when the grammatical feature in question is written correctly otherwise in the text, the incorrectness will be considered a mistake. Likewise incorrectness with a grammatical feature that is present more than once and where the majority of the occasions the feature is used are wrong, the incorrectness will be considered as an error. Whenever a more neutral distinction indicating that something in the text is wrong, the more neutral term incorrectness will, as has been in this segment, be used.

3.3. Troubles encountered when gathering the material

The process of gathering materials for a study such as this is dependent in many ways on the situation. That is to say, it is very difficult to gather national writing tests for an analysis if there are no tests to be done at the given time. Teachers may not always save the students’ answers from such tests, and as mentioned previously, creating a new test for the students to take may not have the desired effect. With this said, there were some factors that proved troublesome when it came down to gathering the tests. The most important factor was that the test was held at a rather late date in the spring term. This lead to the choice of either abandoning the study in order to attempt something else, creating another test, or simply carry on and hope for the best. The first option would possibly mean that any previous work in gathering background research and so on would have to be abandoned. The second choice would significantly increase the amount of time needed that would be taken from the students’ normal education, as well as put some extra strain on the educating teacher. In the end, the choice was made to carry on with the study. However if any similar study is to be performed in the future, it is highly advised to gather the material, if possible, a long time in
advance. After all, it does not particularly matter when the texts were written, as long as it is relevant and in accordance with the current syllabus and curriculum.

Regarding the survey, it proved to be far less challenging than the gathering of the tests. In a Swedish school today it seems to be far more common for the students to have their own e-mail address, making the act of contacting them rather straightforward. The initial thought was to use the survey as a way to decide the group of students that would partake in the study. This idea was however dropped, as it would mean interfering in the education, which is good to avoid if possible. Additionally, the teacher had a good sense of which students would be interesting for the study at hand, and was in just a few minutes able to recommend the desired number of participants. These students were then contacted and asked to participate, and none of the students decided against it. This is of course something that may otherwise cause problems, it is therefore recommended to hold off starting analyzing the material until clearance is given. As mentioned, contacting the students posed little to no challenge, and the survey provided short and concise as well as rather accurate answers. It can be argued after all that the students themselves would have the most accurate estimates of time spent and activities engaged in online.

4. Results and Analysis

As already mentioned in section 3, the test that was to be analyzed was the national writing test in English. This year the topic was Responsible buying and the students were asked to write an article discussing their own opinions and experiences when it comes to responsible buying. The text was to be fictively published in an Internet magazine. The average length of the texts was roughly three hand-written pages. As previously mentioned ten tests were used; five were written by male students and five were written by female students. For the sake of anonymity, the students will be referred to as male student 1-5 (MS1-5) and female student 1-5 (FS1-5).

In the study at hand, certain types of mistakes and errors made by the students are of particular interest; however in the results section all grammatical errors made more than once in the text will be listed and exemplified, even if some of them may not be of major importance in the analysis. Results will be listed for each individual student, and the more common mistakes and errors will be shown as examples.

4.1. Results from the tests
Before we go into the details of each student, there are some things that can be said for all the student texts that were part of the study. One of the features to be looked at was the subject/verb ellipsis that was the most noticeable feature of the chat language in the previous study by Österljung (2011). In the 10 texts that were analyzed, no cases of this subject/verb ellipsis were found. There were cases of missing verbs but there would be no other reasonable explanation than that the ellipsis was due to an error as in the case illustrated by example (1):

(1) a organization that _ traying to stop...

is has been left out. Apart from this the most notable verb issue was that of agreement errors, where there was no agreement between subject and verb. The lack of subject/verb ellipsis and the implications of that for the study will be discussed further on.

Another noticeable incorrectness that was apparent across most of the texts analyzed was the problem caused by apostrophe use. Every example possible of the mistakes and errors associated with use of the apostrophe could be found in the texts, from the lack of apostrophe in contractions, to misplacing the apostrophe, lack of it in genitive and the use of it in plural. The possible reasons for the problems with the apostrophe will be discussed in the analysis section.

In the texts written by the students in this study, the use of contracted forms was rather common. It can be argued whether or not contracted forms would be formal enough for this type of assignments. The assignment was to write an argumentative article for an online magazine, although fictional. Contracted forms can be found in numerous text of this nature, and newspapers such as The Sun use contracted forms regularly. With this in mind, any use of contracted form will be considered neither an error nor a mistake, but will be considered in agreement with the assignment.

4.1.1. Male participant 1

As mentioned before, subject and verb agreements were an issue in most of the texts and so was the case with MS1. All of the occurrences were confusions of the forms is and are, which is illustrated in the following example:

(2) the sweetshops is most common in the countries with bad economy.
If the sentence is corrected, *sweetshops* is actually *sweatshops* and as they are here plural it is of course *are* that is the correct verb form. Several cases of errors similar to this one were present in the text of MS1. There was also a case of wrong pronoun in the sentence (3):

(3)  *computer screens just laying around filled with toxic gas in it.*

Again there is no agreement with the subject of the clause, which in this case is in plural; the correct pronoun is thus *them.*

MS1 also shows some uncertainty when it comes to the use of the apostrophe, most notably with genitives, but there are also cases of the apostrophe missing in contractions, even though most contractions in the text were complete with the apostrophe. An excellent example to show this uncertainty is the first part of the sentence:

(4)  *All im trying to say is that if the world end is near.*

If we look past the notoriously common mistake of writing *I* with lower-case *i*, there is also the apostrophe missing and it should be *I’m* of course. There is also the problem of the genitive in *world end* and it must of course either be *end of the world* or *world’s end*. Other cases of genitive errors were present, most common was the lack of apostrophe, as in:

(5)  *it’s not because the indians calander ended.*

In this sentence the apostrophe that comes with the genitive is omitted, resulting in a faulty construction. What MS1 is saying here is that there are many Indians, when it should say *Indians’.* Several other cases of the apostrophe missing in genitives were present in the text, which is why this is regarded as an error rather than a mistake (Ellis 1997).

4.1.2. Male student 2

MS2 wrote a text that is rather difficult to grade and get a feel for at first glance. Yet there is little pointing towards a situation where the student would fail the assignment. The main problem in this student’s writing is that every other word is misspelled. However the spelling will in this case be overlooked and any error that can be attributed to spelling mistakes will not be mentioned at all. The reasoning behind this is that the student suffers from dyslexia,
which means that the student has severe difficulties with spelling correctly. There are nevertheless points of interest in the text that have nothing to do with spelling.

As many of the other students, MS2 has some verb problems. They are not so much due to subject and verb agreement, but have more to do with inflection and writing in the right tense which example (6) illustrates:

(6)  *If you support fair-trade and baying their products with their logo on it...*

As mentioned, spelling is not the main focus here, but rather the use of the verb which in this case is *baying*. The verb has an inflectional error as well as being misspelled, and it should read *If you support fair-trade and buy their products with their logo on them*. There are also two errors regarding pronouns; one error can be written off as a spelling mistake, but could of course just as well be that the student mixes up *there* and *their*. The other error is using *it* with the plural products instead of *them*. There are some hints to suggest that the first error is not of a spelling nature, but the result of an uncertainty when it comes to pronouns. MS2 makes repeated errors with pronouns, which examples (7) and (8) illustrate:

(7)  *We humans have to save ower self first.*

(8)  *Miljons of pepol bay every year for ower working them self...*

The second sentence may look confusing, but considering that *bay* probably in this case should be *die* it starts to make more sense. In both cases the pronoun is wrong though, as it should naturally be *ourselves* and *themselves*. The previously mentioned dyslexia is also quite evident in these examples; however dyslexia is not likely to cause a structure such as:

(9)  *Dont just save you [yourself], save humanety.*

The tests were, as mentioned, written by hand and MS2 had little aid in his writing, which is rather unfortunate. It is of course arguable that all the errors regarding the pronouns in examples 4-6 are due to spelling. MS2 does however make similar errors throughout the text, many of which are plural reflexive pronouns. In fact, not a single reflexive pronoun in plural was written correctly, which at least indicates that the problem goes beyond spelling.
Last but certainly not least, especially not in these circumstances, MS2 uses contractions rather frequently. More importantly, not once was a contraction complete with an apostrophe. The word *don’t* appeared seven times in the text, every time written as *dont*. Considering that the text is two hand written pages long, this is a rather frequent error.

4.1.3. Male student 3
The text produced by MS3 gives a feeling that MS3 has a rather well developed language and is most likely to pass by a good margin, possibly even get a VG. MS3’s text displays a low frequency of major grammatical errors, such as agreement and inflection. One or two agreement mistakes were found, such as:

(10) …*supporting the companies that is using them.*

Here the common mistake of using *is* instead of *are* is made, and there was also a case of an inflectional error in:

(11) *But ofcourse it does not only involved clothes.*

MS3 either intends to write in past tense, in that case the inflection should be on the auxiliary verb and not *involve, does* thus becoming *did*, or MS3 is using present tense, in which case there should be no inflection at all. The –*ed* inflection is wrong either way.

The grammatical feature that seems to cause MS3 the most headaches however, is plural. Several plural errors were made, some adding the plural –s to uncountable words, such as *stuff*, where MS3 writes:

(12) *some new stuffs*

This plural construction appears on several occasions in the text. MS3 also makes an error when writing some plurals where instead of adding the plural –s, MS3 adds the genitive apostrophe –s construction which is demonstrated by example (11):

(13) *Some company’s buy their stuffs from other countries that force children to work.*
Instead of making plural on *company* with –ies, just as MS3 did with *countries*, he instead uses a genitive construction with ‘s. On a separate note, as it is one of the features looked for in the study, MS3 uses a contracted form only once. Why this is noted is due to the fact that MS3, just as MS2 before him, wrote *don’t* as *dont*, either forgetting or not knowing how to use the apostrophe.

**4.1.4. Male student 4**

When reading the text produced by MS4, it is evident right from the start that we are dealing with a top grade student, and likely one of, if not the student in the class with the most developed language. The errors made are much fewer than with the other students, and the errors are of a nature that can best be described as careless mistakes. They are, as mentioned, not that many though. There are some errors that are perhaps not due to carelessness, but are not grammatical in nature but rather expressions that one has to learn by heart, things such as example (12) illustrates:

(14) *if its inhabits do not...*

The word should be *inhabitants*. Another example is writing *human kind* rather than the proper expression *humankind*. MS4 shows signs of having a well-developed grammatical understanding as well as a strong vocabulary, uses the correct prepositions and so on. A few grammatical errors are found, which are illustrated by (15):

(15) *knowledge make you stronger...*

*Knowledge* being uncountable and without plural does take the third person –s in present tense, but this may just as likely be carelessness as a lack of knowledge, hence this is a mistake rather than an error (Ellis 1997).

Even for a student that is clearly very good at English, MS4’s text nonetheless demonstrates that the constructions of –ing form and infinitive are still challenging. This is shown by the sentence:

(16) *start think before you buy*
In this example, an infinitive marker is needed, *start to think* or the –ing form, *start thinking*. One of the reasons why this is such a challenge is that in Swedish, the infinitive marker *att* can be omitted, something that is not possible in English. It is clearly indicated by this text that MS4 has little trouble with adapting the language to fit the given situation.

**4.1.5. Male student 5**

Like some of the other students, MS5 shows that the apostrophe is a constant source of problems. MS5 shows some inconsistency when dealing with the apostrophe, especially when it comes to contractions. Every contraction of *do not* is written as *dont*, in other words, without the apostrophe. When MS5 is writing the contracted form of *does not* it is written as *dos’nt*, i.e. both misspelled and with the apostrophe in the wrong place. The form *dos’nt* appears four times in the text, the form *dont* appears twice, but on no occasion are the correct forms used. Only one case of correct use of contraction appears in the text, and it is the contraction of *it is* into *it’s* in the sentence:

(17) *It’s all over the news and it’s almost written on the back of the product*

There are also cases of missing genitive apostrophe, as in the case of example (14):

(18) *is destroying a kids life.*

There is also the previously mentioned mysterious use of apostrophe with plural, similar to the error of MS3. This is illustrated by example (15):

(19) *thanks to some cheap asian chief’s that dos’nt care…*

Several errors are made in this sentence. One is the use of the word *chief* for the Swedish word *chef* meaning *boss* or *manager*. Another is the case of lower-case letter replacing a capital letter in *Asian*. But the error that is most relevant in the present context is the use of the ‘s where it is obvious that a plural construction is intended.

**4.1.6. Female student 1**

An assignment such as the one the students were asked to perform, where not much in the way of limitations and requirement is given, other than that some content is recommended,
can come to vary greatly from student to student. FS1 wrote a text that is not bad as regards form and content, but is rather on the short side, which means that there is less text to be analyzed. FS1 has produced a well written text and there are generally not that many mistakes; however there are some worth noting. Not unlike many of the male students, the text has some agreement errors, such as illustrated by (20):

(20) *because every young want to have...*

Here the third person singular –s has been omitted. There are however not very many of these kind of mistakes, and the agreement errors are limited to just the third person –s. There are also examples of mistakes related to interference from Swedish, such as writing *the Internet* as *internet* as one would in Swedish.

There is one error that is particularly interesting. At first glance it can be mistaken as a simple missing apostrophe, but on a closer look it appears to be more. *And now, when I’m soon eighteen, everythings changed.* In the text as a whole there are multiple contractions that are all done correctly with the apostrophe in the right place, so it would be peculiar for FS1 to suddenly miss one, unless it was simply due to carelessness. It can however be argued that this is instead an error of a more grammatical nature. This is a contracted form of *everything has* and the apostrophe should obviously be before the *everything’s*. It is possible that FS1 has only heard this kind of construction, thus not knowing the grammatical structure behind it, and that this is an attempt at turning everything into a plural.

**4.1.7. Female student 2**

In contrast to FS1, FS2 made several errors in the text, many of which are recurrent features throughout the text. Like most of the students so far, there are some cases of agreement errors. Again it is the *is/are* mix up that is causing problems. A clear example of this is (17):

(21) *There is a few organisations that is working with fare labours and against child work.*

The sentence contains two cases where *are* has been replaced by *is* and there is no relation to the subject, *organisations*.

Even though there are some cases of agreement errors in the text, the most common error is the use of wrong pronouns and prepositions. A clear example of this is the following sentence (22):
They who live with a descent salary and can’t throw their money in the lake want to buy things so cheap as they can.

Firstly, it is the use of the pronoun they in the very beginning of the sentence where those would be a lot more fitting. Also there are two prepositions that are incorrect, with should be replaced with on and so cheap should be replaced with as cheap. In the text there are several cases just like the one illustrated, such as example for this problem which should be example of this problem.

There is also a very interesting sentence in the text that does not quite add up:

This people don’t know about big companies letting child labour make their rugs, or hire people to work eighteen hours a day with barely no rights at all.

First of all, the pronoun that initiates the sentence is wrong, and should be what rather than this. However the pronoun is not really needed, and for the pronoun construction to work at all, the sentence needs some changes, such as: don’t know about is that big companies are letting... As the sentence is constructed by the student, the most logical way to correct it however would be to simply remove the pronoun and start the sentence with: people don’t know about big companies... In addition, the expression, with barely no rights is a double negation and should be with barely any rights.

Another error that occurred in the text by FS2 is the genitive construction without the apostrophe. The movie “Darwins nightmare should by all logic be “Darwin’s nightmare and Tanzania’s population must of course be Tanzania’s population. Both are cases where there can be no confusion between genitive and plural; thus the only explanation is that the rule to use apostrophe in genitive construction is not adhered to. Additionally, it is arguable that the population of Tanzania is a better choice than Tanzania’s population, and FS2 shows some uncertainty when dealing with genitive in general.

4.1.8. Female student 3

As mentioned, the variation of the texts that stem from this type of assignment is indeed substantial. FS3 has produced a text that is almost the exact opposite to that of FS1. Where FS1 produced a text that was short and had a low frequency of errors, FS3 produced the longest text by far, and with a rather high frequency of errors. Additionally, after going
through the texts, certain patterns are starting to emerge. The most common errors made by FS3 are, rather unsurprisingly, agreement errors and prepositional errors. FS3 also shows some trouble in dealing with fixed idiomatic expressions, as in:

(24) *For the first we need to realize...*

This is a word for word translation of the corresponding Swedish expression *för det första*. The correct English expression is *first of all*, but arguably *firstly* would work in many cases as well. This error appears several times, indicating that the student is unaware of the correct expression, and did not just make a careless mistake.

When it comes to the matter of agreement errors, it is once again primarily agreement between subject and verb, and the incorrect use of *is* when there should be *are*. There are also cases where *are* replaces *is*, often in relation to uncountable nouns such as is the case in example (25):

(25) *Because of the humans consumerism the pollution are increasing and the ecology are given worse...*

*Pollution* is uncountable and the verb in agreement would be *is*, and *the ecology* is an uncountable with no plural as well, and is thus followed by *is*, not *are*. In addition there are, as mentioned, cases that are reversed, in other words, where *is* is used to replace *are*. One sentence in particular exemplifies that FS3 has some problems with verbs:

(26) *It’s given me peace when I especially know that other people not have getting hurted because of a product...*

There is a tense issue in this sentence to start with. As the sentence starts with *It has given me peace*, it should continue with *have not gotten hurt*. There is also a word order error, the negation should come between the auxiliary and the main verb, the correct constructions thus being *are not getting* or *have not gotten*. In order to keep the construction: *are not getting*, the sentence would need to start in the same tense, and thus *It’s giving me peace* would be the correct choice. In addition to the above mentioned errors, there is the construction *peace when I especially know that*. The word order in this construction is wrong and gives the sentence a Swenglish feel and writing *peace to know that* correct the sentence. In order to keep a
construction similar to the one used by FS3, punctuation with a comma would be needed, as well as a shift in the word order, thus: ...peace, especially when I know that...

FS3 made several genitive errors, most of which were genitive written as plural where the apostrophe marking genitive was omitted. This is illustrated by example (27):

(27) The humans consumerism is a big problem for our planet.

The construction the humans consumerism appears in the next sentence as well, making it less likely to be a case of carelessness. A genitive apostrophe must be added in order to create a proper genitive construction, humans’. It could perhaps be argued that it is preferable to drop the –s altogether, thus resulting in the more general term the human consumerism. It is after all the general consumerism of humans that is being referred to and a construction without genitive is arguably more appropriate in this situation.

4.1.9. Female student 4

Similar to the text produced by MS4, the text by FS4 is of a very high level. The errors that are made mostly consist of agreement errors where subject and verb are in disagreement. Three such errors were found, the first being example (28):

(28) because I’ve got older

The correct inflection would be gotten, but more preferably, the verb would be changed to become. The other two are just about the same (29):

(29) You can also choose products that’s produced near to you

and

(30) ecological products is a very good choice.

In both cases the subject is the plural products and the verb must thus be are, not is. It is also notable that that’s is written without the apostrophe, but the contraction should not be there to begin with as the correct verb choice is are. These errors are written off as carelessness, as FS4 has shown good understanding of subject and verb agreement both earlier and later on in
the text. Other than the three agreement errors, the only other mistake is the mix up of *throw* and *through* in example (31):

(31) *we also through away.*

This may as well be a case of carelessness; although the words are not perfect homonyms, to a Swedish learner of English, they may be pronounced rather similarly.

### 4.1.10. Female student 5

As the text by FS5 is analysed, the pattern is becoming clearer still. FS5 shows a great desire to communicate her opinion, yet there are numerous errors throughout the text. The errors are of a familiar nature to anyone following this study: subject and verb agreement as well as prepositional errors. FS5 also seems to have some trouble in dealing with different tense. The sentence in example (32) illustrates this well:

(32) *I had hard to think you would did it every time when you buy something*

Analysing this sentence is a study in itself, and we will leave it at stating that there is a lot going on, most notably that the whole sentence seems to be in the wrong tense.

As for the subject verb agreement, *is/are* are once again the main contributors, but there are also other cases related to the third person singular problematic, as with example (33):

(33) *when we buy a expensive thing child labour and things like this doesn’t exist, but thats wrong, bullshit.*

The subject here is *child labour and things like this* thus it is not in third person singular, so the correct verb would be *don’t*. Additionally, the contraction of *that is* is missing the apostrophe. In the text there are also cases where the verb is left out, as with example (34):

(34) *Even things we can produce here beeing sent over the world.*

That this would be an intentional case of verb ellipsis is however highly unlikely.

As mentioned, prepositions posed a problem for FS5, just as they did for so many of the other students. Mostly the errors here are related to fixed expressions such as *blind for the problem*
when it should in fact be **blind to the problem** and **difference of the things** rather than the correct **difference between the things**.

4.2 Summary of results

In order to make any analysis of the results possible, the results will need to be simplified and categorized. Dividing the errors and mistakes into a few major categories will help to highlight which students had problems with which categories. The categories were formed by simply selecting the most common errors and mistakes, and forming a category from the ones that are of a similar nature. The categories are the following: **Verb** – other than agreement, **agreement** – between subject/verb and subject/pronoun and so on. **Preposition/pronoun** – all similar in nature as pronoun errors due to agreement are included in the previous category. Last but not least, **the apostrophe** – contractions as well as genitive, and the errors can be either the lack of or misplacement of the apostrophe. The following table is an overview of errors and mistakes made by the students in the study. Note that students in parentheses made mistakes in the category that are likely due to carelessness.

**Table 1 Overview of student errors and mistakes**

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<td>FS3</td>
<td>MS5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS5</td>
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<td>FS5</td>
<td>FS3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 The survey

Concerning the survey that was performed in addition to analysis of the tests, the results will be simplified into a factor for Exposure to Internet English (EIE) as mentioned in 3.1.1. Each student will be given a number from 1-5 with 5 representing a high amount of exposure, and 1 naturally representing very little exposure. The value was calculated using the amount of time spent online, and the estimated amount of the content that was in English. In addition to the value, the type of social activities in English the students took part in will be listed. As an example, a student spending around 2 hours per day online and estimating the amount of IE to 20% will receive a value of 1 as the EIE is rather low. Respectively, a student spending roughly 4 hours per day online and an estimate 70-80% of IE will receive a value of 5 as that
is to be considered a rather high amount of interaction in English. The following figure illustrates the value of the students’ EIE:

**Figure 1 Value of EIE**

In addition to the value of EIE, the students’ activities are also of interest. There were three students who claimed to take part in no particular activity when online, most likely spreading their time spent online on a various number of activities. These students are MS2, FS1 and FS2. The other seven students engage in four major activities: Google, YouTube, forums and games. These activities can be further divided in relation to the nature of the activity, and whether the student is actively producing language or not. Table 2 illustrates the spread of activities across the students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Google, YouTube</td>
<td>Forums, Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS4 and FS4</td>
<td>MS3, MS4, FS3, FS4</td>
<td>MS3, MS5 and FS4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and FS5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MS1 and MS5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Noticeable from this table is that the male students are over-represented when it comes to the activities where the students are actively producing language. This corresponds well with Sundqvist’s (2009) findings that male students are more likely to engage in activities that force the user to produce language and actively partake in the activity rather than being a passive recipient.

5. Discussion

The mistakes and errors made by the students were divided into categories relating to the nature of the incorrectness. These categories will be analysed in an attempt to find likely causes for the errors and mistakes. This will not be an in-depth journey through the linguistic and grammatical logic behind the features, but will be rather simplified. Two major factors will be taken into account in the analysis; one being the value of EIE corresponding to each student, and the other factor being the nature of the incorrectness. The nature of the incorrectness can for instance be a relation between English and Swedish, in other words, are there similarities or differences between the two languages for the given category. Take the agreement error caused by mixing up is/are. In English, the verb in question is to be. There are seven forms of the verb in English, while there are only four forms of the verb in Swedish, att vara. The major difference here is that there are different forms used for the same tense, as with I am, you are and he/she/it is. All are in present tense, while present tense for the same verb in Swedish uses only one form regardless of person jag är, du är, han/hon/den/det är and vi är. This can cause problems for learners of English and is something that needs to be learnt by heart.

5.1 Category 1: Verb

Four students showed at least some cases of verb errors, be it inflections or tense, the lack of auxiliary or squeezing in an extra verb where one is not needed. The students are MS2, MS3, FS3 and FS5. Errors of this nature may in some cases be related to issues resulting from a Swedish learner’s perspective. One such example is when to use –ing form and when to use the infinitive form. This can be hard because, as mentioned in the results section, there is no real correspondence to the –ing form in Swedish that functions in the same way. The most common use of –ing form is to describe something that is on-going at the time, such as: I am writing this essay which translates to: jag skriver den här uppsatsen compared to: I write essays for fun, jag skriver uppsatser för skoj skull. In addition, the infinitive marker can, as mentioned, be excluded in Swedish Han tycker fotboll är roligt works even though there
really should be an infinitive marker before fotboll. The –ing form is both overused and underused by many Swedish learners and is something that does not come very natural, thus resulting in the following sentence by MS2: When i go out and buying i go for the prise...

Disregarding the spelling (MS2 suffers, as mentioned, from dyslexia) the sentence as it is does not quite work. It must either be: when I go out and buy... or when I go out buying...

Cases such as these were the more common verb errors.

There are other verb errors not relating to –ing form, such as mixing up different tense in the same sentence, as FS3 did in example (26): It’s given me peace when I especially know that other people not have getting hurted because of a product... or writing in the wrong tense all together, just as FS5 did: I had hard to think you would did it every time when you buy something. Both cases have been looked at in the results section, and there is little to add at this point. However the from hurted was in fact the only case of a student making an error with an irregular verb, not counting be. While tense and agreement can cause problems even for seasoned veterans, it warms the heart of a linguistics loving soon-to-be teacher that at least the irregular verbs have at this point sunk in.

As for the students who made these errors in relation to the amount of EIE they have, no real relation is possible to make here, other than the previously stated benefits of using extramural English. The nature of the interactions online, as noted by Österljung (2011), is that the sentences are rather short and of a “basic” grammatical level. The students have rather varied values of EIE, further supporting the idea that there is no real link between this category and the amount of time spent online with English content. The errors are more likely related to the individual student’s grammatical skill level and understanding than anything else. The grammatical skill level of Swedish students is a discussion in itself worthy of substantial studies.

5.2 Category 2: Agreement

One of the more common categories was the agreement errors, most commonly between subject and verb, but also in regards to pronouns. Agreement is something that everyone needs to look out for, as it is easy to lose track of what the subject is in a long, complicated sentence containing multiple subordinations and so on. That this category was the most common is clearly demonstrated by table 1, with (MS1), (MS4), (FS1), FS2, FS3, (FS4) and FS5 all making agreement errors. Note that, as mentioned in section 4.2, the parentheses around the name illustrate that the student likely made careless mistakes. As mentioned, it was the subject/verb agreement that was the cause of most of the errors, and the mix up
between *is/are* dominated here. This can be explained by the fact that the verb *be* has so many forms and that there are different forms used for the present and past tense depending on person.

So what are the likely causes as to why the students tend to make these errors? In some cases, they may be a result of carelessness, the student is simply writing too fast in order to make the time deadline, and thus makes the error. Some students are known to skip the read through of their finished text, myself most certainly included, and errors such as the *is/are* mix up can easily be corrected once spotted in a read through. The mistake is after all rather basic, yet it is still made by even the most seasoned learner of English. There are of course other reasons than just that of pure carelessness.

Looking at the students who made the errors, we can remove MS1, MS4, FS1 and FS4 as they had the agreement errors occurring only once or twice throughout the text, with several cases where it was done correctly. Also, the texts written by MS4 and FS4 were arguably the most well written texts with the best grammatical structure and highest language level, further suggesting that in these cases the mistakes were likely caused by carelessness. MS1, MS4 and FS4 also have very high values of EIE, something that the other students who made the errors of agreement do not. In addition, the other students, FS2, FS3 and FS5, all have the agreement errors appearing on multiple occasions. This fact makes carelessness a much less likely cause, which means that this type of incorrectness can be classified as errors (Ellis 1997).

The students that tended to make more errors concerning agreement all had lower values of EIE. FS3 had the highest value of the four, a value of 3. In other words, all four of the students had values in the lower end of the table. As, according to Sundqvist (2009), extramural English has a positive effect on both the oral proficiency and the vocabulary, it is perhaps not unlikely that extramural English activities will have a positive effect on the general language proficiency. Sundqvist (2009) also notes that activities where the participant is active and produces language contribute more to the level of language proficiency. There are undoubtedly many reasons behind the students’ agreement errors; however it is arguable that more time spent with extramural activities with active participation could have helped improve the proficiency of perhaps one or two of the students who made several agreement errors.
5.3 Category 3: prepositions and pronouns

When dealing with this category, it is important to keep in mind that the agreement aspect of the pronoun errors is not accounted for here, but fell under category number 2, agreement. Instead, this category is referring to the errors that are made when using the wrong pronoun or preposition. Certain verbs for instance, take a certain preposition in different situations, and it can be troublesome for a learner to know when to use which preposition. Likewise, certain pronouns can easily be mixed up by a Swedish learner, as they translate to the same Swedish pronoun. Take the example displayed in the results section from FS2: *They who live with a descent salary...* In the sentence both a pronoun and a preposition have been misused. The correct pronoun in this case is *those*; the error is however easily made, as the translation of *those who live* is *de som lever*. The Swedish pronoun *de* can also be translated as *they*, as is the case in *de spelar, they play*. Therefore the mistake is rather understandable.

Furthermore, the sentence also has a prepositional error in the form of *live with a descent salary*; the correct preposition here is *on*. The tricky part here is that *live* can take different prepositions depending on the following noun, as in: *to live with cancer is hard* and *to live on a low salary is hard*. A person will simply have to learn what preposition that corresponds to what situation, something that comes naturally for a native speaker of the language.

Another word that seems to cause trouble for the students in the study is the multifunctional word *that*. The word can have many different grammatical functions, such as a pronoun *that looks heavy*... as an adverb *don’t do it like that*... and as a determiner *that car is nice*... Take the sentence from FS2: *The shoes are so cheap because as many as possible need to be sold*. Arguably, *that* would work better in the sentence: *the shoes are that cheap because as many as possible need to be sold*, but it somewhat depends on what the student is trying to say and where the focus is. It becomes yet more troublesome when you consider that regardless of what word one chooses, the translation is the same in Swedish *Skorna är så billiga därfor*... where the word *så* is the translation for both *that* and *so*. Personally I feel that the best choice would be *that*, but this may just be down to preference. Either way, it is quite the minefield for a learner, and it is advised to tread lightly.

The texts that contained the most notable and most frequent errors of this kind were produced by MS2, FS2, FS3 and FS5. MS2 is the only one of the four who made no prepositional errors. Instead the most common error here was to write pronouns the wrong way. The student simply did not take plural on some of the pronouns, such as *for them self* instead of *themselves* and *ower self* instead of *ourselves*. MS2 made no mistakes when it
comes to prepositions. FS2, FS3 and FS5 all made several prepositional errors throughout their texts. Coincidently, they all have a low value of EIE, thus not spending a very large amount of time online and active on English speaking communities and websites. In the study by Österljung (2011) previously referred to, which focused on chat language from the English speaking communities in online gaming, prepositional errors did not stand out as particularly evident. Although not specifically looked for in that study, had it been a common feature it would in all likelihood have been noticed. One explanation for this is that a large number, perhaps even a majority, of the members of such communities are native speakers. It thus comes naturally to use the correct proposition or pronoun.

As the three students who made several prepositional errors engaged in less extramural English activities than their peers, it is not entirely unlikely that there is a relation between extramural activities in English where the learner interacts with native speakers or other learners, and the actual proficiency. This is further indicated by what was found by Sundqvist (2009) and Byrnes (2006), i.e. that the more time one spends interacting with and using a language, the more proficient one becomes. And in all honesty, that does not sound all that astonishing. Note that engaging in online activities is not given out to be the solution to any grammatical problem a learner may have. However it may not hurt, and could possibly help students who are learning English, at least when it comes down to proficiency and the ability to use the correct preposition and pronoun as they have to be learnt by heart as full expressions, not as fragmented and isolated words.

5.4. Category 4: The apostrophe

While it has been suggested that some of the grammatical problems that caused the errors of some of the other categories could be helped by engaging in online activities in English, there is one category that seems to suggest the opposite. The apostrophe is a phenomenon that Swedish learners of English often have little or no relation to prior to starting their English studies. This is due to the fact that the apostrophe is very rarely used in Swedish, and is mostly used to mark a missing phoneme in written characterization of colloquial pronunciation. In English however, it is used rather more frequently, and in more formal situations as well.

The errors in this category can be divided into two different types: contractions and genitive. Five of the students made errors concerning the apostrophe in contractions, while only one of them made errors restricted only to the genitive. FS3 only made errors with the genitive, and wrote contracted words in the proper manner. FS3 has a low value of EIE while
MS1, MS2, MS3 and MS5 all have a high value of EIE and all made errors with contractions and genitive or just contractions. It is the errors made with the contractions that are of certain interest here. All four of these students wrote every contraction in their text wrong and without the apostrophe, with one exception. MS5 wrote one contraction correctly: it’s and used apostrophe when contracting does not, but misplaced it as shown in the results section with example (17). It is interesting that out of all the words contracted, it is it’s that is done correctly. This is interesting as it is the only one of the contractions that appeared in the texts that has a changed meaning without the apostrophe. This was one of the things that Österljung (2011) noticed when analysing chat language, that the apostrophe would fall off when writing it’s so that both it’s and its looked the same. This indicates that MS5 is aware of the importance of the apostrophe, and to some extent the purpose of it, that is to replace the letter or letters that are removed. For whatever reason however, MS5, along with the other three, failed to use this properly when writing other contractions.

So what is likely to have caused the apostrophe omission by these students? One explanation may relate to the habit, sprung from simplicity as well as a measure to save time that has evolved in chat language, has carried over into the students more formal writing. The apostrophe is rarely used in online chat language, which was shown in the study performed by Österljung (2011). The apostrophe was dropped by native speakers and foreign learners alike. As the four students have the highest value of EIE out of the ten students that took part in the study, it is not unlikely that this habit is the cause, or at the very least contributes to the mistakes. This is somewhat supported by the fact that MS5 only made errors in the fourth category, and also has the highest value of EIE with the value 5. Furthermore, MS5 lists games as one of the activities linked with EIE. In any case, this category and the fact that some of the students with high value of EIE made the most errors in the category do suggest that there may be a link between the students’ computer habits and the way they write in English.

5.5. The missing feature
One of the grammatical features that this study aimed to investigate was the ellipsis of subject and/or verb in a sentence. This was found to be a rather prominent feature in Österljung (2001), and it would thus be interesting to see if there were any cases where the students, especially those with high value of EIE, used this feature in a more formal text as well. As mentioned in the results section, there were no cases of intentional ellipsis. There are two possibilities as to why there were no cases of ellipsis in the student texts. First of all, there is
obviously the possibility that the students have never come across this feature, and are thus unaware of it. Even the students who spend significant amounts of time online are not guaranteed to come across this feature, no matter how common it was found to be in the previous study. Secondly, there is also the possibility that the students simply have the ability to adapt their choice of words and grammatical structure to suit the given situation, even if they are using the feature of ellipsis in online chat language. All in all, the majority of the ten texts studied were written in accordance with the level of formality that one might be expected to follow when writing an article for an online magazine.

5.6. The matter of formality
One of the focal points of the essay was to examine how well these students were able to adapt their language to suit a certain given situation in regards to using the correct grammatical structure. It can only be speculated as to how much experience the students have when it comes to writing an argumentative article in English. The curriculum states that the students should be able to use their language in different situations and for varied purposes; however the teachers in Swedish schools still have many options when it comes to selecting the content of a course. It can be assumed however that the students have been given at least some information about the test and how they are expected to write. The general level of formality across the texts by the ten students is on a par with what one would expect in a text like this. While for instance contractions are not considered to be very formal, the text they are writing is not a scientific report or research article, but an argumentative article to be presented in an online magazine. If *The Sun* can use contractions, then so can the students as well, the formality level here can be said to be roughly the same, as not much information is given about the fictive magazine that the students are writing for. Aside from the various mistakes and errors made, the students in this study are generally successful in their choice of degree of formality.

While most of the students managed to find a fitting level of formality, there are some exceptions. MS3 is using a word that could be considered too informal for this text. The word was mentioned in the results section where the student used it in the plural form. It was argued then that the word *stuff* does not have a plural form. If there is a plural form of *stuff*, it would have to be considered to be highly informal. MS3 claims to spend most of the time online on forums, some of which are likely in English, as when asked if the student took part in any English speaking communities, forums were listed. It is possible that the rather informal form *stuffs* has been picked up by the student in one of these environments, and
carried over into the student’s more formal writing. Although lexical choices fall beyond the scope of this study, this word choice stood out as rather inappropriate for the given situation, and the error to use the rather informal form in this context is one of only two real errors of this kind. The other error was the use of the word bullshit by FS5 in example (33). The two errors in lexical choice, though not the main focus of the study, are indications suggesting that the students are not fully able to adapt the language to the given situation.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine how well the students in this study are able to adapt their language to a situation, in this case writing an argumentative article discussing the global issue of consumerism. The study also examined what kind of errors were most commonly made by these students, and if this had any relation to the student’s Internet habits. In order to examine this, a survey was performed where the students were asked about what they were doing online and how much of the content they used were in English. The students were also asked to list any English speaking online communities they were active in, along with what their most common activity online was. In addition to the survey, the students’ national writing tests were analyzed and the grammatical errors from these essays were presented.

It was found that many of the students made agreement errors due to a lack of agreement between the subject in a clause and the following verb or pronoun. The dominating error here was the mix up between is and are, and it was argued that one likely contributor is the fact that the equivalent word in Swedish has less forms, and does not change depending on person; as the mistake to mix up is and are is related to person, in other words, if the subject is third person singular or third person plural. It was also suggested that more time spent on extramural activities with high EIE would benefit the students suffering from these errors, as native speakers of English are less likely to make these errors, at least according to the findings revealed in the study by Österljung (2011).

Another error that was rather common, especially among the students in the study that had lower values of EIE, was the error to use the wrong preposition or pronoun. As certain words always take a specific preposition, and some words take different prepositions depending on the situation, it was argued that foreign speakers of English will have a hard time to learn when to use what preposition. Some of the students made several errors of this kind, and they were also the ones with the lowest value of EIE. As the use of correct prepositions is something that has to be simply learnt by heart, as there are no general rules
concerning the prepositions, as there are with verbs, a student is likely to require much repetition in order to acquire the knowledge of what preposition to use when. Therefore, it can be argued that time spent with active extramural English activities, such as online activities where the user produces language, could benefit these students and be one of the steps taken to improve their proficiency when it comes to dealing with prepositions. Such online activities would provide a possibility for the students to come in frequent contact with the expressions, thus the act of repetition would be subconscious, but nonetheless present and benefit the students’ vocabulary.

One angle of the study was to examine if, and how the language used by students online affected their writing. A very common feature used in chat language that was looked for in the student texts was the ellipsis of subjects and verbs. However this feature was not present in the national tests analyzed. There were however some other hints that the language used by the students in various chat environments, forums and communities affected their language negatively. One was the frequent use of contractions without the apostrophe by the students with the higher EIE values. As the apostrophe was very rarely used in contractions in the chat language data analyzed in Österljung (2011), it can be argued that the habit of not using apostrophe in contractions carried over into these students’ more formal writing. If such is the case, a small link between their Internet usage and their written language could be established. However one must not forget the possibility of completely different factors weighing in, factors that were not within grasp of this study. With the material at hand, it is not unlikely that the chat language and Internet habits played a part at the very least.

So how able were the students to adapt their language to a given situation and write a text of a more formal nature? In the majority of the texts, the level of formality was found to be rather fitting for the task at hand. Apart from the grammatical errors and spelling mistakes made, the students showed that they knew what kind of language that was expected, and attempted their best at providing it, albeit with varied results. One of the students in particular however showed signs of using a language that was not at the level of formality that was expected, using words such as stuff and a plural form of the word that can only be considered to be rather too informal for the task at hand. All in all however, the students that took part in this study showed that they are able to adapt their language well to a given situation, all according to the framework set up by Skolverket.

It is very important to note that the results and conclusions that are drawn from this study do not apply to any school and class in Sweden, but are rather constricted to the ten students in the study. It is entirely possible that students in another class in the same school
show completely different sets of problems when writing a somewhat more formal text. Then again, generalizations of that sort were never the aim of this essay. The study simply provides a sample of the errors that some students can make. The study does however open up to some interesting questions, and most likely raises more questions than it answers.

6.1 Future research
With the results gained and the conclusions drawn from this essay, certain interesting questions open up, that would both benefit the didactics of English, and perhaps give some answers to the habits of Swedish adolescents. One such field is the question of gender, which is somewhat hinted at in this essay. Due to the rather low number of students in the essay, no generalizations can be made. However it is a rather interesting coincidence that the average value of the EIE among the male students is significantly higher than the value of EIE among the female students. A study to examine if there is a general difference between the activities that male and female Swedish students engage in online, especially those activities with English content, is therefore suggested. A similar gender differences was suggested by Sundqvist (2009) in her study on EE, although that study concerned extramural activities in general. It would therefore be interesting to test Sundqvist’s theory with online activities exclusively. In addition, a gender based study of the grammatical errors made by Swedish students could be performed. If there is a difference in what kind of grammatical features cause problems for male students and female students, this could in turn be compared to the Internet habits of male and female students. Such a study could give some insight and possibly show one of the factors that play a part in such a difference, if one exists.

Furthermore, a larger study using multiple schools from various parts of the country is also suggested. This would investigate if the effects that the Internet habits of some of the students in the study have are more than just coincidence. This essay does find hints that there is a possible link between what activities students engage in and how active they are, and what kind of problems they are likely to face when writing in English, but for this to be confirmed with any certainty, a substantially larger study would have to be performed. It is thus suggested to do a similar study but with a much larger number of students participating. Due to the limitations of this study, a larger number of participants would have been near impossible to manage, due to the qualitative nature of the test analysis.

Although it is far from established with any certainty that extramural online activities in English are of benefit to the students’ language proficiency, the students could only benefit from an increase of the general understanding of what is going on online. This study has given
me the confidence to at least introduce students to environments that are English speaking over the Internet. As several studies have shown prior to this, such as Byrnes (2006 and Sundqvist (2009), the more time spent with the target language, the more the proficiency will increase. As long as the students have someone to guide them and explain what they are likely to interact with, I see no reason as to how this could hinder the students’ language development. If anything, time spent online using the Internet could prove to be of benefit. I for one will surely attempt to use more of the environments that the students may experience at home in the my future profession as a teacher of English.
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