Teaching Grammar in EFL Classrooms in Swedish Upper-Secondary School

An Empirical Study on the Use of Two Models

Degree project in English studies

Emil Hasselqvist
Supervisor: Thorsten Schröter
Examiner: Karin Molander Danielsson
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Abstract

How to teach English as a second or foreign language has been heatedly debated as long as the subject has been taught. One of the many issues regarding the teaching of English as a second or foreign language is the issue of whether or not to teach grammar, and if we teach it, how should we go about it?

This study examines two different approaches to teaching English grammar at the Swedish upper-secondary school level. Experiments were conducted in four different groups of students (a total of 64 informants were used), all from the same upper-secondary school in a medium-sized Swedish city. The experiments were based on teaching the genitive construction to the informants during a 75-minute class. The results were analyzed mainly quantitatively with the help of test results from the 64 informants; the aspect of gender differences in the results was also analyzed.

According to the study, one of the approaches seemed to be slightly superior to the other. There were also factors (other than the test results) which may speak in favour of one approach rather than the other.
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1 Introduction

"Nothing in the field of language pedagogy has been as controversial as the role of grammar teaching" (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011, p. 1).

In antiquity and for a long time thereafter, language didactics was focused around grammar. All through the Middle Ages, second language (L2) learning was based on studying the grammar of the highest-status language at the time, Latin, which in practice also meant that Latin became the model for how all other languages should be learned (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). In modern language teaching, the controversy over grammar can be summarized as being based on two distinct alternatives: whether to teach grammar directly as a set of formal grammatical rules or indirectly through exposure to natural language use. These two contrasting views on language teaching can be referred to as grammar-based approaches and communication-based approaches. The two extremes of these approaches can be described as a) focusing solely on the grammatical system on which a language is based, b) deeming time spent on grammatical instruction to be time wasted (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012). Although much has happened over the years in terms of practical, research-based recommendations, many language teachers still adhere to traditional, often obsolete ways of teaching language (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012).

Having taught English at the Swedish gymnasium level (upper-secondary school level, i.e. grades 10-12) to different groups of people, including adolescents, adults, students with Swedish as their native language and people with other native languages, has made me realize that teaching English grammar is a particularly difficult and often time-consuming task, and I believe that there exists a need for a more comprehensive understanding of grammar teaching for teachers and students alike. The present study will, it is hoped, be able to contribute to such an enhanced understanding. It is based on an experiment comprising two different approaches to teaching English grammar at the Swedish gymnasium.
1.1 Aim of the study

This study aims to help develop a deeper understanding of two methods of teaching English grammar in an EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom in Swedish upper-secondary school. The teaching approaches which will be used are called the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model, which does not have an identifiable originator, and the Grammar Consciousness-Raising (GCR) model, proposed by Rod Ellis (2002; 2005). In this study, the grammatical aspect used to test these models is the genitive form of nouns. The purpose is to give EFL teachers an enhanced understanding of two different approaches to teaching English grammar and also, perhaps, of the potential usefulness of these approaches, and to investigate which of the two approaches work the best. In addition, this study will take into account the differences between male and female achievements regarding grammar learning.

A similar study was carried out in 2006 by Fawzi Al Ghazali. It comprised two groups, each with 25 students aged 18, whose native language was Arabic. One of the groups was taught English grammar (specifically, the different uses of be+used to+noun and get+used to+noun) using the PPP approach and the other using the GCR approach, and there was a test after each teaching session. The students also had the chance to answer a questionnaire regarding their thoughts on the approach that they had been taught with. In this study, the GCR approach was favoured by the students, and it also yielded better results than the PPP approach. The percentage of students who passed a certain threshold on the test was 88% for the GCR approach and 76% for the PPP approach. The conclusion of that study was, nevertheless, that both GCR and PPP can be useful in different contexts. GCR works well with younger students who like learning by active participation, whereas PPP works well with older learners who have the metalinguistic competence which is needed to understand abstract grammatical concepts (Al Ghazali, 2006). No other studies similar to Al Ghazali’s study and my own have been found. Also, no studies similar to this have been found written about Swedish conditions.
The present study is in many aspects very similar to the study carried out by Al Ghazali. However, not only will it test similar conditions to the previous study, it also adds a dimension by considering the differences between the scores of the different genders. Furthermore, the study is carried out with students who (with very few exceptions; cf. section 3) have Swedish as their native language, as opposed to Arabic.

1.2 Research question

- How do the results of the two different teaching approaches differ when it comes to the EFL students’ mastery of the genitive case in English?
- Are there any discernible differences between the results of the girls and the results of the boys?

2 Background

2.1 Historical approaches to language teaching

As stated above, grammar was the predominant aspect of language teaching for thousands of years (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). During the Middle Ages, grammar was closely associated with other important disciplines such as law, medicine and theology, and knowledge of grammar was also thought to be invaluable when acquiring rhetorical skills. L2 acquisition was based on the grammar of the high-status language at the time, which was Latin. According to Brown in Nassaji and Fotos (2011), other languages became increasingly important to learn from the Enlightenment era (18th century) onward, although these languages were still taught using the concepts of Latin grammar.

Two main methods of L2 teaching were used from the late 18th century up to World War II. During the late 18th century and the 19th century, the Grammar Translation Method dominated. With this method, the teaching of a language focused on the explicit grammatical rules of that language, with exercises often involving memorization and translation from the student’s L1 to the target L2. Toward the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, linguistics shifted toward a structural approach, in which the focus was put on describing and studying the structures and phonological characteristics of new languages –
independently of Latin or the L1. This, together with the fact that during World War II there was a great demand for people who were orally fluent in foreign languages meant that the Audio-Lingual method of teaching language was used to a greater extent (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012).

The Audio-Lingual method was different from the Grammar Translation Method in the sense that it did not make use of explicit grammatical rules in language instruction. However, grammar was still the main focus of this method. While the Audio-Lingual method emphasized oral proficiency more than written, it introduced grammatical structures in a linear fashion. One might begin by learning an easy structure and then go on to more and more complex ones; thus, the grammatical rules were learned indirectly by repetition on the sentence level (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Both of these historical methods of teaching grammar can be characterized as “teaching grammar as product” (Batstone in Nassaji & Fotos, 2011, p. 3). Teaching grammar as a product could be described as dividing language into segments and teaching them independently from one another; in this approach, grammar is considered the goal. The opposite would be to teach grammar as a process, where communication is the goal and grammar a tool, or process, to achieve that goal. This is an approach adopted in later developments of L2 teaching (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

2.2 The controversy in language teaching

Second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language acquisition (FLA) are fundamentally different from acquiring one’s first language. It is true that some people stress the similarities between the two processes at play when people acquire their first language (L1) and learn their second language (L2). However, as Gao (2001) points out, the fact still remains that small children acquire their L1 in a cultural and linguistic setting which they are fostered into during a period of their life (the critical period) when they are able to pick up a language very easily, while the same cannot be said about adolescents or adults learning a second language. Other factors which only apply to learners of an L2 are “motivation, attitude, social distance or perceived social distance from the target language group.” (Gao, 2001, p. 329). Ellis (2005) states that
Proficiency in an L2 requires that learners acquire both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions, which caters to fluency, and a rule-based competence consisting of knowledge of specific grammatical rules, which cater to complexity and accuracy […] Native speakers have been shown to use a much larger number of formulaic expressions than even advanced L2 learners. (p. 210f)

With this, Ellis points out that for L2 learners to become truly proficient in their L2, formulaic expressions, not just grammatical rules, need to be learned and used on the same level as a native speaker would use them.

The role of grammar teaching in SLA and FLA has been disputed by researchers since the dawn of SLA research, and there is no obviously superior method or approach to grammar teaching in L2 and FL instruction. Mystkowska-Wiertalak and Pawlak (2012) claim that the fact that grammatical competence is vital to mastering an L2 is widely recognized by researchers, and the controversy regards, rather, the different approaches teachers may take to instill grammatical competence in their students and, more specifically, whether grammar should be taught explicitly or implicitly. In contrast to the general view on the matter, Aarts, Clayton and Wallis (2012) claim that “[f]or second language learners, the value of the explicit teaching of English grammar has never been questioned” (p. 3; my italics); however, the case for claiming that there is in fact a conflict seems to be stronger. According to Rod Ellis (2006), there are several questions to answer when talking about grammar teaching in SLA and FLA, one of them being the core of the dispute over grammar teaching: “Should we teach grammar, or should we simply create the conditions by which learners learn naturally?” (Ellis, 2006, p. 83).

2.2.1 Pros and cons of communicative approaches

The idea of teaching grammar implicitly through meaningful communicative language use was first developed in the late 1960s. It can be seen as a reaction to the earlier approach of teaching language as a fixed set of grammatical rules, which was used extensively in language classrooms since the dawn of language teaching (cf. 2.1). Researchers started to challenge the idea that grammar was the only essential part of SLA and FLA (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Corder argued in 1967 that every person had a built-in syllabus for learning grammar, and Krashen followed the same line in 1981, suggesting that grammar teaching should be abolished in L2 classrooms around the world. This was the start of the communicative approaches to language teaching (Ellis, 2006).
The aim of language learning and teaching, according to the communicative approaches, is the ability to communicate in real-life situations. One of the most influential contributions to the communicative approach was Hymes’s theory of communicative competence from 1972, a reaction to Chomsky’s theory according to which language competence is mainly focused on grammatical competence. Hymes’s theory is based on the notion that language consists of more than grammar and rules, and that there is a real-life aspect of language that makes the ability to communicate a paramount goal (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Some of the most influential claims inspired by the communicative approaches were those made by Stephen Krashen, however.

Krashen introduced his theories on SLA in the early 1980s and some parallels have been drawn between his theories and Chomsky’s theory of language, as they both incorporate the idea of an innate ability to learn language. Krashen’s theories attempt to explain the experiences of language teachers and learners that “not everything that is taught is learned and sometimes what is learned may not have been taught” (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012, p. 37). Krashen claimed that grammatical competence would follow suit if learners had access to comprehensible input (text and speech which learners understand the essence of) and were sufficiently motivated (which stems from wanting to understand language). Furthermore, he argued that language had to be acquired implicitly and subconsciously rather than learned through explicit teaching of grammatical structures, for example (Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 2006; Nassaji & Fotos 2011). According to Krashen (1982), there are three conditions which must be met before formal rules can even begin to play a part in second language learning: a) there needs to be sufficient time to consider all the rules; b) there must be focus on form, that is, we need to not only consider what we are saying, but also how we say it; c) one must know all the rules, because if all rules are not known, one cannot make proper use of them in one’s communicative efforts. However, Krashen believes that in normal conversations, there is no time to focus on form, and it is very hard for learners of an L2 to know all the rules. So before one begins to consider the use of all the formal grammatical rules of the L2, perfect conditions must apply (p. 16).

Krashen’s theory has had a tremendous impact on SLA research, but has also been criticized extensively due to a number of factors. Critics claim that the theory is not supported by enough studies, and that studies of the theory may be hard to conduct due to the vagueness of
the possible practical applications of the theory. In later publications (2003), Krashen himself has admitted that some explicit grammar teaching may be useful for learners, but only if the grammatical aspects in question would also need to be taught to L1 students, such as the difference between its and it’s. This is in line with his belief that L1 and L2 acquisition are basically the same. One of the pedagogical applications of Krashen’s theories is the emergence of immersion programmes, in which the target language is taught implicitly through other subjects, such as history, mathematics or physics. Unfortunately, the immersion programmes often fail to provide sufficient grammatical knowledge, although the learners’ communicative and discourse competence is usually higher than for those enrolled in other SLA programmes (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012; Ellis, 2006).

### 2.2.2 Pros and cons of grammar-based approaches

After the seeming demise of grammar-focused teaching in the 1970s, there has been much debate on how to incorporate explicit grammar teaching in the language classroom without losing the focus on communicative competence (Richards, 2002). In the 1980s and 90s, studies were carried out to tackle the controversy over which method was to be preferred (Ellis 2006). The conclusion of these studies was that the acquisition processes (the order of acquisition) were practically the same with implicit and explicit learning, but that learners who were taught explicitly showed a higher grammatical competence, even though there was no guarantee that explicitly instructed students would acquire what they had been taught. Rather, Long (as cited in Ellis, 2006) concluded from a study in 1988 that for grammar teaching to be beneficial, the order in which grammar is taught has to simulate the natural process of L1 acquisition as much as possible (Ellis, 2006).

One of the theories concerning explicit grammar teaching is the Skill-Learning Theory, proposed by Fitts, Posner, Anderson and Byrne (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012). It essentially aims to explain the transformation from explicit knowledge to implicit knowledge. The first step of acquiring knowledge, according to the Skill-Learning Theory, is acquiring knowledge about a particular skill (in this case a specific grammatical aspect), often by listening to and/or observing someone talking about or performing tasks related to the skill. The kind of knowledge which the learners acquire at this stage is called declarative knowledge. The second stage involves converting the declarative knowledge into procedural
knowledge; this is the stage in which the learner practices the skill in question. Much fine-tuning may be required at this stage, but with practice, the learners will experience shorter response time and a decreasing error rate. The last stage aims to convert the procedural knowledge into an implicit, almost reflex-like skill. This is done by extended practice and production, which has to be communicative in nature (i.e. be based on real-life communicative situations), that is, practice and production rely on the procedural knowledge of the skill in real-life conditions and thus creates implicit knowledge of it (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012). As Jean and Simard (2011) put it

Kill two birds with one stone. Choose an approach that does more than teach grammar. […] grammar instruction should work as a catalyst for language acquisition, not purely as a way to learn the intricacies of the language and improve accuracy. (p. 480)

To summarize, teachers ought not to see grammatical competence as the only goal when explicitly teaching grammar. One could just as well incorporate communicative tasks and real context into their grammar teaching. The Skill-Learning Theory serves as a basis for the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approach of grammar teaching.

2.3 Gender and foreign language acquisition

The correlation between FLA and demographic variables, such as gender, has been researched quite extensively. Week and Ferraro (2011) cite studies carried out by Andreou, Vlachos, and Metallidou et al. which show that girls are more likely than boys to show willingness in communicating in foreign languages and to have a more positive attitude toward learning a foreign language to begin with. Girls have also shown to perform more strongly in the fields of syntax and semantics than boys (Week and Ferraro, 2011). These results were also true in a study by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Donovan (2002), with the explanation being attitudinal differences between male and female students (MacIntyre et al., 2002). According to a study conducted by Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley (2001), men seem to have lower achievement rates in foreign language classes than women. The authors also cite Jacobson as saying that males perceive language learning as a female domain, and that males “act in ways that do not maximize their ability to learn” (p. 12). MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Donovan (2002), too, report that foreign languages seem to be perceived as traditionally female subjects. According to Salahshour, Sharifi and Salahshour (2013), female foreign language
learners are more frequently aware of and make more extensive use of different learning strategies than their male counterparts, which results in higher achievements.

2.4 The Presentation-Practice-Production approach

The PPP approach to teaching grammar follows a “traditional” linear sequencing pattern, where the three components Presentation (P1), Practice (P2) and Production (P3) are carried out in that order (for a theoretical background, cf. 2.2.2). This approach may be viewed as a combination of grammar-based and communication-based teaching, as P1 and P2 resemble grammar-based teaching, while P3 integrates the communication aspects (Criado Sánchez, 2008; Mystkowska-Wiertalak & Pawlak, 2012). According to Willis (as cited in Nassaji & Fotos, 2011, p. 4), the PPP approach is one of the most widely used teaching methods in ESL and EFL teaching around the world.

In the P1 stage, the teacher will present the specific grammatical structure to be studied. This can be achieved in a number of ways: the teacher may read a text, a dialogue or a story which incorporates the grammatical structure, or the students may read it aloud themselves. The main goal of this stage is for the students to become familiar with the grammatical structure and to imprint the structure in their short-term memory. Linking the new grammatical structure to the students’ previous knowledge may also be vital at this stage (Criado Sánchez, 2008; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

The P1 stage is followed by the P2 stage, where the students’ will practice the grammatical structure in question. The main aim of P2 stage is a high level of accuracy when using the grammatical structure and to move the explicit knowledge of the structure from the short term memory to the long term memory. This can be achieved by first doing highly controlled practical exercises (such as fill-in-the-gaps or similar) to achieve high-level accuracy and then go on to less controlled activities and exercises (such as conversations in pairs) (Criado Sánchez, 2008; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

In the last stage (P3), the students are encouraged to use the structure and thereby internalize the rules related to it, eventually creating reflex-like fluency. The students may engage in discussions, debates or free text writing. The key at this stage is to incorporate the explicit knowledge of the grammatical structure into a communicative context where students use
their pre-existing language skills together with the newly-learned ones in order to automatize their use of the grammatical structure and of the language as a whole (Criado Sánchez, 2008; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertalak & Pawlak, 2012).

This approach (in particular the P2 and P3 stages) has been questioned by scholars such as Ellis and Rathbone. Ellis conducted a study in 1984 in which learners practiced *when* questions (i.e. did stage P2); however, the practice did not enable them to acquire this structure. Ellis and Rathbone conducted another study in 1987 where learners practiced word-order rules in L2 German; this also did not result in acquisition. Ellis maintains that practice may aid learners in connection with pronunciation and phrasal chunks such as “nice to meet you” or “may I have the…?”, but that in the teaching of grammatical rules, it lacks certain aspects (Ellis, 2002; cf. also 2.4). According to Maftoon and Sarem (2012), there are also practical problems with the P3 stage. It is very difficult for teachers to design a stage that naturally incorporates the use of the grammatical structure which has been taught. Students will often have some strategic competence to fall back on and can therefore easily bypass the use of the structure if they do not feel that they are confident enough to use it.

2.5 The Grammar Consciousness-Raising approach

The Grammar Consciousness-Raising approach (GCR) was developed by Rod Ellis in the 1980s and 90s as a reaction to approaches to grammar teaching which he believed to be outdated, such as the PPP approach. Ellis claims, contrary to Krashen (cf. 2.2.1), that grammar teaching is a viable tool in teaching language, and that the problem lies in unchallenged and outdated views on teaching grammar (Ellis, 2002).

As opposed to the PPP approach, which strives to encourage grammatically correct formulations in meaningful communicative contexts, GCR is focused on increasing the learners’ awareness of certain grammatical structures and how one may use these in everyday communication. Ellis argues that GCR sets lower expectations on grammar teaching than approaches such as PPP. When teaching grammar with GCR, the main goal is to facilitate the acquisition of grammatical knowledge and to create cognitive tools needed for meaningful communication, as opposed to having grammatical knowledge as a goal, as is the case for PPP (Ellis, 2002).
GCR can be divided into three distinct processes. Firstly, the learners will *notice* the grammatical structure and become conscious of its place in the input provided. This can be done by providing learners with texts or sentences which illustrate the grammatical structure in question. Ungrammatical examples may also be used, to illustrate the difference between the right and wrong use of the structure. Secondly, the learners will *compare* the grammatical structure, which they noticed in the input provided, with their own mental grammar and try to fill the gap between the grammatical knowledge which they have previously learned and the knowledge which is being obtained during these exercises. At this stage, the learners may create their own grammatical rule(s) for how to use the structure. Lastly, the learners will try to *integrate* the grammatical feature into their own mental grammar, although this process will only occur when the learner is developmentally ready for it. As the first two steps create explicit knowledge of the grammatical structure, even if the learners are not ready to integrate the structure in their own mental grammar, the explicit knowledge can be stored separately and used when the learner is developmentally ready to integrate it. This means that there may be a delayed effect from teaching with a GCR approach. Another effect of the noticing and comparing stages is that the learners will develop cognitive tools to notice and compare other grammatical structures in the future, which may possibly aid in their future language studies (Ellis, 2002; 2005).

### 3 Method and material

The present study builds on an experiment involving the practical application of two teaching approaches in Swedish EFL classes. One was rather a “traditional” approach to teaching grammar, following the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model (cf. 2.3). The other approach corresponded to what is called the Grammar Consciousness-Raising (GCR) model (cf. 2.4). Four groups of students were chosen to participate in the experiment: two groups were taught using one approach and two groups were taught using the other approach, each during a 75-minute lesson. The topic was the English genitive construction. In a subsequent lesson, all groups were given the same test to assess their understanding of this grammatical aspect. The results of the tests will be analyzed both from the perspective of the two approaches, but also from a gender perspective.
3.1 Informants

The four groups of students all attended Swedish upper-secondary school at the time of this study and will be called G1-G4 from here on. All the students had passed their English courses in Swedish secondary school prior to attending upper-secondary school. Almost all the students had Swedish as their native language. The scores of the five informants whose native language was not Swedish did not deviate from the general trend; therefore the aspect of native language was not deemed necessary to explore further in the analysis of the results.

The Swedish upper-secondary school system has their students divided into so-called programmes, which focus on different subjects of study. There are two different programmes represented in this study: the social sciences programme (which focuses on social science, political science and history) and the aesthetics programme (which focuses on art, music, dance and theatre). The English courses in the respective programme only differ with regard to the focus of some activities. The Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) states that all subjects in the Swedish school system ought to incorporate, to some degree, the students’ chosen programme focus in the teaching. That is, some activities in the English courses in the aesthetics programme will be focused around music, art, dance and theatre, while some activities in the English courses in the social sciences programme will focus on social science, political science and history. The general trend of scores between the different study programmes did not deviate from the general trend, therefore the aspect of study programme was not deemed necessary to explore further in the analysis of the results.

The four groups of participants in this study, G1-G4, are as follows:

- **G1 and G2**: These groups were both in the social sciences programme. The students were 16 years of age and had been studying English for approximately seven years; they were currently studying the course English 5 (first English course at upper-secondary level). These two groups had the same English teacher. G1 consisted of 16 students: 12 girls, 3 boys and 1 other/unsure. G2 consisted of 16 students: 4 girls, 9 boys and 3 other/unsure. Three out of the four other/unsure in G1 and G2 did not provide a gender affiliation on their tests, which is why I decided to place them in the other/unsure category.

- **G3 and G4**: These groups were both in the aesthetics programme. The students were 17 years of age and had been studying English for approximately eight years; they
were currently studying the course English 6 (second English course at upper-secondary level). These two groups also had the same English teacher (though a different one from G1 and G2). G3 consisted of 16 students; 13 girls and 3 boys. G4 consisted of 16 students; 5 girls, 10 boys and 1 other/unsure.

Groups G1 and G3 were taught according to the GCR model and groups G2 and G4 were taught according to the PPP model. Before arriving at the classroom at the time when the teaching session was to take place, I was not aware of the group composition, other than the students’ study programme and age. This is an explanation for the skewed number of girls and boys who were taught using the two approaches respectively. All teaching and evaluation was done by myself, based on my own materials and lesson plans (cf. appendices 1-5). According to Ellis (2002), when teaching according to the GCR approach, one can make use of texts, sentences and/or dialogues, which is why I chose to incorporate all of the above in my material for the GCR teaching sessions.

3.2 Assessing the tests

The result of this study is mainly based on the answers given by informants on a test (cf. appendix 3), which was administered four to six days after the initial teaching sessions. Some issues emerged during the assessment of the test results; these issues will be discussed in this section.

The most general problem concerned the use of incorrect grammar apart from the use of the genitive case, as in “My friends’ house are bigger than mine” (“My friends’ house” being a correct example of the genitive case). In cases like these, the solution adapted was to regard the answers as ‘correct’, as long as they featured the correct form of the genitive case.

3.2.1 The use of the “of-phrase”

In the teaching sessions, the term used for describing the form in examples such as the roof of the house was the “of-phrase”, which Swan (2005, p. 415) refers to as “a structure with a preposition (usually of)”. Because the word of was so central to the whole concept of the “of-phrase”, there were a few answers which were deemed not to be correct. The test question was as follows
The fourth _____________ is about plants and herbs.

book – chapter (cf. appendix 3)

In this question, the aim was for the informant to answer *The fourth chapter of the book is about plants and herbs*. However, there were three tests which contained the answer “The fourth chapter in the book is about plants and herbs”, which was marked as incorrect in relation to the task at hand, even though it means practically the same thing as the expected solution.

### 3.2.2 Translation of answers in incorrect Swedish

In the last part of the test (cf. appendix 3), there was a question which consisted of two blank lines on which the informants were asked to provide two different examples of the forms of the genitive case. On one test, the informant had written one of their answers like this:

**My sisters’ dog.**

**Min systers hund.**

The English phrase is correct, and even though it is not a complete sentence, it is still an example. However, the Swedish translation does not correspond to the English phrase. The Swedish translation means ‘my sister’s dog’ with the word “syster” in the singular, whereas the correct Swedish translation would be ‘mina systrars hund’. Even though it is hard to say if the informant had actually understood the difference between the singular and plural use of the genitive case, this answer was deemed correct because a correct answer was given in English. The Swedish translation was regarded as unnecessary and therefore not considered a part of the answer.

### 3.3 Ethical aspects

Before each lesson, all informants were informed of the ethical aspects of their participation in the study. The information covered confidentiality and the use of the material. The informants were informed that any information recovered during the course of this study would only be used for the purposes of this research project. They were also informed that their participation would be completely anonymous, and that it would thus be quite impossible for this study to affect any informant negatively. All ethical issues were dealt with
in accordance with the Swedish Research Council’s ethical guidelines for research in the humanities and the social sciences (Vetenskapsrådet 2004).

4 Results and discussion

The results will be presented according to teaching approach. Correct answers will be represented by the colour blue and incorrect answers will be represented by the colour red.

The parameters which have been used are the different forms of the genitive case. For each form, 1-2 points could be achieved (yielding a maximum score of 10 points).

- Singular ’s (the cat’s ball, the dog’s tail, etc.) – 2p
- Singular -s’s (James’s car, Mr. Jones’s trash or James’ car, Mr. Jones’ trash, etc.) – 1p
- Plural -s’ (my parents’ cabin, the snakes’ tongues, etc.) – 2p
- Plural -’s (the children’s toys, the women’s dressing room, etc.) – 1p
- Of-phrase (the foot of the mountain, the leg of the chair, etc.) – 2p
- Individual (the students’ own examples of the genitive case) – 2p

In the presentation of the results (both in the diagrams and in the text), the scores have been presented in percent form. This is to give the reader the chance to compare the results even though the number of informants representing each group is not the same.

4.1 The PPP Approach

The teaching sessions in G2 and G4, respectively, were very different. In general, the girls paid more attention and were more focused on the task at hand than the boys, but G2 had a few troublemakers (boys), which made the teaching session harder, especially for those boys who got dragged into the attitude of not listening and not working properly with the exercises. By contrast, G4 was probably the most interested group of all four groups participating in this study. They asked questions and wanted to answer questions very eagerly, especially the few girls present in G4, which may be why the girls in G4, out of all gender groups in G1-G4, scored the overall highest percentage of 80% correct.
In Figure 1 we can see that the boys had an easier time with the singular forms than with the plural forms. The majority of the answers regarding the singular forms and the of-phrase were correct, with as high a correctness rate as 74% for the singular -s’s whereas the majority of the answers regarding the plural forms were incorrect with as low a correctness rate as 32% for the plural -’s. On average, the boys scored 50% correct on their own individual answers, with correct answers such as Rasmus’s house is red and The top of the skyscraper looked as if it was bent a couple of degrees and incorrect answers such as My fathers’ alligator shot him and All the childrens toys are gone.

In Figure 2 we can see that the girls scored a majority of correct answers in connection with all forms, as opposed to the boys (Figure 1). The forms with the highest share of correct answers were the two singular forms with 100% correct answers, while the forms with the lowest scores were the plural forms, both with 56% correct answers. 67% of the individual answers were correct, with correct examples such as The dog’s owner took the leash and I spilled water on the pages of my book and incorrect ones such as My parents’ are married and He’s parents’ were mad.
Three of the informants taught according to the PPP approach did not specify any gender affiliation whatsoever, and were therefore placed in the other/unsure category. The fourth informant included in this category actually checked the box for other/unsure. As can be seen in Figure 3, these informants scored 75% correct on the singular -s’s form, which was the form with the highest score. The form with the lowest score was the plural -’s form with 0%
correct. When it comes to the individual answers, these informants scored only 13% correct, with correct answers such as *The floor of the house* and incorrect answers such as *The swing swings slowly* (even though this is grammatically correct, the answers does not incorporate any example of the genitive case) and *His fingers was cold*. (Although this last answer shows understanding of the genitive/possessive determiner, the answer was not deemed correct as these determiners were not discussed at all during the teaching session.)

In the groups taught with the PPP approach, the female informants had the overall highest scores with 74% correct answers, while the male informants scored 55% correct answers. The other/unsure category scored 33% correct answers overall. The girls scored higher on all categories, compared to the boys and the others.

### 4.2 The GCR Approach

![Figure 4: Test scores (in percent) after the GCR approach, boys (N=6)](image)

Both G1 and G3 (taught with the GCR approach) were fairly similar. Although G1 seemed more interested in the task at hand, there were plenty of informants in G3 who seemed interested as well. The teaching session with G3 was a bit delayed as half the group showed up late to the scheduled lesson and the session had to start over after ten minutes. However, in
the opinion of G3’s regular teacher (who was present at the time of the teaching session), this did not affect the experiment or results negatively.

Figure 4 shows that the boys taught with the GCR approach had grasped the concept of singular -s’s best, with 100% correct answers for that form. The form that the boys scored the lowest on was the plural -’s with 33% correct answers. Of the individual answers provided, 50% were deemed correct, e.g. In my backyard I found my dog’s ball and The beaver’s teeth are strong, while the other half of the answers, such as My parents’s house is big and The house’s doors are tall and wide, were incorrect.

For the girls taught according to the GCR approach, all genitive forms had higher shares of correct answers than incorrect ones (Figure 5). We can see that these informants scored 92% correct on the singular -s’s form, which was the form that the girls scored the highest on, while the girls scored their lowest on the two plural forms, each with 56% correct answers. 70% of the individual answers were correct, as in The driver of the bus and My mother’s food tastes good, while the incorrect answers included The dog’s has only one eye and This house is my brothers.

![Figure 5: Test scores (in percent) after the GCR approach, girls (N=25)](image)
Unfortunately, not much can be said about the category others/unsure in the GCR group. The one informant in this category must either have a very hard time with English grammar or not made an honest contribution to the study, as the person in question did not score a single point.

Apart from the singular -s’s, which the boys scored 100% correct on and the girls 92% correct on, the girls scored higher than the boys and the one “other” informant on all of the genitive forms. The overall score for the girls taught according to the GCR approach was 70% correct. As for the boys, this number was 57%. The scores may be a bit askew as there were only six boys as opposed to 25 girls in the two groups taught according to the GCR approach.

4.3 Comparison of PPP and GCR

As can be seen from Figure 6, in this particular study, the GCR approach seems to be the marginally better choice of teaching approach. Even though Ellis states that the GCR approach can have a delayed effect on the knowledge of the students taught by it (cf. 2.4), this did not seem to be the case in this study. The students taught according to the GCR approach scored higher on all genitive forms (apart from the singular -'s, where it was a tie) than the
students taught by the PPP approach (Figure 7). The only noticeable instance in which the PPP approach was superior in this study was in the scores of the girls taught according to the PPP approach (Figure 2). These girls scored an overall score of 74%, compared with the second-highest-scoring category, the girls taught according to the GCR approach, which scored 70% correct.

Figure 7: Overall scores (in percent) for both approaches (PPP N=32, GCR N=32)

According to the Skill-Learning Theory (cf. 2.2.2; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012), the second part of the PPP approach (practicing) may require much fine-tuning to decrease the learners’ error rates. Another important aspect of the PPP approach is the linking between the learners’ previous grammatical knowledge and the grammatical structure being taught (cf. 2.3). In my opinion, this was not achieved to the fullest during the PPP teaching sessions. Maftoon and Sarem (cf. 2.3) acknowledge that learners’ may bypass the use of the grammatical structure which has just been taught (if they do not yet feel comfortable using it) during the production stage (P3), using their strategic knowledge. For example, when asked to produce a few sentences using the different genitive forms which had just been taught, the informants often copied examples used by myself in the presentation or incorporated the same genitive form in all sentences.
Both of the approaches may be categorized as teaching grammar as a product (cf. 2.1). When adhering to the PPP approach, the learners will almost exclusively learn (if anything) the grammatical structure in question. However, when using the GCR approach, the learners will not only learn (if anything) the grammatical structure in question. They may also increase their consciousness of grammar as a whole, making it easier to notice and learn new grammatical structures in the future (cf. 2.4; Ellis, 2002; 2005). This implies that teaching according to the GCR approach may actually benefit learners more in the long run (even if acquisition of the grammatical structure in question is delayed), as it is designed to create cognitive tools to aid in the further development of the learners’ target language (cf. 2.4; Ellis, 2002; 2005). One might say that GCR does in fact teach the grammatical structure as a product, although the additional positive cognitive influences on the learners may be categorized as teaching grammatical consciousness as a process. This goes well together with what Jean and Simmard (2011; cf. 2.2.2) argue: learners who are explicitly taught grammar ought to acquire other language or cognitive skills as well, to make explicit grammar teaching worthwhile.

4.4 Differences between genders

![Bar chart](image)

Figure 8: Overall scores (in percent) in relation to gender (girls N=34, boys N=25, others/unsure N=5)
As Figure 8 shows, the correct scores achieved by the female informants in this experiment (71%) are noticeably higher than the corresponding figures for the male informants (56%) and especially the others/unsure informants (26%). Week and Ferraro (2011) claim that girls seem to perform more strongly in the field of syntax, which the results of the present study would confirm. Also, the present study supports the claim that boys sometimes “act in ways that do not maximize their ability to learn” (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey & Daley, 2001, p. 12; cf. 2.3), as the only troublemakers in the classrooms during the teaching sessions were boys. The generally more positive attitude toward language learning in female students, which was observed by Andreou, Vlachos, and Metallidou et al. (as cited in Week and Ferrero, 2011) and MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Donovan (2002), may be part of the explanation for the female informants’ overall higher scores in this study, regardless of teaching approach.

5 Conclusion

To sum up, the concrete results of the two approaches did not differ to any great extent in the present study (Figure 6). However, if Ellis’s predictions on the additional positive effects of teaching according to the GCR approach are true, the overall results for teaching according to the GCR approach are actually greater than by teaching according to the PPP approach, in this study at least. Whatever Krashen (1982; cf. 2.2.1) may believe about the pointlessness of explicitly teaching grammar, this study has shown that it may not be the grammar teaching in itself that is the problem. It may be, as Rod Ellis (2002) wrote, that the problem lies in unchallenged and outdated views on teaching grammar (cf. 2.4). During the course of this study, the findings compiled and the many references used have not provided any conclusive evidence that would confirm one approach to be superior to another, and further research regarding the many different approaches to teaching grammar would be beneficial to the fields of both second and foreign language learning and teaching. It does, however, seem to be confirmed by this study, as in much research before this (cf. 2.3 and 4.4), that girls overall achieve higher levels of competence in a foreign language with the help of formal instruction. In the present study, the learning of a particular grammatical problem was at stake, and the results showed that girls had an easier time using that feature correctly afterwards. However, the aspects which trigger this difference between the genders are not discussed afterwards. However, Suggestions for further research include following a group of learners and using different approaches to teaching grammar in connection with different grammatical structures which
are similar to each other. This way, all the informants are the same for all the testing, making it easier to compare one approach to another without having to take into account the variation of informants in different groups.
List of references


Appendices

Appendix 1 – Lesson plan for the PPP approach

Lesson 1

- 5 minutes to make respondents aware of the ethical issues that I have taken into consideration. Every student will be given a random number, and in the presentation of the study, students will only be referred to by this number, if at all. Only the permanent teacher will have access to which number corresponds to which student. Every student will fill out their number, gender and native language on the top of the test page, in the subsequent lesson during which the test will be held.

- P1 - 20 minutes will be used to present the different ways to form the genitive in English. This will be done by showing examples in a PowerPoint presentation and answering any questions the students may have.

- P2a - 20 minutes will then be used for the students to practice the genitive construction. This will be done using fill-in-the-gap sentences and sentences in which the student must categorize each sentence as grammatical or ungrammatical (if ungrammatical, the student will be asked to explain why and give the proper grammatical structure).

- P2b - 10 minutes will then be used to go through the practice sentences together with the whole group and answer any questions which may arise.

- P3 - The last 20 minutes will be used for the students to write their own text/sentences and say them out loud in which they illustrate how to use the grammatical structure in question; this will be done in pairs and I will walk around in the classroom, answering any questions and giving tips and correcting if necessary.

Lesson 2

20 minutes will be allowed to complete a short test which will test the students’ knowledge of the genitive in English. The test will both incorporate fill-in-the-gap sentences, sentences which are grammatical/ungrammatical and a part where the students will create their own sentences.
Appendix 2 – Lesson plan for the GCR approach

Lesson 1

- 5 minutes to make respondents aware of the ethical issues that I have taken into consideration. Every student will be given a random number, and in the presentation of the study, students will only be referred to by this number, if at all. Only the permanent teacher will have access to which number corresponds to which student. Every student will fill out their number, gender and native language on the top of the test page, in the subsequent lesson during which the test will be held.

- Noticing – 30 minutes will be used to let the students read a text, some sentences and some dialogues and ask them to try to notice the different uses of the genitive. This will be done in groups of 3-4 people.

- Comparing A – 10 minutes will then be used for the students in the groups to try and formulate rules for the use of the genitive construction and comparing this to their previous knowledge, trying to fill in the gap if necessary.

- Comparing B – 10 minutes will then be used to discuss the proposed rules with the whole group and correcting each other’s if necessary.

- Integrating – 20 minutes will then be used for the students to write their own sentences and saying them out loud in pairs or the previous groups to try and illustrate the use of the genitive.

Lesson 2

20 minutes will be allowed to complete a short test which will test the students’ knowledge of the genitive in English. The test will both incorporate fill-in-the-gap sentences, sentences which are grammatical/ungrammatical and a part where the students will create their own sentences.
Appendix 3 – Materials used for the PPP approach

Exercises on the genitive case

Fill in the gaps

The order of the words underneath is always "owner – owned". Please fill in the gaps so that the sentences appear grammatical.

Is this your ___________________________?
parents – bungalow

How adorable! The _____________________ are so short!
dog – legs

Have you ever been to the ___________________________?
skyscraper – top

Do you have _____________________________?
yesterday – newspaper

What do you think of _____________________________?
James – children

The ________________________ has been attacked by fungi.
house - floor

Grammatical or ungrammatical?

Are the following sentences grammatical or ungrammatical? If a sentence is ungrammatical, please write the proper sentence on the line provided. G for grammatical, UG for ungrammatical.
My dad’s lawnmower is not working properly. G [ ] UG [ ]
______________________________________________.

I have never seen a cat’s teeth before. G [ ] UG [ ]
______________________________________________.

The children’s toys are everywhere! G [ ] UG [ ]
______________________________________________.

The table’s legs are not sturdy enough. G [ ] UG [ ]
______________________________________________.

Having been to many countries in the past has made me realize that Sweden’s economy is fairly stable. G [ ] UG [ ]
______________________________________________
______________________________________________.
Appendix 4 – Materials used for the GCR approach

The genitive case

Text and sentences

Please read the following text and sentences. Try to notice how the genitive case is used differently in different situations, such as: when the noun is singular or plural. Underline the instances where the genitive case is used. When finished, please discuss your findings in your respective groups.

Once upon a time, there was a cat who lived in a box. One day, the cat’s tail got stuck in the door of the box. The cat, whose name was James, screamed out “argh my tail is stuck!”. Luckily, James’s friend José the caterpillar came to James’s rescue. “How did you get stuck in the door of the box?”, asked José. “Well”, said James, “I forgot to go to the taildresser this week so my tail is all furry, I guess it just got too big to fit in the door”. José’s sisters had a taildressing salon not far from James’s box, so the friends decided to go there immediately. The Cat-Pill Women’s salon was Boxville’s most famous taildresser and it served clients as famous as Caterpillia Jolie and Eva Longtailia. Upon arrival, José’s sisters greeted José and his friend and gave them the best station of the salon to get their tails groomed at. After an hour’s work, the two friends thanked the sisters, who now had a lot of cat hair to clean up from the floor of the salon, and walked home. On the way home, James said to José, “Boy, I’m glad your sisters’ salon was so close by, now my tail won’t get stuck again in the door of the box for at least another week!” José replied, “Well, our family’s door is always open to a good friend like you. Come on, let’s go clean up that pigsty you call a box and get ourselves a good night’s sleep”. The friends’ lives would be lined with both happiness and sadness, but they would always remain each other’s best friends.

- Is this your parents’ bungalow?
- How adorable! The dog’s legs are so short!
- Have you ever been to the top of the skyscraper?
- Do you have yesterday’s newspaper?
- What do you think of James’s children?
- The floor of the house has been attacked by fungi.
Dialogues

Please read the following dialogues in pairs or in your respective groups.

D1.
A – Don’t you just love the smell of the forest?
B – Well, I like Ken’s smell more.
A – Who is Ken?
B – That tree over there! His smell is so lovely I could eat him for dinner.

D2.
A – There is a party at my friends’ house tomorrow! Do you want to come?

B – I’ll come under one condition: that you will call me “The Master of the House” the entire evening.

A – Ok...I’m not sure the party is tomorrow though...I’ll call you when I know more. *runs away*

D3.
A – So, your mother’s sister’s boyfriend’s dogs’ chewing toys are on the floor of my bathroom AGAIN?

B – Sorry, Augustus and Agnes’s toys won’t bother you again, Mr. Obama.

D4.
A – Alas! The lost memento of my late mother has been lost forever in a sea of nothingness, now I cannot live another day by my sister’s side.

B – But…didn’t you just drop it by the side of the road?

A – Ah yes, there it is! Let us go have lunch, shall we?
Formulating rules

Now, please discuss with your group about how you could formulate rules to explain the different uses of the genitive case. Try to formulate a set of rules amongst your group.

Appendix 5 - Test on the genitive case

Test on the genitive case

Age

Class

Native language

Gender

Fill in the gaps

Please fill in the gaps with both words presented underneath the gap. The first word is the owner and the second word is the owned.

The __________________ is long and furry.

    cat – tail

________________________ is the largest house on the street.

        Mr. Smith – house

The fourth __________________ is about plants and herbs.

        book – chapter

Have you seen the __________________?

        children – toys

The __________________ are used for storing fat.

        camels – humps
Correct the sentences

Is the genitive case used correctly in the following sentences? If the use of the genitive case is correct, write correct. If the use of the genitive case is not correct, please provide the correct genitive case on the provided line.

Are Mr Jones’s children playing in our backyard?
______________________________________________________________

The house’s floor is uneven.
______________________________________________________________

My parents’ marriage has lasted over fifty years.
______________________________________________________________

Create your own sentences

Please write two sentences of your own in which you illustrate two different forms of the genitive case (singular, plural, etc.).

_____________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

Good luck and thank you for participating in my experiment!

/Emil Hasselqvist, Mälardalen University