Examensarbete
15 högskolepoäng

Teaching form and function
Some English teachers’ beliefs and thoughts concerning form and function in connection with their teaching

Undervisa form och funktion
Några lärares tankar och tro vad gäller form och funktion i samband med deras undervisning

Maria Ramberg
Abstract

This study aims to investigate Some English teachers’ beliefs concerning form and function in connection to their teaching. The investigation was carried out through qualitative in-depth interviews and classroom observations focusing on critical incidents. During the study, it became clear that all the participating teachers found that both form and function were important parts in their teaching of English as a second language (L2). Nevertheless it was interesting to notice that they had different ideas about which of the two concepts was the most important one when it comes to language learning. Some of the teachers emphasized the need to put stress on form, arguing that knowledge about form makes it possible for the learner to understand how the language is built, while some believed that too much focus on form might block the communicative competence and thus affect the function.

Keywords: Teachers’ Beliefs, Form and Function, Communicative Competence, Second Language Teaching.
# Table of contents

1. **Introduction** .................................................................................................................... 7
   1.1. Background ...................................................................................................................... 7
   1.2 The syllabus for English at upper secondary school ........................................................ 8
   1.3 Current conditions for second language teaching ............................................................ 9
   1.4 Purpose and research questions ..................................................................................... 10
   1.5. Key concepts .................................................................................................................. 11
   1.6 Form and function .......................................................................................................... 11
   1.7 Teacher beliefs .............................................................................................................. 12
   1.8 Communicative competence and the Council of Europe ................................................. 14

2. **Literature Review** ............................................................................................................. 17
   2.1 Some theories concerning second language teaching .................................................... 17
   2.2 Instructional language learning ...................................................................................... 18
   2.3 Empirical research ........................................................................................................ 20

3. **Method** .......................................................................................................................... 22
   3.1 Data collecting methods ................................................................................................. 22
   3.2 Observations .................................................................................................................. 22
   3.3 Interviews ....................................................................................................................... 23
   3.4 Procedure and selection of participants ......................................................................... 24
   3.5 Ethical considerations .................................................................................................... 24
   3.6 Participants ..................................................................................................................... 25

4. **Results** .......................................................................................................................... 26
   4.1. Interviews ...................................................................................................................... 26
   4.2 The interpretation of form and function in the syllabus ................................................ 26
   4.3 Beliefs concerning form and function ........................................................................... 27
   4.4 Implementing form and function .................................................................................. 29
4.5 Observations ........................................................................................................... 31
4.6 Teachers’ role and involvement .............................................................................. 31
4.7 Activities ................................................................................................................... 33
5. Discussion .................................................................................................................... 35
6. Conclusions .................................................................................................................. 38
7. References .................................................................................................................... 40
8. Appendices ..................................................................................................................... 42
1. Introduction

The current Swedish syllabus for English at upper secondary school advocates the communicative ability as a means for acquiring what is expressed as the aim for the subject. In addition, the present educational system in Sweden holds a communicative approach towards language where the communicative- and functional abilities play a central role. Several studies concerning second language learning in the classroom stress the need to balance form-focused and meaning-focused teaching, as results have shown that a combination of both are most effective in promoting second language learning (Lightbown & Spada 179). In addition, a separation as well as a tension between form and function is deeply rooted within the Swedish educational field and can be traced back to the changes that have occurred within the school system during the last century. In this particular study the concepts of form and function refer to the description expressed in the syllabus for English at upper secondary school: knowledge about language structure and language use.

Numerous theories and studies have been carried out within the educational research field, focusing on second language learning in the classroom. However, there seems to be an excess of research focusing on the learners’ perspective. The American scholar of psychology and education, M Frank Pajares, discusses in his research article Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning up a Messy Construct, the importance of including a teachers’ perspective. Moreover, Pajares points to the importance of specifically including the beliefs and thoughts held by a teacher as he argues that they could contribute with valuable information concerning second language learning. Thus, it seems important as well as motivated to scrutinize some English teachers’ beliefs and thoughts concerning form and function in connection with their teaching.

1.1 Background

The introductory section concerning the syllabus is presented with the intention to give a description and an explanation of its content and view of language concerning form and function. Furthermore, the reason for focusing on the syllabus for English at upper secondary school and not including the syllabus for English at compulsory school is due to the informants being upper secondary teachers of English, teaching at upper secondary schools which made it reasonable to focus on the syllabus for English at upper secondary school. Moreover, the
brief presentation of the syllabus is to be seen as a part of the background information necessary for acquiring the reasoning expressed in combination with the results in the discussion. ‘Current conditions for second language teaching’ will give a brief description of the development towards current views upon language and type of approach that is to be applied when teaching English within the Swedish educational system.

1.2 The syllabus for English at upper secondary school

The expressed aim of the subject of English is described as preparing the learners for “… international contacts, and an increasingly internationalised labour market, in order to take advantage of the rapid developments taking place, as a result of information and communications technologies, as well as for further studies” (Syllabus). The means for its realization is described in terms of “… developing an all-round communicative ability and the language skills necessary …” (Syllabus). The communicative ability naturally concerns the functional aspect of language, meaning using the language. However, the all-round communicative ability does not leave out the form-focused aspects of language which are described as connected to the usage of language, providing its “… vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, spelling and grammar” (Syllabus). Moreover, this linguistic competence should be developed with the intention of “… forming linguistically coherent utterances …” (Syllabus). The amount of coherence is described as being dependent on content, which in its turn determines form. Furthermore, the language skills necessary’ can be interpreted as signifying either form or function, or both, depending on the type of language action a specific situation requires. The syllabus exemplifies this in terms of possible strategies to make use of such as: “… reformulating, or using synonyms [and] questions …” (Syllabus).

The different strategies expressed in the syllabus do not necessarily involve language, as the syllabus points out that a situation might require a clarification in form of e.g. body language. Moreover, the syllabus explicitly makes it clear that language is to be treated as a unity consisting of different types of usage, “English should not be divided up into different parts to be learnt in a specific sequence. Both younger and older pupils relate, describe, discuss and reason…” (Syllabus) Thus, form and function are explained as two dimensions, equally important for different types of language use. Besides a clear connection to the communicative competences: **linguistic-**, **sociolinguistic-**, **discourse-**, **strategic-**, **
sociocultural- and social competence, the syllabus also advocates learner awareness. All in all, the different conditions and contexts described in the syllabus refer to different communicative abilities, which combined denote an all-round communicative competence and requires the ability to master both language form and function.

1.3 Current conditions for second language teaching

Even though communicative language ability, with its embedded motive of a functionalist view of language, plays a very central role in current syllabus for English at upper secondary school it is nevertheless essential to remember that the subject of English (in Swedish schools) is to be taught according to a language-driven approach. This means, as expressed in Lundahl, that “… language learning is the goal, and content is an effective means for attaining it” (Lundahl 93). However, there are some exceptions within the Swedish educational system that correspond to the so called Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, such as the IB-program and several international program combinations, at upper secondary level (Lundahl 96). This approach implies that teaching is carried out with an equal amount of focus on both language learning as well as content learning.

The division between form and function is most commonly described as a dichotomy between language use and language as a system, indicating also a separation between language and content (Lundahl 95). This dividing up may seem easy to grasp. However, when placed into the context of a language-driven approach that emphasizes function, meaning on the one hand language use and on the other hand the language ability, it evidently seems more complex. In addition, this complex view upon language forms the current holistic approach that is about the ability to use language (Språkboken 39). As a reaction to a previous existing behaviorist form-focused tradition, where language learning was seen as a result of stimulus and response, a new perspective developed which, instead of placing learning within the acts of imitation and practice, highlighted natural learning or natural acquisition (Lundahl 146-149). The American linguist Krashen’s emphasis on language intake and the separation between reaching language acquisition, meaning natural acquisition, and language learning had a huge impact on the view of language development (Lundahl 149). This division between acquisition and learning also questioned the value of formal learning as Krashen, who favored natural acquisition, also came to the conclusion that ‘learning’ can only be profitable in a
formal situation, thus acquisition should be the aim to strive for (Lundahl 150). This led to a change in teaching approaches, as the instructional practices started being filled with methods trying to imitate natural learning, disregarding language form. Even though Krashen’s theory has been very much questioned, studies have also proved some of his ideas to be legitimate and his view upon the significance of communication can be traced to current conditions for second language teaching (Lightbown and Spada 38).

1.4 Purpose and research questions

This study aims at examining some English teachers’ beliefs and thoughts concerning form and function in relation to their language teaching. More specifically, I will investigate teachers’ beliefs regarding form and function, which is evidently based on their interpretation of how it is being visualized and expressed in the Swedish syllabus for English at upper secondary school. Moreover, I intend to look at teachers’ beliefs and thoughts concerning their actual implementation of form and function in the language classroom.

The overall research question for this study is:

- What are some English teachers’ beliefs concerning form and function in relation to their language teaching?

As the nature of this question is broad and somewhat abstract the two subordinating questions will enable a necessary elucidation:

- What are the teachers’ thoughts and beliefs concerning the role of form and function with regard to their interpretation of the syllabus for English at upper secondary school?

- What is the nature of the teaching and the means used when implementing form and function in the language classroom?

Given that this is a fairly small study, I will not attempt to describe any sort of general understanding that exists among teachers today, but rather to take a random sample of teachers’ own descriptions of their understanding, thoughts and opinions concerning form and function in connection to their teaching. The purpose is to present an investigation carried out within the area of my major subject, explored in the light of its syllabus, with the intention to
present a discussion that can be of interest for future fellow teachers of English as well as other personnel, active within the educational practice.

1.5 Key concepts

The following three sections, ‘Form and function’, ‘Teachers’ beliefs’ and ‘Communicative competence’ are presented with the intention to elucidate and define these two key concepts as well as provide an explanation of their development and origins. The communicative competence is of importance for this study as this competence denotes when a language learner is able to combine form and function and as such the goal to acquire to communicate effectively. In other words, the communicative competence is the combination of form and function, the goal that a teacher is aiming for.

1.6 Form and function

As mentioned above, form and function is generally described as a dividing between language use and language as a system. Knowledge about the language system is expressed in the syllabus for English at upper secondary school in following words: “…vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, spelling and grammar […] as well as […] forming linguistically coherent utterances, which in terms of their contents and form are progressively adapted to the situation and audience” (Syllabus). By language use the syllabus refers to being able to use English “…for studies, travel in other countries and for social and professional international contacts of different kinds” (Syllabus).

However, as previously mentioned, these two components are closely intertwined and the syllabus describes them as complementing each other, both requirements for the fulfillment of the different abilities that forms an all-round communicative ability. Furthermore, Tornberg describes the tension between form and function as, on the one hand, an emphasis on activism and on the other hand a focus on formalism. The first one indicates a stress on the importance of active communication, meaning using the language, while the latter one concerns formal teaching with the aim of acquiring language grammar, specifically the languages formal structure. Thus, the significance of form and function in this study is to be interpreted as language as a system, indicating form, and language use, meaning function.
1.7 Teachers’ beliefs

When carrying out a study concerning teachers’ beliefs, it is vital to fully understand the concept of belief in general in order to be able to distinguish and present the accurate and appropriate definition that denotes what is being investigated and can function as the fixed definition throughout the study. Thus, it is important for my investigation to define what is meant by belief.

When inquiring into the definitions given by the three English dictionaries: *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* and *Longman Dictionary of the English Language*, four types of definitions can be distinguished. When categorizing these definitions according to their content, one definition can be identified as a clearly theological one, dealing with belief in regard to religious faith. The other category characterizes a relationship between belief and truth and is described with the two definitions: acceptance of a firmly held opinion as true or real and acceptance of a principle or idea, regardless of any proof of it being the truth. The fourth definition concerns belief in a matter of trust and confidence in something, not including any specific references to neither truth nor religious faith. The American professor M Pajares’ study *Teachers’ beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct* presents a taxonomy of numerous belief structures containing different categories withholding different types of beliefs, overlapping and effecting each other. Pajares argues that the ambiguous and nuanced definitions that surround the global concept of belief “… demand not only clarity of thought and expression but also preciseness of word choice and meaning …” in order to be able to operate with specific parts of the construction that constitute the very notion of belief in general (Pajares 310). Thus, it is vital to keep in mind the purpose statement that applies for this particular study: some teachers’ beliefs and thoughts concerning form and function in relation to their language teaching, as “… the educational research community has been unable to adopt a specific working definition” (Pajares 313).

The educational researcher Michaela Borg outlines four perspectives when looking at the concept of belief, based on some common features that can be found among its many definitions. The first one concerns what she calls ‘the truth-element’, which corresponds to the definitions mentioned in dictionaries as discussed above (Borg 186). Borg also points out the question of truth as one of the key differences between belief and knowledge “… in that
knowledge must actually be true in some external sense” (1 Teacher’s belief Borg). In addition Pajares mean that the confusion when trying to define belief is situated in this very distinction between knowledge and belief and he refers to the American philosopher John Dewey when trying to explain the complex interrelationship between the two: Belief “… covers all the matters of which we have no sure knowledge and yet which we are sufficiently confident of to act upon and also the matters that we now accept as certainly true, as knowledge, but which nevertheless may be questioned in the future (Dewey 6; Pajares 4, 8).

The second perspective deals with belief in connection to behaviour, meaning that a person’s behaviour is very much dependent on the person’s beliefs. Pajares presents a definition made by Harvey, that describes the very interrelationship between belief and behaviour as “… an individual's representation of reality that has enough validity, truth, or credibility to guide thought and behaviour” (Pajares 313), which very much corresponds to Dewey’s explanation of the relationship between belief and knowledge.

Borg’s third perspective concerns a disagreement among definitions, whereas some argue that awareness must constitute a belief, while others claim that a belief can be either conscious or unconscious depending on the type of cognitive component that is involved.

The fourth perspective looks upon belief regarding a person’s values. Pajares discusses the evaluative aspect of belief arguing that a belief may “…become values, which house the evaluative, comparative, and judgmental functions of beliefs and replace predisposition with an imperative to action” (Pajares 314). Both Borg and Pajares view a person’s beliefs as something depending on a person’s individual belief system.

Teachers’ beliefs can be placed within the construct of educational beliefs, which itself constitute a wide and encompassing construct that contains many different dimensions within the educational field such as beliefs concerning teacher efficacy, students’ performance, learning strategies, local planning, national planning etc. Borg identifies teachers’ beliefs as “… teachers’ pedagogical beliefs, or those beliefs of relevance to an individual’s teaching” (Borg 2). This definition nevertheless also holds a complex set of perspectives to assume and variables to take into account. Though Pajares highlights the necessity of conceptualizing the definitions of belief in general and look at it from a holistic point of view in order to create an accurate understanding, he also recognizes that “All broad psychological constructs at some
point must come before the reductionist, multidimensional, or hierarchical chopping block to better suit the needs and requirements of research” (Pajares 315). Consequently, in this study some teachers’ individual, consciously or unconsciously held, evaluative, comparative, and judgmental, principles and values concerning form and function in relation to language and their teaching, will be investigated. A connection between belief and behaviour, through an analysis of interviews and observations, is made on the basis that the teachers’ principles and values constitute the notions which they are adequately confident to act upon as they interpret them as having enough validity, truth, and credibility to guide their thought and behaviour.

1.8 Communicative competence and the Council of Europe

Communicative competence plays a central role in present Swedish syllabus for English at upper secondary school, as it declares that “… The subject aims at developing an all-round communicative ability …” (Syllabus). This comprehensive ability implies a set of different communicative sub-competences which are all indicated throughout the entire syllabus for English and together form the very notion of a communicative competence. In order to fully understand the nature of these competences it is important to be aware of the fact that the concepts that denote communicative competence do not only spring from a purely linguistic background but that the all-round communicative ability also holds a pedagogical-philosophic perspective that emphasizes communication in the name of democracy.

The American sociolinguist Dell Hymes first introduced the idea of a communicative competence in 1968, with the definition; “what a speaker needs to know to be able to communicate effectively in culturally significant settings” (Språkboken 19). This sociolinguistic view upon language was one among others, such as Chomsky’s idea about an innate language ability and a division between language competence and language performance, that contrasted to earlier existing formalistic ideas within the linguistic field which had emphasized a more structural view upon language and language learning, focusing on form rather than function (Lundahl 116). Based on Chomsky’s ideas concerning different competences, Hymes added the three socially conditioned communication factors: feasibility, appropriateness and accepted usage to the already existing grammatical awareness and identified these four factors as the core structure of a communicative competence (Tornberg 40).
As an attempt to concretize this functional view of language with the intention to further develop the language education within Europe, the Council of Europe published the so-called *Threshold Level* in 1975. This new material advocated a functional- and communicative approach towards language and gave a detailed description of what an adult language learner should develop in order to reach the threshold level (*Språkboken* 17, 26). But its author, the Dutch linguist Jan Van Ek, was of the opinion that these new ideas needed to be further developed in order to fully reach the holistic approach towards language that could hold the complex set of abilities which, he meant, needed to be addressed in connection to language learning. In 1986 Van Ek published *Scope*, an extensive definition of the communicative competence, containing the six communicative abilities; linguistic-, sociolinguistic-, discourse-, strategic-, sociocultural- and social competence. *Scope* has played an important role both when it comes to the continued work within the Council of Europe as well as the planning on a national level (*Språkboken* 18).

Language use is a multidimensional phenomenon and it is therefore important to bear in mind that the communicative competences, though compound in their nature, only represents one aspect of the complex act that is applied when individuals communicate with one another (*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* 9). The ideal would be to dissect each competence and scrutinize its internal dependence of both form and function. However, as space does not permit a thorough exposition, a brief description of the six communicative competencies, based on Van Ek’s definition, will be given in order to enable enough transparency before the discussion.

Linguistic competence: This competence refers to the formal aspects of a language, meaning words and lexical awareness, orthographic and phonetic understanding as well as an overall understanding of grammar, including knowledge about morphology and language syntax.

Socio-linguistic competence: This competence involves the ability to adjust one’s language according to content, context and to whom you are speaking, including both form and function. Since linguistic usage is a deeply socially rooted phenomenon, speakers need to be aware of the fact that improper language can be very misinterpreted and be seen as a lack of respect or rudeness, which in its turn prevents a successful exchange of words.

Discursive competence: When communicating, it is important to make sure that the one you are speaking to is able to understand what is being said. Understanding the content of a conversation is one thing, but having a discursive ability means that you know how to bring
forward what you want to say in a way that makes it possible for the listener to follow. In this case being able to know how to formulate sentences with the help of different types of linking words and conjunctions, forming a unity of what is being said is a requirement.

Strategic competence: To be able to control and make use of communicative strategies indicates being able to reformulate and explain what is being said in a manner that makes it understandable for the listeners. This means that a speaker sometimes also needs to use strategies, such as body language, to create an understanding within the conversation about what is actually being said. A competence like this, presuppose a great deal of flexibility as well as knowledge about different appropriate communicative strategies.

Socio-cultural competence: This is about an awareness concerning different cultures and that different types of communicative behavior apply within them, indicating a necessity of both a formal- and functional ability.

Social competence: In order to be able to communicate, social skill is needed. This involves being able to make contact and take initiative for starting a conversation as well as knowing how to socially behave during an ongoing conversation. Social behavior during a conversation refers to acts such as being able to listen, make eye contact and be able to show empathy for the other person speaking.
2. Literature review

The literature review presents a brief description of some theories focusing on language teaching. It also discusses instructional language learning based on some principles set by the New Zealander linguist Rod Ellis. In addition, the literature review contains a brief overview regarding previous research done within similar areas of research.

2.1 Some theories concerning second language teaching

As second language teaching and learning is a multidimensional phenomenon, it seems wise to introduce some theories from the area of second language development research as they might facilitate an understanding as well as a concretization of the results from this study. Both Ellis and Lundahl highlight the cognitive and psycholinguistic area of research as being of vital importance for the second language teaching and learning and Ellis describes how “…much of the theorizing about L2 instruction has been specifically undertaken with language pedagogy in mind …” (Lundahl 150; Ellis 210). However, as the social phenomenon of communication has been given a central role in current second language teaching, language development from a social constructivist perspective will also be taken into account. Thus, three theories from the area of second language development will be introduced: Long’s Interaction Hypothesis, Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis and Swain’s Comprehensible Output Hypothesis.

The Interaction Hypothesis is based on the assumption that second language learning occurs through interaction, meaning communication (Lightbown and Spada 43). However, there are certain variables of importance that Long points out as necessary for acquisition to occur, such as modified interaction and comprehensible input (Lightbown and Spada 43). Modified interaction is described by Long as “…the necessary mechanism for making language comprehensible”, through means of both linguistic simplification but mainly through cooperation between speakers, working towards mutual comprehension (Lightbown and Spada 43). Through an extremely simplified description, the process can be described as follows; during communication speakers modify interaction in order to make input comprehensible and reach mutual comprehension, which promotes acquisition. Long also highlights the importance of corrective feedback from an interlocutor, arguing that the
negotiating for meaning between a learner and an interlocutor, when communication becomes complicated, promotes language development (Lightbown and Spada 44).

Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis suggests that “… nothing is learned unless it has been noticed” (Lightbown and Spada 44). At the same time Schmidt makes it clear that noticing is not enough in itself for acquisition to occur, as the input needs to be consciously ‘taken in’ and transformed into explicit knowledge in order to reach acquisition (Tornberg 109).

The Comprehensible Output Hypothesis is described as a cognitive activity and a social activity, where the two work conjointly to promote language learning (Lightbown and Spada 48). Swain explains the process in terms of learners participating in so called ‘collaborative dialogues’ while working with language tasks such as e.g. speaking or writing that focuses on form and meaning. This, Swain argues, will create ‘collaborative dialogues’ concerning language meaning and its formal aspects while the learners, at the same time, use the language as a means for attaining this new knowledge about the form and meaning of the language (Lightbown and Spada 48). The outcome of the hypothesis is described by Swain as “… language use mediating language learning” (Lightbown and Spada 48).

2.2 Instructional language learning

Ellis points out ‘focusing on meaning’ as one out of ten principles of instructed language learning in his article Principles of instructed language learning and he distinguishes two ways in which the term ‘focus on meaning’ can be interpreted. One possible interpretation is explained as “… the idea of semantic meaning …” and the second as relating to pragmatic meaning (Ellis 211). In addition Ellis explains the necessity of having different kinds of instructional approaches when teaching semantics vis-à-vis pragmatic meaning, as the first one enables the teacher and students to “…treat language as an object and function as pedagogues and learners”, while the latter one signifies a view upon the L2 as “… a tool for communication and to function as communicators” (Ellis 211, 212). Creating pragmatic meaning corresponds very much with current communicative approaches towards language since understanding the pragmatic aspects of language is of outmost importance for creating successful communication.
Another principle formulated by Ellis concerns the need for instruction to ensure that learners also focus on form (Ellis 213). Also the phrase ‘focus on form’ can be interpreted in more than one way according to Ellis and he describes it in terms of three different possible interpretations. Firstly, ‘form’ can be linked to “... a general orientation to language as a form” (Ellis 213). Secondly, it might imply a concentration of focus on “... the graphic or phonetic instantiations of linguistic forms” and thirdly, Ellis suggests that “... focus on form might be assumed to refer to awareness of some underlying, abstract rule” (Ellis 213). The first interpretation indicates a product-oriented approach towards form. Tornberg discusses how grammar can be seen as either a product or a process arguing that this distinction is beneficial from a language-teaching point of view, as the combination of these two perspectives enables a distinction between grammar as a form, and as an integrated part of language use (Tornberg 102). Schmidt is doubtful about working with grammar as a product as he argues that the amount of learning rests upon the amount of intake that occurs (Tornberg 109). This concerns the complex relationship between input and intake, mentioned above, where input indicates all (L2) language that a learner is exposed to, while intake refers to the amount of language that the learner actually notices and stores as explicit knowledge (Tornberg 109). However, Lundahl highlights the fact that it is not the amount of English that you are being exposed to that matter when it comes to how much one learns, but that it is dependent on active engagement and the level and quality of English that you meet that matters (Lundahl 37). In addition, Tornberg suggests a learning situation where the learner is enabled to focus on intake as well as processing and incorporating the language in to a new context (Tornberg 110). To work with the language as a process signifies using the language, indicating grammar dependent on creating context. Here the learner can be challenged by only being given bits and parts of the whole context, forcing the learner to use his or her language abilities to fill a so called ‘information gap’ or ‘context gap’ (Tornberg 116).

A third principle is expressed by Ellis in the following words; “Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge” (Ellis 214) Implicit knowledge, also known as procedural knowledge, involves a person’s conscious knowledge about the structure of a language while explicit knowledge, also known as declarative knowledge, implies the ability to apply language rules during fluent communication (Tornberg 62). As current communicative approaches towards language imply an emphasis on function, communication nevertheless involves different aspects of a communicative ability. In addition, Hedström stresses the importance of not
overlooking the importance of implicit knowledge by interpreting the significance of communicative competence as solely verbal fluency (Tornberg 76). Moreover, Ellis argues that grammar instruction leading to acquisition will affect the “... ability to use structures with ease and accuracy in fluent communication”, which indicates that form-focused instruction is not only profitable for careful language analysis but can also be fruitful during free communication (Ellis 83)

2.3 Empirical research

There are quite a few studies concerning teachers’ cognition formulated as teachers’ beliefs. However, studies that particularly focus on Teachers’ beliefs concerning form and function linked to their teaching are scarce. Ellis presents a study, which connects classroom practices to teachers’ beliefs regarding incidental focus on form. In his study, Ellis separates incidental and planned focus on form, arguing that incidental focus on form is frequent within Communicative Language Teaching (Ellis 244). Ellis also recognizes teachers’ stated beliefs as being of great importance for their actual implementation of focus into practice (Ellis 245).

Ellis defines beliefs as a statement based on a teacher’s thoughts and knowledge. In addition, his study discusses the occurrence when studies turn out to show a mismatch between teachers’ stated beliefs and their actual teaching. He sees this as possibly being dependent on that teachers make use of two different kinds of knowledge that are differently prominent due to the type of situation. “Technical knowledge denotes the body of explicit ideas derived by a profession from deep reflection […] while…] Practical knowledge denotes the procedural knowledge […] a resource to be applied rapidly and intuitively” like e.g. in a spontaneous classroom situation (Ellis 247). Ellis’s study, which among other things, examines how teachers’ stated beliefs concerning incidental implementation of form actually corresponds to the results from the observations of practices, showed evidence for that teachers’ stated language beliefs could be very inconsistent. Ellis refers to previous differentiation between two types of knowledge and refers them to ‘espoused theory’ and ‘theories in use’, when describing this inconsistency: Espoused theory “… are the beliefs people communicate to others and which they are aware of having […] while…] the latter are the beliefs that are implied by people’s behavior and are based primarily on their practical knowledge” (Ellis 268-269).
The importance of teachers’ cognition for teachers is also discussed in Borg’s paper *Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do*. In this paper Borg presents a discussion concerning the importance of teachers’ cognition for teachers. When inquiring previous research done within the area of teacher cognitions’ influence over their practice as teachers, Borg sees an agreement among studies explaining classroom practices as being dependent upon many varying factors, not seldom in conflict with each other, resulting in that teachers’ “…cognitions, though, emerge consistently as a powerful influence on their practices […] not ultimately always reflect teachers’ stated beliefs, personal theories, and pedagogical principles” (Borg 91). Moreover, Borg presents a list containing eight categories, consisting of instructional considerations that represent common cognitive factors influencing a teacher’s classroom practice: student involvement and motivation, instructional management, curriculum integration, student affective needs, subject matter content, student understanding, student language skills and ability and appropriateness of teaching strategy.
3. Method

The following method section presents the chosen methods for carrying out this investigation as well as an account for ethical considerations and introduces the informants.

3.1 Data collecting methods

This degree project presents an in-depth qualitative study, inductive and descriptive in its nature. One of the three chosen research methods consists of qualitative in-depth interviews. The interviews were carried out together with five teachers of English in order to attain their subjective thoughts and beliefs concerning the matter. My intention with using more than one survey method was to increase the trustworthiness of the study as a whole as well as its conclusions. In addition I believe that two methods can enable me to conduct a profound discussion as the two different perspectives, presented by the two different methods, can result in a multi-dimensional analysis. Thus, my interviews are combined with qualitative observations. Furthermore my intention is to let each gathering of data examine one subordinating research question each. This is done with the intention to create a structure that not only clarifies the over-all question and facilitates a general understanding of the content of this study, but also to make it easier to distinguish the different aspects that are included as well as follow the line of reasoning in the discussion and conclusion.

3.2 Observations

Well aware of the fact that language learning is not only about form and function, that is nevertheless the focus of this study. Furthermore, the intention with a combination of interviews and observations is not to test the degree of truthfulness in the teachers’ statements but rather to include an objective perspective, which together with the teachers’ viewpoint, that naturally includes a larger assortment of teaching occasions, can lead to an interesting analysis and discussion. The observations carried out are so called continuous observations focusing on critical incidents (Johansson and Svedner 58). When carrying out this type of observation it is vital to define what types of incidents that denote a critical occurrence (see observation guide, appendix 2). Furthermore it is also of great importance that these on beforehand determined incidents are closely interconnected with the stated research questions.
(Hatch 115). With the help of the gathered material I hope to enable a discussion concerning the distribution between form and function, the means in which form and function are implemented and answering the subordinate research question: What is the nature of the teaching and the means used when implementing form and function in the language classroom? During the actual observations the aim was naturally to attain unobtrusive data (Hatch 116). This was done by giving a short presentation of my intentions for the students, highlighting that they were not the object of the investigation as well as placing me in a strategic position where my presence was not interfering, but still provided a full view of what was going on in the classroom.

3.3 Interviews

Each teacher was interviewed individually during a minimum of 30 minutes and maximum of 45 minutes. The qualitative interviews were carried out according to an interview guide (see appendix 1) and they were so called “structured” or ‘in-depth interviews’, containing open-ended questions (Hatch 94). The interviews were divided into two parts whereas the first part contained discussions regarding the Swedish steering documents with the intention of answering the subordinating research question: what are the teachers’ thoughts and beliefs concerning the role of form and function in regard of their interpretation of the syllabus for English for upper secondary school? The second part of the interview focused on the teachers’ thoughts and beliefs concerning their actual methods when putting form and function into practice. Even though the second part of the interview does not have a specific research question to answer, this part of the interview was discussed jointly with the research question expressed together with the first part of the interview. Moreover, my belief is that the second part of the interview will be interesting to discuss in connection to the findings from the observations. Once again it is important to emphasize that the intention of this study is not to test the degree of truthfulness of the teachers’ statements but rather to analyse and discuss their teaching.
3.4 Procedure and selection of participants

When finding accessible informants I turned to a personal contact with a wide circle of teacher contacts in Östersund, Sweden. Important to mention, is that my personal contact did not participate as an informant in order to avoid bias based on the personal relationship between the informant and me as a researcher. A written letter, containing an explanation of the aim and purpose of the study was sent via my personal contact to possible informants. The participants were selected on the basis of being English teachers at upper secondary school level, currently teaching English at upper secondary schools as well as willing to provide their time. Since the teachers teach at different upper secondary schools in Östersund it is important to stress that the variable of significance for this study is the selected English teachers’ thoughts and beliefs concerning form and function in connection to their teaching. Thus, variables such as context, type of school, type of students and local planning will not be taken into consideration based on the fact that some sort of delimitation is necessary (Hatch 48). No formal permission was needed as the study focuses on the specific teachers who themselves agreed to participate and no further factors were taken into account in this study (Hatch 46). The intention was to include six informants, but since one informant suddenly were hindered, the informants participating are five in total, four women and one man.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Since none of the informants or the actual research objects during the observations were minors, no parental agreements were necessary. However other ethical considerations such as the benefits for the participants, participants’ insight in research intentions, voluntariness and anonymity were taken into account during the realization of this study (Hatch 67). Thus, the informants were encouraged to ask questions as well as initiated in their participation being based on their voluntary participation and that they could choose not to participate or discontinue their involvement whenever they felt that they wanted so. The informants were also informed about the aim and purpose, in the letter mentioned above. Furthermore the informants were promised total anonymity and thus given the fictional names Anna, Louise, Patricia, Clara and Stefan. The possible benefits for the informants were not expressed in some concrete action but described in the very purpose of this study: the intention to present a discussion that can be of interest for fellow future teachers of English as well as other
personnel, active within the educational practice. Finally, the participants were encouraged to take part of the interview notes and notes taken during the observations and they were assured that the recording material with its belonging transcriptions were not to be used for any other purpose other than as material for this particular study.

3.6 Participants

Louise is 63 years old. She has been teaching at the same upper secondary school for 35 years and she teaches English and German.

Patricia is 29 years old. She graduated teacher training education 5 years ago and she has been teaching English and German at upper secondary school level since she graduated.

Clara is 30 years old. She received her teaching diploma four years ago. She is a teacher of Swedish and English at an upper secondary school.

Stefan is 55 years old. He is currently teaching part time and doing research within the educational field at the university in Gothenburg. He has been working as a teacher for 28 years and he teaches Swedish and English at an upper secondary school.

Anna is 62 years old and she has been teaching for 35 years at upper secondary schools. She teaches English and French.
4. Results

Following sections describe the results from the interviews and the observations in regard of this degree project's purpose and formulated research questions.

4.1 Interviews

The results from the interviews are below presented according to a typology, withholding categories which can be distinguished in the subordinate question: What are the teachers’ thoughts and beliefs concerning the role of form and function in regard of their interpretation of the syllabus for English at upper secondary school?

In addition, the category relating to the implementation of form corresponds to the second part of the interviews (see appendix 1). The reason for including this category is to get an insight into the teachers’ own subjective view concerning their implementation of form and function, thus enabling me to conduct a two-dimensional discussion based on the results from the interviews combined with the results from the observations. The reason for not presenting the results from each informant separately is due to an ambition to create transparency.

4.2 The interpretation of form and function in the syllabus

Stefan believes that the syllabus for English places a lot emphasis on the communicative competence. Even though he is in favour of the communicative approach towards language, he experiences function as overshadowing form owing to the fact that the majority of focus is placed on the actual speech as a communication form. Louise also regards communicative ability and communication as the most accentuated part in the syllabus, thus giving a clear message that form and grammar should not be given priority. Patricia on the other hand, experiences that the syllabus focuses as much on form as on function and that the syllabus at the same time clearly expresses what is needed and included in an all-round communicative ability. On the contrary, Clara experiences the syllabus as being a bit unclear when describing what the student should acquire, ”The student should be able to produce correct spoken
language, but what is meant by correct one might ask?”

Stefan expresses that he experiences that the learners’ proficiency concerning writing has decreased as a result of a reduced focus on the more formal aspects of language use. In addition Stefan refers to a change that has occurred within the educational system during the last thirty to forty years, which has resulted in language proficiencies, such as communicating through written language, not receiving the amount of focus that it should get. Anna on the other hand, says that she is glad that language teaching has developed since the behaviorist era when everything was about repetition and learning by heart and all focus was directed towards formal correctness. She continues by describing how all errors were instantly corrected which did not leave an opportunity for the learners to try to solve the errors on their own. Moreover, Stefan accentuates the ability to master different types of genres, which he believes should be even more highlighted in the syllabus, and he refers in particular to the necessity of being able to separate the more formal language from the informal language. In addition, Stefan expresses a desire for an even more structured syllabus containing unambiguous guiding principles concerning the interpretation of its content. He also believes principles concerning the actual implementation of the syllabus to be beneficial for preventing misunderstandings.

4. 3 Beliefs concerning form and function

Stefan chooses to divide form into two categories. The first category counts for the more traditional view of form, representing grammar and grammatical correctness. The second category consists, according to Stefan, of the actual use of language, meaning e.g. using the right language in the right situation and being able to separate academic language from the everyday language usage. Stefan continues by expressing that he believes that knowledge about a language’s form and structure represents the base of the communicative competence. In addition, he expresses that he believes teaching about the division between formal and informal language is one of the most important assignments that language teachers are faced with. Patricia also emphasizes the ability to know when to express oneself in a specific manner and be able to tell the difference between formal and informal language as well as know when to use language based on the situation.
Even though Stefan believes that too little focus is directed towards form he expresses that function is at least as much important and he utters that language is about communication and the function of being able to communicate in different ways. “Even if there are mistakes when it comes to form the message could be understood but if there are problems with the function it could be difficult. Yet using incorrect forms will result in a dysfunctional language”. Anna expresses how she looks upon form and function as one, as a unity that cannot be separated. She continues by describing how she sees the form as a means for attaining a good function. She explains this by the ability to know how, what and when to say something and that she also believes that both form and function are equally important in order to master that ability. In addition Anna highlights the ‘when’, meaning the context, as she believes that the context decides the ‘how’ and ‘what’ to say. Here Anna also expresses the importance of both mastering a formal as well as an informal language, in order to be able to use the language in a broader spectrum of situations. Similar to Anna, Louise also describes her view upon form and function as being integrated in each other, “Form and function are one and the same”.

Patricia expresses that she believes it to be hard to evaluate communication, both written and oral, when there are a lot of formal errors but when it still seems to work from a functional view. At the same time, she experiences actual errors to be easier to detect when they are related directly to form. Clara believes function to be the most important factor when it comes to being able to communicate, thus being a good indicator of how well a student is doing when evaluating his or her communicative competence. At the same time, Louise emphasizes the strategic competence, as she believes it to be very important to develop strategies that enable communication even though a learner e.g. cannot come up with the right word or correct formulation.

Louise explains that even though communication is highlighted in the syllabus and therefore of most importance when grading a student, she also believes it to be very important to look at how a student is able to adjust his or her language to a given receiver, an opinion that she shares with Patricia. Louise also expresses that this relationship between participants in a conversation is a good example of how form also plays a vital part when communicating, “When addressing someone it could be crucial what kind of language one is using and how one talks to someone while a wrong usage could be perceived as very impolite”. Patricia also points to the importance of form as she believes it to be the most important ingredient for acquiring the ability to express oneself as it is very much dependent on knowing a wide range of words and knowing how to use them.
4.4 Implementing form and function

Stefan believes that teaching in general has become very focused on function, “It has become a tradition within the language education in Sweden to focus on speaking while formal correctness has been put in the shade”. Stefan continues by describing how he believes that the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is an excellent way of combining both form and function when analyzing and producing written texts. Stefan believes that continuous input together with explicit instructions and models showing suggestions for how to use the language is an efficient way of working with the language. Stefan also refers to the SFG as an effective means for practicing authentic language use, “Although the genre school is very structured it can come up with good examples of the authentic world and give concrete and structured terms of how to do and how to put it when communicating in writing”. When implementing form and function in his teaching, Stefan expresses that he works a lot with distinguishing different contexts. He describes how many of his students are fairly good when it comes to fluency in speech, but that many of them do not really know, or think about, how they speak. Stefan exemplifies swear words as a typical example that demonstrates how the students do not really understand the significance of socio-cultural competence, as he argues that swear words in e.g. an English classroom would be unacceptable. Thus, the socio-cultural competence is something Stefan tries to emphasize in his teaching.

Anna expresses that she very seldom treats form as a separate phenomenon and that she always tries to start out from some sort of context. Anna expresses how she instead of simply going through e.g. different types of grammatical rules she rather wants the learners to analyze their own language or a text, trying to see what is wrong and what is correct from their point of view and afterwards have a discussion about it together in class. Anna expresses that she likes the idea of working with the language in a problem-solving manner, where the students are able to think for themselves first, then maybe together in groups and then afterwards listen to their suggestions and give them feedback with the intention of giving them a chance to actually solve any possible problems by themselves. The material that Anna uses is almost everything that can awaken some sort of opinion and be of interest. She believes in being a little bit provocative in order to engage the students in something that they feel matters to them. Thus, she often works with texts concerning some sort of ethical dilemma or movies with an open ending that can trigger the students’ fantasy and willingness to discuss.
Louise on the other hand, is not unfamiliar with dividing form and function during instruction, as she believes that it sometimes can be beneficial for some learners to treat them separately. When working with grammar, Louise expresses that she never uses other texts than texts that the students have produced themselves. The reason for this she describes in terms of that fact the students’ texts enable her to easily pinpoint what they might need to work with. She also expresses that she rather focuses on a few grammatical phenomena at a time than many. Louise expresses that she adjusts her teaching depending on the kind of learners that she teaches and their needs, thus making her lessons vary a lot. When focusing on form she explains that she believes grammar books to be very helpful as they are well structured and presents the students with a lot of exercises. One aspect of the language that Louise sometimes experiences as being problematic for many students is the use of an idiomatically correct language. Moreover, Louise explains that she also sometimes carries out systematic instructions where she starts out from some sort of recurrent grammatical error that she has noticed among her students, e.g. from their written texts. Louise expresses that she believes it to be crucial never to use Swedish during an English lesson as that destroys the communication. When teaching, Louise explains that she often uses role-plays such as talk shows, as she believes that they can be beneficial for the learners as it becomes very obvious if the language that is being used works or not.

Patricia highlights the importance of giving the learners opportunities to practice communication in different types of situations. She also finds it is important to incorporate form and function in different types of activities which not only offer the learners communication in an oral sense, but also in e.g. written form. Furthermore, Patricia believes it to be fruitful to let the learners discuss different types of grammar issues, using the English language as a means of attaining more knowledge about the structure of the language.

Clara describes how she tries to create some sort of connection to life outside of school when implementing form and function in her teaching. By doing so, she believes it to be more interesting for the learners to actually learn, as the context represents something that is real. Furthermore, Clara believes that the students think it is boring and hard to relate to a grammar book that only consists of grammar exercises. Thus she uses material such as authentic newspaper texts or movies that concerns something that the learners can meet outside of school. Clara also believes it to be important to present the learners with authentic language from different parts of the English speaking world as well as introducing them to different
cultures with the purpose of preparing them for the great variety of English and cultures that they might meet later on in life. When implementing form in her teaching, Clara usually starts by treating it separately from function as she thinks it is important to really understand e.g. the genitive-s before starting to use it in a context. Clara also describes how she implements activities that focus on developing strategies for getting their message understood, even though they might not come up with the right word. She exemplifies this with a game where a learner is supposed to describe a celebrity for the rest of the class, without revealing his or her name and instead using the strategies necessary for the other students to work out who the celebrity is. Moreover, Clara describes this game as relating to real life as the learners probably at some point will find themselves in a situation where the listener has no idea of whom or what he or she is talking about. Clara also highlights the necessity of exposing the learners to a lot of English, as she believes it to be beneficial for them to be surrounded with the language that they are learning.

4.5 Observations

The results from the observations are presented in the same way as the results from the interviews. Thus the results of the observations are represented by the critical incidents that were designed based on the subordinated research question: What is the nature of the teaching and the means used when implementing form and function in the language classroom? (See appendix 2). To create further structure these incidents have been divided into two categories: ‘Activities’ and ‘Teacher’s role and involvement’.

4.6 Teacher’s role and involvement

How are instructions about activities that concern form and/or function given?
The instructions concerning form were very clearly described by Louise who both provided the student with oral instructions as well written, by writing some of her instructions on the white board. In connection to an activity, where the students were supposed to play a word game in groups, Louise both handed out a written instruction as well as gave them an oral description of how to play. Stefan gave all his instructions orally while Patricia handed out
written instructions, encouraging the students to ask questions if there was anything that they didn’t understand. Anna gave the majority of her instructions orally, except when she handed out written questions concerning a movie, which they had watched during an earlier lesson. The written instruction contained information concerning the expected extent of their written answers and what to include in their over-all oral description of one of the characters from the movie.

**Which role does the teacher take on during activities that involve form and/or function?**

Louise was very active during the whole lesson, going around asking the students who were working with their grammar books, if they needed any help, drawing up examples on the white board and providing the students with extra material once they had finished what they should from the book. Clara, Anna and Stefan were also very active. Anna and Clara started the lesson by asking about how the students had been doing since the last time they saw each other and Anna described what she had been doing as well as asking if anyone could share what he or she had been doing. Patricia was active in the sense that she was available at all times, telling the students to ask her if they had any questions, but she stood out not being as active as the other teachers, by letting the students work pretty much on their own until they came across some sort of difficulty. It is important to stress that all teachers used English at all times, except Louise who sometimes explained some of the form-related content that she wrote on the white board in Swedish.

**How are further instructions/help/input given by the teacher when needed in connection to form and/or function?**

Clara provided her students with continuous input whenever they seem to need it. At the same time it was obvious that Clara did not want to hinder the students from trying on their own, thus her inputs were given as a means of helping the students to come up with a word or try to pronounce a word on their own. Stefan also provided his students with inputs when it seemed necessary but he was using a somewhat different strategy than Clara. Instead of giving bits and part of what the student was seeking in form of clues by e.g. giving the first letter of a word, Stefan provided input by asking further questions or referring to something that could help the student to associate to something that could lead him or her to finding the correct word or looking at the problem from a different perspective. Stefan also waited a bit longer before giving input than Clara did.
When questions appeared Anna first turned to the rest of the class, asking if anyone could help his or her fellow student in some way. Depending on how the rest of the class answered she provided the input necessary in order to enable the student to develop their thoughts and come up with a correct solution. Sometimes she also told the student or students to think for a minute or two more before she provided with some sort of help and it was interesting to observe how this many times led to that the students often solved their problems without further help from Anna. Louise on the other hand made sure that the students were provided with the correct answer rather instantly.

4.7 Activities

What is the nature of activities that emphasize practicing form and/or function and how is the distribution between activities concerning form versus function?

Louise emphasized form during this particular lesson. Even so, function could be distinguished as a part of some of the grammar exercises as the students were required to compare and discuss each other’s answers. Clara mainly focused on function as her word game naturally included speaking with the purpose of being understood and able to participate in the game. In addition, Clara encouraged the students to come up with different strategies to
use when finding it difficult to e.g. remembering a word or how to formulate a phrase, thus also including a bit of form integrated with function. On the contrary, Stefan’s lesson was very much built upon explaining form, using the language as a tool for discussing different types of genres and different ways of expressing oneself accordingly to a specific context as well as discussing concrete examples of language form. However, the fact that Stefan and his learners used the spoken English as a tool when discussing, describing and comparing the different genres also indicated a learning situation similar to the one taking part during Clara’s lesson. Anna also used the language as a tool when talking about the language e.g. when trying to distinguish the different types of languages used within the movie that they had been watching.

What teaching materials were used when working with form and/or function?
Louise used a grammar book when implementing form. Clara’s word game consisted of notes, which had written words on them, while the students’ spoken language represented the resource used during the actual game. Stefan used different types of authentic texts and film clips from YouTube when discussing forms while, as mentioned above, using the language as an instrument. Louise also used the white board quite a lot when describing different forms, a material that also was used by Anna though in a different manner. Anna used the whiteboard to write down key words from the oral descriptions of the characters with the intention to visualize what each group had said, thus enable a discussion where all groups discuss each other’s given description, adding or removing something. Patricia used material that she had produced herself which consisted of different exercises mainly focusing on form and one quite extensive writing exercise, which demanded the previously mentioned written instruction.
5. Discussion

There is an over-all consistency between on the hand the teachers’ stated beliefs and thoughts and on the other hand their actual implementation of form and function into practice. Thus, confirming Ellis recognized importance of teachers’ beliefs for the actual implementation and at the same time contrasting to Ellis description of ‘exposed theory’ and ‘theories in use’ as differing in a way that ‘espoused theory represents the “… beliefs people communicate to others and which they are aware of having […] while ‘theories in use’ represent […] beliefs that are implied by people’s behavior and are based primarily on their practical knowledge” (Ellis 268-269).

Stefan experienced the syllabus as being too focused on function and even though he expresses that he sees form and function as equally important for attaining a communicative ability, his strong belief in the importance of form is very much reflected on his teaching during the observation. Stefan’s way of focusing on how to express oneself according to a specific context as well as discussing concrete examples of correct language use mirrors a strive towards being able to avoid what he expresses as a dysfunctional language caused by incorrectness in form. Ellis who also stresses the importance of form, describes a way of interpreting how to focus on form that corresponds to Stefan’s approach towards language, where his form-focused teaching clearly refers to some sort of “… awareness of some underlying, abstract rule”. Stefan stressed the need of being able to distinguish formal and informal language and he refers this ability to being able to use correct type of language depending on the context, which he explains by his example of some of his learners’ inability to use a correct language according to an underlying socio-cultural code, by using swearwords in class.

Anna’s focus on communication and disbelief towards giving instant corrective feedback was very much present during the observation. Her problem-solving approach towards language was characterized by a motivation to delay feedback in order to encourage the students to develop their own thoughts about the language’s form and function. Moreover, Anna’s view upon form and function as a unity that should not be separated during language instruction
was both apparent in her teaching during the observation as well as in agreement with the syllabus emphasis on the fact that “English should not be divided up into different parts to be learnt in a specific sequence” (syllabus). Thus Anna presented her students with exercises combining ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘when’ to say something, involving both written and oral tasks that includes formal as well as functional proficiency.

Stefan’s focus on context in connection to his focus on form indicates what Tornberg refers to as working with the language as a process. ‘Information gaps’ were created by Stefan’s way of providing the students with assignments requiring the students to discern what type of context that is represented behind the language form. In addition, input was provided formulated as leading questions about possible contexts. Patricia who also emphasized the importance of knowing the difference between formal and informal language approaches the matter in a somewhat different way as she provides her students with grammar exercises, encouraging them to discuss its content together. This way of working with the language is described by Swain as “… language use mediating language learning” (48 Spada). By encouraging the students to interact through ‘collaborative dialogues’, Patricia enabled the learners to produce comprehensible outputs concerning the form of the language. Language use mediating language learning can also be traced to Anna’s way of implementing both form and function when using the language as a tool for discussing different language varieties.

The interpretation of the syllabus as being built upon the notion of an all-round communicative ability can be distinguished in all the teachers’ utterances concerning its content. Recognizing the all-round communicative ability as being dependent on acquiring formal as well as functional efficiency corresponds to Ellis third principle of instructed learning. “Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge”, thus emphasizing both the ability to perform careful language analysis as well as the “… ability to use structures with ease and accuracy in fluent communication”. Stefan’s way of presenting his students with different text types with the intention of letting them analyze the language to promote language awareness concerning language form in order to develop the ability to produce a correct language according to context, is a good example of how both explicit and implicit knowledge about language form and function can be combined and incorporated in language teaching. The implementation of implicit- and explicit knowledge is also exemplified in Louise’s teaching by her focus on
practicing form and different communication strategies with the purpose of creating mutual understanding as well as fluency during communication.

Moreover, the fact that all teachers used English at all time, except Louise during specific grammar instructions, indicates that there is a consistency regarding the recognized importance of language meaning amongst the teachers. In addition, their constant use of English can further be interpreted as an indicator of a willingness to provide the students with as much L2 language (input) as possible, creating opportunities for the students to notice specific features about the language form and function with the intention of it being transformed into explicit knowledge.

In line with the syllabus underlying signification, indicating a global context, Clara described how she tried to create some sort of connection to life outside of school as well as to other cultures when implementing form and function in her teaching. This connection to the ‘real world’ was also implemented by Stefan through presenting his students with authentic texts when discussing different types of language. Moreover, both Anna’s and Louise’s means for implementing form and function in their teaching indicated an approach in accordance to the language-driven approach that apply for second language teaching within the Swedish educational system. Anna’s enthusiasm concerning the content of her language instructions and obvious strive towards presenting her learners with a meaningful and interesting content could be interpreted as her placing focus on knowledge about the language as being of secondary importance compared to knowledge about a specific content. However, Anna’s use of contents with the intention of making the learners use the language, indicated an implied motive of using the content as an effective means for facilitating language acquisition. Louise’s implementation of form and function indicated a more apparent focus on language learning as being the goal. She started out from the students’ errors visualized through e.g. their written texts, with the obvious intention of elucidating any uncertainties and thus preventing future language errors. Moreover, Patricia’s feedback was characterized by corrective feedback both including a negotiation for meaning as well as presenting the students with the correct language use without any cooperation between herself and her students. Clara on the other hand assisted her students by comprehensible input as she continuously provided her students with the linguistic simplifications necessary for making the language comprehensible for the learners.
6. Conclusions

This study aimed at investigating some teachers’ thoughts and beliefs concerning form and function in connection to their teaching. Thus, the investigation included an inquiry of the teachers’ beliefs concerning form and function in regard to their interpretation of the syllabus recognition of form and function. In addition, the scrutiny of the teachers’ beliefs was combined with observations of their actual implementation of form and function in their teaching, in order to obtain a thorough insight.

The teachers’ inconsistency when ascribing significance to form vis-à-vis function was very much distinguished in the teachers’ different means when applying form and function in their teaching, as some of the teachers clearly emphasized the ability to use the language while others emphasized language ability. However, all teachers ended up by including both form and function in their teaching which confirmed their expressed beliefs concerning the importance of incorporating both form and function in language teaching. This indicated that their practical knowledge seemed to be in agreement with their technical knowledge. In addition, the correspondence between the teachers’ expressed beliefs and thoughts during the interviews and the results from the observations made the findings from this study question the trustworthiness of the ‘exposed theory’ and ‘theory in use’ as general phenomenon. The results can also be interpreted as somewhat contradictory when looking at some of the teachers’ different ideas concerning on the one hand an emphasis on either form or function and on the other hand their concurrently expressed beliefs regarding language teaching being aware of the need of including both form and function. This inconsistency corresponds to Borg’s discussion concerning the complex significance of teachers’ cognition for teachers, meaning that teachers’ cognition at the end of the day not always reflects their actual expressed beliefs and thoughts. Moreover Borg’s compiled list of common cognitive factors influencing a teacher’s classroom practice could be distinguished in all teachers expressed beliefs and thoughts. The results from the interviews and the observations showed that students’ motivation, -needs, -understanding and -language skills influenced the teachers as well as the syllabus and the significance of subject matter, when implementing form and function in accordance to their beliefs and thoughts concerning form and function and their teaching.

The teachers’ individual, consciously or unconsciously held, evaluative, comparative, and judgmental principle and values concerning form and function in relation to language and
their teaching, which they were adequately confident to act upon as they interpreted them as having enough validity, truth, and credibility to guide their thought and behaviour, showed proof of inconsistency concerning the means when implementing form and function and the amount of importance ascribed to form versus function. However, the teachers seemed to be in agreement concerning the necessity of including both form and function in their teaching as they, interpreted both form and function as a requirement for successful language learning, thus a requirement for their language teaching.

Suggestions for further research could involve including teachers’ teaching backgrounds and/or years in practice as variables of significance, when investigating some teachers’ beliefs and thoughts concerning form and function in connection with their teaching.
7. References

Primary sources

Interviews with teachers: 2010-05-06 – 2010-05-12
Observations: 2010-05-06 – 2010-05-12

Secondary sources

Basturkmen, Helen and Loewen, Shawn and Ellis, Rod. Teachers’ Stated Beliefs About Incidental Focus on Form and Their Classroom Practices. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004


8. Appendices

Appendix 1:

Interview guide

Overall research questions: What are (some) teachers’ beliefs concerning form and function in relation to their language teaching?

- Subordinating research question: What are the teachers’ thoughts and beliefs concerning the role of form and function in regard of their interpretation of the syllabus for English at upper secondary school?

Part I:

Focus: Form and function and the syllabus for English

- What is your overall impression of the syllabus for English? What is the expressed view upon language according to you? What is highlighted and what is less stressed according to you?

- Your understanding of form and function.

- What parts of the syllabus for English do you perceive as accentuating form or function or both? How, Why?

- The Swedish syllabus for English highlights the so called 'Communicative competence'. What is your view of this concept and its subordinated competences (linguistic-, socio-linguistic-, discursive-, strategic-, socio-cultural- and social competence) when it comes to form and function.

Part II: Focus: Teachers’ thoughts and beliefs concerning their actual teaching methods

- What type of activities do you categorize as focusing on form respectively function? Please give some examples and motivate your answer.

- Do you prefer to work with form and function jointly or separately? Please motivate your answer.
• What activities and teaching materials do you prefer to work with when working with language focus and/or form? Please give some examples and motivate your answer as well as your expressed examples.

• What effect does the communicative approach has on your teaching when it comes to teaching form and function.

• If you where to place form and function in order of precedence where would you place form as opposed to function? Please motivate.
Appendix 2:

Observation guide

Overall research questions: What are (some) teachers’ beliefs concerning form and function in relation to their language teaching?

Subordinate research question: What is the nature of the teaching and the means used when implementing form and function in the language classroom?

Critical incidents:

Activities

- What is the nature of activities that emphasize practicing form and/or function?
- How is the distribution between activities concerning form respectively function?
- What teaching materials were used when working with form and/or function?
- Are form and function integrated in one another or are they treated separately?

Teacher’s role and involvement

- How are instructions given by the teacher when giving instructions about activities that concern form and/or function?
- Which role does the teacher have/take on during activities that involve form and/or function?
- How is further instructions/help/input given by the teacher when needed in connection to form and/or function?