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Abstract

This is a small qualitative study on figurative language teaching within Swedish schools that stems of from a social-constructionist perspective. The objective of this study is to establish to what extent figurative language is being taught throughout the Swedish school system and illustrate examples of different approaches teachers could use to teach it.

The results indicate that English teachers working in elementary school tend to disregard the teaching of figurative language. English teachers in secondary schools differ in their intentions for teaching the subject, but do encounter figurative language and touch upon it anyway. English teachers working in upper secondary school vary as to which aspects of figurative language they teach, but do actively include figurative language in their teaching.

The different approaches towards teaching figurative language are mostly described as being “multi-approaches” and are used in addition to other approaches. The study shows different approaches, such as conceptual, single unit, synonymic, relevance, contextual, cultural/historical background, exposal and constructional approaches.

Key words: Figurative Language, Teaching and Approaches to Teaching Figurative Language

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1 Introduction

This study is an attempt to understand and address the difficulties of teaching figurative language, such as metaphors and idioms. My experience of teaching English in Swedish schools has led me to the assumption that most students that I have encountered have had difficulties in interpreting the underlying meanings within non-literal language. Students might have difficulties understanding plain, literal English language as well but, in my experience, even the students who have a good understanding of literal English seem to be somewhat deficient when it comes to understanding figurative language.

The aspect of figurative language being such an integral part of English has left me concerned at the apparent lack of understanding amongst Swedish students concerning figurative language. For my future profession as an English teacher, I seek to describe different ways to approach teaching these aspects of the language, and perspectives on the topic of teaching figurative language. The study aims to approach this by interviewing Swedish English teachers and relating their experiences and thoughts on the subject. In this search for knowledge, tools, methods and perspectives on the matter at hand, I thus hope to equip myself for my future profession. In addition to this, I hope to inspire and provide tools for other English teachers as well.

When examining the Swedish syllabus for English-teaching, one gets a glimpse of the importance the Swedish educational establishment attaches to the teaching of figurative language. The aspects of figurative language are, as previously mentioned, a foundational part of the English language and thereby implicitly included in several mandatory sections of the different courses in English provided by the Swedish school system. The syllabus provides different instructions for inclusion of elements of the English language in teaching such as song lyrics, poems, newspapers, and etcetera. These texts almost invariably contain figurative language. Furthermore, it could be argued for the syllabus providing the opportunity for teachers to interpret figurative language as integrated into segments of grading criteria. For instance, variation of produced language, aspect of flow in different contexts of writing/speaking could be understood to include aspects of figurative language. However, it is explicitly mentioned on a few occasions within the Swedish syllabus under the directions for course content section. For instance, the lesson plan for English teachers teaching years 4-6 should include fixed phrases, school years 7-9 should include fixed phrases and the concept of

idiomatic expressions and, for upper secondary school and the English 7 course, it is expected to contain strategy training for understanding non-literal language (Skolverket, 2011).

By exploring the “what” and “how” questions regarding figurative language in the Swedish English education, this study aims to promote a greater awareness of the importance of this aspect amongst Swedish English teachers and provide them with ideas for teaching it. By encouraging education of figurative language, Swedish students within the school system will, in turn, hopefully gain a better ability to use and understand this integral part of everyday language and to be more adept and competent users of the English language.

2 Aim and Purpose of the Study

The aim and purpose of this study is to provide an insight as to what, and how, English teachers in Swedish schools teach the topic of figurative language. This illustration, in turn, is meant to inspire Swedish English teachers in their profession and, hopefully, lead to a wider range of abilities in using figurative language amongst Swedish students in the future. Thus, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What do the Swedish English teachers in this study teach their students about figurative language?
- What strategies, methods or approaches do Swedish English teachers use to teach figurative language?

3 Literary Review

This section is designed to provide the reader with an overview of previous work, studies and texts, on your subject area which, in this case, is figurative language as a linguistic phenomenon, and how it is taught to students learning a specific second language, namely English.

3.1 Figurative Language

3.1.1 Lexical Definition

The everyday meaning of figurative language could be seen as non-literal meaning of language. The carried meaning of the language is thereby to some extent abstract.

The Oxford English Dictionary online provides two separate explanations of the words. **Figurative** is described as an adjective which convey the meaning “*departing from a literal use of words*” (www.oxforddictionaries.com) and **language** is described as “*the method of human communication, either spoken or written*” [ibid].

3.1.2 The Nature of Figurative Language

Glucksberg (2001) identifies figurative language as language where the meaning does not coincide with literal language’s meaning and points at metaphors and idioms as examples of it. (preface) He further discusses the topic of understanding the meaning of figurative language as depending on context.

Brown and Hatch (1995) discuss the nature and constituents of figurative language. They conclude that figurative language could be attributed the different major categories of metaphor, simile and includes metonymy and synecdoche as important constituents (pp.88-89).

Brown and Palmer (2004) attempt to map out the constituents of figurative language in reading comprehension. They depict the nature of figurative language to be related to figures of speech that carry non-literal meaning (p.370). Furthermore, the authors state that the constituents of figurative language are numerous and very frequently found in the English language (p.371). They illustrate the constituents as metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, allusions, proverbs and idioms [ibid].

For this study, the definition of Brown and Hatch (1995) will be used. This choice is made with regards to the definition being highly specific. This, in turn, is intended to provide this small-scale study, with a suitable range of aspects of figurative language.

3.2 Metaphors

3.2.1 Lexical Definition

The everyday meaning of the term “metaphor” could be depicted in terms of illustrating or describing something in terms of something else. For instance, by using the metaphor of:

LIFE=PARTY

By resembling life as a party, we can contribute associations to an otherwise abstract word. Life is, in this case described, as somewhat of a festive occasion that could imply an individual should enjoy it.

The Oxford Dictionary online provides a description where metaphor is portrayed in terms of “...a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable...a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable” (www.oxforddictionaries.com)

3.2.2 The Nature of Metaphor

Illustrating the foundations of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe the core notion of the metaphor to be “... understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” (p.5). Concepts of objects are thus described through an individual’s experiences of the other objects and, in this sense, the metaphor is used to illustrate new meaning (p.117). The language provided through such a metaphor thereby involves entire systems of knowledge, rather than an isolated concept. This system of knowledge is based on individual’s experiences of the concept as well as the character of the concept which provides a comprehension of the concept, its function and how to handle it (p.116). For instance, we can conceptualise time through the metaphor of:

TIME=MONEY

By doing so, we might for instance perceive time as something valuable or even something that we could waste or spare.

The objects of a metaphor are defined as “basic domains of experience” (p.117) and are structured as a whole image of coherent “natural kinds of experience” [ibid] of the domain and conceptualised as a collected image of the experiments in “experiential gestalts” [ibid].

These natural kinds of experiences are based on human interaction with their environment and add negotiated aspects to the experimental gestalts described as “interactional properties” (p.121). The numerous experiences that are likely to be attributed to a domain and the different interactional properties that will follow create multidimensional experimental gestalts, in the sense of different aspects or angles to interpret them. In addition, the interactional properties are not solid sets of containers of concepts, but are rather to be considered as structured gestalts as well (p.122). Suggesting that the concept of an object is created through individual experiences though implies that, whereas some properties might be universal, individual differences on attributed properties to an object are likely to occur (p.118). If we look at the example given above of the metaphor:

TIME=MONEY

In this case, the **basic domains** would be exemplified in time and money. The **natural kinds of experiences** would be exemplified in our individual experiences of time and money. The **experimental gestalt** would be exemplified in the combined image of the full set of experiences of both time and money. The **interactional properties** would be the aspects we attribute time and money through our individual experiences, which in this case could be for instance time: something that helps us structure our day, and money: something that is valuable.

Glucksberg (2001) discusses two different ways of defining metaphor, arguing for the complexity of the term itself. These ways of looking at metaphors include metaphor use as a substitution of words and metaphor use by symbolising (p.4).

By this definition of metaphor as language of substitution, he argues for the function of presenting or describing an object in a way that the original meaning of a literal presentation/description is maintained and simply varied in choice of language used. This can be demonstrated in examples such as:

“IT IS USELESS, NOTHING WILL COME OUT OF IT”

=

“THERE IS NO USE IN FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE.”.

Metaphor as a symbol, on the other hand, is described as functioning as a reference to an object which derives from a literal presentation/description. In this sense, the metaphor functions as symbolising a description of the object. For instance:

LOVE=A ROSE

3.2.3 Systematicity of Metaphorical Concepts

Another aspect of the metaphor, highlighted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), is the systematicity of metaphorical concepts. They imply that the metaphorical concept of words and phrases systematically affects our way of talking about an object and even how we tend to act in situations surrounding it (p.7). An example of this might be illustrated through the metaphor:

ARGUMENT=WAR

By conceptualising argument as war, we are encouraged to consider the concept accordingly, not only by the single terms of war but its entailments or attributed properties as well. We might, for instance, talk of argument in terms of strategy, win or lose, gaining ground, etc., and even attack or oppose or defend our position. In this way, we characterize an entire system on the concept of argument as war (p.9).

In accepting a specific concept towards an object and highlighting it in the way of acknowledging that argument is war, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue for the phenomenon of hiding other metaphorical aspects of the subject, “In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept...a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor.” (p.10). In this case, by highlighting the concept of argument as war, we are inclined to forget other aspects of argument such as listening and cooperating.

3.2.4 Types of Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) illustrate several examples of categories of metaphors being categorized by their features or different purposes they serve.

Structural metaphor is described as the type of metaphor which is characterised as metaphors where words are structured metaphorically in terms of other words (p.14), which has been presented previously in this text. This is exemplified in metaphors such as “time is money” or “argument is war”.

Oriental metaphor/spatialisation metaphor, on the other hand, is different in that, instead of conceptualizing an object via another, it gives a spatial orientation to an object [ibid]. Considering the orientational metaphor of “HAPPY” possibly being regarded in the direction of being up, and “SAD” in a downwards direction, is one example of providing meaning to statements like “I am feeling down” or “my spirits rose”. This conceptual system of spatial orientation is attributed to objects through physical and cultural experiences. In the example given above, where happiness is given the spatial direction of up, a physical experience, such as body posture where one’s head is held high when feeling happy, and cultural experience, such as the valuation of happiness as being something sought for and thus higher in rank than sadness, might affect our attribution of the spatial orientation of the object. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that we are able to conceptualise most fundamental objects with spatial attributes but, as the concepts being applied are based on physical and cultural experience, there is no definite universal concept (p.17). Individual experiences and diversity in cultural aspects will probably lead both to individual and cultural variation in attribution of spatial orientation (p.19).

Ontological metaphor is portrayed as providing concepts in the shape of objects and substances (p.25). The implementation of ontological metaphors is claimed to provide the means to put artificial boundaries to non-physical objects that might be difficult to visualise in terms of entities or substance. For instance, we might easily perceive boundaries and substance from our visual field of physical objects, such as buildings or oranges, whilst non-physical objects, such as an event like a race, might need metaphorical conceptualisation. In the example of “I have got a MOUNTAIN of work to do”, we can visualize and quantify the amount of work that is required, through an ontological metaphor. Personification is another example of ontological metaphor where we identify objects with human features, for instance, attributing a disease the ability of human activity when stating that “the cancer CAUGHT UP with him” (p.33).

Categorising metaphors beyond their conceptual aim, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) further divide metaphors into **conventional** and **new metaphors** (p.139). The distinction of the two categories is based on the range of usage within the language and culture, defining the conventional metaphors as more ordinary for conceptualising in everyday usage of the language, whereas the new metaphors are characterized as creative, original and possibly contributing new meaning to the concepts and language [ibid].

Metonymy is one aspect of language that Lakoff and Johnson imply might be perceived as being similar to metaphor, but is described as differing in function (p.35).

Metonymy is shown where an entity is described as a whole something closely related to it [ibid]. For instance, a waitress stating that “the chicken salad is ready for his check” is using the salad to refer to the person eating the salad. The salad becomes a representation for the whole of the person eating it. This stands in contrast to a metaphor which conceptualises an object using another object not closely related.

Gibbs (in Cameron and Low, 1999) delineates metonymy to be closely related to metaphor and that the two look alike, but function differently from one another. Metonymy is described as concerning one domain with its related constituents mapping two constituents within the same domain, whereas metaphor is described as functioning by two different objects/domains where one maps the other (p.36).

Yule (1996) describes metonymy as involving a container-content relation and view on objects (p.122). He suggests that, by viewing objects/words as containers of different contents, we can identify a relationship between the object and related content and, by the use of metonymy, relate to the object by its related contents. By using the example of “he drank the whole bottle” [ibid] he illustrates that we relate the meaning of this statement to “him drinking all of the liquid content of the bottle” rather than the bottle itself. Thus, the concept of metonymy is dependent on background and context knowledge [ibid]. To be able to understand the example in the way portrayed, one needs the background information and the contextual knowledge that bottles are not usually subject of actual drinks and that they usually contain liquids that one could drink.

Synecdoche is a specific kind of metonymy, where an entity or phenomenon is referred to by one of its constituent parts. The entity referred to as a container of constituents and one of these constituents is used to represent the entire entity as a whole (Lakoff, 1980, p.36). By this type of metonymy, we can conceptualise a statement such as, “Have you seen my new sets of wheels?” where the content wheel is used to refer to the entire vehicle.

Brown and Hatch (1995) refer to the distinction between synecdoche and metonymy as metonymy describing an object by a related element, whereas the synecdoche which is a constituent/part of the whole object is used to describe the whole object (p.89). They, therefore, characterise metonymy as a relation-object referencing system whereas synecdoche is illustrated as a part-whole referencing system.

3.3 Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions

3.3.1 Lexical Definition

The lexical definition of the term “idiom” in its everyday sense of the term can be illustrated as an aspect of language or a group of words where the meaning of the combination of specific words alter the meaning of the phrase or combination.

The Oxford Dictionaries online illustrate the term as “a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words” (www.oxforddictionaries.com).

3.3.2 The Nature of Idioms

Fernando (1996) illustrates features and purposes of idioms and idiomaticity, which she argues for being a frequently occurring feature of the English language (p.3). She further illustrates the topic as a highly complex area to define and divide. The definition which is provided as a framework for her work, suggesting that idioms are commonly accepted conventionalized multiword expressions in which semantic opacity provides an alternate non-literal meaning to its constituents, and functions in various ways [ibid].

These multiword expressions take form from common collocation of their constituents over time in a language and the basic literal independent meanings of their constituents are forged into one meaning for the entire unit (p.38).

Glucksberg (2001) defines idioms as a type of fixed expressions (p.68). He illustrates idioms as an aspect of language that is of “non-logical nature” [ibid]. This non-logical nature is described as a fixed phrase’s combined non-literal meaning. That is, when the constituents of a phrase are put together they provide a separate meaning from the individual ones of the constituents.

3.3.3 Defining Idioms

Defining multiword expressions as idioms, Fernando (1996) clarifies several factors of idiomatic characteristics, idiomaticity. These characteristics are used to define whether units can be attributed the status of idiom or to what extent, and into which subcategory, they might fit (p.33). The features of idioms or factors for idiomaticity include categories such as the fixity of words composing the expression, conformity towards grammatical rules and patterns, semantic opacity and culturally embedded encodings (p.34).

The fixity of words within an expression relates to the degree of variation possible in the aspects of lexical variation [ibid]. This is exemplified in the flexible phrase “catching a bus/train/cold” or the fixed unit “spill the beans”.

The factors of conformity towards grammatical rules and patterns refer to the structure of grammar as well as syntactic and componential patterns of the expressions, which components are more commonly used and how grammatical aspects might vary [ibid].

The factor of semantic opacity of the expressions denotes the non-literal meanings of the components of the expressions and the unifying of semantic meaning to the expression as a single unit of meaning [ibid]. For instance, the individual components of “kick the bucket” together as a unit convey to the unified meaning of “to die”.

The culturally embedded encodings of expressions are referred to as factors that refer to cultural effects of reference (p.35). This is done by the of culturally embedded associations to expressions affecting the meaning of the unit [ibid]. Fernando uses the example of the idiom “blue blood” in Spain, which was initially attributed as an idiom and referred to lighter colour

of skin for separation of ethnicity. However, with time, the expression came to signify social class due to cultural aspects [ibid].

These factors are considered in the definition of idioms through levels of idiomaticity, according to Fernando (1996). The vast variety of multiword expressions in the English language tends to apply to the different factors of idiomaticity in different ways and to different extents. This leads to multiword expressions being organised as idioms in a scale of idiomaticity rather than labelled as idioms or non-idioms (p.31).

3.3.4 Types of Idioms

Using the factors of idiomaticity as features of idioms, Fernando categorizes idioms and grades them on an idiomatic scale (p.32).

At the top of the idiomatic hierarchy, Fernando places **pure idioms** (p.32). Pure idioms are conventionalized and non-literal expressions in a sense of fixity of constituents and semantic opacity and might be exemplified by “red herring, spick and span, the coast is clear, etc.” (p.35).

Semi-idioms are next in line and are partially idiomatic and partially literal [ibid]. The structure of semi idioms are often built on co-occurring words/expressions which will stay partially true to their literal meaning, while the other constituents will lose their literal meaning when in co-occurrence with its literal partner (p.36). This subclass provides room for both fixed expressions and expressions with permission of restricted lexical variation of the literal part of the expression. This kind of expression is hard to differentiate from non-idioms, such as habitual collocations, which are structured in the same as way semi-idioms yet less idiomatic in the sense of being not quite as restricted, but more open to variation [ibid]. In this sense, semi-idioms, such as the fixed expression “drop names” or “fat chance”, differ in variation possibilities towards semi-idioms such as “good morning/day” or “chequered career/history” which, in turn, differs in terms of openness to variation from habitual collocations such as “strong/weak/white/black/Irish/hot/ice coffee”.

Scoring lowest on the idiomacity scale of idioms are the **literal idioms**. Literal idioms lack the semantic complexity, being literally constructed but fulfilling the criterion of idiomatic

nature such as fixity and restricted variation [ibid]. Examples of literal idioms are “on foot”, “on the contrary”, etc.

Besides these categorizations of expressions in terms of their features, Fernando is also able to categorize them in terms of their functions, where she portrays ideational, interpersonal and relational idioms (p.72).

Ideational idioms are expressions described to function for a very specific and well-understood purpose. They do so by describing actions, events, situations, people and things, attributes, evaluations or emotions [ibid]. Through these kinds of idioms, we might either specify the content or characterise the content as vague or illustrate and characterise the content being sent. For example, we might use an ideational idiom such as “stepping out of the closet” for characterising the action of homosexual individuals revealing themselves to be homosexual. By using this specific idiom one can further characterise the action by inclination of the subject being a secret that has been officially revealed. If one uses the additional ideational idioms, such as “kind of”, one further characterise the specification of the action as vague.

Interpersonal idioms are viewed as idioms of interactional function in ways of manner and nature of the interaction, by, for example, implying greetings and farewells, directives, agreement, eliciting options, rejections, expressing sincerity, uncertainty, etc. (p73).

Relational idioms are referred to as aiding coherence and serving a textual function. The idioms show relational aspects within a discourse, such as integrating, comparing, contrasting and sequencing words (p.74). For instance, relational idioms, such as “on the contrary”, “no wonder”, “on the other hand” and “last but not least” might aid coherence to the discourse.

3.4 Teaching Figurative Language

Coady and Huckin (1997) approach the topic of figurative language aspects such as metaphor and idiomatic expressions by labelling them as complex lexical units (p.160). They argue for the need of special attention within teaching towards these aspects due to their complex nature and characterize them as crucial features of advanced language learning for native-like competence (p.161). This special attention is suggested to involve vast vocabulary expansion work and strategies for learners to deal with the different aspects. These strategies are

proposed to include elements of ability to identify these aspects of language, the nature and categories of the subjects and the way they function within discourse (p.168).

Leclere, Miller, Palmer and Shackelford (2006) reveal different approaches to teaching figurative language, in their study of a second language learner in an American high school.

They contend that it is of great importance for English language learners to be able to comprehend figurative language in order to cope with everyday spoken and written English (p.259). Developing their line of thought, they conclude that it is imperative for teachers to provide students with an understanding of the concepts, within this specific purpose of English language learner comprehension of figurative language [ibid].

The study of the young second language learner struggling to master figurative language presents six different approaches used to successfully teach the specific student comprehension of figurative language (p.263). These approaches are illustrated as interrelated and all serving the purpose of unveiling the concept of figurative language. The approaches included explicit instruction, connecting the language to the real world, providing context, modelling and independent practice, visualisation and use of native language (pp.263-265).

Explicit instruction is portrayed as direct teacher explanation of the concept of figurative language aspects and its different aspects (p.263). This aspect of teaching is claimed to be crucial for students in order to perceive language as figurative [ibid].

Connecting the language to the real world is described as an approach which includes different ways of aiding the student to relate the language to his/hers own natural environment [ibid]. This is argued to be aided by the use of “student created and concrete tools” which could be seen as tools closely linked to themselves [ibid].

To give students context to the figurative language is an approach described as including aiding their comprehension, by providing contextual hints as to the meaning of the figurative language as well as discussing appropriate forms of use and situations for use of the language (pp.263-264).

Providing students with models and strategies for interpretation and space for independent practice is claimed to be of importance for the students’ acquisition of mastery (p.264). This, they suggest, concerns exposure and experience, which is claimed to be of importance [ibid].

Visualisation approaches is presented as encompassing different ways for students to “image” the language [ibid]. In this specific study, art in the form of sketching and drawing was used, but it could be interpreted to include other means of imaging as well, including pictures, dramatizations, etcetera.

The use of native language for second language learners is portrayed as a way of widening the understanding of the language by aiding primary skills involving figurative language for developing similar skills in their second language (pp.264-265).

3.4.1 Teaching Metaphor

Ravelli reasons for metaphor being an extremely difficult, yet important, aspect to teach (Ravelli, Simon-Vanderbergen and Taverniers, 2003, p.47). She also points out the need for learners to understand the nature, function and forms of the metaphor in order for mastery in usage to be achieved [ibid]. With this argumentation, she illustrates a need for further research on how to effectively accomplish this understanding [ibid].

Brown and Hatch (1995) propose that learner acquisition of metaphor is largely combined with the teacher’s attitude towards learning metaphors (p.99). They argue for the ability for acquisition of metaphor to be possible amongst young learners if teachers promote the subject to be of importance and relevance [ibid].

Furthermore, they provide suggestions for teaching, including teaching the concept of metaphor, analysis/categorisation of provided metaphors in texts and building a vocabulary base of metaphoric synonyms (pp.110-111). Applying these approaches, they encourage teachers to be constantly providing feedback and to have their students reflect upon the subject throughout the process, regardless which approach is being used [ibid].

3.4.2 Teaching Idiomatic Expressions

Deaton demonstrates different ways of approaching to teach idioms (in Colvin and Ross, 1992). She advocates a multi-approach to teaching [ibid]. These approaches are described as formal teaching of the subject, student practice using idioms, idiomatic synonyms for a topic and imaging of language using art (p.473).

Formal teaching is portrayed as including different aspects of idioms such as function/purpose, background/origin and meaning of specific idioms [ibid].

Student practice of idiomatic use is illustrated as students using idioms in both written and spoken language in different forms [ibid].

To provide students with synonymic idioms for a specific meaning or assign students to work out their own synonyms is also advised. This is exemplified by teacher-created extensive vocabulary lists, and student assignments where they create their own vocabulary lists of synonymic idioms supported by teacher feedback and supervision [ibid].

Imaging idioms through art is exemplified in drawing work or sketching amongst the students [ibid].

Karlsson (2012) argues for integrating idioms in teaching for every course concerning vocabulary expansion, due to the natural part idioms play within native speakers language use (p.154). For teaching this specific aspect of language, she identifies advantages in approaching it in for different ways, actualising the reality of idioms being a prominent feature of the English language, mastery technique training through the first language, initially approaching the subject using idioms of more literal nature and providing background information regarding the different idioms (pp.154-155).

The aspect of stressing the importance of learning idioms is something Karlsson acknowledges. She advocates assisting the teaching of idioms by removing complications, like student misperceptions of idioms being a rare aspect of the language. By introducing students to areas of both idiomatic importance and close relations to the students such as sitcoms and stand-up comedy, the students' interest for learning idioms should improve (p.154).

By exposure to vocabulary of idiomatic nature in both the students' first language (Swedish) and second language (English), Karlsson argues for the students' development of mastery techniques when it comes to decoding and understanding idioms, in an acquisitional way. In this process of acquisition of mastery techniques, she discusses the availability of the first language being a shortcut to understanding the concept of idioms. This will, in turn, serve students well in their second language acquisition of idioms as well [ibid].

She also addresses the issue of opaqueness of idioms and illustrates how the idioms which possess more opaque meanings are more difficult for students to understand. She thereby recommends an initial approach to idioms of using idioms that are of a less opaque nature as a way of easing the students into the subject (p.155).

The addressing of historical and cultural background of the idioms is claimed to be an advantageous approach to the teaching of idioms. This functions by the way of making the material interesting for the students as well as contributing to the specific idioms being remembered more easily [ibid].

3.5 The Swedish Syllabus for English Teaching

The Swedish syllabus for English within the Swedish educational system rarely mentions figurative language, as previously explained. However, it does provide some explicit instructions and could be argued to implicitly involve figurative language, as well. This implicit involvement could be claimed to be found within the instructions for different materials to use for teaching and other elements or aspects of the syllabus - that is, through interpretations that some of the elements within the syllabus contain figurative language.

The Swedish syllabus contains three different sections for each course. Those are the aim and purpose of the course, content of centrality for the course and criteria for grading within the course. The syllabus starts in years 1-3 of elementary school and stretches to the three courses of upper secondary school, named, English 5, 6 and 7.

The syllabus contains explicit instructions for teaching figurative language on two separate occasions within the content of centrality parts for years 7-9 and English 7.

In years 7-9, the students are expected to work with the concept of meaning concerning phrases within which individual constituents contribute to a combined meaning as a phrase. This could arguably be interpreted as the concept of idioms.

“Hur sammanbindande ord och andra uttryck används för att skapa struktur och språkligt sammanhängande helheter.” (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2011, p.33)

”How combined words and other expressions are used in order to create structure and units of language.” (own translation)

For English 7, the course is expected to involve learning strategies for conveying underlying meaning or opaque meaning. This could arguably be interpreted as learning strategies for comprehending meaning of both idiomatic and metaphoric nature:

”Strategier för att dra slutsatser om talat språk och texter när det gäller attityder, perspektiv, syfte och värderingar samt för att uppfatta underförstådd betydelse.” (skolverket.se)

“Strategies for determining attitudes, perspective, purpose, opinions and underlying meaning within spoken and written language. (own translation)

Beside these explicit instructions for figurative language teaching within the Swedish syllabus for English teaching, the Swedish syllabus is arguably open to interpretation. Through interpretation, figurative language could be argued to be implicitly included within other elements of the syllabus as well.

There are frequently occurring elements, which are required to be included in the lesson planning, arguably involving different aspects of figurative language. For instance, the syllabus states that teaching should include elements such as newspapers, film, music, poetry, and literature which would probably, to some extent, include some form of figurative language. The criteria for grading students’ production of oral and written language are other aspect which could be understood to include figurative language. The criterion concerning variation of produced language could, for instance, be interpreted as being consistent with the inclusion of figurative language. Figurative language in this aspect could be proposed as offering a possible way for students to vary their language production.

4 Methodology

4.1 Theoretical Perspective

This study stems from a social-constructionist perspective assuming the assumptions that reality and knowledge are constructs of human interaction with its physiological, psychological and social environment. (Erickson, 2005, p.78-82)

4.2 Design

The study was conducted in an inductive manner (Patel, 1994, p.21) where I, as the researcher, devised a research plan with an open mind to the results and with no presumed theories on the subject.

To maximise the “validity” (Peräkylä in Silverman, 1997, p.201) in the data aiming to describe and interpret the objectives of the study, a “qualitative approach” (Denscombe, 2009, p.54) was chosen through “face-to-face interviews” (pp.28-29) with Swedish English teachers and content based “thematic analysis” (Bock & Krippendorf, 2008, p.33). The choice of participants for the interviews was made mostly on “the basis of convenience” (Denscombe, 2009, p.37), where geographical location, economic and time factors provided limitations of choice. Another aspect of choice was manifest in the formulation of the strategy which, with regards to aiming the study to provide a wide illustration of the problem of teaching figurative language in the Swedish educational system, was met by interviewing teachers at the different levels within that system.

The interviews were conducted in a “lowly-standardised” (Patel & Davidsson, 2011, pp.75-76) fashion, where influential aspects for the interviews such as time, location and order of the interview were carried out in different ways, depending on the different situations regarding the interviews. However, the interviews were intended to be carried out in a quiet, peaceful and closed environment in order that they could be completed without interruption.

The questions provided were open-ended and “semi-structural” (Denscombe, 2009, pp.234-235) in character, to provide participants the possibility of answering the questions freely and, if needed, leave room for follow-up questions to further develop or clarify statements were used. Besides the semi-structural character of the questions of the study, the reliability of the data (Peräkylä in Silverman, 1997, p.203) was strengthened by the interviews being recorded and transcribed to avoid researcher misinterpretations.

4.3 Ethical considerations

Due consideration was given to the ethical requirements and these were satisfied by ensuring the confidentiality of the participants and performed with the informants’ consent. Furthermore, the results of the interviews were sought to be displayed in a way which did not

reflect upon the informants in a negative manner and illustrated in its original form to avoid misinterpretations (Booth, Colomb and Williams, 2003, pp.285-288).

5 Results

The results of this study are shown by the thoughts and experiences of the informants participating in the study. The informants are all English teachers within the Swedish school system, but teach at different levels of education. They are anonymous and referred to by names that are relating to the level of education in which they are working. Furthermore, they are named in alphabetical order after which of the informants was interviewed first within the same level of education. For instance, informant EF is a teacher working in elementary school and was interviewed after informant EE, SC is a teacher working in a secondary school and USA is a teacher working in an upper secondary school. The interviewer will be named I within the text.

5.1 Elementary School

Informant EE

EE expresses insecurity as to the topic of figurative language. However, he states that he is familiar with some of its aspects naming idioms as an example.

EE: Not so much, actually, but during my education at the university we spoke a little about idiomatic expressions. That's pretty much it.

Furthermore, he states that he does not intentionally teach figurative language. Idiomatic expressions are, however, asserted to occur occasionally through materials used for teaching.

EE: Actually I'd say I don't teach it at all.

I: Okay... Phrases, sayings...

EE: I guess we work with basic phrases for glossary work. Ehh. We use the text book a lot and the glossary list connected to each chapter.

As for the reason for figurative language not intentionally being taught, he expresses a need for the students to learn the meaning of literal words first.

EE: In their stage it's a lot about learning words and kind of understanding the content of a text.

Informant EF

EF also expresses insecurity as to the subject of figurative language.

EF: Not so much... I'm not really... ehm... I don't... know what is included in that.

As for the subject of teaching figurative language, she expresses that it is not included for her English classes. However, she states that she teaches it to some extent within the student's native language classes. She declares the students' difficulties within comprehension of the subject within their native language to be the main reason of exclusion of figurative language for her English classes.

EF: Not much. Ehm...

I: ...reading between the lines, phrases, sayings...

EF: We work with some sayings in Swedish (classes). We sing and stuff like that...

I: Okay. Ehm. But not in English (classes)?

EF: No. The students have a hard time with the Swedish so no...

When teaching idiomatic meanings in Swedish, she illustrates approaches of reading and singing. When a saying turns up through these approaches, she asserts that she explains the meaning of specific phrase for the students.

I: How do you go about that? Ehm... Do you just read or sing and they follow or...

EF: Ehm... Yeah mostly.

I: Okey... Do you talk about the specific sayings or...?

EF: No not unless they ask... the students ask about them and then I just explain what they mean...

5.2 Secondary School

Informant SC

SC states that intentional teaching of figurative language is not part of her teaching. She does, however, state that some aspects tend to slip in to the practice through materials used in teaching.

SC: Well, I have never and I can say never. I have never taught it deliberately like a, a, a moment in my education to just teach idiomatic expressions. Those expressions and metaphors comes with the other language. So I have not focused on it, never I think. No.

When the occasional figurative aspect does occur, she illustrates an approach of treating the language as a whole unit of meaning. Through this approach, she encourages students to learn them in the same way as literal vocabulary.

SC: I don't think I have a certain approach. I think I just say that they should learn them as words or phrases.

Reflecting on the subject of figurative language, she expresses that these kinds of aspects are difficult for students learn and that they, in her opinion, are acquired at a late stage of students' second language development.

SC: And that's the most.. I think that's the most difficult part when you're not a native speaker. It's the thing that come... the last thing in your language development I think, when you're starting to use metaphors.

Informant SD

SD depict that he tends to teach a few elements of figurative language.

SD: I usually go about teaching metaphor, simile, idioms, clichés stuff like that...

Furthermore, he illustrates different approaches he has used for teaching it. These approaches are illustrated to have been used either in a combined effort for teaching the subject, or as individual approaches.

SD: What I do is that I usually try to work out the... How should I say this... concepts of the... functions of the different elements... In my opinion students can't really use these kind of things without a proper understanding on how they work. Ehh.. So I usually start off by sort of giving a lecture on the theme and then try to have the students... students doing assignments in order to get somewhat a grip of it.

In this approach, a more formal teaching on the overall concept of the subject is illustrated.

SD: Ehh... well I've tried a few different things like trying to work with material which they can relate to, like... film, music song lyrics, poetry, YouTube clips... You know sort of bringing it in to their... Ehh.. sphere of interest... home court, so to speak and used that material to explain the concepts you know... how words relate to each other etc....

Trying to relate the subject to the reality of the students and make it interesting; SD characterises it as bringing the subject into the students' world of reality and attempts to emphasise the importance of learning figurative language by using material of relevance for the students.

SD: And then what I always do is that that I try to get them to come up with their own examples... For metaphors, for instance, I tend to use the the sort of free metaphor where they after they've learned a little bit about the concept, can create their own examples...

Here, SD describes a tactic whereby students are encouraged to create and construct their own figurative language.

5.3 Upper Secondary School

Informant USA

USA declares that he does teach figurative language. Additionally, he refers to some of the aspects he has taught and in which courses he has taught it.

USA: Well the extent that I teach metaphors and idiomatic expressions including similes, I have taught that part of the English language at English C Cambridge level and also at ehh the IB level.

He furthermore explains different approaches towards teaching metaphors, idiomatic expressions and similes. These are described in somewhat similar ways for most of the different kinds of figurative language.

USA: So the way in which I approached that was to provide an explanation as to how often those targets of expressions are used and the differences between metaphors, similes and idioms and so on to provide a general overview.

The focus in this case could be said to concern the relevance or importance of learning these aspects.

Another approach could be seen in providing students with opportunities for general practice. This practice is intended to uncover the meanings within figurative language.

USA: It was more, it was more of a there was a sentence and there was a meaning...

I: Yeah.

USA: and then there were... I think there were three choices of what they thought the bold type meant. So I... So I made sure that they knew exactly what part of the sentence ehh was the idiomatic expression. And then there was A, B and C you know ring one of these whichever one you think is the most appropriate.

In this approach, students are handed explicit material concerning idiomatic expressions and assigned to discuss and reveal the meaning of the language.

To provide knowledge of the concepts of the aspects is another method outlined by USA.

USA: But also relating to other aspects of idiomatic expression. For example, there are some which if you read them then if there is no meaning, if there is no context then, then you just have the expression then you would never know or the students would never know that that actually means something else. So to create meaning, I provided that extra element of knowledge, for the students to understand better.

I: Okay. By treating the whole concept of the subject of expressions and idioms and providing the intel for the expression.

USA: Yeah, exactly.

He also illustrates an approach concerning synonyms of idiomatic expressions.

USA: ... and also, and also to provide them with idiomatic synonyms. So there's... For example, if there was one particular question where there are several different idioms for the same thing.

Here, teaching by providing idiomatic synonyms for a specific notion is used.

Regularly exposing the students to figurative language, in this case idiomatic expressions, is also highlighted as a possible strategy.

USA: What I tend to do with the classes that I teach, is that I use idioms on a regular basis. Sometimes without knowing about it. As I mentioned about using it subconsciously, using them subconsciously. So I say to the class, the classes is if you hear me using an idiom or a metaphor that you don't know please let me know. Because something that I may take for granted ehh you know might be interesting for them to learn as well. So just say put your hand up or stop and and say, you know, what does this mean and what does that mean, and then I would try to create some kind of meaning and give them an explanation.

This example demonstrates an approach of simply using figurative language as a regular part of language when speaking to students. This exposure is then supposed to lead up to students understanding the specific parts of language, through subconscious acquisition as well as through formal explanation and instruction.

Informant USB

USB asserts that he involves teaching of some kinds of figurative language into his courses. However, he admits to not addressing other kinds, like metaphors.

USB: I work mostly with idioms. Ehh. Metaphors do tend to slip in there. Also, similes and other sayings and phrases. Ehhm. Metaphors are a bit different, though. Ehhm. And that's... I I think that's even harder for the students to understand. I teach it in Swedish, where it's a big part of the new itinerary for Swedish teaching, Swedish courses. You know, reading between the lines and getting the meaning that's... you know, not the meaning that's explicit in the words, yeah, getting the underlying meaning. They have a hard time doing that in their own native language, you know, and in English, of course, being a fairly new language for them, it's even harder. It is something, though, you should probably work with more. And seeing a question like this, I sort of feel that I missed the ball on that one.

USB declares the main focus of his teaching figurative language with regards to idioms and idiomatic expressions, which he further outlines his different approaches towards teaching. These strategies are described as a combined approach where he uses different ways of addressing the issue at hand.

USB: I had the first introduction where I explained what idioms were and everything like that and then I just tried to make it fun and interesting. So I would start by finding some kind of material on the internet, either a picture, a comic strip or a YouTube-clip or something illustrating the idiom and then I would try to make them, ehh, guess what it was or what it meant, before actually saying "okay, this is the idiom or this is the saying"...

...I showed them... there is an idiom, "to kick the bucket", which means to die. Ehh. No one of them knew that one. So I showed them a trailer of a film called "the bucket list", ehh, where they... two men, you know, discuss what to do before they kick the bucket. Ehh. And... ehhm.. in that trailer they use the phrase "to kick the bucket" a couple of times and you kind of get the meaning of it, via

that. Ehhm. So I tried to do that for every idiom, and afterwards we would talk about it, how you could use it and... Also, there is a really good webpage, that I've used a lot, ehh, that explains both the meaning and the origin of the idiom. Which is often very interesting, where it comes from. Because, usually, I found, an idiom starts out as something quite different and, you know, the usage changes over time to get the meaning it has today. So I always told them the history of the phrase as well, because I thought, you know, if there is a crazy story to it they might remember it better...

This multi-approach is illustrated as initially introducing the students to the concept of idioms by formal teaching.

The next step is described as making the learning objective interesting and fun, by using different types of student friendly material.

The subsequent step is portrayed as discussion and further introduction as to the conceptual aspects of the language.

The final approach is described as providing background for the idiom, in terms of origin.

6 Analysis & Discussion

6.1 Overview & Analysis of Results

6.1.1 English Figurative Language in Swedish Classrooms

The results indicate that English figurative language is partially taught in Swedish schools. The informants state that this topic is either not intentionally taught at all or that it is deliberately taught by different types and aspects of figurative language. From this small-scale study, a pattern of the extent of English figurative language is being taught could be seen. The teachers educating younger students seem to be teaching less on the topic whilst the teachers educating the older students seem to put more emphasis on the topic.

Teachers at elementary school (years 1-6) state that no dedicated teaching of figurative language is included. Mention is made, however, that there might be one or two occasional idioms in the text books that are used in the classroom.

Secondary school teachers (years 7-9) have adopted a somewhat similar stance towards teaching figurative language. One of the informants states that she does encounter occasional idiomatic expressions in the different materials she uses for teaching whilst the other informant claims to teach the subject deliberately.

Upper secondary school teachers demonstrate a more dedicated attitude towards teaching figurative language. They account for teaching different aspects of figurative language, using different approaches.

As for what is being taught, the study's results explicitly show that teaching of idioms and idiomatic expressions, metaphors, clichés, adages and similes occurs within Swedish classrooms.

Relating these results to the general overview of figurative language, which is provided for in the background section of this study, the extent of figurative language being taught within these classrooms could be argued as not providing education of the full spectrum of figurative language in English. Brown and Palmer (2004) map out figurative language as including aspects such as metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, allusions, proverbs and idioms (p.371). In this respect, the results indicate that a wider range of categories needs to be taught. Brown and Hatch (1995) additionally include metonymy and synecdoche, which could also be argued to strengthen this line of thought.

On the other hand, Glucksberg (2001) provides a definition of figurative language simply including idioms and metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980), in addition, define most of the aspects, besides idioms, as closely related or similar to metaphor. These definitions may be perceived as ensuring that most of the aspects of figurative speech are accounted for.

Additionally, the inability of the study to provide a universally agreed definition of figurative language has left the informants to determine upon which aspects they should focus. When interviewed, the informants were shown examples of metaphors and idioms, which would arguably have lead them to exclude other aspects of figurative language.

The results are relatively compliant with the Swedish syllabus for teaching English (skolverket.se). The syllabus does not give explicit instructions for teaching figurative language in elementary school. Thus, the results showing that elementary school teachers are not teaching figurative language are compliant with these instructions.

The explicit instructions for teaching figurative language in secondary school involve conceptual introduction as to words and phrases acting as a single unit of meaning. Both secondary schools informants state that this subject is accounted for in their teaching. However, one of them admits to dealing with the subject unintentionally whereas the other deliberately teaches it.

The upper secondary school related sections of the syllabus concern strategies for unveiling non-literal meaning. In this aspect, the results could be seen as somewhat compliant. Even though no direct declaration of teaching strategies for unveiling non-literal meaning is provided for, the informants show numerous approaches which arguably involve these kinds of strategies.

6.1.2 Approaches towards Teaching Figurative Language

The different approaches towards teaching English figurative language differ somewhat with regards to the different types of language taught, but are generally seen as approachable in the same way. With regards to some of the teachers asserting that they do not really approach this aspect of language intentionally at all, the approaches towards teaching figurative language were not accounted for by all the informants.

The different approaches towards teaching figurative language that are covered by the results include a wide range of possible strategies. The informants described most of the different approaches as constituents of a multi-approach where more than one approach was used. Thus, the different approaches described should rather be seen as parts of an arsenal of approaches than individual approaches that singlehandedly aid student comprehension and mastery.

The Single Unit Approach

This constitutes a stratagem for treating idioms as simple set phrases or words which are understood as a single unit containing one meaning.

The teachers claiming not to deliberately involve figurative language in their teaching seemed to prefer this approach when they encountered figurative language in classes. The teachers declaring their use of deliberate approaches towards teaching figurative language also admit to occasionally using a single unit approach, but only for teaching idioms.

The Synonymic Approach

This approach was illustrated as providing synonyms of the same figurative form within the English Language. These synonyms are interpreted to function in a way of explaining the meaning of the given language in terms of new language of the same character.

The Conceptual Approach

In this approach, the informants disclosed that they made efforts to provide an understanding for the different attributes and functions of the aspects. The different aspects were also illustrated with regards to each other, by describing the different aspects and explain them in relation to other figurative aspects. This approach was supposed to be accomplished through lectures on the aspects, discussions and other assignments concerning the general concept of the different aspects.

The Relevance of Figurative Language for Students Approach

An approach to stress and exemplify the vast range of figurative language used within the English language and connecting this aspect to the students' realities was also seen in the results. Exemplifying figurative language using student friendly and related materials was described as a possible approach for making the subject relevant, interesting and fun for the students.

The Contextual Approach

By this approach, it was illustrated that figurative language was put into a context for interpretation of meaning. The different materials for this approach varied but involved both written and spoken language. The students were allowed to analyse meaning of the figurative language using the contexts of the materials as reference.

The Cultural/Historical Background Approach

One approach that could be seen in the results included work on the cultural and historical background of the figurative language. This was described as being provided for by websites, discussions and lectures. In providing this cultural and historical background to the language, the informants proposed that the students could reach another dimension of understanding and interest as well as remembering the specific language better.

The Exposal Approach

Regularly exposing students to figurative language through teacher presentations and everyday communication within the classroom was illustrated as one approach. In this way, students were expected to either acquire language or the exposure leading up to opportunities for explanation and learning.

Constructional Approach

Assigning the students to create their own examples and new figurative language was one approach accounted for in the results. This was described as the students using their knowledge of the concepts and through their own attempts at creating similar language they were suggested to obtain insight in the different overall concepts and structures of the figurative language.

In relation to the literary review and previous research on teaching figurative language provided for in this study, the results are for the most part, compliant. All of the approaches shown in the results could be argued for being included in the previous research on the topic. The conceptual, single unit, synonymic, relevance, contextual and cultural/historical background approaches could all be provided for in the works of the likes of Coady and Huckin (1997), Leclere, et al. (2006), Ravelli, et al. (2003), Brown and Hatch (1995), Deaton (in Colvin and Ross 1992) and Karlsson (2012).

It could, however, in the light of previous results be argued for the addition of new approaches in the results of the study. The exposal approach and the constructional approach are not explicitly accounted for in previous research. The exposal approach differs from previous research by its somewhat informal nature. Previous results have shown more direct approaches towards teaching figurative language, whereas this approach does not formally attend to teaching the aspect, but indirectly has the same effect.

The constructional approach could also be claimed to differ to some extent from previous results, as it is not explicitly illustrated. However, it could be argued for being included into results of practice approaches towards teaching the subject.

6.2 Discussion & Recommendations

Regarding which aspects of figurative language that were taught and in which levels of education they were taught by Swedish English teachers, the results indicate a correspondence towards the instructions identified within the syllabus for teaching English in Swedish schools. The syllabus is the absolute guide for teachers' choice of content for teaching and, in this case the results, should be offering a non-problematic solution for teaching figurative language.

However, this subject is portrayed by the informants as a particularly difficult aspect of language to teach. Throughout the performed interviews of this study, the informants describe the mastery of figurative language as demanding a certain level of basic overall English language skills. In this aspect, they highlight the students' need to learn other, more basic skills in order to master figurative language. The elementary teachers are not really involving this element at all into their practices, stating that their students primarily need to learn the basic skills required. One of the secondary school teachers admits to avoiding the subject and

one of the upper secondary school teachers simply states that, due to its difficult nature, he intentionally avoids it as well in some classes.

On the other hand, all of the teachers somewhat familiar with the subject stress the need for students to learn figurative language. It is generally acknowledged that figurative language is a prominent feature within the English language. Through the interviews, it seems that mastery of figurative language is an aspect that, to a substantial degree, is lacking in students' English skill repertoires. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the syllabus contains instructions for teaching using materials which arguably include figurative language. This, in turn, means that students throughout their education of English will encounter figurative language and they need to master it.

Determining the extent to which Swedish English teachers should teach about figurative language is, accordingly, a predicament. The syllabus is an absolute guide for teaching, but it could be argued that the relevance of more/earlier involvement of teaching figurative language than instructed by the syllabus is needed.

Regarding ways to approach teaching figurative language, the results and literary review display a wide range of possible approaches. Through these, suggestions towards teaching figurative language, using a multi-approach, is arguably the most compelling. Most of these suggestions, however, include an approach whereby the general concepts of the aspects are accounted for. With regard to this specific approach, the informants' contention for the subject being a particularly difficult subject for students to learn is highly problematic. Additionally, some of the informants also state their own insecurity as to their knowledge and mastery of the subject to be an issue. This obviously being an essential requisite for teaching figurative language thus makes the teacher's mastery/education of the subject as a necessary factor.

Furthermore, it could also be recommended to use some sort of approach which deals with individual practice and relating the subject to the students' "world of English". To manifest knowledge and mastery, practice in different forms is called for. The approaches towards creating meaning and interest towards learning might arguably also be beneficial. The use of figurative language within the Swedish language is viably used in far less extent than the

English language. This, in turn, might leave Swedish English learners to think of figurative language as an unnecessary aspect to learn.

The different ways of approaching the aspects shown in this study might be deemed to come down to teacher creativity. These approaches are merely examples of different approaches that could be used, and should not be seen as the only ways to approach teaching figurative language. However, the purposes of providing conceptual instructions, individual practice and relating the subject to the students' realities should be served by these approaches.

7 Conclusions

7.1 Summary of Findings

This study shows that Swedish English teachers teach figurative language to different extent and teach different aspects/types of figurative language. The study also presents great variation in how to approach teaching figurative language. The different approaches are found to be used primarily as additional, and supplementary to other approaches, and could be argued to be parts of multi-approaches towards teaching figurative language.

The study provides results of approaches that previous research has accounted for in the conceptual, single unit, synonymic, relevance, contextual and cultural/historical background approaches, but also provide additional approaches in the exposal and constructional approaches.

In the light of these results, Swedish English teachers are recommended to teach different aspects of figurative language to a great extent to their students. The recommendations for approaching these subjects are to use multi-approaches that concern conceptual aspects, individual practice, relating the subject to the students' world and stressing the importance of learning them.

7.2 Limitations of the Study & Future Research

Due to the small scale of this qualitative study, these results may be viewed as having only limited validity and applicability to typical Swedish English schoolteachers. The results

should, therefore, be viewed as examples of how the specific informants of the study treat the subject and not how the subject is treated by Swedish English teachers in general.

With regard to the informants' knowledge of the subject and the limited introduction of figurative language, results might have been affected or different if approached in a different way. As previously mentioned, the informants were allowed to make their own interpretations of the constituents of figurative language. However, they were given examples of metaphors and idioms, which probably affected the results to mainly focus on these two aspects of figurative language.

The fact that the Swedish syllabus for teaching English is fairly new is an aspect that should be highlighted in this discussion. The syllabus referred to in this study was instituted less than year prior to the interviews that were conducted. In addition, the previous syllabus did not concern figurative language to the same extent as the new syllabus. These aspects could arguably have affected the outcome of the results concerning the new syllabus.

In the light of this study's results, to provide a general overview of the questions at hand, future research is proposed to involve a larger study on the same topic as this study. The effects of teaching figurative language in elementary school environments is another field worthy of future research. To clarify the instructions for teaching figurative language within Swedish schools, research on the Swedish syllabus for English teaching is also suggested. Finally, research designed to establish the extent of figurative language within the syllabus and Swedish English-teaching is fulfilling the needs of the students is also proposed.

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