Between theory and practice – foreign language teacher students' cognition of oral proficiency and grammar teaching in Sweden

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The present study explores patterns of cognition among 14 foreign language (FL) teacher students in Sweden regarding teaching oral proficiency and grammar in French German, Italian and Spanish. It is based on reflective cumulative log texts written by the students during a theoretical course in FL pedagogy. The log texts were investigated using qualitative content analysis to uncover central themes and patterns of agency. The findings indicate, among other things, that the FL teacher students hold strong experience-based cognitions regarding teaching both oral proficiency and grammar, and that, regardless if their FL learning experiences at school were based on form-focused teaching or communicative teaching, they struggle to negotiate the role of grammar in a communicative language teaching framework.

Keywords: teacher education, agency, foreign language teaching, teacher student cognition

1 Introduction[1]

It is a well-attested fact that foreign language (FL) teacher students face discontinuities between their own previous experiences as learners in school and at university, and their future roles as teachers (Bronkhorst, Koster, Meijer, Woldman, & Vermunt, 2014; Golombek & Doran, 2014; Hüttner, Mehlmauer-Larcher, Reichl & Schiftner, 2012; Johnson, 2015), a situation which is shared by teacher students in other subjects as well (Agudo, 2014; Borg, 2006; Brown, 2009; Fleming, Bangou, & Fellis, 2011; Peacock, 2001). Added to this is the frequently perceived 'gap' between theory and practice in FL education, that is, between university courses in FL pedagogy and the experiences that FL teacher students gain during their practicum (Bendtsen, 2016; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2011). These factors influence the FL teacher students' emerging agency (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

In Sweden, the inception of the 1980 syllabi for foreign languages (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980) has meant that aspects of communicative language teaching have gained increasing importance. For example, in the Commentary to

the 1980 syllabi one chapter focuses on the use of the target language for communication in the foreign language classroom. The communicative language teaching framework has been further established in the subsequent syllabi from 1994 (Skolverket, 1994), and 2011 (Skolverket, 2011a, 2011b), respectively.

The development of communicative competence in oral and written proficiency has thus been seen as an important goal for language teaching, including the ability to interact in the foreign language in different everyday situations. In this respect, the Swedish steering documents are also modeled on the functional view of language as expressed in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). However, reports and studies have shown that there are many challenges for students and teachers when it comes to actually attaining those goals in the foreign language classroom, attested in Swedish schools (Granfeldt et al., 2016; Skolinspektionen, 2010; Österberg & Bardel, 2016). In this respect, language teacher education serves an important function in preparing teacher students. The present paper investigates how notions of oral proficiency and grammar in foreign language teaching and learning in Swedish secondary and upper-secondary schools are construed in FL teacher students' reflective log texts written as part of a foundation course in language education theory.

The present study is part of a larger collaborative project between Stockholm University and Helsinki University titled "Language education in theory and practice: Development of a professional understanding of intercultural communicative competence among Swedish and Finnish FL teacher students with a special focus on modern languages"[2]. This study focuses on how Swedish FL teacher students of French, German, Italian and Spanish reflect on oral proficiency and grammar in FL teaching during their theoretical courses and after their school practicum, which is an area of FL education that is less researched.

2 Theoretical considerations and previous studies

The key concepts employed in the present study are teacher cognition, reflection and agency; communicative competence, oral proficiency and grammar.

2.1 Teacher cognition

The study is set within the framework of teacher cognition (Borg, 2003, 2006). As cognitions here are understood all those thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and private theories that teachers harbor about such aspects as teaching, studying, learning, subject matter and activities, and which are supposed to affect the way they plan and carry out teaching (Borg, 2006, p. 283). Borg (2006) gives a comprehensive overview of the theoretical aspects of teacher cognition and the accumulated body of research up until that date. In *Language Teaching Bibliography*, Borg (2015) lists well over 700 publications addressing various issues of the field. Furthermore, the special 2015 issue of *The Modern Language Journal* was titled "Language teacher cognition in applied linguistics research: Revisiting the territory, redrawing the boundaries, reclaiming the relevance". This research activity testifies to the vitality of the area both in the scope of issues addressed as well as in the research methods used.

With regard to language teacher cognition research, Borg (2015) contends that the pedagogical content areas that have been most widely studied concern aspects

related to the teaching of grammar and writing. Teaching speaking and oral proficiency development have received relatively little attention, which is also noted by Vijayavarathan-r (2017). Furthermore it can be noted from Borg's (2015) bibliography, which includes publications in the field from 1976 until 2015, that there is a total of twelve publications addressing issues relating to the languages of interest to the present study, namely French (five studies), German (two studies), Italian (two studies), and Spanish (five studies). Of these, five studies address questions relating to either oral proficiency (Chavez, 2007; Drewelow & Theobald, 2007), intercultural communicative competence (Aleksandrowicz-Pedich, Draghicescu, Issaiass, & Sabec, 2003), or beliefs about language (Absalom, 2003; Fox, 1993). The remaining studies do not directly address issues contingent to the present investigation. Consequently, it is clear that the area of FL teacher cognition regarding French, German, Italian and Spanish is generally under-researched when it comes to oral proficiency and grammar, and especially in a Swedish educational context.

2.2 Reflection

Bolton and Delderfield's (2018) definition of reflection, which is used in this study, highlights the role of critical attention to values and theories that guide everyday decisions and actions. With reference to teaching and teacher education we also agree with Luttrell (2000), who points out that reflection involves handling complex elements and emotions concerning practice and theory.

One of the underlying assumptions in teacher cognition as discussed by Borg (2006) is that it is possible to tap into the cognitions of teachers and teacher students, and thereby reveal patterns of thought that mirror not only attitudes but also potential courses of action that the teacher students see themselves as prepared to take once they start teaching. These thought patterns could be captured by means of reflective writing within a course of study. Reflection is seen as an important way in becoming aware of one's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes, and it is seen as one of the crucial elements in the learning process (Beauchamp, 2009; Schön, 1987). Although there are contentious issues surrounding reflection writing (Beauchamp, 2015), the view taken in the present study is that it may form a valuable tool by which the FL teacher students can uncover and probe into some of the factors that influence their emerging professional thinking.

We seek to address one of the possible ways in which the gap between FL education theory and previous experiences and practice can be handled within FL teacher education. The way in question concerns the FL teacher student's opportunities to enter into a reflective dialogue with him/herself by writing reflection texts, which is seen as one interesting option in developing the FL teacher students' sense of agency.

2.3 Agency

Making pedagogical decisions is part of the professional every-day lives of all teachers (cf. Borg, 2006). In order to be able to make informed and consistent decisions teachers need not only content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Teachers also need a "capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112), and one of the fundamental conditions for this capacity is a sense of agency. For the purposes of the present study we base our definition of agency on Beauchamp

and Thomas (2009), that agency is the perceived ability to act according to one's beliefs. This definition contains a very pragmatic element in that it also entails what Buchanan (2015) describes as the teachers' ability to teach the way they want to teach.

2.4 The FL teacher students' cognition base

In the context of the present study, two aspects of the FL teachers' cognition base can be seen as of importance: previous language learning experience, and the knowledge FL teacher students acquire during their teacher education. We surmise that the congruity or incongruity between these two facets may lead to varying perceptions of agency. In the following, FL teacher students' previous experiences and the effectiveness of teacher education will be discussed.

Previous research indicates that the language learning experiences FL teacher students bring with them to a teacher education program will have considerable impact on their decisions, for instance as regards teaching grammar, or factors influencing their possible inclusion of cultural components in their teaching (Borg, 2006). This previous experience is what Lortie (1975) refers to as the apprenticeship of observation. It consists of the accumulated experiences of FL teaching that the FL teacher students have been exposed to during their own years as pupils and students. Lortie argues that these experiences have a strong influence on the preconceptions about FL teaching that FL language teachers hold (cf. also Borg, 2004). Previous FL teaching experiences can be seen as one of the most ingrained components in Shulman's (1987) construct of pedagogical content knowledge. However, Shulman's concept has been criticized by some scholars, particularly in relation to language teaching (Freeman, 2002). One of the bases for criticizing the concept of pedagogical content knowledge has been its lack of detail and precision regarding the teacher's language awareness, a point addressed by Svalberg (2015, p. 529), who argues for a more precise category of "declarative knowledge about grammar (KAG)".

The effectiveness of teacher education as such has been brought under scrutiny by several scholars, see for instance Loughran (2006), Bronkhorst et al. (2014) and Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013). Beauchamp (2015; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) has written extensively on language teacher education among other things stating that language teacher education is seen as a period of transition and as a space where a (partly) new identity is being shaped. Johnson (2015, p. 516) adds further support to this notion when she states that learning how to teach a L2 is seen as "a dialogic process of co-constructing knowledge that is situated in and emerges out of participation in particular sociocultural practices and contexts".

Not least important regarding agency are the possible discrepancies that teachers may experience between their ideals regarding teaching and what actually happens in the classroom (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2011). This study is primarily concerned with FL teacher student cognition during a theoretical course of the pedagogical studies and the issues of potential discrepancies that are related to their experiences as language learners at school and at university. In the context of the present study it is assumed that the FL teacher students draw on their previous language learning experiences as well as on the course in language education theory. These two components form an important part of the FL teacher students' cognition base (see section 4.2).

2.5 Communicative competence, oral proficiency and grammar

The two facets of FL teaching and learning under investigation, oral proficiency and grammar, are understood to be included in communicative competence (CC). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) presents a topical holistic view of communicative competence consisting of a language learner's and user's general competences and communicative language competences (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 101–130). The user/learner also needs communicative language strategies (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 57–90). Regarding oral proficiency, it is to be noted that the comprehensive view of CC covers both written and oral proficiency, and hence there is no model of oral proficiency only. The present study aligns with CEFR and defines oral proficiency as "encompassing the ability to perform communicative language activities...whilst drawing upon both general and communicative language competences" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 32). Oral proficiency includes such aspects as fluency and accuracy in spoken production and interaction which are also referred to in the Swedish syllabi for modern languages (Skolverket, 2011a, 2011b).

Each of the three main components of the language user/learner's competences, i.e., general competences, communicative language competences and communicative language strategies, includes several sub-components. Communicative language competences consist of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. The present study is primarily concerned with linguistic competence, which in turn consists of lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological orthographic, and orthoepic competence (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 106–107). In the current study the focus is on grammatical competence, which refers to knowledge of, and ability to use, the grammatical resources of a language covering morphology and syntax.

3 Aim and research questions

The aim of the study is to describe and analyze FL teacher students' cognition with respect to two central facets of FL teaching, oral proficiency and grammar, and possible interrelationships between teaching and learning them. The study addresses these issues by analyzing reflective log texts that the students wrote as part of the requirements for a foundation course in language education theory. The specific research questions of the study are the following:

- What patterns of cognition and agency emerge in the FL teacher students' log texts with regard to teaching and learning oral proficiency?
- What patterns of cognition and agency emerge in the FL teacher students' log texts with regard to teaching and learning grammar?

4 The study

In the following, the participating students, the context of the study, the material and the method of analysis are presented.

4.1 Participating students and their educational context

The students in the current study were enrolled in a seven-week course in FL education as part of a bridging teacher education program. The course was taught over twelve seminars. The students all held either a BA or an MA in French, German, Italian or Spanish when they were admitted to the bridging teacher education program. This means that they had all finished their university level language studies in one or more foreign languages. For the present study 14 students from two student cohorts elected to take part (see Table 1). Of these, five had completed their schooling in Sweden, and nine had been to school in one or more countries outside of Sweden. As Table 1 shows, their age span ranges from c. 25 to c. 50. Three of the participants have another foreign language in their language combination.

Table 1. Student background variables.

Participant	Born	Language (combination)	Schooling in Sweden
Stina	1965	Spanish, English	Yes
Maria	1966	German	Yes
Sara	1968	Italian, English	No
Norma	1970	Spanish	No
Lena	1973	French	No
Bernt	1976	French	No
Peter	1982	Spanish	No
Jens	1983	German	No
Gustaf	1983	Spanish	Yes
Olle	1984	Spanish, English	Yes
Doris	1988	Spanish	Yes
Birgit	1988	Italian	No
David	1989	French	No
Tom	1992	Italian	No

The course from which the students were invited to take part in the study is a foundation course in FL education and covers the following thematic areas: steering documents for the Swedish school system, instructed second language acquisition and teaching, communicative competence, communicative language teaching, form-focused instruction, analysis of learner language output, and L2 assessment.

4.2 Data, design and analysis

The data used in the current analysis were taken from the Swedish material of the larger research project (see Section 1) and consist of reflective log texts written as part of the course requirements of the foundation course in FL education.

As an integral part of their course the FL teacher students write cumulative reflective log texts in Swedish. This is a course requirement, but since it is intended to be a reflective document the content of the log is not qualitatively assessed towards the final grade. After each seminar, the students were asked to reflect on an optional topic. The reflections were written in one consecutive Word document, and each entry was given a date and a title reflecting the main topic of

the entry. The students were encouraged to refer to their previous experiences as language learners at school and at university, any teaching experience they may have, the course literature, and the seminar discussions. After every third log entry they were asked to go back and read their previous log entries, and add a text where they critically reflect on any developments or changes in their views, thus contributing to the cumulative effect of their reflections. At the end of the course they were asked to write a meta-reflection on the entire process of writing. Thus the data for the present study consist of 1) the chronological log texts; 2) the critical reflections; and 3) the final meta-reflection.

Texts from two cohorts were used, totaling 14 teacher students who agreed to take part in the study. The text corpus for the present study consists of just under 80,000 words, averaging ca 5,700 words per student, and c. 475 words per log entry.

The FL teacher students wrote their log texts in Swedish, which was the language of instruction in the course. The students' log texts were transferred to a uniform format (Word). Each student was given a pseudonym. The sentence was used as the basic unit of analysis. The examples used in the present study were translated into English by one of the authors. The translations were validated by a native speaker of English who also has a command of Swedish. Qualitative content analysis (Creswell, 2014) was used, analytical procedures were applied in four distinct steps and the tokens were recorded in Excel according to the established categories.

- Initially and based on the two research questions that guided the analysis, two content categories, teaching and learning oral proficiency, teaching and learning grammar, were identified.
- Secondly, close, systematic and recursive reading resulted in a number of thematic areas related to the two content categories:
  - target language input and processing
  - proficiency development
  - language form
  - language function

- Thirdly, in order to identify the FL teacher students' cognition base, sentences containing references to the thematic areas were coded as follows:
  - FL learner experience: explicit references to previous experiences as a language learner at school or at university (Fleming et al., 2011; cf. also apprenticeship of observation, Lortie, 1975)
  - FL education studies: explicit references to the course literature or seminar discussions, and references to "common sense" knowledge or general attitudes towards language teaching and learning
  - FL teacher experience: explicit references to teaching experiences gained before entering the teacher education program.
- Finally, using the notion of agency (cf. Buchanan, 2015), and based on Ruohotie-Lyhty (2011), the FL teacher students' verbalized cognition about their own future work as teachers (future time, cf. Kiss, 2012) were coded as representing either opening or restricting agency in relation to the issues treated.

The researchers discussed the data and the establishment of categories during the process of analysis and a common ground was found. When examples were

chosen to represent the recurrent reflective patterns in the categories of analysis, the reflections of some of the students were more explicit than those of other students. Consequently, not all students are represented in the examples discussed in the following section.

5 Findings and interpretations

The findings are presented in two main sections based on the research questions: the FL teacher students' cognitions regarding teaching and learning oral proficiency, and teaching and learning grammar. Finally, the main findings are viewed in light of the FL teacher students' expressions of agency.

5.1 Teaching and learning oral proficiency

The first research question addresses the FL teacher students' cognitions regarding teaching and learning oral proficiency. Based on the major themes that emerged, the findings will be presented in two sections, the first concerning issues of target language input and processing. The second section addresses the issue of oral proficiency development.

5.1.1 Target language input and processing

One of the central themes to emerge in the area of oral proficiency is target language input, and one of the main concerns voiced in the log texts is that learners of the languages focused on in this study do not receive enough exposure to the target language to benefit proficiency development and that the exposure that does take place is largely confined to the classroom. Therefore the issue of teacher talk and student talk is one of the central topics in the log texts treating aspects of oral proficiency. Using the target language is generally regarded as something desirable (example 1), both from the teacher's and from the learner's perspective.

> **Example 1.**
> Finally I feel that I must admit that, although it feels completely self-evident now that I have thought about it, I was not at all aware of the importance of keeping to the target language in the lessons as much as possible, as Eriksson and Jacobsson point out. Olle.1.6

However, as Stina indicates in (example 2) and (example 3), there are challenges:

> **Example 2.**
> Both as a beginner language learner and as a substitute teacher in secondary school it has been necessary to use Swedish as the language of communication for teaching to take place at all. Stina 1.4

> **Example 3.**
> I am convinced that more complex explanations about grammar should be given in Swedish, as long as it is necessary for all students to be able to understand, which Joakim Stoltz points out in his article "Code Switch. On the role of L1 in teaching. Stina1.4

As indicated in examples 1–3, the teacher students rarely mention learner use of the target language. The perspective that comes out is the teacher's in the teaching situation, and the learners are constructed as recipients of the teacher's input rather than active producers of language themselves. In both example 2 and example 3 the students draw on experiences from their language education studies. However, depending on the current topic under discussion, the student in example 2 finds justification for using the L1 on certain occasions, possibly owing to her own previous experiences, whereas in example 3, the student seems to be influenced by the reading and expresses an understanding of the need to use the target language as much as possible. The student in example 4 has strong experience-based convictions and does not discuss the possible use of the L1.

Example 4.
> Personally I believe that the teacher should use the target language as much as possible in the classroom. Sara 1.6

Although it is not the purpose of the present analysis to provide systematic profiles of the students, some students displayed analytical thinking to a greater extent than others. One such student is Gustaf, who discusses the issue of oral input and teacher talk at some length. He does this in terms of quality rather than quantity and focuses on adjustment and adaptation. Gustaf's line of reasoning is captured in example 5.

Example 5.
> As an initial thought on this, it could seem obvious that the teacher must adjust his/her language (the target language) to the learners' level, primarily because you want the learners to understand what is being communicated. But on second thought, you could ask yourself the question if you are actually doing the learners a favor if you modify your language to their language ability (level). [...] In a study by Pica, Young and Doughty (in Tornberg, ch. 10) it says among other things that learners understand better what the teacher says if they have the opportunity to interrupt and ask about things that they have not understood than if the teacher from the beginning reformulates and makes extensive explanations using simpler language. Gustaf.1.6

Drawing on his language education studies, Gustaf questions his initial, experience-based claim by asking to what extent the teacher talk should actually be adapted. He refers to research that questions the assumptions that simplified language is beneficial to language proficiency development. Having proceeded a bit further into the course, Gustaf returns to the issue of teacher talk and use of target language. In example 6, he shows that he is aware of a possible contradiction in his own thought process.

Example 6.
> In contrast to my previous thoughts about the teacher using as much target language as possible in class, I would like to add that there are occasions where it could be more suitable for the teacher to use the L1 instead of the L2 when communicating with the learners. Gustaf.1.8

In example 6, he makes a connection to his quite extensive writing about grammar teaching (see below), and he concludes that depending on the contrastive distance between L1 and L2 regarding particular language structures it can sometimes be wise to use examples in L2 as well as L1 to highlight these contrasts. In other cases, where the contrastive differences are smaller, it would not be so imperative to use

L1 as a contrasting model. Gustaf also connects this discussion to individual learner factors, such as the learners' cognitive maturity and their proficiency level. Gustaf sees clear possibilities in this respect and he becomes quite concrete in his argumentation and suggests procedures where learners would get an opportunity to interact around tasks that involve highlighting contrastive differences between L1 and L2. In this way the communicative focus of the task becomes the contrastive elements themselves, and the use of certain grammatical structures is inferred (cf. task-based language teaching, Nunan, 2004). This procedure would then also be another example of the strong communicative and inductive approach to language teaching (Ellis, 2012) that Gustaf has opted for, although this is not explicitly stated in his log text.

5.1.2 Oral proficiency development

As stated above, the development of oral proficiency is a recurrent topic in all the FL teacher students' log texts. Their reflections suggest that they regularly see the development of oral proficiency as a result of activities that have another primary focus. One recurrent expression of this is the connection between an understanding on the teacher's part of how a language works and the learners' willingness to communicate, as in example 7:

> **Example 7.**
> Through a deeper understanding of how a language functions, it is possible to create safety for the students to dare to talk, and thus they will acquire the fluency which is stated as a central aim in the syllabus for modern languages. Tom.1.7

In example 7, the student makes a connection between the security gained by an understanding of how languages work (for instance, explicit knowledge of structure) and their willingness to use the language. Fluency development, as one aspect of proficiency, is seen as a more or less direct result of oral practice, and no need for explicit teaching is indicated (cf. Goh & Burns, 2012). However, not all students take the same view.

> **Example 8.**
> When I studied German in secondary school I remembered that at every lesson our German teacher had certain phrases and expressions that we were supposed to go through and practice, and every week a new phrase was added. She had these phrases on a piece of paper that she held up and we were supposed to ask/answer each other. Among other things we learnt how to ask the way and explain, different brands of ice cream and to order ice cream, ask the time, the price of something, etc. These were useful expressions that I still remember and that I used when I visited Berlin for the first time. Doris.1.6

In Littlewood's (2004, p. 322) terminology, the procedure suggested in example 8 could be classified as pre-communicative language practice. It does not transpire from the student's log text whether this teacher returned to these functions at a later stage and allowed the learners to use the phrases in more task-based authentic communication. However, given the student's final comment, it seems possible that she would consider using such a procedure in her own teaching.

5.2 Teaching and learning grammar

The second research question addresses the FL teacher students' cognitions regarding teaching and learning grammar. Based on the major themes that

emerged, the findings will be presented in two sections, the first concerning issues of explicit vs. implicit teaching and declarative vs. procedural knowledge. The second section addresses the issue of grammar teaching in relation to communicative competence and language proficiency development.

5.2.1 Explicit teaching and declarative knowledge

As regards the FL teacher students' reflections on aspects of teaching and learning grammar, two central themes stand out in the material: whether to teach grammar explicitly or implicitly, and tensions between declarative and procedural knowledge of grammar. In both themes the students' log texts suggest strong experience-based cognitions, irrespective of their stance. In the following, three students, Lena, Maria and Gustaf, are taken as examples of how strongly previous experiences influence current cognition patterns. Lena and Maria represent the majority of the teacher students in this study with a history of explicit grammar teaching, as exemplified in example 9 and example 10.

Example 9.
Being taught explicitly, that is through formal teaching of grammar is something that most of the learners thought was necessary and decisive for the final command of the language. Lena.1.7

Lena called one of her log entries "Grammar teaching: A dilemma"; it neatly sums up the cognitions revealed by all the students in this study. This dilemma is made even more pertinent in light of language education studies. Several log entries dealing with grammar include questions, which could be interpreted as a search for orientation and possibly a perceived lack of agency. In example 10, Lena voices a typical view:

Example 10.
So, the learners need to master the component parts of the language such as words, phrases, pronunciation, spelling and grammar. However, the role of grammar is not explicitly stated. What importance does grammar have in language teaching? How do teachers integrate grammar in their teaching without deviating from the communicative goals? Lena.1.7

Lena expresses a fairly strong conviction that language teaching should have "communicative goals", but she struggles as to how to incorporate the formal aspects of language in her teaching. She sees this kind of explicit knowledge as "necessary and decisive" – she refers to grammar as "the backbone" in another entry – to develop mastery of the language in question. As a learner in school, she was also expected to explain the "product of our learning", that is to state and describe the grammar rules. In her future profession as a language teacher, Lena struggles with a solution to this dilemma, the tensions between a strongly experienced and felt a need to develop the learners' explicit knowledge of grammar, based on her own schooling background, and the communicatively oriented goals of the syllabus in the context where she will be teaching. One way in which she tries to handle this tension is to regard declarative knowledge of grammar as a motivator, as seen in example 11, a solution also suggested by another student in example 12. This would be in line with social cognitive theories of motivation in language learning and self-efficacy (Oxford, 2017).

Example 11.
By mastering the grammar, the learner will gain a better understanding of words and sentences, which will lead to increased motivation. Lena.1.7

Example 12.
My personal experiences of grammar are so positive. Knowledge of the language structures gave (and gives) me security when I use the language, both orally and in writing. Maria.1.2

Gustaf's experiences when it comes to explicit grammar teaching and meta-talk about grammar go in the opposite direction. He has had positive experiences of learning English through communicative language teaching, but states that he later missed explicit grammar teaching when he encountered grammatical terminology in a context where he felt he was supposed to know it already (example 13).

Example 13.
I remember that I felt very stupid during my first lesson in Spanish (adult education) when the teacher started talking about how to conjugate verbs in Spanish and how they follow certain patterns. Gustaf 1.2

Gustaf's experiences as a FL learner were of a kind where very little or no explicit grammar teaching took place, but rather a focus on input-based teaching and oral communication. He assumes that such a lack of form-focused teaching may be a result of teachers' underestimating "the pupils' abilities to take in this type of knowledge". He adds that it could also be because the teachers themselves are not sure of how to teach these aspects of the language without making them too abstract or mechanical (see Svalberg, 2015). He adds a notable reflection on the experiences involved in studying his most recent language, Italian. It was during this time that he was taught grammar explicitly for the first time. This declarative knowledge he then found was highly useful, as seen in example 14.

Example 14.
So I was able to understand structures and grammar in Italian relatively quickly, but my ability to use them, above all in speech, took a little longer time to develop. Gustaf.1.4

As is shown in example 14, Gustaf's grammatical knowledge of Italian developed rapidly, but his procedural knowledge lagged behind. This suggests an awareness of the value of developing both declarative and procedural knowledge, and is in line with current recommendations in guidelines for instructed second language acquisition (Ellis, 2012).

5.2.2 Grammar in relation to communicative competence and language proficiency development

The final area addressed in this section concerns the FL teacher students' conceptions of teaching grammar in a communicative paradigm to further language proficiency development. The general pattern that emerges is that grammatical form takes precedence over communicative function. The views and thoughts expressed in example 15 illustrate the situation.

Example 15.
I think that you can alleviate the learning processes by mixing explicit grammar teaching and pointing out instances in texts, and by production where the learner needs to use [the structures] that have been presented. Bernt.1.8

The procedure outlined in example 15 is very close to the deductive present-practice-produce formula, originally framed by Byrne (1986), and widely

advocated as a reliable way of organizing language teaching (Anderson, 2016). It represents a way for the FL teacher students in the present study to accommodate two needs of structure: the need to teach in a structured manner, and the need to accommodate language structure.

From the log texts it is also clear that students are struggling to reconcile conflicting views of language – normative, structuralistic views of language vs. functional and communicative views. The former set of views are typically associated with a prescriptive and/or academic approach to teaching grammar (Svalberg, 2015), whereas the latter views are more representative of current trends in language education, where such aspects as interlanguage and communicative strategies are important. Interestingly, although the theoretical course dealt with the latter concepts, students' reflections towards the end of the course are still clearly characterized by a structural or formalistic view. The student Maria puts it like this in example 16:

Example 16.
> In Spanish, basic grammar, for example verb forms, have to be present from the beginner's level, since Spanish puts pronouns and verbs together, and consequently, you need to know this in order to communicate an action and the person who does the action. This knowledge is necessary in order to start using the Spanish language. Maria.2.2

She goes on to state that "during my studies of Spanish, both as a beginner and at advanced levels, the study of form has been crucial for me in order to be able to make myself understood when it came to production or interaction" (Maria.2.2). The student's own language learning experience clearly influences her current beliefs and reported classroom practices.

Maria discusses the relationship between communicative teaching and communicative goals. Referring to steering documents and to the course literature she expresses frustration over a situation that does not agree with her own cognitions: communication is important and "grammar should not be separated from communication". However, to Maria, teaching that addresses grammar features "when they turn up in the communicative exercises" would be chaotic. In this statement she explicitly targets the learners. It would be chaotic for them, not necessarily for Maria as the teacher. It can be assumed here that her conclusion is based on her own strong cognitions, based on very positive experiences from her own time as a learner. Explicitly, Maria justifies her line of reasoning by referring to a sub-conscious process where young learners try to organize input and look for structure on all linguistic levels. Older learners, she claims, have developed the cognitive capacity, and a willingness, to talk about these matters. Hence, there are no reasons to "avoid such questions". However, at the end of this passage she acknowledges the possible importance of her own background as an analytically-minded linguist. She does not address the pedagogical challenges that might arise with students who are not analytical linguists.

Gustaf shares a similar background with Lena and Maria, having had a lot of explicit grammar teaching in his L1 in school. However, at the time he "did not know or understand if it would come in useful". In relation to his future teaching he states that since many learners "hate grammar" it is best to teach it as implicitly as possible initially but then proceed to more explicit teaching. Gustaf, too, connects grammar teaching with motivation. In the teaching unit plan that the students construct as part of their course work Gustaf had "expected criticism from the teacher" because the lesson plan mentioned grammar already in

connection with the initial instructions to the learners. This suggests that Gustaf is struggling with the content and general philosophy of the course (which is to problematize the relationship between accuracy/fluency, form-focused instruction vs. meaning-focused instruction, etc., and to make the students see that the various components of language teaching are all integrated), and his own views of language proficiency. However, later in the same log text he conducts a discussion where he brings up possible consequences of explicit vs. implicit teaching in that he assumes that if the students had been taught the structure in question explicitly from the start, the ensuing discussion/conversation task – to talk about what they had done during the weekend – would probably have focused more on the past tense verb forms than on the message/content. This would be adequately in line with Ellis (2012). Gustaf describes the situation in terms of bottom-up and top-down, and concludes that it is the teacher's goal with the respective exercise or task that will influence the choice of classroom procedure.

One misconception that comes out in Gustaf's text and which could possibly explain the frustration and confusion experienced by many FL teacher students is the fact that teaching grammar is not explicitly mentioned in the Swedish steering documents as part of content or in the knowledge requirements. One of the underlying aspects that could influence such a position is that the teacher students themselves have not been taught foreign languages in an explicitly integrated (communicative) way. Instead they see the different facets of L2 competence as separate components, both in terms of knowledge storage and in terms of teaching. Such an analytic stance to language could account for the challenges that the teacher students perceive when it comes to teaching grammar as a component in a communicative paradigm.

Several students repeatedly return to the issue of teaching grammar during their log writing. The relative space given to this topic is in itself indicative of the importance that the students attach to this, and also to the tensions that they experience between what their cognitions tell them (based on previous experiences), the theory they meet during the course, and the seminar discussions. Gustaf returns for a third time to these questions and again he chooses to write about how to make the students understand linguistic structures. His particular concern this time is how to make declarative knowledge procedural knowledge. The alternatives he discusses are deductive vs. inductive grammar teaching. The conclusion he draws is that the inductive approach is preferable, since it allows the learners to formulate their own assumptions about the structures and then to ask questions. Implicitly, he suggests that the teacher should withhold grammatical explanations until the learners signal that they are ready for them by asking questions.

Gustaf writes about grammar teaching largely within an opening discourse frame. He acknowledges the difficulties and possibilities but he also tries to compare various approaches. Based on these verbalisations he draws conclusions and comes to a decision about which approach he prefers. In addition, Gustaf also becomes quite concrete in his discussions in that he suggests and discusses classroom procedures where he outlines how the preferred approach can be realized.

5.3 FL teacher students' agency

The findings presented in this study agree with Fleming et al. (2011, p. 40) and the claim that a commonsense attitude about foreign language teaching assumes

that explicit knowledge "stands at the core of what has been defined as good pedagogy" (see also Johnson, 2015). The findings are summarized in Table 2. With regard to oral proficiency, FL teacher students' cognitions are vague and individual. Furthermore, it is clear that previous language learner experiences are important, but the FL teacher students also show an inclination to take into consideration the theoretical frameworks and principles for teaching oral proficiency. In other words, their language education studies constitute a notable contribution to their cognition base, and in terms of agency (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2011), the teacher students' log writing about their future world as FL teachers indicated more opening than restricting views (cf. Kiss, 2012).

Table 2. FL teacher students' agency.

Case	Cognition base	Agency
Oral proficiency	FL learner experience	**Opening**
	FL education studies	
	(FL teacher experience)	Restricting
Grammar	**FL learner experience**	Opening
	FL education studies	
	(FL teacher experience)	**Restricting**

As regards grammar, the findings indicate strong influences from the FL teacher students' previous language learner experiences, which in most cases consisted of explicit grammar teaching. Their log texts positioned explicit teaching of grammar as an almost universally necessary prerequisite to develop communicative competence, and references to the course literature presenting alternative views were met with scepticism or an inability to reconcile an apparent conflict between declarative and procedural knowledge. In line with this, the FL teacher students' projections about themselves as future teachers were more clearly restricting than opening.

6 Discussion and implications

The current study concerns a less researched area of teacher students' cognition: oral proficiency and grammar regarding French, German, Italian and Spanish in a Swedish educational context. The use of a reflective approach makes the research link in to studies focusing on other foreign languages using the same approach.

If the two aspects investigated in this study – teaching and learning oral proficiency and grammar – are taken together, the findings suggest that the FL teacher students struggle when it comes to integrating formal aspects and communicative competence. If the students have a learning history that is characterized by the grammar-translation method they find it hard to "let go" of the focus on declarative knowledge and accuracy. If, on the other hand, the students have a learning history characterized by communicative language teaching with an emphasis on input, language use and interaction in the target language with more attention on content than form (cf. Gustaf, above), they find it difficult to implement form-focused instruction without making it a separate strand of teaching (see Ellis, 2012). In sum, none of the students in the present study outright rejected the importance of developing oral proficiency, and none of them rejected the importance of a balanced focus on form. The problems arose in their thinking

about how to combine the two. One possible explanation to this dilemma could be found in the very fundamental issue of the students' views of language and language proficiency (cf. Harjanne & Tella, 2007, 2009). If the students regard the structural aspects of the language they are going to teach as just that – structures that the learners have to internalize in order to be able to use the language – then it could indeed be argued that they are facing a considerable dilemma. Svalberg (2015) argues for a distinction between the traditional academic view of language analysis based on formal and structural properties, and a functional view where grammar is seen as complex and dynamic. She takes systemic functional grammar as one theoretical framework where this view is exploited, and where meaning is central. Thus "semantics and pragmatics are not separated from the grammar but are interacting and interdependent levels of realization" (Svalberg, 2015, p. 531). Svalberg (2015) argues that the type of knowledge language teachers need should include grammatical meta-language and a set of descriptive rules and, importantly, in addition to this also an awareness of the linguistic choices a speaker has in a particular context. According to Svalberg (2015), this type of functional knowledge of the language is largely absent from language teachers' minds, and the findings of the present study confirm this.

As has been seen, the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) weighs quite heavily on the FL teacher students. However, the findings also indicate openness when it comes to acknowledging the value of theories of language learning and language pedagogy, at least in theory. Several students indicated in their log texts that they are anxious to teach language in a communicative way, but at the same time their lack of precision when it comes to envisioning how such teaching could be organized if it is not done from a grammatical syllabus is striking. In the terms of Bronkhorst et al. (2014, p. 74) it is possible to talk about this resistance not as "something that impedes learning", but as something that FL teacher educators have to spend time on in order to engage in a "dialogic and potentially exploratory process" with the teacher students. One way of facilitating this process is to use reflective log texts where the teacher students enter into conversation with themselves concerning these issues, and the analysis of the texts also supports the assumption that writing reflective texts can aid the student's cognitive processes by offering an arena for accessing the "inner life" of language teaching. Thus one of the aims of FL teacher education would be to enable the teacher students to create a nexus between their understanding of communicative language teaching and teaching of grammar (Svalberg, 2015) in the form of a knowledge about grammar that has pedagogical relevance. As Beauchamp (2015) points out there is a substantial body of both theoretical and empirical research that questions the validity of reflection in teacher education in general. Most of this criticism relates to the assumptions made by Schön (1987) about the possible effects that reflection can have on practice. The present study makes no such claims. However, in line with Borg (2006) and Harjanne, Reunamo and Tella (2015), we would make an argument for its usefulness in laying bare areas of (potential) conflict between cognitions and projected practice among FL teacher students.

As with all studies there are limitations to the present investigation. The inclusion of interviews would have further deepened our understanding of these phenomena, and data collection over a still longer period of time would also have captured further processes of change in the FL teacher students' thinking. These are issues that can be addressed in future research. However, based on our results we would make a strong case for the inclusion of recursive reflective writing in FL teacher education as a way of capturing and eventually reconciling conflicting knowledge bases and their impact on teacher agency.

Endnotes

1 Tore Nilsson is the main author of the text, and is also mainly responsible for data collection, analysis and interpretation. Pirjo Harjanne has worked with data analysis and interpretation and has contributed extensively to the text revision process. Pernilla Rosell Steuer prepared the presentation at the TAL conference 2016 at Lund University that formed the first step in the project and has contributed to initial data analysis and interpretation.
2 In the current Swedish syllabi (Skolverket, 2011a, 2011b), French, German, Italian and Spanish, are subsumed under the label 'modern languages'.

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