

TRAINING IN DICTIONARY USE:

A teaching intervention in a 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL classroom in Finland

Bachelor's thesis

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Sanakirjat ovat tärkeä apukeino vieraan kielen sanaston oppimisessa, sillä ne tarjoavat oppijalle paljon tietoa kohdekielen sanastosta sekä auttavat tätä itsenäisessä opiskelussa. Aiempi tutkimus on tarkastellut mm. kielenoppijoiden tarkkuutta sanakirjan käytössä sekä sanakirjan käytön vaikutuksia sanaston oppimiseen ja luetun ymmärtämiseen. Alkeis- ja keskitason kielenoppijoiden sanakirjan käyttöä sekä opetuksen vaikutusta sanakirjan käyttöön on kuitenkin tutkittu melko vähän. Tämä kandidaatintutkielma keskittyi selvittämään, miten opetus sanakirjan käytössä auttaa peruskoulun 9. luokan oppilaita käyttämään englanti-suomi-sanakirjoja luetunymmärtämistehtävää tehdessä.

Tutkimusta varten suunniteltiin opetuskokeilu, jossa yhdelle peruskoulun 9. luokan opetusryhmälle pidettiin oppitunti sanakirjan käytöstä. Oppitunnin jälkeen tämä ryhmä teki luetunymmärtämistehtävän, jonka yhteydessä mitattiin heidän sanakirjankäyttötaitojaan. Kontrolliryhmä teki saman tehtävän ilman aiempaa opetusta, ja näiden kahden ryhmän tuloksia vertailtiin. Opetusta saanut ryhmä osoitti pystyvänsä käyttämään sanakirjaa hieman tehokkaammin kuin kontrolliryhmä ja oppilaat vaikuttivat olevan tietoisempia mahdollisista vaikeuksista sanakirjan käytössä. Lisäksi useampi opetustuokioon osallistunut oppilas raportoi käyttäneensä erilaisia strategioita etsiessään sanoja sanakirjasta.

Asiasanat: sanakirjat, kielet, englannin kieli, opetus, kokeilu

dictionaries, languages, English language, teaching, experiment

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The acquisition of foreign language vocabulary has been an important area in second language acquisition research in the last decades. Autonomous learning strategies have also been a point of interest for many researchers in the field since the late 1970's. Language learners' dictionary use can be seen as a crossing point of these two areas of research: on one hand, dictionary use is a tool for learning vocabulary, while, on the other, it is also a strategy employed in the comprehension, production and learning of a foreign language. This makes it an interesting phenomenon for researchers, teachers and lexicographers alike.

Language learners' dictionary use has been studied from various perspectives. For example, studies have focused on the accuracy of learners' dictionary use (Nesi and Hail 2002; Gonzalez 1999), on the effect of dictionary use on vocabulary learning and reading comprehension (Knight 1994), and on the effectiveness of different types of dictionaries (Laufer and Hadar 1997). Knight (1994:290–292) discovered that using a dictionary while reading a text in the target language improved both the learning of vocabulary and the comprehension of the text. Thus, dictionary use seems to be beneficial for learners. Nevertheless, language learners' dictionary use can also be somewhat problematic: the results of the studies conducted by Nesi and Hail (2002) and Gonzalez (1999) suggest that even advanced learners make mistakes when using dictionaries.

Previous research in the field has, however, tended to focus on the dictionary use of relatively proficient language learners, often disregarding the dictionary use of beginners or intermediate learners. Moreover, many studies have been concerned with the use of monolingual rather than bilingual dictionaries, and little information is available on the effects of training on dictionary use. The present study attempts to fill this void by investigating the effects of training on Finnish 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL learners' dictionary use in the context of a reading comprehension task. The paper presents a short training session in the use of a bilingual dictionary, reports on the effects of the training on the participants' dictionary use, and describes the difficulties encountered by these intermediate EFL learners when looking up words in a dictionary.

## **2 DICTIONARIES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING**

Dictionaries provide learners with access to a vast amount of information about words and their usage. Using dictionaries can be seen as an explicit strategy of learning foreign language vocabulary or as a communication strategy: with the help of a dictionary, a language learner can, for instance, check the spelling, pronunciation and constraints of usage of a familiar word or search

meanings for unfamiliar words. In the following five sections, I shall examine the position of dictionary use in foreign language teaching and present various studies about language learners' dictionary use.

## 2.1 Perceptions of dictionary use in the foreign language classroom

Over the past few decades, researchers and language teachers have taken different views of explicit vocabulary learning in foreign language classrooms. Sökmen (1997:239) discusses the shift in the emphasis of vocabulary learning and teaching: "The pendulum has swung from direct teaching of vocabulary (the grammar translation method) to incidental (the communicative approach) and now, laudably, back to the middle: implicit and explicit learning." As dictionary use clearly requires explicit attention to words and their usage, these different approaches have also affected the extent to which dictionary use has been encouraged in class.

There have been several reasons to discourage dictionary use in foreign language classrooms: for instance, it has been seen as inhibiting learners from developing important skills, such as guessing from context. Moreover, careless dictionary use may sometimes cause grave errors. (Thornbury 2002:60.) These might lead teachers to think that dictionaries are not at all helpful in language learning. Nevertheless, there is evidence of the usefulness of dictionaries in the learning of foreign language vocabulary. A study conducted by Knight (1994) on intermediate level learners of Spanish showed that using a dictionary while reading increased vocabulary learning and reading comprehension, as opposed to merely guessing from context.

It can also be argued that even the incidental learning of vocabulary, which has been promoted in the communicative approach, has its limitations: it is quite a slow and error-prone process of acquiring vocabulary and does not necessarily lead to long-term word retention (Sökmen 1997:237–238). It is, therefore, reasonable to propose the use of both, explicit and implicit, vocabulary learning strategies, in order to get the best of both worlds. Scholfield (1997:296) suggests that a combination of inferring and dictionary look-up may be the best for the long-term retention of vocabulary. According to Nation (2001:296), vocabulary learning as a whole should include meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output and fluency development in approximately equal proportions. Dictionary use can be seen as a type of language-focused learning, and thus has its role in foreign language vocabulary acquisition. In conclusion, dictionary use and other more implicit strategies of learning vocabulary should rather be seen as complementary approaches than as opposed or competing ones.

Finland's National Core Curriculum (Opetushallitus 2004:139–140) advocates dictionary use in foreign language teaching. It mentions dictionary use as one of the language learning strategies that should be mastered as early as in the primary education. In the National Core Curriculum (Opetushallitus 2004:139–140), the dictionary is listed as one of the means for finding information about the target language, alongside with the textbook, and as an efficient language learning strategy.

## 2.2 Different types of dictionaries: advantages and disadvantages

It has been discussed what kinds of dictionaries would be the best for language learners. The three main categories are monolingual, bilingual and bilingualised dictionaries. While **monolingual dictionaries** have the headword, definitions, examples and other information in the target language, the **bilingual** ones provide the meaning of a word in another, normally the user's native language. **Bilingualised dictionaries**, on the other hand, offer both of these options: the information of a monolingual dictionary in the target language and a translation of the head word (Nation 2001:290). It needs to be pointed out that there are also differences within these categories. For instance, monolingual dictionaries may be directed to beginner, intermediate or advanced learners of the language, or to native speakers. In all the categories, there are also specialised dictionaries that include vocabulary from a specific field, such as medicine or information technology.

Bilingual dictionaries have been criticised for encouraging the idea of a one-to-one relationship between the words of the target language and those of the mother tongue, and for providing little information on the usage of words (Nation 2001:289–290). However, as Nation (2001:290–294) points out, there are also many advantages in using a bilingual dictionary: the meaning of a word is easy to understand even for a beginner and the dictionary can also be used when writing or speaking in the target language. When using a monolingual dictionary one has to take into account that usually a vocabulary of at least 2,000 words is required of the user in order to understand the definitions.

A study by Laufer and Hadar (1997:195) on preadvanced and advanced EFL learners indicated that unskilled dictionary users performed better in comprehension and production when using a bilingual dictionary, as opposed to using a monolingual one. In the group of good dictionary users the results were the opposite: monolingual dictionary entries were more effective than the bilingual ones. The study also measured the usefulness of a bilingualised dictionary, which was found to be the most effective aid for all groups.

Various studies have proved that language learners themselves often prefer bilingual dictionaries. For example, Atkins and Varantola (1998:43) found out in their survey study on European EFL learners that the majority of the respondents preferred to use a bilingual dictionary rather than a monolingual one both for understanding unfamiliar words when reading in English (61%) and for finding an English word that corresponds to a word in the mother tongue (87%). However, in order to check the correct use of an English word, a small majority (54%) would prefer a monolingual dictionary. Findings in Schmitt's (1997:219) survey study on Japanese EFL learners were similar: 85% of the respondents said they used bilingual dictionaries, while only 35% claimed to use monolingual ones.

It seems, based on the research results cited above, that both mono- and bilingual dictionaries are needed in foreign language learning. While bilingual dictionaries may be the best for beginners, and perhaps for intermediate-level learners as well, the monolingual ones usually provide more detailed information needed at the advanced level. When translating from the mother tongue to the target language, bilingual dictionaries often continue to be the preferred option regardless of the learner's level.

### 2.3 The effectiveness of language learners' dictionary use and problems encountered

When studying the ways in which second language learners use dictionaries, researchers have made use of questionnaires, analyses of filmed recordings, observation of dictionary use and flow charts filled out after using a dictionary (Nation 2001:282). Studies have often been concerned with what kinds of dictionaries learners use, and how successful their vocabulary searches are (for example Atkins and Varantola 1998; Gonzalez 1999; Nesi and Haill 2002). Nation (2001:283) points out that there is a notable lack of studies about the dictionary use of less-proficient learners.

In a study conducted by Nesi and Haill (2002), 89 international students at a British university were asked to choose five unknown lexical items in a text of their choice and look them up in a dictionary. The results of the study showed that 83.6% of the word searches were successful (Nesi and Haill 2002:282). In a similar study on the dictionary use of ESL students at the City University of New York approximately 79% of the entries looked up by the students provided acceptable definitions (Gonzalez 1999:268). In summary, one might say that the dictionary searches of these proficient adult learners of English were fairly successful. It needs to be pointed out, however, that even experienced language learners make mistakes when looking for word meanings in a dictionary.

Nesi and Hail (2002:282–283) discovered in their analysis of the dictionary search errors that, out of the total of 65 look-up failures, the subject could not find the correct entry or sub-entry in 34 cases. Only eight look-up failures were due to the fact that the word or the appropriate meaning was not included in the dictionary consulted. 23 look-up failures were due to the fact that the subject failed to recognise the word class of the look-up word. In other cases the subjects often accepted the first definition given for a polysemous word, even when it was not appropriate in the context. Nesi and Hail (2002:285) state that these errors “were largely due to the subjects’ lack of dictionary-using skills”.

## 2.4 Skills needed for effective dictionary use

Researchers often make a distinction between two ways of using dictionaries: **receptive use**, i.e. checking the meaning(s) of an unknown word encountered in L2 reading or listening, and **productive use**, which aims at finding the appropriate word or expression when writing or speaking in the target language (Nation 2001, Scholfield 1997 and Thornbury 2002). Scholfield (1997:286) further distinguishes two kinds of lexical problems encountered in production. Either the learner needs to find an unknown L2 word for the meaning he/she wants to convey or some aspect of a familiar L2 word needs to be checked: this may involve looking at a word’s spelling, pronunciation, grammatical features, stylistic value or typical collocates. While a monolingual dictionary can easily be used for receptive purposes and for finding more information about familiar L2 vocabulary, bilingual dictionaries and thesauri are often considered easier to use when searching for words that are unknown in the target language.

Nation (2001:285–288) identifies four distinct steps in both the receptive and productive use of dictionaries. The receptive use involves analysing the context of the unknown word, finding the correct entry, choosing the right sub-entry, and applying the meaning to the original context in order to decide if the search was successful. All these steps require individual skills, such as recognising word classes and inflected forms, alphabetising, and understanding the symbols and lay-out conventions of the dictionary. Quite different steps are involved when looking up words for productive purposes: these include finding the wanted word form, checking the constraints on the use of the word and finding out about its grammar and collocations.

Thornbury (2002:152) also presents a list of key skills needed for effective dictionary use. These include recognising features of dictionary layout; understanding the coding and abbreviations used in the entries; discriminating between the different meanings of a word; cross-checking translation equivalents given in bilingual dictionaries; using synonyms, antonyms and other information to find



the best word for the intended meaning; and inferring the spelling of an unfamiliar word after hearing it.

Some skills are mentioned by both Nation (2001:285–288) and Thornbury (2002:152), such as knowing the symbols, abbreviations and lay-out conventions used in dictionaries and being able to use synonyms, opposite or related words for finding the correct word. However, the emphases are different: while Nation (2001:285–288) outlines the dictionary search process as a series of steps and clearly distinguishes between receptive and productive use, Thornbury (2002:152) pays more attention to the use of a bilingual dictionary and to the receptive use based on hearing.

## 2.5 Training language learners in dictionary use

Supporting learner independence has been considered important in foreign language teaching for some decades. Various researchers underline the importance of training language learners in strategies that help them acquire vocabulary independently (see for example O’Dell 1997, Sökmen 1997). Thornbury (2002:151) suggests that instruction in dictionary use can be regarded as a way of promoting learner autonomy, since it provides a possibility to continue word acquisition outside the formal study of the language. Moreover, it may help learners understand and produce texts with specialised vocabulary that is not usually taught in class.

Dictionaries seem to be quite popular among EFL learners. Schmitt (1997:219) discovered in his survey study of Japanese EFL learners that using a bilingual dictionary was the most popular vocabulary learning strategy, with 85 % of the respondents claiming to use one. The figure was somewhat higher than that of other strategies used to discover the meaning of an unknown word: guessing from context was the second most important strategy with 74% support.

In spite of the importance of providing foreign language learners with means to acquire vocabulary independently, and in spite of the popularity of dictionaries among learners, there seems to be a notable lack in dictionary training. Atkins and Varantola (1998) conducted a large survey study that involved EFL learners from seven European countries. The majority of the respondents (60%) had not been instructed in dictionary use at all, and only 14% had received systematic training (Atkins and Varantola 1998:27). In addition, as Nation (2001:283) points out, there has been little research on the effects of training on language learners’ dictionary use.

### 3 THE PRESENT STUDY

#### 3.1 Research question

Dictionary use is an important strategy in the explicit learning of foreign language vocabulary, as it provides learners with an opportunity to learn and use the target language independently. Moreover, the vast amount of vocabulary knowledge that dictionaries offer and their popularity among learners should not be disregarded. For these reasons it seems important that learners be trained in dictionary use.

The purpose of the present study is to examine the effects of training on Finnish 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL learners' dictionary use in the context of a reading comprehension task. This way, the paper aims to shed light on two areas that have not been investigated extensively: the effects of training on dictionary use and the dictionary use of less-proficient language learners. The study concentrates on the use of a bilingual dictionary, and the effects of the training are examined from three points of view:

1. The accuracy of the participants' dictionary look-ups
2. The participants' perceptions on the use of the dictionary when doing the reading comprehension task
3. The participants' reports on the procedure followed when searching words in the dictionary

#### 3.2 Data collection

A teaching experiment was designed to collect data for the study. The experiment was carried out at a secondary school in South-eastern Finland in February 2010. Two 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes were chosen for the study on the basis of teacher recommendation. At the time of the study, the participants had studied English as a foreign language at school for approximately six years with two to three 45-minute lessons per week.

One of the classes was randomly assigned to participate in a 45-minute training session on the use of a bilingual dictionary. After the training, their dictionary skills were tested. The other class functioned as a control group (N=23): these pupils did not receive training but took the same test as the training group (N=15). Strictly speaking, a control group design like the one described above does not allow for measuring the effect of a teaching intervention, as no comparison is made between the skills of the training group before and after the training session. However, in this

particular case the two groups were similar enough to make judgements on the effects of the training quite reliable: the pupils in both groups had studied English for the same period of time in similar conditions and their teacher estimated the groups to have approximately the same level of English. Moreover, a pre-test post-test design would have required careful examination of the texts used in the test to assure the comparability of the results. In the research design developed for this study the same reading comprehension task could be used for both groups, thus securing that the participants had to engage in the same vocabulary.

Nation's (2001:284–287) description of the skills involved in dictionary use was used as a model for the training session. The training focused on the use of a bilingual dictionary, as they were available at the participants' school and are most likely to be used by the pupils at home as well. *English–Finnish general dictionary* (Hurme et al. 1992) was used as an example during the training, and the participants could practise dictionary searches with it. The following steps were highlighted in the dictionary lesson:

1. changing the word into its basic form
2. guessing the meaning of the word
3. evaluating the necessity of the dictionary look-up
4. finding the entry according to alphabetical order
5. reading the entire entry
6. dividing the word into smaller parts if the whole word cannot be found
7. testing the meaning found in the dictionary in the word's original context.

The words and dictionary entries used as examples in the training did not appear in the test-questionnaire. The text used for practice in the training lesson and the text that appeared in the test-questionnaire were on different topics, so that the training group could not have the advantage of having been familiarised with the vocabulary of the test-questionnaire.

A test-questionnaire (appendices 1 and 2) was designed for the collection of data. In the test-section (appendices 1 and 2: part A and questions 1 and 2 in part B), the participants were asked to read a short text, answer three multiple-choice questions about it, write down the number of words looked up in a dictionary while reading, and provide explanations or translation equivalents in Finnish for three of the look-up words. Because of the lack of time for filling in the test-questionnaire (45 min.), the pupils could not be asked to write down all dictionary searches. The text for the reading comprehension task was taken from a Finnish EFL textbook for the upper secondary school (Daffue-Karsten et al. 2005:37). Therefore, it was likely to provide vocabulary that was challenging

enough to make dictionary look-ups necessary for the participants. The multiple-choice questions tested how well the pupils had understood the text. The answers to these questions were not, however, used as data in the study. Instead, the purpose of the questions was to assure that the pupils at least tried to achieve a certain level of comprehension of the text and, as a consequence, needed to use the dictionary provided for them.

In the questionnaire-section (appendices 1 and 2: questions 3–6 in part B), the pupils were asked about the usefulness of the dictionary in the task, and whether it was easy for them to find information in the dictionary. The final question in the test was about the participants' dictionary look-up procedure. The purpose of these questions was to investigate the learners' perceptions of dictionary use in the task and the way in which they had used the dictionary. In addition, the training group was asked to evaluate the usefulness of the training session, so two different questionnaire sheets were designed: the training group's questionnaire (appendix 1) included three questions about the training session, while the control group's test (appendix 2) did not have these questions. Otherwise the test-questionnaires were identical. All the questions and directions in the test-questionnaire were in Finnish, apart from the questions in the reading comprehension section. The participants' most recent grade in English was asked as background information.

### 3.3 The analysis

The two groups' answers to the test-questionnaire were compared to see the effects of the training session on the accuracy of the participants' dictionary look-ups and on their perceptions about dictionary use in the reading comprehension task. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in the analysis of the data. The qualitative approach complements the quantitative analysis by providing a deeper insight into the data, especially when the sample of the study is small. In the present study, information could be gathered not only about the number of the students that found dictionary use easy, but also about the reasons that made it difficult for some students.

First, the average of the total number of words looked up in the dictionary was calculated for both groups. Then, the dictionary look-ups recorded by the participants were evaluated according to whether the Finnish equivalents were appropriate in the context of the reading comprehension text. The percentage of accurate dictionary look-ups was calculated for both groups. Questions 3 and 4 in part B and questions 1-3 in part C required the participants to answer in the Likert scale. The responses to these questions were analysed quantitatively as well as the responses to the sixth question in part B (*Which of the following statements describe your way to use the dictionary in this task?*).

The fifth question in part B of the test-questionnaire (*What was difficult for you when using the dictionary?*) was an open format question. The participants' answers to this question were analysed thematically and divided into categories that reflected different types of problems encountered in the dictionary look-up process. The number of answers in each category was counted for each group in order to see possible differences between the answers of the training group and the control group.

## 4 THE PARTICIPANTS' DICTIONARY SEARCHES

### 4.1 The accuracy of the dictionary searches

The pupils were asked to write down the total number of words looked up in the dictionary while doing the reading comprehension task. The average of the words looked up by the training group was 4.7 words, while in the control group the average was a little higher: 5.7 words. In the control group the variation in the number of look-up words was also greater: three pupils had not searched any words in the dictionary, while one participant had looked up as many as 19 words. In the training group the number varied from 0 to 11 words. One reason for this difference could be that in the dictionary training session it was emphasised that the necessity of knowing the exact meaning of a particular word should be evaluated rather than searching all unknown words in the dictionary.

The participants were provided with space to write down three of the words they had looked up with the Finnish equivalents found in the bilingual dictionary. The pupils could choose which words to write down. However, some pupils, having looked up fewer than three words, wrote down only the words they had looked up. As a result, the total number of dictionary searches recorded by the training group was 38. The control group documented altogether 56 dictionary searches. The accuracy of these dictionary searches was evaluated according to whether the Finnish equivalents were appropriate in the context in which the English words appeared. Examples of dictionary searches that were considered inappropriate include 'ministeriö' for *government* in "*the present government is expected to apologise for this policy*" (no particular field of government was mentioned in the text), 'pitää huolta' for *foster* in "*children were -- given to white foster families*" and 'sulattaa' for *assimilate* in "*The aim was to assimilate the children into Australian society*". Using this criterion, 30 of the training group's dictionary look-ups were successful, yielding a 78.9% success rate. The control group recorded 38 successful dictionary searches, with a 64.3% success rate. When the results of the two groups are combined, the success rate of the dictionary searches was 70.2% (94 words were recorded in total and 66 of these look-ups were considered correct).

These results suggest that dictionary training did, in fact, improve the participants' dictionary skills. However, it must be noted that statistically relevant results could not be achieved by studying such a small sample of dictionary look-ups. The success rate of the dictionary look-ups analysed in the present study is somewhat lower than that of earlier studies: Nesi and Hail (2002) reported of success rates as high as 83.6%, while 79% of the dictionary searches recorded by Gonzalez's (1999) participants were successful. Comparing those studies with the present one is, however, somewhat problematic, as they were conducted on more advanced learners of English in an English-speaking environment. Moreover, mostly monolingual dictionaries were used in both studies, while in the present study the learners used bilingual dictionaries.

#### 4.2 The helpfulness of dictionary use

After reading the text and writing down three dictionary look-ups, the participants were asked to evaluate the helpfulness of the dictionary in the task (question 3 in appendices 1 and 2). This question was answered on Likert scale *a great deal–somewhat–little–not at all*. The answers of the two groups can be seen in table 1.

**Table 1.** *Sanakirjan käyttäminen auttoi tämän tehtävän tekemisessä.* ('Using the dictionary helped me to do this task.')

	Training group		Control group		Total	
A great deal	2	13.3 %	4	18.2 %	6	16.2 %
Somewhat	6	40 %	11	50 %	17	45.9 %
Little	6	40 %	4	18.2 %	10	27.0 %
Not at all	1	6.7 %	3	13.6 %	4	10.8 %
Total:	15		22		37	

It can be seen in the table that a bigger percentage of the control group respondents perceived dictionary use as helpful than in the training group, with altogether 68.2% of the control group respondents stating that dictionary use had helped them 'a great deal' or 'somewhat'. In the training group only 53.3% of the participants were as positive about the helpfulness of the dictionary use as the control group respondents. There are several possible reasons to account for the fact that the control group regarded dictionary use as more helpful than the training group. Firstly, the training group respondents might have been more conscious of the problems they encountered when looking up word meanings in a dictionary, thus making them more critical of the helpfulness of the dictionary and of their abilities to use it correctly. Secondly, the training included components that encouraged the pupils to guess the meaning of the unfamiliar word prior to dictionary search and to

evaluate the necessity of look-up. This could have made them more confident about their inference skills and more independent of the information provided by the dictionary.

It seems that a greater percentage of the control group felt that dictionary use did not help them at all. 13.6% of the control group respondents stated that dictionary use did not help them at all, while only 6.7% of the respondents in the training group felt the same. These answers should, however, be interpreted with caution, as three of the four respondents that claimed dictionary use not to be helpful at all had chosen not to use a dictionary in the task. Two of these three non-dictionary-users were in the control group and one was a training group participant. As a result, only one control group respondent that had used the dictionary in the task did not find it helpful at all.

### 4.3 Problems encountered in dictionary use

In question 4 (appendices 1 and 2) the participants were asked to evaluate how easy it was for them to find correct meanings in the dictionary. The answers were given on Likert scale *strongly agree–agree somewhat–disagree somewhat–strongly disagree*. The results can be seen below in table 2.

**Table 2.** *Minun oli helppoa löytää sanakirjasta sopiva merkitys englanninkielisille sanoille.* ('It was easy for me to find an appropriate meaning for the words in English')

	Training group		Control group		Total	
Strongly agree	5	33.3%	5	22.7%	10	27.0%
Agree somewhat	8	53.3%	15	68.2%	23	62.2%
Disagree somewhat	2	13.3%	1	4.5%	3	8.1%
Strongly disagree	0	0%	1*	4.5%	1*	2.7%
Total:	15		22		37	

\*The respondent had underlined the words "eri" and "mieltä", one in the column of "disagree somewhat" and the other in the column of "strongly disagree". This answer was interpreted as "strongly disagree".

Generally speaking, the participants in both groups found it quite easy to find appropriate meanings in the dictionary for the unfamiliar words found in the text. The control group was slightly more positive about their dictionary use, with altogether 90.9% of the respondents agreeing strongly or somewhat with the statement. In the training group 86.7% answered that they agreed strongly or somewhat in this question. Nevertheless, a slightly bigger percentage, (33.3%) of the training group respondents strongly agreed with the statement. In the control group only 22.7% of the pupils were of this opinion.

It is difficult to say if one of the two groups clearly considered finding meanings in the dictionary easier than the other group. It can be stated, however, that in general the pupils regarded dictionary

use as quite easy. There were few participants who readily acknowledged that they did have difficulties in dictionary use. This finding supports the claim made by Nesi and Hail (2002:299–300) that language learners seem to be unaware of their dictionary-using problems.

The fifth question of part B in the test-questionnaire was an open format question about the kinds of difficulties the participants had in dictionary use. (*Mikä sanakirjan käyttämisessä oli sinulle vaikeaa?* ‘What was difficult for you in dictionary use?’). The answers to this question give an interesting overview of the problems encountered by the pupils when completing the reading comprehension task with the help of a dictionary. Many of the answers were, however, quite short and not very elaborate. This made it somewhat difficult to assign the responses to a certain group, and often the answers could be interpreted from two or even three different points of view. Therefore, no definite comparisons could be made between the answers of the training group and those of the control group. For the same reason, the frequency of different types of problems is discussed only approximately.

Five respondents in the training group and four in the control group left the fifth question unanswered or answered that they had not had any difficulties. These numbers correspond to the number of pupils who strongly agreed with the statement in question 4: *Minun oli helppoa löytää sanakirjasta sopiva merkitys englanninkielisille sanoille.* ‘It was easy for me to find an appropriate meaning for the words in English.’ The rest of the responses were grouped into six categories that are presented below. The respondent’s group is mentioned after the number of the example (TG = training group, CG = control group).

One of the most frequent problems encountered by the pupils was finding the correct entry. Examples 1 and 2 reflect this problem. The examples given here could also be interpreted as pertaining to other categories that will be discussed below.

**Question 5.** *Mikä sanakirjan käyttämisessä oli sinulle vaikeaa?*

‘What was difficult for you in dictionary use?’

**Example 1.** (CG) *Sanojen löytäminen.*

‘Finding the words.’

**Example 2.** (TG) *Hankalaa löytää se tietty kohta ja välillä kestää kauan.*

‘Troublesome to find that particular spot and sometimes it takes a long time.’

Example 1 is perhaps the most prototypical answer in this category. It is very general, and it is difficult to be certain whether the respondent found it difficult to find the entry itself or the Finnish



equivalent that would be appropriate in the context. In example 2, on the other hand, the participant seems to be talking about finding the correct entry. In addition, he/she found dictionary look-up a slow process.

Not finding an entry for a word at all was closely related to the previous category. This problem was slightly less common, although it was quite difficult to decide whether some respondents had not been able to find an entry or whether they had just found it difficult. Examples 3–4 show instances of answers in which the problem of not finding entries is discussed.

**Example 3.** (CG) *Joitakin sanoja ei löytynyt, sanakirjan käyttö oli muutenkin turhauttavaa.*

‘Some words could not be found, using a dictionary was also frustrating.’

**Example 4.** (TG) *On niin paljon muotoja ja kaikkia ei löydy.*

‘There are so many forms and all (of them) can’t be found.’

The reading comprehension text included at least one word, *transracial*, which did not have an entry in the dictionary used in the test. This might explain why quite a few participants had problems with finding entries. Still, it was possible to infer the meaning of *transracial* by breaking it into two parts (*trans-* and *racial*) and by finding the meaning of these two parts. The data do not show whether any of the participants managed to do this, as the pupils could choose which three dictionary look-ups to write down in the answer sheet and, therefore, did not have to record the ones they found difficult.

The slowness of dictionary use was mentioned in some of the pupils’ answers as a difficulty, as can be seen in examples 5 and 6.

**Example 5.** (TG) *Löytää nopeasti sanoja.*

‘To find words quickly.’

**Example 6.** (CG) *Hidasta, nettisanakirjat on pop.*

‘(It’s) slow, Internet dictionaries rule.’

In example 6, the respondent mentions dictionaries that can be used online as a faster option to the more traditional printed dictionaries. This response was the only one in which Internet dictionaries were mentioned. Nevertheless, it is a sign that at least some pupils are more familiar with this new form of dictionary than with the printed dictionary.

Quite a few participants mentioned the layout of the dictionary as a factor that made dictionary use difficult. This problem constitutes the fourth category of dictionary-using problems. Examples 7 and 8 illustrate the problem.

**Example 7.** (CG) *Sanoja oli niin paljon, että joutui selaamaan kauheasti ja jotkut sanat olivat epäselvästi esillä.*

‘There were so many words that you had to leaf through (the dictionary) a lot and some words were presented unclearly.’

**Example 8.** (TG) *Oikean kohdan löytäminen muotoja yhdestä sanasta on liikaa ja kaikki ahdettu tosi ahtaasti.*

‘Finding the right entry there are too many forms of one word and everything is crammed in very tight.’

Finding the dictionary layout confusing or unclear could be due to the fact that the pupils might not have been accustomed to using this particular dictionary, or any printed dictionary at all. Since many answers were quite vague, it was difficult to evaluate whether the respondents in the control group found the layout more confusing than the training group participants, who had had the chance to use the dictionary before doing the test.

When asked about difficulties encountered in dictionary use, a few respondents discussed finding a meaning or a Finnish equivalent for the unknown word. Examples 9 and 10 show this problem.

**Example 9.** (CG) *Suomenkielinen käsite oli epäselvästi laitettu englanninkielisen perään.*

‘The concept in Finnish had been put unclearly after the English one.’

**Example 10.** (TG) *Löytää sanalle merkitys.*

‘To find a meaning for the word.’

Example 9 could also be interpreted as pertaining to the previous category, as the respondent complains about the unclear layout of the entries. Other answers in this category merely stated that finding the meaning was difficult, as in example 10, without elaborating on the factors that made it problematic.

Finally, some pupils mentioned affixation as a factor that made dictionary use difficult for them. This problem is illustrated in examples 11 and 12.

**Example 11.** (CG) *Eri taivutuksia, ja muunnelmia.*

‘Different inflections, and variations.’

**Example 12.** (CG) *Jotkin sanat ovat hyvin samanlaisia ja etsityn sanan perusmuoto ei ole aina täysin varma.*

‘Some words are very similar and the basic form of the word that is looked

up is not always completely sure.’

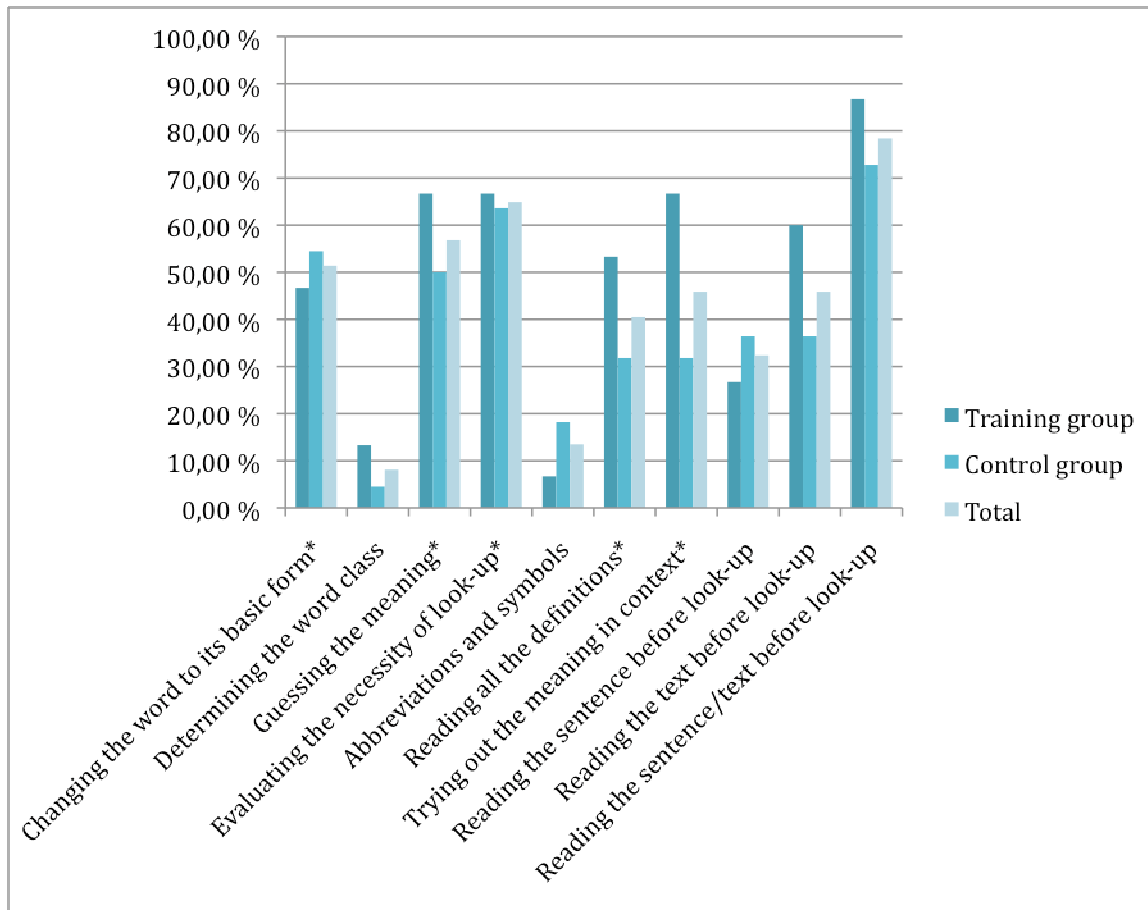
It was sometimes difficult to interpret whether the pupils found the dictionary’s way of presenting related words confusing, or whether they were uncertain of the basic form of the word. Example 11 shows this kind of ambiguity, whereas in example 12 it is quite clear that the respondent discusses the difficulty of changing the word to its basic form.

In addition to these types of dictionary-using problems presented above, one respondent wrote that remembering the alphabetical order was a challenge at times. In summary, six different types of dictionary using problems were reported by the participants: difficulty in finding an entry, not finding an entry at all, the slowness of dictionary use, difficulties induced by the dictionary layout, difficulties in understanding the meaning given by the dictionary, and the affixation of the English words. The pupils’ reports on their dictionary-using problems give rise to possible points of focus in dictionary training. These could include, for example, familiarisation of dictionary layout conventions, practice for making dictionary use faster and more fluent, and alternative strategies to cope with vocabulary items that do not have an entry in a dictionary.

#### 4.4 Dictionary look-up procedure

In the sixth question of the test-questionnaire (appendices 1 and 2) the participants were asked to tick the statements that described their dictionary use. They could mark as many statements as they wished. The aim of the question was to find out about the procedure followed by the pupils when searching word meanings in a dictionary.

The results for the sixth question can be seen in figure 1 below. Five out of the nine statements that were chosen for this question were steps that had been highlighted in the dictionary training session. These steps have been marked with an asterisk (\*) in figure 1. The last columns in figure 1 show the percentage of respondents who read the whole sentence or the entire text before look-up. This option was not given in the test-questionnaire. Instead, it was calculated by adding the number of respondents that had ticked the statement *I read the whole sentence before dictionary look-up* to the number of respondents who reported that they had read the entire text before dictionary look-up(s). This was done to find out how many pupils used either of the two strategies, i.e. did not look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary immediately after encountering them.



**Figure 1. Steps taken by the participants in their dictionary look-ups.**

As can be seen in figure 1, changing the word to its basic form, guessing the meaning of the word before dictionary look-up, evaluating the necessity of look-up and reading the sentence or the entire text before look-up were the strategies that were used most often by the participants of the study. More than 50% of the 37 participants reported to have used each of these strategies.

When comparing the strategy use of the training group and the control group, figure 1 shows that, in six out of the nine strategies mentioned in question 6, a bigger percentage of the training group respondents reported strategy-use. The control group pupils were slightly more active in changing the word into its basic form, making use of the abbreviations and symbols, and reading the sentence before dictionary look-up. The differences between the strategy use of the training group and the control group were most noticeable in four statements: guessing the meaning of the word before look-up, reading all the definitions, trying out the meaning in context and reading the entire text before dictionary look-up. Apart from reading the entire text before dictionary look-up, these points were highlighted in the training session, thus making it rather unsurprising that the pupils in the training group used these strategies more often than the control group participants. Changing the word to its basic form was encouraged in the training session, but the percentage of respondents that

used this strategy was greater in the control group than in the training group. This might suggest that pupils were already familiar with this strategy before the training. Moreover, the use of this strategy depends greatly on the type of words looked up in the dictionary: some participants might only have looked up words that appeared in the text in their basic form.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The present study focuses on the effects of training on the dictionary use of Finnish 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL learners. Two groups participated in the study. One of them received a dictionary training session that focused on the receptive use of a bilingual dictionary. The other group functioned as a control group. The two groups' dictionary-using skills were tested with a reading comprehension task, which was completed with the help of a dictionary. Each participant was asked to record three dictionary look-ups, i.e. the English words with their Finnish equivalents. A control group design, like the one described above, is not a method often used for measuring the effect of a teaching intervention. A pre-test post-test design, which measures the participants' skills and/or knowledge before and after the intervention, could have given slightly different results. The two groups chosen for the study were, however, considered similar enough to make their responses comparable.

The results of the study show that the dictionary training session increased the percentage of accurate look-ups from 64.3% to 78.9%. It is somewhat difficult to evaluate the reliability of the participants' dictionary look-up accuracy rates. Firstly, only three look-up words were to be recorded, and the respondents could choose these words freely. This could have had an effect on the results, as some pupils might have decided to write down only those dictionary searches that they were confident of. Therefore, the percentages mentioned above should be considered as approximations rather than exact figures. Secondly, it is difficult to compare the results of the present study with those of earlier research. This is because researchers have tended to focus on the dictionary use of more advanced language learners. Moreover, monolingual dictionaries have been used in the majority of the studies in the field.

In addition to writing down their dictionary look-ups, the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about the use of dictionary in the reading comprehension task. The data show that the control group pupils considered dictionary use more helpful than the respondents in the training group. This might be due to the fact that in the dictionary training session, the pupils were encouraged to guess word meaning before dictionary look-up and to evaluate the necessity of look-up, thus making them possibly more independent of the information provided by the dictionary. On the other hand, the training group participants might have been more critical of their ability to find

correct information in the dictionary and/or more conscious of the problems they encountered in dictionary use.

The majority of the pupils found dictionary use quite easy. There were no clear differences between the answers of the training group and those of the control group. When asked about the difficulties encountered when using the dictionary, the participants reported on six different kinds of problems: difficulty in finding the entry, not finding an entry at all, the slowness of dictionary use, difficulties induced by the dictionary layout, difficulties in understanding the meaning given by the dictionary, and the affixation of English words. It is suggested that these problems be taken into account when planning for dictionary training in the EFL classroom.

When asked about the strategies used in dictionary look-ups, the training group participants reported more strategy use than the pupils in the control group. The difference was noticeable in the use of the following strategies: guessing the meaning of the word before dictionary look-up, reading all the definitions in an entry, testing the meaning in the original context, and reading the entire text before look-up. All except the last one of these strategies were highlighted in the training session.

It needs to be pointed out that the present study focused on the dictionary use of a relatively small number of EFL learners: there were 38 participants in total. Also, all the participants were pupils in the same school. For these reasons, any generalisations of the results should be made with caution. Nevertheless, the results do suggest that even a relatively short dictionary training session (45 minutes) could improve the accuracy of the EFL learners' dictionary look-ups. The questionnaire-section of the study also shed light on the difficulties encountered by the learners when looking up words in a bilingual dictionary.

It is hoped that the results of the present study would encourage teachers to devote some classroom time to dictionary training. Further research in the field could concentrate on the productive use of dictionaries, or on the dictionary use of beginners. Online dictionaries were mentioned in a participant's response, suggesting that they are familiar at least to some pupils in the research group. As a new format, online dictionaries could provide an interesting topic for further research. A deeper analysis of the problems encountered in dictionary use would also be of a particular interest, as it might help both lexicographers to make their dictionaries user-friendlier, and teachers to plan better dictionary training for their students.

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## APPENDIX 1

Luokka: \_\_\_\_\_

Arvoisa vastaaja,

Teen pro seminaari -tutkimusta Jyväskylän yliopiston kielten laitoksen englanninopettajalinjalla. Tutkimukseni aiheena on sanakirjan käyttö englanninkielisen tekstin lukemisessa. Tällä kyselyllä kerään aineistoa tutkimustani varten. Kyselyssä on kolme osaa: A, B ja C.

### Osa A

Lue alla oleva teksti huolellisesti ja vastaa kysymyksiin 1-3. Voit käyttää sanakirjaa apuna tehtävää tehdessäsi. Alleviivaa kaikki sanat, jotka katsoit sanakirjasta.

By 1970's, transracial adoptions had almost caused cultural genocide in Australia. Up to the mid-sixties, altogether at least 60,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcefully taken from their families – and from their race and culture – and given to white foster families or placed in boarding schools. The aim was to assimilate the children into Australian society. Children were allegedly moved from their birth families out of concern for their well-being. Yet, it was generally the children with lighter skin who were removed as they were considered easier to assimilate into white Australian society.

This government policy took place in every state and territory and touched most Aboriginal families. In New South Wales alone, it is estimated that between 1903 and 1930 over one third of Aboriginal children were taken away. Nearly seventy percent of these children were girls aged between 12 and 15 years, destined to work in the service of white families. So, many of these children were not really adopted by childless couples but rather “abducted” by families who wanted cheap domestic labour. Although saying sorry does not undo the past, the present government is expected to apologise for this policy of its predecessors.

(English United 4, p. 82)

1. Why were Aboriginal children taken to white families in Australia?
  - a.) Because they did not have parents that would take care of them.
  - b.) Because they would be happier in white families.
  - c.) Because the white people wanted these children to become a part of the white Australian society.
2. What did teenage girls do in white families?
  - a.) They went to school.
  - b.) They did household chores.
  - c.) They worked for the family and the family paid them well for that.
3. What do people want the Australian government to do?
  - a.) To say they are sorry about what the earlier governments did.
  - b.) Nothing.
  - c.) Take the children back to their families.

Käännä →



## Osa B

Vastaa nyt sanakirjan käyttöön liittyviin kysymyksiin.

1. Kuinka monta eri sanaa katsoit sanakirjasta? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Valitse kolme sanaa, jotka katsoit sanakirjasta ja kirjoita ne alla oleville viivoille. Kirjoita myös suomenkielinen sana tai selitys kullekin etsimällesi sanalle. Muista valita sellainen sana/selitys, joka sopii lukemaasi tekstiin.

Sana englanniksi

suomeksi

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Sanakirjan käyttäminen auttoi tämän tehtävän tekemisessä

paljon

jonkin verran

vähän

ei ollenkaan

4. Minun oli helppoa löytää sanakirjasta sopiva merkitys englanninkielisille sanoille.

täysin

jokseenkin

jokseenkin

täysin

samaa

samaa

eri

eri

mieltä

mieltä

mieltä

mieltä

5. Mikä sanakirjan käyttämisessä oli sinulle vaikeaa?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Mitkä seuraavista väittämistä kuvaavat tapaasi käyttää sanakirjaa tässä tehtävässä? Laita rasti ympyrään. Merkitse **kaikki** vaihtoehdot, joita käytit, vaikka olisit käyttänyt niitä vain kerran.

- Muutin sanan perusmuotoon ennen kuin etsin sen sanakirjasta (esim. talked -> talk)
- Mietin, mihin sanaluokkaan sana kuuluu (esim. verbi, substantiivi, adjektiivi)
- Yritin arvata sanan merkityksen ennen kuin etsin sen sanakirjasta.
- Mietin, onko sanan tarkka ymmärtäminen välttämätöntä tehtävän kannalta.
- Sanakirjan lyhenteet ja symbolit auttoivat oikean merkityksen löytämisessä.
- Luin sanan kaikki eri merkitykset sanakirjasta.
- Löydettyäni sopivan merkityksen etsimälleni sanalle kokeilin sopiiko se lauseeseen, jossa sana esiintyy.
- Luin lauseen loppuun ennen kuin etsin sanoja sanakirjasta.
- Luin koko tekstin ennen kuin etsin sanoja sanakirjasta.

**Osa C**

Tämän osan kysymykset koskevat oppituntia, jossa käsiteltiin sanakirjan käyttöä. Vastaa kysymyksiin ympyröimällä mielestäsi sopivin vaihtoehto.

1. Opin uusia asioita sanakirjatunnilla.

paljon                  jonkin verran                  vähän                  en ollenkaan

2. Sanakirjatunti oli mielestäni hyödyllinen.

täysin                  jokseenkin                  jokseenkin                  täysin  
samaa                  samaa                  eri                  eri  
mieltä                  mieltä                  mieltä                  mieltä

3. Sanakirjatunnilla oppimistani asioista oli hyötyä luetunymmärtämistehtävää tehdessä.

täysin                  jokseenkin                  jokseenkin                  täysin  
samaa                  samaa                  eri                  eri  
mieltä                  mieltä                  mieltä                  mieltä

**Taustatiedoksi:** Viimeisin arvosanani englannissa: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2

Luokka: \_\_\_\_\_

Arvoisa vastaaja,

Teen pro seminaari -tutkimusta Jyväskylän yliopiston kielten laitoksen englanninopettajalinjalla. Tutkimukseni aiheena on sanakirjan käyttö englanninkielisen tekstin lukemisessa. Tällä kyselyllä kerään aineistoa tutkimustani varten. Kyselyssä on kaksi osaa: A ja B.

### Osa A

Lue alla oleva teksti huolellisesti ja vastaa kysymyksiin 1-3. Voit käyttää sanakirjaa apuna tehtävää tehdessäsi. Alleviivaa kaikki sanat, jotka katsoit sanakirjasta.

By 1970's, transracial adoptions had almost caused cultural genocide in Australia. Up to the mid-sixties, altogether at least 60,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcefully taken from their families – and from their race and culture – and given to white foster families or placed in boarding schools. The aim was to assimilate the children into Australian society. Children were allegedly moved from their birth families out of concern for their well-being. Yet, it was generally the children with lighter skin who were removed as they were considered easier to assimilate into white Australian society.

This government policy took place in every state and territory and touched most Aboriginal families. In New South Wales alone, it is estimated that between 1903 and 1930 over one third of Aboriginal children were taken away. Nearly seventy percent of these children were girls aged between 12 and 15 years, destined to work in the service of white families. So, many of these children were not really adopted by childless couples but rather “abducted” by families who wanted cheap domestic labour. Although saying sorry does not undo the past, the present government is expected to apologise for this policy of its predecessors.

(English United 4, p. 82)

1. Why were Aboriginal children taken to white families in Australia?
  - d.) Because they did not have parents that would take care of them.
  - e.) Because they would be happier in white families.
  - f.) Because the white people wanted these children to be a part of the white Australian society.
  
2. What did teenage girls do in white families?
  - d.) They went to school.
  - e.) They did household chores.
  - f.) They worked for the family and the family paid them well for that.
  
3. What do people want the Australian government to do?
  - d.) To say they are sorry about what the earlier governments did.
  - e.) Nothing.
  - f.) Take the children back to their families.

Käännä →

## Osa B

Vastaa nyt sanakirjan käyttöön liittyviin kysymyksiin.

1. Kuinka monta eri sanaa katsoit sanakirjasta? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Valitse kolme sanaa, jotka katsoit sanakirjasta ja kirjoita ne alla oleville viivoille. Kirjoita myös suomenkielinen sana tai selitys kullekin etsimällesi sanalle. Muista valita sellainen sana/selitys, joka sopii lukemaasi tekstiin.

Sana englanniksi

suomeksi

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Sanakirjan käyttäminen auttoi tämän tehtävän tekemisessä.

paljon

jonkin verran

vähän

ei ollenkaan

4. Minun oli helppoa löytää sanakirjasta sopiva merkitys englanninkielisille sanoille.

täysin

jokseenkin

jokseenkin

täysin

samaa

samaa

eri

eri

mieltä

mieltä

mieltä

mieltä

5. Mikä sanakirjan käyttämisessä oli sinulle vaikeaa?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Mitkä seuraavista väittämistä kuvaavat tapaasi käyttää sanakirjaa tässä tehtävässä? Laita rasti ympyrään. Merkitse **kaikki** vaihtoehdot, joita käytit, vaikka olisit käyttänyt niitä vain kerran.

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- Mietin, mihin sanaluokkaan sana kuuluu (esim. verbi, substantiivi, adjektiivi)
- Yritin arvata sanan merkityksen ennen kuin etsin sen sanakirjasta.
- Mietin, onko sanan tarkka ymmärtäminen välttämätöntä tehtävän kannalta.
- Sanakirjan lyhenteet ja symbolit auttoivat oikean merkityksen löytämisessä.
- Luin sanan kaikki eri merkitykset sanakirjasta.
- Löydettyäni sopivan merkityksen etsimälleni sanalle kokeilin sopiiko se lauseeseen, jossa sana esiintyy.
- Luin lauseen loppuun ennen kuin etsin sanoja sanakirjasta.
- Luin koko tekstin ennen kuin etsin sanoja sanakirjasta.

**Taustatiedoksi:** Viimeisin arvosanani englannissa: \_\_\_\_\_