The dark side of the moon:

High school students' perceptions of grammar instruction

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Tutkielmani tarkoituksena on selvittää, mitä lukion ensimmäisen vuosikurssin oppilaat ajattelevat englannin kieliopista ja sen opetuksesta. Vaikka oppilaiden ja opiskelijoiden asenteita kielioppia kohtaan on tutkittu aiemminkin, nimenomaan kielioppiin kohdistuvaa tutkimusta on paljon vähemmän.

Aineistona tutkimuksessani käytin opiskelijoiden itsensä tuottamia visuaalisia representaatioita kieliopista; pyysin yhden keskisuomalaisen lukion ensimmäisen vuosikurssin opiskelijoita piirtämään kieliopin siten kuin he sen näkevät. Tämä tuotti aineistoksi 13 piirrosta, jotka analysoitiin kvalitatiivisesti, käyttäen aineistolähtöistä sisällönanalyysia. Keskeiset tutkimuskysymykset olivat a) millaisia käsityksiä lukiolaisilla on englannin kieliopin opetuksesta, sekä b) millaisia tunteita nämä käsitykset heissä herättävät.

Tulokset osoittavat, että suurin osa opiskelijoista joko käsitti englannin kieliopin opetuksen koostuvan kirjojen ja terminologian opiskelusta tai ei osannut ilmaista käsitystään. Kieliopin opetusta kohtaan ilmaistut tunteet olivat enimmäkseen positiivisia tai suuresti vaihtelevia. Negatiiviset tai hämmentyneet tunteet esiintyivät harvemmin kuin edellä mainitut mutta olivat yhtä yleisiä keskenään.

Vaikka tulokset eivät ole yleistettävissä, ne antavat silti sekä jonkinlaisen kuvan lukio-opiskelijoiden suhtautumisesta englannin kielen kieliopin opetukseen että tukevat visuaalisten representaatioiden käyttöä tutkimusaineistona.

Asiasanat – Keywords   kielioppi, kuvallinen ilmaisu, sisällönanalyysi, grammar instruction

Säilytyspaikka – Depository

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1 INTRODUCTION

Among students of English at various levels of education, some would say there exists a popular opinion of grammar as boring, and grammar instruction even more so. Even though this opinion, if it exists, is strictly a popular one, usually based on some individual students' personal views rather than any actual research on the topic, it supposedly holds some degree of influence among students, especially at secondary and high school. This much is general knowledge.

There is some research that also suggests a similar phenomenon. In their study, Jean and Simard (2011) used a questionnaire to interview over 2300 students and teachers on how useful and entertaining they thought grammar instruction to be. They discovered that both students and teachers considered grammar instruction to be useful but somewhat boring, which clearly lends some support to the opinion.

Another study, conducted as part of a project to improve a mandatory university grammar course, yielded different results and used a considerably different method. Nikula (2000) had, at the beginning of the course, the students draw a quick picture of how they saw grammar, after which they compared and discussed one another's drawings (Nikula 2000:132-133). The views the students expressed were various and rather positive, which Nikula (2000:133) compared with the way she had previously started the course, having an open conversation about grammar. She stated that the views expressed in the drawings were more multidimensional and generally more positive. This is supported by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) as they have pointed out that some meanings are able to be expressed or are easier to express visually and some verbally.

The defining difference of the present study is that visual accounts were adopted as the form of data. The use of these in the research of language learning and teaching is rare, as indicated by

Kalaja et al. (2008:187), but comparison and examination of the studies discussed above suggested that a more multidimensional picture could be obtained this way.

In this thesis, background information is presented first, both on how learner feelings about grammar instruction have been studied in the past as well as how visual accounts have been used, and how they can be used. Then, research questions of the present study are presented, along with a description of the research method used, after which the actual analysis process is described in detail. This is followed by a discussion of the results and some features of the present study, after which a conclusion on the results and use of visual accounts is presented.

2 USE OF VISUAL DATA AND STUDENTS' FEELINGS ON GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

In this chapter, various levels of background information of the present study will be discussed. Firstly, the guidance available to teachers regarding grammar instruction will be examined on two levels: how it is planned in the national syllabus, as well as how this plan is further refined in the syllabus of the high school in which this study was conducted. Next an investigation of how learner feelings about grammar instruction have been examined and what kinds of conclusions have been drawn in other studies in the field will take place. After that, the use of visual accounts as data will be discussed. In addition to presenting some other studies that have utilized similar or somewhat similar forms of data, some principles will be presented on what visual accounts are, and how they can be used and analyzed.

2.1 Grammar instruction in theory

In syllabi, grammar instruction receives very little to no special attention. It appears to be something that is expected to happen, while there are prominent instructions on all other aspects of language; multimodality, for example, is appreciated in that students are to be given ample opportunities for both speaking and writing, while a number of different themes ensure cultural knowledge and overall education regarding the world are passed to students (*Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003:100-101*). There is very little in the way of actual guidelines on how grammar should be instructed and to what extent, but what there is will be summarized below.

The national high school syllabus (*Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003*), or the syllabus of the high school in which the study was conducted (*Opetussuunnitelma 2009*), are generally rather vague as to the actual proportion and means of instructing grammar. The national one (ibid.) does not directly mention grammar in any specific way, rather emphasizing the need for communicative skills and covering of a wide variety of topics. What is said is that during each English course, attention will be paid to improvement of knowledge, accuracy and extension of use of structures and vocabulary of the language being studied (*Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003:100-10*). As such, grammar instruction does not receive any other particular attention besides this. What is apparently expected is that teachers will provide their students with required tools to be able to use the language; teaching of grammar is not specifically instructed, but it is expected to take place based on how each theme in the syllabus necessitates it. Neither are there any guidelines on how grammar, or more broadly structures, should be taught. The high school in which the present study was conducted follows closely similar principles in its own syllabus (*Opetussuunnitelma 2009*), generally referring to the national one. It is apparent that while grammar instruction is expected to take place, the actual amount and quality of it are generally left to the publishers of schoolbooks and the teachers themselves.

2.2 Student feelings about grammar instruction

A study which in some respects resembles the present one is that of Jean and Simard (2011), conducted in Canada, which examined student attitudes toward grammar instruction in second language learning. Theirs differs from the present one in two important aspects: first of all, they had a large number of participants in the study, well over 2300 in total, and, secondly, in that it was conducted by passing a questionnaire to teachers as well as students, the data being analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. What Jean and Simard (2011) discovered was that both students and teachers considered grammar instruction to be very useful but not very entertaining, there being a slight discrepancy in views in that a somewhat larger portion of students than teachers seemed to hold this view. They also report that students' answers regarding their disposition towards grammar learning were mostly neutral, while positive answers were very few (Jean and Simard 2011)

Though a number of studies on similar topics, as well as the exact same topic, exist, of these the one summarized above was the only one accessible within the scope of the present study.

2.3 Visual accounts as data

It appears that using visual accounts as data in research into L2 learning is still relatively uncommon. Despite mentioning that drawings, specifically, have been used as data in research fields such as developmental and clinical psychology, among others, Kalaja et al. (2008:187) also agree that the use of drawings or other visual accounts as primary forms of data in the study of language learning or teaching is rare. This also seems to be applicable to linguistics in general, though there are some studies. Three recent ones will be discussed below, Kalaja et al. (2008), Nikula and Pitkänen-Huhta (2008), and Nikula (2000).

In their study, Kalaja et al. (2008) asked university students to draw self-portraits of themselves as learners of English. Their approach was a sociocultural one, in that they aimed to analyze the pictures for possible mediational means associated with English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. They had the students also provide short written interpretations of their drawings, though these were analyzed mostly separately. Mediational means in this case refers to semiotic and material tools used to mediate EFL learning, for example artifacts such as books (Kalaja et al. 2008:189). Though Nikula and Pitkänen-Huhta (2008) had a rather similar starting point, in that they asked the students to take photographs of situations, activities and places where they stated English had some significance for them, they had a rather different approach, a discursive one. The idea was to treat photographs as starting points for what they called a *narrative contract*, in which the participants were asked to tell the researchers stories about the photographs.

Of some note is the study that was conducted as part of a project to improve a university grammar course, that of Nikula (2000). Nikula (ibid) had first-year university students of EFL express their feelings about and views of grammar by drawing pictures at the beginning of an important, mandatory grammar course. The aim was to gain access to the more impressionist first reactions of the students, which is why they were given three minutes to complete the drawings (Nikula 2000:132) Then the students would describe and discuss each other's drawings in small groups (Nikula 2000:133). Nikula (ibid) compared this method of beginning a course with the more traditional conversation about the students' perceptions on grammar and the reasons behind them. What she discovered was that while the conversations were prominently characterized by rather negative views on grammar and the rules it imposes, the drawings seemed to open up a more multidimensional and more positive view of grammar. Another important thing she noted (Nikula 2000:139) was that the drawings had obvious value as a means of self-reflection; the students were able to, by drawing and using or not using various colors, express things that might not have necessarily been easily verbalized.

To understand the use of visual accounts as data, it is important to acknowledge the relation between visual and verbal structures. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), there is a general relation between visual structures, such as the drawings used as data in the present study, and linguistic structures such as a sentence. Both structures realize meanings in ways that overlap to some extent; in other words, some meanings can be expressed both visually and verbally, while there are also meanings that can only be realized either visually or verbally (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:2), which also supports what Nikula (2000:139) says about the value of drawings as a means of self-reflection, as discussed above. The main difference in expressing the meanings, however, lies in that when there is a meaning that can be expressed both visually and verbally, the way in which it is expressed is different. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:2) explain this by noting that what is in language expressed through choices of different semantic structures and word classes is in visual communication expressed through choices between other means, such as use of compositional structures, colors etc.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In the subsections here, all starting points for the present study will be discussed. The research questions will be presented first, along with some explanation as to why these particular ones were chosen. Next, the visual data will be described in detail, regarding both the forms it was collected in and the way the collection process was organized and performed. Lastly, the methods used in analyzing the data will be presented. To acquire qualitative results from this rather uncommon form of data, an adapted process of data-based content analysis was chosen for the method of the study.

3.1 The main aims and research questions

The present study is a qualitative one, aimed at finding out and examining high school students' perceptions of and feelings about grammar and grammar instruction. The research questions the study seeks to answer are:

1) What kinds of perceptions of English grammar and grammar instruction do high school students have?

2) What kinds of feelings do these perceptions of grammar evoke in them?

The term *perceptions* is used here to denote those ideas and means that students associate with grammar and grammar instruction: in effect, what properties are inherent in them and constitute them. *Feelings* represents emotions these students have, both about aforementioned properties, and the wholes they make. These were chosen as the main aims of the study because of the popular notion that students, supposedly, consider studying grammar to be boring. Rather than take this as a hypothesis, however, the intention here was to genuinely find out if this would be the case with high school students and if so, then what were the reasons behind their boredom.

3.2. The data and the way it was collected

There were 21 participants to this study, first-year students in a high school in central Finland. As the aim was to gather the data from as average a group of students as possible, I selected the high school of a relatively small county in central Finland to provide a student group. After acquiring approvals from the headmaster as well as the teacher of the course, I sent to the teacher forms of consent for each student (see Appendix A), which they were to fill appropriately and return to their teacher in advance. The teacher, in turn, passed these to me when I went in person to the high school for the actual data collection.

The data collection took place during a normal English class and in a regular school setting, to avoid upsetting the participants in any way. There were three steps to the data collection process: providing verbal and written instructions to the students on what they were expected to do and why, handing them the sheets on which they were to draw, and lastly asking them to provide a short verbal account to explain what they had drawn.

During the first step of the actual research situation the students were verbally explained that they were to draw a picture of English grammar as they see and experience it: to represent what it consists of, what it is like, and what kind of images it calls to mind. Students were encouraged to express themselves as creatively as they saw fit, and were given examples of possible use of abstract images or visual metaphors, to stimulate image production. Naturally great care was taken not to suggest any possibilities on what they should draw, but they were presented with some example options of how to express themselves. The second step involved handing the students simple sheets which had instructions on the top (see Appendix B for an example) and with a large blank space on which to draw. The students were then given around 20 minutes to complete their drawings.

As different students spent different times preparing their drawings, to avoid frustration the third step was initiated in a flexible manner, allowing others to continue drawing while those already finished were instructed to move on to providing a short verbal account of one or two sentences on what they had drawn and why. This was decidedly the first time they heard about the possibility of providing a verbal account, as it would have been otherwise probable that the students would have written more and drawn less. In effect, informing the students about the verbal part only later on was a means of guaranteeing ample visual data for analysis, as the intention was not to use open-ended verbal accounts as data, but as means of assisting analysis of the visual ones.

The students produced in total 15 drawings that I was allowed to use in the study. Two of these were both visually and verbally clearly intended to be puns on the whole research, being representations of altogether something else than what was asked for, and hence had to be discarded as data. All this left me with a total of 13 pictures and verbal accounts to analyze.

3.3 Method of analysis

While Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) have developed elaborate tools to analyze visual structures, they were not employed in the study because the data turned out to be rather more inclined towards expressing feelings through the content itself, rather than the way it was used. However, their basic idea of some meanings being capable of being expressed either visually or verbally is appreciated, as is Kalaja, Alanen and Dufva's (2008) approach to what the drawings are considered to be. As they did in their study, I considered the drawings to be *visual narratives* the students have, in a way, told me. This means that I assume they have attempted to relay information to me in the form of the drawings, and I am attempting to gain access to that information.

Unlike that of Kalaja et al. (2008), however, the aim of the present study was not to look for mediational means students associated with grammar as such: rather, the aim was to examine what they saw in it and how they felt about it. To this end, content analysis was deemed suitable.

Content analysis, as presented by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:91-123), is a procedure to analyze documents systematically and objectively in order to capture an image of the target phenomenon. There are three main forms of content analysis: data-based, theory-bound and theory-based (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:95), of which the first one is utilized here. The key difference between these forms is, according to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:95-98), in the function of theory or theoretic background in qualitative research; in theory-bound and theory-based approaches, respectively,

theory or theoretic information is used to guide the analysis either in all or later phases, or to set a background for the whole analysis, i.e. the traditional approach in natural sciences.

By contrast, data-based analysis starts from the data itself, while theoretical background is used to justify the reasons for conducting a study in the way it is conducted, remaining outside the actual process of analysis (ibid). According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:108-113), it is a three-stage process, involving **1) reduction of data**, whereby all irrelevant elements are removed from it and relevant parts are coded to reduced expressions, **2) clustering of data**, which involves grouping of reduced expressions into classes and subclasses, which are then given appropriate names, as well as **3) abstracting of data**, in which the results of previous stages are conceptualized, and, in effect, the researcher moves from using the expressions in the original data into using more accurate terminology. This terminology is then combined to seek answer(s) to the research question, the conclusions drawn by the researcher by attempting to understand what the phenomena examined in the study mean to the participants (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:112-113).

Because the data collected did not allow the actual process of abstracting to yield sufficient information, in this respect the method of the present study was adapted; instead of simply abstracting, the reduced and clustered data was subjected to a close scrutiny based on which classes of data contained which expressions, and how many of each.

4. ANALYSIS

Closely following the guidelines set by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:108-113), the analysis is conducted in three stages. In the first stage, I reduce the data to what is relevant for the study, by examining each drawing and noting as well as naming each detail that has significance in view of the research questions, i.e. any representations of objects, or ideas that may be part of that student's

view of grammar. I will also note any possible representations of feelings that may have been evoked in the student, presumably by the objects or ideas he/she has drawn. In the second stage, these will be grouped into classes, which are then given appropriate names, while in the third stage these groups will be examined and conjectures drawn based on relationships between them, as well as prevalence or scarcity of items within them. Because the data turned out not to contain enough features to form more substantial classes, the third stage does not follow the process of abstracting as such; instead, reducing and clustering of data are used as a basis for conjectures, as pointed out above. Although the primary focus of the analysis is always on the drawings, the students' written explanations have been used as guidance in cases of ambiguity or difficulty of understanding, where mentioned.

4.1 First stage: reduction of data

This first stage involves creating reduced expressions for the actual analysis. In effect, a listing of what each drawing (hereafter Unit) has to offer regarding the research questions of the present study. These are either a) representations of objects, symbols, or abstract ideas or b) representations of feelings associated with grammar, including emoticons as well as other symbolic ways of expressing feelings. Table 1 displays all these apparent in each drawing (items beginning with **explanation** denote information gleaned from written explanations), while Table 2 explains how they were coded, i.e. given reduced expressions.

Table 1. Relevant features in each Unit of data

Unit number	Relevant features
1.*	a stick figure reaching for the moon, on the dark side of which is an apparently industrial city
2.	a question mark next to an exclamation point; a grammar book; a stack of grammar books; a thundercloud, and a smiling sun; a positive emoticon / crying emoticon
3.	a tree bearing at least five different kinds of fruit; **explanation:** English is a diverse language
4.*	a square filled with various written grammar terms; **explanation:** *grammar is like a big box of things to learn*
5.	four stick figures; one stepping into a spike pit; one saying *this is easy*; one saying *oh yes it went this way*; and another surrounded by a barrier, using a computer, next to which is *written im playing computer games so I can speak English*; **explanation:** student feels that English is easy, despite there being numerous *traps* along the way to understanding; these are, however, negotiable once one *gets the idea*
6.	a freeform maze with various ways out: a positive and a negative emoticon, one that is depicted as changing from a confused one to a positive one, as well as *wtf?* written in capitals
7.	a human figure smiling and saying *I know everything*; **explanation:** student explains that this is a person who *has read through a grammar book and knows all about English and is happy about it*
8.*	a grammar book; a crossword in which is written *grammar* and *hard*; an exclamation point next to a question mark; a spiral; a written statement: *sometimes it is so much fun, sometimes it's frickin hard*
9.	a large question mark; the inside of the question mark has *ENGLISH* spelled with grammar terms forming the letters; the dot under the question mark has *complicated* written inside it
10.*	a drawing of a teacher pointing to a blackboard, on which there is an apparent explanation of what *apple* is; a student's head saying: *This is so easy, I rather draw pictures in my notebook than follow grammar*
11.	a sweating, grinning emoticon
12.	a confused emoticon next to a question mark; an arrow pointing to a light bulb flashing; a list of some grammar terms; a book labeled *English*
13.	a rainbow leading from a smiling emoticon/sun to a sad emoticon/raincloud

*these drawings are included as examples in Appendix C

Table 2. Reduced expressions in each unit of data

Unit number	Reduced expressions
1.	- a stick figure reaching for the moon: **positive feelings**
2.	- a question mark: **Confusion** - a grammar book: **Books** - a stack of grammar books: **Books** - a thundercloud: **Negative feelings** - a smiling sun: **Positive feelings** - a positive emoticon: **Positive feelings** - a crying emoticon: **Negative feelings**
3.	- multiple kinds of fruit, along with student's explanation: **Mixed feelings**
4.	- grammar terms: **Terminology**
5.	- a great variety of different ideas: **Mixed feelings**
6.	- the maze: **Confusion** - a positive emoticon: **Positive feelings** - a negative emoticon: **Negative feelings** - changing emoticon: **Mixed feelings** - *wtf* written in capitals: **Mixed feelings**
7.	- a human figure smiling and saying *I know everything:* **Positive feelings** - student's explanation: **Books**
8.	- a grammar book: **Books** - a crossword, in which is written *grammar* and *hard*: **Negative feelings** - an exclamation point right next to a question mark: **Mixed feelings**
9.	- a large question mark: **Confusion** - the inside has numerous grammar terms: **Terminology** - the dot of the question mark has *complicated* written inside it: **Confusion**
10.	- teacher instructing student: **Instruction** - the student figure's thoughts: **Positive feelings**
11.	- a sweating, grinning emoticon: **Negative feelings**
12.	- a confused emoticon next to a question mark: **Confusion** - an arrow pointing to a light bulb flashing: **Positive feelings** - a list of some grammar terms: **Grammar terms**
13.	- a rainbow leading from a smiling emoticon/sun to a sad emoticon/raincloud: **Mixed feelings**

As becomes apparent when examining Table 2, there is great variety in the drawings; some depict the student's feelings as well as what they think grammar consist of, while some only depict either one. Another axis along which the drawings vary is the number of different items depicting each. At this stage, the following reduced expressions have been established in the drawings: **Confusion, Books, Negative feelings, Positive feelings, Mixed feelings, Terminology,** and one instance of **Instruction.** These expressions are intentionally broad, as the aim here is to generalize the data to an extent that each unit can be compared to one another.

4.2 Second stage: clustering and reforming of data

The clustering process was relatively short, as the data did not contain enough expressions to warrant creation of larger subclasses. Rather, the clustering can simply be expressed in that there are two subclasses of expressions; **feelings**, which includes Positive, Negative, Confusion and Mixed, and **Constituents**, which includes Books, Terminology and Instruction.

Further reforming of the data consists of arranging the units of data into three classes based on which of these features each contains. All this is presented in Table 3 below. It explains, in addition to the total number of units in each class, the numbers for each instance of expression. This means that in those classes with feelings present, the total number of expressions exceeds the total number of units, since units with feelings present rather often had more than one type of feeling expressed in them, as apparent in Table 2.

Table 3. Grouping the units of data into three classes

Classes	Total number of units	Feelings present				Constituents present		
Units…		Positive	Negative	Confusion	Mixed	Books	Term.*	Instr.*
…with feelings only	6	2	2	1	4	X	X	X
…with constituents only	1	X	X	X	X	0	1	0
…with both	6	4	2	3	1	3	1	1

*Abbreviated for illustration: Terminology and Instruction, respectively

Of note here is that I purposely did not settle on labeling each unit negative, positive or mixed, for two reasons. Firstly, whether or not expressing both positive and negative feelings means that that the student has mixed feelings is not the topic of the present study. Instead, **mixed feelings** is used to describe the student either being apparently at a loss to what his/her own feelings regarding grammar are or apparently harboring greatly varying feelings, while **confusion** describes an instance of a student feeling confused regarding grammar. Secondly, by taking into account that a

single student may experience a variety of feelings, a more comprehensive understanding is gained

regarding not only how many students feel which way, but possibly regarding the reasons behind

their feelings as well. Hence, the analysis was shaped according to the data collected.

4.3 Third stage: analysis of data

Table 4 below describes how each expression occurs in relation to each other; in effect, which

expressions would appear to cause the presence of others. Based on this as well as the preceding

tables, I will discuss each expression and how they seem to occur.

Table 4. Co-occurrence between different features

Constituents	Feelings				
	Positive	Negative	Confusion	Mixed	<none>
Books	2	2	1	1	
Terminology	1		2		1
Instruction	1				
<none>	2	2	1	4	
Feelings total	6	4	4	5	1

Since the expressions of feelings were far more common, they will act as focus points. This indeed

is the first apparent information gained from the data; that though students may not have a

conscious understanding of what grammar instruction consists of, they are almost always conscious

of harboring some feeling or other about it. All 13 drawings save for one (unit 4, see Appendix C)

displayed some expressions of feelings, and three of these displayed more than one type of feelings.

One such example is unit 8 (see Appendix C), which displays negative and mixed feelings.

The balance of positive versus negative feelings seems to favor the positive. Positive feelings were

clearly more common, being present in six drawings. They seemed to be evoked in students exactly

twice as often (four (4) times) when they had in mind some kind of constituents for grammar

instruction than when they did not have (twice) , though there was no clear indication as to which

one of the constituents identified here would be the one considered most positive. For examples of expressions of positive feelings, see units 1 and 10 in Appendix C, though note, as pointed out in Table 1 above, that interpretation of the former one as definitely positive required use of the student's written explanation as well. Books were present twice, but were also shown to result in expressions of mixed (once) and negative feelings (twice). Negative feelings, on the other hand, were present in four drawings, of which one displayed it as the only type of feeling. It appears that negative feelings were connected to either the presence of books (twice), as is the case with unit 8 (see Appendix C), or total lack of expressing constituents (twice). When constituents were not expressed, as in unit 1 (see Appendix C), negative feelings were either the only type of feeling expressed or co-occurred with confusion. Hence it seems apparent that here knowledge of the object results in more positive feelings about it.

Confusion seems to have arisen mainly when students either considered grammar instruction to consist of terminology (twice) or books (once). It did not appear alone, as there were always either other types of feelings or either books or terminology present, possibly showing that it is either a part of a more complex set of feelings, as is the case with unit number six (Table 2), or results from the presence of terminology. Unit number two (Table 2) is interesting in this respect, as it displays a complex set of feelings as well as strong emphasis on books as a constituent of grammar. This suggests that confusion may be connected to the level of difficulty in teaching as perceived by the students.

Mixed feelings were most often encountered either as single items or in conjunction with other types of feelings, as is the case with illustrated unit 8 (see Appendix C). As such, the information provided by these units of data is negligible, serving only to indicate that a portion of the students, four out of thirteen, were at a loss as to how they feel, or may have misunderstood something. This will be elaborated below when results are further discussed.

The results regarding the first research question are not very conclusive, though they point about a notion of the students perceiving grammar instruction as use of school books and terminology, with some amount of teacher instruction present. As discussed below among some weaknesses of the present study, this may or may not have something to do with the way the instructions were provided.

Regarding the second research question, however, the results are much more clearly interpreted, in that the majority of the students either harbor a number of feelings beyond classification or feel positively about grammar instruction, while confusion and negative feelings occur equally often, but are not as common.

5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will discuss the results of the present study as well as some of their possible implications, followed by an elaboration on some of the weaknesses inherent in it, and lastly, discuss the use of visual narratives as data regarding the way it affected the present study.

5.1 On the results of the present study

The results regarding how students feel about grammar instruction agree, to an extent, with those of Jean and Simard (2011). The answers they received from students showed mostly neutral disposition, which could also be inferred from the results of the present study. In the drawings, there is apparent difference in the student being either confused or having a variety of different feelings (i.e. possibly sometimes feeling it to be positive and sometimes negative), both expressions of which could be, arguably, interpreted as neutral answers. Why I chose not to do so was to recognize

the difference in the essence of the feelings displayed: one expresses feelings being subject to circumstantial variables, while the other expresses that a student feels grammar instruction to be difficult or confusing without actually resenting it in any apparent way. The extent to which the results of the present study do not agree with those of Jean and Simard (2011) is that while the majority of their participants considered grammar instruction to be boring, the results of the present study indicate the opposite: a larger portion of students expressed either positive feelings or expressed that they experienced a variety of feelings.

The most probable criticism of the results would be that the objectivity of data interpretation, especially during the process of reduction, could be compromised because of the analysis being built around the data itself without a theoretical background. Since there was no theory allowing for analysis of the drawings without either adopting a motivational or attitude research-oriented approach or entirely devoting to the study of the structure of the drawings, I chose to make the analysis process as explicit as possible by providing all the requisite tables and conjectures. In this way, the objectivity is at least partially sustained in that others have the option of verifying my interpretation. However, the problem of not attaining the best possible level of objectivity is still present and must be acknowledged to an extent.

5.2 Limitations of the present study

There were a few minor defects in the research setting, the rectification of which could have in various ways improved the present study and will, if taken into account, be useful for future studies using similar form of data.

First of all, the students should have been somehow physically separated from each other to encourage concentration on the task at hand. As it happened, the students conversed with each

other, even debated in one instance, which clearly caused them loss of motivation for the task. An acceptable degree of separation would have been, for example, to locate the students to the listening exercise lab in the school, which would have had the students sitting in individual tables separated by wood and glass panels.

Secondly, the instructions should have been somehow clearer, as the drawings were clearly divisible to three categories based on how students understood the instructions: those who drew what they felt about grammar or how they felt about themselves in relation to grammar; those who drew what grammar constitutes in their opinion; and those who chose to do both. This is also the most probable reason for the numerous presences of greatly mixed feelings being expressed. It would have been certainly desirable to obtain a larger portion of drawings that did both. Here I cannot offer exact suggestions of improvement, however, as I felt that all the instructions were given as clearly as possible with very little room for misinterpretation. However, that is not what happened; instead, the students took some parts of the instructions more seriously than others, perhaps suggesting that the scope of the study should have been narrower. This would have allowed for more accurate instructions, which in turn might also have resulted in a narrower range of items, phenomena and emotions being presented in the drawings. Why I chose not to do so was to be able to acquire as concise data as possible, to avoid suggesting anything.

5.3 Reasons for adopting visual narratives as data

Here I will briefly discuss some additional reasons for adopting visual narratives as a form of data in the present study, for clarification as well as to, possibly, provide other researchers with incentives for making a similar choice.

An additional reason for choosing visual narratives as the primary form of data in the present study was to examine other optional ways of gaining a deep insight into the students' feelings. I felt that

even though questionnaires seemed to be the prevalent method of data collection when it came to examining students' feelings, asking for visual data would allow me to avoid two pitfalls common when using questionnaires: the relative difficulty of the researcher to perceive whether or not each participant has taken the study seriously enough to answer concisely, and the narrow range of answers and answering methods available to participants. The latter simply means that I was concerned with a questionnaire not being able to obtain concise answers because of lack of self-reflection on part of the subjects. The first pitfall was clearly countered successfully due to the open-ended nature of visual accounts; each student was asked to draw what they wanted to in connection of the topic, resulting in those who did not take the study seriously drawing something altogether different. The second pitfall was likewise successfully countered, as is apparent in the range of ideas and feelings expressed in the drawings. Clearly the freedom of expression was a key idea to many students, as the acquired drawings range from simple landscapes to complex mathematic-graphical representations. This supports what Nikula (2000:139) has pointed out regarding the value of drawings as a means of self-reflection as well.

To conclude, using drawings countered some problems inherent in questionnaires at the cost of presenting some new ones, the latter of which could be easily countered by paying closer attention to the research setting.

6 CONCLUSION

According to the result of this study, first-year high school students perceive grammar instruction as a combination of book usage, terminology and instructions on the teacher's part. These mainly seem to evoke positive or mixed feelings in them, while confusion or straightforward negative feelings, though appearing in equal amounts, are less common. Especially books seemed to evoke a considerable amount of various feelings, equally positive or negative. Generally, though students

may not have a clear picture of what grammar instruction actually is, they certainly harbor many different feelings about it nevertheless. While these results cannot be generalized due to the small number of participants (13), they serve to remind teachers of the fact that students may have a range of different feelings about a particular facet of language teaching.

The present study also supports the idea of using visual narratives in research into aspects of language learning and teaching, a form of data relatively uncommon up to date. Even though, among other problematic issues, it requires considerable open-mindedness and skill on part of the researcher as well as entails a certain amount of controversy in interpretation, the range of responses gained from the participants along with results gained argue that the use of visual narratives as data is an option when examining students' feelings on a topic.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: students' form of consent

Hei

Olen nyt kandidaatintutkielmaa Jyväskylän yliopistolla tekevä Englannin opiskelija, ja toivoisin lapsenne osallistuvan lyhyeen tutkimukseen kyseistä tutkielmaa varten. Aiheenani on lukio-opiskelijoiden näkemykset englannin kieliopista ja/tai sen opetuksesta. Haluaisin teettää lapsellanne lyhyen, aikaa alle yhden oppitunnin vievän kirjallisen tehtävän maanantaina 30.4.2012, normaalin englannintunnin yhteydessä. Tutkimukseen osallistumiseen ei sisälly muuta velvoitetta, ja kerättyä materiaalia käyttäisin kandidaatintutkielmassani sekä mahdollisesti aikanaan pro gradu- työssä. Toivoisin, että täyttäisitte alla olevan lyhyen lomakkeen.

Kiittäen osallistumisesta ja hyvää alkavaa kesää toivottaen,

Antti Myyry

e-mail: antti.i.myyry@student.jyu.fi

Huoltajan suostumus: Lapsen osallistuminen tutkimukseen

Tutkimuksen suorituspaikka: Muuramen Lukio

Tutkimuksen tekijä: Antti Myyry

Tutkimuksen ohjaaja: Lehtori Tuula Hirvonen tuula.a.hirvonen@jyu.fi

Tutkimusta tekevä yliopisto / laitos: Jyväskylän yliopisto / kielten laitos

Tutkimusta varten kerätty aineisto käsitellään niin, että osallistujan henkilöllisyys ei paljastu. Aineistoa säilytetään tutkimusta tekevässä yliopistossa ja se voidaan sijoittaa tutkimuksen päätyttyä arkistoon. Huoltajalle kerrotaan, milloin ja missä tilanteissa tutkimustietoa kerätään. Huoltaja voi halutessaan myös perua lapsen osallistumisen.

1. **Lapsi vastaa:**

   ☐ **Haluan osallistua tutkimukseen**

   ☐ **En halua osallistua tutkimukseen**

2. **Huoltaja vastaa:**
   Suostun siihen, että lapseni tutkimustilanteessa tuottamia kirjallisia materiaaleja kerätään ja tallennetaan ☐

   Näin kerättyä lastani koskevaa aineistoa saa käyttää

   ☐ **tieteellisissä tutkimuksissa ja julkaisuissa**

Paikka:

Aika:

Allekirjoitus:

Nimen selvennys:

Lapsen nimi:

Appendix B: students' sheet

<u>Piirrä kuva englannin kieliopista</u>
Kysymyksiä joita voit miettiä piirroksesi pohjaksi:
Millainen englannin kielioppi on?
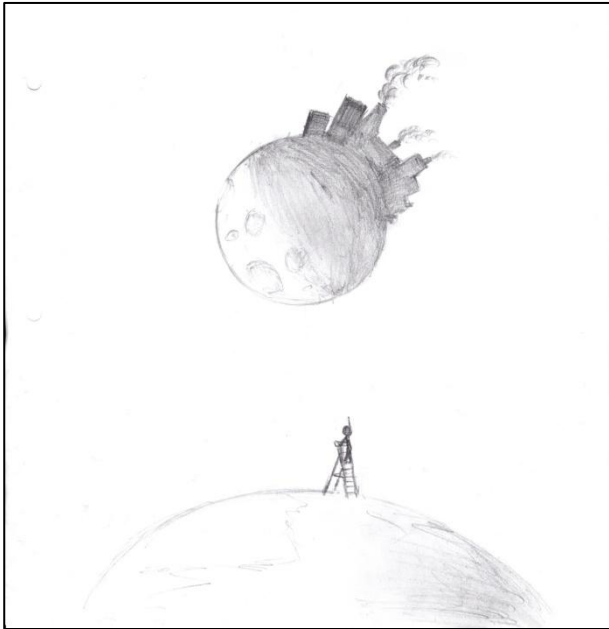Mitä se sisältää?
Mitä tuntemuksia se sinussa herättää?
Piirrä mitä mieleesi tulee; tyyli on vapaa, samoin ilmaisu
Voit piirtää asioita, esineitä, maisemia – jopa abstraktin teoksen
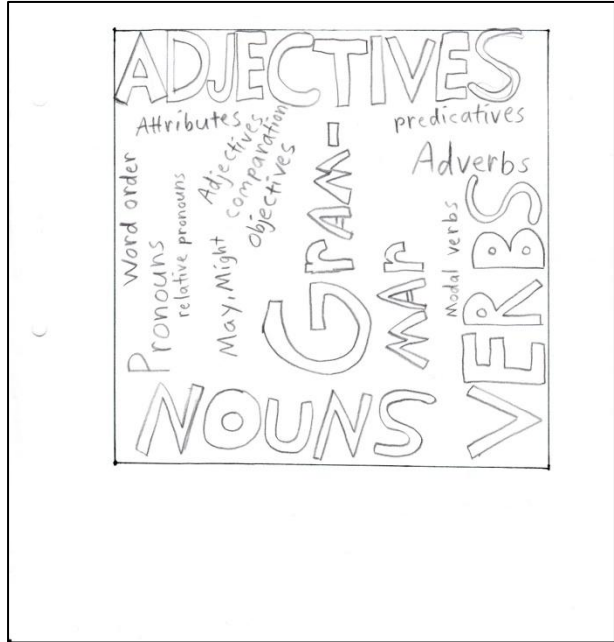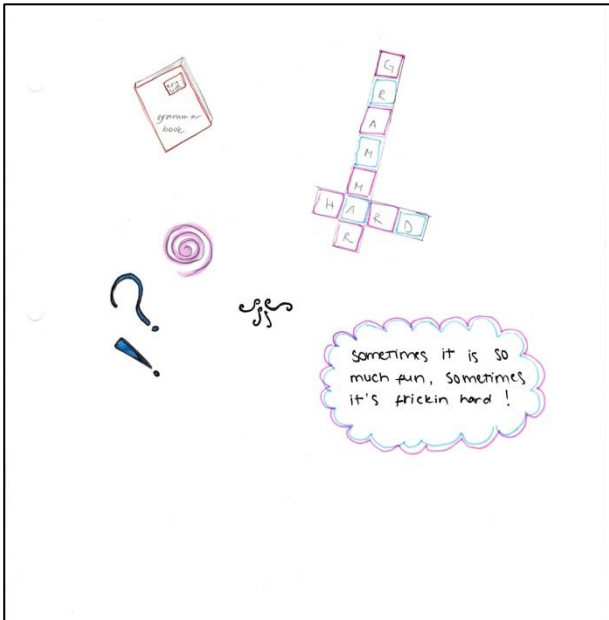
Appendix C: four units of data

(cropped to show only what each student drew)

Unit 1

Unit 4

Unit 8

Unit 10