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Bilingual children as policy agents: Language policy and education policy in minority language medium Early Childhood Education and Care

Abstract: The current study examines bilingual children as language policy agents in the interplay between official language policy and education policy at three Swedish-medium preschools in Finland. For this purpose we monitored nine Finnish-Swedish bilingual children aged 3 to 5 years for 18 months. The preschools were located in three different parts of Finland, in milieux with varying degrees of language dominance. The children were video recorded during their normal daytime routines in early childhood education and care. Three types of communicative situations were analyzed: an educator-led small group activity, free play with friends, and an activity in which one child was playing alone. Representative dialogs were selected to illustrate the children's agency in constructing and enacting bilingual and/or monolingual language policies. Our analysis shows, firstly, that official national language policies can be enacted in different ways depending on the wider practice structures of the site; and, secondly, that each bilingual child has a unique agency and an active role in the construction of not only the monolingual policy but also a bilingual policy within the frames of early childhood education and care.

Keywords: Agency, preschool, early childhood education and care, language policy, education policy

1 Introduction

This article traces the agency – including potential change over time – of nine bilingual children, through the study of the children's communicative actions. The children have agency, a socio-culturally mediated capacity to act (Ahearn

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2001), which can be seen in their communicative acts. The article will identify what kinds of communicative acts are manifested and how these are embedded in the institutional practice structures (i.e. institutional language policy and institutional education policy) in which they occur. By investigating children's everyday reality and actions, we can gain insight into the language policy practiced in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and can understand language policy as the multidimensional construct it is (Spolsky 2004).

The focus of the study is on bilingual Finnish-Swedish children attending minority-medium (Swedish) ECEC institutions in an officially bilingual country, Finland. Swedish-medium ECEC institutions in Finland officially follow a monolingual policy as a means of firmly supporting the lesser spoken national language in the educational domain. At the same time, the education policy emphasizes the individual child and the child's needs for secure and balanced growth. The number of bilingual children attending Swedish-medium ECEC is high, and this can lead to challenges when implementing the two policies: on the one hand there is the declared, monolingual language policy, while on the other hand there is the need to acknowledge the bilingual child's right to make use of both languages. The aim of the study is to explore what kind of practical solutions are created in the intersection of these two officially declared but overlapping policies. We identify the bottom-up implementation of policies through an exploration of nine individual bilingual child agencies in practice.

In examining ECEC practice, we seek to respond to three research questions. First, how are the bilingual children's communicative actions manifested in daily ECEC practices on three different collection occasions? Second, what do the children's communicative actions tell us about the language policy in ECEC? Third, what kind of changes over time can be traced in child agency? We will start by discussing practice structures in ECEC and child agency in general. We will then examine how these can be traced in Swedish-medium ECEC in Finland in particular.

2 The role of bilingual child agency in ECEC practice structures

Recently the focus in studies in language policy and planning (LPP) has been on understanding the role and agency of different policy agents. Rather than simply implementing top-down macro policies and policy structures, policy agents are active in reconstructing national and even supranational policies in the local context (Johnson and Ricento 2013). *Agency* and *structures* can therefore be

described as two sides of the same coin (Oswell 2013: 45). Understanding the structures is important for understanding the role of agency (Block 2015: 21). Bourdieu (1991), for example, concludes that people are valued and given legitimacy due to their ability and right to speak a certain language in a certain way in a certain situation, and these kinds of legitimate languages are reproduced by institutions. Following Bourdieu's view, young children can be seen as being socialized into the use of legitimate language by institutions such as ECEC. Bourdieu's view has, however, been criticized for being too focused on institutions and power struggles between linguistic groups and giving too little attention to the role of individual agents in navigating different policies (Saxena and Martin-Jones 2013). In our study, we follow the socio-cultural paradigm and consider the nine children to be active policy agents. Children are not solely socialized into a language and into a language policy by adults; rather, they shape this process through their own communicative actions (Fogle 2012; Luykx 2005; Markström and Halldén 2009; Slotte-Lüttge 2007).

However, the mere acknowledgement of individual agency does not automatically lead to change in educational language policies and practices. Individuals have the power to change practice, but only if the structures that might hinder the desired agency are changed (Kemmis et al. 2014). Practice is a multidimensional phenomenon as it has its trajectories in time (e.g. practice structures) and is established in the intersubjective space between individuals. People follow a certain discourse typical of the practice, as well as situating themselves in different subject positions and roles in these practices (Davies and Harré 1990). This means that individual agency is affected by the practice structure in time and space, but individual agency can also change the practice.

Spolsky's (2004) multidimensional language policy model reveals the interplay between individual agency and the practice structures. According to Spolsky (2004), the concept 'language policy' can be divided into three interrelated dimensions: 'management', 'ideology' and 'praxis'. The first dimension, 'management', refers to the explicit, often official plan or policy for language use; 'ideology' stands for what people think should be done with languages; and 'praxis' is what people actually do with the languages available. Bonacina-Pugh (2012) suggests using the concepts of 'declared', 'perceived' and 'practiced language policy' in order to make it more transparent that all of the dimensions presented by Spolsky (2004) are intertwined dimensions of language policy. We will use these concepts in this article since they highlight the fact that official language policies can be perceived in different ways and that this perception is affected by different beliefs and values in respect of languages, childhood and so forth. All these factors lead to variables in the practiced dimension of language policy.

The declared, perceived and practiced dimensions of language policy are intertwined and continuously inform and re-form each other; how the world is perceived by those in power shapes the policies that are decided upon and set out in various steering documents. At the same time, the declared policies are always interpreted by policy agents, who in turn perceive the world from a specific perspective with their own particular beliefs and ideologies. Moreover, changes in policy – and therefore in practice structures – occur on different timescales: minor changes in how the policy is put into practice, brought about for example by a new child or educator entering the group, might happen overnight. It will take longer for changes in institutional beliefs to become declared, or at least explicitly stated, and to come into effect. An even longer period of time is needed for national policies to change: any official national education policy is most likely revised and updated only very infrequently –in Finland, for example, this happens every 10 to 15 years. For language legislation and acknowledgement of the official status of a national language or languages, if stated in the Constitution as is the case in Finland, even more profound societal change is needed before any changes will take place.

Since children have a critical role as policy agents in our study, it is also necessary to define 'child agency'. Using Ahearn's (2001: 112) classic definition of agency – "a socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" – as a point of departure, we claim that a child's bilingual agency is the socio-culturally mediated capacity of the child to act, as it is reflected in the child's communicative acts. Agency is socio-culturally mediated since children are members in a certain society. These members participate in a shared world in which the expected linguistic behavior or norm is always related to the culture. A child can be seen as socialized in the norms, but at the same time also has a possibility to challenge these norms. Much of the research literature on agency deals with the extent to which consciousness and intentionality are a prerequisite of agency. Ahearn (2010) points out the difficulties of defining what is meant by intentionality and argues that any single cognitive perspective on agency fails to take into account socio-cultural aspects and the way they affect individual agency. According to Giddens (1979), agency requires the self-reflexive monitoring or rationalization of action; it may include a deliberate choice *not* to act at all, or to act against expectations or norms (Fogle 2012). This type of agency requires some level of consciousness about prevailing norms and ideologies, and must apply too in respect of children when we talk about child agency.

As Oswell (2013: 47–48) remarks, an agency model based on reflexivity, self-awareness and intention is problematic when studying young children as their cognitive development has been found to be significant during the first years of life (van Nijnatten 2010). The children examined in the current study were

between three and four years of age at the time of the first observations, an age in which the development of the ability to attribute mental states – beliefs, intents, knowledge, desires – to oneself and to others is significant (e.g. Barac et al. 2014). Previous research has shown that children are able to separate two languages according to the person they are talking to from at least two years old (Paradis 2009; Almér in this special issue), but also that children of age four have significantly more pragmatic competence than their younger peers (Paradis and Nicoladis 2007).

Child agency requires a degree of cognitive capacity and an emerging understanding of the practice structures in which daily interaction takes place. In the current study, the children are seen as holders of capacities to act which are mediated through language(s). As Garrett (2007: 235) puts it, "the bilingual subject is regarded not only as a locus of bilingual competence, but, equally important, as an agent of bilingual practice".

3 Language and education policy in Finland

Finland's national language policy is set out in the Constitution, which dates from 1919. It establishes that there are two national languages in Finland – Finnish and Swedish – and that public authorities will provide for the cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations of the country on an equal basis. The Language Act of 1922, updated in 2004 (Ministry of Justice 2004) regulates the use of these two languages. In order to guarantee citizens their linguistic rights, everyone is assigned a linguistic affiliation (in terms of 'mother tongue') by their parents shortly after birth. The affiliation can easily be changed but, importantly, only one language can be registered. On this basis, 89.3% of the population in 2013 were registered as Finnish speakers, and 5.3% as Swedish speakers (OSF 2013). The statistics further serve as the basis for the linguistic division of the country: a municipality is either unilingual (Finnish or Swedish) or bilingual (Finnish/Swedish).[1]

Due to the granting of equal linguistic rights to speakers of both of the national languages, Finland has a parallel education system in which ECEC institutions and schools are administratively either Finnish-medium or Swedish-medium. Instruction can be given in any language as long as parents opt for it and it "does not risk the pupil's ability to follow teaching" (Ministry of

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[1] A municipality is bilingual if the minority comprises at least eight percent of the population or at least 3,000 persons. (Ministry of Justice 2004).

Education 1998). Bilingual Swedish-Finnish marriages – in which the spouses have different registered mother tongues – are not uncommon. In 2013, 3% of all families in Finland were bilingual, that is, one parent was registered as a Finnish speaker and the other as a Swedish speaker, and in 3.8% of all families both parents had Swedish as their registered mother tongue (OSF 2015). In bilingual (as well as in Swedish-speaking) families, parents often choose Swedish-medium ECEC as a way to support their children's development in the less spoken language in society (Lojander-Visapää 2008; see Schwartz et al. 2011; for similar parental decisions in other minority language contexts).

The national education policy in Finland emphasizes individuality and democracy. The general aim of the education system is to support pupils' growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society (Finnish Government 2012). Every child has the right to participate in ECEC, which includes day care arrangements as well as goal-oriented early childhood education for children under the age of seven (EURYDICE 2015). In 2009, 46.1% of all three-year-olds and 62.6% of all five-year-olds in Finland were enrolled in ECEC (OECD 2012). The Finnish education system is decentralized, and local policy agents have both the right and the obligation to solve *ad hoc* local policy problems (Siiner 2014). Finnish ECEC policy is described in the national guidelines (STAKES 2005)[2] as a so-called EduCare-paradigm, which comprises care, education and teaching, and aims to form a meaningful whole from the child's point of view. The central value in ECEC is the human dignity of the child. This ideology of the child's best interest can be traced in Finnish legislation: the promoting of warm personal relationships, growth and development in secure environments, the child's right to be treated with understanding and have a say, and the right to one's own culture, language, religion and beliefs. (STAKES 2005: 9–27.) In short, a child's personal well-being is promoted along with the child's right to act and develop as a unique person. It is further declared in the national guidelines that the concept of 'joy' is essential in learning, and no performance requirements are placed on children (STAKES 2005: 9–27).

The educational ideology of Finland, as described in the national guidelines, provides a lens through which to view and perceive the official declared national language policy in different ways. Language policy and education policy can be treated as two separate policies, but if treated together their internal order needs to be taken into account. Language policy guarantees the linguistic rights of language groups, whereas education policy emphasizes the needs of the individual. These can serve the same purpose but they may also clash. The monolingual Swedish language policy for ECEC protects the right to

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2 New Curriculum guidelines on ECEC (FNBE 2016) will be implemented in August 2017.

receive education in the lesser spoken national language and is thus seen as a way to prevent language shift in the minority group (Kovero 2011; see also Thomas and Roberts 2011). However, an individual bilingual child might have different linguistic needs from those of a particular group. For this reason, it is imperative to analyze how the two declared policies are perceived by local policy agents, including ECEC staff, parents and the individual child, and how these perceptions become the practiced policy in everyday situations in ECEC.

4 The study – Bilingual children as policy agents

The current study was part of a larger, ethnographically informed research project which had as its goal a deeper understanding of how concepts of language, bilingualism and bilingual development are both manifested and negotiated in Finnish-Swedish bilingual families and in Swedish-medium ECEC. We sought to achieve this goal by examining the situation at three different ECEC sites in different parts of Finland. The data included longitudinal observations of nine bilingual children in ECEC and in their homes; interviews with the children, their parents, educators and ECEC leaders; and analysis of written policy documents as well as of media debates. For this particular study the main source of data were the observations carried out in the ECEC units.

4.1 Settings and participants

Site I is situated in the capital region, officially bilingual and linguistically the most diverse of the three sites examined, with 81% Finnish speakers and 6% Swedish speakers (see Table 1). Site II is situated in an officially Finnish-speaking unilingual area with less than one percent registered Swedish speakers. Also, the proportion of speakers of other languages is low (4%) here, the lowest of all the three sites. Hence, with 96% registered speakers of Finnish, the

Table 1: Percentages of registered mother tongue speakers in the cities in which the three ECEC sites were located and in Finland as a whole (Official Statistics of Finland (OSF) 2013).

	Finnish	Swedish	Other
Site I	81%	6%	13%
Site II	96%	0%	4%
Site III	70%	23%	7%
Finland	89%	5%	5%

majority language has a very dominant position. Site III is situated in an officially bilingual area where the proportion of Finnish speakers is the lowest of the three sites (70%) and the proportion of Swedish speakers is relatively high (23%). In the surrounding region up to 70% of the inhabitants are registered as speakers of Swedish.

The three ECEC units examined were all so called co-located units. This means that the buildings housed Swedish-medium groups as well as Finnish-medium groups, either with shared or separate administration and leadership. The groups shared some common premises, such as kitchen, playground or library, but the Swedish-medium and the Finnish-medium ECEC groups occupied separate rooms for most of the day. The Swedish-medium groups in focus in this study included between 14 and 25 children. The educator-child ratio was 1:7 in all three sites.

A degree of cultural and linguistic diversity existed across the children and groups. All the children who were enrolled had some knowledge of Swedish and most of the children had at least a basic understanding of Finnish. In addition to bilingual Finnish-Swedish children, there were also bilingual children in other languages. Some of the children had a cultural background in Sweden rather than in the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, while others came from monolingual Finnish-speaking families. All the ECEC educators were qualified according to Finnish ECEC standards. The educators understood both Finnish and Swedish, and they used Finnish in addition to Swedish in communication with the parents. With the children they used primarily Swedish.

Three bilingual children from each site were in focus for the study. The nine children included eight girls and one boy, and their ages ranged between 2;10 (years;months) and 4;11 at the start of the project and between 4;0 and 5;10 at the time of the third data collection (see Table 2). All of the children had been acquainted with both Finnish and Swedish from birth, since one of the parents spoke mainly Swedish with the child and the other parent mainly Finnish. For the purpose of this study we did not measure or analyze the children's productive language skills.

In a previous study, in which we focused only on data collected during the spring of 2014, the first data point, we were able to establish that each child had a unique way of using bilingual resources in everyday situations in ECEC (Bergroth and Palviainen 2016b). A somewhat simplified profile of language practices showed that – with a few exceptions – Anna, Amanda and Ella used only Swedish while interacting with peers and educators, and when playing on their own. In contrast, Tobias, Tove and Tindra used Finnish most of the time, while

Table 2: Children in the study, their age (years; months) and length of recordings (hours: minutes) on the different data collection occasions.

	Name[a]	Spring 2014		Autumn 2014		Spring 2015	
		Age	Length	Age	Length	Age	Length
Site I	Anna	3;11	1:41	4;5	1:44	5;0	5:03[b]
	Amanda	3;6	1:44	4;1	1:44	4;7	
	Alisa	2;10	2:14	3;5	1:39	4;0	
Site II	Tobias	3;5	1:46	3;11	1:09	4;4	1:29
	Tindra	4;1	1:24	4;7	0:40	5;1	1:15
	Tove	3;5	1:57	3;10	1:41	4;4	1:53
Site III	Ella	3;9	2:53	4;4	2:38	4;9	2:21
	Eva	4;11	1:53	5;4	2:40	5;10	1:29
	Ester	4;1	2:16	4;7	2:30	4;11	2:30

[a]All names are pseudonyms.
[b]In all of the recordings in spring 2015 all three of the children in focus were playing together.

Alisa, Eva and Ester made active use of both languages. Therefore, one question we sought to explore in this article is whether the pattern continues over time.

4.2 Data collection and analysis

The children were video-recorded for two to three hours while engaged in typical ECEC activities. The recordings were repeated on three occasions – spring 2014, fall 2014 and spring 2015 – making a total of 50 hours of recorded material (see Table 2). The video-recordings were carried out by the first author, a bilingual speaker. On each occasion the researcher followed and filmed one of the children and the activities in which the child was engaged. The researcher used a portable camera with an internal microphone and the child also wore a portable microphone. The researcher spoke Swedish in the ECEC units. While the children in Sites I and III were used to Swedish-speaking people coming and going in the unit as well as used to hearing Swedish spoken in the surrounding areas, and therefore did not pay much attention to the linguistic characteristics of the newcomer, for the children in Site II it was an unusual experience to have a new Swedish-speaking person visiting the unit (see Almér in this special issue).

Since the practiced dimension of language policy is socially co-constructed, it can be both monolingual and bilingual simultaneously (cf. Grosjean 2001 on monolingual/bilingual language modus) and a bilingual child can orient toward monolingual or bilingual practice. Previous research on bilingual children has, however, typically focused on interactional turns where both languages are used, either by the teacher or the children themselves, such as turns including code-switching or translanguaging practices (see e.g. Cekaite and Björk-Willén 2013; Gort and Pontier 2013; Slotte-Lüttge 2007). However, we wished to shift the focus from solely code-switching episodes on the grounds that, to achieve a general understanding of bilingual child agency, a wide and rich description of situated actions is required, without any specific expectations of certain linguistic behavior on the part of the child. We therefore selected three typical ECEC activities in the video-recordings: free play with peers, an educator-led activity, and a child's private speech.

All the video-recorded data were watched by both of the authors. All instances of the predefined activities were identified and transcribed verbatim. Both of the authors analyzed the excerpts individually and wrote a short description of the communicative actions of each child and the changes that could be observed in their communicative actions over time. The separate analyses were then compared and the minor differences between the analyses were discussed in detail until consensus was reached. In this study only a general overview of each child is presented, due to the richness and complexity of the individual data. For a similar reason we have chosen illustrative examples where the children in whom we are interested happen to interact with each other, which is in fact one type of ECEC activity, namely free play with peers. The examples were chosen as representative of the site as well as of the particular children at the time of the specific data collection.

In order to be able to relate child agency to practice structures we also included secondary sources of data from the project, such as interviews with educators and parents. In our analysis of the video-recorded data and interviews, we analyzed language policy as an integrated whole as it plays out in everyday ECEC practices. This means that we conceptualize official declared national language and education policies and perceptions of these as an inevitable part of language practices, and do not aim to elicit any explicit conceptions of these from different agents. Similarly, we do not split the practiced policy into educator practices and child practices, but consider practices always to be situational and dependent on the participants. For this reason we have chosen to describe the general practiced policy in each site as a fluid and dynamic 'orientation', rather than as a fixed policy. The different practiced policies are

referred to as either Swedish-oriented policy, Finnish-oriented policy or bilin-
gually-oriented policy.

5 Findings

In the following Subsections 5.1–5.3 we first present an overview of the policy
orientation practiced at each site, discuss the agency of each of the children in
focus, and relate these agencies to the practice orientations. In Section 5.4 we
compare the sites and discuss what kinds of practice structures they shape for
child agency.

5.1 Site I: Agency and policy creating a Swedish-oriented policy

The observations collected from Site I established the ECEC unit as a place where
Swedish had a strong position. Relatively little Finnish was used by the children in
focus in this study and the amount of Finnish decreased as they grew older. The
educators in this site seemed to be very pleased when the researcher pointed this
out to them; they expressed that they took it as a sign of success in creating a
strong Swedish-medium space for the children. They seemed to be especially
pleased and somewhat surprised to hear that Swedish was used to an even greater
extent there than in Site III, which they knew was located in a more Swedish-
speaking region of the country. The educators themselves did not use any Finnish
with the children, thus expressing the ideal of Swedish as the main language of
communication. Despite this ideal, the educators did not explicitly attempt to
change the children's bilingual use of Finnish and Swedish by telling them to
use Swedish. However, they actively and repeatedly drew attention to, for exam-
ple, vocabulary with both monolingual and bilingual children. This acceptance of
both languages indicated that the two languages were both valued. Thus it seems
that the education policy of supporting a child's individual bilingual growth was
acknowledged and valued alongside the declared monolingual language policy.

During the spring of 2014 Anna and Amanda were Swedish-oriented, occa-
sionally using Finnish words to communicate. The Swedish policy that was
practiced there could thus be seen both as a result of their communicative acts
and agency and as a result of practices affecting their agency. The Swedish policy
did not change Amanda's or Anna's linguistic agency over time to any great
extent because they were oriented towards the same policy as was commonly
practiced. They continued to use Swedish as their main productive language.

In excerpt (1), from spring 2015, all three of the focus children are playing together with dolls. Only Swedish is used, except for one interjection (*silly*, line 11) expressed in Finnish.

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Excerpt (1)
Participants: Alisa, age 4;0; Anna, age 5;0; Amanda, age 4;7.
1   Alisa:    den här babyn vill sitta med dig. (14) här
              this baby wants to sit with you. (14) here
2   Anna:     kom nu Amanda.
              come on Amanda.
3   Amanda:   OKEJ
              OKAY
4   Anna:     det är min, det är °min°, på lek var det mammas.
              this is mine, this is °mine°, in the play it was
              mum's.
5   Alisa:    jag ska, jag ska x.
              I'm going to, I'm going to x.
6   Anna:     kom nu Amanda.
              come on Amanda.
7   Amanda:   jag kommer, JAG SKA VA MED MIN PLÅNBOK, oj (1) jag
              glömde nästan min väska (1) oj
              ((the children are laughing))
              I'm coming, I'M GOING TO BE (THERE) WITH MY WALLET,
              oh (1) I almost forgot my bag (1) oh
              ((the children are laughing))
8   Alisa:    jag går hitta en annan sån (till mig).
              I'm going to find another one like that (for me).
9   Amanda:   hej. (7) JAG KOMMER
              hi. (7) I'M COMING
10  Anna:     vi väntar på andra x.
              we're waiting for (the) others x.
11  Amanda:   Alisa (.) hupsu
              Alisa (.) silly
12  Anna:     öhm Alisa titta di:t, titta dit (2) Alisa titta (2)
              titta där. (5) ni sku sjunga.
              ehm Alisa look the:re, look there (2) Alisa look (2)
              look there. (5) you were about to sing.
13  Alisa:    ja.
              yes.
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14 Amanda:  vi har vi ej [((sings))]
            we have we not [((sings))]
15 Alisa:   [NÄE DU FÅR INT SJUNGA], DET VAR JAG SOM FICK SJUNGA (.)
            igår.
            [NO YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO
            SING], IT WAS ME WHO GOT TO SING (.) yesterday.
16 Alisa:   här lilla baby, här lilla baby:. det här var stora-
            systern som var här å titta (.) när jag sjungde.
            here little baby, here little baby:. this here was
            the big sister who was here to watch (.) when I
            singed.
```

The most obvious changes over time happened with Alisa, the youngest of the nine children followed in this study. She used both languages to a similar extent in the first recording and seemed to alternate between languages regardless of the language competences of the interlocutor. In the later recordings she continued to use both languages actively, especially when playing alone. However, over time she developed greater interlocutor sensitivity (Paradis and Nicoladis 2007). In interaction with others she eventually spoke more Swedish and less Finnish. However, there was one interesting exception to this pattern. In the recordings made in the fall of 2014, Alisa and her friend Sara, previously a mainly Finnish speaker, were engaged in some language policy negotiations. Previously, their joint language had been Finnish, but now Sara tried gently but determinedly to coerce Alisa to speak only Swedish with her. By the spring of 2015 the two girls were speaking mainly Swedish with each other. It thus seems that Sara's active agency in switching their mutual language from Finnish to Swedish also affected Alisa's linguistic practices.

5.2 Site II: Agency and policy creating a Finnish-oriented policy

Site II can be described as an unsettled bilingual space. During the observations, Swedish was used by the educators but used only occasionally by the children. The children showed a strong orientation toward using Finnish. In this situation, the educators seemed at a loss, since they were expected to help children to develop their Swedish. The educators used a range of different methods to encourage the use of Swedish among the children. These included so called 'language toys' (while playing with these the children were supposed to follow a

Swedish-only 'rule') or different reward systems for using Swedish. The educators also explicitly reminded the children about using Swedish. It became clear that the presence of an educator made children more oriented toward Swedish (see Boyd, Huss and Ottesjö in this special issue). However, in the recordings the children were mostly playing together without any educator present in the same room, and this created space for Finnish-mediated interactions between the children.

Viewed from the children's perspective, the educators' active attempts to promote the use of Swedish seemed to diminish the role of education policy. It is, however, important to remember that the majority language, Finnish, had a dominant role in the surrounding community (96% Finnish speakers). Without the educators' active promotion of the minority language, Swedish, there was a very real risk that the children would use the majority language, Finnish, exclusively, and that their already infrequent use of Swedish might be completely lost.

The language policy practiced on this site oriented the bilingual children toward the use of Finnish as a lingua franca. During spring 2014, Tove did not use any Swedish at all, even when the educator actively tried to get her to repeat a familiar Swedish rhyme. Tindra used Swedish when she was talking to the only child in the ECEC who had a monolingual Swedish background. She sometimes took the initiative to use Swedish with the educators and could sometimes answer them in Swedish. Tobias, for his part, used a few isolated words of Swedish in communication with the educators, but spoke Finnish even with the aforementioned monolingual Swedish-speaking child. During the second and third data collection rounds there were no significant changes in the children's communicative actions. Hence Tobias continued to use mostly Finnish, and Tindra continued to use some Swedish only occasionally when needed. The most evident change over time happened with Tove, who used mainly Finnish in the first two recordings, but increased her use of Swedish in spring 2015. According to her mother, Tove had started to visit a bilingual city regularly, and the family was planning to move there (Bergroth and Palviainen 2016a). This ECEC external factor may explain some of the change in Tove's linguistic agency.

Excerpt (2) from the fall of 2014 illustrates how bilingual children at this site typically communicated with each other. Tindra and Tove are playing one of the board games that will reward them with a language sticker. At the beginning of the recording one of the educators is playing with the girls and doing most of the talking in Swedish. A few minutes later the girls are left to finish the game on their own and the language then switches to Finnish with occasional Swedish words thrown in (cf. *roll*, line 1):

Excerpt (2)
Participants: Tindra, age 4;7; Tove, age 3;10.
1   Tindra: **se on mun vuoro** kasta. ((rolls a dice)) (6) **hmm,**
                 minkä mä sain Tove?
                 it's my turn to roll. ((rolls a dice)) (6) *hmm, which*
                 one did I get Tove?
2   Tove: **nyt sä saat ottaa minkä sä haluut näist väreistä.**
                 now you can take whichever you want of these colors.
     Tindra: **mä haluun ottaa, mmm**
                 I will take, mmm
4   Tove: **ota minkä värin haluat, tos on, tossa on ja [tossa on**
                 ja tossa on]
                 take the color you want there is, there is and [there
                 is and there is]
5   Tindra: **[mä otan,] mä otan tämän.**
                 [I'll take,] I'll take this one.
6   Tove: **tossa on ja (1) tossa on ja tossa on=**
                 there is and (1) there is and there is
7   Tindra: **hei [nyt on sun vuoro Tove].**
                 hey [now it's your turn Tove].
8   Tove: **[=tossa on, tossa on, tossaki] mulla on vie- vaan**
                 yks jäljellä, niin sitte jos sä saisit ton mustan
                 niin sä saat ottaa minkä sä haluut. tohon tai (19)
                 tossa
                 [=there is, there is, and there I have sti- only <u>one</u>
                 left, so then if you get that black one then you may
                 take the one you will. there or (19) there
9   Tindra: **mä sain:** <u>**tämän,**</u> **mä sain tämän Tove, Tove, mä sain**
                 <u>**tämän.**</u>
                 I got <u>this</u> *one, I got this one Tove, Tove, I got* <u>this</u>
                 one.
10   Tove: **no ota sit minkä sä haluut ton, ton tai ton. ei se oo**
                 oikee väri.
                 well take then the one you will that, that or that.
                 no that isn't the right color.
11   Tindra: **tämä**
                 this
12   Tove: **keltanen hyvä**
                 yellow good

To conclude, despite the official monolingual Swedish policy, the main language heard in Site II was Finnish. Neither bilingual nor monolingual Swedish agency was explicitly resisted by the children. However to act on these policies instead of on the established and practiced Finnish policy would most likely require active policy negotiations and reconstructions of the existing norms. It was therefore most likely less demanding to follow the established policy. It also seems that there was not enough critical mass (Cf. Thomas and Roberts 2011) of predominantly Swedish-speaking children to actualize language policy decisions oriented toward the more frequent use of Swedish by the children in our study and to make it worth their while to put in the required effort.

5.3 Site III: Agency and policy creating bilingually oriented policy

The observations collected in Site III establish it as a bilingual site where both languages were heard and seen. The educators spoke mainly Swedish with the children but did not hesitate to use some Finnish, and they promoted metalinguistic awareness by drawing children's attention to differences in the languages. The educators told us that they were not allowed to ask the children to switch language. This means that the education policy of emphasizing the linguistic rights of the individual child was treated as of equal value to the declared language policy, or perhaps even considered to be the more important policy. Nonetheless, the educators worked systematically on strengthening the Swedish skills of each individual child. This was done by allocating time for each child during which they would talk with that child in Swedish. The building where the unit was housed had recently been constructed for the needs of ECEC, which meant that the educators and the children were in the same open space; this gave plenty of opportunities for child-adult interaction in Swedish.

During the spring of 2014 it was observed that both Eva and Ester were actively using both languages at the ECEC. In the fall of 2014 and spring of 2015 Eva spoke Finnish with her best friend, who was bilingual. However, she spoke Swedish with the educators as well as with her monolingual Swedish peers. Eva thus seemed to be separating languages systematically according to interlocutor and using both languages without any visible effort. Ester, too, navigated freely between Finnish and Swedish, using Swedish with the educators and her monolingual peers, and Finnish, Swedish or a bilingual mix with bilingual friends. Comparing Ester and Eva, it can be concluded that Eva always seemed to follow the interlocutor's choice of language whereas Ester sometimes seemed to switch fairly spontaneously. Eva and Ester usually spoke Finnish to each

other, but they both used Swedish when interacting with the third child in the study, Ella. Ella used only Swedish with everyone. This pattern was true of her on all of the data collection occasions.

At this site, either interaction carried out entirely in Finnish or entirely in Swedish, or interaction where both languages were used, would be equally representative as illustrative examples. To exemplify the latter, we observed a peer group activity in the spring of 2015, when three monolingual Swedish-speaking children and six bilingual children participated in an activity of drawing and coloring pictures. All three of the children who are the focus of this study were taking part in this activity: Eva sat quietly most of the time, but used some Finnish with Ester and commented on the activity to the researcher in Swedish. Ester used both languages, depending on whom she was addressing; with bilingual peers she made use of both languages concurrently. Ella used mainly Swedish. The following excerpt (3) from this recorded multi-party activity illustrates how the interaction was bilingually co-constructed among the participants, including monolingual Swedish-speaking children.

```
Excerpt (3)
Participants: Ella, age 4;9; Ester, age 4;11; and three other
children not in focus for this study: Stella, Nea and Rikhard.
1  Stella:  musta, musta. jag vet va musta är. det är orange.
            musta är orange.
            black, black. I know what black is. it is orange.
            black is orange.
2  Ella:    näe musta är svart nog.
            no black is black really.
3  Stella:  näe, musta är orange.
            no, black is orange.
4  Ella:    den här färgen är musta. ((picks up a black pen))
            this color here is black. ((picks up a black pen))
5  Stella:  nä ((continues to draw and comments dismis-
            sively)) den är int musta.
            no ((continues to draw and comments dismis-
            sively)) it is not black.
6  Ella:    det är musta. ((looks at Nea))
            it is black. ((looks at Nea))
7  Nea:     jå det är musta.
            yes that's black.
8  Ella:    näe, den här svarta är inte x.
            no, this black is not x.
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 9  Stella:    Ester visst inte är svart musta?
               Ester surely black isn't black?
10  Ester:     ((shakes her head)) nä-ä
               ((shakes her head)) no-o
               [—]
11  Ester:     MIN MAMMA HAR SAGT NOG ATT DET sä-, det är bara (.)
               man säger bara musta.
               MY MUM HAS SAID THOUGH THAT IT sa-, it's only (.)
               that one says only black.

12  Stella:    och osså är det musta är orange.
               and also is black is orange.
13  Ester:     mm
               mm
14  Stella:    det sa jag.
               I said so.
15  Ella:      min pappa brukar säga att musta är (3) svart.
               my dad says that black is (3) black.
16  Rikhard:   jå den är musta och svart.
               yes it is black and black.
               [—]
17  Ester:     sitten mä tarviin (2) mustaa.
               well now I need (2) black.
               [—]
18  Ella:      ((demonstrating, gives a black pen to Ester))
19  Ester:     kiitti.
               thanks.
20  Stella:    musta, musta, musta.
               black, black, black.
21  Ella:      jag hittade den.
               I found it.
22  Rikhard:   här, musta. ((gives a black pen to Stella))
               here, black. ((gives a black pen to Stella))
23  Ester:     det här, tämä on (.) huono musta, eti parempi
               musta.
               this here, this is (.) a bad black, find a better
               black.
               [—]
24  Rikhard:   mutta Stellalla on se toinen musta. ((throws a
               black pen to Ester))
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            but Stella has the other black. ((throws a black
            pen to Ester))
25 Ester:   toinen, toinen musta, (1) toinen musta.
            another, another black, (1) another black.
            [—]
26 Ella:    ((demonstrating, gives another black pen to
            Ester))
27 Stella:  jag behöver musta. ((reaches out toward the pen in
            Ester's hand)) det här är musta. ((shows a black
            pen and smiles)) (4) du tar en annan musta (2)
            musta.
            I need black. ((reaches out toward the pen in
            Ester's hand)) this here is black. ((shows a black
            pen and smiles)) (4) you are taking a different
            black (2) black.

28 Rikhard: men du är rätt nu musta (är svart). ((laughing
            tone))
            but you are right now black (is black).
            ((laughing tone))
```

In this excerpt, Stella, a Swedish speaker, was being mischievous and trying to convince the others that Finnish *musta* 'black' is the equivalent of Swedish *orange* 'orange'[line 1]. Both Ella and Ester referred to their Finnish-speaking parents as a language authority where Finnish is concerned ("MIN MAMMA HAR SAGT NOG ATT DET sä-, det är bara (.) man säger bara **musta**" [*MY MUM HAS SAID THOUGH THAT IT sa-, it's only (.) that one says only black.*] (Ester) [line 11]; "min pappa brukar säga att **musta** är (3) svart" [*my dad says that black is (3) black*] (Ella) [line 15]). Ella also demonstrated the different colors showing pens [lines 18 and 26]. In the end Stella is holding a black pen and admits that the color black is black (and not orange) [line 27].

These kinds of bilingual language negotiations and games were rather frequent on this site. Even the educators sometimes encouraged them. On one such occasion Ester was showing her hair clip to a Swedish-speaking peer, using the Finnish word for it. When Ester's friend tried to correct her, offering the word in Swedish, the educator intervened and explained that it was the correct name for it, and was just in another language. In Site III, discussions such as these can be a resource for language learning for both linguistic groups as well as a playful element in everyday communicative actions.

5.4 Discussion

The analysis of the communicative actions showed that there were individual differences among the children who were the focus of the study, despite the fact that all nine children were bilingual and had the option of using both of their languages in communication with their peers as well as with educators. Three of the children used mainly Swedish, three mainly Finnish, and three used both languages in their daily interactions in their ECEC units. The reasons why any individual child chose to interact in a certain way were not straightforward, but were likely to depend on factors such as the child's personality in combination with the general language orientation of the particular ECEC site.

As for what the children's observed communicative actions tell us about the language policy in ECEC, we can conclude that there were clear differences between the three sites. Despite the fact that they were all monolingual Swedish-medium ECEC units and followed the same declared national language policy, in practice a bilingual policy could be identified as co-existing alongside the officially practiced monolingual policy. At Site I, a great deal of work was done to promote the minority language; the goal of supporting the minority language in a bilingual region dominated by the majority language was even mentioned on their webpage. This did not mean ignoring the children's bilingual growth, but rather meant the prioritizing of Swedish. This led to a practiced policy that was oriented toward Swedish.

At Site II, the educators were actively trying to promote Swedish as the main language of communication despite the fact that the children used Finnish most of the time. The educators acknowledged and respected the children's right to use Finnish; however, they were also aware of the need to support the acquisition of Swedish. In this sense the educators aimed to keep the amount of Finnish "under control". These partly conflicting practices by the educators and the children meant that in practice the children never followed a Swedish-oriented policy. We therefore interpreted the practiced policy on Site II as being bilingual or Finnish-only in cases where the children were actively participating in oral communication.

At Site III, both languages could be heard and the educators as well as the children made active use of both Finnish and Swedish. As stated on their website, the objective of the preschool unit was to promote both national languages (Swedish and Finnish). While the practiced policy was oriented toward Swedish, the active use and acknowledgement of Finnish resulted in a significant difference from Site I, as the bilingual policy orientation was clear. Even though the practiced policy was most balanced between the two languages

in Site III, it should be noted that the acquisition of Finnish was not promoted by the educators as systematically as was the acquisition of Swedish.

We were also interested in what kind of changes could be traced in child agency over time. In this regard, we found that there were no remarkable changes in the linguistic agency of the children who acted in line with the practiced policy orientation of the site. The children who mainly used Swedish in their communication (Anna, Amanda and Ella) continued to do so for the entire observation period. However, they clearly showed that they understood their peers who chose to speak Finnish. Ella, for example, actively negotiated bilingual vocabulary and borrowed the Finnish language expertise of her Finnish-speaking father (excerpt (3), line 15). The children who used mainly Finnish in their communication at the time of the first observations (Tobias, Tindra and Tove) continued to do so in the succeeding ones. However, Tove used slightly more Swedish in the spring of 2015. All of the Finnish-oriented children come from Site II, where the practice structures – namely, Finnish as the strongly dominant language in the surroundings and a lack of monolingual Swedish-speaking peers – encouraged the use of Finnish. The children who were bilingual in their orientation (Alisa, Ester and Eva) continued over time to use both languages side by side. As this practice was in line with the general practice orientation of Site III, there was no need for the children to adjust their chosen language orientation. In contrast, Alisa's bilingually oriented agency at Site I was slightly steered toward the more dominant use of Swedish as a result of active policy enforcement by her friend Sara.

As discussed above, it is something of a challenge to examine intentionality in connection with child agency. This was particularly true for the children at Site II. At first sight it seemed that these children had gained strong agency and had the clear intention of resisting the Swedish-oriented policy by using Finnish. We are, however, not convinced by this interpretation. Tindra, for example, seemed to be willing to use more Swedish, but as a rather shy girl she often adjusted her language to the language of her peers (cf. example (2) above). In this way her language-related agency should not be interpreted as taking an active stance for Finnish-only policy.

6 Conclusions and implications

In this article we have connected Finland's official language policy and its official education policy with individual bilingual child agency and communicative actions in everyday ECEC practices. Our research questions were

threefold: how do bilingual children's communicative actions manifest in daily ECEC practices? What do these actions tell us about language policy in ECEC units? And what changes in child agency over time can be traced? Our analysis showed that practice structures played an important role in both child agency and in shaping the practiced language policy. We were able to establish that a declared monolingual language policy did not hinder active bilingual child agency in any of the sites that we studied. This was largely due to the emphasis on individual linguistic needs in the national education policy, which seemed generally to be perceived as the predominating policy of the two, partly conflicting, policies.

One implication of this study is the importance of deepening our understanding of the interrelated notions of practice structures at different ECEC sites and individual bilingual child agency. In addition to the conflict between the two national polices, we found that the more balanced the languages were in the surroundings, the more naturally a bilingually oriented policy was implemented in practice. Surroundings where the minority language had a relatively prominent role did not automatically lead to a practiced policy oriented toward the minority language. Instead, when language domination was more balanced – such as in Site III in our study – use of the majority language was experienced as less problematic and bilingualism was given greater recognition.

Individual bilingual child agency was shaped not only by externally declared ECEC policies but also by more concrete practice structures. Our observations showed that structures such as the actual buildings and walls reduced the use of the minority language – as in our study Site II – if there were not enough peers and educators who encouraged the use of the minority language alongside the majority language (see the notion of critical mass in Thomas and Roberts 2011). Beside the more general practice structures, pedagogical solutions as to how to encourage children's bilingual language use (cf. Site III in our study) and individual differences between the children and their group dynamics were also important factors shaping bilingual child agency.

In this study we have offered a glimpse of different kinds of child agencies in three different ECEC units that officially follow the same language and education policies but that in reality have different orientations in the policies they practice. A closer analysis of each individual child and their agency is still needed to complement this research. Despite this limitation of our study, we are convinced that in order to be able to empower bilingual children with subject positions that support their unique agency, it is necessary to identify how different declared policies affect practice structures in ECEC and to analyze what their role is in the practiced language policy.

Transcription key

Regular text	Swedish
Bold text	Finnish
Italics	translation from original languages to English
(( ))	comments of the transcriber
:	prolonged syllable
[ ]	demarcates overlapping utterances
(.)	micropause, i.e. shorter than (0.5)
(2)	numbers in single parentheses represent pauses in seconds
AMP	relatively high amplitude
X	inaudible word
(tack)	unsure transcription
° °	denotes speech in low volume
?	denotes rising terminal intonation
.	denotes falling terminal intonation
=	denotes latching between utterances
ar-	interrupted word
Fare	sounds marked by emphatic stress are underlined
[—]	utterance(s) left out

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