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IN SEARCH OF AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF INVESTIGATING THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE SELF-CONCEPTS OF ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS

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IN SEARCH OF AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF INVESTIGATING THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE SELF-CONCEPTS OF ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS

Tutkielman tarkoituksena on tutkia englantia opiskelevien aikuisoppijoiden käsityksiä itsestään englannin kielen käyttäjinä ja kielenoppijoina, eli heidän kieliminäänsä kvalitatiivisen tutkimuksen keinoin. Tutkimuksen lähtökohtana on etsiä vaihtoehtoista tapaa tutkia aiemmin kvantitatiivisen tutkimuksen keinoin tutkittua kieliminää. Tutkimuksessa etsitään vastausta kysymyksiin 1) Miten aikuisoppijan kieliminää voidaan tutkia kvalitatiivisen tutkimuksen keinoin?, 2) Millaista aineistoa saadaan kvalitatiivisten aineistonkeruumenetelmien avulla?, 3) Mitä vaikeuksia tällaisen tutkimuksen suorittamiseen voi liittyä?, 4) Mitä hyötyä tällaisesta tutkimuksesta voi olla kielenoppijalle tai kielen oppimiselle?, 5) Millaisia ovat kyseisten aikuisoppijoiden kieliminä-käsitykset? ja 6) Muuttuvatko nämä käsitykset suggestopedisen kielikurssin aikana?

Tutkimuksen kohdejoukko on 12 englannin opiskelijaa erään itäsuomalaisen kaupungin kansalaisopiston suggestopedisella kielikurssilla. Aineisto koostuu oppijoiden minäkuvauksista kurssin alkaessa ja päättyessä, oppijoiden päiväkirjamerkinnöistä kurssin aikana, sekä loppuhaastatteluista, joista osa oli yksilö-, osa ryhmähaastatteluja. Aineistoa täydentävät tutkijan tekemät tutkimuspäiväkirjamerkinnät. Aineiston analysoinnissa kokeiltiin kvalitatiivista jatkuvan vertailun menetelmää (constant comparative method). Sitä täydennettiin induktiivisten luokittelujen ja niistä piirrettyjen miellekarttojen avulla. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa esiteltiin esimerkinomaisesti neljän koehenkilön kieliminä-aineistoa tapaustutkimuksen kerronnallisin keinoin.

Oppijoiden kuvaukset osoittavat kieliminän olevan tilannesidonnainen ja vaihteleva. Kieliminässä on havaittavissa sekä pysyviä että muuttuvia piirteitä. Affektiivisen alueen yhteys kielenoppimiseen korostui oppijoiden kuvauksissa. Oppijoiden kuvaukset omasta tunnetilastaan ja luokan ilmapiiristä tuntuivat liittyvän yhteen siihen, millainen käsitys heillä kulloinkin oli itsestään kielenoppijana ja omasta kielellisestä osaamisestaan. Tuntemukset vaihtelivat tilanteittain. Vaihtelua kuvattiin "aaltoliikkeeksi" tai "vuoristoradaksi".

Asiasanat: qualitative research. alternative paradigm. foreign-language self-concept. adult English learners. self-report. diary. interview. suggestopedia.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

As a language teacher I am concerned about the problems of language learning, and the impact of the affective domain, particularly the self-concept of the learner, on language learning. The question what kind of perception the learner has of him/herself as a learner of a foreign language, in this case English, is my main interest and what the implications may be that these perceptions bear for actual learning.

In research on second language learning the affective domain has been of interest to many researchers as they try to understand the reasons for differential success in language learning. The research has focused on both intrinsic and extrinsic affective factors. The intrinsic factors mean personality factors that in some way contribute to language learning. These include for example inhibition and anxiety, self-esteem, and self-concept that is of major interest to my study. The extrinsic or sociocultural factors are understood as factors related to the individual as a member of a social group. These factors have been widely investigated by for example Gardner and Lambert who have studied the impact of motivation and attitudes on achievement in second language learning.

Behind all research, the philosophical set of beliefs or the researcher's worldview can be identified. This set of beliefs or the worldview guiding the investigation is often called a research paradigm, under which the study has been conducted. Traditionally, studies on self-concept have been conducted within the positivistic research paradigm representing a rather static worldview where hypotheses have been tested, and causal relationships between variables established. When adopting the positivistic position, the researcher assumes that the researcher and the phenomenon under investigation are separable, and thus objective observation of the outside world is seen as possible.

In contrast, an alternative paradigm, sometimes termed as the antipositivistic paradigm, has different assumptions about reality and what can be known about it. In antipositivism reality is seen more as the product of individual consciousness, created by one's mind. Therefore, it is assumed that

knowledge that can be acquired of the phenomenon under investigation is more of a subjective nature. Instead of looking for facts and causal relations, the antipositivistic researcher aims at understanding the ways in which individuals create, modify, and interpret the world. The method of investigation is qualitative by nature.

The aim of my study is to provide an alternative to the previous studies on self-concept that have mainly been carried out within the positivistic paradigm applying quantitative measures, that is, questionnaires and attitude scales. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the possibilities of the qualitative methods of inquiry, in this case self-reports, diaries and interviews to elicit information of the language learners' perceptions of themselves as language learners. The study will be conducted among adult learners of English in an intensive suggestopedic English course.

The following will provide an overview of the chapters. Chapter 2 provides a general introduction to the affective domain including self-concept. Self-concept is considered one of the influential affective factors in language learning. Definitions of self-concept will be reviewed in Chapter 3. Previous studies on self-concept that have mainly been carried out within the positivistic research tradition will be reviewed in Chapter 4. In addition, Chapter 4 presents an overview of the philosophical foundations of two research paradigms, the positivist paradigm and an alternative, the so-called anti-positivist paradigm. The positivist paradigm has traditionally been understood as the foundation for quantitatively oriented research, whereas qualitative studies rely on the antipositivistic tradition. The present study will be conducted within the alternative paradigm, and will be carried out by using qualitative research methods. The empirical part of the present study will be reported in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, the main findings are drawn together and discussed. Chapter 7 is the conclusion.

2 AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

This chapter provides an introduction to the affective domain in general and the role of affective factors particularly in second language learning. The division of the affective factors into intrinsic and extrinsic is also introduced. Specific attention is paid to one of the intrinsic factors, namely self-concept.

2.1 Definitions of the affective domain

One definition of the affective domain is stated by Brown (1994:135; emphasis original): "*Affect* refers to emotion or feeling. The affective domain is the emotional side of human behaviour, and it may be juxtaposed to the cognitive side. The feeling of affective states or feelings involves a variety of personality factors, feelings both about ourselves and about others with whom we come into contact."

Another, rather similar definition is given by Chastain (1976:176; emphasis original): "The affective component includes those feelings and attitudes individuals hold toward themselves and their environment. *Affective* refers to the individuals' emotional characteristics as opposed to their intellectual and social traits."

A third definition is provided by Scovel (1979:131; emphasis added) who says that "...*affective factors* are those that deal with the emotional reactions and motivations of the learner; they signal the arousal of the limbic system and its direct intervention in the task of learning."

So, as we can see from the definitions above, it is agreed that the affective domain refers to the emotional side of human behaviour; feelings and attitudes that we direct towards ourselves and our environment. The affective domain is also understood as something opposed to the cognitive side.

2.2 Affective domain and second language learning

The importance of the affective domain in second language learning has been acknowledged by many linguists and researchers. (Brown 1973, 1981, 1994, Chastain 1975, 1976.)

Brown (1981:113) states that "It would be easy to claim that of the major facets of human behaviour, the affective domain is the most important in governing a person's success in second language learning." According to Brown (1981:113-114), the affective factors can either facilitate or prevent second language learning and he sees that it is important to understand these factors in order to control them and thus facilitate successful learning.

The question has been raised to what extent affective factors contribute to successful language learning compared to ability factors. Chastain (1975:153) argues that "...affective characteristics have at least as much influence on learning as do ability factors." Further, it was hypothesised by Krashen (1981a:101) that affective factors are more involved in the *acquisition* type of language learning compared to conscious language *learning*. According to Krashen (1981a), successful language acquisition requires comprehensible input and a low affective filter. Those language acquirers whose affective filter is low, who are more self-confident and motivated, will interact more and gain more input and thereby will be more successful in their language acquisition than those who lack self-confidence and motivation.

The importance of affective variables especially in adult second language acquisition is stressed by Schumann (1975:209) and Taylor (1974) who see affective variables as a major factor contributing to success. In the same vein, Krashen (1981a:102) hypothesised that the strength of the affective filter will increase at puberty and cause child-adult differences in attainment in second language acquisition. This also seems to imply that the affective factors are especially important in adult second language acquisition.

To summarise, we can say that together with the ability factors, the affective factors are involved in language learning either facilitating or preventing learning. They are considered important especially in adult second

language acquisition. It is supposed that the more self-confident and motivated learners are more successful in their second language acquisition.

2.3 Intrinsic and extrinsic factors of the affective domain

Traditionally the affective domain has been divided into intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Brown 1994:134). Intrinsic factors are "...personality factors within a person that contribute in some way to the success of language learning" and extrinsic factors "... sociocultural variables that emerge as the second language learner brings not just two languages into contact, but two cultures, and in some sense must learn a second culture along with a second language."

Intrinsic factors that are of major interest to my study are language learners' perceptions of themselves as language learners and attitudes towards themselves. These could be referred to as foreign language self-concept or self-image, and self-esteem. The importance of self-concept in second language learning has been considered for example by Kristiansen (1992). She considers the effect that poor self-image may have on learning. A similar view of the importance of self-esteem in language learning is shared by Gardner and Lambert (1972), Chastain (1976) and Brown (1994). For example, in Chastain's (1976:67) words "Research shows that students who have a good self-concept will achieve more in their studies". Similarly, it is argued by Krashen (1981b:23) that personality factors such as self-confidence are involved in language acquisition in a way that the self-confident language learner will more easily get involved in situations where the input needed for language acquisition is possible and he/she will also have a low affective filter. Krashen (1981b:23) lists traits that he sees related to self-confidence. These are lack of anxiety, outgoing personality and self-esteem.

A similar view is also expressed by Brown (1994:136). He sees self-esteem as a highly influential factor contributing to success in second language acquisition. Brown states that "Self-esteem is probably the most pervasive aspect of any human behaviour. It could easily be claimed that no successful cognitive or affective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-

esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of yourself, and belief of your own capabilities for that activity."

To conclude we can say that a good self-concept and self-esteem seem to be regarded as major factors contributing to success in second language learning. Next we turn to the notion of self-concept in more detail and see how it has been traditionally defined in the studies on self-concept.

3 SELF-CONCEPT

This section will provide a definition/definitions of the notion of self-concept as it has been traditionally defined in the studies on self-concept. Questions concerning self-concept, its formation, and functions will be answered. The notion of self-concept is further clarified by describing some features that are used to describe the self-concept.

3.1 Definition of self-concept

According to Shavelson et al. (1976:411), self-concept is a person's perception of him/herself. Individuals form their perceptions of themselves through the experiences with their environment. Environmental reinforcements and significant others are seen especially influential when forming these perceptions. The construct of self-concept is important in explaining and predicting how a person acts, maintain Shavelson et al.. A person's self-concept and actions are thought to be in a reciprocal relation. The individual's perceptions of him/herself influence the way he/she acts, and his/her acts influence the way in which he/she perceives him/herself.

3.2 Self-concept described by seven features

Shavelson et al. (1976:411-415) describe self-concept by seven features: Self-concept is organized, multifaceted, hierarchical, stable, developmental, evaluative, and differentiable. These features are explained in more detail in the following.

First, it can be said that self-concept is organized or structured. Perceptions of oneself are based on experiences. In order to reduce the complexity of these experiences the individual adopts a category system. With the help of this category system the individual organizes his/her experiences and

gives meaning to them. Second, self-concept is multifaceted, the facets reflect the different category systems of individuals and groups. Third, self-concept is hierarchical on a dimension of generality. Different hierarchical levels can be distinguished ranging from a general level to more specific levels. General self-concept may be divided into academic and non-academic concepts, and academic self-concept may be further divided into subject-matter areas and then into specific areas within the subject matter. Fourth, general self-concept is stable. Self-concept is thought to be most stable at the general level and becoming less stable when descending the self-concept hierarchy. At more specific levels, self-concept is thought to depend increasingly on specific situations. Fifth, self-concept is developmental. When the individual grows older his/her self-concept becomes more differentiated. Sixth, self-concept is evaluative. The individual develops a description of him/herself in a particular situation. In addition to this s/he also forms evaluations of him/herself in these situations. And finally, self-concept is differentiable from other theoretical constructs with which it is related.

3.3 Self-concept as a composition of three components

Burns (1982:1) defines self-concept as a composition of the beliefs and evaluations one has about oneself. "These beliefs (self-images) and evaluations (self-esteem) actually determine not only who you are, but what you think you are, what you think you can do and what you think you can become."

According to Burns (1982:1-7), self-concept is a compound of three components: the belief component, the evaluation component, and the behavioural tendency component. The belief component is a descriptive element, a set of beliefs about oneself and it can be termed as the *self-picture* or *self-image*. The evaluation component is the evaluation of these beliefs and it can be referred to as *self-esteem*, *self-worth* or *self-acceptance*. Next the belief component and the evaluation component will be explained in more detail. The belief component is a cognitive component of self-concept representing the individual's descriptive knowledge about him/herself. The evaluation

component is an affective component representing subjectively evaluated attributes and feelings attached to the descriptive knowledge. These can be called attitudes that the person holds toward him/herself. Often these evaluations are due to the comparison one makes between his/her self-image and the so-called ideal self that one would wish to be. If the ideal is far from the actual self-image it may lead to a low self-esteem. If, on the other hand, the distance between the actual and ideal images is not too great one may have a high self-esteem.

According to Burns (1982:9), the belief component and the evaluation component are joined by a third component, namely the behavioural component. What is meant by behavioural component is the influence that self-concept has on a person's behaviour. Self-concept is considered important in maintaining inner consistency, in determining how experiences are interpreted and by providing sets of expectancies.

Maintaining inner consistency means that "...the individual will act in ways which he thinks are consistent with how he sees himself" (Burns 1982:9). Experiences are assimilated to the self-perceptions only to the degree that they are consistent with the prevailing self-concept. Otherwise, in case the experience differs greatly from the self-concept, it will be rejected. (Burns 1982:9-11.)

A person's self-concept determines the way he/she interprets the experiences. The same thing happening to two people can be interpreted differently due to their different self-concepts. (Burns 1982:13.) Burns presents an example of a teacher-child relationship. No matter how positively the teacher tries to treat a child with a negative self-concept, this will interpret the actions negatively according to his/her self-concept. Here the self-concept acts like an inner filter, "...every perception that enters the individual must go through the filter." (Burns 1982:14.)

Burns (1982: 10-11) regards the term self-concept as misleading because it is in the singular form, according to him it should ideally be in the plural form as the individual has many, sometimes conflicting self-concepts due to the many roles which the individual possesses.

3.4 The evaluative nature of self-concept - self-esteem

Heyde (1977:227) adopts the term self-concept or self-esteem for the internal attitudes that refer to evaluations which the learner directs towards factors within himself (i.e. his competence, his ability, and his self-worth). "Self-concept is the sum of one's attitudes towards himself - the evaluation of what the person feels he is."

The evaluative nature of self-esteem is stressed by Heyde (1977:229): "Therefore, we can say that self-esteem is an assessment or evaluation which we make of ourselves and our abilities. We express this feeling toward ourselves in ways consistent with our verbal messages and overt behaviour." In addition, Heyde points out that self-concept may vary from situation to situation according to the tasks we perform.

Like Shavelson et al. (1976), Heyde (1977:231) distinguishes three levels of self-esteem: global, specific and task self-esteem. By global self-esteem she refers to the overall evaluations of one's worthiness which one consciously makes. Specific self-esteem refers to evaluations that are made of oneself in situations where he/she is for instance using English and to evaluations he/she makes of for example his/her language learning ability or intellectual ability. Task self-esteem refers to evaluations that are made of for example of one's performance in extemporaneous speech in English or in French/Spanish.

3.5 A summary of the definitions

To summarize, self-concept is a person's perception of his/her characteristics and abilities and attributions one has concerning him/herself. *Self-concept* can be seen as comprising three components; 1) the descriptive component that can be called *self-image*, 2) the evaluative component, that is, *self-esteem*, and 3) the behavioural component which determines how one acts in various situations, (one will always act consistent with one's self-concept) and how one interprets experiences in consistence with one's self-concept.

Also, self-concept is seen as hierarchical according to the level of generality. When accomplishing specific tasks we can differentiate a task-specific self-concept and in more general terms we can talk about a person's general self-concept. The definitions above partly share the understanding that self-concept changes from situation to situation, one could even say that we have many self-concepts instead of one.

4 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON SELF-CONCEPT

4.1 Two competing paradigms for studying self-concept – positivism and anti-positivism

'Paradigm' is defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) as "...the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways."

Two methodological approaches of doing research, namely quantitative and qualitative can be distinguished. Behind quantitative and qualitative research there can be seen two competing paradigms; positivism and anti-positivism. They are based on different views of human nature and the nature of truth.

Nunan (1992:xi-xii) explains the two differing views of the nature of truth so that "The first view is that external truth exist 'out there' somewhere. The function of research is to uncover these truths. The second view is that truth is a negotiable commodity contingent upon the historical context within which phenomena are observed and interpreted."

The previous studies on self-concept have mainly been carried out within the positivistic frame of reference using quantitative measures. The next chapter will give an overview of the philosophical foundations underlying quantitative and qualitative research. Firstly, some characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research will be introduced and then the philosophical background of their underlying positivistic and antipositivistic paradigms will be illuminated. A review of previous studies on self-concept will follow, and finally, some critique of the studies will be presented.

4.2 Quantitative and qualitative research

Although the bipolarization of the quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry is not acknowledged by all researchers (see Reichardt and Cook 1979:27), there are some characteristics which can be better attributed to either of the approaches. Reichardt and Cook (1979:10) list some attributes that characterize the qualitative research paradigm compared to the quantitative one. The attributes are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Attributes of the qualitative and quantitative paradigms (adapted from Reichardt and Cook 1979:10)

QUALITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE
the use of qualitative measures	the use of quantitative measures
understanding human behavior from the actor's own frame of reference	seeking facts and causes of social phenomena
naturalistic and uncontrolled observation	obtrusive and controlled measurement
subjective	objective
close to the data, the insider perspective	removed from the data, the outsider perspective
grounded, discovery oriented, exploratory, expansionist, descriptive, and inductive	ungrounded, verification-oriented, confirmatory, reductionist, inferential, and hypothetico deductive
process-oriented	outcome-oriented
valid; 'real', 'rich', and 'deep' data	reliable; 'hard', and replicable data
ungeneralizable	generalizable
holistic	particularistic
assumes a dynamic reality	assumes a stable reality

According to Filstead (1979:37-38), the differences of quantitative and qualitative research can also be seen in the ways of analysing data and reporting results. Quantitative research presents data and results in numerical ways, whereas in qualitative research the data are presented in the language of the subjects. Quantitative research aims at discovering, verifying, or identifying causal relationships among concepts that derive from an a priori theory. In contrast, qualitative research prefers the theory to emerge from the data.

4.3 Philosophic questions underlying quantitative and qualitative inquiry

As was noted earlier, the differences of quantitative and qualitative research methods are based on philosophical differences of the two paradigms. An overview of the underlying philosophical thinking is presented in the following.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994:3) present some philosophic questions that enlighten the differences underlying qualitative and quantitative research. Those questions can be categorized into four different philosophical categories; *ontology, epistemology, logic* and *teleology*.

The ontological questions concern the nature of reality, epistemological questions are concerned with the origins of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the known, logic deals with principles of demonstration and verification and the questions about the logic of inquiry are whether causal links between bits of information are possible, and what is the possibility for generalization. Teleological questions ask what the purpose of research is. These are summarized in table 2.

Table 2. Framing research within philosophy (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:4)

Areas of philosophy as they relate to research	Questions
1 Ontology raises questions about the nature of reality.	What is the nature of the world? What is real? What counts as evidence?
2 Epistemology is interested in the origins and nature of knowing and the construction of knowledge.	What is the relationship between the knower and the known? What role do values play in understanding?
3 Logic, as it relates to research, deals with principles of demonstration and verification.	Are causal links between bits of information possible?
4 Teleology is generally concerned with questions of purpose.	What is research for?

Guba and Lincoln (1994:108) see that the basic beliefs of research paradigms may be reflected in the answers given to three fundamental questions, which are interconnected so that the answer given to any one question constrains how the others are answered. These three questions concern ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

Cohen and Manion (1986:6) review Burrell and Morgan's analysis of the assumptions underlying two ways of conceiving social reality. Burrell and Morgan identified four sets of assumptions underlying the two differing views of social reality: ontological and epistemological assumptions, assumptions concerning human nature and the relationship between human beings and their environment, and methodological concerns. Since there is overlapping in these classifications, a combination of the classifications of Maykut and Morehouse, (1994) and Guba and Lincoln, (1994) and Burrell and Morgan as reviewed in Cohen and Manion (1986) will be presented in the following.

4.3.1 Ontological questions about the nature of reality

Ontology refers to the philosophical questions about the nature of reality and what there is that can be known about it (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Questions such as whether social reality is external, of an objective nature, a given 'out

there', or the product of individual consciousness, created by one's mind will be asked (Cohen and Manion 1986:6).

4.3.2 Epistemological questions of the origins of knowledge

Epistemological questions concern the origins of knowledge, its nature and forms, how knowledge can be acquired and how it can be communicated to others (Cohen and Manion 1986:7). Two differing viewpoints here stem from positivistic and antipositivistic roots. The positivistic view (Guba and Lincoln use the term 'received paradigm') is that knowledge is something 'hard', objective and tangible which can be acquired. The antipositivists see knowledge as personal, subjective and unique. The researchers role in the positivist research is one of an observer, whereas the antipositivists see that the researcher is involved in the process of research. (Cohen and Manion 1986:7.) This view is shared by Maykut and Morehouse (1994:3) and Guba and Lincoln (1994:108-109) as well. They see the question of the relationship between the knower and the known as an important epistemological question. According to their view, the positivistic approach claims that the knower can stay outside of the known and thus objectivity and 'true' findings are possible. On the other hand, the alternate paradigm sees that the knower and the known are interdependent, and thus findings are subjective and created.

4.3.3 Logical questions about the principles of demonstration and verification

Logic concerns the questions of causality and the possibility of generalizations (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:4). Causality is a central focus of research for the positivistic paradigm; when one event comes after another it can be said to cause that event. In the alternate paradigm the relationship of events is seen as multidirectional, where events shape each other. Generalizations, according to the positivists, can be made. In the alternate paradigm only tentative generalizations are seen as possible.

4.3.4 Teleological questions about the purpose of research

In the positivistic paradigm the purpose of research is verification or proof of propositions, in the alternate paradigm the function of research is to discover or uncover propositions (Maykut and Morehouse 1994: 12).

4.3.5 Questions concerning the human nature and the relationship between human beings and their environment

Two opposite views of human being emerge: the human being can either be seen as mechanically responding to his environment or as an initiator of his/her own actions (Cohen and Manion 1986:7-8). According to the former view, human beings and their experiences are merely regarded as products of the environment, the latter sees them as creators of their environment.

4.3.6 Methodological questions

As mentioned above it is assumed that the answers given to the fundamental philosophical questions are intertwined, and therefore the answer given to any one of the questions will constrain how the others are answered (Guba and Lincoln 1994:108).

Bearing this in mind, the differing assumptions mentioned above of the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge, the relationship between the knower and the known, the nature of human beings and their relationship to the environment, assumptions about causality of events, generalizability and the purpose of research all have implications to what research methodologies will be chosen for conducting research.

If the researcher adopts the positivist approach to the social world and assumes that knowledge is hard, tangible, objective and external to the individual, then the investigation will aim at analysing the relationships and regularities between selected factors in that world. This kind of research will be quantitative by nature searching for universal, general laws, which explain and govern the reality being observed. (Cohen and Manion 1986:8.)

If, on the other hand, the researcher appreciates the importance of subjective experience of individuals in the creation of the social world, then the investigation will be searching for understanding the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he/she finds him/herself. Research will be qualitative by nature. (Cohen and Manion 1986:9.)

Cohen and Manion (1986:9) see that the two perspectives on the study of human behaviour bear implications for research in all its stages. The choice of problem, formulation of questions, characterization of pupils and teachers, methodological concerns, kinds of data sought, and the mode of treatment will be influenced by the viewpoint held.

4.4 Positivistic paradigm

For a moment, we will adopt the viewpoint of the traditional, positivistic, research paradigm and see how the self-concept of a foreign language learner is understood within this framework, what kind of research questions have been asked and what answers have been found to these questions.

Firstly, if we adopt the positivistic view of reality, we assume that reality is something external, of an objective nature. Secondly, following from the above assumption of reality, we assume that the phenomenon that we want to investigate, the self-concept of a language learner, is something that can be measured and objectively observed by researchers.

Thirdly, the positivistic approach regards causality as a central focus of research. Therefore the research has concentrated on finding causal relationships for instance between language learners' self-concept and educational attainment, oral proficiency, success in language learning. Fourthly, generalizations have been made to concern other language learners apart from the research group. Fifthly, the research has aimed at verification of hypothesis.

Sixthly, human beings are seen as mechanically responding to their environment. The human beings and their experiences are products of their environments.

And finally, attributes that are be attached to the positivistic research are as follows: research methods are quantitative, facts and causes for phenomena are sought, measurements are obtrusive and controlled, an objective, outsider perspective is adopted. The research is ungrounded, verification-oriented, confirmatory, reductionist, inferential, hypothetico-deductive, and outcome oriented. Hard, replicable data is sought, the data is presented in numerical ways, the results are regarded generalizable, the research is particularistic assuming a stable reality.

If we look at the definitions of self-concept (see Chapter 3), we see how they reflect positivistic thinking firstly, in the wish to see causality, in the understanding that one's self-concept determines how one acts. Secondly, the relationship between the individual and the environment is seen as mechanical: a person's self-concept is formed by reinforcement from the environment and significant others. Thirdly, hierarchicality reflects the particularistic wish to see the world in small parts instead of a whole. Fourthly, one feature of self-concept was stability, this reflects the positivist stable view of reality.

4.5 A review of previous studies on self-concept

Language learners' self-concepts have been studied mainly within the positivistic frame of reference using quantitative methods of inquiry. Studies of self-concept in language learning have investigated, for example, the relations between attitudes to oneself and attained second language proficiency (Oller et al. 1977), and the relations between self-esteem and attainment in second language studies (Heyde 1977, Anderson 1982, Oxford and Ehrman 1993). The importance of the frame of reference in self-concept formation has been considered for example by Marsh (1990). Hoge et al. (1990) have investigated the influence of school experiences on self-esteem.

Within the Finnish educational setting Laine and Pihko (1991) report on studies that investigated the foreign language self-concepts of pupils in Finnish comprehensive schools. Pollari and Westerholm (1991) investigated foreign language self-concepts of Finnish adult learners of English. The impact of self

concept on poor learner's language learning has been considered by Kristiansen (1992). Previous studies on these issues will be introduced in the following.

4.5.1 Attitudes to oneself and attained proficiency

Previous research has examined the relationship between attitudes to oneself, to one's native language group, to the target language group, and the attained proficiency in second language learning. Correlations have been calculated in order to find out what impact attitudes have had on language learning.

For example, Oller et al. (1977) report on a series of four studies investigating the relationship between attitudes and attained proficiency in learning English as a second language. Among other attitudes, attitudes to oneself were investigated. The results show that attitudes were related to attainment so that a positive view of oneself was positively correlated with the test score of English proficiency in a study involving Chinese learners of English as a second language. The relationship was found to be fairly strong.

The relationship between attitudes and attained proficiency was much weaker in two other studies where Japanese learners of English as a foreign language were studied. The fourth study was of a group of Mexican Americans learning English as their second language and Oller et al. (1977:180-181) found that the relationship between attitudes and attained proficiency was nearly as strong as in the first study. After factor analysis there was one factor, which received positive loadings and correlated with the cloze test of English proficiency. The factor consisted of adjectives 'logical', 'sensitive', 'democratic' and 'shy'. This means that the more subjects saw themselves as logical, sensitive, democratic and shy, the better they did on the cloze test of English.

4.5.2 Self-esteem and success in second language learning

Self-esteem is understood as the evaluative aspects of a person's self-concept. It refers to the attitudes that one holds of oneself. Oxford and Ehrman (1993) examined variables involved in successful second language learning and self-

esteem was one of them. According to Oxford and Ehrman, unsuccessful second language learners have lower self-esteem than successful language learners. Whether this affects their general self-esteem depends on how important the student regards language learning. Oxford and Ehrman (1993:195) report on the initial results of a study conducted at Foreign Service Institute that seem to suggest that "...positive beliefs about oneself and one's learning ability made a definite contribution to learning success as measured by proficiency ratings."

The relationship of self-esteem and success in language learning has also been investigated by Anderson. (1982:109). She claims that "It is not easy to assess a student's self-esteem" and continues "We are all adept at hiding our feelings from others." However, Anderson (1982) reports on a preliminary investigation of self-esteem of adults learning English as a second language. She used a questionnaire consisting of fifteen statements concerning different aspects of language such as general knowledge of English, reading, speaking production, listening comprehension, and grammatical aspects such as use of verb tense, articles etc. The subjects (22) were asked to rate themselves using a scale from one to six.

The results showed that students' and teachers' ratings of the students' language abilities differed from each other so that the teachers' ratings of the students' abilities were higher than the students' own ratings. The means of the ratings were calculated and the students' ratings ranged from 3.59 to 4.91. The instructors' ratings ranged from 4.00 to 4.77. Teachers' ratings of the students' abilities correlated with the scores of a TOEFL test measuring language abilities whereas the students' own ratings did not have any significant correlation with the language test scores. Anderson (1982:113) suggests that this might indicate that the teachers' observations of their students' abilities were closer to that on which learners are tested by the TOEFL tests. The subjects were grouped by geographical region and differences between the ratings of the geographical groups showed up so that the subjects from the Far East rated themselves the lowest of the groups. Anderson (1982:112) suggests that this might imply that there are cultural differences in rating one's abilities.

4.5.3 Self-esteem and oral production of a second language

Another study concerning self-esteem and its relationship to success in language learning has been conducted by Heyde (1977) who studied the relationship between a student's self-esteem and his/her oral production of second language.

In her pilot study in 1977 Heyde used a questionnaire consisting of questions that students were asked to answer by rating themselves on a scale ranging from 0 to 7. The subjects were a group of 15 adult students of an intensive English course. The results seem to indicate that global and specific level self-esteem are related and that specific self-esteem was more closely related to oral performance than global self-esteem. In addition, subjects with a high self-esteem received higher oral production ratings from themselves and their teachers than subjects with a low self-esteem. "Finally, the results showed a tendency for specific self-esteem to be more closely predictive of oral performance than global self-esteem." (Heyde 1977:232) Heyde herself comments that the population was small and data were collected for only two levels of self-esteem (global and specific) and therefore the results are inconclusive.

Brown (1994:137) cites further studies conducted by Heyde in 1979 where she studied the effects of the three levels of self-esteem on oral production of French and found that all three levels correlated positively on the oral production measure, the highest correlation being between task-specific self-esteem and oral performance.

4.5.4 The formation of self-concept

Marsh (1990) points out the importance of the frame of reference in forming one's self-concept. When a person forms his/her self-concept s/he compares him/herself to significant others around him/her.

Marsh developed the I/E (Internal/External) frame of reference model to account for the separation in students' math and English self-concepts. (1990: 107). He had earlier found that student's English and math self-concepts are relatively uncorrelated and therefore there was a need for two higher order

facets instead of just one. Therefore Marsh suggests that the academic self-concept could be divided into verbal/academic and math/academic self-concepts.

Marsh (1990:108) explains the Internal/External frame of reference model as follows: The external frame of reference means that when forming their math or English self-concept students compare their perceptions of their skills in math or English with the perceived skills of other students. The internal frame of reference, in contrast, serves as another basis for the math and English self-concepts. This time students compare their own perceived skills in math with their own perceived skills in English.

4.5.5 School experiences predicting changes in self-esteem

Hoge et al. (1990) investigated the influences of school experiences on self-esteem in a two-year longitudinal study, which included measures of self-esteem at three levels; global, academic and discipline-specific level. They used questionnaires, which were completed twice during the sixth and twice during the seventh grade. Information from other sources was also included, such as grades and teacher ratings of social and work habits and information from student records. Also the test scores of a cognitive test measuring IQ were included. Hoge et al. (1990) found that school climate and evaluations of the teachers had significant effects on global and academic self-esteem, whereas discipline-specific self-esteem was most affected by grades in that discipline.

4.5.6 Foreign language self-concept

Laine (1987, 1988, also reported in Laine and Pihko 1991) conducted a study in the Finnish comprehensive school investigating the foreign language self-concepts (FL SC) of the ninth graders. Foreign language self-concept was used to refer to the perceptions that students have of themselves in the sphere of language learning. It comprises the actual self, the ideal self, self-esteem and the inhibitions connected with foreign language learning. The core of foreign language self-concept is the individual's perceptions of his/her abilities, worth

and ideals. The vulnerable core is protected by inhibitions and defence mechanisms. According to Laine, the foreign language self-concept can be either positive or negative. Foreign language self concept develops through language learning experiences and the development of the foreign language self-concept is influenced by feedback from teachers and peers. Foreign language self-concept is considered an important motivational force directing activity towards language learning tasks. The attitudes that a student has of him/herself determine how he/she gets directed to language learning tasks.

Laine and Pihko (1991) sketch foreign language self-concept as a part of a hierarchical construction of an individual's self concept. Figure 1 serves as an illustration of the hierarchical levels of the self (general, specific, and task-specific levels), and the components of the self (actual self, ideal self, self-esteem, inhibitions and defences). The components can be described and analysed on all three levels:

COMPONENTS OF THE SELF

LEVELS OF THE SELF	Actual self	Ideal self	Self-esteem	Inhibitions and defences
General				
Specific				
Task-specific				

Figure 1. Levels and components of Foreign Language Self Concept (Laine and Pihko 1991:24)

Depending on the focus of the investigation, a similar hierarchical division into three levels can be used to refer to specific areas of the self, in this case foreign language learning. Then the hierarchy consists of the language learner's general self-concept, general academic self, and general foreign language self-concept as is shown in figure 2:

29

GENERAL SELF CONCEPT		
	GENERAL ACADEMIC SELF	
		GENERAL FL SC
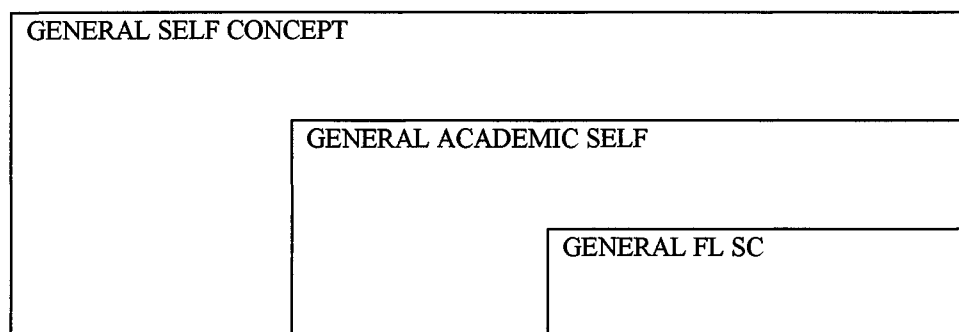
Figure 2. Foreign Language Self Concept in a wider perspective (Laine and Pihko 1991:25)

Figure 3 shows the specification of foreign language self-concept further into three levels, that are: general foreign language self-concept, specific target language self-concept and task-specific self-concept. According to Laine and Pihko (1991), general foreign language self-concept means students' overall perception of themselves as language learners. Specific target language self-concept refers to the perceptions that the students have of themselves as learners of a specific foreign language, in this case English. Task specific foreign language self-concept means how students perceive themselves when accomplishing particular learning tasks in English, such as pronouncing, reading, writing, role play, or other activities during English lessons.

GENERAL FL SC		
	SPECIFIC TARGET LANGUAGE FL SC	
		TASK-SPECIFIC FL SC

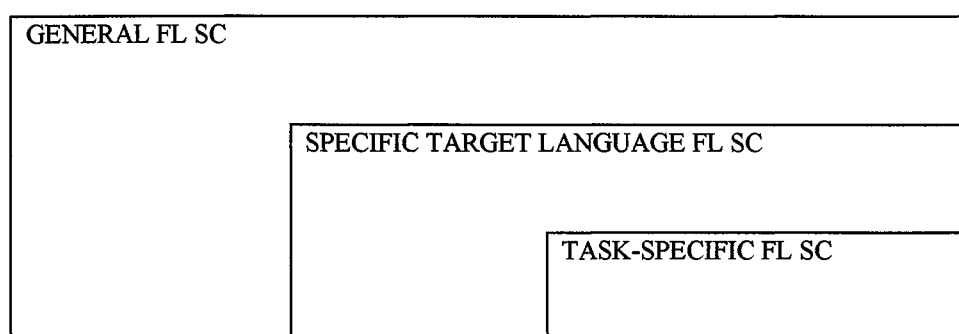Figure 3. Specification of Foreign Language Self Concept (Laine and Pihko 1991:25)

Laine (1988) investigated the foreign language self-concepts of ninth graders in Finnish comprehensive schools in 1987. As reported in Laine and

Pihko (1991), his materials consisted of a questionnaire with statements, some of which were concerned students' perceptions of themselves on different levels of foreign language self-concept. Firstly, the distinctive features of the affective domain, including foreign language self-concept, were identified. Secondly, the causal relations of the affective factors and foreign language self-concept were shown. Thirdly, the development of foreign language self-concept was surveyed. Fourthly, a typology of learners with differential foreign language self-concept and inhibiting filter was drawn. And finally, differences between geographical areas and school types were analyzed.

The results were as follows: Three main features of the foreign language self-concept were identified by means of factor analysis. These were 1) the learner's self-esteem and self-ratings of his/her target language skills (the actual self component), 2) the ideal self component, and 3) the general academic self dimension. Target language related inhibitions that were construed as the reverse side of the foreign language self-concept, showed a dimension connected with the foreign language self-concept.

Causal relations of the foreign language self-concept and the inhibitions were established. According to Laine (1991), the foreign language self-concept and inhibitions stood in a strong reciprocal relation to each other, so that inhibitions tend to suppress the foreign language self-concept, and, in contrast, a sound self-concept tends to lower inhibitions. In addition, both sub-constructs affected motivation strongly, and via motivation, achievement. Foreign language self-concept also affected achievement directly.

The development of the foreign language self-concept was, according to Laine and Pihko (1991), related to a number of background variables. Parental support enhanced target language learning motivation and target language - related and situation related attitudes. Support from friends and classmates strengthened the learner's self-esteem and also his/her foreign language self-concept. The learner's own active processing style supported the foreign language self-concept and lowered inhibitions.

Laine and Pihko (1991) distinguished different learner types and found three foreign language self-concept types and four inhibition types. The foreign

language self-concept types were 1) low achievement and low self-esteem (12% of the sample), 2) mediocre achievement and some foreign language self-concept discrepancy (41%), and 3) high achievement and strong foreign language self-concept (47%). The inhibition types were as follows: 1) low achievement and strong inhibitions (29%), 2) alienated learners and average achievement (15%), 3) a balanced, well-adapted type with good role adoption in school foreign language learning (25%), 4) a non-filter type with a minimum of emotional restraints (32%).

4.5.7 The foreign language self-concepts of adult learners of English

Pollari and Westerholm (1991) applied the self-concept theory outlined by Laine in a study where they investigated foreign language self-concepts of adult English learners at three levels; general, language specific and task levels. The questionnaire also included measures of global, academic and social self.

The subjects were 72 learners in a civic institute and at a private language school. The method of inquiry was a questionnaire. The results show that adult learners generally have a positive attitude towards themselves as well as to their general ability to learn a new foreign language.

Age and sex seemed to play some part in what kind of self-concept the learners had, so that respondents under forty years had better foreign language self-concept than those over fifty years of age and female respondents had better self-concept than the male respondents..

4.6 Critique of the studies on self-concept

Shavelson et al (1976:408-409) heavily criticize studies on self-concept. They argue that studies on self-concept may be criticized "…in that the self-concept interpretations and their measurements may not be valid." And they continue: "First, definitions of self-concept are imprecise and vary from one study to the next." The authors review of definitions "revealed seventeen different conceptual dimensions on which they could be classified." Another problem that

the authors see is that the measurement instruments vary from study to study. And finally they claim that "data are not available to test rival counter-interpretations". Here the authors suggest that the respondents may "select responses that they know to be socially desirable" or " be unable or unwilling to report their "private" self-concepts". The fact that subjects attain scores on the self-favourable end of the scale has also been noticed by Wylie (1989:120). Another problem that Wylie mentions is random responding due to reading difficulties, indifference, inattention, guessing and so on.

Burns (1982:26) has also noticed problems in measuring self-concept. He adopts the definition that self-concept comprises both the notions of self-image and self-esteem and states that his definition has essentially the same meaning as identity. Erikson (1959:158) notes that identity covers much of what is called self-concept, but he wants to stress the continuity aspect of identity.

Burns (1982:26) notes that the problems of defining self-concept have influenced its measurement. He says that "…there have been almost as many measuring devices as there have been self-concept studies."

The review of the previous studies on self-concept gives support to the above criticism. Firstly, the definitions of self-concept are varied, there seem to be many words for the same concept or many overlapping concepts. Operationalization of the concepts also raises questions. Marsh, for example conducted a large-scale study but his questionnaire raises questions: are four statements enough to describe a person's English language self-concept or mathematics self-concept? Are a few statements enough to cover the whole area of self-concept or self-esteem of a person? Do the questionnaires measure what they intend to measure?

As an example of how the quantification of data may derive into findings that are open to scepticism, we can mention Anderson's (1982) research on self-esteem (see section 4.5.2.). The findings were reported in numbers, the students rated themselves on a scale. The question remains, what does it reveal of a student's self-esteem that his/her rating is 3,59?

Oller (1981:18-21) questions the reliability and validity of the tests measuring affective variables and sees that their weakness lies in the use of self-

reports.   He claims that the affective measures may measure a person's language proficiency and intelligence rather than the attitudes intended to be measured.   Another issue that Oller (1981:21) raises and considers a fact reducing the reliability and validity of the measures is the respondents' tendency to give generally desired, self-flattering answers. The same questions were also raised by Shavelson et al. (1976) and Wylie (1989).

To conclude, Oller (1981:15) argues that "…the relation between affect and learning must be a dynamic and bi-directional one. In fact, it may well be that the relation is an unstable nonlinear function that varies greatly across individuals, contexts, and learning tasks."

Now that we have reviewed some of the previous studies on self-concept and noticed that some criticism remains, let us turn to the philosophical foundations of making research and see what other possibilities of studying self-concept there are.

5 PRESENT STUDY

5.1 Alternative paradigm

If we adopt the alternative paradigm as our guiding point of view when conducting a research project then we need to consider what the implications of this adoption are. These implications will be discussed in the following. The alternate paradigm outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), who name it as the naturalistic paradigm and later (Guba and Lincoln 1994) the constructivist paradigm will be adopted as the umbrella under which this study will stand.

Referring to the philosophic review above in chapter 4, I will adopt the alternative paradigm as my research paradigm. This means that first, I will use qualitative methods, second, try to understand human behaviour from the actor's own frame of reference, third, the observation will be naturalistic and uncontrolled, fourth, I will understand the subjective nature of inquiry, and as a researcher I will see myself involved in the process of research. Fifth, as a researcher I will try to get close to the data and adopt the insider's perspective. Sixth, the research will be grounded, discovery-oriented and inductive, process-oriented. Seventh, I will search for real, rich and deep data that will be presented in the subjects' own language. Eighth, the research will aim at holistic understanding and ninth, it is assumed that reality is dynamic and multidirectional relationships exist in it. Finally, I will share the understanding that social world is created by the individuals living in it, individuals, who are active agents in their own lives. Self-concept, therefore, would be understood as created by the individual in a multidirectional process with his/her environment. This view would be closest to the understanding presented by Burns (1982:10-11, see Chapter 3), that instead of one self-concept we may have many self-concepts that may vary from situation to situation.

Now that I have outlined the philosophic standpoint of my study, I will need to consider what these philosophic ideas mean in practice. Maykut and Morehouse (1994:43-47) list eight characteristics of qualitative research that a researcher needs to consider when outlining his/her study. These reflect the alternative paradigm and provide a framework for designing and implementing a qualitative study. These characteristics are:

1 An exploratory and descriptive focus - the study aims at a deeper understanding of the investigated phenomenon, and tries to discover what can be learned about it, a general 'focus of inquiry' is developed to guide the discovery.

2 Emergent design - the research design may be evolving during the research. The researcher may broaden or narrow the focus of inquiry in case some important leads are discovered at the early phases of data analysis. This might lead to asking new questions, observing new situations, sampling new people and settings etc.

3 A purposive sample - the research participants, or settings are selected for inclusion. This is done in order to expand the variability of the sample.

4 Data collection in the natural setting - the natural setting is regarded as the place where the researcher is to discover what is to be known of the phenomenon of interest. Qualitative researcher is interested in people's experience in context.

5 Emphasis on 'human-as-instrument' - the role of the researcher is emphasized in qualitative research. He/she is both the collector of the data and the culler of meaning from the data.

6 Qualitative methods of data collection - for example participant observation, in-depth interviews, group interviews, and the collection of documents are used as data gathering methods. Qualitative data are mostly people's words and actions.

7 Early and ongoing inductive analysis - qualitative data analysis is an ongoing activity starting when a subset of the data has been received. The researcher does not predetermine what is important, but the data suggests it, that means that the analysis is an inductive process.

8 A case study approach to reporting research outcomes - one or more cases will be presented in a rich narrative. The researcher provides the reader with many excerpts from the data in order to give information for understanding the research outcomes.

These characteristics resemble the characteristics of naturalistic inquiry outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In addition to the afore mentioned eight characteristics, they name the following features:

9 Utilization of tacit knowledge - tacit knowledge means the intuitive, felt knowledge that will be appreciated in addition to propositional knowledge, that is knowledge expressed in language form. The interaction between the researcher and the subjects involves tacit knowledge.

10 Grounded theory - theory emerges from the data.

11 Negotiated outcomes - the researcher negotiates meanings and interpretations with the subjects who provided the data, because the researcher tries to reconstruct their constructions of the phenomenon.

12 Idiographic interpretation - the researcher interprets the data idiographically, that is in terms of particulars of the case instead of nomothetically, in terms of lawlike generalizations.

13 Focus-determined boundaries - boundaries for the inquiry are set on the basis of the emergent focus.

14 Special criteria for trustworthiness - the conventional criteria for trustworthiness (validity, reliability and objectivity) are rejected based on the axioms of the naturalistic inquiry. Lincoln and Cuba (1985:43) adopt substituting criteria for trustworthiness; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Maykut and Morehouse (1994:153) suggest that in a qualitative study the trustworthiness of the study be considered. In the present study the actions taken to increase the trustworthiness were the use of multiple methods in collecting data, and building of an audit trail consisting of a research journal, the original self-reports, diaries, and transcripts of the interviews, and the unitized data. This documentation allows anyone to follow the work from beginning to end, in order to judge the trustworthiness of the outcomes. A thick, detailed description of the purpose, method, and process of the study also

allow the reader to make judgements concerning the trustworthiness of the present study.

These 14 points characterizing qualitative inquiry will serve as guidelines for me conducting my study on self-concepts of adult English learners.

5.2 Qualitative research

As the present study is conducted within the alternative paradigm, the methods of inquiry need to be in line with the basic assumptions of the paradigm. Therefore qualitative research methods will be used in this study. Here some qualitative research methodologies will be reviewed.

According to Lazaraton (1995), research in applied linguistics has long been biased to the use of quantitative methods. This may be the reason why there are no examples of studies concerning language learner's self-concept using the alternative paradigm as a frame of reference. However, other studies concerning language learners have been conducted using qualitative measures.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:15) present research methodologies along a qualitative-quantitative continuum. At the qualitative end of the continuum they introduce introspection and say, "Perhaps the ultimate qualitative study is an introspective one, in which, with guidance from the researcher, learners examine their own behavior for insights into SLA." Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:36-37) introduce diary and focused introspection as instrumentation procedures for studying affective variables. Diaries have been used to study both second language teaching and learning, "…the diarist reports on affective factors which would normally escape the attention of an observer." Bailey (1980,1983) and the Schumanns (1977, see also Schumann 1980) used diaries when investigating their own second language learning, and affective factors involved in language learning.

Interviews, think-aloud and self-observational techniques are examples of focused introspection procedures. These self-observational techniques, according to Larsen-Freeman et al. (1991) and Cohen and Hosenfeld (1981:286), are divided into "'introspection', which calls for immediate

inspection of a subject's mental state" and 'retrospection' when some time has been elapsed.

Gaies (1983:214) says that the virtue of the alternative approach to classroom process research is that it allows aspects of language learning to be investigated that conventional external observation cannot get at. Here he mentions diary studies, and other types of introspective and retrospective research studies as examples of the alternative way of collecting data.

This view is supported by Cohen (1984), who argues that it is not possible to obtain accurate insight about learners' conscious thought processes through observations. Instead, learners' own verbal reports give insight into these.

5.3 Research questions

Maykut and Morehouse (1994:43) state that " The questions we ask will always to some degree determine the answers we find". Schulman (1988) also emphasizes the fact that different kinds of research methods ask different questions, and thus, generate quite different answers. As I have chosen an alternate research paradigm for my study and decided to use qualitative methods of inquiry, the research paradigm is reflected in the way the research questions are asked. Qualitative research is open-ended and thus the questions asked will be open-ended.

The present study made an attempt to provide an alternative way of studying language learners' self-concepts instead of the traditional quantitatively oriented questionnaires. The study aimed at investigating foreign language self-concepts of adult learners of English in a suggestopedic group. I wanted to know how adult learners perceive themselves as language learners. The research questions were:

1. How can foreign language self-concept of adult learners of English be investigated with qualitative measures?

2. What kind of data can be elicited when using these measures?

3. What difficulties might arise when conducting this kind of investigation?

4. What possible benefits might there be from this study for the language learner or foreign language learning?

5. What are the foreign language self-concepts of adult English learners like?

6. Do these perceptions change during a suggestopedic language course?

The focus of the study was on the affective side of language learners. A suggestopedic language course was chosen because suggestopedia is a humanistically oriented teaching method that integrates a learner's whole person in the learning process, including affective aspects. The language learners' perceptions of themselves were to be studied by using qualitative measures; student diaries and interviews, as well as self-reports, all of which are assumed to be research methods that could elicit affective type of information. It was thought that by investigating the self-concept at different stages of the learning experience, possible changes in the self-concept could be tapped on. Therefore the self-concepts were investigated at the beginning, at the end and during the language course.

I also wanted to see how the ontological, epistemological, logical and teleological questions, questions concerning human nature and the methodological questions would be answered in this study. The questions above were asked concerning the traditional type of research, and now it was to be seen, how they would be answered in this type of study.

5.4 Research design

The purpose of the study was to investigate adult English learners' perceptions of themselves as learners and users of English, that is, their foreign language self-concepts by using qualitative measures. The data were collected by self-reports at the beginning and at the end of the suggestopedic English course that

the students were attending. Besides the self-reports the data consisted of diaries that the students kept during their language course, and interviews that were carried out at the end of the language course. An attempt was made to analyze the data by using the constant comparative method. The analysis was further elaborated by mind maps and, eventually, case study reports were written of four students.

5.4.1 Pilot study

The study was piloted before actual data gathering. A total of 14 students of a previously arranged suggestopedic course were chosen as subjects of the pilot study. In the pilot study the data were gathered at three stages. An attempt was made to gather the first set of data close to the beginning of the course, but as the course had already started, the data gathering was arranged halfway the course, on their sixth meeting. Then the students were asked to describe themselves as language learners and users of English by giving rather structured instructions asking them to describe their language proficiency, themselves as language learners and what feelings or attitudes this aroused in them, what they would want their language proficiency and their language learning abilities to be, and their general attitude towards English and studying English. A blank sheet was handed to the subjects to write the description on. A time limit of fifteen minutes was given, which seemed quite a suitable amount of time for completing the task. In addition, the students were asked to keep a diary of their thoughts, feelings and experiences concerning language learning during the rest of the course, and also to assess their own progress. At the end of the forty-lesson course a similar description was completed as was done initially. This time, however, the instructions were more general. In addition, a group interview was arranged with two of the students at the end of the course.

The experience gained through the pilot study inspired/resulted in some changes in the actual data gathering process. Firstly, in addition to providing some practice for conducting the interview it also turned out that the interview was a useful tool for eliciting new information that was not obtained by other types of data gathering methods. Secondly, the initial description of "Me as an

English learner" was changed so that no structured questions were given, but the instructions were given in a more general fashion. This was done, because it was felt that the structured questions did not elicit relevant or interesting information. The information elicited seemed rather superficial and as if seen from an outsider's perspective. In contrast, those sections that the students had freely written about themselves contained more affective information, and thus seemed more interesting for this study. This is in line with the general principles of qualitative/alternate research paradigm.

A third point concerns the diaries. During the pilot study hardly anyone wrote anything in the diaries. Of the fourteen diaries that were delivered four contained entries when collected back. Only two diaries had notes about more than one lesson, an additional two diaries had one entry each. As the reasons were discussed with the students, they suggested that the timing was not suitable. The instructions had been to write the diaries right after the lessons had ended in the evening. However, apparently the students had been tired after the long session in the evening and preferred to go home instead of staying a bit longer and writing in their diaries. The instructions were changed so that in the actual data collection the students were asked to write the diary entries during a coffee break between lessons. An extra incentive for writing was provided by the researcher visiting the class midway the course with a treat of sweets, and a promise of coffee and pastry at the end of the course.

When asked about the reasons for not writing the diaries, some of the male students said that diary writing was not regarded as a masculine activity and assumed that this was one reason why "the guys won't write". Therefore, when informing about the research and giving instructions for writing the diaries it was stressed, that this was not to be regarded as something feminine, but as a tool for gathering valuable information about the students' experiences as language learners. The term 'diary' was later found synonymous to 'log', and this term was also used when referring to writing the entries.

Finally, the pilot provided useful information about the timing of the data gathering. The data gathering was during a coffee break, so the students had coffee first, and after that they wrote the self-reports. The 15 minutes suggested

for the actual writing of the self-reports seemed to be long enough a time. The interview took 20 minutes. At the beginning and at the end of the language course the students took a language test. The interview revealed that the closeness of the test seemed to have an impact on the student's view of his or her language proficiency. Therefore, it was decided, if possible, to arrange the data gathering at a time when the test would not interfere.

5.4.2 Setting

"Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding people's experience in context. The natural setting is the place where the researcher is most likely to discover, uncover, what is to be known about the phenomenon of interest." (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:45.) In this case, the natural setting was a suggestopedic language class that had its lessons twice a week in the evenings. The course consisted of forty lessons and it was arranged by a civic institute in a town in Eastern Finland in November-December 1997. I will describe the classroom the way I saw it as I first entered the class. The seating arrangement of the class was typical for a suggestopedic class; the seats (armchairs) were in the shape of a horseshoe. There were no desks. On the walls there were some posters and papers full of writing, on the floor there was a basket with felt pens in it, and some dictionaries were lying beside the basket. The atmoshpere was relaxed and the students were chatting among themselves and became positively curious about the research and the researcher as I entered.

5.4.3 Subjects

At the first meeting there were eight students present on the course. They were aged from 20 to 65. More students arrived later to the course. The total number of students was twelve. Seven of these students participated in the pilot study. Since this was an advanced suggestopedic language course it was assumed that most of the students were familiar with the suggestopedic teaching method which proved to be the case.

5.4.4 Data collection procedures

Since the alternate paradigm assumes that the knower and the known are inseparable and the events are mutually shaped, and a key characteristic of qualitatitve inquiry is that the researcher is understood as a data collection instrument, it is suggested that the researcher includes him/herself in the discussion of the data collection procedures (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:155). In the present study the researcher was a female language teacher, and her interest in the research topic was based on her previous experiences with language learners. The scene of the suggestopedic language courses was familiar to the researcher, because she had been teaching adults using the suggestopedic method as well.

The data consisted of four sets of data. The first types of data were self-reports that the students were asked to write at the beginning and at the end of the language course. The second kind of data were diaries that the students kept during the language course, and the third set of data were interviews that were carried out at the end of the course. In addition, the researcher's field diary and a research journal were included in the data.

Since the data were collected at three subsequent stages, not all the students were present each time, and all four types of data were not received from everyone. The self-report at the beginning was received from eight students, at the end from six students. Seven diaries were returned and seven students were interviewed. This raises the question whether all data should be included or only data that was received from students attending most of the measurements. I decided to use all the available data, since one of the research questions was to find out what kind of information this type of research could elicit and, therefore each piece of information was regarded as significant.

5.4.4.1 Self-reports

The students were asked to write a self-report at the beginning of the language course before the actual course started. This was arranged, because later that evening the students had a language proficiency test, which was assumed to influence the results of this study. Each student was asked to write a

description of themselves as language learners and users of English under a title "Me as a user and as a learner of English". The students were asked to write in their native language, which was Finnish. The students were instructed to concentrate on their own perceptions, thoughts and feelings (appendix 1). A treat of chocolate was offered during the writing that took 20 minutes. The briefing and the writing took half an hour. At the end of the course the students were asked to describe themselves as language learners and users of English at that point. This was carried out in a similar fashion to the first measurement, this time during a coffee break.

5.4.4.2 Diaries

The students were asked to keep a diary of their thoughts, feelings and perceptions during the language course (appendix 2). An A5-size notebook was given to each student for this purpose at the first meeting. The diary was to be written during a coffee break between lessons. However, as I learned later, this instruction had not been followed and thus the diaries had been written partly at the institute, partly at home and at various times; some wrote entries during the night after the course, others after some days. This method could be named retrospection (see Cohen and Hosenfeld 1986:286) as one recalls and reflects past experiences after time has elapsed.

5.4.4.3 Interviews

The interviews were carried out in the evening as the class had its final meeting. The interviews, three altogether, were carried out before or after the students had written the descriptions of themselves. One student was interviewed before the lessons, the second interview was carried out with four students during a coffee break. The third interview was done after the second, three students were interviewed then. The interview schedule (appendix 3) consisted of open-ended questions concerning the general feelings at the end of the course and comments about the diaries. The students were asked to describe themselves as language learners and users at the beginning of the course, and now at the end of the course. The students were also asked to describe what happened to them during

the course, and if they had noticed any influence that the study might have had on their learning. Throughout the interview the focus was on the affective side, the students' feelings were explicitly asked about.

5.4.5 Method of data analysis - the constant comparative method

The students' diaries and self-reports were typed out. Interviews were transcribed. Notes were kept on the first impressions arising at that point. Later as I returned to the data, there was a need for a more detailed analysis. Therefore, the constant comparative method originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and adapted by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) was chosen as the method of data analysis. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparative method is a method mainly used in the social sciences for generating theory from data. This kind of theory is called a 'grounded theory'. Besides generating theory, the constant comparative method is a useful tool for analysing data qualitatively. Glaser and Strauss (1967:105) describe the constant comparative method as consisting of four stages:

1. comparing incidents applicable to each category

2. integrating categories and their properties

3. delimiting the theory

4. writing the theory

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994:128), the first step after typing and transcribing is unitizing the data, that is, defining the meaningful units, coding and separating them from the data. In this way, the whole data will be divided into units that will be cut out and glued on cards.

Glaser and Strauss (1967:105) describe the first stage of analysis as follows: "The analyst starts by coding each incident in his data into as many categories of analysis as possible, as categories emerge or as data emerge that fit an existing category." Coding can be done on margins, or more elaborately, as Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest, on cards. To this coding procedure, Glaser and Strauss (1967:106, emphasis original) add the basic rule of the constant comparative method, that is: "*while coding an incident for a category,*

compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category." Theoretical properties of the categories emerge through this constant comparison of the incidents. Another important rule for the constant comparison method is to keep a record of the ideas that emerge during the coding procedure. This is done in order to tap the freshness of the theoretical notions. One incident can be coded for several categories but Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that it should be used as an illustration only once.

The second stage of analysis is integrating categories and their properties (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The initial comparison is of incident with incident but as the coding continues the comparison changes to be a comparison of incident with the properties of a category that resulted from the initial comparison. The properties become integrated and gradually the theory develops as the categories and their properties become integrated.

The third stage, delimiting the theory means solidifying the theory by reduction (Glaser and Strauss 1967). As the theory develops, the analyst can formulate the theory with a smaller set of higher level concepts after discovering underlying uniformities in the categories and their properties. Besides reducing the terminology, the categories may also be reduced and thus delimit the theory. The final stage in the constant comparative method is writing the theory.

Next I will sum up the method of analysis used in this study. The first impressions were obtained as the data were typed out and transcribed, a record of the first impressions was kept in the research journal. The data were returned to later and at that point divided into meaningful units. The units were labelled or categorized under concepts of one word or a short phrase. The categories were compared and patterns were looked for. When similarities were found, some concepts were classified under a higher level concept. Properties or characteristics for the categories were distinguished. A research journal was kept of the emerging thoughts and ideas, that is, of the process of discovery. The findings will be described in sections 5.5. and 5.6.

5.5 Analysis 1: Constant comparative method

An attempt was made to analyze the data by using the constant comparative method. A description of the findings obtained by using the constant comparative method will be provided in the following.

5.5.1 First assignment/self-reports

Eight students did the first assignement. One student came late and was instructed to write the assignment at home, which he, however, never did.

The constant comparative method of analysis was applied to the self-report data. The constant comparative method was complemented by using mind maps and colours as symbols. The use of the constant comparative method meant that firstly, the data were divided into units of meaning (a total of 101) that were numbered and coded so that each unit of meaning could be traced to its original source. For example, the code AM/A3 means that the source is the first self-report (AM=alkumittaus), and the respondent is person A, the number refers to the third unit of meaning initiated by the respondent.

Secondly, after dividing the data into meaningful units, the units were labelled with a word or a phrase that marked the content of the unit. For instance a sentence like *"I have studied English 30 years ago"* (AM/A1) was labelled as *'previous studies'*. Different colours were used to symbolize different types of labels, the units of meaning were underlined accordingly with the right colour.

Thirdly, mind maps of the units of meaning of each respondent were drawn using colours. The mind mapping generated a combined mind map of the ideas behind the units of meaning. Background information was excluded and only the pieces of information referring to oneself as a language learner or user of English were included in this mind map as shown in figure 4.
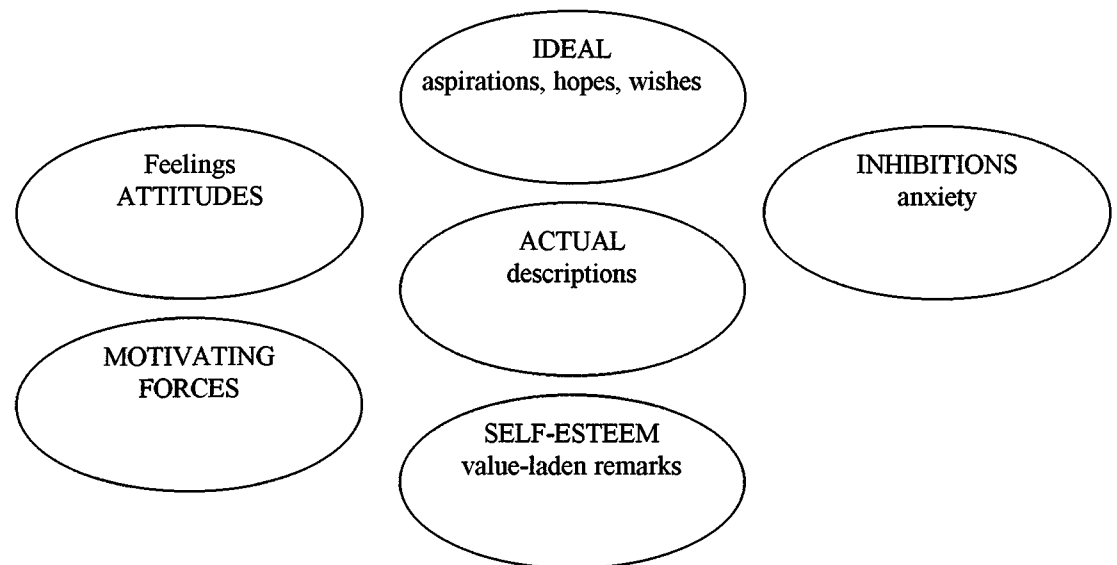
Figure 4. Mind map of students' self-reports, "Me as a language learner and user of English"

Fourthly, the units of meaning were compiled on small cards. The process of discovery had so far generated a hypothetical set of categories that were used as provisional categories for the comparison process. The names of the categories resembled the labels given to the units in the initial stage. In fact, the provisional categories were formed out of the labels, the labels that seemed to belong together, formed a category. The provisional names for the categories were attached to a wallpaper. During the actual comparison process each card containing a unit of meaning was compared to other units of meaning and after comparison it was attached to a category. Units with similarities were attached under the same category, if the unit differed, it was attached to another category or a subcategory was formed. New categories were formed when a need for them emerged.

The categories that emerged during the analysis of the self-reports are shown in table 4.

Table 4. Categories emerging from the initial self-reports:

A Background information
A.1   Previous studies
A.1.a   place
A.1.b   time
A.1.c   contents
A.1.d   comments
A.2   Reason for coming to the course
A.3   Expectations concerning the course
A.4   Others (age, work experience etc.)

B A need for English skills
B.1   work
B.2   travelling
B.3   everyday situations

C A feeling for or an attitude towards English
C.1   positive
C.2   important

D Foreign language self-concept
D.1   Perception of one's English skills
D.1.a   Positive
D.1.b   Negative
D.2   A feeling for the perception of one's English skills
D.2.a   Positive
D.2.b   Negative
D.3   A wish concerning one's English skills

E Me as a language learner
E.1   An estimation of oneself as a learner
E.2   Doubts about one's learning skills
E.3   Hopes and expectations of one's learning
E.4   A desire to learn
E.5   Comments about learning: what learning is like, how one
         learns, the importance of learning

F Student's affective states

Other comments

5.5.2 Diaries

To start with I will include an extract from my notes dated 3rd and 4th December after typing out the diaries:

COMMENTS ON THE DIARIES 3.12.97:

"As I have typed three diaries and had a glance at the other diaries my impressions are as follows: It surprises me how differently the students have described the same sessions/classes. The perspectives are different; one concentrates on making notes about the group dynamics and sees the development of the group important. Another one is more self-centered and describes his feelings of success and failure and tries to see reasons for them. A third one merely describes the activities that were done during the evening, sees himself as if from outside witnessing a chain of events."

4th December

"Today I typed the rest of the diaries and listened to the interviews making some short notes while listening. In the diaries the learners describe their language learning experience not as a steady progress but more like a "rollercoaster" or like a "wavelike movement", with its ups and downs. One evening the learner may feel success and another evening a failure. The same evening may be described differently. One feels that the atmosphere is relaxed, another one experiences it as stiff. The reader gets the impression as if looking through windows into many different classrooms, not just into one."

"The question is whether the data give answers to the original research questions about the language learners' self-concept. The answer is no. What this data gives answers to is the multiplicity of the interpretations of the same learning situation. The diary entries could be analyzed as wholes, not splitting them into separate sentences but as seeing them as individual learners' expressions of their particular point of view."

The diary entries were analyzed by using the constant comparative method. The data were first divided into units of meaning (243 in total) that were labelled/named by using a word or a short phrase in the margin. Then the labels were compared and labels that looked alike formed a theme for a higher level category. The data were moved into excel and there each unit was named with the theme.

The following themes emerged from the diary entries:

- the student's own affective state or state of being
- perceived atmosphere in the class
- comments concerning the group
- comments concerning the teaching arrangements, such as the teaching methods or activities used, time, tests, and the teacher
- the student's own language learning
- other comments

As a whole, the units of meaning seemed to be longer here than in the self-report data. One whole diary entry might be one single unit of meaning, in case it only commented on one theme, such as the activities that were used that particular evening. Since the comments on the student's own learning overlap category E. 'Me as a language learner', there was no need to establish new categories for all emerging themes. Also, the other comments-category, and the category for students' affective states were established earlier. The student's affective state-category was further elaborated to be concerned with both affective states and other states of being. A list of all the categories that emerged during an analysis with the constant comparative method is shown in Appendix 4 in their final state. Appendix 5 presents the order in which the different categories emerged from the data.

5.5.3 Self-reports at the end of the course

The data from the final self-report fitted the existing categories. A total of 98 units of meaning were coded and they were categorized in the categories mentioned above in table 1. I wrote in the research journal on 6th April: "It seems as if the final self-report, like the initial self-report, were written to fit a scheme. Even though the instructions were rather open-ended, the same themes are repeated, as if they had been asked about. The same themes appear in the final self-report as in the diaries and in the initial self-reports." The students described their language skills and commented on whether they had experienced any progress. An overall impression was that an improvement in the oral skills

was perceived. The students also expressed a wish to learn more and continue their English studies, as well as to improve their English skills.

5.5.4 Interviews

At first the interview data were treated similarly to other types of data. First the interviews were transcribed and then they were divided into units of meaning. The units of meaning were longer than the units of meaning in the other types of data. One unit of meaning usually consisted of the interviewer's question, respondent's answer, and possibly other students' comments. Since the interview data contained a lot of information other than related to self-concepts, it was decided not to use constant comparative method to this set of data, but to take the interviews as additional source of information and pay attention to those sections referring somehow to learners' perceptions of themselves as language learners and users of English. The coding system was done differently, now the number refers to the page number where the extract is to be found in the computer files.

5.6 Analysis 2: case studies

The constant comparative method that was used for analyzing the data provided a systematic and data-grounded analysis. With the help of it the data were categorized but, however it seemed to split the data and reduce the richness of the original data. Here I will include an extract of my research journal dated 7th May, describing the thought process before deciding to use case study reports.

"RESEARCH JOURNAL 7th May 1998

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and Lincoln and Cuba (1985) introduce the philosophical background, the basic beliefs of the alternative paradigm, which Lincoln and Guba term as naturalistic inquiry and Maykut and Morehouse choose to call the alternative paradigm. The ideas that they present are quite agreeable, I can share their philosophical views.

However, when it comes to the practical side of carrying out a research they simply present the CCM (constant comparative method) as THE method of data analysis, without pondering its suitability to the principles of the alternative view they represent. The benefits of constant comparative method are that firstly, it provides a tool for analysing qualitative data systematically, secondly, it gives a data-driven theory or outcomes that are formed inductively from the data. Data-drivenness or groundedness and the use of induction are regarded as merits since they are in line with the principles of the alternative paradigm presented by Maykut and Morehouse and Lincoln and Guba.

But, what is left unnoticed by Maykut and Morehouse and Lincoln and Guba are the limitations of the method. These are, first of all, the fact that constant comparative method splinters the data into units that are separated from the context. So, in order to create a holistic picture, the researcher needs to employ other methods of analysis as well. The researcher needs to return to the original data and see the meaningful units in their context. Here I used contextual maps or mind maps as an aid in the analysis. A second limitation is that through constant comparative method you cannot trace the potential change in the individual's foreign language self-concept. In order to do that, again, the researcher needs to return to the original data and see the self-reports, diaries and interviews of each individual in a chronological order.

The outcomes after using the constant comparative method -analysis, in this case, were a list of categories that gave an overall impression what kind of items the data consisted of. Whether it was the inability of the researcher to divide the data into meaningful units or categorize the units is debatable, nevertheless, the categories, so far, did not appear to "speak to each other". Therefore a further analysis focusing on those categories that contained information of the foreign language self-concept and related items is needed."

Therefore I selected those units of analysis from the data that referred to the learner's perception of him/herself as a user of English or as a language learner, that is, units of meaning belonging to categories D and E, and other related units. Then I wrote a "story" of four students in the case study mode

describing each student individually. These four cases serve as examples of the data, and in addition, as examples of how differently the case study reporting presents the data, compared to the previous categorizations.

5.6.1 Burt - "digging through a concrete wall with a spoon"

To begin with I will introduce an older learner, a man in his 60's. I will call him Burt. Burt participated in the pilot phase and there he gives the impression that language learning is very difficult for him, he uses the expression "it is like digging through a concrete wall with a spoon". He seems to be a man with a good sense of humour and seems to appreciate himself the way he is. In the first self-report Burt sketches a rather negative picture of himself as a user and learner of English:

> am/b79: Koen itseni englannin kielen käyttäjänä ja oppijana aika alottelijaksi, sekä suhteellisen hidas oppiseksi. (I feel that as a user and learner of English I am a beginner and a rather slow learner.)

Burt has set aims for his studies and he wishes to learn enough English to manage when travelling abroad:

> Am/b 81: Se siitä, tarkoitukseni on kuitenkin sen verran oppia kieltä että selviän matkoilla ja että voisinpa jopa keskustellakin vieraiden kanssa. Ehkä joskus kirjeenvaihtoakin. (That's it. My aim is to learn that much English that I can manage when travelling, that I could possibly talk with strangers, perhaps letter writing sometime.)

When Burt writes in his diary he reports his difficulties with language learning mentioning vocabulary and word order. Pronunciation, on the other hand, seems easier. The following is written after the first class:

> Pvk/b 180: Ei löytyny sanoja mielestä. (I did not find the words in my mind.)

> Pvk/b 181: Ääntäminen ol' vähän kait sinne päin "luulen". (Pronunciation was to the right direction, I guess.)

> Pvk/b 182: Sanajärjestys käsittämättömän vaikeeta uluko muistista. (Word order was incredibly hard by heart.)

> Pvk/b 183: Joka juttu tökki vähän väliä. (Everything was "sticky".)

> Pvk/b 185: Ihan tuntuu siltä, että oma oppimiseni, omaksuminen on työn ja tuskan takana... (I feel that my own learning is painfully hard work...)

However, the experiences in the next class show a different picture. Burt describes the activities used that evening and the atmosphere in the class, and the feeling of ease:

> pvk/b 188-189: Tämän päivän tehtävät olivat hyvin mielenkiintoisia KOSKA opettaja antoi tehtävä raamit ja sen jälkeen ne toteutettiin pienissä ryhmissä aika vapaamuotoisesti inspiroiden ja hauskaa oli kaikilla, tällaisia hetkiä toivoisin todella enemmän. (Today's activities were very interesting BECAUSE the teacher gave the guidelines and after that the activities were carried out in small groups improvising rather freely and everyone had fun, I really wish there were more moments like these.)

> Pvk/b 190: Ainakaan tänä iltana ei tuntunu tökkivän lainkaan. (At least tonight language learning did not seem to be "sticky" at all.)

Burt reflects the reasons for this feeling of ease:

> pvk/b 191: Ilmeisesti vapautunut olo opiskelulle on tärkeintä. (Apparently, feeling relaxed is the most important thing in learning.)

In the continuation, a similar pattern is to be found, feelings of success and failure alternate. When thinking of Burt, the affective state, the state of being and the overall atmosphere in the class seem to be reported alongside with perceptions of either success or failure as a language learner. Burt reports humour and laughter and seems to indicate the relaxed atmosphere in the class, at those moments Burt feels at ease with the language. Tiredness, sleepless nights and worries about work are reported together with apprehension and difficulties with language learning.

Burt himself is aware of this alternation and he himself calls it a "rollercoaster". He suppposes that the rollercoaster-like movement will ease when he learns more of the language:

> pvk/b 203: Ehkä tämä vuoristorata tasoittuu kun pääsen enemmän kielen sisällöstä perille. (Maybe this rollercoaster will even out when I grasp more of the language.)

Burt reflects the possible reasons for the alternation and stresses the importance of a "good feeling":

> Pvk/b 206-208: Sen oon pannu itestäni merkille kun olen sulle näitä juttuja kirjotellu, mitenkä erilaisia voi kurssipäivät olla. Mielestäni ainakin itse oletan jonain hyvänä päivänä omaksuvani paljon uutta - huonona en mitään. Ilmeisesti jos pystys henkisesti valmistautumaan hyvällä fiiliksellä joka kurssi kertaan vois varmaan tuloksetkin olla maksimaalisia. (I have noticed about myself, as I have written these notes to you, how different the course days can be. At least I myself suppose I learn a lot of new things in a good day - nothing in a bad day. Apparently, if one could prepare oneself with a good feeling for each lesson, the results could be maximal.)

In the final interview, when asked to describe himself at the beginning of the course as a user of English, Burt describes his progress as follows:

> Ha/b 8: Kyllä minä nyt piäsen jopa äkimmin kaopasta ulos. (naurua) (Now I will get sooner out of the shop. (laughter)

Burt tells that he does not aim at perfection, but understanding at a more "lighter" level, and he feels that his goal is no longer far away:

> Ha/b 13: Vaatii liikaa töitä. Liian paljon, ei ikä riitä siihen... mutta tällein sanotaan niinkun kevyen tason ymmärtämisessä niin se ei vissiin ennää ole pitkän matkan perässä...(naurua) (Demands too much work. Too much, my age will not allow it... but, so to say, I mean, a lighter level of understanding, I suppose, that is no longer far away...(laughter)

5.6.2 Mary – "I am apprehensive of using the language"

A middle-aged woman whom I will call Mary describes herself as apprehensive of using the language. In the first self-report Mary explains that in principle she should have quite an extensive vocabulary, but when it comes to situations where she has a chance to speak, she feels "blocked". She tries to figure out the reason for this, and continues that probably she tries to express herself grammatically correctly. She wishes to use English more fluently than now:

> Am/ma 57-61: Olen arka käyttämään kieltä, vaikka periaatteessa esim. sanastoa pitäisi olla hallussa melko hyvin. Ongelmana on tietty "lukkiutuminen" aina kun olisi tilaisuus puhua. Luultavasti yritän saada ilmaistua itseäni kieliopillisesti mahdollisimman oikein.

Toivoisin voivani käyttää englannin kieltä sujuvasti tai ainakin sujuvammin kuin nykyisin. (I am apprehensive of using the language, although in principle I should know quite a lot of vocabulary for instance. My problem is a "block" every time I would have a chance to speak. Probably I try to express myself grammatically as correctly as possible. I wish I could use English fluently or at least more fluently than nowadays.)

In her diary Mary reports conflicting experiences. The first class she describes as relaxing and fun. Even though there are some unknown students, Mary enjoys speaking. Next Mary asks why even the easiest situations make her stumble in her speech. In the test Mary knows all the words but cannot find the Finnish equivalent. Forgetting familiar words frustrates her:

Pvk/ma 231-235: Rentouttava, hauska "opiskeluilta". Vaikka ryhmässä aivan vieraita henkilöitä puhuminen oli mukavaa. Miksi aina vain helpotkin tilanteet aiheuttavat kangertelua? Kirjallisessa testissä kaikki sanat tuttuja, mutta suomen vastine ei vain muistu mieleen. Turhauttaa, kun unohtaa useinkin nähtyjä ja kuultuja sanoja. (Relaxing, fun "study evening". Although there were totally unknown people present, speaking was enjoyable. Why even the easiest situations make me stumble in my speech? In the written test all words (were) familiar, but I cannot remember the Finnish equivalent. It frustrates when I forget words that I have often seen and heard.)

The next class Mary again notes the words lost:

Pvk/ma 238: Lentoemännän rooli ei oikein luonnistunut, sanat eivät vain tunnu löytyvän, mutta yritetään. (The stewardess's role did not work out, I don't seem to find the words, but let me keep trying.)

Then Mary misses one class because of busy time at work. The fourth class Mary seems to find positive. She reports that speaking has become easier and her anxiety has disappeared:

Pvk/ma 242: Puhuminen on kuitenkin kokonaisuudessaan helpottunut eikä ole enää tiettyä jännitystä puhumisessa. (Speaking as a whole has become easier, and the certain tension when speaking does not exist anymore.)

Mary reflects and describes her language learning as a curvelike movement: sometimes you feel that you know the language satisfactorily, the next moment you are "down to earth":

> Pvk/ma 241: Aaltoliikettä: välillä tuntuu että kieli sittenkin on tyydyttävästi hallussa ja seuraavassa hetkessä taas paluu maanpinnalle. (A curvelike movement: sometimes I feel that I know the language satisfactorily and the next moment again down to earth.)

The fifth class, Mary again notices the missing words, but this time she does not find it puzzling, now she tries to find other expressions and feels wonderful when being understood:

> Pvk/ma 246-248: Miksi aina vain sanat unohtuvat. Mutta toisaalta se ei häkellytä vaan on yritystä löytää vastineita. Ihana tunne saada itsensä ymmärretyksi. (Why do I always forget the words? But, on the other hand, it does not puzzle me but I try to find other expressions. A wonderful feeling to make myself understood.)

The sixth class, her anxiety appears again:

> Pvk/ma 251: Miksi aina jännittää kun odottaa vuoroaan puhua. Sanat tuntuvat takertuvan jonnekin. (Why do I always feel nervous when I wait for my turn to speak? The words seem to get blocked somewhere.)

On the other hand, Mary is happy that the private conversation in the group turns into English, and she notices progress when compared to the beginning, the threshold to start speaking is lower, now it is easier to speak:

> Pvk/ma 252: Toisaalta huomaa ajttelevansa englannin kielellä ja "yksityinenkin" keskustelu kurssilaisten kanssa alkaa helposti englanniksi. (On the other hand, I notice that I think in English an "private" conversation with other group members easily begins in English.)

> Pvk/ma 254: Toisaalta on kyllä edistystä tapahtunut -> alkuun verrattuna puhumisen kynnys on kuitenkin alentunut. (On the other hand, there has been progress -> compared to the beginning the threshold of speaking has become lower.)

The seventh class, Mary reports how she enjoys speaking with others. On the other hand, she feels desperate when "the words get stuck" in her throat:

> Pvk/ma 258-259: Keskustelua on mukava käydä eri ihmisten kanssa. Usein kyllä vieläkin sanat takertuu jonnekin kurkkuun ja tuntuu taas toivottomalta. (It is nice to carry out a conversation with different people. Still I often feel that words get stuck somewhere in my throat and I feel desperate.)

Then Mary misses a class and her last entries are written in the ninth class, where she reports that at that moment she cannot see any more progress. The final self-report summarizes her experiences. The threshold to speak is lower now, she still has the same problems as in the beginning, the words forgotten. However, she has learnt to use other expressions, she feels the need to enlarge her vocabulary, she feels disappointed when forgetting familiar words. She wishes she were more fluent in speaking. At the moment she feels that pronunciation is difficult for her. She feels capable of developing her skills, does not feel like a hopeless case.

In the interview, when asked to describe herself as a user of English before the course, Mary says she used to have the feeling that she should be able to say things in English. She has been in situations where she has needed the language, yet she feels that she cannot say things in English. She forgets the words and gets nervous and confused and she is very disappointed at herself for not being able to express herself. In her family the others know English better. During the course, she has felt that the threshold to speak has become lower, the relaxed atmosphere has removed the anxiety and at the moment she says she is actually looking forward to situations where she could use English:

> Ha/ma 16: No periaatteessa koko ajan on ollut semmonen tunne että minun pitäis niinku enemmänkin saada suustani ulos englanniks koska tilanteita on ollu missä on joutunu käyttämään ja pitkin matkaa ja pidemmän aika, mutta sit kuitenkin on se tunne, että minä en saa sanottua niinku asioita englanniksi ja ne sanat aina häviää ja sit tulee semmonen jännitys ja semmonen sekavuus ja olin niinku hirveen pettyny siihen omaan tuota tasooni ja siihen että miten tuota miten ei niinku onnistunu mieleisellä tavalla aina ja sitten kun tuntuu että perheessä kaikki muut osaa paremmin niin siitä tuli semmonen ärsytys ihan että minun täytyy myös tuota topistautua tässä asiassa.

> Ha/h 16: Mitä sinussa tapahtui kurssin aikana?

> Ha/ma 16: Kyllä mulla ainakin kynnys madaltu siinä puheen alottamisessa ja sen tuottamisessa jotenki tuntu että oli niin hauskalla tavalla aina näi tilanteet täällä että ei sitä sitt ees miettiny että niinku sä sanoit että nii rentouttavaa aina, ehkä se just se rentous ja rento ilmapiiri niin se sen turhan jännityksen ja sen poisti,

nyt se on niinku aktiivisempi ja ajankohtasempi koko tää kieli, ett tuntuu että sitä niinku aktivoituu semmoseen omatoimiseen harrastukseenki toivottavasti nyt tänki jälkeen sitten

...

Ha/ma17: Kyll tosiaan se että nyt niinku oikeestaan toivois että tulis niinku tilanteita että nyt sais ja joutus puhumaan ett' nyt on semmonen tunne, että nyt ei vältä aina jos työpaikallekin tulee vierailijoita että en minä ainakaan mee vastaanottamaan tai muuta, että nyt jo odottaa melkein, että kun tulis tilanne että sais käyttää ja aktivoida sillä lailla...

(Well, in principle all the time I have had the feeling that I should, you know, get more English out of my mouth because there have been situations where I have had to use the language all along the way and for a longer time, but then, however, I still have the feeling, that I cannot say things in English and the words get lost and then I get that anxiety and a kind of confusion and I was, you know, terribly disappointed at my own level, and the fact that I did not success the way I wanted always, and then I felt that in my family everyone knows better, so that made me irritated and that I must improve in this matter.

Ha/h16: What happened to you during the course?

Ha/ma16: At least my threshold to start speaking and speaking got lower, somehow I felt these situations here were in such a fun way that one did not even think, you know, as you said, so relaxing always, perhaps it was just the relaxedness and relaxed atmosphere that removed the extra tension, now it is more active and acute this whole language, that I think this will activate me for self initiated studying after this then.)

...

(Yes, now I actually wish that there would be situations that I could and should speak, that now I have the feeling that now I will not avoid visitors at work... that now I almost look forward that there would be a situation that I could use and activate that way...)

Here we seem to be witnessing a change in the self-image of Mary. She reports that previously she has been apprehensive of using English. Anxiety and tension have arisen in situations where English has been needed, leading to forgetting words and avoidance of situations. Feelings of disappointment have been connected to these situations. This has turned into eagerness to use the English skills. During the course she has felt the relaxed atmosphere as helpful

for her to overcome her anxiety. However, as we see from her diary entries, the moments when words are lost still appear, yet Mary tries to get round and find other expressions, and is not as much confused as she used to be.

5.6.3 Nina - never satisfied

The next person I want to introduce is Nina. Nina participated in the pilot study, she did not find the time to write the diary, but she wrote two self-reports in the pilot phase and one at the end of this course. In addition, she was interviewed.

In the self-reports that Nina wrote in the pilot phase she describes her language skills as rather rusty, especially speaking and listening. Nina says her English is rather simple, and "in a miserable condition", and estimates that it would take her years to improve it. Learning English has never been easy for her. She acknowledges that she is very critical of her language skills because in her family there are others who speak English fluently. She needs English at work and abroad where her family will stay for some time in the future. Nina wishes she had a so-called "knack" for languages.

In the interview we find more about Nina's attitude to herself. Nina feels that she has not learned a lot of new things, but has activated her passive skills. She feels that she should have studied more at home in order to benefit more of the course. She has felt that reading aloud in chorus has been "TERribly difficult". She doubts what will happen in a real life situation, here on the course it has been easier because she has been able to "tell tall stories":

> Ha/n 9: eli ett' sit' ku tulee setosi paikka niin kyl mä epäilen ett' ne eväät vielä vähissä on ett' kyllähän se ett' meikäläisen taito on lähinnä siinä että pystyy tekstiä lukemaan ja se puheen tuottamisessa se vaikeus on.

> (so that when it comes to the real situation, I severely doubt that the skills are minor, so that my skills are closer to that I can read text, and speaking causes difficulties.)

She feels that her language skills are far from "not being sold on the market". She has some professional ambitions, and feels that a lot needs to be done. However, the other students comment otherwise:

> Ha/b 12: Kyllä sää pärjäät kuule tuolla, en kuule hetkeekää...(You will certainly manage, I do not doubt a moment...)

> Ha/O 12: Sinä tosin puhut aika lailla HYvää englantia, suhteellisen mukavaa on hänen puheestaan saada selvää... (You actually speak GOod English, fairly nice to follow her speech...)

Nina comments that it depends on what you compare with, her family members are fluent in English and she is afraid of opening her mouth at home. She admits that she can manage with set phrases but when it comes to more difficult things she wishes to get a bit further, to understand and produce answers. She does not admit that she aims at perfection.

When comparing Nina with Burt, we can see too different types of learners. Burt is content with his skills and thinks that the ideal he is reaching for is not very far ahead, whereas Nina has set her aims high and is still far from achieving them. Burt aims at a low level of understanding and Nina has professional ambitions connected to English. In addition, Nina seems to have an outer frame of reference, in comparison with the fluent family members she finds her own skills miserable.

The comparison between Burt and Nina reveals something of the formation of self-concept. The ideal that we have set for ourselves influences how we perceive ourselves in the actual level of performance. Also the frame of reference seems to be influential. "It depends on what you compare yourself with", as Nina put it.

5.6.4 Mark - steady progress

Mark came to the course to fresh up his speaking skills, he has studied English mainly by himself, and at the evening college. A few years ago he did his matriculation exam. Mark has attended a number of suggestopedic English courses, the first ones in the 80's. Now Mark needs English for his other

studies. For the past three years he has participated in a training program which is in English.

In the first self-report Mark describes his passive English skills as reasonably good. He says he has difficulties with listening comprehension - especially if English is spoken fast. Mark ponders whether the reason for this is that he has studied English by himself. He finds he is capable of speaking English if there is enough time. Otherwise he does not find English problematic for himself. In addition he thinks he is fairly capable of learning new items:

> Am/mu 92-95: Passiivisen kielitaitoni koen kohtuullisen hyväksi. Ongelmana on puhutun kielen ymmärtäminen – etenkin nopeasti puhuttuna. Oma puhuminen sujuu jotenkuten, jos on riittävästi aikaa. Englannin kielen käyttö muuten ei ole ongelmallista. (I feel that my passive skills of English are rather good. The problem is understanding spoken English – especially in a quick tempo. My own speaking goes somehow smoothly, if I have enough time. Otherwise using English is not problematic.)

> Am/mu 100: Kuullun englannin ymmärtäminen on minulle jostakin syystä hankalaa ja kehittynyt luvattoman hitaasti – en tiedä miksi. (Listening comprehension is for some reason difficult for me and it has developed very slowly – I do not know the reason why.)

> Am/mu 99: Oppimiskykyni koen kohtalaisen hyväksi. (I feel rather capable of learning things.)

In the diary Mark comments the test that was taken at the first meeting. He wonders whether his reflexes are getting slower because there was not enough time to do the test. In the second class Mark writes that he finds speaking easier and new words are easier to find. Again he comments that he thinks his passive skills are quite good.

> Pvk/mu 112: Oma puhuminen tuntui jonkin verran helpommalta ja uusia sanoja löytyy paremmin. (Speaking seemed a bit easier and new words are easier to find.)

> Pvk/mu 113: Passiivinen kielipohja minulla on varsin hyvä, kunhan vaan saan sen aktiivisempaan käyttöön. (My passive skills of English are quite good, if I only could use them actively.)

In the third class he again refers to speaking and says that speaking and listening comprehension are better that evening:

Pvk/mu 122-123: Puhuminen ja puheen ymmärtäminen sujuivat tänä iltana taas jonkin verran paremmin vaikka ajoittain koin sisäistä jännitystä en tiedä miksi, olisiko ollut väsymystä. (Speaking and understanding spoken English went somehow better again, although at times I felt nervous, I do not know why, may be due to tiredness.)

The fourth class - nothing new:

Pvk/mu 132: Tänään ei kielitaidossa ollut huomattavissa mitään uutta – ei varsinaisesti taantumaakaan. Tasaista puurtamista. (Today there was nothing new concerning my language skills – no drawbacks either. Steady work.)

In the fifth class English goes well, somehow it is easier. Mark notices that his speaking has improved as the group has began to work in a more relaxed way together:

Pvk/mu 137: ...englanti sujui ajoittain ihan hyvin – jotenkin helpommin. (English went quite well at times – somehow easier.)

Pvk/mu 139: Ryhmä alkaa toimia vapaammin, sekin parantaa puhumista. (The group starts to co-operate more freely, that improves speaking.)

The sixth class is different from the earlier ones, Mark describes that he has felt tense already in the afternoon and has not been able to relax in the evening. Speaking is uneasy, he cannot find the words and he feels like being forced to speak:

Pvk/mu 144-148: Tänään oli jo iltapäivällä hieman kireä tunne ja se jatkui kurssin ajan. Rentoa, vapaata oloa ei löytynyt tämän iltaisen kurssin aikana. Jotain jäi päivästä viilemään mukaan iltaan. Puhuminen oli hankalaa tänä iltana. Sanat eivät tahtoneet tulla mieleen – väkisin puurtamisen maku hieman. (Today I felt tense already in the afternoon and that feeling remained during the course. Something that happened during the day "cooled" the evening. I hardly remembered the words – felt a bit like forced to work.)

However, the next time again he feels that the atmosphere is relaxed and speaking and writing go well:

Pvk/mu 152-154: Tänään oli taas vaihteeksi leppoisa ilta. Puhekin tuntui sujuvan välillä ihan mukavasti. Kirjoitettukin sana oli paremmin taas hallussa. (Tonight was an easygoing evening for a change. Speaking seemed to go smoothly at times. Also writing seemed easy.)

In the eighth class Mark finds himself peaceful and relaxed, it is an easy-going evening, stories come up easily and words are easy to find:

Pvk/mu162-164: Tämä ilta oli kevyt ilta. Tarinat syntyivät kevyesti ja sanatkin löytyivät paremmin kuin aikaisemmin. Olo oli rauhallinen ja vapautunut. (This was a "light" evening. It was easy to tell stories and words were easier to find than previously.)

Mark comments on the functioning of the group, playing relaxes and improves speaking, changing partners makes good for the group:

Pvk/mu 165-166: Keskusteluparin ja työskentelyparin vaihtaminen ristiin mahdollisimman usein tuntuu tekevän hyvää ryhmän työskentelylle. Lapsenomaiset leikit näyttävät vapauttavan toistenkin kielellistä antia, ilmeisesti turha kontrolli ja liika kriittisyys katoaa leikkimisen myötä. (Changing partners as often as possible seems to make good for the co-operation of the group. Childish games seem to relax the language reservoir of others as well, apparently criticism disappears when playing.)

In the ninth class Mark sees the steady progress he is making, the progress could be faster but he is satisfied at the way it is:

Pvk/mu 173-175: ja huomasin ymmärtäväni selostuksesta jo varsin paljon, muutamaa sanaa ei korva tunnistanut. Kielen harrastaminen tuottaa pikkuhiljaa tulosta – mukava havainto. Kehitys voisi vaan olla vähän nopeampaa, mutta hyvä näinkin. (and I noticed that I understood quite a lot from the commentary, a few words remained unrecognized. Studying the language makes me see the progress – it is nice to notice it.)

In the final self-report Mark says that the situation has changed only little compared to the beginning, speaking has slightly improved and new words have been adopted. He has had no threshold previously, understanding spoken English on the radio or on TV still causes difficulties, also combining speaking

and writing is deficient, but he is getting better all the time. He seems satisfied being able to learn new items.

Mark concentrates on his linguistic progress. Other things that are worth mentioning are his remarks of the importance of the playfulness and the group as a whole to the ability to speak English. Mark seems to enjoy a slow but steady progress during the course, only once does he feel that his speaking is difficult and that is when he feels tense and unable to relax. When reading through Mark's diary entries we can quite often see remarks of the atmosphere in the group together with the ease of speaking.

In the interview that was carried out before Mark wrote the final self report, Mark tells that his passive English skills are quite good and that he understands spoken English fairly well.

Later during the interview, when asked to describe himself as a user of English at the beginning of the course, Mark finds it hard to say anything particular, nothing special compared to any other thing in normal life. As a learner, Mark feels that he learns fairly well, but he is unsatisfied with his speaking and his "ear", meaning listening comprehension. Reading comprehension is easier than listening. He estimates that speaking has improved a bit, words are easier to find. Using English goes sometimes rather smoothly, depending on the topic and the situation.

When asked about the diary, Mark comments that mostly he wrote about the atmosphere in the class. It varies from evening to evening. Some evenings one is "stuck". One cannot remember how words are written, does not remember words. Another evening is totally different; one is able to speak. When asked about the reasons for this, Mark suggests that potential reasons for this variation might be other events during the day, the overall situation and group dynamics, how the group feels as a whole:

> Ha/h 2: Minkälainen mielikuva sulle noin äkkipäätä tulee että minkälaisia havaintoja tuli kirjattua ylös? What is your general impression, what did you write about?)

> Ha/mu 2: No, oikeestaan sitä, että fiilinkiä, että miltä se tuntuu se ilta aina. Ett' sen huomaa, ett' se vaihtelee illoittain. No pari iltaa ni oon niinku tukossa ihan ett' esmes niinku ois yksinkertastakin tekstiä, ei muista miten sanat kirjottaa ja tuota eikä sanat tule

mieleen eikä muuta. Sitte on taas toinen ilta niin se on ihan ihan ihan erilainen. Se tulee hyvin helposti ja pystyy puhumaan ja (Well, actually, the feeling, I wrote how I felt that evening. I noticed that it varies from evening to evening. A couple of evenings you are like "stuck", so that if there was even a simple text, you cannot remember how the words are written, and you cannot recall the words. Then another evening, it is totally, totally, totally different. It comes so easily and you can speak and)

Ha/h 2: Mistähän se mahtaa johtua? (What might be the reason for it?

Ha/mu 2: Ehkä se on päivän muista tapahtumista ja yleistilanteesta. Ja tietysti näin hienosti sanoen ryhmädynamiikallakin varmasti on vaikutusta siihen, että mikä on kokonaisuutena sen ryhmän siinä ett'... (Maybe it is due to other events that happened during the day and the general situation. And to put it nicely, group dynamics definitely has impact on how the group as a whole...)

The importance of the group Mark finds especially essential in this kind of instruction compared to traditional classroom instruction. When asked whether this has had any effect on the learning itself, Mark comments that hardly, but at that particular moment it affects how well one is able to use one's skills:

Ha/h 2: Vaikuttiko se siihen oppimiseen? (Did it affect your learning?)

Ha/mu 2: Sitä on vaikee sanoo, tuskin se oikeestaan siihen juurikaan. Niin, sillä hetkellä just, että ei pysty hyödyntämään samalla keinoin kaiken aikaa sitä, niitä taitoja mitä on olemassa. (It is difficult to say, I doubt it. Well, at that particular moment it affected in a way that you could not employ the skills that you have.)

6 DISCUSSION

This section serves as a discussion of the main findings of the present study. The findings are grouped according to the research questions that were posed earlier.

To answer the research question how foreign language self-concept can be investigated by using qualitative measures, in this case, self-reports, diaries, and interviews, I can say, yes, it is possible. The point in this kind of study is to do it naturally, in order not to implement the researchers own schemas, but to rely on data elicited from the respondents.

The second research question was concerned with what kind of data this kind of approach would elicit. The data elicited have been described in detail in the previous sections. Therefore there is no need to go deeper into this point again. I will only shortly mention that the data were verbal comments, no frequencies or means were calculated. The method of analysis used for analysing the data, that is, the constant comparative method, classified the data into categories. The emerging categories showed a difference between different types of data collecting methods. The self-reports elicited more static features of the self-concept whereas the diaries revealed the dynamic nature of the self-concept of the language learners.

The fourth research question was what difficulties might arise when conducting this kind of investigation. There were some difficulties in collecting the data. As it was noted after the pilot study, motivating the learners to write the diaries was one difficulty. Finding the time for writing the diaries seemed problematic for some learners. If the diary was not written during the lessons, it seemed to be written later or forgotten. In the pilot phase of the study, diary writing seemed to be anticipated as a feminine activity. However, during the actual data gathering, diary entries were written by both men and women. The written form of reporting requires some sort of writing skills, a fact, which may have affected the length of the entries. Another difficulty was that all learners were not present at the first meeting and they received their diaries later. This

also meant that their initial self-reports were not obtained. At the last meeting also, some learners were absent and the final self-reports were not obtained from them.

The constant comparative method used for analysing the data was laborious and, although it helped to classify the data, the question remains whether some other method of analysing qualitative data could have suited this kind of data better. The constant comparative method splits the data into units of meaning, which, when separated from the actual verbal context seemed to loose some information. The coding system was valuable as it provided a way of returning back to the original context. A fruitful way of investigating the data was to look through the learners' data individually in a chronological order. Also visual aids, colours, mind maps, helped to get information. Due to the handicaps of the constant comparative method the data were decided to present in a case study mode which proved out to suit this kind of data.

An additional drawback for the study was that I was not a participant in the language course, neither as a teacher nor as a student. The question remains whether being a participant could have yielded additional data.

Another point to consider is whether the self-reports should have been made with a more structured instruction or not. It is to be asked whether more structured instructions would have elicited some additional information. However, here I think the pilot study gave arguments in favour of the decision I took, that is, an open-ended assignment.

A further point worth considering is my interview technique. I feel to be an unskilled interviewer, though the pilot study gave some practice in conducting the interview. Due to this fact, I chose rather a structured interview technique. Another limitation besides my own inadequacy was the limited time we had for the interviews that were arranged during the course evening. And I had only a few questions to ask. And I did not allow too much free conversation, was nervous etc.

The fourth question was whether this study might benefit the language learner or foreign language learning. It is to be assumed that by using diaries, learners can become more aware of their learning process and the factors

involved in learning outcomes. In this study, affective factors seemed significant, and some diary remarks clearly showed that learners had become aware of the importance of affective factors in their own learning. Another step forward would be to find out how each individual student could help themselves overcome affective obstacles, and thereby, possibly improve their actual language learning.

The fifth question asked what the foreign language self-concepts of adult English learners are like. In the earlier studies, foreign language self-concept has been described as consisting of actual self, ideal self, and self-esteem. Actual self means the descriptive element, the self-image that the language learner has; ideal self means the hopes and aspirations one attaches to one's skills, in this case, the foreign language skills. The discrepancy between the actual and the ideal self are related to one's self-esteem. If the desired proficiency level of foreign language skills seems far away from the actual proficiency perceived, and the foreign language skill is highly valued, this may lead to a low self-esteem. On the other hand, if the ideal is close to the actual level of proficiency perceived, this may be a reason for a high self-esteem. Also, the foreign language self-concept has been described as rather stable and hierarchical, the self-concept has been identified at a general level, and at task specific levels. The self-concept has been assumed to be the most stable on the general level, and becoming less stable at the more specific levels.

In the present study, the foreign language self-concept that was scetched by adult language learners seemed wider and more varied than the above definitions anticipate. Firstly, the foreign language self-concept seemed to contain a chronological, developmental aspect. The adult language learners had different kind of backgrounds as language learners. These histories as language learners were expressed in the writings. Secondly, the area in life where the foreign language skills were needed seemed to be a part of the foreign language self-concept. In many cases, English skills are needed at work and in travelling. Thirdly, the self-concept seemed to consist of both static and dynamic elements depending on the way of measuring the foreign language self-concept. In the written self-reports at the beginning and at the end of the course, the learners

described the more static features of themselves as language learners and users. However, the diaries revealed a very different picture of the language learners' self-concept. This time the self-concept varied from situation to situation. Learner's affective state seemed to be joined with the perception of his/her foreign language skills. Also the general feeling, or atmosphere in the group seemed to be an influential factor as to how successful the learners perceived themselves to be.

The final question was whether the self-concepts changed during a suggestopedic language course. The students' foreign language self-concepts did change during the suggestopedic course. However, the change was not a linear change but situation-bound alteration of perceptions. A language learner's perception changed from one situation to another depending on how he/she felt at that moment, that is what his/ her affective state was or what the overall "feeling" was or depending on what the student compared him/herself with, in other words, what his/her frame of reference was.

How are the philosophic questions presented in section 4.3. answered in the present study? The questions concerning ontology, epistemology, logic, teleology, human nature, human beings and their environment, and methodology. Ontology refers to the understanding of reality; epistemology is concerned with the origins of knowledge. In the alternative paradigm reality is understood as created in individual's mind, and as mutually shaped in the interaction between individuals, in this case the researcher and the subjects. The researcher aims at reconstructing the subjects' construct. This study appreciated the respondents' own experiences and descriptions of themselves. The researcher's role as an interpreter or reconstructor of the subjets' constructs is revealed in the detailed description of the process. It was understood that research is subjective by nature.

Logic concerns the causality and generalizations. In the alternative paradigm, no causal relations of events are assumed, but instead a multidirectional shaping of events. In this study, no causal relations were sought but instead a co-existence of events. No generalizations of the findings are made. Teleology is concerned with the purpose of the research. The purpose

of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the foreign language self-concept -phenomenon and the methods of inquiry used for investigating it.

Human beings are regarded as creators of their own environment. It was understood that the foreign language self-concept is something created by the subjects in the changing situations.

Finally methodological questions need to be considered. Firstly, the research questions were open-ended, aimed at providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Secondly, the data were collected in a natural setting, that is, in a regular language course. The researcher was seen as an instrument in the data collection process. Thirdly, qualitative methods were chosen for collecting the data. Introspective and retrospective methods, that is, self-reports, diaries and interview were applied. Fourthly, the methods of analysis were inductive and data-grounded, the context was maintained by the case study reporting mode. And finally, the trustworthiness of the study was increased by rich description of the process in reporting the study.

7 CONCLUSION

The present study was born out of criticism towards the conventional way of investigating language learners' self-concepts. This study aimed at providing an alternative way of investigating adult English learners' perceptions of themselves as language learners and users of English (foreign language self-concepts) by using qualitative methods of inquiry, such as introspective self-reports, diaries and interviews. A review of the previous studies conducted on this subject revealed that the use of quantitative methods of inquiry were predominant. The findings of the quantitatively oriented studies are sometimes open to speculations and a critical review maintained that some questions remain.

The research paradigm of the quantitative studies is a positivistic one. A research paradigm consists of the basic beliefs and worldview of the researcher concerning ontological, epistemological, logical and teleological questions, including the understanding of human nature, and the relationship between human beings and their environment, and finally methodological questions. Since the present study attempted to provide an alternative way of inquiry, an alternative paradigm, based on the axioms of naturalistic inquiry and qualitative research were chosen as the background philosophy for the study.

Conducting the present study showed that the inquiry takes a new direction when adopting the alternative paradigm as the research paradigm. The choice of paradigm affects the whole process of inquiry, starting from formulating research questions and becoming aware of the researcher's position to reality and what is to be known about it and by what kind of means.

The foreign language self-concept itself showed partly in a different light compared to the previous studies. Some similarities to the previous constructions of self-concept could be found. Aspects such as the actual self, the ideal self, and the self-esteem could be identified in the initial and final self-reports. However, the diaries revealed very different constructions of foreign language self-concept. In the diary entries self-concept was far from being

stable, but, in contrast, a situation-bound construct. The language learner's self-concept appeared to vary greatly from situation to situation. The individual constructed his/her perception of him/herself as a learner and user of English over and over again in the new situation he/she encountered. Important factors in the construction were how the student felt at that particular moment, how he/she perceived the situation, and the atmosphere in the class, and what he/she referred him/herself to. Hereby, the involvement of affective factors in language learning was shown.

An important outcome of the study for me personally was to become aware of the otherwise transparent philosophic paradigms that define the steps of a research project. Hopefully the readers of the report, in a similar fashion, will become more aware of them, and potentially more critical, when reading research reports, including this one.

In the future, more studies on second language learning using qualitative methods of inquiry would be welcome. The introspective method of using diaries seems well-fitted particularly in studying affective aspects involved in language learning. Diary writing could be used as a tool for making students more aware of their own language learning and through focused attention some issues otherwise unconscious may be raised into their consciousness that might benefit actual language learning. In addition, the diary could be used interactively, in student-teacher -interaction.

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APPENDIX 1 Instructions for the students' self-reports

OHJE OPPIJALLE   27.10. 1997

Teen tutkimusta pro gradu -työtäni varten Jyväskylän yliopiston englannin kielen laitokselle. Tutkimuksessa kartoitetaan aikuisoppijan käsityksiä itsestään englannin kielen käyttäjänä ja englannin oppijana. Kerättyä aineistoa tullaan käsittelemään luottamuksellisesti. Nimeäsi ei tulla käyttämään raportoinnin missään vaiheessa, joten voit vastata nimettömänä tai nimimerkillä.

Aineisto kerätään kolmessa vaiheessa; kurssin alussa ja lopussa tehdään kirjallinen tehtävä ja kurssin aikana pyydän sinua pitämään päiväkirjaa. Osallistumisesi on tärkeää tutkimuksen onnistumisen kannalta, joten toivon sinun kirjoittavan.

KIITOS OSALLISTUMISESTASI.

Ensimmäinen tehtäväsi on kirjoittaa itsestäsi:

MINÄ ENGLANNIN KIELEN KÄYTTÄJÄNÄ JA OPPIJANA

Keskity kirjoittaessasi omiin tuntemuksiisi - siihen, mitä **MINÄ TUNNEN, KOEN, AJATTELEN** tällä hetkellä itsestäni englannin kielen käyttäjänä ja oppijana. Kirjoita vapaamuotoisesti omin sanoin mielellään yksi paperiarkki täyteen.

OHJE OPPIJALLE   26.11.1997

Osallistut tutkimukseen, jossa kartoitetaan aikuisoppijan käsityksiä itsestään englannin kielen käyttäjänä ja oppijana. Kirjoita itsestäsi:
MINÄ ENGLANNIN KIELEN KÄYTTÄJÄNÄ JA OPPIJANA.

Keskity kirjoittaessasi omiin tuntemuksiisi - siihen, mitä **TUNNEN, KOEN, AJATTELEN** tällä hetkellä itsestäni englannin kielen käyttäjänä ja oppijana. Kirjoita vapaamuotoisesti omin sanoin mielellään yksi paperiarkki täyteen.

APPENDIX 2 Instructions for writing the diary

OHJE PÄIVÄKIRJAN KIRJOITTAJALLE

Jokaisella opintokerralla pidetään tauko, jonka aikana kirjoitat **PÄIVÄKIRJAMUISTIINPANOJA.** Kirjoita päiväkirjaasi omia senhetkisiä kokemuksiasi ja tuntemuksiasi liittyen englannin opiskeluun: **MITÄ MINÄ TUNNEN; KOEN; AJATTELEN** itsestäni englannin kielen käyttäjänä ja oppijana nyt. Päiväkirjaan voit tehdä merkintöjä myös kokotna. Päiväkirja kerätään viimeisellä opintokerralla. Pidäthän päiväkirjan mukanasi jokaisella kerralla.

APPENDIX 3 Interview schedule

LOPPUHAASTATTELU

Aika:

Läsnä:

Olet opiskellut n. 40 tuntia englantia, kurssi on päättymässä

- mitkä ovat päällimmäiset tuntemuksesi? mieleenjääneet kokemukset?

- Pidit päiväkirjaa, johon kirjoitit ajatuksiasi, tuntemuksiasi, kokemuksiasi.
  Mitä huomioita teit kirjoittaessasi? Kun katselet päiväkirjamerkintöjä, voitko kertoa millaisia havaintoja olet kirjannut ylös? Mikä merkitys päiväkirjan kirjoittamisella on ollut sinulle/ oppimiskokemuksellesi?

- Palauta sitten mieleesi lähtötilanne, ennen kurssin alkua tai aivan kurssin alkaessa. Miten kuvailisit itseäsi englannin kielen käyttäjänä tuolloin? Miltä tuntui englannin käyttäminen kurssin alkaessa?

- Entä kielen oppijana, millainen olit? Miltä oppiminen tuntui?

- Sitten kiinnitetään huomio tähän hetkeen. Millainen olet nyt englannin kielen käyttäjänä? (mitkä ovat vahvuutesi/kehittämistä vaativat puolet) Miltä kielen käyttäminen nyt tuntuu?

- Entä millainen olet nyt kielen oppijana? Millä tavalla opit parhaiten/ mikä tuottaa vaikeuksia? Miltä oppiminen tuntuu?

- Kerro mitä itsellesi tapahtui kurssin aikana? Kielitaidollesi, oppimistavoille?
  Mitä tapahtui tuntemuksillesi kielen käyttäjänä? Kielen oppijana?

  Mitä tapahtui käsityksillesi itsestäsi kielen käyttäjänä? Kielen oppijana?

- Miten arvioisit tutkimuksen vaikuttaneen oppimistilanteeseen? Omaan oppimiseesi?

Lopuksi kiitän teitä osallistumisesta. Hyvää jatkoa.

APPENDIX 4 Categories that emerged from the data in the analysis with the constant comparative method

A	**Background information**
A1	Previous studies
A1a	Place
A1b	Time
A1c	Contents
A1d	Comments
A2	Reason for coming to the course
A3	Expectations of the course
A4	Others (age, working experience etc.)
B	**A need for English skills**
B1	Work
B2	Travelling
B3	Everyday situations
C	**A feeling or attitude to English**
C1	positive
C2	important
D	**Foreign language self-concept**
D1	Perception of one's English skills
D1a	Positive
D1b	Negative
D2	A feeling attached to the perception of one's English skills
D2a	Positive
D2b	Negative
D3	A wish concerning one's English skills
E	**Me as a language learner**
E1	An estimatation of oneself as a learner
E1a	Positive
E1b	Negative
E2	Doubts about one's learning skills
E3	Hopes and expectations of one's learning
E4	A desire to learn
E5	Comments about learning: what learning is like, how one learns, the importance of le
F	**Student's affective state or state of being**
F1	Positive
F2	Negative
F2a	Confused
F2b	tense
F2c	tired
F2d	apprehension
G	**Atmosphere in the class**
G1	Positive
G1a	peaceful
G1b	other
G2	Negative
H	**Group**
H1	members
H2	functioning group
I	**Teaching arrangements**
I1	Time
I2	Activities
I3	teaching method
I4	others; test, teacher
J	**Other comments**

APPENDIX 5 A graphical presentation of the order in which the categories emerged from the data

am = alkumittaus (the first self-report)
pvk = päiväkirja (the diaries)
lm = loppumittaus (the final self-report)