

**ADULT IMMIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES OF DIFFERENT  
WAYS TO LEARN LANGUAGES AND USING OTHER  
LANGUAGES IN THE PROCESS**

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## Tiivistelmä - Abstract

Maailma globalistuu jatkuvasti ja sen mukana tulee mahdollisuuksia oppia lisää eri kulttuureista ja kielistä. Toinen asia, minkä tämä mahdollistaa on toisiin maihin muuttamisen. Näin eri kielet kohtaavat toisensa ja ihmisten muuttaessa eri maihin voi nousta kysymys siitä, miten he oppivat kieliä, erityisesti aikuisiällä.

Tämä tutkielma käsittelee aikuismaahanmuuttajien kokemuksia eri kielenoppimistavoista ja miten he kertovat käyttävänsä kieliresurssejaan uuden kielen oppimisessa. Tämän tutkimuksen teoreettinen kehys on sosiokulttuurinen kielenoppimisteoria, mikä korostaa vuorovaikutusta tietojen sisäistämiseksi sekä vuorovaikutuksen merkityksien ymmärtämistä. Tutkimus toteutettiin haastattelemalla kolmea eri aikuismaahanmuuttajaa. Haastateltavat olivat eri maanosista (Eurooppa, Etelä-Aasia ja Pohjois-Amerikka), mutta heillä oli samantasoinen koulutustausta.

Haastattelujen kautta selvisi, että jokaisen osallistujan kielenoppimistavat vaihtelivat, mutta myös yhtäläisyyksiä on huomattavissa. Erityisesti kielen käyttäminen aktiivisesti, esimerkiksi vuorovaikutuksessa, oli osallistujien suosiossa, vaikka kaikilla ei ollut suoraan mahdollisuutta siihen. Myös musiikki, uutiset ja internet erilaisten sivustojen kautta auttoivat osallistujia näkemään ja kuulemaan oppimaansa kieltä arjessa. Voisi sanoa, että vaikka näitä yhteisiä teemoja oli nähtävissä, miten niitä tarkalleen hyödynnettiin ja miksi vaihtelivat riippuen osallistujasta. Kaikkein tärkeintä osallistujille vaikutti olevan kielenoppimistavan merkityksellisyys ja hyödyllisyys yksilölle.

Asiasanat - language learning, adult immigrants, formal and informal learning, language resources

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

As the world is very global and the opportunities to meet new people and learn about cultures and languages broaden, how we define language learning has also changed. Since the 1990s there has been more focus given to the social and cultural aspects of language learning (Kurata 2011). Language learning is not anymore simply seen as something that only occurs in a classroom but it can extend beyond classrooms and geographical boundaries. With this come new ways to learn languages through for example technology and music. This raises the question of how much our environments have effect on our language learning and can they restrict our language proficiency.

Although not a coherent group of people, immigrants in general can be seen as having a particularly interesting environment for language learning. An 'immigrant' can be defined as someone who comes to a country to take up permanent residence (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2022). This word might have some negative connotations to it, but in this study it refers to someone who has moved to another country to live there no matter how long they stay there. Immigrants have the opportunity to learn languages in different contexts and in this way, they might become aware of some differences. This might be true especially taking into account the cultural aspects of different languages, such as meanings of words or how thoughts are expressed (Eun and Lim 2009: 22-23).

With this knowledge of different languages and language learning strategies, immigrants can have a variety of ways to learn languages. These ways can change depending on the situation but they are especially closely related to the learners themselves. Thus, it would be interesting to study just how different immigrants are

individually in terms of language learning and what similarities can be found in the ways they use to learn new languages. This will be done in the current study by interviewing three immigrants living in Finland that have studied or are currently in the process of studying a foreign language. The theoretical viewpoint of this study will be sociocultural theory. This study will particularly focus on adult immigrants' experiences of language learning and using their language resources in different contexts. Thus, the two main questions that will be answered are what language learning ways adult immigrants report using and how adult immigrants say they use their language resources in that process.

Overall, there seems to be a gap in research that combines different ways to learn languages in formal and informal environments, especially when it comes to immigrants or multilingual people. There has been research done about integrating informal learning into formal learning (Huang 2020), but there is little research that combines all the ways to learn languages that are possibly utilized by adult immigrants. Thus, this study will combine experiences of both formal and informal learning and in this way offer a well-rounded way to view different language learning ways. I will also discuss using other languages in the process of learning a new one, as this could be relevant to immigrants who already have skills in other languages. The focus will be on the participants as individuals but some notice is also given to their similarities and what could be concluded from those similarities.

## **2 WAYS OF LEARNING LANGUAGES**

In this section, I will introduce the background of this study, what research has been done about the topic and how central terms, such as language learning, language resources, formal and informal learning will be defined. I will first start by talking about sociocultural language learning theory and affordances, then move to discuss language resources in the learning process and finally end by defining and giving examples of formal and informal language learning ways. In this way, I will clarify what the theoretical framework for this study is.

### **2.1 Sociocultural language learning and affordances**

Since the 1990s, research on second language learning and acquisition has been increasingly focused on the social and cultural perspectives of language learning (Kurata 2011: 5). One of the earliest theories that discusses these aspects is sociocultural theory that was fundamentally developed by Lev Vygotsky. This theory is based on the belief that people learn languages through interacting with others and after that these skills will become internalized (Eun and Lim 2009). It states that human minds are mediated by multiple systems, one of them being language. We use language to communicate and connect to our external environments (Kurata 2011: 11).

Thus, this theory is a primary example of taking into account the personal and social aspects in language learning (Eun and Lim 2009: 14).

Sociocultural theory highlights interaction as a way to learn languages, but it also pays attention to what kind of interaction it is. Kozulin (1990, cited in Eun and Lim 2009) proposes that interaction with people of the same language level all the time should be avoided as this can hinder one's language learning. For example, a child can learn language best from someone with more experience than them. Thus, interaction and learning overall should be challenging but meaningful in order to learn the target language diversely. In particular, interaction that involves negotiation of meaning is seen as an effective way to learn languages as through it something not understood becomes understood (van Lier 2000: 247-248).

However, not everyone has the same opportunities, limitations or environments to learn languages. Affordances essentially mean the relationship between an active learner and their environment and they are shaped by what the learner does with language and what they need language for (van Lier 2000: 252-253, 2004). Affordances can be found all around us in our physical and social surroundings and they are largely contextual. Learners perceive different environments in their own way, using them in a way that is relevant for them (van Lier 2000: 252-253) whether it be a social, material or cultural aspect of the environment. Since this process requires the learner to actively view their environment and find different opportunities that they can grab on to, not every learner can find relevant affordances. This relates closely to the thoughts presented in sociocultural learning theory by highlighting the importance of having meaningful material for learning and encouraging learners to be active and engaged in their language learning.

As the sociocultural language learning theory considers social and cultural perspectives of learning, it is especially fitting for studying about immigrants. Language cannot be separated from the culture it is used in and so it is important to take into account culture when learning a new language. This theory highlights communication and learning in a meaningful way. Even though sociocultural learning



theory does not necessarily focus on all kinds of ways to learn languages as much as others, it does take into account different environments and the way our actions are social in nature. This makes it a particularly useful theory when researching about language learning environments and using languages alongside each other.

## **2.2 Language resources in the process of learning a new language**

But how does speaking multiple languages affect language learning? Language resources can be seen as tools or skills that one uses depending on the situation (Pietikäinen, Dufva and Mäntylä 2010). For example, one can use a dialect word with one's family that speaks that dialect but it would not necessarily be as fitting for an official event. So, to paraphrase, language resources are languages and ways to use languages that are used in social interaction (Pietikäinen, Dufva and Mäntylä 2010: 18). Language resources change depending on the situation and what affordances one has to language (Pietikäinen, Dufva and Mäntylä 2010: 18).

Translanguaging is a term that relates to language resources closely. In this study, it will be defined by the words of Canagarajah (2011, cited in Makoe 2018: 17) who defines translanguaging as "the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system". In this case languages are not seen as completely separate but connected to each other and the context they are used in. This is supported by Paradis, Genesee, Crago and Paradis (2011: 67-69) who discovered that bilingual children had at one point some influence from one language to another and used features from each language without noticing. Makoe (2018: 27) found that switching between languages and using all language resources available helped the students to construct knowledge and deepen their knowledge of certain topics. Thus, their learning and also language learning through social interactions was improved.

Language resources can be improved by doing something that requires using language in a social way. Pietikäinen, Dufva and Mäntylä (2010: 24) give an example

of learning certain vocabulary through building a house and using appropriate vocabulary for that situation in different languages and in this way learning language actively. In other words, the language used does not matter as much as understanding what the language is used for, for example to signify a certain tool needed for building a roof. Language resources are something constantly changing and, thus, it is important to be able to use languages as diversely as possible. This also brings forth the idea of language learning being meaningful, social and useful to the learner.

As people live in different situations and have different experiences and opportunities, they are bound to have different resources and skills they can use to learn new things. However, it would be beneficial to offer everyone the opportunity to improve their skills in a meaningful way. There are obvious limitations to how much we can affect our language learning opportunities (Kurata 2011: 6) but the most essential is that it works for us personally.

### **2.3 Meaningful Language learning ways and environments**

Learning environments can be divided into formal and informal learning. Formal learning often includes learning in institutions, such as schools, and other learning that happens in a structured way or environment often with the lead of a teacher (Nygren, Nissinen, Hämäläinen and De Wever 2019). Furthermore, it is seen as compulsory and intentional learning (Nygren et al. 2019). Informal learning on the other hand compasses learning in a non-structured way, for example by talking, listening to music, watching tv-shows and playing video games outside of an institution. In other words, informal learning happens in everyday situations (Jackson 2010: 237).

Often these terms are discussed separately but they can be quite connected to each other. Especially when adults learn languages, separating formal and informal learning might be difficult and sometimes not needed. Demir (2014) found that college students felt that communicating with a pair in a class improved their language skills,

especially in terms of language production. Learning languages, or learning overall, can extend to beyond a classroom and in this way, it can improve learner's language skills in a natural environment. Kurata (2011: 6) highlights that many studies have found positive effects of learning languages outside of classrooms such as learning about the culture of the target language and gaining confidence and willingness to use the target language. Thus, having more opportunities to interact with others can improve one's language skills significantly.

Kurata (2011) brings forth the importance of not only interacting with other people but also building close relationships to speakers of the target language. Thorne (2003, cited in Kurata 2011) found that when the learners' material and social conditions, such as the country of residence, changed, the learners' exposure to L2 increased and this in turn affected their pragmatic and linguistic development in the target language positively. This change happened especially through building close relationships. Thus, on top of frequently interacting with speakers of the target language, one should try to develop close relationships with them as this has been proven to be beneficial for language learning (Kurata 2011).

Communication is also possible through technology, as Qing (2017: 194) discovered. Learning through technology is not connected to time or space and so it opens a way to communicate and get information at any time. Technology also allows people to learn in a more personalized way and cater to their interests and needs (Qing 2017: 197). This creates new opportunities to be a part of different communities and activities in and outside of classrooms.

Another way to use technology in language learning is listening to music. González (2007) found that music helped students improve their vocabulary and it also motivated them to learn more. Learning through music can also improve one's knowledge of structure, phonological features, and receptive and productive skills (Siek-Piskozub 1998: 2, cited in González 2007). Therefore, research on language learning should acknowledge music as a good way to learn languages.

Since watching tv-shows and movies has become easier through the internet, it raises the questions of how effective they can be to learn languages. Similar to learning through music, Alm (2021) found that students especially learned vocabulary through watching Netflix series. They developed their own routines to watching the series and so their language input was more consistent. They also applied multiple learning techniques to further their understanding of the series by for example using subtitles and looking up foreign words (Alm 2021). Most of all watching series from Netflix was something meaningful to the students themselves.

No matter if learning is formal, informal or a mix of them, learning should be meaningful to the learner (Eun and Lim 2009: 21--22) as has been highlighted in this section. This way learning will be useful to the learner, and they are more motivated as they become aware of their progress. Language learning could then be seen as a complex process that happens in environments we do not even necessarily notice. As language learning can be very subjective, taking into account each person's social and psychological history of language learning can highlight the agency of the learners (Kurata 2011). Learners might progress in the same order but how they do it can differ greatly (Coughlan and Duff 1994, cited in Kurata 2011).

### **3 THE PRESENT STUDY**

#### **3.1 Research questions and aims**

The first aim of this study is to investigate adult immigrants' experiences of different language learning ways. As language learning can be highly subjective, I will pay attention to the individuality of the participants and their language learning ways. On top of this, I will also bring forward common themes from the participants' answers. In this way, I will give a general perspective to how language can be learned according to the individuals and how much it can differ depending on the person. This will give perspective to what conscious and unconscious ways to learn languages adult immigrants use and which they prefer.

The second aim of the present study is to find out how adult immigrants say they use their other languages to learn a new language. This aim is particularly interesting since immigrants can have quite a few languages that they know before moving to a new country. Thus, the research questions are as follows:

1. What ways of learning languages do adult immigrants report using? Do they prefer informal or formal learning or do they use both?
2. How do adult immigrants say they use their language resources in learning new languages?

## 3.2 Data collection and Data

The data for the present study was collected by interviewing participants. In total there were three interviews conducted, each with a different participant. Interviews are especially fitting when doing research about people's emotions, feelings, and experiences (Denscombe 2010: 173–174). Thus, it fits the present study well. Interviews allow the researcher to ask further questions and to expand on the participants' thoughts about the topic.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted for 15-35 minutes each depending on the participants. Semi-structured interviews allow the participants to talk about their experiences quite freely and yet the researcher has some topics and questions in mind that should be answered (Denscombe 2010: 175). This method allowed for flexibility in the order and form of the questions and, thus, made it possible to ask questions that were modified to the individual. The participants were given the option to participate in the interview either in Finnish or in English and all of them chose English.

The interview questions for the study were designed to fit the research questions and they were divided into four different categories depending on the topic. First, there were questions about the participants' general language background. Second, the participants were asked about their language learning environments and ways to learn languages and their preferences more specifically. Third, some questions were asked about using other languages while learning a new language. Last, the participants were asked about their future language learning and any closing thoughts. The questions can be found in the Appendix 1 of this thesis.

The interviews took place in Finland, one of them face-to-face and two of them were conducted through Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The interviews were done in December of 2021. They were audio recorded, and all the data were transcribed, which produced approximately 19 pages of text.

### **3.3 The participants**

The participants were immigrants over the age of 20 and at the time of the interview located in Finland. One of the participants is from South Asia, one from Europe and one from North America, thus making their experiences possibly quite different. They were chosen for this study based on having moved to Finland from another country and having learned at least one language on top of their first language. The participants had been living in Finland for different amounts of time, varying from 6 months to 8 years. They had all studied or were at the time of the interviews studying in a university and so they have a similar academic background. They had all learned Finnish or were currently in the process of learning it. In this study, they will be referred to as Jan, Skylar and Taylor which are pseudonyms given to them.

### **3.4 Ethical issues**

Before the interviews were conducted, the participants were given written information about the study and they gave their written consent to voluntarily participate in it. As interviews can bring out some personal information related to the participants, the participants were given pseudonyms and specific names of places mentioned in the interviews were also not mentioned in the transcriptions. This helps to ensure the anonymity of the participants. I am aware of my role as a researcher and how the fact that I did not know the participants before, besides talking once, might have affected their answers in the interviews. To minimize this effect, I gave the participants as much space and time to talk about their thoughts as possible.

### **3.5 Method of analysis**

Qualitative content analysis is used to analyze the data since the aim of the study is to find out adult immigrants' experiences of different ways to learn languages. This is

fitting since qualitative content analysis focuses on understanding a phenomenon and what a certain group has to say about their experiences regarding it (Schreier 2012: 42-43). According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009: 108-113) qualitative content analysis can sort the data into different sub-categories based on the data and then connects them into broader categories and themes. The data was analyzed to find common themes and techniques used by the participants but also to spot differences and unique ways to learn languages that they mentioned.

To find these themes, the data was listened to and read thoroughly multiple times. A part of this process included transcribing the data from the interviews. The transcribed expressions were then further analyzed by color-coding different language learning ways and individually interesting and relevant quotes were noted as well. These notes and highlights were then summarized and turned into the analysis that follows this section.



## **4 FINDINGS**

In this section, I will present the findings of the research. I will first introduce the individual experiences of the language learning processes of the participants. Then I will discuss the overlapping themes and language learning ways that were present in the participants' answers. In this way I will bring forth the participants as individuals and then discuss the similarities between them.

### **4.1 Participants individually**

#### **JAN**

Jan is from Europe. They first came to Finland as an exchange student in 2018 and they returned to Finland again as an exchange student in 2020. Now they wish to stay in Finland with their Finnish partner and start a career here.

When it comes to speaking languages, Jan can speak three languages proficiently, has basic knowledge of two languages and is currently learning a new language, which is Finnish. They learned their first language at home and English through formal education and using it with friends. The basic knowledge of the two languages they know is also through formal education. Currently they are learning Finnish in a course in integration training.

Something important that was found out through the interview was that Jan learns languages the best when they combine theory with practice. They explain this further by saying:

- (1) "So I think it's the best for me is when I combine a lot of practice with good theory. So, when I'm explaining grammar for example, or when when the teacher tells me how things work in this like cases or this kind of thing, I have to understand it to be able to, to speak and to use language in other circumstances. So if I like, I have to have these two pillars kind of active to be able to build anything for myself."

In Excerpt 1, Jan expresses that they have to have both theory and practice as an active part of learning in order to succeed in it. Jan explains this by saying that they need to understand how the language works in order to use it. Moreover, according to them learning theory should have some place for questions and discussions about it. They say that they learn mostly by actively talking to other people. As Jan describes themselves as an achievement focused person, it is important to see progress in their language skills and to receive feedback on them. Formal education also gives them motivation to study and keep a good pace at learning the language. An important part of this process is also self-studying and being committed to learning.

Besides learning language in a formal environment, Jan learns from reading news and surrounding themselves with the language they want to learn. Some examples of this immersion are changing the language on their phone and the alphabet on their keyboard and using the target language as much as possible. This could, for example, mean transcribing interviews for academic research. Jan also watches movies and YouTube-videos and uses social media to support their language learning. Apps like Duolingo and Memorize are also a good way for them to support their vocabulary learning.

There are also some language learning ways that Jan does not use themselves. They see the value of learning through listening to music and singing but music is not an essential part of their personal language learning. They also mostly read books in English, which they do not count as a language they are learning anymore since it is a

natural part of them. This thought of English being something that comes to them naturally comes across in this quote:

- (2) "I think nowadays I kind of exist in an English-speaking environment like everywhere when it comes to culture, politics, news and you know social media. Everything is in English and."

Excerpt 2 illustrates the English-focused nature of Jan's environment. This could be seen as an affordance that Jan has implemented into their language learning but its effects seem to not be central to their language learning anymore. This also brings forth the interesting idea that there is much material to use and learn English from, especially as a language used among people from different countries.

When talking about using other languages in the process of learning a new language, Jan said that they use different languages in different situations. They sometimes mix words from other languages in their interactions, for example with their partner, if they know that the other person understands that word and no other word encompasses the same meaning. This can be seen as a clear example of translanguaging and using language resources flexibly. Jan uses all the languages they know in their life almost daily. For example, they explain things in Finnish to themselves in order to use Finnish more often. They also search for many different news sources in the languages they know, for example through YLE and BBC, in order to find news that are interesting to them. When mentioning translating from one language to another, Jan says they do not feel the need for that. In the formal education of their home country, they used to make mind maps about words in different languages and break them down into smaller units. They explain the effects of it by saying:

- (3) "-- I, I don't know from where it comes, but I just sometimes know what it means and it's on like outside of the language level. (I didn't know if you understand me.) But sometimes it just, it just makes sense and I cannot, even because I did think that it maybe comes from some language I know, but it doesn't."

In Excerpt 3, Jan expresses that they have a connection to the general structure of languages and are, thus, able to use that knowledge to deduce the meaning of words

and sentences. In their opinion, it seems to come from beyond language which is an interesting effect of using this strategy from an early age.

Jan also discussed the importance of culture when it comes to their language learning. The cultural aspect of language learning is something they have a particular passion and interest for. One of the reasons they read news in many languages is to learn the language while also learning about the culture related to the language. Understanding the culture and history of the language and the countries it is spoken in helps Jan also understand the language better, which was mentioned earlier to be essential to Jan's language learning. This is also an essential part of sociocultural theory, as language is seen as a part of culture. It seems that Jan prefers formal learning but also often utilizes informal language learning ways to support their progress.

## **SKYLAR**

Skylar is from South Asia. They have lived in Finland for eight years and have a job here. They can currently speak seven different languages proficiently, including Finnish, some of which they have learned in a school-environment and others by themselves more deeply.

Skylar mainly learns by talking to people. They describe it as a part of their personality no matter the language and meeting new people and talking to them is something they enjoy. From this, they have many friends that support their language learning and can answer their questions when needed. This supports the notion of sociocultural theory that one learns languages through interaction with people of different levels of knowledge. In the beginning of learning a new language, their friends used to also help their language learning by showing pictures to support the communication.

In general, Skylar does not use much conscious effort to learn languages. The only exception to this is Finnish, which they were very passionate about learning. They were very interested in Finnish culture and felt like:

(4) "this (Finland) is not the country I was born in, but I feel like this is the country I was born for"

In Excerpt 4, Skylar expresses their emotional connection to Finland as a country. By saying that Finland is a country they were born for, they convey their feeling of belonging in a country. This likely affected their motivation to learn Finnish as a language which can be seen in the diverse ways they used to learn Finnish. They took different courses to learn Finnish but quickly grew bored of them because of their slow pace and lack of usefulness of the materials learned to life outside of the classroom. They mostly appreciated the courses for the social aspects of it. Growing bored of something also came about with their experiences of often using Google translate when they came to Finland. After a while they grew bored of finding out the meaning of words so easily and they needed more challenges. Skylar even mentioned themselves that to them accepting a new challenge and committing to learning a new language are, to them, very important in learning a language proficiently.

Related to the idea of the language learned being useful or meaningful to Skylar, they often listen to Finnish music and learn 'the language of the streets' from there. They describe it being useful by saying:

(5) "So musics sing the language of the streets, like they use street language in there. For example, rap. I like listening to that, English as well, so it's easy to me to understand those words when I'm walking around the streets or talking with others."

From Excerpt 5, it can be seen that listening to rap music has helped Skylar understand the contextual language of the city center. Listening to music has in this way offered them a way to learn a different kind of language compared to the language used in, for example, official work-related situations.

Skylar also reads news and watches tv-series which helps them learn the language as a part of their daily life. They used to also love reading books, but this habit has stopped with time. Social media was an environment that partially supported their language but not noticeably. Besides Google Translate, Skylar did not mention using any apps or websites.

As Skylar describes it, they are “rich by language” as they use many of the languages they speak on a daily basis. They change the languages they speak flexibly depending on the person they are speaking with. Skylar also mixes the languages they speak if they know the other person speaks it and there is a need to mix the languages or words. From this, it seems that Skylar uses their language resources flexibly depending on the context they are in. Overall, it could be said that Skylar uses their language resources diversely and actively mostly by being social with other people and they prefer informal learning to formal learning.

## **TAYLOR**

Taylor is from a Spanish-speaking area of North America. They have lived in Finland for about half a year and plan to stay longer and start a career here. Currently, they can speak two languages and they are learning a third language, which is Finnish.

Taylor seems to be a very auditive learner. They like to learn languages by hearing audios or watching videos. This possibly comes from their interest in music, which they consume often in multiple languages. In general, Taylor starts learning languages through discovering something interesting related to that language, also referred to as ‘a type of connection’ or through obligatory studies in that language.

Which brings us to formal language learning. When talking about formal education in language learning, Taylor says they do not have much experience with it. They mostly learned English on online courses and by self-studying. The contents of the online course were also basic-level and Taylor expressed that they learned more by themselves outside of courses. However, they do have some experience of studying Finnish at a formal course in the integration training. In their experience, courses and formal learning overall are good as they can push the individual to learn more in time with the schedule. Self-studying is something they found to be more challenging for this very reason. While self-studying, there is no real guidance as to how you should learn or at what pace, which did not seem to be as good for Taylor personally. At one

point, Taylor used apps like Duolingo or Memorize to support their language learning but their interest in them stopped after a while.

When discussing speaking languages and learning in that way, Taylor said:

(6) "I think it's important to speak. I mean, there's some like practicing because you can learn the most grammar and some kind of that but the practice is always good. And if you don't, don't practice the things you have learned may be forget me, forget all those things and. Yeah."

Excerpt 6 illustrates Taylor's appreciation of speaking as a way to learn languages. In it, Taylor acknowledges that practicing the language you want to learn is important if it is possible. They like to talk to people but currently do not have many opportunities to do so. This might be because their current environment does not offer them affordances relevant to them. Despite this, in general using what they have learned seems to be important to them, for otherwise they might forget what they have learned. This is lined with sociocultural theory and the thought of knowledge becoming internalized through interaction.

Taylor does not particularly use news or books as a way to learn languages, besides using them occasionally. This comes down to his personality and not reading many books in general. However, they think it might be a good way to practice languages if one enjoys it. This thought of language learning depending on the person comes across multiple times, such as in the following excerpt:

(7) "Yeah, I think it depends on the person for how easy or hard it's to learn a language. -- And I think it's good but not always depend on the age, sometimes it's, I don't know, how is our mind, how fast we can learn."

In Excerpt 7, Taylor expresses that language learning and the difficulty of it can, in their opinion, change considerably with each individual. According to them, it can be related to age but also just the way that each person thinks and learns in general. Whatever way it is, language learning needs to be meaningful to the person learning it and what they are committed to learning. It seems that Taylor's preference is more towards formal learning but informal learning also plays a part in their language learning process.

Using languages alongside each other does sometimes happen to Taylor but they try to avoid it. They do occasionally translate from one language to another, but as they grow more proficient in the target language, they try to use only that language when learning it. In their opinion, this helps them keep the languages separate so that they can learn one language better at a time. Taylor expresses that they do find that sometimes mixing languages is actually needed, because then the flow of the conversation can keep going without much interruption. Mixing languages is often done with regards to what languages the other person can speak and how well they speak it.

## **4.2 Overlapping themes**

The most prominent themes in the data that connected the participants to each other were the themes of using languages actively and music, news and internet. In this section I will explain the finding regarding these themes by comparing the participants' answers.

Overall, it can be said that using languages in a meaningful and useful way, mostly through interactions, was something the participants had in common. They all express using languages socially as an important way to learn languages. Jan also needs formal education to support their interaction with others, while for Skylar talking to people is a natural part of their life. Taylor also enjoys talking to others when possible. Something that also seems to be a common theme among all the participants is changing languages in interactions depending on who they are speaking to. This comes to using language resources but also to mixing languages. For example, Jan mixes in Finnish words like 'mökki' with their Finnish partner and Skylar and Taylor also adjust their language use depending on the person they talk to. Skylar and Taylor both mentioned mixing languages but trying to avoid doing that if possible.

Music was mentioned by both Skylar and Taylor as a way to learn languages. They both found it interesting and it supported their learning of different language use



contexts. Jan also expressed that they think singing and music overall could be beneficial to language learning, especially pronunciation, even though they do not personally use it to learn languages.

When it comes to using apps and media to learn languages, there are some common themes found. Jan and Taylor both mentioned using the apps Duolingo and Memorize to support their language learning. Even though neither of them used it as their main way to learn languages, the fact that both mentioned only these apps seems to indicate their appeal in the beginning phases of language learning. All participants mentioned using Google Translate at one point, but they try not to use it as much anymore.

Another language learning way that connects Jan and Taylor is preferring formal learning over informal learning. This is strongly noticeable from Jan's data but also Taylor expresses this preference. They both find that formal education can give a good direction and pace to language learning.

Reading the news in different languages was also mentioned multiple times. Especially Skylar and Jan mentioned reading the news quite often to get information in other languages and to possibly learn new words at the same time. They also shared the interest for the culture related to languages.

It can be said that there are many different language learning ways and they change depending on the individual. However, interacting with others and overall using the languages they know had a noticeable preference among the participants. Overall, language learning seems to be the best to the participants when the contents learned and ways used are useful and meaningful specifically to that individual.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In this study, I wanted to find out what language learning ways adult immigrants say they use and their preferences regarding these ways. I was also interested to find out how adult immigrants report using their language resources in the process of learning new languages. My aim was to bring forth the individual participants' experiences as well as similarities and individual differences between their experiences.

The findings of this study indicate that using languages, especially in social situations, is seen as an important way to learn languages. This is closely related to sociocultural theory and how actions are social in nature (Eun and Lim 2009). Specifically learning through interaction with native speakers of the language was mentioned many times. Furthermore, building meaningful relationships seemed to be something that helped practice using languages, as noted by Kurata (2011) as well. Using language resources flexibly was also something all participants used. They are used flexibly to fit the need of the situation, whether it is to continue the flow of the conversation, to support their language production or to replace a word that does not convey the full meaning behind the word needed. This supports the findings of Pietikäinen, Dufva and Mäntylä (2010).

Although there were common themes among the language learning ways the participants used, the way they were used were specific to the participant. For example, using news to learn languages was for one also learning about the culture, as pointed out by Kurata (2011: 6) about the benefits of informal learning, but to the

other it was more about finding reliable information about what is happening in the world. This shows that language learning is subjective and even though the objective of learning might be the same, how it is reached depends on the individual. This also relates to the fact that the participants had different affordances for language learning. Two participants described their social networks being diverse in terms of language learning and use while one participant did not have the same experience.

The results of this study are important to the current discussion about adult immigrants, as it gives a possible start to discuss how different language learning ways could be taken into account in teaching languages to adults. Learning Finnish is a part of the immigration training in Finland and all participants of this study have taken part in it with various experiences and opinions about it. Finding ways to make the learning meaningful and most of all useful to the students could possibly make it easier for the immigrants to learn the new language and the culture related to it. Dedicating time and space to different studying ways, like talking and discussing grammar, gives the students opportunities to learn language in a way fitting for them. This would increase the probability of them finding relevant affordances for their language learning in their environment. Furthermore, it could be beneficial to give space for the immigrants to be a part of determining what materials they would find the most useful and use these ideas to guide the course.

As this study only had three participants, the results cannot be generalized to a larger extent. Also, as a first-time interviewer, my ways of questioning could also not be so refined, which can affect the answers given by the participants. The online interviewing aspect of two interviews could also affect the connection or relaxation experienced throughout the interview and how much information the participants are willing to share.

In the future it would be interesting to study how students progress at immigration language courses. This could help improve the system and ensure that immigrants have good opportunities to learn new languages and get better opportunities for their lives in a new country. It would also be interesting to find out

how exactly different language learning ways improve language skills when measured. As this study only had three participants, it would be fruitful to do a similar study on a larger number of participants. Similar studies could also be done in a different country to get a different cultural context. Focusing on the immigrants' measurable language skills on top of their experiences would provide a better-rounded picture of the reality of immigrants' language learning process.

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## **APPENDICES**

### APPENDIX 1 (Interview questions)

#### **Background information about languages**

What languages do you speak? What languages are you learning?

Where did you learn those languages?

#### **Ways of learning languages and preferences regarding them**

How do you usually start to learn a language?

- Where do you get the idea to learn a new language (do you have a need for it or some other reason)?

In what environments do you learn languages (in school, on your freetime, through interaction with others, on a phone or a computer, from books or media)

- Do you learn better by yourself or with an instructor or someone else helping you?

Do you know any people that you could speak the languages you are learning with?

- Has it helped you learn the language?

Do you watch TV in the language you want to learn?

- What about listening to music in that language?

Do you use or read media in the language you want to learn? (for example Instagram, Facebook or newspapers)

Do you read books or comic books in the language you are learning?

Do you use apps on your phone or websites to learn languages?

- Do you think they help you learn or not?

Do you use different ways to learn new languages that haven't been mentioned yet?

What ways are the best for you? What ways to learn languages do you use the most?

Why?

## Language resources and using them in learning a new language

What languages do you use the most in learning a new language? Do you, for example, use your first language to translate sentences?

- Do the languages you use vary depending on the new language you learn (using a similar language to compare)?
- Do you use words from other languages while learning a new one?

## General ending questions

Do you know a language that you want to learn in the future?

Do you have something else to say about learning a new language?

## APPENDIX 2 (Full extracts from interview transcriptions)

- (1) So I think it's the best for me is when I combine a lot of practice with good theory. So, when I'm explaining grammar for example, or when when the teacher tells me how things work in this like cases or this kind of thing, I have to understand it to be able to, to speak and to use language in other circumstances. So if I like, I have to have these two pillars kind of active to be able to build anything for myself. -Jan
- (2) I think nowadays I kind of exist in an English-speaking environment like everywhere when it comes to culture, politics, news and you know social media. Everything is in English and. -Jan
- (3) I know that most of me learning new words comes somewhere above this translation so I, I kind of. I was taught at school to make mind maps and to kind of like find similarities in, in words so I, I don't know from where it comes, but I just sometimes know what it means and it's on like outside of the language level. (I didn't know if you understand me.) But sometimes it just, it just makes sense and I cannot, even because I did think that it maybe comes from some language I know, but it doesn't. -Jan
- (4) It was a bit challenging so I had to accept that because I knew that I wanted to live in Finland no matter what because this (Finland) is not the country I was born in, but I feel like this is the country I was born for. -Skylar
- (5) So musics sing the language of the streets, like they use street language in there. For example, rap. I like listening to that, English as well, so it's easy to me to understand those words when I'm walking around the streets or talking with others. -Skylar
- (6) I think it's important to speak. I mean, there's some like practicing because you can learn the most grammar and some kind of that but the practice is always good. And if you

don't, don't practice the things you have learned may be forget me, forget all those things and. Yeah. -Taylor

- (7) Yeah, I think it depends on the person for how easy or hard it's to learn a language. Sometimes there are young childs who learn more than one language and they think it's easy for them to use it when they are when they grow. And I think it's good but not always depend on the age, sometimes it's, I don't know, how is our mind, how fast we can learn. -Taylor