

Editorial

Tarja Nikula & Sabine Ylönen, University of Jyväskylä

This volume of *Apples* contains three articles and a book review of Blackwell Guide to Research Methods in Bilingualism and Multilingualism. The articles relate to foreign language learning and mastery by young people in Finland. This is a very topical area as discussions around foreign language education currently proliferate in Finland. Of special concern is the recent development, also dealt with by the authors in this volume, whereby the range of foreign languages studied in schools has constantly grown narrower in the past couple of decades. At the same time, processes of globalization and diversifying linguistic realities in societies keep setting increasing demands on citizens' language skills. The papers in this volume each address an aspect of this phenomenon, with their focus on skills in Swedish, on multilingualism with special reference to German, and on Finnish teenagers' skills in English, respectively.

In her paper Åsa Palviainen offers research-based information about Finnish university students' skills in Swedish, the second national language in the country, as they enter a course leading towards the Civil Service Language Proficiency (CSLP) Certificate in Swedish that all students must obtain as part of their degree. Her results show that more than half of the students' skills fail to reach the level that would make them well prepared for the test. The author both describes students' attainment of proficiency levels, and discusses the findings in the light of decisions made in the area of language education policy in Finland.

The article by Sabine Ylönen and Virpi Vainio is also concerned with Finnish university students. They report of a large-scale survey in which university students' attitudes to multilingualism were investigated in the wake of developments that have made English the dominant lingua franca in the academia. Specifically, they wanted to explore the role of German as part of students' multilingualism. Their findings show appreciation for multilingualism among students but also confirm the strong presence of English. As regards German, the majority of students report knowledge of at least some German, yet only a third use it for study purposes. The authors also explore some aspects of oral communication in German that students report as challenging and suggest actions for advancing multilingualism in higher education.

Lea Meriläinen focuses in her article on Finnish upper secondary school students and their skills in English, especially as regards syntactic transfer from their mother tongue, Finnish, and its role in English compositions written as part of the Matriculation Examination in 1990, 2000 and 2005. This period

Authors' email: apples@jyu.fi

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of time corresponds both to intensified presence of English in Finnish society and an increased use of communicative teaching methods in education so it is of interest whether these developments serve to diminish L1 influence. The findings show the contrary to be true: within the categories observed, the number of syntactic transfer patterns has increased over the years. These findings have important pedagogical implications in suggesting areas of language that need to be attended to in education as they constantly appear in Finns' language use despite the ample exposure to English in out of school contexts.

All three articles underline the importance of language teaching at school. Whereas the first two papers propose more communicative approaches to language learning and teaching for Swedish and German, with special emphasis on oral communication, the third argues that Finnish youngsters generally possess good communication skills in English but that more attention should be paid to teaching grammatical and phonetic accuracy. With their different perspectives, the papers reflect the complexity of the language teaching scene in Finland in that while more teaching hours for both Swedish and other foreign languages from early stages on are called for, there is also a concern that a cut in teaching hours for English would be an "undesirable decision".