

# WATCH AND LEARN!

Finnish university students' beliefs about the role of television in spoken  
language acquisition

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tutkielmani tavoitteena on selvittää suomalaisten yliopisto-opiskelijoiden oppimiskäsityksiä television katsomisen ja puhutun kielen oppimisen suhteesta. Kyseisen aihepiirin aiemman tutkimukset ovat pääasiallisesti keskittyneet sanaston ja kieliopin oppimiseen ja ovat kyenneetkin todistamaan näiden yhteyden television katseluun. Tarkoitukseni on kiinnittää huomiota erityisesti opiskelijoiden itsensä uskomuksiin kielten oppimisesta ja pyrkiä samalla kartoittamaan formaalin opetuksen suhdetta vastaajien suhtautumiseen oppimiskäsityksiin. Tämän lisäksi huomiota kiinnitettiin myös eroihin miesten ja naisten välillä näiden asioiden suhteen.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin sähköisesti kyselylomakkeella, joka lähetettiin erään suomalaisen yliopiston kahdelle postituslistalle. Kyselyyn osallistuneet 143 opiskelijaa vastasivat kysymyksiin liittyen suhtautumiseensa kouluoppimiseen ja epäformaaleihin oppimistilanteisiin, sekä arvioivat omia englannin taitojaan.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat osallistujien uskovan vapaa-ajan aktiviteettien vaikutukseen puhutun kielen oppimisessa, sekä television rooliin oppimisvälineenä. Sekä formaaliin, että epäformaaliin oppimiseen osallistujat suhtautuivat varsin positiivisesti, mutta yhteyttä näiden kahden välille ei löytynyt. Myöskään sukupuolten välillä ei ollut havaittavissa minkäänlaisia eroavaisuuksia, vaan sekä miehet että naiset raportoivat hyvin yhteneväisiä oppimiskäsityksiä.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Television has established its place as household commodity that many people use in daily basis. The average Finn spent 183 minutes daily watching television in 2012 (Finnpanel). However, with modern technology television is not anymore the only medium for watching television content. Series and movies, which in the past best reached viewers through television, are nowadays available in many different forms. One can choose to follow one's favourite shows on the computer or purchase a set of paid channels, which offer a larger variety of television content. What all of this means is that television content is more easily accessible now than it has ever been before.

Television and its relationship with learning have been widely researched in the past (Kuppens 2008, Secules et al 1992, Sjöholm 2004) - mostly concerning the acquisition and learning of grammar and vocabulary. Due to the ever-growing availability of television content, it is justified to note the effects it might have on one's second language abilities. As a field of research, second language acquisition is constantly evolving and the focus is not on television anymore. Despite the fact that technology has moved forward from the days when television was the peak of development, its significance and role in people's lives has never diminished. At the same time, the importance of spoken language has been constantly increasing in second language teaching in Finland.

The aim of this study is to look into the beliefs of Finnish university students on the relation between spoken language and watching television. Data for the study was gathered from Finnish university students with a questionnaire and these results will be discussed in the paper. In essence, the focus is on the participants' beliefs about language learning and how they differ based on different variables, such as gender or educational background. Attention will also be paid on the mental aspect of language use. Although the ability to communicate orally is based on one's knowledge of the language and its suprasegmentals, it is equally important to note the mental processes that are present in communicative situations. Therefore, the emotions that surface when using spoken language are studied in the paper as well.

The paper will begin with a background section, in which the key terminology and related

studies are discussed. I will then go through the data and methods. After this, the data will be analyzed in detail and discussed further in the last section of this paper - the conclusions. This last section will seek to compare the data to the research questions discussed earlier and look into the future in relation to the findings made in the present study.

## 2 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION, SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND TELEVISION

The following chapter looks into the theoretical background of this study. The chapter is divided into four sections, which will each discuss some of the key features related to the present study in more detail. Firstly, the related terminology is discussed. Secondly, language acquisition is explained and related factors are discussed. The third section deals with spoken language and what is required to successfully acquire spoken language. The last section features former studies conducted on the relationship between television and language learning.

### 2.1 Terminology

*Language learning and language acquisition.* For the purpose of this thesis, it is vital to be able to distinguish acquisition from learning. The former is often considered to be a form of incidental learning, whereas the latter is by definition intentional. Krashen (1981: 1) emphasizes the role of consciousness, calling acquisition subconscious and learning conscious. He goes on to remind that learning consists of error correction and a set of explicit rules (Krashen 1981: 2). These features are not present in a situation of subconscious acquisition. Thus, in the scope of this study, the role of acquisition is more profound than that of learning, because television is often watched outside of formal learning situations. The significance of acquisition is underlined by Krashen (1981: 1), who points out that subconscious acquisition has been proven more important than conscious learning.

*Beliefs about language learning.* Learner beliefs about language learning have been studied extensively and the roots of this field of research go back to the 1970s and 1980s. In essence, learner beliefs about language learning include the learners' views on themselves, the target

community and learning situations (Wesely 2012: 100). Researchers have favoured survey research as a method of data gathering when researching beliefs about language learning. This means that they have heavily relied on the participants' ability to supply accurate self-reflection. It is worth noting that a connection between learner beliefs and learning outcomes has been found proving that legitimate and believable data can be produced through self-report. Positive learner beliefs have been found to correlate with lower levels of anxiety, higher achievement and increased level of enjoyment (Wesely 2012: 102).

## **2.2 Key factors in language acquisition**

Successful language acquisition consists of multiple factors. Perhaps the most important factor is the actual target language. The amount of exposure to the target language determines the pace of acquisition. This also affects spoken language, which becomes evident in Camlibel's (2006) research. He studied the language development of two Turkish first graders who lived in the United States. The main focus of the study was both oral and written acquisition. Camlibel recorded and observed the children's development in a school environment, but also conducted interviews with their parents. The results showed that the more the children were in contact with English, the faster they acquired oral language. This happened faster with Alp, who had prior exposure to the language in kindergarten (Camlibel 2006: iii). For the purposes of this research, it is worth noting that television often offers a great deal of exposure to a foreign language. Compared to Camlibel's study, where the children were in touch with English in everyday life, it is common to hear or see English only in media or school in Finland. Thus, the significance of television as one of the most available mediums of English for a regular Finn is further underlined. Camlibel's research proves that both intentional and unintentional exposure to English results in oral language acquisition, which suggests that television not only affects grammar and vocabulary acquisition, but also improves one's spoken language.

The second factor in regard to successful language acquisition is the level of the target language. Language far beyond the knowledge of the learner bears as few results as does language that is too simple. Krashen has established the idea of comprehensible input. In this line of thought, it is believed that language that is slightly more advanced than that of the learner's yields best results (Krashen 1981: 103). In a formal learning environment, the level of target language can be easily adjusted and controlled to serve the needs of the learners. This is

not the case, however, with television. Depending on the content, the range of language can vary from overly difficult to understandable. It is worth noting, that the language foreign television offers is very rarely too easy, as the content is written by natives users of the language. Regardless of this variation, it is safe to assume for the purpose of this study that the contact with native level language is purposeful for the learners, as it offers new content for beginners as well as more advanced language users.

What often sets acquisition apart from learning are the situations in which these two take place. As mentioned in the first paragraph, acquisition is by definition subconscious, whereas learning is conscious. For most people, the conscious learning situations are formal and related to school or studying. These physical environments also bring up the question of motivation. Studies have shown that attitudes and motivation are closely related to second language acquisition (Camlibel 2006: 12). This shows as an increased level of reading and writing. Camlibel also points out that positive attitudes are not only needed for the target language, but also towards your first language. This enables bilingual learning (Camlibel 2006: 13).

### **2.3 Spoken language**

Spoken language, or oral communication, is language in its spontaneous form. As with written language, spoken language is a subject to rules and regulations which are language-specific. What is different from its written counterpart are the aspects of spoken language that make each language unique - such as pronunciation and accent.

Exposure to target language is a key factor in successful language acquisition and this is no different with spoken language. Authentic language with the correct pronunciation, stress and intonation serves as a much needed model of language for any learner. It is important to be aware of these suprasegmentals and their effect on the authenticity of one's language (Chen 2009: 28). Explicit knowledge of these suprasegmentals often requires a formal learning environment, where it is taught by an expert in the field - such as a teacher. This is much harder to achieve with subconscious language acquisition, as one often keeps one's focus on the content rather than the particles it consists of. Explicit knowledge of these suprasegmentals is thus much harder to achieve in the case of watching television, but implicit recognition of them is possible. Chen also reminds the reader about the importance of having

an example and listening in regard to improving one's oral skills (Chen 2009: 25). The significance of explicit knowledge of the aforementioned suprasegmentals can, to some extent, explain the differences between an average language user and a fluent speaker. The awareness of these components gives the speaker a possibility to develop, which might not always be the case with someone who is acquiring the language from television. Thus, for the sake of this study it is more important to focus on the pronunciation model these authentic television series and movies provide the learner with.

The role of motivation has been studied in regard to one's spoken language abilities. Unlike written language, spoken language forces the speaker to make themselves the center of attention. Woodrow notes in her research that a higher degree of anxiety often appears in situations, where one is expected or needed to speak in a foreign language. This is also often in conflict with one's general knowledge of the language, as anxiety might appear even if most aspects of the language are familiar to the speaker (Woodrow 2006: 310). The research took place in Australia, where Woodrow studied 275 advanced learners of English prior to entering university. The participants were from the neighbouring countries and came from fairly similar educational backgrounds. The aim of the study was to hypothesize a model of learning that incorporates affect, motivation and learning strategies. A questionnaire was sent to assess such variables as anxiety, motivation, learning strategies and self-efficacy. A connection between motivation and successful language learning was found in the study. Woodrow reports that participants with task goal orientation and positive affect were more likely to achieve learning results, whereas the unsuccessful ones showed signs of negative affect and performance avoid orientation (Woodrow 2006: 309). Here, task goal orientation is understood as motivation for academic challenges and achievement for the sake of themselves. Performance avoid orientation, on the other hand, focuses on avoiding situation, where one is in danger of exposing one's weaknesses (Woodrow 2006: 298). What was surprising was the fact that no significant connection between oral performance and motivational intensity was found. Woodrow explained that motivation and other effort variables often relate to formal learning environments. This is often different with spoken language, as competence in this area requires more diverse experiences - both in- and out-of-classroom (Woodrow 2006: 310).

## **2.4 Previous research on television and learning**



The ways in which television affects one's language have been studied quite extensively in the past. According to Vanderplank (2010: 9), the interest in learning languages from television peaked in the 1980s and 1990s. During this era, the focus of the research was on acquired vocabulary and grammar. Kuppens reports that significant effects on translation skills, vocabulary and grammar have been found between watching English subtitled television (Kuppens 2008: 17). In addition to these objective observations and assessments of the effects of watching television, the feelings and insights of the participants have been studied by Kuppens. She sought to find out if the participants believed they had learned language from watching television. In her findings, only 5% of the participants thought that they had not learned anything from watching television (Kuppens 2008: 7). The fact that 95% of the participants believed they had learned something is quite significant and it brings a need to research what exactly they believe they have learned. This is partly related to this study, as the data will look into the thoughts of the participants using self-reflection.

An example of a research in the 1990s was conducted by Secules, Herron and Tomasello. They argued that an authentic setting with its dynamic interaction between native speakers is what makes learning possible from video footage. This authentic video shows the use of different accents as well as multiple registers and paralingual cues (Secules et al 1992: 480). Secules et al conducted and reported two experiments in their study, the first of which dealt with more advanced students of French. The participants in the first experiment consisted of university-level students. Divided into different groups, some of the participants were shown French video material as part of their course. The control group took their course without this video. Secules et al concluded that university students showed signs of greater listening comprehension skills after watching television compared to the control group (Secules et al 1992: 483). The target group for the second experiment consisted of 27 freshman and sophomore college students of French. This time both the experimental group and the target group viewed the video, but the targeted structures the researchers were looking at were taught to the control group by the teacher. The results showed no significant differences in the two groups' abilities to learn new structures (Secules et al 1992: 485). However, the control group scored better in weekly vocabulary quizzes. The results of these experiments hold relevance to this study in their discovery of improved listening skills that were gained using television in teaching. It has already been established in this paper that the role of example and listening are key in obtaining oral communication skills.

The role of subtitles, or captioning, cannot be forgotten when discussing foreign televisions. Their presence or absence affects what is understood depending on the viewer's proficiency level in the target language. Apart from being visual cues for the viewer, subtitles in the viewer's first language also serve as a pre-made translation, which helps the understanding of the foreign language content. Studies show that watching captioned television improves productive skills among other aspects of language (Danan as cited in Vanderplank 2010: 13). Given that most of the foreign television content in Finnish television is captioned, these results hold relevance for this study as well. Whether one chooses to make use of these subtitles can possibly have an effect on both comprehension skills as well as productive skills, as mentioned above. This choice of watching television with subtitles was also asked from the participants of this study.

Television can also carry non-linguistic aspects that pass on to the viewer, when it is used as a medium for learning and acquisition. One such aspect is the attitude towards a given language that one can form based on television input. Swedish-speaking eight graders in Finland were interviewed regarding this matter. The participants reported to have more positive attitudes towards American English than British English (Sjöholm 2004). This is believed to have been caused by the students' exposure to mass-media content, which often favours American English over British English. This is further illustrated by Forsman (as cited in Sjöholm 2004) who interviewed Finnish students on their opinions about British and American English. It was reported that the participants preferred American English, because it was the language featured in television and media. British English, on the other hand, was not liked, because it is something that was only taught at school. This brings up the findings presented in the chapter on spoken language. In her research, Woodrow underlined that motivation and oral competence do not go hand in hand, because effort variables relate to formal learning environments. The eight graders' clearly felt less than motivated to study British English, because of the lack of its presence in their everyday lives, yet the research did not suggest that this could be seen in their learning results.

### 3 THE PRESENT STUDY

The following chapter takes a detailed look at the present study and the way it was conducted. The topics that are presented feature the research questions, data and the methods of data collection.

### **3.1 Research questions**

1. How do Finnish university students believe that watching English television has affected their spoken English?
2. How do the participants view the relation between formal learning and learning from television?
3. How do the responses of female and male participants differ?

The aim of the present study is to try to determine whether university students believe in a connection between watching television and learning spoken English. This equation is heavily based on the students' beliefs about learning. Attention is also paid to the possible connections between the type of television content the participants watch and different aspects of their spoken language - such as accent. Secondly, the participants' experiences from formal learning situations are researched to determine how this form of language learning differs from acquiring language from television. Of particular interest is to determine whether one's experiences from formal learning have any bearing on their beliefs about language acquisition through television. Lastly, the differences between the responses of the two genders will be discussed to see, if both men and women share similar views on the aforementioned topics.

I approach these research questions with the hypothesis that Finnish university students believe in a connection between second language learning and watching television. I expect it also to show in a correlation between the participants' answers regarding origin of the television content they prefer and the accent they have. I am also assuming that a positive attitude towards formal learning correlates with an increased belief in the role of informal learning, simply because the participants would then relate more positively and openly to the target language.

### **3.2 Participants**

The data was collected from university students in a medium size Finnish city. The

participants (N=143) ranged from the ages of 20 all the way to 30 and majored in various different subjects. In order to gather reliable data, the participants needed to be mature enough to be capable of self-reflection. University students served as an ideal group of participants, because of their capability of the aforementioned self-reflection, but also because they come from different backgrounds - both educational and geographical. The different backgrounds guaranteed that the sample was vast enough to represent the average university students in Finland.

### **3.3 Methods of data collection and analysis**

Questionnaire was chosen as the method of data collection, because it is an easy way of reaching numerous participants at the same time. As a method of data collection, questionnaire is recognized as an ideal tool for social research that employs empirical statements and has comparative agendas (Sukamolson 2010). The decision of collecting the data online was made to make the questionnaire as accessible as possible and also to reduce the effort it required from the participants. One of the main aims of the study was to be able to categorize answers and participants based on numerous traits and then compare how different variables affected the responses. What also supported the use of a questionnaire was the fact that this study sought to map the participants' opinions. It has been said that questionnaires are used for data collection that does not seek right or wrong answers (Kalaja et al 2011: 148). To accurately measure the opinions of the participants and their relative weight, the study made use of the Likert-scale. The scale's effectiveness in measuring opinions has been noted in academic research (Kalaja et al 2011: 150). The data was analyzed using nonparametric correlations to compare different variables with each other. The greater the correlation coefficient is between two variables, the more the two influence one another. On top of this, a T-test was conducted to compare the differences between the answers of men and women. In a T-test, the statistical significances of the differences between the answers of two groups are determined. These significances are then used to evaluate the variations in the means calculated for the answers of these two groups.

The data was collected online between the 6th and the 13th of February 2013 through two university mailing lists. Feedback was collected from the thesis instructor and a data analyst to ensure that the questions were suitable in relation to the research questions. The questionnaire was also piloted prior to the official data collection. This was a way of ensuring

that the questionnaire was easily accessible for the participants. The questionnaire consisted of five different sections. The first of these segments was the background section of the study. Such variables as age and gender were studied here. On top of this, the background segment sought to determine how much time the participants spend watching television or watching series and movies on the computer. The aim of this part was to find out some key information about the backgrounds of the participants. This information is later needed in order to differentiate between how the two genders viewed the connection between spoken language and television, as well as to find out whether age differences showed in the responses.

The second part of the questionnaire looked into the participants' experiences from school. This section included questions on how the participants had liked English in school, how much weight had been put on teaching oral competence and whether they were happy with the level of spoken language they had acquired from school. The significance of one's school background cannot be ignored when researching conceptions of learning. Positive experiences from school could further encourage one's use of English and the possible use of television in teaching could have influenced one's conceptions of learning. The third section focused on language learning in general, looking into three different forms of acquiring language: school, hobbies and television. Here, the aim was to look at the diversity at which the participants believe they have learned spoken English. The participants' television habits were researched in the fourth section of the questionnaire. This part included questions determining whether the participants watched more English television than Finnish television. The categories were further divided into American and British television content. The participants were also asked if they watched English television without subtitles. The last set of questions dealt with the participants' self-evaluation of their language skills and feeling related to the use of spoken language. Both the productive and the comprehension aspect of language were researched here. The complete questionnaire can be found in the appendix section of the present study.

## 4 FINDINGS

In this section of the thesis, I will go through the results from the aforementioned questionnaire. Firstly, more general results will be talked through including the background of

the participants. Secondly, the role of formal education in learning spoken language will be discussed and how it differs from the influences of informal acquisition. Lastly, the differences between the two genders and their responses will be discussed.

#### 4.1 Overview

The background section of the questionnaire asked the participants for their age and gender as well as their habits of watching television and watching series and movies on the computer. The scales for the latter two ranged from 1 to 5, 1 being "multiple hours a day" and 5 signifying that the participants does not use that particular medium at all. It is worth noting that the response "I don't own a television" was deemed unfitting after data collection, as it did not accurately measure what it was set out to measure and thus these responses have been ignored in further analysis.

Table 1. Frequency table of participants' backgrounds.

<b>Background</b>			
<b>Question</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Age	<20	14	9.8
	21-23	67	46.9
	24-26	44	30.8
	27-29	14	9.8
	> 30	4	2.8
Gender	Male	25	17.5
	Female	118	82.5
How often do you watch television	Multiple hours a day	36	25.2
	Daily or nearly in daily basis	57	39.9
	A couple of days a week	22	15.4
	Less than once a week	8	5.6
	<b>I don't own a television</b>	20*	14*
How often do you watch series and movies on the computer	Multiple hours a day	11	7.7
	Daily or nearly in daily basis	50	35
	A couple of days a week	37	25.9
	Less than once a week	31	21.7
	I don't watch series and movies on the computer	14	9.8

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the responses in the background section. The table's first two columns specify the questions and the answer options, whereas the latter two give the frequency (number of participants who chose the option) and the percentage of all responses. The ages of the participants ranged from those who were under the age of 20 all the way to those older than 30. The most represented age group was 21 to 23-year-olds with 67 participants, which adds up to 46.9% of all participants. As Table 1 shows, the gender division is heavily lopsided with only 25 male participants out of 143.

Tendencies to watch series and movies on both television and computer proved quite similar. The majority of the participants responded "daily or nearly in daily basis" in both of these two questions: 57 participants for television and 50 participants for computer. What is different in these two questions is the way that the answers are distributed. A combined total of 118 participants said that they watch series and movies either in daily basis, a couple of days a week or less than once a week. Only 11 participants reported to spend multiple hours a day watching television content on their computers. At the same time, 36 of the participants said that they watch television multiple hours a day, which equals one fourth of all participants. Television thus seemed to be favoured among those who are greater consumers of television content. Table 2 displays the means for the same four questions on a scale of 1 to 5. These five values represent the aforementioned answers for each question. Looking at the differences between television and computer, one can tell that on average the participants watched less television content on their computers (2.91) than from television (2.43).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of participants' backgrounds.

<b>Means</b>				
Question	N	Min	Max	Mean
Age	143	1	5	2.49
Gender	143	1	2	1.82
How often do you watch television	143	1	5	2.43
How often do you watch series and movies on the computer	143	1	5	2.91

## 4.2 Views on formal and informal learning

### 4.2.1 Formal learning

To accurately measure the effects of television and movies on the participants' spoken English skills, it was necessary to determine how they viewed the meaning of formal learning and school environment in their learning processes. Attention was paid to the role spoken language had paid back in the school days of the participants. These factors were measured using the Likert-scale, giving the participants a range of options to evaluate the statements; from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The following table presents the frequencies of the participants responses to statements related to formal learning

Table 3. Frequency table on formal learning

<b>Formal learning</b>			
<b>Question</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
I feel anxious when I have to speak English	Strongly disagree	63	44.1
	Disagree	56	39.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	4	2.8
	Agree	18	12.6
	Strongly agree	2	1.4
I feel satisfied with the level of spoken language I learned at school	Strongly disagree	22	15.4
	Disagree	74	51.7
	Neither agree nor disagree	6	4.2
	Agree	38	26.6
	Strongly agree	3	2.1
Oral competence was paid attention to at school	Strongly disagree	16	11.2
	Disagree	82	57.3
	Neither agree nor disagree	9	6.3
	Agree	34	23.8
	Strongly agree	2	1.4
I liked learning English at school	Strongly disagree	1	0.7
	Disagree	5	3.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	1	0.7
	Agree	50	35.0
	Strongly agree	86	60.1



The statistics in Table 3 show that the participants did not believe that spoken language was among the key aspects of language teaching at school. 74 of all 143 participants disagreed with the statement that they would be satisfied with the level of spoken language they acquired at school. However, the second most popular response to this statement was “agree” with 38 responses and 26.6% of all participants. The very same trend appeared in the statement about the significance of oral competence in school teaching. 68.5% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. What is worth noting is the fact that even though the participants were not particularly happy about the level of spoken language formal learning had supplied them with, they did not report feelings of anxiety in situations where they had to speak English. 83.3% of the participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement about feelings of anxiety. At the same time, a combined total of 95.1% of the participants had enjoyed themselves in their English lessons.

Table 4. Correlations and formal learning

<b>Formal learning</b>				
	I liked English at school		Oral competence was paid attention to at school	
	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
I feel satisfied with the level of spoken language I learned at school	0.277**	0.001	0.581**	0.000
Television was used as a teaching method in school	0.272**	0.001	0.316**	0.000
My spoken English skills are good	0.328**	0.000	0.086	0.308

Table 4 contains correlations between statements about formal learning environments and the participants’ beliefs about their language skills. The first figures in the table under the column “correlation coefficient” present the correlations between two statements. The next column determines whether the preceding correlation is statistically significant. For the sake of clarity, the statistically significant correlations have been marked with two asterisks (\*\*). The table shows a medium, positive correlation (0.581) between the participants’ statements about the role of oral competence in school learning and their satisfaction with the level of spoken language they learned at school. In other words, the more the participants felt that spoken

language was emphasized in teaching, the happier they were with their own skills. Statistically significant correlations were also found between the other statements presented in Table 4, but these correlations were significantly lower and therefore valid conclusions cannot be drawn.

#### 4.2.2 Informal learning

Table 5. Frequency table on informal learning

<b>Informal learning</b>			
<b>Question</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
I believe that I have learned most of my English skills at school	Strongly disagree	11	7.7
	Disagree	58	40.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	9	6.3
	Agree	59	41.3
	Strongly agree	6	4.2
Free time activities have greatly influenced my English skills	Strongly disagree	12	8.4
	Disagree	8	5.6
	Agree	41	28.7
	Strongly agree	82	57.3
I feel that series and movies have affected my spoken English skills	Disagree	11	7.7
	Neither agree nor disagree	5	3.5
	Agree	59	41.3
	Strongly agree	68	47.6

Much like with formal learning, the participants' views on the role of informal learning were mapped in the questionnaire. Once again, the participants responded to statements on Likert scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". A neutral option was given in the form of "neither agree nor disagree". The statement "I believe that I learned most of my English skills at school" got surprisingly even responses with 58 disagreeing and 59 participants agreeing with this statement. The same trend did not apply to the other two questions about the role of informal learning mediums. The majority of participants (57.3%) believed that their free time activities have greatly influenced their English skills. At the same time, 8.4% of the participants thought that their language skills had not been significantly influenced by their hobbies and such. When the role of series and movies in the participants' spoken language skills was questioned, a combined total of 88.9% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 6. Correlations and informal learning

<b>Informal learning</b>				
	How often do you watch television		How often do you watch series and movies on the computer	
	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
I often watch American television	-0.206	0.022	-0.221**	0.008
I watch English series and movies without subtitles	0.058	0.520	-0.403**	0.000
In my opinion, my spoken English skills are good	-0.099	0.275	0.000	0.999
In my opinion, I understand spoken English well	-0.032	0.725	-0.075	0.371

Correlations between the statements about informal learning and language skills assessments were also researched. Table 6 displays the statistically significant correlations. The comparisons done between the participants' responses to self-evaluation questions about their language skills and the amount of television they watch did not provide statistically significant correlations. Neither spoken language skills nor comprehensions skills showed any connection to television. As the table shows, the only correlations that were found existed between the habit of watching series and movies on the computer and the content the participants watched. The negative correlation of 0.403 in Table 6 shows that the more the participants watched series and movies on the computer the more likely they were to watch this content without subtitles. The negative correlation is caused by the fact that the two questions have opposing scales of values. If the participants watched series and movies on their computer in daily basis, their answers were given a value of 1, whereas 5 was the maximum value for watching television content without subtitles. Another, yet weaker, correlation was found between favouring American television content and following series and movies on the computer. With only a -0.221 correlation between the two, this connection is not significant.

### 4.2.3 Comparative statistics on informal and formal learning

Table 7. Correlations between the responses to both informal and formal learning

<b>Comparative</b>				
	I believe that I have learned most of my English skills at school		Free time activities have greatly influenced my English skills	
	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
I feel that series and movies have affected my spoken English skills	-0.067	0.423	.363**	0.000
I watch English series and movies without subtitles	-.244**	0.003	.428**	0.000
In my opinion, I understand spoken English well	-.248**	0.003	.293**	0.000
In my opinion, my spoken English skills are good	-.217**	0.009	.297**	0.000

Table 7 features a comparison of correlations between formal and informal learning environments. All statistically significant correlations have been compiled to the table. A quick glance at the table tells that there are no high correlations between any of the variables. A positive correlation of 0.428 was found between the belief that free time activities affect the participant's English skills and the habit of watching series and movies without subtitles. In other words, the more the participants' watched television content without subtitles the more they put value on the role of free time activities and language learning. Attention should also be paid to the last two statements in Table 7. Evaluations on both comprehension and spoken language skills correlate very differently with the statements about the role of formal and informal learning. A negative correlation of 0.248 was found between comprehension skills and the belief that school has been the most significant factor in the participants' learning processes. At the same time, the same comprehension statement correlated positively (0.293) with the belief that free time activities play a great role in language learning. The very same trend can be seen in the correlation for the next statement "In my opinion, my spoken English skills are good". This statement also correlates negatively with formal learning and positively with informal learning. It is also worth keeping in mind that all of these correlations are rather

low and too dramatic conclusions should not be drawn.

### 4.3 Differences between genders

As mentioned earlier, one of the aims of this study was to look into the differences between the answers of men and women. This comparison was done using T-test, which allowed differentiating between the significant and insignificant variations in the participants' answers in the questionnaire. The significant results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. T-test results for gender differences

<b>T-test</b>			
	Gender	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
How often do you watch series and movies on the computer	Men	3.44	0.009**
	Women	2.8	
I believe that I have learned most of my English skills at school	Men	2.56	0.068
	Women	3.02	
Free time activities have greatly influenced my English skills	Men	4.64	0.155
	Women	4.29	
In my opinion, I speak with an American accent	Men	3.64	0.017**
	Women	2.97	

The table above contains means for the answers of both men and women. The last column contains the T-test results on the significance of the differences between the two groups. Should this value be lesser than 0.05, the difference is statistically significant. To make interpreting easier, statistically significant values have been marked with two asterisks (\*\*). The first significant difference between the two genders is the habit of watching series and movies on the computer. The mean of men's answers to this question was 3.44, whereas women averaged at 2.8. It is worth noting that the lower the value in this question, the more the participant had reported spending time on the computer watching television content. Thus, the women in this study watch more series and movies on the computer than men. The second

statistically significant difference was found in the participants' reported accents. A greater number of men in this study believed that they had an American accent. What is also noteworthy in Table 8 are the means for the second statement "I believe that I have learned most of my English skills at school". Even though the difference here is not statistically significant, the answer between men and women somewhat varied. The mean of 2.56 shows that men put more value on their free time activities when it comes to language learning. The same can be seen in the responses to the next statement, where men averaged higher in their beliefs of the role of free time activities in language learning.

## 5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will discuss the results of the study in relation to the research questions defined earlier in this paper. Firstly, beliefs about language learning will be looked into through the responses of the participants - in particular their beliefs about the connection between television and spoken language. I will then continue to compare and contrast the views the participants had on formal and informal learning. In this context, television as a medium of learning represents informal learning. Lastly, the differences in the answers of men and women will be discussed.

### 5.1 Beliefs about language learning

As the results section of this study showed, the participants were rather unanimous in the belief that informal language acquisition has played a role in their language learning. This becomes evident from their responses to the statement concerning the effects of free time activities in one's English skills. It must be kept in mind that the participants did not have a chance to elaborate on these responses and therefore the exact nature of this connection the participants believed in cannot be determined. What this does tell, however, is that the role of acquisition is quite significant in the learning process of these participants, much like Krashen also concluded (1981: 1). Whether the participants viewed acquisition as more important than formal learning cannot be concluded based on the questionnaire. The participants were roughly split in two when they were asked to evaluate whether they had learned the most of their English skills at school. It is also worth noting that the most popular responses to this

statement were "disagree" and "agree", which are both rather cautious answers. In other words, the participants were not completely ready to rule out either of the two forms of learning. Keeping in mind that most Finnish university students have English for ten years at school, it is not surprising that they still value school as an educator and are not willing to give all the credit for their skills to informal sources of language acquisition.

The connection between television and spoken English was researched both explicitly and implicitly in the questionnaire. In other words, both the beliefs about language learning and the implicit correlations were studied. The participants were asked whether they thought that a connection of this nature existed, but at the same time they were tested with statements that correlated with each other. Quite significantly, more than 88% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that television has had an effect on their oral skills. This alone obviously does not prove that the connection exists, but it certainly tells a lot about the participants' beliefs about language learning. To sum it up, the participants showed a belief in both language acquisition from free time activities and the connection between television and spoken language.

## **5.2 The connections between formal and informal learning**

In the last section, it was defined that the participants in the present study strongly believed in a connection between watching television and learning spoken English. Contradicting with this statement are the correlations that were done between different variables in the questionnaire. Neither the self-evaluation of the participants' spoken English skills nor the comprehension of spoken English proved to correlate with the amount of television the participants watched. This works against the idea of a connection between watching television and acquiring spoken English. However, it must be said that the participants rated both their spoken skills and comprehension skills rather high regardless of their habits of watching television, so this might also explain the lack of connection. Along the same lines, the participants' habit of preferring American television content did not seem to correlate with an American accent.

In the light of the present study, it can be said that the participants related to both formal and informal learning very similarly. The majority of the participants believed that free time activities had had an effect on their English skills, but at the same time they had enjoyed

studying English at school. This also showed in the comparative statistics between these two forms of language learning and the participants' self-evaluations on their skills. No significant differences were visible, although on average both spoken English skills and comprehension skills correlated slightly more highly with informal learning environments than formal learning. The most reasonable interpretation here is that Finnish university students highly value the education they have been given in the past and also believe in its effectiveness. The direct relationship between formal and informal learning was left unclear in this study. When the participants' attitudes towards school learning were compared to their beliefs about learning from television, the two only showed a low level of correlation. In other words, the participants who had liked English at school did not always report similar beliefs towards informal learning. One of my assumptions in advance was that those who had liked English at school, would have been more inclined to relate more positively to the possible effects of television. This, however, turned out to be a false assumption.

### **5.3 The differences between men and women**

Based on the results of the T-test, it can be said that no significant differences in regard to beliefs about language learning existed between the responses of men and women. As discussed in the results section, the only statistically significant differences had to do with the participants' accents and their use of computer as a medium for watching series and movies. In the light of these results, female university students seemed to spend more time on their computers watching television content. This can be interpreted as a slight surprise, because most often men are reported to spend more time on computer (Tilastokeskus 2011). The men in this study reported to have an American accent more often than women. This same division did not appear when the participants were asked whether they preferred American television content over British, further proving the lack of implicit connection between television and spoken English that was already discussed in the last section. It also leaves the question of where the men in this study have acquired this American accent wide open. In conclusion, both men and women seemed to relate quite correspondingly to statements concerning beliefs about language learning and this study gives no arguments that would support gender divisions in this matter.



## 6 CONCLUSION

This study was set out to study the beliefs about second language learning among Finnish university students. The main focus of interest was to find out, if the participants believed that spoken English would be possible to be acquired through television. It was determined that the participants supported the idea of a connection between watching television and learning English. At the same time, the role of formal learning, mainly school, had not diminished in the eyes of the participants. The differences between the responses of men and women were also paid attention to, but no significant variations were found in relation to their beliefs about language learning. Understanding these beliefs about language learning is important for any teacher and these results can prove useful for anyone who is looking to incorporate technology into their teaching and wants to consider their students' interests when designing lessons. A belief in the effectiveness of television as a medium for learning could potentially boost the motivation of students in language lessons.

The number of men responding to the questionnaire was rather low and this is one of the weaknesses in the present study. To accurately measure the differences between women and men, the number of male and female participants should be more equal. A larger sample would also create greater reliability in the answers of male participants. In hindsight, the subjects that the participants are studying could also have been researched, which would have enabled comparisons between different fields of study. The responses of language students, especially English majors, could potentially differ quite significantly from those of, for example, business students. This would also make the results more representative of all Finnish university students.

The present study only provided a narrow look into the beliefs of Finnish university students and further research should be done to more accurately describe this phenomenon. In particular, studying how these beliefs actualize in the language of Finnish university students would be worthwhile. In this study, I heavily relied on the participants' ability to provide reliable self-report data and it would be interesting to see how the results differed had I had examples of the participants' speech.

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## 8 APPENDIX: Questionnaire on Finnish university students' beliefs

Ikä:

< 20

21-23

24-26

27-29

> 30

Sukupuoli:

Mies

Nainen

Kuinka usein katsot televisiota?

Useamman tunnin päivässä

Päivittäin tai lähes päivittäin

Muutama päivänä viikossa

Harvemmin kuin kerran viikossa

En omista televisiota

Kuinka paljon katsot englanninkielisiä sarjoja tai elokuvia tietokoneelta?

Useamman tunnin päivässä

Päivittäin tai lähes päivittäin

Muutama päivänä viikossa

Harvemmin kuin kerran viikossa

En omista televisiota

Koulu ja kieli

Pidin englannin opetuksesta koulussa.  
 Englannin opetuksessa panostettiin  
 suulliseen kielitaitoon.  
 Koen oppineeni suullista englantia  
 tarpeeksi kouluopetuksessa.  
 Kielten opetuksessa hyödynnettiin  
 televisiota ja/tai videomateriaalia.

## Kielen oppiminen

Täysin eri mieltä Jokseenkin eri mieltä En osaa sanoa Jokseenkin samaa mieltä Täysin samaa mieltä

Uskon oppineeni suurimman osan  
 englannin taidoistani koulussa.  
 Koulun ulkopuoleiset harrastukset  
 ja mielenkiinnon kohteet ovat vaikuttaneen  
 englannin taitoihini merkittävästi.  
 Koen sarjojen/elokuvien vaikuttaneen  
 puhutun englannin taitoihini.

## Television katseleminen

Täysin eri mieltä Jokseenkin eri mieltä En osaa sanoa Jokseenkin samaa mieltä Täysin samaa mieltä

Katson useammin vierasperäisiä  
 kuin suomalaisia sarjoja/elokuvia.  
 Katson englanninkielisiä sarjoja/elokuvia  
 ilman tekstityksiä.  
 Katson usein amerikkalaista televisiosisältöä.  
 Katson usein brittiläistä televisiosisältöä.

## Kielitaito

Täysin eri mieltä Jokseenkin eri mieltä En osaa sanoa Jokseenkin samaa mieltä Täysin samaa mieltä

Koen ahdistusta tilanteissa, jossa  
 minun tarvitsee puhua englantia.  
 Koen ymmärtäväni puhuttua englantia  
 hyvin.  
 Koen puhuvani englantia hyvin.  
 Omaan mielestäni amerikkalaisen  
 aksentin.

Omaan mielestäni brittiläisen  
aksentin.