

**“[English] is a part of who I am”:**

Investigating English majors' linguistic identities

Bachelor's Thesis

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## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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| <b>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</b> <p>Vaikka monikielisyys ei olekaan uusi ilmiö, on siitä esimerkiksi kehittyvän teknologian ja kansainvälisen liikkuvuuden kautta tullut yhä näkyvämpi osa nykypäivän maailmaa. Englannin leviäminen ympäri maailmaa on yksi osa tätä kehitystä, ja esimerkiksi Suomessa englanti on erityisen tärkeässä osassa kansainvälisen kommunikoinnin kielenä.</p> <p>Erityisen tärkeä monikielisuuden ja englannin rooli on suomalaisten yliopisto-opiskelijoiden elämässä, jotka opiskelevat pääaineenaan englantia. Monikielisuuden vaikutuksista puhuttaessa on tärkeää ottaa huomioon myös identiteetti, koska nykypäivän kielitieteellisessä tutkimuksessa katsotaan kielen ja identiteetin suhteen olevan erittäin vankka. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena olikin siis selvittää, minkälaisia kielellisiä identiteettejä englannin pääaineopiskelijat Jyväskylän yliopistossa ovat muodostaneet, keskittymällä erityisesti monikielisuuden rooliin näissä identiteeteissä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineistonkeruumenetelmänä toimi haastattelu, joita pidettiin kolme kappaletta. Haastateltavat olivat kaikki nykyisiä Jyväskylän yliopiston englannin pääaineopiskelijoita. Tulokseni osoittivat, että vaikka opiskelijat luonnehtivat itseään erittäin taitaviksi englannin puhujiksi ja kokivat omien sanojensa mukaan olevansa monikielisiä, he eivät halunneet kutsua itseään monikielisiksi, koska eivät kokeneet taitojensa olevan syntyperäisten englannin puhujien tasolla. Monikielisyyteen koettiin siis vieläkin tarvittavan syntyperäinen kahden tai useamman kielen taito.</p> |   |
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Even though multilingualism has never been a rare phenomenon, in today's world it has become especially visible due to for example the development of new technology, transnational mobility and globalisation (Cenoz 2013: 3-4). Finland is a multilingual country since there are two main official languages, Finnish and Swedish, and several official minority languages such as the indigenous Sami languages. Nowadays, also English can easily be included in the list of languages spoken in Finland; it is not yet an official language, but it nevertheless has a visible, ever increasing role in Finnish society. Leppänen and Nikula (2008: 12) state that the present situation has been a by-product of English's transformation into a global lingua franca. In Finland, it is the language of international communication, which is heard through the media (Taavitsainen and Pahta, 2003: 3-5). Moreover, Taavitsainen and Pahta (2003: 5) observe that one of the reasons for the profound role of English in Finnish society is that it can be constantly heard in popular culture, as foreign television programmes and cinema are not dubbed, but rather subtitled. They continue that one of the effects of this phenomenon is that English has found its way into Finnish conversation in the form of code switching, meaning incorporating English words into one's speech, which has become a frequent act. Multilingualism is thus constantly present in Finland.

The role of English and multilingualism is especially interesting in the lives of Finnish university students who are majoring in English. In most cases, these university students have studied English from the third grade onwards both in formal and informal contexts. English majors spend a great deal of time using English due to their studies alone, and thus the presence of the language in their lives is, and has been, pervasive. Due to the pervasive presence of multiple languages in their daily lives, Finnish English majors can be seen as multilinguals. However, possessing multiple languages in one's linguistic repertoire is not merely an issue of multilingualism, as it has an effect on one's identity as well. In fact, it is generally acknowledged in today's linguistic research that the relationship between language and identity is tightly knit (cf. Edwards 2009). According to Henry and Goddard (2015: 258) not enough research has been conducted on English as a Second Language speaker identities. Thus the aim of the present study is to investigate the linguistic identities of English majors who study at the University of Jyväskylä, focusing particularly on the role that multilingualism plays in their linguistic identities.

## 2 MULTILINGUAL IDENTITIES

Joseph (2004, cited in Edwards 2009: 20) states that identity and language cannot be separated. English majors at the University of Jyväskylä adapt to a pervasive presence of at least two languages, Finnish and English, in their daily lives, which means that the presence of these languages has an effect on their identities as well. To fully understand the intrinsic relationship between language and identity, one must first define identity. I will therefore begin the present chapter by introducing the most common way identity is defined in current linguistic research, as well as identity issues related to the present paper: namely the notion of the *third space* and the *negotiation of difference*. I will also provide examples of past research that has been conducted on English as a Second Language (henceforth ESL) speakers' identities. Finally, I will end this chapter with a discussion of multilingualism.

### 2.1 A post-structuralist take on identity

In today's research, identity is commonly conceptualised from a post-structuralist point of view. Block (2007: 864) explains that this means that identity is not seen as "something fixed for life", but rather as a constantly evolving, ductile phenomenon. Edwards (2009: 18-19) says that individuals simultaneously possess multiple identities, for instance gender identity and social identity. Block (2007: 865) adds that identities are to an extent subject to individual agency, which means that identities are created and maintained by individuals, not acquired at birth. Similarly, Edwards (2009: 19-23) has suggested that identities are processes, which can be experienced as changeable, unsteady and wavering phenomena. He continues that these processes can be best characterised, especially in the case of personal identity, by continuity, which means that despite the unsteady nature of identity, it is basically "an unbroken thread running through the long and varied tapestry of one's life", which changes but at the same time maintains sameness with what it has been before. The tapestry keeps changing during the progression of one's life, and thus the colour and material of the thread change too.

However, each individual goes through times when the wallpaper paste runs out or the wallpaper tears. Block (2007: 864) explains that during our lifetime, we move from different sociocultural environments to others. These shifts can be both across geographical and psychological borders, and the consequence of finding oneself in a completely new environment might result in destabilisation

of one's identity, which is a tell-tale sign of the fluctuating nature of identity. One might feel disoriented, and find him- or herself struggling to find a balance (ibid.). Bhabha (2004, cited in Block 2007: 864) calls this phenomenon the *third space*. However, Block (2007: 864) insists that this phenomenon does not mean adding new features to an already existing identity, or becoming "half of what he or she was and half of what he or she has been exposed to". Instead, the third space incorporates a phenomenon called the *negotiation of difference*, which is a meeting place of one's past and present, and during the negotiation of difference these two factors shape and reconstruct each other, and eventually a new identity is formed (Papastergiadis 2000, cited in Block 2007: 864).

English majors enter a new environment, and cross a new psychological border when they enter university, and thus it could also be regarded as a context for a formation of the third space. Learning English at high school is quite different from studying English at university, because according to the National Core Curriculum (2003: 99), the aim at high school is to better one's language skills and knowledge of English-speaking cultures, whereas at university the assumption is that the students already have good knowledge of the language and the ability to study using it. It may therefore be a shock when the familiar ways of using and learning English are no longer applicable. Overall, since entering university is usually a completely new kind of experience, one's identities could be subject to a great deal of alteration.

On the other hand, Henry and Goddard (2015: 257) admit that researchers have expressed scepticism about whether any link between identity and English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF) exists. House (2003: 560) suggests that L1(s) are the "main determinants of identities", because these languages are the ones that mostly represent their speakers. Moreover, House (2003: 560) explains that in ELF settings, English has been seen as *language for communication*, a tool used to exchange ideas with others, rather than as *language for identification*. This means that when English is used as a lingua franca, it is just a useful medium that lacks cultural connotations, which in turn means that it cannot be used to mark identities or to express a wish to become a part of a hypothetical L2 group, as no such group exists (House 2003: 560). However, this characterisation of English may not apply to the context of the present study, as English majors' relationship with the language is rather unique. English majors have learned English both in formal and informal settings, and since they spend a great deal of time using English due to their studies alone, they do not merely use it as a lingua franca,

but rather they have chosen to study the language in-depth potentially signalling a profound interest in the language.

There has been a wealth of research conducted on ESL identities. For instance, Henry and Goddard (2015) studied the linguistic identities of Swedish university students who were studying on an English-mediated university programme, and found out that ELF settings produce hybridity in identities, and the topic of identity formation in these settings can be quite significant. They also discuss the possibility of L2 English not functioning merely as a language for communication, but rather it might also have great identification value to its speakers. Next, I will move on to discuss the relationship between language and identity in more detail.

### **2.1.2 The multifaceted relationship between language and identity**

The relationship between language and identity can be approached from multiple points of view. For instance, Edwards (2009: 21) states that language itself can be a marker of identity since everyone has their own *idiolect*. He defines idiolect as a unique mixture of for example vocabulary, accent and a combination of informal and formal registers that individuals have formed. Edwards continues that these unique mixtures can tell us a great deal about the individual in question, because one's accent, for instance, is usually the result of the individual's surroundings and belonging to a certain community. All of the participants in the present study have therefore their own individual mixtures, and due to possessing multiple languages in their linguistic repertoires, these mixtures may be characterised as multilingual. Another way the relationship between language and identity can be viewed is explained by Evans (2015: 49), who states that one can also use language to differentiate oneself from others, and for instance teenagers who use vocabulary unknown to their parents to denote difference from them are a classic example of this kind of behaviour.

However, the most important way the relationship between language and identity can be observed, for the purposes of the present paper, is explained by Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 29), who state that identities are created through discourse. Identity is not merely a phenomenon that happens inside one's head, but rather is "performed, constructed, enacted or produced" in interaction with other people (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 49). This means that using language in a certain way is not merely a marker of identity, but rather identities are constructed through language. This is the way identities

are investigated in the present paper, as the English majors' linguistic identities are investigated by analysing the interview discourse and what they say about their experiences as English speakers and students. Next, I will move on to discuss the second major theme of the present study, which is multilingualism.

## **2.2 The problematic notion of multilingualism**

In the present section, I will discuss the definitions of multilingualism in current research, as well as issues related to multilingualism that are particularly relevant to the present paper, such as *code switching*. Aronin and Singleton (2012: 4) state that bilingualism and multilingualism are increasingly used interchangeably in academic publications, and for the present paper I have adopted the term *multilingualism*.

Multilingualism, like identity, has been a somewhat arduous term for researchers to define. Aronin and Singleton (2012: 2) explain that researchers have proposed multiple definitions for multilingualism that vary in breadth. Basically, the narrowest and at the same time oldest definitions entail that one is multilingual only if he or she speaks two or more languages in a native-like fashion. Similarly, Dufva and Pietikäinen (2009: 3-4) observe that the historical way of conceptualising bilingualism would be as having a perfect command of two languages, which is why previously only children from bilingual families were categorised as bilinguals. However, this definition has been considered problematic since having a perfect command of a language would mean mastering every register and variety as well as genre of that language (Dufva and Pietikäinen 2009: 3-4). Furthermore, Blommaert and Backus (2011: 9-10) explain that the process of learning a language is never cumulative, and during that process one does not merely add linguistic resources to one's repertoire. One can just as easily forget or unlearn those resources, and thus the languages we learn and use are never complete nor perfect. The narrowest definitions of multilingualism are therefore not rational since language learning, at any age, does not guarantee the ability to speak a language perfectly, nor is it possible to learn a language completely.

Multilingualism in the world is extremely common. It is no wonder, because there are around 7000 languages and only 200 countries in the world, and thus multilingualism is the norm rather than an exception (cf. Dufva and Pietikäinen 2009). Multilingualism has an important role in Finland as well.

In Finland, one can hear the two main official languages, Finnish and Swedish, and a plethora of other languages, such as the indigenous Sami languages. Moreover, Cenoz (2013: 5) observes that the spread of English has made it possible even for people who live in traditionally monolingual areas to become multilinguals. Even though multilingualism already has a visible role in Finnish society, the spread of English has made it even clearer. The presence of English has been gradually growing in Finland due to for example globalisation and the Internet, and nowadays it is constantly present in mass media, as well as being the “lingua franca of international communication” (Taavitsainen and Pahta, 2003: 3-5). However, Aronin and Singleton (2012: 2) state that the narrow definitions of multilingualism are probably still the most common ways to regard multilingualism outside the academic world.

In linguistic discourse, multilingualism is nowadays defined according to the broader definitions, and these definitions are used in the present study as well. Aronin and Singleton (2012: 2) suggest that whereas the narrow definitions are quite archaic ways of regarding bilingualism as monolingual ability in two languages, the broader definitions are much more liberal. For instance, Edwards (1994: 55) states that to an extent, everyone is multilingual since almost every adult has at least a few linguistic resources in their repertoire from languages other than their mother tongue. Cenoz (2013: 5) points out that the European Commission has defined multilingualism as daily interaction in two or more languages. Kramsch (2009: 17) also defines a multilingual as an individual whose daily interaction happens in two or more languages. According to her, one does not have to be fluent in all of these languages, but rather have varying linguistic ability in languages that he or she has acquired in different formal and informal learning situations. She continues that it does not matter at which age these languages have been learned, nor does it matter whether they have been learned as a foreign or a second language.

Thus according to the broadest definitions, a great number of people can nowadays be called multilingual. English majors could definitely be considered multilinguals, because their daily interaction happens in more than just one language, and their linguistic repertoire includes resources from multiple languages. It will be interesting to discover whether English majors consider themselves to be multilingual since their views on multilingualism also relate to how they see themselves as speakers of English and their relationship with the language, both of which are the focal points of the present study.

Lastly, a concept that is frequently mentioned in relation to multilingualism, and also one of the features investigated in relation to multilingualism in the present study, is *code switching*. For instance, Cenoz (2013: 9) mentions that in recent research, code switching is frequently investigated in relation to multilingual identities. Grosjean (2010: 51-52) explains that code-switching is “a complete shift” from a base language to another language for a word or a phrase, and then immediately returning to the base language that was spoken before the shift. Similarly, Altarriba and Basnight-Brown (2009: 3-4) define code switching as the act of mixing two languages in speech, whilst at the same time being able to maintain clarity and comprehensibility. Grosjean (2010: 53-55) observes that code switching works best when both of the conversational partners understand the languages in question, and that the reason why bilinguals code switch can be explained in multiple ways. Firstly, there are expressions that can be better articulated in another language. Secondly, there might be “a linguistic need” for certain expressions, which means that an accurate translation is yet to be invented. Thirdly, and most importantly in relation to the present study, Grosjean observes that code switching can also be an act of identity, as it can be treated for example as a way to express belonging to a certain group, or even to raise one’s status.

### **3 THE PRESENT STUDY**

In this section I will introduce the aim of the present study and the research questions. I will then move on to present how the data was collected, who was involved and how the data was analysed.

#### **3.1 Research aim and questions**

The aim of the present study is to reveal what kinds of linguistic identities English majors at the University of Jyväskylä have constructed. The analysis will answer the following questions:

1. How do English majors at the university characterise themselves as English speakers?

In order to answer the first question, I will look at the way the participants characterise themselves as English speakers, the role of English in the participants’ lives and the kinds of communities they see themselves belonging to in relation to the English language. The second research question is:

2. How has studying English at university affected the English majors’ linguistic identities?

In order to answer this question, I will look at whether in the participants' views, studying English at a university level has had an impact on their linguistic identities, and whether they have experienced the *third space* and *negotiation of difference* upon entering university. The last question is:

3. What is the role of multilingualism in the participants' linguistic identities?

In order to understand the role of multilingualism in the participants' linguistic identities, I will look at whether the participants consider themselves multilingual, and how they define multilingualism.

### 3.2 Data and methods

Interviewing was the most natural choice of data collection for the present study, because investigating the construction of identities by having the research subjects themselves describe their feelings, experiences and views on the matter produced more detailed results than for instance questionnaires. Interviews also made it possible to ask the participants to elaborate, and ask them follow-up questions during the interviews if the need arose. Thus the data consists of three interviews, which were conducted and recorded in Jyväskylä, with the permission of the participants. The length of the interviews varied due to individual differences, which resulted in one hour and 40 minutes' worth of material to analyse, as one of the participants talked for roughly 20 minutes and the other two for 40 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, and as mentioned above, follow-up questions were asked if an interesting theme arose. However, as the scope of a bachelor's thesis is limited and there were only three participants, one cannot make any great generalisations about all English majors based on the present study.

The questions were divided into five categories, all of which had different themes. Firstly, the participants were asked general questions about their history with languages and especially English. Secondly, they were asked questions regarding the participants' history as English students. The third category of questions handled identity and languages in general. Fourthly, they were asked questions regarding multilingualism, and the questions in the last category were questions regarding the third space. All the material was later transcribed, and the results were coded and divided into categories. Louhi and Aino's interview extracts in the analysis section are translated from a Finnish transcription, and Ilmari's statements are transcriptions. From the interview discourse, I coded the issues that I considered relevant to the study's aim, which included the way the participants characterised themselves as English speakers, what they said about their history with English, what communities

they saw themselves belonging to and their experiences about studying English at university. Moreover, I also coded the material that I considered to answer the third question regarding the role of multilingualism. Finally, the research questions were answered by analysing the coded material.

The participants of the present study are all English majors studying at the University of Jyväskylä, and they were selected in the order of enrolment after sending an email to the University's student association of English students' mailing list, Magna Carta. The participants are at different stages of their studies, and were all given pseudonyms to ensure the confidential nature of the interviews. Neither Aino, who is a second-year student, nor Ilmari, who is a third-year student, have been on exchange, whereas Louhi spent one semester in Japan out of the five years she has studied at the University of Jyväskylä.

Table 1. The participants

| Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Stage of studies             | Studied abroad |
|-----------|-----|--------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Aino      | 20  | Female | 2 <sup>nd</sup> year student | No             |
| Louhi     | 23  | Female | 5 <sup>th</sup> year student | Yes*           |
| Ilmari    | 33  | Male   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> year student | No             |

\*Louhi has studied one semester in Japan

## 4 ANALYSIS

In the following chapter I am going to present my results and provide answers for my research questions. I have divided the present chapter into two sections, and in the first section I will answer the first two research questions, which means that I will discuss the participants' linguistic identities in relation to the English language and the impact that entering university has had on their linguistic identities. In the second section, I will discuss the role of multilingualism in the participants' linguistic identities.

### 4.1 The linguistic identities of English majors - "I am like a fish in the water when I speak English"

The participants characterised themselves as greatly skilled speakers of English. All of them explained that they had developed a tight relationship with English already as a child, and

remembered that their English skills were usually more developed than those of their peers due to informal learning. For example, Louhi and Ilmari remembered feeling frustrated at school, because the studying pace was too slow. They had used English a great deal during their free time due to for example hobbies, and had already learned the pieces of grammar and vocabulary that were taught in comprehensive and high school. Louhi did not like English as a school subject at some point, because the pace was slow and she was not given a permission to move forward at lessons. She liked to practise English outside of school for example by role playing. In comprehensive school, she noticed the feeling of surprise for knowing a great deal more than her peers:

(1) If I remember correctly, the perfect tense wasn't taught to us until junior high school, and I remember feeling confused and thinking "are we seriously learning this now, why doesn't everyone already know this?". (Louhi)

Here Louhi explains that when they were learning the perfect tense at junior high school, she had already learnt it through informal learning, and was left feeling surprised that no one else was familiar with it. Thus we can see that she characterises herself as being somewhat more advanced in English than her peers at junior high school. Similarly, Ilmari characterised his English skills as more developed than those of his peers at high school; he explained that he played English-mediated video games as a child, and felt like the games taught him a great deal of English. He remembers that for the first two years of studying English, he still learned new things at school, but after that he did not. He even refused to take any extra courses of English at high school in addition to the mandatory ones, because they did not teach him anything new. English has thus been an essential part of the participants' linguistic identities from a very young age, and most of them, Louhi and Ilmari, indicate having considered themselves to be somewhat more advanced than their peers before university.

Despite characterising themselves as highly skilled speakers of English, most of the participants did not consider themselves to be as skilled as native speakers of English, which indicates that their linguistic identity construction leans towards ESL or English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) speaker. In fact, all of the participants explained that using English in a university setting feels quite natural, and Louhi, for instance, stated that she might even be better at academic English than Finnish, because English is her main language of study. However, Louhi explained that when she was on exchange in Japan, she met native speakers of English with whom she conversed frequently. She continued that sometimes she did not understand what they said, but did not want to show that to them, because it made her feel like she had *lost*. Thus we can see that she characterises herself as less

skilled than a native speaker, as she felt the need to distinguish herself from them, and reports having tried her best to avoid showing them if she had not understood. Furthermore, Aino explained that:

(2) I don't know why, but [in lectures] I feel more pressured to speak perfectly, and it's harder for me to open my mouth there, especially if the teacher is a native English speaker. (Aino)

Here, Aino reports feeling the pressure of having to speak “perfectly” and therefore making more mistakes than usual. Aino and Louhi therefore regard native ability to speak a language as a standard to which to compare their own abilities in English. The result of learning English in a Finnish context, where English is not an official language although increasingly important, may therefore produce linguistic identities that can be characterised as considering oneself to be remarkably skilled, yet still not as good as a native speaker. Moreover, Marx (2002: 272) states that striving for an accent from which foreign elements are completely erased, is actually a wish to pass as a legitimate member of the target language culture. Similarly, Aino and Louhi's reports about their language use may also indicate a wish to be regarded as having a native like command of English, and thus, at least in their views, seen as competent users of English, even though they were not specifically talking about their accent.

English was an essential part of the participants' linguistic identity construction, as they identified the importance of English in their lives to be pervasive. Even though they tended to possess a great number of languages in their linguistic repertoire, English stood out due to its importance. The number of languages in their linguistic repertoires varied from six to eight, including the usual Finnish, English and Swedish, but also a couple of less common languages for Finnish students such as Polish or Bemba. English, however, was identified as most important along Finnish, as the participants stated that they prefer to use either of the two languages. For instance, Louhi explained that she prefers to use her strongest languages, which are English and Finnish, but English is also important due to other reasons:

(3) And it is of course in a way identity-wise important to me that I can speak English. It somehow relates to interaction with people, so it would feel somehow weird if I weren't able to speak good English with people. (Louhi)

Here we can see that English is a great feature in Louhi's linguistic identity, and that being an English speaker is actually a fundamental part of how she sees herself. Moreover, Aino observed that English is extremely important to her, because she uses it so much in her daily life, and that she is “like a fish in the water when she speaks English”. This statement in particular reflects English's role in Aino's linguistic identity, as she reports feeling as natural using English as a fish does in water, which is the most basic element that a fish needs in order to survive.

Even though English was an extremely important language for the participants, it seemed that Finnish was still their main language for identification. At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were given a choice to answer the questions in either Finnish or English. Aino and Louhi chose Finnish, because they felt that it would be easier to talk about identity related issues in their mother tongue:

(4) Maybe in a way, as Finnish is my mother tongue, it is also my language of emotions, and thus it might be easier to speak about identity-related things and whatnot. (Louhi)

Here Louhi explains that it is easier to talk about identity-related issues in her mother-tongue, Finnish, because it is her language of emotions. In contrast, Ilmari decided to speak English, because he thought it would be easier for the purposes of the research in question. However, despite choosing English, Ilmari expressed similar views with Louhi and Aino, as he stated that he can always use Finnish as a back-up if he cannot express something in English. This means that Ilmari did not feel confident enough to completely count on his English skills, but rather saw Finnish as a stronger resource upon which to rely if the need arose.

The participants indicated that they had formed a somewhat hybrid relationship with the English language. At first, the participants recognised English mostly as a functional tool for communication between themselves and their international friends. Louhi, for example, had been on exchange in Japan, and while there, she used English as a lingua franca with her fellow international students. She also recognised that English is very useful, because one can do so much with the language, and that life would be a great deal more difficult if she had to always find a Finnish equivalent for a term, for example. Moreover, both Aino and Ilmari actually used the phrase *tool for communication* when describing their relationship with English, and Aino, similarly to Louhi, stated that English is a way to maintain relationships with her international friends. However, it seems that English is not merely a tool for communication for the participants. Both Aino and Louhi stated that English is almost like their second mother tongue. Aino explained that:

(5) It [English] is really a part of who I am, I really think that since I use it a lot, it is a part of who I am. Just like Finnish. (Aino)

Here we can see that English, along Finnish, is a solid building block of Aino's linguistic identity. Ilmari, on the other hand, was somewhat hesitant, but stated that:

(6) English has been with me for so long, so you kind of form some kind of relationship with the language when you've studied it for, I don't know, more than fifteen years, and you kind of grow into it, somehow. (Ilmari)

Ilmari, unlike Aino, does not directly state that English has become a part of him, but rather approaches the topic from a different angle; he explains that he has been the active participant in the process, as *he* has formed a relationship with English, and *he* has grown into it. However, Ilmari's statement still clearly shows that English is not merely a tool for communication for him.

The way that the participants categorised themselves as English speakers varied greatly, which emphasises the importance of one's history with a language as an influential factor in one's linguistic identity in a context such as Finland. Because Finland is not an English-speaking country, the participants have all learned the language in different contexts and different ways, which has resulted in different ways of seeing oneself as an English speaker. Moreover, pronunciation played an important role in the participants' categorisation of themselves as English speakers. When the participants were asked to describe and categorise themselves as English speakers, all of them related their answers to pronunciation, in one way or another. Aino felt that her pronunciation is more American than anything else, and thus she could identify herself belonging to a group of English speakers who have an American accent. She added that because English is not her mother tongue, she must also belong to an EFL group. On the other hand, Ilmari stated that ideally he would like to have for instance a Received Pronunciation accent, but that he does not, as his English is quite mixed. However, not having a distinguishable accent did not really bother him, as he saw himself as a "relaxed" speaker of English; Ilmari also felt that since he is not a native speaker of English, he belongs to the majority of English-speakers who speak English well:

(7) I am not native, but I guess I represent the majority, because I guess the majority of English speakers are second language, they have English as second language or foreign language, so I guess I represent the majority in that sense. Also, I think that likely I speak better English than a lot of Central Europeans or South Europeans or something like that. (Ilmari)

Here we can see that Ilmari does not consider himself to belong to a group of native English speakers, but rather to the majority of second language speakers. Furthermore, he then distinguishes that he belongs to the majority group that speaks English well, which is not for example Central or Southern European English speakers, thus constructing a specific Northern European English speaker identity. Moreover, Louhi explained that she usually has difficulties deciding which kind of English, whether for example British or American English she would like to use, which usually results in mixed and hybrid use of English, and she thus categorised herself as either an ESL or EFL speaker.

Now that I have answered the first research question, I will move on to answer my second research question. The participants' linguistic identities had been somewhat affected, in their view, by studying English at a university level. Perhaps due to the strong relationship the participants had already formed before with the language, they seemed not to have experienced the *third space* or the *negotiation of difference*. None of them reported having faced any crises, or noticed feeling any different about themselves as English speakers upon entering university. However, the participants observed that studying English at university had made them see themselves as more competent users of English. Aino, for example, stated that:

(8) Of course I have learned more academic vocabulary, and maybe being more academic is something that I haven't had before, but I don't feel like my colloquial language use has changed that much. -- [the transition] was really smooth, maybe I have matured -- gradually. (Aino)

Here we can see that Aino did not experience the formation of a third space upon entering university. The only difference she had noticed was becoming familiar with an academic way of using English. Similarly, Ilmari observed that he did not feel any different, and studying at university had just brought to his repertoire a wealth of new vocabulary, and that in some situations he might try to be somewhat more precise in expression. Furthermore, Louhi stated that in general she has changed as a person over the last few years, which of course has affected her use of language, but other than that she just felt that her knowledge of English had deepened and she has gained certain authority over the language. Thus we can see that studying English at a university level has affected the participants' linguistic identities in a way that they reported considering themselves to be more academic and gaining more authority over the language.

#### **4.2 To be or not to be multilingual?**

The role of multilingualism was prominent in the participants' linguistic identities. In their daily lives, they observed that using multiple languages feels natural, even though sometimes it might be confusing. For example, Louhi explains that:

(9) Of course, mostly everything university-related reading and doing is in English, and then also a lot of the things you do on your free time --. You notice that you've been so accustomed to it for example when you buy a new appliance, and you read the instruction manual, that you do not necessarily even start looking for the Finnish section, but rather if you find the English section first, you just start reading that one. -- it [English] has become a language that it does not necessarily matter whether you use Finnish or English. (Louhi)

Here we can see that English has become such a normal and indisputable part of Louhi's life that she no longer sees any distinguishable difference between English and her mother tongue, Finnish. Multilingualism has thus become the norm in Louhi's life. Similarly, Aino explained that she sometimes prays in English, which presumably is an act that is usually conducted in one's mother tongue, which could indicate that English has considerable influence on the way she sees herself. Overall, switching between multiple languages daily was considered to be an easy task, which does not require any extra effort. Ilmari and Aino, for example, noted that using English does not feel any different than using Finnish. Aino, on the other hand, explains that:

(10) -- it [switching between languages] isn't difficult. -- sometimes it feels a little tiresome when first you have a German lecture in the morning, then you go to an English lecture, then back to German, and you also speak Finnish with your friends in between lectures, and then you go back to English. That sometimes is hard. (Aino)

Here Aino observes that using multiple languages is not difficult, but it might sometimes feel tiresome. Similarly to Aino, Ilmari thought that switching between multiple languages at university, for instance between English and Finnish, can sometimes be somewhat confusing, but not in a way that he could not handle it. Multilingualism is thus a distinct marker in the participants' linguistic identities, even though they sometimes struggle with the use of multiple languages.

Multilingualism was also detectable in the participants' speech due to code switching, and it was an important feature of most of the participants' linguistic identities. Two of the participants explained that code switching when speaking Finnish is quite usual. On the other hand, all of the participants noted that they code switch when there is no Finnish translation for the English word in question, but Ilmari was the only one to observe that code switching in other situations is fairly rare. However, Aino explained that she quite frequently uses English-mediated humour even when conversing in Finnish, and Louhi explained that talking about university-related issues in Finnish results in a great deal of code switching. Aino even code switched during the interview:

(11) I feel like I am good at them [languages], so of course it's nice when it's not an awful struggle all the time. (Aino)

Here Aino uses the English word *struggle* when answering one of the interview questions in Finnish, which conveniently demonstrates how natural code switching is for her. Moreover, she observed that code switching feels natural, but it might feel somewhat awkward in certain situations:

(12) When I'm with a friend who I know doesn't speak English that well, I feel really bad. I don't do it [code switching] to show that I'm somehow intelligent or that I can speak this language, but it just comes so naturally. -- But if I'm with people who I know understand and it's not a problem for them, it feels good to be able to express myself in my own way. (Aino)

Here Aino explains that it feels good when she is able to speak with people who understand English, because in these situations she feels like she is allowed to code switch and use language that is natural for her. However, when she is talking with a friend who does not speak English that well, she feels like she has to mitigate her code switching, so that the other person does not think that she tries to flaunt her abilities or intelligence. As mentioned above, Grosjean (2010: 53-55) states that code switching can also be an act of identity. In Aino's case, we can see that code switching, and thus also multilingualism, are fundamental parts of her linguistic identity, because using language that includes code switching feels most natural for her.

The participants' views on multilingualism were quite complicated, as all of them stated that they are multilingual, but still did not feel that they could call themselves multilingual, because by definition, they are not. They can obviously be categorised as multilinguals by the broadest definitions of multilingualism, since they possess multiple languages in their repertoire, and for example Louhi observed that she knows at least eight languages, with varying ability. All of them also use more than one language daily, and the languages are mainly English and Finnish. Moreover, the use of English is not usually restricted to just university-related topics. However, when asked whether they regard themselves as mono-, bi- or multilingual, most of them explained that they see themselves as multilingual, but they cannot *really* call themselves multilingual. Ilmari, for example, observed that:

(13) Traditionally I am monolingual and I'm a native Finnish speaker, but I think my level in English is high enough that I could say that I'm bilingual in that sense. But, in the traditional sense of the word I am not. So it's hard for me to kind of see myself as bilingual, but yeah. I know I can speak quite good English, but then I wouldn't say that I'm bilingual -- you would have to grow up in a multilingual family to be a multilingual person. (Ilmari)

Here we can see that Ilmari sees himself as traditionally monolingual, even though his level of English is so high that he could be able to call himself bilingual. However, he explains that he cannot do that, because he is not from a bilingual family, nor has he grown up in a multilingual environment, where he would have acquired the languages rather than learned them. Aino expressed similar views:

(14) That's a difficult question, because English is not my mother tongue, but I still use it almost as much as I use Finnish. I consider myself, I would say that I'm bilingual, but that might not be the correct expression, because I am not. But I consider myself [to be bilingual]. (Aino)

Here, similarly to Ilmari, Aino explains that she considers herself to be bilingual, but cannot call herself bilingual, because *she is not*. On the other hand, Louhi demonstrated being more familiar with the broadest definitions of multilingualism than Aino and Ilmari, as she felt that being able to call oneself multilingual depends greatly on the definition. Louhi observed that she could call herself in almost any situation bilingual, and in her daily life even multilingual. Thus we can conclude that

English majors of the present study consider themselves to be multilingual, but not entirely, because they were not comfortable calling themselves that. This phenomenon might relate to the participants' linguistic identities; they did not consider themselves to be as valid English speakers as native speakers, even though they considered their abilities to be highly skilled. Since they did not consider their abilities to be good enough, they could not call themselves multilingual.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In the present paper, my aim was to investigate the linguistic identities of English majors at the University of Jyväskylä. I had three research questions with which I sought to reach my aim, and the first question concentrated on how the participants characterise themselves as English speakers. I found out that the participants saw themselves as highly skilled English speakers, but did not regard their abilities to be as great as a native speaker's. This suggests that their English speaker identities lean towards ESL or EFL identities. The groups the participants' considered themselves to belong in relation to the English language were varied, which meant that the role of one's background with a language was a significant factor for the identity process in a context such as Finland. With the second question, I sought to investigate what kind of an impact studying English at university has had on the participants' linguistic identities. The participants saw themselves as becoming more academic and competent users of English due to studying English at a university level, and the tight relationship that the participants had formed with English ensued that they had not apparently formed a *third space* upon entering university. With the third question, I observed the role of multilingualism in the participants' linguistic identities. It was prominent; they stated that using multiple languages both in their daily lives and at university felt natural, and that code switching in their speech was frequent. However, their views on multilingualism were complicated, because they regarded themselves as multilinguals, but were not comfortable actually calling themselves multilingual. This might relate to the way they see themselves as English speakers; they did not consider their abilities to be high enough to be truly able to call themselves multilingual.

Based on the present study, we can observe that English can be a fundamental part of linguistic identities even in countries where it holds no official status. Furthermore, my findings align with those of Henry and Goddard (2015). Even though English was the participants' second language and they have been studying it in an ELF setting, the language has had a noteworthy effect on their linguistic identities. Moreover, English was more than merely a tool for communication for the

participants; their L1, Finnish, was still their main language for identification, but they also indicated that they had formed a somewhat hybrid relationship with English. The language was seen mainly as a tool for communication, but at the same time it was a fundamental building block in their linguistic identities. In general, English majors' linguistic identities are an interesting topic due to their unique relationship with the language. In the present study, the participants' characterisation of themselves as English speakers was also quite intriguing; the role of English in their lives was strong and prominent, and they considered their abilities to be high, yet they would not call themselves multilingual, because they did not consider their abilities to be high enough. However, based on the present study, no great generalisations can be made. Further study is thus necessary, as the scope of a bachelor's thesis is narrow, and the present research only had three participants. The study of identities is intriguing and important, and as English has become such a visible component in today's globalising world, the study of linguistic identities is even more necessary.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: The interview questions in Finnish

#### 1. YLEISET

- Suomi/englanti? Miksi?
- Millainen on kielellinen repertuaarisi?
- Mitä näistä kielistä käytät mieluiten? Miksi?
- Ovatko nämä kielet sinulle yhtä tärkeitä vai käytätkö niitä eri tarkoituksiin?
- Mitä englanti on sinulle?
- Onko englanti sinulle tärkeää? Miksi?

#### 2. ENGLANNIN OPISKELU

- Kuinka monta vuotta olet opiskellut englantia yliopistossa?
- Miksi hait opiskelemaan englantia yliopistoon?
- Milloin huomasit, että erityisesti englanti kiinnostaa sinua? Miksi?
- Kerro historiastasi englannin oppijana ja opiskelijana mahdollisimman seikkaperäisesti. Mikä on ollut helppoa? Mikä vaikeaa?
- Kuinka paljon vaivaa olet nähnyt englannin opiskelun eteen? Yliopistossa? Ennen yliopistoa?
- Kuinka paljon englantia käytät päivittäin? Missä tilanteissa? Miltä englannin käyttäminen näissä tilanteissa tuntuu?
- Onko englannin käyttäminen vapaa-ajalla vaikuttanut sinuun englannin puhujana? Miten? Miksi?
- Oletko ollut vaihdossa? Missä? Vaikuttiko vaihto sinuun englannin puhujana tai oppijana?

#### 3. IDENTITEETTI

- Miten kuvailisit itseäsi suomen puhujana? Yritä olla mahdollisimman yksityiskohtainen.
- Miten kuvailisit itseäsi englannin puhujana?
- Miten kategorisoisit itsesi englannin puhujana? Mihin ryhmiin koet kuuluvasi (koskien englannin kieltä)? Miksi?
- Käytätkö englanninkielisiä ilmaisuja puhuessasi suomea? Entä päinvastoin? Milloin? Miltä se tuntuu?
- Ajatteletko ikinä englanniksi? Minkälaisissa tilanteissa ja mitä asioita?
- Miltä englannin käyttäminen yliopistossa tuntuu? (Helpolta, vaikealta, monimutkaiselta, normaalilta?)
- Miltä tuntuu vaihdella suomen ja englannin välillä päivittäin?
- Miltä tuntuu käyttää useaa kieltä päivittäin? Miksi?
- Miltä tuntuu opiskella englanniksi? Entä suomeksi?
- Miltä tuntuu käyttää englantia suomalaisten opiskelukavereittesi tai opettajien kanssa?
- Ovatko tuntemuksesi muuttuneet opiskelu-urasi aikana?
- Kerro minulle tilanteessa jossa on tuntunut erityisen merkittävältä käyttäessäsi englantia.

#### 4. MONIKIELISYYS

- Koetko puhuvasi englantia sujuvasti?
- Koetko olevasi yksikielinen, kaksikielinen vai monikielinen? Miksi?

- Mitä kaksi- tai monikielisyys on sinulle?
- Koetko, että englanti “kuuluu” sinulle?

## 5. THIRD SPACE

- Koetko muuttuneesi englannin puhujana yliopisto-opiskelusi aikana? Miten?
- Huomasitko itsessäsi mitään muutosta englannin puhujana kun aloitit opiskelut yliopistolla? Minkälaisia muutoksia?
- Muuttuiko suhteesi tai suhtautumisesi englannin kieleen kun aloitit opiskella yliopistolla?
- Kohtasitko mitään vaikeuksia suhtautumisessasi englantiin kun aloitit opiskella englantia yliopistolla? Jos kyllä, niin miten pääsit niistä yli? Miltä tämä prosessi tuntui?

## Appendix 2: The interview questions in English

### 1. GENERAL

- Would you like to be interviewed in Finnish or in English? Why?
- What is your linguistic repertoire?
- In general, which language do you prefer to use? Why?
- Are these languages equally important to you or do they have different functions?
- What is English to you?
- Is English important to you? Why?

### 2. STUDYING ENGLISH

- How many years have you studied English at university?
- Why did you choose to study English at university?
- When did you first notice that you were especially interested in English? Why?
- Tell me about your history as an English learner as specifically as possible. What has been easy? What has been difficult?
- How much do you think you have you invested (time and energy –wise) in learning English? At university? Prior to university?
- How much do you use English daily? In what kinds of situations? (Reading? Writing? Communicating?) How does using English feel like in these situations?
- Do you think informal learning has affected you as an English-speaker? How? Why do you think so?
- Have you participated in student exchange? If yes, where? How do you think the exchange changed you as an English-speaker? How about as a learner?

### 3. IDENTITY IN GENERAL

- How would you characterise yourself as a Finnish-speaker? Please be as descriptive as possible.
- How would you characterise yourself as an English-speaker? As said above.
- How would you categorise yourself as an English-speaker? In what kinds of groups do you feel you belong in terms of the English language? Why?
- Do you notice using English words when conversing in Finnish or vice versa? In what kinds of situations?
- Do you find yourself thinking in English? If yes, in what kinds of situations (and about what kinds of things)?
- How does it feel using English at a university setting? (Easy, complicated, natural)
- How does it feel switching between the two languages? (In this case, Finnish and English.)

- How does it feel studying in English? How about in Finnish?
- How do you feel about using multiple languages daily? Why?
- How do you feel about using English with your Finnish “colleagues” and teachers?
- Have your feelings changed during your studies?
- Could you tell me about an especially important or memorable instance when you have used English? (For example you’ve felt especially proud etc. while using English)

#### 4. MULTILINGUALISM

- How fluent do you think you are in English? Why?
- Do you regard yourself as monolingual, bilingual or multilingual? Why?
- What is bi- or multilingualism to you? Why?
- Do you feel like English “belongs” to you? Why?

#### 5. THIRD SPACE

- How do you think you have changed as an English speaker during your studies at university?
- Did you notice any change in yourself as an English speaker when you entered university?
- Did your relationship with the English language change upon entering university?
- Did you face any difficulties regarding you and your relationship with the English language? If yes, how did you try to survive these difficulties? What did this process feel like?

### Appendix 3: The Finnish interview extracts

(1) Muistaakseni perfekti virallisesti opiskeltiin vasta yläasteella, ja mä muistan olin ihan hämmentynyt että “nytkö tää vasta niinku tulee, eiks kaikki muka tienny tätä jo?” (Louhi)

(2) Mä en tiää minkä takia mutta [tunneilla] mä koen enemmän paineita niin kun puhua täydellisesti tai silleen korkeempi kynnys avata suu siellä varsinkin jos on natiivi puhuja siellä opettajana. (Aino)

(3) Ja onhan se tietysti tavallaan mulle niinkun ehkä identiteetin kannalta tärkeää, että mä ns. osaan englantia. Se jotenkin liittyy sellaseen ihmisten kanssa kanssakäymiseen ja sellaseen että se tuntuis jotenkin oudolta jos ei pystyisi puhumaan hyvin englantia ihmisten kanssa. (Louhi)

(4) Ehkä kuitenkin tavallaan, suomi kun on tavallaan äidinkieli, niin se on myös sellanen tunnekieli, että tavallaan ehkä sitten on helpompi puhua sellaista niinkun just tähän identiteettiin ja tämmöseen liittyvistä asioista. (Louhi)

(5) Se [englanti] on oikeesti osa mun sitä kuka mä oon, mä niinkun tosi paljon ajattelen että mä niinkun, ku mä käytän sitä niin paljon niin se on osa mua. Niinkun suomikin, silleen. (Aino)

(8) Totta kai on tullu enemmän sellasta akateemista sanastoo ja semmosta ehkä niinkun just tää akateemisuus on sellanen mitä ennen ei ollu, mutta en mä koe että ihan just arkikielen puhujana en oo muuttunut. --[siirtymä tapahtui] tosi sulavasti, ehkä mä oon kypsinyt -- silleen hiljalleen. (Aino)

(9) Lähinnä tietysti kaikki opiskeluun liittyvä lukeminen ja tekeminen niin on englanniksi ja sitten myös paljon vapaa-ajan juttuja --. Sen huomaa esimerkiksi joissakin että siihen on niin tottunu, että jos vaikka ostaa jonkun uuden laitteen, ja lukee sitä käyttömanuaalia, niin siellä ei välttämättä niinku ala ees ettimään sitä suomenkielistä, vaan jos se englanninkielinen iskee siihen ensimmäisenä eteen niin rupee lukemaan sitä. -- siitä [englannista] on tullu sellainen kieli että ei sillä hirveesti ole väliä onko tässä englantia vai suomea. (Louhi)

(10) -- ei se [kielten vaihtelu] oo vaikeeta. -- joskus se on vähän uuvuttavaa kun eka aamulla on saksan luento, sitten menee enkun luennolle ja sitten taas saksan luennolle, sit puhuu kavereille suomeks välissä ja sit menee taas enkun luennolle. Se on raskasta joskus. (Aino)

(11) Mä koen että mä olen hyvä niissä [kielissä] niin se on totta kai mielekästä kun ei oo semmosta kauheeta struggle koko ajan. (Aino)

(12) Silloin kun mä oon ystävän kanssa jonka mä tiedän että se ei puhu englantia kovin hyvin, mulle tulee tosi huono omatunto. Kun mä en tee sitä [koodinvaihtoa] osoittaakseni että mä oon jotenkin älykäs tai että mä osaan tätä kieltä, mutta kun se vaan tulee niin luonnostaan. -- Mutta jos mä oon ihmisten kanssa joiden mä tiän että ymmärtää ja ei se oo niille mikään ongelma niin se tuntuu hyvältä että mä saan ilmasta itteeni just mun omalla tavallani. (Aino)

(14) Toi on paha kysymys, koska niinkun kuitenkin mä en puhu englantia äidinkielenäni, mutta kuitenkin mä käytän sitä melkeen yhtä paljon kuin suomee. Mä ehkä itteni, niinku sanoisin että mä oon kaksikielinen, mutta se nyt ehkä ei oo korrekti ilmaisu, koska emmää niinku oo. Mutta mä pidän itteeni [kaksikielisenä]. (Aino)