

ENGLISH AND INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES:  
Investigating the identities of English major students  
in Finland

Bachelor's thesis  
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Englannilla on nykymaailmassa lingua franca–rooli, eli se toimii kontaktikielenä eri kulttuureista tulevien ihmisten välillä. Vaikka englannin rooli on usein nähty välineellisenä, tutkimuksessa on herännyt kiinnostus siitä, millainen vaikutus englannilla on sitä toisena tai vieraana kielenä puhuvien ihmisten identiteettiin. Kieli ja identiteetti ovat yhteydessä toisiinsa, sillä kieli antaa välineet sekä identiteetin muokkaamiseen että sen ilmaisuun. Englanti on osaltaan ollut mukana luomassa niin sanottua globaalia, kansainvälistä kulttuuria, jossa ihmiset voivat identifioitua erilaisiin ryhmiin myös oman kansallisen kielensä ja kulttuurinsa ulkopuolella.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman aiheena on, miten englantia ja siihen liittyvä kansainvälisyys ovat vaikuttaneet englannin pääaineopiskelijoiden identiteettiin Suomessa. Tutkielmassa haastateltiin neljää suomalaista yliopisto-opiskelijaa. Haastattelun tavoitteena oli ymmärtää englannin rooli opiskelijoiden elämässä sekä selvittää, millaisena he näkevät englannin ja kansainvälisyyden roolin omassa tulevaisuudessaan.</p> <p>Tutkimus osoitti, että englantia on kaikille opiskelijoille olennainen osa elämää, mutta jotkut opiskelijat kokivat kielen selvästi suuremmaksi osaksi identiteettiään kuin toiset. Ratkaisevia tekijöitä englannin merkitykselle opiskelijoiden elämässä olivat ulkomailla englantia puhuen vietetty aika sekä englannin aktiivinen rooli omassa toiminnassa ja kommunikaatiossa. Kaikki osallistujat kuitenkin tunnistivat englannin suuren roolin nykymaailmassa ja kokivat, että se tarjoaa mahdollisuuksia kansainväliseen toimintaan. Englannilla on ollut vaikutus siihen, millaisena opiskelijat näkevät itsensä ja oman tulevaisuutensa.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Today English is used all around the world as a contact language between people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Second and foreign language speakers far outnumber first language speakers of English in the globalized culture of today's world (Baker 2015). There has been increasing interest into the way language and identity influence each other, and into the different English as a lingua franca (ELF) identities that second and foreign language speakers of English construct. ELF was long considered as a resource for intercultural communication, but the identity-related aspects have been gaining more attention. People identify with and through language in different ways, and so it should be considered how identity might manifest in ELF communication as well.

Throughout this paper, identity is considered from the post-structural perspective, which sees identity as a negotiable and changing subject in different situations. Globalization has created a worldwide culture which gives individuals more ways to identify themselves beyond their own cultural background and native language. The relationship between language, culture, and identity is not as strict as it used to be, and in ELF communication identifications between English and native languages might be in flux (Baker 2015). Many second language speakers, in particular English students, might feel connected to the so-called global culture and wish to express identities beyond their local ones (see Sung 2014, Erling 2007). Furthermore, identities in multilingual contexts might be mixed so that ties to the ELF community and local identifications co-exist and cannot be clearly separated (see Henry and Goddard 2015).

While research into the topic has been conducted in many countries, there is not much research yet in the Finnish context. In the present study, the topic of consideration is the identities of English major university students in Finland. English has a large influence in the students' academic lives, so it is worthwhile to study the overall effect that English might have had on their identities. Furthermore, English has overall a large influence in Finland, being present for instance in academics, business and the media. The context is therefore an interesting one. The purpose of the present study is to see what kind of identities the students have constructed, as related to the ELF context and different identifications through language. The aim is to see how important English and internationality are to the students and in what ways they might have influenced their identities.

## **2 IDENTITIES IN THE GLOBAL WORLD**

### **2.1 Globalization and English as a lingua franca**

Globalization, the free movement of goods and people and communication between different countries, has become pertinent in the modern world. Globalization is defined by its rapid pace and ability to erase barriers between people and create worldwide social relations and consequences (Rubdy and Lubna Alsagoff 2014). The need for a lingua franca has arisen because of the needs of international business and academics, and since large scale international organizations like UNESCO or the EU have come into existence (Crystal 2003). A lingua franca is in essence a language that is used as a contact language between people with different first languages (Jenkins 2007). English has increasingly become the lingua franca language of today's world on a scale that surpasses any other contact languages. It has reached the lingua franca position both because of its historical power, and because English-speaking countries have a large role in international politics and media production today (Crystal 2003). While terms like English as an International Language (EIL) have been used before, ELF is the most used term now, according to Jenkins (2007): the term emphasizes the role of community, of people connecting through the language, and also the changing ownership of English from native speakers to effectively everyone who speaks it. ELF situations might consist of both first and second or foreign language English speakers, but ELF is remarkably often used as a communicative language specifically between second language English speakers without native speakers present at all. A lingua franca is a tool for communication, and that is how ELF has been seen, but nowadays the way ELF affects identities is being considered more.

### **2.2 Language, culture, and identity**

According to Hall (1992), globalization and the rapid change of modern societies has brought with it the fragmentation of cultural identities. This is tied with the post-structural view of identity as something that can be negotiated in different situations: there is no 'essential' self but rather identity is a subject of change. Similarly, Baker (2015) discusses how globalization loosens the relationship between language, culture, and identity: global English opens up more possibilities for various identifications. Before, identities were strongly affected by native and local cultures and languages, but globalization has brought forth a larger range of groups and contexts that one might identify with as well. However, while globalization has brought the global identifications on surface, at the same time regional, local identities have also gained importance, indeed because of globalization

itself (Hall 1992). While the global brings people together, there is growing interest in the local cultures, by people who live outside of it, too. Similarly, Rubdy and Lubna Alsagoff (2014) emphasize that the global and local have an effect on each other: the global not only affects the local cultures, but also vice versa. A notion of hybridity and mixed identities has also taken root in multilingual contexts. Identity can be said to be the sum of social groups that we believe we belong to, and so identity is made in relation to others (Baker 2015). Language and identity are linked: language gives us the definitions and tools to construct, modify and present identities. Because the language of globalization is English, the new groups and definitions for identities are accessed through ELF. In ELF communication identifications with one's native language and English might be in struggle, they might co-exist or be mixed and in flux (Baker 2015).

### **2.3 Changing target communities**

The motivation to learn English might be different now to what it was before. The motivation of second language learners has been conceptualized, for example, in target communities, a group that a learner wants to be a part of. Gardner and Lambert (1972, in Ushioda 2011) conceptualized this as 'integrativeness', the idea that second language learners need to learn the language codes but also want to integrate into the target culture and its speech styles. This usually meant the native English-speaking cultures. However, today the target communities are not as clear-cut as they perhaps used to be: a learner of English could aspire to be a part of a native community, global community, or something else (Ushioda 2011). Furthermore, learners might already see themselves as a member of the global community as such: the motivation does not come from a wish to integrate into a group but rather to express an existing identity through the use of English. Ushioda (2011) argues that a foreign language is not only a skill that one wants to master, but a way to express one's identity in new ways, participate in new diverse contexts and access new information. Following this, it is understandable that ELF and the global contexts in which it operates might be an important aspect for speakers' identities.

Accordingly, solidarity and a sense of belonging into a global ELF culture can exist between second language speakers. Jenkins (2007) interviewed second language English teachers, and some of them expressed opinions about feeling more comfortable in ELF situations over native speaker interactions. One said that she felt 'instinctively' more comfortable with hearing an ELF accent in conversation, because it expressed something the speakers had in common: in effect, just the fact that English is not their first language. This type of reaction is tied to the attitudes of native English

being seen as more prestigious, something that still persists, but it also shows the strong sense of community that ELF speakers can have.

#### **2.4 Bicultural identities: global redefining local**

ELF identities have been studied in different countries among second language English speakers. The identities are often discussed through the global and local distinctions: identifications to the global world versus native cultures. The so-called global identity is defined as a feeling of connectedness to a wider global community, an interest in international events, and a will to travel and stay abroad and communicate with people from different cultures (see Sung 2014). Local identities in turn are defined by the will to express one's local culture and traditions.

Sung (2014) studied the preferred global identities and accents of students in a Hong Kong university where English is used as the instruction language and the campus lingua franca. All of the participants wanted to express some degree of a global identity. However, the students expressed their identities differently: some wished to express only the global side of their identities, while others felt a strong connection to their native Hong Kong culture, for which the global identifications were an addition. Sung (2014) argues that while the latter group seems to present a bicultural identity, where the global and local aspects exist side by side, the former group seems to have a conflict between these two aspects.

Erling (2007) studied English students in a university in Berlin, and attempted to find out how English impacts their local, national, European, and global identities. Indeed, many of the students felt a connection to the global world, and saw English as an opportunity to participate in different global communities. The students were not necessarily studying English because they are interested in the native countries, but because English gives an opportunity for intercultural communication. However, Erling (2007) also notes that most of the students identified strongly with Berlin, their local community. Erling suggests that while students do not lose their sense of national or local identity, globalization and English give the means to expand their identity on a global scale and redefine their national identity. Sung (2014) expressed partly similar conclusions: that for some students, both the global and local are important, while mostly separate, parts. This notion supports the view of bicultural identity, where individuals' identities are influenced strongly by their native language and culture, but they additionally feel connected to the global English-speaking culture.

## **2.5 Hybrid identities: living between cultures**

As mentioned, the notion of mixed identities in multilingual setting has also received attention. Henry and Goddard (2015) studied the identities of students in an English-mediated university program in Sweden. They found similar global identifications as Sung (2014) and Erling (2007) among the students, and established that many students had enrolled to the program because English was seen to present international opportunities in employment and living. However, Henry and Goddard (2015) argue for the notion of hybrid identity over bicultural identity. Hybrid identity is seen as a mix of different identifications and cultures that co-exist rather than stay separate. English has a large influence in Sweden: the students change easily between their two languages, and some had always had international goals. They did not express strong separate identifications with their local culture. Also, it could be said that the Swedish culture is already saturated by global aspects in a degree that has modified the students' identities from the start.

In Sweden, English has a strong influence in the society, for example in research and business. Furthermore, English language media is prominent, and internet use is largely conducted in English. (Henry and Goddard 2015.) The same can be said of Finland, as well as the other Nordic countries. Sweden and Finland also have in common the fact that English-language TV media is usually not dubbed, but subtitled. According to a study by Leppänen et al. (2009), Finnish people encounter English the most in urban and commercial settings, hear it in television, and use it in the internet and in their free time activities. English is largely present in everyday contexts, where everyone hears and sees it, even if the language is not actively in use. It might be that hybrid identities are emergent in Finland, too. Finland is also a bilingual country, because Swedish has an official status beside Finnish; moreover, Finnish people generally put importance on learning foreign languages (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003). Even though most Finns do feel that they are monolingual (Leppänen et al. 2009), Finland can arguably be seen to have a multilingual culture.

It is usually argued that in Asian settings, bicultural identity seems to be prominent, because of the cultural differences between local cultures and the largely Western culture of English. In countries where English has a strong influence, like the Nordic countries, the identities appear more hybrid, because of the already existing presence of English and Western influences in the local culture. However, this is obviously a simplification, because everyone constructs their identity in a distinct way and has different views on the mixing cultures and languages. It should be also noted that not



everyone identifies with the global culture in any significant degree. Nonetheless, the effect of globalization and English on identities does exist.

### **3 THE PRESENT STUDY**

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

The aim of this study is to explore how English and the internationality tied to it has influenced English major students' identities in Finland. I will consider the role of English in students' lives and whether they seem to be internationally oriented in their identities: for example, have they spent time or wish to spend time studying or working abroad. My research questions are:

1. What kind of role does English have in students' lives?
2. Do students use English in lingua franca situations?
3. What kind of role do English and internationality have in students' future career plans?

#### **3.2 Data collection and analysis**

Four interviews with English major students were conducted in September 2017 in Central Finland. The students were of various study years, and from both study programmes of the university: two language specialist students and two teacher trainee students. Interview invitation was sent via email to the English student association's mailing list, and the participants were chosen keeping an eye on the balance between language specialists and teacher trainee students. This was necessary because the two study programmes differ somewhat and for example have generally different career goals, and it was interesting to compare students from both study paths. Additionally, only students in third year or higher were included, because they already have spent a good amount of time studying English and being influenced by it. Therefore, the effect on identities is more noticeable than it might be for first or second year students. The participants are listed in Table 1. The names used in this paper are pseudonyms. All participants are Finnish, and the interviews were also conducted in Finnish. While the interviews could have been conducted in English, it is still a second language for the participants, and some subtle meanings might be easier to express in Finnish. In this paper, the extracts from interviews have been translated into English, and the original Finnish version can be found in brackets under the translation.

Table 1. The participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Study year</b>	<b>Study program</b>
<b>Aino</b>	23	5 <sup>th</sup>	Language specialist
<b>Juuso</b>	31	7 <sup>th</sup>	Language specialist
<b>Elina</b>	22	4 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher trainee
<b>Henri</b>	22	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Teacher trainee

The length of the interviews varied between 15 and 45 minutes. Interviews were voice recorded with permission from the participants, and later transcribed and analysed qualitatively following the themes of the interview. The themes of the interview were the role of English in students' lives as well as the relationship between English and Finnish, students' international experiences, and their future career plans. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing each individual's different experiences to be discussed in a personal order. Interviews were chosen as the method of data collection because they are possibly the best way of obtaining qualitative information, and participants' experiences can be talked about in detail, which is crucial for a multifaceted topic like identity (see Dörnyei 2007). The semi-structured format also ensured that the chosen topics could be elaborated on and follow-up questions were possible.

## **4 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH**

### **4.1 The role of English in students' lives**

The main purpose of the interviews was to explore how English, and the internationality tied to it, has influenced students' identities. The participants were asked to describe the role of English in their life, and more exactly in what type of situations they use English. English has a large role in the students' life in the university setting, where most of their courses operate in English. In addition, the students mentioned the consumption of English-language media via television and internet, reading books in English, and using English while traveling abroad. All of them had experiences of using English in communication, also in situations where English is the only shared language between participants. Elina described English as "the language of education, the language of socialization, and the language of traveling". Aino, after listing some of the situations where she uses English, added that she uses English "whenever she happens to need it". The use of English

seems very natural to all of the students, like something that one can always easily utilise if necessary: all of them expressed this in their interviews in one way or another. They also answered that the reason they started studying English was because English was easy for them, they liked English, or were interested in the culture, so the language had been somehow present for them even before university.

However, the students evaluated the meaning of English in their life, and consequently for their identity, differently. Aino and Elina felt that English is a very important or defining part of their life. Juuso and Henri, while recognizing the everyday role of English in their life, described English as more of a resource than something that strongly affects their identity. The students were asked to compare the roles of English and their native Finnish in their life, and this is where the difference in attitudes can perhaps best be seen. Elina and Aino, whose identities English had affected more, felt that English and Finnish were in balance or that English even had the larger role in their life. Elina described the languages as having a similar emotional importance:

Elina: Sometimes I have moments when I feel like I can't speak Finnish anymore because I use English so much. And I feel like for many their native tongue is like a language of emotions and a personal language, but I feel like for me English and Finnish are in balance in that aspect pretty well.

[Välil on sellasii hetkii ku must tuntuu et mä en osaa enää suomee ku käyttää englantii nii paljon. Ja sitte must tuntuu että koska tosi monelle oma äidinkieli on se semmonen tunnekieli ja semmonen henkilökohtanen kieli, mut must tuntuu et mulla enkku ja suomi tasapainottelee siinä aika hyvin.]

They both said that Finnish will, of course, always be their mother tongue and has importance in that, but English still has a significant meaning for them. Aino said that it sometimes feels like English is “a more important or special language” for her. She also said that because she has more knowledge about the English language and its linguistic aspects compared to Finnish, English feels closer to her in some way. Elina felt that English has “opened more doors” for her than Finnish, in that she has been able to travel and make friends abroad: English has clearly enriched her life.

Juuso and Henri in turn did not feel like English has a role over Finnish for them. Henri said that excluding the university setting, he feels that English does not have a very central role in his life. He explicitly named Finnish as the language that has a more important effect on his identity:

Henri: Finnish is like the comfort zone -- English is more like a tool and Finnish has much more identifying power.

[Suomi on niinku se sillee mukavuusalue -- englanti on enemmän sellanen et se on vaa niinku väline ja sit suomi on siinä on enemmän sellasta identiteettilatausta.]

For Henri, Finnish is the language that has more emotional value. Juuso also explicitly said in his interview that English is “a resource more than a part of his identity”. He said that Finnish has the major role in his life and emphasized the fact that even though English is present in his life for instance in media consumption, he communicates in Finnish much more than in English.

Both Juuso and Henri seemed to appreciate English and felt that it is present in their everyday life, but they still do not define English as a part of their identity in a major way. The difference in the levels of identifying with English might be because of the students’ international experiences and how much they use English in socializing with people. It is the question of consumption versus use of English: whether English is something that mostly comes from the outside in hearing or reading English, or is actively in use in communicating with people. This seems to be the biggest difference between the participants: the more they actively use English, the more it feels like a part of them.

Aino and Elina were the participants who had also spent most time abroad, or for whom the time abroad seemed most meaningful. Aino went on a one semester long exchange during university to Uruguay, where she used Spanish and English as her communicative languages. Elina has stayed several shorter periods of time in Great Britain and other European countries. While the periods spent abroad were shorter than Aino’s, they seemed to be just as important. Elina’s main language of communication while abroad was English.

Aino spent her exchange in Uruguay mainly in a group with other exchange students, and their shared language was most of the time English. She had a roommate from the US and mentioned that while they had first communicated in Spanish, they had eventually changed the language into English. Aino said that only after that she felt like they became closer friends, because the communication was easier: she could express her thoughts and feelings better in English than in Spanish. This demonstrates well the status of English in her life and the ease in its use. After the exchange, she has kept in touch with her international friends, which also strengthens the role of English in her life. When asked about the meaning of internationality, she expressed that it does feel like a part of her now. She has lived abroad and seen different cultures in both travelling and

communicating with people from different countries. Because of this, and the continued communication with the people in her life, she “sees the world as a smaller place”.

Elina’s first experience abroad was relatively early, when she was fifteen years old and went to a language camp in Great Britain. She explicitly mentioned that the experience was very important for her, and strengthened her bond with English, because she was able to use the language with native speakers. Even though her language proficiency was not as good then as it is now, the experience was clearly a positive one, giving her more confidence in her language abilities from a young age. As mentioned before, Elina expressed that English has “opened doors” for her, making her international experiences more meaningful. She has friends from different countries and also has met people from different countries in Finland because she is involved in student organizations and volunteer work on her spare time. As with Aino, this brings the communication in English as a part of her everyday life. This makes the language itself more meaningful for both of them and the ways in which they build their identities.

As a contrasting point of view, Juuso spoke about his traveling experiences differently. He said that if he knows the language of the country he travels to, he always tries to speak in that language. While he recognizes the role and usefulness of English as a lingua franca, he feels that it is more appropriate to try and get experience in using also the other languages he can speak. Not to say that this view is completely unique, seeing as Aino also used Spanish during her exchange. However, Juuso was the only one who raised this perspective during the interviews. Juuso did not go on an exchange during university because of practical reasons like timing. Henri told in his interview that going on an exchange is something that he is still thinking about, but is not sure of pursuing.

As mentioned, the amount of international experience and English-language communication seems to be a major reason for the importance of the language in the students’ lives. Language and identity are connected, because we express our identity through language use (Baker 2015). Because English is largely present in communication in Aino and Elina’s lives, they express their identities, their opinions and emotions more through English, which in turn makes the language more important for them. Aino explicitly answered that English is identifying for her. Elina did not explicitly mention it in these words, but the meaning of English in her life is so significant that in the terms of this study it can be said that she identifies with the language.

## 4.2 Speaking English: ELF interaction vs. native speaker interaction

When English is being used as a lingua franca, there can be two different situations: first, where English is a foreign or second language for both or all participants, and second, where some participants are native speakers of English. During the interviews, the students were asked about the interactions they have had in English, and three out of four raised the issue of ELF versus native speaker interaction themselves, after which they were asked further questions on the topic. The students recognized the difference in these situations and offered their own viewpoints on them. Overall, Aino and Juuso expressed that native speaker interaction is in some way more difficult, while Elina had a preference for it.

Aino interacted with both foreign speakers and native speakers during her exchange, and noted in the interview that she felt different from both of them when speaking English. She felt like she was better than some other second language speakers who did not have the background of being English students; however, she also felt like she did not speak in the same way as the native speakers. She expressed that there is somehow a feeling of being nervous while speaking with native speakers:

Aino: Somehow, with native speakers, I still feel like if I say something a little wrong or funnily I wonder if they are judging me or what are they doing.

[Jotenki vieläki niiden natiivipuhujien kaa joskus tulee semmonen niinku et jos mä sanon nyt jotain vähän väärin tai hassusti niin arvosteleeks se mua vai mitä se tekee.]

However, she also emphasized the fact that during her exchange she got much more confident in speaking English: any fear about speaking English disappeared, and she was not so strict with finding and correcting possible small grammatical errors in her speech.

Juuso expressed similar opinions as well. He remarked that he is more nervous in a situation where he is speaking with a native speaker and somehow is more ashamed with the errors he makes, even though he logically knows there is no reason to feel like that. In addition, he felt that the conversation with native speakers can easily stay a bit dry and distant, because he is not as confident in using English in a relaxed manner, for example in making jokes, compared to using Finnish in a similar situation.

The nervousness in interacting with native speakers most likely comes from the notion of native English being more prestigious. Because the teaching of English, especially before university level, has been mostly based on trying to achieve a native-like command of the language (see Ushioda 2011), interactions with native speakers can strengthen the need to monitor one's speech to be as grammatically correct as possible. However, it is a rather irrational feeling, and when one has more experience with interacting with native speakers, the feeling can lessen. Furthermore, in Sung (2014), one student reflected on the fact that native accents in speech might not even be always easily understandable for ELF speakers: a good ELF accent might be more understandable in ELF contexts. Indeed, one might want to consider the difference between standard English and native English, as there are many different native accents and ways of speaking. A fear of not understanding native speech might also be an underlying reason for the pressure in native communication.

In contrast, Elina expressed a very different opinion about native speaker interaction. She is very confident in using English, and actually preferred to speak English in native settings. She recognized the problems that can occur in ELF communication when people have different levels of language proficiency and understanding. With Elina, the English student status was also brought up in that she felt like her vocabulary and expression were greatly influenced by the academic setting:

Elina: I feel like because of university it is easier for me to speak more proper and more academic language than the kind of everyday language – sometimes I notice that I speak maybe in a way that is a little too complicated if I'm speaking with friends whose native tongue is not English and who don't study English. [Tuntuu et mulle on melkein helpompaa yliopiston takia puhuu enemmän sellasta asiallista ja sellasta akateemisempaa kun sit taas sellasta niinku arkikieltä – välillä huomaa et puhuu ehkä vähän liian monimutkasesti varsinkin jos on kavereita joille se enkku ei oo natiivikieli ja he ei oo ihmisii jotka siis opiskelee englantii.]

Elina has spent time abroad in both native settings and foreign settings, and felt like in native countries speaking English is somehow more natural, and she does not have to hold back on her vocabulary and way of speaking at all. She explained that in a country where English is a foreign language, she tends to start controlling her speech and trying to make it more understandable for everyone. She also mentioned that culture is something that affects the language, and she feels more comfortable with British culture because she knows more about it than other foreign cultures. The fact that Elina's first major experience using English abroad was also in Britain and on a young age

has likely had an effect on her attitude too, making her not to shy away from native speaker interaction.

Henri had also an interesting perspective in that he wished to learn how to modify his language to be suitable for different situations and speaking partners; however, he linked this with being a teacher. He wanted to be able to speak more understandably for someone whose English skills are not yet the best possible, in the teacher–student context. Elina also mentioned that one of her goals is to learn how to modify her language use in different contexts. Henri and Elina both study in the teacher trainee program, and it might have given them a different perspective on the language, one that emphasizes the understandability.

The above demonstrates also that the English student status has had a strong effect on the participants' language identities, in different ways. It can even have a contrasting effect: on one hand giving confidence in one's own abilities, on the other hand providing the critical perspective on one's language use. Aino expressed the importance of the student identity explicitly in her interview, noting how being an English student is one of the first definitions that come to mind when she starts to describe herself.

#### **4.3 Future career plans and the advantages of studying English**

The last topic of the interviews was students' future career plans or wishes, and whether they were interested in working abroad in the future. They were also asked about whether they felt that studying English has some special advantages. The level of students' international orientation seemed to be in balance with how much they identify with English and their previous international experience. While all of the participants expressed being interested in working abroad on a theoretical level, Aino and Elina were the ones who seemed most serious about it.

Elina was considering doing an internship abroad during university, and talked about wanting to work abroad in the future. She is specifically interested in teaching English abroad possibly as a part of an organization or a company, rather than in a school. She said that ever since she went to the language camp in Great Britain, the idea of working abroad has been present for her. It has become concrete in the recent years during her studies. In a similar way, Aino said that she had been interested in possibly working abroad or doing an internship before, but after her exchange studies she was sure that it is something she wants. They were both mostly interested in working in



an English-speaking country, specifically the British Isles, but considered the possibility of working in other countries as well. Their positive international experiences have clearly influenced their attitude toward future plans.

In contrast, Henri said that he was interested in working abroad as an idea, but did not have any concrete plans. Juuso in turn had a very practical perspective on career plans. He said that working abroad has never necessarily been his goal, but he sees it as an interesting possibility, and he felt that he could even have better opportunities to be employed abroad than in Finland. He considered the fact that in the Finnish working life, knowing English is almost expected of everyone: he thinks it is not necessarily a valuable substance skill for other than teachers of English. He considered the reality that if he is working in Finland, he might not be able to use English in his work as much as he would like to.

When asked if they felt that studying English has some advantages or whether it helps to achieve international goals, three of the four students brought up the lingua franca position of English. Elina felt that knowing English is a much bigger advantage than knowing other languages in relation to international goals. Juuso as well mentioned that English is “the key to internationality”, owing to the fact that it is used as a lingua franca. Henri felt that a strong knowledge of English is good for internationality but also for further studies in Finland in any subject, because significant amount of texts in higher education tend to be in English. Aino felt that even though in Finland we often say that “everyone knows English”, it is very different to know the language on the level that English students do. However, Aino spoke about how the studies themselves do not necessarily prepare everyone for international goals, if they do not have international experiences or communicate with international students on home campus as well.

All of the participants expressed wanting to work with English regardless whether they end up working in Finland or in other countries. They also felt that English will stay a part of their life in the future after their studies. Once again, for Aino and Elina that fact was based on the meaning of English in their life. Juuso again referenced to English as a resource that he wished will not go to waste, and recognized that because of English-language media the language will be strongly present in his life whether or not he uses it in communication himself. Elina said that even if she would not use English in her working life, it would obviously be present otherwise:

Elina: I can't imagine that I would have a job where I don't use English, but if that's what will happen I would still continue using English in everyday life and with people.

[Emmä kyl osaa kuvitella et mulla ois joku työ missä mä en käytä enkkuu mutta jos nii kävis nii sitten mä kuitenkin jatkaisin sen käyttöö niinku ihan arkielämässä ja ihmisten kaa.]

Whether or not the students strongly identify with English, the language is a part of their life, and will continue to be. The students were also asked about their goal in studying English. It is interesting to note that all of them said that at first, they had wanted to become as good or as native-like speakers of English as they could. However, in time their understanding of the language had changed: they did not necessarily want to become native-like, and understood that one can never master everything about a language. Their goals now were rather to be able to use English well in different situations and learn more about the language itself. Both the shift from attempting to be native-like and the broadened understanding of language are interesting phenomena in the students' way of thinking.

#### **4.4 The effect of English on identities**

As has been discussed, the way students connected English to their identities was different for each. For Aino and Elina, their positive international experiences and the active role that English has in their life and communication with people seem to have had a strong effect on the way in which they see the language. Aino said that she sometimes sees English perhaps as more important than Finnish for her. Elina even said that she sometimes feels like she "can't speak Finnish anymore", so English has arguably had a strong influence on her thinking as well. This type of attitude, which could even be described as isolation from their native tongue, was not described as negative by them. So it could be said that they identify with English, and the presence of it in their life seems natural. The notion of hybrid identity used by Henry and Goddard (2015) could perhaps be applied here. Finnish and English seem to have mostly balanced relationship and importance in Aino and Elina's lives. They described that English sometimes interferes in their Finnish in code-switching, but also recognized that Finnish sometimes influences their English use. The languages co-exist in their life. Furthermore, if the definition of a global identity is a will to travel and stay abroad and communicate with people from different cultures (Sung 2014), Aino and Elina definitely express this type of identity. English has influenced their lives in the way that internationality has become an important notion for them and affected the way they see the world.

Juuso and Henri did not feel like English has as large of an effect on their identity. Juuso seemed to appreciate English as a resource, and also said that during his studies he had come to appreciate the international possibilities that English brings. However, the language does not have such a central role in his life, rather being on the same level with all of the other foreign languages that he knows. In a similar way, Henri felt that English does not have a major role in his life besides the academic context. He did see international goals as one possibility, but not something he actively pursues. It could be mentioned that Henri was only starting his third year in university: it could be speculated whether his attitude will yet change. Nonetheless, even though Juuso and Henri do not identify themselves with English as much as Aino and Elina, the language has arguably influenced them in smaller ways. It is not as easy to label Juuso or Henri to the identity categories that have been discussed in this paper. However, they do show some degrees of global identity, because they are interested in internationality and entertain the possibility of working abroad, even if these international goals will not be realized in the future.

The status of English in Finland was also brought up in the interviews, as mentioned in the above section: knowledge of English is expected in the Finnish working life, academic texts and media products are in English. Aino and Juuso both mentioned the often used phrase that “everyone in Finland knows English”. Juuso even described it as Finnish people living in an “English-language bubble”, compared to some other European countries. As Henry and Goddard (2015) argued about students in Sweden, it could be said that the Finnish students’ lives have been influenced by the presence of English even before they started studying it. The importance of the language has strengthened during their studies, to the point where they might identify themselves specifically through the English student status, as Aino expressed in her interview. The students are aware of how their native culture has influenced them; however, English has existed beside it during a large part of their life and added its own influence in the mix.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

English students construct a specific group regarding the influence of English on identities, because the language is inherently a part of their life in a way that it might not be for others. English is present in their life in the academic setting, even if it is not largely present in any other contexts. They also have a larger knowledge of the language and different aspects relating to it due to their studies. Notions of internationality are likely present for them whether or not they wish to pursue

international careers. In this study, one of the research aims was to explore the role of English in students' lives and future career plans. All four participants expressed that English is a present part of their everyday lives, in the academic setting and outside of it: it is a skill that can be used whenever there is a need for it. However, the meaning of the language for their identities was different for each of them. For Aino and Elina, the role of English in their life was more defining: they saw it as a significant part of their life, clearly something that has brought them more opportunities and meaningful experiences, especially relating to their international experience. While Juuso and Henri might have similar opinions, they explicitly described English as a tool for communication or a resource, not something that they strongly associate with their identity. All of the students still wish to work with English in their future career, and felt that English will stay a part of their life going forward.

Another research aim was to consider how internationality has influenced the students' lives and whether they have international goals. All of the students have used English as a communicative language in lingua franca situations with people from different linguistic backgrounds; however, the amount and frequency of communication differed. Aino went on an exchange during her studies, and Elina has spent several shorter periods staying abroad, and they both have made friends that they still communicate with in English regularly. Juuso mentioned using English in his work and with acquaintances every now and then, and Henri as well uses English every now and then in communication with people he meets. For them, the amount of active English use seemed to be much smaller than for Aino and Elina though. Considering future career plans, Aino and Elina expressed strong interest in and even plans for working abroad at some point in their lives. Juuso and Henri saw it as a possibility, but not necessarily one they are actively pursuing at the moment.

English has nonetheless clearly influenced how the students see themselves and the world around them. Aino and Elina especially identify in ways where English and Finnish are mixed and have as much importance to them. Furthermore, the student status has also had an effect on all of the participants' identities in different ways. It has set English as something that the students feel they are perhaps better at than most other foreign language speakers. English has a prominent role in Finland, and that has also had a part in how the students see the language and how much it is present in their life. All of these aspects and the different contexts of language use have shaped the students' ways of identification.

The present study has offered a look into the ways in which Finnish students have related to English as a lingua franca and how it has influenced their attitudes and outlooks on life. However, the scope of the bachelor's thesis limited the amount of participants and the depth of the interview topics. The participants' views about the cultural groups in which they feel they belong to could have been explored more: the present study was largely concerned about how they feel about their language use. Obviously, the number of participants is very small, and the results discussed in this paper cannot be directly generalized to all English students in Finland. As seen above, even the four participants in this study had varied opinions on the same issues. However, some trends can be seen, for example the influence of spending time abroad and having international contacts on students' identities and the importance of English for them. Further research into students' ELF identities could be conducted and might confirm similar trends.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Interview questions in Finnish

#### ENGLANNIN ROOLI

Miten olet viihtynyt opinnoissa / tuntuuko omalta alalta?

Miksi päätit opiskella englantia?

Millainen rooli englannilla on (arki)elämässäsi?

Millaisissa tilanteissa yleensä käytät englantia?

Seuraatko englanninkielisiä uutisia / mistä maista?

Onko sinulla ketään jonka kanssa keskustelet vain englanniksi? (englanti ainoa jaettu kieli)

Miten kuvailisit itseäsi englannin puhujana?

Tunnetko että suomalaisuus näkyy jotenkin englanninkäytössäsi, miten?

Millainen suhde englannilla ja suomella on elämässäsi?

#### VAIHTO/ULKOMAANKOKEMUS

Oletko ollut vaihdossa tai viettänyt aikaa ulkomailla muuten? Missä maassa ja miksi siellä?

Käytitkö englantia vai muita kieliä?

Oliko kielellä vaikutusta maan valintaan?

Millaista oli käyttää englantia tässä kontekstissa? (minkälaisia olivat yleisimmät vaikeudet – oliko erilaista ihmisten kanssa eri maista) Esimerkkejä?

Mitkä olivat pääsyyt vaihtoon lähtöön?

Mikä oli tärkein asia jonka opit vaihdosta / ulkomailla?

TAI Aiotko lähteä vaihtoon - mitä odotuksia sinulla on vaihdosta?

#### URASUUNNITELMAT

Mitä tavoittelet englannin opiskelulla?

Onko englannin opiskelulla mielestäsi jotain tiettyjä etuja? (minkälaisia tilaisuuksia tarjolla valmistuneelle)

Millaisia ovat tulevaisuuden työsuunnitelmasi? Haluaisitko työskennellä ulkomailla?

Mikä rooli englannilla on tulevaisuudessasi / uskotko että englanti pysyy mukana elämässäsi?

## **Appendix 2: Interview questions in English**

### THE ROLE OF ENGLISH

Have you been happy with studying / does it feel like your field?

Why did you decide to study English?

What kind of role does English have in your (everyday) life?

In what kind of situations do you usually use English?

Do you follow news in English / from which countries?

Have you got anyone with whom you only talk in English? (English is the only shared language)

How would you describe yourself as an English speaker?

Do you feel that being Finnish can be seen in your English use, in what way?

What is the relationship between English and Finnish in your life?

### EXCHANGE STUDIES/INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Have you been to an exchange or spent time abroad otherwise? In which countries and why there?

Did you use English or other languages?

Did the language have an effect on the choice of country?

What was it like using English in this context? (what were the common difficulties – was it different with people from different countries) Example situations?

What were your main reasons for going on an exchange?

What was the most important thing you learned from the exchange / from being abroad?

OR Do you plan on going on an exchange - what are your expectations about going on an exchange?

### CAREER PLANS

What is your goal in studying English?

Do you think studying English has some special advantages? (what are the opportunities for a graduate)

What are your future career plans like? Would you like to work abroad?

What kind of role does English have in your future / do you think English will stay a part of your life?