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A DISCURSIVE STUDY OF HARD-OF-HEARING LEARNERS' EXPLANATIONS FOR FAILURE AND SUCCESS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten huonokuuloiset oppijat selittivät epäonnistumisiaan ja onnistumisiaan englannin oppimisessa vieraana kielenä. Tällaisia kausaalisuhteiden selityksiä on perinteisesti tutkittu positivistisen tutkimustradition piirissä attribuutioteoriaan pohjautuen. Kausaaliselityksiä eli attribuutioita on pidetty mielen sisäisinä ajatusmalleina, joita on olemassa rajallinen määrä.

Attribuutioteorian luomaa kuvaa kausaaliselityksistä on kuitenkin pidetty liian yksinkertaistettuna. Vaihtoehtoisen lähestymistavan attribuutioihin tarjoaa diskursiivinen tutkimus. Tässä lähestymistavassa attribuutioita tarkastellaan kielenkäyttöön liittyvänä toimintana. Diskursiivisen tutkimuksen materiaalina on usein autenttista tekstimateriaalia, jota analysoidaan diskurssianalyysin periaatteiden mukaisesti.

Tässä tutkielmassa kausaaliselityksiä tarkastellaan diskursiivisen lähestymistavan mukaisesti kielellisenä toimintana. Tutkielmassa selvitetään, mitä eri tulkintarepertoaareja eli tiettyjen termien, metaforien ja rakenteiden muodostamia yhtenäisiä systeemejä huonokuuloiset englanninoppijat käyttivät selittääkseen epäonnistumisiaan ja onnistumisiaan englannin kielen oppimisessa. Materiaali koostuu yhdentoista huonokuuloisen englanninoppijan kirjoittamista oppimiselämäkerroista.

Elämäkerroissa esiintyvistä kausaaliselityksistä tunnistettiin kymmenen tulkintarepertoaaria, joita huonokuuloiset englanninoppijat käyttivät selittääkseen epäonnistumisiaan ja onnistumisiaan. Eri repertoaareissa vastuu oppimistuloksista annettiin eri tahoille. Repertoaareista viisi – auditiivinen repertoaari, ympäristörepertoaari, erilainen oppija -repertoaari, vastuurepertoaari sekä asiantuntijarepertoaari – käsittelivät kuuloa merkityksellisenä englanninoppimisen kannalta. Toiset viisi repertoaaria – lahjakkuusrepertoaari, sattumarepertoaari, työrepertoaari, koulurepertoaari ja naturalistinen repertoaari – eivät pitäneet kuuloa merkityksellisenä. Kuulolle annetun roolin lisäksi repertoaarit erosivat toisistaan sen suhteen, minkälainen merkitys annettiin oppijan omalle aktiivisuudelle ja vastuulle oppimistilanteessa, sekä kuinka merkittävänä oppimisympäristöä pidettiin oppimisen kannalta. Kokonaisuudessaan voidaan todeta, että epäonnistumia selitettiin useimmiten niiden repertoaarien avulla, joissa kuulolle annettiin merkityksellinen rooli. Onnistumisia taas selitettiin eniten niiden repertoaarien avulla, joissa kuulo ei ollut merkityksellinen.

Asiasanat: causal explanations. attributions. EFL learning. success. failure. hard-of-hearing

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Causal explaining is a fundamental human characteristic. People feel the need to establish causes behind various events, such as failures and successes, in different areas of life. In social psychology, causal explaining has been closely related to motivation. In the field of second language learning, causal explanations have received relatively little attention but still their importance to motivational issues has been recognized.

The present study aims at exploring hard-of-hearing learners' causal explanations for their failures and successes in learning English as a foreign language. A research topic related to hard-of-hearing learners' foreign language learning was initially proposed by The Finnish Federation of Hard of Hearing (FFHOH) that was planning a project the purpose of which was to provide support for the EFL learning of hard-of-hearing pupils. Causal explanations for failure and success in learning English were chosen as the topic because there were knowingly no previous studies on hard-of-hearing learners to have addressed the issue.

Causal explanations have traditionally been studied within the positivist research paradigm, more specifically in the light of **attribution theory** (Weiner 1986). In attribution theory, causal explanations, or attributions, are seen as a set of cognitive schemata that people apply in fixed ways across contexts. Attribution research has mainly been conducted with questionnaires, the aim of research being shedding light into the cognitive processes underlying causal explaining. Even though the theory represents mainstream of research on causal explanations, it has also faced a considerable amount of criticism. The theory has been accused of producing a simplistic and decontextualized picture of causal explaining.

In order to avoid some of the problems faced by attribution theory, an alternative approach to causal explanation has been proposed by Edwards and Potter (1992, 1995). Within this **discursive approach**, causal explanations are not considered mental entities residing in people's minds. Instead, they are

seen as discursive actions. People are considered to use language in different ways in order to achieve various outcomes. Thus, it is possible to construct an explanation in a large number of ways depending on its purpose. Accordingly, causal explanations cannot be fixed in number, as in attribution theory. As causal explaining is considered a matter of language use instead of cognition, a discursive researcher approaches the phenomenon by closely examining authentic discourse with the help of, for instance, discourse analysis.

The present study adopted the discursive approach to causal explanation and relied on discourse analysis for methodology. The aim of the study was to identify the different interpretative repertoires, i.e. coherent sets of terms, metaphors and grammatical structures, that hard-of-hearing learners drew on in order to explain their failures and successes in learning English as a foreign language. The data of the present study consisted of life stories written by eleven hard-of-hearing learners of English as a foreign language. In their life stories, the writers reflected on their experiences on learning English in various formal and informal contexts. The data was collected in January – April 2002. Most of the volunteer writers were members of an internet e-mail group that serves as a meeting point for young Finnish hard-of-hearing people. According to the principles of discourse analysis, the life stories were first coded for relevant passages of text, i.e. all accounts of failure or success in learning English as well as the explanations for these were coded out of the rest of the text. These passages served as the starting point of the analysis itself which consisted of reading and rereading the passages carefully in order to find patterns of language use in them. As a result of analysis, ten interpretative repertoires, i.e. ten different ways of using language in order to explain failures and successes, were identified.

The discursive approach was chosen for a number of reasons. First, it has not knowingly been applied on the study of hard-of-hearing people's foreign language learning – a fairly unexplored matter in general – and thus it was believed that it would bring some new insight into the matter. Second, it was believed that the discursive approach would be more suitable for studying naturally occurring explanations in authentic discourse since it allows or,

rather, expects variation, whereas attribution theory aims at applying its predetermined categories on all causal explanation. Third, the discursive approach has been successfully applied on causal explanation in a foreign language learning context in a pioneer study by Heikkinen (1999; see also Ranta and Kalaja in press; Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001). This study served as an encouraging example for the present study.

The present study consists of nine chapters. Chapter 2 illustrates the mainstream approach to causal explanation, i.e. attribution theory, whereas chapter 3 introduces the criticism the theory has faced. Chapter 4 moves on to the alternative discursive approach to causal explanation by introducing the Discursive Action Model (Edwards and Potter 1992, 1995) and the principles of discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Wetherell and Potter 1988). Chapter 5 offers an overview of studies on causal explanation in the second language learning context. In chapter 6, the present study is introduced and the matters such as data collection, coding and analysis are described step by step. The findings of the present study are reported in chapter 7. First, the ten interpretative repertoires identified in the study are illustrated in detail. Second, a summary of the main features of the repertoires is offered in order to illustrate the differences and similarities in the repertoires. Third, some observations about the approximate frequency of the repertoires are made. Chapter 8 discusses the findings of the present study by reflecting on the differences between the interpretative repertoires identified in the present study and the classification of explanations proposed by attribution theory. Further, the interpretative repertoires identified in the present study are compared with those identified by Heikkinen (1999) in a pioneer study conducted on the same lines of research. Finally, chapter 9 concludes the present study by summarizing the findings as well as by making suggestions for further studies.

2 ATTRIBUTION THEORY

Attribution theory is concerned with people's perceptions of causality. Attributions are thus causal explanations that people use to explain why a particular event has occurred (Weiner 1992:230). Attribution research was initiated some fifty years ago by the work of Heider (1958). Later the theory has been further developed mainly by Weiner (e.g. 1986, 1992). This classic version of attribution theory relies on the positivist research paradigm. Attributions are considered cognitive entities which can be measured quantitatively, for example, with questionnaires, and the aim of the research is to uncover general laws about attributions (Weiner 1986, 1992). In this chapter I will first consider the human need for causal explanation and then move on to introduce attribution theory.

2.1 Causal explanation

Explanations take many forms in everyday interaction. Antaki (1994:2-4) suggests that explanations can be divided into three categories. First, an explanation may propose a cause for an occurrence (*All my plants died because they didn't get enough light in the winter*) or an action (*I bought new plants because they look nice on the window sill*). Second, explanation can be parallel to clarifying or making something plain (*Attributions are causal explanations* or *Mrs. Smith is my biology teacher*). The third group of explanations, those that warrant something, can be considered a subgroup of making plain. Warranting means claiming that something is inevitably the case (*It's late, because it's four o'clock*). However, in the present study, we are concerned with the first type of explanation, i.e. causal explanation.

To quote Weiner (1986:2), people are in "a constant pursuit of 'why?'" For example, a person may wonder why s/he did not get the job s/he applied for, or why the neighbours are divorcing. Weiner (1986:2-3) claims that the need to assign causality is typical of all cultures at all times and introduces two interpretations why it is that people feel a need for causal explaining. The first interpretation, known as the principle of mastery (White 1959), suggests that

people simply want to understand themselves and their environment. The second interpretation emphasizes the functional aspect of causal explaining: People use the knowledge attained to manage themselves and their environment. For example, the causes assigned to a past event can serve as a guide to future actions. For instance, if a person explains her/his success in an exam with careful preparation, s/he is likely to prepare carefully for exams in the future, too. In contrast, if a person explains her/his failure in an exam with not working hard enough, s/he can use this information while preparing for the next one. Thus causal analysis allows people to adapt to different circumstances.

Weiner (1986:3) claims that because the need to assign causality can be found in all cultures at all times, and because causal explaining seems to play an important role in adaptation processes, it is possible to construct a psychological theory based on causal ascriptions. This attribution theory that comprises three causal dimensions (locus, stability and controllability) can be used to explain a variety of phenomena, such as human motivation and emotion (e.g. Weiner 1986, 1992). In what follows, I will introduce the three causal dimensions one by one and at the same time describe the origins and development of the current form of attribution theory.

2.2 The first causal dimension: locus

Heider (1958) was the first to propose a systematic analysis of causal explanations. According to him, there was one fundamental distinction between causes: “In common-sense psychology (as in scientific psychology) the result of an action is felt to depend on two sets of condition, namely factors within the person and factors within the environment”, (Heider 1958:82). For example, a student may say that s/he failed an important exam, because s/he did not study hard enough or because s/he was not gifted in that particular subject. These factors are considered to be internal to the person. On the other hand, s/he may say that the instructor did not prepare the students for the exam properly or that the questions were too difficult, both of which are factors within the environment and thus external to the person.

According to Weiner (1986:45), this internal-external dimension became very popular in psychology especially with the work of Rotter (1966), who labelled it **locus of control**. Rotter (1966 as quoted in Weiner 1986:45), while studying causal beliefs, suggested that people differed in the way they perceived and reacted to events regarded as rewards or reinforcements. He claimed that an individual might perceive these rewards to follow from his/her own behaviour (belief in internal control), while another individual might feel the reward depended on factors outside him/herself and did not follow from the way s/he acted (belief in external control). People could be thus divided into internals and externals according to where they perceived the locus of control to be.

2.3 The second causal dimension: stability

Weiner et al. (1971 as quoted in Weiner 1986:46-47) claimed that a second dimension was required to describe causal explanations in addition to the well-established internal-external dimension. They argued that within the internal causes of behaviour, some causes were stable while others fluctuated. For example, a student may explain her/his success in an English exam with her/his ability in the language, which can be considered to be fairly stable. On the other hand, s/he can explain her/his success with effort, which can vary from time to time and is thus unstable. The same stable-unstable dimension also applies to external causes. For instance, if the student claims that s/he succeeded in the exam because the questions were easy, the cause of success is considered stable. However, if the cause of success is said to be lucky guessing, the cause is considered unstable.

There being two causal dimensions (locus and stability), Weiner et al. (1971 as quoted in Weiner 1986:46-47) suggested that there were four dominant causal explanations that people used to explain achievement outcomes and these could be characterized with the two causal dimensions of **locus** and **stability** in the way presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Locus x Stability classification scheme for perceived causality (adopted from Weiner 1986:46)

	Internal	**External**
Stable	Ability	Task difficulty
Unstable	Effort	Luck

However, according to Weiner (1986:46-47) some problems with this model were noticed later. He notes that ability can be considered an unstable characteristic, because people can learn new things (e.g., become fluent in a foreign language) and effort can sometimes be quite enduring (e.g., striving for a long-term goal) and therefore it can be considered a stable characteristic. Similarly, the perception of task difficulty can be seen as dependent on an individual's ability and effort, and luck can be perceived as a personal characteristic (a person can be lucky or unlucky by nature). Weiner (1986:47) suggests that the four causes be renamed to represent the classification system in a more precise way (see Table 2):

Table 2. Locus x Stability scheme revised (adopted from Weiner 1986:47)

	Internal	**External**
Stable	Aptitude	Objective task charasteristics
Unstable	Temporary exertion	Chance

According to Weiner (1986:47), "*aptitude* better captures a fixed capacity than *ability*; *temporary exertion* better describes unstable effort than the mere label *effort*; *objective task characteristics* are not dependent on ability and effort and do remain constant; and *chance* is more indicative of an environmental determinant than is *luck*."

2.4 The third causal dimension: controllability

According to Weiner (1986:48), a third causal dimension was first suggested by Rosenbaum (1972 as quoted in Weiner 1986:48), who noted that, for example, mood, fatigue and temporary effort were all internal and unstable causes; however, temporary effort was different in that it could be controlled volitionally by an individual. Weiner (1979 as quoted in Weiner 1986:48) labelled this third dimension **controllability**. Consequently, what Rotter (1966) had called **locus of control** was now seen more clearly as two separate dimensions: **locus of causality** and **controllability** (Weiner 1986:48).

With three causal dimension the classification of causal explanations became more specific and reached the form in which it is known today. For example, if a student claims s/he failed an exam because s/he is not gifted in the particular subject, the cause can be characterized as internal, stable and uncontrollable. On the other hand, if s/he says the failure was due to not studying for this particular exam, the cause will be characterized as internal, unstable and controllable. When using the three dimensions of locus, stability and controllability, there are eight types of possible causal explanations. They are presented in Table 3:

Table 3. Locus x Stability x Controllability classification scheme for the causes of achievement failure (adopted from Weiner 1986:51)

Dimension Classification	Achievement
1. Internal-stable-uncontrollable	Low aptitude
2. Internal-stable-controllable	Never studies
3. Internal-unstable-uncontrollabe	Sick the day of exam
4. Internal-unstable-controllabe	Did not study for this particular test
5. External-stable-uncontrollable	School has hard requirement
6. External-stable-controllable	Instructor is biased
7. External-unstable-uncontrollable	Bad luck
8. External-unstable-controllable	Friends failed to help

However, problems with this model were identified almost immediately. Weiner (1986:49) himself notes that only six causal distinctions may be possible instead of the eight presented above. This is because external causes can be seen as uncontrollable by definition. Eight causal distinctions become possible only if controllability is defined as “controllable by anyone”, (Weiner 1986:50). In this case, if a student says s/he failed a test because her/his friends did not help, the cause is considered external, unstable and controllable by the friends.

Attribution theory has become very popular and it represents the mainstream in research on causal explanation. However, as seen above, the theory has some internal problems, for example, with the dimension of controllability. Further, attribution theory has its critics, who have drawn attention to the methodology used by the attributionist as well as the positivist research paradigm underlying the theory. These criticisms will be presented in chapter 3.

3 CRITICISM OF ATTRIBUTION THEORY

In the recent years, attribution research has been criticized by a number of researchers (e.g. Antaki 1994; Edwards and Potter 1995). For example, the theory has been accused of producing simplistic, artificial and decontextualized findings. This chapter will illustrate the criticisms by first looking at the methodology used by attributionist and then considering the problems from a wider paradigmatic perspective.

3.1 Methodology

Despite its popularity and wide use, attribution theory has received a fair amount of criticism. It has been accused for the fact that the theory is not based on empirical findings but rather on attribution researchers' personal deductive reasoning: the causal dimensions were derived from intuitions of attributionists, not from their subjects (Antaki 1994:20). Weiner (1986:51) himself admits that this is an "inherent flaw" of attribution theory but points out that this is a common problem in other fields of psychology as well. Further, he (1986:64) claims that empirical research has proven that the suggested three causal dimensions (locus, stability and controllability) actually exist and are "reliable, general across situations, and meaningful." Critics, however, disagree with Weiner. As Antaki (1994:19) points out, attribution research has problems with reliability as it has been difficult to reproduce its findings.

Attribution research has mainly been conducted with the help of questionnaires and under laboratory-like conditions (see e.g. Weiner 1986:52-68; Weiner 1992: 232-246). For example, Kun and Weiner (1973 as quoted in Weiner 1992:241) created situations which were likely to elicit causal thinking. The subjects were provided with information such as "A pupil passed the exam, and 90% of other pupils also passed. The pupil is able. Do you think he or she tried hard?", and then they were asked to choose their answer among five alternatives ranging from "definitely tried hard" to "definitely did not try hard". Another way of gathering data was to present the subjects with pairs of causes

such as ability and effort, or effort and luck, and then ask them to rate how similar or different these causes were (Weiner 1986:52). The data gained from these kinds of experiments could be presented in a numeric form and analysed using different statistical techniques, such as factor analysis and multidimensional scaling (see e.g. Weiner 1986:52-68).

Attribution research has been criticized for being artificial and reductive (Antaki 1994:16). For instance, in the kinds of experiments described above, the research subjects had to cope with the limited information of an outcome provided by the experimenter without the possibility of negotiating meaning. Further, they were forced to choose their answers from the alternatives provided by the experimenter and could not come up with their own explanations nor decide whether an explanation was necessary at all (Antaki 1994:16-17). As Heikkinen (1999:17) points out, these kinds of experiments could only confirm the preformed ideas of the scholar, not produce new ones.

Attribution theory has also been criticized for its unclear terminology (Antaki 1994:20-21). The dimensional scales have been named differently by different researchers and one could never be sure about their meaning. For example, some researchers have talked about the internal-external distinction, while others used dimensions such as personal-situational, dispositional-environmental, or some *ad hoc* phrases that were suitable for the particular context. This makes it hard to compare results of various studies and produce a coherent picture of the results. However, the problems with the three causal dimensions go far beyond naming issues. The dimensions as concepts have been accused of being vague and unclear (Antaki 1994:20-21). In fact, even the internal-external distinction, the cornerstone on which the theory was built, is subject to many obscurities. Firstly, there is the question of whether the two classes are mutually exclusive. Heider (1958) had originally proposed that there was a hydraulic relation between internal and external causes and thus they should correlate inversely. This meant that the more a cause was perceived as internal, the less it was perceived as external. However, experiments soon revealed that this was not the case: people could attribute the same event to both internal and external factors equally highly.

Another misgiving of the internal-external distinction was that it was very hard to categorize a given cause to one or the other (Antaki 1994:20-22). Problems arose with studies in which the subjects could answer in their own words. A classic example of this is asking the respondents why they go to Spain in the summer and receiving two answers: *because it's hot* and *because I like the heat*. In these kinds of cases the experimenters were forced to consider whether the answers really represented two separate categories. Further, it was realized that the experiments did not produce consistent results. It was quite possible that the same subject explained her/his visiting Spain by writing *because I like the heat* and marking on a rating scale "something to do with Spain." This problem was put aside by claiming that the internal-external distinction was an underlying dimension of causal structure and it was not expected to be visible in language. In order to further clarify causal structure, the two other causal dimensions of stability and controllability were added to the theory, but as Antaki (1994:22) notes, these dimensions were just as confusing as the internal-external dimension (see 2.3 and 2.4).

Yet another important point of criticism has been the fact that attribution research has not taken into account the central role of language in causal explaining. In the classical version of the theory, attributions are seen as cognitive entities and the value of language lies only in that it mirrors these cognitive structures and thus makes it possible to study them. Consequently, as Edwards and Potter (1995:87) point out, attribution theory has regarded language as essential for the research methodology (e.g. questionnaires with verbal descriptions of events), not for the theory itself. However, many researchers have started to place more importance on language and new approaches to the study of attribution have been developed. In the following, two approaches, **the linguistic category model** and **the conversational model**, are briefly presented.

The linguistic category model (e.g. Au 1986; Brown and Fish 1983; Semin and Fiedler 1988) looked at causal explanations from a psycholinguistic point of view. This approach was based on the assumption that words, especially verbs, carry intrinsic semantic and presuppositional meaning and the process of causal

explaining could be studied in terms of verb categories (Edwards and Potter 1995:87). The concept of cause in these studies could be understood in two ways (Edwards and Potter 1995:93-94). Firstly, it could mean the direct cause of the action or state labelled by the verb. For example, in *Mary telephoned John*, Mary does the telephoning and is thus the direct cause for the fact that a call was made. Secondly, cause could be considered a person or a thing responsible for bringing about the action or the state labelled by the verb. This second sense of cause was the more important one for the linguistic category model, since it attempted to clarify **causal** structures, not only **linguistic** ones. Again, it is most likely that the second type of causality in *Mary telephoned John* be assigned to Mary. However, were we informed, for instance, that John had asked Mary to call him, the causality would be assigned to John. Problems similar to this arose as the example sentences were made more complex and it was hard to define, what kind of causality was being invoked.

The linguistic category model was largely initiated by Brown and Fish (1983 as quoted in Edwards and Potter 1995:92), who proposed that verbs could be divided into two categories, namely, action verbs (*help, cheat*) and state verbs (*like, notice*), and these categories carried different implications for causality. When an action verb was placed in a simple sentence, such as *Ted helps Paul*, the causality was assigned to Ted. In contrast, the causality in *Ted likes Paul* was assigned to Paul. In these kinds of simple sentences it was easy to identify the intrinsic implications of causality that the verbs carried. Later studies have developed further verb categories, making finer distinctions with regard to causality.

The linguistic category model was valuable in the sense that it pointed out that language was not a neutral system of communication, but words, especially verbs used in everyday interaction carried with them implications of causality (Edwards and Potter 1995:87). However, it had many misgivings as well (Edwards and Potter 1995:95). The subjects were presented with simple decontextualized sentences invented by the experimenter. As the subjects had no other information than the word's semantic meaning, the only thing they

could do is confirm intrasentential semantics. Thus, the linguistic category model is useful only as a semantic analysis of the cognitive reality.

The conversational model (e.g. Hilton 1990; Turnbull and Slugoski 1988; Antaki and Naji 1987) made an attempt to avoid the problem of decontextualization by taking into account the conversational context and examining attibutions in ordinary discourse. According to Edwards and Potter (1995:100), the conversational model includes two somewhat different approaches. One approach (e.g. Antaki and Naji 1987) examines talk or text, looking for certain kinds of utterances, such as *because* statements, and building different classes by categorizing them. The other approach (e.g. Hilton 1990; Turnbull and Slugoski 1988) takes a more pragmatic view of causal explanation, looking at attributions in the light of, for example, Grice's (1975) maxims.

Antaki and Naji (1987) examined naturally occurring attributions in recorded conversations of British middle-class people. The study was carried out by extracting all occurrences of *because* statements from the data and then classifying them into various categories by searching for similarities and differences between the statements. The study made some interesting observations. Most importantly, it revealed that "attribution theory's paradigm case of an event needing explanation, a person's single action, accounted for only about tenth of the data" (Antaki and Naji 1987:124). The findings of the study suggest that the classical experimental studies do not necessarily produce findings that correspond to the actual realization of attributions in ordinary talk. However, despite its important findings, the approach of Antaki and Naji (1987) has been subject to some criticism. As Edwards and Potter (1995:101) point out, the data was searched for only certain kinds of utterances that supposedly were causal explanations. Therefore, the concept of explanation was predefined by the researchers and the text was not studied at its own right but rather as "an ecologically naturalistic source of data which can be selectively searched for spontaneous attributional expressions" (Edwards and Potter 1995:101).

The second approach of the conversational model represented among other's by Hilton (1990 as quoted in Edwards and Potter 1995:103) aimed at examining causal explanation in everyday interaction. However, as Edwards and Potter (1995:103) point out, the approach had actually very little to do with the actual language used in everyday conversation. Rather than studying discourse in its own right, ordinary talk was examined in the light of Grice's (1975) maxims. Consequently, the basic cooperative principle – an account must be clear, informative, relevant and truthful – was seen at work in everyday interaction, including causal explanation. This, according to Edwards and Potter (1995:103), risks creating an idealized picture of natural conversations and may lead to "prejudging the nature of natural causal reasoning."

Edwards and Potter (1995:105) list three major problems with the conversational model of causal explanation. First, they claim that the conversational model fails to pay sufficient attention to the actual language used in everyday conversation. Second, the conversational model, similarly to the traditional attribution theory, treats descriptions and explanations produced in language as reflection of reality, thus ignoring the constructive aspect of language. Third, the conversational model fails to take into account the partiality or interestedness of the language user which may influence the way in which the language user constructs her/his account. Consequently, even though the conversational model provides some new insight into attribution by aiming at studying ordinary conversation instead of conducting decontextualized laboratory experiments, it still seems to fail in examining the actual language used in all its diversity. The reason for this is that the conversational model, like the linguistic category model, share the basic positivist assumptions with the classic attribution theory. Thus, the inability to pay more attention to language and the context of language use is not only a matter of methodology but also a matter of research paradigm.

3.2 Paradigm

The choice of research methodology always reflects an underlying research paradigm. Traditional attribution theory, including the linguistic category and conversational models, is based on the positivist research paradigm. Positivist research, which still represents the mainstream in the social sciences, has its roots in the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry. Scientific research within this paradigm is seen as an objective inquiry on observable, measurable facts (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:3), and the aim of research is to explain, predict and control both physical and human phenomena (Guba and Lincoln 1994:113). For decades in Western societies, the positivist paradigm, with its numerical representation of data and quantitative methods, has been considered the only reliable one for conducting research. Recent years, however, have seen the development of alternative paradigms, such as constructivism. Research within the constructivist paradigm, often using qualitative data, focuses on understanding what kinds of meanings people give to different phenomena, as well as reconstructing those meanings (Guba and Lincoln 1994:113). The positivist and the constructivist paradigms differ fundamentally in their basic assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology).

Guba and Lincoln (1994:109-110) characterize the ontological assumption of positivism as **realism**, refering to the belief that there is one "real" reality. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994:3-12), positivists believe that this reality can be understood as a whole by dividing it into parts and studying them. These parts have to be quantifiable and are thus typically presented numerically and analysed using various statistical techniques. Further, reality is seen as independent of a person and thus it can be observed objectively from the outside. Hence, values or personal interpretations have no role in understanding reality. If reality is one, it follows that it is possible to generalize research findings across contexts. In fact, producing generalizable knowledge is the goal of research. This, according to positivists, can be achieved by testing preformed theories with a large sample of research subjects. Such is the case, for example, in Weiner's (1986, 1992) attribution theory. Attributional dimensions were derived from the researchers themselves and then tested with

research subjects with the aim of producing "results as certain as the outcome of mixing two parts of hydrogen and one part oxygen" (Weiner 1986:10).

Parker and Burman (1993:160-161) criticize positivists for being obsessed with neutral facts. According to them, positivists prefer to use numerical data, which creates an illusion of clarity, because they are unable to cope with uncertainty. However, as Gergen (1988:95, 110) points out, the use of numerical data and quantitative methods has resulted in ahistorical and decontextualized knowledge. These problems being caused by the realist conception of reality, a change of paradigm is required in order to avoid them. The constructivist paradigm distances itself from the positivist paradigm on a fundamental level with its **relativist** conception of reality (Guba and Lincoln 1994:110-113). This means that instead of one absolute reality, it is assumed that there are many realities. These realities are seen as subjective constructions that are bound to a certain social context, and thus may and will alter from one context to another. The aim of research is to examine the different realities constructed by individuals. Thus, instead of neutral, generalizable facts, there are just different subjective interpretations.

Mainstream (social) psychology is based on the positivist paradigm, which has its implications for conceptualizing different psychological phenomena. However, social psychological research is increasingly conducted from the constructivist perspective. Discursive social psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992; Potter 1996; Potter 1998) represents a broadly constructivist approach to social psychological issues and has taken a radically different approach to psychological phenomena. In the following, comparisons will be made between mainstream and discursive conceptions of personality and language.

The positivist conception of personality is coherent with the conception of reality (Potter and Wetherell 1987:95-96). Just as reality is seen as one and absolute, personality, or the self, is regarded as a coherent and consistent entity that, like any other entity, can be described definitively with a fixed set of characteristics. Gergen (1988:110-111) calls this the psychometric approach to

personality. The psychometric approach was clearly reflected in traditional attribution research. It was assumed that people assigned causality in a fixed, automatic way independent of context (Edwards and Potter 1995:90; Antaki 1994:17-18). Thus, researchers thought that by providing people with structured questionnaires containing decontextualized accounts of events and by asking them to draw causal inferences from them, basic human behaviour patterns could be uncovered and generalizations across contexts could be made. However, as we saw in section 3.1, inconsistencies did appear.

The discursive approach, in turn, conceptualizes personality in a very different way (Potter and Wetherell 1987:101-104). Instead of trying to uncover the true nature of the self, the researcher looks at how the self is **constructed** in discourse, i.e. how people talk about the self. It is considered that instead of one fixed self there are numerous selves that are linguistically constructed in different contexts. The constructivist paradigm, unlike the positivist paradigm, also recognizes the role of culture in the construction of the self. As Parker and Burman (1993:160-161) suggest, our knowledge about ourselves is fundamentally bound to our cultural and historical contexts. Even the modern discipline of psychology is seen as bound to the particular cultural and historical contexts we live in. Consequently, as Potter and Wetherell (1987:102) point out, different theories of the self, whether lay or scientific, are not seen as mutually exclusive but as different ways of making sense of the self in different contexts.

As mentioned above, discursive social psychology sees personality as linguistically constructed. This is a good example of the central role language is given in the discursive approach. The mainstream conception of language is quite different. In fact, Wetherell and Potter (1988:168) accuse positivists of having an old-fashioned view of language. Language, in the positivist paradigm, is considered to be "a neutral, transparent medium between the social actor and the world". Consequently, discourse is considered simply to describe events or mental states. Positivists acknowledge that, at times, the neutrality of discourse can be questionable, for example, because people may want to present themselves in a positive light on certain occasions. However,

these distortions in discourse are considered to be fairly few, and in the vast majority of cases, discourse can be taken as a neutral reflection of underlying cognitive schemata that, as pointed out above, are assumed to be fundamentally similar in all people. Edwards and Potter (1995:88) call the positivist approach the "'window on the mind' epistemology of language."

The discursive approach rejects the narrow view of language proposed by positivists. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:6), language should not be treated as a reflection of something underneath, such as cognition about reality, but as the very tool used actively to construct that reality. Thus, discourse is considered to **do** things, not just describe them. Consequently, language is also seen as the medium for constructing and making sense of the self (Potter and Wetherell 1987:106), which, as Heikkinen (1999:23) points out, makes the discursive approach a fruitful starting point for the study of social psychological phenomena, such as causal explanation.

The positivist research paradigm has been criticized for producing an ahistorical and decontextualized picture of the human being (Gergen 1988:110-111). The problem lies in the fundamental assumptions of the paradigm about reality as one and absolute, personality as fixed and stable, and language as a mirror, which make it impossible to take into account such things as, for example, individuality, culture or situational factors. In order to gain a fuller picture of social psychological phenomena, such as causal explanation, the choice of paradigm needs to be reconsidered.

4 THE DISCURSIVE APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF ATTRIBUTIONS

As we saw in chapter 3, attribution theory has been criticized for its methodological choices that have not been solved even with the development of the linguistic category model and the conversational model. The fundamental problem lies in the positivist research paradigm that aims at producing generalized findings and thus fails to take into account the variety of causal explanation. In the recent years an alternative approach to the study of attributions has been proposed by discursive social psychologists (Edwards and Potter 1992, 1995). The discursive approach to attribution does not consider causal explanations as cognitive entities mirrored by language but as discursive actions performed in specific contexts.

4.1 The Discursive Action Model

In order to provide a new theoretical framework for the study of attributions, discursive social psychologists Edwards and Potter (1992, 1995) have developed the **Discursive Action Model** (DAM). According to them (1995:88), DAM is not a theory in the traditional sense but rather "a set of principles at a meta-level", within which attributions can be studied. DAM has three major principles: 1) action, 2) fact and interest, and 3) accountability (Edwards and Potter 1995:88-92). According to Edwards and Potter (1995:89), the most important aspect separating DAM from the traditional positivist research on attribution is the fact that it treats causal explanations as **actions**, not as cognition. Explanations are considered to **do** things and they are thus redefined as "discursive actions, done in and through language" (Edwards and Potter 1995:89). These explanations occur as a natural part of everyday interpersonal activity sequences, such as blaming or defending someone, refusing an invitation etc. (Edwards and Potter 1992:156).

The second principle, **fact and interest**, refers to how causal explanations are always motivated in some way and are made in someone's interest (Edwards and Potter 1995:89-90). Consequently, a dilemma of stake or interest is always

present when an attribution is made. As Edwards and Potter (1995:89) point out, an obviously motivated or interested account is likely to be refuted (e.g. 'He would say that, wouldn't he?'). Consequently, attributions are very often performed indirectly or implicitly. According to Edwards and Potter (1995:89), this is often done by disguizing causal explanations as factual reports or descriptions. The factuality of these reports and descriptions can be evoked by making events directly perceivable. In scientific discourse, for example, this would mean organizing the discourse is such a way as to appear logical and coherent, and by providing graphic descriptions. In everyday talk and writing, factuality can be warranted, for example, by providing eyewitness-like reports of events or by appealing to common knowledge. Factual reports are thus by no means neutral. Rather, they are "constructed precisely for their attributional implications" (Edwards and Potter 1995:114).

As causal explanations are often constructed and displayed as factual reports or descriptions, the aim of DAM is to study their rhetoric design (Edwards and Potter 1995:90). Edwards and Potter (1995:90) suggest that people anticipate the risk of their accounts being discounted on the basis of interestedness and therefore accounts can be designed in a way that, for example, undermines alternative versions. Accordingly, factual discourse is most likely to occur in contexts where there is an issue, conflict or dispute. DAM makes it possible to study these factual reports and descriptions as constructions containing attributional implications. As Edwards and Potter (1995:90) note, the traditional positivist attribution research is conducted by first providing decontextualized statements and then asking the research subjects to draw attributional inferences from them. In contrast, DAM studies accounts that occur as part of natural speech or writing and interprets **them** as constructions of explanatory reality, designed with interestedness. This is one of the major differences between the positivist and the discursive approach to attribution.

The third principle of DAM, **accountability**, refers to the way in which people assign agency or responsibility in reporting events. Edwards and Potter (1995:90-91) note that this is also one of the central concerns of the traditional attribution research. In experiments the subjects were provided with sentences

such as *John scolded Mary* (Au 1986 as quoted in Edwards and Potter 1995:94-95) and then where asked 'why?' The experimenter would be interested in who the subject considered to be responsible for the scolding: John or Mary. In contrast, a discursive researcher, according to Edwards and Potter (1995:91), would primarily look at the role of the current speaker, i.e. what the research subject is doing in assigning responsibility to John or Mary. As Edwards and Potter (1995:91) point out, a person, while constructing an explanation, is accountable for her/his own action in speaking.

Ranta and Kalaja (in press) illustrate the principles of DAM in a foreign language learning context. They suggest that an attribution can be performed, for example, when a foreign language learner talks about a learning task s/he has just completed, evaluating its outcome and giving reasons for its success or failure. This accounting occurs as part of other talk and interaction with fellow learners and the teacher. Therefore the learner has to construct her/his account so as to appear factual and disinterested, and especially in case of a dispute s/he has to design her/his account rhetorically in a way that defends her/his own view, or undermines alternative views. Further, while giving an account the learner will also attend to accountability, i.e. who or what is responsible for the success or failure in the learning task.

According to Antaki (1994:39), DAM has managed to take into account two very important aspects of explanations that the positivist attribution research has not managed to address. First, DAM treats explanations as more than just answers to linguistic puzzles. In fact, an explanation may actually renegotiate the puzzle it is supposed to solve. Hence an explanation is not just a fixed cognitive entity expressed in words and describing the reality as it is but an action performed to construct the reality of the speaker or writer. Second, since explanations construct someone's reality, they are always interested or partial.

Edwards and Potter (1995:108-110) stress that DAM was not created only as a criticism or objection to mainstream positivist research on attribution. Rather, it is formulated on the basis of careful examination of ordinary talk and writing. They point out, that even though firm empirical and statistical evidence cannot

be provided at this stage, there are three major strands of analytic support for DAM. Firstly, it is consistent with the findings of the extensive attribution research neutral with regard to both cognitive and discursive metatheory. Secondly, the obvious failure of traditional attribution research to address the role of language indicates a need for a model such as DAM. It must also be noted that the findings of the linguistic category and the conversational models are compatible with DAM and they are in fact useful in shedding light on the cognitive processes involved in discursive action. Thirdly, even though not much research has yet been conducted using DAM on issues of attribution, a wide range of discourse and conversational analytic studies on related issues have provided empirical evidence of systematic regularities in naturally occurring discourse. These findings have been acknowledged also by cognitive scientists.

To sum up, the discursive action model views explanations as actions performed by individuals in order to construct their subjective realities and other individuals in that reality (Antaki 1994:116). Explanations are therefore always constructed from a subjective point of view and designed to meet specific strategic ends (Antaki 1994:119). A person, while providing an explanation, is likely to make her/his account appear as disinterested as possible and therefore explanations often take the form of factual report or description. Consequently, as Antaki (1994:2) points out, identifying an explanation should not be done on the basis of a fixed definition but rather by looking at the relationships an account has with other accounts in discourse. Causal explanations now redefined, a suitable method is needed in order to study them.

4.2 Discourse analysis

In discursive social psychology, discourse analysis has gained an important role in the study of social psychological phenomena, including attributions or causal explanations. Discourse analysis rests on the same constructivist paradigm as the DAM, and consequently it can be considered a suitable method for investigating the phenomenon of causal explanation. However,

discourse analysis should not be regarded as a method in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, discourse analysis is a "broad theoretical framework concerning the nature of discourse and its role in social life" (Potter and Wetherell 1987:175).

Discourse analysis was introduced into social psychology fairly recently. It received wider attention only in the late 1980's following the publication of a book called *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* (1987) by the social psychologists Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell. Discourse analysis regards the role of language as essential to social psychological issues. As Potter and Wetherell (1987:9) point out, language is the most fundamental and pervasive form of interaction between people in their everyday lives. A major part of our daily activities are performed through language. Accordingly, language is considered a medium of action, not a reflection of something hidden, such as cognition, for example.

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:7), discourse can be defined in its broadest sense as "all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds." Accordingly, discourse analysis refers to the analysis of any kind of text. Potter and Wetherell (1987:46, 178) also stress, that the focus of discourse analysis is purely on discourse itself. The discourse analyst is interested in how discourse is organized in order to perform different kinds of actions, and what kinds of consequences follow from using some discursive organization rather than another. The principles of discourse analysis can be best understood by looking at its three main components: 1) function, 2) variation and 3) construction, as well as its analytical unit, the interpretative repertoire. In what follows they will be briefly presented.

4.2.1 Function

One of the main ideas in discourse analysis is that language is essentially functional: people use language to perform different kinds of actions (Potter and Wetherell 1987:32; Wetherell and Potter 1988:169). For example, a person may use language to apologise to another person, to ask someone to lend her/him money etc. In these examples, the speaker most likely uses language intentionally to attain her/his goal: to be forgiven or to get the money s/he needs. In many cases, however, the speaker may not be aware of the function of her/his discourse (Wetherell and Potter 1988:169; Jokinen et al. 1993:42). For example, if a student explains her/his poor performance in an English test by the teacher's incompetence, the function of the discourse may be preserving a positive image of self, but the student may not be aware of this. S/he is just doing what feels natural. Discourse analysis combines both intended and unintended consequences of discourse under the general term of function (Wetherell and Potter 1988:169). Thus, as Suoninen (1993:48) puts it, function can be defined as "all possible consequences language use may have." According to Jokinen et al. (1993:42-43), from the point of view of discourse analysis, it is not of primary importance whether the speaker is aware of the possible functions of her/his discourse or not. In contrast, they point out that oftentimes it is most interesting to analyse discourse where functions are hidden in what seems "natural" talk.

Sometimes it is fairly easy to detect the function of discourse. For example, in *Can you lend me your bike?* or *I'm sorry I lied,* it is easy to label the first a request and the second an apology. However, people often use language less directly. For instance, it is not as easy to identify the function of *Do you need your bike tonight?* as *Can you lend me your bike?* Potter and Wetherell (1987:33) point out that people often make requests indirectly in order to give the recipient an opportunity to refuse the request indirectly, too. Similarly, as seen in section 4.1, causal explanations are often disguised as factual reports in order to avoid displaying interestedness. Functions are thus not always explicit. Therefore, according to Potter and Wetherell (1987:32-33), analysing function cannot be a mechanical procedure of identifying certain kinds of elements in

discourse. Rather, possible functions can be identified by carefully examining the context.

Blaming, excusing, requesting and apologising are examples of specific functions discourse may have. According to Wetherell and Potter (1988:169) these specific functions are more interpersonal and define the local discursive context. However, as Wetherell and Potter (1988:169) point out, functions need not always be specific but we can think of a continuum from these specific functions to more global functions. As an example of a global function of discourse, Potter and Wetherell (1987:33) mention giving a positive image of oneself to other people. This, according to them, is often achieved by organizing one's discourse in a way that implicitly emphasizes one's good characteristics. Again here, functions can only be identified by reading the context.

As a further example of global functions of discourse, Wetherell and Potter (1988:170) mention the choice of terminology in certain contexts. According to them, the terminology used in public discourse can have wide ideological consequences that can be difficult to specify. Potter and Wetherell (1987:5-6) illustrate the power of terminology by opposing two terms: *terrorist* and *freedom fighter*. If the first one is applied with reference to a group of people, the receiver of the discourse is likely to make negative evaluations of this group of people. On the other hand, if the same group of people is referred to as *freedom fighters*, the evaluations are likely to be more positive. Discourse can thus be used to, for example, legitimate the power of one group of people over another. However, as Wetherell and Potter (1988:170) point out, neither the speaker nor the hearer are necessarily aware of the consequences the discourse may have.

Wetherell and Potter (1988:170) emphasize that discourse analysis is not a straightforward analysis of function(s). According to them, this would not even be possible because functions are rarely directly available for study. Rather, identifying functions is very much a matter of interpretation. Therefore, as Wetherell and Potter (1988:170) suggest, discourse analysis is essentially about

developing hypotheses about the purposes and consequences of discourse. Thus, functions should be considered findings of discourse analysis rather than raw material of study.

4.2.2 Variation

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:33), if language use is considered to be oriented towards many different functions, it will inevitably follow that language use will vary according to what the speaker or writer is doing with the discourse. For example, a person can be described in many different ways depending on whether the purpose of the description is to blame that person for something or, say, to promote her/his political campaign. In the first case, the description will most likely be constructed in a way that emphasizes some disagreeable characteristics of that person. In the second case, in contrast, the description will probably draw on a very different set of characteristics, and construct the person as competent and particularly likeable. Further, the descriptions will vary according to the recipient of the discourse. As Potter and Wetherell (1987:33) point out, the same person can be described, for instance, to a parent in a way that emphasizes certain kinds of characteristics, and to a close friend in a very different way.

The examples above illustrate how "people give shifting, inconsistent and varied pictures of their social worlds" (Wetherell and Potter 1988:171). This, as pointed out by Wetherell and Potter (1988:171), is not consistent with the traditional, positivist view of personality as a coherent, consistent entity that can be described with a fixed set of characteristics (see also section 3.2). While a positivist researcher takes this consistent whole as the starting point of research and has no productive way of dealing with variation in discourse (Wetherell and Potter 1988:171), a discourse analyst concentrates on examining discourse in its own right with all its variation and inconsistencies, treating these as products of different actions people perform with their discourse (Suoninen 1993:48-49).

According to Wetherell and Potter (1988:171), variation has an important role in discourse analysis. Since variation is the consequence of language being oriented towards different functions, it can be used as a clue in identifying these functions. Wetherell and Potter (1988:171) emphasize, however, that variability in language use is not necessarily the result of the speaker's deliberate or intentional action. In fact, most of the time people do not consciously regulate their language use but they just say 'what comes naturally' or 'what seems right'.

4.2.3 Construction

When people use language functionally, producing variable accounts of their social world, what they are actually doing is constructing their social realities (Potter and Wetherell 1987:33-34; Wetherell and Potter 1988:171). The view that language is used constructively is the third major component of discourse analysis. As we have seen in section 3.2, the positivist research paradigm treats language as a mirror that is thought to reflect the true nature of reality. According to Wetherell and Potter (1988:171), discourse analysis, in contrast, regards language as "put together, constructed, for purposes and to achieve particular consequences". Therefore variation in discourse, as they note, is both "an index of function and an index of the different ways in which accounts can be manufactured" (Wetherell and Potter 1988:171).

The term construction is understood in three different levels in discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987:33-34; Wetherell and Potter 1988:171-172). On the first level, language is put together from pre-existing linguistic resources. Second, these linguistic resources are used selectively, i.e. the speaker or writer actively chooses which linguistic resources out of many available s/he will use. Finally, the term construction emphasizes the action orientation of language use. Language is used actively to achieve something and therefore language use has consequences. As Potter and Wetherell (1987:34) point out, "much of social interaction is based around dealings with events and people which are experienced *only* in terms of specific linguistic versions." Accordingly, language can be said to construct reality.

Again, Potter and Wetherell (1987:34) emphasize, that the construction of social reality with language use need not be a deliberate or intentional process in any way. Rather, the construction emerges as people produce variable accounts in order to make sense of events, phenomena and people in their everyday life. Heikkinen (1999:34) illustrates this by the use of the expression *those people* with reference to a minority group. According to her, a person who uses this expression is not necessarily consciously trying to make a racist remark but s/he is simply maintaining "a certain subjective 'reality' where people are divided into 'us' and 'them'." Thus, by unselfconscious accounting a reality is created or maintained without the speaker necessarily being aware of it.

4.2.4 Interpretative repertoire

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:33), the main idea of discourse analysis, in a nutshell, is that "function involves construction of versions, and is demonstrated in language variation." In other words, the speaker or writer will construct and evaluate events and people in different ways according to what s/he is doing with her/his discourse (Wetherell and Potter 1988:172). Discourse is thus highly variable, but Wetherell and Potter (1988:172) emphasize, that this does not mean that it is impossible to detect regularity in discourse. Rather, they suggest (Wetherell and Potter 1988:172, 176-177; Potter and Wetherell 1987:146, 156), that regularity in discourse should not be sought at the level of an individual speaker, as it is done in the positivist research tradition as a result of its assumption of personality as a coherent whole. Instead, discourse analysis takes language *per se* as the starting point of the analysis and aims at finding regularity in language variation (Wetherell and Potter 1988:172). In other words, it is possible to identify "recurrently used systems of terms" in discourse (Potter and Wetherell 1987:149). These systems are called, following Gilbert and Mulkay (1984*),* interpretative repertoires. An interpretative repertoire can be defined as "a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events" (Potter and Wetherell 1987:138).

According to Wetherell and Potter (1988:172), interpretative repertoires are used as "building blocks" when people construct their subjective realities. As Potter and Wetherell (1987:156) point out, people, while performing different kinds of accounting tasks in the plethora of situations they face in their everyday lives, will need to draw upon many different repertoires to suit the particular occasion. Therefore, variability rather than consensus is expected to be found in the accounts of an individual. For example, when talking about learning English as a foreign language, a learner may explain her/his success with hard work on one occasion and with luck on another, or with both during the same stretch of talk. This means that s/he is using two different repertoires that, following Heikkinen (1999), could be called, namely, the efficiency repertoire and the fatalistic repertoire.

Interpretative repertoires - or discourses as they are called by some researchers (e.g Parker & Burman 1993) – are not, as Jokinen et al (1993:28) point out, the raw material of discourse analysis that can simply be picked out of the discourse in a mechanical way. Rather, interpretative repertoires emerge as a result of the analyst closely examining the text over and over again, looking for patterns in the use of terms, metaphors and stylistic and grammatical features. Repertoires are thus a matter of interpretation. Identifying interpretative repertoires in discourse should not, however, be considered the ultimate goal of discourse analysis. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:149), at least two issues have to be addressed after the identification of repertoires. Firstly, the analyst has to consider why a certain repertoire exist, i.e. attend to the function of the repertoire. Secondly, also the issues and problems that are raised by the existence of a repertoire have to be addressed.

5 CAUSAL EXPLANATION IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING: PREVIOUS STUDIES

In the field of second language learning, attributions received attention only in the late 80s and early 90s when some researchers (Skehan 1989; Crookes and Schmidt 1991; Oxford and Shearin 1994; Dörnyei 1994) suggested that they might provide new insights into issues such as motivation in second language learning. For example, Dörnyei (1994:281) suggested that second language learners' motivation could be enhanced by helping them become more aware of links between effort and outcome, and by attributing past failures to controllable factors, such as inappropriate learning strategies, instead of uncontrollable factors, such as low aptitude. Despite the interest shown by these scholars, very little empirical work on attributions has been conducted in second language learning. There are some studies that have looked into some aspects of classic attribution theory (Horwitz 1985; White 1999; Yang 1999; Ushioda 2001). In addition, interest towards issues closely related to attributions has been shown in some studies that have adopted the discursive approach (Huhta et al. 2000; Kalaja 2002; Kalaja in press; Kalaja et al. in press). However, attributions have been the main topic of investigation only in a few studies (Williams and Burden 1999; Williams et al. 2001; Heikkinen 1999; Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001; Ranta and Kalaja in press). These studies have all been somewhat critical of Weiner's (1986) original theory. Williams and Burden (1999; also Williams et al. 2001) took some distance from the original theory, whereas Heikkinen (1999; also Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001; Ranta and Kalaja in press) adopted the fundamentally different discursive approach to attribution. In the following some work on attributions in second language learning will be briefly reviewed.

5.1 Cognitive attributions in second language learning

As noted above, attribution theory has received relatively little attention among second language learning researchers. There are no studies that have taken Weiner's (1986) theory in its original, positivist form as the starting point of research. However, for example, Horwitz (1985), studying learner beliefs about second language learning, included a couple of questions dealing with attributions into her questionnaire Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Similarly, Ushioda (2001), studying learner motivation in second language learning, paid attention to attributional issues. However, it was only at the turn of the millennium that two studies (Williams and Burden 1999; Williams et. al 2001) took attributions *per se* as the topic of research. This section will briefly present Ushioda's (2001) study and Williams et al (2001) study.

Ushioda (2001; being a summary of a Ph.D. dissertation) wanted to explore second language learners' motivation from a qualitative point of view as opposed to the mainstream quantitative approach. She aimed at "identifying thought patterns and belief structures that seem effective in sustaining and optimizing involvement in learning" (Ushioda 2001:97). The study was longitudinal. Fourteen Irish college students studying French as a second language were interviewed on two occasions. The first interview was open-ended in order to allow the subjects to talk about the aspects of motivation they considered the most important. The second round of interviews took place some 15 months after the first round. A semi-structured interview technique was used as the purpose was to concentrate on more specific motivational experiences as well as on motivational evolution over time.

The data from both interviews were transcribed and subjected to content analysis. In addition to common motivational dimensions, four attributional patterns emerged from the second round of interviews. First, the learners could enhance their self-concept by attributing success in second language learning to personal qualities, such as effort. Second, the learners could maintain their motivation by attributing failures to temporary shortcomings that could be

changed, such as a lack of effort. Third, the learners could blame the institutional learning environment (e.g. teaching methods) for their negative learning experiences, thus dissociating these experiences from their own underlying motivation. Finally, the learners believed in their capacity to motivate themselves (e.g. setting goals for themselves), when the institutional learning environment seemed to be rather demotivating.

According to Ushioda (2001:120-121), the attributional patterns discovered in this study illustrate how learners can manage their affective learning experiences. By attributing success to personal factors, the learners can enhance the image of themselves as able and effective learners. Similarly, by attributing failure to temporary shortcomings they can minimize the motivational damage and maintain the positive image of themselves as learners. Thus, Ushioda (2001:121) points out that the relationship between success/failure and motivation does not seem to be a simple cause-and effect relationship, but learners' belief structures, including attributional reasoning, play an important role in motivational issues.

As noted above, Williams and Burden (1999) were among the first to take attributions as a main topic of research in a foreign language learning context. In their study, they sought to find out how English school pupils conceptualized success in learning French as a foreign language and how they explained success and failure. In a more recent study, Williams et al. (2001) carried on along the same lines of research, with an attempt of finding out what kinds of reasons were given by secondary school students in Bahrain in order to explain their successes and failures in learning English as a foreign language. The students' explanations where also compared with those given by their teachers to explain their students' successes and failures. Williams et al. (2001; also Williams and Burden 1999) were somewhat critical of mainstream research on attributions with its positivist underpinnings. Thus they made some adjustments to the notion of attribution in order to avoid some of the problems of the original theory. They approached attributions from an interpretative perspective that foregrounds a person's individual ways of making sense of things. Attributions are therefore no longer seen as fixed in number and

generalizable across contexts, but as subjective constructions that arise in different situations.

The sample for Williams et al. (2001) study included 29 secondary school EFL teachers in Bahrain and 25 secondary school students aged between 16 and 18. The data were gathered in two ways. First, the teachers agreed to fill in an open-ended questionnaire, asking them to list reasons for their students doing well in English as well as for not doing well. Second, the students were interviewed individually in a semi-structured interview, where they were asked about, for instance, what they thought were the reasons for their doing well or not doing well in English. The data from the questionnaires and the (transcribed) interviews were content analysed along the principles of grounded theory. This allowed the categories of causal explanation to emerge from the data instead of looking for a set of predetermined categories. The frequency of each category of attributions emerging from the data was counted. Finally, comparisons were made between the attributions given by the teachers and the students.

The comparison of the attributions identified in the data revealed a striking mismatch in the teachers' and the students' attributions. The teachers seemed to attribute the success of their students to such things as teaching materials and teaching methods, thus congratulating themselves for their students' success. In contrast, the students appeared to attribute their success mainly to sufficient practice. In short, Williams et al. (2001) concluded that the students seemed to attribute success to factors internal to them, whereas the teachers saw the reasons for success to be external to the students. Differences in the teachers' and the students' perspectives could be found also in the explanations for failure in learning English. The teachers explained the students' failures with inadequate teaching materials (prescribed by the government authorities, and thus not the teachers' responsibility) and the students' lack of knowledge about the basics of English. The students, in turn, blamed inadequate teaching methods and lack of support from their family and teachers for their failing. In the light of these findings, Williams et al. (2001) suggest that teachers should pay attention to encouraging the development of their students internal and

controllable attributions. This, according to them, would have a positive influence on students' deve loping motivational processes.

Williams et al. (2001:182) also made the interesting observation that even in this small-scale study the range of attributions identified in the data was far more extensive than that proposed by the classic attribution theory (Weiner 1986, 1992). Further, they point out that luck, for instance, was never mentioned in order to account for a success or a failure, and references to ability as the explaining factor were very few.

To conclude, Williams et al. (2001; also Williams and Burden 1999) were perhaps the first to concentrate on attributions in a foreign language learning context. They made an attempt to revise classic attribution theory by adopting an interpretative approach to causal explanation, and consequently approached their data following the principles of grounded theory. However, Ranta and Kalaja (in press) point out, that event though Williams et al. (2001) considered attributions to be subjective constructions, they still treated them as cognitive entities, not as interested discursive actions made in order to achieve certain goals. As particular attention was not paid to the actual language used by the subjects when talking about their successes and failures, there is a risks that some of the variation in the data may have been missed. Ranta and Kalaja (in press) suggest that theoretically the approach taken by Williams et al. (2001; Williams and Burden 1999) can be placed somewhere between the mainstream positivist approach to attributions and the discursive approach.

5.2 Discursive explanations in second language learning

Within the discursive approach, recent years have shown some interest towards issues linked to causal explanation in second language learning. For example, Kalaja et al. (in press; see also Kalaja in press; Kalaja 2002), while researching high-school leavers' discursive constructions on the English test of the Matriculation Examination, also looked at the high-school leavers' expectations for successes and failures in taking the test. These expectations of success and failure represent one aspect of causal explanations.

However, perhaps the first study to take a discursive approach to causal explanation (proper) in a foreign language learning context was conducted by Heikkinen (1999) as a Pro Gradu thesis. More recently, the initial findings of this study have been further developed and reported by Ranta and Kalaja (in press; see also Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001). Heikkinen (1999; Ranta and Kalaja in press; Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001) aimed at identifying different **interpretative repertoires** (see section 4.2.4 for a definition) drawn on by students while giving explanations for their successes and failures in learning English as a foreign language. The study relied on discourse analysis (as presented by Potter and Wetherell 1987; see section 4.2) for methodology, and treated causal explanations as discursive actions following the Discursive Action Model (Edwards and Potter 1992, 1995; see section 4.1). The data consisted of life stories (approx. 5 pages) written by ten university freshmen who studied English as their major or minor subject at the University of Jyväskylä in 1994. It was assumed that explanations for success and failure would be a natural part of such stories.

The coding of the data involved two stages (Heikkinen 1999:42-44). First, all explanations for success and failure in learning English were identified in the data. Heikkinen (1999:44) notes that the explanations were not identified with the help of some explicit marker, such as the conjunction *because*, but the identification involved interpretation on the part of the researcher. An explanation was defined, following Antaki (1994:4), as "some stretch of talk hearable as being a resolution of some problematic state of affairs." Second, the accounts were divided into two groups, one consisting of success accounts (134 passages) and the other of failure accounts (51 passages). To analyse the accounts, the passages of text were read repeatedly in order to find similarities and differences in them, not so much on the basis of the contents of the accounts, but rather on the basis of how the accounts were constructed out of linguistic resources. As a result of this process, Heikkinen (1999) identified a total of five interpretative repertoires that the writers of the life stories had used to explain their successes and failures in learning English. These were 1) the individualistic repertoire, 2) the naturalistic repertoire, 3) the efficiency

repertoire, 4) the institutional repertoire, and 5) the fatalistic repertoire. In the following, the repertoires will be briefly presented.

According to Heikkinen (1999:47), explanations given in the individualistic repertoire emphasized the role of individual qualities, such as talent, in learning a foreign language, as opposed to, for instance, studying hard in order to learn. Thus, success was considered to be caused by possessing certain inborn qualities, while not possessing these qualities resulted in failure. The learners' individual qualities were also often contrasted with those of others which, as Heikkinen (1999:55) points out, gave the writers of the life stories an opportunity to emphasize their status as individuals.

The naturalistic repertoire, in turn, depicted language learning as a natural process that took place in a natural social context where a foreign language was **acquired** rather than **studied** (Heikkinen 1999:55). The language learner was not considered an individual with certain qualities as in the individualistic repertoire, but rather an active participant in social interaction. The reason for succeeding in learning English was thus considered to be the opportunity to practice English in an active social environment, whereas failure was explained by the lack of these opportunities (Heikkinen 1999:61). In the ten life stories analysed in this study it was found that success was most frequently explained drawing on this repertoire (Heikkinen 1999:94).

The third repertoire, the efficiency repertoire, emphasized the learner's own responsibility in learning English (Heikkinen 1999:61). Learning was seen as hard work requiring dedication and effort from the learner. Thus, success was considered to be the reward of working hard, while failure was said to be caused by insufficient effort. Interestingly, Heikkinen (1999:71) notes that the writers talk about learning in terms comparable to economics, as if they were investing their effort into learning and expecting profits in return.

In contrast with the efficiency repertoire where the learner was depicted as an active agent responsible for the learning outcome, the learner in the institutional repertoire was described as a passive recipient of information

(Heikkinen 1999:71). In this repertoire, the institutional learning environment, including teachers, teaching methods and materials etc., was given credit for success in learning English, as well as blamed for failure. Heikkinen (1999:74-75) remarks that an inanimate object, such as a book, was often given the agent position in the accounts. In this way, the writers of the life stories denied having any responsibility over their own learning. Interestingly, failure in learning English was most frequently explained drawing on this repertoire (Heikkinen 1999:95).

The last of the repertoires, the fatalistic repertoire, was similar to the institutional repertoire in the sense that its learner image was also passive. However, whereas the institutional repertoire placed the learning environment as the agent of learning, the fatalistic repertoire emphasizes the mystical role of fate or fortune in learning (Heikkinen 1999:80-81). Succeeding or failing in learning English was thus seen as a matter of good or bad luck, and consequently the role of the learner's own efforts and personal characteristics were irrelevant (Heikkinen 1999:81).

Heikkinen (1999:105) emphasizes that the five repertoires identified in the study are in no way generalizable; they only illustrate the different ways in which one specific group on language learners talked (or wrote, more specifically) about their successes and failures in learning English. Further, as Ranta and Kalaja (in press) point out, the findings are based on the interpretation made by the researcher. However, the study has important implications for attribution theory. Ranta and Kalaja (in press) list several points in which traditional attribution theory and the discursive approach to causal explanation differ. First, attributions are seen as cognitive models residing in our heads, whereas discursive explanations are ways of using language. Second, attributions are predetermined and fixed in number, whereas discursive explanations are formed in contrast to each other and therefore their number cannot be fixed beforehand. Third, Ranta and Kalaja (in press) emphasize that unlike attribution research, the discursive research of this kind does not aim at forming a theory or a model. Since each explanation is treated

as unique and not forced into some preformed category, the discursive approach seems to offer a new perspective on causal explanation.

Finally, Ranta and Kalaja (in press) suggest that explanations for success and failure should receive more attention in EFL classrooms. According to them, learners would benefit from comparing their explanations with those of others and thus becoming aware of the wide range of contributing factors in learning. The teacher's important task would be to draw attention to the factors that the learners can indeed control, such as attitude and effort.

Heikkinen's (1999) study showed that the discursive approach does indeed offer a new fruitful perspective to the study of causal explanation in a foreign language learning context. Encouraged by this, the present study was also conducted from discursive perspective. The present study is introduced in detail in the following chapter 6.

6 THE PRESENT STUDY

The purpose of the present study was to look into the explanations for success and failure in learning or using English as a foreign language produced by hard-of-hearing learners/users of English in narrative discourse. The mainstream positivist approach to attributions (Weiner 1986), however, did not seem to offer the best possible framework for the present study. As seen in chapter 3, classic attribution theory has been criticized by various scholars (e.g Antaki 1994, Edwards and Potter 1995) for a number of reasons. For example, its methodology that largely consist of experiments carried out in laboratory conditions has been accused of producing reductive and decontextualized findings. Further, the theory seems to disregard the constructive nature of language, treating it solely as a means of accessing something else, such as cognition.

In order to avoid the problems faced by mainstream research on attributions, the present study adopted a discursive approach to causal explanation. The framework for studying attributions within the discursive approach has been provided by Edwards and Potter (1992, 1995) in their Discursive Action Model (see section 4.1). Explanations in DAM are considered interested discursive actions that occur as a natural part of everyday discourse. The aim of research is to study the rhetorical design of discourse. The focus is thus purely on discourse itself and not on something else behind it, such as cognition. For these reasons the DAM was considered a particularly suitable framework for the present study, the purpose of which was to study naturally occurring causal explanation. Discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987) was chosen as the method of analysing the data because it is based on the same constructivist paradigm as the DAM.

Another reason for choosing the discursive approach was the fact that it has yet been relatively little applied to the study of causal explanation. However, in the field of second or foreign language learning, some pioneer studies (Heikkinen 1999; Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001; Ranta and Kalaja in press) have showed that the discursive approach indeed does offer a new fruitful way of investigating

causal explanation. Further, the fact that the discursive approach has not knowingly been applied to research on hard-of-hearing foreign language learners further encouraged the choice of the approach. It was believed that the discursive approach would allow the hard-of-hearing learners' own constructions about language learning to emerge from discourse and thus the perspective of hard-of-hearing learner could be foregrounded.

6.1 Research question

The present study examined the discourse produced in life stories written by hard-of-hearing learners/users of English as a foreign language. More specifically, the study looked into how the writers of the life stories explained their failures and successes in learning or using English. Importantly, the focus of the study was purely on language – no attempt was made to access the writers' minds. In a nutshell, the aim of the study was to identify the different interpretative repertoires, i.e. coherent sets of terms, metaphors and grammatical features, that the writers drew on in their explanations. In the identification of the repertoires, special attention was paid to the role of hearing in the explanations. Further, the interpretative repertoires were compared with each other in order to shed light on the differences and similarities between them, and some hypotheses about the functions of the repertoires were made.

6.2 Data collection

The data of the present study were collected in the form of life stories, following the encouraging example of Heikkinen (1999; Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001; Ranta and Kalaja in press). Her study showed that the kind of narrative discourse produced in life stories was a generous source of spontaneous causal explanation.

The data were collected in January – April 2002. Most of the volunteer writers were members of an e-mail group which serves as a meeting place for young Finnish hard-of-hearing adults. In addition, one writer was contacted through mutual acquaintances. Some of the writers were students while others already

had careers. All the writers had received formal instruction in English within the Finnish school system. Some had begun studying English already in primary school as their first foreign language (language A), some in lower secondary school as a second (language B) or third (language C) foreign language. In addition, most of the writers had also studied English as a part of their vocational or university education, or more informally, for example, in adult education centres. The writers of the life stories did not form a particularly homogenous group of people. However, from the point of view of discourse analysis this does not cause a problem. As Potter and Wetherell (1987:161) note, the main interest of discourse analysis lies on the language used by people, not on the people using the language. Consequently, the heterogeneity of the writers was seen just as a possible source of variation in the language used in the life stories, which, from the perspective of discourse analysis, was welcomed as an interesting phenomenon.

The volunteer writers were provided with an instruction sheet on how to write a life story (see Appendix), which was an adaptation of the one used by Heikkinen (1999). In the instructions, a life story was defined as a chronological text in which the writer reflects on her/his experiences in learning English as a foreign language. The suggested length of the life story was at least two typed pages with no upper limit set. The writers were encouraged to write freely and informally, as if they were writing a letter to a friend. To help the writers get started, some trigger question were provided (*What was it like to study English in primary school, lower/upper secondary school?*, *What was hard/easy?*, *What were the teachers like?*, *Describe some positive/negative learning experiences in detail.*). However, it was clearly stated that the writers were not obligated to answer these questions if they did not find them relevant. The aim of these quite loose instructions was to keep the researcher influence to a minimum, allowing the writers to write about whatever they found relevant and thus to obtain discourse that is as natural and diverse as possible. Further, it was promised that the writers' identity would not be revealed in the study. This was also believed to encourage the writers to write as freely as possible without too much editing. Accordingly, all the

names of people and places as well as dates mentioned in the life stories have been replaced with expressions such as [NAME], [PLACE], [YEAR].

In the end, eleven life stories were received, 42 typed pages altogether. The length of the life stories ranged from one page to eight pages, the average being a little less than four pages. The sample size may seem quite small. However, as Potter and Wetherell (1987:161) point out, small sample sizes are favoured in discourse analysis due to the laborious nature of the analysis itself. According to them, too much data may hinder the emergence of linguistic detail from the data. Thus, a large amount of data does not necessarily result in a more adequate analysis but instead, as Potter and Wetherell (1987:161) note, it can just add to the work load without adding anything to the analysis itself. Consequently, the eleven life stories were considered an adequate amount of data for the purposes of the present study.

6.3 Coding

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:167), the purpose of coding in discourse analysis is "to squeeze an unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks." In other words, coding is a selective process in which relevant passages of discourse are identified in the data. Coding is thus a preliminary procedure preparing the data for a more detailed analysis.

As Potter and Wetherell (1987:167) point out, what should be coded out is dependent on the aim of the study itself. In the present study, the aim was to look into the explanations for failure and success in learning or using English that the hard-of-hearing writers produced in their life stories. Consequently, in the present study the coding involved carefully reading and re-reading the data in order to look for accounts of failure or success which also included a causal explanation. However, before the actual coding it was necessary to define what was meant by an explanation as well as what was to be considered a failure or a success.

In the present study, an explanation was regarded as a discursive action, following Edwards and Potter's (1992, 1995) Discursive Action Model (see section 4.1). Accordingly, the writers of the life stories were considered to use language in order to achieve certain outcomes. Consequently, also the explanations provided by the writers were considered motivated by something and made in someone's interest. As Edwards and Potter (1995:89) point out, in order to manage this interestedness, explanations are often disguised as factual reports and descriptions. Therefore, it was neither possible nor meaningful to provide a clear-cut definition of an explanation. Further, since the present study relied on discourse analysis (e.g. Potter and Wetherell 1987) for methodology, it was crucial to examine discourse in its own right without imposing any preformed definitions or categories on it. Accordingly, in the present study an explanation was defined very loosely, following Antaki (1994:4), as "some stretch of talk hearable as being a resolution of some problematic state of affairs." Thus, an explanation was not defined according to, for example, some lexical markers, such as conjunctions (*because*, *since*) or other kinds of constructions that denote causality (*as a result, consequently*). Instead, identifying an explanation was considered more a question of examining the relationships accounts have with each other. Further, as suggested by the wording *hearable as* in Antaki's (1994:4) definition, identifying an explanation was considered to involve some interpretation. Examples (i) and (ii), both taken from the same life story, illustrate the kinds of explanations identified in the life stories.

> (i) En pärjännyt läheskään aina pareittain käytävissä keskusteluissa, koska luokassa oli samaan aikaan äänessä useampi henkilö, jolloin en saanut selvää parini puheesta. (04F)[1]
>
> I could hardly ever cope in pair discussions because there were more than a few people talking in the classroom at the same time, and consequently I couldn't make out my partner's speech. (04F)
>
> (ii) Lopulta selvitin toisenkin kurssin rimaa hipoen. Olin ylpeä itsestäni. (04F)
>
> Finally I managed to pass the second course, too, but only just. I was proud of myself. (04F)

[1] The codes at the ends of example passages indicate the number assigned to each writer (e.g 04) and the writer's gender (F = female, M = male). The original passage of a life story, written in Finnish, is always followed by an English translation.

It is fairly easy to identify the explanation in example (i). The conjunction *koska* (*because*) clearly denotes causality and thus serves as an explicit lexical marker of a causal explanation. Thus, in example (i), the writer assigns the blame for her failure in a pair discussion assignment to the fact that the listening conditions were not good due to the noise made by other people talking in the classroom. Example (ii), on the other hand, is not as easily identified as containing a causal explanation. Here the writer is describing her success in passing a course in English and there does not seem to be an explicit explanation for this. However, examining the account closely, the writer may be noticed to imply causality by choosing to use the verb *selvitin* (*I managed to pass*). This verb refers to the writer's own effort in passing the course and consequently it seems that the writer is crediting herself for her success. Identifying an explanation thus demands sensitivity to the linguistic choices the writers make while using language. It is important to note that had the present study defined an explanation in a fixed way, for example as beginning with the conjunction *because* (cf. Antaki and Naji 1987), only example (i) would have been identified as an explanation, whereas example (ii) would have been left unnoticed.

From the point of view of the present study, it was also important to decide what was meant by a failure and a success. In discursive research, language is regarded as a construction site where different versions of reality are constructed (see section 3.2). Accordingly, in the present study failures and successes were also considered to be constructed by the writers. Therefore, there could be no outside criteria for a failure or a success, but the writers themselves defined their failures and successes in their life stories. For example, in example (i), the writer defines failure as not coping in a pair discussion, whereas in example (ii) she defines success as passing a course. Both these examples seem to refer to what may be called academic achievement. However, many other kinds of definitions for failure and success were identified in the life stories. Examples (iii) and (iv) illustrate some of these definitions.

> (iii) Varsinaisesti olen oppinut käyttämään kieltä monilla Inter-Rail matkoillani yksin liikenteessä. Oli pakko tulla toimeen englannilla, joten siinä sitä oppi. (10F)
>
> As a matter of fact, I have learned to use the language during the many Inter-Rail trips I made on my own. I had to manage in English, so that's how I learned it. (10F)
>
> (iv) Osasin itse puhua englantia ymmärrettävästi, mutta en itse saanut mitään selvää. (04F)
>
> I myself knew how to speak English understandably, but I myself couldn't make out anything. (04F)

In example (iii) the writer defines success as being able to use English functionally in everyday situations that may be encountered, for example, while travelling abroad. Example (iv), in turn, is an account of failure, and it seems that the writer defines failure as not being able to make out other people's speech, i.e. not hearing properly. What was considered a failure and a success thus varied from one situation to another.

The actual coding involved carefully reading and rereading the life stories in order to identify accounts of failure or success that included an expression of cause. This process produced two files, one for accounts of failure and the other for accounts of success. Both files contained close to a hundred accounts. Giving actual numbers proved to be quite difficult since it was not always clear where one account ended and another began. However, since the present study is qualitative and descriptive in nature, this was not considered a problem. The length of the accounts also varied considerably. At their shortest they were constructed out of only a few words, whereas on the other hand they could comprise a whole paragraph. The accounts of failure and success that were identified in the process of coding served as the starting point of the actual analysis.

6.4 Analysis

As pointed out by Potter and Wetherell (1987:168), discourse cannot be analysed in a mechanical way. Rather, the analysis involves close inspection of the relevant accounts by reading them repeatedly and paying special attention to the linguistic details that appear in them. The aim of the analysis is to identify patterns of language use in the data. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:168), these patterns appear both as variability and consistency. In other words, the accounts are compared in order to find differences and similarities in them. They further point out that the analysis should also include making hypotheses about the function or consequences of the various ways of using language.

In the present study, the analysis was conducted following the guidelines provided by Potter and Wetherell (1987:168-169). Accordingly, the accounts of success and failure identified in the coding stage were taken as the starting point of the analysis. These accounts were carefully read and reread in order to find patterns of language use in the explanations the writers gave for their failures and successes in learning or using English. In other words, an attempt was made to identify the interpretative repertoires the writers drew on in order to explain their failures and successes. Importantly, attention was paid on the actual language used in the life stories. Accordingly, similarities and differences were not identified solely on the basis of the content of the accounts but, more importantly, on the basis of how the explanations were constructed out of linguistic resources. **What** was said was thus considered less important than **how** it was said. During the analysis, the following question were kept in mind: 1) What is the role of hearing in the explanation, 2) What is the role of the learner/user, 3) What is the role of the environment? When the identification of the interpretative repertoires was completed, some hypotheses about their use were formed.

7 FINDINGS

This chapter will present the findings of the present study. First, the interpretative repertoires identified in the study will be introduced and illustrated one by one. Second, the main features of the interpretative repertoires will be summarized and the differences and similarities in the repertoires will be discussed. Finally, some observations will be made about the approximate frequency of the repertoires.

7.1 The interpretative repertoires

The analysis of the explanations for failure and success in learning or using English identified in the eleven life stories resulted in the identification of ten interpretative repertoires. Five of the repertoires constructed hearing as a relevant factor in learning or using English. These were **the auditory repertoire**, **the environmental repertoire**, **the special learner repertoire**, **the responsibility repertoire** and **the specialist repertoire**. The other five repertoires did not construct hearing as relevant for learning or using English. These repertoires were **the talent repertoire**, **the chance repertoire**, **the effort repertoire**, **the school repertoire** and **the naturalistic repertoire**. Sections 7.1.1 – 7.1.10 will introduce and illustrate the ten interpretative repertoires in detail.

7.1.1 The auditory repertoire

The auditory repertoire is almost exclusively used to explain failures in learning English at school or in using English to communicate with other people. In the data analysed, there are only a couple of accounts of success that can be analysed as examples of the auditory repertoire. The basic idea of the auditory repertoire is that the writers of the life stories construct their explanations for failure (or success) in learning or using English on the auditory sense. In other words, poor hearing is blamed for failures or adequate hearing is credited for successes. The learner in this repertoire is constructed as rather passive and powerless, the sense of hearing being a characteristic that

the learner cannot control. Further, the environment where English is learned or used does not bear any significance in the explanations within this repertoire. Learning or using English successfully is thus dependent only on hearing or not hearing properly.

Linguistically, the typical features of the auditory repertoire include vocabulary that has to do with hearing (*kuulo, kuulovamma, kuulla, saada selvää*) as well as vocabulary (especially verbs) that denotes the powerlessness of the learner/user (*missasin, en pystynyt, en kykene*). In addition, comparative structures are sometimes used in order to highlight the difference between a hard-of-hearing English learner/user and a learner/user with normal hearing.

The example passages that follow are meant to illustrate how the auditory repertoire is used to explain failures (or success) in learning or using English. The analyses that follow each example passage attempt to draw attention to the typical features of the auditory repertoire visible in the accounts. Further, in some cases, an attempt is made to look more closely at how the accounts are constructed to highlight the role of hearing, for example, by ruling out alternative explanations.

Failures. Example (1) can quite easily be identified as an example of the use of the auditory repertoire in explaining a failure in learning English at school.

> (1) Jälkeenpäin olen ajatellut, että missasin todella paljon kielten tunnilla juuri kuuloni takia. Ihme, että musta ei tullut häirikköä, sillä tunnit olivat yleisesti ottaen tylsiä koska en pystynyt seuraamaan. (08F)
>
> Afterwards I have thought that I missed really a lot in class indeed because of my hearing. It's a miracle that I didn't become a troublemaker because the lessons were usually boring because I wasn't able to follow/keep up. (08F)

In this passage, the writer of one of the life stories is quite clearly blaming her hearing for failing in learning English at school. More specifically, she defines failure as missing information and not being able to follow the teaching in class. The passage contains several features that are typical of the auditory repertoire (although a part of it can also be analysed as an example of the chance repertoire, see section 7.1.7). First and most obviously, the writer uses

the word *kuuloni* (*my hearing*) in her explanation. She quite clearly states that it was her hearing that caused her to miss information in class. Interestingly, by adding the expression *juuri* (*indeed*) she is able to construct her account in a way that leaves no room for alternative explanations for her failure. She failed **indeed** because of her hearing (*juuri kuuloni takia*) and not for any other reason. The second feature of the auditory repertoire visible in this passage is that the writer uses two verbs in connection with herself that denote powerlessness*: missasin* (*I missed*) and *en pystynyt* (*I wasn't able to*). This creates an impression that the writer herself could not affect her learning in class, which is typical of explanations drawing on the auditory repertoire. Her impaired hearing is thus presented as an insurmountable obstacle that caused her to miss a lot of information and prevented her from following the instruction. Such is the case also in example (2). However, here the writer is not describing a formal learning situation but he is talking about "real life" situations that require using English.

> (2) Minulla itselläni suurimmat vaikeudet tulevat puhutun englannin ymmärtämisessä yleensäkin. Kertakaikkiaan ei meinaa saada kaikista sanoista selvää ja tilanteet muodostuvat täten kiusallisiksi. (05M)
>
> I myself face biggest problems in understanding spoken English in general. I simply don't seem to be able to make out all the words and thus the situations become awkward. (05M)

In this example, the writer is telling about his failure in understanding spoken English and also provides an explanation for this failure drawing on the auditory repertoire. Basically, the writer explains his failure by not being able to hear properly what is said. Linguistically, the explanation is constructed on the expression *saada selvää* (*make out*) which refers to one aspect of hearing, i.e. distinguishing words or sounds clearly from each other instead of hearing a blur of inarticulate sounds. The culpability of the poor sense of hearing in the failure is further underlined by using the expression *kertakaikkiaan* (*simply*). It creates an impression that no matter how big an effort the writer of the life story is making to listen attentively he will not be able to make out what is said. Yet another point of interest in this account is the fact that the writer does not use the first person singular form (*en meinaa saada selvää*) in the explanation but instead the third person singular form (*ei meinaa saada selvää*)

as if he were talking about someone else. This could be a way of distancing himself from any responsibility for the failure. The writer possibly uses the third person form in order to emphasize that he himself cannot control his hearing and consequently cannot be held accountable for failing in a situation that requires listening to spoken English.

Explanations drawing on the auditory repertoire thus blame poor hearing for failures in using or learning English. Although the sense of hearing is a personal characteristic, it is one that the person cannot control. Therefore, it is possible to blame the sense of hearing for a failure without blaming the self. Consequently, as seen in example (2), the accounts can be constructed in a way that denies or minimizes the responsibility of the language learner/user, thus emphasizing the role of the hearing. In the example above, this was done by choosing a particular verb form. The minimization of the writer's own responsibility can also be seen in example (3). However, here it is done in a different way.

> (3) Osasin itse puhua englantia ymmärrettävästi, mutta en itse saanut mitään selvää. (04F)
>
> I myself knew how to speak English understandably, but I myself couldn't make out anything. (04F)

In this example, one of the writers of the life stories is describing an incident that took place during a holiday abroad. The account could, in fact, be analysed as partly a success account and partly a failure account. First, the writer constructs herself as an able person. She states that she knew how to speak English understandably (*Osasin itse puhua englantia ymmärrettävästi*). The use of the verb *osasin* (*I knew*) creates an impression that there is nothing wrong with her skills in speaking English. Apparently, the writer is constructing her account in a way that denies any personal responsibility for the subsequent failure. Since there is nothing wrong with her skills, the cause of failure must be something that she herself has no control over. Again, the writer of the life story resorts to the auditory repertoire. The blame for the failure is assigned to the poor hearing: she is unable to hear what the other person is saying (*en itse saanut mitään selvää*). Again, when describing a

failure, the writer uses the expression *saada selvää* (*make out*) that refers to the sense of hearing. The effect is further emphasized by adding the expression *mitään* (*anything*).

Examples (2) and (3) have been constructed in a way that, in addition to blaming the impaired hearing for failures, deny the learner/user's own responsibility for the failure. As seen in example (3), the language user's skills in English are irrelevant for the failure. The learner/user is thus powerless with regard to the failure, which is typically the role assigned to the learner/user in the auditory repertoire. Example (4) below illustrates the role of the learning environment in explanations drawing on the auditory repertoire.

> (4) Muistan kuinka englanninopettajani kuuntelutti nauhaa luokan edessä viiteenkin kertaan, mutta en vain saanut selvää. (10F)
>
> I remember how my English teacher played the tape in front of the classroom as many as five times but I just couldn't make it out. (10F)

In this example, the writer is describing her difficulties in learning English at school before anyone, including herself, was aware of her difficulties in hearing. The writer constructs her account so that she first describes the efforts made by her English teacher, who tried to give her opportunities to succeed in listening tasks. According to her, the teacher played the tape repeatedly (*englanninopettajani kuuntelutti nauhaa luokan edessä viiteenkin kertaan*). However, despite the opportunity of listening the same text for a number of times the writer of the life story failed in the listening task, and the failure is explained in auditory terms. Once again, the key word that makes it possible to identify this explanations as belonging to the auditory repertoire is the verb *saada selvää* (*make out*). The writer states she just could not make out the text played from the tape (*en vain saanut selvää*). Thus, it had no significance how many times the teacher played the tape or how big an effort the writer of the life story made to listen to it. The failure was caused by the fact that her sense of hearing was not working properly. However, by describing the teacher playing the tape repeatedly, the writer is able to rule out the option that her teacher or the learning environment in general were somehow responsible for her failure.

So far the example passages have all contained an explicit reference to hearing, such as the noun *kuulo* (*hearing*) or verbs such as the verb *saada selvää* (*make out*). The next example, in contrast, does not contain any words directly linked to hearing. However, it can still be analysed as an example of the auditory repertoire.

> (5) Muistan miten ärsyttävää oli jos lukiossa maikka oli valinnut nauhan, joka kesti 20 minsaa, täytettiin aukkokohtia tekstissä ja keskusteltiin aiheesta. Minä tipahdin heti tällasesta. Toisinaan luokkatoverit näyttivät sormella, että missä mennään. Seuraavan stopin jälkeen olin taas väärällä rivillä ja koko homma perseessä. (08F)
>
> I remember how irritating it was in upper secondary school when the teacher had chosen a tape that took 20 minutes, we filled in the blank spaces in the text and discussed the subject. I lost track of it immediately. Sometimes my classmates pointed where we were. After the next pause I was in the wrong line again and the whole thing sucked. (08F)

Here the writer of one of the life stories is describing her failure in doing a certain kind of an exercise that involved listening. Although this account does not explicitly mention hearing, the writer still manages to construct her account in a way that makes it quite evident that her hearing is to be blamed for the failure. First, the writer starts her account by describing a task that involves a tape and thus listening, and expresses her dislike of such exercises. Second, to describe her performance in the exercise she uses the metaphorical expression *tipahdin heti tällasesta* (*I lost track of it immediately*). This suggests that she was not able to follow the sounds coming from the tape. The use of the verb *tipahtaa* (*lose track*) also creates an impression that something happens to her rather than she makes something happen. In other words, she cannot control what is happening to her, which is one of the basic features of the auditory repertoire. She goes on to describe how her classmates tried to help her by pointing her the right line in the text but how she lost track again right after the next pause. By describing this second failure of the same kind in the same short passage of text the writer is able to further emphasize her powerlessness and frustration in the situation. Further, the writer also seems to construct herself as different from other people. To mention that the classmates sometimes pointed her the right line in the text suggests that the classmates were able to do something that she herself was not able to do, i.e. to hear. In example (6) this

contrast between a hard-of-hearing person and people with normal hearing is made more explicit.

> (6) Olin niin kateellinen kaikille normaalikuuloisille, jotka pystyvät noin vaan kuuntelemaan englantia, kun minä taas tuskailin niinä hetkinä. (02F)
>
> I was so envious of all the normally hearing people, who were able to listen to English just like that whereas I was agonizing during those moments. (02F)

In this example passage, the writer is describing her difficulties in doing listening exercises at school. To explain these difficulties she draws on the auditory repertoire, i.e. blames her hearing for them. This is done in an interesting way. First, the writer states that she was envious of a group of people who she characterizes as *normally hearing* (*Olin kateellinen kaikille normaalikuuloisille*). Then she states that these people were able to listen to English *just like that* (*noin vain*), which creates an impression of absolute easiness. Finally, using the conjunction *whereas* (*kun taas*) to mark a comparative structure, the writer contrast herself with these normally hearing people, telling that she was *agonizing* (*tuskailin*) while doing these exercises, which clearly denotes extreme difficulty. This suggests that her difficulties were caused by her not being able to hear well.

Success. So far all the example passages analysed have been accounts of failure in learning or using English. However, even though the auditory repertoire is usually used to explain failures, it can also be used to explain successes in learning or using English. In these few cases, good or adequate hearing is credited for succeeding in learning or using English. Example (7) illustrates this.

> (7) Englannin aloitin jo ensimmäisenä kielenä joten pohja oli jo rakennettu ennen kuin kuulo alkoi vaikuttaa. (10F)
>
> I started English already as my first language so the foundation had already been laid before the hearing started to have an influence. (10F)

Here the writer of one of the life stories is explaining her success in learning English, drawing on the auditory repertoire. She tells that she started to learn English as her first (foreign) language, which means that she was about ten

years old at the time. Apparently, she did have a fair amount of time, possibly even some years, to learn English *before the hearing started to have an influence* (*ennen kuin kuulo alkoi vaikuttaa*). This suggests that hearing is essential to the successful learning of English. The writer has been successful in learning English because *the foundation had already been laid* (*pohja oli jo rakennettu*) while her hearing was still adequate. The writer thus constructs her account in a way that foregrounds the role of hearing in learning English.

To conclude, the auditory repertoire is used to explain failures in learning or using English with poor hearing, or to explain successes with good or adequate hearing. However, this repertoire is much more frequently used to explain failures than successes. There are several features that are typical of the auditory repertoire. First, as can be seen in the examples analysed above, accounts drawing on the auditory repertoire contain vocabulary linked to hearing (*kuulo, normaalikuuloinen, saada selvää*). Second, many verbs used in connection with the writer her/himself denote powerlessness (*missasin, en pystynyt, tipahdin*). Thus the learner/user in this repertoire is constructed as quite helpless and unable to control her/his performance in situations requiring learning or using English. It is also typical of the auditory repertoire that the accounts are constructed in a way that rules out other possible explanations for failures, such as lack of skills (example 3) or lack of opportunities to learn (example 4). Consequently, successful language learning/using is constructed as dependent on hearing. One possible function of the auditory repertoire could be to emphasize the effect that the impaired hearing has on learning English in a formal context as well as using it in everyday interaction.

7.1.2 The environmental repertoire

In the environmental repertoire, various learner-external matters – such as the learning environment, other people, hearing aids or the English language itself – are blamed for failures in communicating in English or, alternatively, credited for succeeding in it. These learner-external matters can often have a direct effect on hearing. For example, the noisiness of a classroom can be blamed for making hearing more difficult. Alternatively, the learner-external

factors can be linked to the sense of sight to which a hard-of-hearing person resorts in communication situations. For instance, a person with clear lip movements can be credited for making it easier to make out speech. Hindering or facilitating communication, in turn, causes the failure or success in learning or using English. The sense of hearing is a relevant matter in the explanations drawing on the environmental repertoire. However, it is not the only explaining factor for a failure or a success, as in the auditory repertoire. Rather, explanations drawing on the environmental repertoire are constructed in ways that assign blame or credit – not to hearing itself – but to factors that have an effect on hearing or communication in general. Successful communication is thus dependent on various learner-external factors. Even hearing is conditional since it can depend on, for example, how clearly a person articulates or how much noise there is in the environment. In the environmental repertoire, the learner/user is, similarly to the auditory repertoire, depicted as rather passive and powerless as s/he cannot control her/his hearing nor the features of the physical context, other people etc. In contrast, the environment of learning/using English, which was irrelevant in the auditory repertoire, is more important in the environmental repertoire. In fact, it is often the environment itself (e.g. listening conditions, other people) that either hinders or facilitates communication and, consequently, causes failure or success in learning/using English.

The most typical feature of the environmental repertoire is that the accounts are often constructed by describing the physical context, other people, hearing aids and the English language. These are given some unfavourable or favourable features. For example, a classroom can be described as noisy, other people as inarticulate or silent, hearing aids as intensifying noises. Hearing being a relevant matter in the environmental repertoire, vocabulary related to it can also be found in the accounts (*kuulo, kuulolaite, kuulla, saada selvää*). Further, vocabulary referring to the fact that hard-of-hearing people resort to the sense of sight while talking with somebody is also present (*huulet, huulio, lukea huulilta, kehon kieli*). Examples (8) – (12) illustrate the use of the environmental repertoire.

Failures. In example (8), the writer is describing the difficulties she had in pair discussion exercises at school and also explains these difficulties drawing on the environmental repertoire.

> (8) Silloin en nähnyt ongelmia muussa kuin parikeskusteluissa. Niissä parini oli useimmiten hiljainen tyttö, jonka ääntä en kuullut edes rauhallisissa olosuhteissa saati luokassa, missä kaikki höpöttävät yhteen ääneen omaa juttuansa. (04F)
>
> At that time I had no problems in anything except in pair discussions. In these my partner was usually a silent girl whose voice I didn't hear even in quiet conditions, let alone in a classroom where everybody is chattering away with their own stuff. (04F)

In the explanation provided by the writer, there is a direct reference to hearing in *I didn't hear* (*en kuullut*). Hearing is thus relevant. However, in contrast to the auditory repertoire, not hearing is further explained. In this account, the writer in fact provides two reasons for not hearing. The first reason has to do with her partner whom she describes as *a silent girl* (*hiljainen tyttö*), a characteristic that is hardly favourable from the point of view of a hard-of-hearing person. The writer further aggravates this characteristic by stating that she could not have heard her even in favourable listening conditions. This brings her to the second reason for her difficulties. The pair discussion exercises took place *in a classroom where everybody is chattering away with their own stuff* (*luokassa, missä kaikki höpöttävät yhteen ääneen omaa juttuansa*), which made hearing even more difficult. The writer's failing in pair discussions in English is thus not directly dependent on her impaired hearing but rather on the unfavourable characteristics of her partner and the physical environment.

Example (9), in turn, illustrates how another learner-external factor, the hearing aid, may be blamed for a failure in learning English.

> (9) Ammiksesta muistan sen kamalan äänneharjoituksen ”Sheila, she sells seashells at the shore” jota en ikinä oppinut sanomaan oikein. Minulla on aina ollut kuulolaitteina sellaiset vehkeet jotka vahvistavat suhinaääniä muutenkin joten kyseinen lause oli ihan mahdoton. (01F)
>
> In polytechnic I remember the hideous speech exercise “Sheila, she sells seashells at the shore” that I never learned to pronounce correctly. I have always had hearing aids that intensify sibilant sounds in any case so the phrase in question was just impossible. (01F)

In this account the writer of one of the life stories is telling about her failure to learn the right pronunciation of sibilants in a speech exercise. As she states, she never learned to pronounce the exercise correctly. In fact, she comes to the conclusion that learning to pronounce the phrase in question was *just impossible* (*ihan mahdotonta*). To explain this impossibility she draws on the environmental repertoire. According to her, the failure was caused by *hearing aids that intensify sibilant sounds* (*kuulolaitteina sellaiset vehkeet jotka vahvistavat suhinaääniä*). Thus again in this account of failure, the role of hearing is relevant as *hearing aid* is clearly a term associated with auditory difficulties. However, the writer does not blame her hearing for the failure, but constructs her account in a way that clearly assigns blame to the hearing aid which, because of its tendency to intensify certain sounds, has an unfavourable effect on hearing. The writer does not seem to have much control over the situation, since she cannot affect the features of her hearing aid. Further, she says that she has *always* (*aina*) had these kinds of hearing aids, which may suggest that they have been prescribed to her rather than she choosing them herself. Thus, she is not responsible for the failure caused by her hearing aids.

The English language contains several sounds that are not a part of the Finnish sound system. For a hard-of-hearing person, learning to identify these sounds is often more difficult than for an average learner. In the life stories analysed in the present study, several references to this were identified. Example (10) illustrates how the features of the English language can be constructed as the reason for a failure.

> (10) Vaikeimmat kirjaimet olivat alussa c ja th. Edellisestä en osannut sanoa äännetäänkö se ässänä vai koona ja jälempi tuli monesti niin pehmeänä (something) että se juuri ja juuri kuului. (01F)
>
> At the beginning, the most difficult letters were c and th. I couldn't tell whether the former should be pronounced as s or k and the latter was often so soft (something) that it could barely be heard. (01F)

In example (10), the writer of one of the life stories is telling about the problems she had with learning the pronunciation of English sounds at the beginning of her studies. First, she explains her problem with the letter *c* by telling that she *couldn't tell* (*en osannut sanoa*) whether to choose one pronunciation or another. This may be interpreted as a reference to poor hearing, in which case the writer would be drawing on the auditory repertoire.[2] However, the most interesting part of the account from the point of view of the environmental repertoire is the way in which the writer explains her problems with the sound represented by the combination *th*. According to her, the sound *was often so soft (something) that it could barely be heard* (*tuli monesti niin pehmeänä (something) että se juuri ja juuri kuului*). The sound is characterized as soft and thus hard to make out, which evidently is an unfavourable feature from the point of view of a hard-of-hearing listener. However, the most interesting point is the writer's choice of verb (to which the English translation does not do justice). She chooses to use the verb *kuulua* (*be heard/audible*). According to her, the sound *could barely be heard* (*juuri ja juuri kuului*), which refers to the audibility of the sound. Had she used the verb *kuulla* (*hear*), as in *I could barely hear it* (*juuri ja juuri kuulin sen*), she would have sent a different message, giving more importance to her ability to hear. Thus, by using a particular verb, the writer manages to construct her account in a way that assigns blame for her difficulties to the feature of the sound, and not to her sense of hearing.

So far the example passages have illustrated how the environmental repertoire can be used to explain failures in learning English. In example (8), the blame for not hearing properly and thus not succeeding in learning English was

[2] On the other hand, it is also possible to interpret the expression *I couldn't tell* (*en osannut sanoa*) as referring to lack of knowledge, in which case the choice of repertoire would have to be reconsidered.

assigned to a characteristic of a fellow student and the unsuitability of the physical environment. Example (9), in turn, illustrated how certain features of the hearing aid can be held responsible for not succeeding in a speech exercise. Finally, in example (10), the features of a particular sound were blamed for making learning difficult.

Successes. The environmental repertoire can also be resorted to in order to explain successes in learning or using English, as can be seen in examples (11) and (12) below.

> (11) Olin matkalla todennut, etten saa muiden puheesta selvää, mutta kälyni ja hänen enonsa puhuivat niin selvästi ja niin helppoa englantia, että pärjäsin heidän kanssaan edes jotenkuten. (04F)
>
> During the trip I had noticed that I can't make out other people's speech, but my sister-in-law and her uncle spoke so clearly and so simple English that I could cope with them at least somehow. (04F)

In example (11), the writer explains her rather unexpected success in making out spoken English. Unexpected, because based on her past experience she had concluded that she was not able to make out other people's speech in English. She uses the verb *make out* (*saada selvää*) which clearly refers to the sense of hearing. Consequently, it seems that her past failures were caused by her hearing. However, the writer's experiences of communicating in English with her sister-in-law and her uncle are more positive, and to explain this she draws on the environmental repertoire. According to her, these two relatives *spoke so clearly and so simple English* (*puhuivat niin selvästi ja niin helppoa englantia*) that she was able to have a conversation with them. Thus the writer is assigning the credit for the success to the sister-in-law and the uncle who spoke *clearly* (*selvästi*) and used *simple English* (*helppoa englantia*), which are favourable ways of using language from a hard-of-hearing person's point of view. A further point of interest with regard to the environmental repertoire is that the verb *speak* (*puhua*) used in connection with the sister-in-law and the uncle is an active one, which helps to create an impression that these two persons had an active role in the writer's success in making out spoken English. As mentioned above, the environment, or the people in it, being constructed as active is typical of the environmental repertoire. The writer thus constructs her

account in a way that assigns credit for her making out spoken English to other people, and not to herself or her hearing.

In example (12), in turn, the writer seems to be thanking the context of communication for his success.

> (12) […] kun näen englantia puhuttavan face to face niin ymmärrän sitä paremmin koska näen lukea huulilta vaikeimmat kohat . Ja aina oikea tilanne on parempi kuin nauhalta tullut monoääninen puhe ..vai mitä . (07M)
>
> […] when I see English being spoken face to face I understand it better because I'm able to read the most difficult parts on the lips. And a real situation is always better than a monotonous voice from a tape .. isn't it. (07M)

Here the writer of one of the life stories is explaining his success in communicating in English in an authentic situation, and also makes a comparison between an authentic situation and a formal learning situation. In his account, he clearly constructs himself as a hard-of-hearing person as he refers to the importance of sight (using the verb *nähdä* (*see*) twice in his account) and lip reading when communicating in spoken English. From his point of view, a favourable situation for communicating in English is one where he can *see English being spoken face to face* (*näen englantia puhuttavan face to face*) because it allows him to *read the most difficult parts on the lips* (*lukea huulilta vaikeimmat kohat*) and consequently understand better. It thus seems that the writer of the life story is drawing on the environmental repertoire because he is crediting the favourable features of an authentic language use situation for his success in communicating in spoken English. He further emphasizes the advantages of an authentic situation by contrasting it with an artificial one, stating that *a real situation is always better than a monotonous voice from a tape* (*aina oikea tilanne on parempi kuin nauhalta tullut monoääninen puhe*).

In conclusion, by drawing on the environmental repertoire, the writer's of the life stories are able to assign blame for failures or credit for successes to learner-external matters. These include the environment of learning or using English, other people, hearing aids and features of the English language in general. These learner-external matters are described as having features that are

either unfavourable or favourable for the successful communication of a hard-of-hearing person. They can either hinder or facilitate hearing, or make it easier or more difficult to use visual cues as a backing of hearing. Consequently, failure or success in learning or using English is constructed as dependent on factors within the environment, not on factors within the individual her/himself. One possible function of the environmental repertoire could be to draw attention to the variety of factors that have an effect on successful communication of a hard-of-hearing person. These should be taken into account, for example, by teachers who have hard-of-hearing students in their classes.

7.1.3 The special learner repertoire

In the special learner repertoire, teachers, teaching methods or the school in general are blamed for the learner not doing well in learning English or, alternatively, credited for doing well. The writers construct themselves as learners who have special needs or limitations because of their impaired hearing. The institutional learning environment either meets or does not meet these needs, which has consequences for the quality of learning. The learner is constructed as rather passive, being at the mercy of teachers, teaching methods and the faceless, institutional system in general. In contrast, the learning environment is constructed as active, since it is the very factor that brings about failure or success in learning English. These descriptions of the special learner repertoire are quite similar to the environmental repertoire introduced in section 7.1.2. However, the fundamental difference between the present repertoire and the environmental repertoire is that the failures and successes in the special learner repertoire are not directly linked to hearing or communication. For example, an explanation within the environmental repertoire could name a noisy classroom as the cause of a learner **not hearing** properly which, in turn, resulted in a failure in a listening task. In contrast, in explanations within the special learner repertoire, failure or success does not result from not hearing or hearing properly. Rather, even though hearing is a relevant matter, failure and success in learning English are constructed as dependent on whether the learning environment acknowledges the special

situation of a hard-of-hearing learner, and how well the learning environment manages to help the learner.

Hearing being relevant in the special learner repertoire, the linguistic markers of this repertoire include vocabulary that has to do with hearing (*kuulo, kuulovamma, kuulla, saada selvää*). Further, as the learning environment has an active role in the explanations within the special learner repertoire, vocabulary linked to the institutional learning environment is also present (*koulu, lukio, yläaste, opettaja, ryhmä, harjoitus*). The choice of verbs also plays an important part in the construction of explanations within the special learner repertoire. Verbs used in connection with the learner often denote powerlessness (*en pärjännyt, en päässyt toimimaan, lensin ulos tunnilta*), whereas the verbs linked to teachers or school in general describe them as active (*opettaja ei suostunut ymmärtämään, opettaja leimasi minut, opettaja halusi kuunnella*). This often creates an effective contrast between the learner and the teacher.

Failures. In example (13), the writer of one of the life stories describes how she as a hard-of-hearing learner experienced English lessons at school in general.

> (13) Mutta jonkinlainen kompleksi mulle on jäänyt niistä tunneista, sillä en päässyt oikeasti toimimaan omien kykyjeni mukaisesti, kuulovammasta ei kukaan tiennyt mitään, olin vaan kummajainen. (08F)
>
> But I've been left with some kind of a complex about those lessons, because I didn't get to really act according to my abilities, nobody knew anything about hearing impairment, I was just an oddity. (08F)

The writer's experiences about learning English at school were not very positive because she did not have the opportunity to act according to her abilities (*en päässyt oikeasti toimimaan omien kykyjeni mukaisesti*). She thus defines failure as underachieving in her studies. To explain this underachievement she draws on the special learner repertoire. Accordingly, the reason for her underachieving was that *nobody knew anything about hearing impairment* (*kuulovammasta ei kukaan tiennyt mitään*), and consequently, she was *just an oddity* (*olin vaan kummajainen*). This suggests that the people

around her, i.e. teachers and other people at school, did not understand the nature of her hearing difficulties, and thus she did not get the help and opportunities she would have needed in order to use all her potential as a language learner. Her underachievement in learning English is thus not caused by the impaired hearing itself (cf. the auditory repertoire), nor by the environment hindering hearing or communications in general (cf. the environmental repertoire), but rather by her teachers and others being ignorant about hearing impairment. The writer constructs herself as powerless in this situation. This can be seen, for example, in the choice of a verb the writer uses in connection with herself. As she states, she did not *get to* (*en päässyt*) act according to her potential. This creates the impression that opportunities to learn are either provided or not provided by the learning environment, the learner her/himself having no control over it.

Example (14) further illustrates the use of the special learner repertoire. The example passage is a part of a longer account where the writer of one of the life stories gives various reasons for her failure in learning English, drawing on various repertoires. However, in example (14), the writer is clearly blaming the institutional learning environment for her difficulties.

> (14) Toisaalta menetelmiin olisin kaivannut lisää yksilöllisiä asioita huomioon ottamista. Sellainen keino on esimerkiksi erilaiset tietokoneohjelmat, joita ei minun käytössäni ole ollut, vaikka niitä oli jo silloin olemassa kuin olen englannin opiskeluni aloittanut. (04F)
>
> On the other hand I wish the methods had taken individual matters into account more. A means for this would have been for example computer programs that were not at my disposal even though they already existed at the time when I started to learn English. (04F)

It seems that the writer was not happy with the methods used in English teaching at school. As she states, she would have wished *the methods had taken individual matters into account more* (*menetelmiin olisin kaivannut lisää yksilöllisiä asioita huomioon ottamista*). This suggest that the methods used did not meet her individual needs as a hard-of-hearing language learner. She goes on to identify computer programs as a means that would possibly have made her learning more successful. However, she notes that they were not at her disposal even though they already existed at the time when she started to learn

English (*ei minun käytössäni ollut, vaikka niitä oli jo silloin olemassa kuin olen englannin opiskeluni aloittanut*). Thus she suggests that the school failed to provide her with adequate means to learn English. To say that these computer programs already existed at that time adds to the responsibility of the school. It creates an impression that the school for some reason did not want her to have the opportunity to use computer programs to learn English, or that the school was indifferent to her needs. The learning environment is thus to blame for her not doing well in English. Again, the writer depicts herself as passive or powerless. For instance, she says that the computer programs were not at her *disposal* (*käytössäni*), which suggests that she is rather a passive pupil to whom the school either gives or does not give an opportunity to learn. Her learning is thus dependent on the formal learning environment, not on herself.

Very often the accounts drawing on the special learner repertoire contain explicit references to teachers. In many cases, the English teacher is blamed for the learner's problems in learning English, or alternatively credited for succeeding. Despite illustrating how a teacher can be blamed for a learner's failure, example (15) is also a good example on how the special learner repertoire is often used in connection with other repertoires, notably the auditory repertoire. In these kinds of cases, the auditory repertoire is used to illustrate the problems that the learner faces at school because of her/his impaired hearing. The special learner repertoire, in turn, is used to illustrate how the learning environment, or the teacher, to be more specific, does not understand the learner's difficulties, thus making the hard-of-hearing learner's situation even more difficult.

(15) En kuitenkaan pystynyt seuraamaan muiden puhetta ja jouduin toistuvasti kysymään vierustoverilta missä olemme menossa. Opettaja leimasi minut piittaamattomaksi ja häiriköksi. Useaan otteeseen lensin ulos tunnilta ”pulisemisen” vuoksi. Kun yritin selittää etten kuullut, missä mennään niin opettaja kuittasi sen sanomalla:” KYLLÄ SINUN PITÄISI KUULLA KUN MINÄKIN NÄIN HUUDAN!” Sama ongelma tuli esiin monen muunkin opettajan puolelta ja opettajien asennoituminen tekikin minusta loppujen lopuksi häirikön. Lintsailin koulusta ja asennoiduin tunneilla välinpitämättömästi, käytösnumerokin laski seiskaan. (06F)

However, I was not able to follow other people's speech and I had to repeatedly ask the person sitting next to me what was going on. The teacher labelled me as careless and a troublemaker. Many times I was kicked out of class because of "chattering." When I tried to explain that I didn't hear what was going on the teacher dismissed it by saying: "YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO HEAR WHEN I'M SHOUTING LIKE THIS!" The same problem came up with many other teachers as well and it was the teachers' attitude that finally made me a troublemaker. I cut classes and took an indifferent attitude in class, even my mark for general conduct dropped to seven. (06F)

In example (15), the writer of one of the life stories is describing how her problems with hearing were not understood by her teachers, and how this had a devastating effect not only on her learning English but also on her whole school life. Previously in her life story, she has told that some special arrangement had been made to help her. However, as the writer states at the beginning of example (15), she was not able to follow other people's speech (*En kuitenkaan pystynyt seuraamaan muiden puhetta*), and consequently had to ask her classmates what was going on. Even though hearing is not mentioned explicitly it is obvious that her not being able to follow other people's speech was caused by not hearing properly, which suggests that the writer is drawing on the auditory repertoire. By using the auditory repertoire the writer depicts herself as a hard-of-hearing learner who cannot control her hearing and thus should not be held responsible for not hearing other people's speech. This way she denies personal responsibility for the problems that she faces with her teachers, which she describes in the rest of the example passage, drawing on the special learner repertoire.

The writer's English teacher is depicted throughout the account as an active agent who makes the writer's situation more difficult. This impression is constructed, for instance, by using verbs denoting activity in connection with the teacher. For example, the writer describes how the teacher did not understand that her talking to the person sitting next to her was necessary in

order to keep up with what was going on, and consequently the teacher *labelled* (*leimasi*) her as a troublemaker. Further, as the writer tried to offer an explanation for her conduct, the teacher *dismissed* (*kuittasi*) her explanation. Finally, the writer states that the teachers' attitude finally *made* her a troublemaker (*opettajien asennoituminen tekikin minusta loppujen lopuksi häirikön*). While the teacher (or the teachers) is constructed as active, the writer constructs herself as passive and powerless before the teacher. For example, she is the passive object of the teacher's labelling. Further, the Finnish expression *lensin ulos tunnilta* (*I was kicked out of class*) creates an impression that the writer cannot control what is happening to her, but rather she is the object of someone else's actions. The writer's powerlessness can also be seen in her description about how she *tried to explain* (*yritin selittää*) her conduct but did not succeed. Finally, stating that the teacher's attitude made her a troublemaker, the writer creates an impression of herself as an object that can be moulded by other people without she herself having any control over it. Thus the writer constructs the teacher (or the teachers) as active and herself as passive and powerless, and consequently manages to assign the blame for her failing in many aspects of school life to the teacher(s).

Successes. Example (15) illustrated how, drawing on the special learner repertoire, a teacher can be assigned the blame for a hard-of-hearing learner not succeeding in learning English. Example (16), in turn, illustrates the opposite case, where a teacher is credited for the learner's success in learning English. Here the writer of one of the life stories tells about her success in passing an English course, and resorts to the special learner repertoire in order to explain this success.

> (16) Hän kuunteli mielenkiinnolla ja lupasi yrittää ottaa huomioon kuuloni tuomat rajoitukset. Samoin hän käski nostaa metelin, jos minun oikeuksiani poljetaan. […] Opettaja kuunteli jokaisen valitukseni, kun en saanut selvää tai en muuten pärjännyt. Hän otti minut huomioon ja auttoi eteenpäin. Lopulta pääsin ensimmäisestä kurssista kirkkaasti läpi, (04F)
>
> She listened with interest and promised to try to take into account the limitations caused by my hearing. She also told me to protest if my rights were being trampled on. […] The teacher listened to all my complaints when I couldn't make something out or couldn't cope otherwise. She paid attention to me and helped me get on. Finally I passed the first course with flying colours, (04F)

In example (16), the writer describes her experiences with one of her English teachers who clearly showed interest in her special needs. As the writer first informed the teacher about her hearing defect the teacher responded positively. As the writer says, *she listened with interest* (*Hän kuunteli mielenkiinnolla*) and also *promised to try to take into account* (*lupasi yrittää ottaa huomioon*) the difficulties that the writer would face in learning English because of her hearing. Further, the teacher encouraged the writer to defend her rights telling her to *protest* (*nostaa metelin*) if these rights were not respected. During the English course, as the writer reports, the teacher constantly showed interest in the writer as she listened to all her complaints (*kuunteli jokaisen valitukseni*) and helped her get on (*auttoi eteenpäin*). As a result, the writer *passed the first course with flying colours* (*pääsin ensimmäisestä kurssista kirkkaasti läpi*), i.e. experienced a great success. The writer's account of success seems to concentrate very clearly around the teacher. The teacher is constructed as an active agent who brings about the success of the learner. This can be seen, for example, in the choice of verbs used in connection with the teacher. The teacher *listened* (*kuunteli*) with interest, *promised* (*lupasi*) to try to take the hearing difficulties into account, *told* (*käski*) the writer to protest if her rights were being violated, *listened* (*kuunteli*) to all the writer's complaints, *paid attention* (*otti huomioon*) to her and *helped* (*auttoi*) her get on. All these verbs denote activity. Thus the teacher's active response with regard to a hard-of-hearing learner's difficulties is constructed as the cause for the learner's success in learning English.

To sum up, explanations within the special learner repertoire assign blame for failures in learning English or credit for successes to the institutional learning environment, i.e. teachers, teaching methods or the school in general. The institutional learning environment is constructed as active. Its failure to meet the special needs of a hard-of-hearing learner results to the learner failing in learning English, whereas if it manages to take these needs into account the learner does better. The learner is thus depicted as rather passive and powerless as her/his learning is dependent on the actions of the institutional learning environment. The special learner repertoire is possibly used to emphasize that a hard-of-hearing learner often faces special challenges in a normal school. To

make a hard-of-hearing person's learning easier, teachers and the school in general should be aware of these challenges and try to take them into account in teaching.

7.1.4 The responsibility repertoire

In the responsibility repertoire, the writers of the life stories either blame themselves for not actively seeking solutions to the problems caused by the impaired hearing or, alternatively, thank themselves for doing so. Failing or succeeding in learning English is thus dependent on what kind of a role the learner her/himself chooses to take in dealing with her/his special needs. Similarly to the special learner repertoire, succeeding or failing in learning English is not directly linked to the sense of hearing. Thus, even though hearing is a relevant matter, not hearing properly does not automatically result in failure nor does hearing well directly bring about success. However, despite this similarity in the role assigned to hearing, the responsibility repertoire and the special learner repertoire differ fundamentally in the roles assigned to the learner and the learning environment. As seen in section 7.1.3, the special learner repertoire constructed the learner as passive and powerless and the learning environment as an active agent bringing about the learner's failure or success. In the responsibility repertoire, these roles are reversed. The learner her/himself is constructed as responsible for her/his failure or success, since these are the results of whether the learner actively seeks solutions to her/his difficulties or not. The role of the learning environment, in turn, is quite irrelevant.

Linguistically, explanations within the responsibility repertoire are constructed by using active verbs in connection with the learner (*käyttää, tiedottaa, informoida*). Also the pronoun *myself* (*itse*) appears frequently in the accounts in order to emphasize the active role and the responsibility of the learner. Since the responsibility repertoire constructs the learner as a hard-of-hearing person who has to attend to her/his own special needs, vocabulary linked to hearing problems is also present (*vamma, huonokuuloisuus, kuulovamma, erityistarve*).

Failures. In example (17) the writer of one of the life stories describes her failure to inform her English teacher about her hearing defect and the effect it had on her learning.

> (17) Poiketen ala-asteesta, yläasteella jouduin itse selvittämään opettajan kanssa erityistarpeeni ja seitsemännellä luokalla se jäikin väliin. En opettajalle, enkä luokkatovereilleni sanonut mitään huonokuuloisuudestani ja siitä seurasikin ongelmia. Kun esimerkiksi luimme tekstiä vuorotellen ääneen, en tiennyt missä olimme menossa kun tuli vuoroni. Nauhalta tulevia kuuntelutehtävien vastauksia yritin lotota tms. Englannin numero laski pari pykälää alas. (06F)
>
> In contrast to the primary school, in lower secondary school I had to inform the teacher about my special needs myself and in the seventh grade I skipped it. I didn't say anything about my being hard-of-hearing to the teacher nor to my classmates and that resulted in problems. For example, when we were reading a text aloud taking turns I didn't know where we were when it was my turn. I tried to guess the answers to listening tasks on a tape. My grade in English dropped a couple of degrees. (06F)

Moving from primary school to lower secondary school, the responsibility of informing the teachers about the hearing defect and the special needs that come with it fell on the writer herself. Accordingly, she *skipped* (*se jäikin väliin*) this responsibility. The English translation does not entirely capture the tone of the Finnish expression *se jäikin väliin*. This expression is passive in nature and creates an impression that the informing was not done but does not explicitly name the person responsible for this. The writer could have used a more active form, such as *jätin sen väliin*, which would have assigned the responsibility more clearly to herself. By choosing the former structure rather than the latter, the writer manages to acknowledge her responsibility without pointing the finger too clearly at herself. In contrast, in the sentence that follows, she uses the active structure *I didn't say anything* (*en sanonut mitään*), thus constructing herself more clearly as an active agent who can choose whether to say or not say anything. Consequently, she herself is responsible for not informing the people around her about her special needs. Next, the writer states that her not informing the teacher and the classmates about her hearing *resulted in problems* (*siitä seurasikin ongelmia*). By using the verb *seurata* (*to result in*), the writer constructs a direct causal link between her lack of action and her failure in learning English. She is thus drawing on the responsibility repertoire. However, she goes on describing her failure and, interestingly, seems to be

switching to the auditory repertoire. She chooses to mention reading texts aloud and doing listening tasks as examples of her problems, both of which require hearing. Also she describes herself as powerless, saying that she *didn't know* (*en tiennyt*) the right line of text when it was her turn to read, and that she *tried to guess* (*yritin lotota*) the right answers to the listening tasks without succeeding. Finally, the outcome of it all was that her *grade in English dropped a couple of degrees* (*Englannin numero laski pari pykälää alas*). Even though the writer draws on the auditory repertoire to describe the problems she faced as a hard-of-hearing leaner, the account in whole is clearly constructed to assign blame to the fact that the writer did not inform her teacher about her disability. Had she done so, some measures could have been taken in order to meet her special needs.

Example (18), despite illustrating the use of the responsibility repertoire, is also an example on how, in the life stories, a number of different causes could be mentioned in connection with one failure or success. Thus, successive sentences could very well draw on different repertoires. This creates an impression that a failure or a success can be caused by more than one factor.

> (18) Mielestäni opettajat päästivät minut liian helpolla, kun antoivat vapautuksia. Olisi pitänyt olla itsekin viisaampi ja tajuta ehdottaa heille, että olisin voinut korvata ne jollakin toisella tavalla. Pääsin liian helpolla. Mutta siinä iässä olisin kaivannut apua ja tukea ja neuvoa. Mutta ei kukaan ole kertonut mahdollisuuksista. (02F)
>
> I my opinion the teachers let me get off too easily when they gave me exemptions. I should have been wiser myself, too, and thought of suggesting them that I could have compensated them in another way. I got off too easily. But at that age I would have needed help and support and advice. But nobody has told me about my possibilities. (02F)

In this example, the writer of one of the life stories explains why her learning English at school has not been very successful. In the account, she seems to be drawing on two repertoires, namely, the special learner repertoire and the responsibility repertoire. First, she constructs her teachers as responsible for her lack of success. She states that the teachers let her get off too easily (*opettajat päästivät minut liian helpolla*) as they did not make her do listening exercises and other things that were hard for her because of her impaired hearing. The teachers are thus depicted as active as they were the ones who *let*

(*päästivät*) her get off and *gave* (*antoivat*) her exemptions, whereas the writer is the passive object of the teachers' actions. The writer thus seems to be drawing on the special learner repertoire. In contrast, in the next sentence the writer acknowledges that she, too, is to be blamed for her failure. To use the expression *I should have* (*olisi pitänyt*) already suggests that there was a lack of action on her part. She says she herself *should have been wiser* (*olisi pitänyt olla itsekin viisaampi*), and she should have *thought of suggesting* (*tajuta ehdottaa*) the teachers that she could have done other kinds of exercises while the others were listening instead of not doing anything. The roles of the learner and the teachers are thus reversed. It is the learner who has to think of suggesting the teachers what kinds of measures should be taken to help her cope, whereas the teachers are the passive recipients of these suggestions. Thus, the writer seems to construct her own lack of action as the cause for her not doing very well in English, which suggests that she is drawing on the responsibility repertoire. However, she returns to the special learner repertoire to finish her account. The writer depicts herself again as passive. As she states, she *got off too easily* (*pääsin liian helpolla*). Even though the structure itself is active, the verb *get off* (*päästä helpolla*) still creates an impression that there was a lack of action from the part of the teachers. Since the teachers did not make her work, she did not work. The writer further describes herself as powerless, stating that she would have *needed* (*olisin tarvinnut*) support. However, she says that nobody has told her about the possibilities (*ei kukaan ole kertonut mahdollisuuksista*), thus suggesting that her teachers should have taken a more active role in informing her, whereas she herself was a more passive recipient of information. She further emphasizes her powerlessness by adding the expression *at that age* (*siinä iässä*) to refer to her being young and thus adults should have been responsible for her wellbeing. Thus, by returning to the special learner repertoire again the writer still manages to minimize the blame she had previously assigned to herself by using the responsibility repertoire.

Successes. Example (19), in contrast to examples (17) and (18), shows how the responsibility repertoire can also be used to explain successes, i.e. to credit the

learner for actively seeking solutions for the difficulties caused by the impaired hearing.

> (19) Käytin FM-laitetta [OPETTAJA]:n ja [OPETTAJA]:n tunneilla. Olin sinut oman vammani kanssa ja hiuksert olivat ponnarilla jatkuvasti, informoin itse opettajia ja hain ratkaisuja kuunteluongelmiin. (08F)
>
> I used my FM device in [TEACHER]'s and [TEACHER]'s classes. I ha d accepted my disability and my hair was always tied up in a ponytail, I informed the teachers myself and sought solutions to my hearing problems. (08F)

In example (19), the writer of one of the life stories provides reasons for the highest possible mark she got in English during her vocational studies. In the account she constructs herself as an active agent by using verbs that denote activity in connection with herself. For example, she *used* (*käytin*) an FM device in class, she *informed* (*informoin*) the teachers and she *sought solutions* (*hain ratkaisuja*) to her hearing problems. It is also worth noting that the writer uses the pronoun *myself* (*itse*) in order to emphasize her active role. Further, having accepted her disability, she tied her hair up in a ponytail so as not to cover her hearing aid. By this she is referring to how in lower secondary school she had not accepted her disability, and consequently let her hair hang loose so as to hide her hearing aids, which obviously made hearing more difficult. Tying her hair up was thus also a measure taken by the writer to help herself hear better. In example (19), the writer thus seems to construct herself as an agent whose determined actions lead to her succeeding in learning English. This suggests that the writer is drawing on the responsibility repertoire.

In sum, the writers of the life stories draw on the responsibility repertoire in order to either blame their own lack of action for their failures in learning English, or credit their own activity in dealing with their special needs for their success. The responsibility for failing or succeeding thus falls on the learner her/himself. Consequently, the learner is depicted as an active agent who either chooses not to attend to her/his special needs as a hard-of-hearing language learner or, alternatively, takes an active role in seeking solutions to her problems. A possible function of the responsibility repertoire could be to show that hearing impairment in itself does not automatically result in failure in

learning English but the learner her/himself can affect her/his learning by taking an active role in dealing with her/his special needs.

7.1.5 The specialist repertoire

In the life stories analyzed in the present study, the specialist repertoire was used only to explain failures in learning or using English. In the specialist repertoire, the writers of the life stories construct their accounts of failure with the type of language that could be expected to be used by, for example, a doctor specialized in auditory disorders or a person promoting hard-of-hearing people's rights. Accordingly, the writers do not describe themselves or their own experiences but talk about the hard-of-hearing people in general. This is a major difference compared with the auditory, environmental, special learner and responsibility repertoires (see sections 7.1.1 – 7.1.4), where the writers of the life stories gave explanations for their own personal failures or successes in learning or using English. In the specialist repertoire, the writers usually take the role of an outside observer, depicting the hard-of-hearing learner as rather passive and powerless faced with the limitations caused by her/his impaired hearing. The blame for the failure in learning English is usually assigned to the impaired hearing or, in some cases, to the environment that is not favourable for hard-of-hearing people. The environment is thus usually passive, but in some cases active. The specialist repertoire, therefore, is based more on the register of the language used in explaining failures than on the actual content of the accounts.

Linguistically, the most typical feature that distinguishes the specialist repertoire from the other repertoires introduced in sections 7.1.1 – 7.1.4 is the use of third person forms (singular and plural) instead of the first person singular form. Accordingly, the writers use expressions such as *people with impaired hearing* or *hard-of-hearing people* in their explanations instead of using the pronoun *I*. In some cases, it is also possible that the writer includes her/himself in the group of hard-of-hearing people by using the pronoun *we*. Another typical feature of the specialist repertoire is that the accounts often include vocabulary that is normally associated with formal or scientific

discourse rather than with informal discourse on the self (*kuulomuisti*, *näkömuisti*, *yksilölliset erot*, *puhealue*).

In example (20), the writer of one of the life stories analyses why learning English poses special problems for hard-of-hearing learners. It seems that he is assigning the blame for these difficulties to the impaired hearing which prevents the learner from using the auditory memory. However, even though blaming the impaired hearing points to the use of the auditory repertoire, the account is constructed in a way that strongly suggests that the writer is drawing on the specialist repertoire.

> (20) Myöskin on aivan ilmeistä, että englantia opitaan kuulomuistin avulla. Mutta meidän kuulovammaisten kohdalla joudumme kompensoidusti turvautumaan näkömuistiin englannin opiskelussa. Oppiminen tahtoo kestää kauemmin, mutta joka tapauksessa oppimista tapahtuu näkömuistinkin avulla. Yksilölliset erot englannin opiskelussa korostuvat nimenomaan kuulovammaisten keskuudessa. Itse olen henkilökohtaisesti tätä mieltä. (05M)
>
> It is also quite obvious that English is learned with the help of auditory memory. But as regards us people with impaired hearing, we have to resort to visual memory in learning English to compensate. Learning tends to take a longer time but in any case learning takes place with the help of visual memory, too. Individual differences in learning English are emphasized especially among people with impaired hearing. This is my personal opinion. (05M)

In his account, the writer seems to be using language that could be used, for example, by a hard-of-hearing person who is giving a lecture to a group of normally hearing people on how hard-of-hearing people learn English. Importantly, he does not talk about his personal experiences explicitly but instead constructs his account in a way that treats the issue on a more general level. For example, instead of using the first person singular form, he talks about hard-of-hearing people in general, which is a typical feature of the specialist repertoire. First, he uses the first person plural form in *as regards us people with impaired hearing, we have to resort to visual memory* (*meidän kuulovammaisten kohdalla joudumme kompensoidusti turvautumaan näkömuistiin*), thus including himself in this special group of people that share the same experience. This kind of a collectivization gives more credibility to the account compared to the use of the first person singular form since usually an experience shared by many people is considered more plausible than a

personal experience of an individual. Further down in his account, the writer changes his position with regard to this special group. He switches to the third person plural form in *Individual differences in learning English are emphasized especially among people with impaired hearing* (*Yksilölliset erot englannin opiskelussa korostuvat nimenomaan kuulovammaisten keskuudessa*). Thus, not marking his membership to this group, he manages to construct himself as a neutral and impartial specialist who is presenting facts about hard-of-hearing people, which again suggests that the writer is drawing on the specialist repertoire.

A further point of interest in this account is how the writer uses vocabulary that could be expected to be used in formal discourse rather than in accounts of personal experiences. For example, the writer uses terms such as *auditory memory* (*kuulomuisti*), *visual memory* (*näkömuisti*) and *individual differences* (*yksilölliset erot*). These help in creating a formal tone that adds to the credibility of the account. Having first constructed his account as quite general in nature, the writer interestingly ends his account by saying *This is my personal opinion* (*Itse olen henkilökohtaisesti tätä mieltä*). There are (at least) two possible interpretations for this closure. First, it is possible that the writer chooses to slightly reduce the factuality of his account by admitting that he is not an expert after all. On the other hand, it may be that the writer is still constructing himself as a specialist whose opinion, no matter how personal, is respected.

In example (21), the writer of one of the life stories explains why she had problems in learning to pronounce English correctly. Similarly to example (20), she seems to assign blame for failure in learning English to the impaired hearing. However, this account, too, is constructed in a way that points to the specialist repertoire rather than the auditory repertoire.

> (21) Kuulovammaisen kuulossa pahinta on juuri se että vajoama on juuri puhealueella, ääntämisessä. (01F)
>
> The worst thing about the hearing of a hard-of-hearing person is the fact that the hearing loss affects particularly the speech frequency, the pronunciation. (01F)

Similarly to example (20), the writer does not use the first person singular form in her account. Instead of talking about her own hearing she chooses to use the third person singular form and talk about *the hearing of a hard-of-hearing person* (*kuulovammaisen kuulo*). This way she manages to distance her own self from the account. She does not talk about the auditory problems she herself has faced as a hard-of-hearing person, but rather talks about the problems of people with hearing impairment in general, taking the role of a specialist observing the issue from the outside. Not talking about her personal experience, the writer manages to make her account seem more neutral and factual and, consequently, more credible. In addition to using the third person form in her account, the writer also uses some words that point to the use of the specialist repertoire. For instance, terms such as *hearing loss* (*vajoama*) and *speech frequency* (*puhealue*) are associated more with scientific discourse than with accounts of personal experience.

Examples (20) and (21) seemed to assign the blame for failures in learning English to the impaired hearing. In example (22), in turn, it seems that the institutional learning environment is blamed for making learning more difficult for hard-of-hearing people because communication in school is based on verbal messages, whereas body language is ignored. However, this example, too, is constructed in a way that points to the use of the specialist repertoire.

> (22) Koulussa ei "puhuta käsillä", ja siksi itse oppiminen on paljon rankempaa kuulovammaiselle kun pitää monesti vaan kuula missä mennään. (08F)
>
> You don't "talk with your hands" at school, and that is why learning itself is much harder for a person with impaired hearing because you often just have to hear what is going on. (08F)

In example (22), the language used by the writer is not as formal as in examples (20) and (21). However, this writer, too, chooses to use the third person form in explaining the difficulties of hard-of-hearing learners. Instead of saying *learning itself is much harder for me* (*itse oppiminen on paljon rankempaa minulle*) she says *learning itself is much harder for a person with impaired hearing* (*itse oppiminen on paljon rankempaa kuulovammaiselle*).

Thus, since she does not talk about herself and her personal experience but instead about *a person with impaired hearing* – as if she herself was an outsider – she manages to constructs her account in a way that appears more factual in nature. Having difficulties at school is constructed as a universal feature shared by all people with impaired hearing, not just a personal failure of the writer herself.

To sum up, explanations drawing on the specialist repertoires are constructed by using language that resembles formal or scientific discourse. Accordingly, the writers of the life stories do not describe themselves and their own personal failures but construct their accounts to describe the difficulties faced by hard-of-hearing people in general. The typical linguistic features of the specialist repertoire include the use of third person forms instead of first person forms, and vocabulary that could be characterized as scientific. These create an impression as if the writer were a specialist on auditory disorders explaining facts about the reasons underlying hard-of-hearing people's difficulties in learning English. A possible function of the specialist repertoire may be to convince other people of the fact that an impaired hearing does indeed create special challenges for learning English.

7.1.6 The talent repertoire

The talent repertoire is used to explain both failures and successes in learning or using English. The repertoire is constructed on the idea of talent or ability. Failure in learning or using English is thus said to be the result of not being talented, or more generally, not possessing certain mental capacities. Success, in turn, follows from being talented, i.e. possessing certain favourable mental capacities. These mental capacities cannot be controlled by the learner/user nor by anyone else, and being or not being talented is very much a matter of chance: one is born either with talent or without it. Consequently, the learner in the talent repertoire is depicted as passive and powerless, not being able to influence her/his abilities. The role of the environment, too, is irrelevant, since the only factors that determine the failure or the success in learning English are the mental capacities of the learner/user. Importantly, also the role of hearing is

irrelevant in the talent repertoire. This is a major difference from the repertoires introduced in sections 7.1.1 – 7.1.5. Since failure and success in learning or using English are dependent on talent, being or not being hard-of-hearing bears no importance.

A typical feature of the talent repertoire is that the writers of the life stories talk about English being either hard or easy for them. On some occasions, the writers also contrast themselves with other people, such as classmates, using comparative structures (*olin luokan paras*, *olin paras englannissa*, *olin parempi kuin luokan kaksi priimusta*). Another feature very typical of the talent repertoire is the use of expressions that denote a special aptitude for learning languages (*kielellisesti lahjakas*, *kielikorva*, *kielipää*). Importantly, in contrast to the repertoires introduced in the previous sections, vocabulary linked to hearing or auditory disorders does not appear in the explanations drawing on the talent repertoire.

Failures. In the life stories analysed in the present study, the talent repertoire was usually drawn on in order to explain successes in learning or using English. However, there were also a few accounts in which the talent repertoire was used to explain failures in learning English. In example (23), the writer of one of the life stories is partly drawing on the talent repertoire in order to explain why she got lower marks than expected in her English courses in upper secondary school.

> (23) Lukion englannin kursseista saamani arvosanat olivat minulle raju pettymys. Vaikka tajusin, ettei oppimiskykyni riittänyt kaiken uuden tiedon omaksumiseen, olin mielestäni yrittänyt enemmän kuin mitä arvosanani ”osoittivat”: olin tehnyt kotitehtäviä melko tunnollisesti, tosin en aivan aina. (11F)
>
> The marks I got of my English courses in upper secondary school were a great disappointment for me. Even though I realized that my ability to learn wasn't adequate for acquiring all the new information, I had, in my opinion, tried harder than my marks 'indicated': I had done my homework fairly conscientiously, although not every single time. (11F)

As the writer states, her English marks in upper secondary school were *a great disappointment* (*raju pettymys*) for her because she had expected to get higher marks. As a part of her explanation for this failure, she admits that her *ability*

to learn wasn't adequate for acquiring all the new information (*ettei oppimiskykyni riittänyt kaiken uuden tiedon omaksumiseen*). Thus the writer creates an interesting picture of learning and herself as a learner. In the light of her account, it seems that there is an individual characteristic that can be called *an ability to learn* (*oppimiskyky*) that allows a person to take in new information. This ability can be adequate for the acquiring to take place or, as in the writer's case, not be adequate. Thus, not possessing an adequate ability to learn causes failure in learning. Since succeeding in learning English is thus dependent on possessing this individual characteristic, the learner has a rather passive role in learning. In the writer's account this can be seen, for example, in her choice to use the verb *acquire* (*omaksua*) which denotes passivity, instead of using, for instance, the verb *study* (*opiskella*) which is more active in nature. Thus, talking about not possessing certain mental capacities and constructing herself as passive, the writer seems to be drawing on the talent repertoire. However, as noted above, not possessing an adequate ability to learn explains the writer's low marks only partially. In the rest of the account the writer seems to make another kind of assumption about the reason for her failure. Ruling out the possibility of her own lack of effort in studying, and not offering any further explanation for the failure, the writer effectively leaves the cause hanging. This way the writer may be suggesting that her receiving a low mark in English was a matter of chance (see section 7.1.7, the chance repertoire).

Successes. Example (24) illustrates the use of the talent repertoire in explaining successes in learning English. In this example, the writer of one of the life stories offers an explanation to why she succeeded in her English studies in upper secondary school even though she had a very demanding curriculum.

> (24) Minä olin aika suossa, koska minulla oli pitkä matematiikka, pitkä kemia ja fysiikka, pitkä venäjä ja nyt vielä pitkä englanti. Onneksi se kuitenkin oli helppoa, siis minulle. (03F)
>
> I was really drowning in work, because I had A-level mathematics, A-level chemistry and physics, A-level Russian and now even A-level English. Fortunately, however, it was easy – for me, that is. (03F)

The writer begins her account by telling that she was *drowning in work* (*Minä olin aika suossa*) in upper secondary school. She had A-levels originally on four subjects (mathematics, physics, chemistry and Russian), which meant that her curriculum was quite extensive already before A-level English was added to it. However, she still did well in English, too. To explain this success, she says *Fortunately, however, it was easy – for me, that is* (*Onneksi se kuitenkin oli helppoa, siis minulle*). This sentence is constructed in a very interesting way. The writer states that learning English *was easy* (*oli helppoa*) but immediately specifies this statement more by adding the words *for me, that is* (*siis minulle*). Thus, learning English is not characterized as an easy task in general, but as an easy task particularly for the writer. This suggests that the writer possesses a special talent or aptitude that makes it easy for her to learn English, whereas another learner might not posses such mental capacities and would therefore find it hard to learn English. Being talented is not a characteristic that the learner her/himself can influence. It seems that the writer acknowledges this in starting her explanation with the word *fortunately* (*onneksi*), which creates an impression that being talented is, in the end, a matter of chance.[3]

In example (24), the writer talked about English being easy for her, thus implying that she had a special aptitude for learning English. Example (25) also seems to be constructed on the idea of talent or aptitude. In addition, it illustrates how comparative structures can be used in accounts drawing on the talent repertoire.

> (25) Tässä pienessä luokassa olin paras englannissa: tein kaikki tehtävät nopeammin kuin muut, ja varsinkin viidennellä sekä kuudennella sain paljon lisätehtäviä. (11F)
>
> In this small class I was the best in English: I did all the exercises faster than the others and especially in the fifth and the sixth grade I got a lot of extra assignments. (11F)

[3] It may also be argued that example (24) is partly drawing on the chance repertoire (see section 7.1.7) because of the use of the word *fortunately*. However, since being talented is also a matter of chance by nature, it is also possible to include the word *fortunately* in the talent repertoire.

In example (25) the writer of one of the life stories describes her success in studying English in primary school. In doing so, she compares her performance in English to the performance of her classmates. According to her, she was *the best in English* (*paras englannissa*) in her class and she made all the exercises *faster than the others* (*nopeammin kuin muut*). Interestingly, instead of saying she was *good* (*hyvä*) in English, she chooses to use the superlative form *the best* (*paras*), thus distinguishing herself from her classmates. Similarly, instead of saying she did the exercises *quickly* (*nopeasti*), she reports having done them *faster than the others* (*nopeammin kuin muut*). She does not explain her success further, but constructs her account merely on being the best in English and being faster than her classmates. This implies that she had a special aptitude for learning English which, obviously, all her classmates did not have.

In example (25), the writer did not explicitly state that her success in studying English resulted from her being talented, but constructed her account in a way that implied such a conclusion. In example (26), in turn, the writer of one of the life stories quite openly suggests that having a special aptitude for languages may be the reason for her success.

> (26) Ja lukio sitten. Yllättävän hyvin on mennyt. Ehkä minulla sitten on sitä kuuluisaa kielipäätä kun ysiä ja kymppiä tippuu kursseista. (09F)
>
> And then about upper secondary school. It has gone surprisingly well. Perhaps I have that famous linguistic instinct since I always get nines and tens of the courses. (09F)

In example (26), the writer tells about her success in upper secondary school that she attended at the time of writing the life story. Her first comment on her performance in upper secondary school *It has gone surprisingly well* (*Yllättävän hyvin on mennyt*) points to the use of the chance repertoire (see section 7.1.7). However, she makes another more explicit suggestion about the reason for her doing well in English in upper secondary school, drawing on the talent repertoire. She suspects that she has *that famous linguistic instinct* (*sitä kuuluisaa kielipäätä*). The Finnish expression *kielipää* (*linguistic instinct*) refers to a special characteristic that makes it easy for a person to learn languages. One is either born with it or without it. It is also typical of a person

with linguistic instinct that s/he learns languages without effort. The writer also refers to this when she reports always getting nines and tens (the two highest marks) in English. The Finnish expression *ysiä ja kymppiä tippuu* (*I always get nines and tens*) denotes effortlessness on the part of the learner even more clearly than the English translation. The verb *tippua* (*fall*) creates an impression as if the high marks appeared out of nowhere without the learner doing anything at all. The writer thus depicts herself as very passive. Her fate has been to born with a special aptitude for languages, and consequently she is successful in learning languages without making any effort at all.

In sum, in the talent repertoire, the writers of the life stories construct their explanations for failure and success in learning or using English around the concept of talent or aptitude for languages. Possessing this mental capacity is a matter of fate: it is a "gift" that is either given or not given at birth. Therefore, the learner/user her/himself has no control over it, nor do other people or the learning environment. Since talent is the only factor that brings about success in learning or using English, it makes no difference whether the learner/user is hard-of-hearing or not. The role of hearing in thus irrelevant. A possible function of the talent repertoire may be to create an impression that failing or succeeding in learning English is not up to the learner her/himself, but some people are by nature better language learners than others. Another possible function of the talent repertoire could be – the role of hearing being irrelevant – to emphasize that hard-of-hearing learners/users of English are no different from those with normal hearing.

7.1.7 The chance repertoire

In the life stories analysed in the present study, the chance repertoire was used to explain both failures and successes in learning or using English. The repertoire is based on the ideas of fate or chance. This means that things, such as good or bad luck or mysterious forces of some kind are blamed for failures in learning or using English or, alternatively, credited for successes. These things are quite random and cannot be controlled by the learner/user, nor by other people or the environment. Also the role of hearing is irrelevant, since

success and failure in learning or using English are dependent on pure chance. These features of the chance repertoire resemble very much the features of the talent repertoire, in which the roles of the learner and the environment were also passive and the role of hearing irrelevant (see section 7.1.6). However, there is a fundamental difference between these two repertoires. Talent, or aptitude for languages – even though having it is a matter of chance – is an individual characteristic. Thus it is a factor within the learner/user although the learner/user cannot control it. In contrast, in the explanations drawing on the chance repertoire, the random factors, such as luck or mysterious powers, that bring about failure or success in learning or using English seem to reside outside of the learner/user.

The linguistic features of the chance repertoire include expressions that refer to chance or luck (*ihme, onneksi, yllättävän hyvin*). It is also typical of the explanations within this repertoire that the passivity and powerlessness of the learner/user is emphasized by making the learner/user an object in the sentence rather than a subject. Consequently, the first person singular forms are hardly ever used.

Failures. In example (27), the writer of one of the life stories describes her failure in giving a presentation in an obligatory English course at university. She also provides an explanation for this failure, drawing on the chance repertoire.

> (27) Myöhemmin kurssin aikana tuli esitelmien ja puheiden pitäminen sekä ryhmäkeskustelut. Vuorollani kirjoitin esitelmäni ja kun piti se esittää, iski paniikki ja tekeydyin sairaaksi ja jäin kotiin. (06F)
>
> Later during the course it was time to give presentations and speeches as well as have group discussions. In my turn I prepared my presentation and when I was supposed to give it, I panicked and pretended to be ill and stayed home. (06F)

The requirements of the course the writer took part in included oral assignments, such as presentations, speeches and group discussions. As the writer says, she did prepare her presentation but failed to actually give it in class. The reason for this failure, according to the writer, was the fact that she

panicked (*paniikki iski*). It could be argued that some people are more anxious by nature and therefore more likely to panic than other people, and therefore panicking should be considered a personal characteristic. However, the way the writer constructs her explanation points to another kind of an interpretation. Again, the English translation does not do justice to the original Finnish expression. A more word-to-word translation of the Finnish *iski paniikki* would be something like *panic attacked me*, the writer being an object rather than a subject. By using this kind of a construction, the writer manages to create an impression as if panic were a mysterious power of some kind that appears out of nowhere, attacking people in a random manner at any time. This mysterious power cannot be controlled by anyone or anything, but people are entirely at its mercy. Thus, failing to give the presentation was not the writer's fault, nor can the blame be assigned to the environment or to impaired hearing. The writer simply had bad luck.

Example (28) illustrates another kind of a situation where fate seems to play an important role in a learner failing in her studies in English. In this account, the writer explains why there was a sudden decline in her English marks when she moved from primary school to lower secondary school.

> (28) Ala-asteen ajan englannin numerot olivat kiitettäviä, mutta yläasteella tilanne muuttui. Mummini kuoli ja englanninopettaja vaihtui. (06F)
>
> In primary school my English marks were very good but in lower secondary school the circumstances changed. My granny died and there was a change of English teachers. (06F)

According to the writer, her marks in English were very good in primary school, but in lower secondary school *the circumstances changed* (*tilanne muuttui*). To explain this the writer draws partly on the chance repertoire, mentioning that her *granny died* (*Mummini kuoli*). Earlier in her life story she reported that her grandmother had been an English teacher and described how she had helped her with her English homework, etc. Since the grandmother passed away, she was not there to help her, which had a negative effect on her studies. To mention the death of her grandmother suggests that fate was at least partly responsible for the writer's failure, since living and dying are generally not considered to be 'in our hands." The writer, however, also offers another

explanation for the sudden decline in her marks, telling that *there was a change of English teachers* (*englanninopettaja vaihtui*). Although the writer cannot control this change either, it still seems that changing teachers is common practice when moving from primary school to secondary school. It is more a feature of the school as an institution than a matter of fate. Therefore, it seems that the writer is no more drawing on the chance repertoire but switching to another repertoire that could be called the school repertoire (see section 7.1.9).

Successes. The chance repertoire was also used in order to explain successes in learning or using English. In example (29), the writer of one of the life stories seems to be suggesting that chance had something to do with her success in learning English in an English playschool that she attended as a small child.

> (29) Leikkikouluaika oli sitä aikaa, kun minulla ei vielä ollut kuulolaitteita, mutta yllättävän hyvin sieltä silti jäi sanoja päähän. (09F)
>
> At the time of the playschool I didn't have a hearing aid yet, but surpri singly many words stuck to my head there anyway. (09F)

The writer begins her account by telling that at the time she attended playschool she did not yet have a hearing aid. However, as the writer puts it, *surprisingly many words stuck to my head there, anyway* (*mutta yllättävän hyvin sieltä silti jäi sanoja päähän*). In the light of the writer's account it seems that the writer would not have expected to have learned so much because she did not have a hearing aid. In other words, the writer expected the impaired hearing to have a negative effect on her learning. However, this assumption turned out to be wrong. As the writer says, she managed to learn *surprisingly many* (*yllättävän hyvin*) words. By using the word *surprisingly* (*yllättävän*), the writer creates an impression that the cause behind her success in learning English was good luck. Apparently she herself did not have anything to do with the success, since she says that the words stuck to her head (*jäi sanoja päähän*), as if the words somehow entered her head and stayed there without her doing anything. Thus the writer constructs herself as rather passive. Had she said *I learned a lot of words* (*opin paljon sanoja*), she would have constructed herself as more active and the impression would have been quite different. The writer does not refer to the teacher or teaching methods, either,

nor does she suggest that her hearing had anything to do with the success. Her learning a lot of words in the English playschool was thus just an unexpected but pleasant surprise brought about by luck.

In example (30), the writer describes her success in using English in an authentic communication situation, constructing her account in a way that seems to assign causality to some kind of a mysterious power that makes her speak fluently.

> (30) Joskus minulle käy niin että kieltä alkaa vaan valua suusta eikä sille mahda mitään. (09F)
>
> It sometimes happens to me that language just starts to pour out of my mouth and it can't be helped. (09F)

The writer characterizes her success in using English by describing how language just starts to pour out of her mouth (*kieltä alkaa vaan valua suusta*). It might be suggested that by this the writer is referring to being talented in English and therefore being able to speak fluently without making any effort at all. In this case, the writer would be drawing on the talent repertoire. However, looking more closely at the account, it seems that this is not the case. Importantly, the writer says that this happens only *sometimes* (*joskus*). If the 'flow of language" was caused by a special talent, which is a fairly constant characteristic, it would be likely to happen more or less every time the writer wanted to speak English. However, as this happens only sometimes, it seems that the cause behind the writer's success is more random in nature, which points more towards the chance repertoire than the talent repertoire. Another interesting point in the writer's account is how she says that language pouring out of her mouth happens to her (*minulle käy niin*) rather than she making it happen. This creates an impression as if she were overcome by a mysterious force of some kind which makes language pour out of her mouth. She also further emphasizes the uncontrollable nature of this phenomenon by adding that *it can't be helped* (*eikä sille voi mitään*). Interestingly, she does not use the first person singular form *en voi sille mitään* (*I can't help it*) but chooses to use the third person form *eikä sille voi mitään* (*it can't be helped*). This gives a more general tone to the account, creating an impression that nobody in her

situation would be able to control what was happening. Thus the writer creates a picture of herself as a passive object who at times is overcome by a mysterious force that makes her speak fluent English and thus be successful in using English. It thus seems that the writer is drawing on the chance repertoire.

In sum, the chance repertoire is constructed around concepts such as fate, chance and luck. Failing or succeeding in learning or using English are thus completely random. The learner/user is depicted as a passive and powerless person facing forces that s/he cannot control. The environment of learning or using English is irrelevant and being or not being hard-of-hearing has no significance in failing or succeeding. It is further characteristic of the chance repertoire that the mysterious forces of fate that bring about failure or success seem to come from the outside of the learner/user, as opposed to the talent repertoire where the special aptitude for languages was depicted more like an individual characteristic that was more permanent in nature. One possible use of the chance repertoire could be to create a picture that failing and succeeding in learning or using English are completely random, which, for example, makes effort pointless and thus diminishes personal responsibility.

7.1.8 The effort repertoire

The writers of the life stories analysed in the present study draw on the effort repertoire in order to explain both failures and successes in learning English. The effort repertoire is based on the idea of self-help. Failure in learning English is said to be the result of the learner not working hard enough to achieve good learning results, whereas success is said to follow from hard work. The learner is thus depicted as an active agent responsible for her/his own learning. The role of the learning environment, on the other hand, is irrelevant, since the responsibility for failure or success is ultimately in the hands of the learner her/himself. It seems that the effort repertoire is very similar to the responsibility repertoire introduced in section 7.1.4. However, the fundamental difference between the two repertoires is the role assigned to hearing. In the responsibility repertoire, failure in learning English was said to result from the learner not actively seeking solutions to the problems caused by

an impaired hearing, whereas success was the result of doing so. Even though the learner her/himself was constructed as responsible for her/his learning, hearing was still assigned a relevant role in the explanations within the responsibility repertoire. In contrast, the role of hearing in the efficiency repertoire is irrelevant. Failure and success in learning English is dependent solely on the effort made by the learner and thus it has no importance whether the learner is hard-of-hearing or not.

A typical linguistic feature of the efficiency repertoire is that first person singular forms are used in order to make the learner her/himself the subject in the accounts. The responsibility of the learner is often further highlighted by using the expression *minä itse* (*I myself*) instead of *minä* (*I*) alone. The vocabulary used within the efficiency repertoire includes expressions that depict learning as hard work (*tehdä töitä, lukea, opiskella, tehokas, ahkera, motivoitunut*). Another interesting point is that explanations for failure in learning English are typically constructed by using conditional forms (*olisi pitänyt/olisin voinut/olisin saanut tehdä enemmän*).

Failures. Example (31) illustrates the use of the effort repertoire in explaining failures in learning English. The writer of one of the life stories seems to be drawing on the effort repertoire in order to explain her bad marks in English word tests.

> (31) Kielteisiä muistoja jää lukioaikaisista pistosanakokeista, kun sain joskus todella huonoja arvosanoja (nelosta vitosta), kun en ollut lukenut ja se tietty hävetti. (11F)
>
> I have bad memories of word quizzes in upper secondary school, since I sometimes got really bad marks (fours or fives) because I hadn't studied, and of course I was ashamed. (11F)

In example (31), the writer defines failure as receiving *fours or fives* (*nelosta vitosta*), the two lowest marks, in word tests in upper secondary school. She offers an explanation for this failure, saying that it happened because she *hadn't studied* (*en ollut lukenut*). Clearly, she is referring to a lack of effort on her part, which points to the use of the effort repertoire. The explanation is also linguistically constructed in a way typical of the effort repertoire. For example,

the writer uses first person singular forms, thus making herself the subject in the explanation. Further, the verb *study* (*lukea*) denotes activity and creates an impression that learning depends on the effort made by the learner. Since the writer says *I hadn't studied* (*en ollut lukenut*), she constructs herself as an active agent responsible for not making an effort and thus also responsible for receiving low marks in the word quizzes. To add that she *was ashamed* (*se tietty hävetti*) seems to emphasize the responsibility of the writer even further. Had she not been responsible for her failure she would not have had any reason to be ashamed.

Example (32) further illustrates the use of the effort repertoire in explaining failures in learning English. In his account, the writer of one life story is looking back at his English studies in comprehensive school and also provides an explanation for him not doing well in English.

> (32) Näin jälkeenpäin ajateltuna olen tullut siihen tulokseen, että peruskouluaikainen englanninopiskeluni olisi saanut olla tehokkaampaa ja antoisampaa minun puolelta. Minun olisi pitänyt olla ahkerampi ja motivoituneempi. (05M)
>
> Thinking back I have come to the conclusion that my studying English in comprehensive school should have been more efficient and productive on my part. I should have been more efficient and motivated. (05M)

In example (32), the writer seems to assign the blame for his failure in his English studies to his own lack of effort. As he says, *my studying English in comprehensive school should have been more efficient and productive on my part* (*peruskouluaikainen englanninopiskeluni olisi saanut olla tehokkaampaa ja antoisampaa minun puolelta*). Interestingly, in this case the writer does not make himself the subject in the sentence, but instead he says that his studying English (*englanninopiskeluni*) should have been more efficient and productive. However, by placing the words *on my part* (*minun puolelta*) at the end of the sentence – the place usually reserved for the most important information – the writer manages to create a special emphasis on his own responsibility. He goes on to explain this further, now making himself the subject saying *I should have been more efficient and motivated* (*Minun olisi pitänyt olla ahkerampi ja motivoituneempi*). Example (32) is also a good example on how conditional structures are often used in explanations of failure within the effort repertoire.

First the writer says that his studying *should have been* (*olisi saanut olla*) more efficient and productive, and further on he adds that he himself *should have been* (*minun olisi pitänyt olla*) more efficient and motivated. By using these kinds of conditional structures the writer manages to create an impression that he did not work hard enough, and had he made a bigger effort, his learning results would have been better.

Successes. In the life stories analysed in the present study, the effort repertoire was also drawn on in order to explain successes in learning English. In example (33), the writer of one life story describes what kinds of efforts she herself made in order succeed in learning English.

> (33) Kesälomille pyysin maikkaa suosittelemaan joitakin kirjoja, joiden asiasisältöä tultaisiin käsittelemaan loman jälkeen. Eli opiskelin jo seuraavan vuoden asioita "varastoon" kesälomalla, tai ainakin silmäilin asian sieltä ja toisen täältä. (08F)
>
> For the summer holidays I asked the teacher to recommend some books the subject matters of which would be treated after the holiday. In other words, I already studied the next year's subject matters "in store" during the summer holiday, or at least I skimmed through some of them. (08F)

The writer constructs her account so as to depict herself as an active agent who is responsible for her own learning. This can also be clearly seen in the actual language used in the account. The writer makes herself the subject in the account and uses verbs that denote activity in connection with herself. First, the writer says that it was she herself who actively *asked* (*pyysin*) the teacher to recommend some books to read during the holiday. This seems to reverse the traditional roles of the teacher and the learner, according to which the teacher is the one who makes the initiative, for instance, by giving assignments, and the learner completes the assignments following the teachers instructions. However, here the learner seems to be the one who takes the initiative and consequently the traditional roles are reversed. This seems to emphasize the active and responsible nature of the learner. The writer further constructs herself as active by using two other verbs that denote activity in connection with herself. She describes how, during the summer holiday, she already *studied* (*opiskelin*) the next year's subject matters "in store" for the next school year, thus depicting herself as active and also giving the impression that

learning requires studying. However, she admits that she did not have her nose buried in a book during the summer but rather she *skimmed through* (*silmäilin*) some of the matters. Still, she constructs herself as an active agent in her own learning.

In example (34), the writer of one of the life stories also seems to be thanking herself for her success in passing an English course that was a part of her vocational studies.

> (34) Lopulta selvitin toisenkin kurssin rimaa hipoen. Olin ylpeä itsestäni. (04F)
>
> Finally I managed to pass the second course, too, but only just. I was proud of myself. (04F)

It may not be obvious that example (34) includes an explanation at all. However, looking more closely at the account, it seems that the writer in fact does construct her account in a way that may be interpreted to contain an explanation within the effort repertoire. The writer does not explicitly mention what made her succeed in passing the English course. However, she uses the words *I managed to pass* (*selvitin*) the course. The key word that suggest the use of the effort repertoire is the Finnish verb *selvittää* (*sort out/manage to pass*) which denotes activity on the part of the writer. It creates a picture of the writer efficiently disentangling one problem after another and consequently managing to pass the course. Had she chosen to use some other Finnish verb, such as *päästä läpi* (*to pass*), the impression would have been quite different. The Finnish phrase *pääsin kurssista läpi* (*I passed the course*) would not have emphasized the active role of the writer but rather would have suggested that somebody else decided to let her pass. Thus, by choosing a particular verb, the writer manages to create a picture of herself as an active agent bringing about her own success by working hard. She also seems to depict learning English as hard as she begins her account with the word *finally* (*lopulta*), which created an impression that she had to work persistently for a long time in order to succeed. Further, she says that she managed to pass the course *only just* (*rimaa hipoen*). Finally, the writer states that she was proud of herself (*olin ylpeä itsestäni*), thus further congratulating herself for her success.

To sum up, the writers of the life stories draw on the effort repertoire to emphasize their own role in learning English. In other words, the writers blame themselves and their lack of effort for failures in learning English or, alternatively, thank themselves and their hard work for succeeding. The learner is thus depicted as an active agent responsible for her/his own learning. The role of the learning environment, including other people, is irrelevant, since learning or not learning is constructed as dependent on the learner's efforts alone. Similarly, being hard-of-hearing is an irrelevant matter and thus auditory problems are never mentioned in the accounts drawing on the effort repertoire. A possible function of the effort repertoire could be to create a picture of the self as an active learner who can influence her/his own learning and, more generally, be in control of what happens to her/him.

7.1.9 The school repertoire

The school repertoire is used quite equally to explain both failures and successes in learning English. In the school repertoire, the writers of the life stories blame the school as a learning environment for their failures in learning English or, alternatively, credit it for their successes. More specifically, teachers, teaching methods, fellow students and other matters linked to school as an institution are said to be the cause underlying failure or success. The learner is assigned the role of a traditional pupil, i.e. s/he is depicted as a rather passive recipient of information. The learning environment, on the other hand is constructed as active: teachers, teaching methods and materials are the ones responsible for making the learners learn. The school repertoire resembles the special learner repertoire (see section 7.1.3) in that the learner is depicted as passive and powerless, being at the mercy of the active institutional learning environment. However, the two repertoires differ in the roles assigned to hearing. Hearing was a relevant issue in the special learner repertoire where the learning environment was blamed for not taking a hard-of-hearing learner's needs into account or, alternatively, credited for doing so. In the school repertoire, on the other hand, the role of hearing is irrelevant. The writers of the life stories do not depict themselves as hard-of-hearing learners but rather as

average school pupils or students who face the same problems in learning English as everybody else.

Vocabulary related to the institutional learning environment is one of the key features of this repertoire. References to school, teachers, and teaching methods are frequent (*koulu, opettaja, luokka, menetelmä, kirja, harjoitus*). Active verbs are often used while talking about the teacher, whereas the learner is often the object of the teacher's actions.

Failures. In example (35), the writer of one life story compares the methods used in the instruction of different languages she has studied. It is not very evident that the account includes an explanations of failure in learning English because the writer does not explicitly report of a failure. However, since the writer seems to criticize the instruction she received in English it is possible to interpret that this had a negative effect on her learning. Had the instruction been better, her learning results could have been better. This points to the use of the school repertoire.

> (35) Saksan ja hollannin kielten opiskelut olivat mielekkäimmät. Niissä opetus oli vain sillä kielellä, mikä on eriittäin hyvä tapa. Sitä olisin kaivanut englannin kielen opiskelussa. Kaikki kieliopit sun muut selitettiin suomen kielellä vaikka paras tapa olisi ollut opettaa sillä kielellä mitä opiskellaan. (02F)
>
> My studies in German and Dutch were the most sensible. In those studies the instruction was given only with the language in question, which was a very good method. I would have wished for that in my English studies, too. All the grammar and other things were explained in Finnish even though the best way would have been to teach in the language that was studied. (02F)

The writer begins her account by describing her studies in German and Dutch, the latter of which she had not studied at school but during her stay abroad. She characterizes studying these languages as *the most sensible* (*mielekkäimmät*) because *the instruction was given only with the language in question* (*opetus oli vain sillä kielellä*), which, according to her, was *a very good method* (*eriittäin hyvä tapa*). Next, she states that she would have wished that this method had been used also in the instruction of English she received at school. Thus, she seems to create a contrast between the method used in teaching German and Dutch and the one used in teaching English, implying that the

former was better than the latter. She goes on to explain this further, telling that in English classes *all the grammar and other things were explained in Finnish* (*kaikki kieliopit sun muut selitettiin suomen kielellä*) even though, according to her, *the best way would have been to teach in the language that was studied* (*paras tapa olisi ollut opettaa sillä kielellä mitä opiskellaan*). By constructing her account in this way she manages to imply that she did not receive the best possible instruction in English. Example (35) seems to construct the learner's learning as dependent on the instruction s/he receives and not on her/his own efforts, for instance. For example, when telling about her studies in German and Dutch, the writer chooses to use the construction *the instruction was given* (*opetus oli*) which creates an impression that the instruction was imposed on the learner from the outside rather than the learner actively seeking it. Further, while describing the methods used in her English studies, the writer says that things *were explained* (*selitettiin*) in Finnish even though the best way would have been *to teach* (*opettaa*) them with the target language. Both these verbs also denote activity on the part of the person who does the explaining and the teaching, i.e. the teacher. However, as the writer does not seem to blame a particular teacher for not teaching in the best possible way. Rather, since the writer chooses to use verb forms that do not specify the actual agent (*selitettiin, opettaa*), it seems that she is assigning the blame to the way of teaching English in Finnish schools in general.

Most of the explanations drawing on the school repertoire seem to assign blame or credit for success and failure more or less evidently to teachers. Example (36) illustrates how a teacher can be held responsible for a learner failing in using English. In this account, the writer of one of the life stories tells about an incident that took place at an international summer camp when she asked two native English speakers to give her feedback on her spoken English.

> (36) En miettinyt hetkeäkään omaa kielitaitoani, ja kysyinkin sitä kahdelta syntyperäiseltä britiltä, jotka olivat mukana leirillä. He totesivat, että "on ihan hyvää tekstiä, mutta vähän kaavamaista"....no niin opettaja, siinä se nähtiin, kirjakielellä ei pärjää! (03F)
>
> I didn't doubt my language proficiency for a minute and so I asked two native Brits who were at the camp about it. They said that 'the language is quite good but a bit stiff'… well Ms Teacher, there you have it, you can't cope with standard language! (03F)

The writer begins her account by depicting herself as very confident in her language skills as she says *I didn't doubt my language proficiency for a minute* (*En miettinyt hetkeäkään omaa kielitaitoani*). However, the feedback she received from two native speakers of English seemed to reveal a shortcoming in her spoken language skills that the native speakers characterized as *quite good but a bit stiff* (*ihan hyvää tekstiä, mutta vähän kaavamaista*). The writer assigns the blame for the stiffness of her spoken English to her upper secondary school English teacher who, as the writer reports earlier in her life story, did not accept colloquial language but insisted on the students always using standard language. The writer constructs her account in a very interesting way. She seems to address her words directly to the teacher as if the teacher was standing right next to her, saying *well Ms Teacher, there you have it, you can't cope with standard language!* (*no niin opettaja, siinä se nähtiin, kirjakielellä ei pärjää!*) By constructing her account in this way the writer manages to make it clear that the teacher was wrong in insisting on the use of standard language and thus also responsible for the writer's failure in using English. Consequently, it seems that the writer is drawing on the school repertoire.

Example (37) also illustrates how the blame for a failure in learning English can be assigned to a teacher. In this example, the writer of one of the life stories defines failure as receiving the mark nine (the second best mark) in English instead of ten (the best mark).

> (37) Yhdeksännellä luokalla opettajamme vaihtui yllättäen, edellinen lienee irtisanottu, opettajaksi tuli naisopettaja, jolla oli aivan erilainen opetustyyli ja tiukempi ote, kuin edellisellä opettajalla. Hän tiputti arvosanani kympistä yhdeksikköön, mistä olin hyvin pettynyt. (11F)
>
> In the ninth grade our teacher was changed unexpectedly, the previous one was probably fired, the new teacher was a woman who had a completely different style of teaching and was more controlling than the former teacher. She dropped my mark from ten to nine, of which I was very disappointed. (11F)

Earlier in her life story, the writer has described herself as a good student who received good marks in English. However, as she reports in example (37), the situation changed a little in the ninth grade. Her English teacher *was changed unexpectedly* (*opettajamme vaihtui yllättäen*). Since the writer uses the expression *unexpectedly* (*yllättäen*) it may be interpreted that the writer is partly drawing on the chance repertoire (see section 7.1.7). However, in the rest of the account, the writer seems to assign the blame for the slight drop in her mark mainly to her new English teacher. The writer says that the new teacher had *a completely different style of teaching* (*aivan erilainen opetustyyli*) and she was *more controlling* (*tiukempi ote*) than the former teacher. These descriptions of the teacher create an impression that the teacher is the one in control, whereas the learner is quite passive, the recipient of the teacher's teaching. Thus, the learner cannot influence what happens in the class but has to adapt to changes in the style of teaching. The ultimate control over the failure and success of the learner seems to be in the hands of the teacher, since the writer says it was the teacher who *dropped* (*tiputti*) her mark from ten to nine. Thus, by using an active verb in connection with the teacher, the writer manages to depict the teacher as an active agent who has the power to drop the learner's mark without the learner having any control over what happens. It seems thus that the writer is drawing on the school repertoire.

Successes. The school repertoire was also drawn on in order to explain successes in learning English. In these cases, teachers, teaching methods or the school as an institution were credited for the leaner succeeding in learning English. In example (38), the writer of one of the life stories seems to assign the credit for her good English skills to the instruction she received in upper secondary school as well as to her English teacher.

> (38) Saimme siis pitkän englannin opetusta ne kolme lukion vuotta! Ope kopsasi pitkän englannin lukusuunnitelmista suurimman osan ja luetti meillä mitä vain ikinä hirvisi ja kehtasi. (03F)
>
> So we received instruction in A-level English during those three years in upper secondary school! The teacher copied most of the curriculum of A-level English and made us read everything she dared. (03F)

The writer of the life story had started her English studies only in the lower secondary school as her third foreign language, i.e. C-language. However, as the writer says, in upper secondary school her class received instruction in A-level English, which is somewhat more advanced since A-level English begins already in primary school. The reason for this, according to the writer, was that the teacher chose to follow the A-level curriculum instead of the one for C-level. Again, the account seems to reflect the traditional roles of the teacher and the learner, where the former is the active agent who makes the learners learn and the latter is a rather passive recipient of information. Right at the beginning of the account the writer says that her class *received* (*saimme*) instruction in A-level English. Clearly, this creates a picture of the learner as a passive recipient. Further in the account, the writer of the life story depicts the teacher as active by using active verbs in connection with her. For example, the teacher *copied* (*kopioi*) most of the curriculum of A-level English. Further, and most interestingly, the writer says that the teacher made them read (*luetti meillä*) everything she dared. By using this kind of a construction the writer manages to emphasize the activity and control of the teacher as well as the passivity of the learners who are the objects of the teacher's actions. The writer is thus drawing on the school repertoire.

Even though the teachers are often held responsible for the failure or the success of the learner, the blame or credit can also be assigned to the school at a more general level. In example (39), the writer seems to be crediting the school's resources, teaching materials and the general atmosphere for her success in learning English.

> (39) Kauppiksessa oli rahaa ja se näkyi opiskelumateriaalissa, sillä meihin tosiaan satsattiin. Oli videota, lehti-juttuja kopioituna jne. Kielistudio oli pinempi ja ilmapiiri oli kotoisampi kuin lukiossa. (08F)
>
> The business college had money and it showed in the learning materials since we were really invested in. There were videos, copies of newspaper articles etc. The language lab was smaller and the general atmosphere was cozier than in upper secondary school. (08F)

Example (39) is part of a longer account where the writer draws on various repertoires in order to explain her success in learning English in the business college she attended after upper secondary school. However, in this particular passage, the writer seems to draw on the school repertoire. First, the writer talks about the financial resources of the school, reporting that *the business college had money* (*kauppiksessa oli rahaa*) which, in turn, *showed in the learning materials* (*se näkyi opiskelumateriaalissa*) that included *videos, copies of newspaper articles etc.* (*videota, lehti-juttuja kopioituna jne.*) The writer also makes a comparison with the business college and the upper secondary school, saying that *the general atmosphere was cozier* (*ilmapiiri oli kotoisampi*) in the former than in the latter. It seems thus that the writer constructs a very positive picture of the business college which, in addition to having a nice atmosphere, had adequate financial resources to offer the students good learning materials. This suggests that the writer is crediting her learning environment for her success in learning English, which points to the use of the school repertoire. However, maybe the most interesting part of the account is the writer's asse rtion that they, i.e. the students, *were really invested in* (*meihin tosiaan satsattiin*). By using this kind of a construction, the writer manages to create an impression as if the learning environment were an active agent who invests in the students, providing them with many kinds of learning materials, whereas the students are more or less passive objects of the actions of the learning environment. These roles assigned to the learning environment and the learner are also consistent with the school repertoire.

To sum up, the school repertoire is drawn on by the writers of the life stories in order to blame teachers, teaching methods, materials or the school as an institution for their failures in learning English or, alternatively, credit them for their successes. In the school repertoire, the learner is depicted as rather a

passive recipient of information. In contrast, the learning environment, i.e. the teachers, teaching materials etc. are constructed as more active, being the ones that make learners learn. Thus, the learning environment is considered to be responsible for the failure or the success of the learner, whereas the learner is a passive object of the actions of the learning environment. The role of hearing is irrelevant in the school repertoire: the writers of the life stories do not mention their hearing in the accounts thus constructing themselves as average language learners with no special needs. One possible function of the school repertoire could be to construct learning in a traditional way, where the teacher teaches and the learner learns as a result of the teacher's actions. This reduces the learner's responsibility in her/his own learning. Another possible function of the repertoire could be to point out that, since in the Finnish system schools are mainly responsible for offering instruction in foreign languages, they also have a big responsibility in keeping up the quality of teaching.

7.1.10 The naturalistic repertoire

In the life stories analysed in the present study, the naturalistic repertoire was used mainly to explain successes in learning or using English, although on a few occasions it was also drawn on in order to explain failures in learning or using English. The naturalistic repertoire is constructed on the idea that a foreign language is best learned while using it purposefully in a natural communication situation. Consequently, failures in learning or using English are said to result from a lack of opportunities to use English, whereas successes are said to follow from sufficient opportunities for practical language use. In the naturalistic repertoire, the writers of the life stories depict themselves as active language users. Also the environment of leaning or using English is assigned an active role. Further, the environment is depicted as natural, i.e. the writers of the life stories talk about their experiences of using English abroad, with colleagues at work or with international friends and family members. A foreign language is thus learned in interaction between an active learner and an active, natural environment. Thus, the naturalistic repertoire shares some features with the effort repertoire and the responsibility repertoire in the sense that they all depict the learner as active. However, in the effort and

responsibility repertoires the role of the environment was passive or irrelevant, whereas in the naturalistic repertoire also the environment is assigned an active role. This, in turn, resembles the role assigned to the environment in, for example, the school repertoire and the special learner repertoire. However, even though in these repertoires the environment is constructed as active, the school and the special learner repertoires depict the environment as formal or institutional, whereas the naturalistic repertoire constructs the learning environment as informal and natural. The role of hearing is irrelevant in the naturalistic repertoire.

There are several linguistic features typical of the naturalistic repertoire. First, the vocabulary contains references to trips abroad (*inter-rail, matka, kansainvälinen kesäleiri, kurssi, Ranska, Hollanti, Puola, Tanska*) as well as to international family members and friends (*käly, eno, enon vaimo, ulkomaalaiset ystävät, vieraskieliset vieraat*). Second, accounts drawing on the naturalistic repertoire often include verbs that emphasize that English is used purposefully (*käyttää, tarvita*). Finally, the writers often construct their accounts in a way that creates an impression as if the environment forces the learner to use the language (*oli pakko osata, oli pakko tulla toimeen, jouduin keskustelemaan englanniksi*).

Failures. In the life stories analysed in this study, only a few examples of the use of the naturalistic repertoire in explaining failures in learning or using English could be found. However, in example (40), the writer of a life story seems to be partly drawing on the naturalistic repertoire in order to explain the difficulties she faced in passing an English course at university level.

> (40) Tämän kurssin suorittaminen vaati hiukan ponnisteluja: kurssin oppimateriaalissa oli paljon sanoja, joita en tuntenut. Ja tuntuma kieleen oli etääntynyt lähes vuoden tauon jälkeen. (11F)
>
> Passing this course demanded a bit of effort: the learning material used in the course contained a lot of words that I didn't know. And I had lost touch with the language after a break of two years. (11F)

Earlier in her life story, the writer has mainly described learning English as quite easy for her. However, she seems to have faced some challenges in

passing an English course at university level because she says that it *demanded a bit of effort* (*vaati hiukan ponnisteluja*). Thus, having to make an effort in order to pass the course may be interpreted as a kind of a failure, because normally the writer had considered learning English an easy task. The writer offers two explanations for the slight difficulties she faced during the course. First, she tells that *the learning material used in the course contained a lot of words that I didn't know* (*kurssin oppimateriaalissa oli paljon sanoja, joita en tuntenut*). Thus she seems to assign the blame to the properties of the learning materials, which may suggest the use of the school repertoire. However, from the point of view of the naturalistic repertoire, the writer's second explanation seems to be more interesting. She says that she *had lost touch with the language after a break of two years* (*tuntuma kieleen oli etääntynyt lähes vuoden tauon jälkeen*). Thus, the writer seems to suggest that, during the past couple of years, she had not had an opportunity to use her English, which made passing a university level course more difficult. Her explanation seems to be based on the idea that in order to keep up one's language skills, one has to use the language regularly. Not using the language, in turn, results in losing touch with it and, consequently, causes failures in learning or using English in different situations. It seems, therefore, that the writer is drawing on the naturalistic repertoire.

Example (41) contains an explanation of failure in using English as well as an explanation of success in using English. Both of these explanations seem to be constructed in a way that points to the use of the naturalistic repertoire. In this account, the writer is describing her experiences in using English at work on a daily basis.

> (41) Huomaan ihan selvästi, että vielä [VUOSI] keväällä tuskailin englanninkieleni "jäykkyyttä"; huomasin, että sanat eivät vain tule, vaikka periaatteessa osaankin. Nyt kun oli pakko vain osata, vähitellen tuo "muuri" hioutui pois ja sanat tulevat sujuvasti. (03F)
>
> I can clearly see that still in the spring of [YEAR] I agonized over the "stiffness" of my English; I noticed that the words just wouldn't come out even though I knew them in principle. Now that I just had to be able (to use English), that "wall" has been broken down gradually and the words come out fluently. (03F)

At the beginning of the account, the writer tells how she agonized over the "stiffness" of her English (*tuskailin englanninkieleni "jäykkyyttä"*) when she first started to use the language at work. She further describes how, despite her good language skills, *the words just wouldn't come out* (*sanat eivät vain tule*). These descriptions of the writers difficulties may be interpreted as a reference to the naturalistic repertoire. To use the word *stiffness* (*jäykkyys*) while describing language use creates an impression that the language has not been used and therefore the fluency has been lost. Describing how the words just would not come out fluently further emphasizes the impression of the stiffness and inflexibility of the language. Thus, the writer seems to be implying that her failure in using English was caused by a lack of use of the language, which points to the use of the naturalistic repertoire. The account of failure is immediately followed by an account of success that perhaps more openly draws on the naturalistic repertoire. The writer compares her earlier difficulties to a *"wall"* that *has been broken down gradually* (*vähitellen tuo "muuri" hioutui pois*). This happened because she *just had to be able* to use English (*oli pakko vain osata*). By this the writer seems to be referring to the fact that her work required using English on a daily basis, and consequently she got a lot of practice in using it. Thus, as the result of numerous opportunities to use English, *the words come out fluently* (*ja sanat tulevat sujuvasti*). This suggests that the writer is drawing on the naturalistic repertoire. A further point of interest that also points to the use of the naturalistic repertoire is how the writer chooses to say that she just *had to* (*oli pakko*) be able to use English. By constructing her account in this way she manages to create an impression as if the environment forced her to actively use English in practice. Thus it seems that the writer herself as well as the environment have an active role in the writer's success in using English.

Successes. As mentioned above, the naturalistic repertoire is mainly drawn on in order to explain successes in learning or using English. Example (41) already partly illustrated this. Example (42), in turn, is a pure account of success where the writer of one life story explains her success in using English, drawing on the naturalistic repertoire.

> (42) Varsinaisesti olen oppinut käyttämään kieltä monilla Inter-Rail matkoillani yksin liikenteessä. Oli pakko tulla toimeen englannilla, joten siinä sitä oppi. (10F)
>
> As a matter of fact, I have learned to use the language during the many Inter-Rail trips I made on my own. I had to manage in English, so that's how I learned it. (10F)

Example (42) contains several features that are typical of the naturalistic repertoire. First, the writer tells that she has learned to use the language, i.e. English, *during the many Inter-Rail trips* (*monilla Inter-Rail matkoillani*) she made on her own. Thus she constructs the learning environment as natural, as opposed to an institutional environment, such as the school. Second, similarly to example (41), the writer uses a construction that creates an impression of necessity of using English. As the writer says, she *had to manage in English* (*Oli pakko tulla toimeen englannilla*). This creates a picture of the writer using the language actively and purposefully with other people in order to cope in various everyday situations. Thus, it seems that learning English took place in natural interaction between the writer and other people, which suggests that both the learner and the learning environment had active roles in the learning. Further, using the Finnish construction *oli pakko* (*I had to/I was forced to*) seems to even emphasize the role of the environment: it seems as though the environment almost forced the writer to use the language actively. Thus, the necessity of using the language in a natural environment seems to be the ultimate reason for the writer's success in learning to use the language. Yet another point of interest in example (42) is that the writer begins the account with the Finnish expression *varsinaisesti* (*as a matter of fact/strictly speaking*). By using this expression, the writer manages to underline that the cause behind her success in learning English was indeed the opportunity to use the language during the Inter-Rail trips. Accordingly, alternative explanations are denied.

Example (43) also illustrates the use of the naturalistic repertoire in explaining successes in learning or using English. In this passage, the writer makes quite a straightforward assumption about the cause underlying her success in learning English.

> (43) Eniten olen oppinut englantia käyttäessäni sitä muiden ihmisten kanssa muun muassa kälyni kanssa. (04F)
>
> I have learned English the most while using it with other people, among others with my sister-in-law. (04F)

In example (43), the writer seems to capture the main idea of the naturalistic repertoire in a nutshell. As the writer says, she has learned English the most *while using it with other people* (*käyttäessäni sitä muiden ihmisten kanssa*). The writer thus depicts herself as an active language user who uses English while interacting with an active environment. This clearly indicates that the writer is drawing on the naturalistic repertoire. Further, as mentioned earlier, references to international friends and family members are typical of the naturalistic repertoire. This feature can also be seen in example (43) since the writer refers to her sister-in-law, who, as she has reported earlier in her life story, is not Finnish and with whom she needs to use English almost on a daily basis.

In example (44), the writer of the life story describes her experiences in using English at a young age. The writer seems to credit these experiences for her success in learning the language, which suggests that the writer is drawing on the naturalistic repertoire.

> (44) Koulun ulkopuolella englantia olen tarvinnut ihan pienestä asti enoni vaimon kanssa jutellessa, hän on [MAA]. Ja vaikken aina ole enkuksi puhunutkaan, niin ainakin ruokapöydässä olen kuullut kun aikuiset puhuu. Olin tosi ylpeä itsestäni ala-asteella kun osasin puhua hänen kanssaan jotain. Tuolla ja televisiolla on ollut varmaan suuri vaikutus kuullunymmärtämiseeni. (09F)
>
> Outside school I have needed English since I was small when talking with my uncle's wife, she is from [COUNTRY]. And even though I haven't always spoken English, at least I have heard the adults talking at the dinner table. I was very proud of myself in primary school when I was able to say something to her. That and the television have probably had a big effect on my listening comprehension skills. (09F)

The writer begins her account with the words *outside school* (*koulun ulkopuolelle*), thus immediately excluding the institutional learning environment and creating an impression that the learning environment described in the account is more informal and natural. It also seems that the writer constructs both herself and the environment as active. As she says, she

has needed English since she was a small child when talking with her uncle's wife (*enoni vaimon kanssa jutellessa*) who was not Finnish. The Finnish verb *jutella* (*talk/chat*) creates an impression of reciprocal communication between two people, which suggests that both the writer and the uncle's wife were active agents in the situation. Had the writer chosen to use another Finnish verb, such as *puhua* (*talk/speak*) the impression of reciprocity would not have been as evident: you can talk alone or to someone, whereas chatting seems to require at least two active parties. Another interesting point at the beginning of the account is that the writer says that she has *needed* (*olen tarvinnut*) English since she was little. Using the verb *need* (*tarvita*) seems to suggest that speaking English had a practical purpose in the writer's life: she needed to use it in order to communicate with other people, which is one of the key features of the naturalistic repertoire. The writer goes on to admit that she has not always spoken English herself but at least she has *heard the adults talking at the dinner table* (*ruokapöydässä olen kuullut kun aikuiset puhuu*). This also seems to create an impression of natural language learning where a child learns or, rather, acquires a language in everyday life as opposed to actively studying a language in an institutional learning environment. The writer ends her account of success by saying: *That and the television have probably had a big effect on my listening comprehension skills* (*Tuolla ja televisiolla on ollut varmaan suuri vaikutus kuullunymmärtämiseeni*). Although different interpretations are possible as to what the writer refers to with the pronoun *that* (*tuolla*), it is most probable that she is referring to the fact that English was a part of her life already since a small child. It seems that the writer is drawing a direct causal link between the opportunity to use English in practice and her good listening comprehension skills.

In sum, the naturalistic repertoire is based on the idea of learning a language while using it in interaction. Accordingly, the blame for failures in learning or using English is assigned to a lack of opportunities to use English purposefully in communication with other people. Alternatively, the credit for successes in learning or using English is assigned to adequate opportunities to use and be in contact with the language. Since learning English takes place in interaction, both the learner/user and the learning environment are assigned active roles in

the naturalistic repertoire. It is also typical that the environment almost seems to force the learner to use the language actively in order to cope. A possible function of the naturalistic repertoire could be to emphasize the importance of natural language use as opposed to studying it in an institutional environment.

7.2 Summary of the repertoires

The analysis of the explanations for failure and success in learning or using English resulted in the identification of ten interpretative repertoires. Interestingly, five of these repertoires constructed hearing as a relevant factor for the failure or success in learning or using English, whereas the other five repertoires did not assign a relevant role to hearing. This section will summarize the main features of the repertoires. In addition, an attempt is made to compare the repertoires with each other by reflecting on their similarities and differences.

Table 4 summarizes the repertoires by indicating the roles assigned to hearing, the learner/user and the environment in each repertoire. Further, agency in each repertoire is established.

Table 4. Summary of the repertoires

Repertoire	Hearing	Learner	Environment	Agent
auditory	relevant	passive, hard-of-hearing	passive, irrelevant	hearing
environmental	relevant	passive, hard-of-hearing	active	learner-external matters: environment, other people, hearing aids, English
special learner	relevant	passive, hard-of-hearing, special learner	active, institutional	institutional learning environment
responsibility	relevant	active, hard-of-hearing	passive, irrelevant	learner
specialist	relevant	passive, hard-of-hearing	passive (active)	hearing (environment)
talent	irrelevant	passive, talented/ untalented	passive, irrelevant	talent/ability
chance	irrelevant	passive	passive, irrelevant	chance/ fate
effort	irrelevant	active, efficient/ inefficient	passive, irrelevant	learner/user
school	irrelevant	passive, recipient of information	active, institutional	institutional learning environment
naturalistic	irrelevant	active, language user	active, natural	learner and naturalistic learning environment

The first repertoire identified, **the auditory repertoire**, is constructed on the sense of hearing. Accordingly, in explanations within this repertoire, the writers of the life stories assign the blame for their failures in learning or using English to poor hearing or, alternatively, assign the credit for their successes to adequate or good hearing. Since hearing is a factor that a person cannot influence, the learner/user is depicted as passive and powerless. Similarly, the environment of learning or using English is irrelevant in the explanations

drawing on the auditory repertoire. The only factor that determines the failure or success of a learner/user is hearing. Hearing is thus assigned the agency in the auditory repertoire.

Similarly to the auditory repertoire, **the environmental repertoire** also assigns hearing a relevant role in the explanations for failure and success. However, hearing is not constructed as the primary factor bringing about failure or success in learning or using English, as it was in the auditory repertoire. Rather, failure and success are dependent on various learner-external matters, such as the physical environment, other people, hearing aids or features of the English language. These factors either make it harder or easier to hear, or influence the communication situation in some other way, such as by hindering or facilitating the use of visual cues. For example, a noisy classroom can be assigned the blame for a learner's failure in a pair discussion task, or another person's clear lip movements can be credited for succeeding in a communication situation. The role of the learner/user is passive and powerless, as in the auditory repertoire, since the learner/user is unable to influence factors within the environment. The role of the environment, in turn, is active. It is the primary factor influencing the learner's hearing or not hearing properly, and thus it is assigned the agency for failures or successes in learning or using English.

The special learner repertoire resembles the environmental repertoire in many ways (see Table 4). The roles assigned to hearing, the learner and the environment in the special learner repertoire are very similar to those of the environmental repertoire. In both repertoires, hearing is assigned a relevant role, the learner is depicted as passive or powerless and the environment is assigned an active role. However, there are important features that separate the special learner repertoire from the environmental repertoire. First, the learning environment of the special learner repertoire is institutional, whereas in the environmental repertoire the learning environment was not so strictly confined to one kind of an environment. In other words, in the special learner repertoire the writers of the life stories describe failures and successes that have taken place at school, blaming or crediting teachers, teaching methods or the

institutional system in general for their failures or successes. The second and the more important difference between the repertoires is that the failures and successes described in the special learner repertoire are not directly linked to hearing. Failure and success are not caused by not hearing or hearing properly like in the environmental repertoire, but they are dependent on how well the institutional learning environment takes into account the special needs of a hard-of-hearing learner. The institutional learning environment is thus assigned the agency in the special learner repertoire.

The responsibility repertoire also assigns a relevant role to hearing. However, much like in the special learner repertoire, failure and success in learning or using English are not constructed as directly linked with the sense of hearing. Rather, failure and success are linked to how well the learner/user her/himself acknowledges her/his own special needs as a hard-of-hearing language learner and how actively s/he seeks solutions to the challenges faced as a result of these special needs. The learner/user is thus assigned an active role in the responsibility repertoire, which clearly distinguishes it from the repertoires described so far, i.e. the auditory, environmental and special learner repertoires. The role of the learning environment is irrelevant, like in the auditory repertoire, since the only factor determining the failure or success is the learner's own activity in attending to her/his special needs. The learner her/himself is thus the agent of her/his own learning.

The fifth and the last repertoire to assign a relevant role to hearing is **the specialist repertoire**. In the specialist repertoire, the writers of the life stories construct their accounts using a register of language that could be expected to be used by a specialist in auditory disorders or an advocate for hard-of-hearing people's rights. The writers thus construct their accounts on a general level, not talking about their personal experiences but about those of hard-of-hearing people in general. Hearing is named the determining factor for failing in learning or using English, although sometimes some environmental factors are mentioned as contributing factors. A hard-of-hearing learner/user of English is depicted as rather passive and powerless, since s/he cannot influence her/his hearing, nor the environmental factors. The role of the environment it usually

passive and irrelevant, with the exception of a few instances where the environment is constructed as hindering communication. The agency in the specialist repertoire is thus usually assigned to hearing but on few occasions to the environment. However, the specialist repertoire is based more on the register of language used in the accounts than their content.

The talent repertoire differs fundamentally from the repertoires described above in that the role of hearing is irrelevant in the explanations for failure or success in learning or using English. The repertoire is constructed on the idea of talent or ability. Failure and success are thus dependent on whether one is born with a special aptitude for learning languages or not. The learner/user is depicted as passive and powerless, since s/he cannot influence whether s/he possesses these mental capacities or not. Also the role of the environment is irrelevant. The agency in the talent repertoire is thus assigned solely to talent.

The chance repertoire resembles the talent repertoire in many respects. Firstly, hearing plays no role in the explanations for failure and success within this repertoire. Secondly, the learner and the environment are also assigned passive roles in the chance repertoire, as in the talent repertoire. However, the difference between the two repertoires lies in to what agency is assigned. In the talent repertoire, talent or a special aptitude for languages was seen as the factor bringing about the failure or the success of a learner/user. In the chance repertoire, in contrast, the agency is assigned to chance, fate, or mysterious powers of some kind. These factors differ from talent in that they seem to be external to the learner/user, whereas talent, being an individual characteristic, seems to reside within the learner/user. In the chance repertoire, the writers of the life stories thus assign the blame for their failures or the credit for their successes to chance or fate.

The effort repertoire, in turn, is based on the idea of self-help. Failure and success are constructed as resulting from how much work the learner/user is ready to invest into her/his own learning. Similarly to the talent and chance repertoires, hearing is considered irrelevant in the effort repertoire. The role of the learner, in turn, is active: failure and success are dependent on the learner's

own actions. Further, the role of the environment is irrelevant. The roles assigned to the learner and the environment resemble those of the responsibility repertoire. However, the distinguishing factor between the responsibility repertoire and the effort repertoire is the role assigned to hearing. As mentioned above, the effort repertoire disregards the role of hearing altogether, whereas the responsibility repertoire assigns it a relevant role.

The school repertoire resembles the special learner repertoire in many respects. In explanations within the school repertoire, the writers of the life stories assign the blame for their failures or the credit for their successes to teachers, teaching methods and materials and other things encountered in an institutional learning environment. The learner is constructed as a traditional pupil who is a passive recipient of information, whereas the institutional learning environment is assigned an active role. The school is assigned the agency in the school repertoire, since it is considered responsible for making the learners learn. As seen above, also the special learner repertoire assigns a passive role to the learner and an active role to the institutional learning environment. However, the fundamental difference separating the two repertoires from each other is the role assigned to hearing. In the school repertoire, the writers of the life stories do not construct hearing as a relevant factor with regard to learning English. In contrast, in the special learner repertoire the writers assign a relevant role to hearing, constructing themselves as hard-of-hearing learners who encounter special challenges in learning languages because of their disability.

The last repertoire drawn on in the explanations for success and failure is **the naturalistic repertoire**. It is based on the idea that learning a language requires using it purposefully in authentic communication situations. The blame for failures in learning English is thus assigned to a lack of opportunities to use English, whereas the credit for successes is assigned to sufficient opportunities of purposeful use. The naturalistic repertoire resembles the responsibility repertoire and the effort repertoire in that it assigns an active role to the learner. The learner is constructed as an active participant in meaningful communication. Communication being a bilateral event, the environment, too,

is constructed as active. In this respect, the naturalistic repertoire resembles the environmental, special learner and school repertoire. However, the environment depicted in the naturalistic repertoire is natural and informal, whereas in the special learner and the school repertoires the environment is institutional and formal. The role of hearing is also irrelevant, which distinguishes the naturalistic repertoire from the environmental and the special learner repertoires. The agency in the naturalistic repertoire is assigned both to the learner/user and the environment.

The ten repertoires thus differ from each other according to the roles assigned to hearing, the learner and the learning environment. Although some repertoires assign quite similar roles to these, they still differ from each other. For example, as noted above, the environmental and the special learner repertoires both assign a relevant role to hearing, a passive role to the learner and an active role to the environment. However, the repertoires differ from each other in that the environmental repertoire links failure and success directly to not hearing or hearing, whereas the special learner repertoire constructs failure and success as dependent on how well the institutional learning environment acknowledges a hard-of-hearing learner's special needs. The differences between the repertoires are thus fine but, as seen in sections 7.1.1 – 7.1.10, quite visible in language use, which, of course, was the main focus of the present study.

7.3 Frequency of the repertoires

As noted in section 6.3, counting the number of the accounts of failure and success in the life stories was quite difficult. Similarly, it is difficult to give actual numbers of the instances of use of each repertoire. For example, as in example (18) (see section 7.1.4), the writer could explain a failure starting with the special learner repertoire, switching to the responsibility repertoire and then returning to the special learner repertoire at the end of the accounts. In these cases it was not clear whether one should record two appearances of the special learner repertoire, or just one since they were used within one account. Because of the qualitative and descriptive nature of the present study, it was decided

that it was not necessary to count the actual numbers of each repertoire. However, some observations about the approximate frequency of the repertoires could be made.

The number of instances of use varied quite considerably between the repertoires. For example, the responsibility repertoire, the specialist repertoire and the chance repertoire were each used in only around ten instances, whereas the school repertoire was resorted to in close to fifty instances and the environmental repertoire in around forty instances. However, the majority of the repertoires were drawn on in between twenty and thirty instances. These repertoires included the auditory repertoire, the special learner repertoire, the talent repertoire, the effort repertoire and the naturalistic repertoire.

Examining the explanations for failure and the explanations for success separately revealed some interesting findings. It was observed that the repertoires most frequently drawn on while explaining failures in learning or using English were the auditory repertoire, the environmental repertoire and the school repertoire (more than twenty instances of use each). Interestingly, the auditory and the environmental repertoires both assign a relevant role to hearing in the explanations for failure (and success). The auditory repertoire assigns the blame for failures directly to an impaired hearing, whereas the environmental repertoire assigns the blame to various factors within the environment that hinder hearing and communication. In addition to these two repertoires, the special learner repertoire, that also assigns a relevant role to hearing, was also quite frequently drawn on in the explanations for failure (about fifteen instances). Hearing thus seems to play an important role in explaining failures in learning or using English. However, also the school repertoire was among the three most frequently used repertoires. The school repertoire does not recognize hearing as a relevant factor in failures (or successes) in learning or using English. Instead, it assigns the blame to teachers, teaching methods and materials and other matters linked with the institutional learning environment. Interestingly, none of the repertoires mentioned so far, i.e. the auditory, environmental, special learner and school repertoires, assign an active role to the learner/user. Thus, the learner/user is

not constructed as responsible for the failures. However, the effort repertoire, which does assign the agency to the learner/user, was also quite frequently drawn on in the explanations for failure (around fifteen instances). In these explanations for failure, the writers blamed themselves for not working hard enough.

Successes in learning or using English were the most frequently explained by drawing on the school repertoire and the naturalistic repertoire (close to thirty instances each). The talent repertoire was also quite often used (about twenty instances). Importantly, none of these repertoires assign a relevant role to hearing. Drawing on the naturalistic repertoire, the writers of the life stories talk about succeeding in learning English as a result of using it with other people in meaningful communication. Thus, the credit for the success is assigned both to the learner/user and the environment of learning. The self is thus partly credited for the success. However, interestingly, both the school repertoire and the talent repertoire assign a passive role to the learner. Drawing on the school repertoire, the writers assign the credit for their success to matters linked to school as an institution, whereas resorting to the talent repertoire the writers credit their inborn mental capacities for their success. Thus, the learner/user him/herself is not given any credit for succeeding in learning or using English.

In sum, the number of instances of use of each repertoire varied from around ten up to almost fifty. The repertoires that were the least frequently drawn on were the responsibility repertoire, the specialist repertoire and the chance repertoire, whereas the two most frequently used were the school repertoire and the environmental repertoire. In the explanations for failure, the repertoires that were the most frequently drawn on were the auditory repertoire, the environmental repertoire and the school repertoire. In addition, the special learner repertoire and the effort repertoire were also resorted to quite often. Two important observations about the explanations for failure can be made. First, the explanations drawing on repertoires that assign a relevant role to hearing outnumbered those drawing on repertoires that construct hearing as irrelevant. Second, repertoires that construct the learner/user as passive were

much more frequently resorted to than were those that construct the learner/user as active and responsible for the failures. In the explanations for success, in turn, the repertoires the most frequently resorted to were the naturalistic repertoire and the school repertoire. Further, also the talent repertoire was quite often used. Two important observations can be made about the explanations for success, too. First, in contrast to the explanations for failure, hearing did not seem to play a relevant part in the explanations for success. All the repertoires that were the most frequently drawn on constructed hearing as irrelevant. Second, similarly to the explanations for failure, it seems that the explanations drawing on repertoires that construct the learner/user as passive outnumbered those that construct the learner as active and responsible for the success. The naturalistic repertoire does partly credit the learner/user for the success but the school repertoire and the talent repertoire construct the learner/user as passive and assign the credit for the success to factors that the learner/user cannot influence. Yet another interesting observation about the frequency of the repertoires is that the school repertoire is among the most frequently used in both the explanations for failure and the explanations for success. This may be due to the fact that school plays a very central role in foreign language learning in the Finnish society.

8 DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss the findings of the present study. First, differences between the discursive approach to causal explanations adopted by the present study and the mainstream approach, i.e. attribution theory (Weiner 1986), will be discussed. This is done by making an attempt to apply the three causal dimensions of attribution theory – locus of causality, stability and controllability – to the ten interpretative repertoires identified in the present study. Second, comparisons will be made between the interpretative repertoires identified in the present study and those identified by Heikkinen (1999; also Ranta and Kalaja in press; Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001) in a pioneer study on discursive explanations in a foreign language learning context (see section 5.2).

8.1 Discursive explanations compared with cognitive attributions

The basic assumptions of attribution theory and the discursive approach to causal explanation are very different. Attribution theory treats causal explanations as cognitive representations that are applied in fixed ways to account for events. In contrast, the discursive approach emhasizes the constructed and constructive nature of causal explanation. Explanations are actions performed in language use in order to achieve certain outcomes, and as such they are not fixed in nature but vary according to their function. The research methods used in these two approaches thus also differ. Mainstream research on attributions relies largely on laboratory-like experiments conducted with the help of questionnaires while the discursive approach concentrates on studying naturally occurring causal explanations.

Comparing the discursive explanations of the writers of the life stories with cognitive attributions reveals some interesting issues. First, the number of categories of explanation do not match. As seen in section 2.4, according to attribution theory there are eight types of causal explanations that can be identified based on three causal dimensions: locus of causality, stability and controllability. However, in the present study, ten interpretative repertoires, i.e. ways of explaining failure or success in learning or using English, were

identified. This means that there were two more categories of causal explanation than in the traditional attribution theory. Importantly, the ten interpretative repertoires emerged from life stories as different ways of using language and their number was not predetermined as in attribution theory.

The second interesting issue was revealed while trying to apply the three causal dimensions of attribution theory to the interpretative repertoires identified in the life stories. As the interpretative repertoires were based on linguistic evidence identified in authentic discourse, they can be considered to represent the way explanations actually occur in everyday interaction. Attribution theory, in contrast, claims that all explanations can be depicted with the three causal dimensions of locus of causality, stability and controllability. However, applying these dimensions to the authentic explanations made within the ten interpretative repertoires proved to be quite problematic, which suggests that the criticism of artificiality that the attribution theory has faced is quite justified. In the following, each of the ten interpretative repertoires is considered in the light of the three attributional dimensions.

The auditory repertoire is constructed around the auditory sense. Accordingly, impaired hearing is blamed for failures in learning or using English or adequate hearing is credited for successes. At first sight it seems that the auditory repertoire complies quite well with the first category of Weiner's (1986:51) model, i.e. internal, stable and uncontrollable. As hearing is an individual characteristic, it is internal to the person. Further, the writers of the life stories constructed themselves as powerless with regard to hearing, which makes it an uncontrollable factor. Problems arise, however, with the dimension of stability. Normally in the life stories, hearing was talked about as a rather stable characteristic that caused failures in learning English time after time. However, there were also some accounts that created a picture of the sense of hearing weakening over time. For example, in example (7) (see section 7.1.1), the writer of one of the life stories explained her success in learning English by claiming that she had started her studies *before the hearing started to have an influence*. In this example, hearing seems to be an unstable characteristic that can change over time. Importantly, from the point of view of the present study

whether hearing is a stable or an unstable characteristic is not important. Discursive research relies solely on linguistic evidence, and based on that evidence (see section 7.1.1) the auditory repertoire forms a coherent whole. Weiner's (1986) attribution theory, however, cannot account for auditory repertoire, since the dimension of stability is ambiguous.

Applying the causal dimensions to **the environmental repertoire** also revealed the gap between the mechanistic view of explaining represented by attribution theory and the authentic explanations analysed in the present study. As seen in section 7.1.2, the environmental repertoire blames or credits various learner-external factors for either hindering or facilitating hearing or communication in general, which in turn causes failure or success in learning or using English. Trying to apply the three causal dimensions to the environmental repertoire is extremely problematic. First, since the environmental repertoire blames or credits learner-external matters for failures and successes, it would seem that the external category would be appropriate. However, the environmental repertoire still constructs hearing as a relevant factor in the failures and successes. Hearing, in turn, is a personal characteristic and thus internal. Within attribution theory there is no category that allows room for these kinds of explanations where the main cause is external but an internal characteristic, such as the sense of hearing, still plays an important role in the failure and success of an individual. From the point of view of attribution theory the cause must be either internal or external. Further problems arise with the dimension of stability. The learner-external factors mentioned in the explanations within the environmental repertoire include such matters as listening conditions, other people, hearing aids and features of English. While the features of the English language remain quite stable, the amount of noise in a classroom may vary. The dimension of controllability is not very straightforward, either. The causes of failure and success are external to the learner, so it seems only logical that they should also be uncontrollable by the learner. However, should the dimension of controllability be defined as "controllable by anyone" as in Weiner's (1986:51) model, the situation changes. For example, it can be suggested that other people can control the way in which they articulate and teachers can control the amount of noise they

allow in their classrooms. It seems thus that the attribution theory fails to account for the explanations made within the environmental repertoire. The complex features of these explanations cannot be described unambiguously with any of the categories proposed by the theory.

As noted in section 7.1.3, **the special learner repertoire** resembles the environmental repertoire in many ways. Thus, the problems faced while applying the three causal dimensions to the special learner repertoire are quite similar to those encountered with the environmental repertoire. The special learner repertoire assigns the blame for failures and the credit for successes to the institutional learning environment that either fails or manages to attend to the special needs of a hard-of-hearing learner. The main cause for failure or success being external and hearing still being a relevant matter, the dimension of locus faces the same kinds of problems as in the environmental repertoire. Stability, too, is an issue of ambiguity. For example, the writers of the life stories sometimes blame a specific teacher for their problems but do not attend to whether the teachers were always bad or just occasionally. Similarly, it may be questioned whether the school as an institution is stable in nature or whether it changes over time. Therefore, applying the dimension of stability to the special learner repertoire seems quite impossible. Also controllability raises the same kinds of issues as in the environmental repertoire. Even though the learner cannot control how the institutional learning environment treats her/him, for example, teachers can control their own behaviour. Whether explanations within the special learner repertoire should be considered controllable or uncontrollable thus depends on how the dimension itself is defined.

In explanations drawing on **the responsibility repertoire**, the writers of the life stories blame themselves for not seeking solutions to the problems caused by an impaired hearing or, alternatively, credit themselves for doing so. Thus, the locus of causality seems to be internal. Hearing being a relevant matter does not seem to cause problems in this repertoire, since it, too, is an internal factor. However, the dimensions of stability and controllability face some problems. For example, the writers of the life stories do not make a contrast

between always seeking solutions to their hearing difficulties or doing so only occasionally. Thus, the dimension of stability does not seem to be particularly important to the responsibility repertoire. Controllability seems quite straightforward at first. Since the writers blame or credit their own actions for their successes and failures, it seems that the cause is controllable. However, hearing, even though it is not directly blamed or credited, still plays an important role in the explanations within the responsibility repertoire: the problems that the learner/user has to attend to are caused by an impaired hearing. Hearing, in turn, is uncontrollable by the learner/user. Therefore, the dimension of controllability cannot be applied to the responsibility repertoire in a straightforward way.

The specialist repertoire was used only to explain failures in learning or using English and it assigns the blame for the failures most often to poor hearing but, as noted in section 7.1.5, sometimes to the environment that hinders hearing. The special feature of this repertoire is that the writers of the life stories do not talk about themselves but about hard-of-hearing people in general, using language that could be used by a specialist of auditory disorders. Applying the three causal dimensions to the specialist repertoire is quite difficult. First, since it is possible to assign the blame either to hearing or to the environment, the locus of causality is unclear. In some cases it is internal, in others more external. The dimension of stability is also problematic. Hearing, on the one hand, can be considered a stable characteristic, while on the other hand, environmental features may change from one situation to another. Controllability, in turn, seems to be quite clear. Both hearing and features of the environment are uncontrollable by the learner.

The talent repertoire is the first repertoire to treat hearing as irrelevant in the explanations for failure and success in learning or using English. It is constructed around the idea that failures and successes are dependent on whether the leaner/user possesses certain inborn qualities, such as talent or special aptitude for languages. The talent repertoire seems to comply quite well with the first category of Weiner's (1986:51) model where the cause is labelled as internal, stable and uncontrollable. In fact, Weiner (1986:51) mentions

aptitude as an example of this category of explanation. However, it must be noted that Weiner (1986:45-47) himself raised some questions about the categorization of talent or aptitude. For example, it is not clear whether talent or aptitude are always stable characteristics or whether they can develop if practised.

The chance repertoire is constructed around the idea of chance or fate. Accordingly, failing or succeeding in learning or using English are dependent on things such as luck or mysterious forces of some kind. As mentioned in section 7.1.7, the chance repertoire differs from the talent repertoire in that the cause of failure and success seems to be external to the learner/user, whereas in the talent repertoire the cause is internal. The chance repertoire thus seems to fit Weiner's (1986) seventh category quite well: the cause behind failure is external, unstable and uncontrollable.

In **the effort repertoire**, the writers of the life stories constructed failure and success in learning or using English as dependent on the amount of work they were ready to invest into studying. It seems clear, that the cause of failure or success is internal since the writers hold themselves responsible for their learning outcomes. Further, effort seems to be a controllable cause because the learners can decide whether to work hard or not. However, the dimension of stability is problematic. In the effort repertoire, the writers of the life stories refer to both short term efforts, such as studying for a particular word test (see example (31)), and long term efforts, such as being lazy in comprehensive school in general (see example (32)). Importantly, the linguistic evidence, on which the repertoire is based, is coherent in both these cases and the writers of the life stories do not seem to contrast cases of temporary effort and long term effort. Therefore it seems that stability is not an important issue in the effort repertoire. The attribution theory thus fails to account for this repertoire, too, as the dimension of stability is unclear.

In explanations drawing on **the school repertoire**, the writers of the life stories blame or credit teachers, teaching methods and materials and other matters related to school for their failures or successes in learning or using

English. The locus of causality thus seems to be external to the leaner. The dimension of stability, on the other hand, is not as clear. On the one hand, the writers of the life stories may describe the ways in which languages are taught at school (see example (35)), which might be considered a stable characteristic of the institutional learning environment. On the other hand, however, the writers may depict the school as an unstable learning environment with, for instance, changing teachers (see example (37)). From the point of view of discursive research both these cases can be included in a linguistically coherent unit, the school repertoire. However, attribution theory cannot account for the repertoire as a whole. Further, as pointed out above, the dimension of controllability is also problematic because it is not clear what it means. In the school repertoire, the cause of failure or success is uncontrollable by the learner, but possibly controllable by teachers, for example.

The last of the repertoires, **the naturalistic repertoire**, is based on the idea that English is best learned while using it purposefully in communication with others. Thus, the naturalistic repertoire constructs both the learner/user and the learning environment as active participants in interactions. Trying to account for the naturalistic repertoire, attribution theory faces an insurmountable problem already with the first causal dimension, the locus of causality. Since the naturalistic repertoire constructs both the learner and the environment as active, the cause of failure or success is both internal and external, which is impossible from the point of view of the theory.

It seems that attribution theory cannot be applied to the vast majority of explanations analysed in the present study. Most of the repertoires are so complex in their causal structure that a three dimensional model of causal explaining fails to account for them. It seems thus that the criticism of artificiality that attribution theory has received is quite justified: the theory fails to account for spontaneous causal explanations realized in authentic discourse. The discursive approach, in turn, seems to have strengths in the study of spontaneous causal explanation. First, it allows the researcher to approach discourse without any predetermined categories to which explanations have to be fitted into. Second, since the discursive approach relies purely on linguistic

evidence identified in discourse, it does not have to try to disentangle the semantic structure of the explanation and attend to what went on in the writers' minds while explaining. Thus, the discursive approach does not face problems with, for example, the environmental repertoire, where the main cause of failure or success was external, but hearing, an internal factor, still played an important role in the explanation. Accounts like that are approached in their own right and there is no need to determine whether the writers of the life stories consider the causes internal or external, stable or unstable, controllable or uncontrollable. These dimensions become important only if the writers attend to them in their language use, creating contrasts between them.

8.2 The present study compared with previous research on discursive explanations

The findings of a discursive study are always bound to a certain context and cannot be generalized. Consequently, the interpretative repertoires identified in the present study apply only to one unique set of data, i.e. the life stories written by the eleven hard-of-hearing learners of English that were analysed in the present study. However, it is interesting to make some comparisons between the repertoires identified in the present study and those identified by Heikkinen (1999; see also Ranta and Kalaja in press; Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001) in a pioneer study that served as an encouraging example for the present study (see section 5.2). The two studies share the interest in exploring causal explanation in a foreign language learning context from a discursive point of view.

The comparison between the interpretative repertoires identified in the present study and those identified by Heikkinen (1999) revealed both differences and similarities. First, the five repertoires that constructed hearing as a relevant factor for failures and successes in learning or using English (auditory, environmental, special learner, responsibility and specialist repertoires) did not comply with any of the repertoires identified by Heikkinen (1999). This, very obviously, is due to the fact that the writers of the life stories in Heikkinen (1999) were not hard-of-hearing but average university students of English and

thus had no reason to construct hearing as a particularly relevant factor in learning. Comparing the five repertoires that ignored hearing, i.e. the talent, chance, effort, school and naturalistic repertoires with those identified by Heikkinen (1999), in turn, revealed more similarities. In the following these five repertoires will be looked at in comparison to Heikkinen's (1999) findings.

The talent repertoire is very similar to Heikkinen's (1999) individualistic repertoire. Both repertoires are based on the idea of talent, which is an inborn quality that makes it easy to learn languages. Not possessing this special ability, in turn, results in failure in learning languages. The use of comparative structures is also a feature typical of both the talent repertoire and the individualistic repertoire. The writers in both studies thus compared their own abilities with those of other learners.

Drawing on **the chance repertoire**, the writers of the life stories in the present study explained their failures or successes with bad or good luck, or random coincidences of some kind. As such, the chance repertoire resembles Heikkinen's (1999) fatalistic repertoire which, too, assigns causality to mysterious occurrences of fate. There is a small difference between the two repertoires, however, that has to do with the locus of causality. According to Heikkinen (1999:102), the fatalistic repertoire does not attend to whether the cause of success or failure is internal or external to the learner. The chance repertoire, in contrast, seems to be constructed in a way that creates an impression that the mysterious powers that bring about failure and success come from the outside of the learner (see section 7.1.7).

The effort repertoire also had a close counterpart in Heikkinen's (1999) study. It shares all its fundamental features with the efficiency repertoire. In both repertoires the basic idea is that the learner her/himself is responsible for her/his learning outcomes. Hard work is required in order to succeed, whereas neglecting one's studies results in failure in learning English. Although the repertoires share many linguistic features, the use of conditional forms (*olisi pitänyt, olisin voinut*) in explaining failures, however, seem to be unique to the effort repertoire identified in the present study. This, of course, may be due to

the fact that in Heikkinen's (1999) study failure was hardly ever explained with the efficiency repertoire, whereas in the present study explanations of failure drawing on the effort repertoire were quite common.

The school repertoire shares many of its features with Heikkinen's (1999) institutional repertoire. In both repertoires, the learner is assigned a passive role and depicted as a recipient of information, whereas the institutional learning environment is depicted as the active and responsible agent in learning. Thus, for example, teachers are often placed in the subject position in the sentence. However, a feature unique to Heikkinen's (1999) institutional repertoire is giving inanimate objects, such as books, the status of agent by placing them as subjects in sentences. This feature was not encountered in the present study.

The last repertoire identified in the present study, **the naturalistic repertoire** is very similar to Heikkinen's (1999) naturalistic repertoire after which it has been named. Both repertoires are based on the idea that a language is best learned in meaningful interaction with other people. Some minor differences between the two repertoires can be detected, however. Heikkinen's (1999) naturalistic repertoire seems to put the emphasis on depicting foreign language learning as naturalistic acquiring comparable to learning one's mother tongue. In the present study, in contrast, the emphasis of the naturalistic repertoire seems to be on the functional aspect of language use. As pointed out in section 7.1.10, the writers often depicted themselves as using English out of necessity to manage in everyday life, using expressions such as *I had to cope* (*oli pakko osata*).

It is interesting to consider why both differences and similarities were found between the repertoires identified in the present study and in Heikkinen's (1999) study. As already noted above, the five repertoires assigning relevance to hearing found no counterparts in Heikkinen's (1999) study because auditory matters were probably not relevant to average university students of English. Thus, the writers in the present study, being hard-of-hearing, had access to, for example, terms and metaphors that are related uniquely to auditory problems and other matters associated with being hard-of-hearing. These linguistic

resources were not available to the first year students of English who were the writers in Heikkinen (1999). However, language related to auditory matters was not the only type of language the writers in the present study could resort to. As seen in sections 7.1.6 – 7.1.10, the writers could also ignore the role of hearing and resort to the same kinds of explanations as the English students in Heikkinen (1999). Thus it seems that the writers in the two studies also shared a fair amount of linguistic resources. This is probably due to the fact that the writers in both studies have been brought up in the Finnish society and, for example, have attended the comprehensive school which is common to all. Thus it would seem that the same kinds of linguistic resources – such as explaining a failure or a success in learning English with talent, chance, effort, school or authentic language use – would be culturally available for them. The writers in the present study thus shared some linguistic building blocks with the writers in Heikkinen (1999) but they also had access to linguistic resources that were available especially for them as a result of being hard-of-hearing. In the light of this it is easy to see why in the present study ten interpretative repertoires were identified in contrast to only five in Heikkinen (1999).

9 CONCLUSION

Attributions, or causal explanations, have traditionally been studied from a positivist perspective, particularly relying on Weiner's (1986, 1992) attribution theory. In attribution theory, attributions are considered cognitive entities that people apply in fixed ways while accounting for various events in their lives. Despite its wide popularity, attribution theory has faced a fair amount of criticism, such as accusations of producing artificial and decontextualized findings. In order to avoid some of these problems, the present study adopted a discursive approach to causal explanation (e.g. Edwards and Potter 1992, 1995; Potter and Wetherell 1987). In the discursive approach, causal explanations are treated as discursive actions instead of cognitive representations. Accordingly, people are considered to use language in different ways in order to construct versions of reality that vary from one context to another depending on the purpose of discourse. Therefore causal explanations cannot be seen as fixed entities but they, too, vary according to what kind of consequences a person wants to achieve with the explanation.

The present study thus set its focus on language use instead of something hidden behind it, such as cognition. The study looked into the language produced in life stories written by eleven hard-of-hearing learners of English. The aim of the study was to identify the interpretative repertoires, i.e. coherent sets of terms, metaphors and grammatical features, resorted to by the hard-of-hearing learners in order to account for their failures and successes in learning or using English. Special attention was paid to the role assigned to hearing in each repertoire. The study also reflected on the similarities and differences between the repertoires and made some hypotheses about the possible functions of the repertoires. The data, i.e. the eleven life stories, were collected in January – April 2002, most of the volunteer writers of the life stories being members of an internet e-mail group where young hard-of-hearing Finns exchange experiences and opinions.

The interpretative repertoires. The analysis of the life stories resulted in the identification of ten interpretative repertoires. The first five repertoires (the auditory, environmental, special learner, responsibility and specialist repertoires) constructed hearing as a relevant factor for the failures and successes in learning or using English. The first of the repertoires, the auditory repertoire, assigned blame for failures directly to impaired hearing, whereas success was said to result from hearing properly. The environmental repertoire, in turn, blamed or credited various learner-external matters for hindering or facilitating hearing (or communication in general) which, in turn, was considered to cause failure or success in learning or using English. In the special learner repertoire, the writers of the life stories constructed themselves as learners with special needs due to their disability. The institutional learning environment, i.e. the school and factors related to it, was blamed for not meeting these special needs or, alternatively, credited for doing so. Failing or succeeding in learning English was thus seen as dependent on the school's readiness to take a hard-of-hearing learner into account. The fourth repertoire, the responsibility repertoire, assigned the blame for failures or the credit for successes to the learner's own actions. More specifically, success and failure were considered dependent on how active a role the learner her/himself took in seeking solutions to her/his hearing problems. Finally, in the specialist repertoire, the writers of the life stories resorted to the kind of language that could be expected to be used by specialists, such as doctors specialized in auditory disorders. Accordingly, they talked about hard-of-hearing people in general instead of their personal experiences, blaming impaired hearing for failures in learning or using English or, in some cases, assigning the blame to features within the environment.

In addition to the repertoires that constructed hearing as relevant, the analysis of the life stories also produced five repertoires that did not assign relevance to hearing (the talent, chance, effort, school and naturalistic repertoires). The explanations made within the talent repertoire constructed failure and success in learning or using English as dependent on certain inborn mental capacities, such as talent or ability. The chance repertoire, in turn, constructed learning English as completely coincidental in nature. Accordingly, failure and success

were constructed as dependent on things such as bad or good luck, chance or fate. In the effort repertoire, the blame for failures or the credit for successes was assigned to the learner's own efforts. Learning was considered a result of hard work and the writers held themselves responsible for their learning outcomes. The writers of the life stories could also resort to the school repertoire in order to explain their failures and successes in learning or using English. In the school repertoire, the learner was depicted as a passive recipient of information, whereas the institutional learning environment was depicted as active and responsible for the learner's failures and successes. The last of the repertoires, the naturalistic repertoire, was constructed around the idea that a foreign language is best learned while using it purposefully in interaction with other people. Thus both the learner and the environment were constructed as active.

Frequency of the repertoires. The main purpose of the study being the identification and description of the different interpretative repertoires drawn on by the writers of the life stories while explaining their failures and successes in learning or using English, quantitative method were not applied in the analysis of the data. However, some observations were made about the approximate frequency of use of each repertoire. Failures in learning or using English were the most frequently explained with the auditory, environmental and school repertoires. Hearing thus seemed to play an important part in the explanations for failure, since both the auditory and environmental repertoires constructed it as a relevant factor for failures. All in all, it was observed that in the explanations for failure, those that constructed hearing as relevant outnumbered those that treated it as irrelevant. Further, explanations for failure constructed the learner/user considerably more often as passive than active. Successes, in turn, were the most often explained drawing on the naturalistic, school and talent repertoires. In contrast to the explanations for failure, hearing did not seem to play an important role in the explanations for success. However, similarly to the explanations for failure, the majority of explanations for success constructed the learner/user as passive.

Discursive explanations vs. cognitive attributions. Some observations were also made about the suitability of attribution theory (Weiner 1986) to account for the ten interpretative repertoires identified in the present study. As noted above, attribution theory and the present study represent very different views of explaining and thus the findings of the present study could not be satisfactorily explained by attribution theory. The biggest problems occurred with repertoires such as the environmental repertoire, where the environment is constructed as the main cause for failure or success but hearing is still considered a relevant factor. Thus the locus of causality – which, according to attribution theory, should be either external or internal – was both external and internal, and consequently the attribution theory could not account for explanations within the environmental repertoire. It was concluded that the accusations of artificiality that attribution theory has faced seemed quite justified since the theory failed to account for the naturally occurring causal explanations identified in the present study.

The present study compared with previous research on discursive explanations. The findings of a discursive study, such as the present one, are always bound to a certain context and thus not generalizable. However, some comparisons were made between the findings of the present study and the findings of Heikkinen (1999; see also Ranta and Kalaja in press; Heikkinen and Kalaja 2001), a pioneer study on discursive explanations in a foreign language learning context. The comparison revealed both differences and similarities in the repertoires identified in the two studies. Most of the differences appeared in the first five repertoires of the present study that constructed hearing as a relevant factor (the auditory, environmental, special learner, responsibility and specialist repertoires). Hearing was not a relevant matter in Heikkinen (1999) because the writers of the life stories were normally hearing university students of English. In contrast, the five repertoires of the present study that did not assign a relevant role to hearing (the talent, chance, effort, school and naturalistic repertoires) resembled those identified by Heikkinen (1999). It was suggested that the differences and similarities were caused by the writers of the two studies having partly different and partly similar cultural backgrounds. Obviously, the hard-of-hearing learners of English had access to some special

linguistic resources that the average university students in Heikkinen (1999) did not have, which explains why in the present study there were five repertoires that did not have counterparts in Heikkinen (1999). However, the hard-of-hearing learners, being members of the Finnish society and having gone through the Finnish school system, also had access to the same linguistic resources as Heikkinen's (1999) writers, which explains the similarities in the repertoires.

Reflection. The present study, like any other study has its advantages and its limitations that have to do, for example, with matters such as the choice of approach and the choice of data. One of the advantages of adopting a discursive approach to the study of the foreign language learning of hard-of-hearing people – a topic rarely addressed – is that it assumes an insider perspective. The writers of the life stories were allowed to write about whatever they considered relevant for their learning. They were also the ones who defined what was to be considered a failure or a success. It was believed that the insider perspective would allow the voices of the participants be heard better than in, for example, in a survey study. However, a possible downside of a study like the present one is that the results apply only to one specific set of data and are thus not generalizable across contexts.

The eleven life stories that served as the data in the present study proved to be a generous source of causal explanation, as was expected since it was the case in the pioneer study conducted by Heikkinen (1999). One advantage of using life stories as data is that it is possible to minimize the researcher influence – compared with interviews or structured questionnaires, for example – by giving only very loose instructions on how to write a life story, as was done in the present study. Another, very practical advantage is the fact that the data were already in written form, so no transcribing was required. However, in further studies on hard-of-hearing learners' explanations it might be interesting to use other kinds of data, such as interviews, group discussions or oral diary entries (see e.g Huhta et al 2000; Kalaja et al. in press; Kalaja in press; Kalaja 2002) and see if the explanations given orally differ from those given in written form. Further, in order to gain a fuller picture of hard-of-hearing learners' foreign

language learning, discursive studies – and other kinds of studies – need to address different aspects of foreign language learning. The present study only attends to one small, although important area of learning English as a foreign language.

Despite the non-generalizability of its findings and its restricted area of interest, the present study can still be useful to, for example, teachers of hard-of-hearing English learners as well as to hard-of-hearing people themselves. Firstly, the fact that half of the repertoires identified in the present study constructed hearing as relevant for failure and success shows that, from the point of view of the learners, auditory matters indeed do play an important role in learning English. Schools and teachers should thus raise their awareness of the problems encountered by hard-of-hearing learners and, for example, try to provide the best possible conditions for listening and offer any additional assistance the learners may need in order to succeed in learning. The second interesting point from the point of view of foreign language learning and teaching is the fact that the majority of explanations for failure as well as explanations for success drew on repertoires that constructed the learner as passive. Awareness of this should also be raised in both teachers and learners. Teachers need to guide their students to assume an active and responsible role in their own learning and to emphasize that despite any difficulties hard-of-hearing learners may encounter in learning English, they can still themselves significantly influence their learning.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the findings of the present study are based on linguistic evidence and do not attempt to shed light on cognitive processes involved in explaining. The study attends to what the writers say – or write, to be more specific – not to what they think or feel. The interpretative repertoires were identified in the life stories after reading and rereading them a number of times paying close attention to linguistic detail, such as choices made in vocabulary and grammatical structures. The interpretative repertoires have been illustrated in detail in sections 7.1.1 – 7.1.10 drawing attention to the linguistic features typical of each repertoire. However, even though the findings are based on linguistic evidence realized in the life stories, the

findings still represent only one possible interpretation of the data. Another researcher might very well have ended up with different repertoires. Therefore, further studies are welcomed to shed further light on the way in which hard-of-hearing learners explain their failures and successes in learning English, as well as on other aspects of learning English not attended to in the present study.

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APPENDIX: Instructions for writing a life story

Hei!

Olet ilmaissut halukkuutesi osallistua pro gradu –tutkimukseeni, joka pyrkii valottamaan huonokuuloisten oppilaiden käsityksiä englannin kielen oppimiseen liittyvistä asioista. Kiitos Sinulle jo etukäteen vaivannäöstäsi!

Kirjoita elämäkerta itsestäsi englannin oppijana (suomeksi). Elämäkerta tarkoittaa tässä yhteydessä tekstiä, jossa käsittelet **omia kokemuksiasi** englanninoppijana. Kirjoita vapaasti, kuin kirjoittaisit hyvälle ystävällesi. Kieliasusta ei tarvitse huolehtia. Tekstin pituus tulisi olla vähintään kaksi konekirjoitusliuskaa. Ylärajaa ei ole, ja toivonkin mahdollisimman kattavia tekstejä.

Elämäkerran tulisi olla kronologinen, eli edetä aikajärjestyksessä. Voit edetä esim. seuraavasti:

- Kerro ensikosketuksistasi englannin kieleen
- Kerro englannin oppimisestasi/opiskelustasi
    - ala-asteella
    - yläasteella
    - lukiossa/ammattikoulussa
    - myöhemmin esim. yliopistossa, ammattikorkeakoulussa, kansanopistossa yms.

Kirjoittaessasi kokemuksistasi näillä eri kouluasteilla, voit käyttää apunasi seuraavia kysymyksiä, joihin ei kuitenkaan tarvitse vastata.

- Millaista oli opiskella englantia ala-asteella/yläasteella/lukiossa/ammattikoulussa jne.? (kivaa, tylsää, vaikeaa, helppoa... Miksi?)
- Mitä opit? Mikä oli helppoa, mikä vaikeaa?
- Millaisia opettajia sinulla oli? Vaikuttivatko he oppimiseesi? Miten?
- Millaisia oppilastovereita sinulla oli? Vaikuttivatko he oppimiseesi? Miten?
- Millaisena koit oppimateriaalin, esim. teksti- ja työkirjat, nauhat, videot?
- Mitä odotit englannin opiskelulta kullakin asteella? Vastasiko opetus odotuksiasi ja tarpeitasi?
- Kenellä oli vastuu oppimisestasi?
- Kerro yksityiskohtaisesti joistakin mieleesi jääneistä myönteisistä tai kielteisistä tilanteista, jotka liittyvät englannin oppimiseen/opiskeluun koulussa.
- Oletko käyttänyt englantia koulutuntien ulkopuolella? Kerro kokemuksistasi ja niiden merkityksestä kielen oppimisen kannalta.

Arvioi lopuksi omaa kielitaitoasi tällä hetkellä. Oletko siihen tyytyväinen? Riittääkö se vastaamaan esim. työelämän haasteisiin? Mitä haluaisit kielitaidossasi erityisesti kehittää?

Kirjoittamaasi elämäkertaa käsitellään nimettömänä ja luottamuksellisesti.

Kiitos osallistumisesta!

Ystävällisin terveisin,

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