

**UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ**

**IT WAS FULL OF EMPTY**

**Lexical errors in written compositions of Finnish pupils**

**A Pro Gradu Thesis**

**by**

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2000**

## ABSTRACT

HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA  
ENGLANNIN KIELEN LAITOS

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IT WAS FULL OF EMPTY  
Lexical errors in written compositions of Finnish pupils

Pro Gradu -työ  
Englantilainen filologia  
Heinäkuu 2000

70 sivua

Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, millaisia sanastovirheitä suomenkieliset englantia koulussa opiskelevat oppilaat tekevät kirjoittaessaan aineita englanniksi. Tutkittava materiaali koostuu yhteensä 40 englanninkielisestä aineesta, joista 20 on peruskoulun yhdeksännen luokan oppilaiden kirjoittamia, ja 20 lukion toisen vuosikurssin oppilaiden kirjoittamia. Taustaoletus tutkimukselle oli se, että sanaston oikea käyttö tuottaa oppilaille vaikeuksia. Keskeisiä tutkimuskysymyksiä olivat seuraavat asiat: 1) Millaisia sanastovirheitä oppilaat tekevät? 2) Millaisiin kategorioihin eri sanastovirheet voidaan jakaa? 3) Onko peruskoululaisten ja lukiolaisten välillä eroja sanastovirheiden määrän tai laadun suhteen?

Koska kiinnostuksen kohteena oli selvittää sekä sanastovirheiden määrää että laatua, tutkimuksessa käytettiin sekä kvalitatiivisia että kvantitatiivisia menetelmiä. Määrällisiä menetelmiä tarvittiin selvitetäessä sanastovirheiden määrää suhteessa kaikkiin virheisiin sekä vertailtaessa sanastovirheiden osuutta peruskoululaisten ja lukiolaisten välillä. Laadullista lähestymistapaa käytettiin luokiteltaessa sanastovirheitä ja muodostettaessa niistä eri kategorioita.

Tutkimuksessa kävi ilmi, että sanastovirheet olivat sekä peruskoululaisten että lukiolaisten aineissa kolmanneksi yleisin virhetyyppi. Näin ollen taustaoletus siitä, että sanaston oikeanlainen käyttö tuottaa oppilaille vaikeuksia on tullut tuetuksi. Lisäksi sanastovirheistä voitiin löytää yhdeksää erilaista tyyppiä, jonka mukaan sanastovirheet jaettiin yhdeksään eri kategoriaan. Eri tyyppisten sanastovirheiden esiintymissä löytyi eroja peruskoululaisten ja lukiolaisten välillä. Kaiken kaikkiaan sanastovirheiden määrä pieneni hiukan siirryttäessä peruskoulusta lukioon; peruskoululaisten aineissa sanastovirheiden osuus oli 21 %, kun lukiolaisilla vastaava osuus oli 16 %.

Asiasanat: interlanguage, fossilization, transfer

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a lot of discussion about second language learning for decades, and researchers have been interested in finding out about various factors that are included in the second language learning process. There have been a number of studies carried out investigating for instance the actual learning process and the errors the language learners make. I am interested in the language that language learners use and also in the errors that they make, not because I want to know how many errors they make, but because I want to see what types of errors they make. I am particularly interested in lexical errors, because they have not been studied very much, although they provide us with information on language learning. In the background-section of this thesis the reader will be presented with information on what is already known about the topic and this field of applied linguistics in general.

The data of this study consist of essays written by Finnish students of English. There are two groups of students, one consisting of second-year students of senior secondary school (called 'lukio' in Finland), and the other consisting of students who are in the ninth grade in the comprehensive school. All of these students are native speakers of Finnish who have been studying English as their first foreign language. All of the essays have been written as part of an examination, meaning that the students have had no help of dictionaries, grammarbooks or other people. Consequently, these essays should indicate fairly accurately of what the competence of English of these students is like.

As was mentioned above, the main focus of this study

is on lexical errors the students make in their written essays. Because of the qualitative nature of this study I did not create any clear hypotheses before studying the data, but it can be said that I assumed that the students of English make errors in the lexicon. I also assumed that the Finnish language may influence the interlanguage of these students, because it has been noticed in interlanguage studies that the mother tongue usually has an effect on the language learner's second language performance. As the qualitative approach indicates, the starting point of the analysis is to examine the data closely and then continue making the analysis on the basis of what has been found in the data. The original aim was to find all lexical errors in the essays and then to classify them into different categories. Because I had two groups of students, the idea was to compare these two groups with each other and to try to see if there were any similarities or differences between them and if there were differences in the nature or number of lexical errors between these groups. In order to facilitate the making of comparisons between the two groups, the absolute number of all errors and that of the lexical errors were counted and given in percentages.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: first there is background information on second language learning and teaching, individual learner factors, contrastive analysis, error analysis and interlanguage. This part of the thesis introduces the basic concepts of this area of linguistics. After that the reader is introduced with the data of this study. Then the methods used in this study are explained, and after that the results are presented. In the last section there is discussion of the findings of this study, evaluation of its good and weak points, an assessment of the importance of this kind of research as a whole as well as suggestions for further study.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Background for second language learning and teaching

The way people learn languages has been an interesting question in applied linguistics for a long time, and the phenomenon has been studied from many points of view. Today quite a lot is known about language learning, and it has proved to be useful to separate first language acquisition from second or foreign language acquisition. This is because it has been noticed that even though first and second language acquisition processes have a lot in common, they have their own typical features, which make them separate processes. In the next paragraphs some features and hypotheses about second language acquisition will be dealt with. Naturally there are a number of other opinions of what kinds of factors affect second language acquisition, but the hypotheses discussed in what follows are quite fundamental and therefore it is important to go through them here.

#### 2.1.1 Hypotheses about second language acquisition

In his book *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* Krashen (1982) posits five hypotheses about second language learning. The first one refers to making a distinction between acquisition and learning, which would suggest that learners have two distinct ways of developing a second language competence. The term 'acquisition' is used when the idea is to refer to a process of language learning close to one which takes place when a child learns his or her first language. Acquisition, therefore, is usually a subconscious process, where the learner does not even know that he is acquiring language, and the

acquisition does not require any conscious effort to learn the new language. 'Learning', in turn, refers to conscious study of different features of the second language. When somebody is learning a second language, he or she is totally aware of learning new things, and works hard in order to develop his or her second language competence. This 'learning'-type of learning has also been described as classroom-learning, whereas 'acquisition' has been said to occur outside classroom.

The second hypothesis Krashen (1982) mentions is the so-called natural order hypothesis. It refers to an assumption that the acquisition of certain grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order in all second language learners. Also other theorists share this view. For instance, Towell and Hawkins (1994) talk about a "systematic development which is independent either of the first language a learner speaks, or the type of input a learner has received" (Towell & Hawkins 1994:12). Gass and Selinker (1994) in turn point out that "the order is the same regardless of whether or not instruction is involved" (Gass & Selinker 1994:145).

The third hypothesis Krashen (1982) posits is the so-called monitor hypothesis, which suggests that acquisition and learning are used in specific ways. Acquired knowledge of the L2 develops automatically as a result of exposure to the L2, and it is responsible for the learner's fluency. According to Krashen (1982:15), "learning has only one function, and that is as a Monitor, or editor" , which would imply that conscious learning plays only a limited role in second language learning. Krashen's fourth hypothesis, the input hypothesis, refers to an assumption that certain kind of input is crucial for language learning to occur. This certain kind of input means input that the learner can understand but which has an element in it that

the learner is unfamiliar with. As a result, the learner introduces new information into his or her interlanguage, and develops the interlanguage a bit farther. Krashen (1982:2) himself puts it this way: "We move from  $i$ , our current level, to  $i + 1$ , the next level along the natural order, by understanding input containing  $i + 1$ ". Krashen's input hypothesis has also been criticized but there are supporting views as well. For instance Swain (1985;1995) and Long (1996) have been mentioned by Mitchell & Myles (1998) as researchers who have created their own extensions of Krashen's input hypothesis.

In Krashen's (1982) opinion, the so-called affective filter hypothesis takes into consideration how different affective factors relate to second language acquisition, and according to Gass and Selinker (1994), explains individual variation in second language acquisition of different learners. According to this hypothesis, there are three major categories that have an effect on the success of second language acquisition process. These categories include motivation, self-confidence and anxiety, and the main idea is that people with high motivation, at least relatively high self-confidence and low anxiety tend to do better in second language acquisition. There are also other ways of dividing these different types of individual, and possibly even personality-based characteristics that influence second language learning. There has been a lot of discussion of individual learning factors, and they will be dealt with in their own section below. The reason why they are discussed here is that, even though these factors are difficult to examine and their influence on the data used in this study is hard to observe, it is probable that they have some impact on the written work of the students examined in this study.



### 2.1.2 Theories of second language acquisition

There are several different theories of second language acquisition. What follows is a short overview of some of the most important theories in this field. Ellis (1985) lists important theories of SLA, which include the acculturation model, the monitor model, the variable competence model, the universal hypothesis model, and a neurofunctional model. All of these theories will be shortly dealt with here. In addition, there are three other important models, the pragmatic, the socio-educational and the cognitive model of SLA, which will also be discussed.

According to, for instance, Ellis (1985) and Gass and Selinker (1994), the monitor model consists of Krashen's five hypotheses of second language learning that have already been discussed in section 2.1.1. In addition to these hypotheses, Krashen also takes into account several factors that he believes to have an effect on second language acquisition. These factors include aptitude, the role of the first language, routines and patterns, individual differences and age (Ellis 1985). Therefore this model of second language acquisition has been considered probably the most comprehensive of the existing theories.

The variable competence model believes that learners prefer either planned or unplanned discourse, and that the learner has two sets of processes for engaging either in planned or unplanned discourse (Ellis 1985). According to this theory, different types of discourse result in using one or both of the following processes: the learner's variable competence, which means that the learner possesses a heterogeneous rule system, and/or applying procedures for actualizing knowledge in discourse (Ellis 1985). Mitchell and Myles (1998) present another theory which also believes

that spoken discourse and the learner's desire to participate in it are extremely important in language learning. This model has been called as the functionalist or pragmatic perspective on second language learning, and it has been described in the following way: "Its fundamental claim is that language development is driven by pragmatic communicative needs, and that the formal resources of language are elaborated in order to express more complex patterns of meaning" (Mitchell & Myles 1998:100). The so-called acculturation model tries to emphasize the importance that both social and affective factors have on second language acquisition (Spolsky, 1989). More specifically, this view claims that there are nine classes of factors that can have an effect on the process of second language acquisition, which include social and affective factors, personality, biological, cognitive, aptitude, personal, input and instructional factors, of which social and affective factors form a cluster of acculturation (Spolsky 1989:142). The term acculturation is defined as the social and psychological integration that exists between the language learner and the target language group, and according to the acculturation model, the learner will adopt the second language only to the extent that he or she acculturates with the target language group (Spolsky 1989:143; Mitchell & Myles 1998:181).

According to the socio-educational model, intelligence motivation, language aptitude and situational anxiety explain individual differences in second language learning. All of these factors are important in classroom learning, but motivation and situational anxiety are dominant in settings where informal learning takes place (Spolsky 1989). According to this view, second language proficiency can develop in both contexts, but as motivation and

situational anxiety will determine the extent to which students take advantage of the opportunity for informal contexts, their importance is increased (Gardner 1979).

According to Ellis (1985), the universal hypothesis tries to explain second language acquisition differently from the previous models. The main idea in the universal hypothesis is that every human being has a specific and independent language faculty, which makes it possible for us to learn any language, including our first language. Among other things, the universal hypothesis is interested in the relationship between first and second languages, and also in the concept of transfer.

According to the so-called cognitive approaches, the second language acquisition process is just one instantiation of learning among many others, and these processes can best be understood by finding out how the human brain processes and learns new things (Mitchell & Myles 1998:73). That is why the supporters of this view are mostly concerned with the learning part of second language acquisition, not so much with the language. The basic idea in the neurofunctional theory in turn is that it believes that there is a connection between neural anatomy and language function (Ellis 1985). Supporters of this view are not looking for a specific 'language-area' in the brain, but they try, for example, to find out if language functions transfer to new areas after a case of damage or how the plasticity of the brain changes when a person grows older.

### 2.1.3 Teaching methods and second language acquisition

There has been a lot of debate over the issue of how second languages should be taught, and how influential the role of the teacher actually is. Different teaching methods also

have different views about the role of errors, and they give instructions of what the teacher should do when students make errors. According to Krashen (1982), the teaching method called grammar-translation concentrates on teaching grammar and vocabulary bit by bit, by using exercises that are designed to provide practice on the grammar and vocabulary of that particular lesson. Understandably, students get a lot of practice on these areas, but their communicative competence is not trained. In addition, another weakness of this method is that students are expected to be fully accurate, and the total unacceptance of errors may cause the students to feel anxious.

Krashen (1982) also talks about the cognitive code method, which has some similarities with the grammar-translation method but which attempts to help students develop also in speaking and listening as well as in reading and writing. The basic idea, that "competence precedes performance" (Krashen 1982:133), is the same as in grammar-translation method, which refers to the assumption that when structures of the second language are practiced enough, facility will develop easily with the use of the second language. Ellis (1990) states that according to the cognitive code method errors should be corrected in second language learning but not in first language learning.

If the direct method in second language learning is used, the target language is the only language used in the classroom. The focus is on inductive teaching of grammar, meaning that students themselves, with the help of the teacher, try to work out the principles of the second language grammar. One of the strong points of this method is that it provides much more comprehensible input than many of the other models. The weakness is again the strong emphasis on grammar and absolute accuracy (Krashen 1982).

The natural approach could be thought of as being the opposite of the grammar-translation method, because in this method the goal is to activate students to speak. Classtime is devoted primarily to providing input in the second language, and the teacher uses only the second language in classroom. The students can choose to speak either with their first or second language the idea being that nobody is forced to speak in the second language until he or she is ready (Krashen 1982).

Cohen (1990) talks about studies that have been carried out to find out how language learners' performance improves if they are guided towards autonomous learning and self-instruction. The students have taken great responsibility for their own second language learning, which means that they have been, for example, involved in decision making, choice of materials, monitoring the participation in activities and homework. According to Cohen (1990), the results in these kinds of studies have been promising in the sense that the learners have felt responsibility for their learning, were motivated to learn and felt more secure about their learning (Cohen 1990:11). Also the role of the teacher seemed to change in these programs, they *"shifted from being leaders of activities to "help and resource person"* (Cohen 1990:12; emphasis original). McCarthy (1990) talks about vocabulary teaching and learning, and also he suggests that students should be made more responsible for their learning results. McCarthy (1990) says that it would be very helpful for students to learn to understand themselves better, because then it would be easier for them to know what kinds of vocabulary learning -techniques suit them best. He even goes further, suggesting that *"learners can also be encouraged to develop their own personal learning styles for vocabulary, in such areas as memorizing and retaining new words"* (McCarthy 1990:130).

## 2.2 Individual learner factors

The term 'individual learner differences' refers to the factors that are assumed to show substantial differences between second language learners in their L2 competence. The idea of studying these factors, therefore, is to get information and explanations for differential success among second language learners. But as Ellis (1985) points out, it has proved to be very difficult to identify and classify these individual learner factors, because almost all of them are abstract, non-tangible, and therefore difficult to observe and examine. There have also been disagreements about the factors. For instance, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) talk about age, aptitude, social-psychological factors, which include motivation and attitude, personality, cognitive style, lateralization and learner strategies as being the factors that affect learner success. In contrast, Gass and Selinker (1994) leave out attitude, cognitive style and lateralization but include such things as social distance, anxiety and locus of control. Ellis (1985) in turn, makes a distinction between personal and general factors. According to him, personal factors refer to each learner's attitudes towards learning an L2, which can be divided into three groups: group dynamics, attitudes to the teacher and course materials and individual learner techniques. In Ellis's (1985) opinion, general factors include age, aptitude, cognitive style, motivation and personality. There seems to be some agreement among these researchers, however, because all of them include such factors as age, aptitude, motivation and personality as being individual learner factors. In the following sub-sections these four factors will be discussed one by one, because they are factors that are likely to have influenced also the performances of the students included in this study.

### 2.2.1 Age

There has been a lot of discussion of whether the learner's age affects the route, rate or success of second language acquisition. According to Ellis (1985), the age of the learner does not alter or interfere with the route of second language acquisition. However, the rate and success of acquisition seem to be influenced by the learner's age. In fact, there seems to be agreement on the issue that age does affect the rate and success of SLA, but disagreement on how it affects them.

Gass and Selinker (1994) point out that it is generally believed that children are at an advantage in second language learning compared with adults. This view has proved to be true in some areas of language learning, but not in all of them. Ellis (1985) states that as far as success in pronunciation is concerned, children do better. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) also mention that this view has been supported by many researchers. But Ellis (1985) reports that also the exposure to the L2 affects the success in the learner's communicative ability meaning that the longer the exposure, the more native-like the communicative proficiency. Thus, although it seems that children outperform adults in this area, this view is not supported by all theorists.

Adults have their strengths, too. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) state that adult learners are faster in their second language acquisition than younger learners. Gass and Selinker (1994) in turn say that adults really learn some aspects of language more quickly than children. According to them, adults are faster particularly in early morphological and syntactic development. Ellis (1985) states that older learners are better when the rate of learning is observed, and that if learners of different

ages are compared on the basis of how long they have been exposed to the L2, the older learners reach higher levels of proficiency. But Ellis (1985) also refers to a study conducted by Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978), where it was noticed that neither adults nor children were the fastest to learn. It was actually the adolescents who outperformed them both. Also Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) give a list of several researchers who have had these types of results in their own studies, ie. results confirming either the hypothesis that adults proceed through certain stages of language learning faster than children, or that older children learn faster than younger. These kinds of results have led researchers to hypothesize the existence of a sensitive period, meaning a period when language acquisition is most efficient and fruitful. There has been a lot of debate about the existence of a sensitive period, although it would explain why adolescents seem to learn second language faster than children or adults.

### 2.2.2 Aptitude

One of the most problematic things about aptitude is the fact that the term is very difficult to define, and it is easily confused with intelligence. This is quite understandable, because intelligence and aptitude really are concepts that are close to each other and deal with same kinds of things. Ellis (1985) tries to make a distinction between intelligence and aptitude, the former being a more general reasoning ability helpful in all learning, and the latter being a more specific combination of abilities needed particularly in second language acquisition.

There has been a lot of discussion about the role of



aptitude in second language learning, and maybe even more debate about the possible components of aptitude. Carroll (in Gass & Selinker 1994) has proposed that aptitude for foreign language learning consists of four components: phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability and memory and learning. However, there are a number of other views as well. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) report that Cummins (1979) drew a distinction between cognitive/academic language proficiency and basic interpersonal communication skills. Krashen (1981a), in turn, made a distinction between acquisition and learning, where acquisition referred to natural and spontaneous acquisition, and learning to conscious study of the second language (in Ellis 1985).

According to Ellis (1985), there is no evidence suggesting that aptitude has an effect on the route of second language learning, but that it can be assumed to influence the rate and the ultimate success of second language learning. However, Ellis (1985) points out that the influence of aptitude can be expected to come out especially if formal classroom learning or linguistic competence are measured. Consequently, one problem with aptitude is that the relationship between communicative competence and aptitude has not been studied very much. Furthermore, also the relationship between aptitude and rate and success of second language acquisition remains uncertain until more is found out about aptitude and the components that it consists of.

### 2.2.3 Motivation and personality

Motivation is a same kind of concept as aptitude, difficult to define and difficult to measure. Gass and Selinker

(1994) talk about motivation as a social psychological factor that is frequently used to explain differential success for second language learning, and learning in general. They also add that it is usually thought that motivation is some kind of a drive, but that definitions vary considerably. Ellis (1985) refers to Gardner and Lambert (1972), who defined motivation as the L2 learner's overall orientation or goal. Ellis (1985) quotes also Brown (1981), who divided motivation into three categories: global motivation, situational motivation and task motivation. Gass and Selinker (1994) state that Gardner revised his ideas about motivation later. He came to the conclusion that when motivation was concerned, four aspects were involved: a goal, effortful behaviour, a desire to attain the goal, and favourable attitudes towards the activity in question.

On the one hand it can be said that motivation definitely has an impact on second language learning, but on the other hand, it has turned out to be difficult to prove. Gass and Selinker (1994) report that a number of studies have provided us with statistical evidence suggesting that motivation really is a predictor in language-learning success. It is easy to agree with these kinds of findings, but there is also a problem with them. As Ellis (1985:119) puts it, "We do not know whether it is motivation that produces successful learning, or successful learning that enhances motivation".

There is a general belief, suggested also in many theories that certain personality factors or traits affect the success in second language learning. But as can be expected, there are many views of what these traits might be. Gass and Selinker (1994) mention things like extroversion/introversion, risk taking and field dependence/independence as personality traits affecting

language learning. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) in turn, talk about things like self-esteem, anxiety, sensitivity to rejection, empathy, inhibition and tolerance of ambiguity in addition to those mentioned by Gass and Selinker. Whatever the traits may be, Ellis (1985) states that the available evidence has not been able to show clear connection between personality and successful second language learning. He also points out that a distinction between studies measuring communicative competence and personality and studies interested in personality and linguistic competence should be made. That way it might be possible to find out if personality has a stronger influence on one or the other.

#### 2.2.4 Role of first language

It is a popular belief that second language learning is strongly influenced by the learner's mother tongue. This belief is based on the assumption that when learning a second language, the language learner always relies extensively on his first language. For some reason it is also easily believed that the affect of the first language is a negative one. However, the research that has been carried out in this field shows considerable disagreement about the effects of L1 in second language acquisition.

The subfield of second language acquisition research that is interested in the role of the first language has come to be known as the study of language transfer. As the term suggests, the researchers who believe that transfer is a major factor in language learning and especially in errors made by language learners, are convinced that language learners automatically transfer aspects of their native language into their second language usage. Lado (1957:2), one of the first writers about this idea, stated

that:

Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture - both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives.

It is assumed that there are two kinds of transfer, positive and negative. According to Ellis (1985) positive transfer occurs when the first language and second language patterns are the same. This means that the first language does not interfere with the learning of a second language but may even facilitate the learning of second language patterns or forms. Negative transfer in turn refers to a situation where the first and second languages differ from each other. In this case the first language interferes with the learning, and the result is usually an error (Ellis 1985).

Different types of errors have been named according to the source of the error. The term interlingual errors refers to errors that can be traced to first language interference (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991), meaning that they are due to negative transfer. According to Larsen-Freeman & Long (1991) and Richards (1985), it has been noticed that a number of the same kinds of errors have been committed by second language learners, no matter what their first language is. These have been called intralingual, in other words, the source of the error has been found inside the second language itself. However, all of these concepts are controversial, and one of the reasons for this is the fact that they are closely related to contrastive analysis, which has its problems and opponents.

It has been said that contrastive analysis is old and out of date, and that is why the idea of transfer has been rejected by many researchers. These issues will be discussed more in the next chapters, in which contrastive analysis and things related to it will be looked at more closely.

## 2.3 Contrastive analysis and error analysis

### 2.3.1 Background for contrastive analysis and error analysis

Long before the present second language acquisition (SLA) studies had been established, there was a field within applied linguistics that studied the relationship between two languages, mainly between students' native languages (L1) and foreign or second languages (L2). This field, called contrastive analysis, tries to identify similarities and differences between those languages by systematically comparing them (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). The idea behind these comparisons is that it is believed that a person's native language may sometimes facilitate the learning of a foreign language, but it may also cause difficulties or interference with the learning of a foreign language. The very basic need for developing contrastive analysis was the attempt to teach second languages as efficiently as possible (Ellis 1985). Contrastive analysis has therefore always had a strong connection with language learning and language teaching.

Lado (1957) took notice of the above mentioned concept of transfer. He was convinced that a language learner's first language plays a significant role in second language learning. He stated that "those elements that are similar

to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult" (Lado 1957 in Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:53). Lado was not alone with this conviction, and before long a joint hypothesis called the contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH) was formed. The main statement of the CAH was that "where two languages were similar, positive transfer would occur; where they were different, negative transfer, or interference, would result" (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:53)

However, the early contrastive analysis, and also the contrastive analysis hypothesis, received some heavy criticism and there even was discussion about their failure. Some of these claims were justified, because it was noticed that contrastive analysis and the needs of language teaching did not always meet (Sajavaara 1994). Contrastive analysis also failed to predict all errors made by language learners (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991). It was able to correctly predict some errors, but it also overemphasized some other errors and in addition, was not able to detect some errors at all (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991). This gave rise to a new way of analyzing errors made by language learners, and this method came to be called error analysis.

Error analysis was developed to patch or fill the gap left by the early contrastive analysis. The difference between contrastive analysis and error analysis is that the latter begins with errors, whereas the former starts off with comparing learners' first language and second language (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991).

Error analysis has been described in many ways. One way of defining it is to say that it is a field within applied linguistics that studies and interprets errors made by second language learners (Svartvik 1973). Svartvik (1973) also mentions that error analysis investigates the type,

frequency and cause of errors and applies the results to teaching methods. Richards (1971:1) in turn states that error analysis deals "with the differences between the way people learning a language speak, and the way adult native speakers of the language use the language".

In the early days of error analysis, its main function was to find out what kinds of errors learners make, and then develop teaching methods that could stop them from making errors. Corder (1967) held a rather different, or almost contrary, view of the importance of errors compared to most of the researchers at that time. Corder (1967) saw errors as something interesting and worth investigating, not just something to be destroyed, but as something with some intrinsic value of its own (in Gass & Selinker 1994). It could be said that Corder's views have partly been influenced the development of a newer idea of errors. As pointed out by Gass and Selinker (1994), a more contemporary view of errors is that the existence of errors is evidence of the fact that the learner is going through a language learning process, and that errors serve as indicators of a learner's attempt to figure out the system of the second language he/she is trying to learn.

Error analysis has its weaknesses, too. First, there has been a lot of discussion about the concept of error, and there is great variation among researchers in the definition of the term itself. Different researchers approach the concept of error differently, and thus different studies may have very divergent views of what to concentrate on and what to consider as erroneous or inappropriate language use.

Error analysis has also been criticized for being too narrow-minded. It has been claimed that, by focusing only on errors, the researchers are not able to look at the learner's performance as an integrated whole (Larsen-

Freeman & Long 1991:61). This means that there is always a possibility that something important is accidentally left unnoticed. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) also point out another weakness of error analysis. This is the fact that it has often turned out to be extremely difficult to identify one single source of an error. On many occasions there are several possible causes or explanations to an error, which naturally makes the classification and explanation of errors difficult or even unsystematic.

### 2.3.2 Newer approaches to CA and EA

Although some researchers still possess a relatively sceptic attitude towards contrastive analysis as a research method, according to Ellis (1985) there has been a successful revival in the belief of the role of the first language in second language learning. One of the reasons for this may have been the fact that people still get the kinds of results in their studies that confirm the idea that transfer does occur in language learning and that transfer does explain at least some of the errors made by language learners. Transfer has been reported to happen especially in those areas of language learning that have not been extensively studied before. For instance, Ellen Broselow (1987) studied the production and perception of word juncture in the target language, the types of errors that had not been widely explored before. In her study Broselow (1987) found evidence that transfer really plays a role in second language acquisition as far as phonology is concerned. In his study Sheen (1987) found same types of results. He studied near-bilinguals and the effects of negative transfer in their speech, and reported that "the results show that at least for the type of foreign language learner concerned here that NT is the single most important



factor in the causing of lexical and grammatical errors" (Sheen 1987:49). Also Aktuna and Kamish (1997) studied something that had not been extensively dealt with from the point of view of transfer before. They were interested in the cases of pragmatic transfer in the interlanguage of advanced level EFL learners whose mother tongue was Turkish. They found that in the pragmatic performance of the Turkish EFL learners there were many instances of negative transfer from their mother tongue (Aktuna & Kamish 1997). According to Aktuna and Kamish (1997), this may result from the fact that learners may act on the assumption that speech behavior is universal, and when first and second language norms are different, they run the risk of being inappropriate or making some other errors, which can be seen in the relatively large amount of negative transfer in their speech behaviour.

The second reason for the new positive attitude towards contrastive analysis and transfer has probably been the re-examination of the concepts. An important new concept, called 'avoidance' (for instance in Gass & Selinker 1994) has both explained language learners' behaviour better and shown that contrastive analysis has not failed as badly as had been thought. The concept avoidance refers to the assumption that when facing difficulty, language learners may not always use the kinds of structures that are difficult for them and make errors but they may be more cunning and avoid using structures or forms that they either find difficult or know they do not master. There is evidence on avoidance, and this concept partly rises the value of contrastive analysis. As aptly put by Ellis (1985:34), "although Contrastive Analysis might fail to predict *production* errors, it might still be successful in predicting *comprehension* errors and *avoidance* of structures" (Ellis 1985:34).

## 2.4 Interlanguage

### 2.4.1 The nature of interlanguage

The term 'interlanguage' has been established to express the type of language that the language learner uses when he or she is communicating in a foreign language. Therefore, it takes into consideration all the habits, errors, correct or incorrect forms that the language learner uses, and tries therefore to identify all the features that are typical of learners' use of a foreign language. The term 'interlanguage' was first introduced by Selinker in 1972, and it has been described as the study of the language that language learners use (Corder 1981), as a branch of applied linguistics that is "interested in the *emergence* of these languages rather than in the finished product" (James 1980:3), or as "a continuum between the L1 and L2 along which all learners traverse" (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:60). Interlanguage is therefore seen as something that is not the target language, but the learner's version of the target language. And, as Mitchell and Myles (1998:104) point out, the emergence of the concept of interlanguage "involved a major shift away from viewing learner language essentially as a defective version of the target language". Among researchers of interlanguage there is a strong conviction that in the process of language learning the learner constructs and reconstructs his L2 using both the input of the target language he receives and his native language as tools to help him. This is how a second language learner gradually builds and improves his mastery of the second language. This reconstruction process takes a long time and, in fact, it is never complete. It has been noticed that second language learners never totally achieve native speakers' competence

of the target language, and that is why it has been said that language learner's language is always interlanguage. It may resemble the target language more or less, but it will never be exactly what the target language is.

Even though all languages, and also interlanguages are variable, it does not mean that the reconstruction process of the target language made by the language learner would be random. Spolsky points out that thanks to the notion of interlanguage, "the learner's knowledge is to be seen as a unified whole, in which new knowledge is integrated and systematically reorganized with previous knowledge of the native language" (Spolsky 1989:31). According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), the language of all learners is systematic, which means rule-governed, and it is common to all learners. Also Ellis (1985) states that the language learner's reconstruction process is not haphazard, but can be at least partly well predicted.

As well as being systematic, it has been found that interlanguages show a high degree of uniformity in some acquisition orders and developmental sequences (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:88). According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), the so-called morpheme studies have been able to show that there is a common acquisition order for a set of grammatical morphemes in English. The notion of developmental sequences refers to the assumption that interlanguage consists of these morpho-syntactic sequences that all learners seem to go through. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) mention that developmental sequences have been found at least in interrogatives and negation.

The third unifying factor in interlanguages is that they are influenced by the learner's mother tongue. This phenomenon has been discussed in section 2.2.4 of this study (pp. 19 -21), and for instance the notion of transfer was dealt with there. But Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991)

give more information to support this view, when they review a study carried out by Zobl (1982). He found that the mother tongue influences both the pace at which a developmental sequence is passed, and the number of developmental structures in such sentences. Zobl and some other researchers also noticed that linguistically unmarked features of the first language have a tendency to transfer, but that linguistically marked first language features will probably not transfer (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:101).

Ellis (1985) gives two other factors common to all interlanguages. According to him, interlanguage of a language learner is permeable, which refers to the fact that the rules of the target language that the learner has created himself at any stage of development are not fixed, but can be changed or altered quite easily. This also leads to the fact that interlanguages are dynamic (Ellis 1985; Mitchell & Myles 1998), meaning that they are in constant action, the rules being constantly revised, altered and extended. This is very understandable, because interlanguage and language learning in general has been described as constant hypothesis-testing process. And as Ellis (1985) points out, the language learner does not suddenly jump from one stage of development to the next, but he slowly revises and corrects his internal ideas about the target language system.

One of the important features that has been assumed to exist in learners' interlanguage is fossilization, discussed for instance by Selinker (1987) and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991). According to Selinker (1987) fossilization refers to different linguistic rules, items and systems that a speaker of a certain NL tends to keep in his or her interlanguage relative to a particular TL. Selinker (1987) continues to say that these fossilizable units are so strong or powerful that they exist in the

learner's interlanguage regardless of how old the learner is or how much instruction he or she has had or has in the foreign language. Mitchell and Myles (1998:86) share this view when saying:

Fossilization refers to the fact that L2 learners, unlike L1 learners, sometimes seem unable to get rid of non-native-like structures in their L2 in spite of abundant linguistic input over many years" (Mitchell & Myles 1998:86)

Selinker (1987) also noticed that very few language learners succeed in reaching target language competence, and therefore almost all of them stop developing further at some point. Selinker and Lamendella (1978a) theoretize that one explanation for this may be that the learner does not feel the need to develop further. Thus, if the learner can cope with his interlanguage, he stops striving and settles for his present level. Corder (1981) shares this view and posits that a learner continues to improve his understanding of the target language only so long as he has a reason for doing so. When the interlanguage is adequate enough, the phenomenon of fossilization takes place, and the learner's interlanguage ceases to develop. Another possible explanation for fossilization Selinker and Lamendella (1978a) offer is changes in the neural structure in the learner's brain resulting from age.

#### 2.4.2 Errors in interlanguage studies

The way that errors have been seen and how they have been treated has changed quite radically over the years. As mentioned above (pp.21-23) in this paper, the main goal of the early contrastive analysis was to be able to predict

the errors learners make and to teach second language so efficiently that errors would disappear, or at least diminish to minimum. In fact this kind of view about the destruction of errors was strong for very long, but slowly teachers and theorists have started to have a more gentle or understanding attitude towards errors. Corder (1981) mentions that teachers differ from each other in the respect as to when and how much to correct errors made by language learners. Selinker (1992) in turn points out that it has been noticed that native speaker teachers tend to be more tolerant of learners' errors than non-native speaker teachers, who appear to fight for 'proper' language use more vigorously.

The researchers of interlanguage have been very merciful to errors, and this is because the whole idea of interlanguage sees them as inevitable and important parts of the learning process. Thus, when the theorists have previously seen errors as intruders or as elements that learners and teachers should get rid of, the contemporary view sees them as elements of interest and as important sources of information. Selinker (1992) simply sees them as a part of IL performance, and Corder (1981:66) says that:

They are regarded as useful evidence of how the learner is setting about the task of learning, what 'sense' he is making of the target language data to which he is exposed and being required to respond.

In this study errors are considered as interesting manifestations of learners' development, and therefore they have not been considered as negative, but as possible hints that could lead to better understanding of learners in their use of interlanguage.

### 3. THE PRESENT STUDY

There are several reasons why lexical errors were chosen as the primary research topic in this study. First of all, lexical errors have not been previously studied very much. Secondly, it can be assumed that through lexical errors interesting facts and features of interlanguage are found out. This is because it has been noticed that language learners use many types of strategies and means to get away with situations where they lack appropriate vocabulary, and on many occasions these strategies can at least partly be seen in the person's interlanguage. Linnarud (1986) talks about certain strategies distinguished by Palmberg (1983), who has mentioned for instance strategies like topic avoidance, message abandonment and meaning replacement as being the kinds of strategies that language learners frequently use. Topic avoidance refers to a strategy where the learner does not even attempt to talk about a topic whose vocabulary is unknown to him or her. Message abandonment in turn means that the learner has to interrupt his or her expression because he or she does not know how to continue. When a learner is using a strategy called meaning replacement the topic is preserved but the language is deliberately less specific, and therefore usually easier than what it originally was meant to be, which makes sure that the learner can get the expression finished, but also leaves the meaning more vague (Linnarud 1986).

There are also other kinds of strategies that language learners use when they try to figure out what to do when their vocabulary is too restricted for a specific purpose. Linnarud (1986) says that the concept of lexical transfer has been discussed, and it is assumed by some researchers that in the beginning of the process learners

start by assuming that there is a word in L2 for every word in L1. However, little by little learners realize that this assumption is false and start internalizing the semantic relationship of the L2 independently of their L1 equivalent. That, in turn, makes it possible for the learners to think in the foreign language without constantly resting on the semantic system of their mother tongue. This kind of hypothesis would explain at least some lexical errors, and would show that the learning of proper use of vocabulary is a part of a wider process, namely the development of the learner's interlanguage. It also indicates that also in the learning of a second language lexicon, the first language plays a very important role. This view actually suggests that for a long time the first language functions as a 'safety net' for which the learner turns to in the hour of need, in other words, when he or she does not know the appropriate word or group of words. That is why the previous sections of this study have been included in this thesis and that is why they serve important purposes in it. First, their purpose has been to convey basic information on contrastive analysis, error analysis and interlanguage study and show how these methods have traditionally been used. Secondly, another important aim has been to show how closely related and on many occasions intertwined these different modes of study really are, and why it would be reasonable to use two of them in the present study.

As has been already mentioned (sections 2.3 and 2.4), several researchers talk about the close inter-relationship that exists between contrastive analysis, error analysis and interlanguage study. According to Selinker's (1992) opinion, for instance error analysis data can, and in many cases has to be used when the aim is to study certain features of interlanguage. This notion is perfectly



reasonable, because, as already mentioned in the previous section (2.4.2), Selinker himself has said that errors cannot be separated from the whole process of second language learning but that they are an integral part of every learner's interlanguage performance. This same view has been adopted in this study, and therefore methods of error analysis have been used in order to find out more about the interlanguage of comprehensive school students and students of senior secondary school. The research problem of this study is based on the assumption that students of English do have difficulties in the correct use of the lexicon in the English language. The aim of the research is to find out and classify the types of lexical errors the students make in their compositions written in English.

### 3.1 Data and methods

The data in this study consists of compositions which were written by Finnish students of English. All of the compositions were written during the autumn semester of 1998 by students whose mother tongue is Finnish and who study English as a second language. The compositions were written by two groups of students. The first group consisted of students who were in the ninth grade in the comprehensive school, in Kivelän yläaste in Leppävirta. The students had English as their first foreign language, and they had started studying English in the third grade of the comprehensive school. By the time the compositions for this study were collected, these students had studied English for five years and the ongoing schoolyear was the sixth year they were studying English. In the second group there were students who were first year students of senior secondary school, called 'lukio' in Finnish. These students

in general. That is why the different lengths of the compositions between the two groups have not been seen as a problem in this study. The main concern has been to ensure that all of the compositions included in the data have been written under the same kinds of conditions without anybody benefiting more than others. There was some variance in the topics the students wrote about, because in both of the examinations the students had several alternative topics from which they themselves chose one to write about. The students could write about topics 'My life in 2020', 'Fit and healthy' or 'Problems home and away' in the comprehensive school, of which 15 chose the first topic to write about, 3 students wrote about the second, and 2 students about the third topic. The lukio student group had four alternative topics. The first three were titled 'Is there a God', 'Women are worse drivers than men' and 'A speech'. The fourth topic did not have a specific title, but the students were required to end their composition with a sentence 'I would never have believed that anything like that could happen in my hometown'. 7 students used this opportunity and wrote compositions ending in that phrase. 6 students wrote on the topic 'Is there a God', 5 students on 'Women are worse drivers than men', and 2 students on the topic 'A speech'.

The primary research topic, and the object of interest in this study, was to find out what types of lexical errors language learners make in their use of English as a second language, and also to classify these error types. Also, the idea in this study was to do qualitative research, which brought about the fact that the actual data was the starting point, and the results and classifications were drawn on the basis of what was found in the data. However, some help of the means of the quantitative method was used. This refers to the fact that all errors that the learners

made, as well as all lexical errors and other types of errors were counted. After that it was possible to give the different number of errors in percentages. This was done because of two reasons. First, it was easy to compare the number of different types of errors within one group of learners when all of them were given in relation to the total number of errors. The absolute numbers do not say much about the actual frequency of errors, but when the same things are given in percentages, it is easier to see the frequency of a certain type of error in relation to other types. The second reason for giving all the errors in percentages was that this way it was possible to compare the number of errors between the two groups of learners. The comparison with absolute numbers would not have been fair, because the students in the comprehensive school wrote shorter compositions and had therefore basically fewer chances to make errors. The total number of errors and the number of errors in percentages are presented in table 1 (p. 38).

## 3.2 Analysis

### 3.2.1 Errors: overview

Table 1: The total number of errors and the number of errors in percentages

error type	comprehensive school		lukio	
error type	number	%	number	%
lexical	40	20	48	16
articles	51	26	39	13
prepositions	21	11	45	15
grammar	62	31	111	36
spelling	21	11	59	19
word order	2	1	6	2
total	197		308	

All in all, the students in the comprehensive school -group made 197 errors in their compositions. The corresponding number of errors in the lukio group was 308 errors. The total scores were divided into six categories of errors in both groups. These groups included lexical errors, errors in the use of articles, errors in the use of

prepositions, grammatical errors, spelling errors and errors in the word-order. The reason why all errors were divided into so many sub-categories was that the interest was to get the lexical error -category to contain only lexical errors and nothing more. That is why the classification was rather strict, the idea being that in the category of lexical errors only words or phrases in which the problem was specifically in the lexis were accepted. Therefore even though for instance errors in the word order could have in some cases been interpreted as being errors in the correct usage of the lexis, they were categorized separately so that the lexical errors -category would not turn out to include errors that actually were some other types of errors than lexical errors. The same idea applied to all the categories. That is why for instance articles and prepositions were also classified separately and not in the lexical errors -section, because the interest of this study was not to examine the incorrect usage of articles or prepositions but pure lexical errors. Another reason why different types of errors were classified into so many categories was the idea to get an overall picture of how common different error types are, and how common lexical errors are in relation to other types of errors. The main focus of this study was to examine the types of lexical errors students of English make, but all errors found in the compositions were marked and counted in order to be able to find out the relative frequency of lexical errors in the compositions of the two groups of students.

Spelling errors show incorrect use of the lexis, but in this study the difference between the spelling errors -category and lexical errors -category was that errors that were obviously spelling errors, or mistakes, were included in the category of spelling errors, whereas errors that

caused the whole word to change were taken into the group of lexical errors. So for instance an error like \*belive was included in the spelling error -group, but an error like \*tough, when the intention was to say touch, was included in the group of lexical errors.

All in all it can be said that the results of this study confirmed the assumption posited earlier to a great extent, i.e. that learners of English really have some difficulties with the proper usage of lexicon. In fact, in the comprehensive school lexical errors were the third most common type of errors with 20 % of all the errors meaning that there were 40 instances in the comprehensive school data. In the lukio data the corresponding percentage was 16 %, which entitles to the position of the third most common type of errors among the lukio student group. In both of these groups grammatical errors were the most common error type. Naturally, the high frequency of grammatical errors is understandable because the grammatical structures of Finnish and English are quite different from each other, and therefore may cause great problems for Finnish learners of English. In the comprehensive school data the second most common type of errors was errors in the use of articles. It is also understandable that Finns had difficulties with articles since articles do not exist in the Finnish language at all. In the lukio student group the second largest group of errors were spelling errors. Although this result is surprising, it has to be remembered that in the senior secondary school students are presented with a large amount of new vocabulary in a relatively short period of time, which may affect the students' ability to spell all the new words correctly. Also the students are expected to write longer compositions on rather difficult topics, and thus they may be forced to use vocabulary they are not totally familiar with.

On the basis of this information it would seem that students' competence of English improves when they move from comprehensive school to senior secondary school, at least when the use of lexis and articles are concerned. Table 1 shows that the proportion of errors in the use of articles out of the total of errors declines from 26 % in the comprehensive school group to 13 % in the lukio group, which shows significant development. Also the proportion of lexical errors diminishes in the senior secondary school, but the decline is only 4 %, from 20 % in the comprehensive school to 16 % in lukio. Therefore it can be said that even though the proportion of lexical errors of the total of errors decreases in the course of the development of the students' interlanguage, there still are problems in the correct use of lexicon even among senior secondary school students.

The second assumption that was posited at the beginning of the study was that the role of the first language is relatively strong in the interlanguage of language learners and that many errors of the lexis can, at least to some extent, be traced back to the learners' mother tongue, which in this case was Finnish. This phenomenon was also supported by the data, because among the different categories of lexical errors formed on the basis of the data there were some categories in which the mother tongue had affected the vocabulary used by the language learner resulting in an error. The phenomenon of negative transfer is dealt with more specifically in the following sections, in which lexical errors made by the two groups of students are presented.

### 3.2.2 Lexical errors: comprehensive school

When the lexical errors in the compositions written by the

comprehensive school students and lukio students were examined, nine distinctive classes or categories of lexical errors could be distinguished. The first one of these classes included errors that were caused by simply leaving out the word that the writer did not know or was not familiar with. This type of behavior could be described as topic avoidance, a term introduced by Palmberg (1983), although in this case it was a single word that was avoided and not the entire topic. However, this type of avoidance was very rare in the comprehensive school data, in fact there was only one instance in which this type of error occurred. The example is as follows:

- (1) I would            fishing, boating and hiking  
                          around the natural parks.

The student probably knew that something was missing in the sentence, because the empty space was clearly visible in the student's text. What makes this example interesting is that although the student was otherwise able to form a relatively difficult sentence, he or she did not realize that the gap could have been filled with for instance a simple verb like *go*, which would have made the sentence perfectly understandable and correct.

The second category of lexical errors among the students of comprehensive school could be called as 'language switch', and actually it can be divided in two sub-categories. Tarone, Cohen and Dumas (1976) define language switch as being either a process where the language learner takes a native-language lexical item into his interlanguage utterance as it is, untranslated, or uses an anglicized version of a word that is originally from some other foreign language than English and uses it



in the belief that it is the correct English item needed. Both of these types of language switch were found in this data. They will be referred to as language switch 1 and language switch 2 in this study. The category language switch 1 included errors that were due to resorting to the help of the mother tongue by taking a Finnish item and using it instead of an English word. Students did not use this kind of strategy very often, there were three examples of language switch 1 in the comprehensive school data.

- (2) Modern thegnology no "vaikuta" my life.
- (3) I'm wood"seppä"
- (4) I don't have to go anymoore navetta.

These kinds of lexical errors could have been corrected for example in the following ways: the sentence in example number (2) could have been *The modern technology has no impact on my life*. Example number (3) should have been *I'm a joiner*. Example number (4) could have been rewritten as *I don't have to go to the cowshed anymore*.

The first two of these examples were written by the same person, who used inverted commas to indicate what word he or she was aiming at. The student who wrote the sentence that is presented as example (4) did not use Finnish equivalents of the words he or she needed on other occasions than this, which could be seen as an indicator that using the Finnish word was his or her last resort. This strategy can also be seen as transfer in the sense that learners do take some aspects of their native language into their second language environment, but on the other hand, in this case the learner does not think that the Finnish element would be the correct one; but the uses the Finnish word just to be able to fill the gap somehow.

The second type of language switch, which refers to

anglified versions of words that are originally from some other foreign language than English, called language switch 2 in this study, was used by the comprehensive school students as frequently as the first type mentioned above. There were three examples where anglified versions from words that were originally from Swedish were formed. The words that are mentioned to be words of the Swedish language have been checked in a dictionary. Examples from the influence of Swedish can be seen in phrases like

- (5) they are grandpappa and grandmamma
- (6) big garden, extra long trees, tulpans.

where the underlined words have elements from both English and Swedish. Thus it is impossible to say whether these words are more English or Swedish words, they are mixtures of both. The correct English phrase in example number (5) would have been *they are a grandfather and grandmother*. In example number (6), in turn, the word itself is Swedish, but the suffix -s is the plural marker in the English language. In Swedish the correct plural form for the word *tulpan* would be *tulpaner*, and in English the correct stem for the word would have been *tulip*. In these cases the writers have mixed these two languages and language systems, and as a result they have made errors categorized as examples of the category language switch 2.

The fourth type of lexical errors among the comprehensive school students was more common than those mentioned above. It included words that had been borrowed from different foreign languages and used in the second language context as such, untranslated. This type of behavior has been called as complete language shift by Linnarud (1986). There were 8 instances of this type of errors as a whole, and the Swedish influence was very

strong in this category, as the following examples indicate:

- (7) You come dead years yngre
- (8) I oppned på computer
- (9) I will be a famous kirurg
- (10) I eat hamburgare

Linnarud (1986) reports on the strong Swedish influence as a source of borrowing, mentioned by Ringbom (1983), who studied the English used by Finnish-speaking Finns compared to Finns with Swedish as their mother tongue. Ringbom noticed that both groups used Swedish as a source of borrowing in their interlanguage, maybe because Swedish is more closely related to English than Finnish. Ringbom (1983) as quoted by Linnarud (1986) presented a sentence 'Most fathers don't stay at home fast mother would like to go to work' as representing complete language shift; in this case the word *fast*, which is Swedish for *although* was used in the same way as the words in examples number (7) - (10). In example number (7) the proper English phrase would have been something like *You will die much younger*. In example (8) a phrase like *I switched the computer on* would have been appropriate. In the next example the correct English word for the Swedish *kirurg* would be *surgeon*, and in example number (10) the English equivalent for a *hamburgare* is *hamburger*.

There may be two kinds of reasons why students made as many as 8 errors of this type. First of all, the students of comprehensive school study Swedish as well as English as their foreign languages, which could at least partly explain why the Swedish influence has shown in the errors students make in their use of English. However, the ninth grade students who were studied here have started studying

Swedish in the seventh grade, so by the time the data for this study was collected, they had studied Swedish for only a little over a year. Therefore it could be speculated whether their Swedish vocabulary is extensive enough to get mixed up with their English lexicon. But, as mentioned before, English and Swedish do have a lot in common, and in that sense it is very well possible that the students have confused Swedish words and English ones in their compositions, or used Swedish words untranslated in the hope of them being the desired English words. The second possible explanation why these kinds of errors were relatively common in the data is that at least in some of the erroneous cases the Swedish words resembled Finnish words quite a lot. So, even though the words are Swedish words according to dictionaries and 'only almost' Finnish words, the writer may have thought that they are anglicized versions of Finnish words and perhaps correct English words. In the writer's mind a word like *kirurg* could be an anglicized version of a Finnish word *kirurgi*, even though it actually is a correct Swedish word *kirurg*, meaning *surgeon*. These kinds of hypotheses are naturally very difficult to prove, because it would require access to the writer's mind and thoughts, but they offer possible explanations why these kinds of errors were relatively common among the comprehensive school student group.

The fifth category of lexical errors was due to literal translation, where the student relies on word-for-word translation from Finnish into English and thinks that it is the right way to express the idea. Errors due to literal translation can be seen as manifestations of negative transfer, which means that the learner's mother tongue somehow interferes with the second language, which usually results in an error. Linnarud (1986) reports a study by Kellerman (1977) who has studied this phenomenon in more

detail. He talks about language-specific items, referring to such items that cannot be transferred from one language to another, in this case from the first language to the second language. According to him, language-specific items typically include idioms, proverbs and slang expressions. Bearing in mind what was said above (p.31) about the assumption that in the beginning learners presume that for every word in L1 there is an equivalent in L2, it could be expected that at least the poorer students would make these kinds of errors, and they would show in literal translations. This is because Kellerman (1977) found out that more advanced students have developed a 'sense' that many items, such as idioms and proverbs are non-transferrable, whereas less good students are even not aware of the possibility of these kinds of differences between the source and target language (Linnarud 1986). Kellerman's ideas were relatively well supported by the present data. There were quite a few literal translations, 8 of them all put together. They occurred especially in those compositions that had other lexical errors as well. Literal translations were noted in individual words as well as in the use of idioms and proverbs. The following are examples of the different kinds of literal translations that were found in the compositions written by the comprehensive school students.

(11) You come dead years yngre.

(12) I grab myself from the neck

In example (11) the student's intention is to say *tulet kuolemaan*, and therefore the phrase *come dead* is a logical literal translation. Sentence number (12), in turn, is an example of a longer literal translation, i.e. a Finnish idiom *ottaa itseään niskasta kiinni* has been translated

literally. In English people *pull themselves together*, they do not *grab themselves from the neck*.

Category six consists of one instance where an English word has been misspelled in such a way that it has turned into another word, which has therefore been inappropriate in that particular context. The example is as follows:

(13) that once day

where the appropriate word should have been *one*. These kinds of lexical errors have been called errors of 'formal similarity' (for instance in Lamminpää 1980), meaning that they are caused by the fact that a learner either confuses two phonetically similar items of the target language, or distorts a single item when aiming at the desired word (Lamminpää 1980:86).

The following two categories have something in common: both consist of English words that sound or seem awkward in the contexts where they are used. In category number seven there are single words that are used in the wrong context. Category number eight, in turn, consists of entire phrases that are weird. In the compositions written by the comprehensive school students there were 8 instances where the word that was used was English but it was used in a wrong context. Examples from instances belonging to category number seven are:

(14) then healthly eaten is later.

(15) Everyday business will be easy to do with it.

(16) It is very hard job.

In example number (14) the word *later* is proper English, but in this case the desired form was *too late*. The writer of this example was writing about the topic 'Fit and

Healthy', and his or her intention was to point out that you have to start eating healthy food early in your life, because otherwise it will be too late. In number (15) the problem is with the word *do*, because in the previous sentence the writer talks about computers, and therefore the verb *do* is a bit clumsy here. Things can be *dealt with* or *handled* with computers, but usually not *done* with them. In number (16) the synonym *work* for the word *job* would have been better in *It is very hard work*, or another alternative would have been to use an article like in *It is a very hard job*.

As was mentioned in the previous section, category number eight had instances in which entire phrases or sentences were odd or clumsy. There were 6 cases of this kind, of which the following are examples.

(17) I have run and swim much more to get a perfect fit and healthy.

(18) The modern technology don't change my life like anything.

The clumsiness in example number (17) is probably due to the fact that the writer followed the given headline of the composition word for word. The given title was called 'Fit and Healthy', and the writer conveniently used the title to describe his or her future plans concerning his or her condition. The ending of the phrase should have been changed somehow, for instance to *I have to run and swim much more to get into a perfect condition/perfectly healthy*. In example number (18) the writer has probably intended to say something of the kind that the modern technology will not rock her world at all, or that the new technology will not change her life in any direction. It is

difficult to say what the idea was in Finnish, but it could have been something like *Moderni teknologia ei muuta/ tule muuttamaan elämäni mihinkään suuntaan/ollenkaan*. The sentence could have been rephrased into *the modern technology doesn't/won't change my life at all*.

The last category of lexical errors that was found in the data were words that had been used in a wrong form. There were only a couple of instances of errors like this, and in the comprehensive school data the two errors of this type were:

(19) my car is not gasoil car

(20) they would like to make their own decideds

In example number (19) the writer has been aiming at the word *gasoline* but got the end of the word wrong. In example number (20) the writer has had a similar problem. The correct form would have been *decisions*, so also in this case the ending was incorrect.

### 3.2.3 Lexical errors: lukio

When all the lexical errors made by the learner group that consisted of lukio students were gathered and classified, it became apparent that in some of the categories the number of errors in the lukio student group resembled that of the comprehensive school group, but in others the number of errors differed from each other to a great extent. The first category in the lukio data, which included cases where a word or words that the student was not familiar with had been left out, was as rare as in the comprehensive school data. As in the comprehensive school data, there was only one example of this kind of



language use, but the situation was still a little different. The example looked like this:

(21) Young man want show that they can drive fast  
and usually they can control their car's, but  
sometimes very bad  
things.

The difference between this example and the one mentioned in the comprehensive school data was that in this case the writer had tried to use the word *happen*, but probably was not able to find the right way of using it and finally left it out once and for all. The reason why this kind of conclusion can be drawn is that in the composition there originally was a phrase *\*happening and then happening* in the place of the gap, but the writer had drawn a line over the phrase maybe knowing that that was not the right way to say what he or she intended to say. Thus, in this case there had been some effort made to find the correct word before a decision of leaving an empty gap was made. If the decision is looked at from this point of view, it seems that leaving an empty space is one of the very last devices students resort to. This is because when a student leaves an empty gap in a composition in an examination, he or she knows that it cannot possibly be the correct alternative, and that he or she is bound to get less points in the evaluation of the composition as a result of not being able to use any word but an empty space instead. The sentence would have been correct if the student had added the verb *happen* there and changed the word order a little, for example *Young men want to show that they can drive fast and usually they can control their cars, but sometimes very bad things happen.*

In the lukio data there were no instances of using a

Finnish word in the middle of an English sentence, so that type of language switch, referred to as language switch 1 in this study, did not exist at the lukio level. The second type of language switch was used among the lukio students once, i.e. there was one case where an anglicized version of a foreign language word was used in the hope that it would be the correct one. This error, belonging to the third category of lexical errors, ie. language switch 2, was the following:

(22) But how dit they explain wars, famines, katasrofs, plagues and rasism.

In this instance the actual word is Swedish, but the suffix -s is English. In example number (22) the correct English word would have been *catastrophe*.

In the lukio data the fourth type of lexical errors were complete language shifts, errors in which a foreign language word had been used as such, untranslated. This was not a very popular strategy either, and hence there were only 5 instances of the use of this strategy. This strategy was used for example in the following sentences:

(23) Like the god the universum is eternal.

(24) It is more popular to be an ateist or a hindu than a christian.

In this case the words that the students have used are Swedish words, and the correct English equivalents would have been *universe* for example number (23), and *atheist* for example (24). In examples of this kind it would be possible to argue that these examples could be only examples of small slips or misspellings in the students' competence of

English, but because the words presented in examples (23) and (24) are real words in Swedish language, it was reasonable to include them as manifestations of complete language shift. This is also because these kinds of instances show clearly how much other languages influence, and in some cases interfere with a learner's performance in a particular foreign language, and that other languages serve as tools to help students as well. It is possible that the students who wrote sentences (23) and (24) might not have been able to use any words at all had they not known the Swedish words for the items they wanted to use.

The fifth category of lexical errors among the students of lukio were literal translations. The problematic areas about literal translations were pointed out in the section where errors due to literal translation among the comprehensive school students were discussed. Similarly to the comprehensive school students, the lukio students used this strategy quite often. In this data there were 7 cases of literal translations. Some of them consisted of entire sentences while in other cases there was only a part of the sentence, or a single word, that was translated literally. The following are some examples of the errors made in literal translations among the lukio students.

(25) Though I've had very difficult lifesituations

(26) same comments which I have and that is researched.

(27) and as I tought, it was full of empty.

Example number (25) presents a situation in which a single word has been translated literally and in English it is either wrong or at least sounds a bit weird. In example number (25) the writer has probably been thinking about the

Finnish word *elämäntilanne*, which he or she has translated literally, although a better choice would have been for instance *situation in life*, which has about the same meaning as the Finnish word and sounds more 'English' than the literal translation. On many occasions language learners are not exactly sure how to say something in a foreign language. When they think in their native language while speaking or writing in a foreign language, native-like elements tend to slip into their interlanguage. This is what has happened in example number (26). The writer has been expressing his/her thoughts in a way that a Finn would say it. In example number (26) the student has wanted to say something like *ja se (asia) on tutkittu*, and has translated the phrase word for word. This phrase might not be entirely wrong in English but it sounds a bit clumsy, something that a native speaker of English would not say. The last example of these types of lexical errors includes a case where a Finnish idiom has been translated literally. In example number (27) the writer has been thinking about the Finnish idiom *tyhjä täynnä* and translated it literally, hence the phrase *full of empty*. The corresponding phrase in English would have been something like *and as I thought, there was not anything there*. Thus, all of these cases show situations where a language learner has assumed a word or expression to be language-neutral although it really is language-specific.

However, although students made lots of errors with literal translations, it must be said that literal translation is by no means always wrong or cause ungrammatical or clumsy sentences. In some cases literal translation is the correct way to translate things into another language. This is the case when the items are the so-called language-neutral ones. The problem with literal translation lies in the fact that it is very

difficult to know when to apply it and when not, and for a non-native speaker probably the only way to know when for instance idioms or proverbs can be translated literally is to learn the corresponding proverbs or idioms in the foreign language.

The sixth category in the data collected from the lukio students' compositions were words that had been misspelled in a way that they turned into other words. In other words, they were errors of formal similarity. These kinds of errors may be caused by carelessness or simply the fact that the writer has confused the words. In the case of the latter, errors like these can be seen as manifestations of intralingual interference, discussed for instance by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), which means that the second language itself acts as the source of error because different second language items interfere with or confuse the learner. Whatever the reason, these kinds of errors were quite common in this group; there were 11 instances of these kinds of errors, and here are a few examples from them:

- (28) I think the only think that could be the god
- (29) "OH my good there is a chain-saw", I said.
- (30) Why aren't these to lovely persons yet  
married?

In example number (28) the desired word was *thing*. There were many cases similar to example number (28), where only one letter changed the meaning of the word. Other examples were cases where the word that was used was *\*hole* when the correct word would have been *whole* and so on. The situation in example number (29) is almost identical with number (28) but it has the error in an exclamation, *\*oh my good* for *oh my God* which makes the outburst sound quite funny. The

third example, marked as number (30) refers to instances where little words, pronounced at least nearly the same way, have been confused. In this case the writer has had words \*to and two mixed up.

The seventh category of lexical errors in the lukio group consisted of words that were proper words of English but were used in the wrong context. These kinds of lexical errors can also be seen as resulting from intralingual interference. This kind of misuse was common among the lukio students, hence 15 incidents of this kind. Examples of words used out of context were the following:

- (31) I wish to couple long and happy life together. May the ancestors give you their blessing!
- (32) In my mind the people have a right to believe in which they want to until it isn't against the law and good customs.

As can be seen, the errors in these cases have not been very bad, and in examples number (31) and (32) the message may still be clear to the reader even though the writer has chosen a wrong word that is not proper for the context. In example number (32) the word *until* is a little problematic, *as long as* would have been a more suitable choice. In example number (31) the writer has been quite resourceful and used a word that does describe previous generations, the problem being that it does not directly refer to parents but relatives that are much farther away in the family tree.

Category number eight had instances where either a phrase in a sentence or then the entire sentence was clumsy or weird. In the lukio data there were 6 cases like these, of which a few examples are presented here.

- (33) everything here in Earth was born because evolution happened
- (34) All of them houses had been criminals last night.

The first one of these is 'less wrong' than the second one meaning that there are not that obvious errors in it, it just sounds clumsy. A more 'English' version of the same would be for instance *because of the evolution*, but because in the Finnish language lots of things '*happen*', maybe that is why the *happening* was included in this sentence too. Example number (34) has grammatical errors in it as well, but because it is true that the entire sentence is clumsy, it was included in this category. The strange word-order could be traced back to interlingual interference, like so many other things, because in Finnish a word-order like *kaikissa taloissa oli ollut varkaita viime yönä* is perfectly understandable. In English the phrase could have been for instance like *There had been criminals in all of the houses last night.*

As well as in the comprehensive school data, also in the lukio data a few non-words, or words used in the wrong form were found. Among the lukio students this strategy was not a popular strategy either, because there were only two instances of this strategy in the compositions of the lukio student group.

- (35) That is the stupid question but forgively the answer is easy.
- (36) Pekka is very considerative and wants to make sure of everything.

The writer in number (35) is trying to say *fortunately*, in

example number (36) the student is probably trying to say that Pekka is *considerate*. Naturally this is not necessarily what happened but only good guesses at best, but maybe it can be said that there is a relatively good chance that these words presented here were the ones that the writers were aiming at.

### 3.3 Similiarities and differences

In sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 the categories of lexical errors and examples of different categories were presented, whereas this section compares the results of the two student groups. Table 2 shows the number of errors in each category of lexical errors in the comprehensive school student group and in the lukio student group.

Table 2: Number of lexical errors in the comprehensive school group and in the lukio group

category	comprehensive school	lukio
empty space	1	1
lg switch 1	3	0
lg switch 2	3	1
complete lg shift	8	5
literal translations	8	7
formal similarity	1	11
wrong context	8	15
odd sentences	6	6
wrong form	2	2
total	40	48



When these two groups of students, and these two pieces of data are compared, interesting similarities and differences are found. Although in some of the categories of lexical errors the number of errors is almost the same in both student groups, there are also differences between them. There is an instance where lexical errors of certain type are found only in the comprehensive school student group but not in the lukio student group. This could indicate that certain types of lexical errors tend to disappear in the course of development in students' interlanguage. The category that was found only in the comprehensive school group is the category of language switch 1, which includes errors where a Finnish word had been used as such, untranslated. This could indicate that the students of lukio who have studied English longer than the students of the comprehensive school rely on their mother tongue or other foreign languages less than students of the comprehensive school. Since this strategy is fairly elementary, students of lukio do not resort to this type of language use anymore. Although it has to be said that this strategy is also relatively unpopular among the students of the comprehensive school, maybe because when a student writes a Finnish word in his or her English composition, he or she knows that that is not the desired word. Therefore the student has to be rather desperate to use this type of strategy.

There was also some variance in the issues that seemed to be problematic for the two groups of learners. The students of the comprehensive school used complete language shifts 8 times, whereas untranslated foreign words were found in 5 instances among the lukio data. It is intriguing that students of the comprehensive school should find help from other foreign languages more than the lukio students although in lukio the students have more advanced

skills in other foreign languages and therefore better opportunities to find help from them. One possible explanation to this phenomenon could be the fact that the students of the comprehensive school still have a fairly restricted vocabulary, and when they produce their own text they are often faced with situations where they lack the appropriate vocabulary. Lukio students, however, are more advanced, hence they do not need to seek for help from either Finnish, or other foreign languages.

Formal similarity seems to be a problem for the lukio students, which is rather surprising. Formal similarity refers to errors due to misspellings in such a way that the word has turned into another word. These kinds of errors seem to be rather simple lexical errors, and therefore it is surprising that particularly the students in the lukio student group had problems like these. The differences between the two groups at this point are obvious: only 1 instance in the comprehensive school and 11 instances in the lukio group. One possible explanation to this may be the fact that the lukio students' vocabulary is considerably larger than the vocabulary of the comprehensive school students, and it is possible that the lukio students get mixed up with the larger selection of words more easily than the comprehensive school students.

When the number of different lexical error types are looked at, it becomes clear what the most common type of error at the lexical level was. In both of these groups it was the type of error in which the words were English but which had the wrong context; there were as many as 15 cases of these kinds of lexical errors in the lukio data, and 8 cases in the comprehensive school data. On the basis of these kinds of numbers it can be said that even learners who have studied English for several years seem to have problems with putting words into proper contexts.

According to these figures, this problem seems even to increase when the student moves from the comprehensive school to lukio. Maybe this phenomenon could be explained with the fact that in the lukio the overall vocabulary of the students increases very rapidly, and the huge input may cause students to confuse in what kind of contexts particular words can be used. Another possible explanation is that the compositions of the lukio students were generally longer than those of the comprehensive school students, so therefore the lukio students had more possibilities to make errors.

In the comprehensive school, there were 22 instances altogether where some type of interference had occurred. There were three cases of language switch 1, where a Finnish word had been used in the English composition untranslated, three cases of the use of an anglicized version of a foreign word, and eight cases of complete language shift, where a foreign word was used in the composition as such. In this case these words were taken from Swedish and used in the composition untranslated. Then there were also eight cases of literal translations. In the lukio data the corresponding figures were much lower, only 13 instances of these kinds of lexical errors altogether. Therefore the impact of other languages in the learners' interlanguage was considerably stronger in the comprehensive school student group than among the lukio students. 22 errors out of 40 errors makes 55 % in the comprehensive school data, and 13 errors out of the total of 48 errors makes only 27 % in the lukio group. If the percentages are observed, it becomes apparent that interference of other languages caused over half of the lexical errors in the comprehensive school student group of this study, whereas the corresponding percentage of the lukio student group was exactly half of that of the

comprehensive school student group. But in both of these groups the mother tongue and also other foreign languages played an important role in the errors of language learners' interlanguage. In that sense the view posited by Linnarud (1986) (see p.31) is supported by this study. It certainly seems that the mother tongue functions as a help to turn to for a long time for the learners, even for learners that have studied English for years.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The use of lexicon in a foreign language has somehow been a less noticed issue when problems of second language learning have been dealt with. Researchers and also teachers at schools do not seem to consider the appropriate use of vocabulary difficult, hence little or no attention is paid to it. Students are provided with large amounts of vocabulary at school, but there is not much practice on how it should be used appropriately. The students' attitude to language learning is also still fairly grammar-based; as a teacher I often see and hear that students themselves worry about the 'difficult' grammar exercises they are going to face in an upcoming examination, but few of them are concerned about the composition they will have to write, which is actually more important than individual exercises, because the composition makes up a large portion of the total score of the examination. If the students lack sufficient vocabulary when they produce their own text, it usually shows in the text very clearly, and causes the whole text to appear clumsy and elementary to the reader. This is why it can be said that good knowledge of grammar is a good thing, but alone it is not enough if good language skills are concerned, but sufficient vocabulary

and the ability to use it are also needed.

This thesis was designed as a counter attack to the general belief that the use of appropriate vocabulary is easy in a foreign language, and that it does not require more than just 'to memorize the words in the foreign language and that is it'. Therefore the assumption behind this study was that students do have some difficulties in their use of lexis in a foreign language, and that they do make some errors in it. On the basis of previous research it was also presumed that the students' mother tongue causes interference and results in errors. The assumptions were correct in the sense that this study confirmed them, but it was a slight surprise that the negative transfer from the mother tongue did not occur more often. It was particularly Swedish that had interfered with the students' use of English lexicon, not Finnish. Naturally, it is important to be aware that the Swedish language causes problems for students in their English compositions, and one suggestion for further study would be to examine what exactly causes these problems.

As already mentioned, the research questions posited beforehand were supported, and also interesting information about the different lexical errors students make was found. It was possible to form 9 distinctive error categories of all the lexical errors found in the data. They show that the reason why a lexical error is made is usually more complex than just the fact that the student does not know the particular word he or she needs. Students employ different strategies when they write in a foreign language, and when facing problems, they have several alternative means to help them. The 9 error categories reflect what the student may do when appropriate word or phrase is not available. They may, for instance leave out the word they do not know, use words from other languages to help them

and so on. In 4 of the 9 categories the number of errors diminished when the students moved from the comprehensive school to the senior secondary school, from which one could conclude that those error types are 'less mature' or at least are typical to younger students. In three categories the number of errors remained the same in the two groups of students indicating that those types of lexical errors do not disappear over time but stay in the learners' interlanguage also in senior secondary school. In two categories the number of errors increased in the lukio student group, which indicates that there are also errors that are more typical to older students and not as much to younger ones. On the basis of this evidence it could be said that lexical errors certainly are not nonexistent, and that the topic of this study was not insignificant.

As I already mentioned, in my opinion the topic of this thesis has been both interesting and useful. The results that were received in this study show that language learners are active and very resourceful subjects in their language learning process. The notion of interlanguage was also apparent in the findings, because according to the different error types it certainly seems that learners go along a path where their mother tongue is at one end and a second or a foreign language at the other end. On their way along the path they move closer to the second language, further away from their first language, but the connection to the first language never breaks, and the mother tongue will always have an effect on the second language the students use or produce.

If practical usefulness of this study is thought about, it has to be said that schools and teachers could find these results useful if they were not so forced to grade their students. In today's school teachers are obliged to grade their students' performance, and therefore

errors are still regarded as something to be punished. This is quite understandable, because if the teacher has to rank the students somehow, correctness and in that sense 'good' language use have to be rated higher than errors and poor language skills. Therefore, as long as the grading system remains the same, it does not really matter how acceptable the teacher regards errors, when he or she has to keep giving lower grades to students who make errors. This system also has another negative effect: this way it is very hard to convince students that errors are actually very 'normal' and natural things on the path of learning if they are punished and corrected every time they make an error. Maybe the most fruitful situation would be, if students were given information on errors and reasons that cause errors, so that students would be able to have a look at their own language use and perhaps detect certain strategies or error types that are typical to them. Then they would be able to concentrate on getting better on those areas that they find the most difficult. In some schools this type of strategy is already used in the way that students have to rewrite their compositions again after they have got them back from the teacher. This way the students are forced to go back to their text, to improve it and to correct the errors. Unfortunately, this kind of system is not very common in Finnish schools, but hopefully it will become more popular in the future. And if this system is developed further, students should get information not only on grammatical errors but also on lexical errors and correct use of vocabulary, because it is true that bad misunderstandings usually result from wrong use of the lexicon, not grammar.

One thing that is missing in this study are reasons or explanations to why these different types of lexical errors occurred. Actually, to explain why these errors occur was

not the aim of this study to begin with, but that type of knowledge would have been useful. In some cases possible answers were given, but more specific information would be interesting to receive in the future.



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