

**YOUNG FINNS' VIEWS OF ENGLISH ON SOCIAL MEDIA
AND THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THEIR LAN-
GUAGE SKILLS AND USE**

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<p>Sosiaalisesta mediasta on tullut merkittävä osa ihmisten elämää viime vuosina. Vaikka sosiaalisella medialla on pitkä historia, on sen suosio noussut vasta 2000-luvun jälkeen. Tänä päivänä osin esimerkiksi älypuhelimien runsaan käytön vuoksi sosiaalinen media on tullut yhä vakituisemmaksi osaksi ihmisten arkielämää, eikä aina voi edes täysin erotella, milloin ollaan yhteydessä sosiaaliseen mediaan ja milloin ei. Sosiaalisessa mediassa törmää usein myös englannin kieleen, ja englannista onkin tullut paitsi koko maailman yhteinen kieli eli <i>lingua franca</i>, myös internetin käyttäjien jakama yhteinen kieli. Englanti on samalla vahvistanut asemaansa edelleen myös Suomessa.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tarkoitus oli yhdistää sosiaalisen median ja englannin kielen tutkimusta. Pää tavoitteina oli selvittää nuorten suomalaisten näkemyksiä englannin kielestä sosiaalisessa mediassa, ja sitä, miten sosiaalisen median kieli on vaikuttanut heidän englannin kielen taitoihin ja käyttöön. Tutkimus toteutettiin kyselytutkimuksena, ja kohderyhmänä olivat 18-30-vuotiaat nuoret suomenkieliset (n=249). Kyselydatan analysointiin käytettiin sekä deskriptiivistä tilastotiedettä että temaattista analysointitapaa. Suurin osa tähän tutkimukseen osallistuneista oli korkeakouluopiskelijoita, mikä huomioitiin analyysissä.</p> <p>Kyselyyn vastanneista jokainen ilmaisi kohtaavansa englannin kieltä sosiaalisessa mediassa. Näkemykset englannin kielestä sosiaalisessa mediassa vaihtelivat vastaajien kesken jossain määrin. Kuitenkin selkeän enemmistön mielestä sosiaalisen median englannin kieli eroaa siitä englannista, jota käytetään sosiaalisen median ulkopuolella muun muassa sanastoltaan, muodollisuudeltaan ja tyyliltään. Kyselyn vastausten perusteella sosiaalinen media on vaikuttanut vastaajien englannin kielen taitoihin ja käyttöön: esimerkiksi englannin sanaston ja ymmärryksen koetaan parantuneen sosiaalisen median käytön myötä, ja myös koodinvaihtoa tapahtuu sosiaalisen median käytön takia enemmän. Koska tässä tutkielmassa kyselyyn vastanneiden omat näkemykset olivat tarkastelun kohteena, tulevissa tutkimuksissa olisi hyvä tarkastella aihetta esimerkiksi osallistujia tarkkailemalla, jotta voitaisiin varmistaa tulosten todenmukaisuus paremmin.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Social media have taken a larger role in the lives of many people in the recent years and decades. Even though social media have grown their popularity during the past years, they do have a longer history that many might think. The first traces of social media can be tracked as far as to the 1950-1960s, but it is true that in their internet-mediated format they did not become widely known among the general public until the 1990s (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Then, the 2000s was finally the point when social media started to attract more and more users and gain popularity significantly. Today, partly thanks to the development of smartphones, we live in a world where most people around us appear to be connected to the internet constantly. By owning a smartphone, one does not even have to log in or log off a social media platform, but often a simple tone or a notification indicates that there is something happening that calls for a reaction from the owner of the smartphone. It is interesting how social media have become such an important and permanent part of people's lives that it cannot even always be differentiated when one is online and when they are offline (University of Gothenburg 2019). Since social media have surely changed the world in the past decade or two and had an effect on many parts of people's everyday lives, it would be helpful to examine the matter more closely to gain more information of the ways social media have actually affected us.

It could also be assumed that since there are users from all over the world on social media, they could bring people closer to a more international context and that the people on social media might be exposed to other languages besides their own native languages. One of these languages is most likely English, and since it has become the lingua franca of the world (e.g., Leppänen et al. 2008: 12), it can be assumed that English is used to a great extent on social media, too. In Finland as well, the English language has strengthened its status and spread rather widely (Leppänen et al. 2008). After all, since English has the status of lingua franca and it can open the door to the rest of the world, it is rather understandable that it has spread widely in Finland, as well. English in Finland has been researched quite widely in the past years, for example by Leppänen et al. (2008) that was already mentioned, and, in addition, a survey study was conducted by Leppänen et al. (2009) and it is used to compare Finns' views regarding English then and now in this thesis.

The aim of this thesis is to study these two abovementioned themes: social media and the English language. In more detail, the views of young Finns regarding the English on social media

are examined, as well as their thoughts on whether English has had an effect on their English language use and skills. Firstly, in the theory section of this thesis, previous research relating to the themes of social media and English are discussed. The chapter includes a presentation of the various definitions of social media, information of how the use of social media has changed in recent years, and the covering of studies regarding different sub-themes such as social media and language learning, code switching, English on social media and so on. Secondly, in the 'present study' section, the research questions and the means for data collection are presented along with the methods for analysis. Thirdly, the results of the data collection are covered, and the results are presented alongside the data analysis. Finally, in the concluding chapter, the study is summarized and the answers to the research questions are presented in a more concise manner.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are a few important concepts relating to the topic of this thesis that need to be defined and discussed at this point. Firstly, the notion of social media will be defined and explained thoroughly. Since the notion of social media has a great deal of different definitions, some of these (perhaps the most popular ones) are examined in this chapter. However, the participants of this questionnaire were also encouraged to consider what social media mean to them and how they themselves would define the concept.

Secondly, it is beneficial for the study to explore the differentiation between being online and offline, since it might be difficult to differentiate in today's world where smartphones offer a constant internet connection, and people are in a way always online. In addition, the change in the use of social media in recent years is discussed briefly.

Thirdly, in this chapter, the research conducted on the topic of social media and language learning is explored, and one phenomenon related to language use or language leaning, code switching, is defined. After this, the question of whether social media have changed the English language is discussed. Finally, this chapter will shed a light on how Finns viewed the English language 14 years ago by referencing a survey study conducted in 2007 by Leppänen et al. (2009), and some of the results of this study that are relevant to this thesis are discussed.

2.1 Social media

Even though social media and their various platforms have become familiar to most people in today's world, it might be difficult to find a clear and straightforward definition for the concept. Many researchers offer lists of various definitions for the notion in their publications, and some of these definitions are shorter and simpler, whereas others are more complicated. Today, however, it might be difficult to differentiate what social media actually mean or what they consist of. These sorts of issues have been reflected on various international publications. Firstly,

Fuchs (2017) has examined the notion of social media from different angles in his book and, in addition, gathered a list of definitions for the concept. Secondly, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) briefly describe the birth of social media and define the notion in addition to the notions of ‘Web 2.0’ and ‘User Generated Content’.

Even though social media have existed for a longer period of time, their popularity did not grow significantly until the 2000s (Fuchs 2017: 37). However, the first traces of internet-connected social media can be found from the 1950-1960s, when “Open Diary”, founded by Bruce and Susan Abelson, allowed people writing online diaries to become one community (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 60). The 1990s, however, was when social media started to evolve more slowly at first and then, later on, rather explosively in the 21st century. This was made possible by the increasing availability of a higher speed internet connection (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 60). Nonetheless, a great deal of evolving happened already in the second half of the 1990s: blogs and even some social networking sites started to emerge from the depths of the internet, and, for example, Google was founded in 1999 (Fuchs 2017: 37). However, as mentioned before, these types of technologies were not used by the general public before the turn of the century.

According to the first definition that Fuchs (2017) mentions, social media consist of sites and services established in the 2000s which include content sharing sites such as blogs and social networking sites. In this definition, being able to create and share content for others is emphasized, as well. If social media are defined based on these reflections, for instance the blogs that were created before the new century would not be considered a part of social media. It could be assumed that in the 1990s these blogs were not as interactive. That is, there were not perhaps as much social activity such as comments compared to how blogs and their communities function today. Does this, however, mean that the blogs created in the 1990s were not social enough to be called social media?

The following definitions highlight the social part relating to the concept. Social media are described as information services that aim at offering opportunities for social interaction, creating communities and collaboration between people. Social media are also said to be comparable with, for instance, a coffee-house (Fuchs 2017: 38). This comparison is quite understandable, since nowadays people might get together on social media similarly as they do in downtown cafés. Nevertheless, in many definitions, content creation and sharing are mentioned. Thus, can media be social if there is not someone to see and react to what one is posting there? Since words such as participation, interaction, communication, and collaboration are mentioned in multiple definitions, it could be assumed that the answer to this question is no.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define the notions of Web 2.0 and User Generated Content in their article before focusing more on social media specifically. A key word that describes Web 2.0 is collaboration, since the new way of using the World Wide Web allowed its users to not only share content, but also to participate in modifying it (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 61). Then again, User Generated Content (UGC) represents the way people use social media in practice

and describes the media content created by the users. As the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development states it, UGC has to fulfil certain requirements: the content must be published on a site that makes it accessible for all people or for a certain group, there must be creative effort to be noticed in the content, and the content has to be created outside professional practices (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 61). However, nowadays a great deal of the social media content is in fact created as a part of a professional routine, for example on LinkedIn, so one might wonder if the content on these sorts of social media platforms could be called User Generated Content, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Regardless of this, Kaplan and Haenlein offer their take on defining social media: it is “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 61).

Then, what in fact is social about social media? According to Fuchs (2017), this truly is a burning question whenever the concept of social media is mentioned or discussed. Fuchs (2017) approaches the question by stating how some people view every media as social. He gives an example where one writes something on their computer without being connected to the internet or other people, and how this could be viewed as social, as well. This is due to the fact that everything people create has somehow been inspired by other people, the surrounding community or society which is why it can be seen as social behaviour (Fuchs 2017: 6). This view relating to the social aspect is rather broad which is why, for this thesis, other more specific views need to be examined. After reflecting on the relationship of cognition and socialness, Fuchs (2017) proceeds to mention communication, community, and collaboration. When the concept of communication is mentioned in regard to social media, writing something on a Word document without being connected to anyone else, for example, would not be considered using social media, since there is no one to communicate with (Fuchs 2017: 6). Communication enables the birth of communities and collaboration between people. Finally, Fuchs (2017) states that it is possible to consider all forms of media as social which have the ability to store and forward knowledge that is born in social relations between humans.

Naturally, social media consist of multiple different platforms which users can use in a way that is suitable for them. Due to this, it can be assumed that one social media platform can be used in various ways, depending on how its users want to use the particular platform. For example, WhatsApp might not always be seen as a part of social media, since content sharing to a wider audience is not usually its main use, but rather connecting with one’s inner circle. However, the way of using WhatsApp does usually contain the aspects of communication and communities in addition to content sharing such as text, pictures, gifs etc. which is why according to the definitions mentioned by Fuchs (2017), WhatsApp could be seen as a part of social media. Of course, WhatsApp can also be used as a means to connect with a wider audience, since for example the Finnish radio channel YleX uses WhatsApp to connect with their listeners during their broadcasts (Yle 2022). YouTube is also a platform which users might use in multiple different ways. Some of its users might be active in uploading videos and commenting on other users’ content, for example, but then again others might be mainly casual viewers.

In fact, most of the online users are merely casual viewers, or ‘lurkers’, since according to “The 90-9-1 Rule” referenced by Nielsen (2006), 90% of the internet users simply ‘lurk’ in the background and do not create content in online communities themselves.

Since there might be varying opinions regarding what social media mean among the general public, the participants of this thesis are, as mentioned in the preface of this chapter, encouraged to reflect on what social media mean to them and how they would want to define the concept. However, the definition presented by Fuchs (2017: 38) according to which social media consist of internet services that allow social interaction, creating communities and collaboration, and the definition by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) are used as a means to define the concept in this thesis.

2.2 The change in the use of social media and the differentiation of online and offline

Since social media have evolved not only before and after the 2000s but also in recent years, it could be assumed that the way people use social media has changed, as well. In their article, Jungselius and Weilenmann (2019) studied how much their study participants’ ways of social media use have changed in five years. In this study, the participants were interviewed first in 2012 and then in 2017 and asked to reflect on their social media use and how it has changed during the years. The evolvement of social media can be seen from the interviewees’ answers, since they describe to have more versatile possibilities five years after the first interview regarding different platforms, for example. In addition, the participants mention that social media platforms have become more similar to one another. In 2012, the different platforms had their unique uses whereas in 2017 the ways of using them are more alike (Jungselius and Weilenmann 2019: 187). Another change that the participants had noticed was issues with privacy and how the conversations and posts that were more public in 2012 have become more private in 2017 and happen in smaller and more closed groups (Jungselius and Weilenmann 2019: 189). In addition, even though some of the participants appear to spend more time on social media in 2017, they post less than five years earlier. Thus, the interviewees have noticed a difference between being active on social media versus merely checking what is currently happening or being posted there (Jungselius and Weilenmann 2019: 189-190).

In today’s world, where we carry the access to the internet in our pockets almost everywhere we go, it has become more and more difficult to differentiate when we are actually online and when offline. In fact, if one owns a smartphone and is available nearly all the time, are they actually ever offline? According to Jungselius (ScienceDaily 2019), social media use cannot be divided into being online and offline anymore, since social media is present everywhere people go even if they might not be active on any platform. Consequently, social media use as a notion might have to be redefined.

Takahashi (2012) examined the social media use of young Japanese people living in the Tokyo metropolitan area, and according to the information she gathered from interviews, the young Japanese people are available and online even around the clock. These Japanese youngsters might often even reply to messages in the middle of the night, and not remember it the next morning (Takahashi 2012: 190). Takahashi (2012: 191) uses the term of “full-time intimate community” to describe the social behaviour of the study participants. In this case, it might be very difficult to tell whether the participants are actually ever offline: is one in fact online when they are replying to messages while they are asleep and then remember none of it the next day? Technically if they are replying to a message on a social media platform, they are online, but then again can one fully be online if they are not available mentally? Thus, due to a change in the behaviour of social media use and leaning on the examples presented in this section, it seems that today it is more difficult to differentiate being online and offline.

It is likely that there will be more changes in the use of social media and the Web in the future since technologies are constantly developed further. There is even talk of a new era of the World Wide Web which is called ‘Web 3.0’. Conrad Wolfram states in an interview by Kobie (2010) that in this era, the information is created more often by computers than humans. For instance, data is collected of the internet users, and based on this collected data important information of the user can be discovered and stored (Rudman and Bruwer 2016; Morris 2011). For instance, whenever an internet user visits a website, the website asks whether the user allows the ‘cookies’, and thus allows that data can be collected of the user based on their actions performed on said website. This data is then used for marketing purposes, for example. In addition, another real-life example of Web 3.0 based technology could be smart watches that gather the user’s health information. Thus, it cannot be known for certain what new technologies will be developed in the future, and how they will affect the lives of people.

2.3 Social media and language learning

Social media has been examined from the perspective of learning in general, and how pedagogy and social media could be connected in a way that is beneficial for the students. Chawinga (2017) conducted a study where he aimed at discovering, how incorporating the use of Twitter and blogs into a university course teaching affected the students’ learning. The data was gathered by analysing the students’ posts on said social media and later sending out a survey, where the students were able to shed a light on their own views regarding this learning method. The results show that most of the students did view using Twitter and blogs as a beneficial tool for learning (Chawinga 2017: 9-10). There were some differences between Twitter and blogs when it came to the way the students used them: whereas Twitter was used mainly for questions and clarifications, the use of blogs focused more on reading and reflections (Chawinga 2017: 10). One benefit mentioned of the use of Twitter and blogs was that with social media as a support, they did not always have to rely that heavily on the teacher. Other benefits included for example instant feedback, learning critical thinking and summarizing skills, cooperative learning, and

being able to work remotely (Chawinga 2017: 12-13). Relating to the instant feedback, there were mentions from the students that they could for instance post a question online at any time and get a quick answer, since there was always someone from the course online, and that the teacher was able to answer a student's reflection even in the middle of the night (Chawinga 2017: 10, 12). As was stated in the previous chapter, nowadays it might be difficult to differentiate being online versus offline, and it can also be seen in this study based on the students' answers. When incorporating social media into teaching, a challenge might arise for the teacher considering differentiating work and free time.

In addition to learning in general, social media have been investigated from the point of view of language learning. In this thesis, as well, one of the aims is to reveal if social media has had an effect on young Finns' English language skills. Since there is a great deal of content online and on social media in different languages, it could be assumed that being exposed to this content could have a positive effect on language learning, as well. According to Tschirner (2011: 25), the broad selection of material that can be found online has contributed to the increasing motivation in learning oral skills of foreign languages. In addition, it has given foreign language education new opportunities. Since audio input is important in language learning and helps the acquisition of the oral skills of a foreign language, especially the audio and video material available online for example on YouTube provides useful opportunities for hearing authentic language use and thus learning oral skills (Tschirner 2011: 25). Furthermore, Siddell (2011) also states that the increasing amount of material online means that there is more material for practising listening comprehension, as well. The studies also suggest that it would be beneficial to bring this material into the curriculum (Siddell 2011: 65). Thus, social media can help learn oral and listening skills of foreign languages.

Aloraini and Cardoso (2020) conducted a survey study for Saudi-Arabian university students regarding language learning and different social media platforms. The participants were from two different proficiency groups: beginners and advanced students. According to the participants, social media have various educational advantages such as being able to learn at any place at any time, being able to use the material that is not utilized for example at school, and learning new vocabulary. However, some disadvantages were mentioned by the students as well, for example privacy issues, the lack of human interaction, the (un)reliability of the content and being exposed to incorrect language forms (Aloraini and Cardoso 2020). There were differences between the proficiency groups regarding the question of the role of social media in language learning. The advanced students seemed to think that social media does play a role in language learning but more as a support for the EFL learning. On the contrary, the beginners preferred social media to take a more significant role in their language learning most likely due to the fact that they do not use English that much anywhere else outside school (Aloraini and Cardoso 2020). Finally, according to Aloraini and Cardoso (2020), the students recognize the positive effects that social media can have in a pedagogical sense.

Yet another study relating to social media and language learning was conducted by Songxaba and Sincuba (2019). In this study, the researchers aimed at discovering if social media, and

especially WhatsApp, play a role in the appearance of language errors in ESL essay writing of grade 10 students. The results suggest that this, in fact, is the case. The errors that were made by the students in their essays included word omission, mistakes in sentence construction and the use of numbers in place of words (Songxaba and Sincuba 2019). According to Songxaba and Sincuba (2019), the students are so used to using informal language on social media on their spare time that this informal language appears in their essays, too. In conclusion, the researchers noticed a negative effect that social media had on the students' second language learning (Songxaba and Sincuba 2019). Thus, unlike the other studies that have been reviewed in this section, this study gives another, more negative perspective on the use of social media in language learning. Perhaps, social media can have varying effects when it comes to language learning: some areas or levels of language learning might be positively affected and improved due to the use of social media whereas others might suffer from a more negative effect. This aspect is examined more closely in the analysis in Chapter 4. In addition, the language on social media, to which this study by Songxaba and Sincuba (2019) also in a way refers to, will be discussed further later in this chapter.

2.4 Code switching

Naturally, there is a wide selection of different phenomena that can be connected to languages in general, language learning, and multilingual language use, but since all of them cannot be covered in this thesis, code switching was chosen as the notion to be defined briefly. This is because firstly, in the questionnaire of this study, the participants were asked whether they have noticed switching of Finnish and English codes or mixing the languages in their own speech and if so, has social media been a factor in this. Secondly, the topic was also examined in my bachelor's thesis from the point of view of English students, and the study showed that English students do switch codes rather often (Lehojärvi 2020). Thus, the question regarding the switching of Finnish and English was added to the questionnaire to let the participants of this study evaluate their own ways of language use regarding code switching.

Code switching has had a great deal of different definitions in the past. The term has been used as early as in the 1950s (Auer 1998: 27), and it has been examined widely. Code switching does not differ from the concept of social media in the sense that there are various definitions for the notion, some of which are more complicated than others. To put it bluntly, code switching is a phenomenon where two or more languages are mixed in a discourse setting (Poplack 2015: 1). To add more to the definition, Altarriba and Basnight-Brown (2009: 3) also highlight the functional and pragmatic clarity that have to be maintained while switching languages. Heller (1988), in turn, has suggested that code switching offers the speaker an alternative, since it gives them an opportunity to avoid making the choice of which language to use in discourse.

It can be assumed that in an environment where there is more than one language in frequent use, code switching is due to happen more likely. Consequently, Gardner-Chloros (2009: 4)

states that the people who are surrounded by two or more languages or dialects, that is, the bilingual people, are affected by the phenomenon of code switching. Since in this thesis, the English language of social media is examined, based on this assumption by Gardner-Chloros (2009), it could be assumed that there might be a greater likelihood of code switching to occur if one faces different languages for example while being online. Nilep (2006: 1), then again, emphasizes that code switching is not performed by bilinguals solely, but additionally language learners in general can switch codes. He describes it as a cognitive linguistic ability, and it can occur in, for example, a learning situation where more than two languages are used. The definition by Gardner-Chloros (2009) can be debatable since it seems to exclude the people who are not completely fluent in both of the languages they are using for code switching, depending on how the term ‘bilingual’ is defined. Also, today it would perhaps be more suitable to use the term ‘multilingual’ since language does not simply mean the language one speaks, for example English, but also intralingual variations such as registers, styles, and dialects. Thus, these sorts of variations should be considered when speaking of multilingualism. Then again, according to Nilep’s (2006) statement, all language learners can actually switch codes.

In an online context, there can be different languages faced, and even in one single message there might be more than one language used (Lee 2017: 38). When speaking of communication performed online, code switching occurs when a writer utilizes more than one linguistic resource (Lee 2017: 40). Later in this thesis, it will be discovered if young Finns who are users of social media have detected this utilization of various linguistic resources in their online language use.

2.5 English and multilingualism on social media

Many users of social media might come across English content on social media even though it might not be their first language. In fact, according to Lee (2017: 15), since the internet was originally developed in the United States, everything online at that time was naturally in English. There were also people who were worried that English would be granted with the status of the language of the internet. However, researchers viewed either that the internet gave the English language an opportunity to grow and spread, or that the globalization that would increase due to the internet would promote linguistic diversity (Lee 2017). Today, there can be all kinds of different languages and language variations detected on social media in addition to standard English. Technology has also evolved greatly in the past decades, and not all of the language that is faced online is produced by humans. Machines can translate, for instance, websites, picture captions, and YouTube videos, which can naturally also affect the language of social media and the internet in general. Thus, multilingualism can be seen in various forms on the internet and on social media as well. According to Lee (2017: 6-5), after the first important publication regarding multilingualism on the internet, the study of multilingualism has increased greatly. In Finland, multilingualism on the internet and on social media has been studied rather widely, too. For example, Leppänen and Kytölä (2017) presented two different

cases from an online context in which multilingual and multisemiotic resources were utilized. In addition, Leppänen and Peuronen (2012) examined multilingualism on the internet on a more general view.

Regarding the language(s) in use on social media, there can be various language settings detected online in which there is not just one language in use but more. One of these settings is when the users do not share a language with each other (Leppänen and Peuronen 2012). In this sort of cases, the users might have to use another, third language to be able to communicate with each other. Hence, the users have to choose a language that is most likely known by other users so that the communication can be understood (Leppänen and Peuronen 2012). Lee (2017: 27) also states that English is viewed as the lingua franca even by internet users, and English is often used by the users of the internet who do not speak the same language as their native language. In addition, as Leppänen et al. (2008: 12) state it, as well, English has become the language used widely in an international context. Thus, it is rather clear that English might often be used as the shared language in an online context, as well.

It is inevitable that when the world and the people in it change and evolve, so do the languages that are used. If this is the case, have social media, that most likely have changed the world to some extent, and their increasing use affected languages in any way, particularly the English language? Foster (2022) argues that social media have changed English by causing changes in vocabulary. First of all, thanks to social media, old words have gained new meanings and thus, social media has caused vocabulary appropriation. Foster (2022) gives the word “wall” as an example, since before social media the word merely meant the walls in a house, but today, the word can also mean one’s homepage on a social media platform. However, in addition to appropriating words, social media have introduced a broad set of new words and acronyms, and some of these have even made it to official dictionaries (Foster 2022). Perhaps, changes in vocabulary are the most obvious changes, since languages would most likely gain new words and new meanings for old words even without social media. In other words, it is inevitable that languages change when the people who use them also change. Nevertheless, changes in vocabulary can be rather expected in the case of social media affecting the language, but changes happen in other areas, as well. Naturally, there is a wide selection of different aspects that relate to language and language use, such as pragmatics, semantics, phonology, syntax, and so on, and all of these areas could also be affected by the use of social media.

Ergo, it appears that there have been certain changes in language due to social media use, but do the academics agree? Eisenstein (2013) examined the so-called “bad language” of social media from the perspective of natural language processing systems. Eisenstein (2013) gives examples of this online language and mentions a few ways that this language differs from the normal language, for instance, difference in punctuation, vocabulary, spelling and so on. According to Eisenstein (2013), this type of online language has been justified with a few different factors. Firstly, some people seem to think that one of the factors that could affect this is illiteracy. In other words, people do not know how to, for example, spell correctly. However, this theory has been debunked by researchers (Eisenstein 2013: 360). Pragmatics is also presented

as one of the reasons that might affect online language. That is, an emoticon or an abbreviation might be used to convey a specific pragmatical function (Eisenstein 2013: 361). In addition, according to Eisenstein (2013), social variables such as location, gender, race, and age also play a role in online language use. These views presented by Eisenstein (2013) can seem rather peculiar when they are examined from the perspective of language studies or, more precisely, sociolinguistics. First of all, what can be detected already from the title of the study, referring to the language of social media as ‘bad’ does already imply that the language used online is different from the one used in the outside world that is, assumably, the ‘good’ language. Sociolinguists widely agree that there are no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ languages, but rather different varieties, styles, and registers. For example, Lee (2017: 29) states that local dialects and ways of using the language often spread from the people’s everyday language use to online use, as well. Assumably, these ways of language use are not criticized as heavily outside social media, since people understand that everyone uses language in a different way, and language use can be greatly affected by the person’s living environment, among other things. Perhaps, these same thoughts should be remembered in the context of social media, as well. As Leppänen and Kytölä state (2017), among other researchers in the field, multilingual resources such as different languages, styles, varieties, and genres are used in today’s social media. Thus, this provides more proof that there, in fact, are uncountable different ways of using language in an online context, none of which should be considered incorrect.

However, as was mentioned earlier in this section, Songxaba and Sincuba (2019) revealed in their study that WhatsApp did have a negative effect on the essay writing of their study participants. According to them, the students for example wrote numbers where they should have written words, used words in which certain letter were omitted, used informal words that are typical in WhatsApp language, and committed spelling errors. The researchers also state that the learners, however, do have knowledge of what the correct language is at least to some extent, but these unnecessary errors are made, nevertheless (Songxaba and Sincuba 2019).

Based on what has been written in this section, it appears that people do think that the language used online differs from the language used offline. However, some of this online language might sometimes find its way to offline language, as well. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, according to multiple studies, social media can be a useful tool in language learning, but, as it turns out, it might also have a negative effect on language learning simultaneously. Of course, for example in the study conducted by Songxaba and Sincuba (2019), the use of WhatsApp performed by the study participants was not linked to pedagogy or the teaching process, which is why it might give different sort of results compared to if WhatsApp was actually used as a tool for learning essay writing. Later in this thesis, the opinions of young Finns regarding social media and the effects of social media on their English language use are examined and it is discovered if the participants of this study share some of the views that have been mentioned in this section.

2.6 Finns' views of the English language – then vs. now?

Leppänen et al. (2009) conducted a survey study 14 years ago on how Finns used and viewed English in 2007. As the writers state, during that time English had just started becoming a greater part of Finns' everyday lives. Up until the 1960-1980s, English was mainly used for communicating with foreign people. However, after the turn of the century, English started to strengthen its position in Finland as well which was due to various different factors. Since Finland did not have a significant number of immigrants living there or flowing in the country, other factors such as the modernization of the society, the growing interest in internationality in general as well as the internationalization of the job market, and the new possibilities provided by the new and evolving information technology services have had a significant role in bringing Finns closer to the English language (Leppänen et al. 2009: 15).

According to Leppänen et al. (2009), this particular survey offered new quantitative information of how Finns used and viewed the English language in the late 2000s, and the researchers' aim was to discover the views and opinions of the entire nation which, as a matter of fact, had not been done the same way anywhere else in the world. The questionnaire was directed at Finns on all walks of life regardless of their background, age, gender, or language skills. This national questionnaire managed to provide information of how Finns in practice define their internationality, for example. In addition to this, based on the participants' answers, it could be analysed how the Finnish society was in fact transformed into a more multilingual and multicultural society (Leppänen et al. 2009: 16-19).

In this part, some of the results from the survey that are relevant considering this thesis will be summarized. In 2007 when the study was conducted, a rather large group of the respondents answered that they have acquired their English skills outside the classroom and education, and this was the case especially regarding youngsters, people living in cities, and people who have or had studied in an institution of higher education (Leppänen et al. 2009: 88-91). Thus, 14 years ago Finnish people already thought that they are frequently exposed to English outside schools and additionally learn the language without the help of English teaching. However, the majority did view education as the main route to language learning. It is quite understandable that young people tend to learn English outside the school environment more than older people, and it could possibly be assumed that this is the case even today. In addition, it is quite natural that in bigger cities and in higher education the exposure to English is greater, especially in the offline context.

The study results revealed that for most of the participants, English was mainly used during their free time (Leppänen et al. 2009: 93). The English language was encountered for example when watching movies and TV series, listening to music, and visiting websites. What is also interesting and relevant considering this study, 14.3% of the participants used English for writing online (Leppänen et al. 2009: 98). To be more precise regarding using English online, the participants mostly used it for searching information. Of course, the language was used for

other purposes as well, such as reading papers, playing online games, and communicating (Leppänen et al. 2009: 103). It could be assumed that in today's world where for example smartphones have become an important part of our everyday lives, the answers to these questions could be different. For instance, do people still use English mostly for searching information online? A great deal of the content available on different social media platforms is in English which is why it could be presumed that people often use English for reading and creating content. The situation is probably quite different from what it was 14 years ago: since social media platforms were not as popular during that time, changes have surely occurred.

Relating to the topic of mixing one's native language and English in speech, according to the survey results only 10.8% never mixed the languages (Leppänen et al. 2009: 119). It is quite surprising how much people added English in their speech already 14 years ago, since it might often be viewed as more of a new phenomenon. However, it is understandable since people encountered English rather often at that time as well which has most likely affected the increase of language mixing. As it is analysed later in the report, code switching was a part of people's everyday lives in 2007: people could understand English phrases rather well, and it was not viewed as a negative issue, but it rather happened without the participants noticing (Leppänen et al. 2009: 147).

The participants were also asked about their opinions, or rather, predictions of how English is used in twenty years of time. Out of the participants, 36.7% thought that English will be used more than Finnish in some sectors of the society in twenty years. Some of the sectors that were predicted to shift more towards using English in the future were, for instance, corporate world, science, music, and education (Leppänen et al. 2009: 132-134). It is rather interesting to think of these predictions since 14 years has already passed. It is quite safe to assume that English is used more in today's world, and later in the analysis chapter of this thesis, it is examined if, according to the participants of this study, social media have had something to do with this.

3 PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, the key premises of this thesis are outlined and previewed. Firstly, the aims and research questions relating to this study are presented. Secondly, the methods for data collection and the data itself are covered. Lastly, the means and methods that were used for analysing the data are presented.

3.1 Research aims and questions

The aim of this study is to provide new information of young Finns' views regarding social media and the English language. Thus, in this study, the views and opinions of the participants themselves are at the focus. Since in today's world, people spend a great deal of their time on various social media platforms, it is beneficial to examine how this phenomenon has affected the way young people view the English language of social media.

First of all, the general perceptions that young Finns have regarding social media and the English language are examined. Since English appears to be a part of many Finns' lives in today's world, it could be assumed that young Finns face English content on social media at least to some extent. This study aims to discover how these young Finns actually view the English language on social media, and what sort of perceptions they might have regarding the matter. The second aim of this study is to examine if the participants have noticed any effects that the language on social media has had on their English language use and skills. For this part, the participants were asked, for instance, to review their English language use both offline and on social media and, additionally, reflect on the different areas of the English language, such as vocabulary and oral skills, and whether the use of social media has had an effect on them.

Thus, the research questions of this thesis are the following:

1. How do young Finns view the language of and on social media?

2. Has social media affected young Finns' use of English language and their language skills, as indicated by the participants themselves, and what sort of effects have the participants noticed?

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Questionnaire

The data for this study was collected by conducting a questionnaire. The questionnaire was created in the autumn 2021, and the collection of respondents begun in February 2022. Before this, the questionnaire was also piloted. The responses to the final questionnaire were gathered in the span of approximately two weeks. There was no specific time limit after which the link to the questionnaire would be closed given to the (possible) participants beforehand. Instead, the link was closed when there was enough data to be analysed. The respondents were gathered by spreading the questionnaire on university mailing lists, in local Facebook groups and through announcements on the researcher's personal Facebook and Instagram accounts. The sampling techniques are discussed more closely later in this chapter.

Firstly, in the questionnaire, the participants were asked to give general information of themselves including their age and their status. These two questions were asked both as warm-up questions and also for the purpose of discovering whether there is a certain age or status group that is overly represented in the participants. After these general information questions, the participants were asked general questions related to social media and the English language. These questions aimed at revealing information of what social media platforms the participants use, how much they face or use English offline and on social media, what sort of English content they create and post on social media, and if they have noticed any differences between the English language on social media and the English in an offline context. In the third part of the questionnaire, the participants had to agree or disagree to different claims regarding the effects that social media may have had on their English language use. The claims included mentions of, for instance, vocabulary, grammar, understanding, speech production, and written text production. In addition, the participants were asked if social media have affected the amount they use English offline, and if they mix languages more often due to social media. In the last part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to review if the English language on social media differs from offline language, and if they have identified any ways of language use that are present mainly in the context of social media. Since the aim of this study was to gather information from Finnish-speaking participants, the questionnaire was in Finnish.

Questionnaire as a method for data collection has varying advantages. With questionnaires, the anonymity of the respondents can be maintained if necessary, the researcher's bias can be eliminated, and the participants can be given as much time as they need to answer the questions. In addition, as a method for data collection, questionnaires do not take much of the researcher's

time (Chasteauneuf 2010). Anonymity was also one of the reasons why questionnaire was chosen as the method for data collection in this thesis. With questionnaires, it is possible to gather a great deal of data, but without having to put an enormous effort in the data collection process (Alanen 2011). This was the main reason why questionnaire was selected as the method for data collection: the aim was to get as many participants as it was possible in the given time, so that there would be a broad and versatile selection of different views to make sure that the data is as reliable as possible.

3.2.2 Participants

For this questionnaire, the participants were gathered by using the convenience sampling technique in which there is not a particular pattern for gathering respondents, but the ones that are convenient to the researcher are used (Galloway 2005). Although according to Galloway (2005), convenience sampling does have its disadvantages and can often produce biased results, for this sort of a relatively small-scale study, convenience sampling could be used in a rather successful manner. As stated by Galloway (2005), convenience sampling is likely to produce biased results, and in this study, as it turned out, the bias was towards students of higher education. This is most likely due to the fact that the questionnaire was sent to a certain university's mailing lists in addition to spreading it on Facebook and Instagram. However, this was taken into consideration when analysing the data. Convenience sampling can also be a useful way to collect data when there is a need for tentative research after which the topic can be studied further in a more large-scale study (Galloway 2005). Since one of the aims of a master's thesis might often be discovering some preliminary information of a particular topic which could be studied further in a more detailed and organized manner, convenience sampling could often be a useful method for data collection. In addition to convenience sampling, snowball sampling technique was also used to some extent. Snowball sampling is a subtype of respondent-assisted sampling, and in this sampling technique the number of participants increases systematically like a snowball when being respondent-driven (Daniel 2012). In this study, it is not possible to know how many of the responds were gathered by using the snowball sampling since there was no personal information gathered in the questionnaire, but this technique was used at least to some extent, since some of the participants did spread the link to the questionnaire.

The aim of the study was to gather participants of ages 18-30. In the end, there were 251 participants who responded to the questionnaire, of which two respondents did not meet the age requirements. Thus, after eliminating the two respondents' answers, there were 249 participants left. The age requirements were set due to certain demands of the researcher. First of all, the lower age limit was set to eighteen years, so that there would not be any issues with handling data gathered from underage participants. Thirty was set as the upper age limit, since the study concentrates more on younger generations' views and opinions. In addition, one of the interests in this research was to collect information from people who have had social media as a part of their life since they were quite young.

3.3 Methods of analysis

Considering that conducting a questionnaire was chosen as the method for data collection, and the questionnaire included multiple choice questions, Likert scale questions and open-ended questions, there was a need for both quantitative and qualitative methods for the analysis. Firstly, descriptive statistics was used to analyse the part of the questionnaire which offered quantitative data. According to May (2017), using descriptive statistics gives the researcher an opportunity to organise, summarise and describe the data they have. In this thesis, the quantitative data was presented with the help of descriptive statistics, and tables were also used as a means for presenting the results in a more visual way to make the illustrating more agreeable for readers. However, the percentages that the tables illustrate were also explained thoroughly in the text for the reasons of accessibility. In addition, mode was chosen as the means for describing central tendency, since it points the option that was chosen the most (May 2017). That is, since the first three sections of the questionnaire included mostly multiple choice questions and questions based on the Likert scale, quantitative methods were used for analysing the results of those sections. For example, in the questions that had different options to choose from, the results were analysed by observing which of the options was the most frequently chosen by the participants, what was the second most popular option, and so on.

With the open-ended questions, a qualitative method was used for the analysis. More precisely, thematic analysis was chosen as the method. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to discover relationships in the data set and then systematically analyse them and, in addition, it also helps with organising the data (Chasteauneuf 2010). Also, with thematic analysis the researcher is able to include a great deal of the data to the analysis when the amount of data is vast, and it is not possible to present all the data in a detailed manner. Thus, thematic analysis was used for finding similarities in the participants' answers, dividing them into different themes, and finally for analysing the answers. Since, for example, in question 23 where a participant could answer the question with a 'yes' or a 'no', but also with an answer somewhere in between the two, all of the ones that answered 'yes' were grouped and analysed together and so on. Since there were 249 participants' answers in the questionnaire, all of them could not be analysed separately in a detailed manner. Consequently, thematic analysis was chosen as the method so that the answers could be divided into themes and thus analysed accurately.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the participants' answers that were gathered by conducting a questionnaire are presented and analysed. In addition, the relevant research reviewed in the theoretical framework are compared to the results of this study. Firstly, the general information of the participants is presented. Secondly, the general views that the participants have of social media and English language are examined. Thirdly, it is discovered whether the participants' English language use and skills have been affected by the use of social media. Finally, the participants answered questions relating to language of social media, and they were given the opportunity to reflect on the matter on a general perspective, but also on a more personal perspective, and these results are presented and analysed in this chapter.

4.1 General information of the participants

In the very first section of the questionnaire, which included two questions, the participants were asked to fill in some general information of themselves: their age and status. As mentioned in Chapter 3, these questions were asked mainly as warm-up questions, but they did have another important function. With the question regarding age, it was ensured that the participants met the age limit of the study, which was 18-30 years. This question revealed two unsuitable participants whose answers were omitted from the data. The question regarding status aimed at discovering information of the participants' occupational background. The aim of the study was to gather participants with different backgrounds which is why this question was included in the questionnaire. With the help of this question, it was ensured that the analysis could be done in a reliable manner. Thus, if some specific group would be overly represented in the answers, it could be considered in the analysis.

Based on the answers, the questionnaire attracted participants of various ages. In fact, all of the ages from eighteen to thirty were represented in the answers. Thus, the age variation offered a reliable framework for the analysis. Then again, the question regarding status revealed that a significant part of the participants identified themselves as students of higher education. In

other words, the mode was the fourth option, higher education students. The percentages were as follows: 21.7% (n=54) employed, 3.2% (n=8) unemployed, 2.0% (n=5) upper secondary or vocational school students, 81.1% (n=202) students of higher education, and 2.8% (n=7) with a status that was not mentioned in the options. According to their own answers, these 2.8% included a part-time worker and a student, a student at an upper secondary school for adults, a person on medical leave, a student at an open university, a pensioner, an incapacitated person and a student with an apprenticeship contract. However, in this question, it was possible to choose more than one of the status options. Hence, the question gathered 276 answers altogether, while there were 249 participants in total. Naturally, this means that, for example, some of the students of higher education could have also answered the first option 'employed' which is why the possible bias towards students of higher education had to be taken into consideration in the rest of the analysis.

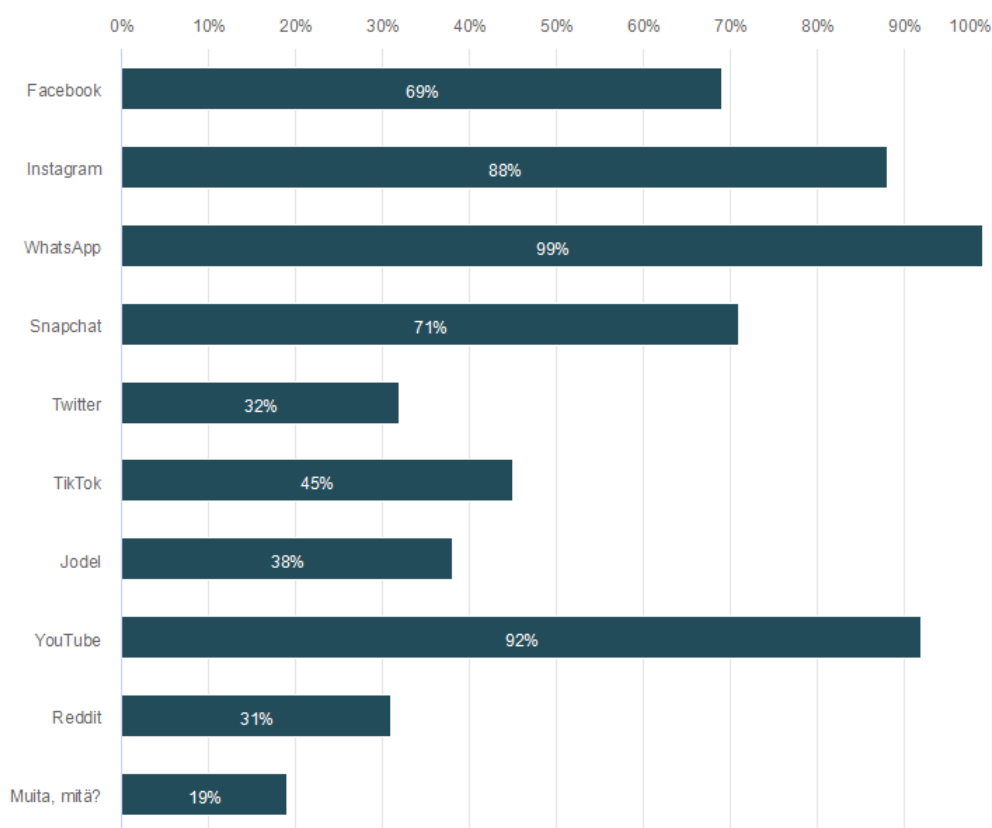
4.2 Participants' general views regarding social media and the English language

In the second part of the questionnaire, the general views that the participants had towards social media and the English language were observed. This section covers issues such as the participants' social media use regarding which social media platforms are used the most, the languages the participants face on social media, the amount of English that is used by the participants both on and outside social media, on which social media platforms English is used the most, and if the language differs depending on the platform.

4.2.1 What social media platforms do the participants use, and what languages do they face on those platforms?

In the third question of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to indicate which social media platforms they use. The question included ten options of which nine were generally known, popular social media platforms, and one option offered the participants an opportunity to mention other platforms they use and that were not included in the options. The given options were chosen based on what platforms are generally and assumably the most popular ones amongst the age group of the participants. In addition, the answers to the pilot questionnaire presented more information and gave an insight of which additional options could be added in the final questionnaire. Table 1 below shows the answers to this question.

Table 1: Which social media platforms do you use? You can choose more than one.



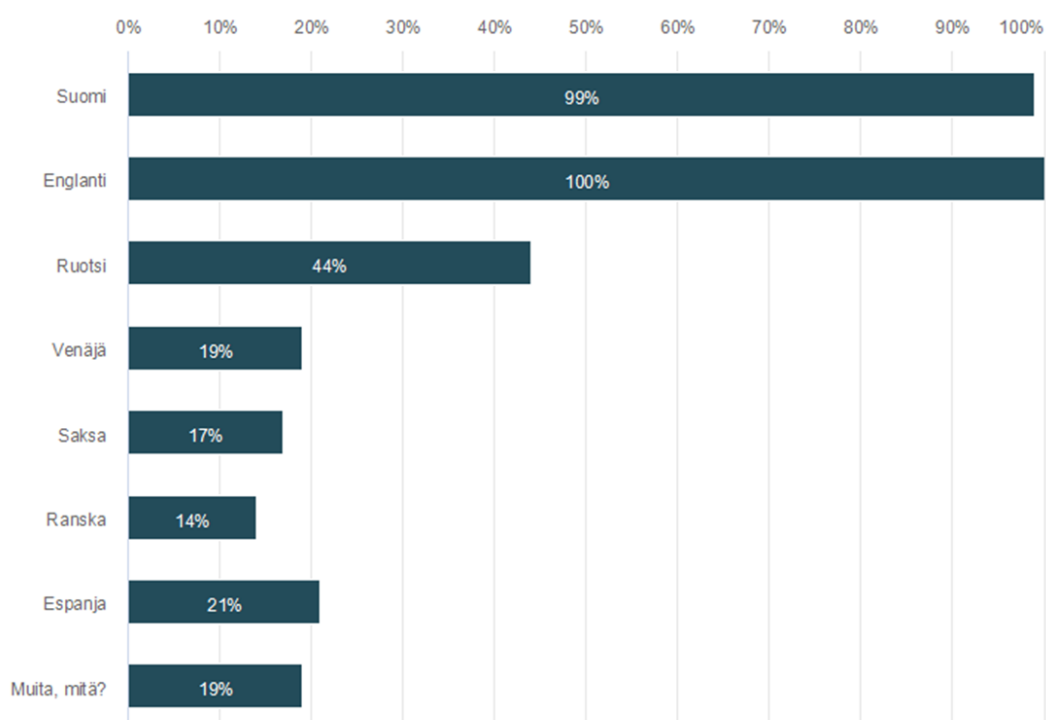
As can be seen from Table 1, WhatsApp was the most used social media platform by the participants with 98.8% (n=246). This was not surprising, since WhatsApp has increased its popularity steadily in Finland (Reunanen et al. 2021), and many people seem to use it as their main means for communication. In fact, researchers of journalism, communications and media in the University of Tampere and the Reuters Institute conducted a study in Finland regarding the news media online, and according to this study, 72% of Finns use WhatsApp, and it has become the most used social media platform in Finland (Reunanen et al. 2021: 69). It can be noticed from the results of this larger-scale study that younger generations use WhatsApp even more than the average amount: among the Finns aged 18-24 the percentage of WhatsApp users is 83%, and of Finns aged 25-34 the same percentage is 80% (Reunanen et al. 2021: 69). Thus, the participants of this study appear to use WhatsApp even more than what the average amount in Finland is. This might just be a coincidence, but the bias towards higher education students of this study could possibly explain this. Likely, there has not been a study conducted on the social media platform use by specifically higher education students which is why this correlation cannot be verified.

YouTube came in as a close second after WhatsApp with the percentage of 92% (n=229). The platforms that followed these two were Instagram 87.6% (n=218), Snapchat 71.1% (n=177) and Facebook 69.1% (n=172) forming the top five of the most popular platforms. As can be seen from Table 1, Twitter, TikTok, Jodel and Reddit were also used by many, but not to the

same extent as the top five. As mentioned before, the participants were also able to share if there are any other additional social media platforms they use. This option gathered 47 answers and the following platforms were mentioned: Discord by 13, Telegram by 13, Tumblr by 12 participants, Twitch by 9, LinkedIn by 4, Pinterest by 3, and Vkontakte by 2. Other platforms that were mentioned once were Stack Exchange, Quora, online gaming sites, Line, StackOverflow, and Ylilauta. As Reunanen et al. (2021) also state, the platforms owned by Facebook (currently Meta) are among the most popular ones in Finland, and so it is based on the participants' answers in this study, too with WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook being included in the top five most popular platforms. In the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, it was mentioned that the participants are encouraged to define social media by themselves, which is why there was not a specific definition given to them for this question. Based on the answers, it can now be seen what platforms and online sites are considered social media by the participants.

The topic of the fourth question was more related to the language aspect of this thesis. The participants were asked, what languages do they face in the context of social media. An interesting aspect appeared from the answers to this question: even though the difference was very small, English is faced on social media more than Finnish.

Table 2: In which languages do you face content on social media?



English and Finnish were the options that were chosen the most, conspicuously more than the other options offered, English by 100% (n=249) and Finnish by 99.2% (n=247). Based on these results, it is clear that English is faced on social media to a great extent. However, Finns face

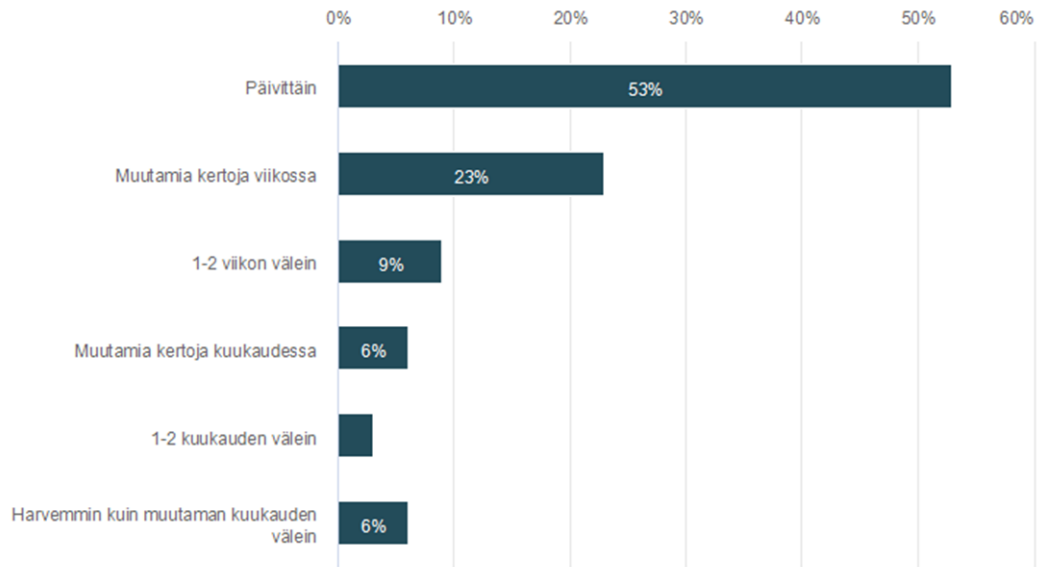
various other languages on social media in addition to these two languages that could have probably been assumed as the top two in advance. Swedish was chosen by 44.2% (n=110), Spanish by 21.3% (n=53), Russian by 19.3% (n=48), German by 16.9% (n=42) and French by 14.1% (n=35). In this question as well as in the previous one, the participants were given an opportunity to mention some other languages they might face on social media, and this option gathered 47 answers altogether. In other words, the option was chosen by 18,9% of the participants. The other languages mentioned were Japanese (n=18), Korean (n=15), Chinese (n=7), Italian (n=6), Arabian (n=3), Dutch (n=3), Norwegian (n=3), Estonian (n=2), Hungarian (n=2), and Northern Sami (n=3). Languages that were mentioned once included Karelian, Finnish and American Sign Languages, Tagalog, Polish, Hindi, Ukrainian, Danish, Portuguese, and Thai. One participant also mentioned that they do face other languages on social media as well, but they are not able to recognise them.

As can be noticed based on these answers, many different languages, even the ones that are not generally or widely spoken in Finland or even in Europe, are faced in the context of social media. There can be many different reasons why these particular languages were mentioned the most. Considering the Asian languages of which Japanese and Korean were mentioned rather frequently, the popularity of, for instance, Japanese comics and series might explain the frequency of the mentions of the Japanese language, whereas the popularity of Korean pop music and entertainment industry might explain why Korean is faced by many on social media today. One of the participants mentioned that they face Italian on social media due to the increasing popularity of the Eurovision winner, an Italian rock band Måneskin. Of course, simply the social media user's location could affect the variation of languages faced on social media. That might also be why for example Norwegian, Danish, and Estonian were mentioned by the participants, since they are languages that are spoken geographically close to Finland. In addition, since many of the participants were students of higher education, and universities often offer a wide selection of foreign language studies, it could also affect the answers of this questionnaire. Thus, many factors can play a role in what languages are faced on social media.

4.2.2 Participants' views of social media and the English language

With the next two questions, numbers 5 and 6, the aim was to discover how often English is faced and/or used both on and outside social media by the participants. The variation of answers between these two questions appeared to be quite large.

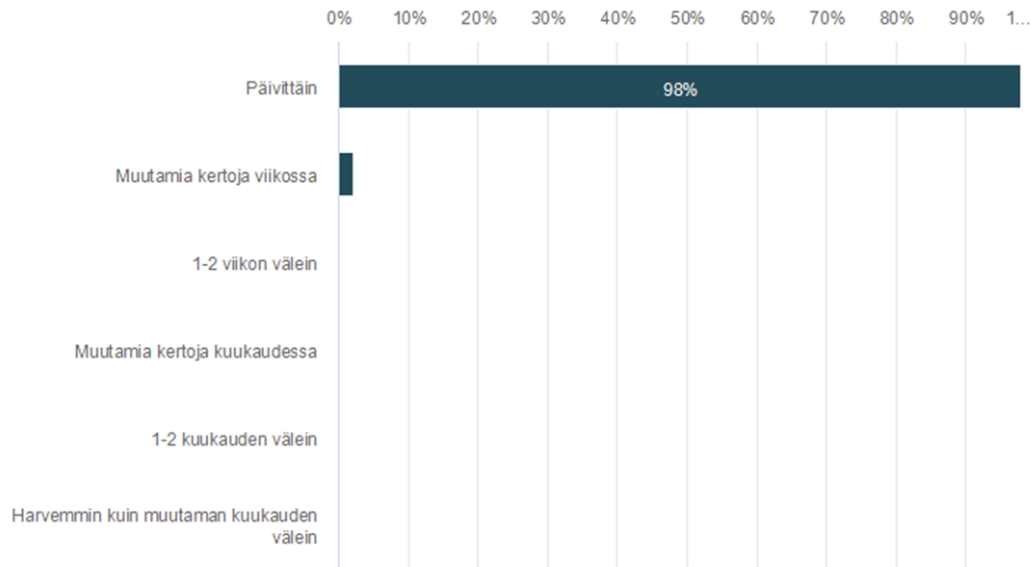
Table 3: How often do you face and/or use English in the life outside of social media?



Firstly, the participants had to estimate, how often they face or use English outside of social media: on a daily basis, a few times a week, every 1-2 weeks, a few times a month, every 1-2 months or less frequently than every few months. As Table 3 illustrates, a majority of the participants do face or use English daily, more specifically 52.6% (n=131). However, all of the other options were represented in the results, too. English was faced or used a few times a week by 22.9% (n=57), every 1-2 weeks by 8.5% (n=21), a few times a month by 6.4% (n=16), every 1-2 months by 3.2% (n=8), and less frequently than every few months by 6.4% (n=16).

The question relating to facing or using English on social media gathered very different results, as can be seen from Table 4 below.

Table 4: How often do you face English content on social media?



In this question, the participants had to choose between the same options as in the previous question. However, in the results of this question, only two of the options were represented. Of the participants, 98% (n=244) answered that they face or use English on social media daily, whereas 2.0% (n=5) chose the option ‘a few times a week’. The results show a clear difference in the amount of English that is faced or used outside of social media versus on social media. These results might even be expected or assumed, and various factors could explain this difference. First of all, since the context of this study was Finland and Finnish-speaking participants, and English is not an official language in Finland, it is understandable that it might not be faced or used outside of social media by all Finns on a weekly, or even on a monthly basis. This, of course, depends on the individual themselves, whether they for instance have to use English in their work or school environment, consume English-speaking media or entertainment on their spare time, communicate with their acquaintances in English, and many other factors. However, since social media offers a great deal of material in foreign languages (Tschirner 2011: 25), including English, it might be that English is often easier to face there. For example, on different platforms, one is able to see content from various different locations even if the user themselves is based in Finland. This is most likely one of the reasons why English is faced on social media frequently. Regarding using English, perhaps it is more natural and easier to use English on social media if the context there is often more international compared to many Finns’ lives outside social media.

In this study, the target group was young Finns aged 18-30 which naturally affects the results, as well. For instance, in the results of the fifth question, a majority did use or face English outside of social media, but the results could have been different if the older generations had a chance to participate in this study, too. Generally, younger generations appear to use social media more than older generations. For example, in the study by Reunanen et al. (2021: 69), it can be noticed that with many of the platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok, the number of users decreases when moving on to the older generations. In addition to the target

group, the bias towards higher education students has to be considered when analysing the results. It might be that higher education students face English more likely for example in their studies which could affect the quite high number of participants that face or use English on a daily basis.

The seventh question was an open-ended question, where the participants were asked to mention the social media platforms on which English is faced the most. Three platforms were represented in the answers the most: Instagram was mentioned by 159, YouTube by 128 and TikTok by 91. Other platforms that were mentioned often were Twitter, Reddit, and Facebook. Some participants also gave elaborations to their answers. A few participants stated that the amount of English depends on who you follow on the platforms. For example, on some platforms the participants might follow mostly users that create English-speaking content, and thus English is faced often. One participant compared Instagram and Facebook: on Instagram they follow users that create English content, whereas on Facebook the emphasis is more on Finnish-speaking groups, for instance. There were even mentions of platforms on which English is faced the least, for instance WhatsApp. Regarding this, it might be that WhatsApp is used especially for communicating with friends and family, and that is why the participants' own native language is mostly used on the platform. On the contrary, for example Instagram, YouTube and TikTok seem to be used mostly for following popular content creators who often create English content instead of only following one's inner circle.

In the eighth question, the participants were encouraged to reflect on the differences in the English language between different social media platforms, and they were asked if they have noticed any differences between different platforms regarding the English language. The answers were divided rather evenly between the three options, 'yes', 'no' and 'I do not know'. The option 'yes' was chosen by 36.2% (n=90), 'no' by 30.5% (n=76), and 'I do not know' by 33.3% (n=83). After answering this question, the participants that answered 'yes' were asked to describe the differences and give concrete examples. Out of the 90 that answered 'yes', 80 gave broader explanation for their answer, since answering the question was optional. There were eight rather clear themes that could be detected from the answers, and they are listed below:

1. Formal versus informal language
2. Spoken versus written English
3. Differences in the lengths of the posts
4. Differences in the content itself
5. Differences in the level of English
6. Censorship on different platforms
7. Effects of anonymity
8. Average age of the users.

Firstly, the difference that was mentioned unquestionably the most was the difference in the formality of the language. Many participants have noticed that on some social media platforms

formal language is used more, and the content and posts are often more information based and thoroughly written. An example of a platform on which this formal language is faced often is, according to the participants, Twitter. Then again, on some platforms the language appears to be more informal, and slang words and abbreviations are used more often. One participant called this more informal language ‘meme language’. Many mentioned TikTok as a platform on which this informal language can be faced rather often. Secondly, perhaps a quite obvious difference was mentioned by many: the difference of spoken and written language. For this theme, the platforms that were mentioned often were YouTube for spoken language and Instagram for written language. Thirdly, there is a clear difference in the length of the posts depending on the platform. It was mentioned that on YouTube users often post long videos, whereas on Twitter users post shorter texts since there is a word limit for every post. Thus, when there is a word limit that cannot be exceeded, there is a greater need for abbreviations, for example, which naturally affects the language. Next, it was mentioned by the participants that the content itself affects the language in use. One participant gave a concrete example of this and stated that there is a difference between the language that the gamers on Twitch use versus the language that is being used by a musical artist’s fans on Twitter. Another mentioned that all communities use language in a different way.

(1) All communities have their own way of using the language.

The fifth theme that could be noticed from the answers was that users on different platforms appear to possess English skills of different levels. For example, Reddit and Instagram were mentioned as platforms on which many non-native English speakers write posts which can be seen from the level of English that is used in these posts. The sixth theme dealt with censorship, and how there is a difference in the amount of censorship on different platforms. A few participants mentioned TikTok as a platform on which new counterparts have been created for inappropriate words that the platform censors in the users’ posts. Thus, the language used on the platform is affected. Next, anonymity was mentioned as a factor that could have an effect on the language used on certain platforms. For instance, it was stated by the participants that controversial comments are more likely to be found on the comment sections on Reddit, where the users are anonymous, whereas on Instagram, a platform on which the users usually create content under their own name, it is more unlikely to see inappropriate comments. The last theme that was mentioned was the average age of the platforms’ users. An example that was given by a participant was that on TikTok the users are often quite young, and that is why the users are likely to use more trendy language that is often popular among younger people.

Even though these themes could be quite clearly noticed from the answers, there were also some disagreements between the participants, especially considering the examples that were given of different platforms. For instance, Instagram was mentioned multiple times both as a platform for formal language and for informal language. However, one participant mentioned that formal language on Instagram is often produced by social media influencers. Thus, it could be assumed that it also depends on the users one follows on these platforms whether they face more formal or informal language. Of course, this aspect of formal versus informal language

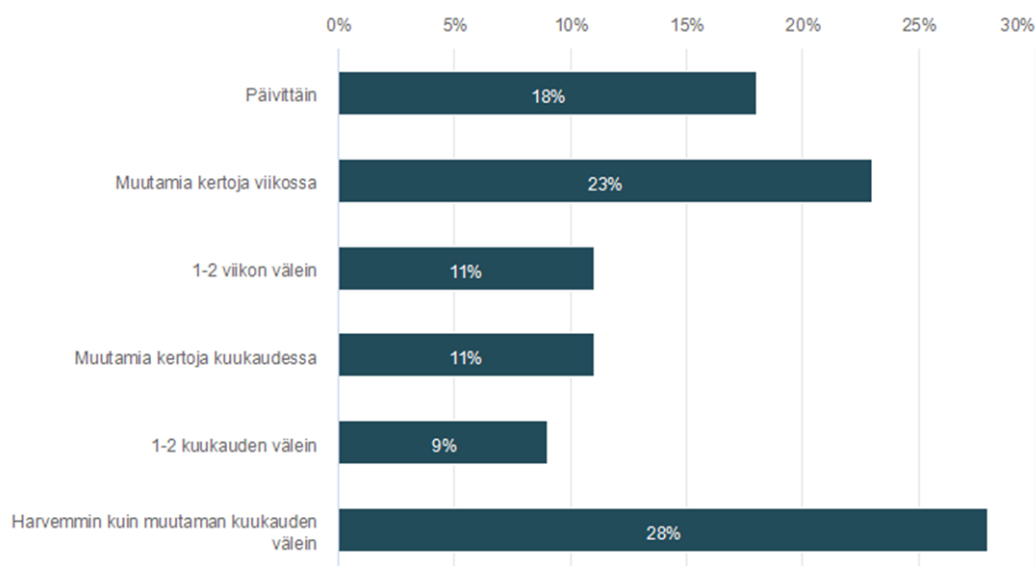
could also be linked to the difference in content itself. Perhaps it can be expected that formal language appears often on more information or news based content, whereas informal language on posts written for one’s inner circle or for a closed community or fandom. One participant also took a stand regarding the change in the English language on social media.

(2) The English language has “ghettoed” and become boring, in my opinion, people are lazier when it comes to word use. A lot of grammar mistakes even by natives.

This opinion could be linked to the article by Eisenstein (2013), where he contemplated the factors that affect the occurring and forming of ‘bad’ language on the internet, since this participant’s statement implies that the language used on social media today is lazy and not correct. However, perhaps a language cannot be considered ‘bad’, but rather just different. Since there are various ways of using a language, different dialects, variants, and registers, can one way of using the language in fact be considered bad? However, Aloraini and Cardoso (2020) also mentioned in their research that their study participants named facing language errors on social media as a con when considering language learning. In addition, Songxaba and Sincuba (2019) argued that their study participants seemed to commit more language errors due to social media use. Ergo, it appears that there are, for example, grammatical mistakes made on social media rather often, and people have voiced their opinions about the negative effect of this.

Next, the participants were asked how often they create English content on social media. It was also clarified in the question that English content can mean for example posts, comments, gifs (animated pictures or stickers), or any other sort of social media content. The results were divided between all of the given options: on a daily basis, a few times a week, every 1-2 weeks, a few times a month, every 1-2 months or less frequently than every few months.

Table 5: According to your own estimate, how often do you create English content on social media?
This might include e.g., posts, comments, gifs, etc.



A majority of the participants, 27.3% (n=68), viewed that they do not post social media content in English on a monthly basis but less frequently than every few months. Of course, it is possible that some of the participants who chose this option might not post English content on social media at all. The number of participants that chose the option of posting English content a few times a week came rather close to the most popular option with 23.3% (n=58). 18.1% (n=45) post English content daily, 11.3% (n=28) every 1-2 weeks, 10.8% (n=27) a few times a month, and 9.2% (n=23) every 1-2 months. Based on these results, there is a clear variation between people regarding how often English content is posted on social media. It could be assumed that this depends greatly on the person in question. Others might prefer using their native language on social media, and it feels the most natural option for them. Then again, for others using English might be more comfortable, or they might aim at reaching a bigger and/or more international audience. Of course, it is also possible that another language is used instead of Finnish or English, or that the users generally post on social media rarely or not at all.

After this, the participants were asked to describe the English content that they might post on social media. Answering this open-ended question was voluntary, and the question gathered 174 responses in total. For this open-ended question, the method for analysing the answers was again thematic. The responses were divided into six different themes. Firstly, what was mentioned undeniably the most by the participants was texts of different lengths. However, short texts in particular were mentioned most frequently. These short texts included for example texts on the stories function and picture captions, tweets, and comments. There were mentions of long texts, as well, and examples of these were long posts relating to one's own interests, peer support posts, and fan fiction. The second theme included speech on videos of different lengths. The participants might either film a video of themselves for instance in the form of short video posts, live streaming or singing videos, but they also indicated that they might post or forward videos that other people have made, for example TikTok videos. One participant mentioned that these videos are a way to communicate with friends, and they are often in English since there is more high-quality English content available.

(3) Between some friends we don't talk every week, but we link funny videos nearly daily. There is a lot more English content available which most likely also leads to the fact that the content is of better quality.

Thirdly, the participants mentioned pictures and memes which might either be made by themselves or by other users on social media. In the fourth theme, mentions of more social media based content were lumped together, and examples that were mentioned were gifs, hashtags, and stickers with English text. The fifth theme consisted of statements regarding code switching or mixing English to another language. This appears to happen most often among Finnish-speaking friends, when English is mixed with Finnish in messages on social media platforms. The platform on which this often happens and that was mentioned most frequently was WhatsApp. One of the participants described this mixing of languages as 'memeing', and another stated that it is used for referring to a friend group's in-jokes. Generally, code switching

is used for funny sayings or jokes between friends. Another reason for code switching can also be not remembering the Finnish equivalent for a word.

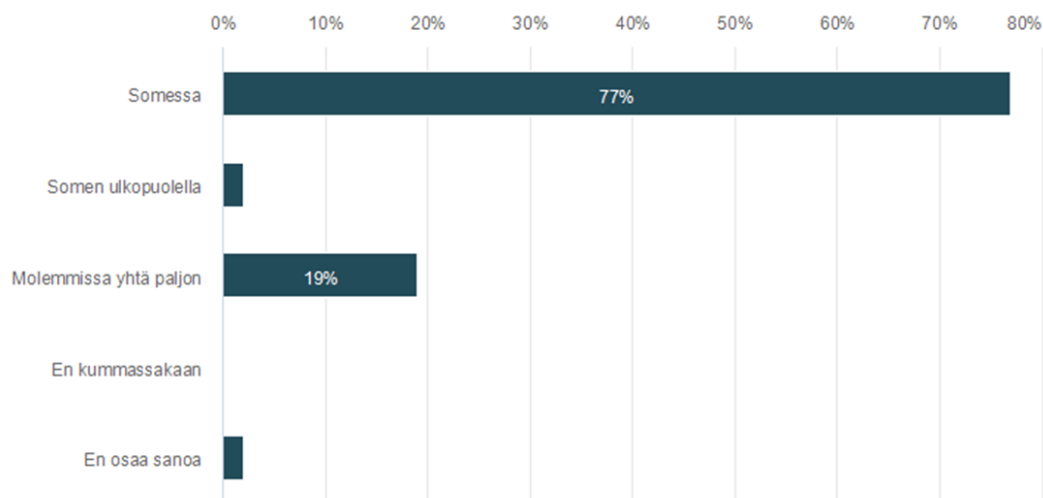
(4) Finglish, gifs, mostly on Whatsapp. If one doesn't remember the word in Finnish, then it might come out in English.

The last theme included fully English communication and conversations with other people. This happens the most often between friends and especially with foreign friends. However, one participant mentioned that they communicate even with their Finnish-speaking friends in English. As Leppänen and Peuronen (2012) stated it as well, there are various language settings that can be found on social media one of which is when the participants do not share the same language, and often in situations like these, English is used for communicating. Thus, for example between foreign friends, English might often be the shared language.

Ergo, English is used in multiple different ways and forms on social media by the participants. Since the most popular mention was short texts, perhaps something could be assumed based on it. For example, shorter texts do not take much effort from the social media user, and the bar is set lower considering using English which is why it might be easier to use English in this context, especially if one is insecure about their English skills. After all, posting long comments or videos in English does require a certain level of English proficiency. Then again, with gifs, hashtags, and stickers the bar for using English is even lower than with short texts, since social media platforms often suggest certain gifs, hashtags and stickers for their users based on what is popular or what the user has used before. Posting or forwarding videos and memes made by other users does not take much effort either which is probably why it was mentioned rather frequently. In addition, since there appears to be a great deal of English content of good quality online, it does not require the user to create their own video, but they can merely use a video made by another social media user. It was not a surprise that the mixing of English and Finnish was also mentioned, since according to Leppänen et al. (2009) code switching was performed by a majority of Finns already in 2007. In addition, as Lee (2017: 64) states, code switching or English in general is often used for humour reasons online, which also seems to be the reason for some of the participants for choosing to use English.

With the last question of this section, the aim was discovering where the participants face English more, on social media or outside it. The participants were given five options to choose from: on social media, outside social media, as much on social media as outside it, neither on social media nor outside it, and I do not know.

Table 6: Do you face English more on social media or in the life outside it?



As can be noticed from Table 6, a great number of participants, precisely 77.1% (n=192), face English more on social media. This was rather predictable, since there is a great deal of material available in foreign languages on social media (Tschirner 2011: 25), as it has become evident earlier in this thesis. However, everyone did not agree with this option, since 19.3% (n=48) estimated that they face English as much on social media as they do outside it. Also, 2.0% (n=5) face English more outside social media, and 1.6% (n=4) chose the option ‘I do not know’. The option ‘neither on social media nor outside it’ did not gather any responses. Again, as with Question 10 regarding the amount of English content created on social media, it quite likely depends on the person where English is faced the most. Nevertheless, English is faced by everyone since the option ‘neither on social media nor outside it’ did not attract any respondents. Perhaps, in today’s world where English has become an international language used worldwide (Leppänen et al. 2008), it can be rather difficult to avoid facing it. Interestingly, 48 participants estimated that they face English on social media as much as in the world outside social media, and there were also two participants who face English more outside social media than on it. These participants might, for example, face English in their school or work environment or during their free time, for example by consuming and following English-speaking media or entertainment. Of course, the bias towards higher education students might affect this, as well, if English is used for example in their studies to a great frequency. In fact, English could be faced in multiple different situations all of which cannot be covered in this thesis. All in all, English is faced on social media to a great extent, but it is also faced outside it.

4.3 The effects of social media on the participants’ English language skills and use estimated by the participants themselves

In the next section of the questionnaire, the focus was on the second research question of this thesis. Thus, the aim was to find out whether the participants have noticed any effects that

social media might have had on their English language use and skills. There were ten questions in total in this section. Of these questions, a few were more general and related to the relationship between the participants' English skills and social media. In addition, there were more specific questions relating to different subareas of the English language. These subareas included themes such as vocabulary, grammar, understanding, speaking, and writing. Other themes included issues such as code switching, the possible effects of social media on the motivation of using English outside social media, and so on. All of the questions in this section were based on the Likert scale, and in all of the questions the participants had to choose between options from 1 to 5, option 1 signifying 'fully disagree' and option 5 'fully agree'.

4.3.1 General questions relating to the effects of social media on the participants' English language use and skills

The first and last questions of this section aimed at revealing the participants' thoughts of the effects that social media may have had on their English skills on a general level. The last question was added to confirm that the aim of the questionnaire is not to guide the participants to view social media only in a positive light, but to think critically, as well. The results of the first and last questions of this section can be seen from Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: The use of social media has improved my English language skills.

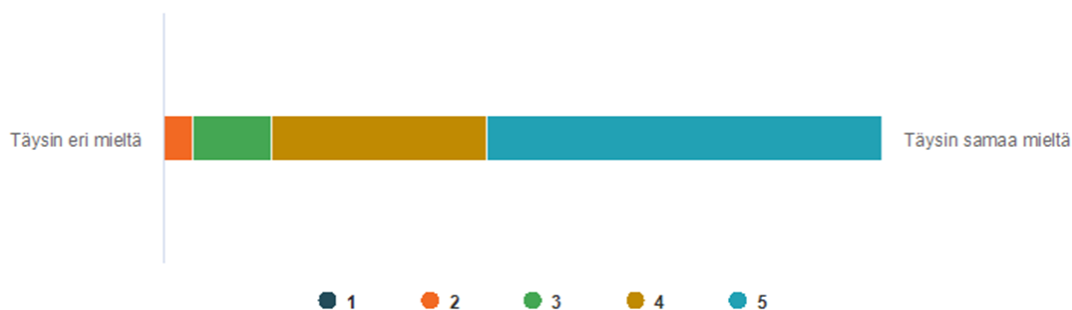
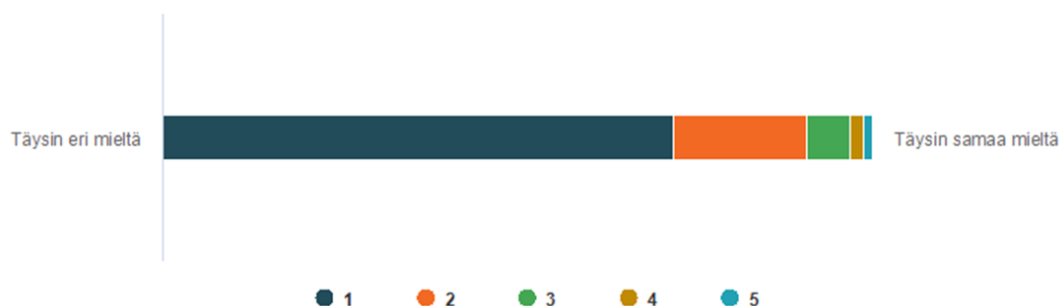


Table 8: Social media has impoverished my English language skills.



In the first question, the participants were asked to choose an option between 1 and 5 according to how much they view social media has improved their English skills. As can be seen from Table 7, a majority of the participants, 55% (n=137), chose the fifth option, 'fully agree'. Thus, the fifth option is the mode in the results of this question. The second most popular option was the fourth option with 29.7% (n=74). All of the other options attracted answers as well: option 3, which was in the middle of the Likert scale, was chosen by 10.9% (n=27), option 2 by 4.0% (n=10), and option 1 by 0.4% (n=1).

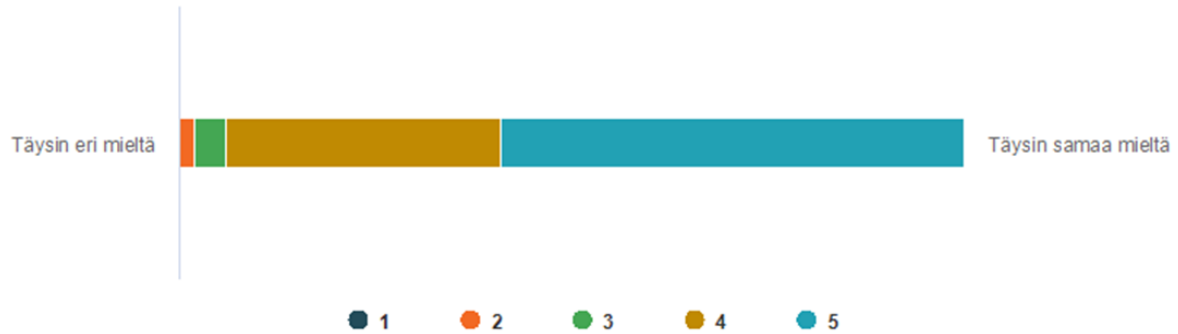
The very last question aimed at discovering if the participants' English skills have impoverished due to social media use. Since these two questions were rather similar but observed the situation from opposite perspectives, it was interesting to see if the results had any resemblance with each other. The mode and the most chosen option in this question was option 1 'fully disagree', and it was chosen by 71.9% (n=179). The second most popular option chosen was option 2 by 19.3% (n=48) of the participants. The other options gathered the following answers: option 3 was chosen by 6.0% (n=15), option 4 by 2.0% (n=5), and option 5 by 0.8% (n=2).

Firstly, the percentages vary between these questions rather greatly. In Table 6, one can see that 55% of the participants fully agree with the statement that social media has improved their English skills. However, when the question was asked from the opposite perspective, out of the participants 71.9% disagreed fully to the statement that suggested an impoverishment in their English level due to social media. Perhaps, the participants did not think these questions were interchangeable with each other. Then again when the questions are analysed more carefully, they in fact are not the complete opposites of each other: Question 13 deals with improvement in language skills, whereas Question 22 does not actually deal with worsening of language skills but rather with impoverishment. The results might have been different if the perspectives of the questions would have been perfect opposites. Nevertheless, based on the actual results there are more participants that do not view social media having been impoverishing their English language skills than participants who think the so-called opposite. In total, there were 211 participants who think social media has improved their English skills, in other words have chosen either option 5 or 4, whereas there were 227 participants who thought that social media has not impoverished their English skills and had chosen either option 1 or 2. Based on these numbers and the percentages presented in the previous paragraphs, the participants feel more strongly about social media not impoverishing their English skills than they do about social media improving their skills. This issue will be analysed later in the conclusion of this section of the questionnaire.

4.3.2 Questions relating to vocabulary, grammar, understanding, speaking, and writing

Firstly, the participants were asked whether they agree or disagree that their English vocabulary has been expanded due to social media.

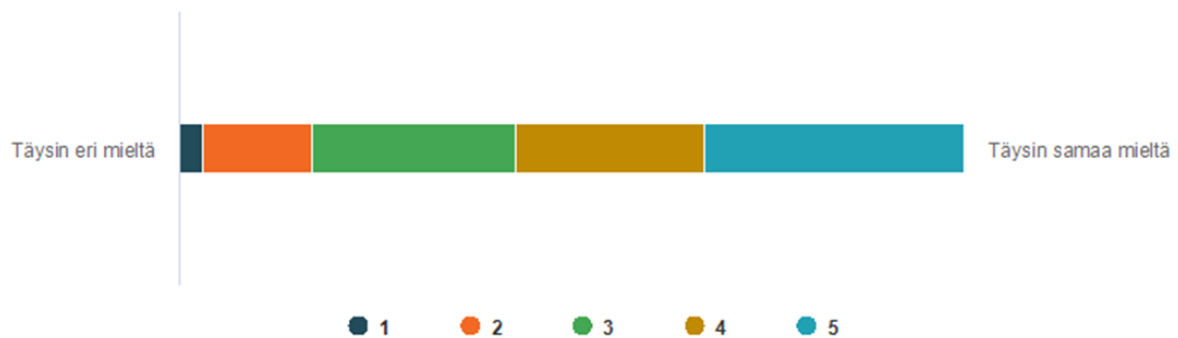
Table 9: My English vocabulary has grown along with the use of social media.



A majority of the participant agreed with this statement, since 58.6% (n=146) chose option 5 ‘fully agree’. In addition, 35% (n=87) chose option 4. The rest of the results were divided as follows: option 3 was chosen by 3.6% (n=9), option 2 by 2.4% (n=6), and option 1, ‘fully disagree’, by 0.4% (n=1). These results could be analysed based on the literature and previous research review done in Chapter 2. Since it has been mentioned frequently in this thesis, social media is a place where a great deal of material in foreign languages can be found (Tschirner 2011: 25) which could be why many of the participants agree with the statement in Question 14. Also, Aloraini and Cardoso (2020) state in their article that their study participants view that social media has helped them learn new vocabulary. It is most likely inevitable that a person who uses social media and faces English content there also faces new vocabulary. Then, if certain words or phrases appear on social media on a regular basis, it is likely that remembering them becomes easier. Thus, new vocabulary is learnt.

Question 15 presented a statement which suggested that social media has had a positive effect on the participants’ grammar knowledge.

Table 10: Social media has had a positive effect on my grammar knowledge.

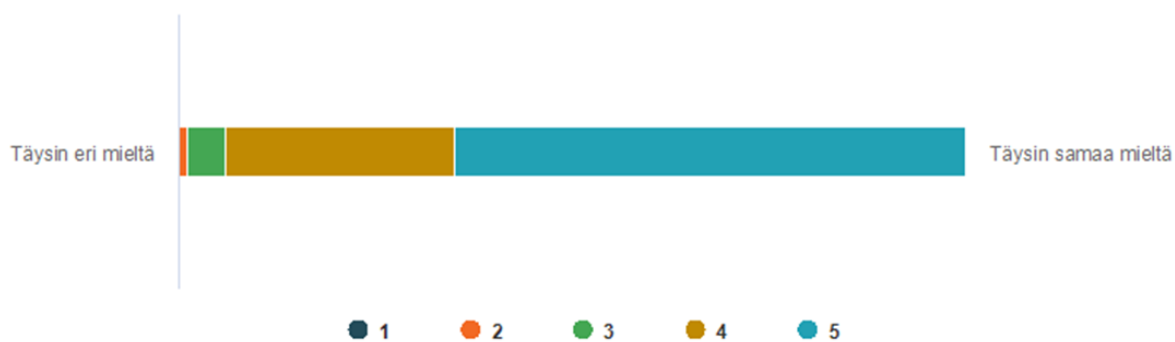


The mode and the most popular answer with this question was option 5 ‘fully agree’ which was chosen by 32.9% (n=82) of the participants. However, with this question the results spread

more than with the previous one, since option 4 was chosen by 24.1% (n=60), option 3 by 25.7% (n=64), option 2 by 14.1% (n=35), and option 1 ‘fully disagree’ by 3.2% (n=8). Ergo, the participants do disagree to some extent considering the effects that social media might have on grammar skills. As stated earlier in this thesis, social media appears to have been a factor in the change of, for example, punctuation and spelling in the English language (Eisenstein 2013), and language errors have been performed by students due to social media use (Songxaba and Sincuba 2019). In addition, according to the participants’ previous answers, for instance informal language, acronyms and ‘meme language’ often occur in the English content on social media, and even natives seem to commit grammar errors to a larger extent. Perhaps, based on this information, it could be concluded that people do not necessarily always write or speak perfectly edited English on social media, especially if the context is informal. Thus, social media users might come across this content and face this sort of language, which could possibly have a negative effect on their grammar skills. Then again, most of the participants chose the fifth option which means that social media does have a positive effect on the English skills of the majority of the participants, according to themselves. Since there is a great deal of English content on social media, users also face different sorts of structures and forms there which naturally can improve the learning of grammar, as well.

Next statement covered the issue of language understanding, and the participants had to express their views on whether social media has had a positive effect on their English language understanding.

Table 11: Social media has had a positive effect on my English language understanding.

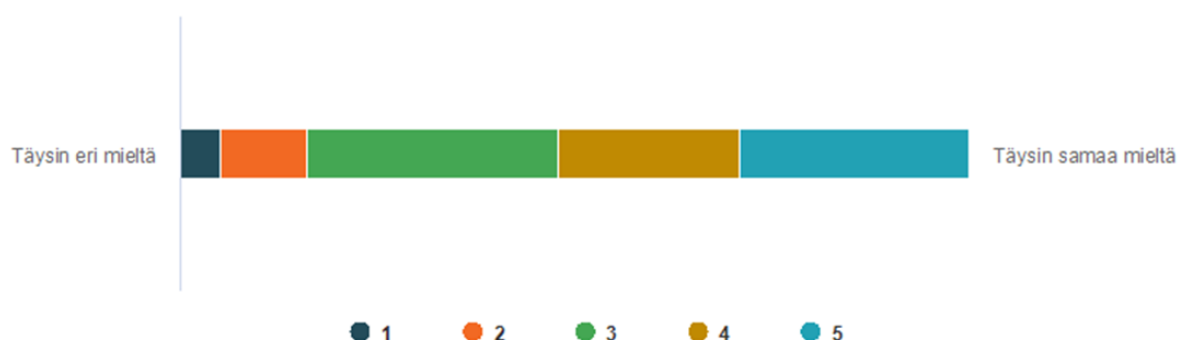


Again, option 5 was the mode according to the results, and 65.1% (n=162) of the participants chose to ‘fully agree’. Option 4 attracted a large part of the participants as well, and it was chosen by 28.9% (n=72) of the participants. Additionally, option 3 was chosen by 4.8% (n=12), option 2 by 0.8% (n=2), and option 1 by 0.4% (n=1). Thus, with this question, the answers were not divided evenly between all of the offered options, and a large majority of the participants agree with the statement of this question. The explanation for these results could be similar as with Question 14: due to the large amount of material, social media offer for their users an opportunity to learn to understand languages. Social media users might face a great deal of

English content on a daily basis, and seeing, reading, and hearing this content can be a useful way to get more English language input in one's life, and thus improve language learning. Also, Siddell (2011) states that social media offers an increasing amount of material for the practice of listening comprehension, which can also explain these results.

The next statement was related to speaking and aimed at discovering if the participants have noticed positive effects considering their oral skills of English due to social media use.

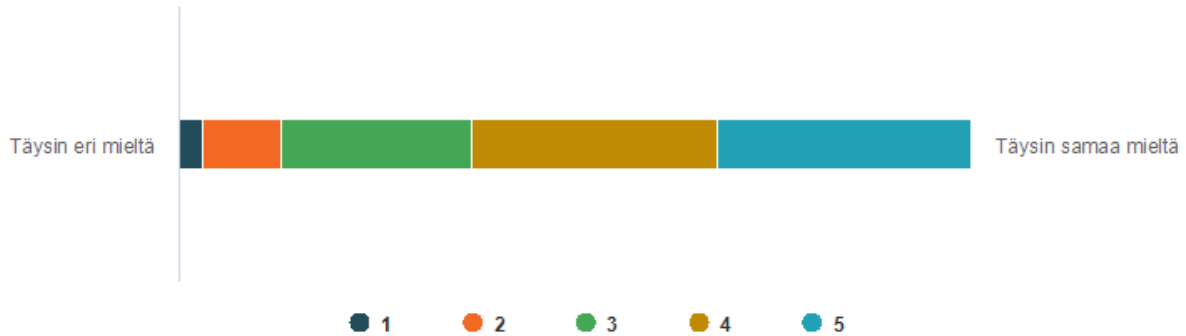
Table 12: Social media has had a positive effect on my English language speaking.



As Table 12 shows, this statement divided the participants more than the previous statement, and the most popular option in this question was option 3 which was in the middle of the Likert scale. This option was chosen by 32.5% (n=81) of the participants. However, options 5 and 4 were again quite popular: option 5 was second most popular choice with 28.9% (n=72), and option 4 came in third with 22.9% (n=57). Option 2 was chosen by 10.9% (n=27) of the participants, and option 1 by 4.8% (n=12). In Question 11, where the participants had a chance to explain what sort of English content they create on social media, texts of various lengths were mentioned multiple times whereas creation of spoken content was mentioned only by a few. Perhaps, it could now be assumed that the participants get more experience of, for example, writing than speaking on social media. Thus, it might be that evaluating one's own skills with writing and vocabulary is easier than evaluating one's speaking, since it is not done as much in general on social media. This could be why specifically option 3 was chosen the most, which is as close to agreeing as it is disagreeing, since the participants might feel conflicted regarding this matter.

Writing was mentioned in the previous paragraph, and the theme of the next statement was writing, too. The participants had to reveal their thoughts regarding whether they have noticed if it is easier to write in English thanks to the use of social media.

Table 13: Due to social media, it is easier for me to write in English.

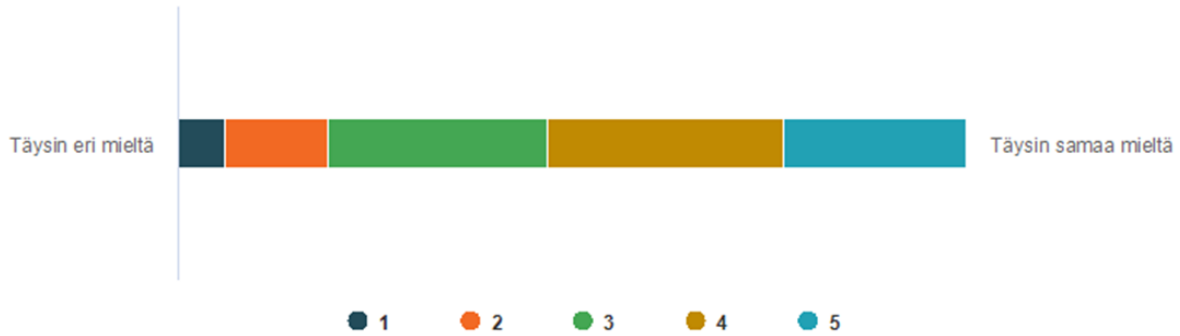


Option 5 reclaimed its status as the mode in this question with 32.1% (n=80) of the participants having chosen to ‘fully agree’. However, option 4 came very close to the most popular option with 30.5% (n=76). Option 3 was also chosen by quite many of the participants, 24.1% (n=60) to be exact. Additionally, option 2 was chosen by 10.1% (n=25), and option 1 by 3.2% (n=8). That is, over a half of the participants agree at least to some extent with the statement, However, there were also many who feel conflicted about the matter or do not agree. Again, based on the previous results from Question 11, short texts in particular were mentioned by the participants frequently. Longer texts were mentioned by many as well, but not nearly as often as shorter texts such as story and picture caption, tweets etc. Based on this, again, it could be assumed that social media users generally get more practice with shorter texts than longer ones. This might affect the users’ views regarding improved skills in writing in English. Nonetheless, a majority still views that social media have had a positive effect on their English writing skills. Of course, for example vocabulary and grammar are vital parts of writing, as well, and learning them also contributes to improving in writing.

4.3.3 Participants’ views regarding social media’s relationship with their English language use

With Question 19, the participants were encouraged to share their views on whether English is easier to use on social media than in the life outside it. In section 4.2.2, the results of the questions regarding the frequency of how often English is faced and/or used outside social media versus on social media were analysed. Thus, it was interesting to reveal the participants’ views of the use of English on social media versus outside it and which one feels easier or more natural to them.

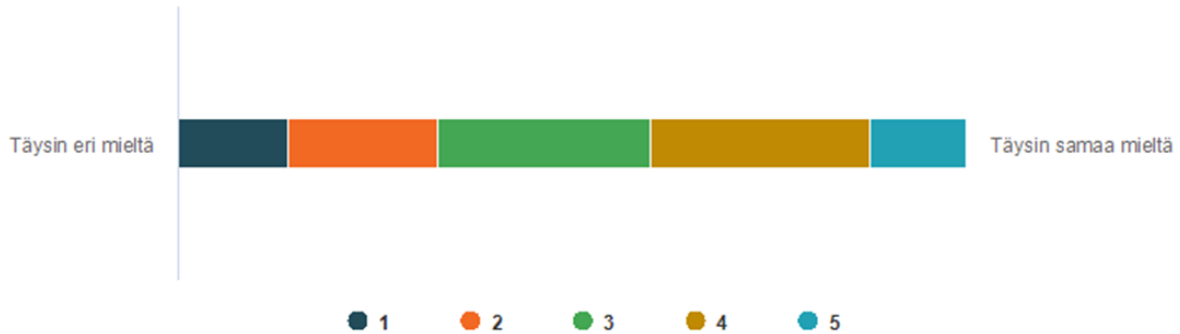
Table 14: It is easier to use English on social media than in the life outside it.



There were three different options which gathered answers rather evenly. The most chosen option was option 4 with 29.7% (n=74) of the answers. A close second was option 3 with 28.1% (n=70), and third most popular option was option 5 with 22.9% (n=57) of the answers. Options 1 and 2 did not attract as many participants: option 2 was chosen by 12.9% (n=32) of the participants and option 1 by 6.4% (n=16). Hence, again, most of the participants agree with the statement, but a large part of them also seem to feel conflicted about the matter since option 3 was chosen by a relatively large group. Perhaps, an assumption could be made that if all of the participants face English on social media, often more than they do in the life outside social media, it could also be easier to use English on social media since the context already is more English-friendly. Based on these results, this could be at least a part of the truth, since a large group of the participants agreed with the statement in this question. The participants who chose option 3, which is in the halfway of agreement and disagreement, may have various motives behind their answer. Perhaps, they do not know how to answer the question since it is difficult for them to evaluate their English language use. It could also be that they simply chose the option in the middle because they think English is as easy to use in social media as it is in life outside it. There were 48 participants who chose to disagree at least to some extent with the statement, in other words, chose either option 1 or 2. It is likely that these participants do not think English is any easier to use on social media as it is in outside world, or they feel it is significantly easier to use English outside social media.

Next, the participants had to agree or disagree to a statement which stated that social media has made them use English more outside social media.

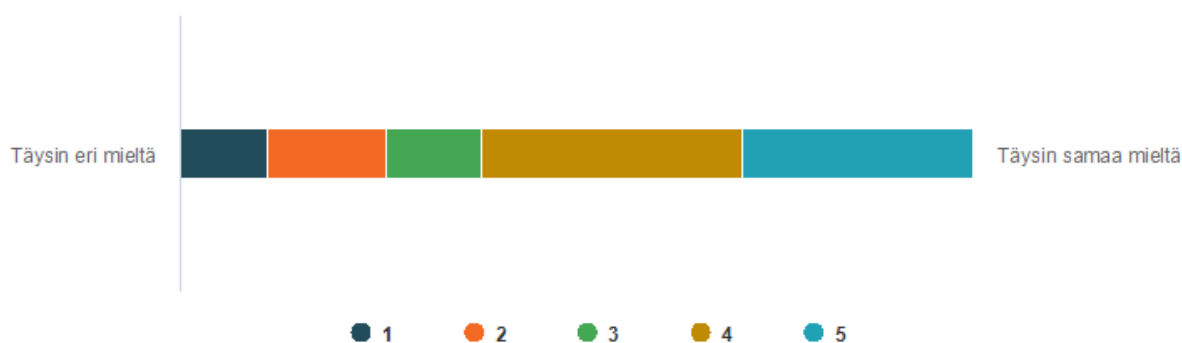
Table 15: Social media has made me use English more in the life outside it.



As seen in Table 15 above, this statement divided the participants quite largely. All of the options attracted participants, and the answers were rather evenly divided between all of the options mentioned. However, the most popular option was option 4 with 27.7% (n=69). Option 3 was a close second with only one participant less, and the option was chosen by 27.3% (n=68) of the participants. The rest were as follows: option 2 was chosen by 18.9% (n=47), option 1 by 13.7% (n=34), and option 5 by 12.4% (n=31). Based on these divided results, it could be assumed that whether using social media has played a role in using English more outside social media depends largely on the person. For example, there most likely are people who do not use English at all, and earlier in this questionnaire 16 people indicated that they face or use English less frequently than every few months. Thus, since some people might not use English at all, social media has not played a role in adding English in their life outside social media. In other cases, it could be that English might be used both on social media and outside social media, but the use of social media does not correlate with the English that is used in one's life outside social media. Again, it is likely that agreeing or disagreeing to this statement depends largely on the person and their personal experiences and preferences.

One of the last statements of this section dealt with a phenomenon that could be named as code switching even though it was not written in the statement itself per se. Thus, the participants were asked to give their views of whether social media have made them mix English and Finnish in their speech more.

Table 16: Due to social media, I might mix English and Finnish in my speech more.



The results of this question were rather divided even though there were two options that were notably more popular than the others. These were option 4 with 32.5% (n=81) and option 5 with 29.3% (n=73). Hence, a majority of the participants agreed to some extent with the statement in question 21. Additionally, option 3 was chosen by 11.7% (n=29) of the participants, option 2 by 15.3% (n=38), and option 1 by 11.2% (n=28). Code switching as a notion might not be familiar to people apart from linguists or people who take special interest in languages. However, as Gardner-Chloros (2009) points out, it is more likely that a person switches codes if they are surrounded by different languages or dialects. Based on this, an assumption could be made that when one faces for example English on social media often, it is more likely that this person might mix English with their native language(s) in their speech, as well. According to the participants of this study, there appears to be a consensus among the majority that they indeed have noticed that social media has had an effect on their language use and code switching, in particular. In Question 11, one participant mentioned that the English content that they create online could be a mix of Finnish and English, ‘Finglish’, and if they do not remember a word in Finnish, the English counterpart might be used in this situation. Perhaps, this same phenomenon might occur outside social media, too. Since English is faced on social media by a vast majority of the participants, according to the results of Question 6, the use of English could possibly find its way into people’s lives outside social media, too, and code switching could be one of the phenomena partly caused, or at least furthered, by the great amount of English faced on social media. However, according to the large-scale survey study conducted by Leppänen et al. (2009), a significant majority of Finns mixed languages already in 2007. Thus, this phenomenon is clearly not a new one in Finland. Nonetheless, most of the participants seem to think that social media has had at least some effect in their language use considering code switching.

4.3.4 Conclusion of the section

The last question of this section with the theme of social media playing a role in impoverishing one’s language was briefly analysed earlier in section 4.3.1. In summary, a higher number of participants viewed that social media has not impoverished their language skills than who viewed their language skills been improved due to social media. Based on the results of all of

the questions in this section, the participants generally view that social media has enriched their language skills at least to some extent. That is, a significant majority of the participants of this study viewed that social media has improved their vocabulary knowledge and understanding skills. In addition, a majority of the participants viewed that it is easier to write in English due to social media use. However, there was more variation in answers regarding the positive effects social media might have had on the participants' grammar and oral skills. It could be that these skills are not practiced as much on social media than the others, since the participants did mostly produce English content in short text format, according to their answers in Question 11, which is why their oral skills might not get practiced as much as their writing skills. In addition, since the context of social media might often be informal, less attention might be paid on the grammar, which is why it could be ignored more easily. However, a majority of the participants think that social media have in fact enriched their own English language, and this could mean, for example, learning new vocabulary or improvement in understanding. All in all, the results of this section offer a great amount of useful information to respond to second research question of this thesis. Thus, it appears that social media in fact has had an effect on the participants' English language use and skills.

4.4 The English language on social media

The last section of the questionnaire included five questions, of which three were compulsory for everyone to answer. In this section, the emphasis was on open-ended questions which is why out of the five questions four were open-ended. In the first three questions (23-25), the point of view was more general, whereas with Questions 26 and 27 the participants were asked to answer the questions based on their own personal experience. With the questions of this last section, the aim was to discover more information of the English language that is used on social media and if it differs from the English used outside social media, according to the participants. When the questions were formed, the participants' assumed variation considering their background knowledge relating to linguistics was considered, and the questions were written so that they would be easy for everyone to understand. For instance, in Question 24 the participants were asked whether they view there are some English words, utterances or grammar structures that are used mainly in the context of social media. Even though words, utterances and structures are all different ways of using the language, they were named in more detail to ensure that the participants understand the question correctly, even if they are not particularly familiar with the notions of language use.

In this section, however, there was a problem with one of the questions. A mistake was made in the last section of the questionnaire which caused a biased view from the researcher. Question 25 was marked as obligatory for the participants, and this gave the participants the impression that they should have answered the previous question with a 'yes'. That is, they should have viewed that there are certain words or expressions that are used mainly on social media. This question should have been marked as optional, or the questionnaire should have been built

in a way that Question 25 becomes visible only if one answers Question 24 affirmatively. This biased view was taken into account in the analysis of the question.

4.4.1 The differences between the English language used on social media and the one used outside social media

The first question of this section gave the participants an opportunity to think if they view the English used on social media differs from the English used outside it. If the participants thought there are, in fact, some differences between the language on social media and the one outside it, they were asked to elaborate their answers. Since answering this question was compulsory, it gathered 249 answers altogether. However, out of this 249, three participants did not share their opinion which makes the outcome 246 answers. Firstly, the answers to this question were divided by using the thematic analysis to three different themes: the ones that answered ‘yes’, the ones that answered either that they do not know or that it depends, and finally the ones who answered ‘no’. Since a significant majority of the participants answered this question with a yes and an elaborated answer, the ‘yes’ part was also divided into separate themes. Many participants had listed various reasons why they think the English on social media differs from the English used outside it, and thus, there were nine themes that could be separated from the answers. These themes were the following:

1. Abbreviations
2. Informal language
3. Social media based language and vocabulary
4. ‘Broken’ language
5. Anonymity
6. Fast-paced language
7. Variations and accents
8. Code switching or language mixing
9. Form of the language

The ‘yes’ answers and these themes will be analysed first.

Firstly, there was no question of which issue was mentioned the most: abbreviations. Many of the participants merely wrote down ‘abbreviations’ without elaborations, but many also did give a justification for mentioning this issue in particular. The most popular explanation was that since many social media platforms have a word limit for their posts, social media users are almost forced to use abbreviations and shortened words so that they are able to convey their whole message. However, today abbreviations are often used on platforms that do not have a word limit for their posts, as well. This might be because abbreviations have become a part of the language of social media, and they are often used even when there is no specific need for using them. The social media based language will be analysed separately later in this chapter.

Secondly, many participants mentioned that the language on social media is more informal and relaxed. There were quite a few mentions that the participants use English outside social media in their studies, and in this case the context is often academic. The bias towards higher education students in the participants could explain these views. This was mentioned as one of the reasons why the participants think the English on social media is more informal. In addition, a few participants mentioned that there are more curse words used on social media than outside it. The informal nature of the language of social media was considered in Songxaba and Sincuba's (2019) study, as well, since they state that the students of their study face informal language on social media to the extent that it started to affect their essay writing. Perhaps, as many Finns are not native speakers of English, and many Finns have learned English in schools, the language might often be more polished than their native language Finnish. Of course, since one does not hear this relaxed English, for example curse words and grammar errors, in schools that much, they might not be used to it, and this is why the language on social media feels more informal. Of course, for example the use of curse words might be affected by the anonymity social media can offer, but more on that later in this section.

Another matter that was mentioned by many, and which became the third theme, was social media based language that is not used outside social media. Many participants wrote that on social media, the way of using language is freer than outside it, and new words and phrases might emerge often. In addition, new meanings for old words are created by the users of social media. This semantic change was also mentioned by Foster (2022): new meanings are given for old words. This often happens when the language is directed for a certain target group that might have their own specific language. This matter was also mentioned earlier in the analysis, when analysing Question 9. Of course, emojis, memes and gifs are social media based language, too, and they can convey a variety of different messages, as Eisenstein (2013) also points out. In addition, Lee (2017: 30) explains that one of the reasons for using emoticons in an online context is the fact that the users are often not able to see each other's facial expressions and gestures. Another issue that was mentioned by many was that the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) might often be used on social media by users that are not Black, and thus it has in a way become a part of the social media based language performed by the Non-Black social media users. This phenomenon has also been examined by Kytölä and Westinen (2015) from the perspective of analysing a Finnish footballer's posts on Twitter, and in this study they, for instance, discussed whether using this type of language is appropriate considering his sociocultural background. One participant described that the English on social media sort of has its own laws, and not everything has to sound correct when said aloud. Another one wrote that 'meme language' has had its effect on the language of social media, and it might be difficult to communicate if the other interlocutor does not understand this language.

(5) Meme culture has also shaped the English language in its own way so that for example just with English meme references one can communicate with other people — but if the other does not know the meme beforehand, a kind of language barrier might be formed between the parties.

Of course, it is quite inevitable that differences between the language on social media and the one outside it might arise if the world of social media in fact has its own specific language that

does not reach significantly to the everyday lives of people outside social media. Since the world of social media is undeniably different from the world outside it, at least to some extent, it is understandable that in this world an existing language might be transformed, or even a new language might emerge.

The fourth theme that could be detected from the answers is ‘broken’ language. That is, many participants mentioned that they have noticed a great deal of grammar mistakes made on social media. One of the participants used the phrase ‘broken’ language to describe the grammar mistakes that can often be detected on social media platforms. This issue has been discussed earlier in this thesis, as well. This might be due to a fact that was also mentioned by a participant: it feels like there are less rules considering language use on social media, and thus mistakes happen more easily. Perhaps, some of these mistakes are even committed on purpose, and they are in a sense a part of the language of social media which was discussed in the third theme. Also, the informal context that seems to be present on social media could affect the larger amount of grammar mistakes made on social media compared to the language used outside it.

As with Question 9, in this question many participants mentioned anonymity as one of the reasons why English language is different on social media than it is outside it, and thus it was selected as the fifth theme. Again, according to the participants, since some social media platforms offer an opportunity to their users to not reveal their identities, it also appears to influence the way people use language. The participants mentioned that people are meaner on social media, which might lead to a different sort of language. This language might often be more offending or unfriendly than the language used outside social media. Additionally, the participants mentioned the lack of gestures as one part that might change the language of social media and what can be seen as a part of anonymity, as well. It is likely that anonymity might affect people’s way of using the language, and many might think that anything can be said when protected by the anonymity. The people who use different sort of language on social media due to anonymity might often not use the same kind of language in their everyday lives outside social media.

The sixth difference that was mentioned by several participants was the fast pace of the language used on social media. Since the language of social media is often produced by typing or by speaking quite fast – for example fast reactions play a significant role on social media – it is inevitable that it might affect the language. With this theme, there were also a few mentions of quite the opposite issue. One participant mentioned that on social media one has more time to think about what they are going to say or write next, which gives them a chance to produce more polished language compared to, for example, a real-time conversation. It is likely that both of these observations are in fact true, and both might affect the language used on social media. For instance, when something important or significant happens in the world, many might feel as if they need to express their opinion on the matter as fast as possible before the story is old. In this case, the language they produce might be concise or just a brief reaction post. Then again, many might want to wait for the dust to settle after an important or surprising incident, hence they prefer taking time to react and form their opinion on the matter.

Different language variations and accents were also mentioned by many participants, and so it became the seventh theme. The context of social media might often be more international compared to the life outside social media in Finland, and therefore social media users might face more variations, dialects and accents on social media than outside it. It is no wonder that the language of social media differs from the language used outside it according to some if these different variations of the English language are not heard anywhere else. The eighth theme could go to the same category as the international context, since several participants mentioned code switching or language mixing as one thing that is different on social media. It appears that on social media people mix languages more frequently than in the life outside social media. Perhaps, if the context is more international on social media and English is faced more there than outside it, people might feel more comfortable using other languages than just their native language, which results in code switching.

The ninth and final theme was the difference in the form of the language. The participants stated that on social media the language is often written, whereas outside social media it is mostly spoken. For example, a social media user might often speak outside social media, but when creating a post on social media, the post is frequently in a text form. Of course, what was already discussed earlier, the language is also more summarized on social media. A person can have a live conversation with another person that lasts for hours, but on social media, people often summarize their thoughts and produce language in the form of short texts. Of course, this does not mean one cannot have a long conversation on social media, too, but the participants seem to think that the form of the language is usually different on social media than what it is outside it.

Next, there were 21 participants who did not completely know whether they think the language on social media differs from the language used outside it or thought that it depends on various things, which is why there is no clear answer to this question. There were a few participants that stated that the English on social media might differ greatly from the English they use for example at work, but it does not differ much from the English that they use in their group of friends. In other words, some of the participants felt that the everyday language that for instance friends speak to each other is largely similar to the language that is used on social media. One participant also mentioned that this is probably the case especially with native speakers of English. There were quite a few mentions that the difference in languages depends greatly on the context and the platform. On one platform the language might be very similar to the language used outside social media, whereas on another platform it might be significantly different. Finally, there were 29 people who thought that the language on social media does not differ from the language used outside it. One participant stated that they have not spotted any differences, but they have not really paid attention on the matter before answering the questionnaire. With the participants that answered 'no', it might be that the English they face on social media is similar to the English they face in the outside world, and for them they do not differ from each other. Then again, it is also possible that they use English with their friends both on social

media and outside it, which is why the context might not affect the language. In conclusion, the reasons are surely varying.

As an ending for this part of the analysis, one participant wrote that they do view that English is different on social media than outside it and carried on by stating that the language on social media does often have more grammar errors, but there can also be detected smart playfulness. Finally, they stated that the language on social media is at the same time poorer and richer than the language outside social media. It can be seen from the participants' answers that even though certain repetition and themes could be detected quite clearly from the answers, there was always someone that had an opposing view than the majority. Thus, everyone experiences social media differently, and there might never be a completely clear answer to these questions. In addition, as can be noticed from this analysis, many of these issues mentioned by the participants affect each other and overlap, for example grammar mistakes might be a part of the social media-based language, and so on.

4.4.2 Social media-based language

Next, the participants were asked if there are any English words, utterances or grammar structures that are mainly seen on social media and not outside it. Answering this question was again compulsory for the participants. However, there were a number of participants who decided not to share their opinion, and from the 249 answers, 234 gave their view on the matter. This question also gathered more 'no' answers than the previous one: 43 participants answered this question with a 'no'. In addition, there were 20 participants that answered, 'I do not know'. Lastly, the rest of the participants, 171 to be exact, answered the question with a 'yes' thus forming the majority group. Thematic analysis was used for this question as well: firstly, to divide the answers into three groups, that were mentioned a moment ago, and after that the 'yes' answers were again divided into sub-themes. These themes are rather similar to the ones in the previous question, but there were only five themes detectable this time. The themes are listed below:

1. Abbreviations and shortened words
2. Certain expressions and structures
3. Intentional grammar mistakes
4. Certain words and vocabulary
5. Certain audios.

Firstly, abbreviations were again mentioned by a majority of the participants that answered the question with a 'yes'. This time, however, there were more clarifications for the answers. Several participants mentioned that especially the abbreviations of sayings that are said wholly out loud in normal speech outside social media are faced mostly only on social media. The participants gave examples of these sort of abbreviations and their meanings, such as *POV* 'point of view', *IRL* 'in real life', *TL;DR* 'too long; didn't read', and *OOMF* 'one of my followers/friends'. In addition, social media users seem to shorten words that are often said wholly

outside social media. An example of such word could be ‘because’ which is often written *bc* on social media. Another way of shortening one’s sayings that was mentioned by a participant is to replace a letter or letters with numbers, for instance *good 2 go* where number 2 has replaced the word ‘to’. Since the word ‘to’ sounds similar as the number 2 when pronounced, it cannot be distinguished in speech. Songxaba and Sincuba (2019) also mentioned this use of numbers instead of words in their study as a social media based way of writing. One participant also mentioned that in today’s social media language, even emojis can be used instead of words.

(6) Emojis are mixed with text as words and letters that have a certain meaning. For example, on TikTok there has become “Pushing P” in which “P” is written with the emoji “P”. It probably means that it’s going great or something. Also, with the nail painting emoji one can refer to femininity or gayness, or with the blind man walking emoji, one means that one is pretending that something that happened was not seen.

In addition, Lee (2017: 31) states that in Japan some of the emoticons in a frequent use have even made their way to dictionaries. Thus, perhaps it is possible that it could happen in the Western countries, as well, if the same emojis are always used to convey a certain meaning. As will later be stated, some abbreviations that can function in speech as well have in fact become part of the language outside social media, too, for example the abbreviation *LOL* that one participant pointed out. It is rather understandable that at least some abbreviations are not faced outside social media since they would most likely disturb the flow of the speech. As an example, it is likely easier to say ‘in real life’ than the letters I, R and L one by one.

Secondly, different expressions and structures were mentioned several times in the answers. It appears that social media are full of different expressions and structures that do not necessarily find their way into the outside world, according to the participants. There were also various examples mentioned for this theme. One participant mentioned that often in dog-related social media posts there are certain phrases that are used frequently, for instance *I sits*, or *I does a boop*. What is interesting is that both of these examples are grammatically incorrect. Perhaps, since these phrases are meant to describe a dog’s thoughts, the grammatical mistakes make the phrases more child-like and cute. Maybe people think that this is how dogs would speak if they in fact could speak. Other examples that were mentioned were *(someone) be like, is great* (leaving out the subject), *CEO of* (insert a thing the user is good at), *could of* (instead of could have), *sliding into one’s DMs*, and *the alphabet mafia* (LGBTQ+ people). In addition, AAVE was again mentioned by a participant.

(7) Well, probably the AAVE at least has given something like these for White people... For example, “He always do the right thing” etc. I think here it is very important to take into consideration racialism and how different racialized people’s cultures/customs are exploited on social media, but they are seen “less worthy” outside social media, or it makes their user e.g., “stupid” or “unreliable”.

Thus, sayings taken from AAVE have become a part of the language of social media used by White people. The problematic nature of this phenomenon would be an important topic for another research.

It could be that some of these expressions are so ordinary when seen in the context of social media that they would sound out of place when used outside that context. For example, *CEO of* in social media context means a certain thing, but when used in the outside world, people are used to its original meaning ‘the chief executive officer’, when using it with a new meaning might feel odd. Some of the examples that have been mentioned in this section also function as examples for the third theme, intentional grammatical mistakes, such as the dog-related phrases, using *could of* when *could have* should be used, leaving out the subject in sentences, and so on. A few participants also mentioned that not using capital letters and punctuation marks such as stops is also typical in the social media context. Perhaps, the high frequency of grammatical mistakes could be caused by the informality that appears to be present in the social media context: people do not mind that much whether one uses correct grammar structures or not. Alternatively, it could be that grammatical mistakes add humour value to social media posts.

The fourth theme that could be detected from the ‘yes’ answers is certain words and vocabulary. Again, the participants mentioned many different examples of words that are not really faced outside social media. These examples included words such as *finna* instead of *gonna*, *blue check* meaning a verified user on Twitter, and *boi* instead of ‘boy’ (in this case, the participant also stated that more i’s can be added to the word to make it funnier, for example *boiiii*). Additionally, which was also discussed earlier when analysing the answers to Question 9, censorship also plays a role in the creation of new words that are used instead of the ones that are being censored by a social media platform such as TikTok. Examples of such words that were mentioned by the participants are *accountant* used instead of the word ‘stripper’, and *unalive* used instead of ‘suicide’. Maybe with these words the same could be assumed as with the social media-based expressions: many of these words might sound out of place outside social media which is why they are not faced often outside the context of social media. Since TikTok was already mentioned in this paragraph, the fifth and last theme of the ‘yes’ answers is certain audios or audio clips. One participant mentioned that certain audio clips might be faced often on TikTok but not that much outside the platform. It could be that these audio clips are often so short that they work best on the context of social media where the language is more fast paced than in the outside world. Perhaps, there is not a real function for them outside social media, at least not yet, which is why they are faced mainly on social media.

As stated earlier, this question was also answered with ‘I do not know’ by 20 participants, but none of these participants elaborated their answer any further. On the contrary, many of the participants who answered that there are not any words, utterances or grammar structures that do not appear outside social media did give more clear explanations to support their view. Several participants mentioned that even though many words or phrases are originally from social media, they eventually become part of the language that is used outside social media.

(8) Not really. There are utterances and sayings that are originally from social media or that are used considerably more often on social media than anywhere else, but usually words that are born on social media nevertheless pass on from social media to people’s other language use. (E.g., “lol”,

“dab/dabbing”, and “yeet/to yeet” are all originally from social media, but they can be used – at least among youngsters – fluently as a part of live conversation, too.)

One participant also mentioned that these certain social media-based words and phrases are trendy for a short period of time after which they become ‘old’, and they are not used as much anymore. Thus, there are differing opinions regarding whether there actually are some specific words or sayings that are only faced on social media. Of course, every participant has their own views and experiences and even interests when it comes to the language of social media: others might have thought of these issues often before, whereas for others answering this questionnaire was the first occasion when attention was paid on this topic. In fact, some of the participants who answered either ‘no’ or ‘I do not know’ also stated that they have not thought of these matters before, which is why they answered as they did.

After this question, there was one more question relating to the general perspective of the language of social media, and which was also related closely to the question previously analysed. However, at this point when the answers have already been gathered and the questionnaire cannot be edited anymore, there appeared a biased perspective in the next question which was Question 25. In this question, the participants were asked whether they think these social media-based words or expressions can be faced outside social media, as well. Since this question was also marked as compulsory for the participants to answer, it might have given the participants the idea that they should have answered the previous question with a ‘yes’. Due to this mistake, the answers to this question will be analysed only briefly, and they will not be taken into consideration in the bigger picture that is this study. In summary, the question had three options: ‘yes’, ‘no’, and ‘I do not know’. The option ‘yes’ was unquestionably the most popular one with 71.5% (n=178) of the participant having chosen this option. Option labelled ‘no’ gathered 6.4% (n=16) of the answers, and option labelled ‘I do not know’ gathered 22.1% (n=55) of the answers. It can be noticed that the number of participants that answered the previous question with a ‘yes’ (171) matches quite closely with the number of participants that answered ‘yes’ to this question (178). However, this question will not be analysed further.

4.4.3 The language of social media – the participants’ personal experiences

The last two questions of the questionnaire gave the participants who wanted to share their own experiences an opportunity to describe their own views regarding the language of social media. Hence, these two questions were optional to answer. For Question 26, out of the participants, 106 wanted to share their experiences of whether there are any English words or expressions that they only use on social media. The answers were again divided into different themes, and there were nine themes in total. The themes are the following:

1. Abbreviations
2. Platform-based words
3. Hashtags
4. Certain expressions
5. Emojis and stickers

6. Overusing punctuation marks
7. Curse words
8. There are no such words or expressions
9. The participants were not sure if there are any

Firstly, abbreviations were again mentioned by several participants. There were also multiple examples given by the participants, such as *LOL*, *IMO*, *TBH*, *FTW*, *SMH*, and so on. It could be assumed that most of these are the kind of abbreviations that are said completely in a regular speech outside social media, why they might be more social media based. Secondly, some words that are often a part of the language of a certain platform might not find their way into people's language use outside social media. For example, one participant mentioned that on TikTok, they use words that are typical for said platform for commenting on other people's posts. Another one gave examples from the world of gaming.

(9) As an example, expressions familiar from the gaming world like gg (good game), wp (well played) and other game-specific vocabulary when the topic is related to those particular games. For example, on a comment on a YouTube video about a certain game, I use the words and expressions connected to that game.

Based on these comments, these platform or context based words would unlikely function well when taken away from their context, which is why they are not used outside social media often. Thirdly, there were a few mentions of hashtags in the participants' answers. It is rather understandable that hashtags are not really used outside social media, since they do not have the same sort of function outside social media than they do on social media. In other words, hashtags are, again, rather clearly social media-based which is why it might be odd to use them outside their original context. Fourthly, a few participants mentioned quotes and expressions, however, there were no specific examples of these. Perhaps, they could be something similar as in Question 24. The fifth theme was emojis and stickers. Understandably, these could be rather difficult to use outside social media, although definitely not impossible, which is why they do not leave their context that often. The sixth theme mentioned by the participants was overusing punctuation marks, and the seventh was curse words. It could be that both of these are viewed more unprofessional or unfriendly in the world outside social media which is why their use is somewhat limited to social media.

The eighth theme is dedicated to the participants who viewed that there are no words or expressions that they use solely on social media. Many of them stated that they cannot figure out any words or expressions that they use only on social media, since they use the same sort of language on and outside social media. In addition, many viewed that there are not left any words or expressions that are originally from social media but have not found their way into the participants' everyday language use. One participant even mentioned that they use all the social media-based words outside social media as well, and it has resulted in everyone not always understanding what they mean by a certain word. Perhaps in this example both of the interlocutors should be users of social media or a certain social media platform to be able to understand each other completely. As was stated earlier by a participant, these social media-

based words can in fact create language barriers between people which in a way proves that social media do have their own, distinct language. Lastly, there were also participants who answered that they do not know or that they are not sure if such words or expressions exist. They elaborated their answers by saying, for instance, that they would not use most of the social media-based expressions outside social media unless they are talking to someone with the same sense of humour, and who they know will surely understand what they are saying.

The very last question of the questionnaire attracted 126 answers from the participants. With this question, the aim was to discover whether there are any words or expressions that are familiar from the context of social media and which the participants use outside social media, too. The question also included the situational perspective, and the participants were asked in which situations they might use these words or expressions outside social media. The analysis regarding this question will be divided into two parts, the ‘what’ and the ‘when’.

Firstly, regarding the first aspect of ‘what’, the answers were divided into eight themes which are the following:

1. Social media or platform-based words
2. Expressions
3. Words or expressions that are popular or trending in that particular moment
4. Meme references
5. Abbreviations
6. (TikTok) audios
7. There are none or the participants had not noticed such words or expressions
8. The participants cannot recognize which words are from the context of social media

The thing that was mentioned the most by the participants were words that are familiar from the context of social media or that are platform-based. Some examples that the participants mentioned were *living*, *yeet*, *slay*, and *cringe*. There were also a few mentions of words that are characteristic for certain games or game platforms such as *based* meaning when something is ‘civilized’, and *copium* when someone/one is convincing themselves that the situation is better than what it actually is. Secondly, different sorts of expressions were mentioned. The participants mentioned examples such as *it’s giving (something)*, *emotional damage* when one’s pain is hilariously overestimated, *spill the tea*, and *it iiiis what it iiiis*. One participant also gave thorough explanations for a few different social media-based expressions.

(10) ‘vibe’ > “Now this isn’t the vibe” / “This didn’t pass the vibe check”. The first one generally with people my own age, the latter with TikTok conscious people. I use these when I disagree, or I don’t like something/someone. ‘yaas queen/king’, when I appreciate someone’s actions, self or appearance. I use this with close friends. ‘hot girl summer’ (when a divorced/separated (female) person enjoys being single for the summer.) My sister told me she broke up with her boyfriend, and I asked her if she has a hot girl summer coming, for which she answered yes. I used this assuming that she knows the social media context.

The third issue that was mentioned frequently in the answers was words or expression that are trending or popular at that particular time. The participants also stated that these popular words and expression change fast. Alongside the popular words or expressions, the participants also use the ‘old classics’, for instance *LOL*. One participant mentioned that these older expressions are also used due to their ‘meme worth’. In other words, they have become a bit comical during time which is one reason for their use.

Relating to memes, the fourth theme and which was also mentioned frequently by the participants were references to memes. There were not any specific examples of these memes, but it could be assumed that some of them could be for example the expressions that were already mentioned. Abbreviations were mentioned in the previous answers rather frequently, and it was mentioned in the answers to this question, as well, however, not as often as with the earlier ones. Some examples mentioned were *LOL*, *OMG*, and *ASAP*. The sixth theme centred around audios, especially TikTok sounds. One participant mentioned that the sounds that are popular on TikTok might find their way into the participant’s everyday language use. Many of these words, expressions or others that were mentioned by the participants were often associated with being popular on social media. Perhaps, it is rather understandable that these sort of parts of a language might pass on to people’s everyday language use if they are faced, read, and heard on social media daily. The aspect of humour and amusement seemed to be mentioned in the answers rather frequently, as well. Many people consider these words and expressions funny in a way which might naturally bring cheerfulness to everyday conversations. Thus, perhaps using them could make people happier or at least more amused.

For the last two themes, there were also participants who did not think there are any such words or expressions familiar from social media that they would use in their lives outside social media. Some of the participants also stated that they have not given any thought to the matter before which is why they do not think such words or expressions exist. Lastly, there were a few participants who told that they do not exactly know which words are familiar from social media which is why they cannot give any particular examples. It can surely be difficult to differentiate the words that are the most familiar from the context of social media. Perhaps, one does not use social media that much, or they do not pay attention to these sorts of matters. Of course, in today’s world where we are almost drowned in the amount of information we get, it can be extremely difficult to know surely where a word that has gained popularity has originally come from. There might not be any way to proof that a certain expression, for example, was created by a social media user. Thus, these participants do raise an important issue.

After answering the ‘what’ part of this last question, lastly, the aspect of ‘when’ will be analysed. There were nine themes in total related to the situations in which these words or expressions from the context of social media might be used outside social media. The themes were rather straightforward and there were not many elaborations given by the participants. Firstly, the most mentioned situation was with friends, partners, or family, in other words, it could be said with one’s inner circle. The second situation was with people who are the same age or younger. Perhaps, regarding this, it is often safe to assume that one’s peers are familiar with

the same matters and phenomena than oneself which is why using the words or expressions from the context of social media could usually be familiar for them, too. Since some of the participants mentioned that they use these words or expressions with younger people, it could be assumed that people might generally think that social media is well-known and used especially among younger people. And as the research conducted by Reunanen et al. (2021) proves, this in fact appears to be the truth, since the younger generations clearly form the majority of the social media users on certain platforms at least in Finland. Thirdly, social media-based language is often used in the company of people who are generally familiar with the lingo of social media and who will most likely understand what is being said. Perhaps, this somewhat relates to the previous themes. One most likely knows what sort of language their inner circle would understand, and they can also make assumptions of the people they do not know that well, for example based on their age which might guide them to use a certain kind of language.

This social media-based language is used in other situations, too. Fourthly, the words and expressions from social media might be used as a joke. This was a rather popular answer among the participants, and according to them, this type of language is often used in a humour sense or ironically. As stated earlier, perhaps using this language brings the fun to the conversation which is why they are used in the first place. The fifth theme was code switching since many of the participants stated that they often use these words and expressions when they cannot remember the Finnish counterpart for a word, or one does not simply exist. An example of such word that was mentioned in the answers is *shadowban*. One participant mentioned that they often speak a mixture of Finnish and English, ‘Finglish’, since these words that are familiar from the context of social media and are currently popular there are most often in English. Thus, the words are usually not translated but used in their original language English in between otherwise Finnish words. In addition, it was mentioned that video games often have a specific vocabulary that is not translated in Finnish which is why the words are used in English. Apparently, code switching also arises negative feelings in some, since one participant mentioned that even though they might use these English words sometimes, they do not willingly use these words since they do not support the mixing of languages or the “Americanization of the Finnish way of speaking”. It does make sense that these words are easier to say in English since, as stated before, translating them, or trying to remember the Finnish counterpart might disturb the flow of the speech. In addition, it is also easier to the interlocutor to say the word in English since it might not require as much thinking.

The sixth theme regarding the different situations is a reaction to something. There might be, for example, a surprising or an embarrassing occurrence, and in this situation, exclamatory words or abbreviations familiar on social media such as *OMG* or *WTF* might be used. For example, in a surprising situation, the first words that might come to one’s head could be the ones used on social media in such situations, especially if one is an active social media user. The seventh theme relates to this topic, since the social media-based words and expressions are often used in same sort of situations as they are used on social media, according to the participants. An example of this could be a surprising issue occurring.

The eighth theme and situation was mentioned by a few of the participants, and it was when being alone. There were not any explanations for this in the answers, and it might be difficult to analyse, what is the reason behind this. It would be interesting to know if these participants only use this social media language when they are alone or is it used in other situations, as well. Perhaps, they do not prefer anyone hearing them using such language which is why they only use it when alone. The ninth and the very last theme was simply in normal conversation. It could be assumed that the participants who answered this might not change their way of speaking according to their company, but they use this language of social media in all kinds of conversations.

On the basis of these responses and my analysis of them above, at least according to most of the participants, this language might often find its way to the outside world of social media, to conversations between people. Since social media appear to be somewhat their own world, it is understandable that this world might create its own language, which is then used also outside of its original context. In fact, the same phenomenon can be seen with other languages, as well – English is not only spoken in English-speaking countries, but the people in Finland, for example, see English as a part of their life, too.

5 CONCLUSION

In the last chapter of this thesis, the results and analysis of this study are summarized. First, the research questions of this thesis are reviewed, and the parts of the results and analysis that give answers to these questions are presented in a summarization. Finally, the implications and applications that relate to this particular study are covered.

5.1 Answering the research questions

For this thesis, two research questions were formed to guide the research to the correct direction. The first research question was rather broad and more general than the second one.

1. How do young Finns view the language of and on social media?

Nearly all of the participants' answers and the analyses done based on them contribute to answering this question. First of all, many different languages in addition to Finnish and English are faced on the social media platforms that the participants use. What comes to English in particular, it is faced on social media by all of the participants of this study. In fact, a large majority of 98% face English on social media daily. When the different platforms are considered, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok were mentioned as the platforms on which English is faced the most. There were also participants who viewed that the English language varies depending on the platform, although there were also as many participants who did not know how to answer the question or did not agree. There was rather great variation in the participants' answers regarding how many of them create English content on social media: a majority of them create English content on social media less frequently than every few months. However, there were also a great deal of participants who create English content either on a daily basis or a few times a week. These answers prove that English is in fact faced in the context of social media by the participants, and perhaps based on the information gathered in this study, it could be assumed that young Finns in general face English on social media rather often. Since according to Reunanen et al. (2021) most of the users of the most popular social media platforms

are the people of younger generations, and English is often viewed as the lingua franca of the internet (Lee 2017), it is very likely that most of the young Finns who use social media do face English there.

According to the participants' answers, the English language is often different on social media than it is outside it. However, there were also differing opinions on this matter. Nevertheless, there was a significant majority who argued that English is different on social media. The differences that were mentioned by many were, for example, the vocabulary used on social media that is not necessarily used in the outside world, such as words that are social media based and can be understood best in the context of social media. In addition, it is rather natural that the English language on social media might be different, since the form is often different, as well. When comparing for example a live conversation between two people and a short comment posted on social media, it is understandable that the language might be different. Other issues that were mentioned were, for instance, the informal nature of the language on social media compared to the English faced outside social media, and the grammatical errors that occur more frequently in the context of social media.

The second research question was more specific and aimed at discovering more information of the English language use and skills of the study participants.

2. Has social media affected young Finns' use of English language and their language skills, as indicated by the participants themselves, and what sort of effects have the participants noticed?

Firstly, regarding the English language skills, there were many areas of the English language covered in the questionnaire: vocabulary, grammar, understanding, oral skills, writing, among other issues. Some of these topics divided the answers more, whereas on some topics the participants agreed more often. Regarding improvement in the English language skills, the participants viewed that their vocabulary knowledge and understanding skills have been improved due to the use of social media. Also, grammar and writing skills have improved according to most of the participants, however, there was more variation in the answers regarding these two topics. The skill that was not viewed by most of the participants to have been improved was oral skills. What comes to language use, over a half of the participants viewed that English is easier to use on social media than in the life outside it. In addition, a majority of the participants viewed that due to social media use they mix English and Finnish in their speech more. Thus, social media appear to have affected the way English is used, and the effects are varying, as can be noticed from the analysis. Of course, social media do play a role in what words or expressions are used outside social media as well since some of the words that are normally used in the context of social media have also spread into the everyday language use by the participants.

5.2 Implications and applications

One issue that had to be taken into consideration when analysing the data was the fact that a majority of the study participants were students of higher education. Naturally, this created a certain kind of a bias in the answers. First of all, since higher education students most likely face English more often during their studies, it can also affect the way they answer some of the questions in the questionnaire. For example, according to the answers, over a half of the participants face English daily outside social media. It might be that this percentage would not be as high if there were other groups represented more in the participants. However, many of the questions included in the questionnaire would not necessarily attract different sorts of answers if there were other groups represented as much as students of higher education. Perhaps, it could be beneficial to examine these themes more closely in the future. For example, the higher education students could be examined as one group, or it could be ensured that in the study as many groups as possible are represented. Furthermore, regarding bias, there was a mistake made in the last section of the questionnaire which caused a biased view from the researcher, as stated in section 4.4. Taking this into consideration, unbiased view should be maintained more carefully in the future studies relating to this topic.

Since this study is based on the views of the participants of the study, there is always the possibility that the participants cannot review their own actions completely truthfully. For example, Blommaert (2009: 270) referenced Hymes' theory by stating that people are not necessarily able to describe their behaviour even when they are asked to do so. Thus, it would be beneficial to study these themes by, for example, observing the study participants to ensure that the views are presented in a truthful way. In conclusion, social media and the English language are broad themes, and they both continue changing constantly. This means that it is always useful to examine these topics, since new information can always be revealed. For instance, in the future, one particular social media platform could be examined from the same sort of perspective.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE IN FINNISH

Perustiedot

1. Ikä:

2. Status:

- Töissä
- Työtön
- Ammattikoulu- tai lukio-opiskelija
- Korkeakouluopiskelija
- Muu, mikä?

Yleisiä kysymyksiä liittyen sosiaaliseen mediaan ja englannin kieleen

3. Mitä sosiaalisen median alustoja käytät? Voit valita useamman.

- Facebook
- Instagram
- WhatsApp
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- TikTok
- Jodel
- YouTube
- Reddit
- Muita, mitä?

4. Minkä kielistä sisältöä kohtaat sosiaalisessa mediassa?

- Suomi
- Englanti
- Ruotsi
- Venäjä
- Saksa
- Ranska
- Espanja
- Muita, mitä?

5. Kuinka usein kohtaat ja/tai käytät englantia elämässä sosiaalisen median ulkopuolella?

- Päivittäin
- Muutamia kertoja viikossa
- 1-2 viikon välein
- Muutamia kertoja kuukaudessa
- 1-2 kuukauden välein
- Harvemmin kuin muutaman kuukauden välein

6. Kuinka usein kohtaat englanninkielistä sisältöä sosiaalisessa mediassa?

- Päivittäin
- Muutamia kertoja viikossa
- 1-2 viikon välein
- Muutamia kertoja kuukaudessa
- 1-2 kuukauden välein
- Harvemmin kuin muutaman kuukauden välein

7. Millä sosiaalisen median alustalla/alustoilla kohtaat englannin kieltä eniten? Voit mainita useamman.

8. Eroaako englannin kieli mielestäsi eri sosiaalisen median alustoilla?

- Kyllä
- Ei
- En osaa sanoa

9. Jos vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä, kuvaile miten. Voit myös mainita konkreettisia esimerkkejä eri sosiaalisen median alustoista.

10. Kuinka usein itse arvioit tuottavasi englanninkielistä sisältöä sosiaaliseen mediaan? Tähän voi kuulua mm. postaukset, kommentit, englanninkieliset gifit yms.

- Päivittäin
- Muutamia kertoja viikossa
- 1-2 viikon välein
- Muutamia kertoja kuukaudessa
- 1-2 kuukauden välein
- Harvemmin kuin muutaman kuukauden välein

11. Jos tuotat englanninkielistä sisältöä sosiaaliseen mediaan, millaista se on? Voit kuvailla esim. tuotosten laatua (tekstejä, kuvia, reagointeja, gifejä, jne.), pituutta tms.

12. Kohtaatko englantia enemmän sosiaalisessa mediassa vai elämässä sen ulkopuolella?

- Somessa
- Somen ulkopuolella
- Molemmissa yhtä paljon
- En kummassakaan

- En kummassakaan

Sosiaalisen median vaikutukset englannin kielen taitoihin ja käyttöön

13. Sosiaalisen median käyttö on parantanut englannin kielen taitoani.

1	2	3	4	5
Täysin eri mieltä				Täysin samaa mieltä

14. Englanninkielinen sanavarastoni on kasvanut sosiaalisen median käytön myötä.

1	2	3	4	5
Täysin eri mieltä				Täysin samaa mieltä

15. Sosiaalinen media on vaikuttanut englannin kieliopin osaamiseeni positiivisesti.

1	2	3	4	5
Täysin eri mieltä				Täysin samaa mieltä

16. Sosiaalinen media on vaikuttanut englannin kielen ymmärtämiseeni positiivisesti.

1	2	3	4	5
Täysin eri mieltä				Täysin samaa mieltä

17. Sosiaalinen media on vaikuttanut englannin kielen puhumiseeni positiivisesti.

1	2	3	4	5
Täysin eri mieltä				Täysin samaa mieltä

18. Sosiaalisen median ansiosta minun on helpompi kirjoittaa englanniksi.

1	2	3	4	5
Täysin eri mieltä				Täysin samaa mieltä

19. Englantia on helpompi käyttää sosiaalisessa mediassa kuin elämässä sen ulkopuolella.

1	2	3	4	5
Täysin eri mieltä				Täysin samaa mieltä

20. Sosiaalinen media on saanut minut käyttämään englantia enemmän elämässä sen ulkopuolella.

1	2	3	4	5
Täysin eri mieltä				Täysin samaa mieltä

21. Sosiaalisen median takia saatan sekoittaa englantia ja suomea puheessani enemmän.

1	2	3	4	5
Täysin eri mieltä				Täysin samaa mieltä

22. Sosiaalinen media on köyhdyttänyt englannin kielitaitoani.

1	2	3	4	5
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Täysin eri mieltä

Täysin samaa mieltä

Sosiaalisen median kieli vs. kieli sen ulkopuolella

Yleinen näkökulma:

23. Eroaako sosiaalisessa mediassa käytetty englannin kieli mielestäsi sen ulkopuolella käytetävästä englannin kielestä? Jos eroavat, miten?

24. Onko mielestäsi olemassa jotain englannin kielen sanoja, lausahduksia tai kielioppirakenteita, jotka esiintyvät pääasiassa vain sosiaalisessa mediassa? Jos on, anna esimerkkejä näistä.

25. Käytetäänkö somesta tuttuja englannin kielen sanoja tai ilmauksia yleisesti myös somen ulkopuolella?

- Kyllä
- Ei
- En osaa sanoa

Omat kokemukset:

26. Mitä englannin kielen sanoja tai ilmauksia itse käytät ainoastaan sosiaalisessa mediassa?

27. Huomaatko itse käyttäväsi sosiaalisesta mediasta tuttuja englannin kielen sanoja tai ilmauksia myös somen ulkopuolella? Jos näin on, mitä ilmauksia ja millaisissa tilanteissa?

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH

General information

1. Age:

2. Status:

- Employed
- Unemployed
- High school or vocational school student
- Higher education student
- Other, what?

General questions regarding social media and the English language

3. Which social media platforms do you use? You can choose more than one.

- Facebook
- Instagram
- WhatsApp
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- TikTok
- Jodel
- Others, which?

4. In which languages do you face content on social media?

- Finnish
- English
- Swedish
- Russian
- German
- French
- Spanish
- Others, which?

5. How often do you face and/or use English in the life outside of social media?
on a daily basis

- A few times a week
- Every 1-2 weeks
- A few times a month
- Every 1-2 months
- Less frequently than every few months

6. How often do you face English content on social media?
- A few times a week
 - Every 1-2 weeks
 - A few times a month
 - Every 1-2 months
 - Less frequently than every few months
7. On which social media platform/platforms do you face English the most? You can mention more than one.
8. Does the English language differ on different social media platforms?
- Yes
 - No
 - I do not know
9. If you answered the previous question ‘yes’, describe how. You can also mention concrete examples from different social media platforms.
10. According to your own estimate, how often do you create English content on social media? This might include e.g., posts, comments, gifs, etc.
- A few times a week
 - Every 1-2 weeks
 - A few times a month
 - Every 1-2 months
 - Less frequently than every few months
11. If you create English content on social media, what sort of content is it? You can describe the quality of the content (texts, pictures, reactions, gifs, etc.), the length, etc.
12. Do you face English more on social media or in the life outside it?

The effects of social media on English language skills and use

13. The use of social media has improved my English language skills.
- | | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Fully disagree | | | | Fully agree |
14. My English vocabulary has grown along with the use of social media.
- | | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Fully disagree | | | | Fully agree |
15. Social media has had a positive effect on my grammar knowledge.
- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Fully disagree

Fully agree

16. Social media has had a positive effect on my English language understanding.

1 2 3 4 5
Fully disagree Fully agree

17. Social media has had a positive effect on my English language speaking.

1 2 3 4 5
Fully disagree Fully agree

18. Due to social media, it is easier for me to write in English.

1 2 3 4 5
Fully disagree Fully agree

19. It is easier to use English on social media than in the life outside it.

1 2 3 4 5
Fully disagree Fully agree

20. Social media has made me use English more in the life outside it.

1 2 3 4 5
Fully disagree Fully agree

21. Due to social media, I might mix English and Finnish in my speech more.

1 2 3 4 5
Fully disagree Fully agree

22. Social media has impoverished my English language skills.

1 2 3 4 5
Fully disagree Fully agree

The language of social media vs. the language outside it

The general view

23. In your opinion, does the English used on social media differ from the English used outside it? If so, how?

24. In your opinion, are there any English words, utterances or grammar structures that mainly occur on social media? If so, give examples of these.

25. Are these words or expressions known from social media generally used outside social media, as well?

Yes

- No
- I do not know

Own experiences

26. Which English words or expressions do you use only on social media?

27. Do you notice yourself using these English words or expressions known from social media also outside social media? If so, which expressions and in what sort of situations?