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Imagined Identities and Communities in the Learning Context of Finnish as a Second Language

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Abstract

This case study on two migrant pupils of Finnish as L2 was carried out in Finland, which lies outside the most common context of such research, i.e. ESL or EFL in an English-speaking country. The study thus attempts to address the need to expand the research contexts of L2 identity issues. Using ethnographic data collected inside and outside a preparatory language classroom, this study aims to examine how the pupils make sense of their new learning environment and how, through language learning, they construct identities. The results show that they extend their repertoire of identities and connect to a wider world of possibilities as they strive to gain greater resources in their imagined communities through their investment in the target language. This study has led to implications for the L2 classroom, where pupils' current learning is shown to be positively affected by the development of their subjective identities in their imagined communities.

Keywords: Finnish as L2, migrant pupils, preparatory class, post-structuralism, imagined identities, imagined communities

Introduction

In recent decades, Nordic countries have faced increasing transnational mobility and cultural and linguistic diversity (Holmen, 2014), and this has strongly challenged the imagined monolingual traditions of these countries (Ortega, 2019). These developments have also increased the need for research on multilingualism and multiculturalism in these countries. Until now, the discussion around multiculturalism and multilingualism has, however, often centred on groups rather than individuals, which can lead to an essentialist view of minority groups and become an obstacle to genuine encounters (Räsänen, Jokikokko, & Lampinen, 2018). To better embrace the complex phenomena of culture, language and identities, there is a need for a perspective on the phenomenon that recognizes the intertwined nature of identities and the dynamicity of cultural, linguistic and social categories (Nieto, 2002). Although some studies with a more personal and ethnographic perspective on migrant youth and their identities have already been carried out, especially in Sweden (Svensson, Meaney & Noren, 2014) and in Norway (Roth & Erstad, 2016), more research is still needed in various Nordic contexts, including Finland (Räsänen, Jokikokko, & Lampinen, 2018). This study focuses on the narrative process of L2 identity construction from the perspective of two recently migrated siblings in a Finnish preparatory class. These siblings, from a Finnish-American family, have moved to Finland because of their father's work. They share a complex network of cultural and linguistic resources for their identity construction that goes beyond the stereotypical views on migrant children (Räsänen, Jokikokko, & Lampinen, 2018). Their stories offer important personal insights into Nordic multiculturalism and suggest useful ways of developing the educational context in which they take place.

In this article, the process of L2 development is considered not only in terms of acquiring a set of linguistic rules and forms, but also as a process in which learners adopt new social and linguistic practices in the unpredictably varied contexts of L2 learning (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 23). To better understand the variety of social worlds of L2 learners, the article draws on post-structuralist and narrative perspectives on L2 identities (Norton, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Post-structuralism and L2 identity construction

A recent focus in SLA, influenced by post-structuralism, has indicated that the process of investigating identity is far more dynamic and complex (Norton, 2014) than it was thought to be earlier, when the research on identity focused on learners' inner, mental process of internalizing the language input, independently of the context (Yamat, 2012). Language here is considered not as a biologically innate system (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 277), but rather as a social practice in which the learners' experiences are organized and identities negotiated in a variety of communities (Norton, 2010). At the centre of the post-structuralist theory of SLA are the views of language as symbolic capital and the site of identity construction (Bourdieu, 1991), of language acquisition as language socialization (Wenger, 1998) and of L2 learners as agents whose multiple identities are dynamic and fluid (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Especially research on L2 pupils has sought to investigate how children's identity construction process impacts on the effort they put into language learning and the actions they take to ensure that they are accepted as competent members of their learning community (Yamat, 2012). For example, Yamat's (2012) case study on immigrant Malaysian children's L2 learning experience indicated that children best learn through social interaction with the people around them, particularly with their friends in the L2 community. The study helps us to understand that the process of L2 identity construction can be dynamic, changing, and very much context-sensitive. With regard to the contexts in which these kinds of studies were carried out, Yoshizawa (2010), however, noticed a remarkable imbalance in the number of studies about L2 learners' identity construction in English-speaking environments and such studies in other contexts. She pointed out that these studies have tended to focus on learners of English as L2 in English-speaking countries such as Canada, the United States and Australia (e.g. Norton, 2013). Some studies have explored identity and the learners' social participation in learning other languages than English as L2 in other contexts (e.g. Kanno, 2000), but such studies are still significantly fewer than those conducted in the core circle of English-speaking countries (Yoshizawa, 2010). Even recently, there is still a need for more qualitative research in foreign-language learning contexts as opposed to ESL migrant communities in English-speaking countries to investigate the context-based relationship between identity and L2 learning (Nooshin, 2018). Pavlenko (2002) had already noted the need for studies with a post-structural approach to L2 identity to explore other L2 environments than those where there is one clearly dominant language and culture (mostly English as L2 in English-speaking countries) so that the variety of social worlds of L2 learners and their participation can be better understood. The experiences of the two

participants in our study can throw some interesting new light on the topic. First, studying the L2 identities of these particular pupils can help us to identify the degree of cultural and linguistic diversity in pupils and their linguistic practices in classrooms in Finland, as well as in other Nordic countries, over the last two decades (Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014). The children of 'elite migrants' (Bloomaert, 2011, p. 251) who have migrated by career choice have been in focus in this research area much more rarely than asylum seekers or ethnic minority groups, who have been given widespread attention in European research settings (Nørreby, 2020). Looking at the stories of such migrants can further explain the growing complexities, mobilities and language repertoires found in research on migrant communities (Barakos & Selleck, 2019). To paint the variety of social worlds of the young migrant L2 learners and their participation in various learning communities, we adopt the post-structural approach to L2 identity.

Imagined identities constructed in the imagined communities through L2 investment

To better understand the post-structural nature of L2 learning and identity, we begin with Norton's (2013) argument that *investment* rather than *motivation* more precisely describes the socially constructed relationship of learners to the language, and their desire to learn and practise it. The notion can be best understood through Bourdieu's (1991) view of linguistic practices as a form of *symbolic capital*, which can be converted into economic and social capital. Bourdieu (1991) refers to the term as the modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups in relation to specific social forms, which indicate that some forms of economic and social capital have a higher value than others in a certain context. Norton (2013) suggests that if learners invest in an L2, they do so with an understanding that they will obtain a higher value of *symbolic* (e.g. language, education, friendship, etc.) and *material* resources (e.g. capital goods, money, jobs, etc.), which will in turn increase the value of their symbolic capital. They expect to have greater rewards by investing in the language – a return that will help them to gain access to hitherto unattainable resources. The notion of investment presupposes that when learners speak or learn a target language, not only are they processing the linguistic input and output or exchanging information with others, but also constantly constructing a sense of who they are and how they engage in the multiple social contexts where they operate (Norton, 2013). We can thus infer that learners' investment in an L2 contributes to the construction of their identities, which are fluid, multiple, and a site of struggle (Darvin & Norton, 2015) and

are based on the learners' social relationships with other members of the learning communities to which they belong (Ruohotie-Lyhty, Aragão, & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2021). In this post-structural understanding of L2 identity, it is important to mention the notion of *imagined community* as one of the possible resources to which L2 learners are expected to gain access when they invest in the language and construct identities (Norton, 2013). The notion originated in Anderson's (2006) argument that a nation is socially constructed and ultimately imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of the group. A nation may be imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members or meet them; the image of a community still lies in each member's mind (Anderson, 2006). Norton (2001) takes Anderson's concept to mean that a community of L2 learners may be imagined, and applies it to the unknown community that the learners imagine while they are learning a new language. The notion of imagination has further been conceptualized in Kanno and Norton's (2003) study on the process of L2 learners' identity construction. They draw on Wenger's (1998) definition of imagination, which he defines as 'a process of expanding oneself by *transcending our time and space* and creating new images of the world, people and oneself' (p. 176). Based on this definition, they explain that language learners' creation of imagined communities involves certain groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible in their prevailing reality, with whom the learners connect across time and space through the process of imagining (Kanno & Norton, 2003). As the imagination links and expands learners both temporally and spatially, we can infer that learners invest in L2 for a sense of community with people they have not yet met, but perhaps they hope to meet someday and somewhere. In the meanwhile, they may *imagine and create* their identity through a desire to be competent members of the imagined communities (Yamat, 2012). The notion of imagined communities provides researchers with a theoretical framework for the exploration of L2 learners' 'creativity, hope and desire' in identity construction (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 248). In our study, the two pupils' imagined identities are focused and shaped by their creativity, and by their hope for affiliation in the imagined communities they create in the expansion of time and space brought about by their L2 investment.

Research questions

We have hitherto narrowed down our theoretical frameworks to clarify our research aims. Aiming to examine the two L2 pupils' identity construction through interaction with their new learning environment and the notion of imagined identities and communities, we formulated

two research questions, as follows:

1) What imagined identities do the pupils construct in their new L2 learning environment?
2) How are the imagined communities created in the process of their L2 investment and identity construction?

To answer these questions, we begin with a series of observations of the two L2 pupils in a transnational context. Then, exploiting a range of data, we delve into some significant moments when they construct their imagined identities and create their imagined communities in learning L2.

The Research

Context and participants of the study

The main research context for our study is a preparatory class that was conceived and introduced in response to the increasing number of immigrants in Finland in the early 1990s (Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014, p. 168). According to the National Core Curriculum for Instruction Preparing Immigrants for Basic Education 2009 (Finnish National Board of Education, 2015), preparatory instruction for basic education must be provided in this class for one year for newly arrived pupils whose Finnish skills are not sufficient for them to be able to enter the ordinary Finnish education system at once. The pupils who attend this class vary in terms of nationality, origins and cultural or language background, for the simple reason that the reasons behind migrating to Finland vary; some families come attracted by the better labour market, and some as refugees or asylum seekers (Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014).

Sun (the first author of this article) made some initial visits to the preparatory class and, of the nine pupils with different nationalities including American, Russian and Somali, decided to recruit Janne and Katie (pseudonyms). These children, who had a Finnish father and who came to Finland because of his work, were chosen as the main participants for some particular reasons. First, such children have been less often the focus of research than those who have experienced forced migration (Nørreby, 2020). They can contribute their complex and unique stories of young migrants as individual L2 learners. Second, Janne and Katie shared a common language – English – with Sun. This makes it easier to appreciate the pupils' deep understanding of their language learning and identities for the data collection. The table below indicates the participants' language use and background (Table 1) (Sun, 2019).

Table 1. Language profile of the family of the main participants (at the time of data collection)

Family members	Janne	Katie	Father	Mother
Age, gender	10, Male	8, Female	Mid-40s, Male	Mid-40s, Female
Age upon arrival in Finland	10	8	Born in Finland	Mid-40s
Nationality	U.S.A.	U.S.A.	Finland	U.S.A.
Mother tongue	English / Finnish	English / Finnish	Finnish	English
Language(s) spoken at work/school	Finnish / English	Finnish / English	Finnish / English	English
Language(s) spoken at home	English / Finnish	(Mainly) English	Finnish / English	English

At the time of the data collection, Janne and Katie found themselves in a transnational setting due to their father's decision to move to Finland for career advancement. Until they moved to Finland, the children had gone to school in the United States and lived in a predominantly English-speaking environment. They had been learning Finnish for about two months, since their arrival in Finland. Although exposed to Finnish culture and language through their father, their Finnish skills were not sufficient to study in regular classes in Finland. They therefore mainly started their schooling in the preparatory class and visited the regular classes from time to time to prepare for their integration into them.

Data collection

Sun collected data using an ethnographic research methodology, which was a one-semester project (February ~ June, 2017). The process of data collection drew on Crump and Phipps's (2013) suggested advice for doing qualitative research with children. It fostered respectful relationships with the pupils. Before the data collection through class observation began, Sun spent a preliminary two-week period 'doing nothing but just being there with the pupils' to build rapport and trust with all of them. She waited until the pupils confirmed that they felt safe with her being in the classroom. She also explained the aims of the study and obtained all the necessary consent from the pupils, their parents and the class teachers.

While collecting data, she took field notes throughout the classroom observation to capture the

main participants' language learning practices inside and outside the classroom (during both lesson times and breaks). Before the observation of Janne and Katie began, there was a one-hour interview with the main teacher of the preparatory class to obtain background information about the pupils, such as their family and language background and their perspective on the pupils as Finnish learners.

The observation in the preparatory class took place once a week during both the morning lessons and the breaks. Throughout, some photos of artefacts in the classroom were collected, and field notes and occasionally audio-taped classroom interactions were recorded. Some particular aspects of the theories on which the study is based were foregrounded during the observation. The observation focused not only on the pupils' linguistic input and output but, more importantly, on their social participation, in order to get a sense of how far they identified with others in the L2 learning community (Kanno, 2000 ; Pavlenko, 2002). More specifically, Sun paid careful attention to how Janne and Katie constantly constructed a sense of who they were and how they engaged in the multiple social contexts in which they operated through their investment in the Finnish language (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013).

After the classroom observation, five semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the two main participants. Sun asked further questions about their interpretations of what she had observed. She also designed some linguistic tasks for use in the interviews (see Table 2); the pupils were asked to reflect on their language use and identity by means of these tasks. These tasks were multimodal with a mixture of verbal, visual narratives and visual representations (Busch, 2012; Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019).

Table 2. The pupils' linguistic activities and interviews

Date (time)	Participant and activities
12 May (15:00–15:30)	Janne: Language body (see below) + interview
13 May (15:00–15:30)	Katie: Language body + interview
2 May (15:00–15:30)	Janne: Timeline (see below) + interview
23 May (16:00–16:30)	Katie: Timeline + interview
29 May (15:00–15:30)	Janne: Language passport + interview
30 May (16:00–16:30)	Katie: Language passport + interview

12 June (15:00–15:40)	Janne: (Drawing task) Describe your class ('Vary' & Year 4 class) and yourself as a Finnish/English speaker + interview
13 June (15:00–15:40)	Katie: (Drawing task) Describe your class ('Vary' & Year 2 class) and yourself as a Finnish/English speaker + interview
19 June (15:00–15:30)	Janne: Wrap-up interview
20 June (15:00–15:30)	Katie: Wrap-up interview

In this way, we endeavoured to gain insights into the participating children's thoughts in a variety of ways and positioned the pupils as knowledgeable and active agents with multiple and dynamic identities in L2 learning (Crump & Phipps, 2013). Although the research began with a period of observation, which gave us some indications of the pupils' interaction with their learning contexts, it was mainly the data from the interviews which were transcribed verbatim (see Appendix. Transcription conventions) and the linguistic tasks with the pupils that advanced our understanding as well as their own understanding of their identities and imagined communities. Table 3 summarizes the diverse data that were collected.

Table 3. Summary of data collection

Period	Time	Research activity	Forms of data
March~April, 2017	Once a week (1.5 hour: class hour, 0.5: break time)	Classroom observation (Audio-taping)	Field notes, classroom artefacts
March 2017	Once (1 hour)	Interview with the teacher (Audio-taping)	Transcribed excerpts
May~June, 2017	Once a week (0.5 hour)	Interviews with the pupils (Audio-taping)	Transcribed excerpts, pupils' portfolio

Analytical approach

The analysis was partly integrated into the data collection process. The observations provided us as researchers with certain initial ideas about the participants' thoughts and identities that were further discussed and elaborated on with the participants through the various modalities in the tasks and in the interviews. On the basis of these joint efforts, Janne and Katie were

narrated 'as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines' throughout the data (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). In this process, the different modes of written and visual data were designed to work together as an individual case file, which finally helped us to create the pupils' L2 'identity texts' (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 3).

In analysing these identity texts, we were guided by our post-structural approach to L2 identities and focused on the imagined identities and communities that were present in the narratives. Through multiple readings of the data at different stages of the data collection process, we identified five central imagined identities and connected imagined communities (two for Janne and three for Katie) that helped the participants to make sense of their L2 learning and that guided their investment in multilingual identities.

Findings

We now move our focus to Janne and Katie's own understanding of their learning of Finnish as L2 and the identities they constructed in particular imagined communities. To do this, we looked through the multimodal nature of data (Kress & van Leewuen, 2001) and its analysis as a representation of their L2 identities (Cummins & Early, 2011). We first present those parts of the observation data that led us to choose certain themes in the interviews and provided a context for the reflective tasks. We then go on to discuss the imagined identities and communities that were reflected on by Janne and Katie.

Janne's imagined identities

In the classroom observation, we noticed Janne's distinctive use of English and Finnish across different times. The excerpt below illustrates his willingness to speak only Finnish during lesson time and his complete switch to English during breaks.

> Janne is struggling with a Finnish word that he doesn't know the meaning of. He approaches the teacher and ask the meaning in Finnish. (..) He still tries to respond to the teacher and speak only in Finnish, although the teacher goes on with additional explanation in English. He tries to speak only in Finnish while he works with his task in class. (..) However, he completely switches from Finnish to English after he completes his work and joins the card game with the other classmates. (Field note – 23 May, 2017, 13:48:50)

In the teacher's comment below, we drew further attention to his deliberate use of Finnish only in class, which made the teacher appreciate him as a motivated Finnish speaker.

> Janne, from the beginning, tried to speak Finnish about whatever it was. In the beginning, like the first two days, he was trying to use every Finnish word that he knew. They (the other pupils in the classroom) try to get along in whatever the language is .. Finnish or English. (..) But he is different. It is a very high motivation.

As we became interested in Janne's distinct use of different languages across different times and his continuing efforts to speak Finnish, in the interviews we attended to how he made sense of his activity and how different *times* affected his L2 identity and learning. In the data from the interviews, we detected some *imagined identities* that he constructed: 1) someone who tries to make Finnish friends, and 2) someone who will get a lot of work opportunities.

1) Janne who tries to build friendship with his mates in Finland

In one of the interviews with Janne, we used a linguistic activity called 'Language timeline' (inspired by Salo & Dufva, 2018). We asked Janne to reflect on some specific times that had been important to his language learning and use and to explain the specific emotions and events connected to each language (see Figure 1).
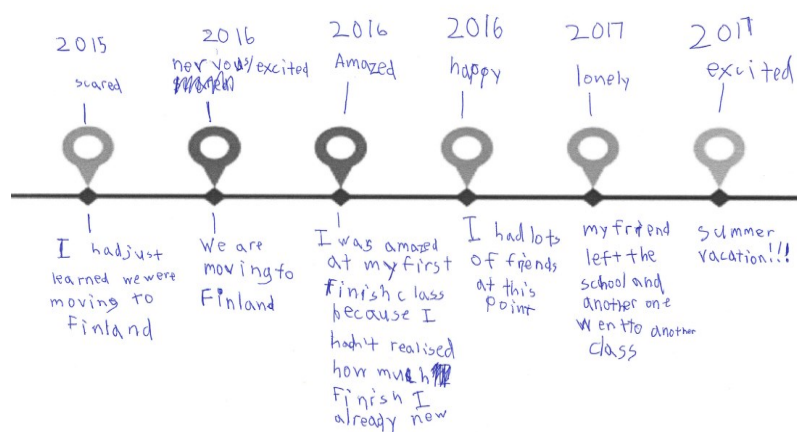

Figure 1. Janne's timeline about his emotions and linguistic events

He showed a strong tendency to evaluate the present moment in the light of an imagined future. For example, during his flight to Finland he had imagined himself making lots of Finnish friends *after* settling into school in Finland. The quote below shows how he was thinking about moving to Finland in the plane on the way from the United States:

> In 2016, while we were moving to Finland, I felt nervous but .. excited as well. Because I was imagining

making myself a lot of friends when I get there. Later in 2016 .. on my first day of (the preparatory) class, I was amazed at how much Finnish I already knew .. coz I didn't know that I knew that much Finnish (..)

What Finnish language meant to him changed considerably after he arrived in Finland. Before coming to Finland, he was nervous about the change in his living environment, but also excited at the prospect of creating his new identity: he was someone who hoped to make Finnish friends in Finland. He also described another important event which took place at a different time. From the quote below we can infer that the trans-temporal nature of the event affected his construction of a new identity and his willingness to learn Finnish.

Around the end of 2016, I felt happy because I had lots of friends there. But in 2017, I felt lonely because one of friends left the school (preparatory class) and went into another (regular) class. However, I ended up going into the .. he was in the fourth grade (Year 4) class .. so I ended up seeing him. I could make it because I learned a lot.

In 2017, when his best friend, another English speaker in the preparatory class, moved to the regular Year 4 class, he felt lonely. However, he reaffirmed his determination to study Finnish hard, hoping to be reunited with his friend in the regular class in the near future. His goal was achieved by the end of the semester. We can thus conclude that his identity in his future imagined communities positively affected his Finnish learning (Norton, 2013).

2) Janne who will get a lot of work opportunities in the future

In another interview with Janne, we designed an activity called 'Language body' (adapted from Busch, 2012). We gave him a drawing of the silhouette of a human body. We then asked him to list all the languages that had played a role in his life and to place each language onto the body part that he thought it fitted in terms of its meaning in his understanding (see Figure 2). He explained his thoughts with a drawing during the interview. From this we detected another identity that Janne constructed.
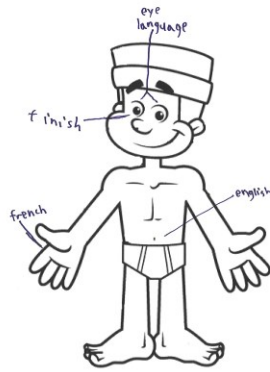
Figure 2. Janne's Language body

Janne again displayed a future-oriented view of himself in the interview when evaluating his identity in relation to Finnish. The quote below illustrates Janne's negotiation of his identity as a Finnish learner.

> I'm unique when I know Finnish because there aren't many people who speak Finnish. When I go to America, I still want to keep speaking Finnish because it gives me ability if I want to come and work here (in Finland). If you learn a language, it gives you the ability to speak with millions of people. You get some working opportunities in your future. Or .. what if I choose to go the army back here? I also want to be a best story-teller with so many different languages.

He said that he wanted to keep up his Finnish language *after* he goes back to the United States in the future, envisaging that, because so few people speak Finnish there, keeping Finnish in his language repertoire would give him a variety of future benefits and opportunities. He also created his identity as a Finnish speaker in the hope of making himself stand out as a brilliant story-teller, and as someone who would have a lot of work opportunities in the future in Finland, such as being a soldier there. We can deduce from all this that he used his imagination about his future identities as a Finnish speaker in his imagined communities, in his future life in the United States or Finland, and this helped him to persuade himself of the importance of the Finnish language in the present time.

Katie's imagined identities

In the classroom observation, we paid particular attention to the fact that Katie moved about a great deal and used different spaces in the classroom while working on her language worksheet.

We found that her activity in different *spaces* stood out, somewhat in contrast to her verbal quietness in learning Finnish. The teacher's comment on Katie, below, shows that she associated Katie's verbal quietness with either shyness or a lack of motivation in class.

> Katie's Finnish was quite little in the beginning. She is generally very shy in class. I don't know how much she knows but she spoke very little. (..) She does everything but she doesn't come and ask for more. Katie tries to learn but she is not so enthusiastic compared to Janne.

We found it worth noting the meanings of different *spaces* for Katie and how she made sense of different spaces as she learned or spoke languages. More precisely, we focused on Katie's construction of her identities across different places, where she positioned herself as she wanted. The imagined identities she constructed were as an English and Finnish speaker, as an outsider in Finnish groups, and as an active Finnish learner.

1) Katie as an English as opposed to a Finnish speaker

In general, Katie's sensitivity to different spaces was evident in the narratives in which she negotiated her identities as a language speaker. One of the interviews with her was conducted on the basis of drawings she made where she showed herself as an English and a Finnish speaker. When she described her identity as an English speaker, she gave detailed descriptions of the space where she positioned herself as a participant in the context, and of her close rapport with the interlocutor, her guinea pig (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Katie's drawing of herself as an English speaker

The quote below explaining the above drawing indicates that in her narrative, English is the language she shares with her pet.

> Here .. I am in Finland. This whole picture is me talking to my guinea pig. He lives in my room. One thing is probably the emotions I give to him. (..) I think, as an English speaker, I speak English to him .. a lot! (..) I can always speak English to him when home, even though he is only a guinea

pig. But I know that he is greatest in understanding me.

Katie felt safe using English with her guinea pig. Although the pet did not speak, for Katie, establishing rapport with the pet was emotionally significant, and it was possible to do it in a context with a clear indication of the space. She could feel confident of herself as a speaker of the language when she made sense of the context. Her identity as a Finnish speaker, however, was not attached to a clear and detailed description of space (see Figure 4).
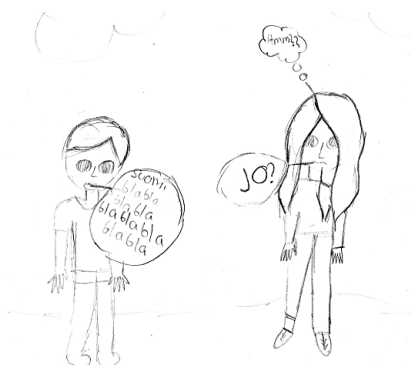

Figure 4. Katie's drawing of herself as a Finnish speaker

For Katie, constructing an image of herself with an interlocutor was difficult in Finnish. When she talked about the picture, she indicated the perplexity she felt about speaking Finnish with the interlocuter. What she says about the picture in the following quotation indicates that there was no clear or detailed indication of a space.

> Here ((pointing to herself in the picture as a Finnish speaker)) I try to understand what they are saying. Here I have no feeling. I can't process what they are saying. I can understand some words. But I can't put them into sentence because I'm not sure my understanding is okay. So .. sometimes .. I need to know my saying would work out to them.

It was difficult for Katie to make sense of where she was and who she was speaking to. She could not convey her feelings or process what others were saying to her in an unknown space. She affirmed the need to have herself and others understood in a clearer context. Her recognition of the importance of confirming her identity across different spaces was also evident in the other data.

2) Katie as an outsider in Finnish groups

In another interview with her, we asked her to draw herself as a Finnish speaker in the

preparatory class and in the regular Year 2 Finnish class, and to compare her understanding of her identity as a Finnish speaker in the two spaces (see Figure 5).
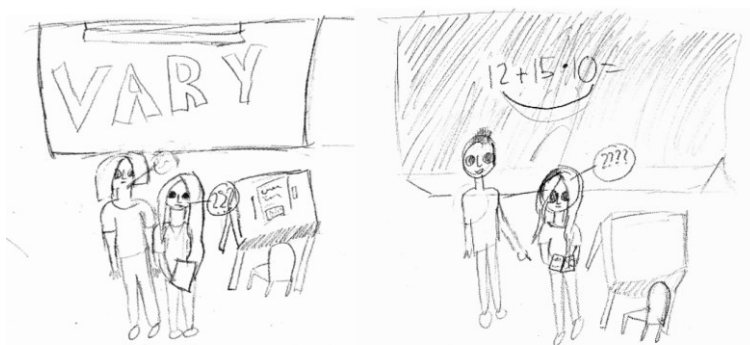

Figure 5. Katie as a Finnish speaker in the Vary and Year 2 classroom

The picture above indicates that Katie saw a clear difference in how she made sense of the two different classes.

> I have a friend in Vary class (the preparatory class). We speak Finnish to each other. That's actually a lot easier than speaking Finnish in second grade (Year 2) class…because we are spending most of our time together in Vary class. But when I am in the second grade class, I don't feel more comfortable. (..) I'm not really speaking it that much in Vary class. (..) Still I can stand up in the middle. But, I can't stand up in the second grade classroom.

In this data, we detect that she was creating an imagined identity *as a member* who did not yet feel a sense of community with the Finnish group, as opposed to others who felt more sense of belonging with the others in the preparatory class. This processing of her identity construction according to different communities reflects her desire to be accepted as a competent member of the communities (Yamat, 2012). In her imagined communities, there was more connection and more active interaction with her friends in the preparatory class than in the Year 2 class. In her imagination she did not feel such a strong sense of belonging there as in the preparatory class. We can conclude that her construction of a positive L2 identity depended on an imagined community where she could feel secure and affiliated as a member of the group, with a clear understanding of the spaces and the other members.

3) Katie as an active learner of Finnish

Through the other activities and our interviews with Katie we found, firstly, that different physical and material spaces were significant for her Finnish learner identity and, secondly, that she felt more confident as a Finnish learner when she could express herself in written mode.

She expressed her spatial orientation in drawing and writing strong, positive Finnish words about herself as a Finnish learner (e.g., Olen valmis! – which means, 'I'm ready.') in empty spaces on her worksheet (see Figure 6). We particularly noticed that she expressed rather different tones in her choice of written words on her worksheet from the tones that were expressed or observed when she was speaking Finnish in the classroom (e.g. shy, quiet and a less enthusiastic Finnish learner than Janne).
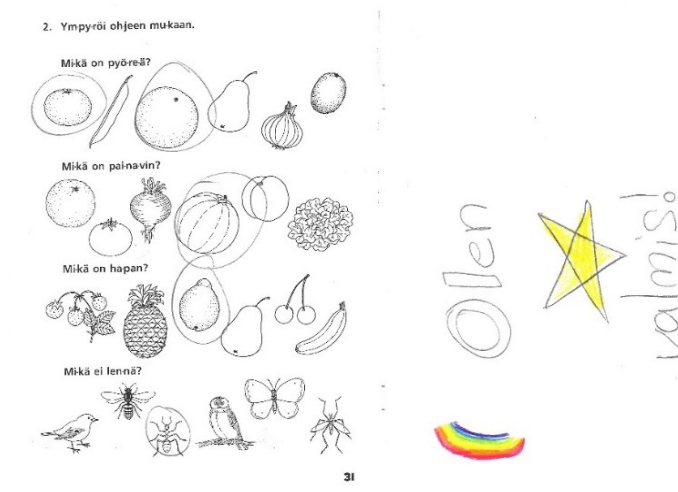

Figure 6. Katie's use of empty spaces on her language worksheet

Katie's geometric arrangement of vocabulary in her personal vocabulary book further demonstrated her tendency towards and sensitivity to spatial elements (see Figure 7).
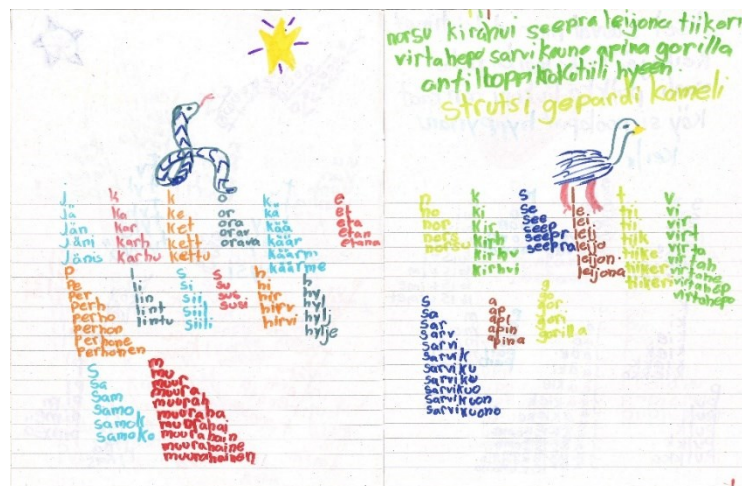

Figure 7. Katie's personal vocabulary book of Finnish words

This data indicated that Katie's spatial orientation through the use of various *spaces in the physical world and in her learning materials* helped her to construct her positive L2 identity.

She was able to imagine herself as a competent and able Finnish user in the written mode and able to use these imagined symbolic spaces for her Finnish learning.

Discussion

So far we have sought to capture two migrant pupils' imagined identities expressed through creativity, hope and the desire to be competent members of the imagined communities they created in learning Finnish as L2 (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Yamat, 2012). Although Janne and Katie, as siblings, might previously have been exposed to Finnish through their Finnish father, their very individual stories have illustrated unique patterns of L2 learning in terms of how they expand time and space respectively and construct their unique identities in their new L2 contexts.

Janne's imagined identities were constructed while in his imagination he was projecting his present time onto future time (Wenger, 1998) and creating some imaginary members of his communities, such as his future Finnish friends, his best friend, with whom he hoped to be reunited, and unknown people in either the United States or Finland. In his imagined communities, he hoped to obtain a higher value of symbolic resources (e.g. friendship, and a unique language repertoire that included Finnish) and material resources (e.g. working opportunities). This gave him his own reasons to learn Finnish, and this positively affected his Finnish learning in the present reality (Norton, 2000).

Unlike Janne, Katie did not see her imagined identities in the light of the future. Instead, she actively revealed her spatial orientation and her need for clear contexts in which she could ensure her identity as a competent member of her imagined community. While she could position herself as a member of a community where she felt secure and affiliated, it was difficult for her to make sense of her identity as a member of an unknown community where she felt no sense of community. However, she did not give up on her Finnish learning. Instead, she agentively constructed her identity as someone who is creative and alert to the possibilities of making active use of physical and material spaces and of making herself a confident, affirmative Finnish learner. We noted her expansion of learning spaces and construction of a somewhat different identity from the one we observed in her verbal performance in the classroom. By creating learning spaces in her imagined communities, she invested in Finnish

learning and expressed the need that she could have a clear context for her speaking or learning, and the desire to become a member of the communities (Norton, 2000).

Conclusion

This article has made some contributions to the field of L2 learning in the ways in which it has extended the body of research evidence of post-structural understanding of L2 learning and identity. It has done this by examining the notions of imagined identities and communities in an under-investigated context, migrant pupils' learning of Finnish as L2 in Finland. The aim in doing this was to contribute to understanding how best to respond to the diversity among L2 pupils and their language practices that is the obvious consequence of increasing migration in recent years (Barakos & Selleck, 2019; Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Ortega, 2019). This article provides a necessary personal perspective on migration and L2 identity development in the Nordic context, and supports attempts to adopt a more person-centred and multifaceted approach to understanding Nordic multilingualism (Räsänen, Jokikokko, & Lampinen, 2018). The experiences of identity building of the participants in this study differ in many ways from those of migrant children who have experienced forced migration (Roth & Erstad, 2016; Svensson, Meaney, & Noren, 2014). However, our study shares with other studies the conclusion that each migrant story is complex and unique.

Another contribution of this study has arisen from using the pupils' own understanding of L2 learning and identity to explore these notions, and the post-structural approach to L2 learning and identity. Our use of the learners' own views enabled us to draw out some of the implications for L2 learning and teaching. L2 learners have images of the communities in which they hope to participate, and these images have a significant impact on their current L2 learning and identity construction (Norton, 2000). When the learners begin a programme of instruction, their investment in the language may also take place through the expansion of their time and space brought about by their imagined communities (Nooshin, 2018). We therefore conclude with the hope that L2 teaching will consider how language classrooms can be reimagined as places of possibility and creativity for students whose own life stories have given rise to a wide range of histories, investment and desires (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). This can lead to a truly learner-centred classroom.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions

(..)   sentence(s) omitted in a phrase

..   brief pause in a sentence

(( ))   transcriber's comment

( )   transcriber's explanation for clarification within parentheses added by the author

,   utterance signalling more to come

.   utterance final intonation

!   utterance final intonation with exclamation