

**TRANSFER IN THE USE OF PREPOSITIONS IN FINNISH  
FIRST-LANGUAGE WRITERS' ENGLISH TEXT**

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<p><b>Abstrakti</b></p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena oli löytää viitteitä suomen kielen siirtovaikutuksesta suomenkielisten englanniksi kirjoittamissa teksteissä. Näitä viitteitä etsittiin tutkimalla sellaisten prepositioiden käyttöä, jotka voitiin kääntää suomen paikallissijamuodoiksi ja niiden esiintyvyyttä määrällisessä muodossa eri taitotasolla. Tämä aihe valittiin, koska prepositioiden käyttö nimenomaan suomen paikallissijamuotojen yhteydessä on kielenkäytön osa-alue, jonka on aikaisemmassa tutkimuksessa osoitettu todentavan suomen kielen siirtovaikutusta. Aineistona käytettiin aikaisempiin Jyväskylän yliopistossa suoritettuihin Cefling- ja Topling tutkimusprojekteihin yläkoululaisilta ja lukiolaisilta kerättyä aineistoa, joka oli näiden tutkimusprojektien yhteydessä jaoteltu Yleiseurooppalaisen Viitekehyksen (CEFR) mukaisesti taitotasoihin A1, A2, B1 ja B2. Tarkoituksena oli kvantitatiivista informaatiota hyödyksi käyttäen löytää säännönmukaisuuksia, samankaltaisuuksia, eroavaisuuksia sekä nousevia ja laskevia trendejä näiden taitotasojen välillä ja aikaisemman tutkimuksen perusteella löytää näistä piirteistä todisteita kirjoittajien äidinkielen vaikutuksesta heidän käyttämäänsä vieraaseen kieleen. Aineisto käsitti 13090 sanaa, keskimäärin 3273 sanaa/taitotaso. Aineistosta etsittiin ne prepositiolausekkeet, jotka kääntyivät suomen paikallissijamuodoiksi ja näiden lausekkeiden prepositiot tilastoitiin tilastoyksikköinä preposition nimen, idiomaattisuuden ja suomen kielen paikallissijamuodon mukaan. Aikaisemmasta tutkimuksesta poiketen tämä tutkimus kartoitti yksityiskohtaisesti myös positiivista siirtovaikutusta sekä prepositioiden käyttämistä turhaan.</p> <p>Tuloksissa ei löytynyt prepositioiden poisjättämistä (nollaprepositiot) lukuun ottamatta selkeää aikaisempaan tutkimukseen pohjaavaa näyttöä suomen kielen siirtovaikutuksesta. Vaikka säännönmukaisuuksia, eroavaisuuksia ja samankaltaisuuksia sekä nousevia ja laskevia trendejä löytyi, ei näiden yhteyttä suomen kieleen pystytty toteamaan, koska aineisto ei ollut suoraan verrannollinen aikaisemman tutkimuksen kanssa. Tärkeimmät löydökset liittyivät nollaprepositioihin sekä todennäköiseen positiiviseen siirtovaikutukseen erityisesti in-preposition ja inessiivisijamuodon sekä to-preposition ja illatiivi- ja allatiivisijamuotojen kanssa. Prepositioiden turha käyttö näkyi erityisesti A1 taitotasolla, mutta sitä löytyi kaikilta taitotasoilta. Nollaprepositiot olivat pääasiallinen piirre, joka oli osittain yhteneväinen aikaisemman tutkimuksen kanssa, vaikkakin tässä tutkielmassa nollaprepositiot löytyivät valtaosin taitotasolla A1. Koska suurin osa (73 %) prepositioista oli idiomaattisia, välttelyn pääteltiin olevan yksi aineiston laatua selittävä tekijä. Koska tutkielma oli maisterintutkielman tavoin suppea, tulokset voidaan tulkita enintään suuntaa antaviksi.</p>	
Keywords transfer, crosslinguistic influence, preposition, locative case, paikallissijamuodot,	
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Additional information	

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	CROSSLINGUISTIC INFLUENCE AND TRANSFER.....	5
2.1	Development of the field of transfer research.....	5
2.2	Key Theoretical concepts .....	8
2.3	Studying transfer: the landmark findings of transfer research .....	9
2.4	Transfer and proficiency .....	11
3	FINNISH LOCATIVE CASES AND ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS .....	13
3.1	Finnish locative cases.....	13
3.2	Morphological, lexical, semantic and syntactic transfer .....	15
3.3	Previous research .....	17
4	DATA AND METHODS .....	21
4.1	Data .....	21
4.2	Methods.....	22
4.3	Research questions.....	24
5	RESULTS.....	25
5.1	Overview of the data .....	25
5.2	On ambiguity .....	29
5.3	Idiomatic prepositions.....	30
5.3.1	Idiomatic in-preposition.....	30
5.3.2	Idiomatic to-preposition.....	31
5.3.3	Idiomatic from-preposition.....	32
5.3.4	Idiomatic of-preposition.....	33
5.3.5	Idiomatic on-preposition.....	33
5.3.6	Idiomatic by-preposition.....	34
5.4	Unidiomatic prepositions .....	34
5.4.1	Unidiomatic in-prepositions .....	35
5.4.2	Unidiomatic to-preposition.....	35
5.4.3	Unidiomatic at-preposition.....	36
5.4.4	Unidiomatic for-preposition .....	37
5.5	Zero-prepositions.....	37
5.5.1	Zero in-preposition .....	38

5.5.2	Zero to-preposition .....	38
5.5.3	Zero at-preposition.....	39
5.5.4	Ambiguous Zero-prepositions .....	39
5.6	Redundant prepositions.....	40
5.6.1	Redundant in-preposition.....	40
5.6.2	Redundant to-preposition.....	41
5.6.3	Redundant for-preposition .....	42
5.7	Idiomatically ambiguous prepositions .....	42
6	DISCUSSION.....	43
6.1	Regularities .....	44
6.2	Similarities and differences.....	45
6.3	Previous research .....	46
6.4	Conclusion.....	48
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	51

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to analyse English texts written by Finnish first language (L1) speakers - more specifically how Finnish locative cases translate to English in them - and to find evidence of potential L1 influence, transfer. The Finnish internal and external locative cases were chosen as the focus of this study because it has been previously shown (Jarvis & Odlin 2000, Odlin & Jarvis 2004, Meriläinen 2010, Saurio 2014) to be a linguistic feature susceptible to transfer in Finnish writers' English texts. The aim of the study was to look for instances of both negative and positive transfer by tracking the idiomatic and unidiomatic prepositional phrases and see if any of them could be traced back to the L1 of the writers. The data consisted of texts written by students in Comprehensive and Upper Secondary Education. The texts were collected for the Cefling (<https://www.jyu.fi/hytk/fi/laitokset/kivi/tutkimus/hankkeet/paattyneet-tutkimushankkeet/cefling/suom>) and Topling (<https://www.jyu.fi/hytk/fi/laitokset/kivi/tutkimus/hankkeet/paattyneet-tutkimushankkeet/topling/suom>) research projects funded by the university of Jyväskylä and the Finnish Academy. For the purpose of the above-mentioned research projects, the data was sorted according to CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) proficiency levels.

Transfer - the influence of one language on the learning and using of the other - offers a unique way of observing and studying Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Transfer can actually be seen as crucial to understanding SLA (Yu and Odlin 2016:12). It can reveal some of the mechanisms of language-learning and use that are language- and culture-specific and thus credit learners from the same L1 background in a way that the more general theories may not be able to do.

The command of structures is one of the key features of the text production mentioned in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Opetushallitus 2014). Another important feature is the ability to find similarities and differences between languages. Most English teachers in Finland are L2 learners themselves, and the knowledge of how their L1 might affect the target language (TL) is useful to them

not only in terms of how they teach the language but how they use it. Understanding the different processes of transfer that can affect how the TL is learned and used is helpful when working with students from the teachers' own L1 background but can also help with students whose L1 is different from their own

From a terminological viewpoint, transfer and crosslinguistic influence are the two terms most frequently used to describe the interrelationship between first and other languages (e.g. Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008:3, Odlin 2003:436). Although crosslinguistic influence can be seen as more of an umbrella term that recognises the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon, and transfer can be used more specifically (as in positive and negative transfer), for the sake of clarity, the former term will not be used in this study if not strictly necessary. This study is, after all, concerned with a specific aspect of crosslinguistic influence: a specific L1, Finnish, influence on a specific second language (L2), English, and transfer is a more suitable term to describe it.

Transfer can be both positive and negative. In the case of transfer from the L1 to the TL, positive transfer occurs, for example, when a Finnish learner of English connects on-preposition with Finnish illative case -llä/lla (e.g. pöydällä/on the table). Negative transfer occurs when a Finnish L1 speaker uses "You are on my way" instead of "in my way", most likely overgeneralising the aforementioned rule, using on-preposition to express the English version of the Finnish illative case *tieLLÄ*.

Although language teaching aims at improving student's proficiency in the TL language and as such need to be concerned with learner errors, when the language of the L2 users is studied, such an error-oriented approach is no longer useful. The ideal of a native-like user of languages is criticized (Cook 2003), because it makes judgments of the L2 users which are counterproductive. On the same note, using 'learner' to describe a L2 user can be seen as emphasizing the imperfect command of the TL. Thus, it has been proposed that L2 users and the language they use, *interlanguage* (IL), should be treated as a language in its own right (DeAngelis 2007:13). To fully adhere to this view, the IL should not be compared with the native-like language. Although this was not attempted in this study for analytical reasons, the view was acknowledged. So, instead looking for grammaticality, this study focused on idiomaticity, meaning that the preposition use was deemed either idiomatic or unidiomatic (Saurio 2014:13). Still, the native-like language was used for comparisons in some cases by consulting the Corpus of Contemporary American English. The writers that contributed the data of this research are also referred as learners since the context in which the texts were written could be considered a learning situation and the writers were participating in formal English instruction at the time of the data collection.

This study provides quantitative information about the preposition use of Finnish learners of English from the viewpoint of both positive and negative transfer as well as detailed qualitative information about specific features in the preposition use.

The negative transfer was tracked by finding unidiomatic use, omissions and unnecessary use of the prepositions. This kind of detailed information particularly of positive transfer and of unnecessary use of prepositions has not to my knowledge been provided before in the Finnish context. Even though the results are presented quantitatively, the processes of identification and categorisation of the prepositional phrases that form the data were qualitative. And even though the method of choosing the English prepositional phrases for the research was based on the Finnish internal and external locative cases they could be translated to, this study does not mean to imply that translation from the L1 to the TL is the only strategy a language user has at their disposal when using the language they are learning, nor that L1 transfer is the only thing that explains their performance in the TL.

Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008:111) state that the ultimate goal of transfer research is to learn “how the languages a person knows interact in the mind.” Moreover, the aim is to find how individual’s assumptions and perceptions of those languages interact in the mind (Jarvis 2016). The ultimate goal could not be pursued in the scope of this study. However, previous research was used as a reference point to find evidence of transfer even if the current data did not offer a possibility for a rigorous empirical design. The results of this study can contribute to what Jarvis mentions as a side goal of transfer research:

--- the detection of cross-linguistic effects in learners’ language performance, which could be used for pedagogical purposes, and the development of treatment interventions designed to minimize the negative effects of transfer in language learners or language communities and to take maximum advantage of its positive consequences. (2016:21)

Transfer in the context of Finnish EFL (English as a foreign language) learners has been studied by comparing Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking Finns’ written narratives (Jarvis 2000, Jarvis 2002, Jarvis & Odlin 2000; Odlin & Jarvis 2004; Ringbom 2006) and analysing the performance of Upper Secondary School students in the written compositions of Finnish Matriculation Examination (Meriläinen 2010). Transfer has also been studied in the unpublished MA theses by analysing Finnish writers’ English texts in the genre of fan fiction (Saurio 2014) and written English texts of Finnish 6<sup>th</sup> graders (Ukkonen 2014). Previous research (Jarvis & Odlin 2000, Odlin & Jarvis 2004, Meriläinen 2010, Saurio 2014) on the use of prepositions has shown that omissions and unidiomatic instances of preposition use are quite common among Finnish-speaking users of English and that the translation of those prepositional phrases to Finnish locative cases can reveal transfer effects.

The data of this research is quite unique and offers an interesting angle to studying transfer in different proficiency levels. The TL proficiency has been one of the important variables in transfer research and as such has been given some attention



(e.g., Jarvis 2000, Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008, Meriläinen 2010). The issues concerning the studies of transfer and proficiency are the topic of chapter 2.6. Suffice it to say here, that the assessment of the texts used in this study had been conducted by multiple evaluators, and at least three had to agree on the proficiency level before it was decided on. The CEFR levels that the texts were sorted into gave a good reference point for comparisons.

The purpose of this study was to examine the texts of Finnish ESL learners and to find characteristics in the use of the prepositional phrases that could be translated into Finnish internal and external locative cases by studying their frequencies. More specifically, the aim was to see if there were any significant features that stood out in this comparison by investigating the differences and similarities between the proficiency levels. By using quantitative methods, this study aimed to find answers to the following questions:

- 1) What kind of regularities can be found in the preposition use of the different proficiency levels and in the light of the previous research, can any of them be attributed to L1 transfer (both positive/negative)?
- 2) By comparing different proficiency levels are there:
  - a) features that persist regardless of the proficiency level of the writer
  - b) features that consistently decrease or increase in frequency according to the proficiency level of the writer;and in the light of the previous research can any of these be attributed to L1 transfer?

This paper is organized by first introducing the background theory, then the data and methods, followed by the results and the discussion of the results. In chapter 2, transfer as a term, its development and current uses are examined. Some theoretical hypotheses and models are also introduced, followed by the eight landmark findings of transfer research (Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008:11-13, Jarvis 2016:23). The relationship of transfer and proficiency will be discussed with an emphasis on the reasons why this relationship has been problematic in transfer research. In chapter 3, the Finnish internal and external locative cases will be explained, followed by the types of transfer that are relevant to this study, namely, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic transfer. Chapter 3 closes with a summary of the previous research on the preposition use of Finnish learners of English. Chapter 4 is an overview of the data and methods; in Chapter 5, the results are presented and in Chapter 6, the results will be discussed with the conclusions as well as suggestions for further inquiries.

## 2 CROSSLINGUISTIC INFLUENCE AND TRANSFER

In this chapter the development of the field of transfer research and the definition of the term will be discussed (2.1). Some important theoretical concepts and models will be introduced (2.2). The eight landmark findings (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008:11-13, Jarvis 2016:23) of transfer research will be presented (2.3). The relationship between transfer and proficiency is the focus of chapter 2.4 which will introduce seven reasons for its problematic nature in the transfer research (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008:201-204). The use of the terms *transfer* and *cross-linguistic influence* will depend on the way the terms have been used in the sources referred to, but transfer will be used if the use of the other term is not strictly necessary.

### 2.1 Development of the field of transfer research

Much of the perennial discussion and disagreement concerning the effects of the processes of intralingual and interlingual interaction in the acquisition of languages, called transfer or interference, seems to be caused by the ambiguity of these terms. This ambiguity is the result of the theoretical, methodological and empirical complexity and the controversial foundation and goals of linguistically oriented transfer. (Dechert 2006:5)

Almost from the beginning, the terminology of transfer research has been a source of controversy. The quotation above neatly sums up what the difficulty concerning transfer as a term envelops. Although both the methodology and terminology of the field have gone through a process of re-evaluation and clarification over the past two decades, the fact that the concept of transfer is missing a cohesive theoretical explanation continues to cause difficulties. To understand the definition of transfer, one needs to look at the variety of ways the phenomena has been described and defined as well as to consider the history of the field.

In a simple way, transfer can be defined as “different ways in which the L1 influences the L2 learning in a foreign language learning context” (Ringbom 1987:2) or “the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired”(Odlin 1989:27). The latter definition, however, has been questioned because it does not define the word “influence” (Odlin 2003:436), a proof of the fact that the simple definitions are not always the most adequate ones.

As one takes a more detailed look at the definition of transfer, the issues concerning it become more complicated. The phenomena called transfer has also been referred to by terms such as *interference*, *the role of the mother tongue*, *native language influence*, *language mixing* and *cross-linguistic influence* (Odlin 2003:436). The most frequently used terms are still *transfer* and *cross-linguistic influence* which are often used interchangeably (Odlin 2003:436; Jarvis ). The reason why transfer is not as widely accepted as cross-linguistic influence is caused by the critique that has been and keeps on accumulating against the term.

The term transfer has been criticized for its failure to recognize the complex yet cohesive relationship of different languages in the mind (Cook 2003:8) and for its connection with behavioural theories where it is seen closely related to *interference* (Corder 1993) as well as its “imposing” nature (Bullock & Toribio 2004:91). Thus, cross-linguistic influence is sometimes considered to communicate more clearly the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon. Sharwood & Kellerman (1986) and Pavlenko (2003) state that transfer adequately describes the incorporation of elements from one language to the other whereas cross-linguistic influence can envelop a wide variety of phenomena such as avoidance, borrowing, attrition (the way the L2 influence may cause language user to struggle in producing structures in their L1, or “lose” them) and convergence (the way bilinguals create structures that differ from both their L1 and L2).

Historically the scholarly use of the term transfer with regard to linguistics has been accredited to Robert Lado (1957, quoted in Odlin 2003: 438). The term, as Yu and Odlin (2016:5) point out, had already been used in the form *transference* and *transfer* in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a linguist William Dwight Whitney (1881, quoted in Odlin 1989:8; Yu & Odlin 2016:5), and Aaron Marshall Elliot (1885), who in turn may have adopted the term and translated it to English from German words signifying “to carry over”: *hinübergarten* used by Prussian linguist and philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt (1836:59) and *übertragen* used by German linguist Hugo Schurhardt (1884). The works of Fries (1945, quoted in Pavlenko and Jarvis 2008:3), Weinreich (1953) and Lado (1957) contributed to the emergence of transfer research, where transfer was not seen as a failure of the L2 user to follow the rules of the L2, but more as an inevitable result from L2 learning (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008:3). These researchers based

their studies on the contrastive analysis, an approach to linguistics that attempted to find explanations for different aspects of language learning by comparing languages. Later, the behaviourist approach on learning was regarded as a part of this view of transfer, partly because transfer as a term was also used in behaviourist theories in other contexts. This was one of the reasons that caused transfer to be neglected as the behavioural theories fell out of fashion. The other explanations offered are that the contrastive analysis the earlier transfer research was based on failed to effectively predict learner errors (Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008:10) and that language acquisition seemed to have similar stages regardless of the characteristics of learner's L1 (Odlin 1989). Whatever the explanation, the researchers that continued to study transfer in the seventies did it in an unfavourable climate (Jarvis 2016:18).

Gradually the evidence proving the existence of transfer and more detailed descriptions of its nature and constrictions began to pile up as comparisons between different L1 groups learning the same language brought important insights to the study of transfer (e.g., Ringbom 1987; Ard & Holmburg 1993). It was proven that the similarities between the L1 and the TL led to a different learning curve compared to when the two languages were less similar with each other. The trend has been shifting from viewing transfer as simply affecting L2 learning towards a bidirectional view where even at an early level of acquisition the L2 starts to have an effect on the learner's L1 (e.g., Cunningham & Graham 2000). The goal of language learning has also been shifting from trying to attain the ideal native-like proficiency towards becoming a functional bi- or multilingual (Cook 2003). This is reflected in many studies of transfer which instead of focusing on error-detection have started to focus on the cognitive processes that provide useful insights into the function of the multilingual brain in different stages of language acquisition.

So, beginning with the contrastive studies initiated by researchers such as Lado who viewed transfer as an obstacle that the language learners had to tackle on their way to native-like proficiency to the point where transfer is now seen as a multifaceted phenomenon that has an effect on all areas of language usage - including gestures - the study of transfer has gone through what Jarvis (2016) calls a paradigm shift. The same shift has caused transfer to become a factor that needs to be explained instead of a factor that explains some other area of language learning or use. Even though advances have been made, transfer research has yet to discover a widely accepted and reliable theoretical model which would also clarify the problems involving terminology. This may only become attainable once the brain-imaging technology develops in a way that enables detailed descriptions of how languages interact in the brain to be made (Jarvis 2016:19). Next a brief overview of some of the theoretical concepts developed so far will be presented.

## 2.2 Key Theoretical concepts

Approximately 20 years ago Odlin (2003:437) stated that “the highly diverse evidence for transfer has impeded attempts to develop truly comprehensive theories of cross-linguistic influence”. Evidence of transfer and its different manifestations have been steadily accumulating after this statement was made. Yet a cohesive theoretical framework has not yet been developed (Jarvis 2016:28-29). There is, however, an ongoing effort to find theoretical explanations. Naturally, transfer has also been criticized, one of the main arguments being that transfer is merely falling back on the languages an individual already knows when facing difficulties with language learning, also called the ignorance hypothesis. But the findings from rigorous research have proven that transfer is a phenomenon far more complex than this. From the multitude of theoretical concepts that have been applied on study of transfer the most relevant to this study are those of linguistic relativity, multicompetence model, resistance to redundancy and perceived and assumed similarities.

From the above-mentioned theoretical concepts one of the most significant ones is that of linguistic relativity, also called Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008). Linguistic relativity is concerned with the way language influences the cognitive processes and conceptual presentations. It has been criticized for promoting linguistic determination which means that one’s L1 somehow fixedly determines what one’s cognitive processes are and how they function. This, however, is not at all what the hypothesis proposes, quite the opposite. The languages that one learns shape the language-related cognitive processes equally to one’s L1. In the works of, for example, Pavlenko (2004), Brown and Gulberg (2008) and Cadierno (2010) linguistic relativity has been seen as an explaining factor that makes bilinguals different from their monolingual peers. This study, however, is concerned with one-directional transfer where linguistic relativity can be seen to explain how Finnish first-language users perceive spatial relationships, both with concrete and abstract concepts that are expressed through Finnish internal and external locative cases.

From the field of bilingualism an important theoretical model that is also concerned with transfer is the multicompetence model (Cook 2003, Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008). It states that a bilingual mind does not contain separate languages that can be compared to monolinguals in the respective languages but forms a compound and unique system. Multicompetence model provides another explanation to the bidirectionality of transfer because it sees the linguistic system as a whole, which naturally points to the direction that the interplay of different languages in the person’s mind can have an influence on the person’s first-language performance. The evidence supporting bidirectionality in terms of acquired languages having an effect on the L1 has been extensive (e.g., Brown & Gulberg 2008, Balcom 2003, Cook 2003, Cunningham &

Graham 2000, Pavlenko 2003, Pika, Nicoladis, & Marentette 2006; Van Hell & Dijkstra 2002, Cadierno 2010). The reason why multicompetence model needs to be mentioned here is not so much because this research could investigate this interplay of languages in a person's mind, but because it restricts the kind of conclusions that can be made from the results when one-directional transfer is studied.

From the point of view of the preposition use of Finnish students of English it is essential to note two more theoretical concepts, opposition to redundancy and perceived and assumed similarities. Ringbom (2011) considers these as the two most important factors when speaking about transfer and the strategies of language learning and using. Opposition to redundancy explains how at the beginning stages of learning, language users tend to discard those elements of the language they consider redundant. This could be one explanation for the omission of articles and prepositions in the English texts of the Finnish L1 speakers. Perceived and assumed similarities (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008), on the other hand, deal with the kind of judgements a language learner makes about source and target languages: perceived similarity is a similarity that a learner either consciously or unconsciously sees between some element of the source language and the TL; assumed similarity is something that the learner assumes exists between the source language and the TL, even though they might not have come across any instance that proves this to be true and even though such similarity might not actually exist. Perceived and assumed similarities are interconnected since "all the perceived similarities are also assumed similarities, although not all assumed similarities are actually perceived" (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008:179).

### **2.3 Studying transfer: the landmark findings of transfer research**

The eight landmark findings of transfer were first introduced in Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008) and further elaborated in Jarvis (2016). They offer important insights to the nature of transfer and provide evidence that contradicts the *ignorance hypothesis* which sees transfer as simply falling back on one's previously acquired languages whenever facing difficulties with the TL. The findings are: 1) most transfer effects may be positive, 2) transfer can impact the rate and route of language learning, 3) transfer relies mostly on similarities, 4) the effects of transfer do not diminish as proficiency increases, although they do take different forms, 5) transfer is bidirectional, all the languages that a person learns can influence each other in some ways, 6) transfer does not rely on the actual differences and similarities between languages, but on the learner's assumptions and perceptions of what they might be, 7) transfer involves meanings and functions, not just forms and structures, 8) transfer effects show individual variation and are sometimes unpredictable at the individual level. Each of these

findings will now be presented separately, and their relevance to this study will be reflected on.

*Positive effects* refers to the idea that most transfer effects may be positive. Although from the beginning, transfer research has mainly concentrated on error detection and finding and quantifying the negative effects of transfer, positive effects of transfer play a significant role in the acquisition of languages. In this study this has been taken into account by tracking both idiomatic and unidiomatic uses of language.

*Rate and route* is concerned with the view that transfer has an effect on the speed and different stages of language learning, contrary to the *natural order hypothesis* (Krashen 1977, quoted in Jarvis 2016:24) which predicts that language learning goes through the same stages regardless of the learning situation or the learner. The rate and route can be affected by individual differences, the ways in which the language is acquired and the distance between the L1 and the TL as well as by other previously learned languages. This aspect, however, requires longitudinal studies, which is not what this study is concerned with.

*Similarities* has already been discussed above, but in short, it refers to the fact that transfer mostly occurs when the learner makes assumptions (correct or incorrect) on what the similar features between the L1 and the TL are. In fact, as Ringbom (2007) points out, even the perceived differences are tracked through similarities since it is not possible to find differences if there is no reference point based on similarities. Similarities can lead to both positive and negative transfer. Negative transfer can occur, for instance, with overgeneralization, or when a learner disregards the similarity and avoids a construction that they feel is deceptively similar.

*Non-linear changes* means that the effect of transfer does not diminish when the proficiency of the learner increases. This issue will be dealt in more detail in the next chapter (2.4), which is concerned with proficiency. In this study, this was considered with the higher proficiency levels, although a more detailed analysis would have been required to investigate it.

*Directions* is concerned with the bidirectionality of transfer. Since the L2 is shown to start affecting learner's L1 from early on, it is important to notice that the effects of transfer are not clear-cut. A multilingual brain can have a complex interplay of languages within it and thus without following the rigorous methods of investigation the existence of transfer cannot be definitely proved. In Finland, any person going through the comprehensive education has to study at least two foreign languages which according to the view of multilingualism that considers even the beginner-level users of language as multilinguals, makes every Finnish L1 speaker, at the very least, a trilingual. Previous research conducted in Finland has shown that the length of studies of the L3 (Swedish) can have an effect on the L2 (English) (Odlin & Jarvis 2004) and the results of the aforementioned research were considered in the analysis.

*Transferability* refers to the assumptions that the learner makes about the universal versus language-specific features of the TL that then impact which of the features show evidence of transfer. Especially some early learner errors can occur because the learner makes assumptions about the TL that are not supported by either or any of the languages the learner has acquired. One of the ongoing research concerns in the field of transfer research is to find out what constricts transfer, meaning what areas of language usage are not prone to show effects of transfer. The topic chosen for this study is one that is shown in previous research to be susceptible to transfer but one has to bear in mind that other factors, such as universals, can play a part especially in the beginning stages of the language acquisition.

*Meaning* means going beyond simply looking at forms and structures to also consider meanings and functions that underlie in them. In this study, this is challenging, because the original meaning of the writer can only be guessed at. However, it is important to reflect on this even when the data does not allow any definitive conclusions to be made.

*Individual differences* addresses the fact that transfer research should not be solely based on statistical analysis because individual differences can reveal important insights into the nature of transfer (Yu & Odlin 2016:12. In this study the individual differences will be addressed to some extent in the results (Chapter 5) and in the discussion (Chapter 6).

## **2.4 Transfer and proficiency**

The relationship of transfer and proficiency is problematic for multiple reasons, starting from how both concepts have been defined and how they have been measured. Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008:201-204) offer seven reasons why L2 proficiency has caused issues in transfer research. These reasons can also be seen as factors that should be considered when studying transfer and proficiency.

The first three reasons deal with the methods of measuring the proficiency and are concerned with the effects of proficiency, measurement of proficiency and the ranges of proficiency. These reasons are not directly relevant to this study because the evaluation and sorting was done beforehand, but they can be considered when reflecting on how the subject under study, prepositional phrases, have influenced the evaluation and thus inform both the evaluation processes and future inquiries.

The fourth reason for the problems regarding the proficiency and transfer research is that proficiency behaves differently in different aspects of language learning and use. Fifth reason is that different studies look at different effects of proficiency. So, the fourth reason, in the view of this study, is concerned with how proficiency relates



to the use of prepositions and the fifth how the use of prepositions relate to proficiency. Both of these reasons were investigated in this study although the emphasis in the planning and executing stages was on the prepositions.

Sixth reason is that the errors have been measured differently (occurrence vs. proportion to other factors). This is important because while the occurrence of transfer-related-errors diminish over time, the proportion of errors that can be attributed to transfer increase, so much so that in proficient language-users, almost all errors caused by fossilization are to some extent transfer-related (Jarvis & Palvenko 2008:202). Odlin (1989:134) also notes that the claims that transfer effects diminish as proficiency increases fail to acknowledge two factors: firstly, positive transfer and secondly, the fact that some proficiency is required for certain effects of transfer to be found. Transfer cannot manifest, for example, in the use of relative clauses if the learner does not know how to form them to begin with.

The seventh and the final reason why the relationship of transfer and proficiency is problematic is that many studies have been concerned solely on negative transfer. The effects of negative transfer are easier to track because positive effects are mostly shown as the absence of errors. This study, however, is concerned with both types of transfer, negative and positive.

The main issue with studies dealing with transfer and proficiency is that because of the above-mentioned reasons the results are bound to vary a great deal and no generalizations can be made from the results. With regards to this study, although the previous research that was used to inform its methods and analysis have to some extent acknowledged the proficiency of the language users, none have emphasized the proficiency to the same extent. For example, years spent studying English (Jarvis 2000, Meriläinen 2010:186) does not give sufficient information about the proficiency of the learner. In this study the highest and the lowest proficiency levels (A1 and B2 in CERF-scale) could be found both with writers in Comprehensive and Upper Secondary Education. It is important to bear this in mind when we turn to discussion about the omission of prepositions, and the reasons for this feature in the Finnish writers' texts (chapter 6).

### 3 FINNISH LOCATIVE CASES AND ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS

This chapter will begin with the presentation of the Finnish locative cases (3.1). The relationship of English prepositional constructs and Finnish inflectional systems will be considered in relation to different types of transfer (morphological, lexical, semantic and syntactic) (3.2). Finally, previous research (Jarvis and Odlin 2000, Meriläinen 2010, Saurio 2014) concentrating on Finnish locative cases and English prepositions will be introduced (3.3).

#### 3.1 Finnish locative cases

Finnish has a nominal case system that includes 15 productive nominal cases that use agglutinative suffixes on nouns and their modifying adjectives to express relationships between the entities in sentences (Jarvis & Odlin 2000:541). Finnish expresses spatial relationships through locative cases and adpositions which can also be inflected to some extent (Huumo & Ojutkangas 2006). The locative case system is divided into internal, external and general locatives and is expressed through suffixes. The internal and external locative cases have three constituents to express directionality: goal, source and action (Jarvis & Odlin 2000:542). The general locative cases *essive* and *translative* were excluded to narrow down the scope of the study. From now on, "locative case" will be used to refer to internal and external locative cases, excluding the general locative cases. Besides locative relationships Finnish locative cases can also be used to express duration of something or a certain moment in time as well as possession, cognition and circumstantial relationships (Huumo & Ojutkangas 2006).

Huumo & Ojutkangas (2006:12) use the terms *trajector* and *landmark* to describe the constituents expressing spatial relationships in a sentence. In Finnish, the trajector

is often the object which location the locative case describes. The landmark describes the location of the trajectory via the locative case. For example:

I	travelled	to Thailand
Minä	matkustin	ThaimaaHAN
trajector		landmark/ illative case (internal goal).

As mentioned above, the Finnish locative cases can be divided to internal and external ones, and they each have three constituents that express either goal, source or action.

Table 1. Finnish locative cases explained.

	Goal	Source	Action
Internal locatives	Inessive Talossa (in the house)	Elative Talosta (from/out of the house)	Illative Taloon ((in)to the house)
External locatives	Adessive Talolla (at/by/with the house)	Ablative Talolta (from the outside of the house)	Allative Talolle (onto/to the outside of/to the house)

In the data of this study, the translations of the prepositional constructs to Finnish locative cases included expressions of (explanations modified from Huumo & Ojukangas 2006):

- the location of an entity within another entity  
A1: WE lived IN a big house  
ME asuimme isossa talossa (houseINESSIVE) internal goal
- the direction of an entity away from another entity  
A2: The SHIP left FROM Turku  
LAIVA lähti Turusta (TurkuELATIVE) internal source
- the direction towards an object  
A2: One morning I went to school  
Yhtenä aamuna MINÄ menin kouluun (schoolILLATIVE) internal action
- an entity 'supported' by another entity (a surface)  
A2: WE slept ON the floor  
ME nukuimme lattialla (floorADESSIVE) external goal
- an entity moving away from the vicinity of the object  
B1: HE came too far away FROM goal  
HÄN tuli liian kauaksi maaliin (goalABLATIVE) external source
- a direction of an entity towards the vicinity of an entity

- A2: I run TO bus-stop  
MINÄ juoksen bussipysäkILLE (bus stopALLATIVE) external action
- a point of time
- A2: IN August  
ElokuuSSA (AugustINESSIVE) internal goal  
IN evening  
IILALLA (eveningADESSIVE) external goal
- duration
- A1: We swang ainakin (at least) three kertaa (times) IN day  
Keinuimme ainakin kolme kertaa PäiväSSÄ (dayINESSIVE) internal goal
- possession: the three external locatives can be used to describe possessing something, giving away or losing something, and receiving something.
- B2: grant money FROM European Union  
Rahoitus Euroopan UnioniLTA (UnionABLATIVE) external source
- B1: something FOR my dad  
jotain isäLLE (dadALLATIVE) external action
- internal states
- B2: your body is still IN the REM-state  
Kehosi on edelleen REM-tilaSSA (stateINESSIVE) internal goal
- instrumental function of the adessive case i.e., doing something with something
- A1: they took a picture WIHT (with) digital camera  
he ottivat kuvan digitaalikameraLLA (digital cameraADESSIVE) external goal
- adposition
- B1: They had all their things AT the front  
Kaikki heidän tavaransa olivat edeSSÄ (frontINESSIVE) internal goal.

### 3.2 Morphological, lexical, semantic and syntactic transfer

A study of a possible impact of Finnish locative cases on the use English prepositions of Finnish L1 learners of English, raises a question of what type(s) of transfer is involved. Keeping in mind the topic of this study, this chapter will introduce some linguistic concepts and the types of transfer connected to them: morphological, lexical, semantic and syntactic.

Morphological transfer describes a situation where the language user makes interlingual identification between a morphological structure of their L1 and a corresponding structure in the TL, such as connecting Finnish inessive case with the in-preposition in English (Jarvis and Odlin 2000, Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008). Morphology is

a study of language involving the combination of sounds or letters that carry meaning. These are called morphemes. For example, the inessive case marker *-ssa* in Finnish is a morpheme. The example above is a bound morpheme as it is combined with words to form meanings, and in this case, it is a suffix, since it is placed at the end of the word. Free morphemes, on the other hand, can stand alone as words. When investigating a possible transfer of Finnish locative cases to English prepositions, one is studying whether a system of bound morphemes is transferred to a system of free morphemes. Thus, it can be defined as morphological transfer.

Lexical transfer is “the influence of word knowledge in one language on a person’s knowledge or use of words in another language” (Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008:72). Thus, lexical refers to words, or lexemes. One lexeme represents a word in all its inflectional forms. Word knowledge is by no means a simple concept. Ringbom (1987:37, elaborated in Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008) gives six aspects that form a continuum of lexical knowledge from no knowledge to a full theoretical knowledge: accessibility (accessing the words in one’s mental lexicon), morphophonology (knowledge of different pronunciations and spellings of the word in its different forms), syntax (how the grammatical structure of the language connects with the word and constrains it), semantics (knowing what meanings the word can have), collocation (how the word is regularly used and connected with other words) and association (how the word associates with other words, how the words can be grouped together). Without going into these in detail, according to this categorization, lexical transfer can be seen to envelop or, at the very least, overlap with morphological, semantic and syntactic transfer.

Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008) draw a distinction between formal lexical transfer which in terms of negative transfer means that the form of the word is in some way unconventional for the TL, and lexico-semantic transfer which in terms of negative transfer means that an error occurring is formally conventional in the TL but is either a mistaken identification of a presumed semantic correspondent of TL or a loan translation i.e., calque. When considering the Finnish locative cases, one can assume that the interlingual connections concerning them and prepositions in English may not necessarily include words, but morphemes. This may also lead to overgeneralization, if a Finnish user connects, for example, the inessive case with the *in*-preposition, without connecting the prepositional phrase with the other parts of the sentence, or the syntax and collocation aspects of Ringbom’s lexical knowledge. More will be said about lexical transfer and Finnish locative cases in the next chapter (3.3).

Semantic transfer describes making interlingual connections based on meaning. Semantic transfer is closely tied to linguistic relativism (Odlin 1989). Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008:75) make a distinction between conceptual and semantic transfer, although these are not always mutually exclusive. Conceptual transfer is connected with conceptual understanding and semantic with semantic understanding. Conceptual

understanding includes understanding how concepts, the mental representations of categories, form those categories and how these are connected to each other, how they are defined, what they include and what kind of knowledge and beliefs are connected to them. Semantic understanding involves combining words and concepts, knowing which concepts can be expressed by which words and being able to recognize relationships between words such as collocations (how words are combined with each other), associations (how words can be categorized into groups such as *furniture*), synonyms (different words expressing the same concept) and antonyms (the opposites such as *hot* and *cold*).

Semantic transfer and conceptual transfer are clearly connected to how Finnish learner of English make possible interlingual identifications between Finnish locative cases and English prepositions. They are linked to the question of how Finnish L1 speakers' conceptualisations are expressed through locative cases and whether the directionality (in/from/to) connected to them is also manifested in the uses of locative cases that do not express spatial relationships. Additionally, it is linked to how Finnish first-language speakers transfer these conceptualizations to English and how other languages (especially Swedish) might influence this process.

Syntactic transfer involves making interlingual connections based on syntax. Syntax in linguistics means studying how words in their different inflectional forms are combined to express meaning and how the different parts of speech form phrases (for example, prepositional phrases). Syntactic transfer can manifest in, for instance, word order, relative clauses or the use or misuse of articles or prepositions. Meriläinen (2010:164) defines the prepositional transfer as a form of syntactic transfer, because even though it contains lexical characteristics, the omission of prepositions is a result of syntactic simplification. Thus, the Finnish locative cases and their potential transfer on English prepositions can be seen as a form of syntactic transfer as well.

It is clear that the different types of transfer are extensively interconnected. Understanding what type of interlingual connections a language-user makes requires investigating and comparing both different groups of language-users and individual cases. In this study, the evaluation of the interlingual connections and the types of transfer they might involve will be done by comparing the results drawn from data with previous research as well as taking a closer look to certain individual cases.

### **3.3 Previous research**

Transfer in the Finnish context has been studied extensively because Finland offers an excellent environment for a rigorous study of transfer. Finland is officially a bilingual country, where the cultural and educational backgrounds of the different

language groups do not differ extensively, and where the two official languages, Swedish and Finnish, are distant from each other; Swedish being a Germanic language, whereas Finnish is part of Finno-Ugric language family, distant from both Germanic and other Indo-European language families.

For the purpose of the rigorous study of transfer, Jarvis (2000:246) defines L1 influence as a phenomenon that can be found in a statistical analysis as a “correlation (or probability-based relation)” that “is shown to exist between some feature of learners’ IL (interlanguage) performance and their L1 background.” To accommodate this, three conditions that a reliable analysis should include in order to prove the effect of the L1 transfer are: intra-L1-level homogeneity in IL performance (eg. similarities in the IL performance with subjects from the same L1 background), inter-L1-level heterogeneity in IL performance (differences in the IL performance with subjects from different L1 backgrounds); and intra-L1 level congruity between the L1 and IL performance (finding features from learner’s IL usage that are similar to the learner’s L1). Previous research that has been relying on all or some of these conditions and concentrating on Finnish first-language influence on the use of prepositions will now be presented, namely Jarvis & Odlin (2000), Odlin & Jarvis (2004) and Meriläinen (2010), with a reference to Saurio (2014).

Jarvis & Odlin (2000) investigated the transfer of bound morphology in texts written in English by both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking Finns, also comparing these texts to the texts written in their respective languages by English, Swedish and Finnish native language control groups. All texts were narratives describing an extract of the silent film *Modern Times*. The use of prepositions studied was described as morphological transfer, since it was concerned with the Finnish nominal case system of bound morphology being transferred to prepositional phrases of English free morphemes, and the results were deemed to show evidence of both semantic transfer and simplification. The forms of simplification in the study were divided into structural simplification (omissions, or zero-prepositions) and semantic simplification (overgeneralisation).

The study first investigated the prepositions connected to verbs *sit* and *take*, and then all the prepositions used to describe a certain scene in the film. Finnish-speaking writers favoured to-preposition more than the Swedish-speaking did. With words *sit* and *grass*, Swedish-speaking writers more frequently used *in* and Finnish-speaking writers used *on* which seemed to reflect their L1s. This finding was statistically significant. The most striking finding in the study was that Finnish-speaking learners had overgeneralized the word *in*, to an extent that it did not correspond directly to their native language. They used in-preposition to refer to any type of internal relationship, even when referring to internal source (Finnish elative case, see chapter 3.1). Only Finnish-speaking writers omitted prepositions. This seemed to prove that

simplification was not solely an effect of universals in language learning but was impacted by the L1 influence as well.

The results of the study showed that bound morphology is transferable. The Finnish-speaking learners were found to be restricted by the bound, agglutinative morphology of the Finnish language and Swedish-speaking learners were found to be restricted by their free, prepositional morphology of the Swedish language, thus proving that the transfer was evident in the spatial referencing of the respective groups. It was concluded that “the nominal case system of Finnish is a frequent source of cross-linguistic influence in the acquisition of English” (Jarvis & Odlin 2000:537).

Using the same data, Odlin & Jarvis (2004) explored the effect of Swedish on the English language use of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking learners of English. From the written narratives retelling a scene from the silent film *Modern Times*, they chose four words that were presumed to show possible Swedish influence, *instead of*, *for*, *some* and *what*. The years studied Swedish had an effect on how and to what extent the Finnish-speaking writers used *for*. Those who had studied Swedish the longest used *for*-preposition the most. Finnish-speaking writers used *for* more to express benefit and overgeneralised the use of *for* notably more than Swedish-speaking did, especially with verbs of stating (say, tell, ask). Thus, Finnish-speaking writers made interlingual identifications between Swedish and English that were different from the ones made by Swedish-speakers. It was concluded that the L2 closely related to the TL is more prone to cause formal lexical transfer, meaning what words the learners choose, whereas the L1 impacts the semantic transfer, meaning the way the words are used.

Meriläinen (2010) studied negative transfer in different forms in English texts by Finnish writers written for Finnish Matriculation Examination in three different years (1990, 2000, 2005). The results were compared with Swedish-speaking writers to verify the effects of first-language influence in the Finnish-speaking writers’ texts. Decrease in negative lexical transfer could be detected but negative syntactic transfer remained the same or increased during the period under investigation. The most prominent feature of negative syntactic transfer was found in the use of prepositions.

With regard to the Finnish nominal case system, the prepositional phrases that could be translated into locative cases showed most syntactic transfer. The most frequent cases were the inessive, elative, illative and ablative cases. Omissions of prepositions were the most prominent in verb and adjectival complements and different types of adverbial clauses. *In* was used incorrectly mostly in abstract expressions, where Finnish inessive cases English equivalent did not contain *in*-preposition. *To* was most often used incorrectly to express emotional states. Evidence was found that overgeneralization could occur also between internal and external markers of the same constituent (for example internal and external goal, see chapter 3.1). Ablative case was not very frequent in the data. Allative case was most often involved with abstract uses.



Both examples of allative case presented in the paper included redundant prepositions: *go (to) abroad* and *go (to) jogging*.

The zero prepositions were slightly more frequent than unidiomatic ones. When compared with the Swedish-speaking writers, the number of omissions of prepositions was 19/10000 words in Finnish-speaking writers' texts and 1.8/10000 words in Swedish-speaking writers' texts. Meriläinen (2010) concluded that Finnish writers' omission of prepositional constructs was evidence of redundancy. The writers assumed that the English word carried the same meaning as their inflected Finnish counterpart, and thus did not feel the need to pay attention to adding a preposition to the prepositional phrase. What was important in this finding according to Meriläinen (2010:186-187) was that the writers were in a relatively advanced stage in their English studies, and the omissions of prepositions were still a frequent source of error in their texts where syntactic transfer was concerned.

The zero prepositions were divided to verbal or adjectival complements and adverbial contexts. In the case of complements, they were most frequently found with verbal complements which were the biggest group altogether containing zero-prepositions, and with adverbial uses, where they were most frequently found with expressions of time. Again, the most frequent occurrences were those that could be translated into Finnish locative cases. With adverbs it was conjectured that time adverbs pose a challenge to all ESL learners because sometimes they include prepositions and at other times not. However, because the omission of prepositions also occurred in other types of adverbial clauses, it was concluded that the omission of prepositions with the adverbial phrases was evidence of L1 transfer.

In the period under investigation (years 1991-2005), the ungrammatical uses of prepositions showed only a slight increase over the years, whereas omission of prepositions increased significantly. In a study similar to Meriläinen(2010), Saurio (2014) found that the ungrammatical use of prepositions was more common than zero prepositions, and the former ones only occurred with the translation equivalents of Finnish locative cases. The preposition errors were the only ones that showed similar frequencies to Meriläinen's (2010) study, despite the fact that the data in Saurio's (2014) study consisted of texts that were written and edited without time constraints.

## 4 DATA AND METHODS

This chapter will first present the data (4.1) and then describe the methods used in conducting the research (4.2) as well as the research questions (4.3).

### 4.1 Data

The data was originally collected for the Topling and Cefling research projects of Jyväskylä University and Finnish Academy. Students of English from fifth grade of Comprehensive Education to third grade of Upper Secondary Education were asked to write short compositions from varying topics. The compositions were then sorted in the proficiency levels according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) rating scale. The evaluation was conducted by multiple professional evaluators. At least three had to agree on the proficiency level before it was decided on.

The fact that the data had been pre-emptively sorted in this manner, enabled the making of this study, which in the limited scope of an MA thesis would have been otherwise quite unlikely. Even though the original research project did not aim to find evidence of transfer, the characteristics of the data makes it well worth studying also within the scope of transfer research.

The compositions chosen for this research were narratives about some significant occurrence in the writers' lives. They were chosen randomly from the data, meaning that the compositions were not read prior to choosing them, and the goal was to include compositions from both Cefling and Topling-projects, both from students in Comprehensive education and Upper Secondary Education.

B2 level, which defined the word count, had a total of 3278 words that were divided among 20 compositions. The number of words and composition in other proficiency levels were as follows: 3275 words/83 compositions in A1, 3261/29 compositions in A2, 3276/26 compositions in B1. Thus, altogether, the data consisted of 13090

words and 158 compositions. The Finnish words were excluded from the word count, and apostrophized (e.g., 't in don't) words were included in the word count. S-genitive was not counted as a word (e.g., Tom's).

Table 2. The number of words and compositions in the proficiency levels.

Proficiency	Composition	Words
A1	83	3275
A2	29	3261
B1	26	3276
B2	20	3278
Total	158	13090

## 4.2 Methods

The original data consisted of multiple files sorted into proficiency levels and Comprehensive/Upper Secondary Education writers. The compositions for the research were chosen starting from the beginning of each proficiency level's file until the required word count was full. The goal was to include compositions from both Cefling and Topfling projects as well as from both comprehensive and upper secondary school. With regards to these, the attempt was made to get equal number of words from each, although in some cases the proficiency levels dictated how many compositions could be found.

Next, each phrase that could be translated into Finnish locative case was searched from the chosen compositions. This was the part of the research that required a qualitative approach, since the original meaning of the writer could not be known, and thus the meaning of each phrase and their translation into Finnish required in some cases a great deal of guesswork. Still, any phrase that could be in any way interpreted to translate into a Finnish locative case was included, since exclusion would have required much more complex systems and subsystems of definitions.

Prepositional phrases that could be translated into Finnish locative cases were then categorised according to idiomaticity. There were five categories of idiomaticity: idiomatic, unidiomatic, zero (meaning the preposition had been omitted), redundant (meaning the preposition was used when it was not necessary) and ambiguous. In unclear situations, Contemporary American Corpus was used to see if the phrase in question were ever used in written form of English and sometimes the context in which it was conventionally used was also contemplated with the help of the corpus. If there was any possibility for the phrase to be considered idiomatic, it was deemed so, because much of the previous research seemed lean to error detection, and there was a strong inclination for it also in conducting this study. Thus, rather than trying to find errors the goal became justifying the unidiomaticity whenever it was suspected.

Idiomat�icity as a concept, however, is not as clear-cut as grammaticality, because the former relies much more on the perception and whether the meaning of the writer is clear.

At this stage, the data was still sorted according to the compositions, with each prepositional phrase having three features, the preposition, idiomat�icity and the Finnish locative case it could be translated to. Because all the possible instances were recorded, the three categories, that is preposition, locative case and idiomat�icity could be defined *ambiguous*. This was the case when, for instance, there were multiple possible translations, or the preposition had been omitted (zero preposition) and the meaning was not clear. Ambiguousness will be further explained in chapter 5.2. At this stage, the data was presented in the following manner:

Writer id: E-309/ Word count: 61

My life	ELÄMÄSSÄNI	IN ZERO INESSIVE
This happened our room	HUONEESSAMME	IN ZERO INESSIIVE

After all the phrases had been categorised, the results were coded to SPSS, using the preposition as a statistical unit. The preposition was chosen for the statistical unit, because it gave the relevant information of the individual prepositions, which was deemed the most important aspect in the numerical depiction of the data. The data in this form consisted of five variables. Number 1 was the anonymised writer id, which was kept the same as in the original data, to help to finding it, and also to keep track of how many compositions were written by the same writer. Number 2 contained the four different proficiency levels. Number three included all the individual prepositions, which totalled 14 in number: *in, to, from, at, ambiguous, for, of, with, into, on, by, about, onto* and *till*. Number four tracked the idiomat�icity of the prepositions and had five values, idiomatic, unidiomatic, zero, redundant and ambiguous. Number 5 was concerned with the locative cases, inessive, elative, illative, adessive, ablative and allative, with an additional value for ambiguous.

Table 3. The variables and their values

Variable	Values
The writer	The anonymised id from the original data
The proficiency level	A1=1, A2=2, B1=3, B2=4
Preposition	Values 1-14
Idiomat�icity	Idiomatic=1, unidiomatic=2, zero=3, redundant =4. Ambiguous=5

The locative case	Values 1-7, six locative cases and ambiguous.
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These basic variables were further sorted and recoded to produce groups within the data, so that, for example all idiomatic in-prepositions could be cross-tabulated according to the proficiency level and locative case. All these variables will not be explained here, but when looking at the results, one needs to bear in mind that each of the subgroups within certain idiomaticity category was recorded as a distinct variable.

### 4.3 Research questions

For the purpose of the analysis, the following research questions were formed:

- 1) What kind of regularities can be found in the preposition use of the different proficiency levels and in the light of the previous research, can any of them be attributed to L1 transfer (both positive/negative)?
- 2) By comparing different proficiency levels are there:
  - a) features that persist regardless of the proficiency level of the writer
  - b) features that consistently decrease or increase in frequency according to the proficiency level of the writer; and in the light of the previous research can any of these be attributed to L1 transfer?

Thus, the aim was to study the frequencies and crosstabulations produced by the data and find rising and falling trends, similarities and differences between different proficiency levels. The aspiration was to find elements that could be attributed to transfer on the basis of the previous research.

## 5 RESULTS

This chapter begins with a more detailed overview of the data that will present how the compositions, the word count, the prepositional phrases, idiomaticity of the prepositional phrases and locative cases were divided among and between the CEFR proficiency levels A1, A2, B1 and B2 (Chapter 5.1). This overview will already reveal some rising and falling trends, differences and similarities between the proficiency levels. Next, the prepositions will be cross tabulated according to the Finnish locative case they could be translated to and the proficiency levels. Since the idiomaticity of the prepositions clearly showed differences between the proficiency levels, each idiomatic category: idiomatic, unidiomatic, zero, redundant and ambiguous will be presented separately, with the prepositions most prominent in each category (Chapters 5.3-5.7). This comparison will reveal both differences and similarities in the use of prepositions of the proficiency levels. The implications of these results and the possible transfer effects will be reflected in Chapter 6.

### 5.1 Overview of the data

The data consisted of 158 compositions, written by 151 writers. Five writers had two compositions included in the data and one writer had three. Four out of the five writers with two compositions, had the compositions in different proficiency levels, namely B1 and B2. Others with more than one composition were on B2-level. The compositions were distributed among the proficiency levels as follows: A1-level had 83 compositions, A2-level had 29 compositions, B1-level had 26 compositions and B2-level had 20 compositions.

The number of words in a composition got higher with the proficiency level of the writer. The data consisted of 13090 words, averaging 82,85 words per composition. A1-level's compositions consisted of 3275 words, with an average of 39,46 words per

composition (standard deviation 20,05); A2 level's compositions consisted of 3261 words, averaging 112,45 word per composition (standard deviation 40,18); B1 level's compositions consisted of 3276 words, with an average of 126 words per composition (standard deviation 57,16); B2 level's compositions consisted of 3278 words with average of 163,9 per composition (standard deviation of 48,55).

There were 647 prepositional phrases (including the zero prepositions) in the data that could be translated to Finnish locative cases (4,95/hundred words). A1 level had 173 prepositional phrases (5,28/100). At the A1-level, 14 compositions had no prepositional phrases relevant to this study. A2-level had 148 prepositional phrases (4,56/100). B1-level had 164 prepositional phrases (5/100). There was also one composition with no relevant prepositional phrases at B1-level. B2-level had 162 prepositional phrases (4,94/100).

From now on, instead of referring to "prepositional phrase", I will refer to the prepositions within those prepositional phrases. These include zero prepositions, meaning the prepositional phrases where the preposition was omitted. If the omitted preposition could be clearly defined, it was placed in the category of that preposition. If this was not the case, the missing preposition from the prepositional phrase was placed in the ambiguous category. The different ambiguous categories will be further explained with examples in chapter 5.2.

Seven most frequent prepositions that made the 94% of the data were *in*, *to*, *of*, *on*, *at*, *from* and *for*. *In* and *to* were by far the most frequent prepositions in the data. 67% of the prepositions were either *in* or *to*.

A1: At least <b>IN</b> our <b>mind</b> . in idiomatic inessive	mieli <b>SSÄ</b>
A2: I wen't with my friend <b>TO Helsinki</b> to idiomatic illative	Helsinki <b>IN</b>

The second biggest level were *of*, *on* and *at*; which together made 19 % of the total.

B1: Then we got out <b>OF</b> the first <b>elevator</b> (out) of idiomatic elative	hissi <b>STÄ</b>
B2: <b>ON</b> the <b>pony</b> on idiomatic illative (pony back <b>ILLAT</b> )	(ponin) selkä <b>ÄN</b>
A1: that was so fun and scary ( <b>AT</b> ) same <b>time</b> at zero illatiivi	(samaan) aika <b>AN</b>

The seven most frequent prepositions were completed by *from* and *for*. 8 percent of the prepositions were either *from* or *for*.

A2: We just ran <b>FROM</b> <b>machine</b>	lait <b>TEELTA</b>
--	--------------------





When looking at the frequencies of the prepositions divided among the different proficiency levels, there was no rising or falling trend with *in*, *at*, or *for* to be found. With *to* the frequency lessened as the proficiency got higher; whereas *of*, *on* and *from* became more frequent as the proficiency got higher.

The comparison between A- and B- proficiency levels showed a clear difference with *of*, *on* and *from*. 71 percent of these prepositions occurred in the compositions on B- proficiency levels.

Table 5. The division of *from*, *of* and *on* between A- and B- proficiency levels.

	From	Of	On	Total
A	31% (8)	23% (10)	33% (14)	29%(32)
B	69% (18)	77% (33)	67% (29)	71% (80)
total	100%(26)	100%(43)	100%(43)	100%(112)

When the percentages of the prepositions within each proficiency level was compared, two of the most frequent prepositions (*in* and *to*) made 75% of the prepositions in level A1, while in A2-level their percentage was 71, in B1-level it was 57 and in B2-level it was 63 percent. The variation of different prepositions rose as the proficiency got higher.

Table 6. The percentages and frequencies of the 7 most frequent prepositions in the proficiency levels

	In	To	Of	On	At	From	For
A1	32% (69)	29% (62)	5% (2)	9%(4)	33% (12)	12% (3)	32% (9)
A2	23% (50)	26% (56)	19% (8)	23%(10)	19% (7)	19% (5)	18% (5)
B1	21% (46)	22% (47)	42% (18)	26%(11)	42% (15)	27% (7)	18% (5)
B2	24% (53)	22% (47)	35% (15)	42%(18)	6% (2)	42% (11)	32% (9)
total	100%(218)	100%(212)	100%(43)	100%(43)	100%(36)	100%(26)	100%(28)

When the idiomaticity of the prepositions was compared, differences between the proficiency levels could be detected. Idiomatic- and unidiomatic-category seemed to be divided to two, namely A and B. With zero- and redundant-categories, however, A1-level stood out.

Table 7. A crosstabulation of idiomaticity and proficiency levels, with the percentages of the idiomatic class within each idiomaticity-category and the frequencies.

	idiomatic	unidiomatic	zero	redundant	ambiguous
A1	19% (91)	33% (25)	82% (40)	46% (15)	25% (2)
A2	22% (106)	33% (25)	10% (5)	21% (7)	56% (5)
B1	29% (141)	18% (14)	6% (3)	15% (5)	11% (1)
B2	30% (142)	16% (12)	2% (1)	18% (6)	11% (1)
Total	100%(480)	100%(76)	100%(49)	100%(33)	100%(9)

The division of unidiomatic prepositions between A- and B- proficiency levels could clearly be seen when two of the most frequently occurring prepositions – in and to – were compared by combining unidiomatic, zero and redundant categories into one unidiomatic-category. This comparison showed that 79 % of unidiomatic *in* or *to* were found in the A- proficiency levels.

Table 8. Unidiomatic (unidiomatic, zero and redundant) in- and to-prepositions divided between A- and B- proficiency levels.

	In	To	total
A	77%(33)	81% (38)	79% (71)
B	23% (10)	19% (9)	21% (19)
total	100% (43)	100% (47)	100% (90)

From the locative cases, inessive case was the most popular, followed closely by the illative case. While the inessive, adessive and allative cases did not show any rising or falling trend, there was a notable rise in the elative case as the proficiency got higher, and a small rise with the ablative case. With the illative and ambiguous, the trend was falling, especially with illative case and from the level A1 to A2.

Table 9. The Finnish locative cases the prepositions could be translated to in the proficiency levels.

	inessive	elative	illative	adessive	ablative	allative	ambiguous
A1	31% (49)	8% (6)	34% (52)	24% (25)	17% (2)	24% (26)	29% (13)
A2	22% (35)	20%(14)	23% (35)	21% (22)	25% (3)	26% (28)	24% (11)
B1	27% (42)	35% (24)	22% (34)	27% (28)	25% (3)	20% (22)	24% (11)
B2	20% (32)	36% (25)	20% (30)	27% (28)	34% (4)	30% (33)	22% (10)
total	100%(158)	100% (69)	100%(151)	100%(103)	100%(12)	100%(109)	100% (45)

## 5.2 On ambiguity

The prepositions in this study were given three features according to which they were studied: idiomaticity, the name of the preposition and the Finnish locative case the preposition could be translated to. Each of these features could be ambiguous, and with each of the feature, ambiguity had a different significance.

In terms of idiomaticity, ambiguity meant that the original meaning of the writer could not be known, and the idiomaticity of the prepositional phrase depended on the meaning. This feature is further investigated in chapter 5.7.

Ambiguous prepositions were zero-prepositions - meaning prepositional phrases where the preposition was missing - that did not clearly show what the missing preposition might be. These are addressed in chapter 5.5.4.

Finally, ambiguous in terms of how the prepositional phrases translated to Finnish locative cases meant that there were multiple possible translations for the prepositional phrase.

Phrases where the translation into Finnish locative case was ambiguous.

A1: I go <b>TO</b> Tordano <b>rollergoaster</b>	vuoristorada <b>LLE</b> /vuoristorata <b>AN</b> allative/illative
A2: We were (?) many places	paik <b>OISSA</b> /paikk <b>OIHIN</b> inessive/illative
B1: funniest happening of my life	elämäni/elämä <b>SSÄ</b> genitive/inessive
B2: time to get back to the hotel	hotelli <b>IIN</b> /hotelli <b>LLE</b> illative /allative

Next, the idiomaticity of the prepositions and their division between the proficiency levels and locative cases they could be translated to will be investigated. Each category - idiomatic, unidiomatic, zero, redundant and ambiguous - will be addressed separately. Each chapter will include the most frequent prepositions (either most frequent form the total number of the prepositions, or the most frequent in relation to other idiomaticity-categories within a certain preposition) of the category.

### 5.3 Idiomatic prepositions

74 percent of the prepositions were idiomatic. From the idiomatic prepositions, the ones chosen for closer inspection in this chapter were either those most frequent within the idiomatic-category or those with most idiomatic uses within the particular preposition that were used by more than one individual. These included *in*, *to*, *from*, *of*, *on* and *by*. *From* and *by* were included because they were mostly used idiomatically in the data.

*In* and *to* were the most dominant prepositions in this category. In fact, idiomatic *in* and *to*-prepositions make up 52 percent of the total number of prepositions, meaning that over half of the prepositions in the data were either idiomatic *in* or idiomatic *to*. Within the idiomatic-category, 69 percent of prepositions were either *in* or *to*.

#### 5.3.1 Idiomatic in-preposition

In-preposition was used idiomatically 80 percent of the time. From all the idiomatic prepositions, 37 percent were in-prepositions. From all the prepositions, 27 percent were idiomatic in-prepositions.

When the idiomatic in-preposition was cross-tabulated according to the locative case and the proficiency level, it was clear that inessive case had the most occurrences, amounting to 68 percent of the total.

Idiomatic in-preposition in inessive case  
 A1: This happened last summer **IN** the **Finland** Suome**SSA**  
 A2: This happende **IN** a **park** puisto**SSA**  
 B1: we were walking **IN** **New York** New York**ISSA**  
 B2: when we were **IN** **Egypt** Egypti**SSÄ**

The second biggest group was adessive case, with 18.5 percent of the total.

Idiomatic in-preposition in adessive case  
 A1: IN summer two years ago kesä**LLÄ**  
 A2: it was a guitar selleg IN 350€ euro**LLA**  
 B1: 8 o'clock IN the morning aamu**LLA**  
 B2: IN the Canary Islands Kanariansaari**LLA**

Related to the total number of prepositions in each proficiency level, the idiomatic in-prepositions in inessive case amounted to 21 percent in A1 proficiency level, 16 in A2, 19 in B1 and 17 in B2. There was no clear upward or downward trend in inessive case. In the second biggest level, the adessive, A1 level stands out, having only four occurrences compared to 10, 9 and 9 in rest of the proficiency levels.

Table 10. Idiomatic in-prepositions cross-tabulated according to the proficiency level and the locative case.

	inessive	elative	illative	Adessive	ambiguous	total
A1	30% (36)	0%(0)	40%(2)	13% (4)	24% (4)	(46)
A2	22% (26)	0%(0)	20%(1)	31%( 10)	18% (3)	(40)
B1	26.% (31)	0%(0)	0%(0)	28% (9)	24% (4)	(47)
B2	23% (27)	100%(1)	40%(2)	28% (9)	35% (6)	(45)
total	100%(120)	100%(1)	100%(5)	100%(32)	100%(17)	(175)

### 5.3.2 Idiomatic to-preposition

To-preposition was used idiomatically 75 percent of the time. From all the idiomatic prepositions, 33 percent were to-prepositions. From all the prepositions, 27 percent were idiomatic to-prepositions.

To-preposition was used idiomatically only in illative and allative-cases, and 6 times the translation of the preposition to a Finnish locative case was ambiguous.

Idiomatic to-preposition in illative case  
 A1: I travel **TO** **Viro** Viro**ON**  
 A2: we where going **TO** the **sinema** elokuv**IIN**  
 B1: we went **TO** many other **places** paikk**OIHIN**  
 B2: the time when I moved **TO** **Sweden** Ruotsi**IIN**

Idiomatic to-preposition in allative case

A1: I and my friend go <b>TO beach</b>	ran <b>NALLE</b>
A2: We just ran from machine <b>TO other</b>	toi <b>SELLE</b>
B1: send some text messages <b>TO my friends</b>	ystäv <b>ILLE</b>
B2: All the people were so nice <b>TO me</b>	min <b>ULLE</b>

Although illative case had prevalence over allative case, the difference was not as clear-cut as the two most prominent locative cases of in-preposition. Illative made 57 percent of the total and allative 39. Again, there was no clear upward or downward trend with idiomatic to-preposition in the proficiency levels, although the A1- level used the to-preposition idiomatically less than other levels, especially in allative case. The prepositions in B2-level were divided equally in illative and allative cases, which was not the case with other proficiency levels.

Table 11. Idiomatic to-prepositions cross-tabulated according to the locative case and proficiency level with the percentages and frequencies.

	illative	allative	ambiguous	total
A1	24% (22)	16% (10)	40% (2)	34
A2	26% (24)	26% (16)	0% (0)	40
B1	28% (26)	25% (15)	20% (1)	42
B2	22% (20)	33% (20)	40% (2)	42
total	100% (92)	100% (61)	100% (5)	158

### 5.3.3 Idiomatic from-preposition

From-preposition was used idiomatically 92 percent of the time; out of 26 uses only one was unidiomatic and one was redundant. Of all the idiomatic prepositions, 5 percent were from-prepositions. Of all the prepositions, 4 percent were idiomatic from-prepositions.

Although the numbers are quite small, there are some things that need to be noted about from-preposition. Firstly, it was mostly used idiomatically. Secondly, it was used only in elative and ablative case, with the elative case prevailing over ablative case. Lastly, there is a growing trend with idiomatic from-prepositions: as the proficiency level increases, so does the number of from-prepositions.

Idiomatic from-preposition in elative case

A1: my dad bring me <b>FROM school</b>	koulu <b>STA</b>
A2: It was just like <b>FROM</b> som a <b>movie</b>	elokuva <b>STA</b>
B1: away <b>FROM those</b>	nii <b>STÄ</b>
B2: <b>FROM</b> that <b>day</b> I knew	päivä <b>STÄ</b>

Idiomatic from-preposition ablative case

A1: When I walk to home <b>FROM Kaisa</b>	Kaisa <b>LTA</b>
A2: We just ran <b>FROM</b> machine	lait <b>TEELTA</b>
B1: <b>FROM</b> the walls	seini <b>LTA</b>

B2: my father found better job **FROM here**

täälTÄ

Table 12. Idiomatic from-prepositions cross-tabulated according to the locative case and the proficiency levels with the percentages and the frequencies.

	elative	ablative	total
A1	13% (2)	11% (1)	3
A2	19% (3)	11% (1)	4
B1	25% (4)	33% (2)	6
B2	44% (7)	44% (4)	11
total	100% (16)	100% (8)	24

### 5.3.4 Idiomatic of-preposition

Of-preposition was used idiomatically 88 percent of the time. From all the idiomatic prepositions, 8 percent were of-prepositions. From all the prepositions, 5 percent were idiomatic of-prepositions.

With idiomatic of-prepositions, A1-level had only one occurrence, and the number grew especially from level A2 to B1. The elative case was the only case that idiomatic of-prepositions could be placed in the data, in cases where the Finnish translation was clear.

Idiomatic of-preposition in elative case

A2: My parents and part **OF** my whole **family** perheESTÄ(ni)

B1: to watch out **OF** the **window** ikkunaSTA

B2: One **OF** the greatest **moments** in my life hetkiSTÄ

Table 13. Idiomatic of-prepositions cross-tabulated according to the locative case and the proficiency levels with the percentages and the frequencies.

	elative	ambiguous	total
A1	0% (0)	20% (1)	1
A2	21% (7)	0% (0)	7
B1	39% (13)	80% (4)	17
B2	39% (13)	0% (0)	13
total	100% (33)	100% (5)	38

### 5.3.5 Idiomatic on-preposition

On-preposition was used idiomatically 86 percent of the time. Out of all the idiomatic prepositions, 8 percent were on-prepositions. Out of all the prepositions, 6 percent were idiomatic on-prepositions.

With on-preposition, there was a growing trend. This was most notable in the adessive case, which had the most occurrences of idiomatic on-prepositions (65%). Actually, the three proficiency levels; A1, A2 and B1; had the same number of idiomatic on-prepositions combined in adessive case as the B2-level alone. In the total



### 5.4.1 Unidiomatic in-prepositions

*In* was used unidiomatically 12 percent of the time. 33 percent of the unidiomatic prepositions were in-prepositions. 4 percent of all the prepositions were unidiomatic in-prepositions.

There was a clear division between A-levels and B-levels: the first two levels had 84 percent of the total. In fact, in B1-level, there were no unidiomatic in-prepositions to be found.

Adessive case occurred mostly at the A1 level.

Unidiomatic in-preposition in adessive case, Level A1

and we sat **IN** the **sofa** and ate  
we was working **IN computers**

sohva**LLA**  
tietokone**ILLA**

The A1 level also used in-preposition in relative-case two times. A1 level was the only level to use in-preposition this way.

Unidiomatic in-preposition in relative case, Level A1

my mother go käskemään(tell) we pois(away) **IN water**  
We watched movie **IN** a **TV**

ve**DESTÄ**  
TV:**STÄ**

With A2, level, on the other hand, the unidiomatic *in* was divided between illative and inessive cases when the Finnish translation to the locative cases could be clearly defined.

Unidiomatic in-preposition in illative case, Level A2

went **IN** Alahärmä's **Powerpark**  
Me and my mom bringed it **IN** our **home**

Powerpark**IIN**  
koti**IIN**

Unidiomatic in-preposition in inessive case, Level A2

to be **IN machines**  
It's same **IN** some **hobbie**

(huvipuisto)laitte**ISSA**  
harrastu**KSESSA**

Table 15. Unidiomatic in-prepositions cross-tabulated according to the proficiency level and the locative case with the percentages and the frequencies.

	inessive	relative	illative	adessive	allative	ambiguous	total
A1	20% (1)	100% (2)	33% (3)	83% (5)	100%(1)	0% (0)	12
A2	60% (3)	0% (0)	56% (5)	0% (0)	0%(0)	50% (1)	9
B2	20% (1)	0% (0)	11% (1)	17% (1)	0%(0)	50% (1)	4
total	100% (5)	100% (2)	100% (9)	100% (6)	100%(1)	100% (2)	25

### 5.4.2 Unidiomatic to-preposition

*To* was used unidiomatically 8 percent of the time. 22 percent of all the unidiomatic prepositions were to-prepositions. Out of all the prepositions, 3 percent were unidiomatic to-prepositions.



A2 level dominated the unidiomatic to-prepositions. There was also a division between A- and B-levels. 71 percent of the unidiomatic to-prepositions belonged to the first two levels, while B1 and B2 contained 29 percent.

Unidiomatic to in inessive case, Level A1

I was **TO Switzerland** with my two big sisters

SveitsiSSÄ

To was used once in elative.

Unidiomatic to in elative case, Level A2

I sometimes am nervous **TO them**

heISTÄ

The three adessive-case occurrences in A2 level came from two individuals.

Unidiomatic to in adessive case, Level A2

I and my whole family were **TO holiday**

TO the summerholiday

and sitting **TO river**

lomaLLA

kesälomaLLA

joeLLA

Table 16. Unidiomatic to-preposition cross-tabulated according to the proficiency level and the locative case with the percentages and the frequencies.

	Inessive	Elative	Illative	Adessive	Allative	Ambiguous	Total
A1	100% (2)	0% (0)	25% (1)	25% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	4
A2	0% (0)	100% (1)	0% (0)	75% (3)	50% (2)	100% (2)	8
B1	0% (0)	0% (0)	25% (1)	0% (0)	25% (1)	0% (0)	2
B2	0% (0)	0% (0)	50% (2)	0% (0)	25% (1)	0% (0)	3
total	100% (2)	100% (1)	100% (4)	100% (4)	100% (4)	100% (2)	17

### 5.4.3 Unidiomatic at-preposition

At was used unidiomatically 39 percent of the time. 19 percent of the unidiomatic prepositions were at-prepositions. 2 percent of the prepositions were unidiomatic at-prepositions.

73 percent of unidiomatic at-prepositions were in the B1-level, while in B2-level there were none. In fact, the B2-level had only 2 at-prepositions altogether in the data. However, from the 10 occurrences of the unidiomatic *at* in B1-level, 6 came from the same individual. If that is counted as one occurrence, it gives B1 level a total of 5 occurrences, which still stands out compared to the other levels.

Unidiomatic at in adessive case

A2: I like to be **AT stage**

B1: **AT the evening**

näyttämöLLÄ

illaLLA

Unidiomatic at in inessive case, Level B1

Have you been **AT Norway**

was **at the line**

I was **AT bath**

NorjaSSA

jonoSSA

kyIVYSSÄ



prepositional constructs where the missing preposition could be decided on, *to* was the most prominent one.

There were altogether 49 zero prepositions in the data, and they made 8 percent of the total. 40 of these, making 82 percent of the total, were in the A1 class. Besides *in*, *to*, *at* and *ambiguous* that together accounted for 46 occurrences of the zero-prepositions, on-preposition occurred twice in this category, and of-preposition occurred once.

### 5.5.1 Zero in-preposition

Within in-preposition, zero prepositions made 4 percent of the total. Out of all the zero prepositions, 16 percent were zero in-prepositions. This was an exception with *in*, as all the other idiomaticity classes (excluding *ambiguous*), in-preposition made over 30 percent of the total. Out of all the prepositions, 1 percent were zero in-prepositions.

The prepositional phrases where missing preposition was clearly *in*, occurred mostly in inessive case and in A1 level. From the ones in inessive case, five out of seven occurred in a prepositional phrase that included a possessive pronoun.

Zero in-preposition in inessive case, Level A1

309: This happened (**IN**) our room

2262: (**IN**) My **mind**

2359: I want follow (**IN**) him **footsteps**

huone**ESSA**(mme)

miel**ESSÄ**(ni)

jalanjälj**ISSÄ**(ään)

Zero in-preposition in allative case, Level B2

I participated (**IN**) an international youth **camp**

leiri**LLE**

Table 19. Zero in-prepositions cross-tabulated according to the proficiency level and the locative case.

	Inessive	allative	total
A1	7	0	7
B2	0	1	1
total	7	1	8

### 5.5.2 Zero to-preposition

Within to-preposition, zero prepositions made 9 percent of the total. Out of all the zero-prepositions, 37 percent were to-prepositions. Out of all the prepositions, 3 percent were zero to-prepositions.

B2-level did not have missing to-prepositions in prepositional phrases that could be translated to Finnish locative cases. A1-level stands clearly out, and most of the zero to-prepositions were in illative case.

Zero to-preposition in illative case

A1: When i'm going wrist(first) time (**TO**) **school**

**kouluUN**

A2: i go **(TO) hospital**

B1: And I asked that were(when) are we moving **(TO)**

sairaala**AN**

mi**NNE**

Table 20. Zero to-prepositions cross-tabulated according to the proficiency level and the locative case.

	illative	allative	total
A1	80% (12)	100% (3)	15
A2	13% (2)	0	2
B1	7% (1)	0	1
total	100%(15)	100% (3)	18

### 5.5.3 Zero at-preposition

Within at-preposition, zero prepositions made 17 percent of the total. Of all the zero-prepositions, 12 percent were at-prepositions. 1 percent of the total number of prepositions were at-prepositions.

There were six occurrences, where the missing preposition was clearly *at*. They could all be found in A1 level. They came from 6 different individuals and were equally divided in illative, adessive and allative cases.

Zero at-preposition in illative case, Level A1

She was learning mine(teaching me) **(AT) same times**

aika**AN**

Zero at-preposition in adessive case, Level A1

I and my best friend were **(AT) she's grandparents**

isovanhemmi**LLA**

Zero at-preposition in allative case, Level A1

We laught **(AT) the film**

elokuva**LLE**

### 5.5.4 Ambiguous Zero-prepositions

Ambiguous zero-category consisted of those prepositional phrases that were missing a preposition which could not be clearly defined. Of all the zero-prepositions, ambiguous made 29 percent of the total. Of all the prepositions, 2 percent were ambiguous zero-prepositions. This category included also the prepositional phrases missing a preposition where the landmark (see chapter 3.1) was in Finnish.

B2-level did not have any prepositional phrases in this category. Again, most ambiguous zero-prepositions could be found in A1-level. There, the most occurrences were in the illative and allative case.

Ambiguous zero-preposition in illative case, Level A1

then my litle borthe comed **(TO/IN/INTO) my room**

huone**ESEEN**

Ambiguous zero-preposition in allative case, Level A1  
 My friend go (?) **meille**

meILLE

With A2 and B1, the few times the ambiguous zero preposition could be clearly placed in a locative case, it was in the elative case.

Ambiguous zero-preposition in elative case

A2: We speake**d (OF/ABOUT) icehockey**

jääkiek**OSTA**

B1: we told **(OF/ABOUT) our little trip**

matka**STA**

Table 21. Ambiguous zero-prepositions cross-tabulated according to the proficiency levels and the Finnish locative case.

	Inessive	Elative	Illative	Allative	ambigu-ous	total
A1	1	0	4	3	2	10
A2	0	1	0	0	1	2
B1	0	2	0	0	0	2
total	2	3	4	3	2	14

## 5.6 Redundant prepositions

There were 33 redundant prepositions in the data, which meant that 5 percent of the prepositions were redundant. *In* and *to* were the most prominent ones. 70 percent of the redundant prepositions were either *in* or *to*. *For* could be found five times in this category, *about* occurred twice and *with* and *from* once. *In*, *to* and *for* were chosen for a closer inspection.

### 5.6.1 Redundant in-preposition

Within *in*-preposition, 5 percent of the prepositions were redundant. Of all the redundant prepositions, 30 percent were *in*-prepositions. Of all the prepositions, 2 percent were redundant *in*-prepositions.

There was no clear upward or downward trend between the proficiency levels with redundant *in*-preposition although with B1- and B2-levels, they only appeared in the adessive case, which was also the most popular category in terms of locative cases. All the redundant *in*-prepositions in adessive case were connected to either words *here* or *there*.

Redundant *in*-preposition in adessive case

A1: I swim so much **IN here**

tä**ÄLLÄ**

B1: the people are very very kind **IN there**

si**ELLÄ**

B2: They played Marlene Dietrichs song **IN there** si**ELLÄ**

Table 22. Redundant in prepositions cross-tabulated according to the proficiency level and the Finnish locative case.

	Inessive	illative	Adessive	total
A1	1	1	2	4
A2	1	0	0	1
B1	0	0	2	2
B2	0	0	3	3
total	2	1	7	10

### 5.6.2 Redundant to-preposition

Within to-preposition, 6 percent of the prepositions were redundant. Of all the redundant prepositions, 38 percent were to-prepositions. Of all the prepositions, 2 percent were redundant to-prepositions.

With redundant to-preposition, there was a division between A and B proficiency levels. Majority (77 percent) of the redundant to-prepositions were in the first two levels. The most occurrences were in the illative case, with allative case coming in second.

Redundant to-preposition in illative case

A1: I walk **TO home**

A2: When we came **TO home**

B1: we came across **TO her**

koti**IN**

koti**IN**

hän**EEn**

Redundant to-preposition in allative case

A1: My teacher gave a big hug **TO me**

A2: Because it learn(taught) **TO me**

B2: My dad called **TO the boss**

min**ULLE**

min**ULLE**

pomo**LLE**

Table 23. Redundant to-prepositions cross-tabulated according to the proficiency level and Finnish locative case.

	Illative	Adessive	Allative	total
A1	4	2	0	6
A2	1	0	3	4
B1	1	0	0	1
B2	0	0	2	2
total	6	2	5	13

### 5.6.3 Redundant for-preposition

Redundant for-prepositions occurred in A1 and A2-levels. Four out of five were in A1 level. Within A1-level, 2 occurrences were in the allative case, with ablative and ambiguous appearing once. The one occurrence in A2-level was in the allative case.

Redundant for-preposition in allative case

Level A1: My friends want's to näyttää(show) **FOR me**

Level A2: I called **FOR** my **mum**

min**ULLE**

äi**DILLE**

## 5.7 Idiomatically ambiguous prepositions

This category consisted of prepositions where the idiomaticity of the prepositional phrases depended on the meaning of the writer. Because the original meaning of the writer could not be known, it was easiest to place these constructs in their own category. Four out of eight occurrences were in the A2 proficiency level. 6 were to-prepositions, while *for* and *of* occurred once.

Excluding one occurrence where the verb was missing the ambiguous to-prepositions were all referring to the same incident: to describe going on an amusement park ride.

Idiomatically ambiguous to-preposition

A1: when I go **TO** Tordano **rollergoaster**

A2: I wen't the first time in my life **to spaceshot.**

B1: First we went to 'Torndo'

VUORISTORADALLE/TAAN

SPACESHOT'ILLE/IIN

TORNDOLLE/ON

It is likely that the writers originally meant actually going *on* a ride, not *to* a ride. However, using to-preposition here is not unidiomatical, if the meaning of the writer is that they went to the ride.

## 6 DISCUSSION

This study aimed to find evidence of transfer in the preposition use of the texts written in English by Finnish writers. More specifically, the study aimed to find evidence of transfer in the prepositional phrases that could be translated into Finnish locative cases. From the data collected from students in Comprehensive and Upper Secondary education for previous research projects (Cefling and Topling of the University of Jyväskylä) that had been sorted into CEFR proficiency levels A1, A2, B1 and B2, this study attempted to find answers to following questions:

- 1) What kind of regularities can be found in the preposition use of the different proficiency levels and in the light of the previous research, can any of them be attributed to L1 transfer (both positive/negative)?
- 2) By comparing different proficiency levels are there:
  - a) features that persist regardless of the proficiency level of the writer
  - b) features that consistently decrease or increase in frequency according to the proficiency level of the writer; and in the light of the previous research can any of these be attributed to L1 transfer?

In order to find answers to these questions, the prepositions in the prepositional phrases that could be translated into Finnish locative case were chosen as statistical units. Each of these prepositions were tracked with the help of three characteristic: the name of the preposition, the idiomaticity of the preposition and the Finnish locative case it could be translated to. Additionally, with each preposition, the proficiency level of the writer who had used and the anonymized identification code of the writer was tracked.

The results were somewhat inconclusive. Although some regularities and persisting, decreasing and increasing characteristics were found in the data, most of the results were not directly comparable with the previous research. The only characteristic this study had in common with the previous research was the presence of the



omissions of prepositions (zero prepositions), although in the data they were overwhelmingly used by the lowest proficiency level, A1. The results seemed to point strongly to the direction of avoidance as one of the major language-using strategies of the writers in this study, although with restrictions of both time and depth of analysis that an MA thesis necessarily involves, all the results should be treated as conjectural at best.

The results will be now discussed in more detail with regards to the research questions. First, the regularities in the data will be discussed (Chapter 6.1). Secondly, the similarities and differences, and rising and falling trends in the data will be discussed (Chapter 6.2). Thirdly, the connection with the previous research will be contemplated (Chapter 6.3). Finally, the conclusions and suggestions for further inquiries will be presented (Chapter 6.4).

## 6.1 Regularities

From the beginning stages of the analysis, it was clear that there were some elements that influenced the language that was used in the compositions. The participants could choose freely what to write about in the scope of the given topic - some occurrence of significance in their lives. Also, they were not under a pressure of performing. These factors could explain why so many prepositions were idiomatic. Another reason for this, naturally, could be the actual categorisation of the idiomaticity which as a term, is more flexible than, for example, grammaticality.

From the regularities that could be found in different proficiency levels, there were four things that stood out. Firstly, the variation of the prepositions, secondly, the zero prepositions, thirdly, the high frequency of *in* inessive and *to* illative and allative and finally, the rising trend of elative case and the falling trend of the illative case. A brief description of these regularities will now be offered which will be reflected upon in the following chapters.

The variation of the prepositions rose as the proficiency got higher: even though *in* and *to* had the highest frequencies in all the proficiency levels, in A1-level 75 percent of the prepositions were either *in* or *to*, in A2 level 71 percent, in B1-level 57 percent and in B2-level 63 percent. A1 level had only 8 percent of *on*, *from* and *of* combined.

The zero prepositions were predominately found in the A1 level (82%). Here, they could mostly be found with *to*-preposition and *in* illative case. To a lesser degree, however, zero prepositions were found in all the proficiency levels, but the gap between A1-level and other levels was considerable, and the trend was falling throughout the proficiency levels with B2-level having only one occurrence.

In all the proficiency levels, the idiomatic uses of the in-preposition were most frequent in the inessive case, and idiomatic uses of to-preposition were most frequent in the illative case, although the allative case was quite frequent as well.

The rising trend of the elative case has to be noted here, together with the falling trend of the illative case. The elative case is strongly linked to from and of-prepositions, whereas illative case is linked with to-preposition, the main source of zero-prepositions in the A1 proficiency level. The elative case will be further discussed in chapter 6.3.

## 6.2 Similarities and differences

The regularities presented above will now be addressed in more detail, with the emphasis on the similarities and differences between the proficiency levels as well as the rising and falling trends that could be found in them.

There were not many features that were similar or persisted throughout all the proficiency levels. The most prominent ones of these were the frequency of idiomatic *in* and the idiomatic *to* in illative. Idiomatic *in* was closely tied to the inessive category, which was also found to be a persistent feature in the data, meaning that the frequency of the inessive did not have a rising or falling trend. One more feature to be mentioned here is the number of redundant prepositions, which - except for the A1 level that had almost half of them - was relatively constant although the numbers were small.

The most notable differences were seen between A and B proficiency levels, although in some cases A1 level also stood out. The differences concerned firstly, the variation of the prepositions in general, secondly, the unidiomatic uses of *to* and *in*, thirdly, the use of zero, redundant and unidiomatic prepositions, and fourthly, the rising and falling trends in the different locative cases, namely elative and illative.

Concerning the prepositions *on*, *of* and *from*, B-levels had a much higher frequency of these prepositions. With the unidiomatic uses of the prepositions *in* and *to*, A-levels had higher frequency.

Besides the high frequency of zero-prepositions, A1-level alone had 49 percent of the combined number of unidiomatic, idiomatic and redundant prepositions. Although with A1 and A2 levels the frequency of unidiomatic prepositions was the same, the fact that the number of redundant and especially zero prepositions dropped from level A1 to A2 caused even these two levels to be different. One interesting detail that stands out is that while idiomatic in-preposition in adessive is less frequent in A1-level (e.g., **IN summer** two years ago/**kesäLLÄ** kaksi vuotta sitten) compared to other proficiency levels, the case is the opposite with the unidiomatic in-preposition in adessive case in A1-level (e.g., we sat **IN the sofa**/istuimme **sohvaLLA**). Also, an

interesting feature in A1-level was the zero in-preposition in inessive, which was linked to the possessive (e.g., this happened **IN** our **room**/tämä tapahtui meidän **huoneessa**). It could be that the possessive form somehow made the use of the preposition seem redundant.

The characteristics that single A1-level out from the others are the high frequency of zero and redundant prepositions as well as illative case prepositions (e.g., When i'm going **for**(first) time **(TO) school**/Kun menen ensimmäistä kertaa **kouluun**) and the low frequency of the elative case (e.g., my dad bring me **FROM school**/isä toi minut **koulusta**). The zero and redundant prepositions and the illative case are linked because A1 level had predominately the occurrences of zero and redundant *to* in illative. Incidentally, the similar kind of dominance with the A1-level could not be found in allative case, the other case that had the most occurrences of preposition *to*. In fact, allative case occurrences were slightly higher in B2 proficiency level than the others. Elative case was linked to the use of prepositions *from* and *of* and will be reflected on more in the next chapter (6.3).

With the higher proficiency levels, individual difference began to play a part in the results. For example, in B1-level, one individual's unidiomatic use of at-preposition caused a rise in that category. The similar effect could be found in B2 level with idiomatic on-preposition, where 5 instances came from one individual. With the B-levels the categorisation of the idiomaticity became much more complex. For example, all the redundant uses of *in* in B2 level were linked to either *here* or *there* (e.g., they played Marlene Dietrich song **IN there**/**sieLLÄ** soitettiin Marlene Dietrich'in laulua). Whether *in* can be used with *here* or *there*, is a question of context and what the writer wants to emphasize. The use of *in* with *here* and *there* was still evidence of overgeneralisation that might be linked to Finnish locative cases, more specifically to the adessive cases of *sieLLÄ* and *tääLLÄ*.

### 6.3 Previous research

Next, some findings of the previous research presented in the chapter 3.3 will be revisited and their relationship to the findings of this study will be reflected on. The findings of Jarvis and Odlin (2000), namely simplification in terms of omissions (zero-prepositions) and overgeneralization (in terms of using same preposition to describe all internal relationships) could be to some extent found in this research. Findings similar to those of Odlin and Jarvis (2004) could not be found in this study. Meriläinen's (2010) findings were similar to this study in terms of omissions of prepositions, but the distribution and the frequency of unidiomatic and zero constructions were different and more in line with Saurio (2014).

The most striking finding in this study was the fact that all the unidiomatic categories, unidiomatic, zero and redundant, occurred for the most part in the first two proficiency groups. Moreover, zero and redundant prepositions occurred mostly in the A1 group. Even though the proficiency of the language users is addressed to some extent in previous research, when it comes to the specific instances of language use, it is not commented on extensively enough to inform this study. Thus, it is not clear whether, for example, zero prepositions occur mostly in a certain proficiency level, even with the language users that have been studying the language longer as, for example Meriläinen's (2010) Upper Secondary School students. The other reason why this finding could not be compared to previous research is that in the previous research the proficiency has not been measured in a way it was measured in this research, by sorting the compositions according to CEFR proficiency levels. The occurrences of the zero and redundant preposition in the lower proficiency group is a finding that provides a new insight to the use of zero prepositions in Finnish writers' texts.

Nevertheless, the occurrence of zero prepositions is similar to the findings of Jarvis & Odlin (2000), Meriläinen (2010) and Saurio (2014). As Jarvis & Odlin (2000:550) state, the possible explanation for omitting prepositions is a result of the interplay of simplification and first-language influence. The question whether the existence of the zero constructions in the data of this research could be placed more in the domain of simplification because of the fact that it was mostly found in the lowest proficiency group, can only be speculated on. The fact is that in all the previous research, the zero constructions are present, and it has been found to be an aspect of language use that Finnish first-language learners favour more than other language groups. Thus, it is safe to say that the use of zero preposition can be at least partly accredited to L1 transfer even in the lower proficiency levels.

In Meriläinen's (2010) study, the zero prepositions were more frequent than unidiomatic ones which was not the case in this study (87 unidiomatic and redundant prepositions/10000 words in this study opposed to 18/10000 in Meriläinen, and 37 zero prepositions/10000, opposed to 19/10000 in Meriläinen). The results were more similar to the data of Saurio (2014), who found that unidiomatic uses were more frequent than zero uses. The fact that Meriläinen (2010) studied English learners at the end of their studies in Upper Secondary Education might be a contributing factor to the different distribution and frequencies that could be found in this study. This could corroborate the fact that as the proficiency gets higher, the proportion of the mistakes that can be accredited to L1 influence also rises (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008:202). Thus, even though the frequency of zero constructions gets lower, they can still be found in the texts of proficient Finnish-speaking users of English especially if the data is large enough. Still, the question remains if the years of exposure to the language is good enough indicator of proficiency.

With regards to Jarvis & Odlin (2000), the overgeneralisation of the internal locatives to external source was found only three times in the data. *In* was used twice in relative and *to* was used once (e.g., my mother go käskemään(tell) we pois(away) **IN water**/äitini meni käskemään meitä tulemaan pois **vedeSTÄ**). This may at least partly be due to the fact that the writers felt insecure using expressions of this type and since it was not mandatory, they avoided them. The relative case, in general, was used to a lesser extent in proficiency levels A1 and A2, which was also the case with preposition *from*, the most common preposition to express relative.

With regards to Odlin & Jarvis (2004) and the use of *for*, no clear connection with the data of this study could not be found. The use of *for*-preposition was an interesting detail in the data, considering that only unidiomatic, zero and redundant uses were found in the A1 and A2 levels, whereas only idiomatic uses could be found in the B1 and B2 levels. However, *for*-preposition was not used predominately with verbs of stating.

The differences between data of this research and that of the previous ones needs to be addressed. The data of previous research were produced in different contexts. With Jarvis & Odlin (2000) and Odlin & Jarvis (2004) the writers had a very clearly defined topic (narrating event of a short extract from silent movie *Modern Times*) and this was, naturally the case in Meriläinen's (2010) study as well where the pressure of performing well was also an issue, since the context was the Finnish Matriculation Examination. Because of the different contexts where the compositions were written and the different purposes they were originally compiled for makes the comparison challenging.

## 6.4 Conclusion

To conclude, this research did not show any decisive evidence of transfer in the use of prepositions of the Finnish EFL learners' English texts that could on the basis of the previous research be deemed as such. There are several reasons for this. For example, the fact that this study did not follow exactly the designs of the previous research, the writers providing the data varied in age and the years they have studied English and the texts were collected in different ways and for different purposes. This study also collected information that had not been the focus of the previous research, such as evidence of positive transfer and the unnecessary use of the prepositions. Because of the way the data was originally collected, it was assumed that avoidance was the dominant strategy that the writers of this study used while writing the compositions. The most significant finding was the use of zero prepositions that were found mostly in the A1-proficiency level and this can be at least partly accredited to transfer.

Positive transfer - which seemed to be most evident in the use of *in* and *to*-prepositions, and perhaps also to a smaller degree with prepositions such as *from* and *by* - has not, to my knowledge, been extensively studied in the Finnish context. Although both Meriläinen (2010:177) and Jarvis & Odlin (2000:538) mention the connection that Finnish users of English make with *in* and *inessive* case, the fact that it seems self-evident does not mean that it should not be studied. Especially interesting is the connection of this with the proficiency in the TL. This study suggests that while the presence of these constructions remains dominant even in higher proficiency levels, the dominance lessens as the proficiency rises.

The data seems to strongly suggest a strategy of avoidance, where a language-user avoids those structures that they are uncomfortable with. This could be one explanation for why the variation of the prepositions seemed to become higher as the proficiency got higher. Avoidance could also explain why so many prepositions were idiomatic.

Although decisive evidence of transfer could not be found in this research, there were some interesting findings. First of all, the fact that the zero and redundant prepositions mostly occurred in the lower proficiency level is a finding that is unique because of the nature of the data in which the texts were sorted according to the CEFR proficiency levels. This brought the use of the zero prepositions in the Finnish writers' English texts into a slightly different light. More information is needed about the actual nature of the use of zero and redundant prepositions of Finnish learners of English. For example, the way learners in B2-level used *in* with *here* and *there* might be linked to transfer and to Finnish adessive case (*sieLLÄ* and *tääLLÄ*).

There were limitations that had an effect on the outcomes of this study. Some were caused by the narrow scope that an MA thesis unavoidably requires. Some were caused by the design of the research. To have a clear understanding of the interplay of languages in the cognitive processes of Finnish writers of English, one would need to include data from similar texts written in the writers' L1 and their other languages such as Swedish and also similar texts from native speakers. To understand individual differences, more detailed background information would have been needed. Because in the data of this study the highest proficiency level was B2, it does not provide information of highly proficient users of English, which could also give a clearer idea of how the trends shift when proficiency increases. The question remains whether Finnish L1 writers of English that could be placed in C-proficiency level in the CEFR would still keep manifesting the upward trend in terms of variation in preposition use, and the reduction of the *in* *inessive* and *to* *illative/allative*. While conducting this research, more attention could have been paid on the categorization of the idiomaticity of the prepositions. Also, the statistical analysis would have been easier to conduct if the data was coded by using ordinal scale variables instead of nominal scale ones. The

fact that this study was concentrated on finding evidence of transfer did not offer a possibility for looking at the data in a wider scope that would have considered other theories of SLA.

There are several implications from the results of this research that could inform both English teachers in Finland as well as future inquiries. The most important of these are the positive transfer in the use of *in*-inessive and *to*-illative/allative, the connection of the zero constructions to proficiency and the unnecessary use of prepositions. Because *in*-inessive and *to*-illative connection seemed to be an easy one for Finnish learners to make, English teachers could pay attention to presenting the students with exceptions of these rules from early on, so that the overgeneralization of them could be avoided. The omission of prepositions and its connection to proficiency, especially with proficiency measured by using CEFR, is something that requires more attention. The data of this research implies that as the proficiency gets higher the number of zero prepositions gets lower and by concentrating on zero constructions especially with highly proficient Finnish users of English, the statement of the proportion of errors attributed to transfer getting higher as proficiency rises (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008:202) could be investigated. To my knowledge, the redundant use of prepositions of Finnish writers has not been systematically studied before in the field of transfer. The redundant use of prepositions was one of the areas of language use that, after A1 level, seemed to stay constant. The sample of this study was small, and it would be interesting to study these instances in more detail with a wider sample and use the methods of rigorous transfer research to find out whether it is connected to transfer.

This study could be further extended to look in more detail of the use of specific prepositions, such as *in* and *to* in the data. The comparison of these features to, for example, Meriläinen's (2010) results might be informative. In addition to the zero prepositions, other features should also be studied in the highest proficiency levels, to find out what kind of unidiomatic and idiomatic uses persist and how these relate to find out what kind of unidiomatic and idiomatic uses persist in proficient language users.

The hegemony of English language has been criticized in the field SLA (e.g., Tenfjord, Jarvis & Golden 2017). Even though there are solid reasons for studying the use of English of Finnish EFL learners, other languages that Finnish language learners are learning as well as different groups of learners (for example, adults of all ages) should be studied further. It is very likely that studies that to some extent overlap with the topic of this research have been and are being conducted in other languages. However, the fact that they are usually written in the language that they are concentrating on, limits their use to those that have skills to read and understand them.

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