Elisa Räsänen

To the Wild and Back

Supporting Language Learners' Agency beyond the Classroom

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

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JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2024

ABSTRACT

Language learning in today's world takes place in complex settings, and it is impacted by globalism, mobility, and technology. This dissertation draws on nexus analysis, exploratory practice, and the ecological approach to investigate how learners of Finnish at a U.S. university learn Finnish beyond the classroom, in the wild. The data are comprised of the learners' portfolio entries submitted as a classroom assignment. The teacher-researcher used nexus analysis as the conceptual framework, along with discourse analysis to examine the social actions recorded and reported in the portfolios.

The learners found many affordances to use and learn Finnish in the wild. The social actions were shaped in relation to the roles of an expert Finnish speaker and a learner, and those of a teacher and a learner. The learners' prior experiences and expectations of the target language and culture, and their professional or free-time roles directed what resources they used as learning material, and how they reflected on their learning. The portfolio task incentivized the learners to use the target language in the wild and to reflect on their language use. It also directed them at the writing level.

Change is important in nexus analysis. The findings indicate that learner agency can be supported by incorporating the digital wild into the classroom. Teachers can promote new classroom interaction orders that center on learner initiative, decision-making, and expertise, while also developing new practices that help learners tame the wild, strengthen their social connections, and make them reimagine familiar spaces as language learning spaces. Learners can recognize the impact of their previous experiences on their agency through reflection. I argue that nexus analysis is a flexible mode of inquiry that can be applied to analyze rich data from different perspectives to inform pedagogical change.

Key words: (the) digital wild(s); discourse analysis; language learning and teaching; language learning in the wild; nexus analysis

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Nykypäivän kielenoppimisympäristöjä määrittävät globalisaatio, liikkuvuus ja teknologia. Tämä väitöstutkimus tarkastelee sitä, kuinka yhdysvaltalaiset yliopistossa suomea opiskelevat oppijat opiskelevat kieltä arjen ympäristöissä (in the wild). Hyödynsin tutkimuksessa neksusanalyysia, tutkivaa käytäntöä (exploratory practice) sekä ekologista lähestymistapaa. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu oppijoiden kurssitehtävänä olleista portfoliopalautuksista. Neksusanalyysi toimi tutkimuksen konseptuaalisena viitekehyksenä. Käytin diskurssianalyysia analysoidakseni oppijoiden dokumentoimia ja raportoimia sosiaalisia toimintoja tutkivan opettajan roolissani.

Oppijat löysivät useita kielenkäytön ja -oppimisen tarjoumia luokan ulkopuolella. Keskeisten sosiaalisten toimintojen vuorovaikutus muotoutui suhteessa asiantuntevan suomenpuhujan ja oppijan ja toisaalta opettajan ja oppijan rooleihin. Oppijoiden aiemmat kokemukset ja odotukset kohdekielestä ja -kulttuurista sekä heidän ammatti- ja vapaa-ajan roolinsa ohjasivat, mitä resursseja he käyttivät oppimateriaaleina ja miten he reflektoivat oppimistaan. Portfoliotehtävä ohjasi oppijoita käyttämään kieltä arjen tilanteissa ja reflektoimaan kielenkäyttöään. Portfolio myös tuki oppijoita kirjoittamisen tasolla.

Neksusanalyysissa keskeistä on muutos. Löydökset osoittavat, että oppijoiden toimijuutta voi tukea hyödyntämällä digiviidakkoa (oma suomennos käsitteestä digital wilds) luokkaopetuksessa. Opettajat voivat uudistaa luokkahuonevuorovaikutusta, tukea oppijoiden aloitteellisuutta ja päätöksentekoa ja hyödyntää heidän asiantuntijuuttaan luokassa. Opettajat voivat kehittää käytänteitä, jotka tukevat oppijoiden selviytymistä arjen vuorovaikutustilanteisissa, vahvistavat heidän sosiaalisia suhteitaan ja auttavat heitä lähestymään tuttuja tiloja kielenoppimisen tiloina. Oppijat voivat reflektoida omaa toimintaansa ja asemaansa kielenkäyttäjinä. Tutkimukseni pohjalta väitän, että neksusanalyysi on joustava tutkimusmenetelmä, joka mahdollistaa rikkaan aineiston tarkastelun erilaisista näkökulmista, ja siten se on erinomainen menetelmä pedagogisen uudistustyön välineeksi.

Avainsanat: digiviidakko; diskurssianalyysi; kielen oppiminen ja opetus; kielen oppiminen luokan ulkopuolella; neksusanalyysi

ABSTRAKT (ABSTRACT IN SWEDISH)

Språkutveckling sker i komplexa miljöer och dessa påverkas av globaliseringen, ökad mobilitet och den teknologiska utvecklingen. Den här avhandlingen använder nexusanalys, undersökande undervisning, och ett ekologiskt perspektiv för att analysera hur amerikanska universitetsstudenter i finska lär sig finska i sociala situationer utanför klassrummet ('in the wild'). Forskningsmaterialet består av studenternas portfoliouppgifter. Det teoretiska ramverket utgörs av nexusanalys och i min dubbla roll som forskare och lärare använde jag diskursanalys för att analysera sociala handlingar som framstod i studenternas inlämnade portföljuppgifter.

Studien visar att studenterna skapade många möjligheter att använda och lära sig finska utanför klassrummet. De sociala handlingarna uppstod i relation till rollerna som experter på finska respektive student som håller på att lära sig finska, samt lärare respektive finskstuderande. Studenternas tidigare erfarenheter och förväntningar på finska som målspråk och på den finska kulturen samt rollen som användare av finska i arbetslivet respektive rollen som användare av finska på fritiden påverkade vilka resurser de använde och hur de reflekterade över sitt lärande. Portföljuppgiften uppmuntrade studenterna att använda finska utanför undervisningen och att reflektera över sitt språkbruk. Portföljuppgiften styrde även deras skrivande.

I nexusanalys utgör förändring ett grundläggande inslag. Resultaten visar att studenters agens kan stödjas genom att använda digitala resurser utanför undervisningen. Lärare kan påverka skapandet av nya roller i klassrumsinteraktionen, vilka fokuserar på studenternas egna initiativ, deras beslutsfattande och expertis, samt utveckla nya praktiker som hjälper studenterna att skapa möjligheter att använda finska utanför klassrummet, stärka deras sociala kontakter och använda vanliga, bekanta situationer som arenor för utveckla kunskaper och färdigheter i finska. Genom reflektion kan studenterna se vilken inverkan deras tidigare erfarenheter har på deras handlingar. Jag hävdar att nexusanalys är en flexibel metod som kan användas för att analysera rika data ur olika perspektiv och utgöra en grund för vidare utveckling av undervisningspraktiker.

Nyckelord: (digitalt) lärande utanför klassrummet; 'the (digital) wild'; diskursanalys; språkutveckling och undervisning; nexusanalys

Author   Elisa Räsänen
                      Centre for Applied Language Studies
                      University of Jyväskylä, Finland
                      Email elisa.k.rasanen@jyu.fi
                      ORCID 0000-0002-9697-0372

Supervisors   Senior Researcher, Docent Mia Halonen
                      Centre for Applied Language Studies
                      University of Jyväskylä, Finland

                      Senior Researcher Heidi Vaarala
                      Centre for Applied Language Studies
                      University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Reviewers   Professor Lari Kotilainen
                      Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian
                      Studies
                      University of Helsinki, Finland

                      Associate Professor Ingrid de Saint-Georges
                      Department of Humanities
                      University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg

Opponent   Professor Lari Kotilainen
                      Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian
                      Studies
                      University of Helsinki, Finland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FIGURE

TABLE

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

I   Räsänen, E. (2021). Toimijuus ja vuorovaikutusjärjestys amerikkalaisten suomenoppijoiden itsenäisessä kielenkäytössä. [Agency and interaction order in American Finnish Language Learners' independent target language use]. *Puhe ja kieli [Speech and Language]*, *41*(3), 225–245. https://doi.org/10.23997/pk.112565

II Räsänen, E. (2024a). Language Learners' Historical Bodies Directing their Agency in the Digital Wilds. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2300974

III Räsänen, E., & Kivik, P.-K. (2023). Portfolio assessment: facilitating language learning in the wild. In M. R. Salaberry, A. Weideman, & W.-L. Hsu (Eds.), *Ethics and Context in Second Language Testing: Rethinking Validity in Theory and Practice* (pp. 135–161). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003384922-9

IV Räsänen, E. (2024b). Scaffolding learning through reflection: Finnish language students recycling, negotiating, and reinterpreting instructions in a portfolio assignment. In M. Kivilehto, L. Lahti, T. Pitkänen, E. Pitkäsalo & M. Tervola (Eds.), *Tutkimuksellisia siltoja rakentamassa. Vetenskapliga bro-byggen. Building bridges through research. AFinLAn vuosikirja 2024.* (pp. 234–255). Suomen soveltavan kielitieteen yhdistyksen julkaisuja 81. https://doi.org/10.30661/afinlavk.143399

Article III was coauthored. I was the corresponding and lead author, while we planned the article and designed its contents together. Both authors participated in writing all the sections. In the theory background, I was more in charge of writing the sections on portfolios as assessment and dynamic assessment, whereas Kivik was mainly responsible for writing the sections on learning in the wild and learning-oriented assessment. I also had responsibility for the method section. I oversaw analysis of the Finnish data and Kivik the Estonian data, although we worked on the analysis collaboratively. The introduction and the discussion sections were written together.

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The motivation and aim of the study

> I was at the store the other day, and a few people in front of me were speaking in what sounded like Finnish. The cashier asked them where they were from, and they told him Finland. When we had both walked out I said, "Moi!" and they were happy to hear that I knew a little Finnish.
>
> I went to part of the … music festival last week and listened to the Finnish folk band Kardemimmit perform. It was a really good experience and I loved their voices, harmonies, and style of the music. … I could understand the numbers in their songs, and was pretty happy about that, but any other words were hard to catch. However, I listened to some of their songs on YouTube afterwards too (some links listed below) and found some of the lyrics, so that was cool. … It was cool to see a Finland band touring the US!
>
> So... I love *The Sims* franchise, and I was looking at the new expansion for *The Sims 4* recently. I scrolled past the available languages, and for some reason, "Suomi" caught my eye... First, I went into Create-a-Sim and made a couple of sims. … I built their apartment, learning a few new words for household items such as "huonekasvi" for house plant, "työtaso" for counter, and "amme" for bath.

These quotes from learners of Finnish in the United States demonstrate how language learning in today's world takes place in complex settings, and is impacted by globalism, mobility, and technology (see Sibanda & Marongwe, 2022). Language learners, even those living an ocean away from the country their target language is most closely associated with, can access the affordances of rich, technology-mediated settings (Douglas Fir Group, 2016), such as those of a computer game or a smartphone application. Learners can run into other target language speakers at a store or hear the language sung at a folk concert, all made possible by the mobility of people and resources. Language learners no longer necessarily need to travel anywhere to use their target language.

This study explores and analyzes how learners of Finnish at a U.S. university learn Finnish beyond the classroom, in the wild, in environments such as a chat or digital game. The *wild* refers to the wilderness: "a free or natural place" (Merriam-Webster, 2024). It is a metaphor that encourages seeing human cognition as socially distributed in interaction with its ecological context and resources (Hutchins, 1995, p. 14). Researchers on interactional competence (e.g., Clark et al., 2011; Eilola, 2024; Eskildsen et al., 2019; Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2019a; Wagner, 2015) emphasize the role of learners' everyday life interactions beyond the classroom in the wild as an important resource in classroom language learning (see Section 2.2). The experiences and exposure learners gain in the wild should be reflected in the language classroom so that learners can learn from them. In this study, I define *reflection* in line with the reflection model by the sociologist Gibbs (1988), "as the process that involves the description, evaluation, and analysis of an experience, leading to a change in the form of an action plan for a future language use event" (Article IV).

During my many years of engagement with the U.S. Finnish Studies program as a Finnish language teacher, I felt a need to develop foreign language instruction so that it would support language learners' learning in the wild. Considering the ongoing climate crisis, I did not see it as sustainable to encourage traveling or tourism as the learners' main targets of language learning, and I felt more could be done to encourage learners to use the language where they are, in their learning environment. I wanted to enhance learner agency and lifelong learning by incorporating learners' more efficient use of their different learning environments in classroom instruction and conduct a systematic, in-depth study on the learners' practices that would then inform change (see Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

Thus, viewing through an ecological orientation, I understand language learning as learners' adaptation to the environment in an active process (Atkinson, 2011, p. 149; van Lier, 2000, 2004). It is a dynamic response to the affordances provided by the environment. I analyze affordances in relation to agency to mean the perceived possibilities the environment can offer an individual, and how the individual uses these possibilities (Gibson, 1979; van Lier, 2000). I define agency as both a socioculturally mediated and an individual phenomenon (Ahearn, 2001), to mean how individuals use the resources of their environment to function and succeed in navigating it (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Duff, 2013; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). When I use the word *learning* in the study, I refer to the process of learning, as understood within the ecological framework (see Section 2.1), not the outcome per se. In the study, learners turn their experiences in the wild into learning moments.

The study draws on Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis, which is a "study of the ways in which ideas or objects are linked together" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. viii). It is a change-oriented approach and methodological framework that draws on "ethnography of communication, linguistic anthropology, interactional sociolinguistics, and critical discourse analysis" (Lane, 2010, p. 67; see Section 3.1.1). Because of the strong pedagogical connection,

the study is also informed by Allwright's (2005) and Hanks's (2017) exploratory practice (see also Allwright & Hanks, 2009) as a form to conduct research as a teacher-researcher (see Section 3.1.2). I also used discourse analysis (Gee, 2004a, 2004b; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019) as an analysis method.

In sum, the present study seeks to gain a research-based understanding of the learners' practices and develop classroom instruction to facilitate task, course, and curriculum-level developments to support their language learning in the wild. The aim is that learning goals and classroom instruction can be developed to better align with actual learner needs. In addition, I offer some insights into further developments of nexus analysis in the study of language teaching and learning.

1.2   The data and the research questions

The participants of the study are learners of Finnish at a university in the United States. I, as a teacher-researcher, used a classroom task that I call an *Independent Use Portfolio* to generate the data. I created the portfolio task together with my colleague Piibi-Kai Kivik (see Section 3.2). In the Independent Use Portfolio, the learners were tasked to use Finnish in any way they chose beyond the classroom (see Appendix 1), in the wild. For the portfolio, the learners as the participants of the study were tasked to record their interactions in the wild, report what they did, and reflect on their learning in the same situation. Figure 1 summarizes the different types of data included in the portfolios:

Recorded samples of language use situations: Photos, screenshots, audio/video recordings, drawings, links	**Written reports**: Learners wrote about what they did	**Written reflections**: Learners reflected on their learning
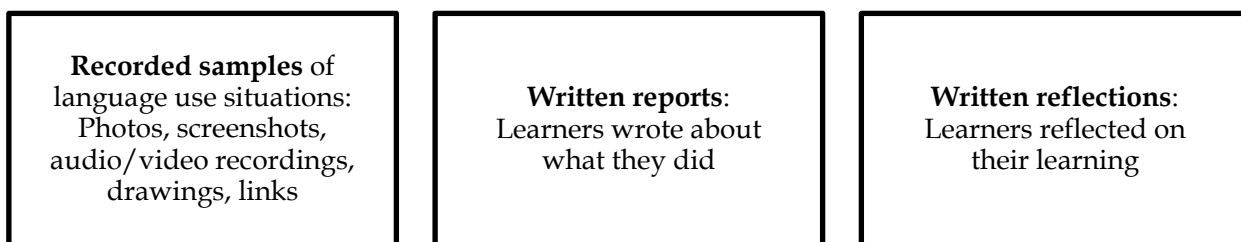
FIGURE 1   The portfolio data

The data of this study thus includes learners' recorded interactions, reports, and reflections. The data consists of altogether 99 portfolio entries. I also used the ethnographic experience I have gained through my constant interaction with the learners as their Finnish language teacher to facilitate the data collection and analysis processes (see Chapter 3).

Typically for nexus analysis, the research questions were only discovered at the end after a thorough observation of the actions (Wohlwend, 2020, p. 6). This compilation part synthesizes the findings of the four research articles (Räsänen, 2021, 2024a, 2024b; Räsänen & Kivik, 2023) the study is comprised of.

The individual articles have their own specific research questions examining the issue of learning in the wild from different perspectives. These questions are introduced in Chapter 4, where the articles are summarized. The questions of the overall dissertation are the following:

1. How do language learners use and report using the target language in the wild for the portfolio and why this way? (the findings of all the articles)
2. How do they reflect on their learning in the wild and why this way? (the findings of all the articles)
3. How can classroom practices be changed to support learner agency in the wild? (the implications of the overall study)

All articles included in the study contribute to answering all questions. The third research question concerns the implications of the study for changing the existing practices, so it will be answered by drawing together the conclusions of all the articles.

1.3   The context and the related concepts

The context of this study was a Finnish Studies program located at a research-first university in the Midwestern United States. The university offers classes in numerous different languages on four levels. Language instruction, in this university, serves to complement undergraduate students' General Education: All undergraduate (bachelor level) students must study a foreign language in addition to their first language (mostly English). In addition to undergraduate students, the Finnish courses are open to graduate students, staff, faculty, and members of the surrounding community.

The studied context can be characterized as a *foreign language learning* context because it is physically located in an area where there are no significant communities of target-language speakers. *Foreign language* (L3), traditionally, has been defined as a language not used in the learners' immediate surroundings, often studied for the purposes of future tourism or living in the target culture, whereas *second language* (L2) is defined as the official language or the language that has social power within the country in which it is studied (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 4).

However, digitalization, globalization, and the increased mobility of people put the concept of foreign language in a questionable light, as technology enables learners to access a second-language environment independently of time and place (see, e.g., Godwin-Jones, 2019; Reinders et al., 2022; Vaarala & Jalkanen, 2011). In this study, I use the concept of foreign to distinguish the setting from a second language environment where learners get more automatically exposed to the target language wherever they go. However, I am wary of the negative connotations that the word foreign has in the multilingual reality and argue that the distinction between foreign and second language learning is not always that

clear-cut. Learners in a foreign language learning context can search for affordances in *(the) digital wild(s)*,[1] which Sauro and Zourou (2019b) define as being different digital environments, such as fanfiction sites or gaming platforms, which learners can use to practice their target language, but which have not been specifically designed for learning purposes (p. 1). In the global, technology-mediated world, learners can use the target language already at the beginning of their learning process, and already beginning-level learners can have some target-language networks or interest in building them.

Finnish, like many other languages in the United States, is classified as a so-called *less commonly taught language* (LCTL), which is a group of languages that share similar pedagogical and administrative challenges (Diao et al., forthcoming) due to relatively low enrolments and a lack of resources compared to more commonly taught languages (Blyth, 2013). The National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL, 2024) defines LCTLs as "all languages other than English and the commonly taught European languages of German, French and Spanish," so their grouping consists of nearly all world languages. Even Mandarin Chinese, by this definition, is considered an LCTL.

I avoid using the concepts *native* and *non-native speaker*. Instead, I use Rampton's (1995) concept of *expert* to describe those language speakers who have such a stabilized language repertoire that they are not categorized as learners. With this choice, I hope to avoid some ideological positionings, because expertise is defined in relation to other speakers through their skills, not their heritage (Rampton, 1995, pp. 340–341). In addition, learners can also take on the role of an expert when, for example, they talk to their non-Finnish speaking friends. Expertise is thus a relational category, as it depends on how one is positioned against other speakers (Rampton, 1995, pp. 340–341).

I see my participants as *new speakers* of Finnish, defined by O'Rourke and Pujolar (2015), as individuals who are learning their L2 in their adult age without much "community exposure" to it (p. 1). All the participants are expert English speakers and most of them had (based on my interactions with them) little foreign language learning experience before studying Finnish. Although it is typical for LCTL learners to study their target language because of a heritage connection (Johnston & Janus, 2003; Lee, 2005), this was not the case with most of the learners in the study. Although some of them had Finnish heritage, they did not grow up speaking the language. Only a small number of the learners had visited Finland. Most of the participants were studying Finnish as a mandatory language study component of their undergraduate degrees, as part of their general education requirement. To fulfill the requirement, they could have

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[1] To use *wild* as a noun instead of an adjective, there are two conventions: (1) singular form and the definite article: *the wild*, or (2) plural form without an article: *wilds*. The first version is more widely used in the literature related to language learning in the wild, with one exception: Sauro and Zourou (2019) use *wilds* in plural to talk about *digital wilds*. I also used this plural form in Articles II and IV. However, Shafirova and Cassany (2019) and Sundqvist (2019) use the singular version *the digital wild* and for the sake of coherence, I also use the singular version in this compilation where possible. To further complicate the matter, in Article III, Kivik and I also refer to Lech and Harris's (2019) *the virtual wild*, which is a similar concept.

chosen any language. Murphy, Magnan, Back and Garrett-Rucks (2009) found that compared to more commonly taught languages, LCTLs attract learners who study for personal reasons rather than requirements in their degree. Thus, it can be assumed that the learners were motivated to study Finnish. Some were also graduate students or non-degree students whose Finnish language studies did not fulfill any requirements but who pursued the study of Finnish solely due to personal interest.

In this compilation, I mostly refer to the participants as *learners* because the study focuses on pedagogical developments in which they are in a learner role. However, the learners are also speakers and users of the language, and they do not always take on a learner role while using the language in the wild (Article I; Lilja, 2014). I also use *student* when I refer to the institutional role of the participants as university students. In the original articles, I used *learner* and *student* interchangeably.

The Independent Use Portfolio task was developed in this context to answer some of the pedagogical challenges the teaching of LCTLs faces (see Section 3.2.1).

1.4   Using nexus analysis for a holistic understanding to inform change

Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis aims for change, and this study was designed to benefit language learners, teachers, researchers, program administrators and language policy actors. Nexus analysis was developed by the linguists Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wong Scollon (2004), who worked to develop an understanding of why there was a low ratio of Alaska Natives studying at an Alaskan university. They traced their different sub-studies conducted with the Alaska Natives over the years to explore and analyze why the ethnic minority was discriminated against, with the aim of changing the practice so that it would provide them equal access to education (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

I chose nexus analysis because it enables exploring complex contexts and dynamics (see also Kuure et al., 2018), like the different in-person and online contexts included in this study. Wohlwend (2020) describes being attracted to nexus analysis because of its "humility and openness" (p. 6): Nexus analysis presumes that the researcher makes observations without strong guiding preconceptions, allows the data to surprise the researcher, and determines the research questions only after a thorough examination (Wohlwend, 2020, p. 6). Nexus analysis is also suitable for the study because of its multimodal orientation. Current technologies make it possible to collect multimodal data, so it would be harder to justify the exclusion of video or images (Wohlwend, 2020, p. 12). Many scholars have used nexus analysis to explore language pedagogy and language teacher education (see the review by Kuure et al., 2018). It paired well with exploratory practice, a form of teacher research (see Section 3.1.2).

Nexus analysis aims for a holistic understanding of *the nexus of practice*, which "can be understood as a point at which historical trajectories of people, places, discourses, ideas, practices, experiences and objects come together to enable some action which in itself alters those historical trajectories in some way as those trajectories emanate from this moment of social action" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 159). The starting point of nexus analysis is social action, and the aim is to identify the major discourses that together shape the studied action. In this study, the social actions were comprised of the learners' language use activities in the wild and the actions they took to reflect on their learning. The process of nexus analysis involves engaging, navigating, and changing the practice in separate but overlapping stages (see Section 3.1.1).

This study set out to explore two closely intertwined nexuses of practice, *using Finnish in the wild* and *reflecting on learning in the wild*. Each consists of a set of smaller social actions. The two nexuses form a wider nexus of *learning in the wild*. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the two nexuses:
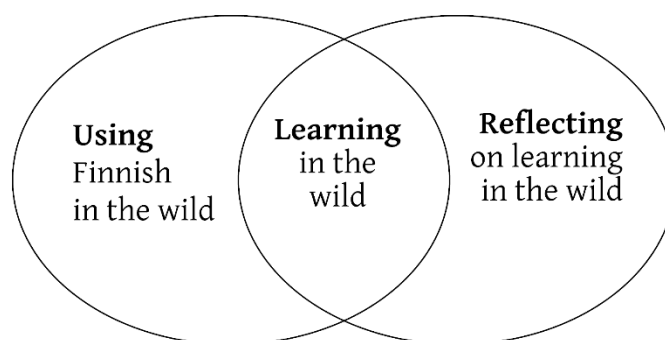
FIGURE 2   Learning in the wild

As Figure 2 shows, learning in the wild happens when learners use Finnish in the wild and reflect on their learning. I will introduce research related to learning in the wild in Section 2.2 and reflection in Section 2.3.

1.5   The structure of the dissertation

The dissertation study is reported in four research articles (Räsänen, 2021, 2024a, 2024b; Räsänen & Kivik, 2023) that approach the nexus from different perspectives. This compilation part will introduce the conceptual and theoretical foundation of the study, describe how the research process was conducted, and compile and summarize the findings. I will also address the implications for change that the findings point to, evaluate the study, and provide suggestions for future research.

This compilation consists of six chapters. I have named some of the chapters or their sections according to the stages of the nexus analytical process: engaging (Section 3.3.1), navigating (Section 3.3.2), and changing (Chapter 6).

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical foundation of the study and reviews previous related literature. Chapter 3 explains how the study was conducted. Chapters 4 and 5 summarize the articles included in the study and present the main findings. Chapter 6 discusses how the proposed changes can be implemented and includes an evaluation of the study, future research ideas, and a conclusion to the compilation.

2 LANGUAGE ECOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM AND THE WILD

2.1 Language ecology

2.1.1 Environment and exposure

It is not possible to study a topic such as learning in the wild in a laboratory setting: It is necessary to examine the impact of the environment in which these learners are acting. Clark, Wagner, Lindemalm and Bendt (2011) suggest a need for a paradigm shift in language teaching from seeing language as a purely linguistic phenomenon to seeing it as socially and contextually bound. Supporting learners' language learning in the wild through instructional activities strengthens "the ecological validity and developmental power of language education" (Thorne & Hellermann, 2022, p. 37).

Aligning with these ideas, this study views language learning through an ecological orientation (van Lier, 2000, 2004, 2010), which means that language is learned in interaction with the environment, as learners learn to utilize it in increasingly effective ways. This chapter will outline how learning environments, agency, and affordances are conceptualized in the study through the ecological orientation. In Section 3.1, I will further explain why nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), combined with exploratory practice (Allwright, 2005; Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2017), is a useful approach to studying these complex ecologies.

The learning environments in this study take place in the classroom and the wild. They can be institutionally organized, such as the spaces where the Finnish Studies program hosts its extracurricular conversation hours, familiar spaces such as homes, or public spaces such as stores or streets. Most often, however, the environments that this study introduces are digital spaces, such as the environment provided by a digital game (*the digital wild(s)*, Sauro & Zourou, 2019b). These digital environments can provide a temporary sense of immersion, and learners can develop strategies to succeed in the game more efficiently.

Different material environments enable and create different discourses (*discourses in place*; see Section 3.1.1). For example, the discourses around a university building can relate to the role of that building as a significant landmark in the town it is located in, or the many institutional meanings associated with its use, such as the significance of that building as the home of the university's administration. Different discourses related to the building can become backgrounded or foregrounded. The backgrounded discourse related to the history of the building being constructed on native land can become foregrounded in the university faculty's land acknowledgment statements included in their email signature lines or opening speeches at university functions.

As language learners interact with their environments, they develop methods to interpret the world and its meanings (van Lier, 2000, 2004). For example, a learner who changes their phone settings to Finnish learns to use the applications through visual and linguistic cues by navigating the phone. When learners interact with their peers in a chat conversation, they need to interpret and respond to their interaction partners' messages and thus adapt to the interaction event.

Van Lier (1996) describes language learning through the stages of *exposure*, *engagement*, *intake*, and *proficiency*, which often intertwine. Because of the focus on the learners' reflections on their language use in the wild, this study especially focuses on exposure and engagement. In the exposure stage, the learner is exposed to target language material, which they need to engage to learn from the exposure (van Lier, 1996). The source of the linguistic exposure connects to the different hierarchies that are created (*interaction order*, see Section 3.1.1): If a language learner seeks out linguistic exposure from expert language speakers, the interaction can be more hierarchical than if they decide to discuss with their target-language-speaking peers (Article I). Learners, in this study, actively seek out target language exposure prompted by the portfolio task, and they then engage with the exposure by processing it in their written reflections. The Independent Use Portfolio, the feedback from the teacher, and the target language speakers with whom the learners interact support them in the engagement process. The learners can thus utilize target language affordances for their learning (van Lier, 1996).

Communication, as viewed through the ecological orientation, is seen as a semiotic rather than just a linguistic process, and visual cues and embodied interaction are part of the meaning-making. In the previous example, where a language learner navigates their phone with the help of images and symbols in the applications, meanings are highly contextual and tied to certain times and places (van Lier, 2000, 2004), and learners actively process information multimodally and with their senses, while involved in both intentional and incidental activity (see Section 2.2.1).

Language ecological analogies have also been criticized (see, e.g., Edwards, 2008; Pennycook, 2004). Pennycook (2004) encourages researchers to pay attention to the metaphors related to nature and ecology used to describe

language learning because of their potentially misleading aspects. Pennycook (2004) argues that ecological analogies are part of the historical developments that want to see humanistic things such as languages or cultures biologically. These metaphors can be understood as harmfully depoliticizing linguistic diversity. For example, following the logic of language ecology, language loss would also be interpreted as something that would naturally happen through this fight for survival, although many ecological linguists themselves are in favor of linguistic diversity. In addition, as Pennycook (2004) argues, language ecology "downplays human agency and linguistic creativity" (p. 223), although agency is central to learning. It is therefore important to understand the limitations of the ecological analogies: Languages and language speakers are not to be considered species that fight for existence. This study recognizes that learners of Finnish at a U.S. university are mostly learning the language for reasons other than mere survival in the environment: They explore the target culture and create social connections through the language. In addition, this study emphasizes the role of the individual in the learning process through the focus on agency, which will be elaborated on in the following section.

2.1.2   An ecological approach to agency

Learning requires an active and agentive learner, and it happens in social interaction through adapting to the environment in an active, dynamic process (Atkinson, 2011; van Lier, 2000, 2004). Ahearn (2001) defines agency as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112). It happens when individuals engage with the affordances of the environment (Hsieh et al., 2022, p. 2), meaning how individuals use the resources of their environment and their social context to function and succeed in it (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Duff, 2013; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Ahearn (2001) encourages researchers to focus on exploring the sociocultural mediation of agency in different contexts and situations (p. 122).

When we examine learners' agency through the ecological orientation, we are not just examining their personal properties, but also the ecologies in which they act (Priestley et al., 2015). This study features a context seemingly limited in affordances (more about affordances in the following section) when it comes to Finnish language learning, as learners do not get exposed to Finnish automatically outside of class. Not many Finnish speakers, in the context of the study, live in the same town apart from their learner peers, so learners need their agency to seek out practice opportunities. They reach out to their existing Finnish language contacts and access digital environments.

Although agency is heavily contextual and understood in relation to the environment, it is still something that can be achieved by an individual when their "personal capacities" interact with the "affordances, and constraints of the environment" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 19). These personal capacities can be linked to the individual's life experiences and expectations (*historical body*; see Section 3.1.1). Thus, agency relates to an individual's "ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and … pursue their goals" (Duff, 2013, p. 417) and their perception of to what extent they can direct their actions (Jones, 2007, p. 254).

Tying these together, agency is the individual's ability to control their actions, but also their perception of themselves in relation to their actions. For example, a language learner interested in music can actively pursue using songs in the target language for pronunciation practice or to learn new vocabulary. Their effort and ability to search for useful songs and to use them, and their perception of the usefulness of this activity for their learning, constitute their agency.

When emphasizing the significance of the environment, we must also understand agency as a shared, collective phenomenon, organized contextually in communities (Vaughn, 2020). Language learner peers in a class can have a mutual goal of learning that they pursue together, at the same time strengthening their interpersonal relationships and their individual agencies. A group of peers can jointly take charge of the collective learning effort, for example, by recommending resources to peers.

Both the learner's ability to control, and their perception of their ability to control their actions, can evolve over time. Agency is situational and positional: It is shaped in relation to others (Vaughn, 2020, p. 113). An internalized sense of agency, however, is needed for lifelong learning (van Lier, 2010), so that individuals can direct their actions even after they are not enrolled in a language class.

In sum, agency is (1) achieved by an individual and (2) positional and contextual, shaped collectively with the support from the environment. Through instruction, teachers can enhance an individual's agency in their environment. Pedagogical arrangements that enable learners to affect their environment can support their agency (Vaughn, 2020).

2.1.3 Agentive learners utilizing the affordances of their environment

A concept closely linked to agency is affordance: what perceived possibilities the environment can offer an individual and how the individual uses these (Gibson, 1979; van Lier, 2000). This study views affordance ecologically in relation to agency. In other words, affordance is the relationship between the actor and the target, and it enables activity but does not cause it (van Lier, 2000). Originally Gibson's (1979) concept, the concept of affordance has been explained through ecological and biological metaphors to describe what possibilities the living environment can offer animals. However, the analogies made with the animal world do not give sufficient credit to the role of agency (Pennycook, 2004, p. 223). It is necessary to look at agency and affordances together (Hsieh et al., 2022). If learners are active and committed, and engaging their agency, they can observe linguistic possibilities and use them for linguistic activity (van Lier, 2000).

Affordances are formed ecologically in the relationship between the learning environment and agency. Especially when looking at digital spaces, where learners can rather freely access a great number of affordances, it is clear that agency and affordance should be analyzed together through an ecological lens (Hsieh et al., 2022): Affordances are elements from the environment picked up by the individual. In a study by Hsieh, Chuang and Albanese (2022), enhancing learners' agency during a course project also enhanced their use of

digital affordances. So far, few studies have focused on contextual affordances from the point of view of learner agency from an ecological approach although various contexts shape how we relate to agency and affordances (Hsieh et al., 2022, pp. 3–4).

Different things can appear as affordances for different actors, and according to Norman (1988), objects can also have affordances that do not become actualized. Gibson's (1979) original definition of affordance links it to sensory perception: Affordances are where we see or perceive them. One individual may see affordances where another one does not. In this study, it is possible to analyze the affordances the learners utilize. Unused affordances are more challenging to operationalize because they are not salient to the teacher-researcher or possibly even to the learners. Affordances are closely tied to action and if a learner does not act upon an affordance, it is difficult to analyze whether they have perceived it as an affordance in the first place. Although sensory perception is the first step, some level of action proves the affordance's real potential.

As individuals are impacted by their immediate environments but also by contexts beyond their immediate reach (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979), this study examines affordances on multiple levels. On the macro level, the institutional setting of the Finnish Studies program, and the society and culture within which it is nested, provide affordances for the learners' Finnish language learning, and on an even wider level, the conceptions of language learning in the cultural context afford learning to the learners. On the meso level, the portfolio assignment is an affordance for the learners' learning of Finnish. On the micro level, one word in an interaction event can function as an affordance for situated language learning.

In the context of this study, affordances can be created and enabled institutionally or non-institutionally in digital or material spaces. Some are offered by the institutional program, for instance, extracurricular events like a conversation hour organized by the Finnish Studies program, or non-institutionally, provided by friends and other target language-speaking contacts, online communities, and target language content that the learner is interested in. The Internet offers almost limitless affordances for language practice. Learners can use their digital environment in diverse ways and find different affordances in it (Hsieh et al., 2022). Online affordances can also be institutionally or non-institutionally provided, depending on whether learners use the course learning management system or access the digital wild (Souro & Zaurou, 2019b).

Affordances can also be examined through different categories, such as linguistic, semiotic, social, cultural, and digital (see Figure 3). This categorization was developed by Hsieh, Chuang and Albanese (2022) to describe the affordances of virtual English as a lingua franca exchange. It also applies to the context of the present study, which is multimodal and often expands to digital environments. I added the category of *material affordances* because the learners in this study did not act in digital environments only. It is to be noted, that the

categories overlap. For example, all the affordances are by default social, and many of them are digital.
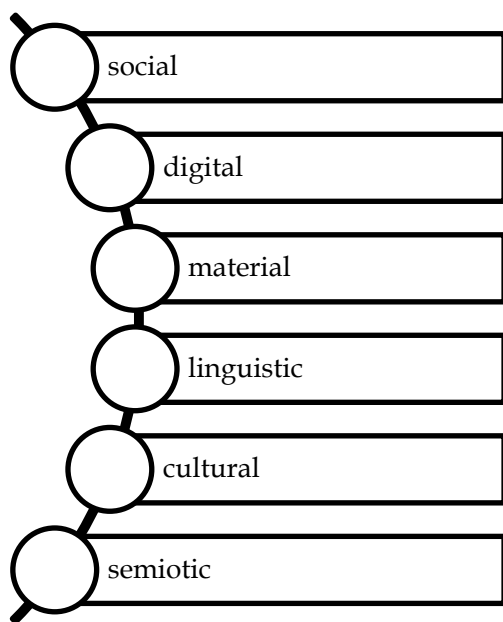
FIGURE 3   Types of affordances in the study

Learning a language is a social endeavor because language is essential in communicating and connecting socially (Eskildsen, 2022, p. 59). As learning happens in social interaction (Atkinson, 2011; van Lier, 2000, 2004), learners use their *social affordances* for language learning. Social affordances, in the study, can include the teacher, learner peers, and other target language speakers. Learners can reach out to their existing social contacts (see also Article III) and practice using the target language with their interaction partners, thus receiving exposure. Many technologies, such as chat, require existing contacts with other target language users.

The Internet and mobile devices enable many *digital affordances*. Digital affordances can be games, chat, and social media. Mobile devices enable, according to Lai and Zheng (2018), "the mobility of time, space, and learning experience" (p. 300; see also Ducate & Lomicka, 2013): Learners are not limited only to what is within their immediate material environment but can engage in language learning activities even when waiting for a bus, for example. Learners can change the language of an application, or the entire phone navigation, into the target language, and then navigate it or use it to receive further exposure (Ducate & Lomicka, 2013; van Lier, 1996). Internet and technology enable collaboration, reflection, interaction, creativity, searching and organizing information, and access to authentic language use (e.g., Haines, 2015; Komppa & Kotilainen, 2019; Richards, 2015). With the term *material affordances*, I make a distinction with more technology-mediated practices, as exemplified above. Learners can, for example, read a book printed on paper.

Of course, sometimes the distinction between digital and material (or offline) is not clear-cut, as mobile devices bring the internet everywhere (*ubiquity, kaikkiallistuminen*; Isosomppi et al., 2023). However, as Jones and Hafner (2012) state, digital affordances impact our actions in many ways, enabling us to do, think, and be things that we could not if we were limited to the material world only. Without digital technology, we could not share a picture with a large group of friends or post a comment for our professional networks to see. Having access to these kinds of affordances has changed how we see the world today. For example, access to news reporting on television has changed the way we think about the news as a phenomenon, as we can know broadly what is happening in the world, whereas earlier we would have been limited to the news of our local communities (Jones & Hafner, 2012, p. 5). Digital technologies also enable us to explore different identity positions through membership in different digital online communities. If we were limited to the material world, the communities might be limited to the peer language learners and the teacher, and perhaps the few target-language speaker community members living in the area.

In the study, *linguistic affordances* are the situated language use opportunities the learners have for example, when they produce language to interact in a chat. Learners can utilize target language exposure (van Lier, 1996). For example, they can learn vocabulary in a video game, idiomatic expressions used by a friend in an email, or ways to address people in a TV show. *Cultural affordances* refer to, for example, when learners learn about Finnish upper secondary school students' graduation traditions through a picture shared by their discussion partner in a chat (Article I). Language and culture learning are often closely connected, and these two dimensions are inseparable from one another (Godwin-Jones, 2016).

Douglas Fir Group (2016) also mentions *semiotic affordances*, which is a relevant category, because communication, in the ecological approach, is seen as a process that involves both linguistic and semiotic resources such as visual cues and embodied interaction that are also part of the meaning-making (van Lier, 2000, 2004). However, semiotic affordances are backgrounded in the study, as they support learners' use of linguistic and cultural affordances. Semiotic affordances play an important part in meaning-making (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 27). Eskildsen (2022) notes that regular everyday interaction events can be full of semiotic affordances that L2 learners can use (p. 62). In digital environments, these semiotic affordances can be very rich, as learners can use images, movement, symbols, etc. in the meaning-making process. The more different contexts L2 learners participate in, "the richer … their evolving semiotic resources will be" (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 27). Digital affordances enable many semiotic affordances, such as different visual cues that help a learner navigate a language learning application in addition to the linguistic affordances in the form of text.

According to Gibson (1979), the prior experiences, beliefs, and so on of an individual impact how they use affordances (*historical body*; see Section 3.1.1; Article II). Perhaps a student is interested in Finnish music, for example, and is

motivated to listen to Finnish songs, read the lyrics in Finnish, and use them as learning material, because she has had good experiences doing it before in other languages. In addition, every learner has a linguistic repertoire and resources that they can use when interacting in the target language (see, e.g., Blommaert, 2005).

In sum, affordances, in the study, are social, digital, material, linguistic, semiotic, and cultural elements in the environment or the target language exposure that hold potential for interaction and enable learning. Affordances are analyzed in connection to agency, as learners report which affordances they have taken up and what they have done with them.

Overall, Section 2.1 explained how I operationalize agency and affordances within the ecological approach. I conceptualize language ecology to mean the following things:

1. The social support provided in the environment plays a significant part in the learning process, and thus language learning is not considered only an individual process. A learner's ability to get practice in the target language depends much on whether and what kind of practice partners they can find.

2. Learning happens through the process of adapting to an environment. If a learner struggles to navigate a game in the target language, for example, they can try different commands to move forward.

3. Language learning is also affected by wider societal contexts, such as institutions, teaching approaches, or online communities, in addition to the immediate contexts in which the learner participates.

The following chapter will outline the conceptual and theoretical foundation of the Independent Use Portfolio and review the related literature.

2.2   Learning in the wild

2.2.1   Defining language learning and teaching beyond the classroom

This study emphasizes the significance of the wild as a resource for classroom language learning. Reinders, Lai and Sundqvist (2022), whose edited volume compiles research in the area of language learning and teaching beyond the classroom, emphasize that the field is not consistent in its use of terminology, and call for clarity.

Benson (2011) uses the concept of *language learning and teaching beyond the classroom* (LLTBC), which Reinders, Lai and Sundqvist (2022) consider the broadest of the different concepts used to describe a phenomenon that has many different names. Benson (2011) avoids making a strong distinction between learning that takes place inside and outside of the classroom and, in reality, these dimensions are part of a continuum.

Benson (2011) divides these different dimensions into four categories based on *location* (classroom, outside-of-class), *formality* (formal, informal), *pedagogy* (how much instruction is provided, or does the learner engage in self-study), and *locus of control* (is the learner in charge, or who makes the decisions). Other

researchers have since expanded the model by adding further dimensions to it. Many language learning events mix features of these different dimensions (Benson, 2011). Learners can be tasked to search for information in the target language online using their mobile phones during a language class activity, and access environments that go beyond the language class, while remaining physically in the classroom space. Conversely, learners could be studying a language outside of a formal curriculum, such as using a language learning application or a TV show specifically made for language learning. Although these kinds of activities take place physically outside of the classroom, they can resemble activities connected to taking a course (Benson, 2011). Thus, making clear distinctions between inside and outside-of-class learning is challenging and unnecessary. Each activity rather falls on a continuum.

LLTBC can involve different types of learning: formal, non-formal, or informal, but it centers on informal learning. Schugurensky (2000) defines *formal learning* as institutionalized, being based on a hierarchical system, and leading to a diploma or a certificate. *Non-formal*, on the other hand, means often voluntary educational activities that are not part of an official curriculum, such as workshops or extracurricular programming, but involves teachers. *Informal learning*, then, is defined as what formal and non-formal are not. It can take place within a formal or non-formal context but is not tied to their official curriculum. (Schugurensky, 2000.) For example, if learners use their mobile phones during a classroom task to find information, they can engage in informal learning. Following this definition, informal learning can happen even in a classroom.

Informal learning can involve different types of learning. Schugurensky (2000) defines informal learning to be:
1. self-directed (done without a teacher's assistance)
2. incidental (the learner did not set out to learn something, but in retrospect realizes that they had indeed learned something)
3. to include socialization (the learner internalizes some values and practices of everyday life through the process).

Schugurensky's (2000) definition of informal thus describes the type of learning that takes place in LLTBC, although it does not say anything about the context in which it takes place.

Incidental learning is the opposite of *intentional learning*, and it takes place, for example, when a learner, engaged in a target language activity, such as reading a text, pauses to think about a word previously unknown to them (Webb, 2020). Incidental learning is a feature of informal learning (Schugurensky, 2000). It is the by-product of performing a task (Ellis, 1999). Learners of Finnish, when they chat in Finnish with a friend, for instance, can learn the language incidentally, when they stop to ponder on a word used by their conversation partner. However, if they then seek out more information on a specific linguistic element that they encountered in the chat, they might learn more intentionally. Thus, although most LLTBC research, as Reinders, Lai and Sundqvist (2022) point out, focuses on "self-directed incidental learning" (p. 4), learners can also engage in intentional learning beyond the classroom. For instance, a learner who

plays a digital game can engage in incidental learning, but they can also set out to intentionally learn vocabulary from that game. To expand on Schugurensky's (2000) definition of informal learning, it could be argued that it is *often* or *mostly* incidental but can also be intentional.

Because Benson's (2011) concept of LLTBC, by describing a continuum, is so general in range, another concept is needed to emphasize learners' activities outside of class. Two concepts have been used: *extramural L* and *learning in the wild*.

Extramural L or *extramural English* is a concept developed by Sundqvist (2009) to refer to any English learning that happens outside of the walls of a classroom, such as through gaming or watching TV shows. Sundqvist (2019) later expanded the term to *extramural L* to also consider languages other than English. Sundqvist's (2009) definition does not include the word *learning*. Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) emphasize that extramural L does not refer to deliberate, intentional learning but does not exclude it either. However, it is strictly defined as happening outside of the classroom (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). The concept, therefore, has no strong ties to institutional and intentional learning.

The research tradition using the concept of *language learning in the wild* emphasizes the "real-life and situated nature of LLTBC" (Reinders et al., 2022, p. 2) but also the pedagogical aspect (see Section 2.2.3). Sauro and Zourou (2019b) define the wild as being learner initiated, not necessarily connected to any educational context. However, they do not explicitly exclude the instances where learners would be engaged in, for instance, playing a video game or chatting freely in the target language in the classroom. This study uses the concept of learning in the wild because of its strong connection to pedagogical research literature. As stated in Chapter 1, this study was motivated by the drive to develop language pedagogy and support learners' learning in the wild. Although previous research on language learning in the wild focuses heavily on oral communication because of its background in an ethnomethodological research tradition and conversation analysis (Thorne & Hellermann, 2022, p. 42), I argue that the concept is also suitable for describing non-oral social actions.

2.2.2   Researching language learning in the wild

Eskildsen, Pekarek Doehler, Piirainen-Marsh and Hellermann (2019) address a need to expand the contexts of language learning research to concern "the full ecology of the wild" (p. 2). Although the wild plays a major part in most learners' language learning, historically, most language learning research has focused on classroom learning, investigating, for example, teaching methods and classroom interaction (Reinders et al., 2022; Thorne & Hellermann, 2022). To fill this gap, there has recently been a growing interest in researching learning beyond the classroom either on its own or in connection to classroom learning, stirred by the recent technological developments that have exponentially grown learners' access to informal learning affordances. Researchers of language learning beyond the classroom come from different fields and research interests, such as

computer-assisted language learning or study abroad research. (Reinders et al., 2022.)

Studies on learning in the wild have often focused on institutional language use situations, such as customer service encounters, in which learners can use the language as a tool to access services (Clark et al., 2011; see, e.g., Eilola, 2024; Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2019b) or workplace interactions (e.g., Lehtimaja, 2019, on learning language during a workplace training for nurses) where communication happens through a work role. In contrast, the present study focuses mostly on non-institutional language use. Learning in the wild, in the study, refers to informal free time activities mostly due to the foreign language learning context where the target language serves the purpose of maintaining and constructing social connections and gaining access to information and entertainment (see the categorization by Lai et al., 2018). However, because the Independent Use Portfolio was assigned to the learners within an institutional context, and they had to record, report, and reflect on these situations in a portfolio assignment, many of their activities are connected to institutional language use. Furthermore, many free time practices learners participate in are organized within an institutional framework, such as conversation hours. During conversation hours learners also make references to content learned in class (Kivik & Räsänen, 2019).

In addition to focusing on institutional situations, most "in the wild" studies such as those in Reinders, Lai, and Sundqvist (2022) examine agency and learning environments in a second language environment, where learners often have a wider range of affordances in their environment for active learning. This is especially typical in research on Finnish learners (see, e.g., Komppa & Kotilainen, 2019; Lilja et al., 2022; Strömmer, 2017). In contrast, the U.S. Finnish studies program offered an interesting setting for the study because learners had more limited access to resources than what is typical in "in the wild" research.

Consequently, learning in the wild was expanded to online spaces, and the digital wild (Sauro & Zourou, 2019b), as the activities took place in global, mediated, and technology-enhanced environments. A great deal of the digital wild research has focused on fan fiction (e.g., Shafirova & Cassany, 2019), gaming (e.g., Sundqvist, 2019), and social networking sites, and especially on the learning of English (see Sauro & Zourou, 2019a). There is a need for more studies that address learning in the digital wild in the context of LCTLs (cf. Theodórsdóttir & Eskildsen, 2022, about Icelandic, and Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2019a, b, about Finnish, in in-person interactions).

To aid in filling this research gap, the present study expands the (digital) wild research to the LCTL of Finnish in the United States. With LCTLs, the digital wild becomes perhaps even more important, because learners might not automatically get exposed to the target language outside of class (Article II). The digital wild provides these learners with opportunities to experience immersion and an environment close to that of second language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2016).

2.2.3 Bringing wild language use back to the classroom

Wagner (2015) suggests that the relationship between the wild and the classroom can appear in two ways: First, classroom activities can inspire and direct the target language activities the learners engage in their everyday lives. Learners bring their unpredictable outside-of-class interactions to the classroom to reflect on and make sense of, possibly preparing them for later repeating the same activity. Second, the teacher can create classroom tasks that relate to the learners' experiences in the wild, so that they can gain tools to use the language outside of class (Wagner, 2015).

Thorne, Hellerman and Jakonen (2021) propose a third way. They introduce the concept of *rewilding education* as a metaphor for creating pedagogies that facilitate the structured use of the wild in classroom education. They illustrate this with a project in which augmented reality was used to facilitate learners' cooperation and use of their material spaces as resources for learning. The learners moved outdoors on a campus area and the game gave them tasks that related to the material spaces around them (Thorne et al., 2021).

Because the ecological conditions for language learning in the wild are often unpredictable and challenging, learners need to learn flexibility and ways to manage unpredictable situations already during their language class (Thorne et al., 2021; Wagner, 2015). Learners in the present study could not control their interaction partners' turns and they ran into communication trouble they would then process in their portfolios. Real-life interactions can be challenging to plan for since even simple customer-service interactions do not often follow textbook-like sequences (Wagner, 2015).

Many strategies enable bridging language learning practices and learners' everyday life encounters. Wagner (2015) argues that teachers can help learners make sense of their encounters and prepare for repeated interactions by encouraging reflection but cautions that debriefings in small groups or one-on-one conversations can take a great deal of time. Clark, Wagner, Lindemalm and Bendt (2011) describe how encounters in coffee shops can be harnessed for language learning purposes by engaging the actors – baristas and the learners themselves – to commit to target language use instead of switching to English. Thus, the social environment is crucial in these pedagogical arrangements. The different actors that learners interact with, such as store clerks, baristas, and even the learners' romantic partners, take on new roles as language supporters. To enable practicing the social side of communication, these actors should help keep the focus on communication and not on language-related episodes. (Clark et al., 2011.)

These types of learning practices have been brought to the classroom in pedagogical interventions. In Lilja and Piirainen-Marsh (2019a, b), who greatly inspired the present study, learners first prepared for coffee shop interactions in the classroom, then went into the wild, and returned to the classroom to report their experiences. These interactions were oral customer service situations, whereas, in my study, the interactions were mainly technology-mediated free time activities, and often text-based. In the study by Lilja and Piirainen-Marsh

(2019a, b), the preparation phase made language learners notice and reflect on the practices they would use in the wild. The debriefing made their learning salient in the classroom.

2.3   Reflection and portfolios

2.3.1   Using reflection to learn from experience

In Gibbs's (1988) classic reflection model, developed from the educational theorist Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, learners move from processing a concrete experience to evaluating and analyzing the experience, leading to an action plan for a future language use event. Kolb (1984), in turn, reports drawing on the work of the psychologists Lewin, Dewey and Piaget.

Experiential learning theories emphasize the role of the learners' construction of knowledge from their own experiences over information transmission where the teacher introduces the theories to the learners directly (Gibbs, 1988; Kolb, 1984). The learner actively constructs knowledge based on their experience and then tests out their own theories in practice (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning theories, rather than the transformative learning model developed by the sociologist Mezirow (1981), characterize the type of learning from reflection that the learners in this study are engaged in. In this study, the importance of reflection is in how it harnesses the potential of learning by doing. Rather than transform their ideas, the learners reflect on their use of Finnish in the wild to process the exposure and learn from the experiences they have collected.

Gibbs (1988) introduces a practical guide for teachers of all fields to help utilize the potential of using reflection to learn from different kinds of experiences, such as those gained in a nursing course. It is perhaps this practicality of Gibbs's (1988) book that makes it so popular for teachers of different fields: Rather than a great deal of theorization, the book focuses on introducing thoroughly designed prompts that teachers can use to scaffold their learners to do reflection (see Article IV). The Gibbs (1988) model has since been adapted to different contexts. For example, Dressler, Becker, Kawalilak and Arthur (2018) describe the process of constructing a cross-cultural reflective model to enhance pre-service teachers' experiential learning when studying abroad.

Gibbs's (1988) reflection model includes the following steps of reflection (p. 49), which are often, like in the original, presented in the shape of a cycle:
1. initial experience
2. description
3. feelings
4. evaluation
5. analysis
6. conclusions (general)

7. conclusions (specific)
8. personal action plans

It must be noted that while Gibbs (1988) talks about *learning by doing*, he does not distinguish what kind of learning he is talking about. [2] Pedagogically, reflection is an intentional learning activity, although incidental learning is part of the initial experience (for these definitions, see Section 2.2.1).

2.3.2 Reflection in university language classes

LCTL and other foreign language instruction in the United States relies heavily on the proficiency goals developed by the professional organization the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2024a). These goals emphasize communicative competence and the reaching of proficiency levels, leaving less attention on meta-level skills and reflection (Diao et al., forthcoming). The proficiency-oriented teaching tradition has de-emphasized the role of critical reflection in the U.S. foreign language classrooms (Simard et al., 2007), although several studies (e.g., Dam & Legenhausen, 2011; Porto, 2007; Simard et al., 2007) address its importance in the development of learner autonomy. The communicative method has even been seen to discourage reflection (Tarvin & Al-Arishi, 1991) because of its heavy emphasis on sole target language use. However, since U.S. university-level foreign language instruction aims to fulfill the important curricular goal of general education, meta-level skills should not be ignored even at the lower language levels. Reagan and Osborn (2019) argue for the importance of reflection and propose that U.S. foreign language programs could start departing from the focus on proficiency goals.

Reflection is key to learning from experiences in the wild (see, e.g., Gibbs, 1988; Wagner, 2015). If learners only experience a linguistic element in the wild once, they might not remember it later, unless supported to do so (Eskildsen, 2022). They need to process the exposure to learn from it (see Section 2.1.1). It is a useful practice that can facilitate *doing learning* (Lilja, 2014) and enhance remembering. The classroom task can provide a platform for it.

In the context of higher education foreign language learning, reflection has been used for learners to process their learning experiences and make personal connections to the target language in their learning beyond the classroom. For example, Marden and Herrington (2022) used written reflections for learners to reflect critically on their learning in their group work with so-called native-speaker tutors.[3] Learners in Kessler (2023, p. 1057) engaged in reflective writing about their mobile-assisted language learning with the language learning application Duolingo. Crane (2016) used reflective writing for learners to

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[2] Although coming from a slightly different paradigm, the concepts of *explicit* and *implicit learning* can be used to describe the kind of learning done in the portfolio. Requiring a reflection can help make the learners' implicit, tacit knowledge from experience more explicit, facilitating learners' ability to articulate "some kind of rule or description" for what they have observed (Gasparini, 2004, p. 204). However, in this dissertation, I view learning from the ecological perspective (see Section 2.1).

[3] As explained in Section 1.3, I do not use the concept of native speaker in this study.

critically reflect on their understanding of the German language and their own language-learning journeys (p. 55). Most of the previous studies conducted in the foreign language learning context focus on reflecting on general experiences, like Crane (2016), or teacher-predetermined situations, like Marden and Herrington (2022) or Kessler (2023). The Independent Use Portfolio focused on learners' specific self-selected activities instead of teacher-determined ones.

Many of these studies consider that written reflection provides teachers and researchers access "into the internal, largely private world of the language learners" (Bailey, 2022, p. 355). For example, Kessler (2023) states that journals "provided a clear window" into learners' metacognitive awareness (p. 1057). In contrast, I view written reflection, in the context of classroom language learning, as an interactive process where learners explain their choices to the teacher. In other words, in my view, written reflection is a process that consists of several *socially mediated actions* or *social actions* (Scollon, 2001; see Section 3.1.1) that are moderated by the learner's deliberate or not deliberate choices on what to communicate to their teacher. When reflection is used as an assessed classroom assignment, it must be considered the learner is writing to the teacher as the recipient to whom they explain their choices. Porto (2007), who studied Argentinian university-level English learners' reflections on their classroom language learning, found that almost all the reflections addressed the teacher and more than half of them were written in the form of a letter. The learners sought the teacher's confirmation of their reflections and included requests to her (Porto, 2007). Thus, because the learners submitted their reflections as part of a classroom task, they wrote with the teacher in mind. The role of a (language) learner has certain established social roles and expectations: When learners reflect on their learning in a classroom task, they are writing to the teacher, which impacts how they express themselves (*interaction order*; see Section 3.1.1).

Several studies (e.g., Dam & Legenhausen, 2011; Porto, 2007; Simard et al., 2007) address the importance of reflection for learner autonomy. Thus, rather than language acquisition directly, reflection has been seen to help build learner autonomy and "facilitate L2 development" (Simard et al., 2007, p. 510). For example, Simard, French and Fortier (2007), who studied French elementary-level English learners' written reflections, could not find a direct correlation between L2 development and learners' journal reflections but found some links between them (Simard et al., 2007). Corrales and Erwin (2020) found a connection between the depth of language learners' reflective tweets and their overall performance in the class, but also no direct correlates. Following these findings, the present study is not interested in language learning per se, but in the use of reflection to develop learner agency, which facilitates their learning.

2.3.3 Portfolios as an empowering form of assessment

Portfolios are considered an alternative, empowering type of assessment in contrast with so-called traditional assessments such as language tests (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al., 2021; Lynch & Shaw, 2005). Unlike tests, portfolios provide learners with more context and enable the integration of different language skills (Abrar-

ul-Hassan et al., 2021). Chostelidou and Manoli (2020) consider portfolios a useful, empowering method to assess learners with learning differences.

Some studies, such as Chostelidou and Manoli (2020), differentiate electronically submitted portfolios from more traditional ones by calling them *e-portfolios*. However, since most portfolios today are submitted in an electronic format, the addition of the *e* seems unnecessary.

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) includes a reflective writing component in which learners set goals for their language learning and then reflect on their achievements (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010). It includes the documentation of activities and reflection, as well as aims to help learners develop their "learner autonomy, plurilingualism and intercultural awareness and competence" (Council of Europe, 2024b). The European Language Portfolio features learners' work with different languages and includes elements such as a biography and a language passport.

Abrar-ul-Hassan, Douglas and Turner (2021) list the different types of portfolios typically used in language teaching: a showcase portfolio, a progress portfolio, and a working portfolio. Lynch and Shaw (2005) list the following characteristics of optimal portfolios:

1. The students actively participate in the selection of the portfolio components.
2. The students reflect on this selection process, and their reflection is included in the portfolio.
3. The process of creating and selecting the portfolio components is included in the evaluation.
4. The evaluation contains elements of peer and self-assessment.
5. The portfolios are evaluated by persons familiar with the individual students and their learning context.
6. The students participate in deciding the criteria for evaluating the portfolios.
7. The evaluation is reported qualitatively, as a profile or other detailed description of what the student has achieved.

(Lynch & Shaw, 2005, p. 265; I added the numbers)

Portfolios involve learners throughout the assessment process, and they give learners a choice over what to present (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al., 2021, p. 3). Lynch and Shaw (2005) emphasize this process nature as a crucial feature of portfolio assessment (p. 272): It is significant that the focus is not only on the outcome. Portfolios can also enhance learners' "emotional growth" (Chostelidou & Manoli, 2020, p. 518). According to Abrar-ul-Hassan, Douglas and Turner (2021), teachers also play an active part in the portfolio process because they assess the learners' work and support learners in the process. They consider it important that assessment practices are carried out throughout the process (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al., 2021). In Section 3.2.1, I will explain how the Independent Use Portfolio connects to these categories.

2.4 Previous nexus analysis studies on language learning in the wild

Nexus analysis has been popularly used to explore issues related to language teaching and learning (see the review by Kuure et al., 2018), such as the study by Tiermas (2022) on disciplinary social and linguistic practices in a physics class or Legutko (2024) on multilingual approaches to writing instruction. Nexus analysis has also been used to study family language policy (see, e.g., Vorobeva, 2024), language teacher training (see, e.g., Tumelius, 2022) and pre-service teachers' language learning (see, e.g., Dressler et al., 2021). In this section, however, I will discuss previous studies that examine (non-teacher-trainee) learners' language learning or use in the wild.

The study by Ruuska (2020) focuses on very advanced Finnish learners' identity work and language use in everyday life contexts. The study revealed that very advanced Finnish speakers needed many strategies to engage in complex identity work to manage their everyday language practices and achieve legitimacy in Finnish. Leskinen (2023) examines language-related experiences in the trajectories of three migrants who were participating in skilled migrants' training. Their lives and trajectories were impacted by practices related to language choice in different situations, different ideologies related to migration, and institutional language requirements. The participants' language choices and practices were situational, and they became skilled in multilingual interaction (Leskinen, 2023). Ruuska's (2020) participants are very advanced Finnish speakers, and Leskinen's (2023) participants have a working proficiency (B level in the European Framework of Reference), in contrast with my study, which features A1- to B1-level learners (see Council of Europe, 2024a; more on the participants in Section 3.2.3). In addition, the participants in Ruuska's (2020) and Leskinen's (2023) studies use Finnish in Finland.

To my knowledge, Karjalainen (2012) is the only other nexus analytical study that focuses on Finnish language speakers living in the United States. Karjalainen (2012) applied the approach to the language biographies of American Finns and examined the mobility of language through migrant stories. Even partial language skills functioned as a resource to the participants, and their Finnish skills were connected to many material and ideological dimensions (Karjalainen, 2012). Karjalainen (2012) uses nexus analysis as an analytical tool in her ethnographic study, especially to connect the micro and macro levels of analysis (p. 87). She does not specifically follow the three stages of nexus analysis (see Scollon & Scollon, 2004, see Section 3.1.1) but refers to them in the description of her ethnographic data collection. Haneda (2005) is another study focusing on an LCTL in the North American context. The study focuses on Japanese learners' writing practices in a classroom context. The study found that the learners' investment in their writing was connected to their life trajectories and memberships in communities of practice. The focal learners had either Japanese heritage or had lived in Japan before (Haneda, 2005).

The participants of my study do not live in Finland (cf. Leskinen, 2023; Ruuska, 2020), and most of them do not have any Finnish heritage (cf. Karjalainen, 2012). Yet also to these learners, the Finnish language seems to be an important means of building connections, and the ability to speak Finnish as an LCTL makes them stand out from other speakers in the area. Ruuska (2020) and Karjalainen (2012) both conducted short-term ethnographies, although both were very familiar with their research contexts, in which they held insider positionalities. My *engagement* (see Section 3.1.1) in the research context lasted for seven years.

A couple of nexus analytical studies focusing on Finnish learners' language learning in the wild have focused on working life contexts. Strömmer (2017) focused on cleaning work and Virtanen (2017) on nursing. These studies found that learners' agency, the affordances of their environment, and social support are essential in learners' use of linguistic resources.

Some nexus analytical studies conducted in the Finnish context focus on learners' learning of English with digital technologies. Kuure (2011) used technology-mediated discourse analysis to investigate English learners' learning of English outside of school. The case study focused on Oscar, who invested a great deal of time in a virtual game that he played at home. Online games and related activities enabled several affordances for language learning, although learning language was not the main goal – it was more central to him to build social connections, solve problems, and build communities with peers. Online communities were available to Oscar when he needed them. Potential spaces for learning were created when some English language expressions or game features became the target of negotiation in the game (Kuure, 2011). Koivisto studied (2013) elementary-level pupils' use of mobile devices in the classroom context. Specifically, it investigated how the pupils oriented to the introduction of mobile devices in their language classes and found that they were prejudiced about bringing these free time practices to the classroom context. Similarly, Tapio's (2013) study showed a contrast between learners' English language practices in and outside of the classroom. Tapio (2013) studied Finnish Sign Language (FinSL) signers' use of English and found that the pupils had multiple affordances for learning English and took agency over their technology-mediated informal English language activities. The interesting finding of the study was that those affordances and resources were not recognized or actively utilized in classroom language teaching.

In sum, the previous studies focus on the affordances or limitations of the learners' material (Strömmer, 2017; Virtanen, 2017) and digital environments (Kuure, 2011; Koivisto, 2013; Tapio, 2013) (see also Figure 3). I focus on an LCTL, Finnish in the United States, where the learners' access to material affordances can arguably be even more limited than those who live in a target-language-speaking context, so the digital affordances are emphasized. In addition, the learners of my study do not study a mainstream language (Koivisto, 2013; Kuure, 2011), so there might be fewer digital affordances available. The previous nexus analytical studies focusing on language learners' target language learning or use

in the wild have either focused on a mainstream language as a target or a language to which the participants had a connection through their heritage or current or prior residence in the target culture. To my knowledge, there are no previous nexus analytical studies that examine LCTL learners' learning in the wild when the learners do not have a heritage or residency connection to the target language and culture. Examining these kinds of learners' practices in the wild and encouraging these practices through classroom pedagogy is especially important when the learners' access to affordances might be limited. The present study attempts to fill this gap.

3 CONDUCTING THE STUDY

3.1 The theoretical and methodological approach

3.1.1 Nexus analysis

The ecological orientation discussed in Section 2.1 needs to be paired with a methodology that takes into account the complexities of language use in its ecological context (Hult, 2010). A multimethod approach is necessary because it can facilitate seeing the connections between social actions and the entire nexus (Hult, 2017, p. 93). Nexus analysis enables capturing such complexities (Kuure et al., 2018).

Nexus analysis takes *social action* as its starting point (Scollon, 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 2004), which, according to Scollon and Scollon (2004), is "any action taken by an individual with reference to a social network, also called a mediated action" (p. 11). Scollon and Scollon (2004) explain taking this micro-level approach because "much of the social world that we come to take for granted is constructed out of these rather small pieces of action" (p. 64). Social actions can be divided into smaller and higher-level actions (Scollon, 2001). For example, when a higher-level social action is writing an email, narrower actions would be opening the email application, choosing a recipient, writing a greeting, and so on. In the process of *circumference*, the "act of opening up the angle of observation to take into consideration these broader discourses in which the action operates" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 10–11), it is determined how small a unit the researcher zooms in on in their effort to find the appropriate unit of analysis. The social actions this study focuses on are explained and listed in Section 3.3.1.

According to Scollon (2013), an action can only happen once. Practice, on the other hand, means that an individual action can be seen "as being the same as that action" (Scollon, 2013, p. 185). Thus, writing an email could be characterized as practice because the same actions are conducted in a rather similar fashion in repeated instances. Practice can be considered as an abstraction

or an idealization of how unique and concrete actions can be grouped together (Scollon, 2013, p. 186). The entrance point of nexus analysis is the *site of engagement*, defined by Scollon and Scollon (2004) as "a unique historical moment and material space when separate practices … come together in real time to form an action" (p. 12).

Discourse, in nexus analysis, means two different things, the small 'd' and the capital 'D', as divided by Gee (1989). The small 'd' discourses are "any instance of language in use or any stretch of spoken or written language" at the micro level (Gee, 2014a, p. 226). Discourse is also analyzed at the macro level as the big 'D' Discourse. Big 'D' Discourses are defined as "ways of being in the world… forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes" (Gee, 1989, pp. 6–7). In other words, Gee (1989) sees the big 'D' Discourse as an "identity kit," meaning the things that form a social identity (p. 7). Nexus analysis engages in the analysis of both (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 90), as the big 'D' Discourses are enacted in the small 'd' discourses. For example, a learner can enact their expert position in U.S. politics in the way he writes about it in a forum post with confident expressions (Article II). The challenge is to be able to provide evidence of how the micro-level action and wider societal level connect (Lane, 2010, p. 67), which nexus analysis helps do. Section 3.3 will outline how I have operationalized the small 'd' and the capital 'D' discourses in this study.

Nexus analysis examines the "discourse cycles that are circulating through the moment of social action" that is being studied (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 87). It aims to find out which discourse cycles are relevant to understanding the social action and looks for the sources of those discourse cycles (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 103). These discourse cycles or *semiotic cycles* (Scollon & Scollon, 2005) that nexus analysis maps are *historical body*, *interaction order*, and *discourses in place* (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Together they shape and are shaped by social action. The cycles can be operationalized separately: however, it is important to study all the intersecting cycles together to get the full picture of the nexus of practice. Figure 4 introduces the cycles of discourse and summarizes what they mean:

Historical body:
prior expectations and experiences of the individuals

Interaction order:
social order, hierarchies, and arrangements

social action

Discourses in place:
the "wider circulating discourses that are already present … when the action occurs" (Hult, 2017, p. 96)
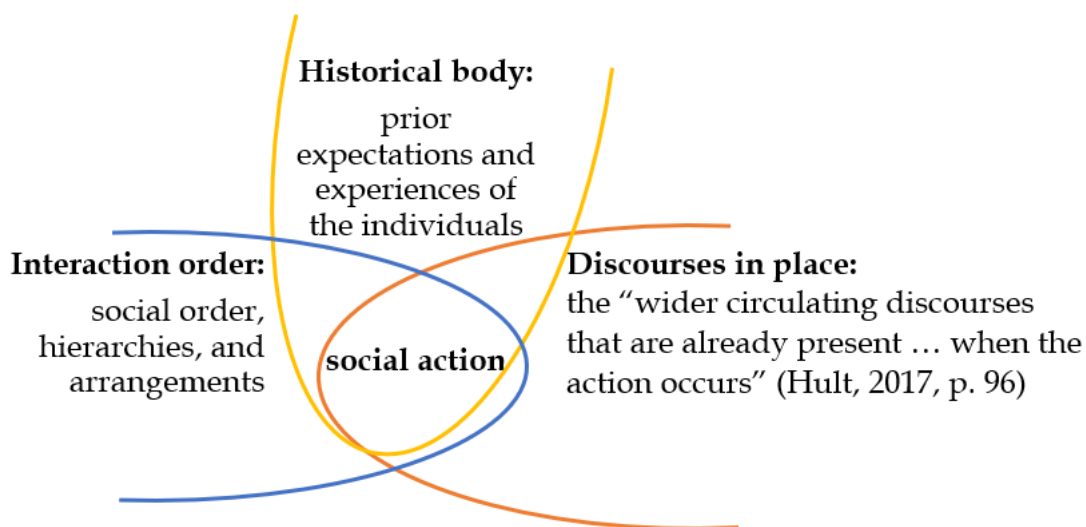
FIGURE 4   Cycles of discourse (adapted from Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 20)

Originally philosopher Nishida's (1958) concept, the *historical body* embodies the actors' life experiences (Scollon & Scollon, 2005, p. 108), their life histories, prior experiences, "goals and purposes, … unconscious ways of behaving and thinking" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 19, 46). Scollon and Scollon (2004) prefer the concept of historical body over Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) habitus, because they view habitus as being too static and abstract (Scollon & Scollon, 2005). When starting to learn a new language, we carry within our bodies our previous experiences of learning other languages, which shape how we orient ourselves to learning the new language. Learners also bring in the traditions and ideas of what it means to be a language learner and a university learner. Learners might also have had previous encounters with the target language and culture which shape their thinking. Historical bodies, in this study, are understood dynamically "as action" (Jones, 2007): They can change over time (Article II, p. 3). However, our physical bodies also impact how we are seen by others in a situation (Beiler, 2022). Following Forsman (2015), this study also focuses on historical bodies at the collective level, as "constructions connected to collective narratives, such as the lived history of the language class" (Article II, p. 3) that the learners have attended together.

Participants in interaction define one another through social hierarchies (Goffman, 1983, p. 3). *Interaction order* encompasses different social arrangements and hierarchies that shape actions in a given situation (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 19). A typical interaction order at a grocery store checkout is that the cashier greets the customer, scans the products, and asks whether the customer wants a receipt. If the cashier were to sing a song instead, the expected interaction order would be disturbed, and the customer might get confused. The interaction practices of language classrooms are often dynamic and there are many hierarchies in place. The roles of teacher and pupil are inherently asymmetrical, and this impacts how turns are distributed in the classroom (Seedhouse, 2004; Tainio, 2007). Classroom interaction order varies depending on the pedagogical

focus of the class: whether it is on form and accuracy, meaning and fluency, or completing a task (Seedhouse, 2004). Learners can carry expectations of the classroom interaction order in their historical body (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 23). For example, language learners can enact a typical classroom interaction sequence even if the teacher has left the class (Seedhouse, 2004).

Scollon and Scollon (2004, p. 14) state that "all social action is accomplished at some real, material place in the world." Hult (2017) defines *discourses in place* as the "wider circulating discourses that are already present … when the action occurs" (p. 96), which shape our actions in that place. Discourses in place can be material or conceptual. Scollon and Scollon (2003) use discourses in place to refer to the symbolism of signs in the material world and the meanings they place on our interactions (p. 11). Hult (2015) defines them as "the material and the conceptual context in which the action takes place" (Hult, 2015, p. 224).

In other words, discourses in place are the overt and covert discourses enabled by the material dimensions, visual elements, design, and interactional affordances of a place (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 163). For instance, a customer in a grocery store is directed by signs of products, and how the shelves, corridors, and cash registers are located. It would be highly atypical for a person to try to climb over the shelves, for example, because the material discourses in place direct how we move. At the same time, our activities are impacted by more conceptual discourses, such as dieting talk in the media, or an often-repeated TV commercial for a chocolate brand that impacts customers' actions in a store. Material discourses in place in a classroom can be, for example, the course syllabus, or the assignment that the learners are tasked to follow. Classroom environments are characterized by the preference of different signs, which can represent institutional discourses, or can be hand-written by the students, for example (for more on signs, see Scollon & Scollon, 2003). A classroom seating order reflects discourses related to teacher and student positions in a school environment: the teacher standing up on a platform and the students positioned in the audience, or everyone seated around a round table. At the same time, the classroom seating order impacts the interaction order of the classroom (Tainio, 2007).

There are several discourses in place foregrounded and backgrounded in each social action and it would be impossible to analyze them all. That is why it is important to ask, "which discourses matter here?" (Wohlwend, 2020, p. 29) to narrow down the focus of the analysis. It is useful to deal with discourses in place as they are materialized so that the focus is not too abstract (Raudaskoski, 2021). For example, when looking at the ideologies that permeate a school environment, one can analyze how they materialize in school curricula or the signs that are posted on the building walls. For example, in the staff dining room of a university I have worked at, there is a sign that prohibits loud talking in the room and a device that blinks red if the noise gets too high. I interpret this kind of sign and the placement of the device to reflect two separate discourses: The sign promotes a quiet and peaceful environment for relaxation, but it also communicates that the room is an academic environment and a workplace as well as that the people who use that space are not to have too much fun in it.

All the cycles of discourse can be seen to have both conceptual and material dimensions, as in Table 1.

TABLE 1   The conceptual and material dimensions of the cycles of discourse

	abstract/conceptual	physical/material
Interaction orders	Norms that control how social action is organized How we position ourselves in relation to other people	The seating arrangement
Historical bodies	Our experiences and life histories	Our physical bodies (Beiler, 2022)
Discourses in place	The "conceptual context" (Hult, 2015), such as ideologies	The "material context" (Hult, 2015), such as signs on walls

The discourse cycles are *conceptual instruments* (Hult, 2017, p. 100) that help see the studied phenomena holistically. By operationalizing them separately, we can reveal some possibly invisible practices. Although nexus analysis aims to find out how these cycles shape actions together, in some studies, one of the cycles might receive less emphasis over another (Hult, 2017, p. 101). In Section 3.3.1, I explain how I have mapped the different cycles of discourse in this study, and in Section 3.3.2, I explain how I have analyzed their impact on the social actions that the study focuses on.

In the present study, nexus analysis was used to structure the research process. Although the study heavily draws on Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis, the process of data collection, the type of data collected, and the analysis methods did not strictly follow their field guide (pp. 152–178). Nexus analysis came in after the data collection had started, but even partially retrospectively it helped operationalize the different stages of the research process. Scollon and Scollon (2004, pp. 8–9) introduce three activities of doing nexus analysis: *engaging*, *navigating*, and *changing* the nexus of practice, as introduced in Figure 5.
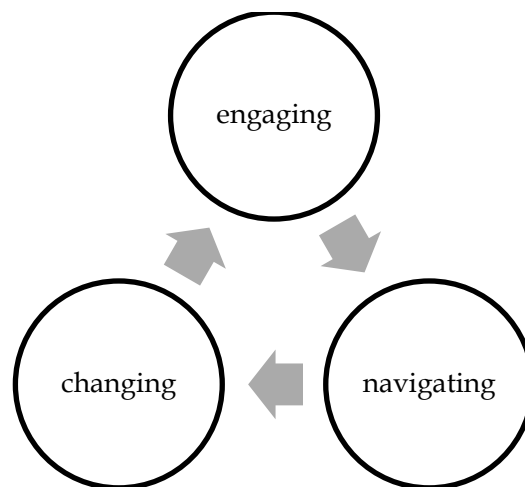
FIGURE 5   Activities of nexus analysis (adapted from Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 153)

The figure illustrates the cyclical nature of the process: The stages overlap and intersect. This study explored two closely intertwined nexuses of practice as part of the same research process.

In the first stage, the researcher *engages the nexus of practice*. The researcher familiarizes themself with the social actions and actors that are essential in the studied social issues and recognizes, selects, and narrows down their focus. Nexus analysis contrasts the arrangement typical in the ethnographic tradition where the researcher would observe the participants from the outside (Scollon & Scollon, 2007). During the engagement stage of the nexus analysis, the researcher aims to be recognized as one of the participants, or at least be clearly identified by them (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 153, 2007). The researcher interacts with the key participants and is recognized by them. The researcher identifies the most important cycles of discourse, which are formed by the historical body, the interaction order, and the discourses in place. (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 153–154.) In Section 3.3.1, I will explain how I engaged the nexus of practice.

In the second stage, the researcher *navigates* the nexus of practice by searching for connections and relevance in the different discourse cycles and analyzes them (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 159–160). Scollon and Scollon (2004, p. 87) call this activity *mapping*, the goal of which is to understand broadly what factors have impacted the social action. Here we can ask: "How have just these elements come together at just this moment to produce this particular action?" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 169). According to Raudaskoski (2021, p. 253), we can use any method, such as interviews or observations, to reach this understanding, but the focus of the analysis needs to be on what the participants perceive as meaningful. The researcher cannot simply come up with explanations or try to somehow be objective (Raudaskoski, 2021).

The next part of navigating is *circumferencing*, examining what "semiotic ecosystems" impact the actions in focus. The semiotic ecosystem consists of the cycles of discourse, the different personal and societal level meanings that come together in social action (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 88–89). In this stage, the researcher conducts a discourse analysis. It was part of the *navigation* stage to trace the different discourses and decide which ones deserve further examination, and then analyze their impact. As Lane (2010) states, nexus analysis provides the tools to expand the discourse analysis, as the analyst can explore how the life histories, interaction patterns, and surrounding discourses intersect in the nexus (p. 77). Nexus analysis enables zooming in and out in the discourse analysis and movement between the micro and macro. Using the analogy by Scollon (2013), *zooming in* can be like looking at an online map to see the street names to find out how to get to a restaurant, and *zooming out* is needed to see the city as a whole and what places surround the restaurant (p. 186). Understanding how discourse is constructed at the micro-level is necessary to see how the macro-level is constructed, and at the same time understanding the big picture can help understand what is happening at the interaction level. In Section 3.3.2, I first explain what I did to map the relevant cycles of discourse to focus on and, second, how I zoomed in to the interaction level.

The stage of *changing* includes re-engagement with the nexus of practice which can mean direct actions. The researcher can make salient the different practices in place and bring social change (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 177–178). Even navigating the nexus already changes it, because the process results in asking new questions, and the participants become more aware of the studied phenomena (Hult, 2015, p. 225). Change is the part where the researcher can directly contribute to the nexus of practice and bring in their own contribution. As expressed by Wohlwend (2020), with nexus analysis, we can locate the social actions that can be changed to reconstruct the nexus. Nexus analysis is thus both *deconstructive* and *reconstructive* (Wohlwend, 2020, p. 8). It first focuses on analyzing the discourses that shape the social action and making different links visible, before pointing out which ones of the actions could be changed. Often the change must start from the smaller scales because those are the ones we can change. Implementing change on the small scales can lead to change on the wider scales (Hult, 2010). The idea is to study all the factors first before the change stage: Nexus analysis does not advise changing anything for the sake of changing before reaching a comprehensive understanding of the nexus. I discuss the changing stage in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.1.2 Exploratory practice

In addition to nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), the study is informed by exploratory practice, which integrates teaching and research practices (Allwright, 2005; Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2017), and it is conducted by an insider teacher-researcher (see e.g., Nakata, 2015). In exploratory practice, research practice is engaged in the regular classroom teaching and learning practices as different dimensions of the same phenomenon (Hanks, 2017).

Exploratory practice bears a strong resemblance to action research (see e.g., Cohen et al., 2011; Kemmis et al., 2014) and design-based research (e.g., Campanella & Penuel, 2021), although they emphasize slightly different aspects of the research process. Action research is a type of practitioner research where teachers examine their own practices with the aim of changing them (Cohen et al., 2011). The teacher-researcher orients to solving a specific problem in the classroom (Hanks, 2017). Design-based research also orients to changing existing practices through a pedagogical intervention, even though the teacher does not need to be a teacher-researcher improving their own practice but can collaborate with a researcher. Revising and re-examining the design and developing theory are emphasized (Campanella & Penuel, 2021). While all these approaches share similar features, exploratory practice is particularly useful for the present study because it encourages being puzzled about classroom practices and seeks to understand why things happen rather than orienting to solving problems, although improving classroom practices can still be a desired outcome (Allwright, 2005; Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2017). Exploratory practice emphasizes the role of learners, alongside their teachers, as researchers of their own practice, and thus has a stronger focus on learner agency (Hanks, 2017). This distinction is not strict, since also in critical participatory action research, participants can be

empowered to participate in different parts of the research process (Kemmis et al., 2014), and many design-based studies aim to empower the participants (see the case examples in Campanella & Penuel, 2021).

Nexus analysis can reveal and make salient invisible practices (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). In this study, it worked as a method and an approach to discover and explore practices that can otherwise go unnoticed in classroom instruction and learning. Classroom instruction needs to connect to learners' everyday lives, but it is often challenging for a teacher to know what target-language practices the learners engage in once they leave the classroom. Many of these practices are, in a way, "invisible," to the learners' teachers and peers (Benson, 2011).

Leuverink and Aarts (2019) synthesize the features that make teacher research distinct from regular pedagogical practice or other types of research, based on their analysis of 30 teacher research publications, most of which are review publications. Figure 6 summarizes the characteristics:
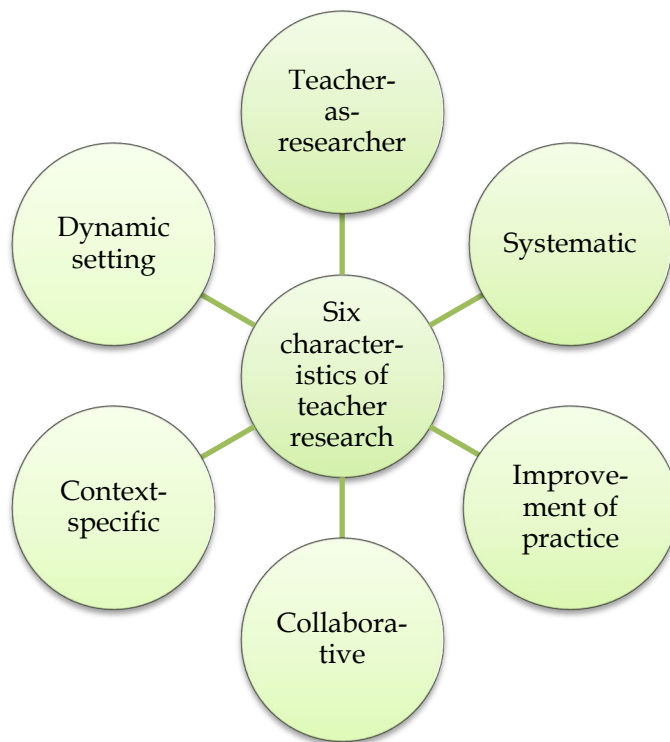
FIGURE 6   Six characteristics of teacher research (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019, pp. 760–762)

Teacher research includes the *teacher-as-researcher*, which at first glance might seem apparent, but in fact is a unique feature of teacher research. In the present study, the teacher of the Finnish language program conducted the study as the researcher, instead of an outside researcher or a research partner, for example. I researched my own educational practice in the environment where I worked (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019, p. 760). It is also a central feature of nexus analysis that the researcher participates in activities in the research context (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

Teacher-research is *systematic*: To lead to improvements in practice, the research needs to be conducted systematically (see also Hanks, 2017, p. 51–53). What that systematicity means depends on the chosen approach (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019). The present study followed the stages of engaging, navigating, and changing typical for Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis, and traced the cycles of discourse circulating through the social action.

Teacher research aims for *improvement of practice*: According to Leuverink and Aarts (2019), although teacher research can contribute to general knowledge, its main goal is to improve teaching practice. The present study, however, considers these two goals equally important. This study stemmed from the need to re-evaluate the curriculum and learning tasks used in the Finnish language classrooms, but it offers insights into the improvement of foreign language instruction in general. Although teacher research is often considered less generalizable due to the diverse contexts in which it is conducted, it is the diversity of the different contexts that make it so ecologically valid (Rose, 2019, p. 899).

Teacher research is often *collaborative*: It is conducted collaboratively with the stakeholders (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019) who, in the present study, were the learners who participated in the study. The teacher-researcher remains in dialogue with the stakeholders throughout the process of the study (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019) and the portfolios were constantly discussed in the classroom with the learners.

Teacher research is *context-specific*: It is conducted in the teacher's own educational context (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019, p. 761) which, as mentioned, might make it susceptible to issues in generalizing the findings to different contexts (see Rose, 2019). However, the findings can work as an analogy to other contexts and thus the context-specific features must be rigorously reported so that the findings can be generalized (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019). For the specific features of the context of this study, see Section 1.3.

Taken together, these six characteristics illustrate what makes teacher research distinct from other types of research. At the same time, many of these characteristics, such as systematicity and collaboration, are features that other types of research often share. To say that teacher research is *systematic* makes it distinct from non-research, such as research-informed teaching practice, for example. Especially when examining their own practices, the teacher-researcher must be critical in their analysis (Nakata, 2015).

An important feature of insider teacher-research is that in addition to rigorously reporting about the conduct and context of the study, detailed information about the teacher is given (see e.g., Nakata, 2015). Nakata (2015) introduces three teacher-researcher positions from which data collection and analysis can be approached. These positionings impact how decisions are made in research. Table 2 summarizes Nakata's (2015) categories:

TABLE 2   Different teacher-researcher positionings (Nakata, 2015)

Type of teacher-re-searcher positioning	Data collection	Analysis
1	Outsider	Outsider
2	Insider	Outsider
3	Insider	Insider

The first type is an outsider teacher-researcher who collects and analyses the data without much inside information about the learners. The second type is an insider teacher-researcher who collects data from their own students but conducts their study as if they were an outsider, directed by the desire to avoid bias as a teacher-researcher. The third type is an insider teacher-researcher who conducts the analysis from the insider point of view of wanting to understand and improve their own pedagogical practice. (Nakata, 2015.) The second type is popular, especially among graduate students. However, conducting research with one's own students but still being concerned about teacher-bias and data reliability can put teachers in an uncomfortable dilemma where they feel that they would like to help their students learn better with their recently gained knowledge, but they cannot do so at the risk of jeopardizing their data (Nakata, 2015). It is also impossible to "tell the truth" and to present one single true narrative (Hakala & Hynninen, 2007) and it is, in reality, impossible to control for all factors impacting the research study and data to keep it objective (Nakata, 2015). For these reasons, being transparent about the teacher's impact on their own research is a more truthful approach. The third type equals the position of the teacher-researcher in exploratory practice (Hanks, 2017). However, the categories of an outsider and insider are not to be considered dualities (Nakata, 2015) and although the present study has been planned to position the teacher-researcher in the third type, the researcher positioning has fluctuated between the insider-outsider categories at different stages of the project (see Section 3.5).

In sum, this study combines teacher research (exploratory practice) and nexus analysis, because they go well together through their shared focus on examining actions rather than language (see also Scollon, 2001, p. 141), their emphasis on the researcher's insider positionality and participation in the research context, and orientation to changing existing practices (see the previous Section 3.1.1). I use tools and research strategies from nexus analysis to bring systematicity and depth to the teacher research project. The following sections will detail what I did in the engaging and navigating stages.

3.2 Data

3.2.1 The Foundation of the Independent Use Portfolio

This study incorporated a portfolio assessment due to its flexible format: Learners could include examples of their language use in the wild and reflect on them in the same assignment. As portfolios are considered an empowering type of assessment (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al., 2021; Lynch & Shaw, 2005; see Section 2.3.3), using a portfolio was chosen because of its potential to support learner agency.

The data of this study thus comprised of learners' portfolio entries. The Independent Use Portfolio, inspired by conversation analytic studies on interactional competence, was designed to offer an incentive and opportunity for the learners to bring instances of the wild to the classroom, and for the teacher to then develop scenarios based on the portfolio findings that would feed back into classroom learning. Interactional competence means L2 learners' ability "to engage in the dynamic and context-sensitive coordination of social interaction" (Eskildsen et al., 2019, p. 8). As stated in Section 2.2.3, in Lilja and Piirainen-Marsh's (2019a, b) studies on interactional competence, learners in the classroom prepared for their language use actions in the wild, engaged in those actions, and then returned to the classroom to reflect.

The Independent Use Portfolio materialized from a study of L2 Estonian and Finnish learners' interactional competence that I started together with my colleague Piibi-Kai Kivik, who was puzzled by the same questions within the U.S. university in which we taught (see also Article III). In the project, we recorded language learners' classroom and conversation hour interactions over a semester in spring 2019 (see e.g., Kivik & Räsänen, 2019). When developing the portfolio task, we were also informed by the European Language Portfolio introduced in Section 2.3.3 (ELP, 2024), which enables learners to showcase their learning beyond the classroom, integrated with classroom learning. Like the European Language Portfolio, the Independent Use Portfolio, at its early stages, also included a biography, which was not conducted every semester.

For pedagogical reasons, we chose to call the portfolio Independent Use Portfolio (see the definitions outlined in Section 2.2.1). The name needed to be short and self-explanatory in the course syllabi. Independent, in this context, refers to self-directed (see e.g., Abar & Loken, 2010) language use that would not be otherwise part of learners' homework. However, being independent, in the portfolio, did not mean that learners would not receive any social support or scaffolding. Many of the actions the learners reported were social events such as interactions with other target language speakers.

The Independent Use Portfolio functions as a *showcase portfolio* in which learners present what they have done. It partially fulfills the portfolio criteria by Lynch and Shaw (2005, p. 265; see Section 2.3.3) because it includes learner-selected content, a reflective component, self-assessment as part of the reflection, and the learners' own Finnish language teacher as the evaluator. The

Independent Use Portfolio is a type of ongoing, formative assessment, in contrast with traditional summative assessment (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al., 2021, p. 2). Like Gibbs's (1988) reflection model introduced in Section 2.3.1, the Independent Use Portfolio included the elements of description, evaluation, and analysis of a specific experience, and learners' plans for an enhanced future language use event.

Exploratory practice emphasizes the teacher's and students' agency and questions the traditional positioning where learners are the recipients of teacher research, teachers solve those problems, and researchers provide guidance (Hanks, 2017, p. 5). Thus, the learners themselves, as experts in their own language use practices, are considered important practitioners in the study. Access is a relevant concern for anyone doing ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995): The teacher cannot (easily) follow students to where they use the target language in the wild. This study used learner-self-generated and reported data, and involved students as co-researchers (Hanks, 2017, p. 49) who made decisions on what aspects of their language use to present. This practice also supported their agency (see Karjalainen, 2012, p. 90).

All students, independent of their decision to participate in the research study, participated in the Independent Use Portfolio, and the practice also continued after the data collection was over. The portfolios were discussed with the students and the findings impacted classroom practice.

3.2.2 Data collection

The Independent Use Portfolio was used as a course assignment in several Finnish language classes during the years 2019–2020 (see Appendix 1 for one version of the portfolio instructions). Section 1.2 introduced the different types of data included in the study that were collected as part of the Independent Use Portfolio. The data were collected in three cycles. First, in the spring of 2019, I collected portfolios with my colleague, Estonian teacher Piibi-Kai Kivik, as part of the project *Study of Interactional Competence in L2 Finnish and Estonian*, which focused on classroom and conversation hour interactions. Second, the portfolios for the academic year of 2019–2020 were collected by myself. The third and final phase of data collection took place in the fall of 2020, and the Finnish portfolios were collected while Finnish language instruction was conducted entirely online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 7 summarizes the data collection timeline:

spring 2019		*fall 2019*		*spring 2020*		*fall 2020*
•**40 entries** (8 students from 3 levels)	→	•**25 entries** (6 students from 2 levels)	→	•**14 entries** (6 students from 2 levels)	→	•**20 entries** (5 students from 2 levels)
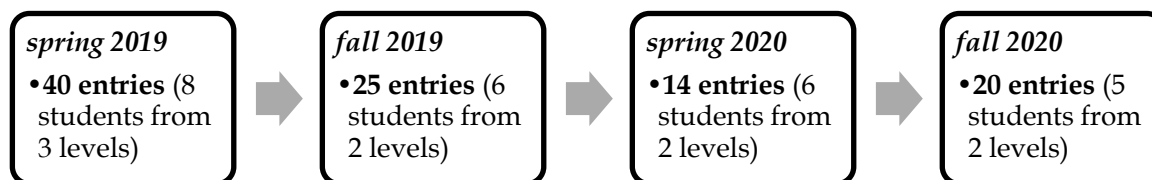
FIGURE 7   Timeline of data collection

In the portfolio, the learners were tasked to use Finnish independently outside of class in any way they chose and to record, describe, and reflect on their language use. Figure 8 summarizes the different components included in each portfolio entry:

Recording
- Format is free. Can be (but is not limited to) any of these: photos, drawings, link, copy of a chat conversation or email exchange, video...

Written description
- In your entry, describe what you did in the target language. When? With whom? Where? Why?
- You can also write about the following:
- What did you say, how did your peer respond?
- What did you learn in this language use situation? New phrases, vocabulary, or something else?

Written reflection
- Also include a reflection, in which you address the following:
- What discoveries did you make about the language?
- What did you understand? What didn't you understand?
- What was challenging or confusing?
- What would you do differently next time?

FIGURE 8   The portfolio components (see also Appendix 1)

Each entry, including all its components, was submitted electronically.

Different level classes and different semesters received slightly different versions of the instructions. The portfolio also carried different names in different semesters, such as *Portfolio*, *Language Portfolio*, *Independent Language Use Portfolio*, and finally, *Independent Use Portfolio*. [4] The developments took place for pedagogical reasons: I felt a need to adapt the task slightly for different language levels and to develop the task for the following semesters as I saw how it worked. For example, the first time I conducted the portfolio in my classes, I separated the written components into description and reflection, like in Figure 8 (see Appendix 1). I adapted the instructions in later semesters, and in some of the new versions, the description and reflection were to be submitted jointly as one text (see Appendix 1 of Article III). First-semester students were tasked to write their entries entirely in English, second-semester learners wrote the description in Finnish and reflection in English, and students in the third semester or higher wrote their entire entries in Finnish.

To illustrate the portfolio components, I have included a portfolio entry from a learner in spring semester 2019, who followed the instructions in Appendix 1. In her recording, the learner included eight screenshots of a chat conversation, and Figure 9 is the first one of them. I have removed the learners' friend's turns from the example. I have included my own translation of the excerpt below the figure.

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[4] Or *Itsenäisen kielenkäytön portfolio*, in Finnish.

FIGURE 9   Example of recording

> My translation:
> Hi! What's up?
> (friend's turn)
> (friend's turn)
> (friend's turn)
> (friend's turn)
> (friend's turn)
> Oh no, what kind of exam do you have?
> I'm really good, spring break starts tomorrow! I'm going to go to New Orleans with friends
> I have also applied to a summer school in X
> (friend's turn)

The learner included the following description:

> Päiväkirjamerkintä
>
> Tässä portfoliossa mä keskustelin kavereiden kanssa Whatsappissa. Mä aloitin keskustelu ja vain kysyin "Miten menee?". Sitten me keskustelimme meidän elämästä.

Esimerkiksi, mä puhuin kesäsuunnitelmasta ja hän puhui penkkareista ja hänen englannin opinnoista. Keskustelussa olivat paljon uusia rakenteita hänestä. Mä ymmärsin niitä mutta en voi tehdä rakenteita keskustelussa itsensä. On tosi kiva nämä rakenteita ovat tekstissä koska se auttaa minua kun mä voin nähdä uusia asioita. Myös keskustelussa mä opin mikä penkkari on. Mä ajattelen mä tiesin sana mutta unohdin sen. Hän lähetti linkki englannin testin oppimäärä, siis mä opin vähän englannin testi suomessa.

My translation:
Journal entry

In this portfolio I chatted with a friend on WhatsApp. I started the conversation and just asked "What's up?" Then we talked about our lives. For example, I talked about summer plans and she talked about *penkkarit* [5] and her English studies. The conversation included many new structures [posted] by her. I understood them but could not produce those structures in the conversation myself. It is nice that these structures are in a text because it helps me when I can see new things. Also, in the chat I learned what *penkkarit* is. I thought that I knew the word but I forgot it. She sent me a link to the English test syllabus, so I learned a little bit about the English test in Finland.

The following is the learner's reflection on the same activity:

Reflektio

Mä ajattelen keskustelu meni hyvin, ei ollut katkos kommunikaatiossa. Keskustelu muistutti mua "opiskella aihe" suomessa on normaalisti sanottu "lukea aihe". Yks asia joka voi parantaa keskustelussa on kieli tyyppi. Maija lähetti viestejä kirjakielessä usein. Ehkä on koska hän tietää mä olen suomen opiskelija ja kirjakieli olisi helpompi mulle, mutta mun mielestä olisi hyvä idea oppia puhekieli vai slangi tekstissä. Oli pieni ongelma kun me puhuimme televisiosta. Hän halusi tietää jos David oli jaksossa jo mutta mä ajattelen hän halusi tietää jos hän voitti, mutta mä ymmärsin myöhemmin keskustelussa.

My translation:
Reflection

I thought the conversation went well, there were no breaks in the communication. The conversation reminded me that "to study a subject" in Finnish is normally said "to read a subject." One thing that could be improved in the conversation is language type [register]. Maija often sent messages in written [standard] Finnish. Maybe it is because she knows I am a student of Finnish and written language would be easier for me, but, in my opinion, it would be a good idea to learn spoken language or slang in text. There was a small issue when we talked about television. She wanted to know if David was in the episode already, but I thought she wanted to know if he won, but I understood later in the conversation.

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[5] A Finnish tradition in which graduating upper secondary school students drive around in trucks and throw candy to school children.

As the examples show, the description and the reflection parts largely overlap, and for this reason, these two elements were integrated in some other semesters, such as shown in Appendix 1.

Students received a grade for each entry. The grading was based on active engagement and effort. Students also received written feedback that aimed to further encourage them to explore different language use situations, rather than traditional feedback on accuracy. For instance, if a learner was interested in Finnish crime shows, the feedback pointed to a crime show that they might like and answered any questions the learners had asked.

The actions the learners reported in their portfolios (see Section 5.1) included a wide range of interactions with other speakers of Finnish in a variety of situations in different modalities and engagement with target-language content. About two-thirds of those activities took place online. A few entries also dealt with learner interaction with the target culture or introspective activities, such as writing a journal. The current Finnish language portfolio data consists of 99 portfolio entries in Finnish and/or (partially) in English, including recordings (video, screenshots, images, text, drawings, or links) of language use and reflections (see Figure 1 in Section 1.2).

3.2.3 Participants

The focus on the one setting, in this study, was chosen to achieve a deeper level of analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 3). All the participants studied in the same Finnish studies program and their total number was 17. The learners participating in the study are students of Finnish at a U.S. university, enrolled in language classes at four different levels, approximately ages 17–50. Due to the specific context and small class sizes, to protect their identities, I do not disclose their exact ages, study majors, or other identifying information. The participants studied Finnish in different classes that aimed for A1- to B1-level proficiencies (see Council of Europe, 2024a).

Three of the articles included named focal learners. Article I focused on Owen, Ivy, Tina, and Vera. Article II featured learners that I named Matt, Bob, and Katya. Article III focused on examples from Eva, Violet, Ella, Kim, Lisa (learner of Estonian), Maya (learner of Estonian), Jenna, and Lucas. I intentionally chose names that were short and rather generic Anglo-American names to avoid identifiability. In addition, some of the named focal learners in the three articles overlap. In each article, different names were given to further avoid identifiability, since the focus of this dissertation was not on following a single learner's trajectory (see Section 3.4). In Article IV, I did not find it necessary to name the learners whose portfolios were featured, because the excerpts were short and served to illustrate intertextuality between the portfolios and the portfolio instructions (see Article IV).

The Finnish courses that the learners participated in met two to five times a week for 45 to 75 minutes, usually in person, but in the spring and fall of 2020, meetings were held online using video conferencing. As reported in the previous

section, the participants were recruited in three cycles, and some of the participants remained in the study through the different semesters.

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Engaging: Entering the zone of identification and defining the social actions

The first stage of nexus analysis is thus engaging the nexus of practice. As the study was conducted in the field, I lived and worked in the studied environment as a regular participant, participating in the everyday functions of the community, which is typical in ethnographically informed field research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This experience as a teacher-researcher gave me access to deeper contextual knowledge an outside researcher would not have access to. The teacher-researcher position meant that entering the zone of identification had taken place before the beginning of the study, as I already had an existing relationship with the participants. Established "field relationships" made it easier to receive consent from the participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 57) and the learners were possibly more inclined to participate, as they knew the study would benefit their own teacher in the planning of the language course they were taking (more about the teacher-researcher positioning, see Section 3.5). One beneficial factor in the study was time (see also Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995): my extended engagement in the research site of seven years of teaching in the same university, which enabled continued access to the research site and a profound understanding of the studied phenomena. I discuss my own historical body and position as a teacher-researcher further in Section 3.5.

The ethnographic posture I take in this study relates to ethnography as an approach and theoretical paradigm rather than as a method. My discourse analysis has been informed by an ethnographic "perspective on language and communication," meaning that I analyze language in its social context as one of the learners' resources in performing their actions[6] (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 5). I did not conduct fieldwork the way it is often understood in ethnography as an outsider entering a community with a fresh mind to collect fieldnotes (Blommaert & Jie, 2010 pp. 4–5; Scollon & Scollon, 2007) but was very familiar with the context even before I started the study (see Section 3.5). I also used my ethnographic knowledge or experience from the context of the study to facilitate the analysis (see Section 3.3.2).

As explained in Section 3.1.1, instead of language use per se, nexus analysis takes social action as its starting point and an important part of the engagement stage is to define the social action that is being studied (Scollon & Scollon, 2004,

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[6] In nexus analysis, language can be seen as a tool or a mediational means that mediates the social actions (Scollon, 2002, p. 7; Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 12).

p. 153). The social actions the learners recorded and reported in the wild are listed in Section 5.1.

The sites of engagement in the wild were different material and digital spaces where the Finnish learners engaged in language use in the wild, in the context of a small university-level Finnish Studies program in the United States. These were, for example, a storefront, a video game, a phone navigation, an online forum, and a sauna. The repeated site of engagement in reflecting on learning in the wild was writing in the Independent Use Portfolio.

3.3.2 Navigating: Mapping the cycles of discourse and conducting a discourse analysis

The navigation started with mapping the relevant cycles of discourse (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 87) by going over the portfolio data. Different actors (learners, classmates, teachers, peers, online communities) and places (the classroom, institutional events such as the conversation hour, home, storefronts, and technological spaces such as a mobile application) come together in the nexus, and certain discourses become foregrounded and backgrounded in the data. I created mind maps and tables on the contents of the learners' portfolios to see what these actors, places, and situations were. I also took notes of my initial observations of the discourses that stood out. This mapping was a way of organizing the data, and I returned to this process several times during the analysis (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 258).

The digital wild, alongside in-person activities, became representative of the language use activities described in the portfolios: With limited access to in-person communities, the learners turned to online games, chats, YouTube videos, and other resources to get access to authentic target language use. Learners could thus access wider communities of Finnish speakers. Since these contacts were mostly located elsewhere in the world, learners needed to be especially self-directed and agentive about reaching them. At the same time, due to globalization and migration movements, learners also encountered occasional opportunities for in-person meetings with target language speakers. It seemed that they were specifically attentive to any opportunities to use the target language. For example, learners happened to run across other Finnish speakers in stores and used even the minimal opportunities they had to practice their Finnish in these situations (Article I).

After the initial mapping, I scanned the data again and searched for repetitions and patterns, but also items that stood out. These observations informed me about possible patterns that I could then group into categories, constantly returning to my research questions but also revising the questions as I oriented my focus (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019).

For each substudy reported in the articles (Article I, II, III, & IV), I formulated an individual set of research questions that guided me to focus on specific aspects of the data (see the summary in Section 4.1). After going over the data multiple times, I realized it made sense to focus the questions around one cycle of discourse at a time. In the later stages of my study, following Dressler,

Crossman and Kawalilak (2021), I started using the discourse cycles as lenses through which I approached the data. Focusing on each discourse cycle separately made it possible to operationalize and examine them closely. For example, in Article II, I used the concept of historical body as a lens to examine the nexus of practice, although I always also analyzed the two other intersecting cycles—interaction order and discourses in place—for a holistic analysis, to get the full picture of the nexus (see also Dressler et al., 2021, p. 609).

For each article, I restarted the process of going over the portfolios with the research questions in mind. I searched for patterns in sentence structures, punctuation marks, pronouns, choices of certain words over others, and so on. I then moved on to seeing these observations as belonging to certain phenomena, which facilitated my grouping of the observations into categories (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019).

After the categorization, I chose representative portfolio entries to zoom in on. These entries were often rich in exemplifying the category I wanted to illustrate. I analyzed these examples in detail to search for patterns but also items that stood out. As an example of a pattern, a learner wrote about his navigation of a phone in Finnish using the repeated pattern of *when I did x, I did it in Finnish* throughout his report. For example, he used the sentence*: When I checked my calendar, I read the months in Finnish.* As an example of an item that stood out, a student I call Matt used the word *random* to refer to some Instagram accounts he followed. He, however, mentioned that these accounts, in fact, belong to the Finnish President and Prime Minister, which indicates that they hold a certain institutional prestige and are not that random after all (Article II). The word *random* thus stood out because it seemed to contrast with the learner's message.

The micro-level analysis drawing on interactional approaches to critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2014a) was used to make syntheses about the macro level. I interpreted this repeated sentence structure of *when I did x, I did it in Finnish* to mean that the learner is emphasizing the affordances of the phone interface for his language learning and his own role in the actions because he is repeating these active verbs. The reflection also shows what the learner can express in his emerging language skills. Upon analyzing the entire portfolio entry where the word *random* had been used, I realized that the word appeared to function as a way for the learner to position himself as unique and different from the other students in his class: He is especially interested in these kinds of institutional Instagram channels (Article II).

Discourse analysis examines language as a social action in its context of use in relation to "the social practices and structures of language users" (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019). It enabled analyzing, for instance, how the learners position themselves against more *expert speakers* (Rampton, 1995), revealing different hierarchies and power dynamics by using language and other semiotic resources. The learners position themselves in relation to other people for example by using the pronouns *we* or *they*. The interactional discourse analysis was conducted to get behind what the learners were saying and doing as they performed different actions and participated in meaning-making mediated by language (Gee, 2014b;

Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 158). I analyzed the expressions the learners used in their reports, reflections, and recorded samples. I used different tools, as introduced by Gee (2014b), to conduct the analysis: for example, making familiar strange and strange familiar (pp. 25–28), analyzing not only what is said, but also what is not said and why, and analyzing subject positions, that is, who is positioned against certain norms and how (p. 116).

In cases where the learner had submitted screenshots of their interactions, such as in Vera's chat exchange (Figure 9), I was able to analyze samples of how the original interaction had unfolded. As the submitted samples were selected by the learner, I interpreted them as their attempts to demonstrate something they brought up in their reports and reflections. When I analyzed such samples of interactions, I first analyzed the learner's report and reflection and then searched the interaction data for the interaction sequences mentioned in Vera's report and reflection. I then analyzed the chat sequence on its own and compared it with Vera's own interpretation of the situation. For example, Vera mentions in her reflection that a vocabulary item, the word *penkkarit*, had caused her trouble in the interaction, but upon analyzing the interaction sequence in the original interactional data, I found no evidence of such trouble, since the interaction partner ignores Vera's concern and continues the interaction as if no problematic source item had been indicated (Article I, pp. 237–238). This led to my interpretation that since the learner used the chat to mediate the interaction, her learner role, in this short sequence, did not cause significant delays in the interaction, making it more like an equal exchange between two peers.

Sometimes the samples the learners had submitted did not include such interaction sequences but rather featured some visual representation of material the learner had explored or created, featuring examples of semiotic meaning-making with visual cues (Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.3). The learner's choice of including a certain visual and framing it a certain way gave me an interpretative lens through which I analyzed the visual. I analyzed what kind of discourses the visual created together with the learner's report and reflection. For instance, a learner had submitted a picture of a Sims character she had created and writes *So I made a Finnish sim, and moved her into a Finnish house that I built* (Article II, p. 10–11). I thus interpreted the picture through how it depicts this so-called Finnishness and found that it reflects a certain neo-colonial bias (see e.g., García, 2019) of what Finnish people look like: The character has blond hair, blue eyes, and Western clothing.

As mentioned, I used each discourse cycle as an analytical lens, so my way of approaching the small 'd' discourses was slightly different depending on the focus of each article. To analyze the interaction order, I analyzed how the interaction was constructed: how the learners position themselves against other speakers, and, for example, turn-taking in the interactions (Article I). To analyze historical bodies, I searched for evidence of past interactions in the interactional data (Article II). The discourse analysis revealed how the participants explain their past actions in retrospect, make sense of their actions, and negotiate them, revealing instances of learner agency (Jones, 2007). To analyze discourses in place,

I looked for "evidence of intertextuality and interdiscursivity"(Hult, 2017, p. 100) in the data to locate relevant discourses in place. I realized that the Independent Use Portfolio instructions circulated through the learners' reflections on the material level as they recycled the instructions in their reflections (Article IV). On the conceptual level, the portfolio task impacted the learners' social actions by incentivizing them: The actions exist because of this discourse in place (Article III).

I used my ethnographic experience as a teacher-researcher to facilitate and triangulate the analysis (see also Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä, 2012). Meanings depend on the context (Blommaert & Jin, 2010, p. 7), and discourse analysis can help make the context a more salient part of analyzing communication (Gee, 2014b). For example, the word *random* in a learner's portfolio entry appears different when it is examined in the context of the full portfolio entry instead of an isolated sentence. The interpretation deepens even more when we know that the learner often highlights his unique interests in the Finnish class he is taking. Gee (2014b, p. 30–31) calls this issue *the frame problem*: The more we know about the context the more accurate our analysis can be, and any conceptual information can change the interpretation of an utterance.

My ethnographic information helped me answer some of the "why that now" questions in the discourse analysis (Kunitz & Markee, 2016, p. 9). It is typical for discourse analytic research that during data collection the researcher acquires contextual knowledge that gives them an insider perspective on data analysis (Taylor, 2013, p. 50). This contextual knowledge was especially helpful in understanding those elements in the data that would otherwise have been challenging to interpret. My presence in the data collection also helped me understand the situational and contextual references made in the interactional data. For example, the reference relations of demonstrative pronouns are easier to understand when the researcher is present in the data collection situation (see Suni, 2008, pp. 47–48).

Figure 10 summarizes the data analysis process:
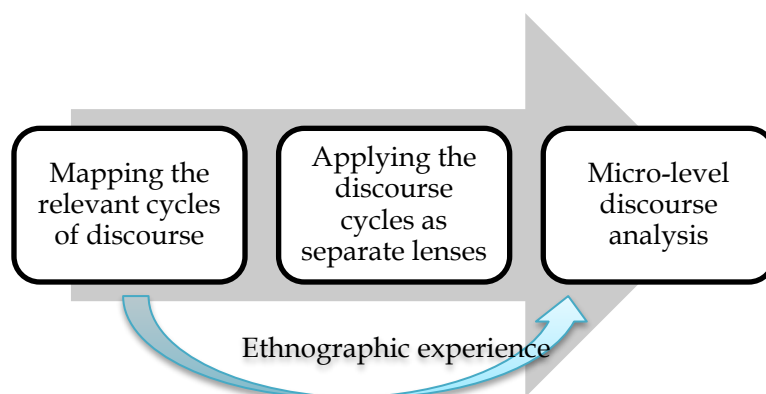
FIGURE 10   Analyzing the data

Figure 10 illustrates the analysis process that was repeated during the study. The different steps largely overlapped: I mapped the relevant cycles of discourse, used the three concepts of nexus analysis (the cycles of discourse, see Section 3.1.1) as separate lenses to analyze the data from different perspectives, and conducted a discourse analysis to see how the big 'D' Discourses were enacted at the micro level. The teacher-researcher's ethnographic experience informed the process of mapping and facilitated the discourse analysis.

3.4   Ethical considerations

The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University. An updated approval was obtained for each data collection cycle (see Section 3.2.2). All potential participants were given a study information sheet that communicated that the study would increase knowledge about learners' independent language use and help the teacher-researcher develop instructional materials and methods to better correspond with the learners' needs.

The fact that the participants would directly benefit from the study was an important ethical component of it: The participants were not just subjects, but they would also gain from the research (Nakata, 2015). Students were not asked to do anything specifically for research, as all of the students completed the Independent Use Portfolio as a regular classroom assignment. Exploratory practice can also be a way of avoiding burdening participants (Allwright, 2005): Learners are not subjects of the study, but they partake in regular classroom activities. In addition, when the researcher is the students' teacher, the data collection instrument does not necessarily draw that much attention, but the students can focus on learning, whereas students might respond differently to an outsider (Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä, 2012).

Because the researcher was also the students' teacher, a third-party assistant helped in collecting student consent. It was communicated to the students that the decision to participate in the study would not affect their coursework or grade in any way and that their teacher would not know about their decision before she had submitted the final course grades. In the first two data collection phases (see Section 3.2.2), the assistant collected consent by entering the classroom while the teacher was not present, and in the third phase of data collection, the assistant administrated participant recruitment via email due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was communicated to the students that they would remain anonymous, and images in any publications or conference presentations would be processed so that participants would not be identifiable. Exploratory practice sees the students as practitioners of the research, and it would be good to credit them for their own ideas (Hanks, 2017). However, because of institutional ethics requirements, it was necessary to keep the participants' identities anonymous. The original data was only accessed by the researcher and stored in a secure place. Because the linguistic community was small (small class sizes and the unique context of studying Finnish), I needed to take extra steps to protect the

participants' identities (see also Tapio, 2013, p. 82). Thus, little information about them is revealed. As mentioned in Section 3.2.3, the learners' names and other identifying information, such as place names and their study majors or professions, if they mentioned some, have been changed from the data. However, since the analysis does not focus on evaluating any personal qualities of the participants but their activity as language learners, the data are not high risk.

Additional ethical consideration was needed to deal with any third parties participating in the data. In their portfolios, learners shared recordings or screenshots of their interactions with friends or other Finnish language contacts. I removed and blurred these third-party turns from the data excerpts in the research articles where necessary.

Like Scollon and Scollon (2004), I researched practices within my own institution and needed to be reflective of any possible challenges, such as maintaining a confidential relationship with the participants who were my students and examining my own motives for the study. Alvesson (2003) cautions that avoiding revealing confidential information can lead to hiding some practices that would be relevant to the study, which I needed to be mindful of when selecting what information to include in my research articles and what to exclude from them. It is also challenging to deal with research that is so closely related to the self (Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä, 2012). I had to constantly evaluate my skills as a teacher, as the portfolio revealed hidden practices and also some possible unintended impacts of the portfolio task (Article IV). As is typical for insider research, the teacher-researcher had a participant position in the study as I generated and analyzed data about my own practices (Nakata, 2015, p. 175). It is typical in language research for the researcher to be part of their own data and to appear in it as one of the participants. The learners sometimes refer to their teacher in their portfolios. Since the portfolio task was part of the learners' course assessment, they received feedback about their entries, which possibly influenced how the data turned out.

As a teacher-researcher at a U.S. research-first university, I navigated different personal and institutional expectations related to research and teaching. Conducting research alongside regular teaching duties can be an overwhelming task. Incorporating research practice into my own teaching enhanced my understanding (Allwright, 2005) and kept my overall workload as a teacher manageable when the primary task was to offer quality instruction to the learners. Barkhuizen's (2021) study of the teacher-PhD researcher Ana revealed identity dilemmas in how she sees *academic institutional research* and teacher research. Academic institutional research was perceived as more meaningless, driven by neoliberal discourses that encourage publishing for the sake of publishing, and teacher research was considered more meaningful, practice-oriented, and impactful (Barkhuizen, 2021). On the other hand, teacher research does not always enjoy the same kind of prestige as research conducted by non-teacher researchers (Rose, 2019). As an educator, I wanted to engage in the production of research-based knowledge so that teaching would inform research, not only the

other way around, with research informing teaching practices (see also Rose, 2019).

The involvement of the teacher-researcher in the different stages of designing and implementing the pedagogical project can be a major advantage (Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä, 2012). Conducting research and teaching at the same time can lead to a more research-based teaching practice because the newly gained knowledge can be put into practice (Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä, 2012; Hakala & Hynninen, 2007). The ongoing research study helped the teacher-researcher understand some of the contexts in which students were using Finnish, which impacted the contents taught in the class. At the same time, being a teacher-researcher enabled deviating from pre-set plans and making decisions on the go (cf. Räisänen et al., 2016).

3.5   My own historical body and position as a teacher-researcher

In ethnographic research, the research findings are affected by the researcher's life history (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 15). The researcher must examine their motives: how they analyze the actions from their own positioning (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). According to Scollon and Scollon (2004), the very beginning point for a nexus analytical study is the researcher's values and positionality (p. 87). Already the research questions come from certain discourses and the researcher defines the field with their questions (Hakala & Hynninen, 2007). Reflections on researcher positionality are thus an important component of all social research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) and are even required from research conducted by a teacher-researcher (Jensen et al., 2022). This reflection is especially necessary when the researcher is highly involved in the research site as a participant observer (Duff, 2020, p. 148), as was I as the teacher-researcher of the present study, working in the same community for years. Examining one's own researcher positionality is, however, also a great challenge (Nakata, 2015). Conducting research as a teacher-researcher requires openness from the researcher and a willingness to engage with findings that do not show the researcher in a positive light (Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä, 2012).

A pedagogical relationship is uneven when it comes to power (Hakala & Hynninen, 2007). As a language teacher and a faculty member, I had the power to make decisions in the classroom and at the curriculum level. Decisions made by the teacher-researcher allow the students to participate in their learning activities (cf. Räisänen et al., 2016). My historical body was shaped by several ideals of language learning. I aimed to be a democratic teacher and to move instruction in the direction of finding out things together and thinking together (Hakala & Hynninen, 2007). I intentionally aimed to make the interaction order in the classroom into a participatory one (cf. Räisänen et al., 2016; Wohlwend, 2020, p. 244) through the implementation of the portfolio task, group and pair work, and for instance classroom tasks that engaged students in project work. The portfolio task also overturned the expected roles of a teacher as the one who

is telling and the student as the listener (cf. Räisänen et al., 2016): In the portfolios, it was the students who were telling the teacher things.

The teacher's background should be considered when reflecting on teacher-researcher positionality (Nakata, 2015). Teacher agency is shaped by the teacher's life histories, teaching experiences, and their own education (Priestley et al., 2015). My historical body as a language teacher impacted what questions were relevant to ask, but also how they were asked. My teaching philosophy and conceptions of good language teaching were shaped by my pedagogical training and ongoing discussions with colleagues about language teaching. I have experience teaching university-level Finnish courses both in Finland and at two universities in North America, along with previous experience teaching adult migrants in integration training programs in different parts of Finland. Experience from teaching in integration training settings, in which instruction was directly aimed at students' integration into the local labor market (see Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015), contrasted with the U.S. university setting, where students were studying an LCTL for rather personal reasons (for more on reasons students study LCTLs, see Murphy et al., 2009).

My historical body also holds experiences gathered as a former and current learner of languages (cf. Alanen et al., 2013; Hanks, 2017), which explicitly and implicitly informed the study. For instance, my experience that text-based chat in a foreign language can contribute to oral fluency (see e.g., Blake, 2009) found its way to the portfolio instructions (see Appendix 1). In reverse, the ongoing study shaped the language learning experiences of the teacher-researcher as a learner of different languages through practical tips from the learner portfolios.

Barkhuizen (2021) found that teachers who are also doctoral students need to negotiate their dynamic identities as teachers and researchers. The duality of the role brings to the forefront different ways of knowing – the researcher directs their eye differently than the teacher. While the researcher seeks knowledge, the teacher is often the source of knowledge for the learners. The PhD student role emphasizes that the position of the researcher, as someone seeking knowledge, is similar in status to that of the students and aims to unravel previous knowledge and assumptions. (Hakala & Hynninen, 2007.)

At the same time, it is not always possible (or even desirable) to separate the role of the teacher and researcher (Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä, 2012). Barkhuizen (2021) suggests that pre-service teachers should have an introduction to conducting research as part of their teacher training, and my research-oriented pedagogical training made it natural to combine the roles of the teacher and researcher from early on in projects conducted with senior colleagues.

Typically, learners of LCTLs treat their teachers as cultural informants and model speakers of the language, especially when they are so-called native speakers of the target language (Magnan et al., 2014). My historical body also carried my position as a so-called native (see Section 1.3 for a brief discussion on the concept of *native*) Finnish-speaking Finnish person in the United States, and as such, I served as a cultural and linguistic informant in the surrounding culture.

Thus, the concrete body of the teacher-researcher can also impact how learners see the target language and its speakers.

In this chapter I outlined how I engaged the nexus as a teacher-researcher, by entering the zone of identification and defining the social actions, collecting data with the Independent Use Portfolio, analyzing it by using discourse analysis, and navigating the ethical questions and my own teacher-researcher positionalities relating to the study. In the following chapter, I outline what I learned while navigating the nexus.

4   ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY

4.1   Summary of the articles

The study aimed to find out how learners of Finnish at a U.S. university learn Finnish in the wild, focusing on two closely intertwined nexuses of practice, *using Finnish in the wild* and *reflecting on learning in the wild*. All four articles analyze all the cycles of discourse (interaction order, historical bodies, and discourses in place) but focus specifically on one. Together, the articles give a holistic picture of the nexus of practice.

Table 3 introduces each article and the discourse cycle it focuses on. The other central concepts of each article are introduced in the third column. The fourth column introduces the respective research questions of each article.

TABLE 3   Summary of the articles

	The cycle of discourse in focus	Other central concepts	Research questions
Article I	Interaction order	Ecological approach and stages of language learning: exposure, engagement, intake, and proficiency (van Lier, 1996) Agency (van Lier, 2010; Mercer, 2011) Expertise (Rampton, 1995)	- How do the learners initiate Finnish language use situations, utilizing the affordances provided by their learning environment and technology? - How is interaction order constructed in these situations?
Article II	Historical body	Agency (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Duff, 2013; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)	- How do language students' historical bodies direct their agency in the digital wilds?

		Digital wilds (Sauro & Zourou, 2019b) New speakers (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2015)	
Article III	Discourses in place	Learning in the wild (Clark et al., 2011; Eskildsen et al., 2019; Hutchins, 1995; Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2019a, b) Dynamic assessment (Poehner, 2008; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005) Learning-oriented assessment (Purpura, 2016; Turner & Purpura, 2015) Learnables (Jakonen, 2018; Majlesi & Broth, 2012)	- How did the portfolio assessment impact students' target language interactions? - What kind of learning did the students report happening in those situations?
Article IV	Discourses in place	Gibbs's (1988) reflection model Scaffolding written reflection (e.g., Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Crane, 2016; Grossman, 2009)	- How do phrases from the Independent Use Portfolio instructions circulate to the reflections? - What are the implications of this circulation… …for the created discourses? …for learning?

The order of the articles in the table does not reflect the order in which the articles were written and published. Writing of Article III began in 2019, already before the official start of the dissertation study. I finished Article I first and Article II third. Article IV was written last.

The focus on one discourse cycle in each article opens different perspectives on the nexus: It enables the nexus to be viewed through a specific lens and, thus, closer examination of it. My definitions of the discourse cycles and their analyses interact across the articles, and I draw all their findings together in Section 5.1 to open up the circumference to consider the full nexus.

In the following sections, I summarize each article separately.

4.2   Article I: Interaction order

Introduction

The first article was motivated by the need to bridge the gap between classroom learning and learners' everyday life interactions by enhancing learner agency and self-directivity (van Lier, 2010). It examined how four focal learners—Owen, Ivy, Tina, and Vera—actively engaged in situations in which they utilized the affordances (van Lier, 2000) of their material and digital learning environments. The focus was on interaction order (Goffman, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 2004) and how the learners' interactions were constructed hierarchically. Agency was defined as literal and metaphorical movement, orientation, or change of direction (van Lier, 2010) and as the individuals' general and situational sense about the impact of their actions and behavior—how they participate in action (Mercer, 2011). The research questions were as follows:

- How do the learners initiate Finnish language use situations, utilizing the affordances provided by their learning environment and technology?
- How is interaction order constructed in these situations?

Background and literature review

Van Lier (1996), whose ecological approach informed the article, has described language learning through the overlapping stages of exposure, engagement, intake, and proficiency. Because I focused on how the learners find and utilize affordances, the stages of exposure and engagement were especially relevant. As van Lier (1996) has suggested, learners need to process their target language exposure to benefit from it (pp. 48–53).

Participants in interaction define one another as individuals and through social hierarchies (Goffman, 1983, p. 3). In the article, interaction order became salient in how the interaction between expert language users and language learners was constructed hierarchically, while the learners defined their own and their interaction partners' language skills (no skills, beginner-level learner, more advanced learner, expert language user, language teacher). I used Rampton's (1995) notion of *expertise* to describe the learners' interaction partners whose language skills were so established that they were not in a learner role in the reported situations. Expertise is constructed in relation to the interaction partners (Rampton, 1995, pp. 340–341).

Data and method

The data consisted of 36 portfolio entries of the focal learners, who were selected because they showcased especially active agency in various types of social actions.

Scollon and Scollon (2004), in their field guide, identified discourse analysis as a suitable tool for the navigation stage, when looking at hierarchies and interaction, so I used discourse analysis to examine how the focal learners reflected on their own agency and interaction (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 173–174). In discourse analysis, language is examined as social action in its context of use in relation to the social practices and structures of the users (Gee, 2014a; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019).

Findings

The analysis showed that the interactions were often constructed hierarchically. The learners and their interaction partners constructed their identities in social interaction and took on different roles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010, pp. 18–20). The learners directed their activity with their own initiative, with the interaction partners in an expert role. Positioning oneself as a learner or an expert language user impacted how the interaction order was constructed.

The learners' active agency and initiative had a significant role in the interactions. I divided the findings into three categories.

1) The learner making initiatives and directing the interaction event

The portfolios of the beginner-level learners were often constructed according to the skill levels of the participants: The learner and the expert Finnish speaker had their own roles in the interaction. The interaction was often initiated by the learner, and the interaction advanced on the learner's terms. The expert language user participated in the interaction within the frame set by the learner.

The beginner-level learners described situations in which they had participated in interaction multilingually using their still truncated repertoires (Blommaert, 2010, pp. 103, 106). In their reflections, the learners paid attention to their abilities to participate in interaction with their Finnish language resources. The learners utilized their interaction partners to get maximal relevant exposure in the target language and the interaction event was often constructed around the learner's questions and the expert speaker's answers. In this way, the interactions often came to resemble interviews.

2) The learners' aim for equal interaction

Several portfolios also showed how the learners aimed for equal interaction not defined by the roles of a learner and an expert. This became salient especially in the portfolios of more advanced learners when the learner had used the target language with another learner at a similar level to theirs. Social media enabled language use independent of time and place (see also Leppänen et al., 2019, p.

110). For example, in chat messages interaction was often structured as an equal conversation between peers. Communication trouble, such as forgetting a word, did not hinder the interaction when the learner could quickly check it. Interaction was thus constructed as a friendly exchange between peers, and the roles of learner and expert speaker were not emphasized in the interaction.

3) Learner as a language expert

The learners also reported on situations where the learners acted as language experts. Because the learners' exposure to the target language in their living environment was limited in the studied context, the learners expanded their chances for target language use with their own activity. They even introduced and taught Finnish to their friends and families in the United States. In these situations, the learners' role changed: Instead of only learners, they were also language experts and teachers. When they shared the target language with other people, they got extra practice. They presented their knowledge of Finnish in a positive light, and the learners also used Finnish to create humor. Studying Finnish gave the learners an expert position, and they indicated being happy to share the language with others. This phenomenon highlighted a unique feature of studying an LCTL: In a target language environment, the learners would have had fewer situations for similar language expert positions because there would have been several experts around. Knowledge of Finnish was a way for the learners to stand out from their peers.

Discussion

The learners participated in many interactions both in person and online. On the one hand, in some situations, the learners described how they seized a sudden opportunity to use Finnish. On the other hand, some examples demonstrated careful preparation, goal orientation, and critical reflection. Overall, the portfolios demonstrated the importance of having opportunities for target language interactions.

The portfolios also showed glimpses of conceptual-level discourses in place, which were the Finnish language learners' conceptions of language and learning. The learners did not aim for perfection but to succeed in communication and be understood.

The findings can be used to develop foreign language pedagogy to better correspond with learners' actual needs in the target language. Teachers could critically evaluate what kind of language use situations learners should be trained for in the class and encourage learners to suggest target situations themselves. Language classes could center on practicing using the target language in acquiring and maintaining relationships, while encouraging learners to explore their living environment as a language learning environment. Teachers could also help learners build networks in the target language and develop tasks where learners can practice communicating with other people using different technologies.

4.3   Article II: Historical body

Introduction

The second article focused on the concept of historical body, defined as the learners' life histories and prior experiences of language learning. The study was motivated by the notion that the influence of historical bodies on learners' agency is often not given enough emphasis in language learning (see e.g., Wedin, 2021). There is a need to develop language education to enhance learner agency and to develop inclusive classroom practices.

The article focused on three focal participants—Matt, Bob and Katya—who used Finnish in the digital wilds and reflected on their learning. There is relatively little research on learners' language use in the digital wilds with languages other than English. The study applied Duff's (2013) definition of agency: "people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals" (p. 417). The research question was the following: How do language students' historical bodies direct their agency in the digital wilds?

Background and literature review

The literature review first defined historical bodies and the connection between historical body and agency and then outlined studies that examine language learners' historical bodies and investigate language learning in the digital wilds. In the article, historical bodies have been treated "as action" (Jones, 2007), and as collective (Forsman, 2015) and individual embodied life histories (Scollon & Scollon, 2005, p. 108). In contrast with Haneda (2005) and Dressler, Crossman and Kawalilak (2021), who also investigated language learners' historical bodies, the participants of the article did not have experience living in the target culture before. It focused on learners in higher education, unlike Koivisto (2013), who analyzed school pupils. Historical bodies were defined in the article as "the learners' prior experiences and expectations of the target language and culture, and the professional or free-time roles they bring to the social action" (p. 3).

Agency, which gets its material from the historical body, is done in the present moment but also has a future orientation (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Jones, 2007). The current literature on language learning in the digital wilds features studies that examine learners of English (see also Sauro & Zourou, 2019a). When learners observe authentic language use, for example when they watch television, they can notice gaps in their own language use (Richards, 2015).

An important concept in the article was O'Rourke and Pujolar's (2015) "new speakers," individuals who are learning their L2 in their adult age without much "community exposure to a minority language" (p. 1).

Data and method

The analysis drew on nexus analysis. Although the article focused on historical body as the lens through which the nexus was examined (see also Dressler et al., 2021), the other two discourse cycles of interaction order and discourses in place were also incorporated in the analysis.

To reach a deeper level of analysis, the article focused on three learners. When looking at the portfolios, I looked for references to the learners' life histories in their portfolios and examined the reflections using discourse analysis to see how the learners wrote "different versions of the historical body onto past situations" (Jones, 2007, pp. 253–254). The analysis focused on the linguistic resources of the learners and how they were writing to the teacher as the audience (Gee, 2014a, pp. 19−20). The "retrospective discourses" (stories) shed light on the connections between learner agency and historical body and how the learners give meaning to their actions (Jones, 2007, pp. 253–254). My ethnographic knowledge facilitated the analysis.

Findings

The analysis revealed how historical bodies directed the learners' choice of learning material, what items in that material they oriented to as their learning targets, and how they oriented to future language use. I thus divided the findings into three parts:

1) Historical bodies directing choice of learning material

The learners' pre-conceptions, personal and professional interests, expertise, or familiarity with the resource directed what resources the learners used as learning material. One learner used official institutional channels as sources for recommendations, one got a recommendation from a peer learner in the same classroom, and one made his learner role salient in his post on a public forum. Historical bodies also had ideological dimensions, such as the perceived prestige of certain resources. The learners' agency was linked to their historical bodies. When they selected their own learning materials, the learners also actively took agency of their language use.

2) Historical bodies directing orientation to learning targets

Historical bodies also directed what learners did with the resources they chose. The learners oriented to certain elements in the target language use and noticed gaps in their language knowledge (Richards, 2015, p. 19) in their reflections, directed by their metalinguistic knowledge, past learning histories, professional

experience, or world knowledge. These elements included cultural aspects and vocabulary items. Experience with a certain platform, like a game, directed learners to use it as a resource. Each platform had its own discourses in place that the learners used for language learning. The learners were also directed by knowledge gained in the classroom or even their implicit biases.

3) Historical bodies directing future learning projects

The learners' historical bodies also directed what they oriented to as their future learning targets in their reflections. They did this by emphasizing their role as learners and highlighting their need to learn more. The learners' historical bodies informed them about potential notice gaps, elements they did not yet know in the target language. They, for example, refer to noticing gaps in their knowledge due to their learner status. They reflected a need for more or enhanced practice in a similar language use situation.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate the impact historical bodies have on learners' language use in the wild and their reflections on their learning in the wild. A relevant implication would be the development of an enhanced portfolio assignment that incorporates critical reflection on the target culture. The portfolio can be used as a tool of inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), in which learners direct their own learning. The article highlights Beiler's (2022) suggestion of expanding the concept of the historical body with decolonial theory. In line with Biesta and Tedder (2007, p. 139), it is argued that the portfolio is a fruitful platform for learners to learn about their own agency. The article concludes by stating that reflection about and sharing of one's life history is a way to enhance the role of learner agency in the language classroom. Learners can start to see how their historical bodies impact their learning.

4.4   Article III: Discourses in place

Räsänen, E., & Kivik, P.-K. (2023). Portfolio assessment: facilitating language learning in the wild. In M. R. Salaberry, A. Weideman, & W.-L. Hsu (Eds.), *Ethics and Context in Second Language Testing: Rethinking Validity in Theory and Practice* (pp. 135–161). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003384922-9

Introduction

The third article was motivated by the need to teach and assess learners' interactional competence, the ability of L2 learners to coordinate their interactions dynamically depending on the context (Eskildsen et al., 2019, p. 8), in contrast with individual performance ability, which is how assessment is

usually done. I collaborated with Piibi-Kai Kivik on the article, which explored the Independent Use Portfolio as an assessment practice that incorporates learners' language use in the wild. We analyzed what kind of washback impact the use of the portfolio had on learners' interactions and learning.

The research questions were the following:
- How did the portfolio assessment task impact students' target language interactions?
- What kind of learning did the students report happening in those situations?

Background and literature review

Lynch and Shawn (2005) have referred to portfolios as being a more empowering type of assessment than testing. According to Abrar-ul-Hassan, Douglas and Turner (2021), portfolios feature integrated skills and a variety of activities. Portfolios have been found to enhance learner motivation and self-reflection, among other things (Chostelidou & Manoli, 2020, pp. 509–510). We positioned the Independent Use Portfolio as being different from other portfolios because of the focus on LCTLs, interaction skills, and learner-initiated situations. We labeled the Independent Use Portfolio as a showcase portfolio, introducing "examples of a learner's best work" (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al., 2021, p. 3). It drew inspiration from the European Language Portfolio (ELP) with its focus on lifelong learning (Council of Europe, 2024b).

The article was guided by research on language learning in the wild (Clark et al., 2011; Eskildsen et al., 2019; Hutchins, 1995) and research on how the wild can benefit classroom learning. It was particularly modeled on a task design by Lilja and Piirainen-Marsh (2019a, b). Another source of inspiration included studies of interactional competence (Salaberry & Kunitz, 2019). The article also discussed learning in *the virtual wild* (Lech & Harris, 2019), a concept similar to that of the digital wilds (Sauro & Zourou, 2019b) that I have used in other parts of the overall study.

Another central concept in the article is *learnable* (Majlesi & Broth, 2012), an item learners bring into "a shared pedagogical focus" during interaction as a relevant item to learn (p. 193). Learners orient to certain learnables in their reflections when they retrospectively point to instances of language use that they ponder. Learnables are learner-identified learning targets, and returning to them after the interaction event might lead to learning.

The article draws connections between the Independent Use Portfolio and dynamic assessment because the portfolio aims to create a positive washback from assessment into teaching, and the learners are assessed based on their active engagement instead of performance. In dynamic assessment, assistance is incorporated in assessment procedures, following the Vygotskian principle of the zone of proximal development, within which learners can reach higher-level performances (Poehner, 2008, pp. 5, 12; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005, pp. 233–234). The Independent Use Portfolio also draws on Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA) (Purpura, 2016; Turner & Purpura, 2015), which treats assessment as a

learning practice, featuring language use in different contexts. Like in LOA, in the Independent Use Portfolio, the learners start the process in the classroom, then go to the wild, and then return to the classroom to reflect, and then possibly go back to the wild.

Data and method

In addition to the Finnish learners' portfolios, a smaller Estonian language portfolio corpus from the same university was also included in the analysis. The two language programs are comparable because they are both small LCTL programs and the two languages, Finnish and Estonian, are closely related. We used a nexus analytical approach (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) and interactional discourse analysis to analyze the data.

The orientation to change that is central in nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 177−178) was introduced both through the portfolio that incentivized learners to use the target language in the wild and also through orienting to possible curriculum-level improvements. In the analysis, we did not focus on language learning per se, but on how students oriented themselves to learning activities and constructed meaning retrospectively (Jakonen, 2018) in their written reflections (Article III, pp. 142–143).

Findings

The findings focused on two identified washback effects: The portfolio as assessment pushed learners to interact in the wild and it also functioned as a means of doing learning through reflection.

1) Portfolio assessment pushing learners to interact in the wild

The portfolios demonstrated how the learners increased their usage of the target language in their communications with their target-language-speaking friends. They reported a willingness to start doing this and to continue the practice because of the classroom assignment, which contrasts with typical classroom assessment practices that usually end when the assessment is complete. Some learners interacted with peer language learners and indicated they did it specifically for language practice, as otherwise the interaction would have taken place in English. Some learners, mainly the Estonian learners whose interactions were included in the article, reported using their target language to establish new contacts, as a way to open an English-language discussion.

2) Portfolio as a means of doing learning through reflection

Having to engage in reflection enhanced the learners' noticing of the elements of language use that they could potentially learn. These learnables were often vocabulary or structures, but sometimes also related to discourse elements such as register, or the pragmatics of language use.

Discussion

The Independent Use Portfolio can thus create the washback effect of adding more of the target language to learners' interactions beyond the classroom and reflecting on their learning in those situations. The portfolio provides the platform but also the incentive for reflection. It can enhance learner agency while also impacting how learners return to and operationalize their learning. It makes metalinguistic processes and reflection part of classroom assessment practices, elevating their status as important aspects of classroom language learning.

4.5   Article IV: Discourses in place

Introduction

The fourth article was motivated by the change orientation of Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis: the need to further develop the Independent Use Portfolio task to scaffold learners' reflections on their learning in the wild. The article emphasized the importance of reflection in learning from experience. Reflection was defined through Gibbs' (1988) reflection model, and viewed as necessary for learners to process and learn from experience. The article suggested that learners could be scaffolded to reflect more deeply, which previous studies by Grossman (2009) and Coulson and Harvey (2013) have also emphasized.

The article applied Hult's (2017) definition of discourses in place as the "wider circulating discourses that are already present … when the action occurs" (p. 96). For example, Källkvist and Hult (2016) have analyzed how discourses from language policy documents are negotiated at the interactional level.

This article focused on the Independent Use Portfolio as a material discourse in place that circulates to the learners' reflections. The article followed this model to analyze how phrases from the portfolio instructions circulate to the learners' reflections. The research questions guiding the analysis were the following:

- How do phrases from the Independent Use Portfolio instructions circulate to the reflections?
- What are the implications of this circulation…
   …for the created discourses?
   …for learning?

Background and literature review

Nexus analysis is an approach that enables examining how discourses circulate between contexts. Discourses in place, the central concept of this article, can also be conceptual, but this article analyzed them at the material level by focusing on the Independent Use Portfolio as a writing prompt.

Gibbs' (1988) reflection model was used as a way to structure written reflection. In the article, *reflection* was defined "as the process that involves the description, evaluation, and analysis of an experience, leading to change in the form of an action plan for a future language use event" (Article IV). Several studies (e.g., Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Crane, 2016; Dressler et al., 2021; Grossman, 2009) have emphasized the importance of scaffolding in reflection tasks to get learners to reach a deeper level of reflection because, without scaffolding, learners can overgeneralize and have difficulties providing concrete evidence for their conclusions (Corrales & Erwin, 2020; Grossman, 2009). Correia and Bleicher (2008) analyzed learners' use of *reflection markers* to structure their reflections. This article also focused on the phrases learners use to structure their reflections. However, to my knowledge, there have been no previous studies that use nexus analysis to map how discourses circulate from the instructions to the reflections.

Data and method

The article focused only on the reflection component of the Independent Use Portfolio. First, the central discourse in place, the Independent Use Portfolio Instructions, was identified. After that, the teacher-researcher mapped how the instructions circulated to the instructions. Text-level discourse analysis was used to see how the learners negotiated their instructions in their reflections. The analysis was facilitated by the teacher-researcher's ethnographic knowledge.

Findings

The first research question asked: How do phrases from the Independent Use Portfolio instructions circulate to the reflections? There were two central findings:

1) Recycling phrases from the instructions

The learners often recycled phrases directly from the instructions to either structure their reflections or demonstrate they had fulfilled the task. Thus, they performed being good learners by answering the prompt sometimes word by word. Agency and effort were part of the grading criteria for the portfolio, and the learners either demonstrated how they had engaged their agency or explained why they had not.

For example, the learners frequently recycled the phrases *challenging* or *confusing*. The mention of challenges is typically contrasted with a contrastive conjunction and an explanation of how the learners had used their agency to

overcome the obstacle. They thus demonstrated how they were in charge of guiding the learning process. The learners also frequently recycled the phrase *next time* but did not always elaborate on what they would do differently were they to engage in the same activity again.

In sum, the instructions provided the learners with a scaffold and structure but directed them to write about things the teacher wanted them to write about. Sometimes the recycled phrases were just mentioned but they were not followed by deeper reflection.

2) Negotiating or reinterpreting the instructions

The learners also sometimes negotiated phrases used in the instructions, such as the request to focus on situations outside of class or the request that they would have to write about different language use actions in different portfolios. By deviating from the instructions and explaining their deviation, the learners used their agency by showing that they know what works best for them and can thus be justified deviating from the instructions. In other instances, the deviation provided them with an easier way to complete the task. Their disclaimers served to pre-empt the teacher's possible rejection of their choice of doing so. In some instances, the learners reinterpreted the instructions to mean different things than expressed in the prompt, because of some contradictory messages or ambivalent wording. This practice was revealed when the learners explained and justified their choice of deviating from their interpretation of the teacher's instructions, again emphasizing the role of their agency.

The second research question asked: What are the implications of this circulation…
…for the created discourses?
…for learning?

On the one hand, the circulation of the phrases created a discourse of the learners performing being good learners. When this circulation was done by repeating the teacher's phrases, a teacher-led discourse centering the teacher as the creator of the reflection prompt was emphasized. The teacher, therefore, was controlling the discourses. On the other hand, especially when the learners negotiated the phrases, a discourse centering on learner agency was emphasized.

In terms of learning, the circulation of the phrases helped students structure their reflections and perhaps reach a deeper level of reflection. However, by impacting what topics they could write about, the instructions potentially also limited the learners' learning potential by restricting the topic they were expected to write about.

Discussion

The way that the learners recycled, negotiated, and reinterpreted the instructions shows how they used the Independent Use Portfolio to scaffold their reflections.

They engaged their agency to deviate from the instructions when necessary or to justify why they had not fully engaged their agency.

The findings indicate that the learners can potentially benefit from receiving more scaffolding to do reflective writing. For example, one example showed how a learner was very vague in her reflections on her future action plans, which indicates that the learners could benefit from more scaffolding to be able to reflect on an action plan. One of the possible implications would be that the learners could work together to develop the prompt and provide scaffolding to one another. On the other hand, the portfolio task could be developed to include the learners' return to the wild in the form of a repeated encounter with an action they had previously reflected on. It is important that teachers remain reflective about their practices and give room for learner agency.

The findings of the article also suggest that nexus analysis can be used to bridge research practice with instructional change and task development. In the study, nexus analysis was a helpful approach to tracing how discourses circulated between the instructions and the reflection.

There are also recommendations for teacher training. Pre-service teachers or teachers in professional development training could be tasked to collect data and analyze the impacts of their own learning tasks. It is beneficial to see what kind of responses a classroom task can result in, so the task can be developed and the teacher can remain reflective about their own pedagogical practices.

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Learning in the wild

In this chapter, I summarize the main findings of the overall study and discuss their meaning for language instruction. The following research questions were asked in the study:

1. How do language learners use and report using the target language in the wild for the portfolio and why this way? (the findings of all the articles)
2. How do they reflect on their learning in the wild and why this way? (the findings of all the articles)
3. How can classroom practices be changed to support learner agency in the wild? (the implications of the overall study)

The findings show that the learners engaged in various social actions and had multiple affordances for learning in the wild, and they did not need to travel anywhere to access target-language environments (cf. the concerns raised in Section 1.1). The social actions the learners recorded and reported in the wild are exemplified in Figure 11.

Speaking/ talking...	Listening to...	Reading...	Writing...	Cultural activities
• in a conversation hour • to a friend in person • to introduce oneself to a stranger • to a friend on the phone • ...	• music • video • the radio • the voice recognition app Siri • ...	• a magazine • a comic • a website • a news article • chat messages • forum • Facebook comments • phone menus • game menus • ...	• a journal • a social media post • a chat post • an email • a forum post • a Facebook post • ...	• building a house in a virtual world game • visiting a home • building a sauna • ...

FIGURE 11   The learners' actions in the wild

In the figure, which is not comprehensive of all the actions described in the portfolios, I have divided the social actions according to the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading, or writing separately, and cultural activities as their own category. However, the skills are often integrated, and the social action of chatting on WhatsApp, for example, consists of both reading and writing, while the learner reads their interaction partner's messages and then responds to those. In addition, most of the social actions could be further divided into smaller units, such as the social action of talking in a conversation hour, which starts from exchanging greetings, possibly introducing oneself, asking questions, answering questions, and so on. However, for the purposes of this study, and within the realms of the available data, I chose that the level of detail presented in Figure 11 is sufficient.

The social actions surrounding the learners' reflections on their learning in the wild can also be divided into wider or smaller-level actions. They can be, for instance, writing about challenges, writing about learning orientations, writing about future action plans, or asking questions from the teacher.

Figure 12 illustrates how learning in the wild happens at the meeting point of two nexuses of practice, *using Finnish in the wild* and *reflecting on learning in the wild*, both of which are impacted by several cycles of discourse:
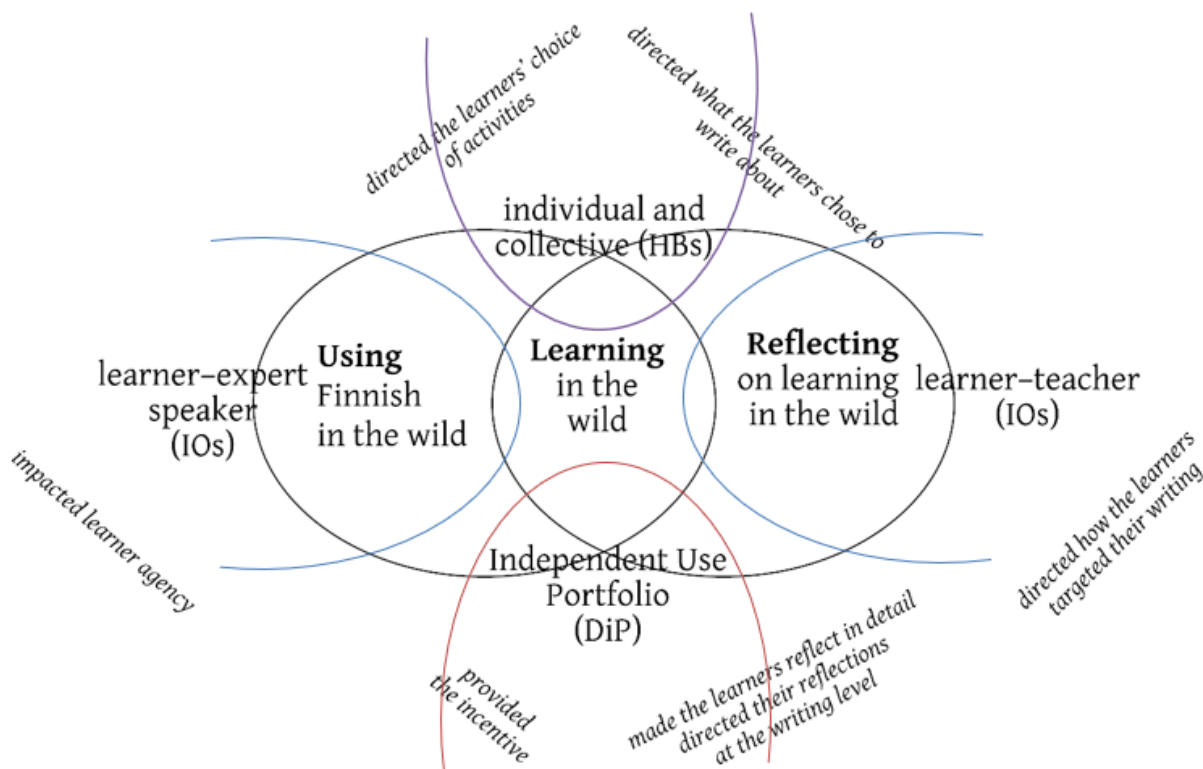
FIGURE 12   The nexus of learning in the wild

(IO = interaction order, HB = historical body, DiP = discourse in place)

Figures 11 and 12 thus summarize the answers to research questions 1 and 2. The learners' historical bodies, their prior experiences and expectations of the target language and culture, and the professional or free-time roles, as well as collective historical bodies in the form of the lived history of the language class, directed the learners' agency and use of affordances: what resources learners used as learning material. They also directed how the learners reflected their learning and what they chose to write about: what elements they oriented to as learning targets and how they oriented themselves to future actions.

The findings concerning the interaction order highlighted the importance of learners' agency and initiative and their interaction partners' support. The learners used their interaction partners to maximize their opportunities to practice. The interaction order was equal when an advanced learner interacted with a Finnish-speaking peer using technology. The *interaction orders* consisted of the learners' writing to their teacher in their reflections and the teacher provided guidance to the learners in the task. This shaped how the learners targeted their writing: They addressed their teacher in the portfolios and wrote to her as their audience.

The central discourse in place in this study was the Independent Use Portfolio as a classroom learning and assessment task, which incentivized the

learners to use the target language in the wild. It pushed them to reach out to new or existing target language contacts and use Finnish with them. The portfolio task incentivized the learners to do learning through reflection. The Independent Use Portfolio also functioned as a writing prompt and it directed the learners' reflections at the writing level, and the learners recycled, negotiated, and reinterpreted phrases from the original task.

As the figure shows, both nexuses take place at the intersection of several cycles of discourse, two of which (historical bodies and discourses in place) have the same sources. The historical bodies that direct the learners' agency in using Finnish in the wild and their reflections come from the same set of experiences. The Independent Use Portfolio as a discourse in place shapes the learners' language use in the wild and their reflections.

However, the interaction orders of the two nexuses are different. In their reflections, the learners interacted with their teacher. The interaction orders of the learners' language use in the wild take place between learners and expert speaker peers, and at the level of the classroom.

5.2   Supporting learner agency

The study aimed to suggest improvements for (foreign) language pedagogy (research question 3). As the central actors in the two nexuses are the same—the learners—we can examine the different cycles of discourse from the perspective of learner agency.

As stated in Section 3.1.1, change is often easier to implement at the smaller level, and to instill change in the wider nexus of practice, it is necessary to identify the points at which change could take place. Change in one cycle of discourse can impact the other cycles, as they all circulate through one another. Following the overall findings of the study, and the example by Strömmer (2017, p. 80), I present a change cycle that supports language learners' agency in the wild. The figure illustrates the change implications for each cycle of discourse, the interaction orders, historical bodies, and the discourses in place:

Shaping new interaction orders

• Creating a learner-centred classroom interaction order that centres on learner initiative and decision-making
• Recognizing learners' expertise
• Utilizing the digital wilds to create new interaction orders

Learning from the historical bodies

• Recognizing learners' historical bodies
• Familiarizing learners with new platforms
• Incorporating conscious reflection of language user positionalities and biases

Discourses in place: Creating tasks and assessments that empower learners

• Developing classroom tasks that help learners tame the wild
• Reimagining familiar spaces as language learning spaces
• Creating practices that strengthen learners' social connections and support social sharing
• Creating incentives through assessment practices

FIGURE 13   Supporting learner agency in the wild

Even implementing one of the improvements listed in the cycle can enhance learners' agency and impact the other cycles. For example, recognizing learners' expertise, as listed in the interaction order discourse cycle, is a way of creating tasks and assessments that empower learners, as listed in the discourses in place cycle, and it is also a way to forefront the learners' historical bodies in the classroom. In nexus analysis, social change can take place by changing any of the cycles through one's own social action, and thus change in any of the listed items will enhance learners' agency. In the following sections, I outline what these changes mean and how they could be implemented in language classes.

5.2.1 Shaping new interaction orders

The findings show that language learners have control over their language use and learning. The learners took a great deal of initiative in finding affordances, both in person and in the digital wild. They used their practice partners as affordances for learning and navigated the exposure from the environment with their agency. If the learners' prospective interaction partners did not have prior Finnish language skills, the learners' role changed into that of a language expert as they taught them some phrases. Learners' interactions in the wild were often hierarchically constructed, but the use of digital applications as affordances enabled more equalizing practices.

The goal of incorporating language use in the wild as a resource in the language classroom would require increasingly flipping the university-level classroom interaction order to a more learner-centered one: The learners would make observations and teach one another, with the teacher facilitating their learning. Teachers would create tasks that give learners freedom and choice in the content, while also scaffolding the learners to reach their goals.

The learners do not always have to be in a learner role: They have a great deal of expertise over their own learning which the teacher can learn from. Wohlwend (2020) also discusses flipping the interaction order to unravel the hierarchies between teachers and learners. She offered teachers workshops where they had the opportunity to learn to rethink their classes through learning from their pupils (Wohlwend, 2020, p. 242). Teacher education could increasingly aim to make teachers question their assumptions of a typical classroom interaction order and then help them reshape that order. Language teachers, especially in the context of foreign language teaching, might be accustomed to being in charge of moderating learners' target language exposure, so letting go of some of the traditional classroom interaction order might create a conflict in the teacher's historical body of experience. Teachers might hold the belief that their learners cannot survive without handholding. Wohlwend (2020, p. 242) also notes that changing the classroom interaction order and trusting the learners to be in charge of their learning was one of the most challenging aspects for teachers in her teacher workshops. However, instruction that involves learners in the process of decision-making and materials selection will likely have a higher potential for learner engagement than solely teacher-driven curricula.

In the study, the learners used the digital wild to learn Finnish. To offer more sites for foreign language learners' adventures in the wild, the future will likely see an increase in the use of different learning technologies in classroom instruction. When learning foreign languages, the digital wild might become even more important than in a second language environment, as learners might not automatically get exposed to the target language outside of class. Digital platforms can also facilitate learners' access to more diverse target language-speaking voices than traditional textbooks (Diao et al., forthcoming; Kramsch, 2019, p. 55). The digital wild can provide learners with opportunities to experience immersion and an environment close to that of second language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2016).

The findings suggested that digital games can increase learners' practice opportunities by enabling target language exposure and offering new ways to practice interaction. Some learners in this study reported on their use of the virtual world game *The Sims* for learning. Games have been found to increase learners' vocabulary learning and retention, and their motivation (Hitosugi et al., 2014). Rama, Black, van Es and Warschauer (2012) found games to have multiple affordances for language learning, such as immersion in a target language environment, and opportunities for authentic communication (see also the review by Peterson, 2010). The immersion environment afforded by games can help foreign language learners feel that they are interacting in a second language environment. Learners living in a second language environment can also find games to be a motivating environment for taking risks in the target language. When learners successfully participate in interaction in such spaces, their confidence can increase (Rama et al., 2012). In addition, multiplayer games can provide opportunities for socialization in new speaker communities, as has been found in the case of English language learning (Sundqvist, 2019).

Successful language learning applications do not necessarily need to have a linguistic or learning focus. The findings indicate that it is relevant to focus on interaction, sharing, and the negotiation of meaning, and learning the language can be an important side-product (see also Kuure, 2011). The learners' discoveries made in the digital wild seem to suggest that rather than developing new language learning applications, resources could be spent to develop ways to apply already existing applications for language learning purposes.

The findings showed that learners do not necessarily need to have an extensive target-language network to be able to practice, even though the lack of a target language speaker network and practice partners is often considered a key issue in (foreign) language teaching and learning (see e.g., Muhonen & Räsänen, 2021), and even learners that have target-language-speaking families or friends can consider practicing in face-to-face situations potentially uncomfortable. The digital wild can help alleviate some of these issues.

The findings concerning the interaction order of the reflections revealed how the learners often wrote their reflections to the teacher as the audience. The teacher, on the other hand, communicated with the learners by providing structure for their reflections in the reflection task. As raised in Article IV, it is relevant to consider, however, who the audience of the learners' reflections are. It might be more useful to have the audience of the reflections be the peer language learners, which would enhance the role of social support in the language classroom.

The portfolio task provided learners with some scaffolding as it functioned as a writing prompt that the learners used to structure their writing. The learners also often negotiated the instructions, which indicates that the task needs modifications. One of the potential implications of the findings was aiming for a more participatory approach to the portfolio, which aligns with Wohlwend's (2020, pp. 201–226) work to use immersive literacies as a way to bring about equitable change. Abrar-ul-Hassan, Douglas and Turner (2021) suggest that

effective portfolios use peer review and self-assessment as assessment methods. Adding these dimensions to the assessment of the portfolios would further facilitate flipping the classroom interaction order: Learners would be co-learners and teachers, and they would also further take their learning into their own hands.

With the additional use of technology in society and language learning, learners must get opportunities to critically reflect on language use with technology as well, as technology does not interact in the same way as humans do. For instance, a chatbot on a company's website, or a voice robot on a company's telephone customer service line will only respond to certain commands. Thus, learning to navigate interaction with technology is useful for such future encounters. At the same time, the newest technologies offer numerous opportunities for language learners. Learners can, for example, use Chat GPT as a tireless practice partner (see Section 6.3).

5.2.2 Learning from the historical bodies

Since the findings indicated not every learner would necessarily seek out the same target language activities (Article II), learners in the classroom could be encouraged to explore activities that work for them. Teachers and peers could help learners by offering them recommendations, but it is relevant to acknowledge that new practices do not necessarily persist if the learners cannot have a say in what those practices are. In the study, the learners' historical bodies were recognized through the analysis of their reflections. However, learners' historical bodies could also be mapped in advance before engaging in classroom tasks through pre-class tasks, group interviews, or surveys.

The findings showed that the learners' prior experiences directed their use of digital applications. The learners referenced their historical bodies as experienced Sims players as prerequisites for playing in Finnish (Article II). The findings also indicated that when introducing a new application, such as a game in the classroom, learners should be trained in the platform or game mechanics first before using it for language learning purposes (see also Rama et al., 2012). Activities such as navigating a phone in Finnish are easier when you already know how to use the phone in your own language. Thus, teachers could invest some class time to first familiarize the learners with new platforms (see also Rama et al., 2012) and pilot them, to ensure that learners are familiar with the basic functions before engaging in learning activities.

The findings showed that historical bodies had a significant role in directing learner agency and in their use of affordances in their reflections: They directed what learning targets the learners oriented to and their future learning goals. Hult (2014) suggests that reflection is a helpful practice in lifelong learning in enhancing language awareness (p. 79) that can help learners navigate the different symbolical positions that come with having a repertoire in more than one language. Ruuska (2020) also states how second-language speakers of languages need to constantly reflect on their identity positions depending on the "sociolinguistic environment" within which they act (p. 14). Learners of Finnish

will likely need to foreground their historical body position as new speakers (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2015) of Finnish in their daily target language interactions: Based on my reoccurring observations of expert Finnish speakers' interactions with the learners of Finnish at the U.S. university, expert speakers are typically overly curious about why Americans are learning Finnish, so the learners are constantly asked to position themselves in relation to their personal interest or heritage. As exemplified by Hult (2014, pp. 74, 76), this task of constantly having to explain one's bilingualism in everyday encounters can become burdensome. My own historical body of acquired daily life experiences as a Finnish person in the United States with a marked Finnish accent confirms this experience: I have developed an annoyance toward answering questions about my background when trying to buy a coffee in a hurry. Reflection could be a useful tool to process these experiences and develop strategies to manage the emotional load (see also Hult, 2014).

The life histories directing learners' agency were sometimes more explicitly pronounced, such as their professional orientations, but some are at a more ideological level, such as unconscious biases and stereotyped ideas of how target-language speakers are. As implicit biases affect our decision-making (health care: Marcelin et al., 2019; education: Staats, 2016, p. 30), incorporating reflection could be used as a strategy for learners to process their biases, possibly leading to learning from those (see also Marcelin et al., 2019, p. 67; Staats, 2016, p. 32). Staats (2016, p. 33) also notes how life histories can consciously and unconsciously influence how we see others, but it is possible to lessen their impact. Biesta and Tedder (2007) also note that "biographical learning" (p. 144) can enhance agency. It is necessary to be cognizant of one's biases to be able to work to change them (Marcelin et al., 2019, p. 67). In the portfolios, learners have a platform to make their positionings and biases more salient to themselves.

5.2.3 Discourses in place: Creating tasks and assessments that empower learners

The findings show that the portfolio task was an important discourse in place that incentivized the learners to use the target language in the wild. The study aimed to enhance classroom practices and curricular changes following the assumption that (foreign) language learners can be agentive learners who have the resources to take charge of their own learning in the wild. Teachers do not need to wait to introduce authentic language use even in elementary-level classrooms. Foreign language learners have multiple opportunities for authentic target language use outside of class when they turn to the digital wild (Thorne et al., 2015; Sauro & Zauro, 2019b). Additionally, when encouraged to do so, learners can find ways to use the target language even in their material living environment.

Foreign language pedagogy can be adapted to match these findings: Teachers can develop tasks for learners to tame the wild so that it is not so confusing anymore. As Bergroth-Koskinen and Seppälä (2012) also state, language learning environments are changing due to "internationalization and

developments in technology, societies, and working life" (p. 95). While a structured language class can provide safety, learners cannot stay sheltered for longer than necessary. Language instruction should aim to help learners to be flexible and adapt to different environments: to understand the different semiotic cues and adapt their communication to different situations (see also Thorne et al., 2015, p. 229). Language learning in the wild can be unpredictable and challenging, so it is beneficial if learners learn to be flexible and manage this unpredictability (Wagner, 2015; Thorne et al., 2021). To do that in the classroom, learners can be incentivized to observe authentic language use, make generalizations, and engage in communication. Teachers can design classroom tasks in which learners explore language use on their own and report about it in class. If learners get exposed to the target language in authentic contexts from the start, the barrier to using the language later in life would likely be lower. Already beginner-level learners can personalize their language learning journey through personalized task types and a reflective approach. The findings showed that digital applications enabled exposure to the target language. However, learners needed to command, navigate, and manipulate the digital environments to use them for learning. The learners' actions then repurposed these applications as language learning affordances.

Learners in a classroom could be tasked to *reimagine* (see also Wohlwend 2020, p. 202) their familiar material and digital spaces as language learning spaces. Even learners in a typical second language environment, especially in the Nordic countries, can face the issue that so-called locals want to speak English to them (Kotilainen et al., 2022; Wagner, 2015). For instance, Kotilainen, Lehtimaja and Kurhila (2022) note how many international workplaces in Finland use English as a lingua franca when a non-Finnish speaker is present, which can exclude learners from many practice and learning opportunities in their target language. At the same time, Finnish remains the main language of communication in the surrounding society and thus Finnish skills are essential (Laitinen et al., 2023; Onikki-Rantajääskö, 2024). The study showed that learners can participate in interactions multilingually with their emerging language skills (Article I, Article III), and thus flexible multilingualism could be key to getting more practice opportunities while able to express things at a more intellectual level (Kotilainen et al., 2022; Laitinen et al., 2023; Onikki-Rantajääskö, 2024; Article III).

Learners could create new immersion environments by changing the language of an application they have previously been using in English (or another language) or introducing their target language in an environment that is otherwise dominated by English. They could insist on the use of the target language in customer service interactions or the workplace lunchroom, and strategies to do so could be taught in the class. Of course, the surrounding society plays an important part in this endeavor (Laitinen et al., 2023). Classroom tasks can be used to make these affordances salient to the learners and learners can explore different affordances and see what works for them.

As with understanding language learning within the ecological approach (van Lier, 2000, 2004, 2010), social support from the environment is key in

learners' growth into agentive language learners. Classroom tasks can be used to strengthen learners' social connections, support social sharing, and help them form communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Learners in the study got recommendations from classmates, who had used previously familiar applications for learning in new, innovative ways. In class, learners even requested to share good practices together as a class.

The study emphasized the importance of an incentive provided in the classroom. If beyond-the-classroom activities are just something extra that the learners can choose to do on their own time, they might not similarly invest in them. Getting out of the comfort zone takes effort and time, and learners in a traditional classroom might carry the assumption in their historical bodies that learning the class contents is enough. If learners receive tasks and incentives to expose themselves to the target language in the wild, they might be likelier to value that agency. Reflection skills alongside proficiency could also be weighed in language class assessment. If a teacher emphasizes learner agency in classroom tasks but then relies on end-of-semester exams as the sole assessment method, learners might feel that the classroom time has not been spent usefully. What is assessed and graded in the class also seems like the most valuable item in the course. The portfolio assessment introduced in this study is more focused on the process of learning than the outcome, and the main grading criteria are based on learners' engagement and effort. Thus, the assessment practice emphasizes life-long learning. Language exams that evaluate learners' ability in a decontextualized situation will likely not predict how the learner would do in a real-life situation. The goal of life-long learning should be emphasized at the curriculum level. The Independent Use Portfolio could be further developed so that it would genuinely function as an alternative assessment according to the criteria introduced by Lynch and Shaw (2005, p. 3, Section 2.3.3): In the future, the portfolio could also include the process of selecting the language use activities in its evaluation criteria and include the learners in deciding these criteria.

Even beginner-level learners can greatly benefit from portfolio reflection (see e.g., Article III). Reflection can enhance the development of learners' critical skills and multicultural competence (Biers, 2022; Diao et al., forthcoming; Reagan & Osborn, 2019). The reflective component can be completed in the learners' first language so that learners can focus on the metalevel and get to express their so-called adult selves without the barriers of learner language.

The findings also indicate that reflection as a skill can and should be taught. On the one hand, a potential implication of the study includes scaffolding learners to reflect in depth. Learners could be trained to provide evidence for their conclusions, and thus make reflection a more beneficial tool for learning. As the findings showed, the writing prompt directed the learners' classroom responses. As ChatGPT can provide learners with readily composed essay answers, teachers need to be increasingly mindful of what kind of questions to ask. This also calls for assignments that communicate clear expectations and learning outcomes, emphasizing the importance of taking charge of one's

learning. This also means that learners would shape those learning goals for themselves through classroom discussions.

Learners do not all learn the same way nor do they benefit from the same type of instruction (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 9-10). As the findings of Article IV show, learners have their own learning agendas (see also Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Kress 2013). They can deviate from instructions when they find another way more beneficial to their learning (Article IV). Thus, teachers need to be constantly reflective on what works for their students. As the study demonstrates, learners have a great deal of agency in pursuing their own learning goals by searching for situations to use the target language. If the students were to receive too strictly formulated prompts, the teacher would run the risk of taking over the classroom discourse and simultaneously limiting the learners' agency.

This chapter discussed the potential implications of the findings for language learners and teachers, how to shape new interaction orders, harness learners' historical bodies as affordances in language classrooms, and create pedagogical practices that empower learners. The following chapter presents an action plan on how these suggested improvements can be put into practice.

6 CHANGING THE NEXUS

6.1 Implementing change in the studied nexus

Nexus analysis aims to change existing practices (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). The improvements suggested in Section 5.2, however, might easily go unimplemented without a concrete action plan (see also Aarnikoivu, 2024, p. 117). Aarnikoivu (2024) argues that a great deal of literature (on doctoral education, in her context) discusses possible changes but not how to implement them. As Scollon (2013) states, change is conducted by individual actors that turn the "potential to actual" (p. 192). Thus, this chapter focuses on the concrete actions researchers can take to implement change, with examples from the present study. Following Aarnikoivu (2024, p. 117), I divide change into three kinds: *individual* (learners and the researcher), *institutional* (the immediate context), and *wider community-level change* (learners, teachers, researchers, language program administrators, and language policy actors).

At the individual level, participating in a study can empower participants by impacting discourses in many ways. Scollon and Scollon (2004, p. 92) discuss how even the sole presence of the researcher impacts the practices studied. In their case, the presence of Ron Scollon changed the language of a game. Changes emerge as outcomes of the research and data generation activities, discussions with the participants, and engaging in new actions (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 152). In this study, discussions around learning in the wild became regular practice in the classroom, as we often dedicated class time to sharing about the portfolios. As an ongoing study produces new information, the teacher-researcher can find it relevant to update their teaching methods and materials. As I learned about how my students were using Finnish in the wild, I adopted my lesson plans and materials to better suit their needs. I shared practical tips to facilitate the learners' engagements in the wild. These changes also have relevant ethical dimensions, as the benefit to the learners from the research study is immediate, and they would not feel exploited for the sake of research (see Nakata, 2015). In other words, the participants of the study also reap the benefits.

Research practices can also impact participants' social connections and even their relationships beyond the classroom (Article III). In this study, the learners gained several new Finnish language contacts due to their participation in the portfolio, as they sought out more Finnish-speaking contacts to interact with. As Aalto, Mustonen, and Tukia (2009) note, instruction can give learners the tools they need to obtain memberships in the target language communities of their choice, and access to communal resources (p. 404). By participating in the study, the learners expanded their communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and possibly gained new memberships in communities, such as Facebook groups.

Nexus analysis also leads to changes in the researcher's own historical body as they enhance their understanding of their "own place in life" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 78, 81). Conducting a research study can contribute to enhanced teacher agency (see Seppälä, 2015), as the teacher-researcher adapts their understanding of the subject (cf. Räisänen et al., 2016), as well as contribute to professional development. At the same time, the researcher learns about the process of conducting research. Because of the orientation to change, a nexus analyst must constantly challenge their assumptions about the research process (Wohlwend, 2020, p. 238). For instance, in this study, it turned out to be important to explore the impact of the classroom assignment on the studied actions: The data collection instrument received a new meaning as analyzable data.

The research process can also impact how the teacher-researcher is seen by others, as the research process facilitates becoming a legitimate part of an academic community (Barkhuizen, 2021, p. 359). Research was not considered a requirement by my institution when evaluating language instructors' professional success for reappointment or promotion (cf. Rose, 2019) but, at the same time, it was requested (see also Barkhuizen, 2021).

The study only led to minor changes at the institutional level. I use the findings of Mahon, Heikkinen, and Huttunen (2019) to structure my reflections on why that is. According to Mahon, Heikkinen, and Huttunen (2019), enacting institutional change requires "asking critical questions," as well as creating the right kind of conditions (p. 463). Those conditions are enabled or constrained by the following factors:

Enablers:
1. time (especially for interrogating practice)
2. space for creativity
3. space for autonomy and flexibility
4. positive, productive, and trusting relationships
5. rigorous critical dialogue and reflexive conversations
6. opportunity for engagement and experience.

Constraints:
1. intensification of academic work
2. lack of, or diminishing, contact time between university teachers and students
3. over-regulation and standardisation of practice
4. promotion of particular constructions of pedagogical practice.

(Mahon et al., 2019, pp. 471, 474)

The participants in Mahon, Heikkinen and Huttunen (2019) highlighted time as the most significant factor enabling or constraining institutional change. In this study, space seemed even more central. In terms of space, it was easier to impact practices that were within the immediate reach of the teacher-researcher. I had the *autonomy and flexibility* to instill change within the Finnish Studies curriculum that I was solely in charge of. In the early stages of the study, new curricular goals were added to the Finnish course curriculum and syllabi. The new learning goals addressed building personal connections with the target language and culture and the ability to use Finnish outside of class with greater confidence and reflect on one's path as a language learner.

However, it was more challenging to find space to impact curricula at the departmental or university level. On the one hand, the demand for unified assessment practices across language curricula created a narrower channel for change (cf. Mahon et al., 2019, p. 475). On the other hand, these challenges were caused by having little collaboration across languages and disciplines. To bring change to this issue, Legutko (2024), for example, examines ways to increase collaboration between language instructors to create multilingual approaches to writing instruction.

More could be done at institutions to create safe spaces for pedagogical sharing (cf. Mahon et al., 2019, pp. 471–472) so that research conducted within an institution would directly benefit it. For instance, institutional sharing could be facilitated by organizing informal pedagogical working groups. I did find some platforms to present the pedagogical experiment to other instructors at workshops aimed at colleagues. I also found some spaces to engage in informal conversations with them. Some became interested in conducting similar projects in their own classes and sought my assistance in applying for grant opportunities. However, due to individual workloads and the demands of academic work for performance and productivity (Mahon et al., 2019, pp. 471–472), it was challenging to find the space for critical discussions about pedagogical practices.

The study aimed for community-level change that would impact language learners, teachers, researchers, and program administrators. It has implications for textbook and materials development. Teaching materials have a significant impact on learners' development because they mediate their material conditions for learning (Thorne et al., 2021, p. 120). Genuine functionality (e.g., Aalto et al., 2009) could also be the goal of teaching material in the foreign language context. Material developers and teachers should critically evaluate what kind of language use situations learners should be trained for, or whether learners should choose the situations themselves (Article I). The Finnish as a second language textbook tradition is quite teacher-centered and structure-heavy (Aalto et al., 2009). Future language textbooks and materials could aim to equip learners with the skills they need to integrate into society. Textbooks could incorporate portfolio assessment, reflection, and activities that enhance learner agency in the wild (see Elg et al., forthcoming, for an attempt to do so).

To disseminate pedagogical research findings to teachers, researchers should actively seek out platforms, such as teacher conferences and workshops,

to communicate with teachers directly. Rose (2019) raises the issue that teachers often engage with professional journals where teachers write to teachers, and researchers communicate with one another in their own publication channels. I have taken active steps to present the findings of this study both at researcher and teacher conferences. Researchers could also solicit research ideas directly from the teachers working in the field. It would be relevant to produce research-based knowledge that makes teaching inform research and not only the other way around (Rose, 2019).

In terms of language program administration, the study has implications for the planning and marketing of language programs. As the study demonstrated foreign language learners' interest in developing social connections through their target language (Article III), it becomes questionable whether marketing language classes with the sole goal of enhancing learners' careers and professional competence will be attractive to students (see also Diao et al., forthcoming; Reagan & Osborn, 2019). Rather, in Diao, Räsänen, and Tanaka (forthcoming), we argue that it might be more attractive to emphasize softer values such as diversity and inclusion through language learning.

6.2 Theoretical and methodological implications of the study

The study also has theoretical and methodological implications. First, I propose other teacher-researcher projects to combine nexus analysis with exploratory practice, where the learners are also in charge of generating data about their learning. In this study, the learners collected evidence of their language use in the wild and analyzed their learning in such situations. While participating in the research practices, they kept learning about themselves as learners, which enhanced their agency (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). Having learners generate data of their own learning can shift the classroom interaction order where traditionally the teacher poses as the expert. Exploratory practice pairs well with nexus analysis, because they both examine social practices and share the idea that already understanding the phenomenon is part of the change (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 173). In comparison with action research, exploratory practice has a stronger emphasis on curiosity, puzzlement, and seeking a holistic understanding before proposing changes. There are no specific steps that exploratory research projects need to follow (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 172), and this flexibility makes it easy to pair with other approaches, such as nexus analysis.

Second, this study demonstrated that it is possible to conduct a "full" nexus analysis with a very focused data set that comes from a single classroom assignment when the analysis is facilitated by the teacher-researcher's ethnographic experience from the classroom. Nexus analysts usually collect massive and vast amounts of data in the form of observation data and field notes, audio or video recordings, and interviews (see e.g., Strömmer, 2017). Scollon and Scollon (2004) as well as Hult (2017), who has further developed nexus analysis,

also seem to suggest different types of data to be collected to examine historical bodies, interaction order, and discourses in place. However, I argue that it is also possible to use a more focused data set, if it includes examples of interactions (interaction order), introspection (historical body), and evidence of discourses circulating between different scales. The Independent Use Portfolio data were rich (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 279–281) because they included interactions at different layers—the learners' interactions with other Finnish speakers and with their instructor—and written reflections (see also Räsänen & Aarnikoivu, forthcoming). Using a classroom assignment as nexus analytical data can be beneficial for teacher-researchers who want to develop pedagogical practices and find out what kind of change a classroom task can bring to the studied nexus.

Nexus analysis is a flexible approach, and it can be adapted and used selectively to study different contexts. A researcher must ask what data collection method best benefits their research agenda, even when it requires deviating from Scollon and Scollon's (2004) field guide to some extent (Räsänen & Aarnikoivu, forthcoming). Tapio (2013) also argues that since nexus analysis is not a fixed methodology, the future will probably see different, adapted versions of nexus analysis taking place (p. 63). For example, due to our communicative contexts increasingly moving to online spaces, perhaps researchers will start to conduct all-online nexus analysis studies, as digital ethnography (see e.g., Varis, 2015) is already widely applied. This adaptable quality of nexus analysis is useful for seeking answers to different research questions. Thus, in Räsänen and Aarnikoivu (forthcoming), we argue that as a research community, nexus analysts should stay open to this methodological flexibility and remain reflective about what nexus analysis is.

Third, the findings pointed to some important expansions to the concept of historical body. Beiler (2022) suggests expanding the concept with decolonial theory. In Article II, a learner explained building a Finnish house for her Finnish Sims character in the virtual world game, a character whose appearances reflected colonial ideas of what Finnish people look like. Another learner used official institutional Instagram channels that represent the Finnish President and Prime Minister as resources for his learning, instead of mentioning accounts of some more underrepresented voices. Wohlwend (2020) also discusses how "bodies and actions," relate to producing expectations and practices in social spaces. Wohlwend (2020) uses the example that stirred media attention in the United States when a Starbucks employee called the police to expel Black customers waiting for their associates to arrive before ordering. Interpreting waiting as loitering was a result of the barista's historical body of prejudices and the customers' actual physical bodies, which embody racial histories.

In addition, I propose that nexus analysts use various methods to collect information about historical bodies. Although interviews are a popular method to learn about participants' life histories, I echo Varis (2015), who claims that "interviews are…not necessarily the magic fix" (p. 63). I followed the approach of Jones (2007), who searched for evidence on the participants' retrospective

orientations to their past experiences in the discourse, as they made these experiences relevant. This historical dimension in the discourse can even be observed within a single episode, such as when learners refer to a phrase they have learned in a previous class (also Kivik & Räsänen, 2021). Depending on the research project, it might not always be necessary to have the participants share their full trajectories.

6.3   Evaluation of the study and future research ideas

Nexus analysis worked well as an approach for this study because it aims to reveal hidden practices. The approach was initially developed by Scollon and Scollon (2004) to find out the practices preventing Alaska Natives from studying at an Alaskan university. The hidden practices this study aimed to reveal were the actions learners engage in after they leave the classroom space. The concepts of interaction order, historical body, and discourses in place facilitated understanding of the complex phenomenon of learning in the wild from different dimensions. Nexus analysis focuses on seeing links between the micro-level discourses, even at the level of a single utterance, and wider-scale dimensions, such as conceptions of language learning, which would be challenging to achieve with other approaches (Lane, 2010, p. 67). It enabled combining different types of data: the written data with the images and recordings, with the teacher-researcher's ethnographic knowledge. This methodological flexibility was attractive for an early career researcher. The change orientation of nexus analysis was also directly linked to the research goal of developing pedagogical practices.

The added value of nexus analysis to simply combining ethnography and discourse analysis is the way it allows one to search for explanations in the complexities. Nexus analysis combines the concepts of historical body, interaction order, and discourses in place in a way that enables seeing how one impacts another. The historical dimension brought in by the concept of historical body is a significant addition because it facilitates tracing hidden discourses (Lane, 2014). For instance, we can examine how policy-level discourses in place can be the result of micro-level interactions, where the historical bodies of the individual actors come together (Källkvist & Hult, 2016). The explanations thus emerge at the intersections where the discourse cycles come together in social action.

However, using nexus analysis also involves many challenges concerning zooming in and out. On the one hand, as nexus analysis focuses on individual social actions, the researcher needs to be mindful of opening up the circumference to avoid focusing on too narrow a topic (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 9). When drawing together the analysis of the three discourse cycles, one can say many things about a single social action. On the other hand, it is important to examine the full nexus, and thus collect information on all cycles of discourse. Consequently, a nexus analyst can end up with massive amounts of data. This, in turn, can lead to feelings of insecurity about data generation and analysis

(Räsänen & Aarnikoivu, forthcoming). In this study, the issue of circumference was alleviated by focusing on a rather focused data set.

Nexus analysis cannot be used for all research topics. The focus needs to be on social actions, and thus it is not useful for studies that have a solely linguistic focus. In addition, nexus analytical studies include the researcher as one of the participants, and a full nexus analysis, as described by Scollon and Scollon (2004), can take "months or years" (p. 9) to complete. Thus, a nexus analytical study heavily involves the researcher and is not necessarily the easiest journey to embark on.

This study focused on one specific language learning context and, as with other types of teacher research, it can be appreciated for "its richness in ecological validity" (Rose, 2019, p. 899). I consider *relevance* an important factor in evaluating qualitative research (see also Gutierrez & Penuel, 2014), and this study was conducted with learners in a real setting where it was relevant to research learning in the wild. The study thus aimed for credibility and transferability to different language learning contexts instead of objective reliability (Nakata, 2015). Although it focused on so-called foreign language learning, the findings are equally useful in second language contexts where learners might find it challenging to maintain the language of their interactions in the target language (Kotilainen et al., 2022). Gaining strategies to prepare for the wild is therefore important.

The study was conducted in a higher education setting, but the findings can also be applied in schools. Jensen (2019) found that children were highly motivated to use English beyond the classroom and emphasizes that children's experiences in the wild should be recognized in the language classroom. Research on young learners' learning in the wild has largely focused on English language learning and gaming (see e.g., Piirainen–Marsh & Tainio, 2014; Sundqvist, 2019), but other languages and contexts could also be explored. School pupils could be tasked to reflect on their historical bodies as language learners and recognize the environments in which they encounter the target language, seek out learning resources in digital environments, and act as experts among their learner peers. In the classroom, pupils can learn digital literacy skills to be able to critically evaluate the affordances and constraints of these environments (Jones & Hafner, 2012).

My position as a researcher, the learners' teacher, and a so-called native Finnish speaker created many power hierarchies in the study (see also Karjalainen, 2012, p. 90, p. 101; Leskinen, 2023, p. 144). Even though I aimed, in accordance with nexus analysis, to be recognized as one of the participants (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 153, 2007), my status was hierarchically different, and these hierarchies impacted the learners' portfolio responses (see Section 3.5).

In Article IV, I treated the Independent Use Portfolio task as a discourse in place that directed the learners' reflections. Another approach would be to treat the task as a "cultural tool" or *mediational means* (see Scollon, 2002, p. 7). In addition to learning tasks or materials, several other discourses in place direct language learners' actions. These include, but are not limited to, different

concepts and ideologies related to language learning, and different sociocultural and institutional discourses.

The technology-mediated interaction orders discussed in Section 5.2 call for more research, and it would be interesting to examine discourses in place in new digital sites of engagement. There is still relatively little research conducted on learners' interactions in virtual reality (VR) or with artificial intelligence (AI). VR and augmented reality can expand learners' learning environments (see Thorne & Hellermann, 2022) as well as offer learners spatial, situated experiences (Lan, 2020; Outakoski, 2018), which can potentially be used to create a sense of presence when interaction partners are located physically far from one another (Räsänen & Lampela, 2023). The use of avatars in VR environments has also been found to reduce learners' speaking anxiety (Liaw, 2019; Trasher, 2022). AI enables learners' access to a practice partner whenever and wherever they live, and such a practice partner does not tire of the learner's push to maximize target language exposure (cf. Article I). It would be relevant to further explore how the arrangements and design of these spaces shape interaction orders.

6.4   Concluding words

The study mapped and analyzed a complex nexus of learning in the wild. The portfolio data included examples of a wide range of interactions in person and in digital settings as the learners used a variety of affordances to learn. The study demonstrated that nexus analysis is a flexible mode of inquiry that can be applied to study questions broadly and in-depth and to analyze rich data from different perspectives. Since the process of nexus analysis leads to revealing many hidden discourses, it provided a fruitful method for pursuing well-informed change in educational practices through teacher research. A major portion of the research study was therefore dedicated to discussing changing the studied nexus so that it would better support learner agency.

In the global and digital era, teachers must reconsider the contents and methods of the language classes they teach. Alongside more traditional language-related content, today's language teachers can increasingly help their learners navigate and make sense of the chaos of resources, materials, and linguistic exposure they face in the wild.

SUMMARY IN FINNISH

Ulos ja takaisin: kielenoppijoiden toimijuuden tukeminen luokassa ja sen ulkopuolella

Tutkimuksen tausta

Tämä väitöstutkimus tarkastelee sitä, kuinka yhdysvaltalaiset yliopistossa suomea opiskelevat oppijat opiskelevat kieltä arjen ympäristöissä luokan ulkopuolella. Vaikka tutkimuksen kontekstia voidaan pitää niin kutsuttuna perinteisenä vieraan kielen kontekstina, koska se sijaitsee kaukana kohdekieltä puhuvista yhteisöistä, teknologia mahdollistaa tutkimuksen oppijoille mahdollisuuden päästä toisen kielen oppimisympäristöihin milloin vain ajasta ja paikasta riippumatta (ks. esim. Reinders ym., 2022; Vaarala & Jalkanen, 2011). Oppijoiden arjen kielenkäyttötilanteita pitäisi korostaa luokkaopetuksen resurssina (ks. esim. Eskildsen ym., 2019; Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2019a, b; Reinders ym., 2022). Reflektio on hyödyllinen väline luokan ulkopuolisista kielenkäyttötilanteista oppimisessa (ks. esim. Gibbs, 1988; Wagner, 2015).

Hyödynsin tutkimuksessa Scollonin ja Scollonin (2004) neksusanalyysia ja Allwrightin (2005) ja Hanksin (2017) tutkivaa käytäntöä (exploratory practice; myös Allwright & Hanks, 2009) selvittääkseni, miten oppijat käyttävät suomen kieltä luokan ulkopuolella portfoliotehtävässä ja reflektoivat kielenkäyttöään. Lähestyn ilmiötä ekologisen viitekehyksen näkökulmasta: Oppimista tapahtuu oppijan toimiessa vuorovaikutuksessa ympäristönsä kanssa, kun tämä kehittää toimivia keinoja käsitellä ympäröivää todellisuutta ja sen merkityksiä (van Lier, 2000, 2004). Analysoin kielenoppimisen tarjoumia suhteessa oppijoiden toimijuuteen: miten oppijat käyttävät ympäristöään oppimiseen.

Tutkimukseni menetelmällisenä viitekehyksenä on neksusanalyysi (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), joka yhdistää etnografiaa ja diskurssianalyysia. Neksusanalyysi on hyödyllinen menetelmä esimerkiksi, kun tutkitaan kielenoppimista verkottoituneena toimintana (ks. Kuure ym., 2018, s. 72, 74) ja se tähtää piilossa olevien rakenteiden avaamiseen ja purkamiseen (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Neksusanalyysissa keskeistä on toiminnan muuttaminen, ja tutkimukseni lähtökohtana ja päämääränä on nimenomaan muutos.

Portfolioaineistoon kuului kolmenlaista aineistoa: oppijoiden tallennukset erilaisista kielenkäyttötilanteista (kuvat, kuvakaappaukset, ääni- ja videonauhoitukset, piirustukset, linkit), kirjalliset raportit siitä, mitä he tekivät ja kirjalliset reflektiot, joissa he analysoivat oppimistaan.

Koko työn päätutkimuskysymykset ovat:

1. Miten kielenoppijat käyttävät ja raportoivat käyttävänsä kohdekieltä luokan ulkopuolella portfoliotehtävässä ja miksi tällä tavalla?
2. Miten kielenoppijat reflektoivat oppimistaan luokan ulkopuolella ja miksi tällä tavalla?

3. Miten luokkahuonekäytänteitä voidaan kehittää, jotta voidaan tukea oppijoiden toimijuutta luokan ulkopuolella?

Aineisto ja analyysi

Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu oppijoiden Itsenäisen kielenkäytön portfolio -merkinnöistä, joissa he ovat dokumentoineet ja analysoineet itsenäistä, luokkahuoneen ulkopuolella tapahtuvaa kielenkäyttöään. Aineistoon sisältyy 99 portfoliopalautusta 17 eritasoiselta suomenoppijalta. Aineisto kerättiin vuosina 2019–2020 osittain Covid-19-pandemian aikana. Itsenäisen kielenkäytön portfoliossa yhdysvaltalaisen yliopiston suomen kielen oppijoita pyydettiin käyttämään suomen kieltä luokan ulkopuolella. Oppijoita ohjattiin dokumentoimaan toimintojaan kuvien, kuvakaappausten tai nauhoitusten avulla sekä raportoimaan ja reflektoimaan niitä portfolioissaan lukukauden aikana.

Seuraten Scollonin ja Scollonin (2004) neksusanalyyttisen tutkimusprosessin työvaiheita kartoitin tutkimuksen keskeisiä sosiaalisia toimintoja eli oppijoiden kielenkäyttötilanteita ja heidän reflektioitaan sekä tutkimuksen kannalta olennaisia, sosiaalisten toimintojen kautta risteäviä diskurssin kehiä – vuorovaikutusjärjestystä, toimijahistorioita ja paikan diskursseja – tutkivan opettajan roolissani ja navigoin niissä. Vuorovaikutusjärjestys viittaa niihin sosiaalisiin järjestyksiin ja hierarkioihin, jotka vaikuttavat siihen, miten vuorovaikutus rakentuu. Toimijahistoria tarkoittaa esimerkiksi oppijoiden elämänkokemuksia ja ennakkokäsityksiä kielenkäytöstä. Paikan diskurssit ovat vuorovaikutuskäytänteisiin vaikuttavia materiaalisia järjestelyjä ja esimerkiksi ideologioita. Analysoin näistä kutakin erillisissä artikkeleissa ja kokosin löydökset yhteen saadakseni kokonaiskuvan sosiaalisten käytänteiden risteymästä (nexus of practice, suomennos Strömmer, 2017), joka kertoo, miten oppijat ohjaavat oppimistaan arjen kielenkäyttötilanteissa.

Tutkimus on noudattanut neksusanalyysin prosessia, johon kuuluu kolme limittäistä työvaihetta: 1) kartoittaminen, 2) navigointi ja 3) muokkaaminen (Scollon & Scollon, 2004; Pietikäisen, 2012, suomennokset). Ensimmäisessä vaiheessa kartoitin tutkimuksen kontekstia vuorovaikuttamalla osallistujien kanssa ja toteuttamalla portfoliotehtävän. Tein aineiston alustavaa analyysia, etsin olennaisia diskursseja ja toistin tehtävän seuraavina lukukausina.

Toisessa vaiheessa navigoin aineistossa (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Käytin diskurssianalyysia (Gee, 2014; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019), jonka tukena oli etnografinen kokemukseni, jota olen kartuttanut toimiessani osallistujien suomenopettajana. Analyysi keskittyy siihen, miten oppijat ilmaisevat itseään reflektioissaan ja muokkaavat vastaanottajan eli opettajansa tulkintoja esimerkiksi lauserakenteidensa ja sanavalintojen avulla (Gee, 2014, s. 19–20).

Kolmannessa vaiheessa keskityn neksuksen muuttamiseen. Muutos on ollut mukana portfolioprosessissa jo sen alusta lähtien, kun portfoliotehtävä on kannustanut oppijoita tehtävänannossa aktiiviseen toimijuuteen. Tutkimustulosten avulla voidaan uudistaa pedagogisia käytänteitä ja opetusjärjestelyjä eri oppilaitoksissa.

Tulokset

Oppijoiden kielenkäyttötilanteiden vuorovaikutusjärjestykset muotoutuivat suhteessa asiantuntevan puhujan ja oppijan rooleihin. Oppijat hyödynsivät vuorovaikutuskumppaneitaan maksimoidakseen mahdollisuutensa harjoitella kielenkäyttöä. Vuorovaikutusjärjestys oli tasavertainen, kun edistynyt oppija keskusteli suomea puhuvan kaverinsa kanssa teknologian avulla. Vuorovaikutusjärjestystä koskevat tulokset korostivat oppijoiden toimijuuden ja aloitteellisuuden merkitystä ja vuorovaikutuskumppaneiden tukea. Reflektioita läpäisevä vuorovaikutusjärjestys muodostui oppijoiden vuorovaikutuksesta opettajan kanssa: Oppijat kohdensivat reflektionsa opettajalle ja opettaja ohjasi heitä tehtävän muodossa.

Toimijahistoriat koostuivat oppijoiden aiemmista kokemuksista ja kohdekieleen ja -kulttuuriin liittyvistä odotuksista, heidän ammatti- ja vapaa-ajan rooleistaan sekä luokan yhteisistä koetuista historioista. Oppijoiden toimijahistoriat ohjasivat heidän toimijuuttaan ja sitä, mitä resursseja he käyttivät oppimateriaaleina. Toimijahistoriat ohjasivat myös sitä, miten oppijat reflektoivat oppimistaan ja mistä he päättivät kirjoittaa: mihin kohdekielen elementteihin he kohdensivat huomionsa ja mihin tulevaisuuden oppimistavoitteisiin he orientoituivat.

Keskeinen paikan diskurssi oli portfoliotehtävä, joka kannusti oppijoita käyttämään kieltä luokan ulkopuolella: olemaan yhteydessä vuorovaikutuskumppaneihin suomeksi ja käyttämään suomea heidän kanssaan. Portfoliotehtävä ohjasi oppijoita prosessoimaan oppimistaan reflektioissa ja ohjasi myös reflektointeja kirjoittamisen tasolla. Oppijat kierrättivät fraaseja ohjeista. He neuvottelivat ohjeista ja tulkitsivat niitä uudelleen.

Tutkimuksen mukaan yhdysvaltalaisilla suomenoppijoilla on toimintaympäristössään monenlaisia tarjoumia. Tulokset korostavat oppijoiden toimijuuden ja aloitteellisuuden merkitystä tarjoumien hyödyntämisessä.

Neksusanalyysissa keskeinen vaihe on muutos. Löydökset osoittavat, että oppijoiden toimijuutta voi tukea hyödyntämällä digiviidakkoa luokkaopetuksessa. Opettajat voivat uudistaa luokan vuorovaikutusjärjestystä tukemalla oppijoiden aloitteellisuutta ja päätöksentekoa sekä hyödyntämällä heidän asiantuntijuuttaan. Oppijoita voidaan kannustaa reflektoimaan omaa toimintaansa ja asemaansa kielenkäyttäjinä. Opettajat voivat auttaa oppijoita selviytymään arjen kaoottisissakin vuorovaikutustilanteissa. He voivat kehittää opetuskäytänteitä, jotka vahvistavat oppijoiden sosiaalisia suhteita ja auttavat heitä lähestymään tuttuja tiloja kielenoppimisen tiloina.

Päätäntä

Tutkimustuloksia voidaan hyödyntää sekä yksittäisten oppijoiden, instituutioiden että kielenoppijoiden, opettajien ja koulutuksen suunnittelijoiden yhteisöissä. Tulevaisuudessa olisi kiinnostavaa tarkastella, miten digitaalisten ympäristöjen, kuten virtuaalitodellisuuden ja tekoälyn, tuomat uudet vuorovaikutusjärjestykset muovaavat kielenoppijoiden toimintaa.

Neksusanalyysi on joustava tutkimusmenetelmä, joka mahdollistaa rikkaan aineiston tarkastelun erilaisista näkökulmista, ja siten se on erinomainen menetelmä pedagogisen kehittämistyön välineeksi. Nykypäivän kielenopettajan on tuettava oppijoita käsittelemään ympärillään olevan globaalin ja teknologiavälitteisen maailman tarjoamia resursseja ja kielellistä altistusta.

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APPENDIX 1 PORTFOLIO INSTRUCTIONS [7]

Advanced Finnish II, spring 2019[8]

Portfolio

Mitä teet suomeksi kurssin ulkopuolella? Osallistutko kahvitunneille? Puhutko suomalaisten kavereiden kanssa kasvotusten tai netissä? Katsotko YouTube-videoita tai kuunteletko suomalaista musiikkia? Tee portfoliota asioista, joita teet suomeksi vapaa-aikana. Kerää esimerkkejä ja analysoi niitä. Voit esimerkiksi kopioida sähköpostin, jonka kirjoitat kaverille suomeksi.

Etkö tee paljon mitään suomeksi kurssin ulkopuolella? Aloita nyt! Voit kysyä opettajaltasi tai kurssikavereiltasi ideoita. Voit saada opettajalta myös suomalaisen opiskelijan yhteystiedot, jos haluat harjoitella puhumista natiivipuhujan kanssa.

Projektin tarkoitus on, että
- Käytät suomea aktiivisesti kurssin ulkopuolella ja prosessoit kielenkäyttöäsi ja oppimistasi
- Opettajasi voivat miettiä keinoja tukea kielenkäyttöäsi kurssin ulkopuolella

Puhumme portfolioista luokassa ja saat myös palautetta.

Portfolio on **10 %** kurssin kokonaisarvosanasta.

(My translation:
What do you do in Finnish outside of class? Do you participate in the Finnish program coffee hour? Do you speak with your Finnish friends face-to-face or online? Do you watch YouTube videos or listen to Finnish music? Prepare a portfolio of the things you do in Finnish in your free time. Collect samples and analyze them. You can, for example, include a copy of an email that you write to a friend in Finnish.

Don't do much in Finnish outside of class? Start now! You can ask your teacher or classmates for ideas. Your teacher can also give the contact information of a Finnish person if you want to practice speaking with a native speaker.[9]

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[7] Note that there were several different versions of the instructions. One version is published as an Appendix to Article III.
[8] The instructions for this specific class were written bilingually. I have translated the parts that were given in Finnish only and added the phrase *my translation* to indicate these.
[9] Here I used the term *native speaker*, but since then, I have started to prefer Rampton's (1995) *expert.*

The aim of the project is that
- You use Finnish actively outside of class and process your language use and learning
- Your teachers can think of ways to support your language use outside of class

We will talk about the portfolios in class and you will also receive feedback.

The portfolio is 10% of your final course grade.)

Aikataulu
(My translation: schedule)

Task	Deadline	Max points
1. Portfolio	Feb 11	5
2. Keskustelu 1 ja itsearviointi	Feb 25	5
3. Portfolio	March 4	5
4. Portfolio	March 18	5
5. Keskustelu 2 ja itsearviointi	April 15	5
6. Raportti		5
TOTAL		**30**

(My translation:
2. Conversation 1 and self-assessment
5. Conversation 2 and self-assessment)

Näyte (sample): Format is free. Can be (but is not limited to) any of these: photos, drawings, links, copy of a chat conversation or email exchange, video…

Päiväkirjamerkintä (journal entry):
In your entry, describe what you did in the target language. When? With whom? Where? Why?
You can also write about the following:
What did you say, how did your peer respond?
What did you learn in this language use situation? New phrases, vocabulary, or something else?

Reflektio (reflection):
Also include a reflection, in which you address the following:
What discoveries did you make about the language?
What did you understand? What didn't you understand?
What was challenging or confusing?
What would you do differently next time?

Päiväkirjamerkintä ja reflektio ovat yhteensä 180–200 sanaa.
(My translation: The journal entry and reflection should altogether be 180–200 words.)

Rubric:

The portfolio entries are graded using the following rubric. The emphasis will be on the effort you have put into your portfolio entry and less on the accuracy of your language. However, it is important that you use your own words: Please do not look up entire phrases or use a translation tool.

Grading: Max 5 p.
5 = Completed with excellent effort, coherent and comprehensible text. You are using your own words.
4 = Completed with good effort, coherent text, and/or mostly comprehensible text. You are using your own words.
3 = Completed, but list-like or difficult to comprehend
1–2 = Only partially completed, list-like and/or difficult to comprehend
0 = not submitted or submitted late

ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

TOIMIJUUS JA VUOROVAIKUTUSJÄRJESTYS AMERIKKALAISTEN SUOMENOPPIJOIDEN ITSENÄISESSÄ KIELENKÄYTÖSSÄ [AGENCY AND INTERACTION ORDER IN AMERICAN FINNISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' INDEPENDENT TARGET LANGUAGE USE]

by

Elisa Räsänen, 2021

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
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TOIMIJUUS JA VUOROVAIKUTUSJÄRJESTYS AMERIKKALAISTEN SUOMENOPPIJOIDEN ITSENÄISESSÄ KIELENKÄYTÖSSÄ

Elisa Räsänen, Indiana University & Jyväskylän yliopisto

Aiemmat tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet vastakkainasettelun luokassa ja luokan ulkopuolella tapahtuvassa kielenkäytössä ja oppimisessa. Tässä artikkelissa tarkastelen neljää amerikkalaista suomenoppijaa ja sitä, miten he hakeutuvat aktiivisina toimijoina itsenäisiin suomen kielen käyttötilanteisiin. Artikkelin aineistona on portfoliotehtävä, jossa oppijat ovat dokumentoineet ja reflektoineet itsenäistä, luokkahuoneen ulkopuolella tapahtuvaa kielenkäyttöään. Tarkastelen aineistoa Scollonin ja Scollonin (2004) neksusanalyysia ja van Lierin (2010) ekologista viitekehystä hyödyntäen. Artikkelin analyysimenetelmänä on diskurssianalyysi. Portfolioissa dokumentoidut vuorovaikutustilanteet rakentuivat hierarkkisesti, mikä usein syntyi oppijan pyrkimyksestä saada vuorovaikutuskumppanista ja ·tilanteesta maksimaalinen hyöty ja kielellinen altistus. Lisäksi hierarkkisuutta loivat oppijan ja asiantuntevan suomenpuhujan erilaisiksi koetut roolit. Vuorovaikutus rakentuikin usein oppijan aloitteen ja asiantuntevan kielenkäyttäjän vastausten varaan. Tämä artikkeli osoittaa, kuinka suuri merkitys aloitteellisuudella, toimintaympäristöllä ja vuorovaikutuskumppaneilla on vieraan kielen oppijoiden itsenäisessä kielenkäytössä. Tutkimustuloksia voi hyödyntää vieraan kielen pedagogiikan kehittämiseen, jotta se vastaisi paremmin oppijoiden todellisia kielenkäyttötarpeita.

Avainsanat: affordanssit, diskurssianalyysi, neksusanalyysi, sosiaalinen media, toimijuus, vieraan kielen oppiminen, vuorovaikutusjärjestys

1 JOHDANTO

Jo vieraan kielen alkeita opiskelevilla voi olla erilaisia kohdekielisiä verkostoja tai kiinnostusta niiden rakentamiseen omassa toimintaympäristössään. Teknologian ja ihmisten lisääntyneen liikkuvuuden myötä erilaiset kohdekieliset ympäristöt ovat helposti saavutettavissa, kunhan oppija on aktiivinen: internetissä oppijat pääsevät käyttämään suomea suomenkielisessä ympäristössä milloin vain riippumatta maantieteellisestä etäisyydestä

(Vaarala & Jalkanen, 2011). Lisäksi globaali todellisuus ja ihmisten lisääntynyt liikkuvuus kyseenalaistavat koko vieraan kielen käsitteen (Kramsch, 2014).

Aiemmat tutkimukset ovat käsitelleet vastakkainasettelua luokassa ja luokan ulkopuolella tapahtuvassa kielenkäytössä ja -oppimisessa (Dufva, Heikkilä & Martin, 2003; peruskouluista Luukka, ym., 2008). Pedagogisissa keskusteluissa on pohdittu, miten toi-

Kirjoittajan yhteystiedot:
Elisa Räsänen
elisa.k.rasanen@student.jyu.fi

sen kielen opetuksen sisältöaines tulisi valita ja kuka on vastuussa oppimisesta (esim. Aalto, Mustonen & Tukia, 2009). Pohdin samoja kysymyksiä vieraan kielen oppimisen kontekstissa. Tarkastelen tässä artikkelissa neljää amerikkalaista eri tasokursseilla opiskelevaa suomen kielen opiskelijaa, Owenia, Ivya, Tinaa ja Veraa, sekä heidän itsenäistä kielenkäyttöään Scollonin ja Scollonin (2004) neksusanalyysia ja van Lierin (2010) ekologista viitekehystä hyödyntäen. Tarkastelen sitä, miten oppijat hakeutuvat aktiivisina toimijoina suomen kielen käyttötilanteisiin hyödyntäen oppimisympäristönsä ja teknologian mahdollistamia tarjoumia (*affordance*; ks. van Lier, 2000). Olen kiinnostunut erityisesti *vuorovaikutusjärjestyksestä* (*interaction order*; Goffman, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 2004) eli siitä, miten oppijoiden itsenäisen kielenkäytön tilanteet ovat rakentuneet sosiaalisesti ja hierarkkisesti. Toimijuudella tarkoitan tässä yksilön kirjaimellista tai metaforista liikettä, suuntautumista tai suunnan muutosta (*movement*; van Lier, 2010). Toimijuutta on lisäksi yksilön yleinen ja tilanteinen tunne oman toiminnan vaikuttavuudesta sekä käytös eli se, miten hän toimintaan osallistuu (Mercer, 2011). Oppiminen riippuu yksilön toimijuudesta. Kehittyäkseen elinikäiseksi oppijaksi, oppijan täytyy hyödyntää toimijuuttaan itseohjautuvasti (van Lier, 2010).

Gibson (1979, s. 79) on kehittänyt käsitteen affordanssi (tarjouma, *affordance*) kuvaamaan sitä, mitä mahdollisuuksia ympäristö tarjoaa yksilölle – esimerkiksi sillan voi ylittää tai järvessä voi uida. Tarjouma viittaa Gibsonin alkuperäisessä määritelmässä eliön vastavuoroiseen suhteeseen toimintaympäristönsä tietyn ominaisuuden kanssa. Tarjouma ei ole siis toimijan tai sen kohteen ominaisuus vaan näiden välinen suhde. Se mahdollistaa tietynlaisen toiminnan, mutta ei aiheuta sitä. (van Lier, 2000.) Kielenoppijat, nekin, jotka näennäisesti elävät samanlaisessa ympäristössä,

voivat havaita asioita eri tavoilla. (Menezes, 2011, s. 61). Jos kielenoppija on aktiivinen ja sitoutunut, hän havaitsee kielellisiä mahdollisuuksia ja voi käyttää niitä kielelliseen toimintaan (van Lier, 2000). Tutkimuksessani tarkoitan tarjoumilla oppimisympäristön ja teknologian mahdollistamia vuorovaikutustilanteita ja kielenkäyttömahdollisuuksia, joita oppija voi aktiivisesti hyödyntää tai jättää hyödyntämättä. Tarjoumia voidaan ajatella sosiaalisina toimintoina (Menezes, 2011, s. 61). Hahmotamme maailmaa ja sen tarjoumia suhteessa itseemme ja identiteettiimme. Vuorovaikutustilanteen osapuolet rakentavat identiteettiään sosiaalisessa vuorovaikutuksessa ja ottavat itselleen erilaisia tilanteisia rooleja (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010, s. 18-20). Roolien myötä vuorovaikutusta myös rakennetaan hierarkkisesti.

Portfoliotehtävässä suomenoppijat ovat dokumentoineet ja analysoineet itsenäistä, luokkahuoneen ulkopuolella tapahtuvaa kielenkäyttöään. Tutkimuksen osallistujat opiskelevat suomea Suomesta maantieteellisesti etäisessä yhdysvaltalaisessa suomen kielen ja kulttuurin opetusohjelmassa, joka on myös kaukana suomea kohdekielenä puhuvista yhteisöistä, koska alueelle ei ole historiallisesti muuttanut merkittäviä määriä suomalaisia. He kuitenkin käyttävät suomea monipuolisesti erilaisissa vuorovaikutustilanteissa sekä teknologiavälitteisesti että fyysisessä toimintaympäristössään.

Tutkimuksessa on yhtymäkohtia *arjessa oppimisen tutkimukseen* (*learning in the wild*: Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2018; Wagner, 2015), jossa on tutkittu esimerkiksi luokan ulkopuolista kielenkäyttöä ja sitä, miten kohdekielisiä asiakaspalvelutilanteita tarkastellaan yhdessä kielikurssilla. Tässä artikkelissa pääpaino on kuitenkin itsenäisissä ei-institutionaalisissa suomen kielen käyttötilanteissa. Vieraan kielen oppijoiden itsenäisessä ei-institutionaalisessa kielenkäytössä on

aiemmin tarkasteltu esimerkiksi affekteja ja strategioita (Hurd, 2008). Lisäksi on tutkittu esimerkiksi pelien (Piirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2007) ja mobiilisovellusten käyttöä (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012). Tämä artikkeli jatkaa näitä näkökulmia keskittyen kartoittamaan vieraan kielen oppijoiden kohdekielisiä sosiaalisia toimintoja ja sitä, miten oppijat näitä kokemuksia merkityksellistävät. Vastaan siis artikkelissa seuraaviin kysymyksiin: Miten oppijat hakeutuvat aktiivisina toimijoina suomen kielen käyttötilanteisiin hyödyntäen oppimisympäristönsä ja teknologian mahdollistamia tarjoumia? Miten vuorovaikutusjärjestys näissä tilanteissa rakentuu?

Luvussa 2 esittelen tutkimuksen viitekehystä. Luvussa 3 esittelen tutkimuksen aineiston ja menetelmät. Luvussa 4 esittelen analyysin ja tutkimuksen keskeiset tulokset. Luvussa 5 pohdin tutkimustuloksia ja niiden soveltamista vieraan kielen pedagogiikan kehittämiseen.

2 EKOLOGINEN LÄHESTYMISTAPA KIELENOPPIMISEEN

"Perhaps, after all, we 'learn' language in the same way that an animal 'learns' the forest, or a plant 'learns' the soil."

(van Lier, 2000, s. 259)

Ekologisessa lähestymistavassa käytetään luontometaforaa sen kuvaamiseen, että ympäristön mahdollisuudet voivat avautua yksilölle tämän ollessa vuorovaikutuksessa sen kanssa. Yksilön kielenkäyttö on sidoksissa kontekstiin, ja sen avulla tämä voi mukautua kulloinkin käsillä olevaan tilanteeseen. (van Lier, 2000.) Vieraan kielen oppijoiden, kuten tutkimukseni amerikkalaisten suomenoppijoiden, onkin etsittävä kielenkäytön mahdollisuuksia ympäristöstään ja teknologian avulla aktiivisesti, koska he eivät asu kohdekielisessä ympäristössä. Opiskelijat joutuvat ikään kuin

rakentamaan ympärilleen kohdekielisiä ympäristöjä. Esimerkiksi suomenoppija Owen päätyy tutkimuksessani esittelemään itsensä suomeksi sattumoisin kaupassa tapaamilleen suomalaisille (luku 4). Oppijan on hyödynnettävä tilaisuuksia kohdekielen käyttämiseen silloin kun niitä on tarjolla ja myös hakeuduttava näihin tilanteisiin aktiivisesti.

Ekologisessa lähestymistavassa kielen oppimista ei katsota prosessina, jossa kielellinen aines menee tai laitetaan "oppijan pään sisälle". Tutkimukseni avainosallistujat eivät omista tai hallitse kieltä, vaan elävät siinä. Oppimisessa oppija kehittää entistä tehokkaampia tapoja käsitellä maailmaa ja sen merkityksiä. (van Lier, 2000, 2004.) Tutkimuksessani tarkastelen kielenoppijoita erityisesti *kielenkäyttäjinä*: he osallistuvat vuorovaikutukseen sen hetkisillä resursseillaan ja kaikentasoisten suomenpuhujien kanssa. Kielitaito on tutkimukseni avainosallistujille vain yksi resurssi vuorovaikutuksen apuna: esimerkiksi keskustelu voidaan aloittaa suomeksi, jolloin funktiona on yhteyden luominen, ja sen jälkeen keskustelua jatketaan englanniksi. Kielitodellisuuteen myös mukaudutaan tarpeen mukaan: esimerkiksi suomenoppija Ivyn suomea osaamattomat Facebook-kaverit käyttävät Google-kääntäjää, jotta hekin voivat osallistua Ivyn suomeksi aloittamaan vuorovaikutukseen.

Tarkastelen yksittäisen oppijan kielellistä repertuaaria siis suhteessa tämän kohtaamiin kielenkäyttötilanteisiin. Analyysin kohteena on aktiivinen oppija ja tämän toiminta (van Lier, 2000). Van Lier (1996) kuvaa kielenoppimista seuraavien vaiheiden kautta: *altistuminen* (exposure), *työstäminen* (engagement), *sisäistäminen* (intake) ja *taitaminen* (proficiency) (suomennokset: Alanen, 2000). Vaiheet voivat limittyä toistensa kanssa. Koska tutkin oppijoiden toimijuutta ja sitä, miten he hakeutuvat itsenäisiin kielenkäyttötilanteisiin, olen kiinnostunut erityisesti altistumisen ja työstämisen prosesseista.

Altistumisessa oppija kohtaa kohdekielistä ainesta, jonka hyödyntämisessä tarvitaan *työstämistä*. Oppijan työstäessä kieltä hänen sisäinen tietojärjestelmänsä on vuorovaikutuksessa ympäristön kanssa. (van Lier, 1996, s. 48-53.) Esimerkiksi tutkimuksessani Ivy altistuu suomen kielelle, kun hän vierailee uuden suomalaisen tuttavansa Mairen kotona ja keskustelee tämän kanssa suomeksi. Altistumisessa tärkeää on sen laatu ja määrä: altistuskielen pitää olla ymmärrettävää ja lisäksi oppija tarvitsee tukea, kuten kontekstuaalisia vihjeitä tai vuorovaikutuksessa saatua tukea (van Lier, 1996, s. 42-48).

Lisäksi tärkeitä ovat oppijan aiemmat kokemukset, kiinnostuksen kohteet ja asenteet. Oppijan tulee olla vastaanottavainen ja utelias altistuskieltä kohtaan. Kohdekielen käyttö vaatii panostusta. (van Lier, 1996, s. 46-53.) Ivy osoittaa kiinnostusta suomen kielen oppimiseen pyytämällä ystäväänsä kertomaan Suomen-matkastaan suomeksi, vaikka keskustelua voisi käydä englanniksikin. Altistuskielelle vastaanottavainen oppija kiinnittää siihen myös huomiota. Huomion kiinnittämisessä olennaista on kohdentaminen, jota ohjaa aineksen tuttuus tai tunnistettavuus. Oppija voi esimerkiksi poimia tuttuja teemoja käsittelevästä keskustelusta uusia sanastoaineksia. Tällaisissa olosuhteissa oppija voi hyödyntää altistuskielen tarjoumia oppimiseen. (van Lier, 1996, s. 49-7.)

3 AINEISTO JA MENETELMÄT

3.1 Portfolioaineisto

Artikkelin aineisto koostuu amerikkalaisen yliopiston neljän suomenoppijan, Owenin, Ivyn, Tinan ja Veran, portfoliomerkinnöistä, joita on yhteensä 36. Opiskelijoiden nimet on artikkelissa muutettu. Otanta on osa laajempaa tutkimusaineistoa, johon sisältyy artikkelin kirjoitushetkellä 99 portfoliomerkintää. Portfoliotehtävä, jonka suunnittelin yhdessä kollegani kanssa[1], on ollut osa kurssiarviointia kolmella suomen kielen tasokurssilla. Tehtävässä opiskelijoiden täytyy kerätä kielenkäytöstään "todistusaineistoa", eli esimerkiksi nauhoituksia, kuvakaappauksia tai linkkejä, ja reflektoida oppimistaan kirjallisesti suomeksi tai englanniksi. Kuvaan eri vaiheet tiivistetysti kuviossa 1.
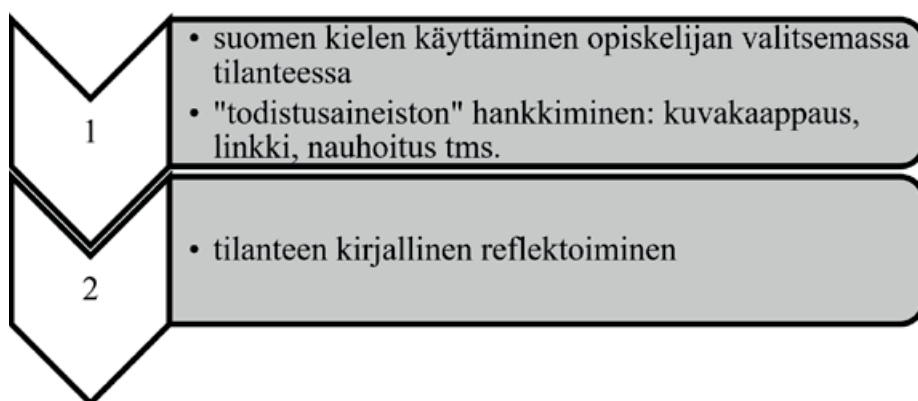
KUVIO 1: Portfoliotehtävän vaiheet

Tarkoituksena on lisätä oppijoiden arkioppimista (*incidental learning*, ks. Kelly, 2012) ja itsenäistä kielen oppimista (*autonomous language learning*, ks. esim. Benson, 2001). Tavoite on 1) kannustaa ja "pakottaa" oppijoita luokkahuoneen ulkopuolella tapahtuvaan itsenäiseen kielenkäyttöön ja 2) tarjota opettaja-tutkijalle tietoa kielenkäytöstä (*tutkiva opettaja, exploratory practice*; ks. myös Hanks, 2017). Tavoitteena on, että oppijat aloittavat paitsi oppimisympäristönsä aktiivisen hyödyntämisen myös kielenkäyttönsä systemaattisen reflektoinnin. Reflektioissa oppija kohdistaa huomiotaan itseään kiinnostaviin aineksiin (ks. myös van Lier, 1996, s. 49).

Reflektioihin oppijat kirjoittivat havaintojaan ja analysoivat oppimistaan. Apukysymykset johdattelivat heitä pohtimaan muun muassa sitä, mistä asiasta he olivat pitäneet, minkä kokeneet haasteelliseksi ja mitä he olivat oppineet. Tässä artikkelissa analysoin oppijoiden kirjallisia reflektioita ja myös esimerkkejä alkuperäisistä kielenkäyttötilanteista.

Valitsemani avainosallistujat kirjoittivat portfolioissaan monipuolisista kielenkäyttötilanteista ja osoittivat erityisen aktiivista toimijuutta. Toisaalta myös muiden opiskelijoiden portfolioissa reflektoitiin samanlaisia teemoja, ja analyysini vahvistaa muistakin portfolioista tekemiäni havaintoja. Rajaus neljään avainosallistujaan mahdollistaa aineiston syvällisemmän tarkastelun.

Tutkimuksen osallistujat olivat yliopistotason opiskelijoita, jotka opiskelivat suomea kolmella eri vuosikurssilla. Suomen kurssit kokoontuivat 4-5 kertaa viikossa 50 minuutin ajan. Suurin osa osallistujista suoritti yliopistossa kandidaatin tutkintoa. Ivy ja Tina olivat keskenään samalla kurssilla, ja heiltä on portfolioita kolmen lukukauden ajalta. Owen oli vasta aloittanut suomen opintonsa, kun taas Vera oli jo pitkälle edennyt opiskelija, joka oli myös viettänyt aikaa Suomessa.

3.2 Neksusanalyysi ja kielenoppijoiden tutkimus

Käytän tutkimuksessa neksusanalyyttista lähestymistapaa, jossa yhdistetään diskurssintutkimuksen ja etnografian tutkimusperinnettä (ks. Pietikäinen, 2012, s. 419; Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Scollon ja Scollon (2004) kehittivät neksusanalyysin tutkiessaan viestintäteknologioihin liittyviä sosiaalisia käytänteitä Alaskassa. Neksusanalyysia on hyödynnetty esimerkiksi tutkittaessa kielenoppimista verkostoituneena toimintana (ks. Kuure, Riekki & Turmelius, 2018, s. 72, 74). Tutkimusprosessi tähtää kohteen muuttamiseen, ja sitä motivoi tutkijan itsensä havaitsema sosiaalinen ongelma (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, s. 8-9), tässä tutkimuksessa ristiriita vieraan kielen opetusperinteen ja oppijoiden aktiivisen toimijuuden sekä muuttuneiden oppimisympäristöjen välillä. Lisäksi tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tarjota välineitä vieraan kielen pedagogiikan kehittämiseen.

Neksusanalyysia on hyödynnetty erilaisissa kielen oppimiseen ja kieli-ideologioihin liittyvissä tutkimuksissa. Amerikkalaisia suomen puhujia on aiemmin tarkastellut esimerkiksi Karjalainen (2012), joka sovelsi neksusanalyyttista lähestymistapaa amerikansuomalaisten kielielämäkertoihin ja tarkasteli kielen liikkuvuutta näiden siirtolaisten näkökulmasta. Kielen osittaiseenkin osaamiseen liittyy monia materialistisia ja ideologisia ulottuvuuksia. Ennen kaikkea osittainenkin kielitaito on kuitenkin resurssi, jonka hyödyntämismahdollisuudet vaihtelevat kontekstin mukaan. (Karjalainen, 2012.) Jatkan tässä artikkelissa samoja teemoja, mutta tarkastelen amerikkalaisia suomenoppijoita, jotka opiskelevat suomea vieraana kielenä ilman suomalaisia sukujuuria. Heillekin suomen kieli näyttäytyy juuri identiteetin rakentajana ja yhteyden luonnin välineenä enemmän kuin pelkkänä hyötyarvona (ks. Karjalainen, 2012, s. 230).

Toisen kielen tutkimuksen kontekstissa on havaittu, että kielenkäyttö on tilanteista eli ajallisesti ja paikallisesti kerrostunutta. Kieliresurssien hyödyntämisessä keskeistä on oppijan oma toimijuus, ympäristön affordanssit ja sosiaalinen tuki. (Strömmer, 2017; Virtanen, 2017.) Kuure (2011) on tutkinut suomalaisten englanninoppijoiden verkkopeleissä tapahtuvaa kielenoppimista. Videopelit voivat tarjota kielen oppimisen affordansseja, jotka liittyvät sosiaalisten suhteiden ja vuorovaikutuksen rakentamiseen (Kuure, 2011). Myös omassa tutkimuksessani teknologialla on paljon vuorovaikutustarjoumia. Tässä artikkelissa keskityn erityisesti sosiaalisen median ja chatin tarjoumiin. Oman tutkimukseni osallistujat eivät opiskele globaalia valtakieltä, englantia. Internetissä he voivat kuitenkin samalla tavalla hakeutua kohdekielisiin tilanteisiin aktiivisen toimijuutensa ohjaamina.

Etenin tutkimuksessa Scollonin ja Scollonin (2004) menetelmäoppaan mukaan kolmivaiheisesti: 1) kartoittaminen, 2) navigointi ja 3) muokkaaminen (Pietikäisen, 2012, suomennokset). Kartoittamisvaiheessa tutustuin niihin sosiaalisiin toimintoihin ja toimijoihin, jotka ovat tärkeitä tutkimusongelman ratkaisemisessa, sekä keräsin aineiston. Navigoimisvaiheessa hain yhteyksiä ja merkityksiä havaitsemistani sosiaalisista toiminnoista eli analysoin tarkemmin opiskelijoiden portfolioissa dokumentoimaa vuorovaikutusta. Neksusanalyysiin kuuluu myös muokkaamisvaihe, jossa tutkija osallistuu uudelleen tutkimiinsa sosiaalisiin toimintoihin ja voi pyrkiä muokkaamaan niitä. (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, s. 153-178.) Tämä tutkimus lähti liikkeelle tutkimuskentällä havaitsemastani muutostarpeesta, sillä olen pohtinut, vastaako opetukseni riittävästi oppijoiden todellisiin kielenkäyttötarpeisiin. Esitän toiminnan muuttamisen mahdollisuuksia luvussa 5.

Olen hahmottanut vuorovaikutuskumppaneiden ja kielenkäyttötilanteiden mo-

ninaisuutta ja hierarkkisuutta piirtämällä portfolioissa dokumentoiduista sosiaalisista toiminnoista karttaa, jonka avulla pääsin kiinni tutkimuksen kannalta kiinnostaviin tilanteisiin. Tarkastelin useamman kerran kokonaisaineistoa suhteessa aiempaan tutkimukseen ja palasin aina takaisin valitsemieni avainosallistujien portfolioihin. (ks. myös Pietikäinen, 2012, s. 423.)

Kartoittamisvaiheessa työskentelyäni on helpottanut se, että asun ja työskentelen tutkimassani ympäristössä. Kielentutkimukselle on tyypillistä, että tutkija on itse mukana aineistossaan - olen tutkimuksen osallistujien suomen opettaja. Kartoittamisvaiheessa tieto kontekstista ja aineiston syvä tuntemus ovat auttaneet minua ymmärtämään tilannesidonnaisia viittauksia. Lisäksi minulla on syvällisempää ymmärrystä kielenoppimiskontekstista ja kohdeyliopiston suomen kielen opetusohjelman toimintaperiaatteista kuin täysin ulkopuolisella tutkijalla olisi. Oman organisaation tarkastelemiseen voi liittyvä kuitenkin monenlaisia haasteita, kuten luottamuksellisen suhteen säilyttäminen tutkimuksen kohteena oleviin (omat opiskelijani) (Alvesson, 2003). Tutkimuksen osallistujat tiesivät aineistonkeruun aikana tutkimuksestani vain, että sen tavoitteena on analysoida oppijoiden vuorovaikutusresursseja ja että tutkimusta on tarkoitus hyödyntää kielenopetuksen kehittämiseen. Portfoliotehtävä on osa opiskelijoiden kurssiarviointia, joten olen antanut siitä opiskelijoille palautetta. Olen kerännyt tutkimusluvat opiskelijoilta avustajan avulla ja vasta kurssiarvioinnin päätyttyä, jotta he voisivat varmistua siitä, että osallistuminen tai osallistumatta jättäminen ei vaikuttaisi heidän kurssisuoritukseensa.

Neksusanalyysiin liittyy kolme keskeistä käsitettä: toimijahistoria, paikan diskurssit ja vuorovaikutusjärjestys (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, s. 19). Toimijahistoria (*historical body*) kuvaa aiempia kokemuksia ja olettamuksia,

esimerkiksi tutkimuksessani avainosallistujien aiempia käsityksiä vuorovaikutustilanteista, tekstilajeista ja erilaisista kielenkäyttökonteksteista, esimerkiksi sähköpostista tai chatista genrenä. Toimijahistoria näkyy tutkimuksessani myös oppijoiden käsityksinä kielenoppimisesta. Myös van Lierin (1996) mukaan kielenoppijan aiemmat kokemukset ja esimerkiksi asenteet ovat tärkeitä kielellisen altistuksen työstämisessä. Paikan diskurssit (*discourses in place*) ovat esimerkiksi tilan materiaalisuuden, suunnittelun ja vuorovaikutustarjoumien mahdollistamia diskursseja (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, s. 163). Tutkimuksessani nämä paikat ovat usein virtuaalisia tiloja, kuten sosiaalisen median ympäristöjä, mutta myös fyysisiä paikkoja: vuorovaikutusta tapahtuu pikaisesti kaupan lähettyvillä tai puoli-institutionaalisissa puitteissa suomen ohjelman järjestämällä keskustelutunnilla. Oppija käsittelee kielellistä altistusta suhteessa toimintaympäristöön ja sen tarjoamiin vuorovaikutustilanteisiin (van Lier, 1996).

Vuorovaikutusjärjestys (*interaction order*), johon keskityn tässä artikkelissa, käsittää erilaiset sosiaaliset järjestelyt ja hierarkiat (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, s. 19), tutkimuksessani esimerkiksi sen, miten asiantuntevien kielenkäyttäjien ja kielenoppijoiden vuorovaikutus rakentuu hierarkkisesti. Vuorovaikutuksen osapuolet määrittävät toisiaan yksilöinä ja sosiaalisten valtarakenteiden kautta (Goffman, 1983, s. 3). Tutkimuksessani vuorovaikutusjärjestys rakentuu sen mukaan, miten osapuolet määrittävät omaa ja vuorovaikutuskumppaninsa kielitaitoa (kieltä osaamaton, alkeissoppija, edistyneempi kielenoppija, asiantunteva kielenkäyttäjä, kielenopettaja). Käytän Ramptonin (1995) *asiantuntijan* käsitettä kuvaamaan niitä avainosallistujieni vuorovaikutuskumppaneita, joiden kielitaito on niin vakiintunut, että he eivät ole artikkelissa kuvatuissa tilanteissa kielenoppijan roolissa. Tutkimukseni monikielisessä todellisuudessa asiantuntijuus kuvaa näitä osallistujia paremmin verrattuna esimerkiksi *äidinkieliseen* puhujaan, johon liittyisi erilaisia ideologisia ulottuvuuksia: Asiantuntija tai asiantunteva kielenkäyttäjä määrittyy osaamisensa, ei syntyperänsä kautta. Asiantuntijuus määräytyy myös suhteessa vuorovaikutuskumppaniin. (Rampton, 1995, s. 340-341.) Luvussa 4.3 avainosallistujani esiintyvät itse asiantuntijan roolissa, koska he ovat kielellisiltä resursseiltaan kieliasiantuntijoita suhteessa suomen kieltä osaamattomiin ystäviinsä ja perheenjäseniinsä. Asiantuntijuus siis riippuu siitä, miten vuorovaikutuksen osapuolet asemoivat itseään suhteessa toisiinsa. Tässä artikkelissa perehdyn erityisesti siihen, miten oppijanrooli ja toisaalta oppijan panostus ja aktiivinen toimijuus vaikuttavat vuorovaikutusjärjestyksen rakentumiseen.

3.3 Diskurssianalyysi

Analyysimenetelmäni on diskurssianalyysi, joka Scollonin ja Scollonin (2004) kenttäoppaan mukaan sopii navigointivaiheen välineeksi, kun tarkastellaan hierarkioita ja vuorovaikutusta. Diskurssianalyysin avulla tarkastelen, miten avainosallistujat reflektoivat omaa toimijuuttaan ja vuorovaikutustaan asiantuntevien kielenkäyttäjien kanssa (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, s. 173-174). Diskurssianalyysissa kieltä tarkastellaan sosiaalisena toimintana käyttökontekstissaan suhteessa "kielenkäyttäjien sosiaalisiin käytänteisiin ja rakenteisiin" (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019).

Neksusanalyysin mukaisesti analyysin kohteina ovat sekä toiminnan makro- että mikrotaso. (Pietikäinen, 2012, s. 417.) Makrotasolla olen esimerkiksi kiinnostunut siitä, millaiseen kielenkäyttötilanteeseen oppija osallistuu ja mitä tilanne paljastaa oppijanroolista. Mikrotasolla olen kiinnostunut vuorovaikutuksen rakentumisesta ja siitä, miten oppija sanallistaa oppimaansa - tässä olen käyttänyt diskurssianalyysia. Keskityn analyysissa oppijoiden

dokumentoimiin vuorovaikutustilanteisiin sekä niissä esiin nouseviin oppijan havaintoihin, joihin oppija kiinnittää huomiota kirjallisissa reflektioissa tilanteen päätyttyä. Reflektointikin on sosiaalista toimintaa: Reflektioissa oppijat jäsentävät ja merkityksellistävät kielenkäyttötilanteita jälkikäteen opettajalle. Lisäksi he kielentävät näille kokemuksille antamiaan merkityksiä.

Artikkelissa en ota varsinaisesti kantaa siihen, millaista oppimista portfoliotyöskentelyn aikana tapahtuu, vaan kuvaan ja analysoin, miten oppijat näitä kokemuksia merkityksellistävät. Analysoin siis, mitä oppija on oman kuvauksensa mukaan kielellä tehnyt ja mitä hän tilanteesta kirjoittaa. Oppija esimerkiksi kertoo harjoitelleensa imperfektin käyttöä suomalaisen kaverin kanssa pyytämällä tätä kertomaan menneestä lomamatkastaan. En kuitenkaan analysoi, onko opiskelija oppinut imperfektin käyttöä tämän harjoittelutilanteen myötä.

4 TOIMIJUUS JA VUOROVAIKUTUSJÄRJESTYKSEN RAKENTUMINEN ITSENÄISISSÄ KIELENKÄYTTÖTILANTEISSA

Portfolioissa osallistujat kuvaavat osallistumistaan erilaisiin suullisiin ja kirjallisiin suomenkielisiin vuorovaikutustilanteisiin asiantuntevien suomenpuhujien, muiden suomenoppijoiden sekä jopa suomea osaamattomien henkilöiden kanssa. Vuorovaikutus voi olla kasvokkaista tai teknologiavälitteistä. Vuorovaikutustilanteet näyttäytyvät aineistossa opiskelijoille keskeisimpänä suomenkielisen toiminnan ja kieliharjoittelun tarjoumina (ks. myös Suni, 2008). Ne rakentuvat tilanteissa usein hierarkkisesti: oppija ohjaa toimintaa omalla aloitteellisuudellaan ja vuorovaikutuskumppanit toimivat tilanteissa usein asiantuntijan roolissa. Kartoittamisvaiheessa hahmotin portfolioissa esiin nousevia suhteita ja sosiaalista verkottunei-

suutta. Vuorovaikutustilanteiden osapuolet rakentavat identiteettiään sosiaalisessa vuorovaikutuksessa ja ottavat tilanteen mukaan itselleen erilaisia väliaikaisia rooleja (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010, s. 18–20). Itsensä asemoiminen oppijaksi tai asiantuntevaksi kielenkäyttäjäksi vaikuttaa merkittävästi vuorovaikutusjärjestyksen rakentumiseen. Keskeiseksi nousee oppijan aktiivinen toimijuus.

4.1 Oppija aloitteentekijänä ja vuorovaikutustilanteen ohjaajana

Alkeisoppijoiden portfolioissa vuorovaikutuksen hierarkiat näyttävät rakentuvan osallistujien kielitaidon tason mukaan: oppijalla ja asiantuntevalla suomen puhujalla on vuorovaikutustilanteessa omat roolinsa. Vuorovaikutuksen alulle panijana on portfolioissa oppija, jonka ehdoilla keskustelu etenee. Asiantunteva kielenkäyttäjä osallistuu vuorovaikutukseen oppijan säätelemien raamien puitteissa.

Alkeisopiskelijat kuvaavat portfolioissa tilanteita, joissa he ovat osallistuneet viestintään monikielisesti osittaisella kielitaidolla. Kukaan ei hallitse mitään kieltä "kokonaan" eli ole sen "täydellinen" puhuja. Kukaan ei myöskään tarvitse kaikkia kielen resursseja arkielämässään. Globaalissa ajassa juuri kielenkäytön osittaisuus ja monilähtöisyys on tärkeä analyysin kohde. (Blommaert, 2010, s. 103, 106.) Reflektioissa oppijat kiinnittävät huomiota mahdollisuuksiinsa osallistua vuorovaikutukseen suomen kielen resursseillaan.

Esimerkiksi suomen kielen opintonsa vasta aloittanut Owen kirjoittaa kohtaamisestaan kaupassa. Hän on huomannut, että kassalla asioivat ihmiset vaikuttavat puhuvan suomea. Kassahenkilö on kysynyt heiltä heidän kotimaastaan ja Owenille on varmistunut, että he ovat suomalaisia. Tämän jälkeen Owen on mennyt juttelemaan heille. Olen lihavoinut Owenin reflektioon kohdat, joihin kiinnitän analyysissa erityistä huomiota.

Esimerkki 1

> When we had both walked out **I said, "Moi!"** and they were happy to hear that I knew **a little** Finnish. **I attempted to** introduce myself in Finnish, and we had **a very brief conversation** about my studying Finnish. It was exciting to be able to use Finnish to be able to relate to other people I come across in my everyday life.

Esimerkissä Owen korostaa suomen kielen käytön vähyyttä kohtaamisessa sananvalinnoillaan *a little* ja *I attempted to*. Owenin sananvalinnat korostavat hänen osallistumisensa yksilöllistä puolta: kuvauksesta syntyy vaikutelma Owenin performanssista, jonka yleisönä suomalaiset kuulijat ovat olleet. Tämän jälkeen on vaihdettu englannin kieleen. Englanninkielistä vuorovaikutusta Owen kuvaa keskusteluksi. Tervehdykset ja itsensä esitteleminen opitaan suomen kurssilla ensimmäisenä ja niillä on luontevaa aloittaa keskustelu. Abstraktimman tason keskusteluun siirryttäessä kielenvaihto on luontevaa, koska osallistujat ovat kaikki englanninkielentaitoisia.

Oppijan kiinnostus ja vastaanottavaisuus ohjaavat häntä altistumaan kielelle (van Lier, 1996, s. 46). Owenin reflektiosta näkyy vastaanottavaisuus altistuskielelle: hän suhtautuu kohtaamiinsa suomalaisiin eräänlaisena kielenkäytön tarjoumana. Kun hänelle tarjoutuu pienikin mahdollisuus käyttää suomen kieltä, hän hyödyntää sen. Kielenoppijat, nekin, jotka näennäisesti elävät samanlaisessa ympäristössä, havaitsevat asioita eri tavoilla (Menezes, 2011, s. 61). *Paikan diskurssien* syvempi analyysi on muun kuin reflektioaineiston puuttumisen vuoksi haastavaa, mutta Owenin kuvauksen perusteella kaupan ulkopuolella on yllättäen tarjoutunut tilaisuus lyhyeen keskusteluun: tilanteen hetkittäisyys on ehkä juuri ollut kannusteena siihen tarttumisessa. Kuvauksen perusteella molemmat keskustelun osapuolet

ovat yllättyneet tilanteesta positiivisesti, sillä kyseisessä amerikkalaisessa yliopistokaupungissa ei ole tyypillistä törmätä suomenkielisiin. Tarjoamat ovat tärkeitä toimijuuden muodostumisessa ja niitä ei voi irrottaa kontekstistaan (Mercer, 2012, s. 46-48).

Seuraavassa esimerkissä Ivy, joka on tässä vaiheessa opiskellut suomea puolisen vuotta, reflektoi vierailuaan suomalaisen Mairen luona. Maire on Ivyn asuinkaupungissa asuva suomalainen, johon tämä on tutustunut sattumalta kaupassa. Näitä sattumuksia esiintyy portfolioaineistossa paljonkin, mikä kertoo siitä, että opiskelijat ovat olleet erityisen vastaanottavaisia altistamaan itseään mahdollisille kielenkäytön tarjoumille. Ivy menee Mairen luo kylään tavoitteenaan tutustua tähän paremmin ja harjoitella suomen kielen käyttöä:

Esimerkki 2

> - - **Me** enimmäkseen puhuemme englantia ja vähän suomea. - - I was surprised at how easy it was to say simple greetings **with her!** Getting to know **each other, we** mainly spoke in English. - - **She agreed to** meet with me regularly to speak Finnish - - **I told her** how I had just learned "past tense" earlier that day, **and she spoke** of what we had done during our visit in Finnish.

Ivyn sananvalinnoissa korostuu yhteisen tekemisen merkitys. Suurin osa kuvauksesta on *me*-muodossa. Kuvauksen loppuosa rakentuu Ivyn pyyntöjen ja sitä seuranneen toiminnan kaavalla. Ivyn pyyntö on kummassakin tapauksessa synnyttänyt vuorovaikutuskumppanissa myönteisen vastauksen. Esille nousee siis toiminnan vastavuoroisuus eli se, että toimintaan vastataan toiminnalla.

Van Lierin (1996, s. 53-54) mukaan oppijan panostus on olennaista kielen prosessoinnissa. Ivyn reflektio kertoo siitä, miten hän pyrkii aktiivisesti hyödyntämään vuorovaikutusti-

lanteen kieliharjoitteluun. Hän menee vierai-
lulle Mairen luokse tavoitteenaan harjoitella
tämän kanssa suomea sekä pyytää Mairea har-
joittelemaan kanssaan myös jatkossa. Norton
ja Toohey (2001) ovat tarkastelleet kahden
tapaustutkimuksen kautta "hyvän kielenop-
pijan" ominaisuuksia. Tutkimuksen mukaan
hyvä kielenoppija hyödyntää yhteisöjä vuo-
rovaikutukseen (Norton & Toohey, 2001).
Ivy kertoo Mairelle, mitä hän on oppinut
kurssilla, tavoitteenaan kohdistaa harjoitte-
lua juuri opittuun imperfekti-rakenteeseen.
Hän hyödyntää uutta tuttavaansa tarjoumana
rakenteen oppimiseen. Oppijan ja asiantunte-
van suomenpuhujan vuorovaikutus rakentuu
siis aineistossa usein hierarkkisesti. Portfo-
liotehtävässä aloitteentekijä on oppija, joka
hyödyntää vuorovaikutuskumppaniaan eli
asiantuntevaa suomenpuhujaa altistuakseen
kohdekielelle.

Alkeisoppijan ja edistyneen suomenpuhu-
jan keskustelut ovat aineistossa usein haas-
tattelumaisia tai ne jäsentyvät kuten opetus-
tilanne. Vuorovaikutustilanteen haastatte-
lumaisuus näkyy oppijoiden toimittamissa
video- tai äänitiedostoissa, mutta oppijat
myös itse nimeävät tilanteita haastatteluiksi.
Esimerkiksi Ivy on opettajan kehotuksesta
nauhoittanut erään Mairen kanssa käymänsä
suomenkielisen keskustelun, joka rakentuu
Ivyn kysymysten ja Mairen vastausten varaan.
Ivy reflektoi keskustelua esimerkissä 3:

Esimerkki 3
> Se oli **hidas keskustelu** ja enemmän kuten
> **haastattelu** kuin mä haluaisin, mutta se
> oli okei!

Raportissaan Ivy nimeää oman toimintansa
haastatteluksi. Diskurssin nimeäminen syn-
nyttää vastuuvelvollisuuden (Enfield & Sid-
nell, 2017, s. 517) eli Ivy ikään kuin osoittaa
tyytymättömyytensä keskustelun haastattelu-
maisuudesta. Hän kuitenkin "puolustautuu"

toteamalla *mutta se oli okei*. Haastattelumai-
suus on tässä tilanteessa ollut hyväksyttävää
ehkä juuri Ivyn oppijaroolin vuoksi. Haas-
tattelutilanteessa kysyjällä ja vastaajalla on
selkeät roolit, ja asiantuntevan kielenkäyt-
täjän eli vastaajan tehtäväksi jää ymmärtää
oppija-haastattelijaa ja reagoida esitettyihin
kysymyksiin vastauksillaan.

Haastattelu vaikuttaa portfolioissa olevan
oppijoille luonnollinen tapa osallistua suul-
liseen vuorovaikutukseen kielellä, jota he
hallitsevat vasta vähän: kysymyksien esittä-
minenhän opitaan usein kieliopintojen al-
kuvaiheessa, ja kysymykset ovat muodoltaan
vakiintuneita. Vastaaminen puolestaan vaatii
pidempää reflektoimista ja monipuolista kie-
litaitoa. Haastattelumaisuus johtunee lisäksi
tyypillisestä oppijan roolista. Taustalla näkyy
ehkä osapuolten toimijahistoria eli käsityksiä
edistyneen kielenkäyttäjän ja oppijan välises-
tä rakenteellisesta hierarkiasta. Edistyneellä
kielenkäyttäjällä on käytössään enemmän
kohdekielisiä resursseja.

Useassa portfoliomerkinnässä oppijat kir-
joittavat, kuinka asiantunteva kielenkäyttäjä
on alkanut keskustelun aikana opettaa kieltä
kielenoppijalle tai kuinka kielenoppija on itse
alkanut hyödyntää tätä opettajanaan. Tina on
osallistunut suomen kielen kahvitunnille ja
pyytänyt kahvitunnin vastuuhenkilönä toi-
mivaa opetusassistenttia opettamaan hänel-
le kaunokirjallisuuteen liittyvää sanastoa ja
fraaseja:

Esimerkki 4
> - - **mä leun** paljon ja **mä tarvitsen** sanat
> puhua kirja. - - **opin** paljon uusia sanat.
> Esimerkiksi kuningas ja salamurhaaja,
> koska **mä puhuin** kirja mä luin. - - it was
> super cool **to incorporate Finnish into**
> - - **my hobbies** - -. Next time **I would**
> definitely **take better notes**, because **I**
> **don't remember** all the words that (**ope-**
> **tusassistentti**) **taught** us that day.

Tinan *mä*-pronominit korostavat tapahtuman yksilöllistä merkitystä Tinan oppimiselle. Kuvauksesta ei käy ilmi, onko paikalla ollut muita kuin hän ja assistentti. Keskustelukumppaniin viitataan ainoastaan Tinan toiminnan apuvälineenä. Tina kuvaa opetusassistentin toimintaa opettamiseksi. Omaa toimintaansa Tina kuvaa puhumiseksi ja oppimiseksi. Tina käsittelee informaalia kahvituntia ikään kuin oppituntina, jossa oppija saa valita opetuksen sisällön ja kulun.

Aktiivinen toimijuus rakentuu suhteessa toimintaympäristöön ja siihen, miten oppija ympäristön tarjoumia hyödyntää (van Lier, 2004). Kahvitunti tarjoaa kielenkäytön harjoittelulle puitteet eli fyysiset ja sosiaaliset raamit. Oppija voi hyödyntää tilannetta monella tavalla. Jo kahvitunnille saapuminen on ensiaskel tarjouman hyödyntämiseen. Oppija voi aktiivisella osallistumisellaan kuitenkin pyrkiä saamaan tilanteesta itselleen maksimaalisen hyödyn. Hiljaa olemalla tai esimerkiksi englantia puhumalla oppija saisi kahvitunnista vähemmän mahdollisuuksia suomen kielen käytön harjoitteluun.

Nykyaikana vieraan kielen oppijan ei tarvitse kuitenkaan aina hakeutua tai "törmätä" kielenkäyttötilanteisiin altistuakseen niihin fyysisessä lähiympäristössään. Teknologia tuo vuorovaikutuskumppanit metaforisesti mutta kirjaimellisestikin käden ulottuville eli tarvitaan vain toimiva laite ja sovellus sekä verkostoja, joihin olla yhteydessä. Verkostot voivat olla missä vain. Seuraavaksi esittelen tilanteita, joissa oppijat hyödyntävät sosiaalista mediaa vuorovaikutuksen apuna.

Ivy hyödyntää suomenpuhujien verkostojaan sosiaalisessa mediassa. Ivy on laittanut portfolioonsa kuvakaappauksia Facebook-päivityksistään sekä oman alkuperäisen postauksensa ja siihen saadut kommentit[2]. Hän reflektoi kielenkäyttötilannetta esimerkissä 5:

Esimerkki 5
Mun Englatia kieli puhuminen kavereja Facebook:ssa **nauttavat** mun posteja suomea kielissa. **He voisivat** käänökset mun kirjoitan koska Facebook antaa käänökset montille kielille. - - **Mun käverit ovat kerrottu** minä etta **he pidävät** lue mun Suomen kirjoittaminen Facebook:ssa. Mulla on muutama Suomalainen käverit Facebook:ssa, **mutta he vastavat** harvoin mun postejä. - - **Mä toivon he voisivät** vastaa minun postejä Suomea kielissa! Ehkä yksi päivä. **Mä** usein **postin** mun kissojästä, mun koirasta - - Se on hauska kun **mä muistan** Suomea kieli ja **mä en tarvitsee** katsoo sitä sanoja!

Reflektion alussa Ivy kirjoittaa Facebook-kavereistaan ja heidän toiminnoistaan ja ajatuksistaan kontrastina omalle toiminnalleen. Tämän jälkeen hän kirjoittaa omasta toiminnastaan mä-pronominiviittauksilla asettaen ystävien toiminnan vastakkain oman toimintansa kanssa. Vastakkainasettelua lisää *mutta*, joka "aiheuttaa adversatiivisen suhteen lauseiden välille" (VISK § 1102) sekä adverbiaalit *usein ja harvoin / yksi päivä*. Ivy siis asemoi itsensä aktiiviseksi sisällön jakajaksi ja suomalaisen yleisönsä passiivisiksi vastaanottajiksi, jotka eivät osallistu vuorovaikutukseen.

Yhteisöt ovat tärkeitä kielenoppimiselle (Norton & Toohey, 2001, s. 314-316). Teknologia voi tarjota kielenoppijalle runsaasti vuorovaikutusmahdollisuuksia, ja oppijat voivat sen avulla rakentaa yhteisöllisyyttä sekä päästä osaksi kansainvälisiin yhteisöihin. Facebook mahdollistaa kertomisen henkilökohtaisista arkisista asioista, kuten lemmikeistä. Tilapäivitysten postaaminen voi olla yksipuolista jakamista, mutta siinä on myös mahdollisuus vastavuoroisuuteen. Ivy kiinnittääkin huomionsa viestien vastaanottajiin. Reflektiossa on paljon positiivisia adjektiiveja. Amerikkalaiset ystävät ilahtuvat päivityksistä ja osallis-

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[2] En sisällytä Ivyn alkuperäisiä kuvakaappauksia tähän suojellakseni hänen sekä hänen Facebook-kavereidensa anonymiteettiä.

tuvat vuorovaikutukseen käännöstyökalun avulla. Ivy tuo esille myös suomea puhuvan verkostonsa potentiaaliset tarjoumat, jotka jäävät osittain toteutumatta, koska suomalaiset kaverit eivät vastaa hänen viesteihinsä.

Ivy reflektoi portfoliossaan Facebookin tarjoumia suomenkieliselle vuorovaikutukselle. Sosiaalisessa mediassa on monia tarjoumia autenttiseen kielenkäyttöön (Leppänen, Vaarala & Taalas, 2019, s. 103). Ivy kirjoittaa Facebookin käännösominaisuudesta (ks. myös Alm, 2016, s. 9-10) ja siitä, miten se hyödyttää vuorovaikutuksessa: suomea osaamattomat ystävät voivat kääntää päivitykset omalle kielelleen. Ivyn ja hänen kontaktiensa Facebook-vuorovaikutuksessa näkyy myös huumorin merkitys. Amerikkalaiset Facebook-kaverit käyttävät käännöstoimintoa suomenkielisen päivityksen ymmärtämiseen ja luovat huumoria käännöksen perusteella.

Teknologia ja digitaaliset viestintävälineet mahdollistavat sen, että amerikkalaiset opiskelijat voivat olla yhteydessä myös kaukana asuviin suomalaisiin tuttaviinsa, mikä kuitenkin usein vaatii oppijoilta erityistä aloitteellisuutta. Tutkimuksessa oppijat ottavat yhteyttä tuttuihinsa, joiden kanssa he eivät ehkä ole puhuneet toviin tai joiden kanssa he tavallisesti keskustelevat englanniksi. Vera on opiskellut suomea hetken aikaa Suomessa ja aloittanut sitten opinnot amerikkalaisessa yliopistossa. Suomessa olosta on jo hiukan aikaa, ja Vera kirjoittaa sähköpostiviestin entiselle suomen kielen opettajalleen:

KUVA 1. Veran sähköposti

Viestissä Vera esittelee itsensä tavalla, joka viittaa siihen, että kohtaamisesta on ollut aikaa. Viesti on kuin kiitospuhe, jossa vastakkain ovat Veran oma mahdollisesti vähäinen merkitys opettajan elämälle (esittely ja *en tiedä jos sinä muistat minua*) ja toisaalta opettajan suuri merkitys Veran elämäntarinassa. Tässä näkyy jälleen oppijan aloitteellisuuden rooli. Vieraan kielen oppijan on oltava aloitteellinen altistaakseen itsensä kohdekielelle. Vera analysoi opettajan vastausviestiä esimerkissä 6:

Esimerkki 6

Hän (opettaja) **vastasi** mulle ja **sanoi** oli kiva kuulla minusta. Myös **mä opin uusia fraasia**, "lämmittää sydäntä" ja "sydämessäni paistaa aurinko. - - **Varmasti koska hän** on kielen opettaja, ei ole *mitään vaikea* ymmärtää sähköpostissa. - - Jos mun täytyy kirjoittaa toinen sähköposti **se olisi tosi samanlainen** koska **mä ajatellen** ei ollut ongelma ymmärtämisessä. Mä käytin kirjakieli koska on sähköposti, ehkä mä voisin käyttää puhekieli mutta **kirja kieli oli sopiva**.

Vera referoi sähköpostin sisältöä tyypillisin raportointiverbein. Opettajan vastaus on reflektion perusteella lämminsävyinen, mikä näkyy myös opettajan käyttämistä kielikuvista. van Lierin (1996) mukaan on tärkeää, että oppija kiinnittää huomiota kohdekieleen. Jo huomion kiinnittäminen on aktiivista työstämistä. Kielikuvat ovat kiinnittäneet Verankin huomion. Vera hyödyntää opettajan vastausviestin ikään kuin oppimateriaalina. Hän analysoi reflektiossaan opettajan käyttämiä idiomeja ja niiden merkitystä. Asiantunteva kielenkäyttäjä tarjoaa oppijalle altistuskieltä, jota hän voi työstää.

Vuorovaikutusaloite on tullut Veralta itseltään ja Veran reflektiosta näkyy tyytyväisyys viestinnän onnistumiseen. Vera analysoi omaa ja opettajan kielellistä toimintaa varmoin sanankääntein: *varmasti, ei ole mitään vaikea, olisi tosi samanlainen, oli sopiva*. Hän esittää mahdollisuuksia vaihtoehtoiselle toiminnalle mutta kumoaa ne saman tien, ikään kuin perusteluna oman toimintansa onnistuneisuudelle. Viestintätavoite on täyttynyt, koska molemminpuolisessa ymmärryksessä ei ole ollut ongelmaa. Lisäksi Vera pohtii rekisterin valintaa. Hän kirjoittaa käyttäneensä sähköpostissa kirjakieltä tekstilajin vuoksi, mutta pohtii myös, olisiko puhekielikin ollut sopiva valinta. Portfoliotehtävä on ollut Veralle kimmoke olla yhteydessä entiseen opettajaansa ja kertoa tälle kuulumisistaan. Samalla hän on saanut mahdollisuuden ehkä myös esitellä lähtönsä jälkeen kehittynyttä kielitaitoaan.

4.2 Oppijan pyrkimys vastavuoroisuuteen

Alaluvun 4.1 esimerkeissä oppijan ja keskustelukumppanien vuorovaikutusjärjestys on hierarkkisesti rakentunutta. Oppija ohjaa toimintaa omalla aloitteellisuudellaan ja todelliset sekä potentiaaliset vuorovaikutuskumppanit vastaavat aloitteellisuuteen omalla toiminnallaan niin, että oppija saa tilanteesta hyödyn ja asiantunteva kielenkäyttäjä tarjoaa tälle kielellistä altistusta. Toisaalta useissa portfolioissa näkyy myös oppijan pyrkimys osallistua vuorovaikutukseen tasavertaisena keskustelukumppanina, jota ei määrittäisi oppijan ja asiantuntevan kielenkäyttäjän roolit. Tämä näkyy erityisesti pidemmällä suomen opinnoissaan olevien opiskelijoiden reflektioista tai silloin, kun oppija on käyttänyt kieltä samantasoisen oppijan kanssa.

Vera on asunut aiemmin Suomessa ja nyt hän on pitänyt yhteyttä suomalaiseen ystäväänsä Maijaan chattailemalla. Oheinen esimerkki on ote pitkästä keskustelusta.

KUVA 2. Veran (oikealla puolella) sekä Maijan (vasemmalla puolella) välinen WhatsApp-keskustelu

Esimerkissä 2 kuvattu katkelma on osa pidempää keskustelua. Tässä chat-keskustelussa vuorojen otot jakautuvat tasaisemmin kuin luvun 4.1 esimerkeissä. Valitsemassani esimerkissä Veran keskustelukumppani vaihtaa aiheen penkkariteemaan. Maijan kysymysmuotoinen viesti on avauksena penkkarikuvien jakamiselle ja niistä keskustelulle. Vera vastaa kysymykseen kohdentaen huomionsa *penkkari*-sanaan. van Lierin (1996, s. 49-51) mukaan onkin tyypillistä, että oppija kohdentaa huomionsa hämmennystä aiheuttavaan ainekseen kohdekielelle altistuessaan. Keskustelukumppani kuitenkin ohittaa Veran sanastopohdinnat ja jatkaa keskustelua jakamalla penkkarikuvansa. Vera kertoo chatissa katsoneensa sanan Googlesta. Sanan etsimi-

nen ei kuitenkaan juuri hidasta vuorovaikutusta, sillä Vera vastaa kuvaviestiin minuutin kuluttua ensimmäisestä viestistä.

Teknologian käyttö voi murtaa hierarkioita oppijan ja asiantuntevan kielenkäyttäjän välillä. Sosiaalisen median avulla oppijat voivat harjoitella kielenkäyttöä vapaa-ajallaan ajasta ja paikasta riippumatta (ks. myös Leppänen ym., 2019, s. 110). Esimerkiksi chat-viesteissä vuorovaikutus on usein tasavertaista kahden samanikäisen opiskelijan välistä keskustelua. Kommunikaatiokatkos, kuten Veran tapauksessa sanan unohtaminen, ei vaikeuta vuorovaikutusta, koska sanan tarkistaminen onnistuu nopeasti ja katkos jää lyhyeksi. Vuorovaikutus siis rakentuu luontevasti kahden ystävän vuoropuheluna, eivätkä Veran ja Maijan roolit suomenoppijana ja asiantuntevana puhujana juuri korostu keskustelussa.

Vera kuitenkin kommentoi reflektiossaan Maijan viestejä:

Esimerkki 7
> **Maija lähetti** viestejä kirjakielessä usein. Ehkä on koska **hän tietää** mä olen suomen opiskelija ja kirjakieli olisi helpompi mulle, **mutta mun mielestä olisi** hyvä idea oppia puhekieli vai slangi tekstissä.

Reflektiossa vastakkain asettuvat Veran toiveet ja Maijan toiminta. Konjunktio *mutta* korostaa kontrastia ystävän toiminnan ja Veran toiveen välillä. Myös muissa portfolioissa pohdittiin valintaa kirjakielen ja puhekielen välillä sekä tarvetta oppia autenttista kirjallista vuorovaikutusta. Näissä tapauksissa yleiskielisen rekisterin valinta, ainakin oppijan itsensä mukaan, asemoi tämän oppijaksi (*kielenoppimis- ja kielenopetusrekisteri*; Lehtonen, 2015, s. 213). Esimerkiksi Maija käyttää kuvan 2 esimerkissä toisen persoonan pidempää allatiivimuotoa *sinulle*, joka voidaan kokea ideologisesti yleiskieliseksi: Persoonapronominien pidemmät taivutus

muodot mielletään usein osaksi opetusrekisteriä tai ulkomaalaispuhetta (Lehtonen, 2015, s. 215). Sosiaalisen median teksteissä taivutusmuotojen käytössä on on usein paljon enemmän variaatiota kuin painetuissa teksteissä, ja sosiaalisen median käyttäjät joutuvat kiinnittämään rekisteriin eri tavalla huomiota (ks. esim. Leppänen ym., 2019, s. 97). Chatissa kirjoittaminen on usein reaaliaikaista, mikä näkyy rekisterin valinnassa. Viestittely ei ole huoliteltua yleiskielistä tekstiä, vaan keskustelunomaista vuorovaikutusta, puhekieltä. Toisaalta maallikko saattaa käsittää juuri kirjoitetun yleiskielen kielenoppijalle helpoimmaksi variantiksi. Kielten alkeisopetuksessa on vaihtelevia käytänteitä siitä, missä määrin puhe- ja kirjakieltä opiskellaan. Tutkimuksen kohteena olevassa suomen ohjelmassa pääpaino on ollut puhekielessä, mikä on kaiken kaikkiaan käsittääkseni harvinaisempaa. Oppijan toive puhekielisemmästä keskustelusta vaikuttaa samalla toiveelta tulla kohdelluksi vertaisena keskustelukumppanina.

4.3 Oppija kieliasiantuntijana
Koska tutkimukseni vieraan kielen oppimisen kontekstissa oppijoiden altistus kohdekielelle omassa elinympäristössään on usein vähäistä, oppijat lisäävät mahdollisuuksia suomen kielen käyttöön omalla aktiivisella toiminnallaan. He jopa tuovat suomen kieltä aktiivisesti osaksi lähipiirinsä arkea. Portfolioissa onkin paljon kuvauksia tilanteista, joissa oppijat ovat opettaneet suomea amerikkalaisille perheenjäsenille ja ystävilleen.

Tina kirjoittaa viikonlopustaan esimerkissä 8:

Esimerkki 8

- - tämä vikkonloppuna mä tapasin paljon ihmisiä. **Kun mä puhuin** ihmista kanssa ja **sanoin että** mä opiskelen suomen kieltä, he **he ajattelivat**, että se oli siistiä. **Jotkut heistä kysyivät** "mitä kuulostaa kuin?". **Niin mä puhuin** vähän suomea heille **ja mä opetin** heille joitain sanoja. - - Se oli **tosi hauska** jakaa suomen kieli ihmiset kanssa. Mä mielesta se on **hyvä ja helppo** tapa esitellä ihmisiä Suomeen ja suomen kieli ja ehkä kielten oppiminen. Mun perhe ja mun serkku tietävät sana "joo" koska mä käytän sitä paljon joskus sijaan "yes". - - se **saa** perheeni ja kaveri **nauramaan** joten **se on hauska**.

Kuten esimerkki 2, tämäkin kertomus etenee hierarkkisesti toiminta-seuraamus-periaatteella: kun *mä* tein näin - *he* tekivät näin ja kun he kysyivät - *niin mä puhuin* ja *opetin*. Tällä kertaa roolit ovat kuitenkin vaihtuneet eli oppija on toiminut tilanteessa asiantuntijana, joka on tuonut altistuskieltä tilanteeseen. Vuorovaikutuksen muut osapuolet eli suomea osaamattomat tutut ovat olleet oppijan roolissa. Tina kuvaa tilannetta positiiviseksi. Tuttavien innostus on ohjannut tilannetta eteenpäin.

Owen kirjoittaa, että hän toisinaan chattailee perheensä kanssa suomeksi huolimatta siitä, että nämä eivät osaa suomea. Kuva 3 on kuvakaappaus Owenin keskustelusta isänsä ja veljensä kanssa (sotkettu kohta on Owenin oma lisäys).

KUVA 3. Owenin perheen chat.

Owen hyödyntää perheen chattia suomen kielen harjoitteluun ja opettaa chatissa numeron suomeksi. Owen on postannut chattiin kaksikielisen lauseen, jossa ainoastaan numero on suomen kielellä. Lol³-lyhenne kategorioi viestin huumoriksi, vastuuttaen muita osallistujia reagoimaan siihen (ks. Enfield & Sidnell, 2017, s. 525). Veljen vastaus ja pohtiva emoji osoittavat, että hän on mahdollisesti kontekstista päätellyt sanan *kaksikymmen-täyksi* merkityksen ja myös sanan pituuden tuoman humoristisen lisän lauseeseen. Isä puolestaan vastaa viestiin pyytämällä tarkennusta, jolloin Owen joutuu määrittelemään viestin merkityksen eksplisiittisemmin. Isoveli jatkaa suomenkielistä huumoria kirjoittamalla: *olet idiootti*. Owenin vastaus, *kiitos*, on merkitykseltään kontrastissa isoveljen syytöksen kanssa, ja oletuksen vastainen reaktio jatkaa huumorin rakentamista. Isäkin osallistuu kaksikieliseen huumoriin toteamalla: *You are both huono!* Vuorovaikutustilanne toimii kielen työstämisen ympäristönä (van Lier, 1996, s. 54). Näyttää siltä, että suomen kieli toimii perheen yhteisen huumorin rakentajana.

Esimerkeissä oppijan asema muuttuu. Hän ei olekaan enää vain suomen kielen oppija vaan myös sen asiantuntija ja opettaja. Suomen kieltä jakaessaan oppijat saavat myös itse harjoitusta. Asioitahan yleisen käsityksen mukaan oppii parhaiten opettamalla niitä itse muille. Suomen kieli näyttäytyy muidenkin opiskelijoiden portfolioissa tietynlaisena erikoisuutena ja ylpeyden aiheena, jota he mielellään jakavat. Esimerkiksi Owen kirjoittaa: "Finnish is definitely a lesser known language here in America, so my friends think it is really exciting when I can speak some of it to them." Suomen kielen opiskelun myötä hän on saavuttanut erityisasiantuntijuuden, josta muut ovat kiinnostuneita ja haluavat osallisiksi. Näissä esimerkeissä tulee esille vieraan

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³ Lol = "laughing out loud" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021)

kielen oppimiskontekstin erityislaatuisuus suhteessa immersioympäristöön: kohdekielisessä ympäristössä oppijoille harvemmin tarjoutuisi vastaavanlaisia mahdollisuuksia kieliasiantuntijuuteen, koska kielen tuntijoita on paljon. Suomen kielen taito on vieraan kielen kontekstissa keino erottautua, mikä taas motivoi oppimaan. Jo kehittyvällä kielitaidolla voi olla kieliasiantuntija ja opettaa alkeita muille kiinnostuneille.

5 POHDINTA

Tässä artikkelissa tarkastelin vuorovaikutusjärjestystä ja toimijuutta amerikkalaisten suomenoppijoiden itsenäisen kielenkäytön portfolioissa. Portfolioista esiin nousivat oppijan oman aloitteellisen toimijuuden merkitys ja vuorovaikutusjärjestyksen hierarkkisuus, joka syntyi oppijan tarpeesta saada vuorovaikutuskumppanista ja -tilanteesta maksimaalinen hyöty ja oppijan ja asiantuntevan suomen puhujan erilaisiksi koetuista resursseista ja rooleista. Vuorovaikutustilanteessa oppija aktiivisesti altisti itseään kohdekielelle ohjaten tilanteen kulkua aloitteellisuudellaan ja kysymyksillään. Asiantuntevan kielenkäyttäjän puhe toimi kohdekielisen altistuksen ja oppimisen tarjoumana. Vuorovaikutus rakentuikin usein oppijan aloitteen ja asiantuntevan kielenkäyttäjän reaktioiden varaan. Toisaalta aineistossa näkyi myös oppijan pyrkimys tasaveroisempaan vuorovaikutukseen. Roolit myös kääntyivät niin, että oppija toimi itse kieliasiantuntijana kieltä vielä osaamattomien tuttaviensa keskuudessa.

Tutkimuksen suomenoppijat osallistuvat monenlaisiin vuorovaikutustilanteisiin sekä kasvokkain että teknologiavälitteisesti. Osa kielenkäyttömahdollisuuksista vaikuttaa luonteeltaan "yllättävän tilanteen haltuun ottamiselta", kun taas osassa näkyy valmistautuminen, tavoitteellisuus ja kriittinen pohdinta. Keskiössä näyttää olevan ylipäätään mahdollisuus suomenkielisiin viestintätilan-

teisiin. Portfolioissa näkyi väläyksiä amerikkalaisten suomenoppijoiden kielikäsityksestä. Kielenkäytön "täydellisyys" ei ollut oppijoille pääasia, vaan viestinnän onnistuminen ja ymmärretyksi tuleminen.

Globaalissa maailmassa vieraan kielen pedagogiikka on uudenlaisten kysymysten äärellä (ks. myös Kramsch, 2014). Luokassa ja luokan ulkopuolella tapahtuva kielenkäyttö eivät välttämättä aina kohtaa oppimisessa (Dufva ym., 2003; peruskouluista Luukka ym., 2008). Toisen kielen oppimista koskevissa pedagogisissa keskusteluissa on jo pitkään pohdittu oppimateriaalin funktionaalisuuden merkitystä (esim. Aalto ym., 2009). Samaa ajattelua pitäisi tuoda myös vieraan kielen pedagogiikkaan ja pohtia sitä, millaisiin kielenkäyttötilanteisiin oppijoita tulisi valmentaa vai tulisiko oppijan kenties valita tilanteet itse. Oppikirjoissa usein esiintyvien arkisten asiointitilanteiden, kuten ruokakaupassa asioimisen tai lääkärissä käymisen, hoitaminen suomeksi ei ole vieraan kielen oppijoille usein tarvehierarkiassa ensisijaista, sillä he eivät asu Suomessa tai välttämättä suunnittele sinne muuttoa, ja tilanteiden harjoittelukin voi tuntua keinotekoiselta. Vieraan kielen oppijat saattavat sen sijaan käyttää kieltä verkostojen ja yhteyksien ylläpitämiseen teknologiavälitteisesti ja omassa elinympäristössä sieltä poistumatta. Koko oma elinympäristö voi olla kielenoppijan temmellyskenttää ja täynnä kielenkäytön tarjoumia, myös vieraan kielen oppimisen kontekstissa. Kielellä on tärkeä rooli esimerkiksi identiteetin rakentamisessa sekä yhteisöllisyyden muodostamisessa. Oppijat itse voivat olla aktiivisia kohdekielen käyttötilanteiden etsimisessä ja niiden havainnoimisessa.

Yksi vieraan kielen opetuksen keskeisistä tavoitteista voisikin olla uudenlaisten viestintätapojen harjoitteleminen, erilaisten kontaktien rakentaminen sekä verkostoitumiseen kannustaminen. Opetuksella on tärkeä rooli

oppijoiden varustamisessa parhailla mahdollisilla resursseilla oppimisympäristönsä tarjoumien hyödyntämiseen (Menezes, 2011, s. 71). Tärkeää on myös teknologioihin, kuten sosiaaliseen mediaan, tutustuminen, ja näissä viestimisen harjoittelu. Kielikursseilla toteutetut teknologiahankkeet voisivat olla kimmokkeena erilaisten medioiden haltuunottoon, yhteisöllisyyden rakentamiseen sekä teknologian ja verkostojen hyödyntämiseen itsenäisesti jatkossakin. Esimerkiksi tässä artikkelissa kuvatun portfoliotehtävän tavoitteena on ollut monipuoliseen kielenkäyttöön kannustaminen teknologiavälitteisesti ja omassa toimintaympäristössä.

Vieraan kielen kontekstissa toimijuutta on aiemminkin tutkittu erityisesti englanti vieraana kielenä (EFL) -tutkimuksen näkökulmasta luokkahuoneopetuksen kontekstissa (ks. esim. Kalaja, Ferreira, Aro & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2015). Muiden kielten osalta toimijuutta on tarkasteltu vähemmän erityisesti opiskelijoiden itsensä valitsemissa arjen tilanteissa. Toimijuuden tarkastelu näissä tilanteissa on kuitenkin tärkeää, koska tilanteet heijastelevat oppijoiden arkea luokkahuoneen ulkopuolella. Tutkimukseni tarjoaakin lisää näkökulmia siihen, millaisissa tilanteissa opiskelijat kohdekieltä käyttävät.

Tässä tutkimuksessa viitekehyksenä toimi ekologinen lähestymistapa kielenoppimiseen ja tutkimusprosessina sekä -menetelmänä neksusanalyysi. Neksusanalyyttinen tutkimusprosessi soveltui monipuolisessa ja kompleksisessa tutkimusaineistossa navigoimiseen, koska menetelmä mahdollisti tutkimusongelman tarkastelun läheltä vuorovaikutuksen tasolla ja kauempaa tilanteisena toimintana sekä erilaisten yhteyksien havainnoimisen. Ekologinen lähestymistapa käsittää yksilön suhteessa ympäristöönsä, ja tämän dynamiikan ja verkottuneisuuden kartoittamiseen neksusanalyysi soveltui erinomaisesti. Artikkelissa keskityin erityisesti vuorovaikutus-

järjestyksen käsitteeseen mutta tarkastelin myös soveltuvin osin paikan diskursseja ja toimijahistorian käsitettä. Mikrotason analyysimenetelmänä käytin diskurssianalyysia, joka soveltui hyvin vuorovaikutusjärjestyksen tarkasteluun. Neksusanalyysi kaipaa rinnalleen tällaista tarkemman analyysin välinettä.

Neksusanalyysiin kuuluu paitsi toiminnan tutkiminen myös sen muuttaminen. Tutkimuksen aineistonkeruussa hyödynnetty portfoliotehtävä on yksi yritys valjastaa oppijoiden

itsenäistä kielenkäyttöä osaksi kurssioppimista. On kuitenkin tarve kehittää lisää malleja, joilla vahvistetaan ja tuetaan oppijoiden toimijuutta toimintaympäristössään. Lisäksi on tärkeää kohdentaa vieraan kielen opetuksen sisältöjä vastaamaan oppijoiden todellisia kielenkäyttötarpeita. Jatkossa tutkin vielä tarkemmin teknologiavälitteisen vuorovaikutuksen synnyttämiä tarjoumia ja kehitän tässäkin artikkelissa tarkastelun kohteena olleen suomen kielen ohjelman opetusta.

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**AGENCY AND INTERACTION ORDER IN AMERICAN FINNISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS'
INDEPENDENT TARGET LANGUAGE USE**
Elisa Räsänen, Indiana University & University of Jyväskylä

This paper focuses on Finnish learners' independent target language use outside of class in an American university-level Finnish program that is geographically distant from any native speaker communities. Earlier research has demonstrated a mismatch between classroom and outside of class learning and use. In the global postmodern world foreign language students can use the target language in authentic situations already at the beginning of their studies in their learning environment, as this paper demonstrates. The study follows a nexus analytical method and an ecological approach to language learning to explore and analyze how four American learners of Finnish report and reflect on their language use. The data is excerpted from a portfolio assignment in which students have documented and reflected on their independent language use and it is analyzed using discourse analysis. Students' active agency and initiative had a significant role in the interactions. The interactions reported in the portfolios were hierarchically constructed following the different perceived roles of a language learner and an expert speaker. Students utilized their interlocutor to get maximal relevant exposure in the target language and the interaction event was often constructed around the learner's questions and expert speaker's answers. The results can be used to develop foreign language pedagogy to better correspond with learners' actual needs in the target language.

Keywords: agency, affordance, discourse analysis, foreign language learning, interaction order, nexus analysis, social media

II

LANGUAGE LEARNERS' HISTORICAL BODIES DIRECTING THEIR AGENCY IN THE DIGITAL WILDS

by

Elisa Räsänen, 2024

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Language Learners' Historical Bodies Directing their Agency in the Digital Wilds

Elisa Räsänen [ID][a,b]

[a]Indiana University; [b]University of Jyväskylä

ABSTRACT

Life histories and prior experiences of language learning, called historical bodies, direct language learners' agency. However, their influence on agency is often underemphasized in the language-learning context. To develop practices that facilitate foreign language learners' agency beyond the classroom, I present the case of American university-level Finnish learners' reflections on their language use in the digital wilds, where they used different digital applications not designed for language learning. The data came from a portfolio assignment in which students documented and reflected on their independent language use. The study drew on nexus analysis, and discourse analysis was used to examine the reflections. The findings show that historical bodies directed what resources students used as learning material, what elements they oriented to as learning projects, and how they oriented themselves to future actions. Understanding the impact of historical bodies is important in shaping inclusive classroom practices that consider students' agency and individuality.

Introduction

Life histories and prior experiences of language learning, called *historical bodies* (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), direct language learners' actions. However, their influence on the agency is often not given the emphasis it deserves in the language learning context (see, e.g., Wedin, 2021). Getting students to take charge of their own learning beyond the classroom is a key challenge to educators, especially in the context of foreign language learning where the instructor traditionally moderates most of the input. Education serves little purpose if the skills learned in class do not transfer to life beyond it. Chik and Ho (2017) call for more research on "the extent to which the language learning process depends on factors other than the proficiency levels, for instance, personality and purposes" (p. 170). To enhance students' agency in language learning in and beyond the classroom, and to shape inclusive classroom practices, more information is needed on how students' historical bodies relate to their agency and learning. I present the case of American learners of Finnish (L2) and their reflections on their independent, self-selected learning activities, focusing on examples from three students—Matt, Bob, and Katya (pseudonyms)—whose L1 is English. Students in the study were tasked to use Finnish beyond the classroom in any way they chose and report on it in an Independent Use Portfolio task (see also Räsänen, 2021; Räsänen & Kivik, 2023). The context is a small university-level Finnish program in the United States, geographically distant from any significant Finnish speaker communities. Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) in the U.S. context, such as Finnish, are relatively under-studied. More research is needed to provide solutions to the pedagogical issues related to the lack of resources that many of these programs face. At the same time, practices that apply to teaching LCTLs can also be applied to teaching more commonly taught languages.

CONTACT Elisa Räsänen ✉ elisa.k.rasanen@jyu.fi 🖵 Centre for Applied Language Studies, Agora, Ag Building, 5th floor, Mattlanniemi 2, PL 35, Jyväskylän yliopisto FI-40014, Finland

This article focuses on students' language use in the *digital wilds*. I follow Sauro and Zourou's (2019) definition, defining *wild* through its scope of going beyond anything directly connected to "educational institutions and practices" (p. 1). *Digital* refers "to the possibilities afforded by digital artifacts," which are "crucial in enabling spontaneous, user-driven, bottom-up practices" (p. 1). Few existing studies on the digital wilds focus on LCTLs or a language other than English, despite how they become even more important when students' access to in-person communities is limited. This article also responds to a societal change: more of our interactions happen in a textual format and online.

The study followed the process of Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis, a change-oriented approach and method that combines discourse analysis with ethnography. Nexus analysis is helpful in exploring complex contexts that reach beyond the classroom. Discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) is used for a close analysis of how the students construct their agency in their written reflections. When we see "the historical body as action," we are concurrently analyzing agency (Jones, 2007, p. 254). In Duff's (2013, p. 417) definition that I have adopted, *agency* means "people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals."

Most existing research on language learners' historical bodies occurs in institutional settings (e.g., Beiler, 2022; Koivisto, 2013), while few studies analyze their role in self-directed language use (cf. Dressler et al., 2021) in the digital wilds. The present study connects these two dimensions, in and beyond the classroom, and contributes to expanding understanding of the impact of historical bodies in learners' language use. The central argument is that to support students in becoming agentive language learners, instructors would benefit from incorporating the digital wilds in their classroom practice, creating opportunities to connect students' historical bodies in classroom tasks, and letting students initiate classroom activities. The following research question guided the analysis: How do language students' historical bodies direct their agency in the digital wilds?

Key concepts and literature review

Language learners' historical bodies

A person's history "conditions and constrains what they can do in social action" (Blommaert, 2013, pp. 29–30). Historical bodies conceptualize how people participate in interaction in social spaces (Blommaert, 2013, pp. 29–30), through embodying "human lived experience" (Scollon & Scollon, 2005, p. 108). Forsman (2015), who has researched language shifts in communities, sees the historical body as a collective phenomenon.

Only a few previous studies have explored language learners' historical bodies. Haneda (2005) studied the investment of two learners of Japanese as a foreign language in their target-language writing and found that their investment was linked to their life trajectories and memberships in communities of practice. Haneda's (2005) context was a North American (Canadian) LCTL program and the focal students had experiences of the Japanese language and culture through their heritage or previous residence in Japan. Dressler et al. (2021) used nexus analysis to examine pre-service teachers' blogs in a study abroad context, focusing the analysis of historical bodies on the participants' experience level with language (learner, advanced speaker, and native speaker) and previous encounters with other cultures, suggesting that blogs provided a fruitful platform to reflect on language learning. Koivisto (2013) investigated the introduction of mobile devices in Finnish elementary pupils' English classes and found that although the pupils were involved in rich, already existing technology-mediated practices outside of class, they were prejudiced about bringing these practices to class because they expected the teacher to be in charge.

In contrast with Haneda (2005) and Dressler et al. (2021), my focal students had little direct contact with other target language users in their physical environment. The Independent Use Portfolio introduced in this article provided a similar platform for reflection as the blog used by Dressler et al. (2021), but with students who did not live in the target culture. Like Koivisto (2013), I also investigate students'

perspectives on a pedagogical intervention which reaches beyond the classroom. However, I study a higher education context where students often, as more experienced learners, have more explicit preconceptions of what is beneficial to their learning.

Historical bodies, in this article, are the learners' prior experiences and expectations of the target language and culture, and the professional or free-time roles they bring to the social action. Informed by Forsman (2015), I also consider the collective level in the analysis. I understand historical bodies as constructions connected to collective narratives, such as the lived history of the language class. Because they have attended class together, the students have shared learning practices and interacted with one another.

Historical body and agency

I treat "historical bodies as action" (Jones, 2007), not as forms of storage. Historical bodies direct which affordances learners orient to and use for language learning. Agency is performed in the present, is informed by the historical body, and includes a future orientation (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Jones, 2007). Rather than being linear, historical bodies' impact on agency is complex and cyclical.

According to Duff's (2013) definition, which I have adopted, agency "enables people to imagine, take up, and perform new roles and identities ... and to take concrete actions in pursuit of their goals" (p. 417). Students can, for example, refuse to participate in instruction, or actively pursue learning beyond the classroom. If students feel they are not given sufficient agency, they can become disengaged (Duff, 2013, p. 417). By empowering students to direct their own learning, they can become more engaged learners. Biesta and Tedder (2007, p. 144) show "a connection between agency and biographical learning."

This study takes an ecological perspective on agency: Those who have agency over their actions in their social context have the power to succeed in it (Duff, 2013, p. 417). In other words, agency is heavily contextual (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Duff, 2013; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and resources play an important part in how students can construct their agency (see also Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 145).

Like Biesta and Tedder (2007), the present article reveals instances of how students can learn about their agency through constructing narratives, although the data are cross-sectional instead of longitudinal. It features students in a foreign language environment, and their agency directs how they make use of the limited resources they have for spontaneous language practice beyond the classroom. Within their context, turning to the digital wilds is essential. When they use Finnish, it is with resources they have selected and decided how to use for learning.

Language learning in the digital wilds

The existing literature on the digital wilds (see also Sauro & Zourou, 2019) focuses heavily on English as the target language. Television programs and other authentic materials provide learners with notice gaps, meaning that by watching television, students can notice what they have not learned in the classroom, such as how the target language is used in authentic interactions (Richards, 2015). The three students featured in this article used different resources in the digital wilds in Finnish (a TV show, *The Sims*, a forum) that, following the categorization presented in Lai et al. (2018), qualify as *entertainment and information-oriented technological experiences*. Activities conducted in an LCTL can also be oriented to these purposes. In Lai et al. (2018), students reported that these types of experiences were motivated by their "personal life needs and personal interest" (p. 121) or a recommendation from a learner peer and they were sometimes doubtful about the learning value of these resources. They noted that their learner-level language limited their interaction on the platforms.

Although television programs (Peters & Webb, 2018) and *The Sims* (see e.g., Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006; Ranalli, 2008) have been found especially useful in expanding learners' vocabulary, previous studies have focused more on the outcome of learning than the process of it. This article, in contrast, focuses on the process of how students direct their learning. It also regards cultural learning targets that go beyond linguistic learning, such as typical interaction patterns in the cultural context where the language is spoken.

Data and methods

The study drew on nexus analysis and followed the three overlapping stages of engaging, navigating, and changing introduced by Scollon and Scollon (2004). In this study, the social action is comprised of students' reflections on independent language use. A repeated social action becomes a nexus of practice, which reveals how the students direct their learning beyond the classroom. The historical body, in this article, is the lens used to examine the nexus of practice (see also Dressler et al., 2021), although it is important to also study the two other intersecting cycles—interaction order and discourses in place—to get the full picture of the nexus of practice. *Interaction order* refers to the social arrangements and hierarchies that affect how the interaction is structured. *Discourses in place* are related to the arrangements and design that enable and affect interactional practices (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). I treat discourses in place as the "structural factors" that affect students' "achievement of agency" (see Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 145), such as the interface and navigation options of the game *The Sims* that affect what students can do in that space. This study specifically focuses on historical bodies because it is interested in how students' life histories and prior experiences direct their agency but is still informed by other concepts.

Engaging

Data collection

First, I engaged with the research context, a U.S. research-oriented university, and the students of Finnish, by interacting with them as their Finnish-language instructor and assigning them the portfolio task. For the Independent Use Portfolio, the students were tasked to use Finnish independently outside of class as part of classroom assessment during the semester (see also Räsänen, 2021; Räsänen & Kivik, 2023).

The portfolio was a regular course assignment across different language levels from first to fourth-year classes. The data collection took place from 2019 to 2020 (partially during the COVID-19 pandemic). Students documented their activities with photos, recordings, or screenshots, included these in their portfolios, and provided written reflections on these activities in recurring journal entries in which they analyzed what and how they had learned Finnish outside of class. I recognized some relevant discourses, such as the students' search for authentic language use with online resources, and repeated the task in the upcoming semesters to collect more information (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board of the university. The students were informed about the research procedures by a third-party assistant who collected consent from them. The consent forms were released to myself as the teacher-researcher, only after I had submitted the students' final grades. These steps were taken to assure the students that their choice to participate would have no effect on their course grades. The students completed the assignment regardless of their participation in the study. All identifying information has been removed or changed in the data.

Participants

The focal participants are new speakers of Finnish, L2 learners, who are, as defined by O'Rourke and Pujolar (2015), "individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it ... as adult language learners" (p. 1). To my knowledge, the focal students have no Finnish heritage and they had not visited Finland before the course began. All the focal participants were completing their undergraduate degrees. For anonymity purposes, I do not disclose their age and majors. The students participated in Finnish language instruction for 45 to 75 minutes two to five times a week.

Focusing on three participants enables a more in-depth examination of their portfolios, and thus provides a more profound view of the complex phenomenon of historical bodies and agency.

Table 1. Focal students and their activities.

Student	Background (target level)	Target Language Activity
Matt	Year 1 student (novice high)	Watched a television program.
Bob	Year 2 student (intermediate low/intermediate mid)	Posted on a forum.
Katya	Year 1 student (novice high)	Played *The Sims*.

Because the research was qualitative and exploratory in nature, the teacher-researcher chose their portfolios using so-called purposive non-probability sampling (see Daniel, 2012) to find interactions illustrative of activities taking place in different types of digital wilds (television programs, games, and forums). Table 1 introduces the focal students.

Matt's, Bob's, and Katya's portfolio entries correspond with the reality of language use beyond the classroom for most students in the studied context: with the almost absence of in-person target language communities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, out of the 99 portfolio entries, around 67% focused on technology-mediated language use. Although students were tasked to use the target language in any way they chose, most of them chose the digital wilds.

Navigating

In the second stage, I navigated the data (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) and located the students' references to their personal histories, understood broadly as their prior experiences and expectations of the (target) language and culture, and the professional or free-time roles they brought to the social action. After that, as "people write different versions of the historical body onto past situations" (Jones, 2007, pp. 253–254), I used discourse analysis to examine the reflections. The analysis focuses on how students use various linguistic resources "to shape the interpretations" of the recipient, their instructor, in their reflections (Gee, 2014, pp. 19−20). Through analyzing these "retrospective discourses" (stories), we can see the links between the students' historical body and action (agency) (Jones, 2007, pp. 253–254), shedding light on "how [they] discursively construct their life trajectories" (Forsman, 2015, p. 44). The discourse shows the students' meaning-making and negotiation of their actions "and it also constitutes the tools with which participants will interpret and conduct future social actions" (Jones, 2007, pp. 253–254).

Discourse analysis was approached from an ethnographic perspective, using information gained through my recurring interactions with the participants. I used my background knowledge from the classrooms to facilitate the analysis.

My own historical body directed the research process. I had been the participants' Finnish language instructor prior to the study, and my insider information of the participants aided the analysis. Because the language groups were small, I got to know the participants on a personal level. My teaching experience and educational background and my own historical body as a language learner (Finnish L1, English L2) informed the design of the study.

Changing

In the third stage, the researcher can change the nexus of practice (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). The study aims to impact pedagogical practices that incorporate student agency and digital wilds into classroom instruction. The findings of the study can be used to develop an enhanced portfolio task and other tasks that enhance student agency.

Findings and discussion

Historical bodies directing choice of learning material

Students often started their reflections by explaining how they had arrived at the resources they used. The reflections explicitly or implicitly revealed what aspects of their historical bodies had directed their selection of resources and how. Selecting their own materials provided the students with individualized learning experiences because they used material that was personally relevant to them. The first example features Matt, who wrote about watching a Finnish television show. In Excerpt 1, Matt writes about how he discovered the show.

> Excerpt 1 (Matt's reflection)
>
> I came across a suggested Instagram page for the YLE program [the name of the show].[1] *At first* I didn't know what it was, *but* I follow *random*[2] some [*sic*] Finnish accounts (I follow the President, the Prime minister and some official [account type omitted] accounts) *so I looked into* this page and realized that it's a TV show.

Matt's explanation of how he chose to use the show as learning material reveals his historical body, and his preconceptions of what are relevant Finnish media for language learning. Matt starts by expressing his reservation towards the resource and explaining that the accounts he follows are "random," although they do not appear to be so, because they represent official governmental institutions (President and Prime Minister). By writing that they are random, Matt signifies initial uncertainty toward the resource, highlighted with the adversative conjunction "but," followed by acceptance. He signifies that the Instagram accounts and the TV show are valid sources of authentic Finnish.

It is relevant that Matt reveals the name of the streaming platform, Yle, which is Finland's national broadcasting company (similar to the BBC in the United Kingdom) and has an officially recognized status. Chik and Ho (2017) found that learners were keen to adopt "brand-name materials," such as those from the BBC, because they saw them as displaying "expert knowledge" (p. 169). Although this Yle program is not targeted at learners, Matt uses it as language learning material (see Section 4.2). It is significant that the learner assumes the material he uses is a credible resource, so that he can perceive it as beneficial for his learning. Matt does not report following more informal Instagram accounts or watching a more commercial television program, for example, but material produced by these officially recognized institutions. In Excerpt 2, Matt continues his reflection:

> Excerpt 2 (Matt's reflection)
>
> *I don't think anyone in our class has to guess that this would be something I like … I would like to note that* I have also watched a Canadian TV show called "[name of show]" that is the very similar, *a very weird genre that I am into.*

With several word choices, Matt creates a distinction between his historical body and the collective historical body in the classroom. He labels the television shows he watches "a very weird genre." After that, he denotes that he is "into" that genre, indicating that his specific interests are what make him unique, further highlighting his interests with another example from the same genre. Matt addresses his collectively known historical body, the fact that students in the class know about his interests, with the self-ironic indirect reporting, "I don't think anyone in our class has to guess." With these expressions, Matt positions himself in the "collective narrative of history" (Forsman, 2015, pp. 46–47) of the language class by separating himself from the rest of the students. At the same time, as a program funded by Finnish taxpayers, the show most likely enjoys a solid viewership in the Finnish context. Matt seems inclined to explain why this resource is useful for his learning: he receives a learning experience specifically tailored for him.

While Matt's activity focused on receptive skills, Bob, a second-year learner, practiced his productive written skills by posting on a Finnish forum. Like Matt, Bob motivates his choice of learning activity through his historical body of personal interests and expertise. Excerpt 3 is from Bob's original forum post translated into English.

Excerpt 3 (Bob's forum post)[3]

Hi

My Finnish name is Lari and *my American name is* Bob. I am an *American student who studies Finnish. This message is meant* as part of a portfolio *assignment. I wanted to write about* the American president Donald Trump and Muller's investigation.

In Excerpt 4, Bob explains how he has come to post on the forum. Bob writes:

Excerpt 4 (Bob's reflection)

This week I *wrote* a post on a Finnish forum. The page is called [name omitted] discussion and conversation about politics. I *introduced* myself in the post, and I *wrote* on the forum about President Donald Trump. In the writing, I *added* links to a newsletter and a video about American news. I *wrote* about Trump's government and accusations. I *gave my opinion* on the issue .... *Next time I would* write longer in the post and *discuss* American politics *more* because the American political system *is so different* from the Finnish political system.

In his forum post and reflection, Bob reflects on the dual position which he participates from: an expert on the topic of American politics but a novice in the language of communication. Bob indicates he has chosen to write in the forum because he has a historical body of expertise in the matter he is writing about, U.S. politics. In his post, Bob shares statements about the U.S. president and predicts what would happen if he were to be impeached. He presents himself as an expert by making confident statements and predictions about the topic and sharing resources (a website link and a YouTube video). In the reflection, he uses active action verbs that demonstrate his engagement in the forum and refers to his knowledgeability by writing about differences between American and Finnish political systems in an informative manner.

Bob's choice of learning material, the forum, seems to be guided by his historical body of interest in U.S. politics. By participating in the Finnish forum, even as a learner of Finnish, he can claim an expert position through his contextual knowledge of writing from the United States. Participation in the forum enables him to share information about the topic.

However, Bob clearly indicates in his post he has chosen this activity mostly because he needs to do something for his portfolio in Finnish. It could potentially be a free-time context, but Bob's forum participation starts off like a classroom exercise. By explaining his role and that he is writing because of an assignment, Bob makes salient his historical body as a language learner. He may be posing as an expert in American politics, but in his post, he justifies his participation through his need to practice Finnish. Furthermore, his learner role may also function to justify his participation in a Finnish forum where, as an American, he might feel like an intruder. Bob's activity has set himself to using the target language in an authentic context with other (non-learner) speakers of the language. He makes his historical body salient to the forum participants by performing being a non-expert of the language (see Hauser, 2018), a way to potentially soften the possible response from the interlocutors. While pre-empting his learner status, Bob informs the recipients of why he is writing in learner language, which might assist them in judging his content. This could possibly make them dismiss the post as a classroom assignment and not as an actual contribution to the interaction.

These two students, Matt and Bob, chose their learning activities because of their interests in certain topics and used their resources to practice language use related to these topics. Katya, however, creates a personalized learning experience using a familiar format: a virtual world-building video game. *The Sims* is a single-player game where players construct their own world, and then control how the characters interact in the game. Changing the language of an application into Finnish was a popular learning method in the portfolios. Katya explains why she has chosen this activity:

Excerpt 5 (Katya's reflection)

For this portfolio, I *decided* to play one of my favorite games, The Sims 4, in Finnish. *I would like to thank Susan* for pointing out to me that this was an option! *Originally, I was going to* play with one of my *already-established* save files, *but then* I decided to make a file *just* for this assignment and *try* to make it *as Finnish as possible.*

In addition to the reflection, Katya includes a screenshot (Figure 1) of the game interface.
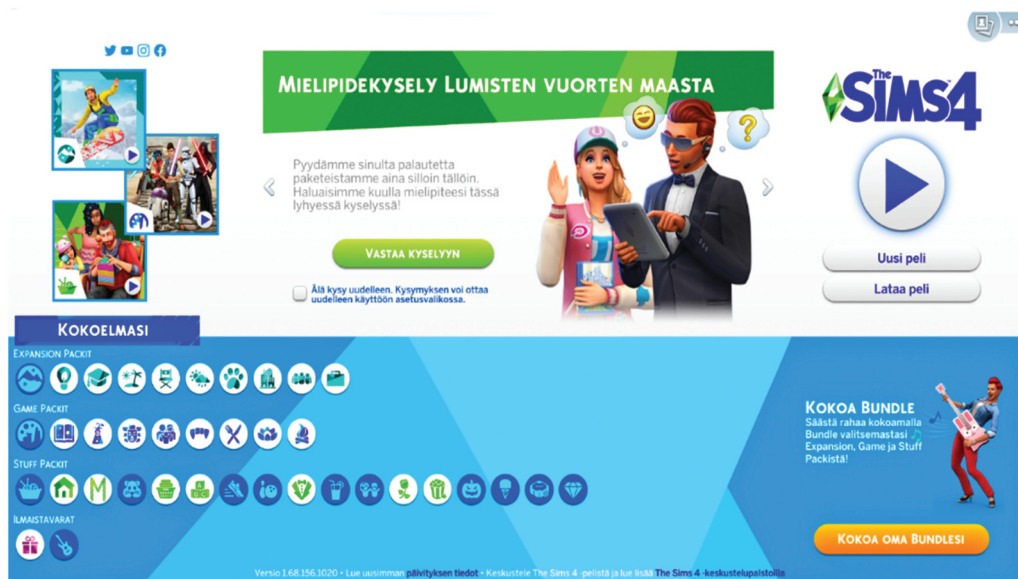
Figure 1. Sims navigation (Maxis, 2013).

By referring to her pre-existing files, Katya makes her historical body salient, signifying that she is already an experienced Sims player. Throughout the reflection, she signifies that her knowledge of the game has informed the process ("I was going to"), although she adapts her behavior for the task at hand ("originally"–"then"). By using the adverb "just" in the meaning of "only," Katya contextualizes her effort as a learning activity, in comparison to playing for entertainment. Connecting her free-time entertainment activity with language learning will likely motivate her to learn (see also Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006; Ranalli, 2008). Her effort to "make it as Finnish as possible" serves her goal to use *The Sims* specifically for language learning (see the next section).

The testimony to her classmate Susan, emphasized with an exclamation mark, positions Katya's activity in the context of the collective historical body of the language class, highlighting shared experiences between classmates. Students in Lai et al. (2018) had also often received their recommendations from peers. According to Forsman (2015), "the historical body of an indivi-dual is ... also partly formed as an extension of the interaction order prevalent in the group" (p. 46). In this excerpt, Katya creates links between two portfolios submitted in the same class, as Susan also writes about *The Sims*, creating a discourse of playing the game for learning Finnish as a collective practice. The students "act as a collective that has its own experiences with language in the specific setting" (Dressler & Mueller, 2022, p. 81). Through the portfolios and subsequent classroom discussions it becomes apparent that the students have talked about their experiences with *The Sims*. Perhaps the students will further share practices and strategies connected to playing the game together.

The examples in this section illustrated how historical bodies directed the students' choice of learning materials. Past experiences and personal interests led them to choose these resources. Matt and Katya further explained their choices through external references, such as official institutions and a learner peer. Bob emphasized his learner role in his reflection but also in his forum post to contextualize it as a class submission. The process of selecting learning materials was directly connected to the students' personal histories and agency.

Historical bodies directing orientation to learning targets

Through selecting their own learning materials and using them for individual learning projects, students became "active designers of their own learning" (Koivisto, 2013, p. 121). Each resource featured in the previous section (TV program, *The Sims*, forum) enabled certain discourses in place that the students used for language learning, such as the interface of the application, or the kind of language used in the game. Historical bodies directed the students to orient to specific linguistic or cultural elements.

Matt watched a Finnish television program to learn Finnish. In Excerpt 6, he orients to specific language elements (how people are addressed in his field) in the television program:

Excerpt 6 (Matt's reflection)

One thing that stood out to me was "Herra xx" and "Rouva xx." *We haven't gotten into* addressing people formally *yet*, but *I understand this* to be "Mrs. xx" or "Madam xx" I just found that as an odd way to address an executive and reminds me of German.

By addressing his metalinguistic knowledge and past learning history, his historical body, Matt makes salient how he directs his noticing and learning. "Addressing people formally" attracts his attention because he considers it "odd." He orients to a notice gap, an element he has not learned in class, which he has discovered through watching the show (Richards, 2015, p. 19). Matt makes hypotheses about the target language based on his experience with German. Previous studies have found that an L2 can have a positive transfer into a student's L3 (see, e.g., Woll, 2018). What is relevant, however, is that the learner reflects on this transfer. When the learner makes salient his metalinguistic observations, he can recognize their potential for future learning. As Biers (2022) and Reagan and Osborn (2019) suggest, this kind of meta-lingual and cultural knowledge should form a foundational component in foreign language programs.

Matt also explains that he uses the television program to learn cultural information. In doing so, he bridges his historical body of professional experience with his language learning.

In Excerpt 7, Matt continues his reflection:

Excerpt 7 (Matt's reflection on TV show)

So I found *many interesting differences* between US and Finnish business culture[4] (*I would love to elaborate* on the differences, but *I will spare you* from *a long reading* as it is *not related to* my Finnish language learning.)

Matt indicates that his historical body of professional background and interest is well-known in the social context of the classroom but perhaps overlooked in the context of language learning. Combining these two, Matt tailors an individual learning experience for himself. He makes a distinction between his language learning, which would be of interest to the instructor, and issues related to his personal interest. He addresses his instructor as "you," directly talking and explaining his choices to her. He then "spares" the instructor from learning about cultural differences related to his field, signifying that in his judgment, the language instructor would only be interested in language learning, or soliciting whether the instructor would be interested in cultural information. Language and culture teaching are always tightly intertwined and impossible to separate from one another (Godwin-Jones, 2016).

Like Matt, Bob also focuses on vocabulary learning. He orients to the vocabulary used by other forum participants as the main source of his difficulty in understanding them. He has also searched for topic-specific vocabulary. Excerpt 8 is from his reflection:

Excerpt 8 (Bob's reflection)

Other people on the forum *responded* to my message .... *I thought* that reading the messages in the forum was *challenging and confusing* because people used vocabulary and abbreviations that *I did not know*. I used Glosbe to look up vocabulary. *I have learned* new vocabulary about politics and government. (list below)

New vocabulary:

- kysely—investigation
- erota—to resign
- kaksipuolueinen—bipartisan
- oikeudellisissa—legal
- vaikeus—trouble/conflict
- virkasyyte—impeachment

Bob lists specific vocabulary items that he has focused on while writing his forum post, which signifies that these are his learning targets. Providing a concrete list also seems like a tool to indicate to the instructor that he has engaged in a learning activity: learning these words is a concrete outcome.

Bob also orients to the vocabulary used by his interlocutors in the forum. He describes the interaction order as being that he wrote his post and the others "responded" to it. He further illustrates his perception of the interaction order through screenshots taken from the forum (not included in this article). He then casts doubt on this account by describing the responses as "challenging" and "confusing," suggesting he is unsure of what the interlocutors wrote about. Like Bob, students in Lai et al. (2018) found it challenging to participate in interaction in technology-mediated platforms. Based on the responses Bob has copied from the forum, it appears the others did not respond to him or refer to his post in any way. Bob addresses this uncertainty to the instructor, again making his historical body as a language learner explicit. "Casting doubt on something just said" is a language learners' method of performing non-expertise (Hauser, 2018, p. 98). Through orienting to this challenge, Bob signifies that he has put effort into the assignment, but he is not in charge of the interlocutors' contribution.

The previous section featured Katya's reflection of why she started playing *The Sims* for language learning and in the following excerpt, she reflects on how she uses the resource. She learns vocabulary through navigating the game (cf. Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006; Ranalli, 2008). Katya writes:

Excerpt 9 (Katya's reflection)

I discovered that it's actually *pretty hard* to navigate considering *my limited* vocabulary, but by clicking buttons *I was familiar with*, I was able to do what I was *trying to do*, like get a job for my sim, and learn some new words in the process!

In this excerpt, Katya continues to refer to her historical body as an expert player, by referring to being "familiar" with some functions and pronouncing her intentions informed by this experience ("what I was trying to do"). In the reported activity, Katya's schema of doing the same activity in English now directs her play in Finnish. Linking to previous schemas can activate new ones and give context to language use. Katya indicates that getting a job is a key function in the game, which she knows due to her experience of playing it before. Katya highlights her success with an exclamation mark, signifying enthusiasm.

Katya has used *The Sims* to learn vocabulary and create an immersive environment for learning. Figure 1 shows that the navigation panel is in Finnish, demonstrating what kind of discourses in place the game enables and what language is involved when she uses the program in Finnish.

In Excerpt 5, Katya explained her plan to make her Sims world "as Finnish as possible." She further continues:

Excerpt 10 (Katya's reflection on *The Sims*)

So I made *a Finnish sim*, and moved her into *a Finnish house that I built (based on* some of the videos *we watched earlier* in the semester and *some photos I found online*).

The reflection is accompanied by screenshots (Figure 2).

Katya's process of building her world in the game is directed by her explicitly learned knowledge and at the same time, her historical body in the form of implicit preconceptions of what is Finnish. Her "Finnish house" is featured in the screenshot and the sources are provided

Figure 2. Sims character and house (Maxis, 2013).

in brackets. She provides little explanation, however, for her process of creating the "Finnish sim" featured in the pictures. The historical body that has directed Katya's creation of the house is more recent and explicit (classroom material and an online search) than the ideas that have guided her to select the appearances of the character, which seem to reflect a neo-colonial bias of what a Finnish person should look like (for more about the colonial history of languages as "constructions of nation-states," see, e.g., García, 2019, p. 152). The example illustrates how historical bodies can, on the one hand, be the result of explicit instruction, and on the other hand, reflect more implicit knowledge. Classroom instruction could be developed to shape students' conceptions of the target culture and offer more diverse imagery (Benaglia & Smith, 2022).

The examples illustrated how the students used the resources they had chosen for language learning. Each resource enabled different discourses in place and the students, directed by their historical bodies, used their agency to use these discourses in place for learning. TV shows, forums, and *The Sims* enable the following of authentic language use and discovery of notice gaps. Matt's professional interest and metalinguistic knowledge directed him to notice cultural and linguistic elements. Bob oriented to unfamiliar vocabulary needed to communicate about his area of expertise and to confusing vocabulary used by the interlocutors in the forum. Katya was directed by her previous experiences of playing the game, connecting that experience to what she had learned in class about Finnish houses.

Historical bodies directing future learning projects

While focusing on their learning targets, students also oriented to what they would need to know, including a future dimension to their learning efforts. Directed by their historical bodies, students oriented to future actions and learning projects, transferring "the history of their relationship with past actions" to their future goals (Jones, 2007, p. 250). They often did this by emphasizing their learner/ novice statuses.

Matt exemplifies his learner status through expressing what he does not know yet. In Excerpt 6, he oriented to future learning with the clause "we haven't gotten into addressing people formally yet." He anticipates collective action by using the pronoun "we," by which he refers to the whole class. With the word "yet" he presents his aspiration to be at a higher language level, signifying that addressing people formally is a potential future learning target in the class. The instructor could address this topic collectively, or Matt could further pursue learning about this topic on his own. The student, while interacting with the instructor, aspires to be at a higher level which he could reach with the help of an expert.

In Excerpt 6, Matt performs non-expertise (Hauser, 2018), making salient his historical body as a language learner. He softens his speculation with "I understand this to be." Matt's translations of "herra" and "rouva" are both feminine, although "herra" is the male equivalent in Finnish, which demonstrates that Matt has not checked these words in a dictionary. Instead, he tries to deduce their meaning from the context through utilizing his metalinguistic knowledge. Language learners are expected to "know" things in a language class, but they are also there because they are learning (Hauser, 2018). Matt addresses this uncertainty to the instructor, anticipating a need for further study. The instructor could utilize this request and address it in the lesson plan. When learning targets stem from students' own observations in authentic, situated interaction, they can link to filling a learning gap that the student is already projecting (*learnables*, see Jakonen, 2018).

As demonstrated in the previous section, Bob pre-empted his learner status in his reflection, but also in his forum post. By explicitly stating that he is confused, he signals there is a need for further language study. As directed by the portfolio instructions, Bob also explicitly orients to the future in his reflection, further reinstating this need for extra practice:

Excerpt 11 (Bob's reflection)

Next time I would write a *longer* forum post and discuss American politics *more*, because the American political system is very different from the Finnish political system .... *Next time* I will find a Finnish news source that deals with President Trump.

Bob's future orientation circles around getting "more" practice. He backgrounds this need through comparing the two political systems in an informative statement, signifying there is an increased need or opportunity to utilize his expertise to further educate Finnish forum users.

In a similar manner, Katya also calls for more practice. While describing her challenges navigating *The Sims* in Finnish, she orients to future learning. Katya continues her reflection:

Excerpt 12 (Katya's reflection on *The Sims*)

However, some activities had so many options that it was *difficult* for me to understand what to click. *Eventually, I managed* to find out how to adopt a cat, which was one of the easier things for me to understand.
Overall, it was *challenging* for me to play sims *like I normally do* because there was so much I didn't understand. *In the future, I might* play in English *first and then* switch to Finnish so that the English meanings of words are *more fresh* [*sic*] in my mind and it's *easier* for me to pick up on the vocabulary that the game uses!

Katya's suggestion for future enhancement ("I might") is to enhance her historical body of playing *The Sims* ("more fresh," "easier") before returning to playing it in Finnish ("first," "then"). She backgrounds this future orientation by contrasting her historical body of experiences of playing in her native English ("like I normally do") with the challenge of playing in Finnish.

Historical bodies directed the participants' orientation to future actions. Students oriented to future learning targets based on the notice gaps that were informed by their historical bodies. They made their learner/novice roles explicit, stating a need for clarifications and enhanced practice. These anticipations and orientations were directed by past experiences. The examples demonstrated the significance of historical bodies in directing students' agency during their independent learning in the digital wilds.

Conclusions and implications

This article focused on language learners' historical bodies and how they directed learners' agency when they used Finnish independently in the digital wilds as part of a classroom assignment. The study followed the process of nexus analysis, and discourse analysis was used as the micro-level analysis method. Together, they shed light on the complexity of the nexus of practice that reached beyond the classroom context. In this final section, I summarize the findings and discuss their pedagogical implications.

The analysis shows that historical bodies directed the students' agency in three overlapping stages. First, they directed what resources students chose to use as learning material and, second, what linguistic and cultural elements they oriented to as learning targets (although the discourses in place set the frame for how the material could be used for learning). Third, they directed students' orientation to future actions and learning targets.

Matt's historical body directed him to search for materials that afforded him a personalized learning experience, yet he chose to use institutionally recognized sources. Historical bodies directed his noticing and learning of cultural and linguistic elements. By pointing to notice gaps and anticipating further actions in the classroom, he oriented to future learning targets. Bob interacted in a Finnish forum from a dual position: he acted as an expert on the topic but a novice in the target language. He oriented to new or confusing vocabulary, though not without challenges, and aspired to get more practice to talk about his desired topic. Katya's previous experience of playing *The Sims*, along with a recommendation from a classmate, directed her to use the game as learning material that she then used, directed by her historical body. Her future actions were embedded in the historical body through the desire to get enhanced experience playing the game in her L1 before playing again in Finnish.

The findings suggest that historical bodies had a significant impact on students' agency in the digital wilds. Previous studies exploring language learners' historical bodies had focused on learners with more direct contact with the target language through their heritage or experiences living there (cf. Dressler et al., 2021; Haneda, 2005). The present study, however, focused on new speakers (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2015) and demonstrated that life histories and experiences were similarly important in their learning. The article saw the historical body as a dynamic concept that was tightly connected to students' agency. Following nexus analysis, discourse was seen as action: students processed their agency and its impact on learning through the written portfolio discourses. The three portfolio entries, which were representative of the submitted entries throughout, illustrated the ways in which historical bodies impacted the students' practices. Although all students' historical bodies were naturally different, their impact in selecting resources and orienting to learning targets and future actions was revealed through the reflections.

The learners, in their reflections, are constantly positioning themselves, for example as experts in one thing and novices in another (Bob) or as being different from the other students in the class (Matt). In this article, this positioning was analyzed from the perspective of the body: how people participate in interaction in social spaces (Blommaert, 2013), through embodying "human lived experience" (Scollon & Scollon, 2005, p. 108). Concurrently, as the students take on "different socially significant identities" while negotiating their "ways of being in the world at different times and places for different purposes" (Gee, 2014, pp. 2–3), they engage in identity work. Future research on the portfolio data in this study could perhaps further explore the question of identity negotiation.

Since the portfolio was used as a (graded) classroom assignment, the students wrote to the instructor as the interlocutor and explained their choices to her. This became explicit when, for example, Matt directly addressed his instructor as "you" in the portfolio. The learning reflections are social situations, and it is important to examine how the students contextualize their efforts as classroom learning activities, writing for the teacher-researcher as the audience, because the teacher-centeredness impacts practices in all classroom-driven situations.

In showing how the historical bodies directed agency, the study made salient the nexus of practice that surrounds students' language learning in the digital wilds and offers insights into the development of an enhanced portfolio assignment. As the examples from Matt's and Katya's portfolios reveal, students focus their attention on the target culture alongside linguistic learning. In an enhanced version of the Independent Use Portfolio, there should be further encouragement to explore and reflect on cultural learning. In addition, more attention in the language class needs to be dedicated to critical reflections on the connections between language and culture.

Understanding the impact of historical bodies is important in shaping inclusive classroom practices that consider the students' individuality. In inclusive pedagogy, instead of differentiating students according to their skill levels, students decide what and with whom they want to learn. The instructor becomes a facilitator, consulting with the students (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The portfolio gave space for the students to select what they wanted to learn about and to reflect on their learning, giving students from different skill levels room to shine. The students who did not always succeed best in proficiency-oriented assessment tasks demonstrated great levels of commitment and learning in their portfolios. Open-ended tasks that enable learners to bring in outside information and connect their personal interests and experiences to their learning can help bridge the gap between the classroom and the world beyond it.

In addition to their personal experiences, some of the analysis indicated that the learners' noticing of linguistic or cultural elements was directed by their conceptions of national languages and mainstream cultures (see, e.g., García, 2019). Beiler (2022) suggests that the concept of the historical body should be expanded with decolonial theory. Dismantling these conceptions through inclusive, decolonial pedagogies (see, e.g., Benaglia & Smith, 2022) poses a challenge for language instructors. Students should receive diverse examples of language use by a diversity of speakers so they can orient themselves to future language use events that are not managed by the dominant discourses only. Through instruction, existing schemas can be expanded and diversified.

Reflection enhances students' agency in language learning in the digital wilds. Reflective practices can enhance students' agency by allowing them to make their historical bodies salient to themselves, their instructors, and the class as a collective. Following Emirbayer and Mische (1998), when students put their "agentic orientations" on display through "imaginative recomposition and critical judgment," they can untie themselves "from past patterns of interaction and reframe their relationships to existing constraints" (p. 1010). In this line of thought, Biesta and Tedder (2007, p. 139) also argue that narratives offer a potential platform to learn about one's own agency.

Through using tasks that include reflection and personal sharing, instructors can encourage learners to be more agentive and understand the connections of historical bodies to their learning. Pushing students to explore different resources is especially fruitful in the context of LCTLs where students might not automatically get exposed to the target language in their living environment. Language classes could, when combined with proficiency-oriented assessment, use students' reflections as part of their assessment practices.

Note

1. I have omitted the name of the show, and some other information, as they are connected to Matt's profession.
2. Word order used by Matt.
3. Bob's forum post and reflection have been translated into English by the author.
4. I changed the field to protect Matt's anonymity.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

Funding

Notes on contributor

Elisa Räsänen is a Doctoral Researcher at the Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and a former Senior Lecturer of Finnish language and culture at Indiana University, USA. Her research focuses on North American university learners of Finnish and the ways in which they utilize the physical, digital, and social affordances of their learning environment for language learning. She obtained her MA in Finnish in 2014 at the University of Jyväskylä.

ORCID

Elisa Räsänen http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9697-0372

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III

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: FACILITATING LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE WILD

by

Elisa Räsänen & Piibi-Kai Kivik, 2023

Ethics and Context in Second Language Testing: Rethinking Validity in Theory and Practice, 135–161

6. Portfolio Assessment: Facilitating language learning in the wild

Elisa Räsänen

ORCID: 0000-0002-9697-0372

Piibi-Kai Kivik

ORCID: 0000-0001-8084-9845

Abstract

Language class assessment focusing solely on proficiency does not sufficiently address the objectives of cultural awareness and interactional competence. This article explores an alternative approach to language assessment, a portfolio that considers students' activities beyond the classroom, in the wild. The data of this article came from the implementation of an Independent Use Portfolio that followed the principles of Dynamic Assessment and Learning Oriented Assessment. The task was implemented in two U.S. university programs of less commonly taught languages, Finnish and Estonian. Nexus analysis and discourse analysis were used to analyze the learner portfolios. Using the portfolio task for assessment created a positive washback effect: the students sought out more opportunities to use the language and paid attention to the elements of language in these episodes. Students pursued existing relationships and established new connections in the target language. In the reflection part of the portfolio, students oriented to learnables such as specific vocabulary items, which enhanced the learning potential of their interactions. The portfolio integrated independent use in the wild with classroom instruction and will enable instructors to develop explicit instruction and assessment pertaining to the needs of real-life use. The study suggests a possible model for adopting such teaching and assessment practices.

Introduction

College foreign language programs in the United States are increasingly oriented to language proficiency, and ACTFL OPI is often considered the gold standard of assessment. Concurrently, integration of language use *in the wild* into classroom teaching and educating learners to be independent users are considered central to the state-of-the-art language instruction aiming at interactional competence, defined as the ability of L2 learners "to engage in the dynamic and context-sensitive coordination of social interaction" (Eskildsen et al., 2019, p. 8), not individual performance ability. Narrowly defined proficiency orientation and the associated assessment methods have clashed with the goal of achieving L2 interactional competence, going back to Kramsch (1986), see Salaberry and Kunitz (2019, p. 6). Approaches to the study of interactional competence that take the emic (participant-based) perspective of language use to realize social action (conversation analysis and discourse analysis) have been found incompatible with assessment as an etic judgment of individual performance against standards (Kley, 2019, p. 292). Our article explores an alternative approach to classroom assessment, a portfolio that considers students' activities beyond the classroom, *in the wild.*

We study how using a portfolio assessment procedure creates a positive washback effect for learning, as it pushes students to use the target language in the wild. The task encourages the students to seek out real life interactions as resources for learning and focus their attention on specific learning moments within those interactions. The data we used for this study was collected using a portfolio assignment titled *Independent Use Portfolio* (see Appendix 1). The portfolio includes students' self-reports of their independent language use outside of class and documentation, as well as their reflections on these events (see also Räsänen, 2021).

Independent language use, as employed here, denotes the students' self-directed language use (see e.g., Abar & Loken, 2010) beyond the classroom context, and is independent from the instructional setting of the language course. *Independent Use Portfolio* was implemented in two university programs of less commonly taught languages (Finnish and Estonian at a U.S. university), with a focus on language use in its social context.

The portfolio assessment procedure was prompted by a pronounced need for introducing language use in the wild into the curriculum. We, as instructors, observed a mismatch between the curricular goals of our language programs and current assessment methods: while our classes aimed to train students to be engaged, independent learners, we were testing them solely for language proficiency. The pedagogical objective of the portfolio was to enhance language use in authentic contexts, and promote incidental learning (see Lech & Harris, 2019) as well as learner autonomy, which is crucial for successful learning (e.g., Benson & Reinders, 2011). The portfolio was designed to support lifelong learning (Lech & Harris, 2019) and to develop classroom instruction that would contribute to this goal, following the principles of dynamic assessment (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005) and learning-oriented assessment (Turner & Purpura, 2015).

As Purpura (2016, p. 202) notes, most of the research on social consequences of assessment have focused on test misuse, such as injustices due to decision-making based on high-stakes tests (see this volume). We present a different context and explore the social relevance of language practices in the context of an assessment task. We believe that interactions between novice and expert language users and memberships in "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) are central for the development of L2 skills (e.g., L2 socialization approaches in Duff & Talmy, 2011, i.e., social constructivist perspectives to L2 learning). This chapter

contributes to the ongoing discussion of assessment and authentic, situated language use in second and foreign language teaching (e.g., McNamara & Roever, 2006; Ross & Kasper, 2013; the chapters in Salaberry & Kunitz, 2019). The portfolio assessment task is designed for students to interact in the target language in the wild and thereby create a washback effect, emphasizing the role of language use in the wild in students' learning.

As teacher-researchers seeking curricular change, we utilized a nexus analytical approach (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) that enabled us to study our students' interactions and their reports of such interactions in the portfolio, and to 'zoom in' to the analysis of the interaction level. Nexus analysis is an approach that combines ethnography and discourse analysis (see Data and Methods, in this article) and enables incorporating change to the studied practices. As a result of implementing the Independent Use Portfolio, students added their target language to interactions with people with whom they already had existing relationships or reached out to new contacts in the target language. We ask how the interactions (prompted by the portfolio) impacted their practice and, consequently, created opportunities for learning the target language. We provide detailed analyses of the portfolio reflections to identify learning orientations emerging from these social activities. Our research questions are:

- How did the portfolio assessment task impact students' target language interactions?
- What kind of learning did the students report happening in those situations?

In the next section, we will outline relevant previous research on portfolios as language class assessment. We will then explain the core principles behind the Independent Use Portfolio and the present study.

Background

Benefits of Portfolio Assessment and the Features of Independent Use Portfolio

Portfolios have been regarded as an alternative, more empowering, assessment task compared to traditional testing procedures (Lynch & Shaw, 2005). A portfolio enables the students to showcase integrated skills and a wider scope of activities than decontextualized tests (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al., 2021, p. 3). Portfolios contribute to learner language development, motivation, self-reflection, autonomy, cognition, metacognition and to develop a sense of community. They also promote authenticity. (For an overview of e-portfolio research, see Chostelidou & Manoli, 2020, pp. 509–510.) In general, research on portfolio assessment in language instruction in the past ten years has mostly focused on writing instruction (see, e.g., Mak & Wong, 2018) and students' self-regulation and active learning (Mak & Wong, 2018; Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015).

Our study stands out from previous portfolio research studies for the following reasons. First, it uses data from less commonly taught language programs at the university level. Second, it emphasizes the role of language use for interaction. We focus on student-initiated instances of language use, instead of reporting on formal classroom assignments. Independent Use Portfolio is a *showcase portfolio*, introducing "examples of a learner's best work" (Abrar-ul-Hassan, et al., 2021, p. 3), which means that it does not measure linguistic development, but rather highlights learners' successful language learning experiences. Here, this *best work* is done in the wild instead of in the classroom and success is understood in terms of using the target language to achieve interactional objectives. This is different from most of the otherwise comparable portfolio projects in higher education contexts, where the learning goals were defined by the instructor and based on standard formulations of proficiency milestones, with limited opportunities for student-defined artifacts and practices (e.g., Cadd, 2012).

Our Independent Use Portfolio initially drew on The European Language Portfolio (ELP) in emphasizing life-long learning and including language use that is not connected to students' other homework tasks. A distinctive feature of the ELP is that it does not differentiate between skills obtained from formal classroom instruction and a more informal setting. The ELP, like our portfolio, offers language learners an opportunity to document and reflect on "language learning and intercultural experiences" (Council of Europe, 2021). It includes three parts: a language passport, a language biography, and a dossier (Cummins & Davesne, 2009). Our portfolio only included the dossier aspect, although some of our classes also wrote language biographies, and focused on student engagement and effort rather than demonstrated proficiency.

Language Learning in the Wild as the Resource of Independent Use Portfolio

The portfolio was introduced in our classrooms (and subsequently used for this study) as a response to the recent scholarship of language learning *in the wild* (see Eskildsen et al., 2019 for an overview). The study of second language learning in the wild focuses on language learners' interactions outside of the classroom (Clark, et al., 2011; Hutchins, 1995). As Eskildsen et al. (2019) have put it, researchers "scrutinize learning in everyday mundane situations by means of micro-analyses of how L2 speakers/learners act in the world in concord with others while they accomplish social tasks and move through time and space" and "explore ways in which such L2 speaker experiences can be utilized for classroom purposes" (2019, p. 3). While the present study employs analysis of written exchanges and reflection data instead of oral interaction analysis, it is guided by the research agenda of learning in the wild.

Eskildsen et al. (2019) noted that although the term *in the wild* is often seen as "the antithesis of classroom" (p. 4), the concept is actually more nuanced and there is more of a "gradient" relationship with classroom learning. In our effort to bring language learning in the wild to the classroom via the Independent Use Portfolio and subsequently develop teaching and assessment, we drew on recent advances of integrating research of L2 use in the wild with classroom pedagogy (e.g., L2 interactional competence studies in Salaberry & Kunitz, 2019). Specifically, the portfolio model was inspired by the pedagogical task that directed students to use target language in the wild, take their experience back to the classroom in the form of recording and reflect on it in a group setting (Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2018, 2019).

Lech and Harris (2019) observed that L2 learning in the wild assumes access to in-person speaker community, which is not always viable, and argued for studying "incidental foreign language contact in unstructured, virtual environments, the virtual wild" (p. 39). One of the areas identified as in need of further study included "measuring students' interest, or lack of, in engaging in – – OILL (Online Informal Learning of Languages) activities" (Lech & Harris, 2019, p. 52) and how effective they are for learning. Also, Cole and Vanderplank (2016, p. 41) suggested investigations on how online learning could be combined with and enrich the formal classroom in assignments that take into account learners' individuality in language use that goes beyond the class. Our study contributes to this line of investigation. As our students have limited access to target language communities in-person, they often rely on online interactions.

The analyses of naturally occurring interaction can pinpoint actual learning only indirectly, via observable learning: changes in practice. We apply the same principle in the analysis,

adopting the emic perspective of the participants as they orient to *learnables*, defined by Majlesi and Broth (2012, p. 193) as "whatever is interactively established as relevant and developed into a shared pedagogical focus." In the portfolio task, we locate the students' orientation to learnables in the reported interactions, as the shared focus between participants in the samples of interactions and, also, as identified by learners in their subsequent written reflections.

Background Principles: Dynamic Assessment and Learning Oriented Assessment

We utilized principles of dynamic assessment (DA) in the Independent Use Portfolio. Learning in interaction, and lifelong learning are at the core of DA. DA approaches language learning from a sociocultural perspective, following the Vygotskian concept of the zone of proximal development: learners should not only perform tasks at their level, but with assistance, they can reach higher level performances (Poehner, 2008, pp. 5, 12; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005, pp. 233–234). Whereas "assessing without mediation is problematic because it leaves out part of the picture – the future" (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005, p. 251), dynamic assessment includes the concept of life-long learning.

The approach of DA brings about a paradigm shift enhancing students' development through assessment, whereas more traditional tests and assessments are by nature *static* (Poehner, 2008, p. 13). Our Independent Use Portfolio follows a similar principle of developing students' skills through an assessment intervention, with the aim of a positive washback effect of assessment on teaching, encouraging students to do more with their target language outside of class. The instructors assess the students' performance based on the level of their reported active engagement and effort.

Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA) (Purpura, 2016; Turner & Purpura, 2015) also puts assessment in the service of learning and relies on evidence elicited in a variety of L2 contexts. LOA employs classroom elicitations in diverse planned and unplanned contexts. It takes the elicitations out of the classroom context and then brings them back to the pedagogical realm. Our portfolio process starts in the classroom, takes learning to the wild and then brings it back to the classroom as reflection and potentially, in repeated or new encounters. The students have authority and autonomy in choosing the material.

Becoming *functional* in the target language is only possible for autonomous learners (Lech & Harris, 2019) and therefore, it is "crucial that teachers of languages are also teachers of skills for continuing one's education in the wild." (p. 40). Thus, the core principle behind the Independent Use Portfolio was to highlight for the students the importance of the activities they do in the target language outside of class, and the potential of those activities for learning. The practices promoting learner autonomy are assigned weight by elevating them to the level of course assessment.

Data and Methods

The Portfolio Process

The context of the study is the one of two small less commonly taught foreign language programs, Finnish and Estonian, at a public university in the United States.[1] There are no substantial local target-language speaker communities, and students have limited opportunities for in-person language use in the wild in communicative situations. The two target languages are typologically distant from the students' first language (English), and structurally complex. Estonian and Finnish are typologically closely related (Finnic branch of the Uralic languages). The language programs are comparable for instructional setting and

methods, focusing on task-based instruction and target-language interaction. The participants were students in first, second, third, and fourth-year Finnish and first and second-year Estonian language classes. As the present study focuses on students' social activities and their learning orientations instead of development, the students' proficiency levels were not assessed for the purposes of our study.

The present study is part of a larger research study, primarily conducted in Finnish classes with a smaller additional Estonian portfolio corpus. The larger research project includes 99 portfolio entries from 19 students of Finnish, and 21 portfolio entries from 8 students of Estonian. The participants in the study were mostly undergraduate-level students who studied Finnish or Estonian as part of a language requirement in their degree. Some students participated in the research study through several (fall, spring, summer) semesters. We implemented the Independent Use Portfolio in the Finnish/ Estonian courses as a continuous homework assessment. An Estonian intensive course also had a final submission.

Depending on the class, students were required to submit 4–6 portfolio entries per semester and the portfolio counted for 5–10 % of their final course grade. The instructors assessed the students' portfolio entries based on engagement and effort (see the full rubric in appendix 1). It has been found important for foreign language learners' reflections to be in their L1 to express deeper thoughts (Cadd, 2012, p. 101 on ePortfolio). In the Independent Use Portfolio, the entries were written in both the target language and English, depending on the students' language skills. Figure 6.1 summarizes the portfolio process (see also Räsänen, 2021):
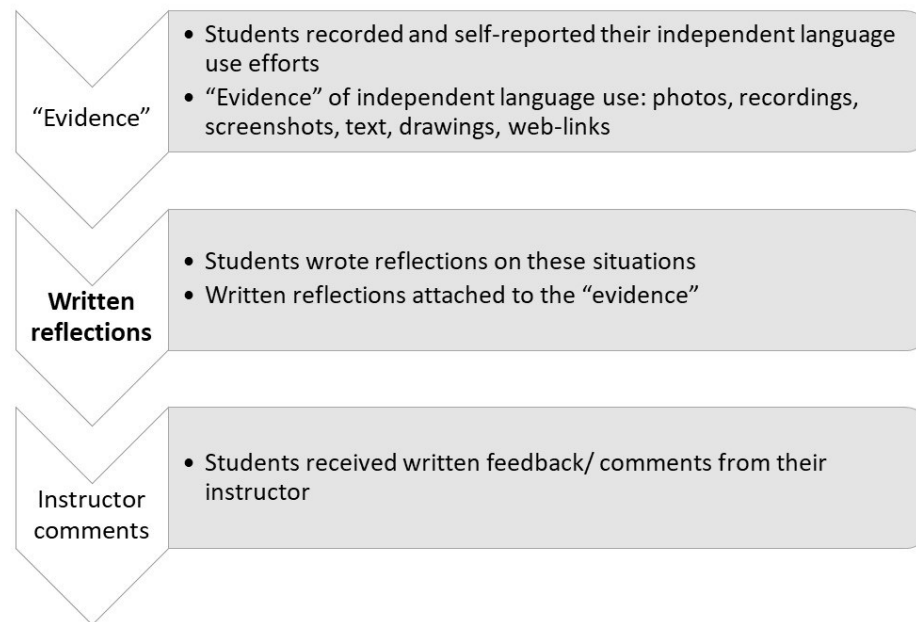
Figure 6.1. The Portfolio Process

The students collected samples of language and self-reflections on their language use in the wild and recorded them in an electronic portfolio (cf. Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2018, 2019 study of students recording their authentic interaction for classroom discussion). Students were tasked to collect samples of their language use situations in the form of photos, recordings, screenshots, and text, and they also included drawings and web-links. The samples were accompanied by written reflections on the instances of target language use (see Appendix for portfolio instructions). Students received prompt questions that directed them, among other things, to identify what they had found enjoyable or challenging and what they had learned while engaging in activities in the target language. For research purposes, the portfolio data was de-identified before sharing between the researchers and analyzing to identify common themes.

A Nexus-analytical Approach to Discourse Analysis

As teacher-researchers we utilized nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) both in the data collection and analysis, along with discourse analysis (Gee, 2004) to facilitate a closer analysis of the student entries. In nexus analysis, discourse is examined from an ethnographic perspective (also Pietikäinen, 2012). The process enabled us to study practices through a three-stage process: 1) engaging, 2) navigating and 3) changing the nexus of practice. In the first phase, we engaged with the actors (the students) and relevant social actions (instances of their language use in the wild), reported in the portfolio project (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 153−154). In the navigating phase, we analyzed and categorized the data, looking for trends. We conducted close analyses of the portfolios, and then again 'zoomed out' to see the 'big picture', in a dynamic process (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 159−160). Nexus analysis includes change (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 177−178), which in our study was introduced in two ways: the portfolio prompts students to change their engagement with the target language and holds potential for curricular changes.

Nexus analysis involves three central concepts: discourses in place, interaction order and historical body that we used to analyze discourses in the reflection data. *Discourses in place* means the nexus of discourses where social action happens. *Interaction order* refers to social order, hierarchies, and arrangements (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 19). *Historical bodies*, students' prior expectations and experiences, become salient as students bring their prior language learning experiences into their interactions and reflections. They also address their histories of existing social relationships.

In the analysis, we do not focus on language learning *per se*, but on how students orient themselves to learning activities and construct meaning retrospectively (Jakonen, 2018) in their written reflections. Locating and naming the discourses and their connections is an

important part of the analysis (see also Pietikäinen, 2012, p. 423). We use the emic categories and categorizations that our participants (student authors of the portfolio entries) themselves applied or that emerged from their text, for instance, presenting themselves as novice learners or peripheral members of the speaking community. We also supplemented the analysis with the ethnographic information available to us (e.g., students' learning histories: beginner or more advanced). In the following section, we introduce the analysis and results of our study.

Analysis and Results

Portfolio Assessment Pushing Students to Interact in the Wild

The portfolio assessment task, focusing on student engagement in the target language in the wild, created a positive washback effect as it led students to seek out interaction partners and new contexts for using the target language. In this section we will focus on how these interactions, prompted by the portfolio, impacted language practice and learning. As described before, the research questions we used to guide our analysis were the following:

- How did the portfolio assessment task impact students' target language interactions?

- What kind of learning did the students report happening in those situations?

As a result of our analysis, we identified three general types of positive washback:

1) Students pursued existing relationships in the target language (either elicited by the portfolio assessment itself or reported and reflected on by the learner).

2) Students established new connections through the target language.

3) The portfolio became a means of *doing learning* through reflection.

Pursuing Existing Relationships in the Target Language

Eva reports in her portfolio entry how she has added using a new language, Finnish, in communications with a Finnish speaking friend, and how the relationship further motivates her language practice. She writes that she has added Finnish to her interaction with the friend because of the portfolio. She starts her reflection by describing their relationship:

Excerpt 1. Reflection (Eva/ Finnish)[2]

> Minä näytän häntä koko kesän, joka kesä. **Kahdeksan vuotta**, meidän perheet menemme X:n kesämökki juhannukseen. – – **Me** tekstimme **yksi kertoa** koska sanoin että **tarvitsen teksti viestiä kurssilta**, mutta sitten me **haluamme** tekstata **lisää suomeksi!** Minä **kaipaan** häntä **todella paljon**.
>
> 'I saw her all summer, every summer. **For eight years**, our families went to X's summer cottage for midsummer. – – **We** texted **one time** because I said that **I need text messages for class**, but then **we want to** text **more in Finnish**! I **miss** her **very much**.'

Eva's reflection suggests an existing, long-term social connection between the two as a reason to continue the chat. In the reflection, she uses the words *I miss* and *a great deal*, and says how they have visited their cottage, which in Finnish culture is a place to which close friends are invited, *for eight years*. This *historical body* of their mutual history shapes how the interaction proceeds. Eva reports that they texted in Finnish as she needed a sample (for the portfolio), but they *want to* continue the practice. The use of the inclusive pronoun in *we want* signals that according to Eva this is a mutually shared commitment. The portfolio has prompted her to add the target language interactions to the relationship.

Eva's reported willingness to continue and expand a class activity in her life outside the classroom contrasts with typical course assessment practices where the student's engagement ends with the submission of the assignment. We suggest that being friends with the practice partner has a motivating effect for the student to want to continue the practice. Orientation to the future and lifelong learning are at the core of dynamic assessment (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005, p. 251). An implication of the portfolio assessment is that in addition to students initiating communication in the target language, they create practices that might continue after the portfolio has been completed and the language course is finished.

Further excerpts of Eva's chat reveal that the practice is indeed continuing. The chat chain indicates that the conversation has ended and it has been restarted at least once. Eva wishes the friend good night and after a couple of lines Eva writes:

Excerpt 2. Chat (Eva/ Finnish)

> haluan textin suomeksi enemmän😂 😂
>
> ja hyvää ystävänpäivää❤️
>
> 'I want to text in Finnish more
>
> and happy Valentine's Day'

With the message, she expresses her interest to continue interacting in Finnish. The laughing emojis soften Eva's request, to which the friend responds, continuing the chat with several messages. The conversation has restarted, and the friends discuss different day activities, suggesting that the second thread happened on another day.

Chatting with a more advanced speaker enables functioning at the zone of proximal development (Poehner, 2008; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005): Eva writes at her own level and the friend responds with more advanced-level language, which is still comprehensible to Eva. The chat exchange does not suggest any communication trouble. Thus, the portfolio task prompts Eva to use Finnish with an expert speaker, who is also personally close to her, pushing her to maximize the opportunities to learn from interaction in the wild.

Another student, Violet, also texted a Finnish friend in Finnish, which resulted in an extensive exchange characterized by sharing. This interaction is prompted by the portfolio task as well. Violet is a third-year Finnish language student, who has lived in Finland. Excerpt 3 is the beginning of their chat exchange, transcribed here from the phone screenshot.

Excerpt 3. Chat (Violet/ Finnish)

> Violet: Moi! Miten menee? 7:46 AM
>
> 'Hi! What's up?'
>
> (5 posts in response)
>
> Violet: Voi ei, millaiset kirjoitukset sulla on? 1:18 pm
>
> 'Oh no, what kind of writing do you have?'
>
> Violet: Mä oon tosi hyvä, kevätloma alkaa huomenna! Mä aion mennä New Orleansiin kaverieden mukana 1:20 pm
>
> 'I am really good, spring break starts tomorrow! I am going to New Orleans with friends'

The chat continues with several messages. In response to Violet's short *Hi! What's up?* The friend writes five lines of response, including the use of a hyperlink.[3]

In excerpt 4, Violet reflects on the chat:

Excerpt 4. Reflection (Violet/ Finnish)

> Mä aloitin keskustelu ja **vain** kysyin "Miten menee?". **Sitten** me keskustelimme meidän elämästä. Esimerkiksi, mä puhuin kesäsuunnitelmasta ja hän puhui penkkareista ja hänen englannin opinnoista.
>
> 'I started the conversation and **just** asked "What's up?" **Then** we talked about our lives. For example, I talked about a summer plan and she talked about penkkarit[4] and her English studies.'

Violet emphasizes how her short, casual inquiry quickly leads to the friends sharing information about their lives. In the beginning, their *interaction order* is characterized by Violet asking, and the friend responding. The friend's response turns the chat to a dialogical exchange. Not responding and not continuing the conversation would have had real-life social consequences. Although the portfolio instructions value even minimal target language use (greetings), the social concerns of real-life interactions prompted expanded use, as is seen in this case. Chat enables sharing about one's life in a personal and authentic manner (see also Räsänen & Muhonen, 2020). When Violet *just* asks how the friend is doing, the friend responds by writing about her stress, moving the exchange to a personal level about topics that are currently relevant in the participants' lives. Chatting as a task for the portfolio has

initiated a Finnish-language exchange that can then continue outside the assessment submission.

The interaction stays in Violet's target language, Finnish, perhaps because of the portfolio. During the long chat exchange (73 turns) that Violet has included in her portfolio, the friend writes one turn in English. In response to this turn, Violet also responds in Finnish. Apart from that one turn, the chat continues in Finnish. Violet, thus, opts out from using English in the chat, possibly because the chat will be part of her portfolio.

In addition to expert speaker partners, some students reached out to peer language learners in their target language. These beginner-level learners, however, seemed to do this specifically to practice the language, and they reported the use of Finnish to be restricting their social sharing. For example, Ella and her friend, who are both learners of Finnish, 'kept in touch' in English, while practicing Finnish in the same correspondence. Ella, a beginning Finnish language student, has corresponded with an American friend, Kate, who currently lives in Finland. The email correspondence is mostly in English, but there are also Finnish sections. The two languages, Finnish and English, have different functions in the emails. The following is a short excerpt of one of the emails Ella has included in her portfolio:

Excerpt 5. Email (Ella/ Finnish)

On + 30 astetta X:ssa tänään (how important is word order in Finnish?) ja on aurinkoista. En pidä koska on syyskuu ja syyskuu on syksyllä ja sysky on usein lämmin tai vileä. Mä olen surullinen takia sää (presumably a case ending goes there, but we haven't actually explicitly talked about case endings yet).

Kuka olen? Olen kaunis, vähän vanha, usein iloinen, nopea ja terve.

'It is +30 degrees in X today () and it is sunny. I don't like because it is September
and September is in the Fall and Fall is often warm or cool. I am sad because of the
weather ().

Who am I? I am pretty, a little old, often happy, fast and healthy.'

The portfolio task encourages Ella to write in Finnish to her friend. However, she is making it
clear that the Finnish part of her communication is for practice. In the email, Finnish and
English have clearly delineated functions. Finnish language seems to be used in this exchange
as language practice, and the use of English serves to maintain Ella's relationship with Kate
as her fully competent self. Ella writes a part of her email in Finnish (see excerpt 5). Ella's
self-description orients to her learner role: it reads like an excerpt from a classroom task and
does not serve to relay contextually relevant information about herself. From the reflection
and correspondence, it is obvious that Kate knows who she is. The self-description presents
Ella as a learner of Finnish practicing her writing skills. In English, she includes another,
more abstract and critical voice. She adds meta-comments in English (bracketed off to further
background these visually), positioning herself as a (classroom) learner of Finnish. Ella's
Finnish language learner identity is more limited than the English-language meta voice and
including the English-language voice helps to maintain the social relationship.

Practicing Finnish and sharing Finland-related information seems to connect these two
friends. In her response email, Kate responds to Ella's language choice, replying in Finnish:
Oh, you are speaking Finnish!! Awesome.[5] Kate positions herself as a fellow learner,
comparing their learning experiences and the different instructional contexts: *We all learned*

starting from written Finnish, but it looks like maybe y'all are starting from spoken? Instead

of commenting on the content of Ella's Finnish-language practice, she comments on her

language, as a response to the language practice. As Ella is writing as a language learner,

Kate also responds to her as a language learner. Writing in Finnish and asking Finnish-related

questions is a topic that both participants in the exchange relate to and it serves as point of

connection. Ella's action of discussing the Finnish language and her Finnish course with Kate

expands the class to her time outside of the classroom. The distinction between in and outside

of class learning becomes blurred (Benson & Reinders, 2011, p. 2). In this example, the

primary goal of the interaction is to keep in touch and exchange information among friends,

but since they are both learners, they also include Finnish practice. When language practice

intersects with social sharing with a friend, there are risks to the authenticity and depth of the

exchange, caused by the lack of linguistic resources. The following example also illustrates

the social riskiness of language practice with a friend.

A beginning Finnish language student, Kim, has emailed her American friend, Tim, in

Finnish. Kim's email follows the typical conventions of a Finnish language email. It includes

greetings, and it is a rather personal note sharing information about her own life. We know

from Kim's entry that her friend is also an American learning Finnish, and the email

correspondence is part of their language practice.

In Excerpt 6, Kim reflects on her email exchange:

Excerpt 6. Reflection (Kim/ Finnish)

>   Since we're friends, I tried to make it a **casual** email and write about **basic things** that
>
>   have been going on in my life lately **to keep him updated**. I was **surprised** by **how**

quickly and easily I was able to write this email. – – It was a bit **challenging to limit myself to** only things **we have learned**, since I talk to **my friends** about **many other** things, but I still found that I had **lots** to say.

Kim is concerned about maintaining the social relationship with her friend during her language practice. Two discourse elements of *effortlessness* and *challenge* emerge: one relating to the language use and the other to the social connection. She highlights how *casual*, *basic*, *quickly*, and *easy* the writing has been. She, however, finds it challenging to express the thoughts she needs to maintain the already established relationship in the Finnish language, suggesting that in English the friends usually share information at a more abstract level. Kim is making an evaluation of her own language skills and reflecting on her effort to stay in what we would call the zone of proximal development in Vygotskian terms. She notices her limits: by keeping the conversation at a certain linguistic level determined by her current resources in the target language, she also limits the level of social sharing that she is able to do. The challenge is that this interaction is consequential, as all 'real life' interactions are. Even if the email is for the portfolio, it is still with an actual person in a real-life relationship.

These excerpts illustrated what kind of interactions followed, when students, prompted by the portfolio assessment, added a new language to a previously existing relationship. In Eva and Violet's cases, Finnish language served merely as a medium of interaction, while two friends shared about their lives. Ella and Kim, however, were concerned about interacting in the target language 'as themselves'. In the case of Eva, adding Finnish to her close relationship was motivating, and encouraged her to further the Finnish language interaction. The already existing relationship encouraged her to continue writing in Finnish. Violet engaged in 'real'

sharing in Finnish, and the need to maintain the flow of the exchange and possibly the fact

that the interaction was for the portfolio, ensured that it also continued in Finnish. When the

peer was also a language learner, like in the cases of Ella and Kim, students were concerned

about representing their 'true selves' and maintaining their relationships in the target

language. While engaged in language practice, they felt like missing out on some aspects of

the social relationship. These students made explicit self-assessments of their language level.

In Ella's case, being language learners functioned as a mutual interest point, establishing

further connections between the two friends. In this section we have focused on instances, in

which students reached out to their existing contacts in the target language. The following

section will feature instances where students used the target language to reach out to new

people.

Establishing New Connections Through the Target Language

Students also established new contacts in the target language, with people that they had not

interacted with previously. The portfolio prompted students to engage in target language

conversations. Target language use functioned as a bridge to open interaction with another

target language speaker. The interaction would then continue either in English or in the target

language.

The first example is from a business transaction. Lisa, an experienced language learner but a

novice learner of Estonian, included screenshots of email inquiries to the Estonian online

bookstore where she had used a greeting. The email that Lisa submitted with her portfolio

had a greeting in Estonian, and the rest of the email was in English.

Excerpt 7. Reflection (Lisa/ Estonian)

> In having to coordinate either my move or textbook order with Estonian, I made sure to **at least** use 'Tere'. In using **even that small bit** of Estonian, I found that I received emails back relatively quickly. **Even** using **a few phrases** of greeting in Estonian seems to lead to those I'm corresponding with to be even friendly.

The portfolio assessment prompted Lisa to pay attention to her own target language use in a business transaction. While reflecting on one of her first opportunities to connect to the native speaker community, Lisa oriented to the use of the word *tere* ('hi') as a resource that helped her establish contact with native speakers and create a friendly communication exchange. This required minimal effort but it was a rewarding instance of authentic language use in an institutional (and therefore potentially consequential) exchange. Lisa brings her *historical body* of intercultural encounters into the virtual transactional exchange where she participates at the very edge of the 'community of practice' of Estonian learners. She ascribes the friendliness of the exchange to her use of the greeting, which serves to further motivate her in the language learning endeavor.

While Lisa's example featured a business transaction, students also reached out to new people in informal settings. By engaging with authentic target-language content, they were not always immediately involved in a dialogic interaction, but they were able to observe the interaction and became exposed to authentic language use (cf. Lech & Harris, 2019 on OILL). The observation would then lead to the student joining the interaction. Maya reported that as she followed comments at an Estonian blog in real time, she came across a thread where participants were taking turns posting lines of a nursery-rhyme. Maya posted a screenshot of the forum interaction that she observed and reflected on her experience (excerpt 8).

Excerpt 8. Reflection (Maya/ Estonian)

> And it was **so bizarre** because I could understand **every single word**, but I had **no idea** what was going on! I added my own comment to the posts saying just that, and a native Estonian speaker messaged me telling me that it's a well-known song about an elf who lives in a forest and bakes bread**?!** We **ended up** having a nice conversation in Estonian, as well, because they were **very confused** about there being **a random** American student with **zero connection** to Estonia learning the language.

Maya's observations of her experience are made salient in her reflection. The song lines consist of a series of questions and answers, which, posted on this online forum by different participants, 'masqueraded' as a regular chat exchange for someone not familiar with the song (here a familiar media format, which normally promotes target language comprehension, is actually misleading). Maya's engagement, which had first started as receptive, reading only, turned spontaneously interactive as she inquired about the situation. During the encounter she forged connections with a community of Estonian speakers (even though these contacts were momentary and fleeting) while positioning herself as an outsider: *random American*, *zero connection*. Both Maya and the other posters had a moment of being *very confused* about each other and resolving the confusion became a memorable experience for Maya.

The two examples in this section featured learners reaching out to new people in the target language in the virtual wild. The portfolio encouraged students to engage with the target language in any way, including minimal conversations (see appendix 1). Lisa reported one of her early real-life uses of the target language, as she used an Estonian greeting in online

business communication. Maya reached out to speakers of Estonian for clarification after observing a thread of blog comments, reported using the target language in a meaningful way and obtained new cultural knowledge.

In this section, we have shown how the Independent Use Portfolio task created a positive washback effect in the form of the students pursuing interactions in the wild. In the case of the students with an existing relationship with a target language speaker, the task prompted them to change the language of communication in that relationship, with variation in the perceived social consequences. In the virtual wild, students also engaged with target language users that they did not know, making initial contacts with the community as peripheral members. The task to use the target language in the wild provided an incentive to make these connections and led them to reflect on the social actions accomplished.

Portfolio as Means of Doing Learning Through Reflection

The enhanced opportunities for learning from interaction in the wild were provided by the reflection component, which eventually led the students to 'do learning' within the task: students returned to possible learning objects after the interaction had already happened, so the noticing aspect was enhanced. Previous research suggests a connection between portfolios and students' self-regulation and active learning (see e.g., Mak & Wong, 2018; Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015). In this section we will show how the students reported learning in their portfolios.

In their reflections, students brought up language elements, such as vocabulary or structures that they paid attention to (*learnables*, see Background). Eskildsen et al. (2019, p. 7) argue that although the learnables that are most easily observed in interaction are indeed lexical

items, the actual learning targets are not linguistic structures themselves but "appropriating and developing these as resources for action."

Students oriented to elements produced by other target language speakers that 'stood out' by being new or interesting. This was, for example, vocabulary or structures that were previously unknown to the student. However, they also reflected on more holistic and discourse-level linguistic phenomena, such as register, if it had become salient for them in their interactions. The following example of a chat excerpt (9) demonstrates Violet's (introduced in the previous section) orientation to a formulaic expression during the chat with her friend.

Excerpt 9. Chat (Violet/ Finnish)

>Violet: Onks sulla yliopisto suunnitelma? 1:40 PM

>'Do you have plans for college?

>Friend: Aion hakea lukemaan biologiaa yliopistoon. 1:49 PM

>'I plan to study biology (literally: 'read biology') at college.'

Violet writes in her reflection:

Excerpt 10. Reflection (Violet/ Finnish)

>Keskustelu **muistutti mua** 'opiskella aihe' suomessa on normaalisti sanottu 'lukea aihe'.

>'The conversation **reminded me** that 'to study a subject' in Finnish is normally said 'to read a subject'.'

This excerpt demonstrates the significance of the reflection part in orienting to learnables. By writing about the phrase, Violet indicates that she had previously encountered the formulaic expression, and she was now reminded of it contrasting with English, while seeing it again in the chat. In the portfolio, the student receives a platform to reflect on her remembering a particular vocabulary item as she observed it used by the expert speaker during the chat. The 'recycling' of the language item by re-using it in the reflection passage can be assumed to strengthen learning.

In other instances, the learning orientation emerged from a reported misunderstanding. Certain communication trouble occurred in the original interaction, which made the student pay attention to that specific element where the problem occurred. For example, Jenna reports misusing a word in her phone conversation based on her L1 and that she found out that it was *confusing* to her friend.

Excerpt 11. Reflection (Jenna/ Finnish)

> **Haulaisi sanoi** hänestä jotka minä aikoi mene 'kuntosaliin' **mutta** minä oli sekava ja **sanoin** 'terveasema' koska minä sanoin 'health center' kun mun puhun englanti, ja puhun kuntosalista.
>
> '**I wanted to say** to her that I was going to go 'to gym' **but** I was confusing and **said** 'health center' because I said 'health center' when I speak English, and I talk about the gym.'

The retelling of the conversation misunderstanding with the trouble-source item spelled out was likely to contribute to Jenna remembering the word. The reflection gave Jenna the opportunity to process the conversation in retrospect and orient to this element. The example

resembles the learning situation described by Lilja and Piirainen-Marsh (2018) where students recounted a communication trouble that had happened in the wild, in order to clarify and learn a new phrase the expert speaker had used.

In addition to vocabulary, students paid attention to more general features of authentic situated language use such as the register. They also wrote about various social expectations of the language use in a situation (cf. Compernolle, 2018), in which they made salient their *historical bodies* as language users: their expectations on how interaction functions. For example, Lucas oriented to the register of language in his reflection on a chat exchange. He is a second-year learner of Finnish and chatted with his friend, also a learner of Finnish. Excerpt 12 is from their chat exchange (the friend's turns are not included):

Excerpt 12. Chat (Lucas/ Finnish)

      Moi! Mitä kuuluu?

      'Hi! How are you?'

      (Response)

      Olen hyvä, mutta olen väsynyt. Koulu on vaikea tämä vuosi :/

      'I am good, but I'm tired. School is hard this year'

      (Response)

      Minulla oli kevätloma viime viikko! Mä menin kotiin, mutta se oli tosi rentouttava.

      Milloin on sinun kevätloma?

      'I had a spring break last week! I went home, but it was really relaxing. When is your

      spring break?'

      (Response)

In this chat, the two interlocutors mostly use the standard, written variation of Finnish. This is especially noticeable in the use of personal pronouns *minulla* (form of 'I') and *sinun, 'your',* which in a chat would normally be their shorter, colloquial counterparts, such as *mulla* and *sun*. Apart from a couple of uses of *mä* (colloquial 'I'), the chat is written in standard Finnish. Lucas addresses this in the reflection:

Excerpt 13. Reflection (Lucas/ Finnish)

> Kun mä puhuin Jessica, en tiedä, jos mä mun pitäisi käyttää puhekieli tai kirjakieli. Koska **me** olemme **molempia** aloittelevat suomalaiset puhujat, **me käytimme** kirjakieli. **Me molemmat** kirjoitimme yksinkertaisia lauseita ja kysyimme yksinkertaisia kysymyksiä. Mutta, mä ymmärsin lähes kaikki, mitä hän sanoi. 'When I talked to Jessica, I don't know if I should use spoken or written language. Because **we** are **both** beginning speakers of Finnish, **we used** written language. **We both** wrote simple sentences and asked simple questions. But I understood almost everything she said.'

In his reflection, Lucas oriented to the choice of register in the exchange. Lucas assessed his and his friend's language skills, assuming them to be at a similar level (*we – both – we used*) and refers to the novice status as a motivation for the *written* (i.e., the standard) language used in the chat.[6] Lucas brought up his previous experiences, his *historical body*, to his judgment about register: he seems to suggest that novice language learners typically are more accustomed with the standard version of the language – colloquial expressions belong to the repertoire of a more advanced learner. The portfolio provided Lucas with a forum to reflect on these choices, and to display his pragmatic and sociocultural competence, making them salient also to his instructor. Traditionally, in proficiency-focused assessment, this knowledge

would not be part of language classroom assessment at lower levels of instruction (more in the Discussion section).

The previous examples show that in the context of the portfolio task, the students needed to pay attention to their own and others' language use in the wild and consequently they were led to 'do' learning. The analysis demonstrated the students' orientation to *learnables* while they were reflecting on language use in the wild. These *learnables* were often vocabulary elements. In their reflection, students either oriented to specific vocabulary items that they had encountered before, or items that had caused a misunderstanding in the original interaction event. Students also oriented to elements such as the register of the language in interaction and explained register choices in their reflections. The written portfolio reflection made salient their learning orientations in the portfolio task. The reflection made students notice and reproduce these elements, leading to an enhanced learning experience.

Discussion

In the analysis of the data presented above, we have analyzed how the portfolio assessment task (i.e., students' interactions in the wild and how they reported learning in those situations) created a positive washback effect of seeking out more opportunities to use the language and pay attention to the elements of language in these episodes. We will now assess the overall impact of the task and describe the curricular implications of our findings.

The portfolio assessment task prompted students to use the target language in the wild, often in socially relevant interactions. The portfolio thus led students to change the language used in their interactions with target language users with whom they had established social relationships. In some of these cases, the target language served as a (new) medium of

interaction, as students continued their regular interactions as friends in the target language instead of English. Some students, however, used the L2 'just' for language practice and made a distinction between this practice component and their social sharing. While some students already had previous target language contacts, students also reached out to new contacts through the target language. Some of these exchanges were purely transactional, while some of them resulted in more profound intercultural exchange. The portfolio prompted them to reflect on their target language engagement.

In their portfolios, students were tasked to also reflect on their learning in the interactions. Students were consequently pushed to engage with the language elements of their exchanges, potentially leading to learning. While reflecting on their language use in the wild, students oriented to certain learnables such as specific vocabulary items that they perceived as familiar, or which had caused misunderstandings. The written portfolio reflection functioned as a platform to return to these learnables. The portfolio assessment task required the students to reflect on their experience and thus enhance the learning potential of their target language interactions by re-engaging with their experiences at a cognitively higher level and by contextualizing the experiences within their learning process.

The portfolio as assessment followed the principles of Dynamic Assessment, through facilitating a positive washback effect of assessment on teaching and learning and emphasizing sociocultural and lifelong learning that continued beyond the classroom (see Poehner, 2008; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005). Reflecting the principles of Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA), the assessment task was employed to serve students' learning that included their use of the target language in a variety of different learning contexts (Purpura, 2016; Turner & Purpura, 2015).

Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis enabled us as teacher-researchers to engage with and navigate our students' interaction practices in the wild. The portfolio provided us as instructors insight into the students' target language use outside of the institutional learning situations. Typically for nexus analysis, our study included the aspect of change, as the portfolio was designed to have an immediate impact on the students' learning practices. The portfolios will also enable creating future data-driven assessment methods (cf. Kley, 2019), such as real-life interactional scenarios and speaking prompts. Another aspect of the change will be future enhancements of the course curricula in response to the results of the study. Nexus analysis uses discourse analysis as a micro-level analysis tool, which enabled us to 'zoom in' to the interaction level of the data. It also allowed us to include ethnographic perspectives into the discussion of results, such as the evaluation of how the students' historical bodies impacted their reflections. As assumed by nexus analysis, we as teacher-researchers needed to constantly reflect on our positionality, as we used the data as assessment in our own classes, and as research data. The study was designed to enable making curricular developments in our language classes and to enhance our pedagogy, which also impacted our research focus and practices.

Language learning is a social activity, and the portfolio assignment pushed the learners to expand the range of situations and contexts for their target language use. Those students, who did not have any previous target language contacts, reached out and established new connections in the language. The assessment connected students' learning inside and outside of class and encouraged them to increase the amount of practice they received during the course and after it. The results of this study indicated that the students found reaching out to previously existing contacts in the target language motivating, because of the social sharing

aspect. Arguably connecting socially in order to learn the language seems to be important for our learners' needs. The portfolio enhanced community building, addressing the social function of foreign language learning for American students: creating ties with other speakers of the language. The potential of the portfolio as preparation of students for the reality of the global world was reflected in the multitude of social situations reported on, as well as the students' observations. The portfolios reflected the range of target language use that the learners would typically engage in (peer conversations, technology-mediated applications), thus aligning the course content better with actual learner needs.

Most teaching materials available to learn Finnish and Estonian do not target interactional practices in a systematic manner (especially in online peer interactions). A research-based understanding of these interactions benefits designing enhanced pedagogical materials, especially with the view to online and hybrid language instruction. Online language teaching requires specific attention to tasks that can be accomplished in a technology-mediated environment. As the opportunities for face-to-face interaction are limited in online instruction, both instruction and assessment regarding L2 interactional skills must be designed for maximum efficiency. Independent use, if well integrated into assessment and teaching, holds promise for this endeavor.

In sum, the portfolio described in this chapter raised the learners' awareness of themselves as language users, including in socially situated interactions, and increased their agency in the learning process by pushing them to identify learnables (Eskildsen & Majlesi, 2018). Besides vocabulary items, these included social expectations of the language use in a situation (cf. Compernolle, 2018) such as, for instance: recognizing registers and code-switching, managing interactions as non-native speakers, recognizing the learning benefit of target

language use beyond the classroom, and learning cultural and social phenomena associated with the target language. Furthermore, the portfolio provided opportunities for individualized learning and increased learner autonomy, thus enhancing learner agency. As the students were in charge of selecting the portfolio material, the power dynamic of the language class became increasingly learner centered (see also chapter 9 of this volume). Crucially, elevating independent use tasks and reflection to the status of course assessment helped learners realize the importance of these practices for their learning.

Conclusion

Language class assessment focusing solely on proficiency does not sufficiently address the objectives of cultural awareness and interactional competence. In our language programs, however, proficiency and achievement still form the major component of students' final course grade, but metalinguistic knowledge, engagement, agency, intent, and effort also play a part in assessment via the portfolio task. Furthermore, it is limiting for students (especially in the case of adult learners, such as our university students) to only express what they can produce in the target language.

The portfolio assessment task we described in this chapter gives students an opportunity to make their metalinguistic processes as part of a pedagogical task that gives them a platform to express complex thoughts about language learning in their native language, something that is not always allowed for in the context of communicative language teaching. The portfolio addressed the general education goal of foreign language learning. In the context of U.S. university-level language programs, language courses fulfill important educational goals of multicultural communication. Even introductory level learners made observations about the

target language and culture that go beyond what they can produce at their level in the language.

This study enhanced our understanding of language students' interactional needs. Based on the student-gathered data, we will put forward criteria and rubrics for future portfolios that will assess language use in the wild and reflection. We suggest curricular changes addressing the demonstrated needs, including the development of metacommunicative skills and strategies to manage interaction in the wild (cf. interactional competence). There is a need to develop summative course assessment that is in line with principles of Dynamic Assessment and Learning Oriented Assessment and teaching materials that reflect actual real-life communicative situations for our learner populations, including scenarios. Integrating independent use in the wild with classroom instruction will enable instructors to develop explicit instruction and assessment pertaining to the needs of real-life use.

Recommended Further Reading, Discussion Questions and Suggested Research Projects

Further Reading

For those interested in reading more about second language portfolio assessment, the article by Abrar-ul-Hassan, Douglas, & Turner (2021) offers a useful overview.

For those interested in reading more about dynamic assessment, Poehner's (2008) book is a good starting point. Purpura's (2016) article gives a good overview of second and foreign language assessment.

Salaberry & Kunitz's (2019) edited volume incorporates a section on testing, which explores assessment in the context of innovative research-based pedagogy, with a focus on interactional practices.

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Discussion Questions

1. What is Independent Use Portfolio, and what kind of alternative approaches does it introduce to language assessment?
2. What kind of washback effect does the Independent Use Portfolio have for a) students' language use in the wild b) how students learn the language?

Suggested Research Projects

This chapter encourages educators to bridge the students' language use in the wild with their classroom learning. Design a project in which you:

1) Investigate what your students do in their target language outside of class.

2) Use that information to reform your classroom practices.

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Appendix

INSTRUCTIONS   //

INDEPENDENT USE PORTFOLIO

Keep a record of your language learning outside of class. Do you participate in coffee hour? Do you chat with your Finnish friends face-to-face or online? Do you watch YouTube videos or listen to Finnish music? Even small things count: Do you greet your classmates in Finnish when you run into them on campus? Collect samples of your activities. For example copy the email you have written to a friend in Finnish.

Not doing much in the language outside of class time? Start now! Contact your instructor/classmates for tips and ideas. Your instructor can also connect you with a native speaker of Finnish to have a conversation with.

The purpose of the project is:
1.   You will keep track of and actively process your language use and learning (we are learning the language to be able to use it not only in but also outside of class)
2.   Your instructors and classmates can find ways to support your language use outside of class. We will read and discuss your portfolio entries in class, and you will also receive feedback.

ENTRIES: COLLECTING SAMPLES OF YOUR WORK

Keep a journal about different situations in which you use Finnish outside of class time. Include a date and time to your journal entries. Try to be as detailed as possible. Collect samples of things you are doing in the target language. Did you write emails to your friends in Finland? Copy the email and keep it for your records (ask permission from your friend to include their responses in your portfolio). Did you listen to a song? Copy the link to your entry. Use the language in a variety of different ways (make sure that you are recording different kinds of instances of language use, e. g. not just listening to songs or reading the news but also having conversations etc.).
In your entry, describe what you did in the target language: When? With whom? Where? Why?
You can also write about the following:
 • What did you say, how did your peer respond?
 • What did you learn in this language use situation? New phrases, vocabulary, or something else?
 • What discoveries did you make about the language?
 • What did you understand? What didn't you understand?
 • What was challenging or confusing?
 • What would you do differently next time?
Write 120-150 words

Grading
The portfolio entries are graded using the following rubric. The emphasis will be on the effort you have put in your portfolio entry and less on the accuracy of your language. However, it is important that you use your own words: please do not look up entire phrases or use a translation tool.
Grading: entry, max 5 p.
 5 = Deep engagement with the target language. Entry and reflection written in coherent and comprehensible language and in your own words. You reflect on your learning in depth and provide examples.
4 = Portfolio entry and reflection completed with good effort, coherent text, and/or mostly comprehensible text. Entry and reflection written in comprehensible language and in your own words.
3 = Portfolio entry is completed with some effort but might be list-like or difficult to comprehend.
1-2 = Portfolio entry and reflection are only partially completed, list-like and/or difficult to comprehend.
0 = not submitted

Footnotes

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[1] The data collection took place before the Covid-19 pandemic.

[2] The bolded parts have been added to emphasize what we pay special attention to in the analysis.

[3] The friend's responses have been removed to protect her identity.

[4] A festivity in Finnish upper secondary schools.

[5] To protect her identity, Kate's response email is not included in this chapter.

[6] Here, *written* and *spoken* refer to different registers, not the format.

IV

SCAFFOLDING LEARNING THROUGH REFLECTION:
FINNISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS RECYCLING,
NEGOTIATING, AND REINTERPRETING INSTRUCTIONS IN
A PORTFOLIO ASSIGNMENT

by

Elisa Räsänen, 2024

AFinLA Yearbook 2024, 234–255

Elisa Räsänen
University of Jyväskylä

Scaffolding learning through reflection: Finnish language students recycling, negotiating, and reinterpreting instructions in a portfolio assignment

Highlights

- Students need scaffolding to efficiently reflect on their language learning in the wild.

- Students in the study recycled, negotiated, and reinterpreted phrases from the reflection task instructions.

- The task could be developed to support students in reaching a deeper level of reflection.

- Nexus analysis is a useful approach for bridging research with instructional change.

Abstract

Students' everyday life interactions in the wild are an important resource for their language learning, and reflection helps in utilizing the learning potential of these experiences. Students need scaffolding to benefit from reflection, and task design must support learners' agency. These requirements suggest a need to examine and develop such reflection tasks. This paper examines a portfolio task developed by the teacher-researcher to enhance students' learning in the wild as part of an U.S. university-level Finnish Studies program. Drawing on nexus analysis and using discourse analysis, the paper maps and analyzes how phrases from the instructions circulate to the subsequent reflections, and what the implications of this circulation are for the discourses created as well as for learning. The analysis reveals how the students recycle, negotiate, and reinterpret phrases from the original task, and how the task scaffolds the reflections. Pedagogical implications focus on how the task can be developed. The author advocates for the use of nexus analysis in teacher research to bridge research practice with task development and instructional change. As part of their training, pre-service teachers are recommended to collect and analyze student data to study the implications of the learning tasks they develop and use.

Keywords: discourse analysis, discourses in place, language learning in the wild, nexus analysis, written reflection

1   Introduction

Recent studies on language learning emphasize the importance of strengthening the relationship between the language classroom and students' everyday life target language interactions in the wild through reflection (Clark et al. 2011; Eilola & Tapaninen 2022a; 2022b; Eskildsen et al. 2019; Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh 2019; Reinders et al. 2022; Wagner 2015): Students can bring in instances of their language use to the classroom to reflect upon, and then return to the wild with enhanced skills. According to the sociologist Graham Gibbs's (1988) classic reflection model, which builds on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, an experience, without reflection, does not lead to explicit learning. Crucially, students need scaffolding in the Vygotskian (1978) sense to be able to "to move through their zones of proximal development to a deeper level of reflection for learning through experience" (Coulson & Harvey 2013: 401). Several scholars, such as the psychologist Grossman (2009) and the education researchers Coulson and Harvey (2013), recommend scaffolding students with reflective writing prompts so that they can benefit from reflection.

This article investigates such a reflective classroom practice, a task called the Independent Use Portfolio (see Appendix 1), which was developed to create a stronger link between the wild and the classroom, scaffold students to reflect on their learning, and enhance student agency in the context of a university-level Finnish language program in the United States. The aim of the portfolio was that students could turn their experiences in the wild into learning moments. By requiring reflection, the task

was meant to make students' implicit learning in the wild more explicit, so they could explain and remember what they experienced and then apply that knowledge in the future (Gasparini 2004). In the portfolio (see Appendix 1), students of Finnish in four semesters between spring 2019 and fall 2020 were tasked with using the target language beyond the classroom and then reporting and reflecting on their activities. The portfolio entries consisted of two parts: a record (images, video, links) of what the students did, and the written reflections that this article focuses on (more in Section 4).

The article is part of a larger study I conducted as a teacher-researcher to investigate how U.S. learners of Finnish direct their learning in the wild. In this article, I will refer to research conducted by a teacher-researcher to examine their own teaching practices simply as teacher research. Following Gibbs (1988: 19–20), the term *reflection*, in this article, is defined as a process that involves the description, evaluation, and analysis of an experience and which leads to change in the form of an action plan for a future language use event.

Drawing on Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis, a change-oriented research approach that studies "the ways in which ideas or objects are linked together" (Scollon & Scollon 2004: viii), as well as on discourse analysis (Gee 2014), the study set out to examine the concept of discourses in place, which Hult (2017: 96) defines as the "wider circulating discourses that are already present … when the action occurs" and which also shape our actions. Discourses in place can be understood conceptually to mean ideologies related to language learning, or in the case of this study, materially to mean the learning assignment that directs how students reflect on their learning in the wild. The article focuses on the portfolio instructions as an important discourse in place (Scollon & Scollon 2004: 163) that circulates through the students' reflections and impacts their learning.

In my study, I aimed to develop an enhanced reflective writing prompt that would scaffold students' learning through reflection and, at the same time, enhance their agency. Agency, in this study, means how an individual uses the environment's resources to succeed in navigating it (Biesta & Tedder 2007; Duff 2013; Emirbayer & Mische 1998). Agentive students can utilize reflection as a method of directing their learning.

Several studies that focus on reflection in language learning emphasize the importance of scaffolding in the form of structured prompts in facilitating students' reflective writing (e.g. Coulson & Harvey 2013; Crane 2016; Dressler et al. 2018; Grossman 2009), and some have tested and analyzed the implications of a reflection task for the quality of the resulting reflections. Correia and Bleicher (2008) studied students' use of certain phrases in making connections in their reflections. Dressler et al. (2018) constructed a cross-cultural reflective model and tested it out in their own research group to develop an enhanced task. In a previous sub-study focusing on the Independent Use Portfolio, Räsänen and Kivik (2023) analyzed how the use of the portfolio as an assessment task impacted the students' target language interactions and what kind of learning the students reported in those situations. The

task was found to push students to reach out to new or existing target language contacts, and to do learning through reflection (Räsänen & Kivik 2023).

However, these studies do not pay specific attention to how phrases from the instructions circulate to the reflections and consequently impact students' learning through reflection. According to Hult (2010), different discourses are interconnected in actions, and some studies focusing on language policy (see e.g. Källkvist & Hult 2016) map how discourses circulate from policy documents to the interactional level. Drawing on Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis and using discourse analysis (Gee 2014), this article maps and analyzes how phrases from the instructions circulate to the student reflections (see also Hult 2010; Källkvist & Hult 2016) and what the implications of this circulation are. The aim is to offer suggestions for ways to develop the task in the future. I also aimed to show how nexus analysis can be used to inform instructional change. The following research questions guided the analysis:

1. How do phrases from the Independent Use Portfolio instructions circulate to the reflections?
2. What are the implications of this circulation…
   » …for the created discourses?
   » …for learning?

2 Mapping discourses through nexus analysis

At the core of nexus analysis is social action (Scollon & Scollon 2004), which in this article was the students' reflections on their language learning in the wild. Nexus analysis is perceived as useful by educational linguists in the attempt to develop instructional practices (Hult 2017; Scollon & Scollon 2004) because it aims for change, and due to its capability to capture the complexity of human action by zooming in on the relevant discourses that circulate through the social action (Scollon & Scollon 2004: 87). Nexus analysis has also previously been used to study language pedagogical questions (see the review by Kuure, Riekki & Tumelius 2018), and it can be used to track the connections between action and more macro-level discourses, such as how institutional language policies are negotiated at the interaction level (Hult 2017; Källkvist & Hult 2016). Nexus analysis operates with both small 'd' and capital 'D' discourses, as defined by Gee (1989). Small 'd' discourses mean discourses at the interaction level, whereas capital 'D' Discourses refer to the elements that form a social identity, such as values and beliefs (Gee 1989).

In nexus analysis, three different types of discourse cycles are mapped: historical body, interaction order, and discourses in place. In this article, historical body means the embodied life histories, preferences, and prior expectations emerging from the students' reflections (see also Räsänen 2024). Interaction order refers to the social order, hierar-

chies, and arrangements enabled by the reflection task, such as perceived hierarchies between the student and other speakers of the target language (see also Räsänen 2021).

Discourses in place are discourses that impact actions in a given situation, and they can be understood to have concrete and physical but also abstract and conceptual dimensions, such as language ideologies (Scollon & Scollon 2004). This article focuses on one important material discourse in place that circulates through the social action of the language learners' reflections on their learning in the wild: the instructions for the Independent Use Portfolio.

3   Scaffolding written reflection to learn from experiences

Reflection is key to learning from experience (Gibbs 1988), and several studies empha-size the importance of structured prompts to scaffold students' reflective writing (e.g. Coulson & Harvey 2013; Crane 2016; Dressler et al. 2018; Grossman 2009). As Coulson and Harvey (2013) state, based on their review of existing reflection studies, simply tasking students to keep a reflective journal about their experiences is not enough, because they need scaffolding to benefit from reflection. When students receive sufficient scaffolding before an experience, they do not need as much of it during or after (Coulson & Harvey 2013).

Dressler et al. (2018) and Crane (2016) emphasize the importance of scaffolding students to write in detail and concretely about their experiences. In other words, with proper scaffolding, students can be encouraged to avoid producing general or vaguely explained reflections that do not benefit their learning. Students must receive scaffolding in providing evidence for their conclusions because they might not be automatically apt to do so (Grossman 2009), and they often overestimate the depth of their reflection (Corrales & Erwin 2020).

Coulson and Harvey (2013) propose a scaffolding model which accounts for the development of student agency. In their model, students receive different types of scaffolding in different parts of their process of learning from experience. These stages are "learning to reflect, reflection *for* action, reflection *in* action, and reflection *on* action" (Coulson & Harvey 2013: 404), with the first stage being present throughout the process and the latter three being parts of the preparation, experience, and debriefing stages.

Correia and Bleicher (2008) studied students' use of reflection markers in their written reflections in the context of a service-learning course. These reflection markers were phrases, such as *I never thought*, which the students used to indicate they were making connections between their experience and their beliefs, the classroom, and outside sources (Correia & Bleicher 2008: 45). The study illustrates how students used different phrases to visibly link or compare different situations. Correia and Bleicher (2008: 47) argue that by using prompts that guide students to use reflection markers,

students can be taught to reflect in a way that goes beyond reporting. In other words, reflective writing prompts could be adapted to include reflection markers such as *I was surprised that* (Correia & Bleicher 2008: 47).

The Independent Use Portfolio used in my study shares similarities with Gibbs (1988), as it includes the elements of description, evaluation, and analysis of a specific experience, along with students' plans for an enhanced future language use event. Previous studies conducted in foreign language learning contexts have examined reflective writing that focused on reporting more general experiences, such as Crane (2016), or teacher-predetermined situations, such as in Marden and Herrington (2022), where students reflected on group work situations, or Kessler (2023), in which students reflected on the use of Duolingo. In contrast, the Independent Use Portfolio in this study focused on students' specific self-selected activities. The students did not receive scaffolding from the task or their teacher while in the wild. Instead, the Independent Use Portfolio scaffolded students to prepare *for action* and to reflect *on action* in the debriefing stage (Coulson & Harvey 2013: 404).

Like Correia and Bleicher (2008), I am interested in the phrases students use to reflect on their experiences. To my knowledge, there are no studies that use nexus analysis to map how phrases used in the reflective writing prompt circulate to the reflections, and the implications of this circulation for learning, even though the language used in the prompt likely plays an important role in scaffolding students' reflections and, consequently, how deeply the students reflect.

4   Data and methods

In the reflections in the Independent Use Portfolio, the students were tasked with writing about their observations and analyzing their learning. The portfolios were written in Finnish and English. The instructions were mainly given in English, although higher-level learners received them partially in Finnish. In the excerpts chosen for this article, whenever a reflection was written in Finnish, I translated it into English.

The study was guided by the stages of nexus analysis – engaging, navigating, and changing – as introduced by Scollon and Scollon (2004). I will discuss the change stage in Section 7. I had engaged and familiarized myself with the research context before the beginning of the study and had started to identify some of the relevant discourses already in my work as the Finnish language teacher of the participants. My ethnographic knowledge as the teacher-researcher and familiarity with the context facilitated the analysis. The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University, and a third-party assistant was used to collect consent from the students.

The students participating in the study were university-level learners of Finnish who studied the language at different levels at an American university. The program

was geographically distant from any significant target language-speaking communities. The students' first language was English and only a few of them had Finnish heritage or any contacts in Finland. Altogether 17 students consented to the research study and the overall portfolio data includes 99 portfolio entries.

In the navigating stage, I used nexus analysis to map and analyze the different circulating discourses in place (Hult 2010, 2016; Scollon & Scollon 2004). In this article, I focus on the portfolio instructions as one important discourse in place that circulates through the students' reflections. I zoomed in on the text level and used discourse analysis (Gee 2014) to show how the instructions are negotiated in situ (Hult 2017; Källkvist & Hult 2016) through word and textual choices, such as the use of noun forms, pronouns, and conjunctions. These small 'd' discourses, in turn, impact the capital 'D' Discourses (Gee 1989). For instance, students use pronouns to construct their identity by positioning themselves in relation to others.

Teacher research should include reflections on researcher positionality (Jensen et al. 2022), especially when the researcher is also the teacher whose materials are being analyzed. Honko (2017), who examined the conceptions of language learning in her own field notes, noted that the passing of time introduced a distancing element into the analysis. Such passing of time, along with the change of roles from teacher to researcher (see also Hakala & Hynninen 2007), provided me with some distance. It was, however, also necessary that I conducted the analysis as a teacher-researcher so that the project would contribute to the development of the task.

5   Recycling phrases from the instructions

In their reflections, the students commonly recycled phrases from the instructions. These phrases thus scaffolded and shaped how the reflections materialized. The scaffold impacted what aspects of their initial experiences in the wild the students explicitly processed.

A common source for recycled elements was the question prompts given in the instructions. The instructions state (I added the bolding later):

(1)   You **can also** write about the following:
    ….
    What was **challenging or confusing**?
    What would you **do differently next time**?
    (Portfolio instructions)

Most students ended up recycling phrases from the questions directly in their reflections. The questions posed in the instructions reveal the instructor's historical body, her presuppositions of language learning, and scaffold students to write about the

things she considers relevant for learning. Asking a question implies there is an answer. Posing these *wh*-questions presupposes some of the content of the students' reflections: that something has been *challenging*. The phrase *challenging or confusing* comes from the instructor's historical body that assumes the students will experience some challenges. Experiencing challenges is embedded in the role of language learners simply because they are learning. The questions that direct the students to think about a next time enforce the idea of developing an action plan for a repeated experience (cf. Gibbs 1988). At the same time, the questions are open-ended *wh*-questions instead of verb-initiated questions that typically prompt a yes/no answer, and as such, they encourage the students to reflect on them further.

Perhaps because of this teacher-directed interaction order and the students' expectation to fulfill the task, students use these prompts in their reflections directly. There is thus a connection between the small 'd' discourses and capital 'D' Discourses (Gee 1989): By using the teacher's phrases, the students can perform the role of good learners and show her they are answering all her questions while demonstrating their learning exactly the way the teacher wants.

Especially the terms *challenging* and *confusing* from the questions appear in the reflections frequently, as the following Excerpts 2 and 3 demonstrate:

(2)   The only parts that were **challenging and confusing** was the huge amount of new vocabulary, **but** it was not an impossible obstacle to overcome.
(Reflection; read articles from a Finnish news website)

(3)   I don't find the music to be **challenging or confusing** to listen to, **however** I'm not putting a great amount of effort into understanding the lyrics, I have tried a few times, and that has been difficult.
(Reflection; listened to Finnish folk music)

The recycling of the phrasing from the questions demonstrates that the students not only follow the instructions but use them to structure their writing. The terms frequently appear together in the portfolios either as a chunk, or the words *challenging* and *confusing* are used separately. Around half of the time, the use of these words is, followed by the contrastive conjunctions *but* or *however*.

This practice of contrasting a limitation, in Excerpt 2, emphasizes the role of the student's agency in resolving obstacles. Since a certain level of not knowing and non-expertise are part of the learner's role (Hauser 2018), the resulting challenges belong to the language learning process, as indicated by the learner. He can solve these challenges on his own, and this fact signals his self-directivity in guiding his learning process, which is an important part of agency (van Lier 2010). In the reflection, the student writes that he is reading the same articles in Finnish and English (a statement not included in this article) and that he mostly orients to cultural learning.

He thus implicitly indicates how he does not need to understand all the vocabulary because he merely wants to learn the content.

Agency is also a criterion in the assessment of the portfolio. The word *effort* is used in the grading rubric (see Appendix 1) to receive full points from the portfolio entry, signaling that the students need to show they are engaging their agency for the portfolio.

However, the student in excerpt 3 explains why he has not fully engaged his agency. The student's explanation appears as a justification for why the entry does not fulfill this requirement. The student indicates he has not worked to overcome the obstacle because the task is above his level. It can be inferred he has not learned that much from listening to Finnish folk music. In his later reflection, he states that he has engaged in the activity because as a beginning language learner, he finds it helpful to immerse himself in the target language even when not explicitly paying attention to the lyrics. The explanation can function as a strategy to receive points for the task: Even though the student has not learned language from this activity, he has prepared himself for future learning.

The phrase *next time* from the questions is also frequently recycled in the reflections, and a few students recycle the phrase *do differently*, as the following Excerpts show:

(4)   **Next time**, I'm going to use this portfolio as an opportunity to explore more verb tenses (Reflection; emailed a Finnish acquaintance)

(5)   I would not really **do anything different** in the future from what I did when reading the Charlie Brown comic book. (Reflection; read Charlie Brown comics in Finnish)

The recycling of these phrases engages the students to make an action plan for a repeated language use situation, as proposed in Gibbs's (1988) reflection model. The recycling of the phrase enables the student to include such a future orientation (Räsänen 2024). In excerpt 4, the student refers to his earlier reflection on how he has used the portfolio to learn about the perfect tense and includes a concrete, linguistically oriented action plan for his next entry. By tasking the students to orient to the future, the portfolio scaffolds the students to do learning through planning how to improve.

However, the students do not, in some instances, take up this opportunity. In excerpt 5, the recycling of the word *different* appears redundant, because of the lack of detail or explanation. The mere mention of doing *anything different* does not indicate that the student has critically reflected on her need to learn more. Crane (2016) reported that such generic descriptions most likely reflected what the teacher wanted to hear. The teacher has asked about future language use, so the student is writing about it but is not engaging her agency. This could be because students do not automatically know that providing a conclusion is not enough if not followed by a justification (Grossman 2009): According to Crane (2016), students' reports about

their future plans for language use were often short and general. Yet here the phrase appears to fulfill the function of demonstrating to the instructor that the student has completed the task by answering all the prompts. By not concretely reflecting on future actions, the student is not setting herself up for further learning from the previous experience.

Recycling phrases from the task is often a means to structure one's reflection or to simply demonstrate fulfillment of the task. Although the Excerpts in this section focused on commonly recycled phrases, other phrases from the instructions, such as the words *understand* and *discovery*, were also used in the portfolios. When the instructions were in English, the students translated these expressions into Finnish when they wrote in Finnish. At their best, the prompt questions provided scaffolding and a structure for the reflections, directing the students to reflect on the things the teacher considered important for the students' learning. However, sometimes the phrases merely functioned as placeholders for more in-depth reflection.

6   Negotiating or reinterpreting the instructions

The students also negotiated or reinterpreted instructions in their reflections. The discourse analysis reveals they did so either because of unclear wording and expectations in the instructions or because the instructions did not align with the students' experiences in the wild. When the students explained their choice to deviate from the instructions, it was not always clear whether they did so to either engage their agency to learn in their own preferred way, or to get an easier way to complete the task. The reasons for the negotiation and reinterpretation of the instructions are, however, significant to consider because they have implications for evaluating the quality of the instructions and developing the task to better support learning.

6.1   Negotiating the instructions

On some occasions, the students negotiated the phrases used in the task. This negotiation indicates that the students presupposed they would be expected to follow the instructions literally but at the same time makes salient how they assume agency in the task. While negotiating the instructions, the students express the need to deviate from them and offer justifications for this deviation. Sometimes the explanations, however, signal that the student did not fully engage their agency and merely completed the task because they needed to.

The following Excerpt 6 from the instructions details the instances expected to be reported in the portfolios:

(6) Entries: Collecting samples of your work
     Keep a journal about **different situations** in which you use Finnish **outside of class**
     time. … Collect **samples of things** you are doing in the target language. Did you
     write **emails** to your friends in Finland?
     (Portfolio instructions)

The instructions emphasize that the portfolio entries need to focus on *different situations* that take place *outside of class time*, in contrast with classroom activities. In addition, as in Crane (2016), the instructions require the students to be specific and detailed.

In a separate assignment from the portfolio, the students have had the assignment to post five messages to a class chat each week. A student justifies why he has deviated from the portfolio instructions, and written about the class chat for his portfolio:

(7) **While it is an assignment**, I try to be **extra** active and **go above the required** 5
     chats in the group chat as **it is one of few places** I have to practice.
     (Reflection; posted messages to the class chat)

The student negotiates the task and indicates taking charge of his own learning (agency) by deviating from the portfolio instructions that tell him to stick to situations outside of class. He starts with the disclaimer, pre-empting the instructor's possible rejection. The portfolio instructions directly state that the language use events need to take place *outside of class time*, and the student has not engaged his agency to seek out such an opportunity. However, he emphasizes that he has gone *above the required* and is thus exempted from the rule. The student further justifies his choice by emphasizing the rarity of his opportunities for practice elsewhere. In this way, he highlights the value of the class chat as a resource for his learning. Indeed, the line between *outside of class* and classroom learning becomes blurred in the task since the portfolio itself is a classroom task.

However, the student only mentions the class chat in his reflection and does not elaborate on what he has learned from writing more messages in the chat. With no evidence, it is unclear whether he has fully engaged his agency in the task. The student brings up several other activities he has engaged in, and he seems to have reinterpreted the instructions to mean that he needed to write about several activities (for more see Section 6.2).

Another student negotiates the emphasis on *different situations* in the instructions:

(8) Use the language in **a variety of different** ways **(make sure that you are recording**
     different kinds of instances of language use, e.g. **not just** listening to songs or
     reading the news **but also** having conversations etc.).
     (Portfolio instructions)

The instructions highlight the significance of writing about something other than *just* listening to music, indicating a presupposition coming from the instructor's historical body of prior experience that students would *just* be writing about music unless told not to do so.

The student writes:

(9)   For this portfolio, I listened to Disney music in Finnish. **I know** that **I have covered** music **before** in the portfolio. **I was curious to see**, because I know the English language version, if it would be easier. **And I have not** listened to **Disney music in Finnish before** (maybe one song in Frozen) **which is funny to me** because **I like** Disney music **a lot**.
(Reflection; listened to Disney songs in Finnish; translated from Finnish by the author)

The student justifies why she deviates from the requirement to reflect on different situations in each entry, highlighting the role of her agency and decision-making in directing her learning. The student explains why she has done another portfolio entry on music, stressing the added value of this specific type of music, by referring to her historical body of experiences: It is her first time listening to it in Finnish. She further justifies her choice with her historical body of interest in Disney music, adding to the personal value of writing about this activity – to make learning personally relevant to her. The disclaimer, starting with *I know*, demonstrates that the student has understood the instructions and deviates from them by choice. She pre-empts the instructor's possible rejection.

However, engaging in the same type of activity twice can be an easy solution for the student. The overall reflection (not included in this article) does not serve to demonstrate that the student has fully engaged her agency to learn, as she does not provide any concrete examples of what she has learned while listening to Disney songs.

The Excerpts in this section demonstrate that the students used their agency to deviate from the instructions when relevant to their learning and offered justifications in their reflections for doing so. Since the instructions highlight that the purpose of the portfolio is to *support your language use*, this deviation seems to fit within the scope of the task: The scaffold is only necessary when it helps the students – the purpose is not to hinder learning. However, it was not always clear whether the explanations to deviate from the instructors were just a way for the students to explain why they had not fully engaged their agency. By including their disclaimers, the students signify their awareness of the requirements and pre-empt the instructor's possible response.

6.2   Reinterpreting the instructions

Along with the negotiation, the students also *reinterpret* (see also Källkvist & Hult 2016) the instructions in their reflections. An original phrase used in the instructions

can become something different in a student's reflection, or it may be reinterpreted with a new meaning.

The following excerpt, for example, demonstrates how a student has read the instructions so that *situations* refer to *interactions*. In Excerpt 10, the student writes:

(10)   **I'm not sure if this counts as interaction**, **but** Saturday Night Live did an impression of the president of Finland this past week, **and** it was interesting to see them portray him. (Reflection; watched the tv show Saturday Night Live)

The student uses the word *interaction*, despite how the portfolio instructions instruct the students to write *about different situations*. With the word choice, the student signifies his most likely not deliberate interpretation of the backgrounded agenda that interaction is valued over receptive skills. In the bracketed commentary in excerpt 8, the significance of oral interactions is highlighted by the command *make sure* and the use of the adverb *just* in the meaning of 'only', followed by a *but*: make sure to do this and not only that. Thus, oral interactions seem to be valued higher than other types of language use situations in the instructions. Cultural learning is not mentioned in the instructions, and the student indicates that the scene in the TV show did not involve that much interaction on his part, as he merely consumed the show. The disclaimer pre-empts the instructor's possible rejection of the student's choice to write about the show while also revealing his interpretation of the instructions. This discrepancy between the intent of the task and the student interpretation of it signals that the instructions could be clarified.

The student justifies why he deviates from his understanding of the instructions: After the disclaimer, he follows with *but*, contrasting his previous statement. He justifies his choice with his historical body of personal interest. Students in Crane's (2016) study also expressed excitement about seeing references to their target language and culture in their environment after starting to study the language. Additionally, perhaps because of the rarity of opportunities to practice oral interaction in the non-target language-speaking environment, he has focused on cultural learning.

Another example of a reinterpretation is how the students interpret the prompt so that they need to write about several situations in each portfolio entry. While the original idea in the task was that students would write about one in each, the analysis of the instructions explains why many students write about several. The instructions state *keep a journal about different situations*. The use of the plural form in many parts (*things*, *emails*, *songs*) can be interpreted to mean that the requirement is to write about several instances of language use in a single entry.

Although the instructions state that *even small things count*, the grading rubric that emphasizes effort also offers a contradictory message. Excerpt 11 features the beginning of the instructions:

(11)   **Even small things count:** Do you **greet** your **classmates** in Finnish when you run into **them** on campus? …
         Not doing much in the language outside of class time? **Start now!** …
         (Portfolio instructions)

In contrast, the grading rubric highlights a different message:

(12)   **The emphasis will be on the effort** you have put in your portfolio entry and less on the accuracy of your language. …
         (Portfolio instructions)

The importance of *effort* becomes emphasized in the instructions, further stressed with the prelude *the emphasis will be on*. The list of various examples in Excerpt 8 further highlights the message that students are, in contrast with what has been stated before, expected to write about many activities in each portfolio entry and to go beyond the *little things*.

This interpretation becomes especially clear when students negotiate or explain why they have not written about several activities. A student writes:

(13)   These past few weeks have been pretty busy with midterms and classes, and I have **also** been sick **so I unfortunately did not** explore **too much extra** Finnish culture this time **outside of class**. **I was able to** continue to listen to the playlist of Finnish music, and that helped keep me in touch with the culture **as much as possible**.
         (Reflection; listened to Finnish music, spoke Finnish to a non-Finnish-speaking friend)

In his reflection, the student demonstrates interpreting the instructions so that he would need to write about several activities and then explains why he has not done so. The justification serves to explain that he has indeed utilized his agency to its topmost potential under the circumstances. The student starts with a disclaimer. The word choice *too much extra* indicates that he has done something but has not gone beyond the regular expectations. By adding that he *was able to* continue listening to Finnish music, he highlights his agency in overcoming the obstacles. He adds *as much as possible*, signifying that this activity was within the limits of what he could achieve.

The original idea to focus on one instance in each entry has pedagogical reasoning behind it: If students focus their reflections on a single experience, they can write about it more profoundly. If they write about several experiences, the reflections easily become lists rather than evidence-based reflections on learning, as was the case with many reflections. However, it seems that the instructions are unclear about this.

The Excerpts in this section showed how the students reinterpreted the instructions to mean something different than what was stated on the textual level or what I as the teacher had originally planned. This revealed that the scaffold sometimes conveyed contradictory messages or confused students with ambivalent wording. It was

common throughout the portfolios for the students to interpret the prompt to mean that they were expected to write about multiple activities in a single entry, although the instructions highlight that they can also engage in smaller acts of language use. The students explain their deviation from their interpretation of the requirements to show the role of agency in their learning or why they have not engaged their agency.

7   Discussion and implications

As reflection is key to learning from experiences in the wild (Gibbs 1988; Wagner 2015), this article focused on mapping and analyzing how phrases from the Independent Use Portfolio instructions, as a central, material discourse in place, circulated to the students' reflections on their learning in the wild and what implications this circulation had for the created discourses and learning. The analysis reveals how the students recycled, negotiated, and reinterpreted phrases from the instructions, demonstrating how the prompts scaffolded the reflections and how they could be developed to be more beneficial to students' learning.

The students highlighted their agency in the reflections when they indicated how they fulfilled the task by following the instructions. They emphasized how they overcame obstacles and explained how they took charge of their learning by sometimes deviating from the instructions. However, their explanations might have sometimes functioned to justify finding an easier way to complete the task and not fully engaging their agency. Especially phrases from the prompt questions were recycled in the reflections. They provided the students with scaffolding and structure for their writing. Sometimes this recycling of the phrases merely demonstrated fulfillment of the task, without strong added informational and learning value. Students also negotiated the instructions, especially the quality and number of situations required to be reported in each entry. They additionally reinterpreted some of the instructions to mean different things than what the instructor had planned, mainly the number of language use instances to be reported in each portfolio. This reinterpretation demonstrated that the instructions left room for interpretation because of their ambiguous or contradictory wording.

Because it is a classroom task, the students performed being good learners in their reflections, often even repeating the prompt word for word. The prompt questions reflected the instructor's own historical body of what good experiential learning through reflection is. For example, they asked about challenging or confusing elements or backgrounded the assumption that oral interactions are more valuable than practicing receptive skills in the portfolio. Similar assumptions were not always embodied in the students' historical bodies, yet they still performed fulfillment of the prompt.

Guided by nexus analysis's orientation to change, the study was motivated by my desire as a teacher-researcher to examine how the task impacts student learning and then develop the reflection prompt further, scaffolding students into reflecting more deeply and being more agentive learners. The instructions left room for interpretation, so I implemented changes during the portfolio process by adding a video, alongside the written prompt, where I explained the instructions to the students. The video provided instructions in a different modality, thereby accounting for different types of learners. I used visual cues to point to the parts of the instructions as I spoke and summarized the different steps required. I explained the motivation for doing the portfolio, personally encouraged the students to explore, and told them to ask me any questions they may have about the task.

The findings offer many more potential developments for instructional change. They indicate that the students would need more scaffolding than the prompt to reach a deeper level in their reflections. By *deeper*, I mean that the students provide concrete evidence of their learning instead of general references to past experiences while evaluating that learning instead of just listing or reporting what they did. I suggest introducing reflection as one of the objectives of any language class (see also Correia & Bleicher 2008), albeit with enhanced scaffolding. This enhanced scaffolding would support students in reaching a deeper level of reflection by demonstrating to them the value of being concrete and evaluative. It would be beneficial for the students to receive instruction on how to engage in reflection, such as in the workshops described by Dressler et al. (2018). Students should be given opportunities to practice reflection skills in in-class assignments and to analyze the depth of their and their peers' reflections together (see also Corrales & Erwin 2020).

For instance, the analysis showed that some students perceived it as challenging or unnecessary to reflect on how they can develop their activity for a future language use event. The task, by posing a question concerning future enhancements, presupposed that there is always room for improvement. Not all the students, however, concurred with this idea in their reflections, and they sometimes used the phrase *next time* or *differently* without actively reflecting on improvements. This confirms the finding in Crane (2016), where students often reported their plans in one statement. The students would need more scaffolding to reflect on improvements. Students could also potentially receive reflection markers in Finnish or English as part of the task, as recommended by Correia and Bleicher (2008). One such reflection marker could point to the future (In the future I will…), instead of the future-oriented question.

A potential way to enhance the reflection task would have the students track their progress by re-engaging in a similar situation as in a previous portfolio entry and then reflecting on how they did better (see also Corrales & Erwin 2020). This would also answer the concern of the student in excerpt 9 over wanting to do several entries on music. The instructor could scaffold the students to prepare for future repeated

experiences. The students would have more concrete evidence of their improvement to deepen their reflections.

The task could also be expanded by making it more participatory. The students could collectively develop the prompt questions and thus engage their agency more. Students would discuss the learning expectations and define what language learning is and who they are learning for. The students seemed to be targeting their portfolios at their instructor, an observation in line with Porto (2007). The reflections revealed the students' historical bodies of what they considered reportable as learning. The task could be further developed to target a wider audience in a blog or chat format. As the portfolio instructions emphasize the importance of social support in learning, classmates, alongside the teacher, could also scaffold their peers.

While this article focused on scaffolding, it did not analyze the role of teacher feedback in the students' reflections. The students did, however, receive written feedback from the instructor throughout the portfolio process. A potential future study on the portfolios could look into the feedback and the students' responses to that feedback (for more about feedback, see Coulson & Harvey 2013).

Finally, due to its emphasis on change, nexus analysis proved to be a useful approach to bridge research practice with instructional change. Before seeking improvements, it is important to fully understand the phenomenon and any underlying forces. The discourse analysis of the learning task and the subsequent reflections revealed how the task impacted the students' reflections and what implications this had for learning.

This kind of examination of one's learning tasks would be useful for all (language) instructors, and I propose it to be used as part of training for pre-service language teachers and continuing education for teachers. I recommend that pre-service teachers collect and analyze student data to study the implications of the learning tasks they develop and use. A nexus analytical approach and the examination of the different circulating discourses that impact learning can help obtain a holistic understanding of complex phenomena. Nexus analysis is an especially useful way of examining the teacher-researcher's own instructional practices so that the impacts are visible. For example, the nexus analysis was necessary for me to understand the impact of the task I had developed on the student reflections. Understanding the impact of the task on the students' outcomes is an eye-opening experience for the teacher and this understanding can facilitate not only task development but one's professional growth.

Acknowledgements

Funding

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Appendix 1

7.1   Portfolio Instructions (Räsänen & Kivik 2023)

INSTRUCTIONS

Independent use portfolio

Keep a record of your language learning outside of class. Do you participate in coffee hour? Do you chat with your Finnish friends face-to-face or online? Do you watch YouTube videos or listen to Finnish music? Even small things count: Do you greet your classmates in Finnish when you run into them on campus? Collect samples of your activities. For example copy the email you have written to a friend in Finnish.

Not doing much in the language outside of class time? Start now! Contact your instructor/classmates for tips and ideas. Your instructor can also connect you with a native speaker of Finnish to have a conversation with.

The purpose of the project is:

1. You will keep track of and actively process your language use and learning (we are learning the language to be able to use it not only in but also outside of class)
2. Your instructors and classmates can find ways to support your language use outside of class. We will read and discuss your portfolio entries in class, and you will also receive feedback.

Entries: Collecting samples of your work

Keep a journal about different situations in which you use Finnish outside of class time. Include a date and time to your journal entries. Try to be as detailed as possible. Collect samples of things you are doing in the target language. Did you write emails to your friends in Finland? Copy the email and keep it for your records (ask permission from your friend to include their responses in your portfolio). Did you listen to a song? Copy the link to your entry. Use the language in a variety of different ways (make sure that you are recording different kinds of instances of language use, e.g. not just listening to songs or reading the news but also having conversations etc.).

In your entry, describe what you did in the target language: When? With whom? Where? Why?

You can also write about the following:

* What did you say, how did your peer respond?
* What did you learn in this language use situation? New phrases, vocabulary, or something else?

- What discoveries did you make about the language?
- What did you understand? What didn't you understand?
- What was challenging or confusing?
- What would you do differently next time?

Write 120–150 words

Grading

The portfolio entries are graded using the following rubric. The emphasis will be on the effort you have put in your portfolio entry and less on the accuracy of your language. However, it is important that you use your own words: please do not look up entire phrases or use a translation tool.

Grading: entry, max 5 p.

5 = Deep engagement with the target language. Entry and reflection written in coherent and comprehensible language and in your own words. You reflect on your learning in depth and provide examples.

4 = Portfolio entry and reflection completed with good effort, coherent text, and/or mostly comprehensible text. Entry and reflection written in comprehensible language and in your own words.

3 = Portfolio entry is completed with some effort but might be list-like or difficult to comprehend.

1–2 = Portfolio entry and reflection are only partially completed, list-like and/or difficult to comprehend.

0 = not submitted