

# EIGHTH-GRADERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS STUDYING ENGLISH

A study of the effect of language choices and the differences between the genders

Candidate's thesis

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Asenteilla ja suhtautumisella on suuria vaikutuksia kielenoppimiseen, niin motivaation kuin yleisen innostuksenkin kannalta. Kieliasenteita on tutkittu paljon etenkin motivaation piirissä ja asenteiden vertailua on tehty esimerkiksi eri sukupuolten ja ikäryhmien välillä. On kuitenkin monia tekijöitä, joiden yhteydestä kieliasenteisiin ei ole paljon tietoa. Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää millä tavoin pitkän valinnaisen kielen opiskelu vaikuttaa englannin kieleen suhtautumiseen kahdeksannella luokalla sekä millä tavoin nuo vaikutukset eroavat tyttöjen ja poikien välillä.

Luonteeltaan kvantitatiivinen aineisto kerättiin kyselylomakkeen avulla yhteensä 45 kahdeksaluokkalaiselta. Vastaukset analysoitiin tietokoneohjelmalla ja niiden avulla vertailtiin neljää ryhmää: pitkää ruotsia lukevia poikia, lyhyttä ruotsia lukevia poikia, pitkää ruotsia lukevia tyttöjä ja lyhyttä ruotsia lukevia tyttöjä.

Tutkimuksen mukaan kahdeksannen luokan oppilaat suhtautuivat yleisesti Englantiin varovaisen positiivisesti ja tiedostivat englannin osaamisen tärkeyden sekä kulttuurisessa ja globaalissa mielessä että instrumentaalisen voimavarana. Tyttöjen suhtautuminen oli huomattavasti positiivisempaa kuin poikien kaikilla tutkituilla osa-alueilla. Lisäksi tyttöjen kohdalla pitkän ruotsin lukijat olivat lähes joka kohdassa lyhyen ruotsin lukijoita myönteisempiä, mutta erot eivät yltäneet sukupuolten välillä olevien erojen tasolle eivätkä ilmenneet poikaryhmien välillä aina näin päin; joillain osa-alueilla lyhyttä ruotsia opiskelevat pojat osoittautuivat pitkää ruotsia lukevia myönteisemmiksi, joskus ryhmien välinen ero oli häviävän pieni ja joskus taas huomattavan suuri.

Asiasanat: attitudes, foreign language learning, learners of English as a foreign language, learners of Swedish as a foreign language

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Attitudes are undeniably an important factor in foreign language learning. Ever since the pioneering motivational researchers of the 1950s attitudes have been studied under different terms, divided into different types of sub variables and used in order to improve the language learners' performance. Currently one of the leading names in the field is Zoltán Dörnyei, who has done wide studies on attitudes and motivation.

There is no doubt that *attitude* as a concept is vague and can be defined in multiple ways in different contexts. When attitudes are considered in association with foreign language learning, Pihko (2007), for instance, prefers to use the term *affective variables*. This term will be used also in the present study in order to draw together various attitudinal factors and to avoid the possibility of interpreting the central term to include only the subjects' positive or negative views, their likes or dislikes.

The language attitudes of teenagers, an age group to whom learning foreign languages and especially the global English has become increasingly important, have been studied on various occasions (for instance Csizer and Dörnyei 2005, Julkunen and Borzova 1997, Pihko 2007). However, in the Finnish context and with reference to attitudinal differences between different types of learners, these studies are inconclusive. Although the attitudes of boys and girls have been compared, as well as the attitudes between different age groups, there is only little data concerning the influence of pupils' own choices, for instance, that of learning optional languages.

The goal of the present study is to describe the attitudes that 14-15-year-old Finnish pupils have towards English. It will compare boys and girls as well as those pupils who have chosen to study Swedish already in the fifth grade of primary school and those who begin to study it in the seventh grade.

## **2 LEARNING ENGLISH WITH A FEELING**

In this section I am going to introduce the theoretical framework of the present study. First, I will present the many viewpoints and the basic concepts that are included in emotional variables in learning a foreign language, after which I will present the nature of foreign language learning in Finnish schools. Both of these sections address the global position of the English language, which influences greatly learners' attitudes.

## 2.1 Affective variables and foreign language learning

Foreign language learning leads to two types of results, of which the former is linguistic competence and the latter is various affective results. As Pihko (2007:15) points out, these affective results are reactions on emotional level and include variables such as attitudes towards the language and learning, level of language anxiety, motivation and the idea of oneself as a language learner. Affective variables are clearly connected to language achievement and influence learners' behavior both in language classes and out in the world, for instance through the learners' willingness to communicate, but there is still not much research done on this specific field (Pihko 2007:53).

The present study will concentrate on the affective results of foreign language learning. The concepts and theories, which are defined in the following, are used in building the questionnaire as well as forming the framework for later discussion.

### 2.1.1 Motivational theories

Affective results of foreign language learning have not been studied much, but their history is rooted back in the pioneering studies of the first researchers of *motivation*, that is, in the 1950s. In wider sense motivational research began in the 1980s and even more so in the 1990s (Pihko 2007: 26). All in all, motivational research is where the affective variables are first found and defined.

According to Zoltán Dörnyei (2006:vii), as well as many others, motivation is considered a key factor in language achievement. It is, however, an extremely vague concept that can be defined in multiple ways and that includes different factors. Pihko (2007:26) defined motivation in a very classic sense to include *the reason for, the persistence of and the willingness to continue* doing something. In the context of foreign language learning, according to Dörnyei (2006:10, 11), the term is used as an umbrella-term for *the desire to learn* the target language, *the effort put in the learning* and *the attitudes towards the learning*, but equally often researchers write about the seven variables connected with motivation, which are integrativeness, instrumentality, attitudes towards the target language speakers or community, linguistic self-confidence, cultural interest, vitality of the target language culture and milieu.

As seen in these variables, Dörnyei (2006:xi) connects motivation to social contexts by stating that motivation is not an individual issue but always in relation to many social attitudes. Motivation and attitudes are thus connected already from the start. Also Pihko (2007:27-28) considers the early motivational research and theories very socio-psychological, since the learner's attitudes towards the target language speakers as well as the attitudes of linguistic and cultural groups towards each other are clearly highlighted in the early motivational literature. This is slightly

in contrast with the more current view of motivation, in which the factors highlighted are, in fact, the individual's integrative orientation and the situational factors, such as the individual's attitudes towards teachers and different tasks.

The current trend towards the individual and away from the social context has in its part affected the theories of the two motivational *orientations*. According to Dörnyei (2006:12), in *instrumental* orientation there is a reason for engaging in some type of activity, e.g. learning a foreign language, and it is in relation to utilitarian goals of the learner. Thus, an instrumentally orientated learner finds it useful to aim for foreign language proficiency and hopes, for instance, to get a good education and respect with the language competence. Dörnyei (2006:10) presents the other orientation as *integrative*, which was originally described as the thrive to become similar with the target language speakers or integrate in the target language culture. Pihko (2007:30) states that more recently, however, integrative orientation (or *integrativeness* in a wider sense) is seen also as a positive outlook towards the target language culture, openness to different ways of life and even as a multicultural attitude. According to Dörnyei (2003:126, 134), it is well justified that the concept addresses a wider area than before: the current foreign language learning environment differs greatly from that of second language acquisition in which the term was originally used, and therefore the attitudes towards some specific group have a minor role.

Dörnyei (2006:9, 15) clarifies that there is no well specified English language community in the global world where English is known as a lingua franca. The idea of the target language speaker, with which the learner could identify, does not, therefore, have to be a native English speaker. Thus, the socio-cultural dimension of foreign language learning motivation is more than simply familiarizing oneself with native speakers and their culture when shaping one's foreign language attitudes, and has, in addition, emphasis on "Indirect Contact Through Cultural Products" as well as getting to know the global way of life and the mass media.

The two language orientations are used for instance in Csizér and Dörnyei's (2005) study about *motivational profiles*. Their study results in four motivational groups in students that learn English as foreign language: Group 1 included the least and Group 4 the most motivated pupils, Group 2 was most positive towards the target language community and culture and Group 3 the most instrumentally oriented. The present study aims to compare the results with these groups.

### **2.1.2 Other attitudinal factors**

According to Pihko (2007:27), *attitudes* are a person's ways of evaluating something as either negative or positive. These positively or negatively loaded images and feelings have an influence on behavior and motivation, and therefore also on learning. In learning English as foreign language the

attitudes are targeted towards various aspects, such as situational factors (the teacher, tasks, classroom), the target language speakers, the target language culture(s) and the language itself as a system. In the present study attitudes are seen to include first and foremost the general liking of the language and the school subject, as well as the learners' evaluation of its degree of usefulness.

Attitudes are an important part of the learner's *linguistic self*. According to Pihko (2007:33-35), a self image is built with the help of the feedback that the individual receives from others, and includes values, attitudes, ideas of oneself as a person as well as emotions, skills and ideas of abilities that one possesses. Linguistic self is, therefore, an idea that an individual has about his/her abilities to achieve linguistic competence, the image of oneself as a learner and, importantly, one's self-esteem and self-worth in a situation where language is learned or used. Also Dörnyei (2006:16-17) analyses the linguistic selves when presenting his *L2 Motivational Self-System* that includes the learner's *ought-to self* and *ideal self*, in relation to the *actual self* and the foreign language learning experience. The *ought-to self* is all the attributes that the learner believes he/she should possess and the *ideal self* is all the attributes that the learner would like to possess, and has, therefore, resemblance to one's own desires. According to Dörnyei (2006:92-93), both of these are connected to instrumental orientation: the *ideal self* through the desired professional competence and the *ought-to self* through duties and obligations, but only the *ideal self* is related to attitudes towards the target language speakers or community. All in all, Dörnyei (2006:117) states that a well developed *ideal self* results in good effort and motivation, and leads, therefore, also to better language achievement. From this it could be concluded that at least an *ideal linguistic self* reflects attitudes.

According to Pihko (2007:41), a learner with a strong linguistic self copes better with another affective factor, *language anxiety*. Language anxiety is something that disturbs the learner's performance, is usually related to bad self-esteem and/or perfectionism and makes the learner require more time in the learning or test situation. It easily causes negative feelings towards the learning situation, and at the same time is also caused by them. Pihko (2007:36-37) points out that language related anxiety was studied already in the 1970s and its current form was created at the end of the 1980s. She explains that the currently used and widely accepted view of language anxiety is that of Horowitz's. His language anxiety included *unwillingness to communicate*, *test anxiety* and *fear of negative feedback*. Unfortunately, according to Pihko (2007:122), language anxiety is found to be very common in traditional foreign language learning environment, even though the attitudes towards the language would be positive in general. In addition, Julkunen and Borzova (1997:44) see that language anxiety can be found in learners regardless of their level of linguistic competence.

Language anxiety is measured with various type of scales, most of them including multiple Likert-type statements about the level of anxiety in different types of situations. This

method is found to be very reliable and it is widely used also when measuring other motivational and affective variables and attitudes (Pihko 2007:38). The statements and the Likert-scale are used also in the questionnaire of the present study.

## 2.2 The Finnish context

According to Pihko (2007:17), language competence has been valued highly in Finland for decades. This can be seen for instance in our language teaching. Since the 1960s the pupils of Finnish primary schools have been taught foreign languages, starting already on the third grade. Julkunen and Borzova (1997:8) state that language teaching in Finnish schools follows the communicative approach, which means that interaction is emphasized as the way of learning as well as the goal of the teaching. Probably due to these issues, the pupil's attitudes towards language learning have in general been significantly positive, as they are also in Pihko's 2007 study.

Some language studies in Finland are obligatory and some optional. In short, everyone has to study two languages: *A1* from the third grade of primary school, i.e. minimum of seven years altogether, and *B1* (Swedish or Finnish, according to the pupil's first language) from the seventh grade, i.e. the total of three years. The different amount of years spent on learning implies that also the goals set for the study of the two languages differ extensively. Additionally one can usually choose to study extra languages: an *A2* language in the fifth grade and a *B2* language in the eighth. This means, in addition, that if one chooses Swedish as his/her *A2*, the person does not take a *B1* language. The goal is that the learner's competence in *A1* and *A2*, as well as in *B1* and *B2*, would be at the same levels at the end of the ninth grade (*Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 1994 2000*:18).

Since 2000, 90% of the Finnish pupils have taken English as their *A1* language, which implies that English has become a more or less self-evident part of education. Additionally, according to Pihko (2007:18), for instance in 2002, 33% of all the pupils took an *A2* language. Unfortunately, the *A2* teaching here in the city of Jyväskylä has ended many years ago due to the lack of pupils and resources. Also in the neighboring municipality, Muurame, the current eighth-graders are the last age group that had the chance to choose an *A2* language when in the fifth grade. This group of pupils is included among the subjects of the present study.

According to Dörnyei (2006:147), learning many languages at the same time leads to a more developed and solid ideal linguistic self, but, on the other hand, there is competition between them. The winner in these competitions is usually the global English. Csizér and Dörnyei (2005:657) state that this is due to the limited language learning capacity as well as the forming of positive attitudes towards one language at the cost of the other. Dörnyei (2006:117) also concludes

that it is useful to the development of motivation to be interested in various languages, but if English becomes the only language that needs to be learned, the interest towards smaller languages becomes rarer. In the Finnish context the two competing languages would be the two obligatory ones, often in practice English and Swedish.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented the theoretical framework for the concepts that have been chosen as the affective variables and main focus of the present study. These variables are integrativeness, instrumental orientation, language anxiety and linguistic selves. When added to the question how well in general a learner likes the language, these form the affective variables that this particular study is about. In addition, I described the language learning situation in Finland, the concepts for different languages in the Finnish school system (A1, B1, A2, B2) as well as the position of English in the global world.

Dörnyei (2003:123) states that determining the distinctive features between the various affective factors is a complex task since they are all so strongly connected to each other. I believe that studying all of them together as the profound elements that form *the general attitude*, an individual's emotionally charged viewpoint and stand, will reveal useful information about Finnish pupils' attitudes towards English.

Even though the reasons behind motivational factors and attitudes are interesting and would be helpful in improving foreign language teaching, they are not of interest in the present study. Additionally, I will not study any situational factors as such even though, for instance, Julkunen and Borzova (1997:79) state that tasks and attitudes towards teacher are essential part of motivation. The present study aims to get a clear view of how the learners feel about learning English.

## **3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA AND METHOD OF THE STUDY**

In this chapter the research questions, the data and the methods of analysis are discussed in detail. First I will present the research questions and discuss the assumptions, after which I describe the subjects of the present study and the methods used for collecting the data. I will conclude the chapter in a description of the methods of analysis used for interpreting the data.

### 3.1. Research questions and assumptions

The goal of the present study is to find out what type of influence the study of optional A2 language has on secondary school pupils' attitudes towards school English, as well as to find out if there are any differences between the genders. Following these questions I seek to find specific trends and differences between these four groups:

- **BA2** = Boys who have Swedish as their A2 language
- **BB1** = Boys who have Swedish as their B1 language
- **GA2** = Girls who have Swedish as their A2 language
- **GB1** = Girls who have Swedish as their B1 language

Knowing these trends, if there are any, will reveal associations between positive attitudes and optional language learning. This study will not, however, show any causality. Therefore, if these trends are found, it can either be assumed that language learning started earlier will make the student feel more positive about learning also English, or that a pupil with positive attitudes is likely to choose the optional language in the first place. All in all, the assumption in the present study is that the A2 groups would have more positive attitudes towards English.

According to previous studies (for instance Julkunen and Borzova 1997) and old stereotypes, it could be assumed that the girls' overall attitudes would be more positive than those of the boys, because it is socially more "appropriate" for girls to study languages just as it is for the boys to study mathematics and science. In addition, Pihko (2007:87-88) has studied 13-15-year-old Finnish pupils who study English as a foreign language and found out that Finnish boys have significantly more motivational and attitudinal problems compared to girls. However, girls had significantly more language anxiety of the two groups even though they were in general more positive. This leads to the assumptions that the girls will have more positive attitudes but also more language anxiety than the boys.

Another goal of this study is to reveal the pupils' beliefs and stands on some common stereotypes. These are the differences between the genders in linguistic competence and liking English as well as the idea of "ear for languages" being more important in learning English than the pupil's own effort and practicing the language. It is assumed that those who have more negative attitudes towards English will say that the other gender likes English better and vice versa.

### 3.2. Data and subjects

The research question of the present study concerns the attitudes that secondary school pupils have towards English. Since there are many variables included in the concept of attitudes, I

operationalized the different types of attitudinal factors into statements and according to them formed a Likert-type questionnaire of twenty items. 15 of the statements formed groups with specific items that reflect the different affective variables: integrativeness (items 2, 7 and 13), instrumentality (items 1, 12, 14), language anxiety (items 6, 8, 15), the general liking of the language (items 3, 10, 18), and the linguistic selves (items 5 and 16 reflect the pupil's ideal language self and item 17 the actual self concept). In addition, there were three items about stereotypes: items 9 and 19 reflect the pupil's stands regarding the gender related stereotypes in language learning, whereas item 20 relates to their faith in the usefulness of practicing with regard to learning English. Items 4 and 11 were not analyzed in the present study.

The data of the present study was collected as a survey questionnaire from three classes of 14-15-year-old Finnish pupils. There were 45 subjects altogether of which 22 were girls and 23 boys. 19 of these subjects (10 girls and 9 boys) had chosen to study Swedish as the optional A2 language in the fifth grade of primary school. This leaves 26 students (14 boys and 12 girls) who study Swedish as their obligatory B1 language and, therefore, have started to learn it from the seventh grade. The subjects were chosen by default, since as I have mentioned before, the A2 language teaching has ended in many central Finland schools and I wanted to highlight the fact that the subjects chosen were the last age group also in Muurame municipality. Additionally, I chose the B1 readers from the same classes and the same school in order to minimize the effects of situational factors that could influence the differences in their attitudes.

The data collection was carried out in January 2009 as a survey study in a central Finland town with a population of slightly over 9000 (Muurame 2009), where the questionnaires were handed out in three English classes. The purpose of the study and the questionnaire were explained and both oral and written instructions were given, as well as the possibility to ask if something was unclear. It took the pupils approximately 5 minutes to fill in the questionnaires. Before using the questionnaire, it was tested and filled in by one pupil, after which the questions and the form of the sheet were improved according to her answers and comments. These answers were not included in the data.

### **3.3. Methods of analysis**

The data of the study was analyzed quantitatively. Numeric values given to the statements of the questionnaire were coded in a computer file using SPSS, where the cases were grouped according to the gender and the language choice of the pupil. By calculating mean values for all of the items the average answers could be compared. This way it can be concluded that it is likely for a member of a certain group to mark a higher value on some item than a member of another group, if a difference

is found.

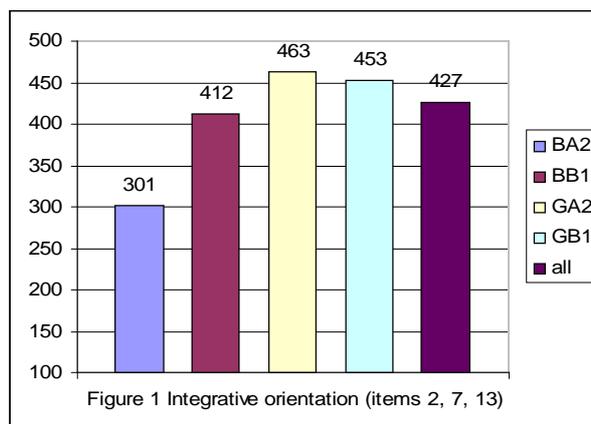
Answers to the different items were also grouped according to the affective variable they reflect. For instance a mean of a subject's answers to items 1, 12 and 14 was calculated in order to get a value for the subject's overall instrumental orientation. In addition, not only the four groups were compared, but also the relationships between different affective variables were calculated using Pearson's two-tailed correlations.

## 4 RESULTS

In this section I will report the results of the study. Firstly, I will present the mean values regarding each of the affective variables. Secondly, I will present the groups' mean values in the items concerning stereotypes. Throughout the section I will report the differences between the four groups, between the boys and girls and between the A2 and B1 Swedish learners as well as give the general average values regarding the different variables.

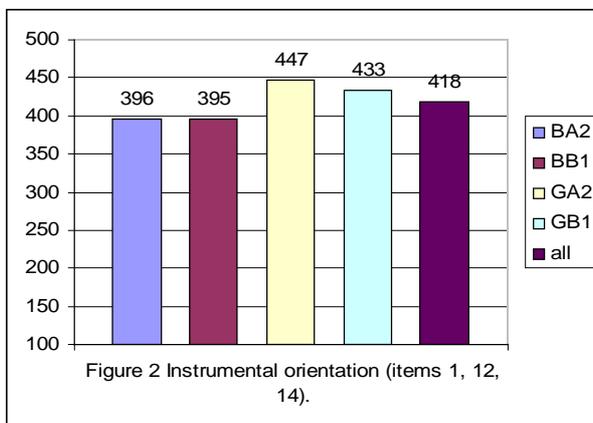
### 4.1 The affective variables

In the questionnaire there were three items concerning integrative orientation. Those were items 2, 17 and 13, which reflected the pupils' beliefs of how useful they consider English in a cultural or global context. In Figure 1 the four groups' integrative means, calculated from the means of the distinct items, are compared.



As seen in Figure 1, the average value given to the cultural usefulness of English is fairly high, 4.27. The average answer of the boy pupils is 3.97, which is 0.61 lower than that of the girls, 4.58. The difference between the A2 and B1 learners is smaller, only 0.11 (A2 learners 4.22, B1 learners 4.33).

Instrumental orientation was tested with items 1, 12 and 14. They reflected the importance the pupils attached to getting good grades, the usefulness of good English skills in the future in getting a good job or further education or in playing English games, reading books in English and listening to English music. The means of the four groups are compared in Figure 2.



As seen in Figure 2, the average value given to the instrumental value of English, 4.18, is slightly lower than that of integrative. The boys' value given to the statement is 3.96, which is 0.44 lower than that of the girls, 4.40. A2 learners' average value was 4.22, which is only 0.08 higher than that of the B1 learners, 4.14.

There were also three items in the questionnaire concerning language anxiety. Items 6, 8 and 15 were statements about feeling helpless or anxious in English lessons and desperation when facing difficult tasks. The means are compared in Figure 3.

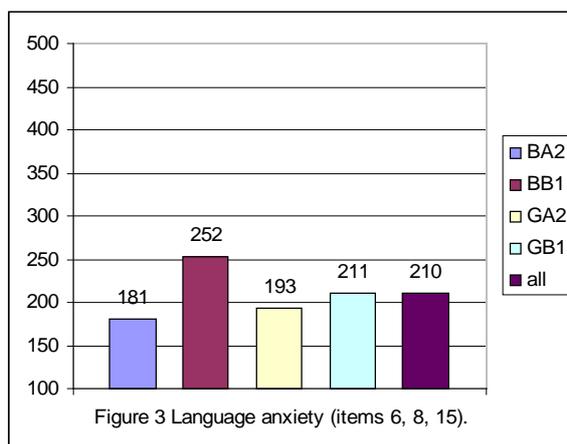
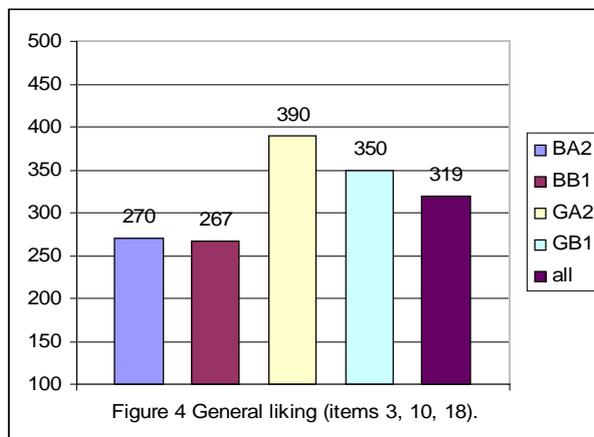


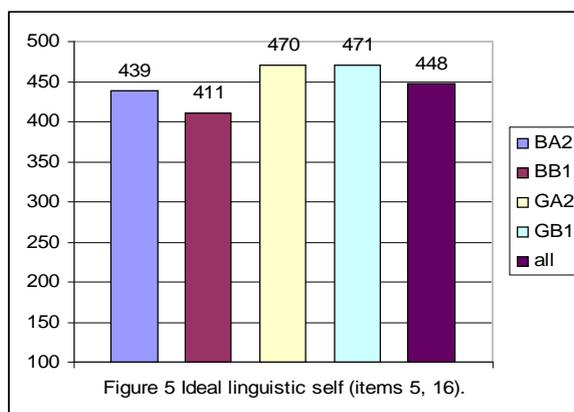
Figure 3 shows that the average language anxiety is not very high, only 2.10. The group suffering from most language anxiety is clearly the B1 boys with their mean 2.52 that is 0.41 higher than that of the following group, the B1 girls, and as much as 0.71 higher than that of the A2 boys. Due to the high value of the B1 boys, the mean of the two groups, 2.32, is 0.45 higher than that of the A2 groups. The difference between the boys and girls is only 1.15 (boys 2.17, girls 2.02) due to the extremely low value given by the A2 boys.

The items reflecting how much the pupils like English in general were items 3, 10 and 18. They were statements about how nice it is to learn English, about doing the homework and about comparing English to other school subjects. The means are compared in Figure 4.



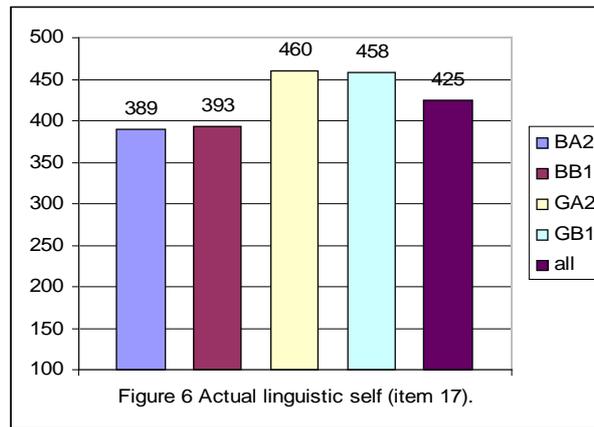
As Figure 4 shows, an average pupil does not like English to any great extent: the value given is only 3.19. There is, however, major variance among the pupils. Apparently the girls like English considerably more than the boys: their mean, 3.70, is as much as 1.03 higher than that of the boys, 2.67. There was also a small difference of 0.21 between the A2 and B1 learners (A2 learners 3.30, B1 learners 3.09).

The ideal linguistic self of the pupils was tested with two items, 5 and 16. They revealed the pupils' thrive to gain similar linguistic skills to that of the native speakers as well as the pupils' goal setting. Figure 5 shows the compared means of the four groups.



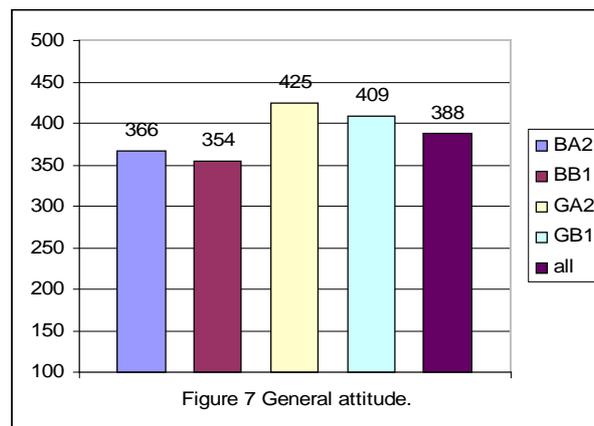
As seen in Figure 5, the average ideal is set fairly high, its value being 4.48. The girls have their ideal higher than the boys, the difference between the two being 0.46 (girls 4.71, boys 4.25). There is also a nearly non-existent difference of 0.14 between the A2 and B1 learners (A2 learners 4.55, B1 learners 4.41), caused by the slight difference between the boy groups.

The actual linguistic self was tested only with one item. Item 17 considered the pupil's belief in the effect of his/her own effort when facing difficult tasks and achieving goals. The average linguistic selves are shown in Figure 6.



As seen in Figure 6, the average value on linguistic self is good, 4.25. The difference between the boys and girls is again very clear. The girls' average, 4.59, is as much as 0.68 higher than that of the boys, 3.91. The difference between the A2 and B1 learners is again nearly non-existent, only 0.03 (A2 learners 4.23, B1 learners 4.26).

In addition to these specific affective variables, the general attitudes of the groups were calculated. This includes all the variables already presented. The values in language anxiety were reversed in order to be able to include them in positive attitudes. The means are compared in Figure 7.



As seen in Figure 7, the average value for positive attitudes is 3.88. The girls' mean value, 4.18, is as much as 0.58 higher than that of the boys, 3.60. The difference between the A2 and B1 learners is only 0.14 (A2 learners 3.96, B1 learners 3.82).

In order to justify the calculating of the general attitude from all the affective variables, the correlations between the distinct variables were calculated. As can be seen in Table 1, various significant correlations were found, for instance, the strong relationship between the integrative and instrumental orientation and the fact that instrumental orientation correlates with ideal and actual linguistic selves and negatively with anxiety, but integrative orientation only with liking the language. All in all, the correlation matrix offers a possibility to draw some conclusions later in the discussion section.

**Table 1 The affective variables: correlations**

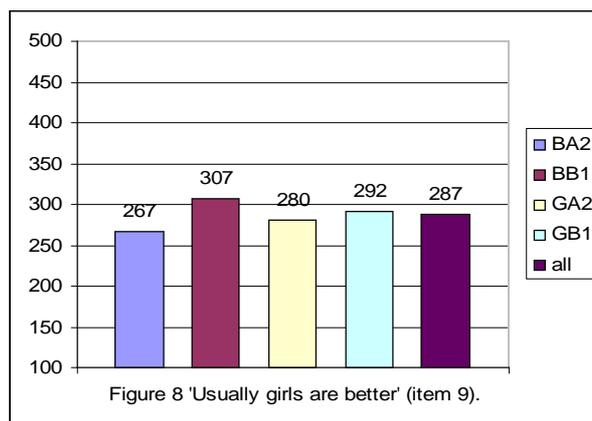
		Correlations						
		integrative (items 2, 7, 13)	instrumental (items 1, 12, 14)	anxiety (items 6, 8, 15)	liking (items 3, 10, 18)	ideal (items 5, 16)	linguistic self (item 17)	attitude
integrative (items 2, 7, 13)	Pearson Correlation	1,000	,770**	-,356	,727**	,348	,748	-,050
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,002	,233	,005	,359	,146	,872
	N	13	13	13	13	9	5	13
instrumental (items 1, 12, 14)	Pearson Correlation	,770**	1,000	-,578*	,496	,806**	,926*	-,127
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,002		,038	,085	,009	,024	,680
	N	13	13	13	13	9	5	13
anxiety (items 6, 8, 15)	Pearson Correlation	-,356	-,578*	1,000	,039	-,040	,579	,499
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,233	,038		,898	,918	,307	,082
	N	13	13	13	13	9	5	13
liking (items 3, 10, 18)	Pearson Correlation	,727**	,496	,039	1,000	,393	,892*	,306
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,005	,085	,898		,295	,042	,310
	N	13	13	13	13	9	5	13
ideal (items 5, 16)	Pearson Correlation	,348	,806**	-,040	,393	1,000	,953*	,716*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,359	,009	,918	,295		,012	,030
	N	9	9	9	9	9	5	9
linguistic self (item 17)	Pearson Correlation	,748	,926*	,579	,892*	,953*	1,000	,967**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,146	,024	,307	,042	,012		,007
	N	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
attitude	Pearson Correlation	-,050	-,127	,499	,306	,716*	,967**	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,872	,680	,082	,310	,030	,007	
	N	13	13	13	13	9	5	30

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

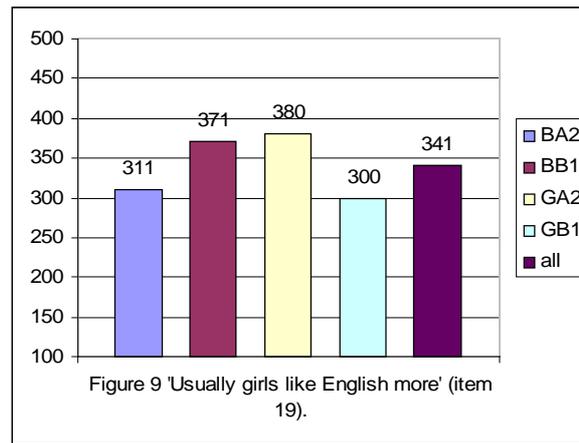
\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## 4.2 Stereotypes and beliefs

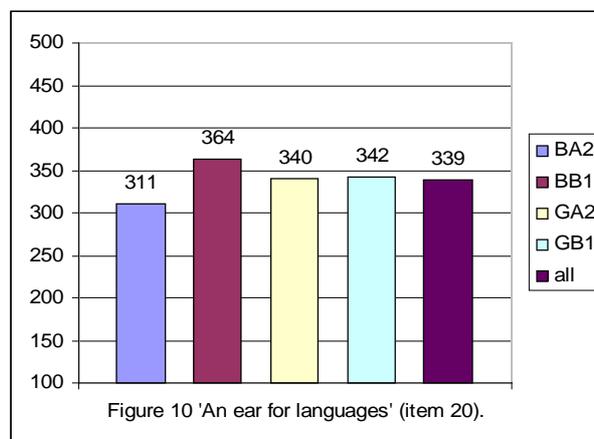
Three items in the questionnaire reflected the pupils' beliefs in stereotypes. Item 9 was a statement about girls being generally better at English than boys. As seen in Figure 8, the pupils did not agree with the statement and the average value is only 2.87. The only significant difference in answering this item was between the boy groups: the A2 boys' value was 0.40 lower than that of the B1 boys.



Item 19 stated that in general girls like English more than boys. This was agreed on slightly more than the previous item, the average being 3.41. The groups who agreed the most were the B1 boys and the A2 girls; the other two groups gave significantly lower values. The results are shown in Figure 9.



Item 20 reflects the pupil's belief in either his/her own effort and practicing or the blessing of an “ear for languages”. Giving a high value on this statement implies that the student believes that learning English is easier for some than the others. Giving a low value highlights one's own effort and practicing. As seen in Table 11, the girl groups think again very similarly with their mean values close to the average, 3.39. The B1 boys find ear for languages slightly even more important than the girls, but the most interesting group is the A2 boys, who gave the lowest value of only 3.11, that is as much as 0.43 lower than that of the B1 boys.



## 5 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FOUR GROUPS

In this section I will discuss the results presented in the previous chapter in relation to the research questions of the study, i.e., present the differences between the answers of the four groups. I will go through the affective variables and items concerning stereotypes and beliefs one by one, after which conclusions can be drawn from the results. I will conclude this section by discussing the weaknesses of the present study and addressing ideas for further research.

## 5.1 Distinctive affective variables

The results presented in the previous section show some interesting differences between the four groups formed according to the pupils' gender and language choice. There were some differences in the mean values of every item and therefore also of every variable, and although the differences seem to be arbitrary, they clearly follow a trend.

In the integrative orientation the trend was that the girls valued English competence more with regard to its usefulness in cultural integration and integrative validity, whereas the boys did not find it as important an aspect of learning English. The B1 groups were more homogeneous, i.e. the trend was clearer in the A2 groups. The general average was high, but it must be considered why the boys, especially the A2 boys, valued integrativeness the least. Following the assumption made previously, it could be, in fact, the integrative aspect of language learning that is not as appropriate for boys as it is for girls. Boys could be assumed to like English because of its usefulness in the instrumental sense, whereas girls are allowed to be more interested in different cultures and traveling. The A2 boys' awareness of this could explain why their mean is even lower than that of the B1 boys. In order to conclude something from these assumptions and pupils' tendency to form attitudes according to social expectations, however, a wide further study would be needed.

In the instrumental orientation the trend was very similar to the integrative orientation. The general average is again high but slightly lower than in the previous variable. This is due to the fact that both of the girl groups as well as the B1 boys indicated slightly lower and the A2 boys slightly higher values. This leads to the nearly non-existent difference between the boy groups and, therefore, the trend that the A2 learners give higher values is seen only in the values of the girl groups. The results of this variable support the assumption stated in the previous paragraph, as does the correlation matrix (Table 1): the two orientations are clearly different in nature even though the correlation between them is significant.

Language anxiety, however, seems to be in contrast with the other assumption presented earlier, i.e. that girls suffer more language anxiety than boys. The most anxious group according to the results of the present study is clearly the B1 boys with a significant distinction to the B1 girls and then the A2 girls, and especially to the A2 boys, who are clearly the least anxious group with their low value of only 1.81. The reason for this is not clear. Pihko (2007) as well as Julkunen and Borzova (1997) give two main reasons for language anxiety: perfectionism and poor self-esteem. With regard to these results, it could be suggested that maybe the A2 groups, and especially the boys, have, for some reason, better self-esteem than the B1 groups. Having studied more languages could, for instance, make the A2 pupils more accustomed to learn languages, and

this effect could well be stronger among boys.

According to Pihko (2007:41), language anxiety is related to a weak linguistic self and self-esteem, but the results of the present study can be interpreted as contradicting. In fact, the lowest values for actual linguistic self were given by the A2 boys even though they had the lowest level of language anxiety. As the results of item 17 show, the girls relied much more on their own capacity and value of their effort with regard to difficult tasks and achieving goals, whereas both the boy groups had weaker linguistic selves. It must, however, be noted, that there was only one item (item 17) concerning linguistic selves in the questionnaire and that the linguistic selves of the boys could also be high but ignored by themselves.

According to the results of the present study, the ideal linguistic self of an average eighth-grader is high and the mean value as much as 4.48. The difference between the girl groups was nearly non-existent, the A2 boys' mean was only slightly lower and the B1 boys' the lowest, 4.11. The ideal self reflects the pupils' aims and goals with regard to their language learning, their motivation and their willingness to work towards the ideal and, therefore, complements the results of the previous variable, the actual linguistic self. In addition, the correlation between the two linguistic selves was strong (Table 1). These results imply that the B1 boys are not as enthusiastic to gain a high linguistic competence as are the other groups, and that the A2 boys' linguistic self-esteem is not as low as the previous variable implied.

These results may be in association with the B1 boys' high value to item 20, which stated that linguistic ear is more important than practicing when regarding learning English. Giving high value to this item implies that a pupil thinks that some just "are" good at English and some not, regardless of the amount they practice. However, the differences to the other groups were not great. Both of the girl groups agreed that it is somewhat more important than practicing, the B1 girls slightly more. The A2 boys gave the lowest value but also they agreed with the statement. All in all, there is a clear trend showing that the A2 learners rely more on their own effort, and again this is seen more strongly in the boy groups.

According to the results of the present study, English is not very liked but not disliked either; the average value was only 3.19. The same trends were repeated also in this variable: the A2 learners like English slightly more than the B1 learners and girls, especially the A2 girls with their significantly high value, like English much more than the boys. These results imply that yet another stereotype is not far from the truth.

It is interesting to see if the pupils themselves believe in this stereotype. In item 19 it was stated that girls like English better than boys. The B1 girls did not know if to agree or disagree with the statement and the A2 boys agreed only slightly. However, the difference to the other two groups was significant, since both the B1 boys and the A2 girls clearly agreed. As seen in the

previous paragraph, the A2 girls liked English best, and therefore they also “know” that it is true. The same way B1 boys liked English the least and therefore assume that the girls like it better. The average answer was 3.41, which means that on average the pupils are mostly conscious about the fact that girls like English more than boys.

Item 9 concerned another stereotype, which states that girls are usually better at English than boys. The girl groups agreed that this is not the case: both of them answered slightly under 3. What is interesting is that the A2 boys gave a much lower value to the statement and, therefore, supported the opposite (or were extremely conscious that these types of generalizations cannot be made) whereas the B1 boys were the only group that slightly agreed with the statement. The average answer was 2.87, which implies that the pupils do not believe in this stereotype or, alternatively, know better.

## **5.2 Trends in a larger scale**

The overall attitudes of the groups (Figure 7) show that there are some trends. This is also supported by the fact that every one of the affective variables tested correlated with some other variable(s), as was seen in the correlation matrix (Table 1). When the differences in the answers to specific items as well as the variances inside the groups are disregarded, a conclusion can be drawn. In short, the analysis showed that A2 girls had by far the most positive attitudes towards English and the school subject. The difference to the other groups was clear. The B1 girls were the second most positive group followed by the A2 boys, and the B1 boys felt the least positive about studying English. This specific order of the four groups was seen repeatedly in the results.

The four groups of the present study do not fit the four motivational profiles of Csisér and Dörnyei (2005). Due to the significant correlation between the instrumental and integrative orientations as well as the clear trend in attitudes, the distinction to motivational profiles cannot be made. The results of the present study only lead to a continuum, in which one end is those who feel positively about English in both instrumentally and integratively and the other those who do not.

All in all, there clearly are differences between the four groups of the present study. The results support the assumption about girls having more positive attitudes. The reasons for this are various and this might be caused by, for instance, the social, stereotypical attitudes or some biological, profound differences between the genders. What is more interesting, however, is the fact that also the other assumption is supported: the A2 learners appear to have more positive attitudes towards English than the B1 learners. For this there is no simple answer. On one hand, it could be possible that the pupils in the A2 groups would have been more positive already in the fourth grade

when they chose to begin their Swedish learning, or it could imply more positive attitudes in the A2 learner's homes, since a ten-year-old seldom chooses the optional language him-/herself. On the other hand, the earlier start of their Swedish learning and the wider exposure to languages could have supported more positive attitudes. Perhaps they have become more used to studying languages, they have come to value languages more or perhaps the A2 language supports learning English and they have become to have better linguistic competence and, therefore, also better linguistic self-esteem and more positive attitude towards studying English. In order to find out the direction of the causality, this topic needs further study.

### **5.3 Suggestions for further study**

This paper surveyed how the four groups of eighth-graders feel about studying English. It mapped out the pupils' attitudes with the help of the affective variables and revealed some trends in their ways of valuing these different aspects of attitudes. However, there are many important conclusions that cannot be drawn from the results.

First of all, this study disregarded all types of situational factors. The effect of the teacher or the books, for instance, were not taken into account, nor were the possible social differences between the three classes that were studied, although these are aspects that have a strong effect on motivation and attitudes (Julkunen and Borzova 1997:79). In order to take these factors into account, as well as the reasons behind the attitude differences, a larger study would be required. Due to the nature of the present study these results are not provided.

Secondly, it would be useful to find out the levels of the pupils' linguistic competences. Knowing the pupils' grades and their linguistic achievements is essential in order to find out if they as well are related to gender and, more importantly, to language choices. However, even if a relationship was found between the language choices and linguistic competence, it alone would not prove that learning Swedish makes the pupils better at English.

The most interesting issue to be studied would, therefore, be causality. Both the attitudes and the linguistic competence of the pupils should be tested already before they begin to learn their A2 language in order to map the differences, if any. At its best, it should be done as a longitudinal study where the same population could be studied various times and at various ages. This would show the possible change or the lack of it and, therefore, reveal if learning an A2 language supports the achievement also in A1 language and has a positive influence on the pupils' attitudes towards it. It could have a major effect on the politics about A2 language learning if the optional language was shown to be extremely useful in educating children to be effective, talented and motivated language learners.

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ASENNETUTKIMUS: ENGLANTI OPPIAINEENA

Hyvä kahdeksaluokkalainen!

Teen parhaillani tutkimusta kahdeksaluokkalaisten asenteista englannin kieltä ja oppiainetta kohtaan. Sinun luokkasi on valittu tutkimukseni yhdeksi tietolähteeksi. Annathan apusi tutkimuksen tekemiseen vastaamalla oheisiin kysymyksiin.

Kysymykset koskevat näkemystäsi englannin opiskelusta. Kaikki vastauksesi ovat luottamuksellisia ja ne analysoidaan yliopistossa keväällä 2009. Sinun ei tarvitse kirjoittaa mihinkään nimeäsi eikä opettaja tule näkemään vastauksiasi. Vastaa mielelläni jos Sinulla on jotain kysyttävää lomakkeesta tai tutkimuksesta.

Kiitos yhteistyöstä!

*Maijastiina Kaski*

A. Sukupuolesi (ympyröi oikea):    tyttö    poika

B. Valitsitko alakoulussa pitkän **ruotsin**:    kyllä    en

C. Seuraavaksi esitetään kaksikymmentä väitettä. Ympyröi vaihtoehtoista se, joka on lähimpänä omaa mielipidettäsi. Vastaa kaikkiin kohtiin rohkeasti ja valitse jokaisesta kohdasta vain yksi vaihtoehto.

(1 = olen täysin eri mieltä, 2 = olen jonkin verran eri mieltä, 3 = en ole asiasta varsinaisesti mitään mieltä, 4 = olen jonkin verran samaa mieltä, 5 = olen täysin samaa mieltä)

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Minulle on tärkeää saada englannista hyviä arvosanoja.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Mielestäni hyvä kielitaito on nykyään tärkeää.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. En usko, että opiskelisin englantia jos minun ei olisi pakko, koska se ei ole kovin mukavaa.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Minusta tuntuu, että jos osaan englantia hyvin, minua arvostetaan enemmän.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Haluaisin osata puhua ja/tai kirjoittaa yhtä hyvin kuin oikeasti englanninkielinen.                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Englannintunnilla tuntuu usein avuttomalta, vastaaminen jännittää ja/tai minusta tuntuu, etten oikeastaan osaa mitään. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7. Minulle englannin osaaminen on tärkeää, koska sen avulla voin kommunikoida matkustellessani ulkomailla.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Minun ei tarvitse tuntea itseäni ahdistuneeksi englannintunnilla.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Yleensä tytöt ovat englannissa parempia kuin pojat.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Teen kotona mielummin englannin läksyjä, kuin muiden aineiden.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Minusta tuntuu, että en ole tarpeeksi hyvä englannissa ja että minun pitäisi olla parempi.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Uskon, että hyvästä englannintaidosta on minulle hyötyä ja että pääsen sen avulla helpommin joskus töihin tai jatkokoulutukseen.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Minulle on tärkeää oppia englantia, koska sen avulla voin saada ulkomaalaisia kavereita ja tutustua ihmisiin muista kulttuureista.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Minulle on tärkeää oppia englantia siksi, että voin ymmärtää paremmin englanninkielisiä pelejä, elokuvia ja musiikkia ja/tai että voin lukea englanninkielisiä kirjoja.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Englannissa vaikeatkin tehtävät ovat mielenkiintoisia eikä niiden takia tarvitse vaipua epätoivoon.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Olen jo miettinyt arvosanan, jota englannissa tavoittelen.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Uskon, että selviän vaikeistakin tehtävistä ja saavutan tavoitteeni, jos vain itse yritän parhaani.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Jos ajattelee englantia muiden kouluaineiden joukossa, niin mielestäni se on erityisen kivaa.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Luulisin, että tyttöjen mielestä englannin opiskelu on kivempaa kuin poikien.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Hyvä kielipää on englannin oppimisessa hyödyllisempää kuin kova harjoittelu.	1	2	3	4	5

Kiitos yhteistyöstäsi ja mukavaa kevätlukukautta!