

AS MUCH ENGLISH AS POSSIBLE:  
A study on two secondary school English  
teachers' language use and the motives  
behind their language choices

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Kommunikatiivisen kompetenssin ja suullisen kielitaidon painoarvo vieraiden kielten oppimisessa ja opettamisessa on kasvanut viime vuosina, mikä on lisännyt huomiota myös opettajien kielenkäyttöön. Tämän proseminaaritutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää, minkä verran englannin opettajat käyttävät tunneillaan englantia ja suomea ja miten he perustelevat kielivalintojaan. Taustana käytettiin teoreettista keskustelua kohdekielen ja äidinkielen hyödyistä kohdekielen oppimisen kannalta sekä aiempia tutkimustuloksia opettajien kielenkäytöstä.

Tutkimuksen aineisto koostui kahdesta videokuvatusta kahdeksannen luokan englannin tunnista ja tunnit pitäneiden opettajien haastatteluista. Toisella opettajalla (A) oli 25 vuoden työkokemus, kun taas toinen opettaja (B) oli noin kaksi vuotta aiemmin valmistunut sijainen. Analyysin pääpaino oli haastatteluvastausten laadullisessa analysoinnissa videoitujen tuntien ja aiempien tutkimustulosten valossa. Tutkimukseen sisältyi myös määrällinen osa, jossa arvioitiin, kuinka paljon opettajat käyttivät kohdekieltä ja äidinkieltä.

Tutkimukseen osallistuneet opettajat halusivat käyttää mahdollisimman paljon englantia, sillä he kokivat oppilaiden altistamisen sille hyödylliseksi ja tärkeäksi. Kuvattujen tuntien perusteella heidän kielenkäytössään oli kuitenkin eroja. Opettaja A käytti kohdekieltä käytännössä koko ajan eli 100 %. Opettaja B puhui englantia 47 % ajasta, mutta hänen kielivalintansa jakautuivat kahteen osaan. Alkutunnista hän käytti 99 % englantia mutta lopputunnista vain 5 %, ilman että tälle löytyi kattavaa selitystä. Tärkeimmät syyt käyttää äidinkieltä olivat kieliopin opettaminen, kurinpito ja selitykset ja käännökset suomeksi ellei oppilas ymmärrä jotakin. Tulosten perusteella vaikuttaa siltä, että opettajan positiivinen käsitys omasta suullisesta kielitaidosta lisää kohdekielen käyttöä. Aineiston rajallisuuden takia tulosten perusteella ei kuitenkaan voi tehdä laajempia johtopäätöksiä, ja jatkotutkimusta tarvitaan niin opettajien kielenkäytön kuin heidän motiiviansa osalta.

Asiasanat: language education, English as a foreign language, target language, code-switching

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The focus on foreign language (FL) teaching has shifted to emphasising communication skills in recent years. According to new curricula in Finland, the goal of language teaching is to provide students with necessary abilities to handle various kinds of communicational situations (Peruskoulun opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2004). This approach has also brought teachers' language use to the centre of attention since they are considered as a significant source of target language (TL) input in FL settings (e.g. Turnbull 2001).

Previous research conducted in Finland has shown that Finnish English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers use considerable amounts of Finnish in their instruction (e.g. Nikula 2005, Hautamäki 2008). Thus, it is debatable whether teachers offer students enough input to develop their communication skills. However, it is also questionable how dependable these results are since the studies are only few and the data used have been rather limited. Furthermore, the research on teachers' language usage has mostly concentrated on analysing language switching or code-switching (e.g. Reini 2008). Meanwhile, teachers' own motives for using a certain language at a certain moment has been left to little notice. Hautamäki (2008) compared teachers' language usage and motives between special education and basic education, but otherwise this topic has thus far been somewhat overlooked in Finland.

In the following chapters, I present a study that focuses on EFL teachers' language usage and their motives for their language choices. The main concepts of the study are target language (TL or L2) and mother tongue or first language (L1) usage. They refer to the amount of the TL or the L1 used by language teachers, TL being English and L1 being Finnish in this case. I start by introducing the theoretical debate and the empirical findings related to the topic. Secondly, I move on to present the goals of the study and the research questions this study seeks to answer. In the same chapter, I also depict the research setting and the data gathering and analysis. In chapter 4, I present the findings and the results that are evident based on the data and that are

discussed and analysed further in chapter 5. Finally, I conclude the report by evaluating the course of this study and by bringing up ideas for further research. The last sections of the report consist of the bibliography and the appendix that includes the outline of the interviews conducted as a part of the study both in Finnish and English.

## **2 ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE USE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS**

This chapter presents the most important theoretical and empirical findings this study draws on. First, I introduce the discussion about the role of the target language and the learners' mother tongue in foreign language classrooms. Then, I depict the most important guidelines that direct teaching in Finnish EFL classrooms and studies that have examined the teachers' language usage in Finland. Also some methods of estimating the amount of a language used are discussed. In the last subsection, I describe the reasons teachers have given for their language choices in previous studies.

### **2.1 The role of the target language in foreign language classrooms**

The use of the target language and the mother tongue in FL classrooms has been an issue of much debate (e.g. Macaro 2001). In the 20th century, using the L1 in the classroom was discouraged based on the assumptions that the L2 should be kept separate from the L1 to prevent negative transfer, and that the most efficient teaching is modelled after L1 acquisition (Cook 2001). In reality, the two systems cannot and should not be separated in students' minds, and L1 and L2 learning cannot be treated as identical processes (Cook 2001). There are, still, arguments for using only the TL which include, for example, creating more real and natural communication situations (Macaro 2001). On the other hand, the use of some L1 is often seen as a valuable tool in language learning for the students as, for example, grammatical concepts can be explained more efficiently in the L1 (Turnbull 2001: 535).

There is little evidence supporting either point of view (Macaro 2001), but there seems to be a wider consensus that L1 should not be completely banned from the foreign language classroom (Macaro 2001, Cook 2001, Turnbull 2001). Since FL classrooms are, by definition, multilingual settings, also multilingual communication is bound to take place (Edmondson 2004: 156). Yet, the question of how much TL should be used remains. Cook (2001) argues that the L1 can be used extensively to convey meaning and check comprehension more efficiently, for explaining grammar so that the students understand better, for organizing tasks more effectively, for maintaining discipline, for giving feedback and praise more naturally, and for more effective testing. On the other hand, Turnbull (2001: 532) emphasizes the importance of exposing students to the TL input in settings where they do not often encounter the TL outside FL classrooms. In his opinion, the L1 can be used sparingly, but he points out that if the teacher does everything suggested by Cook using the L1, there are not that many “classroom functions left to be conducted in the TL” (Turnbull 2001: 537).

Even if we accept that using the students’ L1 is sometimes useful for FL learning, it has to be remembered that TL input is necessary for L2 acquisition (Duff and Polio 1990). As students in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings have limited opportunities to practise their English skills outside school, and as most of the talk in language classrooms is teacher talk (Cook 1996, as quoted by Hautamäki 2008: 5-6), it is a significant source of input. Turnbull (2001: 534) is convinced that teachers can enhance their students’ learning effectively by using the TL as much as possible. Furthermore, even though Finnish students very likely encounter English daily on TV and on the Internet, EFL lessons often provide the only opportunity for them to use the language in interaction with others orally. In addition, classroom communication enables students to learn to conclude the meaning of an L2 utterance even when one does not understand every word used (Cook 2001: 409). According to Edmondson (2004: 157-158), FL learning and communication are tightly related since communication is both the objective of learning the TL and an important means of learning it. Thus, the FL teacher should be obliged to provide the students with

meaningful opportunities to communicate in the TL in the language classroom, and the teacher's own use of the TL is an important part of this goal.

## **2.2 The controversy between guidelines and practice in Finland**

The guidelines for language teaching in Finland are portrayed in the National Curriculum for Finnish General Education (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet [POPS] 2004) which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR or CEF). Both of these documents rely on the functional way of looking at language stressing that language is, first and foremost, a means of communication and a social phenomenon (CEFR 2001). Learning English as a foreign language does not only involve studying grammatical structures but also gaining enough communicative competence in order to survive in different kinds of communicational situations (POPS 2004).

However, despite the functional and communicative goals in the National Curriculum and the CEF, English clearly seems to be the object of study in Finnish EFL classrooms whereas Finnish is the tool of studying (Nikula 2005). That is, teachers aim to teach English, but they do this via Finnish which, therefore, becomes the main language of instruction. Nikula came to this conclusion when she analyzed the functions of English and Finnish in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) classrooms and EFL classrooms in lower and upper secondary schools. Her EFL classroom data consisted of four lessons from a lower secondary school and two lessons from an upper secondary school. She noticed that there is a clear division of labour between the two languages in the EFL classrooms: Finnish is "used for grammar instruction, classroom management and in off-record discourse", and English is connected to dealing with teaching materials (Nikula 2005: 39).

Hautamäki (2008) compared EFL teachers' linguistic choices between special needs and basic education by videotaping one lesson of each. He found out that a seventh-grade EFL teacher in basic education used at least some English in 52.7% of language

instructions. However, the English used consisted mostly of examples and translations. Also very common aspects of classroom language such as greetings and page numbers were given in English. Discipline was mainly maintained in Finnish (Hautamäki 2008). Also Reini (2008) reports findings that are consistent with the previous studies mentioned. In her study on the functions of code-switching in EFL classroom discourse, 40% of a secondary school teacher's speech was in the TL.

It has to be noted that all of these studies vary in their method of estimating the amount of the TL and the L1 used. For example, Reini (2008) counted all meaningful words in Finnish and in English said by the teacher during the entire lessons. Hautamäki (2008) focused on the teacher's language instructions, and compared the amount of instructions in Finnish with the amount of instructions at least partly in English. For the sake of comparison, when Duff and Polio (1990) assessed university teachers' TL usage, they chose to listen to every fifteen seconds of the tape recordings of lessons, and determined the language of the utterance being spoken at that time.

### **2.3 Teachers' motives for their language choices**

There has been very little research conducted on the teachers' motives for their language choices in Finland. In fact, one of the only studies that directly seek to learn what kinds of motives teachers have for their language choices was conducted by Hautamäki (2008). The teachers he interviews confined to using Finnish because it seemed more practical in the sense that they perceived weaker pupils to have considerable problems with English. Other reasons for high L1 usage were habit formation and a lack of confidence as an English speaker (Hautamäki 2008: 15-16).

In international research settings, teachers' motives have been examined, for instance, by Duff and Polio (1990) who observed 13 university language teachers' use of L1 and L2 in the United States. Although the research settings differ significantly from the Finnish EFL classrooms in secondary schools, they state mostly similar findings as Hautamäki (2008). For example, grammar teaching and classroom



management were conducted in the students' L1. Practicality also came up as some teachers said it to be faster "to get their point across" in the L1 and some suspected that the students would not understand more TL (Duff and Polio 1990: 160-161). However, they found considerable variability in methods and language choices between different teachers.

This chapter summarized some points of the theoretical debate concerning the use of the TL and the L1 in foreign language classroom. It aimed to argue that while some use of the L1 can be helpful to FL learners, teachers should aspire to use as much TL as possible. It also brought out the clash between communicative guidelines and teachers' actions in Finland. Finally, the previous research results on teachers' motives for their language choices were discussed. The small number of studies to report these indicates that there is still clearly a need for further research in this field in Finland. Next, I will present this particular study and its aims in detail.

### **3 THE PRESENT STUDY**

In this section, I first present the goals of this study as well as the research questions. In the following subchapters, I will depict the way the data for this study was collected, and ponder on some of the other possible methods I could have chosen for conducting this research. Also the teachers and the classes that participated in the study are introduced, along with the contents of the lessons. Finally, I will present the methods that were used to analyze the data.

The goal of the present study was to get empirical evidence on the amount EFL teachers use the TL, and to gain some knowledge of their perceptions and ideas behind their language choices. Since the earlier studies conducted in Finland have concentrated on analyzing code-switching or depicting teachers' language usage, this study sought to introduce the teachers' point of view and their reasons for using the TL/L1, as suggested by Reini (2008). (For more information on code-switching see e.g. Reini 2008.)

The questions this study aimed to answer were as follows:

1. How much target language do EFL teachers use?
2. How do teachers justify their language choices?

### **3.1 The data gathering**

The first step in gathering the data was to contact two secondary school teachers who taught eight-formers, that is 14-15-year-olds, and to get their consent for conducting the study during their lessons. Eight-formers were chosen because the whole age group goes through the same educational system and because it is their sixth year of studying English and, therefore, they should presumably be able to understand instructions given in English. When the teachers had agreed to participate, I contacted the schools' headmasters to get their approval for my study. As the students were under-aged, also their guardians' permission had to be requested for videotaping them. This was done by giving out forms that the students were to return signed to the teacher. In class A, two students did not get the permission and could not attend the lesson, but in class B everybody who was not absent could take part in the study. I told the teachers that the lesson did not need to have any specific content but that it would be better if it was not focused on grammar, as I suspected that the current norm insists on grammar being taught in the L1.

The data from teacher A was gathered in February 2009 and from teacher B in March 2009. The research settings were adapted from Hautamäki (2008). One 45-minute lesson by each teacher was videotaped and audio recorded to ensure that everything the teacher said would be heard on the recording. The teachers were not told that the research concentrated on them, but instead, they were only told that the study was about classroom interaction. This approach was chosen because it was feared that the teachers might have changed their language use if they had known that it was the topic of the study. Unlike Hautamäki (2008), I stayed at the back of the classroom controlling the video camera as it was not possible to get a view over the whole classroom with a steady camera. This way I could also get a better idea of all the

communication patterns in the classroom. The students did not know me beforehand, but my presence did not seem to disturb them or affect their behaviour notably. Since teacher A did not stay close to her desk but instead moved among the students in the classroom most of the time, I was afraid that the audio recorder would not catch everything she said. Thus, I moved the audio recorder after the first ten minutes of the lesson from the teacher's desk to the first row of students' desk. There were no students using these desks and this way the recorder was closer to the teacher all the time.

A few hours after the lessons I interviewed the teachers asking them questions concerning their teaching background and experience and their language choices during the lesson. I also wanted to find out more about their opinions on their linguistic choices in general. The questions were partly adapted from Hautamäki (2008) and Duff and Polio (1990) and partly my own (see Appendix 1). They were also shown to two peers of mine to comment on them, and some modifications were made based on the feedback they gave. The interviews were conducted in Finnish as that was the mother tongue of all the participants and, thus, the participants could presumably express themselves more freely, and the atmosphere during the interviews was less formal. The interviews were audio recorded but not videotaped in order to enhance a relaxed, informal and conversational atmosphere.

In the beginning, I considered designing a questionnaire for the teachers but decided to conduct interviews. This way there was a possibility to ask clarifying questions and the setting was more flexible. Furthermore, I had a chance to create a personal contact with the teachers and observe their body language and reactions at the same time. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that although the questions were planned beforehand, their order or the word formatting was not very strict. This approach was chosen because I needed information on specific topics, but I did not want to restrict the teachers' own ideas and reflections in their answers. The interviews also had to be comparable with each other. The main function of

videotaping the lessons was to get objective information on the participants' language usage and, thus, to verify what they said in the interview.

### **3.2 The participants**

Participant A taught English and Swedish equally in a medium-sized school in the capital region. She had obtained the qualifications of a language teacher in the eighties, gone through a course for in-service teachers in the late nineties, and worked as a teacher in secondary school all in all for 25 years. Two students from her class were absent and another two did not get or forgot to ask the permission from their guardians and, because of that, could not attend the lesson. Thus, there were 11 students present. The teacher admitted after the lesson that the group was better than the average with about half of the students having a very good or excellent as a grade and 7 being the lowest grade in the class (on a scale from 4 to 10). (For more information on grading in Finland see POPS 2004.)

The second lesson took place in a medium-sized school in Central Finland. The teacher who originally agreed to take part in this study fell ill unexpectedly, and the videotaping had to be postponed. However, it was not possible to wait for the teacher to return to work because of the tight timeframe of this study, and thus, participant B was a substitute teacher. She had graduated as a qualified English teacher in 2007, but was working as a teaching assistant in special education in the school. She had very little teaching experience in English apart from the teacher training in university, although she sometimes taught English among all other subjects in the special education classes. The videotaped lesson was the second lesson she taught to the class in question. 16 students were present. There is no certain information on the level of the students or their grades, but participant B judged that it was an average class.

### **3.3 The lessons**

Lesson A was very student-driven and concentrated on communicational exercises. No textbooks were used, and the only material was a map of Europe with lists of European countries and names of nationalities. The students worked in groups and talked following the instructions given by the teacher. The teacher moved around in the classroom helping, correcting pronunciation, and giving new instructions. Once in a while, she lectured to the whole class and directed the conversations.

The other lesson included a wider variety of different types of tasks and activities. First, there were a short presentation by a group of students and a listen-and-repeat exercise on Irish. Then the class listened to a text in the textbook and read it aloud. The latter half of the lesson consisted of students doing exercises independently and checking them with the teacher in turns.

### **3.4 The method of analysis**

This study is mainly qualitative, as the greater part of the analysis concentrated on the interviews, i.e. the teachers' perceptions on the matter being investigated. The participants' answers were compared and contrasted with each other and with previous studies. The responses were also examined in the light of the course of events in the lessons.

However, determining how much TL and L1 was used during the lessons in question called for a quantitative approach. The contents of the lessons as well as the teaching methods used by the two teachers differed from one another considerably. Therefore, it was not possible to classify their speech acts under any useful categories, but instead I chose to apply a simple word count method adapted from Reini (2008). In this method, "all the intelligible words of English and Finnish used by the teacher are counted" (Reini 2008: 39). This means that only whole words are taken into account, and words that cannot be heard properly, names, and minimal responses that do not clearly belong to either language, for example "hmm", are left out, and contracted forms are counted as single words. (Reini 2008: 39.)

The problem with this method is that it is not possible to take into consideration the semantic and morphological differences in English and Finnish. For example, articles and prepositions are counted as words in English although they are not used in Finnish. (Reini 2008: 39.) These problems could have been avoided, had I counted sentences. However, since the participants occasionally used both TL and L1 in the same sentence, I judged the chosen method to give more exact results. Even though the word-count method gives only a very approximate result, it is accurate enough for the purposes of this study as more importance is given to the qualitative element.

## **4 FINDINGS**

In the previous chapter, I introduced the current study in detail discussing the data gathering, the participants and their lessons, and the methods used in analysing the data. Now, I will move on to present the findings of the study. I will start by presenting the results of the quantitative analysis. Then these results are connected to the teachers' interview answers on their aims in using the TL. Subsequently, I will continue with all the other findings from the interviews.

### **4.1 The participants' observed language use and their aims**

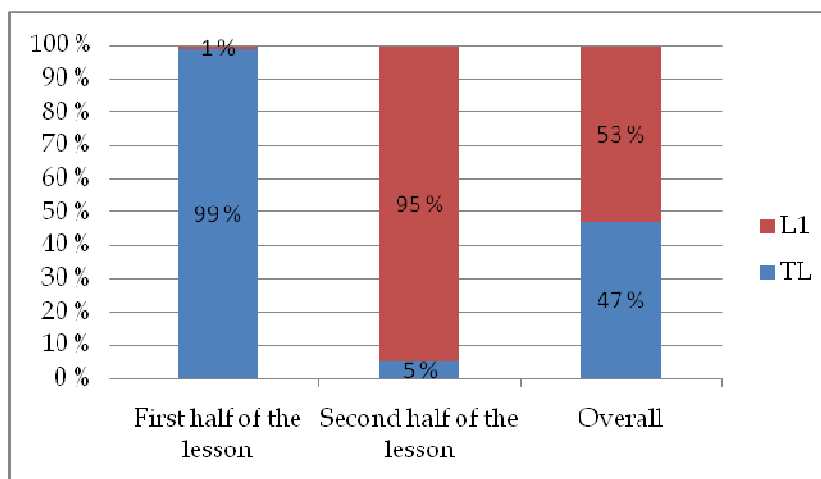
This subchapter shows the results of the quantitative analysis related to the participants' use of the TL and the L1. Their own estimations of how much English they normally use or intend to use are also presented as well as their motives behind those intentions.

The participants' language usage and practices differed a great deal. Teacher A spoke English virtually all the time. In fact, she said only three words in total in Finnish during the entire lesson. Thus, it was not necessary to apply the word count method to be able to conclude that she used practically 100% English. To use the terms

introduced by Nikula (2005), it is apparent that in her case the TL was not only the object of study but also very strongly the tool of foreign language learning.

Teacher B, in turn, used approximately 53% Finnish and 47% English. Interestingly, during the first half of the lesson (22-23 minutes) she spoke almost entirely English, and during the second half (22-23 minutes) almost entirely Finnish. At first, her TL usage was 99%, but during the second part of the lesson only 5%. These results are summarized in Figure 1. The Finnish used in the first half consisted of translations of instructions first given in English. The English used during the second half was mostly examples or single words that came up as a part of exercise instructions. It was completely related to dealing with teaching materials, which is common in EFL classrooms according to Nikula (2005). Surprisingly, English was first used as the tool of studying, but half way through the lesson this role shifted entirely to Finnish.

Figure 1. The percentages of teacher B's language usage



As could already be concluded based on the lesson, teacher A affirmed in the interview that she aimed to use as much English as possible. She admitted that when new students started her classes they were sometimes confused but had observed that they always got used to it (Example 1).

Example 1 (Interview):

A: Sithän oppilaat usein sanoo alkuun just seiskalla, kun ne tulee, et "ei me ymmärretä mitään, mitä sä puhut", mut sitten vaan ku jatkaa, ni huomaa, että kyl ne rupee ymmärtämään.

A: And then pupils often say in the beginning of the seventh grade, when they come [to this school] that "we don't understand anything you're saying", but when you just continue, you'll notice that they do start to understand.

She also found this language policy very helpful for the weaker students, and thus, using Finnish did not seem necessary in her opinion. To make this work, teacher A stressed consistency and teachers' ability to modify the language they use to fit the students' skills. In addition, she had observed that students liked it that she spoke English all the time, and she felt that it gave them possibilities for learning to conclude the meaning of utterances and, thus, meaningful learning opportunities.

Teacher B, alike, stated in the interview that she normally intended to use as much TL as possible because she wanted to expose the students to English. She stressed the importance of knowing the students' skills and using English in all instructions that they should be able to understand (Example 2).

Example 2 (Interview):

B: No esimerkiksi tämmöset hyvin yksinkertaset "turn to page fifty-four and (.) do exercise one", mitä nyt ikinä onkaan. Et siis silleen tämmöset, mitkä on niinku ensinnäki tosi yksinkertasia. Niiden pitäis ne ymmärtää.

B: Well, for example these kinds of very simple [instructions like] "turn to page fifty-four and (.) do exercise one", whatever they are. So like those that are like very simple to begin with. They [the students] should understand them.

These statements, however, somewhat contradict with her actual language use in the lesson as she gave, for instance, all page numbers in Finnish during the second half of the lesson as is shown in Example 3.

Example 3 (Classroom):

B: Sitten ois tämmönen kun 6 A seuraavalla sivulla. 190 sivulla.

B: Then there would be this [exercise] 6 A on the next page. Page 190.



## 4.2 The role and functions of the L1

There were some situations in which both teachers had a habit of speaking Finnish. First, they stated that they always taught grammar in Finnish in accordance with the normal practice in Finnish FL classrooms. In my experience, this is also in line with the instructions commonly given in teacher training. Some of teacher A's students had even asked her to do it in English, but she was afraid that teaching grammar in English would make it too difficult. Secondly, they also said that they sometimes used Finnish for administrative purposes. In these cases, teacher A, however, always first used English to reprimand, whereas teacher B mainly used Finnish because she wanted to make sure that the pupils comprehend the message. These statements cannot be verified by the lesson recordings as neither teacher had to take any actions to maintain discipline. Thirdly, both teachers explained that they had to resort to Finnish if a student clearly did not understand something. There was no example of such behaviour in teacher A's lesson, but Example 4 illustrates a case in point from teacher B's lesson. Still, both said that they usually try to use body language first to make the meaning clear or say the same thing in other words.

Example 4 (Classroom):

B: What about the content? (Silence.) What about the content of the project? (Silence.) Niin sisältö. Oisko jotain kommentoitavaa sisällöstä?

B: What about the content? (Silence.) What about the content of the project? (Silence.) So, the content. Do you have anything to comment on the content?

One situation in which teacher A normally used the L1 came up during the videotaped lesson. Although she used body language, synonyms and longer explanations to make the meaning of an unknown word clear to the students, she found that it was better to give the Finnish translation than to leave a difficult word or concept "hanging in the air". This is illustrated in Example 5:

Example 5 (Classroom):

A: Can you guess what this is (points at a word on the black board)? What is 'famine'? That goes with poverty, hmm, when you don't have enough food. Then you suffer from famine. What could that be? So you're hungry all the time.

S1: Onks se korvike tai joku?

'Is it a substitute or something?'

A: No, no, you're hungry all the time (gestures with her hands).

S2: No nälkä.

'Well, hunger.'

A: Yeah, yeah, nälänhätä. And there was something that happened in the end of the nineteenth 'famine'

century that made this famine very real to many, many families.

Teacher B, on the other hand, had a habit of choosing which language to use based on the exercises. If there was an exercise that required her to use Finnish, she rather used it all the time than switched from one language into the other constantly. She said that she usually told the students when she was going to switch the language as she also did during the videotaped lesson in Example 6. This sentence also marked the shift from English to Finnish as the primary language of instruction.

Example 6 (Classroom):

B: Okay, so let's check it. You were really quick. So. Itse asiassa käydään suomeks tää, kun nää kysymyksetkin on suomeks.

B: Okay, so let's check it. You were really quick. So. Actually, let's go through this in Finnish as these questions are also in Finnish.

### 4.3 Participants' reflections on oral skills and language use

In addition to questions about the views on and motives behind language choices, the teachers were asked about some aspects that might have affected their language use. This included inquiries about the participants' estimations of their oral skills in English, about guidelines they had been given when they studied to become EFL teachers, along with their perceptions of how their language usage had changed over their career. Obviously, teacher A was able to answer the last query more profoundly as she her career had been significantly longer.

Both participants were satisfied with their oral skills in English and especially with their pronunciation. Teacher A, on the other hand, admitted that there was a need to upgrade her vocabulary. In addition, she had noticed that she sometimes made mistakes in the word order or started a sentence but had not thought it quite through and had to finish it differently, which resulted in peculiar sentences as can be seen in Example 7. However, she felt confident speaking English to her students on the whole.

Example 7 (Classroom):

A: Alright, so the person in this chapter (.) who was interviewed.

Teacher B acknowledged that she had occasionally some difficulties in coming up with the right word but stated that she had similar difficulties in her native Finnish and did not think of it as a problem. She also mentioned that she used English daily in international communication on the Internet both orally and in writing. All in all, she was extremely content with her oral skills and thought of them as her forte.

Teacher A did not remember what kind of guidelines she had been given in university since it had been such a long time since her education. When she had been a schoolgirl herself in the seventies, the common norm had forbidden all use of the mother tongue. When she was asked if her language use had changed during her 25 years of teaching, she remarked that she had always wanted to use a lot of English, but that she probably used more English now because it has got easier as the students' initial skills in English are substantially better these days. She also admitted that she had never really thought about her own linguistic choices in the lessons.

Teacher B said that she intended to follow the guidelines given to her during the teacher training in her university studies, but the most important thing was to use common sense in deciding which language to use. She admitted that she probably used more Finnish now that she was teaching special education pupils because their knowledge of English was not as good as the basic education pupils'. Also

Hautamäki (2008: 20) reported that generally accepted teaching methods for special education allowed more Finnish to be used by the teacher. Participant B thought that there was no particular need to think about her language choices as they came naturally and it was easy to decide during an activity which language worked better.

In this section, the main findings of this study were presented. It included results obtained by the quantitative word-count method in addition to the answers the participants gave to the interview questions. These were organized into their aims regarding TL usage, the functions in which they used the L1, and their own assessment of their oral skills and other possible factors affecting their language usage.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, I intend to connect my results with the theoretical debate in chapter 2 and discuss the possible implications of the results. I will start by identifying and examining the surprising elements of the results as well as those that were in line with earlier findings. Then, I will progress to ponder over the possible reasons behind the participants' language choices, especially why teacher A used so much English and why teacher B switched into Finnish half way through the lesson. Also the factors affecting the teachers' motives and interview answers are considered. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by considering the deficiencies in this study in addition to proposals for further research.

### **5.1 Relation to previous studies**

This study offered interesting results in the sense that they differ from the outcomes of previous studies conducted in this field in Finland. No study thus far to my knowledge has found teachers who would use as much English as teacher A in this piece of research. Participant B's language use was also exceptional and unexpected as she first used almost solely English to conduct all possible classrooms functions

and then switched to do the same in Finnish. Thus, these results present a wider variety of teacher practices in Finnish EFL settings.

Teacher A's language use was consistent throughout the lesson, it was guided by her own experience, and it was contradictory to previous findings in many ways. For example, she saw extensive TL usage as beneficial rather than troublesome for weaker students. Teacher B's lessons had two parts that were completely distinct in relation to her language usage. First, her actions followed similar lines as teacher A's and her TL usage was nearly full-time. The second half, however, resembled more the previously reported results by Hautamäki (2008) and Nikula (2005) as the target language provided was completely connected to teaching materials. Yet, her L1 use went to such a great extent that the second half compassed considerably less TL than any lesson in earlier studies. Still, the beginning of her class as well as teacher A's class go to show that substantial TL usage is not a hindrance for successful and fluent EFL lessons. This indicates that teachers' fear that using more TL would be harmful or troublesome for weaker students (Hautamäki 2008) is possibly groundless or exaggerated. Furthermore, it is useful to find out that all EFL teachers' TL use is not as minimal as the earlier studies in Finland have shown.

Some findings from both teachers were also in accordance with the previous studies. Neither participant wanted to exclude the use of the L1 completely, but they did want to expose the students to as much spoken TL as possible. These views are similar to those presented by Turnbull (2001) and Edmondson (2004) (see Chapter 2). The hypothesis that grammar is always taught in the L1 in Finnish schools was also confirmed. The other functions reserved for the L1, namely reprimanding and translations, were also in line with previous studies, but there were fewer functions and they were used less frequently. The participants were mostly unaware of their language use as stated by Duff and Polio (1990: 163). Nonetheless, this factor seems to be quite personal, since the teachers in Hautamäki's study (2008) "were surprisingly aware of their motives concerning their linguistic choices" (p. 22).

## 5.2 As much English as possible

The fact that both teachers said in the interview that they wanted to use as much English as possible but their practises differed markedly is worthy of notice. Apparently, they had different concepts of what is possible. A slight difference in attitudes could also be detected in the interviews. Teacher B concentrated more on what the students might not understand and wanted to use the L1 to ensure comprehension, which is likely to be at least partly a result of her not knowing the students or how good they were in English. Teacher A, on the other hand, seemed to have more faith in the students' skills and used Finnish only as the last choice.

It is possible and even likely that in some other circumstances teacher A would have used some more Finnish in her instruction. Class A's skills in English were above average, and for that reason it is possible that she might have used more L1 had the level of the students been lower. In addition, it has to be noted that grammar instruction would have noticeably increased the amount of Finnish used, and that possibility also exists if they had been dealing with a new text, checking exercises, or doing something similar that would have required Finnish examples or translations. Such activities were not part of the videotaped lesson.

However, even though there might have been more Finnish, there is no reason to believe that the main part of instructions would not have been in English. Participant A had clearly adopted English as the tool of studying the language and did so with consistency, teaching grammar being the only exception. Hautamäki (2008) reported habit formation as a reason for excessive use of Finnish, but I believe that it works both ways. Teacher A had clearly formed a habit of conducting lessons almost entirely in English. Although she had not consciously thought of her language usage, she had good experiences of using nearly exclusively English as well as well-thought-of reasons for it. She found students to be satisfied with the practice, and it fitted her idea of good pedagogy and had become an established teaching practice for her.

Teacher B had a pedagogical reason for switching into Finnish in the first place, and for example Nikula (2005: 34) has observed that teachers use code-switching to mark activity boundaries. However, there was no apparent reason for shifting to Finnish as the tool of studying for the whole rest of the lesson. She was not asked about this specific action in the interview, but some conclusions can be drawn based on her answers and her background. Although teacher B reported that it is easy and natural to speak English to the students, it might have still felt easier and more practical to use Finnish since it was the L1 of all the participants in the class, as indicated by Duff and Polio (1990). Since teacher B aimed for substantial TL usage, it was probably not a conscious choice to switch the language permanently after checking the exercise that initiated the switch. On one hand, this reasoning makes it possible that this was only a one-time incident and that teacher B may usually use more TL. On the other hand, it is also likely that these kinds of switches take place rather often since she did not think about or feel a need to think about her language choices beforehand. A plausible reason behind this behaviour is her lack of experience and know-how as a newly graduated English teacher. Another reason might be that, as she admitted using more Finnish when teaching students English in the special education class, these practices might have been transferred into her language use in basic education too.

### **5.3 Motives behind language choices**

It was easier for both teachers to identify functions for the L1 than for the TL. This was because Finnish had a few distinct roles in their instructions and basically all the rest was carried out in English (if the second half of teacher B's lesson is not counted in). Their main principle was to enhance students' learning by exposing them to the TL. This was followed by secondary principles that directed the use of the L1. Grammar teaching was doubtless influenced by the common norm and the belief that it would prove to be too difficult to teach it in English as was presented in Chapter 2. This seems to be an issue that only few teachers even think about.

Moreover, reprimanding students in Finnish was based on making sure that they understood, but other probable reasons included getting their attention and practicality. Practicality was also likely to play a role when the teachers decided to give Finnish translations and explanations since it was faster than other methods of clarifying the meaning of an utterance. This point of view was, as I mentioned in chapter 2, already brought up by Duff and Polio (1990).

It is interesting to note that neither participant mentioned the POPS or the CEFR as their guidelines in determining their language choices. The most obvious reason is that these communicative and functional goals are not stated clearly enough in them. Neither did the participants mention any school policies concerning teachers' language use. This goes to show how independently Finnish secondary school teachers work and how wide decision-making powers they have over their own work.

All in all, it can be concluded that teaching is a very independent profession in Finland. TL and L1 is evidently one of the aspects that each teacher chooses themselves based on their individual experiences, influences and beliefs. Still, one factor that seems to indicate how much TL teachers are likely to use arises from this study together with Hautamäki's research (2008). He reported teachers' lack of confidence as English-speakers as a reason for resorting to Finnish. The participants of this study stated opposing attitudes, which were apparent in how many functions they used English in and how much they spoke it. Thus, teachers' confidence in their language skills is likely to increase the amount of the TL used.

#### **5.4 Deficiencies in the present study**

As many of the qualitative studies on this topic conducted in Finland, this one, too, is so limited that it is impossible to make any generalizations based on it. The small amount of data is clearly inadequate to exclude coincidences and unusual behaviour that may have taken place on the videotaped lesson, even though the interviews gave



more sustainable grounds for examining the participants' language use in general. Yet, the possible effects of the participants' individual teaching methods, of the classes in question, and of the dissimilar activities during the lessons on the results cannot be ruled out. A major problem with the research setting was that teacher B was a substitute teacher and became part of the study very abruptly. Since she was not very familiar with the class, it is possible that the situation affected her language usage as well as all other behaviour in the lesson. It is likely that she had not had enough teaching experience to form permanent and well-thought-of guidelines for her teaching practices. Additionally, she did not have similar opportunities to prepare or plan the lesson that was videotaped as a regular teacher would have had. Thus, it can be concluded that, for example, the participants' background should be investigated in greater detail beforehand and the research setup should be more controlled in order to be able to obtain more dependable results.

One disadvantage with the research settings was that it was difficult to compare and contrast the language usage of these two teachers mainly because the contents of the lessons were so different. Therefore, I suggest that further research should concentrate on teachers' language use in relation to specific activities or tasks, for example, working with the textbooks, guiding conversational exercises, or checking vocabulary exercises. In addition, there is a need for new results concerning the effects of TL usage on learning results as already pointed out by Duff and Polio (1990: 163). As the debate presented in Chapter 2 (see above) shows, it still cannot be objectively concluded how effective or beneficial substantial use of the TL is for the students.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

Unlike previous research by for instance Nikula (2005) and Hautamäki (2008) has claimed, all EFL teaching in Finland does not rely heavily on the mother tongue. Yet, the results of this small-scale study are not enough to challenge their findings. Instead, rather than confirming or contradicting previous research results on this

topic, this study presented a wider spectrum of teachers' linguistic practices. The results represent an experienced English teacher who used the TL practically all the time giving only very few single-word translations in Finnish. The other participant was an inexperienced substitute teacher who first used almost entirely TL and switched in the middle of the lesson to use nearly exclusively L1, which resulted in an average of 47% target language used.

Both of the participants expressed a will to use the TL substantially in their instruction. This was evident in the case of teacher A, but the fact that teacher B failed to follow this personal guideline indicates that teachers' actions are not always in line with their motives and principles, or that their language choices are not always conscious. It can also be seen as a result of her lack of experience. Although the participants stressed the importance of the TL usage, they had no desire to ban the L1 from the EFL classroom. In line with all previous studies, these teachers used L1 to teach grammar and it also played a role in maintaining discipline. They also saw it as a necessary tool in case a student failed to understand the TL.

Based on all the earlier research results in connection with this one, Finnish teachers seem to have rather wide decision-making powers in their classrooms. It appears that the language of teaching is each individual teacher's own personal decision which is not greatly affected by the national curriculum. The only aspect identified to predict teachers' TL usage was their confidence in their oral skills in the TL. Due to the limited amount of data used in this study, no generalizations could be drawn. Thus, further research to enlighten the matter and give more information on the topic is needed in order to get a fuller picture of teachers' language usage and their motives.

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## APPENDIX 1, The interview questions

The interviews were conducted in Finnish, but the English translation of the interview questions is provided for the benefit of the reader.

1. Minkälaisen koulutuksen olet saanut englannin kielen opettamiseen ja milloin?
  2. Onko sinulla muita merkittäviä oppimiskokemuksia englannin kieleen tai sen opettamiseen liittyen?
  3. Kuinka kauan olet opettanut englantia ja millä luokka-asteilla?
  4. Kuinka arvioisit englannin kielen suullista taitoasi?
  5. Arvioi, kuinka paljon englantia puhut tunneillasi keskimäärin.
  6. Missä tilanteissa käytät yleensä tai pyrit käyttämään englantia tunneillasi ja miksi?
  7. Minkälaisissa tilanteissa on mielestäsi parempi käyttää suomea?
  8. Eroavatko käytäntösi koulutuksesi aikana annetuista ohjeista?
  9. Onko englannin ja suomen käyttösi muuttunut opettajaurasi aikana? Miten?
  10. Minkä verran suunnittelet kielivalintojasi etukäteen?
  11. Minkälainen tämän ryhmän kielitaito on verrattuna yleiseen englannin kielen tasoon samassa ikäryhmässä?
- 
1. What kind of an education do you have as a teacher of English and when did you get it?
  2. Do you recall any other meaningful learning experiences related to teaching English?
  3. How long have you been teaching English and in which grades?
  4. How would you evaluate your oral skills in the English language?
  5. Could you estimate how much English you normally use during your lessons?
  6. In which situations do you use or attempt to use English in your lessons? Why?
  7. In which situations do you prefer using Finnish?
  8. Do your linguistic choices differ from the guidelines you when given in your studies?
  9. Have your linguistic choices changed during your career as an EFL teacher and how?
  10. How much do you plan your language choices beforehand?
  11. How does this group compare to the general level of English skills in their age group?