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Author(s): Pitkänen-Huhta, Anne; Mäntylä, Katja

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Anne Pitkänen-Huhta* and Katja Mäntylä
**Teachers negotiating multilingualism in the
EFL classroom**

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Abstract: This article sets out to explore English as foreign language (EFL) teachers' views of teaching migrant pupils with multilingual backgrounds in a regular classroom. Previous studies on multilingual pupils have mostly concentrated on second language learning contexts or on the role of pupils' L1. In an increasingly multilingual world and due to growing migration, this study concentrates on EFL. The data were interviews with English teachers (n=7), who reflected on their experiences with migrant pupils in the foreign language classroom. The data were analysed through qualitative content analysis. The participants had not really pondered on the role of multilingualism in the EFL classroom and some underlying preconceptions could be detected. Teachers' perception of the multilingual pupil was controversial in that they did not want to draw attention to the linguistic background of the pupil but, on the other hand, they had noticed that multilingual learners had greater language awareness than their mainstream peers. Although not fully aware of the potential of multilingualism and the pupils' linguistic resources in EFL teaching, the teachers had used several ways of supporting their multilingual learners, reflecting the principles of translanguaging.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, English language teaching, multilingualism, multilingual learners, English as a foreign language

Tiivistelmä: Tässä artikkelissa tutkimme suomalaisten englanninopettajien käsityksiä maahanmuuttajaoppilaista, joilla on monikielinen tausta, vieraan kielen luokkahuoneessa. Aiemmat tutkimukset monikielisistä oppijoista ovat keskittyneet toisen kielen oppimiseen tai oppijan äidinkieleen. Tässä tutkimuksessa keskitymme englantiin vieraana kielenä, sillä maailma on aiempaa monikielisempi ja liikkuvuus yleisempää kuin ennen. Aineistona on englannin opettajien haastattelut (n=7), joissa he pohtivat kokemuksiaan maahanmuuttajaoppilaista vie-

***Corresponding author: Professor Anne Pitkänen-Huhta**, University of Jyväskylä, Department of Language and Communication Studies, PO Box 35, Jyväskylä,
E-Mail: anne.pitkanen-huhta@jyu.fi

Dr. Katja Mäntylä, University of Turku, School of Languages and Translation Studies, Turku,
E-Mail: katja.mantyla@utu.fi

raan kielen oppitunnilla. Analyysimenetelmänä oli laadullinen sisällönanalyysi. Tulokset osoittavat, että osallistujat eivät olleet pohtineet monikielisyttä englannin oppitunnilla, mutta joitain ennakkokäsityksiä voitiin havaita. Opettajien käsitykset monikielisistä oppilaista olivat ristiriitaisia: he eivät halunneet johdattaa huomiota oppilaan kielelliseen taustaan, mutta toisaalta he olivat havainneet monikielisten oppijoiden olevan luokkatovereitaan kielitietoisempia. Vaikkakaan opettajat eivät tunnistanee oppilaiden kielellisiä resursseja ja pohtineet monikielisuuden mahdollisuuksia, he olivat tukeneet monikielisiä oppilaita monia eri kielellisiä keinoja käyttäen.

Abstrakt: I den här artikeln undersöker vi finländska engelsklärarens uppfattningar om invandrarelever med flerspråkig bakgrund vid undervisning av främmande språk. Tidigare studier om flerspråkiga inlärare har fokuserat på inläring av andraspråk eller på inlärares förstaspråk. Vi lägger däremot vårt fokus här på engelska som främmande språk, eftersom världen är mer flerspråkig och mobilitet vanligare än förr. Materialet består av intervjuer av engelsklärare (n= 7), där lärarna resonerar kring sina erfarenheter av invandrarelever på språklektioner. Analysmetoden är kvalitativ innehållsanalys. Resultaten visar att deltagarna inte hade funderat på förekomsten av flerspråkighet på engelsklektionerna, men de visade sig ändå ha några uppfattningar om frågan. Uppfattningarna om flerspråkiga elever var motstridiga: å ena sidan ville de intervjuade lärarna inte fästa uppmärksamhet vid elevens språkliga bakgrund, men å andra sidan hade de noterat att flerspråkiga elever är mer språkmedvetna än sina klasskamrater. Även om lärarna inte identifierade elevernas språkliga resurser och inte tänkte på de möjligheter som flerspråkighet medför, hade de stöttat flerspråkiga elever på många olika sätt.

1 Introduction

This article sets out to explore what multilingualism means in English as a foreign language (EFL) education. The focal context is Finland, a country that has two national languages and a growing migrant population. More specifically, the aim is to examine how teachers perceive the migrant pupils with multilingual backgrounds in their EFL classroom and how they take these pupils into account in their classroom practices. Multilingualism and especially the multilingual student have gained considerable attention in recent years. Language education in particular has been examined, but the focus has mostly been on bi/multilingual education in second language learning contexts or on the role of students' first languages in second language education (e.g., Hornberger 2003; Cummins 2003;

García 2009). In other words, the focus has been on contexts where the majority language used in the environment and in education is an additional language to the student. Very little, if any, attention has been paid to multilingualism in foreign language education, i.e., to contexts where the language taught has no official role in that society and is mainly taught in institutions (see, however, Kramsch 2014; Lo Bianco 2014).

The context of this study is a Northern European country, Finland, where English is prominently present in society but where it has no official status. There are two national languages in Finland, Finnish and Swedish, the latter being the L1 of ca. 5 % of the population. In addition, there are minority languages (Sámi, Roma, sign language) that have some rights guaranteed in law. In the case of English, it is not quite accurate to consider it in the same vein as other foreign languages (FL), as it is so deeply present in people's everyday lives, education and working life (Leppänen et al. 2011). English also has a special status as a *lingua franca* in the Finnish National Core Curriculum (NCC 2014), separating it from other foreign languages taught at school. In this article, we use, however, the term *foreign language* to separate our research context from the ones where English is the first language of the majority of people and/or where it is the language of education at all or most levels.

In the Finnish context, the teaching of English (and other FLs) has often been considered a neutral phenomenon and the group of learners has been homogeneous, with one of the national languages as their first language. This idealized situation is, however, no longer the case in most Finnish schools. Due to increasing flows of migration all over Europe, Finnish classrooms are also increasingly multilingual. This linguistic diversification of classrooms and the expanding linguistic repertoires of the students should have an effect on how foreign languages, in this case English, are taught in the classrooms. However, it seems that neither the teaching materials nor teachers and teacher education have much reacted to these changes: English is still most often taught through Finnish and with the assumption that the linguistic background of the learners is homogeneous (Puukko et al. 2019). It has to be noted here that we focus especially on the multilingualism brought about by increasing migration but we are fully aware that there is a great deal of everyday multilingualism among the students created by globalization and linguistic practices. As Kramsch (2012) points out, despite the fact that multilingualism is today more prevalent in societies and individuals' lives than ever before, education is mostly organized for monolinguals.

The altered situation also shows in the newest NCC (2014) in Finland that came into force in 2016. There is a strong emphasis on promoting multilingualism and -culturalism in the NCC. Schools write their own curricula based on the NCC and this means that teachers need to take a stand on multilingualism in their

classrooms. It is therefore vital to understand how teachers enact growing multilingualism in their daily work, as it has been established in research that the knowledge base of teachers guides their pedagogical choices (e.g., Alsup 2006; Basturkmen 2012) and, moreover, that teaching practices are essential in what and how the learners learn (e.g., Lucas and Villegas 2013). More recently, teachers' beliefs and perceptions have also been considered influential in their teaching practices (Mercer and Kostoulas 2018; Mäntylä and Kalaja 2019). There is, however, very little knowledge of whether any of the ideals of multilingual approaches have reached the classrooms (Paquet-Gauthier and Beaulieu 2015).

Empirical research on this issue has been scarce (see, however, Linderoos 2016; Illman and Pietilä 2018) and there is thus an evident gap in research. The aim of this study is to contribute to the discussion on multilingualism in EFL education with empirical evidence from interviews with teachers of English. In order to shed light on teachers' beliefs and perceptions of the role of multilingualism in teaching EFL we ask, firstly, how teachers of English characterize and perceive multilingual learners in their classrooms, and secondly, how they support multilingual learners in their EFL classrooms.

2 Multilingualism and foreign language education

In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to multilingualism in societies and in individuals' lives, even to the extent that scholars talk about a multilingual turn in language research (e.g. May 2014; Conteh and Meier 2014; Douglas Fir group 2016; Meier 2017). In line with recent developments in research on multilingualism, several researchers (e.g. Ortega 2014; Kramsch 2014; Leung and Scarino 2016) have criticized the monolingual bias in much of second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language research and practice. But still "in many English language learning contexts worldwide, monolingual practices continue to dominate even when the opportunity for more translingual approaches to language learning exist" (Anderson 2017: 26).

According to a holistic and dynamic approach to multilingualism (e.g. Cenoz and Gorter 2011; Duarte and Günther-van der Meij 2018), multilingual education does not only mean that multiple languages are constantly used, but it also means that we recognize the value of all languages and the multiple resources of all students. The approach is thus above all ideological and it is related to the view of language as a multimodal resource and to the focus on individuals' repertoires rather than competences (Pennycook 2010; Canagarajah 2013; Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Blackledge and Creese 2010; García 2009; Wei 2011). Multilingual language users use different semiotic resources to different extents in differ-

ent contexts and for varying purposes. The concept of translanguaging – and its related concepts of metrolingualism (Otsuji and Pennycook 2009), polylingual languaging (Jørgensen 2008), translingual practice (Canagarajah 2013) – has been used to describe language practices that go beyond the labeled and separated languages and to adhere to the dynamic use of all multimodal and multilingual resources (e.g. Creese and Blackledge 2010; García 2009, 2019; Wei 2017). Translanguaging can be seen as an individual's way of using languages or as a pedagogical practice. As a pedagogical practice, it is potentially a liberating and powerful tool, as Wei (2017, 7) points out:

By deliberately breaking the artificial and ideological divides between indigenous versus immigrant, majority versus minority, and target versus mother tongue languages, translanguaging empowers both the learner and the teacher, transforms the power relations, and focuses the process of teaching and learning on making meaning, enhancing experience, and developing identity. (Wei, 2017, 7)

It is not only bilinguals who draw on their different linguistic resources but all language learners, and the aim of language learning is not the practically unattainable full competence in a given language (see e.g. Harsch 2017). The focus of FL education should thus not be on language as a bounded entity, which is based on nation states and native speaker ideals as models. There are, however, potential clashes at the practical level. In schools, FL education is organized under the labels of different languages. In the Finnish context, as in many other European countries, these are typically European languages or languages in the neighbouring areas, such as English, German, French, Russian, and Spanish. Teachers are educated to specialize in teaching one or two languages. There is thus no institutionally determined multilingualism in or translanguaging across the school subjects. Moreover, foreign language teachers struggle between the ideals of multilingualism, on the one hand, and their traditional task in teaching the national language, culture and history, on the other (Kramersch and Huffmaster 2015). As Ortega (2019: 32) puts it: “Language educators working in foreign language contexts are generally averse to translanguaging because their main concern has always been with maximizing use of the target language during instruction”. There have, however, been calls for promoting multilingual approaches in FL language education (Kramersch 2014; Lo Bianco 2014; Kramersch and Huffmaster 2015) and in EFL education (e.g., Abney and Krulatz 2015), but there are very few empirical studies, as Gunnarson et al. (2015) also note about the Swedish context.

Some studies have been conducted on bi/multilingual learners in FL education. It has been found that bi/multilingual learners are not acknowledged in FL education even though teachers may be aware of the valuable resources that these learners bring into the classroom (Linderoos 2016). Linderoos (2016) also

found that the teachers lacked means and methods to take the learners' first languages into account and they did not cooperate with legal guardians of the learners to gain more insight into their linguistic backgrounds and experiences. It has also been found that teachers consider teaching English in multilingual classrooms more challenging than in linguistically homogeneous classrooms, that the challenges are more varied in multilingual classrooms (Harju-Autti 2014), and that teachers struggle to find means to support multilingual pupils in their EFL classrooms (Ilman and Pietilä 2018). However, all of the above studies have concluded that both teachers and pupils value multilingualism and see it as an asset.

The three studies referred to above have been conducted in Finland, but similar observations concerning FL education have been made in other contexts. Navracsics and Molnár (2017) note on the basis of their analysis of FL education in Hungary that no matter what foreign language is taught to students, the assumption is that the students are monolingual speakers who are learning an additional language. "There is little consideration in the language classroom and on the teacher training programs of adopting a more multilingual approach to language teaching" (Navracsics and Molnár 2017: 38). Similarly, Tholin (2014: 265) notes that the basis for English language learning in Sweden "is still Swedish culture and 'Swedishness'" and "this gives students with Swedish backgrounds better preconditions for attaining the learning goals and receiving better grades in English than those of students with other cultural backgrounds."

As to classroom practices, there is a growing number of studies on translanguaging in language education in general (see e.g., Paulsrud et al. 2017) but next to none concerning EFL classrooms even though the role of English as a lingua franca may well be considered calling for a particular approach. There have been a few studies that have examined young learners' (Portolés and Martí 2017) and adults' (Anderson 2017) as well as teachers' (Ortega 2019) translanguaging practices in EFL classrooms and Kramsch and Huffmaster (2015) have presented some practical ideas for translanguaging in FL classrooms. In addition, studies on multilingual learners are plenty (see e.g., Kalaja and Melo-Pfeifer 2019), but they concentrate more on multilingual identities rather than classroom practices.

There is thus a narrow pool of studies that indicate that multilingualism is seen as an asset also in the EFL classroom, but there is little evidence that multilingualism would show in classroom practices. The studies further show that teachers struggle to tackle multilingualism in the EFL classroom. It seems thus that we still lack an in-depth understanding of how EFL teachers perceive their multilingual learners and how they aim at supporting them in the classroom and the current study wishes to contribute to filling this gap.

3 Teacher beliefs

As mentioned above, it is crucial to understand how teachers deal with growing multilingualism in their EFL classrooms, as teacher beliefs are influential in their teaching practices (Mercer and Kostoulas 2018; Mäntylä and Kalaja 2019). Teacher psychology has been studied for decades, for instance through teacher attitudes, emotions and beliefs. Mercer and Kostoulas (2018) refer to a number of studies on teacher cognition, a term which they explain to include teacher knowledge, beliefs and thinking processes. Teacher beliefs, in their turn, entail beliefs about learners, learning, language, curriculum, materials, and so on (e.g., Burns 1996), all of which affect classroom practices, and have an impact on how teachers react to changes (Burns 1996, Barcelos and Kalaja 2013, Borg 2017). Beliefs are based on our personal and social experiences, and they are dynamic in nature (Barcelos and Kalaja 2013), socially constructed and contextually situated (Barcelos 2015). Hence, what is happening in society around us and what we face and experience mold our beliefs.

Beliefs can be organized into clusters (Barcelos and Kalaja 2013), forming networks (Burns 1996). They are manifested in not only what we do and how we act, but also in how we speak about and describe our thoughts. However, beliefs about, for instance, classroom practices can also be implicit and unconscious (Burns 1996). This may sometimes result in practices that are not necessarily reflecting our more explicit beliefs (e.g., Barcelos and Kalaja 2013).

Beliefs have been studied via various methods, including questionnaires and more recently via more qualitative methods such as interviews or narratives, including visual narratives (e.g., Barcelos 2015). In this study, we approach teacher beliefs on multilingualism in the EFL classroom through teacher interviews.

4 Languages and language education in Finland

The context of this study, Finland, has traditionally been seen as a bilingual country since there are two national languages in the Finnish constitution, Finnish and Swedish. In addition, the Sámi language has a status of a home language, which means that speakers of Sámi are entitled to education and dealing with authorities in their L1 in the Sámi area (FINLEX). The reality is different, though. Only a very narrow margin are fluent in both Finnish and Swedish, and on the other hand, just like in Europe in general, the number of migrants and speakers of other languages has grown rapidly. According to Official Statistics of Finland (2018), in 2017, there were almost 370,000 (6.6 % of the whole population of ca. 5.5 million) people of foreign origin. Altogether 6.4 % of the population had an L1 other than

Finnish, Swedish or Sámi. There are over 120 home languages spoken in Finland, the biggest foreign language groups being Russian, Estonian, Arabic and Somali. In just three years, the number of speakers of other languages has grown by almost 20 %.

English is not a prominent migrant language in Finland, but it is very much present in people's everyday lives. In comprehensive school, 99.3 % of students study English (Vipunen 2019). Social media, popular culture and other free time activities of the young are often in English, exposing them to implicit learning opportunities (Leppänen et al. 2011).

The growing number of migrants poses challenges to the educational system as well. As the latest PISA study in 2018 (OECD 2019) shows, immigrant students scored worse in reading literacy in PISA 2018 than non-immigrants with the largest differences in performance observed in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden (OECD 2019:185). According to Finnish law, each municipality is required to organise basic education for 6–17 year-olds residing in the area. Language to be used is either Finnish or Swedish. Teaching can also be provided in Sámi, Roma, or sign language (FIN-LEX) or it is possible to organize teaching in some other language as well. In a recent survey on 345 educational institutions, 8 % (20/345) mentioned they provided teaching in some other language, most often in Russian, English, Arabic, Estonian and Kurdish (Kuukka et al. 2015). Teaching of the home language is something that is not required by law, but it is recommended and often organised if a suitable teacher can be found.

The new National Core Curriculum (NCC 2014) became effective in August 2016 and is gradually being adopted in all grades. In the new NCC, there are seven transversal competence areas that should be taken into account in all teaching. Of these, *multiliteracy* and *cultural competence, interaction and self-expression* could be considered to be particularly pertaining to the area of language education. *Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression* involves not only cherishing one's own cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious background but also taking into account the environment and its cultural heritage and being able to discuss these issues in a constructive manner (NCC 2014). *Multiliteracy* includes skills to interpret, produce and evaluate different texts. These skills are considered to help students understand different cultural modes of interaction and to build their own identity. As to how to assess learning these areas specifically is not specified in the curriculum.

The transversal competencies also mention *participation and involvement*, which to an extent could be interpreted as including the recognition of one's linguistic repertoire in teaching. According to NCC, in teaching speakers of other languages, there is a special goal to support their multilingualism and their multi-

lingual identities. Students' backgrounds and L1s should be taken into account in teaching, and they should be encouraged to use their linguistic repertoires in different lessons and other activities at school. As a core element in the new curriculum, language awareness ought to be supported and enhanced in all teaching. NCC states that a language aware community supports multilingualism and acknowledges the vital role of language in all learning and interaction. How all this can be implemented in everyday teaching practices in an increasingly multilingual classroom perhaps with no shared language is a challenge, and very little is known how teachers adopt the new approaches in practice. Also, in order to manage at school and in society in general, migrant children need to learn Finnish alongside possible foreign language subjects.

5 Data and methods

The data for this study come from interviews with seven teachers. The teachers were contacted through our networks so that different parts of the country and different sizes of cities and schools would be represented. The teachers taught in primary, secondary and upper secondary school (see Table 1) and they had varying lengths of teaching experience ranging from 18 months to ca. 20 years. One of the teachers, Elisa, taught a special group for newcomers which included all the core subjects of secondary education, including English. Other teachers had varying numbers of pupils with migrant backgrounds in their classes and they worked in different parts of Finland, in bigger cities and in suburbs. All names are pseudonyms and a written consent to use the anonymized data for research and teaching purposes was received from each participant.

Table 1: Teachers participating in the interviews

| Name (Pseudonyms) | Current teaching position | Yrs of teaching experience | Multilingual learners in the classroom |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Maria | English medium primary school | 18 months | Various backgrounds |
| Matti | Upper secondary school | 4 years | Some exchange students |
| Elisa | Secondary school, special group for newcomers | ca. 15 years | All migrants with various backgrounds and ages |
| Lisa | Primary school | ca. 16 years | 1–2 pupils per classroom |

Table 1: (continued)

| Name (Pseudonyms) | Current teaching position | Yrs of teaching experience | Multilingual learners in the classroom |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Paula | Secondary school (9–16 year olds) | ca. 20 years | 20 % of pupils with migrant backgrounds |
| Anna | Upper secondary school | ca. 20 years | Some exchange students |
| Sirpa | Upper secondary school | 4.5 years | 3 overall |

The interviews were semi-structured. Rather than following a fixed set of questions, the interviews were conducted around specific themes and resembled thus more discussions than interviews. The general outline was the same for all interviews, but any deviations and emerging topics were allowed, to create as free an atmosphere as possible. The themes of the interviews were as follows:

- (1) Background information and teaching experience
- (2) Learners with migrant background in the classroom in general
- (3) Teacher training and migrant/multilingual learners
- (4) Teaching practices

The interviews lasted from 39 to 60 minutes, the average being 49 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interviews were analysed by qualitative content analysis (e.g., Eskola and Suoranta 2005; Dörnyei 2007) and after several readings of the transcripts, the data were categorized by the two researchers into themes. The coding of the data was both data driven and theory driven. The research questions guided the analysis in that any means of characterizing and supporting the multilingual learners that the teachers brought up were categorized, but at the same time, any themes relevant to the topic arising from data were included in the analysis. The analysis was iterative (e.g., Dörnyei 2007), i.e., we went through the data several times, coding re-occurring themes. However, since the research questions and the frame of the interview also guided the themes occurring in the interview and because the number of participants was limited, a separate codebook was deemed unnecessary (cf. Hennink et al. 2011). Salience of themes was determined based on a) theory and b) strong presence in interviewees' comments.

The interviews with the teachers focused on their own experiences, beliefs and perceptions of teaching languages and teaching English in a multilingual classroom in particular. Thus, the data reveal teachers' beliefs of the changing linguistic situation in Finland and its potential effects on EFL classrooms but also

how an individual teacher's thoughts are affected by their teaching environment and experience. They also shed light on how teachers see their own role in supporting learners' multilingualism and taking the principles of the new NCC into account in their teaching.

6 Findings

The teachers in this study raised various issues related to perceiving and supporting the multilingual learners in their classrooms. What was prominent in all interviews was that the teachers clearly lacked means to deal with the issue of multilingualism in the EFL classroom. For most, this interview was the first instance they consciously pondered on the matter. This does not mean, however, that the teachers would not have made any effort in taking multilingual learners into account. It merely means that multilingualism in EFL education has not been an issue that would have been handled in teacher training or consciously tackled in everyday practices.

We present the results in two sections. Section 4.1 provides answers to the first research question, i.e., how the teachers perceive multilingual learners in their EFL classrooms. Section 4.2 answers the second research question by describing how the teachers support multilingual learners in their EFL classrooms.

6.1 Perceiving multilingual learners in the classroom

In the teachers' accounts, several features characterizing multilingual migrant learners came up. These characterizations appeared especially in comparison to mainstream pupils. First of all, the teachers were unwilling to single out pupils with a linguistic background other than the mainstream Finnish background or the pupils themselves did not wish to be singled out. Lisa, English teacher in the primary school, describes in the following how she is not sure whether she even needs to know about her pupils' linguistic background¹:

I'm not quite- I'm not (.) I'm not sure and I don't feel that I have to know any more about that but that they cope in Finnish and then we don't have any problem and that it's sometimes nice to hear if someone says- well there's one Romanian bilingual child who said that this

¹ The transcripts are translations from Finnish (done by the authors). Pauses in talk are marked as (.), cut-off speech as -, and cut out section as [...]. Commas and added words in square brackets are used in translations to ease reading.

word is the same as in English and it's very nice that they bring it up themselves but I don't want to single out anyone that way so that I would see from the colour of the skin that this person is different (Lisa)

This quote could be interpreted in two ways: either the teacher wishes to treat everyone in an equal way, not singling out anyone or the issue is so complicated that the teacher wishes to ignore or bypass it. Thus, a possible reason behind this unwillingness might be fear of racism or simply the wish to treat everyone in the same way. There is, however, also the possibility that ignoring is the easy way out: the language background of the learner does not concern the English language teacher, at least as long as the learner gets along in Finnish and there are no problems. This is an interesting viewpoint and centre-stages "the problem" and is thus related to the deficit discourse, which is very typical around multilingual learners. The multilingual learner and their linguistic background only need to be recognized if there is a problem in learning. What is also interesting here is that coping in Finnish is considered a decisive factor, not English. This view aligns with the idea of Finnish being the underlying common ground in foreign language learning (cf. Tholin 2014).

Related to the ideal "everyone is equal in the classroom" is the fact that pupils themselves might be reluctant to draw any attention to their linguistic background and they themselves wish to choose the moments they want to bring it up. Anna gives an example of such an instance when talking about an English/Finnish bilingual pupil in her class:

every now and then I say like repeat after [James] but he didn't really like it but he'd have the new [sounds] that I don't have, or not really new but the kinds of vowels, how he pronounces everything and (.) but (.) but he doesn't really want it, in his own little circle yes, but not in front of everyone, but then again he always chooses the moment when he wishes to bring it up but not when I say so (Anna)

Anna emphasizes here that the bilingual pupil does not want to bring up his linguistic knowledge or expertise in public, i.e., in front of the whole class, and that he wishes to choose himself when to show his expertise and even then preferably in his own circles. This may also tell about the linguistic atmosphere in the classroom and the school more generally: the use of several languages may not be promoted and encouraged. The pupils may not be proud of their backgrounds; instead, they may wish to hide it and merge into the majority. On the other hand, young people generally are not too keen to be singled out from their peer group but rather wish to be similar to their peers.

Related to singling anyone out on the basis of their linguistic background, the teachers also pointed out that each pupil is an individual, and it is sometimes difficult to say what affects what. For instance, Paula emphasized that each child

has his or her own ability to learn. Sometimes the teachers were worried that migrant children and their linguistic problems such as dyslexia might go undiagnosed because the problems may be mistakenly taken to be caused by multilingualism, as Lisa points out below.

as a language teacher I noticed that where to draw the line so that I can say that their problems to learn foreign languages are not because of that (.) that they don't speak Finnish properly but it's because they've got some other difficulty (.) dyslexia or visual perceptual deficit and I think that's a big problem with migrant-bilinguals that it's always explained by well they've got two languages (Lisa)

This indeed is a valid concern as it is sometimes very difficult to pinpoint the source of a learning problem, or a learning problem may only occur in one specific language (Nijakowska 2010) and language teachers' training does not prepare one to identify or deal with these situations.

Besides the above discussed role of multilingual pupils in the classroom, the teachers also pointed to several features that seemed to be more typical to migrant multilingual learners than to mainstream pupils. All participating teachers had noticed that multilingual learners often portray language awareness differently from their Finnish-speaking peers, and Paula, for instance, considered this to show in their understanding or grasping new languages easily and Elisa had noted the astonishing abilities to compare languages:

and they've got this kind of linguistic, kind of awareness, these migrants much better than Finnish-speakers since they have to move back and forth between languages (Paula)

[their] ability to compare languages is sometimes quite spectacular (Elisa)

These teachers thus compare the multilingual learner to a learner with a monolingual background noticing a clear difference in language awareness. Considering language awareness and the ability to analyze and compare languages can definitely be considered an asset to any language user. If and when a multilingual learner is able to exploit their knowledge of (related) languages and to expand their language knowledge to awareness and knowledge of linguistic phenomena, it certainly shows in their learning a new language (Dufva 2018).

Another trait that the teachers considered to distinguish multilingual learners from their Finnish-speaking classmates was their courage and willingness to use English and communicate. Even though already the previous curriculum in Finland stressed communication and using the target language, language teaching in Finland still often focuses on grammar and errors, and there is an apparent written language bias. However, this does not seem to have affected multilingual learners, as the following two extracts show:

speech is on quite a different level, they say that Finns always think if something is correct and can I open my mouth, they never say anything but then the French and others they just start talking even though they haven't thought about how to say something (Matti)

there was kind of lower threshold to maybe to try out how it feels to say it (Maria)

It could be assumed that moving to another country, maybe several times, has socialized the learners to cope and survive using all the linguistic resources available to them and this attitude towards language is reflected also in the FL classroom.

However, the teachers also felt that sometimes the pupil may have problems with having several languages in a way that they do not master any language properly if, for instance, there are multiple languages at home, multiple languages at school and no language has had an opportunity to develop a strong status:

well, many say that this is difficult (.) that of course it is tricky when you operate in several languages [...] and they may speak more than just one language also at home so it's like (.) a language mess [...] that they don't have any proper mother tongue (.) that they have kind of half a language (Paula)

This view echoes the very often heard claim that if a child acquires several languages from birth, none of them develops properly or the idea that a bi/multilingual speaker is monolingual in all the languages at his/her disposal. Both of these claims have been rejected long ago (e.g., Grosjean 1985) but they still appear to have echoes in people's thinking.

To sum up the teachers' perceptions of the multilingual learners in their EFL classrooms on the basis of our data, there appear to be some controversies. On the one hand, there were views that all the pupils need to be treated in the same way and no attention should be geared to the linguistic background of the pupil. All pupils are individuals – and in that sense different from one another – and should thus be treated equally. On the other hand, the teachers had noticed several features that make multilingual pupils different from mainstream pupils in terms of language learning. Most notable of these was greater language awareness. What was important was that there appeared to be underlying assumptions about the neutrality of the EFL classroom (language background does not matter) and about the problems that may appear when the pupils have to juggle with multiple languages in their lives.

6.2 Supporting the multilingual learner in the classroom

In addition to characterizing the multilingual – mostly migrant – learners in the classroom, the teachers were also asked how they acknowledge these learners and what means of support they had at their disposal, i.e., how the multilingual learners are present in classroom practices. Firstly, the teachers discussed the role of the peer group and secondly, they brought up a few means of making use of the varied linguistic repertoires in supporting the multilingual learners in learning English as a foreign language.

The first point was the presence of multilingual learners in the classroom and how this might influence the general atmosphere of the classroom. The teachers interviewed were aware of the role of the peer group among the migrant pupils, which affects not only the EFL classroom but group dynamics in general. The peer group was seen as both a positive and a negative phenomenon. On the one hand, strong group identities based on linguistic, ethnic or other factors were seen as a separating phenomenon: the migrants were easily grouping amongst themselves only, making them thus separated from the mainstream pupil mass. Maria explains this as follows:

there're easily kind of small cliques, so that same-, pupils who come from the same part of the world are somehow together (Maria)

On the other hand, and on a positive note, the peer group functioned as a supporting group in learning in the classroom. The teachers had noticed that the Finnish-speaking peers were eager to help those with limited skills in Finnish. If there are several learners with the same first language, they are a great support to each other in the classroom, as Sirpa explains:

well it depends on the pupil's own (.) like how active they are but then friends will help and try to explain to the other one that think about this and when it's like this (Sirpa)

As mentioned in section 2.2, English does indeed play a prominent role in Finnish society, and according to Elisa, seemed to be a means to enter the Finnish peer group, as a gateway to youth culture, music, hobbies, and so on. English could thus function as a uniting factor in the peer group:

I think that for some, of course for the young, it is really just the fact that it is also about the feeling of belonging to that (.) whole society, of that age here, because everyone uses all the time English stuff and listens to English (.) songs (.) and then there are like TV and all these kinds of things that they talk about (Elisa)

However, the opportunities to encounter English outside school vary between students: some pupils use a great deal of English in their free time and cope in, for

instance, gaming situations, and others, who do not have access to free time exposure, may be discouraged to learn at school, as Lisa points out:

there is this stumbling block in English that (.) some play, use a lot of computer, English is more familiar and others don't and then there's a difference at the very beginning really that others are familiar with the words, and oh I've seen that there, and heard it, and we've travelled, and others stand by, that I've never seen anything like this (.) and they somehow collapse at that point for a while, and it's an awful struggle and I just try to encourage them that everyone has to do the work at some point (Lisa)

For a teacher, this discrepancy in the degree of out-of-school learning situations poses a new kind of challenge: how to convince the pupils that gaming language is not necessarily enough and, on the other hand, motivate those who do not have an equal access to popular culture and the language learning opportunities it has to offer due to their cultural background. This naturally applies not only to migrants but to all pupils.

In addition to peer support, the teachers mentioned a few practices through which the learners themselves or then the teachers made use of the multilingual backgrounds of learners. The first and perhaps the most obvious practice that most teachers mentioned was the comparison of languages, as Maria's account illustrates:

I remember that he also often compared, what kind of a word was the equivalent Russian word, to a new word and told us that this is because I remember it easily because we have a similar one (Maria)

In this extract, Maria explains that she had noticed that learners compared languages on their own, without teacher initiation, thus echoing a natural trans-linguaging practice. It seemed to be natural to the multilingual learners to reflect on their linguistic backgrounds when encountering something unknown (typically words) in the classroom. In some cases, however, the teachers initiated the comparison themselves, as in the extract below, where Sirpa explains how she worked with a learner with an Estonian background:

for example with this Estonian pupil it was maybe a little easier to compare because the languages are similar (.) but then again it's extremely difficult with the others who have such mother tongues that I don't have the faintest idea of (.) so then I cannot in a way help them at all (.) one could of course – I can of course say that think how it is in your own language but then I cannot say anything about it because I don't understand that language, whether it is the same in the end (Sirpa)

What is notable here, however, is that Sirpa felt that comparing was possible as Estonian and Finnish are similar languages but the comparison would be impos-

sible if the teacher did not know the language of the learner. The same observation was made by Linderoos (2016). There might be several reasons for this. The teachers might have an ideal role of a teacher in mind who knows everything, and thus using resources that you are not yourself familiar with simply does not fit this image of a teacher. Another reason might be that as a language teacher, you are accustomed to *teach the language* and that obviously means that you need to know the language yourself. These kind of teacher-as-an-expert beliefs are one reflection of how teachers see their own role (see e.g., de Laurentiis Brandão 2019).

What also became evident in the interviews was that the teachers felt knowledge of Finnish to be essential in learning English. This may reflect the fact that teaching materials still largely assume Finnish skills and rely heavily on Finnish, for instance, in explaining grammar but, as can be seen in the extracts below, teachers themselves often resort to Finnish:

in principle you need quite a lot of Finnish to be able to study English (Anna)

it's really an individual character, so that it matters a lot how well they know Finnish (.) it has a big influence and there's been one for whom Finnish was really difficult (.) and then I felt a bit like well I don't know whether to explain in English or in Finnish when neither really helps (.) but that you notice that the more they learn Finnish the easier it is for them to be in the language lessons as well (Sirpa)

This is exactly the same observation that Harju-Autti (2014), Illman and Pietilä (2018) and Tholin (2014) made and confirms the assumption that much of the learning of a foreign language takes place through the majority language of the environment, which is most often also the first language of the teacher and the language that the teaching materials rely on. Teachers have indeed noticed in their practices that the teaching materials do not give enough support in teaching multilingual groups. This comes up in the following quote by Paula, who has, in fact, found a solution as well:

materials are really kind of (.) lousy, there are no kind of, they all are kind of based on the other language being Finnish (.) luckily there's google image search, I can always show that this means this, and if I try to explain a word and it's not clear to anyone, then you sometimes have to – I'm not good in drawing so it's kind of (.) it doesn't really work but at least the pupils have fun when I draw (Paula)

Resourceful teachers resort to other semiotic resources when the language of the teaching material fails them. When English only is not enough, pictures come in to help in explaining words in the foreign language. However, what was quite interesting was that English only was very often seen as the solution: the teaching of English in multilingual classrooms leads to monolingual use of English. Tea-

chers wished for more English-only teaching materials and noted that they aim at using only English in teaching, which is illustrated by the following two extracts:

well, it must be just adding English into the textbook (Paula)

if one could have English as a strong language of teaching while at the same time teaching the language (.) so that would be easier irrespective of the background of the learners (Maria)

This seems, of course, to be a very natural solution to the problem, as teaching English in Finland has mainly taken place through Finnish and it is problematic for those who have limited skills in Finnish. This is, however, in quite stark contradiction to the aims of multilingual language education in recognizing multilingual backgrounds and using all linguistic resources in translanguaging practices. Instead, multilingualism leads to monolingualism in the target language.

To sum up the observations concerning the classroom practices in multilingual EFL classrooms, it can be said that the peer group functions as an important support for multilingual learners. This can potentially benefit all learners irrespective of their linguistic background. It could also be seen on the basis of our data that teachers still have only limited tools to find ways to accommodate various linguistic backgrounds in the EFL classroom. This indicates that there is an evident lack of discussion and focus on issues of multilingualism in FL teaching practices and the meaning of the presence of many languages in all school subjects, even if these ideals are present in the curriculum.

7 Conclusion

This study set out to explore how EFL teachers perceive and enact the growing multilingualism in their classrooms and what kind of beliefs of the multilingual learners, on the one hand, and on their own role in supporting learners, on the other hand, they have. Even though we have focused on one specific context, we believe the results have wider significance in other similar contexts. We asked (1) how EFL teachers perceive and characterize multilingual learners and (2) how they support these learners in their classrooms.

As to the first research question, when characterizing the multilingual learners, the teachers noted that each pupil is an individual and singling out pupils on the basis of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds is problematic. The data did not clearly reveal why this was the case, but one could speculate that the teachers either wished to treat everyone equally and not to bring the ethnic background into spotlight or they wished to ignore the whole issue of multilingualism,

because of the complexities involved and because they lacked knowledge and experience on how to address the issue. This may have both positive and negative outcomes. Equal treatment is naturally a basic requirement in education but in our case it may also lead to unwanted emphasis on monolingualism and unintentional misrecognition of the multiple languages present in schools. This approach could further discourage the use of all linguistic resources and point towards the fact that education is still organized for monolinguals (Kramsch 2012), and further emphasize the silos between different language subjects taught in schools. To enhance translanguaging practices, EFL teachers should perhaps be more prepared to relate English to other languages used and taught in schools and by students outside school. This would also help in enhancing students' language awareness regardless of their linguistic backgrounds.

The teachers also pointed out several positive aspects of their multilingual learners. Issues such as high language awareness, ability to reflect on differences and similarities between languages, and the courage and willingness to use English were raised in the interviews. However, the age-old deficit view of multilingual speakers not mastering any language fully also came up when teachers talked about the multilingual learners in the classroom. In addition to being an asset, the use of different languages at home and at school was seen as a struggle. Thus, there seems to be evidence that in the FL classroom, the varied linguistic backgrounds of pupils are not always seen as a resource (cf. Pennycook 2010; Canagarajah 2013; Harsch 2017) but for some teachers the ideal may still be that of parallel monolingualism (Heller 1999). The results of this study are thus in line with the recent observations made by Lengyel et al. (2020), i.e., that the questions of how teachers can and should address the linguistics repertoires of their students and make use of them in the learning processes are still largely unanswered.

In relation to the second research question, i.e., how the teachers support multilingual pupils, the teachers discussed how these students feature in the classroom more generally as well as what means of supporting these students they have used. As to the peer group more generally, the teachers saw both negative and positive aspects in the fact that the multilingual learners often grouped together. This could be seen as a factor that kept those with multilingual backgrounds separated from the mainstream pupils, thus creating and maintaining divisions. On the other hand, the peer group also functioned as a support group in many learning situations in the classroom where, for example, those with the same linguistic background could help each other. What was also interesting was that for the newcomers English seemed to be a means to enter the Finnish peer group, as for young people English is a very important gateway to youth culture, music, and hobbies (cf. Leppänen et al. 2011). This is an aspect that should gain

more attention in ELF education, as through its lingua franca function, English may have an important role in promoting intercultural communication (e.g., Cogo and Dewey 2012, Hulmbauer et al. 2008).

When discussing classroom practices that could support the multilingual learners, the teachers primarily mentioned the comparison of languages, which could be initiated by the teacher or by the pupil. What they also pointed out was the necessity to have knowledge of Finnish to be able to learn English with the current learning materials in Finland, which further strengthens the fact that FL education is largely organized for pupils with monolingual mainstream backgrounds (cf. Kramersch 2012). The materials were thus not considered ideal, but teachers are resourceful and they used other means, such as images, when the teaching material failed them. What is especially noteworthy is that using English only was very often seen as the solution to improve the materials and teaching practices. Thus the teaching of English in multilingual classrooms seems to lead to monolingual use of English, which indicates that the teachers lack means of making use of the varied and rich linguistic backgrounds of their pupils and the ideals of dynamic multilingualism have not reached all FL classrooms (Cenoz and Gorter 2011; García and Sylvan 2011; Paquet-Gauthier and Beaulieu 2015) and that the approach to teaching a FL still has a monolingual bias (cf. Ortega 2014, Kramersch 2014).

The results indicate that it is essential to understand teachers' beliefs concerning multilingualism in their EFL classrooms, as the perceptions lay a ground for implementing and developing classroom practices. On the basis of our results, we can, for example, say that the teachers' reluctance to draw attention to multilingual learners in the classroom is connected to them not making use of the multilingual repertoires of their pupils. Thus, ignoring multilingualism in the EFL classroom may hinder the development of modern multilingual teaching practices, such as translanguaging. What became evident in the discussions with the teachers was that teachers are resourceful and they do care about their learners, but they and their learners would benefit greatly if more pre-service and in-service training were offered on issues of multilingualism in language education, and not only in second language education but across the language palette offered in schools.

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