

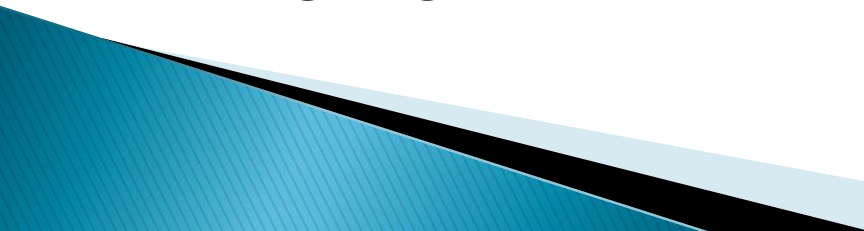
From code to coordinating: contexts of language learning and use

Individuals in Contexts: Psychology of Language Learning 2

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Distributed language & languaging

- ▶ Languaging sustains the human world: it is inextricably linked to human artefacts, institutions, behaviour
 - ▶ Through languaging, people coordinate activities, gain skills and knowledge, share and create resources
 - ▶ “Language” as such can not be ascribed to individuals, who do, however, engage in languaging activities
 - ▶ Learning how to coordinate with others: native languages, second languages vs. foreign languages?
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Dialogical considerations

- Language as a social, shared phenomenon: we learn words from other people in social interaction
- Focus on the individual
- Through the process of appropriation, we add different kinds of words to our repertoire: authoritative, internally persuasive, irrelevant words (Bakhtin 1991)
 - > Issues of authority, learner's voice, content choice etc. in the foreign language classroom

Appropriating a new distributed language

...the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's...

- ▶ Learning to be "functionally fit" in a new language requires acceptance from others; as with our native language, we need to conform (Tomasello 2006; Hodges 2007)
- ▶ In a classroom, we tend to develop theoretical knowledge and simulated knowledge – not felt, lived experience as with our native language
 - What are learners learning – and what makes a learner "good" or "bad"?

The study

- ▶ *From poor learners to proficient users: a dialogical look at language agency*
- ▶ Interview data on professional, adult Finnish users of English who did not do well in English at school, but ended up working in international organisations, using English daily
 - How do they see their English agency in different chronotopes and over time? – learner/user trajectories
- ▶ Funding from the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation

Petri & English – the school years

Petri (45) engineer & MBA, 20+ years in ICT industry – English in daily use

Miten sulla englannin opinnot suju koulussa?

– Huonosti. ... ei mee kielet mun päähän tyyppinen ihminen

How did you do at English at school?

– Badly. ... I just don't get languages type of person

Muistan kyllä monta kertaa huutaneeni kotona läksyjä tehdessä että ei tästä tuu mitään.

I do remember yelling many times while doing my [English] homework that this is never going to work.

Kato ku siellä seiskan pinnassa on niin sillä pääsee hyvin läpi, mutta mitään ei jää päähän.

See when you get Cs you pass your courses just fine, but retain nothing.

– no activities outside of the classroom – no interest

Petri & English – quest for purpose

English lessons at school focused on code:

Jankataan jotain lausetta liitutaululle ja sitte morkataan ku se ei oo oikein ... näin se oli, tästä puuttuu se "a". Vääärin.

You painstakingly scribble a sentence on the blackboard and then get told off for not getting it right... that's what it was like, there's the "a" missing. Wrooong.

... whereas English lessons at vocational school felt more in touch with reality:

Ensimmäinen vuosi oli vähän semmoista yleistä diibadaabaa mut sit tuli ammattisanastoo... sillä oli käyttötarkotus.

The first year was general nonsense but then we got to the field-specific vocabulary... it had a purpose and a use.

Sitte ku pääsin töihin oikeesti käyttämään niin sieltä se sitten tuli.

When I got a job and got to really use [English] that's how it started to evolve.

Petri & English – gaining momentum

- ▶ International colleagues, spoken English courses offered by the employer, business trips abroad, producing documents, working in international organisations... English as work language
- ▶ MBA – entirely in English
- ▶ Also hobbies: reading, writing lyrics, blogs since the early 2000s – “I suddenly realised that I may actually know English”

Huomasin itsekin opastavani muita insinöörejä että tuossa kannattaa käyttää in ja tuossa of.

I realised I was guiding other engineers, use in here and of here.

How do you see yourself as English user now?

Sujuvaa, pystyn tulemaan toimeen, tilanteessa melkein ku tilanteessa.

Fluent, I can manage virtually any situation.

Tanja – contexts of identifying

- ▶ Tanja (46): trained in hotel & restaurant services and business administration; worked in shops, grocery stores, restaurants, hotels, and in accounting; now runs a business with her husband – English in daily use

Äikkä ja englanti oli mun lempiaineita... rakastin sanakokeita, musta ne oli niinku niin helppoja.

Finnish and English were my favourite subjects... I loved [English] vocabulary tests, I found them so easy.

Englanti oli enemmän vaan kouluaine.

English was really just a school subject.

– no English activities outside the classroom (aside from the occasional lyrics translating)

Tanja & English – the current configuration

Melkein päivittäin joudun käyttämään, joudun! (naurua) sähköpostia, pääsääntöisesti niin, koska itse en kyllä soita kenellekään.

I have to use English almost daily, have to! (laughs) emails, mainly, because I will never call anyone myself.

Kirjallisesti paljo helpompaa kun on tuota teknistä sanastoo niitä ku ei oo noissa sanakirjoissa niitä sanoja, pitää erikseen kaivaa niistä erikoisopuksista, hirveen hankalaa... muistaa kaikkien tuotteitten nimiä englannin kielellä.

It's much easier in writing because there's so much technical terminology that you can't find in dictionaries, you have to dig them out of special books, it's so difficult... to remember all the product names in English.

... niin että mä tiedän saksan ja englannin kielellä eräitten tuotteitten nimiä mutta en suomeks.

... so that I know the names of certain products in German and English but not in Finnish.

Contexts of use

- ▶ Mainly as lingua franca – few interactions where solely native speakers of English present

Kari: It wasn't [my Chinese students'] native language either so it was easier, both parties had the basic vocabulary that was used and that was enough for the situation, and a lot of gestures to top it off...

yes, a big difference [between native/non-native and non-native/non-native interactions], because for example in a conversation a native speaker will use words and terms that are not familiar to non-natives, it is easier to miss things and it's just, the language use is on such a different level for those who speak it as their native language from those who've just studied it.

- Also reported problems with e.g. various British accents

... that was enough for the situation ...

On it being enough

How do you feel about your English skills now?

Kari: *Töiden tekoon taito on riittävä.*

– It's sufficient for doing my job.

Tanja: *Tottahan sitä aina haluais tehdä paremmin, vaikka kyllä se varmasti riittävää on.*

– Of course you'd always like to do better, but I'm sure it's sufficient.

On the nature of English

What do you think about English now?

Tanja: *Englannin kieli on ihan kivaa, ja sitä tarvitaan.*
The English language is ok, and it is needed.

Petri: *... se on teknologian yleiskieli, korvannu saksan sellaisena.*

– *Entä sulle henkilökohtaisesti?*

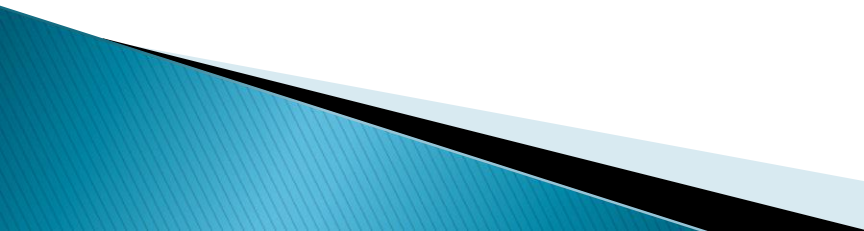
Petri: *Öm, se on voimavara.*

Petri: ... it's the language of technology now, it's replaced German.

– And what about for you, personally?

Petri: Um, it's a resource.

Let us ponder

- ▶ At school, the participants were passing courses, not “learning English”
 - > Researchers and teachers frame e.g. classroom interaction as learning interaction, but is it?
 - ▶ Managing to coordinate activities is “enough”
 - ▶ The participants had a needs–must approach – certainly no wishes to e.g. reach native–like skills
 - ▶ English seen as a “neutral” medium for communication: a resource, a medium, a tool
 - > Do language experts sometimes project their own language enthusiasm & concerns onto learners?
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Thanken yew!

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