

A non-native speaker of English in the business world:
A phenomenographic case study of IT engineers

Frida Bergman

Bachelor's seminar and thesis (682285A)

English philology, Faculty of Humanities

University of Oulu

December 7th, 2016

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Background.....	4
2.1 Previous research.....	4
2.2 Current issues.....	7
2.3 Theory and method.....	10
3. Data.....	12
4. Analysis.....	14
4.1 Analysis of the interviews.....	14
4.2 Analysis of the written survey.....	16
4.3 Categories of Description.....	20
5. Findings and Discussion.....	23
6. Conclusion.....	26
7. Bibliography.....	28
Appendix.....	30

1. Introduction

English has been a part of the educational curriculum of many countries for quite some time. The use of English has also spread wide into the business world. As globalization continues, so does the need for a 'lingua franca' (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). It is now widely accepted that English is the most globally spread language, used by many more than just native speakers of the language. This trend is also reflected in the business world (Bjørge, 2010; Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen & Karhunen, 2015; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Nickerson, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). The reason why the business world seems to have chosen English as the 'lingua franca' could be tied to many factors, possibly dating back to the colonial era. As Rogerson-Revell (2007, p. 104) puts it "historically, the development of any language as a lingua franca or pidgin to facilitate communication between speakers of different languages has been often initiated by international commerce and trade." The term 'pidgin' here is used synonymously with 'lingua franca' and is said to have originated from "the Chinese pronunciation of the English word *business*" (Rogerson-Revell, 2007, p. 104). Whatever the reasons for the spread of the English language are, the fact of the matter is that it is becoming a more and more crucial part of international business communication (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). With this in mind, many businesses are adapting English into their organizations as a necessary tool of the trade. Without including English into working language, it would be difficult to participate in international negotiations and trade (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Rogerson-Revell, 2007).

Despite the fact that the use of the English language is so widely spread and has had its roots in the world's economy for longer than just these past few years, this spread of the English language into the business world does not come without any issues (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Nickerson, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007) and it is these issues that I intend to look at and discuss in this paper. A considerable amount of the people who use English for business purposes are non-native speakers (Bjørge, 2010; Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen & Karhunen, 2015; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Lindgren, 2014; Nickerson, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Wu,

2013) and as such their experiences likely differ from those of native speakers. Kankaanranta and Louhila-Salminen (2010) go on to say that “in international interaction, non-native speakers of English (NNS) clearly outnumber native speakers (NS).” (pp. 206 – 207) The acronym NNS here stands for non-native speaker. They also address the fact that, in international business, it is crucial to know “the other party’s specific context to succeed in communication” (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). In the business world, as well as in conversations outside of this realm, context can play a crucial part in delivering a message. For example, in business negotiations it is important to have an understanding of what the aim of the negotiation is and what point of view the other party is approaching the situation from. By understanding the context of a business negotiation there can be a reasonable expectation of the participants being able to follow along as the conversation progresses.

The aim of this paper is to dive deeper into the issue of the experiences, conceptions, possible challenges and the thoughts of non-native speakers of English using EIB, English for International Business. Rogerson-Revell (2007) points out that there is a lack of knowledge of how non-native speakers feel about using EIB and, on a small scale, it is this issue that this paper attempts to clarify. Specifically, the goal of this small-scale study is to get a better understanding of the attitudes non-native speakers have when it comes to using English in the workplace. For the purpose of being able to develop better methods for teaching English for business purposes, it should prove helpful to know what kinds of attitudes there are towards using the language (Entwistle, 1997). The subject of education is of a particular interest to me personally, as I am studying to become an English teacher myself. My personal goal for this thesis is to give myself a better understanding of what my future students may or may not find useful, what kinds of attitudes they might have when it comes to learning a foreign language and, maybe, to discover what are the biggest challenges in learning a non-native language – in this case, English. My focus here is merely to identify and attempt to categorize the experiences of NNES (Non-Native English Speakers) about the use of EIB, using a phenomenographic method to analyze data collected from short interviews and a written survey of the employees of a multinational company. The phenomenographic method is a research approach where the subject of the research is not the phenomenon itself but the people who experience it. By analyzing the data collected and comparing the answers given by the interviewees I can attempt

to form some general understanding of what kinds of things should be paid attention to when planning and teaching English.

In section 2 of my thesis I will take a look at some of the previous research that has been done regarding EIB and the current issues that this area of research is facing. I will also introduce the method and the theoretical background, which will form the basis of my thesis and support my analysis. In section 3 I will explain the data I have collected and provide some background of the participants of this case study, which will serve as the base of my analysis. In section 4 I will provide explanations of the progress of my analysis, as well as examples of the analyzing process itself. I will then move on to section 5 where I will present my findings and I will discuss what sort of implications could be drawn from the findings. Finally, in section 6 I will give my conclusions to this case study. My thesis will conclude with the bibliography and appendix, where both the interview questions as well as the written survey will be available.

2. Background

In this section I will introduce some of the findings of previous research on the topic of English as a business language. I will also explain some of the issues that this area of research is running into. After this, I will move on to explain the theory and method I have chosen to use for my analysis.

2.1 Previous research

The challenges that the use of English in the business world proposes have been researched previously, but the general consensus is that more research still needs to be done in order to fully understand the extent of the problems and frustrations it proposes. New research is also necessary in order to go about finding ways to mend the issues that have been discovered (Nickerson, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). This area of research is still relatively new but thanks to the ever faster globalization, the need for more knowledge on this subject is becoming more and more evident

(Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen & Karhunen, 2015; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Nickerson, 2005). The challenges of using EIB, English for International Business, are not limited to interactions between native English speakers and non-native speakers (Rogerson-Revell, 2007), though this may be what first comes to mind when considering the subject of English in the business world. Issues also arise between NNEs (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). As previously stated, non-native speakers outnumber the amount of native speakers in the business world, and this also means that there are not only multiple different linguistic backgrounds, but also multiple different cultures that come together in these interactions (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). Nickerson (2005), in her article, discusses that previous research has shown that there are differences between the communication strategies used by the people who are experienced in business communication and those who are not experienced in this field, whether the participants of the communication are native or non-native speakers of a language. This claim is also supported by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2015). People who have an extensive history in business communication may not be perfectly fluent in English, but their advantage is in their knowledge of the rituals and acceptable behaviors of the business world. They are likely to be more comfortable in situations where they need to conduct business, even if it is in a foreign language, than those who are fluent in a language but lack experience in business interactions. Inexperience can make participants of the communication seem unprofessional, and this lack of knowledge can naturally lead to mistakes as well.

Much of the previous research looks at the different genres of business communication such as emails or meetings (Nickerson, 2005), but there is a gap in the knowledge of the natural discourse and the personal feelings of EIB users (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). 'Natural discourse' here means the communication that happens outside of a specific, ritualistic, form of communication that is often involved in negotiations and other types of business communication genres. The idea behind looking at the different genres of business communication is with learning the different conventions that are used in the business world. This is because most, if not all, business interactions are highly ritualized. Not to mention, depending on the genre of business communication there is a very distinguishable pattern that is used in the production of communication (Bjørge, 2010; Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen & Karhunen, 2015; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Lindgren, 2014; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Wu, 2013). For example, in email communication there usually exists a set of appropriate greetings and ways to deliver a

message that are essential in giving the right kind of impression to whomever the email is targeted. Failing to understand what type of a greeting or way of writing is appropriate for a certain context may give the receiver an impression that the writer is, as Rogerson-Revell (2007) describes; “intellectually incompetent or deliberately unco-operative or combative.” (p.118) By learning what these patterns are, the education of English for specific purposes becomes easier. However, not all communication in the business world fits into the patterns of presenting something or writing an email. Things such as small talk, which would fall into the category of natural discourse mentioned previously, are also an important part of the interactions and are used to build relationships, as well as to create a positive atmosphere (Bjørge, 2010). There is not a lot of information currently about how these kinds of acts of communication occur in a natural environment or how the participants feel about the phenomenon of using English as a lingua franca (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). However, these communication acts are a part of business communication and should not be glossed over as unimportant. Nor should the experiences of the participants be considered irrelevant, as personal experiences will likely be reflected in one’s behavior.

Despite there being previous research about the subject of English as a lingua franca and how it has spread into the business world, there is a lack of actual change that has been made to the approaches of teaching English for business purposes (Nickerson, 2005). For example, in her article Nickerson (2005) looks at previous research and notes that in previous articles there are “countless examples of the mismatch between the language taught for meetings and the language used in meetings” (p.370) and for now it seems there is still a long way to go for English education to reach the point where the things that are taught are truly relevant to the students. (Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen & Karhunen, 2015). Nickerson also says that the development of business English education would profit from data gathered from a “real setting, in order to identify similarities and differences that exist across the international business world, together with the types of communicative tasks in English that business people need to complete” (Nickerson, 2005). If future research could obtain more data, which documents real business settings, it would be easier to form conclusions about what kinds of things are, in fact, necessary to perform successfully in business communicative situations. Also, much like globalization, technology is in a constant development and new forms of communicative tasks are going to be born. Data from real settings could possibly show that the way email or meeting communications are taught today might not

reflect what meetings currently are actually like, nor what they will be like in ten years. It is no longer enough to simply be proficient in English, nor should the ultimate goal be the fluency of a native speaker, but the aim should actually be in linguistic strategies which are used to get different types of business related tasks done (Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen & Karhunen, 2015; Nickerson, 2005). The saying 'no one is perfect' also applies linguistically; everyone makes grammatical mistakes or mispronounces things occasionally, even native speakers of a language. With this in mind, the expectation of a non-native speaker to be able to 'perfect' a non-native language seems unreasonable and the logical thing to do seems to be to focus on the strategies used to convey a message, rather than the grammatical correctness or perfect pronunciation of it.

2.2 Current issues

Indeed, as Rogerson-Revell (2007) argues it would seem that currently non-native speakers of English, at least in business contexts, are not so much focused on producing grammatically perfect and complex language but are more concerned with producing effective and easily understandable language. In fact, in business contexts it can sometimes be far better to produce very simple and basic utterances rather than grammatically complex and perfectly structured language. In the business world, the saying 'time is money' is not at all inaccurate. Stating things in the shortest, simplest way possible is almost preferable to long, complex explanations, which can drag on and possibly mislead the participants involved in communication. The reason the short and simple approach is preferred is also likely because the industry is self-aware of the multitude of linguistic and cultural backgrounds that necessarily come face-to-face in these interactions. For example, in some East Asian cultures, like Japan, giving strict answers such as 'no' can be frowned upon. This culturally bound behavior can sometimes reflect poorly in international business negotiations where simple answers such as 'yes' or 'no' can save time and money for the businesses involved. By making the message as simple and short as possible, the business world tries to ensure that the possibility of misunderstandings and an unproductive use of time is reduced to the bare minimum.

This international communication, which uses a lingua franca, means that there are many different levels of fluency that also need to be taken into consideration. There is no international guideline as to how much vocabulary needs to be mastered and what level of fluency needs to be reached in

order to conduct international trade, so it is safer to assume that the other party would prefer issues to be stated as clearly and simply as possible. The ability to know how to communicate in business in the most effective way is a highly valuable skill, almost considered even more valuable than technical skills (Bjørge, 2010; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010) go on to say that since the ultimate goal of using English is to get the job done, it definitely impacts the language users; the language they use is determined by the description of their job, the issues that they intend to look at and the genre they use. The linguistic strategies and approaches of a sales manager and a technical engineer are probably very different from one another because the goals of their communications are different: the sales manager tries to sell a product but a technical engineer is likely trying to explain the intricate workings of the product. In international communication, however, the sales manager and the engineer are likely to come in contact with one another and they need to have an understanding of the context their communication is based on. This sort of a communication may be challenging even when both parties speak the same language as their native tongue, but the use of a lingua franca can provide further challenge. Both parties need to understand what the other party wants to know, and then be able to address the issue in a way that the other party can understand. According to the business world, the best way to do this is by stating things in a simplistic way (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Lindgren, 2014; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Since producing simplistic language would presumably be easier to all parties involved, why is it that international communication still seems to be challenging and difficult to replicate in educational settings?

One of the reasons behind this mismatch in education versus actual business communication might be due to the fact that these issues, relating to the use of English in an international work environment, are not limited to language proficiency (Nickerson 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007) but also include cultural disparities, particularly evident in the experiences of non-native speakers of English. Both play a part in the business world and can affect the end results of communications. To be able to determine what sort of an approach to language in business interactions is appropriate, only being language competent might not be enough; cultural differences can also cause miscommunications or frustrations (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). When the cultures of the participants are different there is a possibility of

the participants misunderstanding each other by the way that they behave (Nickerson, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). This aspect, however, is only being researched more recently, as before research emphasized the language barriers rather than cultural differences (Nickerson, 2005). Yan Wu (2013, p.130) quotes a book by Mark Ellis and Christine Johnson called "Teaching Business English" (1994), saying that one aspect of Business English is that "the language used in business 'will be neither as rich in vocabulary and expression nor as culture-bound, as that used by native speakers'", however, in international business the multitude of cultural backgrounds can add an element of challenge to communication (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). In international business diplomacy is a virtue; it might not be entirely wrong to compare business to politics, both are surprisingly competitive fields. Both require a level of calculation and diplomacy in order to gain success. Despite the fact that the business world may have acquired a reputation of being a world where the saying 'kill or be killed' holds true, open hostility rarely has any place in communication. So, parties are not only expected to be able to communicate using English, but also to be able to deliver their communication in a polite manner. However, as in the example given before of culture-bound behaviors, what is understood as polite may differ from one country to another. How, then, is politeness defined in international business? This question currently remains unanswered, but now that the research in this field is starting to focus its interest on the cultural backgrounds involved in these communications, an answer may be found.

In Rogerson-Revell's (2007) paper titled "Using English for International Business: A European case study" she uses a questionnaire to collect data from an international organization and discusses her findings. This method seems to be quite commonly used to study the topic of English as a lingua franca. Interestingly, studies seem to show that businesses themselves are growing concerned about the possible problems and frustrations that using English can produce (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Wu, 2013). Naturally, employees, as well as employers, would be conscious of the challenges but it is interesting that they themselves also try to categorize and find reasons as to why they are having these feelings of frustration. The issues, as described by Rogerson-Revell (2007), do have an impact on the way the employees behave in meetings, generally in the workplace and their productivity can also be affected. Once again, it would seem logical that using a non-native language in a multicultural business setting would not be without any issues at all, but the impact of these issues on an individual level remains under question. Businesses are, after all,

composed of individuals and the efforts of these individuals are of great importance for the business's survival. Herein lies the reason why this case study was conducted.

2.3 Theory and method

In order to map out the feelings of non-native speakers a phenomenographic approach was chosen for this study. The aim of the phenomenographic approach is to understand the different ways people experience a phenomenon and what kinds of variations there are in the ways of thinking (Entwistle, 1997; Ornek, 2008). Phenomenography does not intend to explain the phenomenon itself, in this case the usage of EIB, but the purpose is to study the people who are experiencing the phenomenon (Ornek, 2008). However, Marton and Booth (1997) say that the way people experience a situation and the way that they behave are connected. They go on to explain that “a capability for acting in a certain way reflects a capability of experiencing something in a certain way” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111). In other words, the conceptions and experiences a person has towards a phenomenon shape the way they behave. In this study the focus is on the way the employees of a multinational company view the usage of English language at the workplace rather than how they actually use it, though the two are linked with one another. Phenomenography has often been used to study education and the way students and teachers perceive different subjects and methods of teaching (Entwistle, 1997; Ornek, 2008; Vermunt, 1996). The method most often used in phenomenography is open interviews with participants, ‘open’ meaning that the interview itself is mostly guided by the answers the interviewee gives to the rather open-ended questions prepared by the interviewer (Entwistle, 1997; Ornek, 2008). In phenomenography, it is necessary for the researcher to allow the participant to express their thoughts and not to project their personal views into the interview and the data which is collected (Ornek, 2008). Of course, some direction is given by the interviewer to make sure the interview stays on topic, but the questions should be as neutral as possible so as to not influence the answers of the participants in any way (Entwistle, 1997; Ornek, 2008). Phenomenography uses *outcome space* to categorize the “conceptions of the phenomenon” and explain the relationships between them (Loughland et al., 2002, p. 190). This outcome space is developed by closely examining the data and the different variations found in it, which are then made into categories of description (Entwistle, 1997;

Loughland et al., 2002; Ornek, 2008; Vermunt, 1996; Yates, Partridge, & Bruce, 2012). The answers to the questions of the interviews, or surveys, are coded, meaning that every single answer of every single participant is compared to the answers given by the other participants, and then, the variations that arise from them will create the base for the developing categories (Entwistle, 1997; Loughland et al., 2002; Ornek, 2008). As with most research, the analysis of data requires some interpretation on the researcher's part. This is also true for phenomenography where the developed categories are formed from the interpretations the researcher has made based on the data they have collected (Entwistle, 1997; Loughland et al., 2002). Only when the analysis of the data has been completed, and all variations have been categorized, can a conclusion be drawn from them.

In this thesis, I will use the phenomenographic approach to analyze audio-recorded interviews and answers to a short written survey. Based on the examples of previous phenomenographic studies I will go through all of the data I have collected and look for the variations that the data presents. I will do this analysis by comparing each of the interviews and answers to the survey, and with one another, and search for any significant differences, phrases and answers that are relevant to my research question that stand out from them. The reason that I have decided to look for any significant differences is due to the fact that, naturally, none of the interviews I conducted were exactly similar to one another, and not one answer was exactly like the other. For this purpose, I will look for the answers that are relevant in answering my research question, and from these answers I will search for any variations. In phenomenography, a certain level of interpretation is needed in order to form the categories of the outcome space (Loughland et al., 2002), and I will attempt to do this interpretation in the most neutral way possible in my analysis section.

The interviews consisted of relatively open questions and follow-up questions about the experiences of the participants. Other than the topic of the interview being predetermined, the direction the interview followed was according to the participant's answers, with follow-up questions depending solely on the answers given by the interviewee to the predetermined questions about their experiences in using EIB. The goal of the interviews and the predetermined questions was to form an idea of what the participants thought of using English at work and to

understand the background of their working situations. See Appendix 1 for the predetermined questions.

The written survey was given to the interviewees two weeks after the interviews were conducted. Though, still quite 'open' in form, the written survey was created in order to provide further information regarding the participants' feelings towards EIB after the interviews. The questions of the written survey were formed after some preliminary analysis of the interviews had already been made. The answers to the written survey were either open for the participants to freely describe their thoughts without any word limits placed on them, or by selecting a number on a five-point scale, which indicated whether they agreed with a statement that had been made regarding personal experiences with the English language. See Appendix 2 for the form of the survey.

3. Data

For this study employees of a multinational company, located at a Finnish branch office, were interviewed and surveyed about their experiences in using English at work. For the purpose of this study, the company will be referred to as '*company X*' from this point on. The company X is an IT company and the Finnish branch, specifically, works in the field of software development. A total of 8 people, of two different nationalities, Finnish and Japanese, participated in the interviews and survey. All of the participants were non-native speakers of English, male and between the ages of 37 and 57. Most of the participants had a similar background in education and all had multiple years' worth of experience in using English at work, ranging from 6 to 27 years. Most participants had previous experience in working at a multinational company before starting their work at company X. All participants had learned English at school for many years, though there was slight variation in the exact amount of English education they had participated in. The participant who is of Japanese nationality, received mandatory English education for 6 years and has accumulated approximately 4 years' worth of voluntary studies in English since. The English education of the Japanese participant, according to his view, is somewhat different from the education his Finnish colleagues have received. It may also be noteworthy that one of the Finnish participants received

his education in the Finnish educational system called '*kansakoulu*', which is the predecessor of the current Finnish educational system called '*peruskoulu*'. Despite this, the participant in question reported receiving a very similar education in English to most of his Finnish colleagues at the branch office. Some of the Finnish participants reported that they felt the English education they had received was somewhat different from the education the younger participants of the survey had received. The differences were mostly related to the focus in the language education and the style of teaching they had experienced: lectures versus somewhat interactive learning.

The interviews, as well as the survey, were conducted in Finnish and English, depending on the preference of the participants. The purpose of offering the two languages, Finnish and English, was to ensure that the participants would have the verbal capability to express their honest thoughts, since previous to this study there was no record of the fluency levels of the participants and no guarantee that all would be able to reflect on their personal thoughts to a satisfactory level in a foreign language. Also, since previous research has indicated that using English may cause some individuals to experience stress (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Rogerson-Revell, 2007), the native language of most of the participants, Finnish, was chosen as a second offered language for the interviews and survey. As a third possibility, Japanese was originally offered to the participant who is of Japanese nationality, but he chose to answer the interview and survey in English. For this reason, the possibility of a Japanese interview and Japanese survey were left out. Seven out of the eight interviews were in Finnish, the one remaining interview in English. A similar linguistic divide was apparent in the written survey as well: most answers were in Finnish, though in the written survey two of the answers were in English. Previous research has often used questionnaires which were written in English to ask participants about their experiences (Rogerson-Revell, 2007), but since the scale of this study is quite small, it was possible to offer a couple different languages for the interviews.

The interviews were relatively short – around 20 minutes each – and all were audio recorded, which was agreed upon before the interviews were scheduled. The audio recordings were later transcribed and translated for the analysis. For the sake of convenience, the interviews took place at the branch office of the company and were scheduled back to back with one another. As

previously stated, the written survey was given to the interviewees two weeks after the initial interviews were completed. The written survey was in the form of an online questionnaire, created on the free-to-use website typeform.com. The survey is accessible only through a specific link and after roughly a week the survey was closed. Links to this online survey were given to the participants via email. According to typeform.com's own statistics, it took each participant roughly 10 minutes to answer the survey. The interviews and the written survey had questions regarding the participants' exposure to the English language at work and in their free time. Both forms also asked the participants to describe how they felt regarding the use of the English language at work, as well as whether they had experienced any difficulties in any specific areas of English, how well they felt the education they had received had supported their professional careers, and whether they had learned something about the English language through their work rather than through education.

4. Analysis

In this section I will provide some examples of how I have done my analysis and explain the process of the analysis. I will also explain what kinds of categories of description have emerged from the data with the use of a phenomenographic approach.

4.1 Analysis of the interviews

The answers to the interviews were examined side by side and compared with one another. For the sake of the phenomenographic analysis the answers to the question "What kinds of things come to your mind regarding your use of English at work?" were of a particular interest. The answers to this question showed, in the clearest way, how the participants felt about using English in their work environment. The key ideas given by the participants over the course of the entire interview were highlighted and color-coded.

What kinds of things come to your mind regarding the use of English at work	Interview number
"ei se enää herätä mitään" "ei enää ajattele" "päivittäistä"	1
"ei se nyt mitenkään stressaa" "osa työtä" "työkalu" "arkipäivää"	2
"luonteavaa" "ei ajattele sitä sen enempää" "vivahteet puuttuu ja se harmittaa" "väärinymmärryksiä" "jää sanomatta" "ei varsinaisesti stressaa"	3
"gives stress" "difficult to express emotion" "very important"	4
"arki rutiinia" "ei ahdistaa" "pärijään hyvin" "pieniä eroja suomenkielen käytön kanssa"	5
"ei jaksa enää hermostua" "haasteellista" "oma persoonallisuus jää pois" "turhaa yrittää enää oppia uutta" "työkalu" "välttämätön paha"	6
"ei enää ole kynnystä käyttää" "vähän joskus pitää miettiä" "ei stressaa"	7
"edelleen joskus hankalaa" "väärinymmärryksiä" "ei stressaa"	8

Chart 1: Color-coded key ideas given by the participants in the interviews

For the purpose of forming categories, the expressions the participants made that were similar in tone were assigned the same color. For the sake of remaining true to the answers given by the interviewees I have listed the key points as they were expressed in the interviews. Please see Appendix 3 where I have provided my translations for these Finnish expressions.

From these coded replies, I formed four basic categories:

1. Neutral feelings towards EIB
2. Feelings of frustration and challenge towards EIB
3. Feelings of personal limitations towards EIB
4. Feelings of stress towards EIB

See the pie chart below for the division of the answers into these four categories.

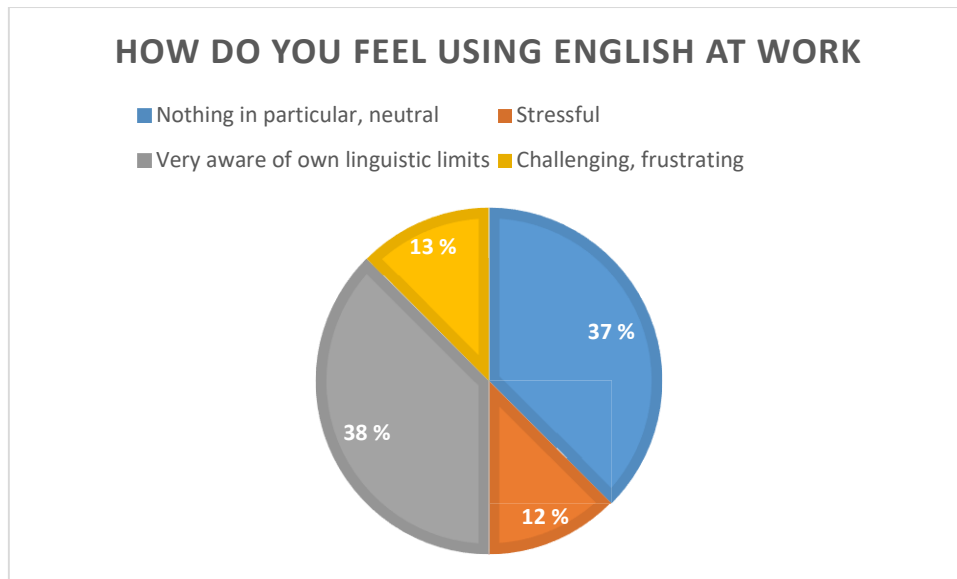


Chart 2: Interview responses divided into four (4) separate categories

As seen in the pie chart, the amount of participants who felt nothing in particular towards EIB, other than expressing that it is a necessary tool for their work, and the amount of participants who felt very aware of their own linguistic limitations when it comes to EIB, was equal. There was only one participant who expressed clear stress when it came to using EIB and only one participant who expressed frustration.

All participants viewed English to be necessary in their daily work, and expressed that they could not go on doing their daily tasks without it, though some felt it was a more crucial part of their work than others. All interviewees reported that they used English on a daily basis to some degree – mostly in a written format – phone calls with clients or suppliers being the most often used spoken format (generally a few times per week). The flow of interviews was strikingly similar in each individual session and the answers given by the interviewees also had quite a few similarities.

4.2 Analysis of written survey

The written survey answers were made into a Microsoft Office Excel file and then color-coded. The color-coding was done so that answers that were very similar to one another were highlighted in

the same color. The key factor behind the separation and categorization were the answers to the first question of the survey: “Describe the English language in 3-5 words/Kuvaile englanninkieltä käyttämällä 3-5 sanaa”. From these answers, I highlighted keywords that were used to describe English.

The keywords that were highlighted are as follows (for the sake of remaining true to the original answers the English translations for the Finnish keywords are provided in parentheses):

“Vivahteikas” (*nuanced*), “kielioppi” (*grammar*), “sääntöjä” (*rules*), “sähköpostiin” (*for email*), “äidinkieli” (*native language*), “business”, “local”, “maailmanlaajuinen”(global), “monipuolinen” (*versatile*), “vaikea”, “epätarkka” (*impercise*) and “global”

Vivahteikas, joskus hankala kielioppi
Älytön joukko irrallisia sääntöjä
käytän sitä sähköpostiin
Nykyään ihan kuin toinen äidinkieli
Must for business
global local nic
maailmanlaajuinen, monipuolinen, vaikea
epätarkka, globaali,

Chart 3: Color-coded keywords from the written survey question 1

The words that were somehow related to one another, at least in my personal opinion, were highlighted in the same color. Some of the words were synonymous (*vivahteikas & monipuolinen*) or directly translated (*global & maailmanlaajuinen*), and thus, related to one another. Some words, on the other hand, were related by their contexts (*local & äidinkieli*).

These keywords formed 4 different groups, each of which was given a different color:

1. **Answers related to grammar** (kielioppi, sääntöjä) **Color: Pink**
2. **Answers related to difficulties** (vaikea, epätarkka) **Color: Yellow**
3. **Answers related to business use** (sähköpostiin, business) **Color: Blue**
4. **Answers related to linguistic locality and frequency of use** (local, äidinkieli) **Color: Green**

The first group “**Answers related to grammar**” was further divided into two separate groups due to the contrasting answers to the 17th (“I would like to participate in English courses/Haluaisin osallistua englanninkielen kursseille”) and 18th (“If you agreed with the previous statement, please provide an example of the things you would like to learn more about/Jos olet samaa mieltä aikaisemman väitteen kanssa, ole hyvä ja anna esimerkki asioista joista haluaisit oppia enemmän”) questions on the survey.

4	Kieliopin kertausta, sanontojen (idiomien) osaamisen laajentamista
3	Ei taida olla vaivan arvoista

Chart 4: Contrasting answers to written survey questions 17 & 18

“4	<i>Grammar revision, improving skills and knowledge of idioms”</i>
“3	<i>Does not seem like it would be worth the effort”</i>

This division of wanting to improve and not seeing the effort that is necessary to improve as valuable enough, created a fifth category and prompted a revision of the first categories:

1. **Answers related to grammar, desire to improve** (kielioppi, sääntöjä) **Color: Pink**
2. **Answers related to grammar, no desire to improve** (kielioppi, sääntöjä) **Color: Orange**
3. **Answers related to difficulties** (vaikea, epätarkka) **Color: Yellow**
4. **Answers related to business use** (sähköpostiin, business) **Color: Blue**
5. **Answers related to linguistic locality and frequency of use** (local, äidinkieli) **Color: Green**

The answers to the survey, which were on a numerical scale from 1 to 5, followed the category separation very closely.

5	5	3	3	3	5	4	2	3	4	5	4	4
5	5	4	3	2	5	4	4	2	4	5	4	3
4	5	5	3	2	5	4	4	2	3	3	4	4
4	5	3	2	1	4	5	1	4	4	3	4	1
5	5	5	4	4	5	3	3	4	4	5	2	5
5	5	4	3	2	5	5	2	4	4	3	5	2
5	5	3	2	2	5	3	1	2	2	3	4	5
4	5	3	2	2	5	3	4	2	3	3	3	4

Chart 5: All written survey numerical scale answers side by side

However, in the yellow category, the rather drastically different answers to the 10th question (“I have some challenges using English/Minulla on haasteita englannin käytössä”) prompted another revision and created a sixth category.

I have some challenges using English/Minulla on haasteita englannin käytössä	
	2
	4
	4
	1
	3
	2
	1
	4

Chart 6: Written survey answers to the 10th question

1. **Answers related to grammar, desire to improve** (kielioppi, sääntöjä) **Color: Pink**
2. **Answers related to grammar, no desire to improve** (kielioppi, sääntöjä) **Color: Orange**
3. **Answers related to challenges, difficulties using** (vaikea, epätarkka) **Color: Grey**
4. **Answers related to challenges, no difficulties using** (vaikea, epätarkka) **Color: Yellow**
5. **Answers related to business use** (sähköpostiin, business) **Color: Blue**
6. **Answers related to linguistic locality and frequency of use** (local, äidinkieli) **Color: Green**

5	5	3	3	3	5	4	2	3	4	5	4	4
5	5	4	3	2	5	4	4	2	4	5	4	3
4	5	5	3	2	5	4	4	2	3	3	4	4
4	5	3	2	1	4	5	1	4	4	3	4	1
5	5	5	4	4	5	3	3	4	4	5	2	5
5	5	4	3	2	5	5	2	4	4	3	5	2
5	5	3	2	2	5	3	1	2	2	3	4	5
4	5	3	2	2	5	3	4	2	3	3	3	4

Chart 7: All written survey numerical scale answers side by side, revised color-coding

4.3 Categories of description

I have used the example Loughland et al. (2002) provide in their study, regarding the construction of the categories of description, while creating the categories of description from my data.

Neutral tone:

1. *English is a tool I use frequently*

Negative tone:

1. *English is a tool that I have challenges using*
2. *English is a tool that I find stressful to use*
3. *English is a tool I do not enjoy using*

As seen in all four categories above the theme of English as a tool is repeated. This is because the data shows that all participants view English as something necessary in order to do their job – a tool, as described by more than one participant. The reason for the division into the two main categories and the four subcategories lies with the different ways the participants felt about using the so-called 'tool'.

Neutral tone:

1. *English is a tool I use frequently.* In the first category English is merely a tool that does not invoke any particularly negative or positive emotions in the user. The participants, who felt they had no bias towards the usage of English in a work environment, gave simplistic statements regarding their personal experiences, such as:

'It no longer invokes any emotion'

'Don't really think about it'

'Global language'

'Use it daily'

'Routine'

'Mundane'

'Similar to a native language at this point'

This first category combines *the interview category 1* and *the written survey categories 4, 5 and 6*.

The next categories, the negative tone, are different from the neutral tone category in that all of the three listed below the umbrella of 'negative tone' express some sort of a negative aspect in the experiences of the NNES regarding EIB. The reason, however, for the three separate categories is because the experiences of the NNESs are qualitatively different from one another. They all share the aspect of a negative tone, but the experiences are not interchangeable with one another.

Negative tone:

1. *English is a tool that I have challenges using.* This is the least negatively leaning category under the umbrella of negative tone. The participants, who felt they had challenges using English, described that they were aware of the fact that their English skills are not up to par with their native language skills. The participants who fit into this category explained that though they do not feel stressed or frustrated with using English, they would not consider it

as smooth as using their native language. The descriptions of the participants indicated that they feel that the English they use is much simpler and more neutral in comparison to when they speak their native language:

'lack of nuance'

'doesn't give me stress'

'normal'

'sometimes need to stop and think'

'imprecise'

'rules'

'still sometimes challenging'

This category combines the *interview category 3* and the *written survey categories 1, 3, 5 and 6*.

2. *English is a tool that I find stressful to use.* This category quite clearly expresses a negative aspect in the experiences of a NNES when it comes to using English in a work environment. Only one participant identified with this category. The following statements were made by the participant regarding their personal experience:

'gives me stress'

'must for business'

'challenging'

'difficult to express emotion'

'misunderstandings'

'I want to improve'

'Very important'

This category combines the *interview categories 3 and 4* as well as the *written survey categories 1, 3, 5 and 6*.

3. *English is a tool I do not enjoy using.* This is the most negatively leaning category within the umbrella of negative tone. There was only one participant who identified using English at work as something they considered somewhat unpleasant due to, what they considered as, the challenging nature of the English language. The participant made the following statements regarding their experience of the EIB phenomenon:

'I no longer have the energy to get unnerved'

'My personality is left out'

'Necessary evil'

'Risk of misunderstandings'

'Rather communicate in some other way'

'Challenging'

'Feel it's a waste at this point to try to improve'

This category combines the *interview categories 2, 3 and 4* as well as the *written survey categories 2, 3, 5 and 6*.

5. Findings and Discussion

There are four logically separate categories that the experiences of the participants can be divided into. The reason there are only 4 categories rather than 6 (written survey categories) or 10 (interview categories + written survey categories) is because this division shows the qualitatively different experiences of the participants. As seen in the analysis all four categories are connected in one way or another; the combining factor for all four is the perception of English as a 'tool'. The negative tone categories shared many of the same qualities but the three categories I have divided them into are not interchangeable.

The data and the analysis seem to suggest that people who have a long history of using English in a work environment have a rather specific way of addressing the phenomenon. English, it seems, is

understood almost as if it were an object comparable to a computer. Just as with computers, some people find using this tool natural and some find it challenging.

Based on the analysis of the data it would seem that because all of the participants had a long history of using English at work, they all consider it as a tool of the trade. No extreme feelings of negativity or positivity arose from the interviews or written survey, though there were some differences in tone, which allowed for the division into four logically separate categories. The variations in the answers to the interviews and the written survey seem to indicate that less than half of the participants had no particular bias towards English. The rest of the participants, roughly 63%, had some negatively leaning thoughts and experiences.

Drawing from this case study, as well as the previous studies, it seems that English is indeed a crucial part of international business, and yet another tool used to complete different tasks in the business world. The business world itself seems to be aware of this, not only on a company level, but on a personnel level as well. Employees seem to be acutely aware of the strong position English holds as the lingua franca. Additionally, employees indicate a relatively high level self-awareness in their own linguistic shortcomings. Most participants of this case study acknowledged a gap between their native language skills and their English skills. Though communicating in English is not as smooth as it is in a native language it is not impossible and does not lead to any major concerns. Many participants reported that getting tasks done in a satisfying manner was somewhat challenging due to the language barrier but said that the tasks would eventually get done even if they took more time to complete. Most difficult situations, as reported by the participants, were communications involving multiple different countries. This was due to the varying levels of fluency and a lack of cultural knowledge. Both of these were issues that the participants saw as hindering the flow of communication.

On the other hand, one participant mentioned that they had never experienced a situation where they were the only person speaking their native language. This, according to the participant, was something that provided mental support for situations where they needed to use English. In a way,

the participant felt that when there was another person speaking their native language in the room there was far less stress of miscommunicating. The presence of another native speaker of a specific language ensured that if, for some reason, communication failed in English there was an option to use their native language, despite the fact that this could be considered out of the norm. Many of the participants also reported that they felt more relaxed when they were speaking with other non-native speakers since they did not expect their English to be perfect and, thus, their own English did not need to be perfect either. One participant mentioned that they felt that communicating with native speakers of English who had previously been exposed to non-native speakers, was perhaps the easiest form of EIB communication. This seems to reflect on the importance of communication skills as mentioned by Rogerson-Revell (2007); the native speakers who have experience in speaking with non-native speakers have acquired the appropriate communication skills for the aforementioned situations. This experience may be reflected in the utilization of simpler vocabulary, grammar and slower pace on the native speaker's behalf.

Interestingly, the topic of education was brought up in most interviews: many participants felt that currently there are no suitable courses offered that would adequately support their needs. The participants reflected on the education that they received at school and, according to them, the focus and methods have shifted considerably since. According to the participants, the English education they received was mostly focused on understanding the language rather than producing it. Some participants compared the education they had received to the education their children are currently receiving and went on to say that the education offered currently seems to be more focused on not only understanding the language but also producing language.

Many of the participants agreed that they would like to continue their English education in the form of courses, which would teach them conversational skills, go over cultural differences and give a review of the English grammar. Some participants had made an effort to find such courses, and one employee was enrolled in an intensive English course, but courses that would fit their needs were reportedly hard to find. This lack of adequate options was discouraging to some participants, and one participant expressed that, at this point in their career, they considered the effort of finding suitable courses a lost cause.

As noted in many recent articles regarding the education of English for specific purposes, the cultural aspect involved in a lingua franca is starting to become more integrated in research as of late (Bjørge, 2010; Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen & Karhunen, 2015; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Nickerson, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Wu, 2013). The fact that cultural backgrounds are only now being taken into consideration within this area of research likely means that it will still take a lot of time before this aspect is looked at in education.

Businesses, however, are already becoming aware of this missing information and employees are reporting that they find difficulties communicating, not only because they lack knowledge of grammar rules or because they do not have enough vocabulary, but also because they have never learned about these issues. Particularly, the employees of multinational companies who have graduated from schools before the 80s, 90s or even the early 2000s feel they lack the skills they need to successfully communicate in the harshly competitive world of international business. Current education and future education may very well be headed in the right direction, but there may be generations of working-age individuals who will not benefit from this change.

6. Conclusion

As this is a very small scale case study the findings are not reflective of the entire business community and should not be considered as such. The purpose of this case study is not to provide conclusive evidence of the personal experiences of non-native speakers of English and how they manage to survive in the business world. Rather, the purpose is to bring this area of research into light and try to offer another perspective. This case study did not solve the gap in teaching English for specific purposes and what kind of education the business world actually requires, nor was this the intention. There are numerous issues that remain to be answered and a variety of subjects that could, and should be, looked at in the future. The personal experiences of non-native speakers of English is one of these subjects.

However, based on this case study it seems that more could be done to improve the language skills of the individuals already involved in the business world. Future research may take years before it is implemented into English education, and within that time many will have entered the workforce. There seems to be a need for easily available educational options for the people already employed, which would not only support their specific areas of work but also enforce their basic communication skills, such as grammar and cultural knowledge. Mainly it seems that non-native speakers, currently employed in multinational business settings, are learning from their experiences in the workforce. Despite this, many feel limited because the skills they acquired through education are not adequate in supporting their actual needs. Non-native speakers of English appear to develop a certain mentality towards English as they gain experience working in the field of international business. For some, due to the lack of a solid linguistic foundation, this mentality is unfortunately a negative view of the tool, which plays a crucial part in their careers. Hopefully, future research could provide some guidelines, not only for the educational community, but the business community as well, and encourage the creation of educational courses that would support the needs of all members of the workforce as well as students.

7. Bibliography

- Bjørge, A. K. (2010). Conflict or cooperation: The use of backchannelling in ELF negotiations. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29(3), pp. 191–203. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2009.04.002>
- Ellis, M., & Johnson, C. (1994). *Teaching business english: An introduction to business english for language teachers, trainers, and course organizers*. Oxford University Press.
- Entwistle, N. (1997). Introduction: Phenomenography in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 16(2), pp. 127–134.
- Kankaanranta, A., Louhiala-Salminen, L & Karhunen, P. (2015). English in multinational companies: Implications for teaching 'english' at an international business school. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 4(1), pp. 125–148.
- Kankaanranta, A., & Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2010). “English? – oh, it’s just work!”: A study of BELF users’ perceptions. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29(3), pp. 204–209. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2009.06.004>
- Kassim, H., & Ali, F. (2010). English communicative events and skills needed at the workplace: Feedback from the industry. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29(3), pp. 168–182. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2009.10.002>
- Loughland, T., Reid, A., & Petocz, P. (2002). Young people's conceptions of environment: A phenomenographic analysis. *Environmental Education Research*, 8(2), pp. 187–197. doi:10.1080/13504620220128248
- Lindgren, S. (2014). *Politeness in BELF Communication: A Study on Directness Strategies and Formality in Professional E-mail Communication* (Undergraduate). Stockholm Univeristy.
- Marton, F. & Booth, S. (1997). *Learning and awareness*. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates. p.111.
- Nickerson, C. (2005). English as a lingua franca in international business contexts. *English for Specific Purposes*, 24(4), pp. 367–380. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2005.02.001>
- Ornek, F. (2008). An overview of a theoretical framework of phenomenography in qualitative education research: An example from physics education research. *Asia-Pacific Forum on Science Learning and Teaching*, 9(2), 15.10.2016.
- Rogerson-Revell, P. (2007). Using english for international business: A european case study. *English for Specific Purposes*, 26(1), pp. 103–120. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2005.12.004>

- Vermunt, J. D. (1996). Metacognitive, cognitive and affective aspects of learning styles and strategies: A phenomenographic analysis. *Higher Education, 31*(1), pp. 25–50.
- Wu, Y. (2013). Business english as a lingua franca (BELF). *International Education Studies, 6*(10), pp. 130–138.
- Yates, C., Partridge, H., & Bruce, C. (2012). Exploring information experiences through phenomenography. *Library and Information Research, 36*(112), pp. 96–119.

APPENDIX 1: Interview questions

Predetermined interview questions:

1. State your age
2. Give some background of your English education
3. Do you use English at work?
4. How long have you worked in an environment where you needed to use English?
5. What kinds of things come to your mind regarding your use of English at work?
6. Is there something you find particularly difficult or easy about the English language?
7. Do you feel that the fact you need to use English at work limits you in any way?
8. Do you feel that it is easier to speak with other non-native speakers of English or is it easier to speak with native speakers?
9. Is there anything you felt you have learned at school that you find to be less meaningful than it was made out to be?
10. Is there anything you have learned in your working experience that you did not learn at school?
11. Do you feel like you are in a different position compared to native speakers of English in the business world?
12. Do any have any additional thoughts you would like to share regarding the topic of English?

APPENDIX 2: Written survey

1 Describe the English language in 3-5 words/Kuvaile englanninkieltä käyttämällä 3-5 sanaa

2 Describe the differences between your native language and English/Kuvaile eroja äidinkielesi ja englannin välillä

I speak English at work/Puhun englantia töissä



Never

1-2 times a month

Everyday

I write in English at work/Kirjoitan englanniksi töissä



Never

1-2 times a month

Everyday

I encounter English language outside of my work/Kohtaan englanninkieltä työni ulkopuolella



Never

1-2 times a month

Everyday

I speak English in my private time/Puhun englantia vapaa-ajallani



Never

1-2 times a month

Everyday

I write in English in my private time/Kirjoitan englanniksi vapaa-ajallani



Never 1-2 times a month Everyday

How important is English for your work/Kuinka tärkeää englanninkieli on työsi kannalta

1 2 3 4 5

Not important Somewhat important Extremely important

I feel comfortable using English/Olen sujut englanninkielen käyttämisen kanssa, se ei haittaa minua

1 2 3 4 5

Completely disagree I don't feel either way Completely agree

I have some challenges using English/Minulla on haasteita englannin käytössä

1 2 3 4 5

Completely disagree I don't feel either way Completely agree

I know English grammar well/Tunnen englannin kieliopin hyvin

1 2 3 4 5

Completely disagree I don't feel either way Completely agree

I have a large vocabulary in English/Minulla on laaja sanavarasto englannissa

1 2 3 4 5

Completely disagree I don't feel either way Completely agree

The English education I received is different from the present day English education/Englanninopetus jonka sain on erilaista kuin englanninopetus on nykypäivänä

1 2 3 4 5

Completely disagree I don't feel either way Completely agree

14 If you agreed with the previous statement, please provide an example of the differences/Jos olet samaa mieltä aikaisemman väitteen kanssa, ole hyvä ja anna esimerkki eroista

15 Are these differences reflected in your usage of English, do you feel the way you use English is different from present day students?/Näkyvätkö nämä erot englannin käytössäsi, onko sinun mielestäsi sinun käyttämä englanninkieli erilaista kuin tämän hetken opiskelijoiden?

/

I don't need to particularly think when I'm using English, it comes naturally to me/En ajattele erityisesti kun käytän englantia, se tulee minulle luonnostaan

1
2
3
4
5

Completely disagree

I don't feel either way

Completely agree

/

I would like to participate in English courses/Haluaisin osallistua englanninkielen kursseille

1
2
3
4
5

Completely disagree

I don't feel either way

Completely agree

18 If you agreed with the previous statement, please provide an example of the things you would like to learn more about/Jos olet samaa mieltä aikaisemman väitteen kanssa, ole hyvä ja anna esimerkki asioista joista haluaisit oppia enemmän

/

Submit

APPENDIX 3:

English translations for the Finnish expressions in chart 1.

"Ei se enää herätä mitään" = "It no longer evokes anything"

"Ei enää ajattele" = "No longer think"

"Päivittäistä" = "Daily"

"Ei se nyt mitenkään stressaa" = "It doesn't particularly give me stress"

"Osa työtä" = "A part of work"

"Työkalu" = "A tool"

"Arkipäivää" = "Mundane"

"Luontevaa" = "Natural/smooth"

"Ei ajattele sitä sen enempiä" = "Don't particularly think about it"

"Vivahteet puuttuu ja se harmittaa" = "There is a lack of nuances and that is a pity"

"Väärinymmärryksiä" = "Misunderstandings"

"Jää sanomatta" = "Is left unsaid"

"Ei varsinaisesti stressaa" = "Doesn't particularly give me stress"

"Arki rutiinia" = "Normal routine"

"Ei ahdistaa" = "Doesn't give me anxiety"

"Pärjään hyvin" = "I do fine with it"

"Pieniä eroja suomenkielen käytön kanssa" = "Small differences with how I use Finnish"

"Ei jaksa hermostua" = "I no longer have the energy to get unnerved"

"Haasteellista" = "Challenging"

"Oma persoonallisuus jää pois" = "My personality is left out"

"Turha yrittää enää oppia uutta" = "It is a waste to try to learn anything new anymore"

"Välttämätön paha" = "Necessary evil"

"Ei ole enää kynnyksiä käyttää" = "There isn't a threshold for using the language anymore"

"Vähän joskus pitää miettiä" = "Sometimes you need to think a little"

"Ei stressaa" = "Not stressful"

"Edelleen joskus hankalaa" = "Still sometimes challenging"