Teaching English in a multilingual classroom

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1 Introduction

How can language teaching be inclusive to learners with diverse backgrounds in languages? How do you teach English to a student who is not native in Finnish or is bilingual in a class designed for native monolingual learners? Teaching English to a group of students from all kinds of backgrounds is becoming a prominent issue, especially as countries continue to diversify and globalize. In this thesis, I examine how students’ existing English language skills and differences in their native languages are supported in English education in the typical Finnish classroom, and if their own languages are used to enhance the teaching. There is a need for more research to be done in teaching students from other language backgrounds than the majority language of a country when teaching them English as a Foreign Language (EFL). I examine how English is taught and how support is provided for multilingual and more advanced learners, with a goal of understanding how language education could be improved to be inclusive to learners from all kinds of language backgrounds. I explore how English is currently taught to Finnish-speaking monolinguals and to multilinguals. I approach the subject by examining two Finnish primary school classes with students from multicultural backgrounds to see if any special or different methods are used to teach English to students from multilingual backgrounds than are used to teach the students from monolingual Finnish backgrounds. I also examine what methods are used.

In this thesis, ‘native language’ is used to refer to a language that is learned from birth, and ‘second language’ is used to refer to a language that is learned at a later stage. Although ‘bilingualism’ can mean knowing any two languages at any proficiency level, in this study it is used to refer to a person who has two native languages. The same applies for ‘multilingualism’; it is used to refer to someone who has two or more native languages, rather than someone who knows more than one language at any level. ‘Monolingualism’ can mean knowing only one language, but it is used here to refer to someone who is native in only one language or viewing languages as a set things to be learned with specific rules. Someone who is not native in English learns English as a Foreign Language (EFL), in countries where English is not the native language, or English as a Second Language (ESL), in countries where English is the native language. This essay primarily examines learners of English as a Foreign Language and native learners.
I begin the study by describing previous research on the topic. I then lay out an overview of the most relevant studies and documents pertaining to multilingualism in the classroom. After I describe the background and previous research, I outline the method that I am using and introduce the study subjects. Finally, I analyze my findings and discuss how they relate to the previous research on how to teach an English as a Foreign Language-class with students from different linguistic backgrounds.

2 Description of previous research in a multilingual classroom

Previous studies conducted in Finland that focus specifically on teaching English as a Foreign Language to multilingual learners are rare, and I am unable to find any such studies. Instead, I have found that there has been some research done in Finland that has focused on whether the current learning curriculum, which in Finland is grammar- and reading-intensive, is the right way to learn another language. I examine some of that research, as well as Finland’s national curriculum for learning English, what accents are used to teach and learn English, how teaching about cultures is handled, and what the significance of the languages used in the classroom is.

Here I examine which accents are used to teach English, and what the suggested accent is. Is there a standard English accent to teach to non-natives? The popular choices in a Finnish classroom seem to be British English or American English, as they are the most culturally available and popular. These accents are often taught in schools to provide students with native-like proficiency in English. However, there are opposing opinions on the matter: Ranta (2010) suggests moving away from teaching the accents of native English speakers to students learning EFL. She argues that as there are now more non-native English speakers than there are native speakers, teachers should move away from teaching English as a foreign language, and move towards teaching English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). This shift in thinking would allow students to embrace English as a “vehicular language between speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (Ranta, 2010, p. 157), rather than a language and culture that is foreign to them. In addition to moving away from goals of native-like competence, students should be taught to be more tolerant of different kinds of English, not just native Englishes. However, in her research, Ranta finds that in previous
studies conducted in Europe, non-native students are the most reluctant to adopt studies of ELF, preferring to learn a native English, while native teachers are more willing to adopt teaching ELF than non-native teachers. Ranta conducts her own study of the attitudes towards learning English in Finland, where she studies a group of 108 students’ and 34 teachers’ attitudes through a survey. Ranta finds that when asking the students to indicate three instances in which they used English, 62% of these instances has been with other non-native speakers, in ‘English as a lingua franca’ situations, while only 25% of the instances are with native speakers. When the students are asked if their future interactions would be with native or non-native speakers, only 18.5% say that they predict they would be with native speakers, while 56.5% say the interactions would be with non-native speakers. Students are also wary of using native Englishes in their own speech, with 70% of them saying that they don’t keep to a certain variety (American English or British English), and 34% of those students claiming that native-like speech is “unnecessary, ‘phony’, or even counter-productive” (Ranta, 2010, p. 163). The majority of students in the study feel that the Finnish school system spends more time and attention on teaching grammar than communication, with some students voicing their frustrations about not being taught enough about real-life communication situations. However, the majority also agree that “English instruction in Finnish schools provide students with good abilities to use the language independently in life after school” (Ranta, 2010, p. 166). A notable reason for the grammar-heavy curriculum comes from the teachers’ answers to the statement “In upper secondary school teaching, the goals set by the Matriculation Examination Board strongly direct the goals the teachers set for their students” (Ranta, 2010, p. 173). Only 6% of the teachers questioned disagree with the statement, while the rest of them agree, many remarking on the matter. Ranta concludes her research by stating that though teachers and students both recognize the need to include more communication-based English in the classroom, teachers have their hands tied due to the tests and regulations set forth by the examination boards.

Along with accents, the concept of multilingualism versus monolingualism is questioned in the research conducted in Finland. The concept of multilingualism means that instead of language being monolingual, it is multilingual in that it draws from several different languages, accents, and situations, and varies according to the situation and social group the speaker is in. Dufva (2010) states that in her study about encouraging multilinguality in the classroom, she found that when a certain variant of a language (such
as Received Pronunciation [RP] in English) is used as the standard variant, other accents and dialects are marginalized. Dufva makes an interesting argument for what she calls ‘resource discourse’ rather than ‘problem discourse’. ‘Problem discourse’, she states, means evaluating students on what they don’t know, and comparing their language knowledge to that of a native speaker. On the other hand, ‘resource discourse’ provides an evaluation based on how the learner uses their language in diverse situations and ways, how successful they are in their interactions, and how well they can manage their resources in a meaningful way. Dufva urges educators to take a move away from materials and evaluation that focus on what students don’t know, and focus instead on resource discourse.

Dufva’s discussions of problem discourse and resource discourse overlap somewhat with another one of her essays, which is co-authored with Suni, Aro, and Salo (2011). In this essay, the authors argue for functionalism in language teaching and teaching ‘multilinguality’, rather than teaching and viewing English as a single, simplistic monolingual language. Drawing inspiration from Mihail Bakhtin, they offer this concept of multilinguality as an alternative for monological views on language. They assert that people are never monolingual to begin with, but multilingual, because their use of language changes over time and depending on their situation. The authors argue that languages should not be viewed as separate entities, or as national languages that usually stop at the border of a country, and that they should not have a grammar, or an “abstract, decontextual set of (grammatical) rules” (Dufva, Salo, Suni, & Aro, 2011, p. 110). These grammatical rules have led to a formalist stand where one studies primarily linguistic form and structures, which in turn leads to a written language bias in language education, according to the authors. National languages and their grammars are problematic to the authors, as they suggest that one way, or variant, of speaking a language is better than other ways. Raising one variant over others was originally done to have a shared language for all citizens of a country, but resulted in grammars and dictionaries developing, and these grammars “started to be regarded as the very object of learning” (Dufva et al., 2011, p. 111). Dufva et al. state that ‘knowing a grammatical rule’, or being able to produce a grammatical utterance, is not the same as knowing the formula to the rule. That is, for example, a native speaker is able to produce a sentence using the correct grammar, but may not be able to explain why it is correct. Furthermore, the authors claim, one cannot reach full proficiency of a language by learning its grammar, as “the proficiency of any speaker consists of a personal repertoire of
certain registers, varieties, dialects and modality-specific usages” (Dufva et al., 2011, p. 112). Furthermore, the authors criticize teaching grammar because it does not teach students how to act and speak in a socially and culturally acceptable way. Their argument is for a communication-based learning module, as they argue that when studying grammar, there is not enough of socially and culturally (semantic and pragmatic) relevant aspects in the materials and learning methods.

What is more important, the authors state, is learning how to use language functionally. Even in the mother tongue, the authors claim, “what people learn is a variety of ways to understand and to use the linguistic, or more largely, semiotic [meaning-making] resources around them. ...each learner comes to have at his/her disposal a unique repertoire of where, why, with whom, by what channel and so on we are using language” (Dufva et al., 2011, p. 116). They suggest that one needs to learn how to do a variety of things in different situations, and that this should be reflected in language teaching. The authors stress teaching, or learning, by doing, moving, and using different situations where the contexts are personally relevant to the learners.

Whether or not to teach culture is another topic to think about when considering an education that is fair for all. Dervin and Hahl (2015) examine how culture is viewed and taught in the Finnish school system. Specifically, they have studied the attitudes of university students towards culture during a course that they taught. In their research, they present that in all interpersonal communication there is an imbalance of power and inequality. Namely, people from different backgrounds are automatically placed in different societal roles that are more or less equal. Teaching culture, such as teaching that the English drink tea or that Americans are overweight, in language classes simply perpetuates cultural stereotypes instead of celebrating every individual’s uniqueness. Celebrating uniqueness is especially important in classes with students from diverse backgrounds, as they are experiencing the stereotypes first hand. Dervin and Hahl (2015) argue that instead of focusing on national culture and identity, which they view as problematic and a social construct, a portfolio should be created to help students develop intercultural competence in a way that improves their “critical ability to question the implicit and explicit assumptions behind cultural claims and the power dynamics that they may be concealing” (Dervin & Hahl, 2015, p. 98). Dervin and Hahl (2015) acknowledge that formative assessment is not suitable when it comes to assessing students’ intercultural competence, stating that
“student teachers need to develop appropriate methods and tools for recognition, analysis and action, which can help them to work on and with everyone’s diversity in the classroom and beyond” (2015, p. 98).

A central question to how language is taught in school is what languages are used in the learning process. Although she does not discuss it in a learning environment, Pietikäinen (2010) explains that how much or how little a particular language is used in a society is often based on a language hierarchy created by the society. This means that a certain language holds a higher position in the classroom or society, and other languages may follow it according to importance and use. At the top of the hierarchy, seen as the most important language, is the mother tongue of the majority of the society. The second tier consists of languages that are beneficial for doing business, or international languages such as English, French, or German. These are followed by languages that are historically or geographically significant, and at the bottom of the hierarchy are often minority languages, because they are viewed as less useful. This societal view of languages impacts the population’s respect for the certain individual languages. In EFL education, this can mean that English and the main language spoken in the country take the top positions of the hierarchy.

Another important thing to consider when discussing language education is the current national curriculum. At the time this study was performed, a 2004 Finnish national curriculum was in use, but a new curriculum was about to be introduced in the following school year. Some of the new teaching methods have therefore already been implemented, which is why both the old (2004) and the new (2014) curricula are examined here. Only the sections on teaching English to grades 3-6 (primary school) are examined, as the observation groups consist of 6th graders.

The 2004 curriculum’s highlighted goals of teaching a foreign language are to prepare students for communication in various situations, to get the students used to speaking in a foreign language, and to teach students to understand and appreciate other cultures. The curriculum stresses using as much spoken language as possible, and slowly integrating written language.

While the 2004 curriculum demonstrates what needs to be taught for all foreign language learners, the 2014 curriculum specifically addresses English as the foreign language to be learned. The curriculum starts by stating that the role of foreign language education is to further critical thinking skills, as well as develop communication skills and
independent learning. The students are to be encouraged to communicate in authentic situations, according to the core curriculum. One of the suggested ways of encouraging students to use languages is by utilizing modern technology and media, which encourages them to take part in the international world.

Expectations in the 2004 curriculum for learning the target culture include familiarizing students to the culture and teaching them to be able to name the differences and similarities of the target culture and their own, Finnish, culture. Students are expected to be able to communicate with people from the target culture in a way that is natural for those in the target culture. The 2014 curriculum, however, stresses overall cultural competence, in being able to think critically about different cultures and what they mean for people and society. The students are shown how widespread cultures and languages can be on the internet, for example. In addition to examining English-speaking cultures, the curriculum urges teachers to introduce students to different languages and cultures, and to discuss how to act and communicate in situations where knowledge in the language is minimal or nonexistent.

The most significant difference in the curriculums is the inclusion or exclusion of how to instruct, support, and evaluate students. While both curriculums have separate sections on support and evaluation, only the 2014 curriculum mentions them in a subject-specific manner, mentioning both students who have learning difficulties, especially with languages, and students who are more advanced learners.

3 Method

Classroom observation, individual observation, and interviews were all considered as methods for this research. Observation was selected, because it gave the ability to gauge how the students work together and with the teacher, and to determine the behavior and activities in the classroom.

The data for this study is obtained by means of observation in a primary school English classroom. In Finland, students begin studying English from age 8-9, at 3rd grade. The observation is conducted in two groups of sixth-grade English classes (children aged 12-13) from the same school, and taught by the same teacher. This is a small-scale study; the observation is conducted in two separate classes, and only one lesson from each is
observed. Therefore, more data is needed for a fuller understanding of the subject area. None of the names of the students, teachers, or school are published, and permission to gather the data is granted by both the teacher and the school in question. Neither the students nor the teacher are described in any way. The school’s name and any characteristics are also omitted. The students and teacher are described by ‘student’ or ‘teacher’, or ‘they/their’ if a pronoun is necessary to protect the privacy of the individual.

There are several questions that were considered during the observation. Attention was paid to whether cultural stereotypes were used in the English class, as they can be harmful and encourage the segregation of students from different cultural backgrounds, as noted by Dervin and Hahl (2015). An examination of whether international students were treated differently than ones from a Finnish background was conducted. Special attention was paid to how the lessons were run, whether they were taught mainly in English, if communicating in English was an important part of the classes, and if the instruction was based on the assumption that the students know Finnish. Language hierarchies can also come through in lessons, so an examination was made of whether Finnish scales the hierarchy, rather than utilizing other languages for the education. Observation was made of whether the students’ own languages were used and if the languages were viewed as monolingual or multilingual. Although not a primary concern of the study, attention was paid to whether there were observable differences in which kinds of English were taught (such as different accents used in teaching), and if the students’ efforts in spoken and listening language skills are taken into account. These were observed only out of interest and keeping future research in mind.

3.1 Findings

The following findings are based on the observation of the two classes. To clarify certain parts of the lesson or curriculum, an informal conversation with the English subject teacher was held.

The classes were held primarily in English, and Finnish was used for translation exercises and grammar, and to reinforce directions given in class if the students do not understand. The lessons were modeled from the textbook that is used by the school, which is one aimed at Finnish students. This means that all students have to use and practice the
grammar rules and translations that are provided in Finnish in the textbooks. Teaching the classes almost entirely in English guarantees that there is no disadvantage to students who do not speak Finnish natively. However, knowledge of Finnish was crucial in the classroom to learn English, which gives the native Finnish speakers an advantage over those who do not speak Finnish natively. The teacher said that they are concerned about the lack of resources to provide support for students with a non-Finnish native language, and tries their best to provide solutions, but feels largely unable to, as they do not have any knowledge of most multilingual students’ own languages and face a lack of materials and resources, along with a lack of time.

The teacher explained that iPads with dictionary apps are provided for students whose Finnish is not good enough to translate English to. Additionally, the teacher mentioned that they use Google Translate to translate the Finnish parts in the exams to each student’s native language if their Finnish is not strong, so they are not at a disadvantage and they benefit from the exams and lessons. Providing Google Translations of texts during exams is a thoughtful step from the teacher, but could also potentially misguide the student, as the teacher is unable to confirm that the translation is correct. Students whose Finnish is not strong enough to participate in the regular classes are first placed into a preparatory class teaching basic Finnish and subjects in a simplified form. The classes observed in this study are regular classes, but do have some students from these preparatory classes in them.

Advanced learners are also provided additional support, but due to limits of the teacher’s time, cannot be given individual support, and the support provided is minimal. The teacher stated that this is due to limited time and resources, and that the teacher cannot concentrate as much on the students who are advanced, as they also have to focus on getting some students to pass the course with decent grades at all.

An advanced native English-speaker in the class was provided with her own projects and her own textbook. The advanced speaker was directed to a computer at the back of the classroom to continue to work on a project. The student had spent a month in New York and was preparing a presentation on their time there. Her language skills, according to the teacher, are good enough to miss the lessons, but when the rest of the students had a game as a class activity, the advanced student’s performance dropped and she seemed to want to join the class instead of working on the individual project. Separating the student by being
assigned to sit at the back of the classroom could potentially isolate the student from their peers. During particularly interesting activities, the student does join in, with the teacher’s permission to join class activities whenever it suits the student.

The lack of additional support provided for the advanced learner is notable, as is the use of Finnish in all grammar and translation exercises. Teaching grammar and translations in Finnish and teaching that English is a native language to some rather than teaching that it is a lingua franca or an international language of communication could be problematic for students from multilingual backgrounds and for the students’ future uses of English when communicating with non-natives. However, students not native in Finnish and those who need additional support in learning English are provided with much more support, and the teacher’s use of English during all situations except translations and grammar is also notable.

Students who need additional help are provided for at this school. Students without backgrounds in Finnish are placed in preparatory language classes before joining the rest of their peers in the regular class. The international students from the preparatory classes seem to be well accepted into the classrooms by the other students, and students are eager to help each other if they do not understand the directions given or what the assignments are asking. According to the teacher, seating is assigned and based on the students’ skills and social circles, to promote concentration and ability to help one’s peer. Once in the regular class, these students are provided with iPads or dictionaries to use during class when going over word meanings or translations, they are given different versions of assignments and tests, and their peers are able to provide support for them as well. Again, the accuracy of the translations and the disadvantage of not having strong Finnish skills should be considered when teaching a class of multilinguals. The need for preparatory classes before joining their peers in the English classroom should also be considered. These classes prepare the students for school-life in Finland, which is useful, but should the students need to go on to study Finnish to be able to join English classes? Learning Finnish is not a necessary step to learning English, and it is a difficult one. The usage of Finnish could possibly be largely reduced from English language teaching. If a student can comprehend a text or speech in the target language, English, they do not necessarily need to know the translation of it, as one does not need to know the translation of something to know what it means, as Dufva et al. suggest in their essay (2011).
Students’ own languages was not used to enhance teaching, although sometimes a student said that a certain word in English is similar to a word in their own language, in which case the teacher discussed that and some other similarities. No other languages than Finnish and English are used in the classroom for instruction. A language hierarchy can be seen in the teaching, with Finnish comprehension and competence the most important skill, as everything has to be translated into Finnish and grammar is examined from a Finnish point of view, with references back to how Finnish is taught. English is also at the top of the hierarchy, as the language to be learned. Other languages are not looked down upon, but not seen as important to learning English. No other languages are of major importance in the classroom. Students’ own languages hold a role, but are utilized only for the particular students who speak them, and not considered as a whole. The teacher did attempt to achieve a more multilingual view on language by occasionally connecting how similar different languages could be. However, this is not very common and is done only when the students provide the teacher with the translation in their own language.

More could be done to break down the barriers of this monological view on language. As Dufva et al. (2011) suggest, each learner has a unique linguistic repertoire, which does not need to match the unique repertoire one has in their mother tongue. These repertoires can be different, according to usage. Why then, must we teach students to translate literally from one language to the other? Students aren’t taught translations when they are learning English as a Second Language in a country where the majority speaks English, they are taught the words or utterances in context. Considering language from a multilingual point of view would release the expectation that students will one day learn ‘a language’, and be done learning it.

How grammar is taught in the classroom is also a cause for slight concern. A problem for the students more advanced in English who are working on individual projects is the absorption of grammatical rules. Students naturally gifted in languages may not need to know the rules of grammar to know how the language is used for communication. This is acceptable in conversation and writing, but could conceivably cause difficulties when being graded on tests and in further learning within the Finnish school system to be able to pass the Matriculation exams. If a shift were to be made towards teaching English as a Lingua Franca, as Ranta (2010) suggests, learning the rules of grammar would become less important. The way grammar is taught in the classroom requires the students to not only
memorize the rules, but to memorize the names of the rules as well, which can be confusing for some students, especially as the rules are compared to the rules of Finnish, which has a very different grammatical system. Grading students based on their knowledge of grammar rather than evaluating students by their communication skills and abilities to work around problems as they arise in communication falls under Dufva’s (2010) ‘problem discourse’. Dufva’s critique of grammars being regarded as the object of learning seems to be true during the observation. The problem of setting grammar as the object of learning has less to do with the teacher’s teaching style, and more to do with what textbooks the school assigns, as well as the requirement to know grammatical rules to be able to pass the national matriculation exams at the end of student’s high school careers. Another consideration for the matriculation exams is what accent is used, and this can be seen in the classes as well.

The teacher spoke in a loosely RP-accented English, but the digital textbook uses RP English for all of the spoken material. However, the stories in the textbooks include trips to countries that use different accents of English, although all native accents. The use of RP English in the classroom could cause a hierarchy in approved dialects and accents within the classroom, as Dufva (2010) suggests in her essay. Another thing to consider is the spelling of words, as the students are taught British English (BrE). Students who have learned English elsewhere than in the classroom used the American English (AmE) way of spelling, and could conceivably be graded down due to their difference in spelling. Although not an issue in this particular classroom or possibly in other primary schools, it may be an issue in secondary or upper secondary school, with the pressure to conform to the matriculation exams, which require the use of British English.

The focus on RP English, which is a native British English accent, could also encourage teaching cultural stereotypes, something which is seen in the textbooks as well. As Dervin and Hahl (2015) state in their case for an intercultural portfolio, teaching cultural stereotypes can create an imbalance of power within the classroom, which a classroom with students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds would be especially insensitive to. Although the teacher didn’t encourage cultural stereotypes with her own teaching during the observation, the textbooks clearly highlight the separate native cultures. It may be worth considering stepping away from textbooks in these instances, or developing the textbooks further to be more suitable. Stereotypes are often very harmful, and are
something that can be seen widely even in Finland. Having stereotypes for certain cultures in society will probably not make the students’ lives or school careers any easier.

Although not an objective of the observation, it is worth noting that the students in both of the classes provided peer support to each other whenever they needed help. This is partially due to the seating arrangement, which allows the students with similar skillsets to sit together and help each other, but partially because the environment and the teacher accommodated mistakes and made them a learning opportunity.

4 Discussion

The findings of this study are very insightful considering the research questions that were set for the study. A lot of support is offered to multilingual students, but there is still room for improvement. Specifically, the material used and the tie-in with Finnish could cause students from multilingual backgrounds to be at a disadvantage to monolingual Finnish students. Moving away from learning grammar and translating into specific languages (Finnish, in the case of this study) would provide a more equal ground for native Finnish speakers and non-natives alike. The most concerning aspect revealed in this study is the use of textbooks that do not consider multilingual learners. With the increase in immigrants and refugees, it is critical to consider the education of their children. Although an argument can be made that the knowledge of Finnish is mandatory when living in Finland, I would argue that the place of Finnish is not in the English classroom. The knowledge and use of Finnish could instead serve as a supplementary tool to learning English, along with other native languages of the students.

Assessment is a topic that repeatedly comes up in both the research and during the observation. Do other methods of assessment need to be considered if schools were to move towards a more communication-based English curriculum? Assessing on the basis of the knowledge of Finnish is also problematic for both advanced English learners and those who are not native in Finnish. Advanced learners do not necessarily need knowledge of Finnish to know what things in English mean, and could be marked down in formative assessment due to not knowing direct translations, while non-natives in Finnish are at a disadvantage to their native Finnish peers. Something else to consider is whether advanced learners or students native in English are graded differently than the rest of the class, if they
have different assignments. This is not something that is clear during this study, but would be more relevant especially when entering secondary or upper secondary school. A consideration to be made would be using non-formative assessment methods. However, non-formative assessment methods are somewhat non-conventional, and the subject yields to opportunities for further research in the area.

While I largely agree with Dufva’s view on grammars and scepticism on national languages, I would urge readers to ask the same question as she did, “if we do not teach and learn ‘a’ language (‘Finnish’, ‘English’) what is it, then, that needs to be taught and learned?” (2011). The answer to this question could be to teach students how to act, react, and communicate in various situations where English would be needed, and to simply focus on other things in the target language, such as projects about specific subjects. Content and Language Integrated Learning for English lessons could also be considered more in the modern classroom, but this is a subject for further research.

This study also opens possibilities for further studies in the field of bilingual and multilingual education. It would be useful to study how English is taught as a Second Language (ESL), and whether people in Finland and in Europe could benefit from adapting some methods from that, as it teaches students from all kinds of backgrounds from a multilingual point of view. This method could be combined with the target of teaching English as a Foreign Language to achieve a more functional English classroom that could benefit both the majority language speakers and the multilingual students. If an ESL-based approach is not ideal, it is worth considering moving towards a bilingual or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) method within the Finnish school systems. As CLIL is already being implemented in some classes due to the requirements in the new national Finnish curriculum, the effectiveness of the CLIL classes within national public schools could be further researched.

For the benefit of international students as well as Finnish students, it may be appropriate to consider teaching International English, or English as a Lingua Franca, rather than RP English or another native English. This would guarantee that no student has an advantage or disadvantage in pronunciation when being graded, as students with more exposure to a certain accent will not be at an advantage to students who are new to English or have exposure to a different accent. Having multilingual students and students from different linguistic backgrounds in an English class could provide a teacher with a unique
opportunity to draw from and explore a diverse set of languages, instead of limiting the teacher and the students by having to create and provide separate materials for the multilingual students.

Because this was such a small-scale study, the data only gives an idea as to how things are in the Finnish classroom, and a larger, longer study would be needed for a more definitive understanding of how English is taught to students from multiple linguistic backgrounds. A new study would also be helpful with the adoption of the 2014 National Core Curriculum, to compare and learn if things have changed for the better.

5 References


Appendix

Observation questions
1. Are cultural stereotypes used in the classroom?
2. Are international students treated differently than natively Finnish people?
3. Are the lessons modeled for a Finnish way of learning, with more reading and grammar than pronunciation and language usage?
4. Is there a focus on which accent is to be used?
5. What is the language of instruction?
6. Is there an observable language hierarchy in the classroom?
7. Are students’ own languages used to enhance teaching?
8. Are other languages used aside from English and Finnish?
9. Are multilinguals held to a higher or lower standard than monolingual Finnish students?
10. How are the students assessed? Based on knowledge of Finnish?
11. Are other languages than Finnish used for translations?
12. How is multilingualism and/or poor knowledge of Finnish taken into consideration?