Construing Identities and Competence:
L2 English Speaker Perceptions

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1 Introduction

People use language to perform a variety of functions. The fundamental function of language is to act as a medium of communication but language is also used to construe and negotiate meaning in our daily lives. With language we can construe ourselves in relation to other people, and negotiate categorizations for the things that we find meaningful. When, however, people acquire more than one language, they have yet another resource in their repertoire, and another tool with which to construe the social world around them. When the proficiency level of this L2 is high, construing oneself as a member of a specific community becomes more complex, and people might end up holding various different speaker identities simultaneously. Competence in L2 becomes a key factor in defining to what degree people choose to identify themselves as part of a specific community of language speakers.

The focus of this study is how identity and competence are construed when English is learned as a foreign language and used in intercultural contexts with people from various different backgrounds. The global spread of English has created a situation where much of the English use takes place in English as a lingua franca (ELF) contexts, where speakers do not share a common mother tongue. Typically L2 speakers are taught to communicate with native speakers of the language, and thus foreign language teaching often defines competence in the L2 by comparing learners’ proficiency level to a native speaker model. This view perceives L2 speakers as learners of the language, and defines their competence in the L2 by the degree learners are able to acquire the target language norms. In lingua franca contexts competence is defined quite differently. Competence in ELF means the ability to use the language successfully with people from various cultural backgrounds, and the
ability to negotiate norms to ensure mutual understanding, which, at times, might even mean deviating from the target language norms.

Before explaining in more detail the aims of this study I would like to clarify what I mean by the terms L1 and L2. A person’s L1 refers to the language or languages which have been acquired as a mother tongue in a naturalistic environment. In this study, the term L2, on the other hand, is used for any language acquired in addition to the L1(s) no matter what the order of acquisition might have been.

This study explores the way speaker identities and competence are construed by proficient speakers of English as an L2, and investigates the factors that influence the salience of the different constructions of these phenomena. I approach these issues from a bottom-up viewpoint, i.e. by looking at how identities and competence are construed in discourse, and mapping recurring themes that become salient when people discuss these issues. The ways people interpret the world around them has profound effects on how they act in the world, and discourse provides a gateway into these interpretations. Construing one’s identity as a member of a group might mean excluding oneself from another or attempting to hold multiple identities simultaneously. Furthermore, adopting an identity also means adopting ideals and norms that the members of the community share, and when people construe identities whose ideals and norms are in conflict, maintaining an identity might become problematic. In a similar vein, construing competence in an L2 as, for example, the ability to follow the target language norms might result in difficulties in maintaining an image of oneself as a competent speaker of the language in situations where one is not able to follow those norms.
At this point it seems appropriate to address the motives I had to study identity and competence constructions in English as an L2. I became interested in understanding how people realize identities as L2 speakers of English, and resolve the issues of holding multiple identities and construing competence in an L2 due to my own status as a non-native speaker of English. Not surprisingly, Suleiman (2006: 51) has argued that – linguists especially – might be driven to study identity realizations due to “personal concerns, even anxieties, about their own personal identity”. He (2006: 51) goes on to add that “writing about identity, a scholar may in fact use the occasion, knowingly or unknowingly, to grapple with issues of personal identity”. Thus, the foci of this thesis is to study how people resolve these conflicts and what are the things that affect identity and competence construction in English as an L2.

Typically ELF research has focused on attitudes in relation to different speaker identities, but this paper will not address attitudes towards ELF usage explicitly. However, attitudes toward different varieties are bound to come up from time to time when we discuss identities and competence in L2 for the reasons I have laid out in the previous paragraph. Furthermore, according to Jenkins (2007:198) “linguistic identity […] is a complex phenomenon that cannot be divorced from other phenomena such as language attitudes and ideologies”. Her research studied how one construes identity as an L2 English speaker, exploring what kind of speaker identities people hold in lingua franca contexts, and by investigating how local versus global user identities are negotiated in multilingual and cultural ELF encounters. Previous research has also studied how identities are hierarchized according to their salience in a given context (Omoniyi 2006), and how people hold and negotiate multiple identities in multilingual contexts (see for example Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). They do not, however, address the issue of the competence constructions of L2
speakers of English. Some English as a foreign language (EFL) research in Finland, on the other hand, has mapped the discourses of language learner identities (e.g. Turunen and Kalaja 2004; Dufva, et. al. 2003). There have also been attempts to integrate the two identities of language learner and user conceptually (Kohonen 2006) but not empirically. The current research, then, seeks to empirically analyze what are the speaker identities and constructions of competence that emerge from proficient English as an L2 speakers’ discourse, and from their retrospective perceptions of their English use.

In order to seek answers to the above mentioned questions, I decided to interview four university students of English, and asked them to tell me about their past experiences of using English, and the ways they have perceived English language learning both in formal and informal settings. From the data I collected I set out to find answers to the following questions:

1. What kind of speaker identities do Finnish university students of English construct in their accounts?
2. How do they construe competence in English?

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 will introduce the differing perspectives of ELF and EFL in detail and discuss their standpoints in relation to the notions of speaker identities and competence in a foreign language. Chapter 3, “Material and Methods”, addresses the methodological issues by presenting my material, participants. In chapter 3, I will also present discourse analysis, the methodological framework with which I will approach my data. In addition, I will introduce a specific method of discourse analysis, the study of interpretative repertoires. In chapter 4, “Construing competence and identity”, I discuss how proficient L2 speakers of English construe their identity and competence in English.
In chapter 5, “The Interpretative repertoires of identity and competence”, I provide a detailed discussion on the interpretative repertoires these L2 speakers employ when talking about identities and competence in English, and interpret the relations of these repertoires to the ELF and EFL paradigms introduced in chapter 2. And finally, in chapter 6, I describe my main findings and discuss their implications to the field of teaching English as a foreign language. I will also address the limitations of the current study, as well as suggest ideas for further research.
2 The ELF and EFL paradigms

In this chapter I present the differing stand points of ELF and EFL research, as well as their implications to the ways identity and competence is perceived in these frameworks. Before discussing these paradigms in detail, I will briefly explain why we need to take both of these perspectives into account when we describe identity and competence in English as an L2.

In today’s world, English is not used by non-native speakers only to communicate with native speakers’ of English, but increasingly as a shared lingua franca which enables people with various backgrounds to communicate with one another. In English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching this is not always acknowledged, and language teaching authorities, policymakers, teachers and textbook writers continue to base the standards of language teaching and learning on native speaker models. While this practice is no doubt useful when preparing students to interact with native speakers of English, it might pose problems when students meet people who do not come from an English speaking culture. I will discuss these problems more extensively in chapter 2.2 when I introduce the notion of competence from an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) perspective. At this point it is sufficient to point out that the current problematization of the native speaker model was brought about by a change in the power dynamics of different speakers of English, namely that non-native speakers now outnumber native speakers of English. Kachru (1985:12-13) described this dynamic situation by defining native speakers of English as an “inner circle”. These are people whose primary language is English, and who often but not always are monolingual. Speakers of English as an official second language form the “outer circle”, while speakers who have learned English through formal education comprise an “expanding circle”. Traditionally the inner circle has provided norms
and standards for language use but lately the sheer number of the expanding circle’s non-native speakers has started to rock the balance of this power dynamic, and to make us rethink the ways language should be used in different contexts.

With the increasing number of non-native speakers, the situations where speakers of various backgrounds come together are bound to increase. These speakers from different L1 backgrounds are able to communicate with each other by using a common language that all interlocutors have in their repertoire. This common language becomes a medium of communication, a lingua franca for the speakers. According to Mauranen (2012:15), the speakers might not have an equally good command of the language, the variety they have learned might be different, and most likely they will pronounce it differently. Given all this variation, people might be inclined to make their messages as clear as possible, and strip all the unnecessary elements that might create confusion or misunderstandings from their talk. So instead of producing simpler structures and vocabulary due to one’s lower competence level, people in lingua franca interaction might produce simpler language to get their message across more efficiently.

2.1 Speaker identities

As noted in the section above, speakers of ELF might not be equally competent in the language when their proficiency level is compared to the standards of formal foreign language learning, but from an ELF point of view they are, nonetheless, equal participants in the interaction. Next, I will discuss in detail how the two different fields — ELF and EFL perceive non-native English speakers, but before that I will briefly introduce the notion of identity from a discourse analytical point of view.
Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 4) define identity from a discoursal standpoint as “a public phenomenon, a performance or construction that is interpreted by other people”. When identity is perceived this way, the context of the discourse becomes crucial. The discursive view argues that people do not actually possess any stable identities, but instead they construct their notion of themselves and their roles in the world through discourse. In other words “identity is actively, ongoingly, and dynamically constituted in discourse” (emphasis original, Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 4). These constructionist approaches to the study of identity investigate how identities are performed, adopted and resisted. This approach also takes into account the influence of internal and external forces, e.g. personal values or norms that might limit people’s options to construe identity freely. In addition, people narrate identities in the stories they tell, and by telling different stories in different situations they “can construct different versions of the self” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 138.) Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 139) also claim that narratives about the self reflect general cultural stories, sometimes also called master narratives or interpretative repertoires. In this study, I will adopt interpretative repertoires as a method to analyze the constructions of the self that are found from the data.

Having established what I mean by identity, we will now move on to discuss how ELF and EFL research perceive L2 speakers of English. Firth and Wagner (1997:759) claim that traditionally in EFL research, or more broadly in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), the focus of study is the learner of the language. In addition, according to Ellis & Shintani (2014), SLA studies the language the learner produces, i.e. the learner language, to determine the mental and developmental processes that enable language learning. It models the output produced by the learner by comparing it to a standard variety of the target language
and measuring the differences (Jenkins 2000: 9). Language learners’ competence level is then determined by comparing their output to the native speaker standard (Firth & Wagner 1997: 757; Kachru 1985: 28). This view is individualistic because its focus is on the learner’s “mind” or “brain.” What is more, Firth and Wagner (1997:760) claim that L2 learners are by default set in a hierarchical situation that presupposes deficiencies in their competence level. This hierarchy can, for example be seen in classrooms when teachers correct learners’ language. Typically, in SLA research, learners are seen as “defective communicators” compared to the native speaker that is set as an ideal speaker (Firth & Wagner 1997:767-768).

According to Mauranen (2012), one of the major differences between EFL and ELF is the social environment the language use takes place in. The above mentioned hierarchy that exists in the classroom, as well as other impositions prevalent in a school setting, are not part of the reality the learners face when they step out of the classroom. Mauranen adds that outside the classroom, learners become language users in their own right. Research has shown that even native speakers focus on the content non-natives produce, instead of pointing out mistakes they might make (Kurhila 2003: 54). Mauranen (2012) makes a claim that the way people identify themselves as either learners or users depends on the situation. Some situations call for a learner identity while in others, the identity of a language user is more appropriate. Moreover people may hold both types of identities, although they manifest in different contexts. This learner-user identity distinction has many implications.

First of all, in a classroom setting, most of the learners typically share a similar cultural background. This means that insurmountable communication breakdowns are not likely to occur. In addition, it is highly likely that people with similar cultural
backgrounds hold matching assumptions on notions such as politeness and appropriateness. Mauranen (2012: 8) points out that while comprehensibility is an evident and desired requirement in an EFL setting as well, the scale of the measures that need to be taken to ensure mutual understanding are very different in intercultural encounters. For as language users in ELF settings, comprehensibility is a vital necessity that makes meaningful communication possible to begin with; for language learners comprehensibility is not critical since even if the message is not understood, there are no unwelcome consequences. Mauranen (2012: 7) argues that feedback and the way learners are evaluated focus on mastering language norms on issues such as grammar and phonology, instead of developing communication strategies, even though communicative competence is one of the explicit objectives in SLA curricula. Due to the specific nature of the classroom setting, evaluating learners in this manner can never objectively assess how well learners would be likely to communicate in an authentic setting.

Much of the difference between the settings is due to differences of emphasis regarding the notion of achieving mutual comprehension. In ELF encounters people typically focus on the content instead of form (Mauranen 2012: 7). This is perfectly understandable since the essence of ELF interaction is to use the language as a medium to convey messages, i.e. to produce content. In contrast, the foci of foreign language teaching are the features of the language itself, grammar, idioms, spelling etc. In order for comprehension to take place in an ELF interaction, participants have to accept the variability that is inherent in ELF communication. With the help of context, the interactants can focus on the content. The features that produce variability are the elements that potentially create misunderstanding in the interaction due to different accents, transfer from one’s L1 and varying proficiency levels. Thus
context provides interactants assistance in understanding what the other speaker might have meant with their utterance (Mauranen 2012: 7). Mutual comprehension may require different language skills than those which formal teaching focuses on. For example, participants need to be able to negotiate meaning and perform other interactive strategies. Sometimes this can even mean adopting solutions that are not standard or native-like, such as language mixing, in order to ensure mutual comprehension (Mauranen 2012: 8).

The different viewpoints of ELF and SLA research can thus be said to boil down to the differences in their perspectives. For SLA language acquisition and use is an individualistic effort while ELF research sees language use as a social and interactive phenomenon.

2.2 Competence

I have already touched upon the issue of competence when I have described the differences in the EFL and ELF settings. It is clear that competence in a foreign language classroom is an entirely different thing than competence in a real life interaction with someone who you do not share an L1 with. In the following chapters I will explain this difference in more detail.

In this paragraph, I will discuss how SLA perceives competence in an L2, and explain the norms that are relied upon to measure competence in a foreign language. The focus of SLA research is “to characterize learners’ underlying knowledge of the L2, i.e. to describe and explain their competence” (Ellis 2008: 13). This is done by studying their performance, looking at learners’ intuitions of correctness by making them judge the specific language structures, and by analyzing learners’ introspection and retrospection reports. Usually SLA makes a distinction between linguistic and
communicative competence, i.e. the linguistic features of the target language as well as the pragmatic knowledge of how to use it (Ellis 2008: 13). SLA research is interested in studying why learners fail to produce correct sentences (according to the target language norms), and instead produce markedly deviant language, called learner language or interlanguage (Ellis 2008:15-16). Researchers studying interlanguage have looked at four aspects to determine learners’ competence level: mistakes, acquisition orders and developmental sequences, variability, and pragmatic knowledge of the appropriate use of language (Ellis 2008: 17.) Having established what SLA means by competence, I will next illustrate how the ELF perspective differs from the perceptions of L2 competence described above.

Much of the difference between ELF and SLA perspectives boils down to different norms in these settings. Mauranen (2012: 6) argues that in an educational setting, the norms for appropriate language use are provided by native speakers; she calls these ‘imposed norms’. They are “imposed from outside”, they are often officially regulated and prescriptive by nature, i.e. these norms comprise the standard language for a given community. Mauranen (2012: 6) says that such imposed norms need to be distinguished from the “natural, or spontaneous, norms” that occur typically in face-to-face interaction to ensure mutual intelligibility and successful communication. These norms are negotiated within the community, and the members of that community are the ones to decide what features they approve or reject. Such norms may or may not include features determined appropriate by imposed norms.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991: 98), this type of community forms a social practice called communities of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991: 98) originally defined it as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice”. This theory
was further developed by Wenger (1998: 72), who claims that because these communities are not externally defined but instead the activity the members engage in and the membership in itself define the community. Communities of practice are characterized in light of the following three dimensions: mutual agreement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire (Wenger 1998: 73). In ELF encounters this means that people engage in actions and define their meaning by negotiating them with one another. This autonomy enables communities of practice to also negotiate language norms within the community.

According to Mauranen (2012: 6), the norms that guide learners in classrooms are the imposed norms of standard language. Learners cannot negotiate these norms since the very notion of learning requires acquiring proficiency in terms of target language standards. Thus competence for learners is by definition as close an approximation to the given standard variety as possible. In ELF contexts on the other hand, there is no need to acquire any specific target language since the goal is successful communication in itself. In other words, competence in ELF means developing successful communication strategies, which include developing shared norms for language use within a particular community.

The reasons why English used as a lingua franca can differ greatly from standard language use vary. Mauranen (2012: 5) argues that “a lingua franca is chosen as a matter of convenience or necessity, and interlocutors may know little of each other’s cultural backgrounds or be unfamiliar with Anglo-American cultures”. Using a native-like variety the other interlocutors might not be equally familiar with can create misunderstandings, and even seem inappropriate in an ELF context (Hynninen 2010: 39). The reason for this is that in normal language use people tend to accommodate to each other’s speech, approximating their own way of speaking
closer to that of the other speaker. Speaking in a similar manner with one another is thus seen as a sign of mutual liking. Meltzhoft and Brooks (2007:152) claim that “the duplication of action patterns, mannerisms, and gestures others use is part of the fabric of human communication”. Furthermore, accommodation produces emotional cohesion between the interlocutors, and often it happens without people being explicitly aware of it.

Originally accommodation theory studied situational convergence and divergence of accents, but as Mauranen (2012: 49) notes, “in principle its tenets could apply at any level of language”. *Convergence* in this respect means “the processes whereby individuals shift their speech styles to become more like that of those with whom they are interacting” (Giles and Smith 1979: 46). This encourages further interaction and decreases the perception of differences among the speakers (Giles & Smith 1979: 46). On the other hand, if speakers accentuate the differences between them, the phenomenon is called *divergence* (Gallois et al. 2005: 123).

People accommodate to each other’s ways of speaking to maintain positive personal and social identities and relationships. Thus, accommodating to others’ speech is a useful strategy to promote successful communication, and it can take place on many different levels, such as in terms of vocabulary, structural features or phonology (Mauranen 2012). If both interlocutors approximate each other’s non-native varieties, the result might easily be forms that are different from the imposed standard language forms.

One of the things interlocutors can accommodate to is the other’s repertoire. According to Mauranen (2012: 22) people have different linguistic repertoires which consist of different registers, dialects and sociolects, as well as different languages
and their different varieties. What is important in this notion is that accommodation only to the linguistic features is not enough, but interlocutors must attempt to approximate in terms of social aspects too. Thus, things such as politeness or power distance must be taken into account as well. Even though accommodation in ELF interaction might produce language that is simpler in certain aspects, it is by no means easier when speakers have to take all the other aspects of communication into account.

Because ELF encounters are often fleeting, Mauranen argues that ELF speech communities often do not have stable or clear norms. She goes on to add that, in principle these communities have indeterminate standards, but often the speakers of ELF view standards in relation to a native speaker model (2012: 25). Mauranen explains that these communities are exonormative since they rely on standards set by the “inner circle” native speakers. According to Pilkinton-Pihko (2010: 66) this becomes foregrounded especially in situations where speakers discuss written text or talk about the notion of “good language”. However, in spoken interaction, these communities “gravitate much more towards endonormativity”, meaning that they negotiate norms in relation to their community’s internal needs (Mauranen 2012).

Given the fact that people face conflicting norms of language use, it is no wonder research has shown people to hold ambivalent attitudes towards different varieties of English. Studies have found that L2 speakers perceive other non-native accents as easily comprehensible, functional, and appropriate in lingua franca contexts. Nonetheless, the same people might still perceive the native speaker model as an ideal way of speaking (Hynninen 2010:36; Pilkinton-Pihko 2010: 72). What is interesting about this phenomenon is that, according to Mauranen (2012: 25), it is usually the same people that “typically hold up both discourses”. On one hand they
view their (L2) English as being “good enough” and the next second they might be describing how it differs from the standard variety. Mauranen says that even though these types of contradictory arguments are not uncommon findings in interviews, it might also reflect the transition of power dynamics in English use.

I order to grasp the notion of competence, we need to know what it does not include, i.e. to understand what different fields mean by gaps in language use. As noted above, EFL traditionally perceives any deviations from a standard variety as deficient language use (Jenkins 2007: 202), while in ELF deviations from the standard might be entirely appropriate. In this light it does not seem odd that these two differing fields hold contrasting views about what in language use is counted as a mistake.

Ellis (2008: 51), an SLA researcher, defines errors as deviations “from the norms of the target language”. He goes on to argue that this imposes that the evaluators of competence have to make some crucial decisions. First of all evaluators needs to decide against which standard the learner language should be compared to, i.e. which standard is chosen as the norm. Furthermore, Ellis (2008) argues that these deviations from the standard can be categorized as either mistakes or errors. Corder (1981:10) defines errors as deviations caused by a lack of knowledge, and thus are evidence of a lack of competence on the learner’s part, i.e. errors of competence. A mistake, on the other hand, takes place when learners “fail to perform their competence” (Ellis 2008: 51), and are thus called errors of performance (Corder 1981:10). These are also sometimes called “slips of the tongue” in everyday speech, and according to Corder they occur continuously both when we are using our first and second languages we have at our disposal. They are caused by problems in memory retrieval, or can be due to physical sensations such as tiredness and
psychological states, e.g. experiencing a strong emotion (Corder 1981:10). Thus, mistakes are cognitive processing problems which impede the information retrieval process and block access to the already acquired target language rules. As a result, the learner might revert to a non-standard rule that is more easily accessible. What is more, according to Ellis (2008: 51), mistakes are not an exclusively second language learner related phenomenon, but rather regular part of all language use.

In ELF, the situational nature of the interaction calls for a relativistic perception on non-standard features. The norms are not static as in EFL, which is why the appropriateness of language use must always be determined in context. According to Kachru (1985: 18), the discoursal level needs to be taken into account when determining appropriateness from a sociolinguistic perspective. This level includes for example “speech acts and functionally determined regional variation” (Kachru 1985: 18). When English is used as a lingua franca, the Anglo-American notions of cultural appropriateness in relation to e.g. politeness might not be relevant, but speakers might instead choose to adopt a culturally different way of expressing politeness when speaking English.

Furthermore, Firth and Wagner (1997: 761-762) claim that the way SLA perceives mistakes and errors is mechanistic. Code-switching, for example, is often seen as a failure to use the proper lexical items even if the message might be correctly understood by the interlocutor. They also claim that because interaction is a joint effort, any problems also arise as a result of both participants’ actions. Thus problems in interaction are “inter subjective entities, and not invariably … things possessed by individuals” (emphasis original, Firth & Wagner 1997: 763). Firth and Wagner (1997: 765) also claim that the non-native speakers’ marked or deviant forms that EFL teaching might count as fossilizations or interlanguage, might in fact
be a successful communication strategy. They might be used “to display empathy, or
to accomplish mutual understanding.” Firth and Wagner view these marked forms as
local responses to communicational needs, and consider the code-switching
“purposive.”

In this chapter I have discussed how the two fields of ELF and EFL perceive the
notions of identity and competence in relation to L2 speakers of English. Next, I will
introduce my material and method of analysis.
3 Material and methods

This thesis studies what kind of speaker identities L2 speakers of English construct in their accounts, and how do they construe competence in English as a foreign language. In the following sections I will describe the material and methods I used when trying to answer these questions.

3.1 Data and participants

In the current research I analyze how four first and second year students majoring in English construe their English learning retrospectively. The study was executed by conducting interviews. Before interviewing the actual participants, the interview was piloted to ensure that the questions were clear. The participants were chosen from among volunteers who were either first or second year students. This was done to ensure that they would be new-comers to academia. I was interested in studying the constructions and categorizations people make before they are socialized into the discourses about language use and language learning in the university. This way I was able to tap into the notions the interviewees had constructed on their own instead of the institutionalized versions they might have adopted. Furthermore, I wanted to study English majors because I presumed they would have developed a high competence level in English, and might have already contemplated upon the issues of identity and competence on their own.

The participants were recruited from a basic studies course in the fall of 2012. The data was collected by conducting interviews in December 2012 and January 2013. In the interviews, the participants were encouraged to talk about their past experiences with English, and to share their thoughts about English learning. The questions I had prepared included questions to determine the participants’ views about English, e.g.
why they had used English in their leisure time; and questions to elicit narratives, such as: can you recall a situation outside school where English had a substantial role? All of the interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. The interviews were conducted in Finnish since this was the mother tongue of all the participants and of the interviewer. The interviews were semi-structured and thematic, and the participants were encouraged to also discuss any issues they felt were relevant to the topic but were not asked explicitly in the interview. Each of the four participants was interviewed separately. Because the interviews were designed to resemble casual conversation, it should be noted that the interviewer also participated in the construction of the discourse topics, e.g. by asking questions and commenting on the issues the interviewees raised about different topics. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each, they were audio recorded and later transcribed using Audacity®. Each of the participants signed a consent form (see Appendix 2).

To ensure participants’ anonymity, I will use the pseudonyms Heidi, Mia, Jesse and Joel for the four interviewees. I have also anonymized some personal information the participants brought up in the interviews to protect their anonymity. The relatively small number of participants ensures that I am able to include relevant background information about the participants when needed, since some topics and themes might show in a different light when discussed in the context of the participants’ past experiences.

That being said, I will provide some background information about the informants here to establish a context for the things they discuss in the interviews. Heidi is a bilingual first year student, who learned English in addition to her mother tongues, Swedish and Finnish, in an institutionalized setting in Finland. Her formal English education started in the fourth grade. Mia is a second year student of English. She too
has learned English in an institutionalized setting in Finland from the third grade onwards but has also spent time in an English speaking country after her matriculation examination. Both Jesse and Joel are English philology freshmen. Jesse has lived in an English speaking country as a child for four years, and received three years of formal education there before attending a Finnish primary school. Joel too lived abroad as a child and received his first years of EFL education from native English teachers. He finished his compulsory education in Finland after spending five years abroad.

3.2 Discourse analysis and interpretative repertoires

For the purposes of this study, it is not necessary to try to understand the actual events that have led these proficient language users to the point which they are currently at, but rather to attempt to describe the way they depict their learning process; what are the issues they bring up, and how do they talk about them. Using discourse analysis, I am able to focus on the way the participants talk about themes and topics, the things they decide to talk about, the words they use, and possibly the contradicting viewpoints they might construct during the interview. As a result, I will not try to present a ‘factual’ account of the steps they have taken in their journey of becoming proficient language speakers, which is a task more suitable for content analysis. Instead, using discourse analysis, I am able to tap into the topics they themselves have considered meaningful to their language learning process.

Discourse analysis, as the name implies, studies discourse, i.e. various forms of authentic written or spoken text (Potter and Wetherell 1987.) Discourse analysis studies how language is used to “do” things, to understand the purposes or functions people use it for. In discourse analysis it is assumed that people use language to construct versions of the social world. This means that when people construct
accounts, they actively select some constructions and omit others (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Furthermore, all language, even mere descriptions of events or things, is constructive, and thus of interest to the discourse analyst.

In fact, Potter (1996: 111) argues that descriptions are used to perform particular actions. Descriptions can be used to categorize things, for example as good or bad, successful or failing, or some other less polar category. Furthermore, descriptions can be used to present some actions as either routine or exceptional, and they can be used to present actions and events as normal or abnormal (Potter 1996: 177).

Potter (1996: 177-179) claims that categorization is used to create meaning for things or phenomena. Descriptions are understood and interpreted in their context, and they may be understood in various ways and have different implications and consequences in different contexts. Categorizations should be interpreted in relation to the context they are produced in, and similarly, context also determines the function of these descriptions. These realizations can be interpreted in various different ways, and have a range of different consequences in the social world. The study of discourse analyzes language use as a social phenomenon, and was originally developed in the field of social sciences. However, discourse analysis studies the social explanations for language use, and describes how people use language to perform, maintain and negotiate meaning, and has thus become a widely used method in the field of sociolinguistics (Downes 1998).

In the analysis, I will identify the ways in which the participants categorize the topics and themes they talk about. I am especially interested in the things they categorize as being meaningful in relation to their language learning, and what are the themes that they bring up when discussing their English usage. These can be evaluations of
specific actions or contexts for learning or using English, as well as their own contributions to the process.

The original idea was to study narratives in order to better understand the meaning the participants themselves give to specific situations where English has played a part in their lives. However, once I had read through the transcripts a few times, I decided to use a different approach in analyzing the data; the analysis of interpretative repertoires. I will describe this approach in more detail in the following sections. Interpretative repertoires were chosen as the method of analysis due to its capacity to identify and illustrate repeated patterns of talk, and their functions in discourse. The aforementioned method of analysis gives a voice to the individual participants and shows how the participants construct their views on language learning.

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987: 149), interpretative repertoires are recurrently employed “systems of terms used to characterize and evaluate actions, events and other phenomena”. Typically, interpretative repertoires make use of a limited set of linguistic items that occur in specific stylistic choices, such as metaphors or when using figurative speech (Potter & Wetherell 1987). These items are then interpreted in a wider social context, so that we are able to describe their functions in discourse. Compared to other types of analysis, such as content analysis or conversation analysis, the strength of interpretative repertoires analysis is its capacity to illustrate how different participants talk about the same themes. By analyzing repeatedly occurring interpretative repertoires, I am able to identify consistent perceptions the participants have in relation to language learning and usage, and in addition, to point out possible contradictory views in the accounts. This way I am able to form a more detailed and comprehensive interpretation of the issues.
the participants introduce. Hynninen (2013: 81) calls this breaking “loose of the individual as an analytical unit”.

The strength of analysis interpretative repertoires is, according to Hynninen (2013: 80), that it “considers the content and form of the interviewees’ accounts in terms of the differences and similarities within and across the accounts”. What is more, this type of analysis is able to take into account the function of the repeated patterns, i.e. why the participants might choose to use specific descriptions in a given situation while using different constructions in other contexts. In other words, this method helps to understand why the participants might want to present the same phenomenon differently in different contexts. The study of interpretative repertoires acknowledges this variation and views its functions systemically (Gilber and Mulkay 1984: 10), i.e. that we can find contextual reasoning behind the choice to employ a specific repertoire over some other possible ones. So instead of attempting to reveal what a specific phenomenon is really like, we need to focus on “describing the interpretative methods which are used” to talk about it (Gilbert and Mulkay 1984: 14).

However, using a qualitative method of analysis, such as interpretative repertoires, does impose issues that need to be addressed. This type of analysis approaches data from a subjective perspective since the researcher constructs interpretations through her personal view points (Dörnyei 2007: 56-57). Due to this, many factors might influence the validity and reliability of the interpretations that are made in the analysis. Such factors include the researcher’s level of experience in using the method, as well as her ability to interpret the found repertoires in relation to the larger contextual and theoretical frameworks. Thus, qualitative findings present subjective and context-dependent interpretations of the studied phenomena, which
also explain the possible inconsistencies across studies (Dörnyei 2007: 57). However, being aware of these issues, providing justification for why I have chosen to select the samples I present and analyze, and supporting my arguments in the light of the previous research, I am able to make valid arguments about the issues that are studied in this thesis.

3.3 The analysis process

In the following sections I will describe how I analyzed the interview data, as well as illustrate some of the decisions I made in the analysis process. I analyzed the transcribed interviews discourse analytically, and chose themes for closer inspection if they seemed to form an interpretative repertoire for all or most of the participants. For example, all of the participants spontaneously discussed English learning in school, and even though their views of its significance to them varied, i.e. they might not describe it in consistent ways, I concluded that it formed an interpretative repertoire that should be studied more closely. If however some topic was introduced by only one or two participants, I did not include it to the analysis. One such case was for example the topic of the “expert user” that was brought up by Joel on many occasions, and as fruitful as it might have been to compare that identity to the learner identity that emerges in different occasions, I chose to leave it out since it was not a topic the other participants discussed at all. Square brackets [] are use to indicate that information has been omitted either to ensure the anonymity of the participants, to indicate that a stretch of text is missing, or to provide additional information for the topics the participants discuss. The transcribed original Finnish excerpts I have used are available in Appendix 3.

Similarly to Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) I have not focused on the actual interaction or transitions between speakers’ turns in the analysis of my data. Instead I have paid
more attention to study the participants’ discourse as comparatively lengthy stretches
of uninterrupted discourse. The reason to present the interviewees’ accounts in this
manner was that the interviews were conducted in Finnish and had to be transcribed
in order to be able to do the analysis. Translating the accounts from one language to
another always has an effect on the message, and I felt that using a rather broad
transcription allowed me to better present in English the phenomena the participants
talked about in Finnish. Nonetheless, I am aware that my translations already are a
form of interpretations of the participants’ discourse.
4 Construing competence and identity

In this chapter I will analyze the recurring themes the participants discuss in relation to their English learning. I will focus on themes and topics which seem to come up in every, or at least in most interviewees’ accounts. Then, in chapter 5, I will introduce the interpretative repertoires that are employed to construe speaker identities and competence in English.

4.1 Learning domains

Interestingly, all of the participants seem to reflect on their English learning comparing their experiences with formal language education. This is probably due to the fact that I encouraged the participants to share their thoughts on language learning, and formal education is strongly connected to the idea of learning. What soon became evident, however, with all the participants, was that in relation to English, school was not necessarily depicted as the primary source of their language learning. In fact, none of the interviewees explain their competence in English as a result of formal language education.

One participant, Heidi, describes her competence as a result of both formal and informal language learning. When I asked whether she thought her English usage outside school had affected her classroom performance in any way she replied:

Sometimes yes. Probably in the sense that you’ve understood some of the cultural aspects that have been introduced, like different cultures, then you notice that the things you’ve seen in movies, read about in books, or talked about with people have given you background knowledge on the topic and you’re able to say something in class. I’m not sure if the leisure time English and school learned English support each other, or whether they have developed at the same time but for different purposes. Of course the principles you learn in school are important so that you’re able to understand more complex structures, but they get used in different situations, and sometimes those situations might be similar.
Heidi talks about how, for her, leisure time English and the English taught in school seem to have developed for different purposes. From the viewpoint of language learning this seems interesting, since languages in general are resources people use to communicate with one another, and for some reason Heidi does not perceive the language she uses outside the classroom to be entirely connected to the language learned in the classroom. Heidi sees formal English teaching as a base from where she gains the basic and some more complex structures, and then takes this knowledge to the outside world and does something with it, namely uses it with other people.

Jesse, on the other hand, talks about the usefulness of formal language teaching very differently. He had spent a part of his childhood in an English-speaking country, which he also describes as the cornerstone of his English competence. The following extract exemplifies how useful he feels the English lessons in primary and secondary school were:

But I’ll tell you that you don’t really learn anything in the English lessons in primary and secondary school, and I spent most of my time half asleep. The teachers talked about something, but I never had any problems. One interesting thing was the workbook, though. I was so bored that at the end of the semester I was 200 pages ahead of everybody else in the class because I had scribbled through the exercises because I was so bored and had nothing else to do.

Jesse describes the formal English lessons as boring because they were too easy for him, and also describes his skill level being far above average in primary and secondary school. He even goes as far as to claim that he did not learn anything in the formal language classes. According to his account, he gives the full credit of his competence in English to the time he has spent abroad. At one point he even says this explicitly. When I asked him to mention two reasons he thought explained why he was ahead of everybody else in class:
Well, because I’ve lived there it has developed naturally. If you’ve lived [in an English speaking country] as a child, the language develops a lot better than as a youngster. I think that’s what it boils down to.

Joel expresses a similar view point. He also spent time abroad as a child, and began his English studies with teachers who were native speaker of English. He describes his English leaning in Finland as follows:

Well, in Finland it’s always been extremely easy. I don’t think I’ve learned really anything besides new vocabulary in Finland. […] I was just wondering if I actually learned anything. And I don’t think I did before coming here [to the university]. Some weird words that have eventually turned out to be translated wrong as it was. In [the textbook] the words had been translated for a very specific purpose and made seem like it’s the normal use of the word. And some names of course, but not much in relation to English usage, at least not in school.

What is especially interesting in Joel’s account is how he talks about the “wrongly translated weird words”. He construes the translations provided for textbook chapters’ vocabulary as oversimplified and as quick-fix solutions that do not help the learner in the long run. What is more, he construes his competence in using English as a result of living abroad, and possibly some leisure time activities, but gives some credit to formal education for his vocabulary development.

The fact that the participants describe formal language teaching as insignificant and even futile is extremely interesting. A recurring pattern in discussing the development of the participants’ English learning seems to be that they do not construe English language teaching as having an important role in their own learning of the language. Rather than giving credit to formal English teaching, they construe their competence as a result of varying other causes, e.g. time spent abroad, native teachers, or other leisure time activities. One of the participants, Mia explicitly verbalizes these ideas:
I don’t remember whether English was easier for me than average in primary school, but in secondary school I remember that my English skills definitely were above average and I found it very easy. In that sense I’m not sure my experiences are such a good example of how useful English teaching actually is, since I feel I’ve never really needed it, or I haven’t fully benefited from it since I’ve always been a bit ahead. I feel that my learning has come from somewhere else.

What is characteristic of each of these interviewees’ accounts is how atypical they actually think their English learning has been. The participants describe their English lessons as boring and even pointless when the lessons focused extensively on things they already knew. Even though the participants talk about school and English lessons, through their reports it is evident that they do not think that formal education is the reason they have developed to become competent English speakers.

4.2 An ear for the language

Reading these accounts made me think about why competent language speakers might perceive traditional language teaching to be futile to some degree. One of the reasons might be that for them, formal English teaching seems to consist to a large degree of memorizing grammar rules by heart, or focusing too much on other theoretical aspects of the language. Jesse at one point even says that he feels like “the Finnish foreign language teaching focuses too much on the theory… the kind of stuff, like this is the proper way to say this”. For him competence in English does not necessarily mean that he has to know the theory behind the “proper” usage, so he construes a distinction between theory and competence. He also brings up the grammatical aspects on other occasions when he discusses how he perceived English learning after returning to Finland: “And grammar was, well, I didn’t really know the theoretical part. In practice I could say whether something was correct or not, but if I had to explain why this comes after that, I really couldn’t say right away”. Mia
brings up the same theme when she thinks back at the reasons that have made her a competent English speaker.

Of course we had more exercises in secondary school but those I’ve always managed well because, at that point, I already had a strong understanding of the language. I’ve just known that this is the way it is. I’ve never learned grammar rules … I’m really lazy, and I’ve always liked doing things that are easy, and with English, I’ve never had to study any grammar rules because I’ve developed an understanding of the language that enables me to answer correctly.

What Mia calls an understanding of the language is something the others bring up as well. Jesse calls it an ear for language: “But if I had to decide whether it was right or wrong, I just had an ear for language and got it right straight away”. Mia says that for her it developed “without conscious awareness”. The participants construe their competence as an overall understanding of the ways English can and cannot be used, an understanding they have developed on their own, without being explicitly taught it. This level of competence can even manifest itself as a type of native English speaker identity. I asked Joel whether he had ever used any tricks to study for exams, and he gave me the following account:

Oh yes, I did have one trick. Especially towards the end of the upper secondary school … I started to write the essay assignments we were given in philosophy and Finnish lessons in English. That’s why I thought at some point that I could nearly be a native speaker since for me it’s merely a switch between the two languages. I really don’t need to think about it much.

For Jesse, being able to perform highly demanding cognitive activities in English was the reason he occasionally considered himself to be a near-native speaker. What is more, the switch did not require any additional effort from him, which probably further affirmed the “near-native” identity.

Heidi does not bring up the “near-native” identity as such at any point, but talks about a phenomenon she has noticed occurs whenever she has, for some reason or another, used English extensively: “Whenever I’ve used English a lot, it has started
to dominate rather quickly. Now at the university I notice now and then that my Finnish starts to fumble so I’ve started to think in English most of the time”. So even though she does not explicitly claim that she feels like a native speaker, she uses English in activities that do not require it as such.

As noted earlier, the primary reasons the participants refer to when talking about learning English vary a lot. Most participants mention an interest in literature; they have enjoyed reading anything from fantasy novels to comic books in English. The interviewees also report having integrated English as a part of their lives by listening to music, watching TV and movies in English, gaming and surfing on the internet. The sources for learning English vary, and no one method is claimed to top any of the others. What the participants seem to perceive as more relevant than the actual source of input might actually be the motive behind seeking out opportunities to use English which I will discuss below.

4.3 Native speaker ideals

When the interviewees were asked about their motives to use English in their free time, they talked about, not so much seeking out opportunities to use English, but rather to do something that interests them intrinsically. Like Jesse says, “I had no other reason besides that it was fun”. And later on he adds that he “enjoyed the stories” he read.

All of the participants mention an interest in literature and languages. They have read a lot, and at some point developed an interest to seek out the original English novels instead of the Finnish translations. Joel can even remember the specific reason that made him start reading in English:
During the last years [abroad] I started to read everything in English because of course you should read in the original language, and secondly, it all started with Harry Potter. I hated Jaana Kapari’s childish translations. Or I thought some of the translated words were childish, and I didn’t find them even remotely as childish in English.

What is very interesting in this account is the way Joel talks about reading literature, and more specifically, how works of fiction should be read in the language they were originally written in. In a similar vein, Jesse describes his main reasons for reading in English as follows: “most of the books I read were originally written in English, and I wanted to read the originals”. He goes on to explain a bit later: “So, the language does matter. If you’re reading the original, you can understand the whole idea of the language”.¹ To him, the originals might have intrinsic value, i.e. they resemble more closely the intended meaning the writer was trying to convey when writing the piece. In a way, reading the originals allows you to get into the writer’s head and understand the nuances that underlie every word choice or phrase the writer decides to use. Underlying the preference to read in the original language seems to be an assumption that literature written by a native speaker is somehow better. This seems to echo the traditional native-speaker ideal which is the basis for most educational material up to this day. Traditionally, competence in a foreign language has meant being able to conform as closely as possible to the norms established by native speakers of the language. In this light it does not seem at all odd that the ‘ideal’ English usage, and the model the participants seek, is in fact language written by a native speaker.

In her account, Mia does not construe a similar native-speaker ideal as the participants cited in the previous sections.

¹ Jesse’s meaning is ambiguous in Finnish: ”Et kylhän sillä kielellä on merkitystä et jos on alkuperäis niin saa sen koko idean siitä kielestää”.
She has, in fact, read English translations from works written originally in some other language quite extensively. But even though she does not share the ideal, she still touches upon the topic of reading literature in the language it was originally written in. Here is how she talks about both reading literature written originally in English and literature that has been translated into English:

I’m not sure if it [reading in English] was because I wanted to read in English, or read in English because it was the language the literature was written in. I know a lot of people who are very good at a language but don’t want to read literature in that language. They say it’s somehow too trying when in the end you don’t know the language well enough, or when it’s not your mother tongue.

So for her reading in the original language is not necessarily that important, but her example makes it clear that you need to know the language “well enough” to be able to do it. What is more, she seems to imply that being “very good at a language” is not sufficient, and that for some people being able to read fiction in a language which is not their mother tongue is too laborious. A question that arises from these claims is; what does Mia actually means by being “very good at a language” if this skill level does not enable a person to read literature in that language. Could this again reflect the “theoretical knowledge vs. practical knowhow of language use” distinction that has come up earlier? Mia seems to construct the notion of competence in a language as something beyond being very good at it, i.e. she construes a distinction between competence and being very good at English. Competence, for her, is the ability to use it, for example to read books in the foreign language.

She does, however, also share Jesse’s and Joel’s appreciation for languages, and acknowledges that language and culture are intertwined phenomena. Language is construed as a gateway to the Anglo-American culture, and a tool with which you can understand the way speakers of that language think and behave. She explains that
she has “always been interested in the language itself, how it works, its characteristics, and how it expresses things”. For her it has also been a key to understanding Anglo-American culture.

When I was younger I think it was partly because, for example, movies have seemed like another world, not real in a sense and existing out there somewhere. The language has been an integral part of that world, and I felt I needed to get in that world, in a way. Mia perceives the culture of the movies and other cultural products accessible only through the language. In order to gain that access one must learn the language. What this passage also quite nicely demonstrates is the innate “need” Mia depicts. The motives to learn English are intrinsic, not imposed by authorities of any sort. Moreover, the English Mia claimed she wanted to learn is the language of films, as if the English learned in school was somehow a different language altogether.

Heidi construes herself as having similar, culture-driven motives to learn English.

Another reason is that at some level, I wish to be somewhere else than in Finland, and to be part of some other society. In a way I’ve always been fascinated by the British culture, even though, like I said previously, it’s not imitation or obsession or anything, but rather a wish of sorts, to be in a different time and place. Heidi introduces the idea of being able to access a different identity through the language. So competence in the language is not just about understanding the British culture, it is also a way to explore, cultivate and express aspects of oneself in a way that might not be possible in one’s mother tongue. Nonetheless, the identity she wishes to adopt “at some level” is the native speaker model.

If competence in English is indeed construed as a manifestation of some sort of identity, it seems only natural that the participants recall quite clearly the dawning of the conscious realization of that identity. What seems to be an important aspect of the
participants’ constructions of their competence is their accent. Here is how Heidi describes incidents when she has been complimented on her accent.

Sometimes some people who had heard me speak or had talked with me thought I was British. And on one occasion in primary school, maybe in the fourth grade, my teacher asked me whether I had lived either abroad or in England. Those have been glimmers of joy in a way. Like, it’s wonderful that I’ve done something right, and I liked feeling competent when speaking the language.

These incidents seem to reinforce the “wish” to be able to take on a different identity through the language she mentioned in the previous extract. Again, the native speaker ideal seems to be prevalent, since Heidi clearly points out that she was mistaken for someone who had lived either abroad or in England, and it made her feel competent. In this passage she actually explicitly says that, to her, being competent in English means, among other things, to be able to pass as a native speaker.

Other people, and especially teachers, are judged according to their ability to sound like a native speaker as well. To some of the participants, teachers’ non-native-like accent even seems to indicate poor command of English. Here is how Joel describes one teacher’s accent.

I had one teacher who didn’t, I’m pretty sure s/he couldn’t even speak English. S/he just read IPA and wasn’t even very good at that. For example, s/he pronounced that capital letter [I in the international phonetic alphabet] as pure Finnish [i in the international phonetic alphabet]. And s/he tried to teach us how to pronounce the language. […] There’s sort of a transition going on since most of the pupils are at least as good in English, and the teacher only has the theoretical knowledge.

It is obvious from this extract that to Joel, being competent in English requires having a native-like accent, and again the theoretical knowledge is not construed as competence, at least not on its own. To him it is absurd that people should consider
other types of competence valid reasons to be able to teach English as a profession.

Mia describes her teachers in a similar manner in the following extract.

I was in at least two different English teachers’ courses. Both of them were Finnish and I’m sure they had received proper training for the profession. They were both female and they both had, well, I’m sure they both had very good technical know-how but didn’t have a very good sense of the language or communication skills in English.

The fact that Mia emphasizes her teachers’ nationality seems to indicate that being Finnish somehow indicated their lack of ability to work as an English teacher, probably due to a heavy Finnish accent. And similarly to Joel, Mia also construes the “technical know-how” as just simply not sufficient to being a competent language speaker. For her it also includes communication skills and a good sense of the language. This seems to reflect a similar notion as the above mentioned “ear for the language”.

In this light it seems perfectly understandable that the other participants also construe their competence through their accent. In fact, nearly all of the participants bring up the topic at some point. The only exception is Mia, although she too discusses ways of speaking quite extensively as a source of either confidence or anxiety for learners of English. For the other three interviewees, their accent seems an integral part of their identity as an English speaker. Some report that finding out that they have a native-like accent has been the turning point in realizing that this is not something everyone can do, and that this must mean that they are already quite competent in the language. Joel tells the following anecdote to illustrate the point:
This happened when I was a sophomore in upper secondary school. […] Purely for the fun of it, we started speaking in English, and for some reason everybody told me that I sounded very British. I didn’t realize it at all, and no matter what people keep telling me, I claim that my English has become more British in Finland due to TV, or due to one particular series. I watched Jeeves and Wooster, and I think it’s more fun to say some things in an extremely colorful dandy intonation.

This anecdote seems to point to two things. First, that Jesse perceives that his accent developed gradually, much like his overall competence in English, and eventually it was an outsider’s feedback that made him realize his ability. Secondly, the example shows that even though at some level his accent is an integral part of his speaker identity, he describes a capability to exaggerate it to serve a particular purpose. Such a capability might be unconscious as well, as Jesse exemplifies:

I try to speak in a more British accent, or with a neutral British accent rather than in a neutral American accent, but sometimes it depends. Sometimes I might spontaneously start speaking in a highly British accent, and especially if I’m frustrated, my English might switch to British extremely fast. I don’t know why but it sort of like just is that way.

Heidi describes a similar phenomenon when she talks about how the way she speaks varies according to her interlocutor. She reports thinking that it is easier to talk to either a British speaker, or to someone who is not a native speaker at all, than with an American. She says that she understands both equally well, but feels like “it’s almost as if the American accent overruns my own, and either I can’t say anything or I too adapt to the American accent”. Even though she first describes the accommodation as a somewhat unconscious process, she later continues on the topic and explains that the switch seems to depend on the context.

I’ve noticed that I can use both accents so it might vary across situations. It depends on how oppressive I feel the situation is, for example, if I have to give an answer to someone quickly, I will reply in an American accent. On the other hand, if I feel I’m in the clear, I feel more at home using the British accent.

This might imply that even though the participants view their accent as an integral part of their identity as competent English users, it is not necessarily a stable part as
such. However, the participants talk in a way which suggests that their accent is not an attempt to imitate a native speaker, and its development has not been a conscious decision. Rather, the development has been unconscious, and the near-nativeness of their accent had not occurred to them before it was pointed out by an objective outsider. However, because they have received input in the two most dominant English accents available in Finland, namely the American and the British, they have developed an ability to switch between the two when needed.

The way the participants construe their accent could indicate that the ability to switch might serve a similar purpose to the interviewees as it does to native speakers; to adapt to a particular context either consciously or unconsciously. If this is in fact the case, does it mean that competent English learners could, to some degree, share similar sociolinguistic features of language use with native speakers? And moreover, is there a point when the language learner eventually becomes a language user, an equal to the native speaker as a communicator, even though the non-native might not match the native in terms of linguistic competence?

4.4 Users of English?

As noted previously, the interviewees seek out opportunities to do things they enjoy, not opportunities to deliberately practice their English skills. It seems like they are not trying to intentionally improve their English skills but rather use English as a medium to do things they are interested in. Joel describes how, during one summer, he used English to post comments to a game-related discussion forum on the internet:

I tried to participate in the discussion as much as I could, and I became quite well-known for a while. I deliberately used English as amusingly as I could. I think it’s very much the same as with an acrobat, that you are able to fool around in exciting ways. [...] At times I felt like an authority of sorts.
He might have originally started to use English to be able to participate in the discussion, but the way he talks clearly suggests that he enjoyed using English in his posts. He describes how he even modified his English for his own amusement, and in the process gained recognition from other users. His account makes it clear that the purpose of this activity was not to try to improve his English skills, but to use it as a tool to be able to participate in a discussion he was interested in intrinsically. In other words, he quite explicitly construes an identity as a user of English instead of a learner of English.

For Heidi English has also been a medium of communication, a lingua franca that enabled her to talk to people she does not share a common language with. She talks about her perceptions of language use as a communication tool that enables interaction with people from various cultural backgrounds.

The more I feel like I’m competent in the language, the more I’m inclined to use it. […] Now that I’m older, […] being in contact with people living abroad or with foreign family friends is easier than when I was younger, and we didn’t share a common language. In a way, the language is more present in my everyday life now because I can use it to be in contact with various different people.

Heidi seems to construe herself somewhere on the borderline of the user-learner identity. On one hand she feels competent using the language to communicate with other people, and describes the language as an integral part of her daily life; one the other, she acknowledges that the competence is not something she has always had, i.e. it is something she has had to learn. On the other hand, she explicitly says that she “uses the language when communicating with different people”.

Joel, too, talks about speaking in English. His account describes quite unequivocally the ease he experiences in using English when talking to people. To him
communicating in English does not require any additional effort or huge amounts of concentration; English seems a natural medium of interaction.

Well pronunciation and listening comprehension are no issues to me. I don’t need to focus on my pronunciation. And if I do, it’s not because I wouldn’t know how to say things but because I have food in my mouth or otherwise twist my tongue. And this can happen with Finnish too. Maybe it happens more often in English but nonetheless, I don’t see it as a mistake but as a slip.

Interestingly, both Joel and Jesse talk on many occasions about making mistakes when using English. What is evident in both interviewees’ accounts is the way they perceive making mistakes in a foreign language. Both see mistakes as an inseparable part of any language use, and view them quite pragmatically. Here is how Jesse describes making mistakes:

Everyone makes mistakes. I know a few Brits with whom I’m constantly like there’s a mistake and there, all the time. Everyone makes mistakes; even native speakers make mistakes with English so it’s pointless to fear making them. People will understand you, and if they don’t they can bugger off, and you can talk with someone who’s not that fussy about mistakes. Especially in a conversation, if you make a small mistake it doesn’t matter if you’ve managed to get your point across.

What seems significant with this type of attitude towards making mistakes is that the interviewees claim that they do not let it affect their English use. Mistakes are a part of using language, and instead of focusing on them, they focus on the message they are trying to convey. They do not perceive English as a school subject in which you either are or are not good at, but rather as a form of communication which enables doing things. Construing mistake-making part of all language use, the interviewees position themselves as legitimate users of the language. This entitles them to make mistakes just as the next native speaker would, and still feel competent using the language. These accounts construe competence, not as flawless language use, but rather as an ability to efficiently and successfully communicate with other people.

These findings seem to be in contradiction with some of the earlier accounts, e.g. the
accounts that dealt with native speaker ideals. The participants seem to construe conflicting ideals of language use which is an issue I will discuss in detail in the next chapter when I introduce the interpretative repertoires of identities and competence.

4.5 Learners of English?

Even though the interviewees use English as a medium to do things instead of consciously seeking out opportunities to improve their English skills, they seem to be aware, at least retrospectively, of the benefits of using English in various leisure time activities. Mia describes how she reads in English, and how this method has increased her vocabulary:

My ability to rely on the context has helped learning English a lot. I get much out of the context. I very rarely take out a dictionary to look up word meanings. For an unfamiliar word, I hypothesize a meaning based on the context. And even if I’ve come across a word just once, and it might even be a long time ago, when I see it the next time I’ll remember it. So my vocabulary develops pretty fast.

Here Mia seems to construe herself as a competent learner of English. She describes how she has used a deliberate strategy to increase her vocabulary. The method in fact resembles strategies that are presented in textbooks, or tricks teachers or other authorities might provide to help get started on a new text in a formal foreign language teaching context. The specific word choices, such as “hypothesize” and “rely on the context” seem to echo English textbook discourse on learning strategies. But most importantly, no matter what the origins of this strategy might be, Mia perceives this as a valid and effective strategy, and as a way to become more competent in using the language.

Heidi too talks about relying on the context. She says that she might have wondered about some word meanings earlier, and then, coming across the word for the second time she makes use of the context to determine the word’s meaning. She construes
the learning of new words as a process, where at the preliminary stages the context seems to provide enough information to understand the overall meaning and later on, the meaning of individual words that were not crystal clear at first becomes evident in another context.

I connected a word or a phrase and had an aha experience that hey, this means this! It might have been something I had been wondering about before, or noticed before that I didn’t understand. I understood it better when I noticed it in the context. I was like, wow, I learned something. I have to remember this later.

The strategy itself sounds similar to the one Mia describes earlier, but in Heidi’s account the learner identity is quite evident. She talks about noticing the gaps in her knowledge, and putting that information into use when she comes across the unknown word in another context. What is more, she explicitly describes this phenomenon or activity as learning, as a conscious mental note she makes to memorize the word and its meaning for later use.

Contrary to Mia, Joel and Jesse, Heidi talks about making use of dictionaries when learning English. Here is how she talks about learning English by listening to music:

In secondary school I often checked what the lyrics meant because I had heard something that didn’t make sense. Some of the lyrics were clear enough but other parts left you wondering. It sounded like they said this but they couldn’t possibly mean it.

She construes her competence to a level where she seems to have an innate understanding of the language that, for one thing, enables her to listen to and enjoy English language popular music, but at the same time to notice vocabulary and structures that are as yet unfamiliar to her. Making use of dictionaries, she describes how she has also been able to learn the meaning of those phrases or idioms which are not evident in the context.
Many participants explicitly mention being interested in the idioms and phrases that are characteristic of English. Mia even goes as far as to claim a love for them: “I love idioms, and I love the structures that are typical of English, and only exist in that language”. That is why it is extremely interesting that the participants find learning grammar rules futile. Could it be that this is a reflection of the popular tradition of teaching grammar as a separate theme, sometimes even as a separate lesson. In addition, grammar is often taught in Finnish to avoid misunderstandings that could arise due to difficult terminology. Could this be the reason why the participants view it as a separate, and not particularly important aspect of language learning? There seems to be a contradiction in the way the participants talk about language learning and competence; learning the interesting peculiarities of language explicitly is seen as futile, while picking them up implicitly or at least autonomously, is a sign of a competent language learner.

One of the participants, Joel, seems to construe himself as more of an English user than the previous examples have illustrated. Nonetheless, when thinking back on his experiences using English, he does provide one example that might point more to the direction of a learner identity. As mentioned earlier, Joel posted comments in English on an online discussion forum, and thus actively took part in the interaction as an equal participant. Although he did not necessarily view the posting as a learning experience at the time, he nonetheless later admits that it had an effect on his English learning:

I’m sure it had an influence. For example, I really had to think about the nuances of different positive words when I reviewed other people’s work. I’ve never really thought about it before but it must’ve affected the way I use English quite a lot.
So even as Joel describes the original motivation for using English as being the pure pleasure of using it, reflecting upon the activities later reveals that they were excellent opportunities to learn English. But even here, Joel positions himself in the border of the learner user distinction since he does not explicitly claim to have learned in the process but rather that it must have “had an influence” on his English usage.

As we can see from the analysis, the participants construe their competence in English as a gradual, somewhat unconscious process, a process whose main catalyst has been something outside the language classroom. They have been driven by their innate interest in the language, its vocabulary, structures, and idioms, even though those aspects of the language are for some reason seen as the least useful aspect of formal language teaching.

They identify themselves as both learners and users of the language depending on the context, interlocutor(s) and topics that are being dealt with. The learner identity manifests itself in discourses where they find themselves in situations that make them realize the gaps in their competence. What is more, the interviewees construe themselves as able to quite pedantically pinpoint the things they have learned by doing whatever it was they were doing. The user identity, on the other hand, emerges when the participants perceive themselves as active agents of their own behavior, using the language merely as a communication tool to achieve other ends. In the next chapter I will introduce the interpretative repertoires of identity and competence, as well as discuss why the participants might have wanted to employ these particular repertoires over other possibilities.
5 The Interpretative repertoires of identity and competence

In this chapter I will introduce the interpretative repertoires the participants employ to construe speaker identities and competence in English, and discuss the functions of these constructions. Even though these repertoires of identity and competence seem to describe intertwined phenomena, I will provide a detailed discussion for each concept separately.

5.1 The Interpretative repertoires of speaker identities

As was noted in chapter 2, the social context the language use takes place in is the key to how identities as English speakers are construed. This is due to the fact that in certain contexts some identities become more salient than others. According to Omoniyi (2006) people choose an identity from a hierarchical cluster of identities with different degrees of salience. This is done to give the most preferred presentation of the self, although, as Omoniyi (2006: 20) says, “identity is the consequence of both production and reception”. The decision is made based on the appropriateness of choosing an identity in a given moment. The speaker determines the appropriateness of a specific identity basing her judgment on the potential goals she might gain in adopting that identity. Omoniyi (2006: 20) argues that the most appropriate identity is foregrounded in the hierarchical cluster while others fall to the background in a particular moment. Furthermore, he says, this explains why we sometimes can find strains of other identities that differ from the one the speaker has foregrounded.

5.1.1 Context-specific speaker identities

In this section, I will discuss how context influences the salience of the two identities construed in the interpretative repertoires of L2 speaker identities. First of all, we
could presume that the learner identity is probably likely to become salient in school. But unlike might be expected, the participants construe school as an environment that did not facilitate their English learning, and instead construe English classes to have been so easy they were even getting bored. So even though the participants probably acknowledge the learner identity as an integral part of the school as an environment, and as an identity they might foreground in other situations, it is not highlighted in this given context. The function of not foregrounding the learner identity in this context might be the desire to present oneself as a highly competent speaker of English. By presenting their level of competence high above average, they are able to discharge themselves, at least momentarily, from the learner identity. Alternatively, we could interpret that the function of this foregrounding is to present oneself as a highly competent learner of English. Outside school, on the other hand, they mostly describe themselves as doing things in English that interest them intrinsically, and not seeking out opportunities to learn English as such. Nonetheless, when the participants think about their extramural English usage retrospectively, they do to some degree construe themselves as learners in those contexts as well. The two identities form a hierarchical relationship, and arise in situations the participants deem appropriate.

The other thing that becomes salient through the different contexts is the hierarchical relations between people in different situations. In schools, learners are typically categorized in relation to their teachers, and this relationship imposes specific roles for the people involved (Kohonen 2006: 44). These identities complete one another because they presuppose specific behavior from each party: teachers are expected to provide the norms, and learners are expected to conform to those norms. Interestingly, when teachers fail to perform theirs, as was seen in the examples where
the participants criticized their teachers’ accents, the learners begin to question the teachers’ ability as norm providers. This might explain why they are not so quick to construe themselves as learners in the formal English lessons. In extramural contexts, on the other hand, they typically view themselves as users of the language, and sometimes even as authorities themselves: “At times I felt like an authority of sorts”, as Joel worded it. What is more, in EFL the hierarchy typically assumes that the teachers have a right to evaluate learners, but in extramural contexts the participants themselves evaluate other people, as Joel did with his reviews on the game-related website.

The user identity is also salient when the participants talk about communicating with other people, and the mindset one should have on those occasions. In Jesse’s words, “people will understand you, and if they don’t they can bugger off, and you can talk with someone who’s not that fussy about mistakes”. This example illustrates that comprehensibility and politeness override flawless language use in communication. In other words, the focus is on the message and not form, and that speakers should attempt to accommodate to each other’s way of speaking. This pragmatic view exemplifies how Jesse perceives himself as a speaker of the language who is not to be evaluated based on his output in these settings, i.e. he construes himself as a user of the language.

That being said, we can make a different interpretation of the identity that becomes salient in extramural contexts. Most of the time the participants construe their English usage as an individual activity, i.e. they read novels, watch movies, and listen to music. This resembles the way SLA views language learning – as an individual effort, rather than as a social phenomenon, which would be a more typical ELF perspective to how people act as language users. In ELF interaction, language
use is always a joint effort; a mutual engagement in interaction to which every participant has something to contribute. In my data the participants do describe situations where they have used English with other people either orally or in writing, e.g. when Heidi describes how she has used English with people from various different backgrounds, or when Joel talks about posting reviews on the internet. However, there are times when the participants tend to focus on their own contributions to the interaction, rather than construing those situations as a joint effort of meaning making. In Joel’s account on how he took part in a discussion forum online, we can see this quite clearly: “I tried to participate in the discussion as much as I could, […] I deliberately used English as amusingly as I could”. In this example he does talk about using English with other people, but his goals are not solely to negotiate meaning as a joint effort with the other people he is conversing with. Instead he uses it as an opportunity to pursue individual ends – to use English in a way that brings pleasure to him, and ignoring how intelligible or not it might be for the other interlocutors. So even though he is using the language, he is not necessarily using it collaboratively.

There is yet another context that seems to foreground the interpretative repertoire where the learner identity becomes salient. The learner identity emerges in contexts where something reminds them of their non-native status. This can happen when they were originally using English purely to do things that interest them, and happen to come across vocabulary or structures that are unfamiliar to them. Like Heidi says, “I noticed something I didn’t understand”. In a way, in these situations the participants realize the ‘gaps’ in their competence level, which makes them want to correct the situation by gaining the knowledge they were lacking when the situation emerged. On the other hand, they might also perceive these situations as possible contexts for
developing their English skills, as an opportunity to learn more. This happens when something draws their attention to realize the opportunities for language learning, even retrospectively. Or as Joel put it: “I’ve never really thought about it before but it must’ve affected the way I use English quite a lot”. So the learner identity emerges in situations where the participants either realize a gap in their competence in English, or view the situation, immediately or retrospectively, as an opportunity to learn more.

5.1.2 Ideals determining speaker identities

In the following sections, I will discuss how the ideologies the participants hold influence the ways they construe themselves as speakers of English. Furthermore, I will analyze what are the interpretative repertoires that emerge when the participants talk about the prevailing ideologies behind their language use.

Firstly, the desire to sound like a native speaker signals that the participants are, at least to some degree integratively motivated to learn the language. According to Gardner, if an individual is integratively orientated, he or she has a positive interest toward the target language, its speakers, and a desire to be able to communicate, and learn more about the target language community, as well as at some level be identified with them (Gardner 1979). The comparisons to native speakers also resemble the typical SLA discourse, as well as the fact that the participants set native speakers as the model for their English usage. This repertoire highlights the learner identity for those very reasons.

In ELF contexts there is no need to draw on the native speaker ideal as a reference point since that identity can even impede successful communication. Communication breakdowns are likely to occur if speakers are not willing to accommodate to each other’s repertoires, but instead insist on sticking to their ideals no matter who the
The native speaker ideals also emerge when participants point out others’ mistakes in their English use which echoes the typical SLA discourse. Similarly to the ways the participants in the current study made judgments on the ‘correctness’ of their teachers’ accents, Jenkins (2007) was able to find in her study on accents and identity, similar ways to construe ‘good English’. She found that people associate good English with a native standard variety, and that the ability to imitate a native speaker is a sign that one can speak good English. She was also able to find that the ability to sound as much like the native speaker model as possible was deemed essential because it was claimed to be part of leaning a new language. Jenkins suggests that the reason people hold these ideals is that native speaker models are the sole teaching models and that non-native speakers might only have had little exposure to non-native accents of English (Jenkins 2007: 220).

The way the participants talk about their own accent can also be seen to illustrate a learner identity. The very notion that acquiring a native-like accent is seen as desirable, and even obligatory for anyone claiming to be proficient in the language, also resembles the typical ideal speaker that foreign language teaching tries to produce. According to Jenkins’ (2007: 218) findings, people tend to judge their own and others proficiency through their accents. She also found assumptions that sounding like a non-native speaker might make (especially native speaker) interlocutors perceive you as less intelligent or educated. In other words, there might be costs in speaking in a non-native accent of English. In this light it seems quite natural that the participants might want to be identified with native speakers by speaking in a native-like accent. By speaking in a native-like accent, the participants are able to give a most preferred presentation of the self – to sound intelligent and educated speakers of English.
In addition, the target language cultural aspirations, e.g. wanting to dive into the world of movies, or claiming a love for the British culture seem to illustrate a similar point, although at least Heidi at one point forcefully denies such motives for her English learning: “it’s not imitation or obsession or anything”. Either way, the model the participants wish to identify with is the native speaker ideal, not, for example, the more local Finnish variety of English. This is especially interesting since previous research has found that while idealizing a native-like accent, people sometimes also want to retain their own local accent to signal group membership both to their own local variety of English and to the wider ELF community (Jenkins 2007).

5.2 The interpretative repertoires of competence

I will now turn to describe the interpretative repertoires the participants employ when describing competence in an L2. On the basis of the analysis, it seems that the participants construe competence in English as gradually developed abilities, and as specific knowledge and skills that enable them to use the language successfully and appropriately in a variety of contexts. What is more, the participants construe competence as an ability or skill that has not been explicitly and deliberately practiced, and certainly not as a product of formal foreign language teaching. Before I discuss the interpretative repertoires of competence, I want to briefly present the findings of a previous research (for a more detailed discussion see Turunen & Kalaja 2004) on how L2 English speakers have metaphorically described themselves as learners. Turunen and Kalaja (2004) found six different metaphors the students in the study employed to describe themselves as learners of English: ‘the perfectionists’ (perfektionistit), the ‘workers’ (työskentelijät), ‘lovers of the language’ (rakastajat), ‘natural talents’ (luonnollahjakkuvudet), ‘sufferers’ (kärsijät), and ‘drifters’ (ajelehti). The frequency of the employed metaphors is shown in the order they are
listed in, so that the most common metaphor was the ‘perfectionist’ and the least common the ‘drifter’ metaphor. Interestingly, I was able to find similar constructions of competence in my data, but since these metaphors present how competence is construed as learners of English, not all of them describe similar repertoires I was able to identify from my data. Hence, I will discuss these learner metaphors in more detail whenever they seem to be describing similar phenomena as I was able to find from my data.

5.2.1 Competence as intuitive knowledge

The participants seem to construct competence as intuitive knowledge about the language, and they do not have an epistemological explanation for the knowledge they have acquired. One of the manifestations of this type of competence is shown in the excerpts where the participants talk about “an ear for the language”, or “an understanding of the language”. In a way this seems to reflect the way SLA measures competence, i.e. intuitions about correctness. On the other hand, the underlying claim seems to be that they do not need to pay extra attention to their English usage, but that it is effortless, much like when native speakers are speaking their mother tongue. It seems that the participants construe their competence as a type of L1 knowledge rather than conscious awareness of the rules and structures that typically characterize the way competence in an L2 is depicted in SLA.

This distinction has been made before. Vygotsky (1962: 109) discusses the differences of L1 and L2 learning in relation to mental development: in L1 acquisition, language develops as a means of communication, and L2 acquisition presupposes “some awareness of phonetic, grammatical and syntactic forms”. This metalinguistic awareness enables people to see language as a system, and understand it through more general categories (Vygotsky 1962:110). Furthermore, Venuti (2010)
makes a distinction between ‘procedural metalinguistic knowledge’ and ‘declarative knowledge’. The procedural knowledge seems to resemble the “ear for the language” in it that it enables speakers to notice systematic properties of language, e.g. have intuitions about correctness or appropriateness, but does not necessarily enable them to state the grammar rules those intuitions are grounded upon on an implicit level. Declarative knowledge on the other hand is the type of knowledge learners acquire in grammar lessons, i.e. the rules they are taught to follow when using the L2.

So rather than constructing their competence in English as declarative knowledge about grammar rules and proper use of English structures, the participants depict themselves as possessing procedural metalinguistic knowledge, which enables them to intuitively use English properly. This intuitive knowledge is built gradually, and through exposure to the language, but since languages also include structures whose meaning cannot necessarily be inferred just by summing up the meanings of its constituents, e.g. idioms and fixed phrases, intuitive knowledge gets people only so far. These structures cannot be inferred intuitively since their meaning is culture specific, and they signal shared cultural knowledge among the speakers of the language. In this context it seems perfectly natural that the participants claim an interest for these features of English since it is one of the aspects that form the foundation of native speaker language usage. Furthermore, similar descriptions were used in the ‘natural talent’ metaphors learners of English employed in Turunen and Kalaja’s (2004) research. They too found that learners of English described their English learning as easy and effortless, and that they did not have to really work to be good at it.
5.2.2 Competence as abilities and skills

In addition to being construed as intuitive knowledge, the participants also describe competence as various different abilities and skills. These abilities have developed without conscious awareness, and although the participants claim that these abilities have not been explicitly practiced, they are able to identify strategies and instances that have enhanced the development of these abilities. The abilities construed are cognitive and performative, conscious and unconscious, and include the aspects of both the user and learner identities discussed earlier.

When the participants employ the interpretative repertoire of the user identity, they construe competence as an ability to perform complex cognitive activities, such as writing essays on philosophy, reading novels in the original language, or posting reviews on a game-related website. What is more, this ability is construed as something not everyone can do, which again reinforces the value of these abilities. Furthermore, some of the participants also referred to an ability to think in English: “I’ve started to think in English most of the time”, in Heidi’s words.

A more performative way to construe competence can be found when we look at how the participants talk about their accents. After being complimented on her British-like accent, Heidi says “I liked feeling competent when speaking the language”. For the participants, the ability to sound like a native speaker is construed as competence. These findings support the results of another interview study where one non-native English speaker claimed that a native-like accent would make her feel “very good” and give her “lots of confidence” (Jenkins 2007: 212). Furthermore, Jenkins (2007: 215) found that non-native speakers equated a native-like accent with competence. This seems to reflect the imposed norms of EFL perspectives that insist on teaching learners to pronounce like native speakers. Furthermore, having a native-
like accent is construed as competence when the participants criticize the accents of others. A Finnish accent most certainly is not a sign of competence for the learners as one of the examples showed: “For example, s/he pronounced that capital letter [I in the international phonetic alphabet] as pure Finnish [i in the international phonetic alphabet].” In other words, competence is the ability to conform (at least in some respects) to the imposed norms of native speakers of English.

Competence is also construed as an ability to communicate successfully with both native and non-native interlocutors. This ability might reflect the concept of communicative competence, the pragmatic know-how that enables learners to act appropriately when communicating, as well as the idea of endonormativity, promoting the negotiation of norms within a community. This is especially highlighted for spoken interaction. As Jesse words it: “Especially in a conversation, if you make a small mistake it doesn’t matter if you’ve managed to get your point across”. What this example quite nicely illustrates is that for the participants the goal of the interaction is successful communication, and that at least in spoken interaction, they tend to focus on message over form – both typical features of ELF.

As noted earlier, previous research has shown that people might be willing to negotiate spontaneous norms when speaking, even though they might conform to standard language rules when writing. Interestingly, for the participants, this seems to apply only to the communicative aspects of spoken interaction, not to the phonological features, as was illustrated above. What might be happening here is the same phenomenon that Mauranen (2012) discusses, namely that when people talk about written texts or discuss the notion of ‘good language’, they tend to gravitate towards exonormativity, i.e. the standard native varieties. It is interesting that the participants choose to criticize their teachers’ accents while at the same time promote
a more liberal interpretation of successful communication. The reason for this might, again, lie in the context. The school context highlights exonormativity in every respect, and in this context teachers are perceived as authorities imposing the norms. What the participant might experience could be an unfair case of double standards; on one hand, learners are expected to develop a native-like phonological competence which, however, is not acquired even by the supposed authorities who impose those norms. What is more, as Mauranen (2012) says, it is usually the same people that hold up both discourses; the idea of ‘good enough’ as well as a condemnation of any deviations from the standard variety. This indeed seems to be the case here too. And as Mauranen (2012) notes, the conflicting discourses might be an indication of a power transition between different speakers of English, but it might just as well be a result of foregrounding different repertoires in different contexts.

The participants also construe competence as either conscious or unconscious ability to adapt their speech according to the context. This seems to illustrate an ability to accommodate to one’s interlocutor, although not necessarily voluntarily, as Heidi exemplified: “it’s almost as if the American accent overruns my own, and either I can’t say anything or I too adapt to the American accent”. This seems to resemble a type of code-switching from the British to the American standard variety, possibly to unconsciously express liking for the interlocutor. On the other hand, this example also indicates that this ability to accommodate might not be at their disposal all the time, but rather that it might vary across situations.

Another interesting finding was that the participants only described accommodating to native speaker varieties. They did not mention once how they might change the way they speak with another non-native speaker, even though they did talk about situations where their interlocutors were not native speakers of English. The reason...
for this might be that accommodating to an interlocutor from an unknown culture is extremely hard, and successful communication in such a context requires excellent communications skills. If the interlocutors lack these, or are not sure which strategies to use in that type of situation, the result might be interaction that by definition is not successful. These types of encounters might be something the participants did not want to share to maintain an image as good communicators in English. Of course it is also possible that even though the participants’ interlocutors were non-native, their repertoires might still be somewhat similar, in which case there would be no need to converge to the other speakers’ way of speaking.

I will introduce one more ability the participants construe as part of their competence as successful communicators – the ability to not to concentrate too much on the mistakes one makes. In a way this seems to resemble a typical ELF situation, where it does not matter if the communication does not conform to standard language norms as long as the result is successful communication. On the other hand, the way the participants talk about making mistakes might suggest something else as well. First of all, the repertoire of making mistakes echoes the typical classroom discourse used to encourage learners to talk in the foreign language, i.e. to develop their communicative competence. In EFL, if communication breakdowns occur or to prevent them from happening, learners are encouraged to “rephrase” or “try to find alternative ways of saying the same thing,” and “rely on the context”. The same encouraging pep talk can be heard in Jesse’s account as well: “if you make a small mistake it doesn’t matter if you’ve managed to get your point across”.

Secondly, in SLA mistakes signal interlanguage, they are a sign of deficient language use and deviation from the norm. Furthermore, Joel’s reasoning for making mistakes indicates a similar categorization as is made in SLA between mistakes and errors:
"And if I do [make mistakes], it’s not because I wouldn’t know how to say things but because I have food in my mouth or otherwise twist my tongue; I don’t see it as a mistake but as a slip". In this example one can almost hear the term *slip of the tongue*, and in any case that seems to be exactly what Joel means here. He construes his deviations from the norm as mistakes, i.e. as a failure to perform his competence, and not as errors that are caused by lack of knowledge. Errors would be indications of the fact that he does not know what would be the appropriate form to use in a given context. The way making mistakes is construed suggests that the participants do not make a distinction between their L1 and L2 deviations, which might further imply that they construe a near-native-like competence in English. What supports this interpretation is the fact that at one point Joel even says “even native speakers make mistakes”, validating mistake making as part of language use. So even when the participants construe language use as a pragmatic communication endeavor, they still reason their claims by comparing their language use to native speaker models.

Finally, the participants also construe competence as an ability to learn English well. They rely on the context, hypothesize meanings for words, and make mental notes of vocabulary and structures for later use. As already noted in the analysis, this echoes quite comprehensively the type of discourse that is traditionally used in the EFL context. In essence these are learning strategies the participants not only construe as beneficial for their English learning but also are employ to depict themselves as competent learners of English. What seems to drive the participants to improve their competence in English is an intrinsic interest in the activities they performed and a love for the English language. Again, these findings seem to tap onto similar notions of competence as Turunen and Kalaja (2004) were able to find from their data. The metaphor that seems to describe the interpretative repertoire of competence as an
ability to learn well is the ‘lover of the language’ metaphor. The lovers of the language adored the English language and the culture of its speakers. They enjoyed leaning English and were willing to work to improve their competence in the language.
6 Conclusions

There are two types of interpretative repertoires that are employed when the participants construe their identities as English speakers – as learners and users of English. The identity that becomes salient depends on the context, and is determined by the opportunities and limitations for identity construction those situations impose. School for example, is a typical setting for a learner identity to emerge, but since the participants construe themselves as more competent than that context expects them to be, they tend to perceive themselves more as users in that context. On the other hand, they determine that very competence in terms of native speaker models, which would suggest the salience of a learner identity. Another factor that affects which of the two identities is construed are the hierarchical structures that are prevalent in different contexts. Typically the contexts where the interpretative repertoire of the learner identity is salient are the situations that are exonormative, i.e. which draw upon the native speaker model as a reference point. Hierarchical settings also imply an imbalance in power relations, e.g. in schools teachers are given the power to evaluate learners, but that power can also be reversed – due to teachers’ inability to conform to the native speaker model, they too can be evaluated on their performance. Furthermore, a perceived high competence level gives the right to evaluate other people as well, drawing on the native speaker model as a reference to the evaluation nonetheless. Conversely, the contexts which highlight the user identity are those where the participants employ the user repertoire to describe how the foci of interaction should be successful communication and politeness should, i.e. they negotiate the norms of communication irrespectively of native speaker ideals. To conclude, the choice of the foregrounded identity is determined on what is perceived to give the most preferred presentation of the self in a given context.
All in all, the picture the participants construe of their competence is multifaceted. The interpretative repertoires of competence in English include competence as knowledge as well as abilities. These repertoires depict the development of this knowledge and abilities as a gradual, somewhat unconscious process. The participants employ repertoires competence to construe themselves as proficient users as well as learners of English. Competence is also construed as native like or near-native-like cognitive and performative abilities, as well as abilities that make them competent communicators in intercultural contexts too.

I have studied how students of English construe identity and competence in English as an L2 using a bottom-up perspective, i.e. looking at how L2 speakers themselves talk about these phenomena. With this approach it is possible to understand how proficient English L2 students perceive their roles as speakers of the language. These perceptions affect the way they act in the world and how they react to other speakers of English. What the findings of this study imply is that at some point advanced L2 speakers of English seem to develop an identity as users of the language in addition to the learner identity they already possess. This identity enables them to perceive themselves as competent users of the language, although competence for them still includes features that reflect native speaker ideals as well. The perceptions of oneself as a competent user of the language encourages them to seek out situations where they are able to use the language in ways that interest them intrinsically, and which, when reflected retrospectively, have been beneficial for their learning of English. In light of these findings, it would seem a good idea to encourage learners to develop an identity as language users from as early on as possible. For this to happen, we need to acknowledge what ELF research has to offer to the field of foreign language learning and teaching, and to appreciate in EFL the fact that English is truly a
widespread medium of communication – a lingua franca for speakers around the globe, and competence in just one native variety might not be enough for future speakers of English.

What this study does not address is how institutionalized settings impose certain identities, and encourage developing specific competences in English. For future research, it would be interesting to see how, for example, the Finnish national core curriculum construes speaker identities and competence in English. Another interesting research prospect could be to compare different ‘language experts’, e.g. English teachers and English translators’ perceptions about identity and competence. Finally, the current thesis has not studied in detail the prevailing gender differences that might have a part to play in how English speakers construe identity and competence in English. It became evident in this study that the male and female participants approached the issues quite differently, but the method of analysis was not the best to detect and describe those differences. It would, nonetheless, make an interesting research topic for another paper.

Qualitative research provides answers to questions such as ‘how’ or ‘why’ something happens. Due to its capacity to delve into realms that have previously remained unidentified, the findings of such research are not generalizable. Thus, qualitative research can be used as a guide to light the way for future research that can, with different methods, establish the frequencies and generalizability of the studied phenomena. It is also helpful when conceptualizing the issues relevant to the research topic and with appropriate method triangulation can offer valuable insights on how relevant and valid the findings are to the issues that are under investigation. In the current research I have shown that advanced L2 speakers of English construe both learner and user identities, as well as employ interpretative repertoires to construe
competence in ways that reinforce these identities. Furthermore, my findings support those that previous research has been able to identify. In addition, the study of interpretative repertoires provides information on how the construction of repertoires depends on the context the talk is produced in. Since the identity and competence constructions themselves also proved to be highly context-dependent, I would argue that this method of analysis was particularly appropriate for describing the situational variation in the repertoires of identity and competence they were construing.

The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in research on EFL and ELF, i.e. to empirically study how L2 English speakers construe identity and competence in English. Previous research has focused on conceptualizing the ‘good language learner’, as well as studied L2 English speakers’ attitudes towards different varieties of English, and the identities that emerge in lingua franca contexts. Furthermore, the current research focused on the constructions made by L2 English speakers who have not yet been fully socialized to share the English language expert identity, unlike the previous studies that have looked at how university students and English teacher students view either good language learning or ELF usage (e.g. Turunen and Kalaja 2004; Dufva et al. 2003; Jenkins 2007). While studying English language experts and future English teachers does provide important information on relevant issues concerning language learning as well as the role of ELF in the world, it is not necessarily beneficial to a large number of ‘lay people’ who have to use English in their everyday life in work, or more personal contexts. That is why the participants in the current research were able to provide such valuable information on how a lay person with advanced proficiency level in English perceives identities and competence in English. Furthermore, this study provided information on how those perceptions become salient in different contexts. Understanding how context affects
the salience of identity and competence constructions, we can help people become more efficient and competent users of English as a lingua franca.

As already mentioned in the introduction, studying the identity and competence constructions of L2 speakers of English has been, for me, a way to understand my own attempts to resolve and construe an identity as an English speaker. I hope this thesis provided food for thought, as well as insight to how identities and competence are construed for all of those who might be wrestling with their English as an L2 speaker identities.
References


Appendix 1

**Kerron tutkimuksesta lyhyesti:** keskustellaan yhdessä haastateltavan englannin oppimiskokemuksista (kouluaikaisista, ei yliopisto-opintojen alettua)

- olen kiinnostunut kaikesta, minkä haastateltava kokee oleelliseksi englannin oppimisessaan
- kuulen mielessäni sattumuksista tai tilanteista, joita haastateltava asian tiimiltä muistaa

**Ei-narratiivia vaativat kysymykset:**

Millaisena koit kouluaikoina englannin opiskelun?

Oletko aina kokenut sen tuolla tavoin?

Oletko käyttänyt englantia vapaa-ajalla?

Mitä teit?

Missä?

Kuinka paljon/usein?

Minkä vuoksi käytit englantia vapaa-ajalla?

Oletko kokenut tästä vapaa-ajan englannin käytöstä olleen sinulle hyötyä englannin oppitunneilla?

Miten?

**Narratiivikysymykset:**

*Tilanteet*

Muistatko, milloin ensimmäisen kerran käytit englantia vapaa-ajalla?

Muistatko koulun ulkopuolelta jotain tilannetta, jossa englannilla olisi ollut suuri rooli?

*Hyödyt*

Huomasitko hyötyneesi vapaa-ajan englannin käytöstä? Voisitko kertoa esimerkin?

Milloin huomasit olevasti hyvä englannin kielessä?

*Strategiat ja metodit*

Oliko sinulla jotain keinoja tai ”kikkoja”, joilla harjoittelit englannin käyttöä? Esimerkki?

**Mahdollinen viimeinen kysymys:**

Millaisia neuvoja antaisit nuorelle, joka haluaisi parantaa englannin taitoaan?
Appendix 2

SUOSTUMUSLOMAKE

Tutkimus: Osaamista rakentamassa; yliopisto-opiskelijoiden englannin oppimiskokemuksia

Vastuullinen tutkija: Hanna-Mari Pienimäki, Englantilainen filologia, Helsingin yliopisto

Tutkimus kartoittaa yliopisto-opiskelijoiden englannin oppimiskokemuksia ennen korkeakoululuopintojen alkua. Tutkimuksessa analysoituu, miten onnistuneet kielen oppimiskokemukset rakentuvat kertomusten ja kuvailun kautta. Tutkimusaineistona ovat englantilaisen filologian pääaineopiskelijoiden haastatelut.


Informanteilla on mahdollisuus pyynnöstä saada kopio kaikista tutkimusteksteistä, joita tuotetaan aineiston perusteella.

Haastateltava

__________________________

Annan suostumukseni aiemmin nauhoitetun haastatteluaineiston käyttöön tutkimustarkoituksiin.

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Paikka ja aika Allekirjoitus
Appendix 3

Heidi: on joksus kyllä. ehkä just et on ymmärtänyt jotain sellasia kulttuuriaspekteja mitä on saatettu jollain tavalla esitellä eri englantia puhuvien maiden kulttuureja niin sillä olla vapaa-ajalla lukemisen elokuvien tai ihmisten kanssa keskustelujen perusteella ymmärtää että on ollu jo valmiiksi pohjatietoa et on osannut sanoa jotain tunnilla. jotkin kummattakin sekä vapaa-ajan että koulussa opittu englanti en osaa sanoa niin kummatkin rakentunut samaan aikaan vähän niin kun eri hollillä. tietyistä koulussa opitut periaatteet on ollut tarpeellisia et voi ymmärtää monimutkasempia rakenteita. mut niitä on käätyttänyt eri tilanteissa ja joissakin on saattanut tulla yhteen.

Jesse: mut no sen mä voin sanoa että englannin tunnit ala-asteella ja yläasteella ei niissä juuri mitään oppinut niissä vaan situ puol nukuksissa. et jotain siellä kerrottiin et ei siinä mitään ongelmaa missään vaiheessa tullu yläasteen aikana. sikäli mielenkiintosta sen tehtäväksikärja yläasteella... mul oli niin tylsää et sen lukuvuoden lopussa mä olin noin 200 sivua muita edellä kun mä olin vaan raapustellut tylsistyneenä niitä tehtäviä läpi kun ei ollut muuta tekemistä tunnilla.

Jesse: no se on sen takia kun on siellä asunut niin siitä on tullu luontaseksi et kun on lapsena asunut niin se kielikunto paljon paremin kun nuorena. et siitähan se loppujen lopuksi.

Joel: suomessa se on aina ollut herveä helppoa varsinkin opiskelu koulussa on ollut herveä helppoa. mielestäni mä en oo oppinut suomessa mutta uusia sanoja [...] mä juutietin et oppinut niin juuri mitään enää. ja en mä oikeestaan ennen tänne tuloo. jotain ihme sanoja ja nekin on ollut vääriä käännöksiä loppujen lopuksi. on käännetty jossain culture cafesssa takasivulla johonkin herveen spesifiseen tarkoitukseen ja esitetty se silleen kun se ois joku ihan normaalina sana. joku ja sit tietysti niimä mut ei sinänsä mitään uutta englannin käyttöön juurikaan ainakaan koulussa.

Mia: mä en muista ala-asteella et oliko se enkku mulle keskivertoa helpomaa mutta yläasteella mä olin koko yläasteen ajan niin et osasin englantia keskitasoa paremin ja se oli mulle tosi helppoa. mä en siinä mielessä tiedää et onko mun kokemukset hyvä esimerkki siitä et miten hyödyllistä se itse opetus on kun mä en oo tarvinnut sitä taita mä en oo vältämättä saanu sitä täyttä hyötyä siitä kun mä oon ollut siinä vähän edellä. mä koen että se mun oppiminen on tullu jostain muualta.

Jesse: suomen koululaitos siisi sellaseen teoreettiseen... sellaseen tämä on oikea tapa puhua.

Jesse: et kielioopi oli vähän silleen et et osannut sitä teoreettista puolta. käytännössä osas et osas sanoa et onko tää olikein vai väärin. mut kun pitäis sanoa et mikä tulee minkä jälkeen ni se meni vähän silleen et ei sitä ihan heti osannut sanoa.

Mia: tietyistä yläasteella oli enemmän sellasia harjotustehtäviä ja mä oon niissä pärjänny hyvin kun mulla on jo siinä vaiheessa ollu jo semmonen voimakas se kielen taju. et mä oon vaan osannut et se on näin. mä en oo koskaan oppinut kieliopin sääntöjä. [...]mä oon tosi laiska ja mä oon tykännyn tehä sitä mikä on helppo. ja
enkun kanssa mä en oo koskaan joutunut päntäämään mitään kielipiispääntöjä ku on muualla kehittynyt se kielen taju et pystyy vastaamaan oikein.

Jesse: mut jos pitäs sanoa et onko tää oikeen vai väärin niin sehän meni kielikorvan kautta meni heti oikein kunnolla.

Mia: se on vaan tullu sille tosi vaivihkaa.

Joel: ainiin semmonen temppu mulla kyllä on. mä oon tota lukion loppupuolella varsinkin jos englannin kokeessa oli aine niin mä tykkäsin filosofiasta ja äidinkielestä hirveesti niin mä en yrittänyt käännöksi tangota niitä englannin aineissa mut mä kirjoitin filosofian ja äidinkielien aineet englanniksi. sen takia mä oon joskus saanu päähänni et mä voisin olla melkein äidinkielennuhtuja koska se on ihan vaan vaihdosta kiinni. siin ei tarvette ajatella juurikaan enempää.

Heidi: kun mä olen englantia paljon vapaa-ajalla käyttänyt niin sit se on ryhtynyt aika nopeasti dominoimaan sitä. ja sitä on nyt yliopistollakin ni on välillä huomannut et suomen kieli on aika harpoointia välillä et rupee jo ajattelemaan englanniksi aika suureksi osaksi.

Jesse: ei siihen mitään sen kummosempaa syytää kun että on hauskaa.

Jesse: mä nauitin niistä tarinoista.

Joel: viimesinä vuosina [ulkomailla] mä rupesin lukemaan kaiken englanniksi koska totta kai se kannattaa luaa alkuperäiskielellä ja toisekseksi. Tää lähti Harry Potterista ja mä vihasin Kaparin Jaanan lapsellisia käännöksiä. tai osa niistä oli mun mielestä lapsellisia niistä käännössanoista eikä ne ollut mun mielestä läheskään niin lapsellisia englanniksi.

Jesse: useimmat kirjat on kirjotettu alunperin englanniksi ja mä haluan luaa sitä alkuperästeosta.

Jesse: et kylhän sillä kielellä on merkitystä et jos on alkuperäis niin saa sen koko idean siitä kielestä.

Mia: et ei ollut niinkun. et emmä tiää olisi se puolittain sitä et halus luaa englanniksi ja halus luaa englanniksi kirjoitettua kirjallisuutta sillä lähtökiellellä. mä tiedän et tosi monet jotka osaa jotain kieltä tösä hyvin ei halua luaa kaunokirjallisuutta sillä kielellä. et se on jotenkin liian vaivalloista ku sitä kieltää ei kuitenkaan osaa niin tarpeeks tai kun se ei oo sun äidinkieli.

Mia: siinä oli ehkä nuorempana jo ihan sekin sekin et esim elokuvat ni se on ollut niin semmonen toinen maailma ku se ei ole todellinen ja se on tuolla ulkona ja se englannin kieli on ollut niin kiinteesti sidoksissa siihen ja on tunnut et siihen pitää päästä siihen sisään et jotenkin pääsee siihen maailmaan.

Heidi: ja toinen on se että ehkä haluaa tai toivoo olevansa sillä hetkellä jossain muualla kuin suomessa ja olla osa jotain muutakin kuin suomalaista yhteiskuntaa. et on ollut sinällään viehtymys siihen brittiläiseen kulttuuriin. vaikka aiemminkin sanoin et ei oo imitointia tai pakkomiellettä niin kuitenkin sellanen toive et tuntee olevansa eri paikassa tai ajassa.
Heidi: aina välillä joku joka on kuullut mun puhuvan tai keskustellut mun kanssa on saattanut pitää maa ihan brittiläisenä. tai sillon ala-asteella eikä neljännellä mun luokanopettaja on kertonut et hän on kysynyt et olenko mä asunut ulkomailla tai englannissa niin ne on ollu sellasia pilkahduksia et ihanaa et on jossain onnistunut se on ollu kiva tuntea vaikutka ikään kun siinä osaavalta.

Joel: mulla oli yks opettaja joka ei mää oon vieläkin varma et se ei osaa ees puhua englantia. se luki suoraan ipaa eikä oikeen osannut lukea ees sitä. se esimerkiksi lausu sen iso i kirjain ihan puhtaana suomalaisia niikä. ja se yrittö opettaja meille miten sitä kielä lausutaan. [...] täät on kyllä jossain murroksessa kun suurin osa oppilaista on vähintään yhtä hyviä siinä kielessä et se opettaja vaan tietää en kirjatiedon.

Mia: mut siis lukiossa mä muistan et mää olin ainakin kahen eri enkun opettajan kursseilla. ja ne oli molemmat sellasia suomalaisia ja tietysti varmasti koulutettuja siihen ammattiin niin tota naispuolista opettajia ja niillä oli kyllä molemmilla... siis varmasti niillä oli tosi hyvä se sellaistien teknen osaaminen mut niillä ei kyllä olla hirveen hyvä suomalaisia sellasia kielitajuia tai sellasia kommunikaatiotaia sellasia kielessä.

Joel: täät oli yläasteella. eikun vai oliko. yläasteella se varmaan sanottiin ekan kerran mutta se mistä mä muistan sen olin lukion kakkosluokan alkupuolelta. [...] alettiin puhua huviseen englantia jostain syystä ja kaikki sano että sää oot ihan hirveen britti. mää on tajunnut sitä ollenkaan. ja vaikka mitä sanovat ni mää väitä että mun englanti on muuttanut britimmäks suomessa ihan britimmäks suomessa telkarin takia. tai siis yhen sarjan takia. mää on ollut joksivat se sellasia sanoa joksivat mä on sellasia sanaa sellasia englantia sellasia kauheen vähän vähän sellasia dandy-intonaatiolla.

Jesse: mää yritän puhua enemmän brittiaksentilla tai siis neutraalilla brittiaksentilla kun neutraalilla amerikkalaisaksentilla. mut se riippuu aina silleen se vähän vaihtele. joskus mää saan ihan spontaanisti ruveta puhumaan sellaisella kunnon brittiaksentilla varsinkin jos mää turhaudun johkon kiin niin mun englanti saattaa hyvin nopeesti muuttua brittiaksentiks jostain syystä. mää on tennä mistä se johtuu mut tota se vaan niin kun tulee.

Heidi: mut toisaalta tuntuu et joko se amerikkalainen akseptti tulee ikään kuin oman päälle ettei siihen pysty sanoo mitään tai sitten se oma puhe mukautuu amerikkalaiseksi.

Heidi: mää oon huomannut et mää pystyn kumpaakin käyttäään ni sitten se saattaa vaiheella tilanteittain et kuinka painostavaks sen tilanteen kokoa et jos pitää antaa nopeesti vastaus johkon niin menee enemmän siihen amerikkalaisen akseptinä kun taas jos tuntee et on turvallisilla vesillä niin se brittiaksentti on luontevampi.

Joel: mää yritän olla mahollisimman paljon esillä ja musta tuli vähän tunnettu siellä vähäksä aikaa. ja siellä mää käytän tahallani mahollisimman hassua englantia. varmaan vähän sama pointti kun jollain akrobaattilla et pysty yleisän mahollisimman jännillä tavoilla. [...] välillä tuntu silleen et mää olin jonkunmoinen auktoritetti.

Heidi: mitä enemmän mää koe et mää sitä jotenkin osaan niin sitä helpommin tai sitä mielekkääämpää musta on sitä käyttää [...] kun on tullu vanhemmaks [...] jos on ollu tekemisissä ulkomailla asuvien tai ulkomaalaisten perheystävien kanssa niin se
kommunikaatio on ikään kun ollu helpompaa niin sitten se on tullu vielä enemmän siihen arkipäivääänkin läsnäolevaks kun on pystynyt olemaan yhteyksissä erilaisten ihmisten kanssa.

Joel: no ainakin ääntämys ja kuullunymmärtäminen ni ne ei tullu miltään. ei mun tarvii ääntämiseeni keskittyä. ja sillonkaan se ei johdu siitä et mä en tietäis miten se menee vaan et mulla on ruokaa suussa tai muuten menee kieli solmuun ja se voi tapahtua ihan suomeksi. ehkä se tapahtuu vähän useemmin mut siitä huolimatta mä en pidä siitä virheenä vaan vahinkona.

Jesse: kaikki tekee virheitä. mulla on muutama sellanen brittihenkilö joiden kanssa mä jatkuu jatkuu oon et toisa ol virhe toisa virhe ihan jatkuu jatkuu. kaikki tekee jopa siis natiivitin tekee virheitä jatkuu jatkuu sen englannin kanssa et ihan turha lähteä pelkäämään virheitä. ihmiset ymmärtää ja jos ei ymmärrä niin ne voi painua suohon ja hankkia ihmisen joka ei oo niin pikkutarkka virheistä. varsinkin keskustelussa jos tekee jonkun pieni virheen niin ei sillä oo mitään väliä. jos pointti menee perille niin se on hyvä.

Mia: mun englannin kielen oppimista on tukenut mun kyky nojata kontekstiin. mä saan siit kontekstista irti paljon. Mä tosi harvoin englantia oppiessa jaksan kattoa sanakirjasta sanojen merkityksiä. johonkin outoon sanaan mä luen oletusmerkityksiä sen kontekstin pohjalta. ja mä muistan vaik mä oon vaan kerran aikasemmin ja siitä on paljon aikaa ni ku mä törmään siihen toisen kerran ni sit mä muistan sen. et se tapahtuu tosi nopeesti se sanaston kehittyminen.

Heidi: ja siinä yhdisti jonkun sanan ja ilmasun siinä tuli sellanen ahaa elämys et hei tää tarkottaa tätäl ja se saatto ollan sellanen mitä on aiemmin pohtinut tai on aiemmin huomannut et ei ymmärrä. sen ymmärs paremmin sen siinä kontekstissa huomas. sellanen elämys et hei tässä oppi jotain et pitää laittaa korvan taakse.

Heidi: sillon yläasteella mä laulujen sanoja usein tarkistin et oli kuullut jotain jossa ei ollu mitään järkeä et osa lauseista oli sellasia et tietää et ne on näin mut mikä se toinen osa on se kuulostat tältä mut se ei varmaan oo niin.

Mia: mä rakastan idiomeja. mä rakastan sellasia englannin kielelle tyypillisiä rakenteita jotka on siis vaan niinkin siinä kieleessä.

Joel: ja varmasti sekin on vaikuttanut. mä esimerkiksi tulin ajatelleeks positiivisten sanojen vivahdenta kun mä arvostelin ihmisten tekeleitä. en oo muuten koskaan tullu ajatelleeks toii on varmaan aika paljon vaikuttanut siihen miten mä käytän englantia.