

**The influence of the prevailing notion of language competence on
English as a foreign language test in the matriculation
examinations arranged between 1919-2008**

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Tässä pro gradu –tutkielmassa tarkastellaan miten viimeisen 90 vuoden aikana vallinneet käsitykset kielitaidosta ovat vaikuttaneet vuosina 1919-2008 järjestettyjen englannin kielen ylioppilaskokeiden sisältöön ja tavoitteisiin. Englannin kielen kokeet on tässä tutkimuksessa jaettu neljään eri ajanjaksoon kokeen sisältöön tehtyjen suurimpien muutosten perusteella. Vuoden 2008 kokeet analysoidaan erikseen, jotta nähdään testaavatko ne nykyisen käsityksen kielitaidosta.

Tutkimuksen lähtökohtana on oletus, että ylioppilaskokeiden sisältö muuttuu hitaasti, eikä aina ole ajankohtainen peili kulloinkin vallitsevasta kielitaitokäsityksestä. Englannin kielen koe ei myöskään itsessään riitä täysin arvioimaan kokelaan omaksumaa kielitaitoa, sillä se ei testaa suullista kielitaitoa, joka on jo pitkään ollut keskeinen osa kielitaitoa. Kokeen rinnalle tarvitaan muita kielitaidon arviointikeinoja jos halutaan testata jokainen kielitaidon osa-alue eli kirjoittaminen, lukeminen, kuunteleminen ja puhuminen.

Teoriaosassa tarkastellaan miten kielitaitoa on määritelty viimeisen 90 vuoden aikana ja mitä kielen oppimisen osa-alueita sen on nähty sisältävän. Kielitaitokäsitystä avataan niin kieli- ja kasvatustieteilijöiden, Euroopan neuvoston julkaiseman Eurooppalaisen viitekehyksen kuin myös opetushallituksen laatiman lukion opetussuunnitelman kautta. Vieraan kielen kielitaitokäsitys on muuttunut tämän vuosisadan aikana. Suunta on ollut kielen kääntämisen taidoista produktiivisiin taitoihin ja kulttuurienväliseen kommunikatiiviseen kompetenssiin eli kielitaitoon, jonka kautta oppija nähdään osana omaa ja vierasta kulttuuria. Aiemmin kielitaidossa painotettiin kykyä kirjoittaa ja kääntää kieltä, nykyään kielitaidon nähdään koostuvan edellä mainituista neljästä eri osa-alueesta. Jokainen alue tulisi näin myös ottaa huomioon kielen opetuksessa ja kielitaitoa arvioivassa päättökokeessa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että englannin kielen ylioppilaskokeiden sisältö on hitaasti muuttunut kielitaitokäsityksen muutosten mukaisesti. Aluksi kielitaito testattiin yksisivuisella käännöstehtävällä, 1960-luvulla kokeeseen lisättiin valinnainen tekstin ymmärtämisen osuus ja 1970-luvulla koe jakautui kahteen osioon: toinen testasi kuullun ymmärtämisen ja toinen luetun ymmärtämisen, kielioppitaidot sekä kirjoittamisen. 1990-luvulta eteenpäin koe on sisältänyt monipuolisia tehtäviä, joissa on vaadittu produktiivisuutta. Koe ei kuitenkaan ole kokonaan pysynyt kielitaitokäsityksen mukana, sillä se ei nykyisellä sisällöllään täysin testaa vallitsevaa kulttuurienvälisestä kommunikatiivista kompetenssia eli muun muassa kykyä ymmärtää vieraita kulttuureja, kykyä viestiä vieraalla kielellä tilanteen vaatimalla tavalla ja tuottaa sujuvaa puhuttua kieltä.

Avainsanat: kielitaito, kielellinen kompetenssi, kulttuurienvälinen kompetenssi, englannin kielen ylioppilaskoe

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1. Introduction

The notion of language competence is central in language learning and teaching. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages defines language competence as the “sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions” (CEFR 2001, 9). Johnson (2001, 15) simply notes that the linguists use the word *competence* to describe knowledge and skills.

In the past, according to KIEPO (2007), the national project on Finnish Language Education Policies carried out at the University of Jyväskylä in 2005–2007, the acquiring of language competence or knowledge of different language structures were seen as a mental practise which would help one to achieve higher educational goals. As will be seen in the following chapters, language competence was also thought of as an ability to translate and produce coherent text in a foreign language. The Grammar-Translation method in the early 20th century and in the middle of the 20th century focused on word-for-word translation competence which meant that the teaching in the class and the assessment of the students’ foreign language skills were based on translation exercises. While the focus was on the structural side in language learning, no emphasis was laid on the communicative qualities of language learning, which is nowadays seen as the most important dimension of language skills. The actual use of language in a communicative situation was not emphasised. Attention in classes, in exams and even in the matriculation examination was mainly paid to foreign language translation skills, in other words, to translation from mother tongue into the target language and the other way round.

Since the early years of foreign language teaching, the focus of language learning has shifted to productive skills such as listening and reading comprehension skills as well as the ability to interact in foreign language. During the last decades, language competence has been seen more as a tool which enables an individual to communicate and be part of different

interaction situations as well as social cultures. As Kaikkonen & Kohonen (2000, 8) note, the emphasis of foreign language learning and teaching has changed from examining language as linguistic structures to using language in different kinds of communicative situations.

Internationalization, working and travelling abroad, refugees and immigrants, internet, TV etc. all affect the current situation in which the language skills are seen as an unquestionable benefit. Communication between different cultures is also seen as important and thus intercultural communicative competence has become one of the main aims of foreign language teaching. Language learning is a lifelong learning process, which does not end immediately after school (Sajavaara, Luukka & Pöyhönen 2007, 34).

During the last 90 years, foreign language teaching as well as the foreign language matriculation examination have come a long way from testing word-for-word translation skills to testing productive writing skills and the ability to use language in various situations. The first tests arranged in the 1920s were one-page translation exercises but the present-day test contains over 30 pages of various task types evaluating both receptive and productive skills. The prevailing emphasis in language competence influences the structure and task types of the English as a foreign language (EFL) test in the matriculation examination.

Nowadays foreign language teaching and testing aims to versatile, intercultural communicative competence. The national core curriculum for upper secondary schools (LOPS) as well as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) are based on the current notion of language competence. The current LOPS published in 2003 bases the evaluation and goals of foreign language learning on the CEFR. The LOPS defines the goals and syllabus for the upper secondary school and by doing that build the basis for teaching and assessing of foreign language skills. Because the matriculation examination tests the syllabus taught and learned during the upper secondary school studies, it ought to be based on the goals set by the prevailing view of what is thought of language competence. This means that the

teaching as well as the matriculation examination should also follow the goals of the CEFR and test the language competences set by the CEFR.

The matriculation examination defines and sets frames for foreign language teaching in Finnish upper secondary schools, because the teaching and learning of foreign language in the upper secondary schools usually aims to success in the final school-leaving exam. This means that the matriculation examination serves as a wash-back effect on teaching. Since the classes are limited, they emphasise those language skills which are tested in the foreign language matriculation examination. The possible influence of the prevailing notion of language competence on the EFL tests can then be seen as an important factor because the current notion of language competence defines goals for versatile language competence, not only for skills of listening, reading and writing which are nowadays emphasised in the exam.

There are several reasons for choosing this topic for my research. First of all, it is a current topic because intercultural communicative skills and oral competence seem to be highly valued by linguists, educators as well as by today's society and labour market. The emphasis in the foreign language studies is on communicativeness and there has been several attempts to add an oral skills test as part of the EFL test in the matriculation examination. If the foreign language test considered oral skills as part of the evaluation, it would presumably cause a wash-back effect on foreign language teaching, meaning that the emphasis of the teaching would be set on communication skills as well as on language use. The continuous improvement of the foreign language examination is vital, because the exam affects the foreign language learning in schools and also the language skills the students will have in the future.

The other reason for writing my thesis on the topic presented above was to increase and to develop my knowledge about foreign language learning, teaching and assessment as well as my knowledge of foreign language competences. Writing this thesis has meant hours of research on the topic but also building up my foreign language teaching professional skill and

gaining highly valued knowledge for my future career as a foreign language teacher. During the research I have come to personal contact with important sources such as the Ministry of Education, the National Board of Education, the Matriculation Examination Board, the composers of the EFL test in the matriculation examination and several experts of education as well as many teachers. They have all given important information and insight for my research as well as for my career as a teacher.

The aim of this research is to analyse the EFL tests included in the foreign language matriculation examination between 1919-2008. The EFL tests are studied in order to find out whether the prevailing notion of language competence influences the structure and task types in the exam. The analysis presents a historical cross section of the tests arranged during the past 90 years but sets an emphasis on the newest tests arranged in spring and fall 2008.

The first chapter of this thesis is introduction. The second chapter takes a look at the language competence and explains how the language competence is understood during the past 90 years as well as today. Attention is paid to the four language skills: writing, reading, listening and speaking. Language competence will be presented through different sources.

Chapter three is concerned with evaluation, various kinds of test types and the characteristics of a good language test. Chapter four introduces the matriculation examination prepared by the Matriculation Examination Board and arranged by the upper secondary schools as a maturity test at the end of the upper secondary school studies. The history of the matriculation examination as well as the structure and levels of the foreign language test in it will be presented. Chapter five defines the methods, the research questions and the material used in the analysis made of the EFL tests in the matriculation examination. Chapter six is an analysis of the EFL tests arranged between 1919-2008. The tests are divided into four time periods according to the greatest changes occurred in the task types and the structure of the test. The newest tests in 2008 are treated separately.

Chapter 7, discussion, combines together the theory and analysis presenting the main findings of the research. The thesis will end in some concluding remark and a bibliography of the works cited.

2. A cross section of language competences

The term language competence nowadays includes four different sectors which are part of the required language skills: *writing, reading, listening* and *speaking* (Johnson 2001, 269).

Especially in listening and writing, one has to be able to understand and draw conclusions, in speaking and writing one needs the ability to produce clear, coherent text. These four skills can, according to Johnson, be further divided into two different categories. The first one is *medium*, with listening and speaking occurring in the *spoken medium*, reading and writing in the *written medium*. The second division includes the *receptive skills* of listening and reading, and the *productive skills* of speaking and writing. The receptive skills were earlier called ‘passive skills’ and productive ones ‘active skills’ but these terms have become outdated, since listening and reading are also seen as highly active processes. The four language skills are sometimes also divided by their common processes into *comprehension skills* including listening and reading, and into *productive skills* including writing and speaking. Language competence consists of all these four skills and that is a remarkable reason why the four different skills cannot be treated separately (Johnson 2001, 270).

2.1. The past and the present-day foreign language competences

The concept of language competence has gone through many changes during the past 90 years. Several factors, such as teaching methods or the image of a person as a learner affect the definition of language competence. Kohonen (2006, 41) presents a table outlining the developments in educational linguistics, psychological, language teaching and evaluation theories.

Table 1. Outline of paradigms in foreign language education.

Theories			
Linguistic	Learning	Lg. Teaching	Evaluation
Traditional, Philology		Grammar-Translation	Translation
Structuralism	Behaviourism	Audiolingual Theory	Analytic tests
(TG), Pragmatism, Sociolinguistics	Cognitivism, Constructivism	Functional communicative competence	Integrative tests; self-assessment
Discourse analysis, Dialogue	Humanism, Sociocultural/ Experiential Learning	Intercultural communicative competence	Authentic assessment; ELP; self-assessment

Looking at the different linguistic and learning conceptions used in different decades during the 20th and 21st century, one can notice how they also affect the way language competence is being defined throughout the various decades in past 90 years. The idea of traditional Grammar-Translation ability was a valid method till the 1970s and partly used in Finland up until the 1980s (Kohonen 2006, 41). It was, however, abandoned because it mainly concentrated on one language skill, namely on the ability to produce written language by translating word-for-word into target language. There was a shift towards more communicative and student-oriented way of teaching from the beginning of the 1980s onwards. Language teaching methods went through great changes and are nowadays based on the idea of communicativeness and intercultural skills. They are taught through oral exercises, creative ways of producing the language, and by group work. The following chapters are a historical cross section of the language competences in the 20th and 21st century.

2.1.1. Grammar-Translation

The traditional, or in other words, *Grammar-Translation method* (GT) emerged in the late eighteenth century but was fully taken into language teaching in the early to mid nineteenth century (Stern 1983, 453; Johnson 2001, 164). The method was based on grammar-translation

exercises and was tested by translation tasks. The linguistic field attached to this method was traditional and philological approach (Kohonen 2006, 41).

The traditional approach among individual learners in the eighteenth century had been to acquire reading knowledge of foreign languages by studying grammar and applying this knowledge to the interpretation of texts with the use of a dictionary (Howatt 1984, 131). This was not, however, a suitable method for young learners, it was rather a self-study method for highly educated students. The GT method was based on the traditional language learning method. It contained exercises of various kinds but most typically sentences for translation into and out of the foreign language. The sentences were thought to exemplify the grammar in a more concentrated and clearer way than texts could do. Howatt (1984, 136) describes the GT times by saying that GT as its worst is “a jungle of obscure rules, endless lists of gender classes and gender-class exceptions, self-conscious “literary” archaisms and snippets of philology”. The focus in GT teaching was clearly on written, not on the spoken language. The aim was to acquire a sufficient grammatical competence at the end of the studies. The GT method has, however, an important role in foreign language learning because the learner’s first language plays an integral part in the learning of second languages and the GT method supports the learning when it is used occasionally as a part of the teaching (Stern 1983, 455).

2.1.2. Audiolingual Theory

The *Audiolingual Theory* (AL) was created at the time of behaviourism in the 1940s to 1960s (Kohonen 2006, 41). In the behaviouristic learning model, learning was based on habit formation which meant that the learner’s skills were reinforced, corrected and practised to the level of automatic routines. AL regarded speech as the first skill to be learned, writing and reading would then follow the speech (Johnson 2001, 172-173). According to AL, receptive skills such as listening and reading should be approached before the productive skills, speaking and writing. Important in language teaching was habit formation through repetitions or so

called drills which meant that, for example, new grammar rules were taught through oral repetition of sentences and examples. AL was the first step towards productive use of foreign language instead of learning the knowledge of language.

According to Johnson (2001, 42) the language learner was seen as a *tabula rasa* which needed to be filled with information. The basic behaviouristic ideas about learning were: conditioning (the process of developing connections), habit formation (the behaviour to be learned was broken into many parts and taught one at a time) and the importance of environment (anything external to the learner, for example a teacher or parents). The learners' internal processes that are nowadays seen as a vital key for learning were not emphasized because they were not accessible to external observation. The individuality, thoughts and feelings of the learners were seen as too subjective and unscientific. AL was, however, the first theory in the field of language teaching claimed to be derived from psychology and linguistics (Stern 1983, 463).

2.1.3. Communicative Competence

From the 1970s onwards the term describing the language skills has been *communicative competence* (Savela 1994, 7). The method is evaluated by integrative and self-assessment tests. The linguistic fields relevant for the concept are pragmatics and sociolinguistics. According to Johnson (2001, 50), the method was created in the era of 'sociolinguistic revolution', which paid attention to the ways in which language is used in the society. The sociolinguistic revolution emerged at the beginning of the 1970s. Hymes, the pioneer of sociolinguistic revolution, along with other sociolinguists saw language use as a central part of the language learning process (Johnson 2001, 53). This thinking was based on the problems with methods such as audio-lingualism: the student might have been structurally competent, yet unable to perform even simple communicative tasks. As a reaction, Hymes launched the idea of communicative competence, which included for example information on the situational factors

which have to be present for a sentence to be interpretable. It was not enough to produce sentences which were grammatically correct; they should also be used correctly and with appropriate associations. The study of speech acts was an important branch of linguistics central to the movement of sociolinguistics. It could also be defined as pragmatics: the study of what is meant by language when it is used in the normal context of social life (Johnson 2001, 54-55).

The solution to the problem of the structurally competent but communicatively incompetent student was to divide the syllabus into different functions in the 1970s. Instead of teaching a new grammatical structure in each lesson, the teacher would now teach a concept or a way to use the language (for example greeting or making plans for future) (Johnson 2001, 184). As Johnson (2001, 185) notes, one of the essential techniques in communicative methodology was role play in which the students would act out parts in a small-scale drama or practice chosen functions. It was not so important to understand every word and structure but to be able to concentrate on important pieces of information and to develop ways to analyse things. According to the sociocultural theory, the responsibility of the learning process was given to the pupils, because a teacher could only teach if the other social partner, in this case a pupil, was involved (Kohonen 2006, 44). Johnson (2001, 188) notes that humanism emphasized the student's own activity and enquiry instead of the transmission of information by the teacher. The communicative approach to language teaching has also been apparent in the Finnish language teaching profession from the late 1980s onwards.

The emphasis in the newest definitions of language competence is clearly put on communicativeness as can be seen in Johnson's definition of language competences. Johnson (2001, 15-36) divides the communicative language competence into three different categories called *systemic*, *sociolinguistic* and *strategic competence*. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (as will be introduced in chapter 2.2) presents similar categories as

Johnson but defines them as *linguistic*, *sociolinguistic* and *pragmatic competences*. The following definition of the categories is based on Johnson's definition of communicative language competence (Johnson 2001, 15-36).

Systemic competence covers knowledge and skills related to the way the language works as a system. This involves many levels of language skills such as pronunciation (phonetics and phonology) and grammar (morphology and syntax). This category also includes semantics, in other words the meaning of the words, and mechanical language skills such as handwriting, spelling and punctuation.

Sociolinguistic competence can be divided into two different categories. The first one, sociocultural rules of use, includes the knowledge of appropriate words, politeness, ways to talk in different situations, the skills of addressing others, small talk used in the culture in which the language is spoken, the ability to understand speaker's intention etc. The second category concerns the rules of discourse which often need to be learned. Discourse is understood as a reference to the way pieces of speech or writing are joined together to form longer stretches. This category involves rules such as the ways of breaking discourse, producing cohesion and coherence in speech, answering the questions in a way that makes sense to the listener etc.

Strategic competence is described as "verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication" (Johnson 2001, 34). Brown (1994, 118) notes that communication strategies consist of "verbal and non-verbal mechanisms for the productive communication of information". It involves strategies such as learning to paraphrase expressions the learner does not know in foreign language and non-verbal miming for things which are only known in mother tongue. It also includes borrowing words from the mother tongue and avoiding structures not known. It is vital for the language learners to learn strategic competence because they will inevitably face some

difficulties and breakdowns when communicating in foreign language without sufficient vocabulary or linguistic resources. Learning of communication skills will prepare the language learners for the use of the language in everyday situations. There is, however, evidence that strategic competence or communicative competence will also develop by itself, as long as the learner is exposed to communicative situations.

Henriksen (2006, 17) brings up another view of language competence. She has explored the quality of lexical knowledge in foreign language learning and states that we have witnessed a shift of attention to lexical competence and an increase in lexical studies in second language acquisition over the last two decades. Many tests, such as word recognition tasks, translation tasks, picture matching tasks, definition tasks, different interview procedures and written product measures, have been developed to measure students' vocabulary size. The lexical competence of the present day English students in Finland has increased rapidly when we compare it to the competence of the students few decades ago. According to my opinion, there are also many external factors which affect the size of learner's vocabulary, such as TV, internet and travelling. Henriksen (2006, 17-18) states that vocabulary size can be seen as an evident factor in language competence because a learner can manage with the knowledge of the most frequent and basic words, but needs a threshold vocabulary between 3000 and 5000 words to be able to read effortlessly in a foreign language. Wide-ranging vocabulary enables students to produce and understand language, in other words, become competent in every area of language proficiency.

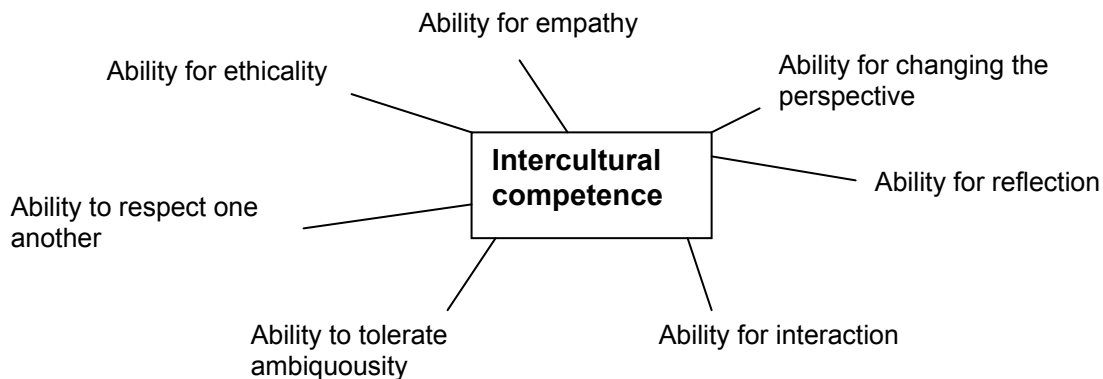
2.1.4. Intercultural Communicative Competence

The recent teaching methods are based on *intercultural communicative competence*. Byram (2000, 296), as well as other researchers, distinguish between intercultural competence (IC) and intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural competence, according to Byram (2000, 297), is the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognise as

being different from our own, whereas intercultural communicative competence is the actual performance in foreign language. These two concepts are often summarized together as Byram does by saying that intercultural communicative competence is the “willingness and ability to interact with someone of different cultural origins on the basis of a conscious awareness of one’s own cultural origins and the relationships between the two” (2002, 18). In this thesis, the term *intercultural communicative competence* will be used, because it focuses on “establishing and maintaining relationships” instead of merely communicating messages or exchanging information. Intercultural communicative competence is evaluated by authentic assessment, English language portfolio and self-assessment. The linguistic field relevant for intercultural communicative competence is discourse analysis (Kohonen 2006, 41).

Figure 1 shows the abilities attached to intercultural competence (translated from a table presented by Kaikkonen 2004, 148):

Figure 1. Abilities attached to intercultural competence.



Dialogue has recently become an important part of language learning. In Johnson’s words (2001, 193), the interest in language teaching has shifted from “a preoccupation with the ‘content’ of language teaching towards an interest in ‘activities done in class’”. This shift can be seen in the late 1980s when the idea of experiential learning emerged and in the 1990s, which was a time of task-based learning. Both these methods are based on activities and tasks

which aim to take learner's attention and to engage them in active language use (Johnson 2001, 194-195). Students are actively engaged in pair and group work, the exercises are often done together in English and they involve every-day language use. The students work together to achieve efficient language competence as well as important co-operation skills. The most important skill in language learning is not the knowledge of language anymore or the skills to memorize certain patterns by heart, but the ability to process new or already learned information and to produce both written language and spoken discourse. Immediate personal experience is the focal point for learning (Kohonen 2006, 49).

Authenticity is an essential part of intercultural communicative competence. According to Kaikkonen (2004, 174), authentic language teaching and learning should be based on the learner's own foreign language communication experiences. The importance is in the use of language in authentic and spontaneous situations. Authenticity can be brought to the language class by foreign language newspapers, movies and documents, advertisements, exchange of e-mails with people from other countries etc. Also student exchanges in foreign countries or exchange students in Finnish schools can add to authenticity in foreign language studies.

Cultural awareness is also attached to intercultural communicative competence. Byram (1997, 53) explains it as "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practises and products in one's own and other cultures and countries". According to Byram (2002, 18), the students should be given opportunities to consider their own culture and compare it with the cultures of the countries and communities where the target language is spoken, and also identify with the experiences and perspectives of people in these countries and communities.

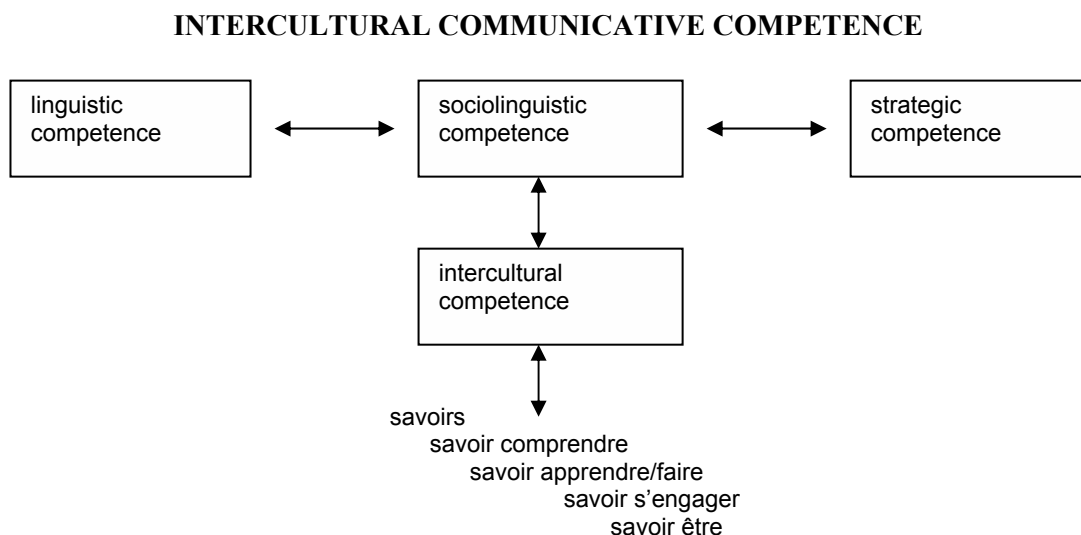
Communicative competence, as explained in chapter 2.1.3, refers to a person's ability to act in a foreign language but intercultural communicative competence, then, builds on communicative competence and enlarges it to incorporate intercultural competence (Byram

2001, 18). This is presented in figure 2 below. According to Kohonen (2006, 17), whereas communicative competence relates primarily to the individual's knowledge and skills in communicative situations, intercultural competence also focuses on the language user's personal and social identities and abilities. One of the aims of intercultural communicative competence is to familiarize the students with the multicultural society and world they are living in as well as teach them to understand and respect people from various backgrounds (Kaikkonen 2004, 137). The emphasis is on relating meaningfully to other persons in different contexts.

To clarify the concept of intercultural communicative competence to educators and teachers in the domain of foreign language education, the knowledge, skills and attitudes which together make up intercultural communicative competence have been organized in a conceptual framework comprising five *savoirs* (Byram 2001, 18). These five *savoirs* should not be considered as isolated components, but rather as components which are integrated and intertwined with the various dimensions of communicative competence. Communicative competence itself can in fact be considered a sixth *savoir*, namely *savoir communiquer*.

The concept of intercultural communicative competence can be seen in the figure taken from Byram (2001, 19).

Figure 2. The concept of intercultural communicative competence.



Byram (1997, 50-53) as well as Sercu (2005, 4-5) present and explain the five *savoirs* created by Byram:

The first *savoir*, *savoirs* (knowledge) has been defined as “knowledge of social groups and their products and practises in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction” (Byram 1997, 51). These *savoirs* together constitute the frame of reference of the people living in a particular culture. They include the words and gestures which people use, the behaviour they display, the values they believe in, the symbols they cherish etc. These features are always culture-bound and carry meaning within a particular cultural frame of reference. Apart from culture specific knowledge, the interculturally competent person needs to be sensitive to potential referential differences and also needs to acquire a certain amount of culture-general knowledge, which will allow him/ her to deal with a large diversity of foreign cultures.

Savoir-apprendre and *savoir-faire* are defined as skills of discovery and interaction. These skills are seen as the “ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practises and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction” (Byram 1997, 52). They also refer to the overall ability to act in an interculturally competent way in intercultural contact situations, to take into account the specific cultural identity of one’s interlocutor and to act in a respectful and co-operative way. *Savoir-apprendre* is also referred to as “the capacity to learn cultures and assign meaning to cultural phenomena in an independent way” (Sercu 2005, 4).

Savoir-comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating) is related to *savoir-apprendre*, and refers to the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one’s own” (Byram 1997, 52). It is important to acquire the skills of finding out new knowledge and integrating it with what one already has. The learners of a foreign language need especially to know how to ask people from other cultures about their

beliefs, values and behaviours. The speakers of foreign language need to be able to see how misunderstandings can arise, and how they might be able to resolve them, they need the attitudes of decentring but also the skills of comparing. The previous three *savoirs* help the learners to continue learning throughout their lifetime (Byram 2001, 6-7).

. *Savoir-être* (intercultural attitudes) and *savoir-s'engager* (critical cultural awareness) are often considered together since they refer to a general disposition which is characterised by “a critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration of one’s own culture” as well as by curiosity, openness and readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures or belief about one’s own (*savoir-s'engager*); and “the capacity and willingness to abandon ethnocentric attitudes and perceptions and the ability to establish and maintain a relationship between one’s own and the foreign culture” (*savoir-être*) (Sercu 2005, 5). They are the abilities to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries. This means a willingness to relativise one’s own values, beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones, and to be able to see how they might look from the perspective of an outsider who has a different set of values, beliefs and behaviours.

The foundation of intercultural communicative competence is in the attitudes of the intercultural speaker. Intercultural communicative competence, according to Sercu (2005, 3) involves knowledge, skills and attitudes at the interface between several cultural areas including the students’ own country and a target language country. The development of intercultural communicative competence is thus seen as a process that includes the students’ experiences and competencies from their own cultural backgrounds, a process that allows them to reflect on their own cultural assumptions as an integral part of the further development of their skills and knowledge of the world.

Being able to cope with intercultural experiences requires that a person possesses a number of intercultural competencies and characteristics. These characteristics and competencies have been identified as the willingness to engage with the foreign culture, self-awareness and the ability to look upon oneself from the outside, the ability to see the world through the others' eyes, the ability to cope with uncertainty, the ability to act as a cultural mediator, the ability to evaluate others' points of view, the ability to consciously use culture learning skills and to read the cultural context, and the understanding that individuals cannot be reduced to their collective identities (Sercu 2005, 3).

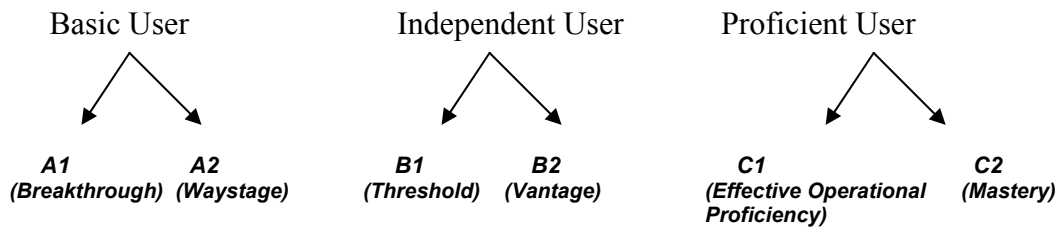
As Byram (2001, 5) states in his book, learners clearly need both linguistic competence and intercultural competence, they are attached to each other. In this thesis, the recent definition of language competence in the analysis in chapter 6.3.3. consists of both communicative competence and intercultural competences because intercultural communicative competence is built on both of them.

2.2. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a European framework developed by the Council of Europe for the learning, teaching and assessment of languages (CEFR 2001, 1). The CEFR provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe as well as in Finland nowadays. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use language for communication. It also defines what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description covers the cultural context in which language is set. The CEFR defines levels of competence which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis. These levels of competence, or according to the CEFR language proficiency, are meant to cover all the schools in Europe, including the Finnish schools, in order to standardize the grading system

and the assessment criteria across Europe (CEFR 2001; 1-4, 6). The levels of proficiency are divided into three main categories described in figure 3:

Figure 3. The levels of language proficiency by the CEFR (CEFR 2001, 23).



The common reference levels start from A1 which means that the student is a basic user of foreign language. He/she can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases. He/she can also introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. His/her interaction is possible if the other person talks slowly and is prepared to help (CEFR 2001, 24).

The highest level of language proficiency according to the CEFR is C2 which means that a language learner is a proficient user of foreign language and can understand with ease virtually everything he/she hears or reads. He/she can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. He/she can also express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of proficient meaning even in more complex situations. The C-level is rarely met in the upper secondary school in which the B-level is required (CEFR 2001, 24).

The Common European Framework is intended to overcome the barriers of communication among professionals working in the field of modern languages arising from the different educational systems in Europe. It provides the means for educational administrators,

course designers, teachers, teacher trainers, examining bodies, etc., to reflect to their current practice, with a view to situating and co-ordinating their efforts and to ensuring that they meet the real needs of the learners for whom they are responsible (CEFR 2001, 1-2).

The main measures concerning language teaching according to the CEFR (2001, 2-6) are to promote, encourage and support the efforts of teachers and learners at all levels to apply in their own situation the principles of the construction of language-learning systems by basing language teaching and learning on the needs, motivations, characteristics and resources of learners; by defining worthwhile and realistic objectives as explicitly as possible; by developing appropriate methods and materials such as ways for student to acquire a communicative proficiency appropriate to their specific needs; and by developing suitable forms and instruments for the evaluating of learning programmes.

The planning of language certification in terms of the content syllabus and assessment criteria of examinations such as the matriculation examination in Finland is also seen as one of the main measurements as well as the planning of self-directed learning. Self-directed learning includes areas such as raising the learner's awareness of his or her present state of knowledge, self-setting of feasible and worthwhile objectives, selection of materials and self-assessment (CEFR 2001, 6).

The CEFR (2001, 108-121) as well as Johnson define language competence by three different categories. Johnson referred to them as systemic, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. The CEFR presents *communicative language competences* defining them as linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. These are described in figure 4.

Figure 4. Communicative language competences by the CEFR

1 Linguistic competences

- *Lexical competence* is knowledge of, and ability to use, the vocabulary of a language, consisting of lexical elements and grammatical elements.
- *Grammatical competence* may be defined as knowledge of, and ability to use, the grammatical resources of a language. Grammatical competence is the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognising well-formed phrases and sentences in accordance with these principles.
- *Semantic competence* deals with the learner's awareness and control of the organisation of meaning. Semantics consists of questions of word meaning, the meaning of grammatical elements, categories, structures and processes; and logical relations such as entailment, presupposition, implicature, etc.
- *Phonological competence* involves a knowledge of, and skill in the perception and production of the sound-units (phonemes) of the language and their realisation in particular contexts (allophones), the phonetic features which distinguish phonemes (distinctive features, e.g. voicing, rounding, nasality), intonation etc.
- *Orthographic competence* is the knowledge of and skill in the perception and production of the symbols of which written texts are composed. It involves the different alphabetic systems, correct use of punctuation marks etc.
- *Orthoepic competence* deals with knowledge of spelling conventions, ability to consult a dictionary and a knowledge of the conventions used there for the representation of pronunciation, knowledge of the implications of written forms, particularly punctuation marks, for phrasing and intonation; and ability to resolve ambiguity (homonyms, syntactic ambiguities, etc.) in the light of the context.

2 Sociolinguistic competence

- *Sociolinguistic competence* is concerned with the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language use. This means the conventions for turntaking, negative and positive politeness, understanding of formal and informal registers, competence in using proverbs and idioms; and ability to recognise different social classes and dialects etc.

3 Pragmatic competences

- *Discourse competence* is the ability of a user/learner to arrange sentences in sequence so as to produce coherent and relevant stretches of language.
- *Functional competence* is concerned with the use of spoken discourse and written texts in communication for particular functional purposes. It is ability to understand initiatives in conversations that lead to a response and moves the interaction further on, being able to conduct questions-answer settings; and express agreement and emotions etc.

The assessment of these competences is further defined in details with evaluation scales which are based on the six different levels of language proficiency in details (CEFR 2001, 121-130). All of the competences are required for sufficient knowledge of foreign language as the CEFR points out. In order to participate with full effectiveness in communicative events, learners must have learned or acquired the necessary competences mentioned above, the ability to put these competences into action and the ability to employ the strategies necessary to bring the competences into action (CEFR 2001, 131).

The CEFR (2001, 134) sees the versatile language competence important and values it highly, not only in speaker's own mother tongue but in several foreign languages. It states that the promotion of respect for the diversity of languages and of learning more than one foreign language in school is significant. It is not simply a linguistic policy choice at an important point in the history of Europe, for example, nor even a matter of increasing future opportunities for young people competent in more than two languages. It mostly is a matter of helping learners to construct their linguistic and cultural identity through integrating into it a diversified experience of otherness and developing their ability to learn through this same diversified experience of relating to several languages and cultures. Language learning, according to the learner, will also be seen as a way for the learner to develop his or her personality (for example greater assurance or self-confidence, greater willingness to speak in a group) or to develop his or her knowledge of how to learn (greater openness to what is new, awareness of otherness, curiosity about the unknown) (CEFR 2001, 134-135).

2.3. The national core curriculum for the upper secondary schools

The Finnish National Board of Education is the national agency in charge of the development of education in Finland. It is working under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and one of its tasks is to establish the core curriculum for Finnish comprehensive and upper secondary schools. In this Pro Gradu Thesis I will only concentrate on the core curriculum for the upper

secondary schools because the matriculation examination is the final examination for that level of education.

The national core curriculum for general upper secondary school or education (LOPS) specifies the objectives and core contents of cross-curricular themes, subjects, and subject groups in general upper secondary education as it is referred in the general upper secondary schools act. In general, the comprehensive and upper secondary education must “provide students with capabilities to meet the challenges presented by society and their environment”. They must be guided to “act as responsible and dutiful citizens” who have enough self-knowledge and keys for positive growth towards well-balanced adulthood. (LOPS 2003, 12)

In addition to that, the LOPS sets objectives for different subjects which are taught at schools. This also means the goals for foreign language learning and teaching. According to the most recent curriculum composed in 2003 (LOPS 2003, 102), instruction and education in foreign language aims to develop student’s intercultural communication skills: it provides the students with skills and knowledge that are related to language and its use. The courses arranged in foreign languages also offer the students the opportunity to “develop their awareness, understanding and appreciation of the culture within the area or community where the language is spoken” (LOPS 2003, 102).

The objective for the students according to the LOPS (2003, 102) is to achieve the levels of language proficiency scale in different syllabuses that are defined by the CEFR. These are seen in table 2.

Table 2. Levels of language proficiency.

Language and syllabus	Listening comprehension	Speaking	Reading comprehension	Writing
English, A	B2.1.	B2.1.	B2.1.	B2.1.
Other languages, A	B1.1.-B1.2.	B1.1.	B1.2.	B1.1.-B1.2.
English, B1	B1.2.	B1.2.	B1.2.	B1.2.
English, B2	B1.1.	B1.1.	B1.1.	B1.1.
Other languages, B2	A2.2.	A2.1.-A2.2.	A2.2.-B1.1.	A2.1.-A2.2.
English, B3	B1.1.	A2.2.	B1.1.	B1.1.
Other languages, B3	A2.1.-A2.2.	A2.1.	A2.1.-A2.2.	A1.3.-A1.2.

In addition to the goals mentioned above, the LOPS sets the objectives which are related to the language skills, language learners and their learning strategies. These are mainly involved with the ability to communicate and conduct successful spoken discourse. The students should gain the competence to “know how to communicate in a manner of characteristic of the target language and its culture, be able to assess their language skills in relation to the objectives, and be familiar with their own strengths and development needs as communicators and language learners” (LOPS 2003, 103). They should also “know how to develop their language skills through strategies that are appropriate to their development needs, study assignments and communication skills” (LOPS 2003, 103).

During their foreign language studies in the upper secondary schools, students are to be provided with opportunities to listen, read, speak and write for different purposes on every language course. In other words, they should be trained in all the four language skills. Attention should be paid to expansion of the knowledge of the structures and vocabulary of the language being studied and also to the diversification and accuracy of its use in every-day and more formal situations. As a final statement, the students should be communicatively competent language users after graduating the upper secondary school (LOPS 2003, 103)

Foreign language teaching in the upper secondary schools, in this case English language (the longest level A started in grades 1-6 of basic education), includes six basic compulsory

courses and two optional courses that specialise in themes such as nature and its development and globalisation. The LOPS sets an aim for every course. As already mentioned before, the assessment of the courses is based on the CEFR and its reference levels. The descriptions for the upper secondary courses seem to follow the language competences strikingly well as can be seen in the following lines. Figure 5 presents the aims of the upper secondary school English courses (LOPS 2003, 103-105).

Figure 5. Descriptions for upper secondary school English courses

The students will

- reinforce their command of vocabulary and basic structures, place great emphasis on discussion and expression of opinion as well as key strategies of communication (course 1)
- practise their writing skills by means of communicative assignments as well as enhance their command of oral communication strategies and confidence of expression (course 2)
- practise oral and written communication as well as understanding and use of language as required in formal situations (course 3)
- place emphasis on speaking and reading comprehension at a relatively demanding level and practise various strategies for reading comprehension (course 4)
- prepare a relatively extensive project and make a presentation about it (course 5)
- place emphasis on understanding demanding language material, practise reading strategies and polish their written expression by writing texts suitable for different purposes (course 6)

The LOPS clearly puts emphasis on spoken discourse, communication skills and strategies in different kind of situations. In addition to that, attention is paid on understanding the language and various texts types, and being able to produce written text suitable for many purposes. The goals of every course include practise of oral communication and often by means of communicative assignments. The foreign language matriculation examination tests the language skills learned in the comprehensive and in the general upper secondary school. This means, that it should test the language competence defined by the CEFR and the LOPS.

3. Language testing

According to the most recent LOPS (2003, 224), the role of assessment in students' foreign language attainment is to provide students with feedback on their progress and learning results. This is done both during and upon completion of the studies. The feedback is also aimed to encourage and guide students in their studies. Tarnanen, Huhta & Pohjala (2007, 381) add that the evaluation and feedback should encourage the students to develop lifelong language learning skills. The assessment also provides information for students' guardians and for the needs of those who provide further studies or representatives of working life who conduct job interviews etc. One of the aims of the assessment is also to help teachers, school community, national board of education and the school community as a whole to evaluate the effectiveness of education (LOPS 2003; 224).

Takala (1971, 1) adds that evaluation is used to find information for different purposes. The goals for the evaluation in school can also be making the teaching and learning more effective; giving motivation for the learning process; evaluating of working methods, evaluating teaching programs and materials; controlling the quality of teaching; and developing the research conducted on the preceding topics. A test or an exam always measures something and in the case of EFL tests, students' skills or the ability in English language is evaluated. As Hirvonen (1974, 2) notes: "Language is not knowledge, but a set of skills." All the four language skills with several components such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation have been the basis in language teaching during the second half of 21st century (Bachman & Palmer 2004, 75).

In Finland, the responsibility of the assessment is left to the schools, or in other words, to the teachers. There are no national tests for language competence, although the foreign language matriculation examination serves as final exam for the students in the upper secondary schools (Tarnanen, Huhta & Pohjala 2007, 384).

As already noted in chapter 2.2, foreign language evaluation in Finland should at present be based on the levels of language proficiency set by the CEFR. Tarnanen, Huhta & Pohjala (2007, 393), however, state that there is still a gap between the matriculation examination and the evaluation of foreign language skills by the CEFR and the LOPS. Although the LOPS presents the evaluation criteria set by the CEFR, the exam is not graded by that criteria. The CEFR would be a good tool for evaluation, because it bases the assessment on acquiring a certain level of language proficiency, not on comparing the students with each other. The whole language proficiency is not tested by one overall grade, but different parts of language proficiency are given a separate grade (Tarnanen, Huhta & Pohjala 2007; 385, 387).

3.1. Five kinds of assessment types

Bachman (2003, 70) as well as Johnson (2001, 292-293) present a division of various test types for different language testing purposes. First of all they present language *aptitude* test, which measures the potential how well a learner might process if he were to learn a language.

According to Bachman, *selection*, *entrance* and *readiness* tests are arranged for admission decisions, for example an admission to a course, school etc. *Placement* and *diagnostic* tests identify the appropriate instruction level of specific areas in which instruction is needed. They are used, for example, in the beginning of the teaching for sorting new students into teaching groups or they might check students' progress in learning certain element. According to Johnson (2001, 292), diagnostic tests are also used to suggest where remedial work on some area of language learning will be required. *Progress*, *achievement*, *attainment* and *mastery* tests evaluate how well students proceed through teaching program, how well they have attained the program's objectives and how well they have done in relation to a particular course of program. Achievement tests, according to Bachman (2003, 71), are syllabus-based test for evaluating the objectives set by the syllabus. Johnson (2001, 92) further defines *proficiency*

tests which are not based to any specific content or program but evaluate the level a learner has reached in the language.

Although the present-day matriculation examination has many purposes and goals, it could be called an achievement test. One purpose of the matriculation examination is to test what the students have learned during the general upper secondary school English courses and also to compare their results with other students at the same age. The EFL test looks back over a longer period of learning, the learning during the several years in the upper secondary school or even in the Finnish school system, evaluating how well the students have done in relation to the syllabus and courses. Since the foreign language test also checks on how well students can put into practice the language they have been learning and measures the language competence reached so far, it also has elements of the proficiency test.

According to Brown (1994, 265), a communicative language test to test the communicative competence has to meet “some rather stringent criteria”. It has to test the learner in a variety of language functions such as grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic as well as strategic competence. This means that the test must be pragmatic so that it requires the learner “to use language naturally for genuine communication and to relate to thoughts and feelings”, in other words, put authentic language to use within a context. Instead of assessing intercultural communicative competence on paper, other ways for evaluation must be found out. Kohonen (2006, 41) as well as Byram (2002, 21) note that intercultural communicative competence can be evaluated by self-assessment and English language portfolio written by the students.

3.2. Characteristics of a good language test

A good language test requires some characteristics and qualities which are based on Johnson (2001, 301-305) as well as Bachman and Palmer (2004, 19-37). Johnson presents these characteristics as *validity*, *reliability*, *feasibility* and *discrimination*. Bachman and Palmer also

mention the first three qualities but refers to *feasibility* as *practicality*. In addition to the fore-mentioned qualities, Bachman&Palmer add three more qualities: *authenticity*, *interaction* and *impact*.

The primary purpose of a language test is “to provide a measure that we can interpret as an indicator of an individual’s language ability” (Bachman & Palmer 2004, 23). The two measurement qualities, *reliability* and *validity*, are thus essential to the usefulness of any language test. A test can be reliable without being valid but it cannot be valid without being reliable.

Reliability, according to Bachman & Palmer (2004, 19) is defined as consistency in measurement. Reliability can also be considered as a function of consistencies across different sets of task characteristics. This means that the tests should always be equal in their measurements and in the information they are testing. Johnson (2001, 304) notes that they must ensure that different markers give comparable marks to the same script as well as ensure that the test will give same results on two different occasions. The measurement of a test must be equal to all.

The *validity* of a test is the extent to which the test measures what it is intended to measure. Johnson (2001, 310) points out that if test is valid, “the outsider who looks at an individual’s score knows that it is true reflection of the individual’s skills in the area the test claims to have covered”. Bachman & Palmer (2004, 21) point out that validity “pertains to the meaningfulness and appropriateness of the interpretations that we make on the basis of test scores”. A language test must correspond to the contents of syllabus or courses. Validity can, according to Johnson, be further divided into five subsections. *Content validity* considers that the test content is representative of the subject area being covered in the test. *Face validity* measures if the test is a reasonable way of assessing the students or if it is too difficult or trivial. Johnson further defines *construct validity* as the relationship between a test and a

particular view of language and its learning, *empirical validity* as a way how the test relates to other testing measures and *predictive validity* as a way in which the results of the test yield some information about the future.

The *feasibility* or *practicality* relates to the administrative issues (Johnson 2001, 15).

Without needed equipment, planned time for the test, test materials reproduced in quantity etc. the test would lose its overall efficiency. Tests also need to be able to discriminate between students. According to Johnson (2001, 15), *discrimination* means the scores produced by a test or the extent which a test separates students from one another on a range of scores from high to low. Especially the achievement test such as the matriculation examination should result in a wide spread of scores. A good test also covers a wide spectrum of questions of varying difficulty so that different levels of attainment can be discerned.

Authenticity, according to Bachman & Palmer (2004, 23) can be defined as “the degree of correspondence of the characteristics of a given language test task to the features of target language use task”. In order to justify the use of a language test, one needs to be able to demonstrate that performance on language tests corresponds to language use outside the language test itself.

Interactiveness is the extent and type of involvement of the test taker’s individual characteristics in accomplishing a test task (Bachman & Palmer 2004, 23). The individual characteristics are such as language knowledge, strategic competence and topical knowledge.

Impact is also seen as a quality of a test meaning the impact of a test on society and educational systems as well as upon the individuals in those systems (Bachman & Palmer 2004, 29). On aspect of impact is the so called *washback*, which is defined as “the effect of testing on teaching and learning”. Teaching affects testing and testing has an impact on teaching.

4. The matriculation examination

The Finnish matriculation examination is an achievement test for students studying in the general upper secondary school. The function of the examination is to test whether students have reached adequate maturity and the required level of education as well as learning which are required in the society and in postgraduate studies. According to the Finnish Upper Secondary School Act, the matriculation examination is arranged to find out whether the students have acknowledged the required skills and knowledge based on the LOPS (Lukiolaki 629/1998, 18 §). According to Kärkkäinen & Takala (1988, 162-163) the tests are related to the syllabi of the schools.

The matriculation examination is strictly regulated by the Upper Secondary School Act, the Act on the Organisation of the Matriculation Examination, and the Government Decree on the Matriculation Examination. The Matriculation Examination Board is responsible for managing the tests: they conduct the preparation of the tests, carry out the administration and perform the assessment of the answers. The Board also issues guidelines on the contents of the examination (LOPS 2003, 105-108).

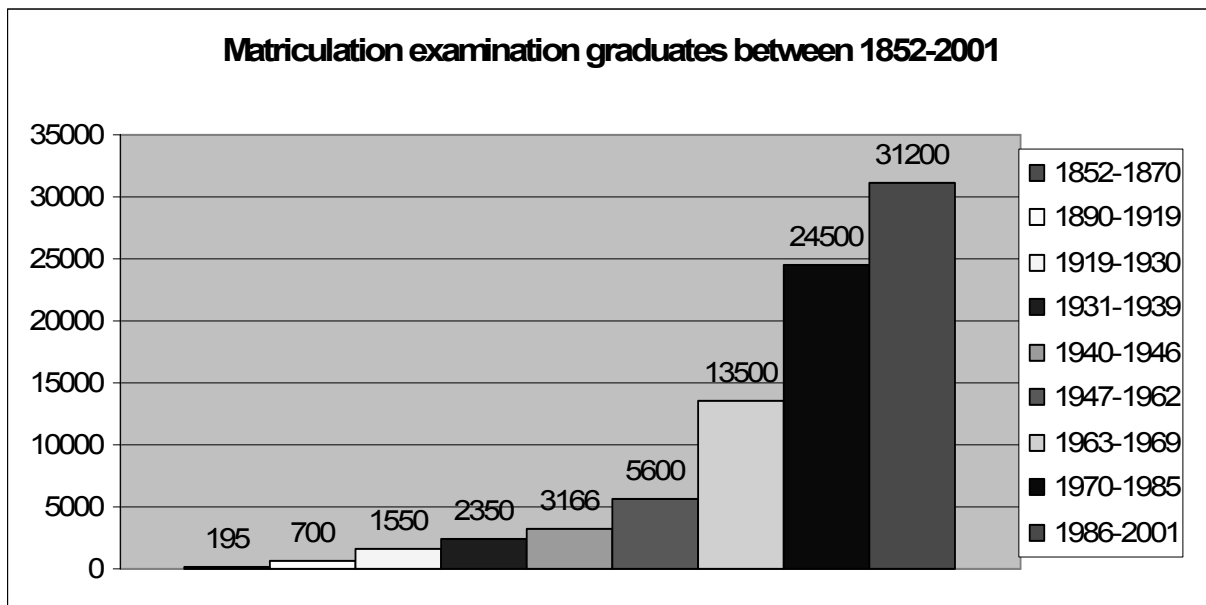
Although the matriculation examination has been arranged for over 100 years and undergone some remarkable changes as will be seen in the analysis, it is still considered as an important measurement for the young students. It opens up a possibility for the students to apply to higher education but also measures the level of teaching and education in the upper secondary schools. According to Hellgren (1982, 67), the matriculation examination also serves as a hidden curriculum in the upper secondary schools. Research has indicated that the washback effect of the matriculation examination can be seen in the fact that the matriculation examination guides foreign language instruction in the upper secondary schools more than the official curriculum. Teaching and learning aim for the end exam but since the matriculation

examination changes slowly and is not, as Hellgren notes (1982, 67), a reflection of the present time viewpoint, it might also have negative effect on the syllabus.

The importance of the examination can, however, be seen in the amount of students who take part in the tests every year. The average amount of students in 1850s was 115 whereas nowadays the amount of the students is well over 30 000 in a year (Sivistyksen portti 2002, 369). The committee lead by Yrjö Ruutu in 1947 saw the Matriculation Examination as an important tool of representing the all-round education and this is still one reason why it is so highly valued among the students and citizens of Finnish society (Yo-tutkintolautakunnan mietintö 1968, 28).

Figure 6 represents the percentage of Finnish students who have taken the matriculation examination during the past 150 years. (Sivistyksen portti 2002, 35-369):

Figure 6. Matriculation examination graduates between 1852-2001.



4.1. The matriculation examination in a nutshell

The foundation of the matriculation examination was laid in 1852 when the first national act concerning the matriculation examination was written. In the beginning, as already mentioned above, the examination was an entrance examination to Emperor Alexander's University of Finland (nowadays called Helsinki University), and in it one had to show sufficient evidence of an all-round education and knowledge of Latin (LOPS 2003; 105-108). Only few skilled young men would participate in it. The candidates took part in test that had two parts: written part that included short composition in mother tongue and translation into Latin or another foreign language, and oral examination that should not last more than 5 hours (Kaarninen & Kaarninen 2002, 62-63). 1863 the test was transformed to a maturity test arranged by 9 upper secondary schools in Finland. The purpose of the test, according to Kaarninen & Kaarninen (2002, 75), was to find out whether the young students were mature and educated enough to qualify for academic studies of that time. Passing of the exam would then entitle the registration for university studies.

The basis of the modern matriculation examination was laid in 1919 when a new act was completed. The new examination consisted of 5 different parts: a short composition in mother tongue; a translation from mother tongue into second national language; foreign language translation either in Latin, German, French or English; mathematics test that consisted of three exercises; and a test in general studies (religion, church history and the basics of philosophy; history and social studies; physics and chemistry; botany, zoology and geology; national economy and agricultural topics). The test was conducted in the upper secondary schools as a final exam and gave an access to university (Kaarninen & Kaarninen 2002, 164-165).

The structure of the present-day matriculation examination has not changed substantially since 1919 but some changes have occurred during the decades. Nowadays the examination

consists of at least four tests of which one, the test in the candidate's mother tongue (Finnish, Swedish or Saami), is compulsory for all candidates. The candidate must then choose three other compulsory tests from the following four tests: the test in the second national language, a test in foreign language, the mathematics test, and one test in the general studies which includes sciences and humanities (Evangelical Lutheran religion, Orthodox religion, ethics, philosophy, psychology, history, social studies, physics, chemistry, biology, geography and health education). The candidates may additionally include one or more optional tests such as additional foreign language or another test in the general studies as a part of their examination (LOPS 2003; 105-108; Ylioppilastutkinto 2008).

4.2. Foreign language tests in the matriculation examination

The form of the EFL test in the matriculation examination has changed many times during the past as will be seen in the analysis. In the beginning of the 20th century, students had to translate texts from the mother tongue into the target language with the help of dictionaries. In the 1920s, dictionaries were abandoned and students were assigned to translate from the target language and the other way round. The translation tests remained till 1965 when remarkable changes were made. The new type of test consisted of a reading comprehension, a translation from the mother tongue into the target language and a short composition. It was, however, just an introduction to a more wide-ranging test that is being conducted nowadays. Listening comprehension was added in the 1970s and the focus of the tasks was placed on productivity in the 1990s.

The EFL test in spring 2008 consists of two parts examined on separate days. The first part is approximately a one hour listening comprehension which includes at least three different texts or dialogues read aloud, which are then followed by questions to test whether the student has understood what was said on the tape. The second part is a written exam consisting of three separate sections. The reading comprehension includes several texts followed by

various options: multiple-choice questions either in Finnish or English, open questions in either of the languages, a multiple cloze test, a productive cloze test, a short summary of the text, translation task or an explanation in own words. The second part, grammar and vocabulary, has up to 60 multiple-choice questions testing the grammar skills and then around 10 words or phrases to be translated in English. The last part, production, is a short writing composition of altogether 150-250 words on one of the given topics.

Different types of tasks measure various language skills such as understanding and production of the language, knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and students ability to produce coherent text on given subject independently etc. Their purpose is to test the students' achievement gained during the schools years and show the general grade of the language proficiency. The structure and changes in the foreign language test will further be analysed in chapter 6.

4.3. Oral skills test in the matriculation examination

Oral skills are seen as an important part of language competence. Although the LOPS also defines the level of proficiency for speaking, oral skills are not tested in the foreign language matriculation examination. There have, however, been many failed attempts to attach an oral exam to the foreign language matriculation test and it still is not part of the exam. As Hildén (2006, 9) notes, the possibility to add the oral exam as part of the exam has been in discussion for a long time. The National Board of Education (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunnan mietintö 1968, 29) confirms that the oral exams were part of the early matriculation examinations at the beginning but were left out in 1919. Since that, the Board has set many working parties to find out different ways to arrange the exam and after 1920s many educators have proposed the implementation of the oral exam as a part of the foreign language test (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunnan mietintö 1968, 29-30).

In 1956, Toivo Aatonen (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunnan mietintö 1968, 29-30) proposed a second part for the EFL test consisting of an oral exam. It should last 20 minutes per one student and be arranged by the National Board of Education. Despite great efforts, the oral test was never added to the examination. Within the last decade, there have been several dissertations written about the oral practise in the upper secondary schools and the ways to test it in the school surroundings. Savela (1994, 10) researched the possibilities to conduct an exam in the language studio as the final oral exam as part of the matriculation examination in the upper secondary schools. According to the researcher, it turned out to be reliable and sufficient test for evaluating a large group of students at the same time. The results and the practicality were, however, criticised because not all the schools have adequate language studios for that purpose.

Between 1990-1993 the National Board of Education carried out an experiment that would develop the teaching and evaluation of oral language competence. It was arranged in 4 municipal upper secondary schools and in the teacher training schools governed by the state. The oral test was not, however, taken as a part of the matriculation examination but as a result of the experiment the National Board of Education decided to prepare oral skills tests for the upper secondary schools. After the experiment the Board has annually produced oral test material for the following languages: English, Spanish, Italian, French, Swedish, German and Russian (Lukiokoulutuksen suullisen kielitaidon arviointityöryhmän muistio 2006, 14-15).

The oral exam arranged by the National Board of Education is tested in student pairs. The exam lasts 40 minutes and is divided into two parts: first of all, the students have 20 minutes to familiarize themselves with the material provided for the test in a supervised place. Then they will have the oral test that lasts from 15 to 20 minutes per pair. The whole test situation is carried out in English. The oral assignments might vary but are usually include warm-up part,

reading and commenting a text, reproduction and conversation based on a given text, and dialogue based on a given situation.

Despite the fact that the oral exam has turned out to be an efficient way of testing the oral competence, several reasons for rejecting the oral test in the foreign language matriculation examination can be found. According to the working party set by the Ministry of Education in 2005 (Lukiokoulutuksen suullisen kielitaidon arviointityöryhmän muistio 2006, 24-27), the costs for the oral exam would be enormous because of teacher trainings, salaries of the official supervisors, material and the recordings of every oral test. The test would not provide equal setting for all because the personality of the students, anxiety, formal test situations, different cultures with their own communicative strategies etc. affect the assessment criteria.

Schools cannot be requested to build a language studio for the exam. The exam for dozens of students in one school requires time, because an exam for every student pair takes 40 minutes and the rest of the students would have to be kept behind closed doors. The test situations should be recorded, because the student have rights to ask for revaluation of the exam. The exams should also be evaluated so that they are reliable, valid and consistent for all the participants taking the test and so meets the main requirements for the matriculation examination.

In 2006, the National Board of Education made a decision and stated that the oral skills test cannot be a realistic part of the foreign language test. They, however, suggested another solution for testing the oral skills. The other English language specialization course set by the LOPS will be transformed to an oral language skills course starting from the August 2009. The students' communication skills are evaluated at the end of the course by their own teacher, either by using the tests set by the National Board of Education or self-made exams. The students can be given a separate report and grade for their oral skills (Lukiokoulutuksen suullisen kielitaidon arviointityöryhmän muistio 2006, 39).

The working party responsible for the change explains their decision by saying that the communicative competence is emphasised in every area of life and the education has to take its responsibility in emphasising it (Lukiokoulutuksen suullisen kielitaidon arviointityöryhmän muistio 2006, 42). The LOPS also requires the teaching and evaluation of oral skills and a consistent evaluation for oral skills makes the practice of oral skills more effective in the upper secondary schools (LOPS 2003, 102).

4.4. Different levels of EFL tests

At the beginning, the foreign language test in the matriculation examination was divided into two different levels, the compulsory test and the additional or extra test. The first one was for those who had studied the language as their first foreign language and the latter for those who wanted to pass the EFL test but had only studied the language for some time.

In 1982, a division was made between A-level and B-level. A-level was for the pupils who started their foreign language studies in the first three grades of comprehensive school and B-level for those who started their studies in grade 7. In 1995, these levels were further developed into 3 different levels of language skills: long, midlong and short syllabus. Long syllabus started in either of the first three grades, midlong either in 5th or 7th grade, and short one in the upper secondary school. From 1998 on, there has been only two levels of tests: one for those, who have studied English as their first foreign language, and the other for those, who have it as their second foreign language (Ylioppilastutkinto 2008).

In this Pro Gradu Thesis, only the A-level tests in English, also called the long syllabus tests, are studied because they require more advanced foreign language competence and so give more depth for the analysis.

5. Method, research questions and material

My method in this study of the EFL tests in the foreign language matriculation examination is qualitative and based on close reading of the test documents. My research question is: Does the prevailing notion of language competence influence the structure and contents of the EFL tests arranged between 1919-2008? Do the EFL tests during the last 90 years evaluate the goals of foreign language learning set by the prevailing notion of language competence at the time being? I analyse whether the content and different task types in the tests correspond the language competences and what is emphasised in language learning. The analysis is a historical cross section of the tests arranged during the last 90 years. The focus is on the most recent EFL tests arranged in 2008. I will discuss whether the tests in spring and fall 2008 test the goals of language learning set by the most recent definition of language competence, in other words, the intercultural communicative competence.

Since the tests are meant to evaluate the adequate maturity gained in a foreign language and the ability to produce language, they should also reflect the prevailing notion of language competence at the time they are arranged. My main concern is that the EFL tests change slowly and do not fully correspond to the various notions of language competences.

The material analysed in this research is the EFL tests as part of the matriculation examination. As already mentioned in chapter 4.1., the basis for the modern matriculation examination was laid in 1919. The matriculation examination, as well as the foreign language test in it, has been arranged once or mostly twice a year ever since, with some exceptions during the Finnish wars. I will analyse the English as a foreign language tests arranged between 1919-2008. To be able to study the material for the analysis, I applied for permission to research the EFL tests filed in the Matriculation Examination Board archives in Helsinki.

Most attention in the analysis of the material was paid to the greatest changes occurred in the structure and task types in the exams. The exams were divided into four different time

periods according to the most remarkable changes occurred in the contents of the exam and then compared to the prevailing notions of language competences in those time periods i.e. Grammar-Translation, Audiolingual Theory, communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence. The tests arranged in 2008 were analysed separately. The results of the analysis are presented in the following chapter.

6. Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the EFL tests in the foreign language matriculation examination between 1919-2008. The EFL tests are divided into four time periods. The division is based on the greatest changes occurred in the tests in various decades. The tests arranged in 2008 will be analysed separately. I will discuss the tests in a chronological order, paying attention to the structure of the tests and various new task types. The impact of the prevailing notion of language competence on the EFL tests is paid attention to.

6.1. The changes in the structure and assignments of the EFL test in the 20th and 21st century

Some of the greatest changes in the matriculation examination along its 90 year history have been the increase in the length of the foreign language test and the expansion of various task types that test the different parts of language competence. The latest aim has been to test all the four language skills, not only reading comprehension skills or the ability to produce word-for-word translations.

6.1.1. The length of the test

Lexical competence and the testing of vocabulary have clearly been in focus in the foreign language test. As Henriksen (2006, 17-18) notes, we have set focus to the lexical competence which is also seen in the exam if we take a look at the length of the texts and tasks during the past 90 years. The length of the EFL test varies remarkably along the years. The first modern EFL test in 1919 had only one page and one English into Finnish translation exercise. In 1967 the test consisted of two translation tasks, some open questions about the text, a few questions about the structure of language and a 150 word essay assignment. In 1974 the English test had developed into two separate booklets: a seven-page listening comprehension with three parts and altogether 30 questions about the listening extracts and a twelve-page written part

consisting of two reading comprehension with altogether 110 lines and 30 questions about the texts, structural test with ten sentences which had to be filled in and a composition assignment for a short 150-200 word essay. The listening comprehension in 2008 was similar but the written part in 2008 had 18 pages. The written part consisted of four reading comprehensions with altogether 270 lines followed by 25 multiple-choice questions as well as five open questions about the text. It also had a two part structural test with altogether 30 multiple-choice questions as well as ten words to be filled in the text. The final task in the written part was a production task, in other words, a composition between 150-250 words.

The amount of required words in the composition task has clearly increased when the focus during the past 50 years has shifted to productivity. In 1965 the required amount of words in the composition in the EFL test was said to be few sentences (about 150 words), in 1967 the essay consisted of 150 words; and in 1974 the short composition was between 150-200 words. After the spring 2005 the amount of words in the productive composition has been 150-250 words. This, however, means that a student can still write the minimum 150 words without getting fewer points or then write the maximum 250 words: the contents and the language of the composition will determine the final points.

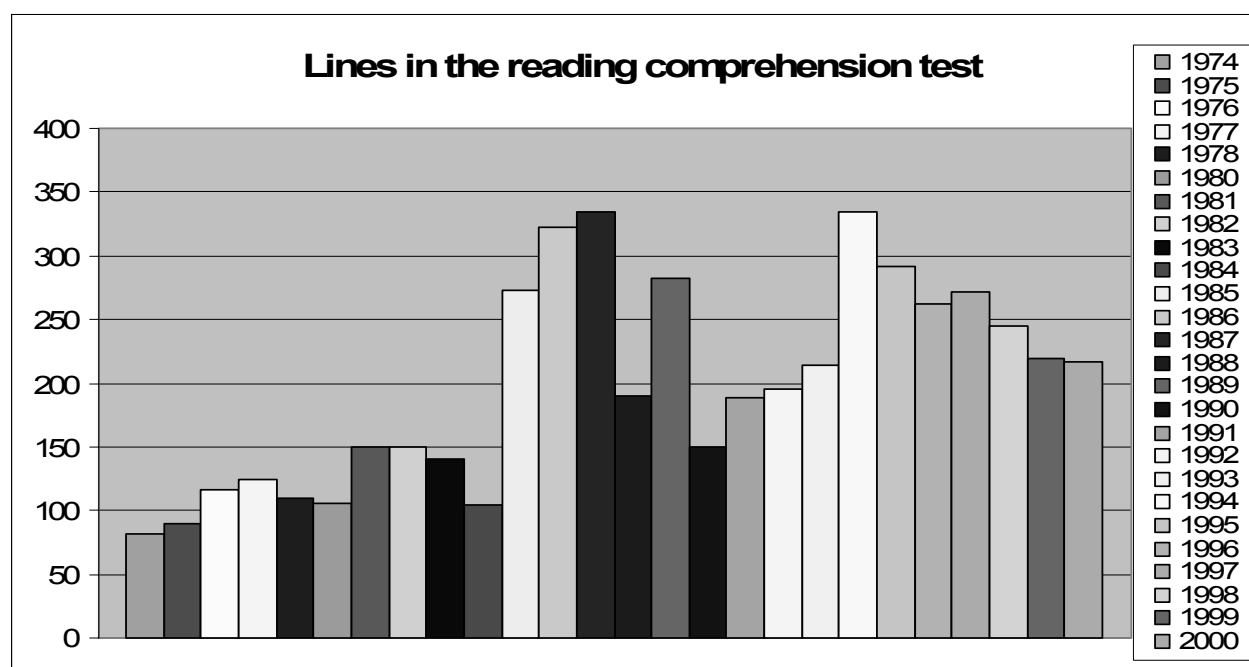
The length of the structural tests has also increased along the years. When the number of questions in the structural test in 1965 was altogether five, the number of questions in 1970s had increased to 20. The exam in 1990 had the highest number of questions: altogether 70.

The lines in reading comprehension exercises clearly expand during the past 90 years. The length of the first reading comprehension with multiple-choice questions in 1974 was 82 lines, whereas it had increased to 150 lines in 1982, almost doubled in 1984 in comparison to the test arranged in 1974 and was three times longer in 1987 with altogether 335 lines. The length of the reading comprehension tasks after 1990 is harder to measure since the assignments vary every year including short extracts with questions, a summary of a text and

some translation tasks of underlined sentences. The number of lines vary, however, between 190 and 295 lines. The variation of exercises and the expansion of the various task types have also extended the test.

Figure 7 presents the length of the reading comprehension tests between 1974 and 2000. The EFL test has been arranged twice a year, but to clarify the table, only the spring time examinations are taken into consideration.

Figure 7. Lines in the reading comprehension test between 1974 and 2000.



6.1.2. 1919-1964 the years of translation exercises

Since the GT method was the prevailing foreign language teaching method in the beginning of 20th century, the language teaching in schools would concentrate on word-for-word translation tasks. Translation skills were also the only skills tested in the foreign language matriculation examination. As Howatt (1984, 131) points out, the students were to acquire reading knowledge of foreign languages by studying grammar and applying this knowledge to the interpretation of texts with the use of a dictionary. In other words, they were to acquire

grammatical competence in their foreign language. Birkstedt (1994, 244) also points out, the didactic rules given for schools in 1916 encouraged teaching that would put emphasis on literal original text translations.

The first modern EFL test in 1919 was a pure translation assignment. The students were required to translate a text from their mother tongue into the target language with the help of dictionaries. The text to be translated was about victorious nations, wars and the reign of Edward III. It was a demanding text which had several words that even a present day university student of English would perhaps find hard to understand without a help of a dictionary. A short extract from the test reveals its nature: “They had grown accustomed to burn and destroy and to treat the sufferings of the clase beneath them as beneath their attention.”

In the 1922 the dictionaries were abandoned and students were assigned to translate from the target language and the other way round (Kärkkäinen & Takala 1988, 162). The test consisted now of a longer translation from English into mother tongue and a shorter translation from mother tongue into English. The texts to be translated in the EFL test mainly dealt with history. They were about the inventor of electricity, Napoleon, the history of Finnish civilization, the origin of Japanese, British writer and poet Robert Burns, the terrible experiences of the Great War, etc. With some exceptions, the translation from mother tongue into English was mostly of the same topic as the translation from English into mother tongue.

From 1940s on, however, the topics were often about present day British culture and travelling. They would demand knowledge about British celebrities, politics, sightseeing etc. In other words, they familiarized the students with life in Great Britain. One reason for the change might be the fact that English became a very common language for foreign language studies. According to Kaarninen & Kaarninen (2002, 266) almost 45 % of all the students in 1946 took part in the EFL test.

The era of Grammar-Translation can be clearly seen in the EFL test which at that time was a simple one-page word-for-word translation task. Till 1964, the EFL test in the matriculation examination was a pure word-for-word translation test with no changes in the task type or setting.

6.1.3. 1965-1973 some changes in the air with the focus on reading comprehension skills

Some changes and experiments occurred in the EFL test between 1965 and 1973. The prevailing teaching or learning method during the time period between 1965-1973 was Audiolingual Theory (AL). It was, however, created already in 1940s but did not affect the Finnish school system until in the 1970s (Kohonen 2006, 41). According to AL, the receptive skills such as listening and reading were to be approached before the productive skills and were seen as an important part of language teaching. To test the receptive skills, such as understanding the text one is reading, a simple reading comprehension, in addition to the translation task, was added to the EFL test.

Although the reading comprehension task is nowadays seen as a vital part of the matriculation examination because it tests the understanding of the foreign language and its structures, it was not, however, added to the exam until the middle of 1960s when some schools conducted experimentation and added third part in the foreign language tests. In addition to the translation assignments, students were now able to answer questions about the contents of the texts they were required to translate (Sivistyksen portti 2002, 293). For the first time, the students were also able to produce their own text in English because the questions were open questions and they were also required to write a short composition in their own words in English.

The new type of test in March 1965 consisted of three parts. Part I was a translation from the mother tongue into the target language, part II a translation the other way round and the third part that tested the vocabulary, reading comprehension skills and writing skills. The test

was, however, optional till 1970s: the students were able to choose either translation of a text into Finnish in part I and into English in part II or then translation of half of the part I into Finnish and answering of three questions in part III. The third part in the exam consisted of a short reading comprehension text followed by a few open questions about the text as well as the vocabulary in the text and a short composition task. The questions were divided into three parts. In part A the students had to explain the meaning of several expressions taken from the text, such as “drive in the nail”. In part B they were required to explain what the meaning of a verb *to drive* is in five different occasions. In part C they were made to write a few sentences (about 150 words) in English on one of the topics given. The reading comprehension assignments did, however, mostly test the students’ vocabulary because only few expressions taken from the text had to be explained.

For the first time the students were required to produce their own text. The composition task demanded productivity and writing skills. The topics for the composition in the spring 1965 were the following:

- (1) My favourite English author (novel, poem, play)
- (2) Why has English such a large vocabulary?
- (3) What does the author of this passage require of a good writer of English?

The third part of the exam between 1965-1973 required several kinds of receptive skills. The students had to answer some questions about the text but their knowledge of English language as well as British culture was also tested, because not all the answers were found in the text. In 1966 the exam had a short extract in which Winston Churchill described his first day at school. The question following the extract was: “For what is Winston Churchill famous?” The students could not answer the question if they did not know the answer beforehand. One of the questions in the spring 1967 would also test the knowledge of British history or cultural competence since the answer cannot be found in the text:

5. What is the difference between the British Empire and the British Commonwealth Nation?

During this period, there was an attempt to try out several kinds of task types. In the fall test 1967 the students were also required to find specific synonyms in the text or a noun corresponding to the verb found in the text. This could also be seen as the beginning of the present-day structural test because it also tested grammar skills. In the spring 1971 an interesting open question followed the reading comprehension for the first time:

I B. 4. In what ways does the writer think that our personal independence can be limited in our modern society? Try to say this in your own words (3-5 lines only).

Although the optional third part of the exam had various kinds of questions, the structure of the test remained the same till 1974. The possibility to conduct a pure word-for-word translation task also remained until 1978. The Matriculation Examination Board would arrange two options for the test (the choice between two papers): old type translation or then new type test with various task types such as translation of one part of the text and the underlined sentences, answering questions about the text and an essay of 150-200 words.

6.1.4. 1974-1989 listening, understanding, more length and new task types

The EFL test was again renewed in 1974. From that year on, a greater step towards the Audiolingual Theory was taken. According to AL, the receptive skills were seen as a key to the learning of a foreign language. Listening and reading were to be approached before the productive skills and language learning as well as teaching were based on habit formation. This meant that new grammar rules as well as idioms and correct small talk were taught through repetitions tasks, also called drills. For the first time, taped recordings were used in the class.

The listening comprehension became important in the field of language teaching and it also had an effect on the EFL test in the matriculation examination. From the year 1974 on, a listening comprehension task was added to the exam. Since 1974, EFL test has been a two-part

exam consisting of two booklets, one for listening and one for reading comprehension. The listening comprehension consisted of three short texts heard from tape. They were all listened once through and for a second time in shorter sections. Each section had ten multiple-choice questions written in a booklet with four given alternatives including the correct answer. The questions were answered after two hearings.

Another significant change occurred in the written part of the exam. The written part in the spring 1974 was a 12-page booklet for testing reading comprehension, including a text extract of 80 lines, 30 multiple-choice questions of the text and four suggested essay titles (150-200 words). The word-for-word translations were abandoned and the attention was clearly shifted to the understanding of language in context. According to Johnson (2001, 185), the reading comprehension tasks used to involve going through a text line by line, dwelling on the meaning of every word and structure, till 100 per cent comprehension was achieved. This idea, however, changed in 1970s when new teaching methods emerged. It became more important for the student to understand the context because 100 per cent comprehension is rarely required even in real life. This change is also clearly seen in the EFL test in which the text extracts were followed by multiple-choice questions.

The EFL test remained the same till the spring 1977 when a short structural test of ten fill-in questions evaluating knowledge of grammar was added. The students had to produce sentences in passive tense, fill in correct pronouns and verb tense forms, and produce an indirect question. In 1979 the amount of tasks in the structural test increased to 20 sentences. From 1980 on the structure test has been a story in which students have to fill in 20 missing words, or in the recent times 30-50 words.

The idea of communicative competence already existed at the time being but it did not influence the EFL test much. The tests did, however, take a step towards the understanding of language but no remarkable changes were made towards communicativeness. The listening

comprehension as well as the written part did not go through any remarkable changes until in the 1990s when the whole foreign language test was reformed to a more productive and versatile test for evaluating foreign language competence.

6.1.5. 1990-2007 focus on productivity

The reformation of the foreign language tests began again in the 1990s. Till that time, multiple-choice tests measured whether the students understood the text they were reading, knew certain structures, superficial idioms and vocabulary but since they only required the answer A, B, C or D they clearly ignored some of the essential parts of language skills, such as productivity and the ways to produce language in one's own words. Productivity was, however, tested through the composition task. According to Kaarninen & Kaarninen (2002, 346), the Matriculation Examination Board decided to add some tasks which would require more productivity.

The prevailing notion of language competence was so called communicative competence. Instead of teaching a new grammatical structure or certain patterns in each lesson, the teacher would now teach a concept or ways to use the language productively (Johnson 2001, 184). The understanding of every word and structure was not seen as the key for foreign language learning whereas the focus was on the ability to concentrate on important pieces of information and to develop ways to analyze things. The most emphasised skills in language learning were the ability to process new or already learned information and to produce both written language and spoken discourse. The focus was on productivity and creative ways to understand, speak, listen or produce language.

During the past 20 years, the focus in the matriculation examination has also been on productivity. There has been continuous increase in various task types and ways to test the different types of language skills. Both the written part and the listening comprehension test

have gone through some changes. The evaluation of communicativeness is not, however, been added to the test.

The first changes in the foreign language test occurred in the spring 1990 when the length of the structural test consisting of multiple-choice questions was considerably increased. Instead of containing 20 multiple-choice questions about the grammar, it would now contain 70 questions testing the vocabulary, prepositions, articles, correct verb forms and meanings as well as the use of idioms. This type of test remained in use till the spring 2004 when the structural test took re-introduced a task which had been used earlier. From 2004 on, the structural test had a second part in which the students had to fill in the sentences with 15 words that were given in Finnish and had to be translated into English.

Till 1993 the reading comprehension task remained the same but in 1994 it was divided into two different parts. In the spring 1994 the first part of the reading comprehension consisted of a text with 20 multiple-choice questions and the second part of a text with five open questions, which had to be answered with own words in English. This was a step towards understanding the main ideas in the whole context of the text better. Now the students had to read carefully and interpret in their own words what they thought the text was about. The choices for correct answers were not given, but the students had to produce them in their own words and usually in English.

From 1995 on, the written part has measured reading comprehension of various texts in new ways. The basic structure of the written booklet has remained the same till today but the following types of tasks in the reading comprehension vary along the years: multiple-choice questions in Finnish or English, open questions in either of the languages, a multiple cloze test, a productive cloze test, translation or explaining of some crucial elements, and a short composition based on the text or a few short writing tasks with specific instructions. In the fall 1995 and 1996 as well as in the spring 2003, the students had to produce a maximum 100-word

summary of the reading comprehension text in Finnish. In the fall 1998 and 1999 as well as in the spring 2003, the students were made to translate the underlined sentences in the reading comprehension into appropriate Finnish. The structure of the reading comprehension texts changed slightly from the year 2000 onwards. Until that year it had consisted of two to three longer text extracts but now it would include up to ten shorter extracts to be read.

The length of the composition task, or nowadays so called production task, has increased from the range of 150-200 words to 150-250 words which is also an indication of the focus on productivity. The topics of the composition along the years have changed from historical and political themes connected to the translation texts to one's own opinions about recent events and personal matters. From the 1970s on, the topics require the student's own opinions and creativity. In 1967 the topics would include titles such as: "My Idea of English People in Colonial Service", "Should Finland Help Undeveloped Nations?" and "The Life of a Retired Man". The composition titles in 1987 would ask if there is a God, or about the student's own thoughts about marriage, road users or beauty contests. In 2007, students were required to think of a situation in which they could have said or done something that might have changed the situation, think why universities as well as other institutes are crowded with girls or write a short speech to international group such as the Red Cross. The task types in composition require productivity, because they vary from writing a newspaper column to writing a short comment on a given topic and from writing a speech to writing a discussion between two people.

As noted before, the listening comprehension test has not considerably changed during the centuries. Since 1974 it has had three to four listening extracts with altogether 30 multiple-choice questions in each booklet. Some changes were however made in 1990 when the whole foreign language matriculation examination went through some reformation. From that year on, the listening comprehension test was divided into three sections: two sections with

multiple-choice questions with given list of alternatives for the correct answer and a third section consisting of open questions that had to be answered in own words with one or two sentences in English.

In 1994, a new type of task became part of the listening comprehension test. The third part of the listening comprehension was only heard once and was then followed by five questions to be answered. This part was not included in the 1995 test but was taken back in 1996 and has been part of the test since that with some exceptions. One exception was the listening comprehension in the fall 1997 which only included 20 questions with alternative answers and five open questions heard twice. The part in which the text is only heard once has occasionally been a short text or story in a few sections, sometimes five short dialogues like in the spring 1996 or short news items like in the spring 1998.

Variation in the listening comprehension has increased since the early years. The structure is kept the same but the different parts vary and have different types of assignments attached to them. The exam in the fall 1998 is a good example of this since it consists of many different tasks in random order: some questions are heard twice, some once and one first straight through and then in shorter sections. The listening comprehension between the years 1994-2008 remains the same with no considerable changes. The contents include four parts: some of the exercises will be heard once, most of them twice and in sections which are of different length. Some of the assignments consist of longer texts or extracts; some are short news items or dialogues. Most of the answers are chosen from 3-4 alternatives but every test has 5 open questions in the last part. Shorter extracts have given a possibility to test the understanding of short dialogues or different accents. They can be seen as a step towards communicativeness.

6.2. English as a foreign language tests in 2008

The year 2008 is crucial if we want to analyse whether the EFL test evaluates the current notion of language competence with all the four language skills. According to the annual report written by the Matriculation Examination Board (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunnan toimintakertomus 2007; 8), the Matriculation Examination Board renewed the foreign language test regulations and instructions in order to follow the goals set by the LOPS published in 2003. These rules and regulations were taken into account in the EFL test arranged in the fall 2008. The most significant change in the foreign language examination was the new assessment scales and tables that are used for evaluating language competence. These are the Common Reference Levels defined by the CEFR and presented in chapter 2.3. Every study level is defined with certain language competence level according to six different levels. The new assessment criteria should also affect the evaluation, contents and the difficulty of various test tasks in the matriculation examination (Upper Secondary School Act 18§).

The new regulations and rules set by the Matriculation Examination Board do not, however, remarkably change the contents of the EFL test. The oral skills are not taken into consideration but the focus is laid on communicativeness (Kielikokeen määräykset ja ohjeet 21.9.2007; 29). This means that the focus in the evaluation of the production exercise is nowadays on communicativeness, in other words, on the ability to convey a message through a written composition. The different task types will also be prepared with a focus on communicativeness. The latest order for the evaluation of the production exercise in the fall 2008 EFL test concentrates first of all on the assessment of communicativeness (Kielikokeen määräykset ja ohjeet 21.9.2007). Secondly, the contents and the structure of the text, and then the accuracy and extent of linguistic skills are evaluated.

The assessment of the production task in the past ten years mainly concentrated on the linguistic factors, in other words, knowledge of language structure. In the older regulations

(Kielikokeen määräykset ja ohjeet 9.12.2005; 40), the criteria for the evaluation of the written composition were slightly different compared to the newest regulations. First of all, the evaluation was based on readability and the use of language, then vocabulary and the ability to use various expressions. After that the handling of the topic and the possible lack of linguistic features were evaluated.

6.2.1. The structure of the spring and fall test in 2008

The EFL tests arranged in spring and fall 2008 consist of two parts: listening comprehension test and written part. The listening comprehension task both in the spring and fall 2008 test has four diverse parts. Part I and II consist of short extracts from topics such as organic farming and Fairtrade coffee, the education of Inuits and the policy of the company Nike. Both parts are heard twice, first straight through and then in short sections. The students are then requested to answer questions 1-20 which are multiple-choice questions about the extracts. The questions are printed in a booklet which is given to each student at the beginning of the test. Part III has five short dialogues between people from diverse cultures with their own accent and ways of talking. Each of them is heard once and then followed by one multiple-choice question for each dialogue. Part IV includes five news announcements heard twice and then five open questions about the extracts in Finnish. The students must answer the questions in their own words in Finnish.

The written part in both exams consists of three parts: reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary; and production. The first part of the reading comprehension in the exams arranged in 2008 has three two-page comprehension texts with altogether 25 multiple-choice questions about the contents of the text. They are about the so called new jungles referring to urban fauna in the suburbs; Muriel Spar, a divorced writer living in London; the sweeteners and the import of sugar; circumnavigation around the world by Ed Gillespie; the food chains formed by globalization; and DNA tests which reveal our origins.

The second part of the reading comprehension in the spring time test 2008 includes five short present-day news extracts taken from *The Guardian Weekly* 2006, *New Scientist* 2005 and *Time* 2006. They are about global and modern themes such as climate change, the plans of Norwegian government for the future of humanity, the Japanese car-maker Nissan, website opened for the art-school graduates and Korean scientist who is busy with cloning things. All the extracts are followed by one open question in Finnish which is then answered in Finnish in one's own words.

The second part of the reading comprehension in fall 2008 has only one article taken from the *BBC History Magazine* published in 2007. It is written about the historical prison called Clink which is nowadays restored as a museum with exhibitions showing the former gruesome conditions of the prison. The text is followed by five open questions which are answered in Finnish

Grammar and vocabulary part in both exams has two sections. The first one is a four-page text with blank spaces which need to be filled in with correct word, preposition, conjunction, tense etc. The possible correct alternatives are given in 30 multiple-choice questions. The second section is a short text extract with empty blanks which need to be filled in using the given suggestions, such as Finnish translations or hints for the correct answer.

The last part in the written part, the production, is a composition between 150 and 250 words on one of the topics given. The composition task in the spring time test was to be written either about a crazy festival, the right voting age, saving one's town or how to be in praise of reading. The composition tasks in the fall required either a short speech to food societies, opinions and advice on donating clothes to poor countries, writing about the values in today's world or writing a short description of an interesting event which took place in history. The topics seem to concentrate on current topics found in newspapers or discussed in television. The students are required to use their productivity because they are requested to write either a

composition based on their own opinions, a letter of advice or a letter to the editor of a newspaper as well as a speech.

6.2.2. The EFL test vs. the four language skills

Since the EFL test is a national school-leaving exam, an end exam for the upper secondary school language learning as well as an achievement test of the language competence acquired during the school years, the structure of the test and the evaluation should include all the four parts of language skills: *listening, reading, writing* and *speaking* (Johnson 2001, 269).

The EFL test in the matriculation examination is an effective test for evaluating listening comprehension because it is a versatile test containing various texts about different types of current topics, extracts read or played in different accents, some parts heard only once such as in every-day conversations and a productive part to test whether the students really understand and are able to process what they hear. According to the regulations set by the Matriculation Examination Board (Kielikokeen määräykset ja ohjeet 21.9.2007; 17), the aim of the listening comprehension is to measure the ability to understand spoken discourse. The exam evaluates students' ability to understand the main ideas presented in the extracts, to select the important details and to make their own conclusions. It also tests the way the students react in situations which involve communication strategies. It can, however, be argued whether the exam indeed evaluates listening skills because the situations heard on the tape are not authentic conversations nor do they represent interaction with speakers from different cultures and societies.

The foreign language test also has a great variety of texts to be read and understood. Most of the texts contain every-day language use which can be read in newspapers, on the internet or in books. Some of the texts are easier, some of them require more advanced comprehension skills. The variety of texts gives more discrimination for the evaluation and shows the individual language competence better. According to the regulations for the foreign language

test (Kielikokeen määräykset ja ohjeet 21.9.2007; 21), the reading comprehension task measures the ability to understand the main ideas, important details and to interpret the text which they have read.

Written or productive skills are clearly tested in the exam by open questions which the students are expected to answer by a few sentences in their own words, possibly by a summary of one of the reading comprehension tests and by a writing composition on a given topic. The summary evaluates the students' ability to understand what they have read and the ability to summarize the text by producing it in their own words either in Finnish or English. The composition, especially, is an effective way to reveal the students' writing skills because only the topic is given and the students are required to write freely their own thoughts and opinions in English. The tasks vary from letters to essays and from articles to speech. From the fall 2008 onwards, the emphasis is laid on the ability to produce independent text in different types of communicative situations (Kielikokeen määräykset ja ohjeet 21.9.2007; 29).

The last and the most important skill, according to the recent definition of intercultural communicative competence as well as the LOPS and the CEFR, is clearly omitted in the exam. The exam does not include an oral part or any kind of test for oral competence and communication skills. The regulations for the foreign language matriculation examination (Kielikokeen määräykset ja ohjeet 21.9.2007; 5) simply state that neither oral production nor interaction is tested in the exam.

6.2.3. The EFL test vs. intercultural communicative competence

Johnson (2001, 15-36) as well as the CEFR (2001, 108-121) define three different competences presented in chapter 2.1.3, which are nowadays considered to form the definition of language competence.

The first competence called the *linguistics competences* (the CEFR) or in Johnson's words, *systemic competence* is well emphasised in the EFL test. The exam includes a variety of

productive, up-to-date and versatile tasks to test grammar, writing skills, knowledge of vocabulary, word meanings, spelling conventions and other linguistic factors. Through the listening comprehension, it also tests the ability to understand phonetic features which distinguish phonemes. It, however, lacks the ability to test phonological competence, in other words, the perception and production of sound-units of the language as well as the intonation of a speaker.

Johnson (2001, 15-36) as well as the CEFR (2001, 109) present the idea of *sociolinguistic competence* which is only partly covered in the EFL test. The exam does not fulfil the requirements of the sociolinguistic competence because none of the parts in the exam test the oral communication skills such as the conventions for turn-taking. It does, however, test the knowledge of appropriate words, competence in using proverbs and idioms through the open questions and the composition. The understanding of both formal and informal registers, negative and positive politeness as well as the ability to recognise social classes and dialects, partly come up in the listening and reading comprehension in which the correct alternatives must be chosen out of several tricky questions. Some of these are especially taken into consideration in the listening comprehension in which different dialects and situations occur and the students are required to come to a right solution in the multiple-choice questions or in the questions which they are expected to answer in their own words. Also the written part only partly tests this competence. It evaluates the ability to use proverbs as well as idioms or the ability to understand what is meant or said in the short dialogues which are meant to convey one's opinion on something. Still the exam does not fully test the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language use because it fails to assess the ways one is expected to talk in different situations, the ability to use small talk in the culture one is living in, the knowledge of the rules of discourse, the ability to produce coherent speech in formal and informal situations, etc.

The evaluation of *strategic competence* (Johnson 15-36) or, according to the CEFR (2001, 120), *pragmatic competences* such as *discourse competence* and *functional competence*, is not emphasised in the EFL test. Since oral skills and verbal as well as non-verbal communication strategies are not tested in the exam, one cannot evaluate whether the students have reached adequate communication skills and strategies needed in every-day oral communication to keep it smooth and to compensate for breakdowns in communication. Also the assessment of the ability to produce coherent and relevant stretches of language, the use of spoken discourse for particular functional purposes or the ability to conduct questions-answer-settings etc. is not possible through the present-day EFL test tasks and setting.

EFL test in itself sets some limitations for the evaluation of the intercultural communicative competence. A strict, classroom setting for an exam does not allow for testing of the ability to interact effectively with other speakers. It would require a different kind of setting and probably evaluation by the teacher over a longer period, e.g. a whole term. If we were to evaluate intercultural communication skills, in other words interaction with speakers from cultures that we recognise as being different from our own, we would have to consider completely different ways for the assessment, probably outside the classroom.

The willingness and ability to interact with someone of different cultural origins on the basis of a conscious awareness of one's own cultural origins and the relationships between the two or establishing and maintaining relationships cannot be tested by a written exam (Byram 2002, 18). The abilities attached to intercultural competence, such the ability for empathy, ethicality, changing the perspective or tolerating ambiguity as well as the ability to respect one another are not to be tested by written production either (Kaikkonen 2004, 148). As Kohonen (2006, 54) notes, they are more likely to be evaluated by self-assessment, such as an English language portfolio composed by the students along the studies. Cultural awareness and the ways to familiarize the students with the multicultural society as well as the world they are

living in, are brought up in the English language textbooks as well by media, teachers and possible student exchanges.

Also authenticity in speech and in interaction with people from different cultures, which is an essential part of intercultural communicative competence, is not tested in the foreign language matriculation examination, because it requires the use of language in authentic and spontaneous situations. As noted in chapter 4.3., an oral test as part of the EFL test would require more arrangements as well as more education for teachers and greater amount of finances. Authenticity is, however, considered in the exam. Some of the text extracts are taken from newspapers and some of the production topics in the EFL test aim for authentic communication.

Most of the five *savoirs* (Byram 1997, 50-53) are not tested in the present-day EFL test. It seems that the older tests arranged between 1919-1965 concentrate more on cultural competence and intercultural skills than the newest ones. The focus in the oldest tests was on British culture and literature whereas the focus nowadays is on current events taking place in the globe and on skills of conveying own opinions. Knowledge about social groups and their cultures, skills of discovery and interaction, skills of interpreting and relating to other cultures as well as intercultural attitudes cannot, however, be fully tested by a paper. Many of the assignments in the EFL test aim to take these factors into consideration by the production task as well as in ways to interpret text but the testing of these skills would require other kinds of means and resources.

As was noted in chapter 2.3, the latest national core curriculum for the upper secondary schools states that “the instruction and education in foreign language will develop student’s intercultural communication skills” (LOPS 2003, 102). The emphasis and the goals set by the LOPS mainly concentrate on the ability to conduct successful spoken discourse as well as on

effective communication skills. These goals are taken well into consideration in the syllabus and in the course contents but are not seen in the foreign language matriculation examination.

6.2.4. The EFL test vs. characteristics of a good language test

According to Takala (1971, 10), the purpose of a good test is to evaluate whether the goals set for the studying are fulfilled. It must correspond to the contents of syllabus or courses. The main purpose of an effective language test is also to evaluate students' whole knowledge and skills of the language, in other words, the language competence.

As was noted in chapter 3.2, the primary purpose of a language test is to provide a measure for evaluating an individual's language ability (Bachman & Palmer 2004, 23). The measure of *reliability* is clearly met in the matriculation examination. It has strict regulations, evaluation criteria and concealment policy, in other words, the tests are equal in their measurements and in the information they are testing.

Regardless the fulfillment of the reliability, the *validity* of the EFL test in the matriculation examination is only partly covered. The test should, in Johnson's words (2001, 310), be "a true reflection of the individual's skills in the area the test claims to have covered". It does cover and evaluate well three of the language skills, which are clearly taught and emphasized in the upper secondary school. The exam consists of many versatile exercises which are an excellent way of testing productivity, listening skills and the knowledge of grammar as well as linguistic factors. The exam does not, however, completely fill the purposes of the assessment or is not fully reasonable way of assessing the students, because only part of the language skills or language competence is tested in the exam. Also the goals of language competence for the upper secondary school students set by the LOPS are not completely covered in the exam, and the criteria as well as aims for language learning, competence and evaluation criteria set by the CEFR are partly omitted.

Feasibility and *discrimination* are well fulfilled in the exam. The equipment, test material and instructions for the exam are sent to the schools and the planned time for the test is strictly regulated. The grading of the test scores is based on discrimination. *Interactiveness* is required in various tasks but authenticity cannot be evaluated in the EFL test if the exam is ought to measure intercultural communicative competence. The test has a great *impact* on society as well as educational systems and individuals in the system. As we saw in chapter 4, the matriculation examination serves as a washback on teaching and also gives allowance to apply for university as well as universities of applied sciences (Hellgren 1982, 67).

According to the recent view of language competence, the emphasis of foreign language studies is clearly on communicativeness and intercultural skills but, as was noted in the analysis, this cannot be fully seen in the present-day EFL test in the matriculation examination. It is a versatile and well organised test for the evaluation of the basic foreign language skills taught in the Finnish school system but is not sufficient enough to test the whole intercultural language competence. It also does not fulfil the foreign language assessment criteria set by the LOPS.

7. Discussion

As we saw in the analysis, the EFL tests between 1919-2008 can be divided into four different time periods according to the most remarkable changes occurred in the tests. The matriculation examination changes slowly and the different teaching and learning methods as well as language competences influence the Finnish school system later than they emerge. When considered through that fact, the four time periods during the past 90 years seem to reflect the prevailing language competences to a some extent. The first tests were one-page translation exercises, which were typical for the era of grammar-translation. The exam was based on translation exercises until 1965 when some changes were made and a simple, optional reading comprehension task as well as a short composition exercise were added. Listening comprehension was taken as part of the exam in the 1970s, at the end of audio-lingual era. The whole structure of the exam was changed in 1974 when the exam was divided into three parts testing both reading and listening comprehension skills as well as the knowledge of grammar. The emphasis was laid on productivity and variation in the task types from the beginning of the 1990s onwards. Since the 1990s, the structure of the exam has remained the same but various kinds of new task types have been added along the years.

The evaluation of communicative competence or intercultural skills is still not seen in the foreign language matriculation examination but some steps towards that kind of evaluation has been taken. The idea of communicative competence emerged as early as in the 1970s along with the sociolinguistic revolution and the emphasis was on language use and communicativeness (Savela 1994, 7). Although the goals of communicative competence have been seen vital and have already been published in the LOPS 2003, they have not considerably affected the testing of foreign language skills in the matriculation examination. The latest rules and regulations for the foreign language matriculation examination (Kielikokeen määräykset ja

ohjeet 21.9.2007; 5) clearly state, that neither the oral production nor the interaction is tested in the exam.

The EFL test from the fall 2008 onwards, however, sets emphasis on communicativeness. According to the latest rules and regulations for the foreign language matriculation examination (Kielikokeen määräykset ja ohjeet 21.9.2007; 29), communicativeness ought to be seen in the production tasks. It can, however, be argued that written composition does not test communication skills or show reference of interaction skills with speakers from other cultures and social groups. Attitudes and abilities for empathy as well as tolerating ambiguity can partly be transmitted through a production of one's own opinions on a piece of paper, but the skills to relate with others as well as the ability to respect one another are only to be fully tested in an actual process of testing spoken interaction through authentic dialogue. An ongoing dialogue does not allow time to think of the sentence, fluency of the words or to erase wrong grammatical forms but requires the whole person with social skills.

Although the present-day EFL test is a versatile, wide-ranging and fair test for acquired foreign language skills, it fails to test the foreign language competence in its entirety, including all the four language skills presented by Johnson (2001, 269): *listening, reading, writing* and *speaking*. Listening, reading and writing are emphasised well in the examination by versatile task types but speaking is omitted. Over the years, the National Board of Education has set many working parties to find out whether an authentic oral test should be added to the EFL test, but the decision to add an oral test has never been made. As presented in chapter 4.3, there are many reasons for not conducting an oral test in the exam. The costs as well as practical issues matter.

Instead of testing communication skills in the foreign language matriculation examination, the National Board of Education decided to transform one of the English language specialization courses in the upper secondary school to an oral language skills course

(Lukiokoulutuksen suullisen kielitaidon arviointityöryhmän muistio 2006, 39). The evaluation of oral competence will be conducted by the teacher at the end of the course. As noted in chapter 4.3, the National Board of Education has prepared oral exams which can be used for that purpose. Teacher evaluation will presumably give better possibilities for the testing of oral competence, because a teacher can also do the evaluation along the foreign language studies and at the end of the foreign language courses. The evaluation of oral competence or communication skills in the foreign language matriculation examination would be based on one communicative situation. If the students were nervous or the test situation too formal, the evaluation would not necessarily give authentic picture of the students' communication skills.

The assessment of the foreign language competence in the upper secondary schools is based on levels of proficiency set by the CEFR. The CEFR as well as the LOPS suggest that the level of proficiency in listening comprehension, speaking, reading comprehension as well as in writing should be evaluated separately and given a separate grade. Nowadays the foreign language matriculation examination does not fulfil the evaluation goals set by the CEFR but it could be made possible through some changes in the foreign language matriculation examination.

The testing of intercultural communicative competence and interaction with different cultural and social groups is not likely to be tested by an exam conducted in a classroom setting but would require completely different ways for testing. Short student exchanges in another country or interaction with exchange students in Finnish schools might help the evaluation, which would have to be done by the teacher along as well as at the end of the studies. Intercultural communication skills could then be evaluated at the end of the upper secondary school studies by the EFL test together with the teacher assessment on speaking.

Since intercultural communicative competence is not tested in the foreign language matriculation examination, it can be assumed, that it is not emphasised enough in the foreign

language classroom. The LOPS should define what is taught at schools and tested in the matriculation examination but as was pointed out above, the reality is different. Instead of setting the emphasis on oral and communication skills which are clearly emphasised in the LOPS and in the CEFR, the students practise productive written skills and listening and reading comprehension skills they need for the final exam. Since written skills and listening as well as reading comprehension are the only skills tested in the national school-leaving exam, these skills are emphasised to a greater extent in teaching as well. As was noted in chapter 4, the matriculation examination, in fact, serves as a hidden curriculum in the upper secondary schools. It has a wash-back effect on the teaching of foreign language and the actual syllabus arranged by schools. Foreign language teaching is based on the content of the foreign language matriculation examination. Sometimes the matriculation examination guides foreign language instruction in the upper secondary schools more than the official curriculum. However, without a focus on training oral skills, the students might have an extensive vocabulary and they might master the grammar rules but they might still be helpless when it comes to communication with speakers from other cultures.

As noted in this thesis, communicative competence and intercultural skills are one of the most important dimensions of language learning and use. They should also be emphasised in foreign language education. The skills and goals attached to intercultural communicative competence seem, however, to depend on factors outside the school syllabus. The skills are mainly acquired through media, teacher's own shared experiences but also through foreign language textbooks. The role of the teacher becomes important in teaching intercultural skills. The teacher is responsible for developing skills, attitudes and awareness of values just as much as developing knowledge of a particular culture or country, or of different cultures within one's own country.

The areas and abilities attached to intercultural communicative competence should, however, be considered in the EFL test. If the emphasis of the exam is on testing linguistic features instead of cultural competence and communication skills, the test affects the teaching and learning in the upper secondary school as well as in comprehensive school negatively. Although the oral skills would be tested separately, the exam should pay attention to cultural and sociolinguistic matters, in other words, on the ability to relate to the target language culture and speakers as well as on the ability to use the language productively and in appropriate ways. Linguistic competence as well as knowledge of grammar and vocabulary build the basis for foreign language use, but the skilful use of language is developed through practising communication and productivity.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse if the prevailing notion of language competence has influenced the contents of the English as a foreign language tests over a 90 year period from 1919 to 2008. I also analysed the present-day exam to see if it evaluates all the parts of language skills and the goals set by the current definition of language competence, in other words, intercultural communicative competence.

Kohonen says in his article (2006, 45) that:

Our knowledge of language is thus far more than a knowledge of words and how to combine them to form grammatical sentences.

As we saw in this thesis, our knowledge of language is nowadays seen as an ability to use language productively and communicate with skilful intercultural communication strategies. It is also the ability to engage with foreign culture, conduct authentic dialogue and be willing to relate to others with different kinds of values, beliefs and behaviours. The knowledge of grammar, semantics, phonetics, the size of the vocabulary and the ability to understand language through reading and listening all add to the overall competence. The goal of foreign language learning is, nevertheless, intercultural communicative language competence.

Although the matriculation examination changes slowly, the content of the EFL tests between 1919-1990 seem to reflect the prevailing notion of language competence. From the 1980s onwards, however, the tests fail to evaluate the prevailing notion of language competence, in other words, communicative competence as well as intercultural communicative competence. It does contain some tasks to evaluate productivity, communicativeness and the use of language but omits the testing of oral communication skills.

In this thesis, I have come as far as to conclude that the EFL test in the foreign language matriculation examination is not a sufficient test for the assessment of intercultural communicative competence. It is a versatile test for the evaluation of the three language skills

(listening, writing and reading) but does not test speaking or oral skills. This makes the test not an adequate test for the present-day language competence. Since it omits the testing of oral competence, it fails to test all the requirements of the intercultural communicative competence as well as all the goals and aims of foreign language teaching and evaluating set by the LOPS and the CEFR.

Although the EFL test does not yet test the intercultural communicative competence in its entirety, it will presumably be changing towards that direction. It would be interesting to conduct similar research within the next 10 years to see what the changes in the matriculation examination as well as in the teaching and evaluation of the foreign language competence in the upper secondary school are. While moving towards a globalised world, intercultural communication skills will be an inevitable benefit and have to be emphasised in foreign language learning and testing.

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